

“Meeting the Needs of Today’s Girl”: Youth Organizations and the
Making of a Modern Girlhood, 1945-1980

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INTRODUCTION

“We need to constantly remember that everyday life always intrudes on politics, always intermeshes with it, always constitutes the background for it. When we forget that, we lose the very substance of reality *and* politics.”¹

This project began, in a sense, at the steps of the Cambridge, Massachusetts YWCA at 7 Temple Street, which, in keeping with the YWCA’s purpose, currently houses the feminist literary organization Center for New Words. The mission of the Center for New Words is, “To use the power and creativity of words to strengthen the voice of progressive women and women speaking from the margins of society.”² In carrying out its mission, the Center sustains and supports female writers and performers by providing a physical and psychological space in the community where they can share their work and their ideas with a receptive audience and develop as expressive individuals. To that end, the Center sponsors weekly open mic nights, readings, lectures, social gatherings, poetry contests, conferences, writing workshops, and a monthly book group. The Center works to engage with the voices of women who come to feminism from a variety of perspectives and identities, including women of color, lesbian,

¹ Levine, Larry, *The Opening of the American Mind* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 149.

² Center for New Words, “About Us,” http://www.centerfornewwords.org/about_us/ (accessed November 29, 2009).

transgender, and bisexual women, those afflicted by poverty, and women representing a variety of religions and ethnic cultures.

The Center for New Words grew out of “New Words, A Women’s Bookstore,” founded in Cambridge in 1974 a mere two blocks from the Boston Women’s Community Health Center and the women’s restaurant Bread & Roses. The bookstore was the brainchild of Rita Arditti, Gilda Bruckman, Mary Lowry, and Jean MacRae, a group of women engaged with the ideas and the politics of the women’s liberation movement who were inspired by the movement’s public celebration of women’s voices and women’s culture. New Words Bookstore was part of a broader cultural awakening in the 1970s brought on by the women’s liberation movement, when hundreds of feminist bookstores and feminist presses opened around the country by groups of women who wished to celebrate and disseminate the writings of women from all historical periods. The bookstore, out of which the Center for New Words evolved, cast itself as a “critical community focal point for political organizing, feminist discussion groups, self-help groups, and cultural programming,” all activities associated with the “personal is political” mantra of the women’s liberation movement.³ Throughout the years, the bookstore merged its literary function with education, hosting readings by numerous notable women who bridged the boundaries between activism, creative writing, journalism, and academe, including Gloria Steinem, Audre Lord, Adrienne Rich, Robin Morgan, Lillian Faderman, Wendy Wasserstein, Blanche Wiesen Cooke, Grace Paley, and Julia Alvarez.

³ Center for New Words, “Our History,” http://www.centerfornewwords.org/about_us/history.php (accessed November 29, 2009).

I arrived at the Center for New Words to interview the Executive Director, Janet Kniffin, about her experiences as a young Girl Scout, and, later in life, as the special projects director with the Connecticut Permanent Commission on the Status of Women, the president of the Hartford YWCA Board of Directors, and a communications and development officer with the Connecticut Valley Girl Scout Council. One of the first stories she relayed to me was the tale of an event held at the New Words Bookstore in its early years. The event had been inspired by Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party* art installation, which premiered in San Francisco in 1979. Chicago's exhibit (now on permanent display at the Brooklyn Museum) featured a triangular table set as if for a banquet, with 39 place settings reserved to commemorate significant women, both real and mythical, in the canon of Western history. On each woman's place setting sat an arrangement of images and symbols related to the woman's life, work, or historical memory. In the late 1970s and 1980s, as it continues to be today, the installation was an icon of the women's movement and a powerful celebration of womanhood. Around that time, the New Words Bookstore held its own Judy Chicago style-dinner party and asked women to bring personal memorabilia that reflected their own history and personal stories to adorn their place settings. Many of these women, self-declared feminists all, decorated their place settings with Girl Scout memorabilia.

For these women, there was a deeply personal connection to the past that acknowledged a link between their adult identity and their youthful involvement with a group devoted to girls. And as I subsequently discovered, the story Kniffin relayed to me was not an isolated one. When asking about my research over the last several years, women to whom I spoke almost invariably responded with a personal story. For those

who had never been part of a youth organization, many immediately told me about the impression they held of girls' organizations when they were young. For women who had grown up using the YWCA facilities, or had joined a Girl Scout troop or Y-Teen club, opinions were varied. Some women noted that they joined a girls' club for a day or two and then quit, having found the uniforms, the rituals, or the activities banal or compulsory. Others commented that they only joined a club because their mothers expected them to, and they found it boring or even stultifying. Many had very positive responses. Some reflected on skills they learned, personal milestones they reached, mentors they met, or on friendships they forged and still maintain. Others shared stories or anecdotes from their camping experiences, using language or describing games and songs that often overlapped with one another. Some were even kind enough to mail me copies of old handbooks and journals they had preserved.

What struck me most in the course of my research, however, was not the lack of uniformity in women's responses, but simply the responses themselves. Virtually every woman I spoke to held an opinion or an experience from her youth she wished to share. That alone convinced me girls' organizations were a significant cultural institution that deserved more historical attention than had been paid.

Voluntary youth organizations for girls have played a significant part in defining and transmitting the meaning of womanhood in America throughout the course of the twentieth century. Since their modest beginnings in the early decades of the 1900s, civic,

patriotic, and religiously-oriented girls' clubs have cycled millions of young women through character education programs that contained within them gendered notions of citizenship, work, education, and sexuality. An academic study in 1939 counted 85 national youth organizations for girls in existence.⁴ While membership numbers have waxed and waned throughout the years, a handful of these have remained prominent over time – the Girl Scouts of the United States of America (GSUSA), the Young Women's Christian Association's (YWCA) Girl Reserves (renamed Y-Teens in 1946), the Camp Fire Girls, and the 4-H.

Meeting the Needs of Today's Girl examines the programs and practices of two of these girls' organizations – the Girl Scouts and the YWCA – in the mid-twentieth century. Founded in 1912 as a female counterpart to the Boy Scouts of America, the Girl Scouts was chartered by Congress on March 16, 1950. At that time, the Girl Scouts served more than one and a half million girls in the United States, having expanded exponentially from the original troop of 18. Today, the Girl Scouts count more than three million girl members and female leaders in the United States. In turn, these girls are united in an international sisterhood under the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS), which claims more than 10 million young members and adults in 145 countries. It is estimated that more than 50 million women living in the United States today were involved with the Girl Scouts, either as members or as leaders, at some time during their lives.⁵

⁴ Helen G. Fudge, *Girls' Clubs of National Organization in the United States - Their Development and Present Status* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1939).

⁵ Girl Scouts of the USA, "Facts," http://www.girlscouts.org/who_we_are/facts/ (accessed December 28, 2009).

The YWCA has a longer history, founded in the United States in 1858 to aid the growing population of immigrant and working women in urban America with procuring decent shelter, education, and labor protections. In 1918, six years after the Girl Scouts was founded, the YWCA also recognized girls as a unique social group by formalizing a program for teenagers separate from those for adult women. Known originally as the Girl Reserves, and as the Y-Teens after 1946, membership peaked in the 1960s at approximately 400,000 girls (with thousands more participating in Y-Teen sponsored activities without formal membership). With 85,000 paid and volunteer staff and assets nearing one billion dollars, today the YWCA serves more than two million women and girls in nearly 300 communities in the United States and 25 million women in 122 countries worldwide.⁶

At their heart, girls' organizations sought to create an ideal of American girlhood that balanced the development of individual interests, talents, and abilities with social expectations for women. The result has been a complex one that historians took little notice of until 1981, when Mary Rothschild published a short article describing her early research into the Girl Scouts. Though she was speaking specifically of the Scouts, Rothschild could have been describing a number of voluntary girls' organizations when she wrote:

The Girl Scout program itself has changed over the years in particulars, but two central themes have always been constant . . . One is the teaching of traditional domestic tasks for women and the other is a kind of practical feminism which embodies physical fitness, survival skills, camping, citizenship training, and career preparation. Both themes – domesticity and feminism – have always been present, though their relative positions have changed throughout the twentieth century . . . [they] are often at odds in the Girl Scout program as they are in

⁶ YWCA, "Who We Are," <http://www.ywca.org/site/pp.asp?c=djISI6PIKpG&b=594079> (accessed December 28, 2009).

women's lives and that program ambivalence continues to reflect, and perhaps affect, women's lives in the twentieth century.⁷

In this dissertation, I assert that these community organizations, run by and for women, constituted crucial sites for the transmission of changing social and cultural values, particularly definitions of "girlhood" and "womanhood" and the gendered expectations that accompanied those definitions. Both organizations, however, have been largely overlooked by historians. In recovering their history, I begin with Girl Scout and YWCA citizenship education programs at the end of World War II and end with their feminist expansion in the 1970s. Drawing on training manuals, handbooks, correspondence, periodicals, contemporary social science, oral histories, and surveys, I explore their programs for girls and the ideology that underlay programming, as well as girls' reactions and responses thereto.

I argue that after World War II, the confluence of a dominant youth culture and lingering postwar international tensions invested girls' organizations with the purpose of developing healthy personalities and strong female citizens. Their programs, which promoted an appreciation for democracy, world citizenship, and interracial cooperation, rested upon a maternalist philosophy of female citizenship in which a public role for women and girls flowed from gendered notions about women's natural calling as homemakers and caretakers.⁸ Despite their dependence on gender difference, the results

⁷ Mary Aickin Rothschild, "To Scout or to Guide? The Girl Scout-Boy Scout Controversy, 1912-1941," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 6.3 (Autumn 1981): 115.

⁸ I use the term "maternalism" as it was defined by Sonya Mitchell and Robyn Rosen: "[A] political concept that accepts the principle of gender difference, specifically, women's identity as mothers, but maintains that women have a responsibility to apply their domestic and familial values to society at large." See Sonya Michel & Robyn Rosen: "The Paradox of Maternalism: Elizabeth Lowell Putnam and the American Welfare State" in *Gender and History* 4.3 (Autumn 1992): 365-386. Maternalism has long been a basis for advancing women's political and social status, and stands in sharp contrast to equality or equal rights feminism, which refutes the notion of an essential difference between men and women.

were often progressive: girls' organizations provided an important avenue for girls to develop a sense of themselves as citizens of the world and enlarge their expectations beyond futures of motherhood and domesticity. As their membership rolls expanded in the 1950s and 1960s, the YWCA and Girl Scouts were significant proponents of vocational and educational planning and activities for young women and girls that encouraged personal development, leadership, and self-sufficiency.

However, as the opportunities available to women expanded in the 1960s, girls' organizations struggled to maintain their relevancy and appeal. Because their maternalist philosophy neither challenged gender difference nor developed a language of equal rights, girls' organizations generally helped girls *adapt* to prescribed gender roles rather than overturn them. The tension between visions of girls as independent citizens of the world and as wives and mothers remained unresolved in these organizations as the 1960s came to a close. That tension was forced into the open in the 1970s, when the language and ideas of the civil rights and women's movements profoundly affected how girls' organizations understood, described, and conducted their program. These movements transformed the meaning and experience of modern American girlhood, and in response, both the Girl Scouts and the YWCA embraced a feminist-inspired program designed to prepare young women for a much wider range of social and political roles.

Youth Organizations as Social Institutions

The YWCA's Girl Reserves and the Girl Scouts developed alongside a broader proliferation of voluntary youth organizations in the Progressive Era. Youth organizations and other youth-oriented social service agencies emerged as sweeping

social changes encompassing urbanization, patterns of labor and leisure, immigration, the structure of American families, and the protective role of the government merged to create a new cultural understanding of childhood and the child.⁹ The movement of native-born American families from farms to urban locales in search of work coincided with a substantial influx of immigrants arriving in American ports and industrial centers, resulting in a population density shift away from rural areas to cities and suburbs. As families adjusted to the ongoing transition from an agrarian, rural, independent-producer economy toward an industrial, urban, wage-based corporate economy, middle-class children were increasingly less likely to work outside of the home for wages and concurrently faced fewer responsibilities within the home. As a result, around the turn of the century middle-class boys and girls found themselves with an abundance of leisure time, leading to concerns that children spent too much of their days engaged in undirected, unproductive, and unsupervised activity.

Progressive reformers sought to fill this gap with expanded public education and supervised recreation for young people of all classes. While the family remained an important private institution for socializing children and providing emotional support, many of the social and educational activities traditionally associated with the family moved outside the home into the care of public institutions. For example, though a high school education had been the privilege of a select few during the nineteenth century,

⁹ John Demos and Virginia Demos, "Adolescence in Historical Perspective," *The Journal of Marriage and Family* 31.4 (1969): 632-638; Steven Mintz and Susan Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of American Family Life* (New York: Free Press, 1988); Howard Chudacoff, *How Old Are You?: Age Consciousness in American Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); David I. Macleod, *The Age of the Child: Children in America, 1890-1920* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1998).

between 1890 and 1918 attendance jumped from 200,000 to 1.6 million (on average, a new high school opened every day between 1900 and 1930)¹⁰.

As children were leaving the fields and the factories for schoolhouses and the city streets, the child gradually became a sentimentalized figure in American culture and society. The sentimentalization of children began outside of the government through the efforts of progressive reformers, educators, and religious groups who worked to create a series of protective structures to insulate children from the dangers of urbanization and industrialization. Beginning with settlement houses and groups like the Playground Association of America, which advocated for supervised recreational spaces as a safer “alternative to street play,” reformers soon turned to the government to provide formal protections for children.¹¹ Lobbying groups like the National Child Labor Committee (1904) stepped up pressure on the federal government to regulate the exploitation of underage workers. Leading female progressive reformers like Jane Addams, Lillian Wald, and Julia Lathrop petitioned Congress to establish an institution in the federal government dedicated to reducing infant and child mortality rates and improving overall child welfare, which President William Taft approved with the creation of the Children’s Bureau in 1912.¹² The short-lived Sheppard-Towner Act, passed in 1921, further expanded public responsibility for child welfare by authorizing federal financial aid to states for maternity and child health programs. In 1930, President Herbert Hoover issued the Children’s Charter, which announced the obligation of all citizens to the health and

¹⁰ Steven Mintz, *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 175.

¹¹ Mintz, *Huck's Raft*, 179.

¹² Kriste Lindenmeyer, *A Right to Childhood: The U.S. Children's Bureau and Child Welfare, 1912-46* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

wellbeing of America's children. Taken together, the partnership between progressive reformers and the government served to reinforce the notion of childhood as a special, protected stage in life.¹³

The segregation of children into social institutions like public schools, the expansion of government attention to child welfare, and the attendant sentimentalization of the child paralleled the rise of a scientific theory of adolescence popularized by psychologist G. Stanley Hall. Hall's 1904 *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education* described adolescence as a unique developmental period between childhood and adulthood when boys and girls were undergoing rapid physical and mental growth and were on the verge of personal independence, yet lacked the internal control of adults. As a crucial developmental stage in life and a period of emotional storm and stress, Hall contended that during adolescence boys and girls required age- and gender-specific social and educational experiences to develop into physically and morally healthy young men and women.¹⁴ The idea that adolescence represented a particular stage in life, separate from childhood and adulthood, with important developmental needs recognized and accommodated by society, was a modern notion far removed from a preindustrial understanding of children as essentially younger adults.¹⁵ While Hall was primarily

¹³ Viviana A. Zelizer, author of *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), argues this process was all but complete by 1930. See also Molly Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work: Women, Child Welfare, and the State, 1890-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

¹⁴ G. Stanley Hall, *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education* (New York: Appleton, 1904). Hall received Harvard's first Ph.D. in psychology.

¹⁵ Philippe Aries, *Centuries of Childhood* (New York: Vintage Books, 1962); Joseph Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America 1790 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), John R. Gillis,

concerned with boys and with correcting what he saw as the feminizing influences of modern culture, the plight of girls, who were leaving behind the trappings of Victorian womanhood, captured the attention of experts as well.¹⁶ Girls' organizations targeted to middle-class youth arose in response to shape modern girlhood in the era of the "New Woman."

Youth organizations sought to help middle-class boys and girls adapt to modern life by educating them in the cultural values and standards of behavior thought to be appropriate to valuable and active members of American society. Since their creation in the early twentieth century, therefore, youth organizations have been expansive vehicles of socialization, much like public schools in terms of their reach. This has prompted some scholars to interpret youth organizations as sites of *social control* whereby adults attempted to reinscribe traditional hierarchies and behavioral and attitudinal norms. Historian William Graebner, in particular, has argued that youth organizations actually constitute part of a much larger system of authority designed by social scientists, educators, reformers, and religious figures that began coalescing in the Progressive Era. Progressive institutions like settlement houses, public schools, and supervised

Youth and History: Tradition and Change in European Age Relations, 1770-Present (New York: Academic Press, 1974), especially chapter 4; Nancy Lesko, *Act Your Age: A Cultural Construction of Adolescence* (New York: Routledge, 2001). In addition to being a modern notion of age stratification, Hall's theory of adolescence also reflected several key modern intellectual trends; specifically, it relied heavily on Darwinian evolution and played to fears of racial degeneration and deterioration of civilized societies. For a discussion of Hall in this context, see Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

¹⁶ Jane H. Hunter, *How Young Ladies Became Girls: The Victorian Origins of American Girlhood* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); Kathy L. Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Susan A. Miller, *Growing Girls: The Natural Origins of Girls' Organizations in America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007). For more on the negotiation of the concept of female adolescence by Hall and his contemporaries, see Crista DeLuzio, *Female Adolescence in American Scientific Thought, 1830-1930* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), especially chapter 3; and G. Stanley Hall, "The Budding Girl," in *Educational Problems*, Vol. 2 (New York: D. Appleton, 1911), 1-40.

recreational groups, Graebner argues, replaced an older system of moral and religious authority eroding in the late nineteenth century in the face of urbanization, immigration, and scientific inquiry. This new system of social control, which he terms “democratic social engineering,” sought to create consensus by making men and women feel they had been active participants in a society of their own choosing while recapitulating existing relationships of power and prescribing boundaries of behavior. Graebner describes democratic social engineering as:

. . . [a] system of authority, democratic in form if not always in substance, operating on groups rather than on individuals and functioning through participatory rather than authoritarian, subject-object relationships.

. . . Democratic social engineers expected to modify beliefs and change behavior by utilizing, and entering into, a “democratic” process within the family, classroom, club, or other small group.

. . . democratic social engineering was explicitly participatory; those whose attitudes were to be changed, or whose behavior was to be modified, had to be part of the process, to participate or be made to *feel* that they had participated. The vehicles for this technique of participation included forums, debates, and, most commonly, group discussions. At the apex of the system, providing information, guidance, and discipline for the discussions and other group processes, were trained leaders – the shop-floor representatives, in a sense, of our democratic engineers.¹⁷

The small group (or troop or club) formed the basis for democratic social engineering, the context in which it was carried out. Graebner posits that after the turn of the century, progressive educational theorists understood groups to be “important agencies of social adjustment” whereby “the *content* of group experience might be more important in a social sense than the *process* of that experience,” meaning *how* a group went about

¹⁷ William Graebner, *The Engineering of Consent: Democracy and Authority in Twentieth-Century America* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 3-4.

carrying out its goal was considered central to the achievement of that goal.¹⁸ In group processes, methodologies of discussion and democratic participation reigned supreme, with all members of the group working toward the goals of social engineers by engaging in inquiry and open discussion. According to Graebner, this process of education was predicated on a participatory ideal, which was often “contrasted with processes and modes of decision making characterized as autocratic, authoritarian, or . . . totalitarian” to disguise the fact that participants often had “no real or ultimate power to affect policy or outcome.”¹⁹

Critics of Graebner’s interpretation of democratic social engineering have rightly noted it fails to allow for individual response and experience.²⁰ As Joe Austin and Michael Willard write in *Generations of Youth*, “Young people . . . are not without power in their interactions with socializing institutions; they reshape and even appropriate such institutions for more self-directed purposes.”²¹ To be sure, girls’ organizations were limiting in some respects, prescribing certain ways of living and often endeavoring to fit

¹⁸ Ibid., 18.

¹⁹ Ibid., 22-23. Graebner advances this thesis further in *Coming of Age in Buffalo: Youth and Authority in the Postwar Era* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990). In *Coming of Age*, he offers useful theorizing on the multiplicity of youth cultures that operate along lines of race, class, ethnicity, neighborhood, religion, age, etc., calling historical discussion of a single youth culture “collective imagination.” (6) His view on adult-imposed institutions (schools, youth organizations, and churches) is less expansive, viewing them uniformly as “efforts at social engineering,” in which “the authority of adults was in no important way challenged by the limited participation granted youth.” (8) Yet his interpretation of youth/adult interaction as a clash of cultures, with one trying to dominate the other, leaves no room for understanding change over time in relationships between adults and youth. Moreover, his otherwise sensitive examination of youth cultures, with careful attention to race and class, offers scanty consideration of gender as an important dimension of experience.

²⁰ See David E. Shi’s review of *The Engineering of Consent* in *The American Historical Review* 94.1 (February 1989): 225-226 and Theodore R. Mitchell’s review in the *History of Education Quarterly* 29.1 (Spring 1989): 169-172.

²¹ Joe Austin and Michael Nevin Willard, eds., *Generations of Youth: Youth Cultures and History in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 8.

girls into a predetermined mold based on middle-class values and family structure. But historians of women have recognized that, when considered within their socio-cultural context, early girls' organizations held within them seeds of liberation as well. For instance, Sherrie Inness's examination of fictional representations of Girl Scouts, Camp Fire Girls and Woodcraft Girls in early twentieth century girls' serials acknowledged that these stories allowed girls to imagine a "fleeting feeling of agency. . ."²² Laureen Tedesco, who built on Inness' attention to written sources by studying early Girl Scout manuals, found early manuals "offered girls new self-constructs" that overturned outdated models of female passivity. Moreover, she contended that camping, hiking, and outdoor activities provided venues for girls to exercise physical freedoms unknown to earlier generations.²³ Rather than looking at publications, Mary Rothschild focused on the face that early Girl Scout leadership presented to the world. Early Girl Scout leaders, including founder Juliette Gordon Low, self-consciously sought to strike a careful balance between maintaining girls' sense of responsibility to hearth and home while simultaneously laying claim to education and recreational experiences previously reserved for men. In doing so, according to Rothschild, the Girl Scouts demonstrated a "commitment to new ideas about sex roles [that] was not inherent in Boy Scouting as it was in Girl Scouting."²⁴ Finally, others have found that the all-female orientation of girls'

²² Sherrie A. Inness, "Girl Scouts, Camp Fire Girls, and Woodcraft Girls: The Ideology of Girls' Scouting Novels, 1910-1935," in *Continuities in Popular Culture: The Present in the Past and the Past in the Present and Future*, ed. Ray B. Browne and Ronald J. Ambrosetti (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1993), 231.

²³ Laureen Tedesco, "Making a Girl into a Scout: Americanizing Scouting for Girls," in *Delinquents and Debutantes: Twentieth-Century American Girls' Cultures*, ed. Sherrie Inness, (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 29.

²⁴ Rothschild, "To Scout or to Guide?," 120.

organizations could provide a safe haven for women and girls with nontraditional sexual identities.²⁵

In light of this work, I maintain that girls' organizations have historically been both limiting and liberating. Assessing their relative value at any time is difficult, as young people experience their participation in socializing institutions individually in ways mitigated by racial, gender, class, or religious identity, among others, and by the strength of a program in the local community and the personality of individual leaders or advisers. Therefore, rather than attempting to inscribe a definitive meaning to participation in girls' organizations, I have viewed them as evolving negotiations between women and girls. Unlike voluntary youth organizations such as the 4-H, which derived its funding primarily from the federal and state governments, the Girl Scouts and the YWCA operated on a consumer-driven model, generating their operational budget from membership dues and Community Chests. This created a bottom-up effect, whereby changes in the organization in the mid-twentieth century stemmed from understanding consumer demand. As membership organizations, the Girl Scouts and the YWCA navigated between what they believed was appropriate character training for girls while securing girls' interest. In doing so, they continued a tradition of activism on behalf of American girls that began almost a century ago.

The Early Girl Scouts

Scouting as an organized recreational and character-training program began for boys in the summer of 1907 on Brownsea Island in southern England. Lord Robert

²⁵ Nancy Manahan, ed., *On My Honor: Lesbians Reflect on Their Scouting Experience* (Northboro, MA: Madwoman Press, 1997).

Baden-Powell, a celebrated British general recently returned from the Anglo-Boer War, conceived of an organization such as the Boy Scouts as a way to reverse the feminizing influences of Victorian culture that he believed had left British soldiers serving under him in South Africa unprepared for the battlefield and the rigors of camp life. The philosophy behind Baden-Powell's early Boy Scout troops was explicitly about reinforcing militarism, discipline, and masculinity in boys. These ends were met through play; namely, through vigorous outdoor activity that included camping, swimming, hiking, tracking, and earning badges, a program Britain's boys took to with unrestrained enthusiasm.

Britain's girls demonstrated their own enthusiasm for scouting when a handful showed up to join 11,000 boys at a high-profile 1909 Boy Scout rally at the Crystal Palace in London. Baden-Powell was immediately supportive of the idea of a female corollary to the Boy Scouts, but feared sharing the name "Scout" with the girls would diminish the masculine character of the Boy Scout program. He insisted the new British group for girls be called "Girl Guides," reflecting popular understandings of the so-called proper role of girls as helpmeets and friends who should give succor to soldiers rather than playing soldier themselves. He handed the project over to his sister Agnes to create a Girl Guide organization, similar in form to Boy Scouting but suitable to girls. Before turning it over, Baden-Powell was sure to replace the militaristic khaki of the Boy Scout uniform with blue blouses and skirts for the Girl Guides, which he declared "attractive yet serviceable."²⁶ With their emphasis on domesticity, Girl Guides stood in stark

²⁶ Quoted in Richard A. Voeltz, "The Antidote to 'Khaki Fever'? The Expansion of the British Girl Guides during the First World War," *Journal of Contemporary History* 27 (1992): 632; also quoted in Miller, *Growing Girls*, 24.

contrast to the Scouts, a name that rang with adventure, exploration, and danger, and their membership grew only modestly before World War I. Thus things may have remained, were it not for the visit to Britain of a somewhat listless American woman in the spring of 1911.

Born to an affluent family from Savannah, Georgia in 1860, Juliette Gordon Low was an archetypical southern lady – educated, wealthy, cultured, and groomed for a life of genteel domesticity – who married Englishman William Mackay Low at the age of 26. His philandering ways and alcoholic tendencies left her a childless, unhappy, and enervated woman even before his death in 1905 made her widow. Wealthy, yet depressed and disillusioned with society's expectations of her sex and social class, Low once wrote to her mother Nellie lamenting she was “just an idle woman of the world, with no real work or duties.”²⁷ Her outlook took a turn for the better when she traveled to Britain in the spring of 1911 and met Lord Baden-Powell and his sister Agnes. She was tremendously taken by the organizations they had established for Britain's children, and by Baden-Powell's personal charisma and charm, and she saw in scouting both an antidote to her personal feelings of uselessness and a cure for the afflictions she believed were visited upon children by the pressures of modern society. After spending several months helping the Baden-Powells organize troops in Britain, Low returned to the United States in March of 1912 intent on establishing a scouting program “for the girls of Savannah, and all America, and all the world.”²⁸

²⁷ Letter from Juliette Low to Nellie Kinzie Gordon, quoted in Gladys Denny Shultz and Daisy Lawrence, *The Lady from Savannah: The Life of Juliette Low* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1958), 260.

²⁸ Quoted in Rothschild, “To Scout or to Guide?,” 116; Charles E. Strickland, “Juliette Low, the Girl Scouts, and the Role of American Women,” in *Woman's Being, Woman's Place: Female Identity and Vocation in American History*, ed. Mary Kelley (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1979).

Low imported the Girl Guides to the United States as a female counterpart to the American Boy Scouts, which had been introduced in the country in 1910. Low's early troops engaged in similar "back to nature" activities like camping and hiking, learned new skills like signaling and fire-making, and practiced typical domestic skills. Initially, Low revised the Girl Guide handbook, *How Girls Can Help the Empire*, an adaptation of the original Boy Scout handbook *Scouting For Boys*, into an American version called *How Girls Can Help Their Country*. But Low had no intention of mimicking the Girl Guide program for long. By 1915, she had discarded the name Guides and renamed her organization the Girl Scouts (which she incorporated in 1915), swapped the blue and white uniforms of the Guides for the khaki of the Boy Scouts, and established a national headquarters in Washington D.C. Low's decision to claim the Scout name for girls disarmed and dismayed American Boy Scout officials, who feared a program for girls that too closely mirrored that for boys "sissified" the Boy Scouts and undermined the very purpose of its creation – reestablishing manliness in American boys.²⁹ James E. West, American Boy Scout Chief Executive, battled Low's use of the name throughout the 1920s in the press and in the courts. Accusing the Girl Scouts of "aping men," West urged the Girl Scouts to merge with another newly established national girls' organization, the Camp Fire Girls, whose leadership adhered to more conservative traditions of femininity and were "dedicated to the cultivation of hearth and home."³⁰

²⁹ West quoted in Rothschild, "To Scout or to Guide?," 118.

³⁰ Ibid., 118; James E. West to Anne Hyde Choate, 8 November 1919, Proposed Amalgamation Controversy 1911-1923 File, Camp Fire Girls Box, National Historic Preservation Center, Girl Scouts of the United States of America, New York City, New York (hereafter cited as GSUSA).

Luther Gulick, a former YMCA executive and long-standing contributor to the playground movement, and his wife Charlotte Gulick, a former Wellesley College student who shared her husband's progressive education beliefs and social conservatism, founded the Camp Fire Girls in the United States in 1911. Besides the Camp Fire Girls, a number of other girls' organizations were appearing in the United States in the early 1910s, including the Bee Hive Girls, the Girl Pioneers, the Woodcraft Girls, and the YWCA's Girl Reserves. Many of these groups had overlapping leadership, comprised of men and women from schools of progressive education, social reform movements, the playground movement, and other religious and civic groups.³¹ Yet the Camp Fire Girls quickly distinguished themselves as the frontrunner, with a membership of at least 60,000 by 1915, twenty times that of the Girl Scouts.³²

Low's insistence on making her organization more similar to the Boy Scouts highlighted a profound difference between the Girl Scouts and the Camp Fire Girls. Camp Fire had a specific understanding of domesticity and the role of girls' organizations in developing American womanhood that was imbued with a celebration of women's essential domestic nature. A press release issued shortly after Camp Fire's organizational meeting described their philosophy: "Activities to arouse what is most womanly in the girl are to center around the Camp Fire and the hearth fire and appeal to the girls' instinct

³¹ For instance, Camp Fire's inaugural meeting was attended by Dr. Anna Brown of the YWCA, American Boy Scout cofounder Ernest Thompson Seton and his suffragist wife Grace Gallatin Seton, Boy Scout Chief Executive James E. West, Secretary of the Playground Association Howard Braucher, and Luther and Charlotte Gulick. Early Camp Fire board members included Jane Addams, pioneer in the settlement house movement and founder of Chicago's Hull House, Grace Hoadley Dodge, the first president of the National Board of the YWCA, and muckraking journalist Ida Tarbell. See Jennifer Hillman Helgren, "Inventing American Girlhood: Gender and Citizenship in the Twentieth-Century Camp Fire Girls," (Ph.D. diss., Claremont Graduate University, 2005), 68-72.

³² Leslie Paris, *Children's Nature: The Rise of the American Summer Camp* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 50; Mary Degenhardt and Mary Levey, *Highlights in Girl Scouting, 1912-2001* (New York, Girl Scouts of the U.S.A, 2002), 7.

to please.”³³ Camp Fire’s philosophy of womanliness, beauty and honor was most aptly expressed through its choice of uniform for girls, an Indian maiden ceremonial dress, which girls could decorate with beads earned for various tasks. As a dramatic play published in Camp Fire’s monthly magazine *Wo-He-Lo* in 1914 exclaimed, “You’ve no idea what fun it is to cook and sew, especially when it means more beads for your ceremonial gown.”³⁴ The Boy Scouts of America considered the Camp Fire Girls, with their emphasis on celebrating the innate, natural differences between boys and girls, to be their true complement.

In fact, Juliette Low and other members of the Girl Scout national staff exchanged a number of perfunctory letters with the Camp Fire Girls about merging throughout the 1910s. In their correspondence, they affirmed that the Girl Scouts and Camp Fire Girls shared certain attributes and practices but rejected the suggestion that the organizations held enough in common to merge into one national movement. And indeed, womanhood as the Girl Scouts defined it was a much more expansive category. Certainly domesticity played a part – girls were encouraged to learn domestic tasks as part of their training for their adult lives and were told that caring for home and children was a vital service to the country.

Yet the Girl Scouts did not necessarily consider women’s domestic role to be an extension of their essential inner nature or evidence that girls and women had to be sheltered or protected from the world outside of the home. Rather, in the Girl Scout program girls were encouraged to become independent, resourceful, and capable young women through a regimen of physical fitness and career preparation, citizenship training,

³³ Miller, *Growing Girls*, 16.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

education, and outdoor adventure. Early Girl Scout manuals highlighted the contributions of important women in American history, urged active public service, and taught new skills like knot tying, map-making, orienteering, and camping. Caroline Slade, a national board member in 1918, encapsulated the organization's position in a letter written just before women gained the suffrage: "The name 'Scout' expresses in a peculiarly adequate way the significance of the larger opportunities which are coming to us, and typifies the vigorous articulation in civic affairs which we anticipate for the coming generation of American women. At the same time, 'Girl' emphasizes the continuance of our responsibilities in the home, and the carrying over to its every task the high code of the scout."³⁵

In 1919, the Camp Fire Girls issued a formal proposal to the Girl Scouts to merge by shedding their respective names and creating a new entity altogether. The proposal was based on the opinion of its leadership that the two organizations shared an interest in educating and socializing American girls into womanhood and thus were "kindred in purpose, differing only in the method of approach or in minor administrative details of their programs." Girl Scout officials vehemently disagreed, blasting Camp Fire as "overstrained and sentimental," as well as "self-conscious and over-emotional." Camp Fire programs, Scout leaders adamantly maintained, "idealize everyday [domestic] routine: hence an elaborate ritual symbolic of the principles of the order and intended to add dignity to the proceedings." Girl Scouting, on the other hand, "does not start with the boy or the girl as an individual or in the home, but with the boy and girl as a member of society . . . In a word, the vital difference is that Scouting stresses citizenship as an aim

³⁵ Caroline Slade to Anne Hyde Choate, 13 February 1918, Comments-Baden-Powell-Low-Miscellaneous File, BSA Controversy Box, GSUSA.

and tries to reach out to the home and the best things in life in order to make them contribute most to the public good.”³⁶

Whether the ideologies of the Camp Fire Girls and the Girl Scouts were substantially different or not, the popularity of Girl Scouting rose steadily throughout the first several decades. The original Girl Scout promise required girls to “To do your duty to God and to your country” and to “help other people at all times.” It also required girls to obey the Laws of the Scouts, which included such moral guidelines as being thrifty, trustworthy, loyal, useful, cheerful, and “a friend to all, and a sister to every other Girl Scout no matter to what social class she may belong.”³⁷ Without a doubt, early activities were revolutionary for their time. Girl Scouting lacked the overt militarism of the Boy Scouts and accepted the concept of men’s and women’s different spheres of responsibility, but it asked girls to be knowledgeable, capable, resourceful, and independent members of society.

Membership in the Girl Scouts increased substantially during the two World Wars, thanks in no small part to the visibility of uniformed girls aiding the war effort by selling Liberty Loans, volunteering in hospitals and child care centers, marching in parades, tending to Victory Gardens, collecting materials for war production, and generally appealing to patriotism and good citizenship. After 1918, Girl Scout membership surged to 50,000, grew steadily to almost 300,000 by 1930 (when they

³⁶ Josephine Bacon to Jane Deeter Rippen, n.d., Proposed Amalgamation Controversy 1911-1923 File, Camp Fire Girls Box, GSUSA; James Russell to Francis P. Dodge, 16 August 1917, Proposed Amalgamation Controversy 1911-1923 File, Camp Fire Girls Box, GSUSA.

³⁷ Degenhardt and Levey, *Highlights in Girl Scouting, 1912-2001*, 54.

began to outnumber the Camp Fire Girls), and reached the one million-member mark just as World War II was ending in 1945.³⁸

The YWCA's Girl Reserves

Though their work with girls would ultimately share a number of distinctive qualities, the Girl Scouts and the YWCA originally sprang from quite different social movements. While the Girl Scouts were firmly planted in the Progressive Era, the YWCA began earlier in a Protestant revival that swept the United States in the 1850s. The organization traces its roots to the Ladies Christian Union, a small prayer circle formed by a group of religious upper-class women in New York City in 1858 who initially busied themselves with moral uplift of the less privileged classes. By the 1870s, this prayer group and others like it had begun to evolve into more formal reform groups known as Young Women's Christian Associations sprouting up in large cities around the country, including Boston, Pittsburgh, and Philadelphia. Women in YWCAs shared a devotion to the tenets of the Social Gospel, a spiritual philosophy that grounded social reform in Christian principles, and were particularly concerned with the spiritual and moral uplift of the growing population of unmarried working women moving to urban areas in the late nineteenth century in search of employment.³⁹ Through their work, they extended protection and social services to working girls by sponsoring private boarding

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Nancy Marie Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood, Race Relations and the YWCA, 1906-1946* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 13.

houses, holding skills-based classes like sewing, and offering employment assistance and education.⁴⁰

As these community-based Young Women's Christian Associations were developing primarily in eastern American cities in the late nineteenth century, a parallel movement was developing among college women who shared a similar religious and class profile with their older counterparts, particularly at land-grant schools in the Midwest. The first Student YWCA was organized at Normal State University in Illinois in 1873, and the student movement spread rapidly to new campuses as female college attendance expanded. These two groups – community YWCAs and Student YWCAs – shared a name, a religious orientation, and similar social reform objectives. But they were not affiliated with one another until 1906, when Grace Hoadley Dodge, a prominent white female reformer from a family with a long history of philanthropic work, brought together community YWCAs and Student YWCAs under a loose federation known as the Young Women's Christian Association of the U.S.A. dedicated to “advanc[ing] the physical, social, intellectual, moral and spiritual interests of young women.”⁴¹

After the merger in 1906, the YWCA was the third largest women's social reform organization in the United States, second only to the General Federation of Women's Clubs and the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, and continued to be guided by a

⁴⁰ Mary S. Sims, *The Natural History of a Social Institution - The Young Women's Christian Association* (New York: Womans Press, 1936); Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood*, 2007.

⁴¹ Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood*, 18. For more on the YWCA in the nineteenth century and the merging of the International Board of Women's and Young Women's Christian Associations (the national organizing body of community YWCAs) and the American Committee of Young Women's Christian Associations (the national organizing body of Student YWCAs), see Robertson as well as Sims, *The Natural History of a Social Institution* and *The Purpose Widens, 1947-1967* (New York: National Board of the Y.W.C.A. of the U.S.A., 1969).

spiritual philosophy that linked personal salvation to social salvation.⁴² Dodge established a national headquarters in New York City staffed by professional women who could support the activities of the 147 community associations and 469 student associations that initially affiliated with the National YWCA. As a loosely affiliated association of women, the national structure allowed local YWCAs to preserve their autonomy while drawing strength and support from their national coalition. Representatives from each local association, student association, and constituent group (such as the YWCA's Industrial Program) gathered at National Conventions to decide on the overall program for the national organization, to elect members to the YWCA's governing body (the National Board), and to periodically vote on policy and constitutional changes. By the 1940s, the organization counted more than 400 affiliated community associations and a membership in excess of one million women and girls.

True to its membership profile, the YWCA described itself as "a fellowship of women and girls."⁴³ Most historians conflate this expression, however, by extending the category of girls only to those in the campus-based Student YWCA. Yet the first official YWCA club for girls, meaning those between the ages of 12 and 17, was established in 1881 in Oakland, California where it was known as the Little Girls' Christian Association. Shortly thereafter, other YWCA-sponsored girls' clubs sprouted up in high schools and in local associations around the country, including the "Girl's Branch" of the Poughkeepsie, New York association, the first long-lived girls' program. Founded in

⁴² Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood*, 75.

⁴³ For most of its history, the YWCA's purpose has been: "To build a fellowship of women and girls devoted to the task of realizing in our common life those ideals of personal and social living to which we are committed by our faith as Christians."

1886 and counting 110 members, the Girl's Branch raised money for their own recreation space, and held singing, sewing, and cooking programs.⁴⁴

The popularity of YWCA girls' clubs grew steadily. When student and community YWCAs merged to create the National YWCA in 1906, there were so many girls participating in YW programs and facilities that Grace Dodge designated a Special Worker for Junior Work to oversee the organization's work with girls. By 1909, 108 associations reported they had a separate program for young girls.⁴⁵ Throughout the next several years, a number of community associations established their own "Junior Departments" to manage the activities and membership of girls under the age of 18. With little standardization, community associations had different girls' club names and different organizational methods, but they generally shared a common understanding of work with girls as character training (and thus an extension of their uplift work with young women) and a method of feeding new membership into the adult association.

Noting the formation of the Girl Scouts, the Camp Fire Girls, and other organizations for girls in the 1910s, in 1917 the YWCA's national office identified the need for a standardized program that would build strong, independent women of spiritual and moral character from an early age and could "understand the conditions in which [girls are] living."⁴⁶ Gertrude Gogin, National Girls Work Secretary, concluded, "the only way to have constructive work with younger girls was to have a national program which would bring about unity and standards to our work" and would be "better adapted

⁴⁴ Catherine Vance, "The Girl Reserve Movement of the Young Women's Christian Association," (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University Teacher's College, 1937), 8.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 11.

⁴⁶ Annual Report of Gertrude Gogin to the Department of Method, 1917, File 38, Box 355, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, MA (hereafter cited as SSC).

to our Association work than is Scout, Camp Fire or Woodcraft.”⁴⁷ The YWCA standardized a program for girls of junior high and high school age in September of 1918, calling it the Girl Reserves. Following the model of their peer girls’ organizations, the Girl Reserves adopted a set of shared rituals, symbols (a blue triangle overlaid upon a circle, with the three sides of triangle representing Health, Knowledge, and Spirit), songs, ceremonials, and a uniform (a blue skirt and white blouse).⁴⁸ Gogin described a Girl Reserve as “a girl who is constantly storing up, putting in reserve, more of those qualities which will help her to take her place as a Christian citizen in her home, her school, her church, and her community.”⁴⁹

Like the Girl Scouts, the Girl Reserves garnered a good deal of public attention during World War I. Clubs engaged in volunteer activities similar to the Scouts: learning first aid and child care, supervising playgrounds, collecting books for servicemen, volunteering with the Red Cross and the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), and assisting in child care facilities and consumer education campaigns.⁵⁰ Thanks to the YWCA’s exposure during the war, their membership grew rapidly among white Protestant and Catholic girls and (more slowly) among African-American and Jewish girls, reaching almost 100,000 members by 1920.⁵¹ By the mid-1930s, membership

⁴⁷ Gertrude Gogin, Annual Report to the Department of Method, 1918, File 38, Box 355, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

⁴⁸ Vance, “The Girl Reserve Movement,” 42-44.

⁴⁹ Y.W.C.A. of the U.S.A. Finding Aid, Record Group 6 (Program), Subseries D. (Teenage and Younger Girls), YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

⁵⁰ Statement of Girl Reserve Program in a Time of War, n.d., File 1, Box 551, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

⁵¹ Gertrude Gogin, Report of the Girls’ Work Bureau to the Department of Research and Method, 1920, File 38, Box 355, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

nationwide stood at 325,000, and clubs could be found all over the country.⁵² The YWCA renamed the Girl Reserve program “Y-Teens” in 1946, signaling the increasing prevalence and influence of teenagers and teen culture in American society.

The Girl Scouts and Y-Teens in the Postwar Era

By the end of World War II, the YWCA and the Girl Scouts had solidified their role as socializing institutions concerned with leadership development, spiritual and character education, and citizenship for girls. Part character training, part schoolroom, and part adventure, after 1945 Girl Scouts came together in troops of 10-12 girls on average, usually formed in their neighborhoods. Most members were white and lived in cities or suburbs where the Girl Scout national office supported a local council, though the organization made some accommodations for girls living in rural areas or in migrant farm camps to join lone troops independent of councils. Troops usually met once a week in leaders’ homes or in churches, or less often in schools or at local recreation centers and YWCAs.

In the 1950s, a girl or her family paid dues to the national office, and in return leaders received training materials and the *Girl Scout Leader* magazine, the *American Girl* magazine for girls, and support from the local council, which maintained local camps and sponsored and managed local activities. Troop activities, which might include camping, public service, travel, or social events, were selected by girls and their leader with the guidance of handbooks that carefully detailed for them the appropriate structure and process of everything from meeting procedures to badge work. Reflecting popular

⁵² Figure Profile of Younger Girls in the Y.W.C.A., 1937, Microdex 4, Reel 130, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC; Girl Reserve Summary, 1932, Microdex 4, Reel 130, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC. The Girl Reserves was most heavily concentrated in the East.

notions of sharp developmental differences among children and teenagers, until 1963 girls were organized into three age groupings: Brownies for girls 7 to 9, Intermediates for girls 10 to 13, and Seniors for girls from 14 to 17. In 1963, the Girl Scouts reorganized to further subdivide older girls into Juniors (age 9 to 11), Cadettes (age 11 to 14), and Seniors (age 14 to 17). The organization was always more popular among younger girls, but in the mid-twentieth century Cadette and Senior scouts represented hundreds of thousands of girls.⁵³

At the local level, Y-Teen clubs functioned in much the same way as Girl Scout troops. Y-Teens were organized into clubs sponsored by local associations, which provided staff members or volunteers to serve as advisers. Girls paid annual dues to the national YWCA individually and as a club.⁵⁴ Y-Teen clubs were ostensibly self-directed and self-governed, but in return for dues, club advisers received standardized training, program materials, and a monthly periodical for teens called *The Bookshelf*. Through their adviser, Y-Teens were kept abreast of nationally-sponsored events for teens, such as regional summer conferences, and local camps, recreational outings, and special educational activities, all of which offered experience in leadership, democracy, and community-building. The national office and their publication wing, the Womans Press, also developed lists of suggested readings and activities to provide clubs with program ideas and to align their work with the YWCA's Statement of Purpose, which read "To build a fellowship of women and girls devoted to the task of realizing in our common life

⁵³ In 1965, girls aged 11-17 (Cadettes and Seniors) comprised approximately 1/6th of Girl Scout membership, or 543,000 girls. See Girl Scouts of the U.S.A. Annual Report, 1965, GSUSA.

⁵⁴ Sims, *The Purpose Widens*, 32.

those ideals of the personal and social living to which we are committed by our faith as Christians.”

A wide range of activities fulfilled the YWCA’s Purpose. At Y-Teen club meetings and in YWCA-sponsored activities, girls received character training and education in family life, citizenship, health and hygiene, world affairs, sports, vocational and educational opportunities, arts and crafts, and religion, and participated in games and athletics, service work, storytelling, and parties. Like the Scouts, the average Y-Teen club was composed of white junior high and high school girls living in medium-sized cities and towns. But while the Girl Scouts generally organized troops along neighborhood lines, Y-Teen clubs were closely tied to the school system and girls were generally organized into Y-Teen clubs based on what school they attended.⁵⁵ Meetings were rarely held at leaders’ homes or in churches; instead, meetings were usually held at school or at the local YWCA, and teachers often served as club advisers.

Y-Teens and Girl Scouts also shared a similar religious and class profile. Both organizations presented themselves as nonsectarian and open to girls of all religious faiths. Some Jewish girls joined their Christian peers in Y-Teen clubs and Girl Scout troops, but in both the overwhelming majority were Protestant and Catholic. While specific class data was not gathered by the organizations, the Girl Scouts and Y-Teens had a middle-class membership profile and middle-class priorities. Participation in voluntary youth organizations was predicated on free time and available resources, such

⁵⁵ Most Y-Teen clubs were white but, as is discussed in chapter three, African-American girls frequently participated in Y-Teens as well, especially in communities with an African-American “branch.” In 1960, roughly 10% of Y-Teens were African American. And while the YWCA made accommodations for girls living in rural areas to join “registered” Y-Teens clubs, rural areas and major metropolitan areas were underrepresented in Y-Teen membership. See “Some Findings of the 1959 Teenage Program Study,” Microdex 2, Reel 250, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

as cars for transporting girls to meetings (with stay-at-home mothers to drive them), and money for uniforms, activities, or special trips. Moreover, the daughters who met in weekly troop or club meetings were not workers as they might have been in earlier centuries. While they may have been expected to do chores around the house, they were not vital to the family economy, and while they may have held jobs outside of the home such as babysitting, they were expected to complete high school rather than pursue full-time wage work.⁵⁶ Distinctively middle-class, the girls participating in Y-Teen clubs and Girl Scouts troops were going to school, focusing on self-improvement, and preparing themselves for the constellation of roles they would hold in the future, as civic volunteers, wives, mothers, homemakers, or career women.

Men and boys were not absent altogether from these girls' organizations. Since the inception of YWCAs in the mid-nineteenth century, men populated local boards of advisers or trustees, overseeing a host of legal, financial, and real estate matters, although they were rarely, if ever, invited to hold leadership positions on the National Board or in local associations.⁵⁷ Full-time male staff members and volunteers were also infrequent, but present. By the mid-twentieth century, men and boys participated in all aspects of local associations in small numbers, taking part in classes, interest groups, and

⁵⁶ Almost all Y-Teens attended school full-time, indicated by the presence of a separate YWCA group for employed and working girls under the age of 18. Moreover, working-class representation in the YWCA ebbed after 1945. The Industrial Program, which had been an important and influential constituent group in the early 1900s, dissolved and was replaced with a national Young Adult Council that incorporated the Industrial Program members, Business and Professional Program members, and Y-Wives, a group for young non-working married women. For more on this transition, see Dorothea Browder, "From Uplift to Agitation: Working Women, Race, and Coalition in the Young Women's Christian Association, 1908-1950" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2008).

⁵⁷ Nancy Marie Robertson with Elizabeth Norris, "Without Documents No History: Sources and Strategies for Researching the YWCA," in *Men and Women Adrift: The YMCA and the YWCA in the City*, eds. Nina Mjagkij and Margaret Spratt (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 279-280.

recreational activities.⁵⁸ The Girl Scouts also counted a small cadre of male volunteers by the mid-twentieth century; by one count, approximately 56,000 men served the Girl Scouts in some capacity by 1964.⁵⁹ In addition, coeducational activities for girls – mostly social activities like teen canteens and lounges, dances, and parties – were part and parcel of both organizations’ program after World War II. In 1947, the first national coed Y-Teen conference was held at Grinnell College in Iowa, reflecting the increasingly prevalent role of coeducational social activities in girls’ lives and social experiences. However, full membership in both organizations remained restricted to women and girls, whose needs continued to define the shape and scope of Y-Teen and Girl Scout programming.

The similarities between the Girl Scouts and the YWCA in the postwar period illustrate some of the key characteristics of twentieth-century girls’ organizations. National staff members of both organizations were educated, middle- to upper-class women who were knowledgeable about social science, childrearing, and progressive educational theory. Both organizations adhered to a liberal Christian religious ethic that valued the individual, spread a message of friendship and brotherhood/sisterhood, and linked spiritual training with personal development and social improvement. Each had a rhetorical tradition of diversity with respect to race and religion that was wholly absent in many other prominent white women’s organizations. Both saw the work they were doing as vital to national health and to the American democratic project. And they shared a

⁵⁸ Report on Men, Boys and Families in the YWCA, November 1956, File 241, Box 6, Young Women’s Christian Association of Cambridge, Records 1881-1981, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

⁵⁹ “Men in Girl Scouting” memorandum, June 1964, Men in Scouting File, GSUSA.

similar organizational setup, with a national body that coordinated managerial and governance tasks and served as a clearinghouse for hundreds of local associations and councils, who in return retained a certain amount of autonomy in their day to day activities. Moreover, the two organizations frequently consulted with one another on issues related to youth education, even formally collaborating under structures like the youth division of the National Social Welfare Assembly (formed in 1945). Perhaps their most important shared quality, however, was a strong commitment to women's advancement through education and skill-building. At a period of time when the interests, needs, and transgressions of boys dominated public discourse, groups like the Girl Scouts and the YWCA sustained a focus on the concerns of girls.

Due to these shared qualities, I have treated the YWCA and the Girl Scouts as more similar than not. Still, they had some important differences that should be noted. While the Girl Scouts was founded in 1912 at the hands of one woman who wished to create an organization specifically for girls growing up in the era of the "New Woman," the YWCA developed during the late 1800s as a social reform organization concerned primarily with the welfare of working-class women, and only later established a formal program for girls as an offshoot of the adult body. This more expansive purpose, which attracted significant numbers of African-American, immigrant, and working women to the YWCA, shaped the organization's historical commitment to social justice, especially to working women's rights, which was much more absent in the Girl Scouts. Moreover, the YWCA's adult wing was fully engaged in national political lobbying, whereas the Girl Scouts held fast to a policy of non-engagement with formal politics. Within the

following chapters, it is evident when these differences were germane to their programs for girls.

Structure and Goals

In analyzing the programs of the Girl Scouts and the Y-Teens between 1945 and 1980, this dissertation makes three contributions. First, it adds to the history of girls by expanding our knowledge of girls' organizations after World War II. A number of studies have investigated the influence of schools, churches, families, peer groups, and the media on youth life and culture after World War II.⁶⁰ Like these other cultural spheres, historian Stephen Lassonde notes that youth organizations have also "broadly and profoundly affected the ways that children learn how they ought to relate to adults and how to function effectively in society."⁶¹ Yet surprisingly little has been written about youth organizations in general (and girls' organizations in particular) in the postwar era, despite their influence as a site for educating and socializing youth. Mary Sims, the unofficial biographer of the YWCA, briefly discusses the Girl Reserves/Y-Teens in her three

⁶⁰ Beth L. Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999) and *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988); Wini Breines, *Young, White, and Miserable: Growing Up Female in the Fifties* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992); Ronald D. Cohen, "The Delinquents: Censorship and Youth Culture in Recent U. S. History," *History of Education Quarterly* 37.3 (1997): 251-270; Susan J. Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media* (New York: Times Books, 1994); Graebner, *Coming of Age in Buffalo*; James Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Andrew Hartman, *Education and the Cold War: The Battle for the American School* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Ann Hulbert, *Raising America: Experts, Parents, and a Century of Advice About Children* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003); Stephen Lassonde, "Age and Authority: Adult-Child Relations during the Twentieth Century in the United States," *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 1.1 (Winter 2008): 95-105; Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988); for much-needed research on postwar cultures of African-American, Chicano, and lesbian youths, see Part II in Austin and Willard, eds., *Generations of Youth*, 136-239.

⁶¹ Lassonde, "Age and Authority," 96.

internal histories of the organization, but the last one was published in 1969.⁶² A handful of historians and scholars have studied the motivations and philosophies of the founders of girls' organizations', have analyzed their natural origins, and have considered their popular and self-representations. Several of these studies have debated the extent to which early girls' organizations challenged traditional gender roles.⁶³ Others have considered the experience of women and girls in local clubs and troops.⁶⁴ But almost none of these studies extend their analysis beyond 1945.⁶⁵ This is particularly surprising because, while girls' organizations were novel in the 1910s and 1920s, their programs

⁶² Sims, *The Natural History of a Social Institution* (1936), *The YWCA - An Unfolding Purpose* (New York: Womans Press, 1950), and *The Purpose Widens* (1969). The Girl Scouts have commissioned several internal histories that extend to the present, which I have drawn from. See Degenhardt and Levey, *Highlights in Girl Scouting, 1912-2001*; Lillian S. Williams, *A Bridge to the Future: The History of Diversity in Girl Scouting* (New York: Girl Scouts of the U.S.A., 1996); Louis Harris and Carolyn Setlow, *Girl Scouts: Its Role in the Lives of American Women of Distinction* (New York: Girl Scouts of the U.S.A., 1991). For an internal history of the Camp Fire Girls, see Helen Buckler, Mary F. Fielder and Martha F. Allen, *Wo-He-Lo: The Story of the Camp Fire Girls, 1910-1960* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1961).

⁶³ There is a similar historiography for non-American youth organizations, but I restrict my examples to those dealing with the American context. See Schultz and Lawrence, *Lady from Savannah*; Melissa Ann Langley Biegert, "Woman Scout: The Empowerment of Juliette Gordon Low" (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1998); Paul Pressly, "Educating the Daughters of Savannah's Elite: The Pape School, the Girl Scouts, and the Progressive Movement," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 80.2 (Summer 1996): 246-275; Miller, *Growing Girls*; Paris, *Children's Nature*; Rothschild, "To Scout or to Guide?"; Inness, "Girl Scouts, Camp Fire Girls, and Woodcraft Girls," in *Continuities in Popular Culture*; Rebekah E. Revzin, "American Girlhood in the Early Twentieth Century: The Ideology of Girl Scout Literature, 1913-1930," *Library Quarterly* 68.3 (1998): 261-275; Laureen Ann Tedesco, "A Nostalgia for Home: Daring and Domesticity in Girl Scouting and Girls' Fiction, 1913-1933" (Ph.D. diss., Texas A&M University, 1999) and "Making a Girl into a Scout," in *Delinquents and Debutantes*; Wendy Sterne, "The Formation of the Scouting Movement and the Gendering of Citizenship" (Ph.D. diss., University of Madison-Wisconsin, 1993). There is an extensive YWCA literature, but it universally omits the girls' program.

⁶⁴ Elisabeth Israels Perry, "From Achievement to Happiness: Girl Scouting in Middle Tennessee, 1910s-1960s," *Journal of Women's History* 5.2 (Fall 1993): 75-94 and "'The Very Best Influence': Josephine Holloway and Girl Scouting in Nashville's African-American Community," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 52.2 (1993): 73-85; Noraleen Ann Young, "'The Girl Scout of Today, the Woman of Tomorrow': Girl Scouting in Central Indiana, 1917-1992" (M.A. thesis, Indiana University, 1992).

⁶⁵ The same holds true for boys' clubs. See David I. Macleod, *Building Character in the American Boy: The Boy Scouts, YMCA, and their Forerunners, 1870-1920* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983); Michael Rosenthal, *The Character Factory: Baden-Powell and the Origins of the Boy Scout Movement* (New York: Random House, 1984); Thomas Winter, *Making Men, Making Class: The YMCA and Workingmen, 1877-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). An exception is Jay Mechling's *On My Honor: Boy Scouts and the Making of American Youth* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

evolved continually throughout the century. Moreover, their membership actually expanded after World War II, peaking in the 1960s.⁶⁶ As a corrective, this dissertation explores how middle-class women conceived of womanhood and communicated their beliefs to girls through voluntary youth organizations after 1945.

Second, this work deepens our understanding of the history of girlhood, exploring the experience of growing up female in the postwar period by considering an overlooked site of women's education and socialization. In operating as socializing institutions, girls' organizations like the YWCA and the Girl Scouts make up part of what one historian calls the "'cultural discourse' that helps to form a girl's experience of what it means to be a girl and, later, a woman."⁶⁷ Thanks to the work of scholars like Joanne Meyerowitz and Susan Douglas, we know much about the cultural discourse of womanhood in the mid-twentieth century conveyed through popular forms of entertainment, such as music and movies, and in print media and advertising. As they have shown, the competing cultural messages communicated to women in the 1950s and 1960s – which told women and girls to be docile, domestic, and well-mannered, but also capable, industrious, and sexually desirable – had unanticipated political implications. They and others established the argument that commercial and consumer culture contained "liberating possibilities" that contrasted with "restrictive norms" to create a friction that fomented feminists' rejection of domesticity and traditional gender roles by the late 1960s.⁶⁸ We know far less,

⁶⁶ A notable exception to the tendency of historians to discontinue analysis of girls' organizations after 1945 is Helgren's 2005 Ph.D. dissertation, "Inventing American Girlhood," although even in Helgren's work the majority of the analysis focuses on the pre-1945 period. I have drawn on Helgren's study of the Camp Fire Girls for comparative purposes.

⁶⁷ Inness, ed., *Delinquents and Debutantes*, 2.

⁶⁸ Joanne Meyerowitz, "Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946-1958," *Journal of American History* 79 (1993): 1455-82; Douglas, *Where the Girls Are*; Quotes from

however, about the other potentially political aspects of girls' lives outside of mass media and consumer culture. This dissertation seeks to fill out our knowledge of the dissonant constructions of womanhood that permeated the experience of girls coming of age in the mid-twentieth century.

Finally, this dissertation affirms the YWCA and the Girl Scouts as part of a larger body of progressive women's activism that bridged the first and second waves of feminism. In doing so, it builds on the extensive work undertaken by historians of women who have established the importance of women's civic organizations to advancing women's social, political, and cultural status in the twentieth century in the absence of formal political movements (i.e., the suffrage movement and the equal rights movement).

An integral part of this work has been developing an understanding of feminism as both a historically specific identity and a transhistorical concept. Nancy Cott has influenced my definition of feminism in relationship to the activities of girls' organizations. At its essence, Cott argues, feminism contains a critique of male supremacy. But as an ideology, feminism is historically dependent, locked in its political, social and economic context, and "has at different times relied on differing elements and taken different forms." In light of that, Cott urges historians of women to avoid totalizing questions, such as "was [insert person or organization] feminist or not?" in favor of exploring "feminist aspects" of women's activities. According to Cott, feminist activity must represent "a challenge to male domination," but her definition leaves ambiguous what exactly "a challenge to male domination" looks like. This ambiguity is what

Breines, *Young, White, and Miserable*, 11.

historians of the mid-twentieth century have seized upon to explore the continuity of women's activism between the first and second waves of the women's movement.⁶⁹

In the early twentieth century, the suffrage movement unified networks of progressive female activists committed to a set of disparate goals, including labor rights, socialism, and social reform. After the vote for women was secured in 1920 this coalition dissolved and the visibility of women's political activism declined, hastened by the government's increasing incorporation of the reform goals of progressive women's organizations into its bureaucratic structure (through New Deal legislation and the expansion of the Women's and Children's Bureaus).⁷⁰ The exigencies of the Great Depression and World War II similarly diverted women's energies away from public activism and from membership in national women's organizations. After World War II, the legacy of destruction, violence, and sacrifice left over from the war encouraged a national "turning inward" that concentrated on the strengthening of families and communities. Women played a central role in this period of postwar normalization, and public commentators, cultural producers, and politicians alike glorified women's domesticity and celebrated the comforts of traditional home and family relations.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Nancy Cott, "What's In a Name? The Limits of 'Social Feminism:' or, Expanding the Vocabulary of Women's History," *Journal of American History* 76.3 (Dec., 1989): 809-829. Quotes from 826.

⁷⁰ Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); Estelle B. Freedman, "Separatism as Strategy: Female Institution-Building and American Feminism, 1870-1930," *Feminist Studies* 5 (1979): 512-529; Susan Ware, *Beyond Suffrage, Women in the New Deal* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981); Mari Jo Buhle, *Women and American Socialism, 1870-1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981); Paula Baker, "Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920," *The American Historical Review* 89.3 (June 1984): 620-647; Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work*; Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890-1935* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

⁷¹ May, *Homeward Bound*.

The presence of a strong public domestic ideology in the postwar period initially led historians to believe middle-class women's activism in this era was all but absent. But a host of studies conducted during the last 20 years have demonstrated that middle-class women's activism was far from lacking in the postwar period. Rather, it reclaimed certain characteristics of nineteenth-century women's social and political activism; namely, that it was carried out on the local level, in women's communities. The political and cultural context of the postwar period shaped women's activism, meaning the focus on the family and the community actually encouraged women's increasing engagement with civic organizations and politics at the local level. Hundreds of thousands of middle-class women, white and African-American, engaged in a wide-ranging array of volunteer activities and incorporated progressive clubs and associations like the YWCA and the Girl Scouts into their daily lives.⁷² The local community served as the context for conservative women activists as well, who joined organizations like the Minute Women to combat issues like communist infiltration of American schools, increased government expansion that threatened to take over traditional functions of the family, and court-ordered integration.⁷³

⁷² Sylvie Murray, *The Progressive Housewife: Community Activism in Suburban Queens, 1945-1965* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); Leila J. Rupp and Verta Taylor, *Survival in the Doldrums: The American Women's Rights Movement, 1945 to the 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Joanne Meyerowitz, *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994); Louise A. Tilly and Patricia Gurin, eds., *Women, Politics, and Change* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1990); Abby Scher, "Cold War on the Homefront: Middle Class Women's Politics in the 1950s" (Ph.D. diss., New School for Social Research, 1995); A. Lanethea Mathews-Gardner, "From Women's Club to NGO: The Changing Terrain of Women's Civic Engagement in the Mid-Twentieth Century United States" (Ph.D. diss., Syracuse University, 2003); Melissa Anne Estes Blair, "Women's Organizations and Grassroots Politics: Denver, Durham and Indianapolis, 1960-1975" (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 2008).

⁷³ Mary C. Brennan, *Wives, Mothers, and the Red Menace: Conservative Women and the Crusade Against Communism* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2008); Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New America Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Michelle Nickerson, "Domestic Threats: Women, Gender and Conservatism in Cold War Los Angeles, 1945-1966" (Ph.D. diss., Yale

In addition to a strong public domestic ideology, scholars attribute the opacity of women's activism in the postwar period to the association of feminist ideology with the National Woman's Party (NWP), which kept the torch of equal rights burning between the first and second waves of feminism through their singular advancement of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). The ERA was drafted and first championed by the NWP's leader, Alice Paul, in 1923. Virtually all other women's organizations in the 1950s rejected the NWP's brand of equal rights feminism, in light of Paul's strident views on the primacy of gender discrimination over racial and class discrimination, her known anti-Semitism and domineering leadership style, and her insistence on complete equality between the sexes.⁷⁴ This is not to say activist women and women's organizations did not engage in feminist behavior in the 1950s and 1960s, only that they did not describe their activities or goals as "feminist," a term tainted with an air of radicalism, anti-Americanism, and elitism.⁷⁵ Scholars searching for evidence of feminist action in the 1950s thus began locating it in a variety of other social movements, such as the labor movement, where women fought for collective bargaining, equal pay, and the adequate provisioning of daycare and maternity leave.⁷⁶

University, 2003); Paige Meltzer, "Maternal Citizens: Gender and Women's Activism in the United States, 1945-1960" (Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 2010).

⁷⁴ Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* and "Feminist Politics in the 1920's: The National Woman's Party," *The Journal of American History* 71.1 (June 1984): 43-68.

⁷⁵ Rupp and Taylor, *Survival in the Doldrums*.

⁷⁶ Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Nancy Gabin, *Feminism in the Labor Movement: Women and the United Auto Workers, 1935-1975* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); Susan Hartmann, *The Other Feminists: Activists in the Liberal Establishment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Harriet Hyman Alonso, *Peace as a Women's Issue: A History of the U.S. Movement for World Peace and Women's Rights* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1993); Amy Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace: Traditional Motherhood and Radical Politics in the 1960s* (Chicago: University of Chicago

Beyond the labor movement, participation in local organizations, clubs and associations was an important form of political and social education for women, and one which claimed a public space for women in the life of the nation. Through community-based organizations and civic associations, women took leadership roles in a wide variety of local initiatives, including volunteering on boards, sponsoring youth civic activities, fundraising for schools, local hospitals, or libraries, and campaigning in local elections. In the words of historian Susan Ware, women's membership and participation in these local political and civic organizations "served as a vehicle for political training and socialization for women in the 1950s and beyond."⁷⁷ This training prepared women to be more active in conventional electoral politics and in the social movements of the 1960s and 70s.

The bridge between the first and second waves of feminism, then, was sustained by troops of women activists who, on the local level, contributed their time and energy to a range of progressive initiatives in the mid-twentieth century. Women have been shown to be central to the continuity of a liberal, progressive agenda in social reform in the 1950s and 1960s. Even more importantly, historians have shown the continuity of vibrant women's organizations in the postwar period – where women controlled the politics and the agenda of the organization in which they worked – was crucial to the reemergence of formal feminist politics in the 1960s and 70s.⁷⁸ In the absence of a radical movement for

Press, 1993); Susan Lynn, *Progressive Women in Conservative Times: Radical Justice, Peace, and Feminism, 1945 to the 1960s* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University, 1992).

⁷⁷ Susan Ware, "American Women in the 1950s: Nonpartisan Politics and Women's Politicization," in *Women, Politics and Change*, ed. Louise A. Tilly and Patricia Gurin (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1990), 291.

⁷⁸ Lynn, *Progressive Women in Conservative Times*.

wholesale social reform in between the first and second waves of feminism, women's organizational activities encouraged leadership, independence, and empowerment, forming an "inherently feminist" project.⁷⁹ In studying intergenerational activism in girls' organizations, this dissertation offers a unique compliment to this extensive literature by shedding light on a relatively unexplored arena of emergent postwar feminist action.

For the purposes of this dissertation, I study two girls' organizations in parallel. Studying only one would limit the ability to appreciate the social and cultural trends that cut across organizational boundaries to influence the trajectory, dynamics, and concerns that girls' organizations shared in the mid-twentieth century. At the same time, focusing on two organizations rather than considering the total body of women working on behalf of girls allows for an in-depth investigation that moves beyond generalities. These two organizations were carefully selected for their size, their influence on a broad swath of American women, and their shared qualities. To be sure, they are unique organizations with important differences, to which I have tried to pay deference. Yet overall I believe they are profoundly similar in their goals, methods, and motivation.

While I have tried whenever possible to introduce individual perspectives, this dissertation relies heavily on the records of the national offices of both the Girl Scouts and YWCA, and therefore is largely a study about a white, middle-class ideal of womanhood constructed at the national level. It is not a history of female delinquents, rebels, or radicals. There might be a somewhat different story to tell depending on the local or individual context. That being said, this analysis attempts to take into consideration the larger social and cultural context, paying particular attention to national trends in social science and politics, which exerted strong influence on Girl Scout and

⁷⁹ Ibid., 114.

YWCA officials. Without this context, studies of youth organizations (or any organization) miss the opportunity to fully engage with the historical landscape in which these organizations existed.

I am also aware the term “girl” is both historically constructed and inconsistently applied. It was used simultaneously at the turn of the century, for instance, as an identifier for middle- to upper-class white girls who reconfigured their identity through an emergent peer culture situated in the public school; as a means of classifying adult working-class women as dependents in need of protection; and in reference to “loose” or sexually available women and prostitutes.⁸⁰ In this dissertation, I use the words “girls,” “daughters,” “adolescents,” and “teenagers” fairly interchangeably. In general, I am speaking of young, unmarried women between the ages of 11 and 18, who were of the age of girls participating in the YWCA’s Y-Teens and the Girl Scouts’ Intermediate, Cadette, and Senior groups.

Arranged chronologically, the first two chapters focus on the YWCA’s and Girl Scouts’ liberal construction of female citizenship after World War II. Chapter Two begins with an exploration of the underpinnings of postwar childrearing and youth education theory encapsulated in the Midcentury White House Conference on Children and Youth, which YWCA and Girl Scout leaders drew upon in adjusting their programs for the postwar world. After the devastation of World War II, government officials, social scientists, and public commentators alike tended to present the emerging cold war as an

⁸⁰ Hunter, *How Young Ladies Became Girls*; Joanne J. Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1925* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*; Mary E. Odem, *Delinquent Daughters: Protecting and Policing Adolescent Female Sexuality in the United States, 1885-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Ruth M. Alexander, *The “Girl Problem”: Female Sexual Delinquency in New York, 1900-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

ideological battle between communism and democracy, where educating young people in the principles of democratic citizenship would constitute a front line of defense. With this understanding, the YWCA and Girl Scouts constructed a maternalist notion of a female citizen who was actively engaged with politics and international relations in service of the nation. Through experiments in group governance, cultural exchanges, travel, and personal study, the YWCA and Girl Scouts encouraged girls' sense of themselves as citizens of the world and as equal partners in postwar rebuilding.

A peaceful postwar world demanded the resolution of American racial tensions as well. Chapter Three examines the organizations' postwar integration work, which linked the dictates of democracy and female citizenship with interracial cooperation. After World War II, many Americans questioned whether the United States could serve as a leader of democracy in the world when racist practices, particularly segregation, continued to create artificial divides between its citizens. Social scientists, who played a significant role in the Supreme Court's reasoning for overturning state-sanctioned segregation in *Brown v. Board of Education*, in particular warned of the danger that racism posed to America's youth. Compelled by the same youth-centric racial liberalism that informed the majority opinion in *Brown*, women in the YWCA and Girl Scouts further defined a healthy female citizen as one who appreciated and espoused tolerance and equality between races. In doing so, they created spaces for white and African-American girls to form positive personal relationships with one another, an important personal experience with progressive implications.

Whereas a commitment to social equality between races was evident in postwar girls' organizations, discussions of equality between the sexes remained conspicuously

absent in the 1950s and 1960s. Turning away from female citizenship, Chapter Four focuses on the contradictions of girls' lives in the previously defined "doldrums" years of women's activism, as they navigated competing messages about work, sexuality, and womanhood. While the second wave feminist movement was still in its infancy, the YWCA and Girl Scouts kept alive a form of protofeminist activism rooted in local communities and in self-education. Publications, including handbooks, advice manuals, and magazines, and special events, including conferences and Roundups, directed girls to plan for careers and provided vocational education and counseling. Club and troop activities, including badge work, fundraising, and social service projects, focused on leadership development, skill-building, and personal accomplishment. The contributions of girls' organizations, however, were tempered by a continued adherence to maternalism that subordinated individualism and independence to domestic ideology.

Amidst the climate of reform activism engendered by the civil and women's rights movements, by the end of the 1960s cracks were forming in the YWCA's and Girl Scouts' maternalist philosophy. Chapter Five examines the shifting terrain of the 1970s, when, in light of changing social patterns, girls' organizations reevaluated their assumptions about the usefulness of ideological constructs such as maternalism and domesticity in defining womanhood. With African-American women and girls leading the way, by the end of the 1970s both the YWCA and the Girl Scouts embraced a feminist-inspired program designed to prepare young women for an even wider range of social and political roles.

This dissertation is an attempt to investigate the “relative positions” of domesticity and feminism in girls’ organizations after World War II. While it is not meant to be a comprehensive study of girlhood or girl culture in the postwar period, it demonstrates that youth organizations are an important component of women’s history and experience, and elucidates some of the ways that women and girls sorted out the meaning of being a woman in modern American life.

CHAPTER 2

“NEVER HAS THE JOB BEEN MORE STRATEGIC OR VITAL”: DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION, CITIZENSHIP, AND THE PROMISES OF POSTWAR GIRLS’ ORGANIZATIONS

“Adolescents must be recognized as being increasingly capable of managing their own affairs, and of sharing responsibility for the workings of the community. Such sharing of responsibility can be brought about only if adults are willing to regard adolescents as responsible persons who have dignity and individual rights.”— Abe B. Stein, School of Education at New York University, 1947¹

“As young people growing up in the atomic age, we know that the promise of atomic power to make life better and happier for all people can be realized only if every one of us shares the responsibility for making the dream of the United Nations come true. As Girl Reserves, we pledge ourselves to find and give the best, and to do our part in the building of a world community.”— Y-Teen Ceremonial for Acceptance of New Name, 1946²

On December 5, 1950, President Harry Truman spoke to an audience of nearly 6,000 social scientists, educators, social workers, community volunteers, and interested citizens gathered at the National Guard Armory in Washington, D.C. The crowd represented a vast network of concerned Americans dedicated to the development of what they considered to be the nation’s most valuable, and increasingly the most abundant,

¹ Abe B. Stein, “Adolescent Participation in Community Co-ordinating Councils,” *Journal of Educational Sociology* 21.3 (November 1947): 177-183.

² Y-Teen Ceremonial for Acceptance of New Name, 1946, File 1, Box 551, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

resource in the years following the end of World War II – the youth of the country. Addressing the delegates and guests of the Midcentury White House Conference on Children and Youth, Truman cast the development of healthy personalities, the topic that dominated the workshops, discussions, and research compiled and presented at the conference, as central to the growing conflict between democracy and communism. According to Truman, the “struggle” to “preserve the elements of our American way of life” began with the youth of the nation. “We must remember, in all that we do at this conference and afterward,” he declared, “that we cannot insulate our children from the uncertainties of the world in which we live or from the impact of the problems which confront us all. What we can do – and what we must do,” he continued, “is to equip them to meet these problems, to do their part in the total effort, and to build up those inner resources of character which are the main strength of the American people.”³

With these words, Truman explained the cold war as an ideological battle where educating young people in the principles of democratic citizenship would constitute a front line of defense. He encouraged the delegates to wage a war for national preservation by inculcating in children and teens a set of values that had long been considered central to the American character – individualism, self-reliance, and an appreciation for and understanding of the workings of democratic institutions.⁴ Five delegates from the YWCA, including one representative from the Y-Teens, as well as ten adult and four

³ “Truman Talk at White House Youth Conference Stating U.S. Aim for Peace,” *The New York Times*, December 6, 1950, 19.

⁴ Ibid.

teenage delegates from the Girl Scouts, stood in the audience listening to his address and absorbing the energy and importance of his speech.⁵

This formulation of the cold war assigned America's youth an important role in ensuring the continued strength of the nation. It was a task to which girls' organizations considered themselves perfectly fitted – from their beginnings, groups like the Camp Fire Girls, the Girl Pioneers, the Girl Scouts, and the YWCA's Girl Reserves had assigned themselves the duty of educating and socializing young girls in the principles of good citizenship. In helping to build strong, independent women of spiritual and moral character through “womanly training for both mind and body,” early girls' organizations blended nationalism and patriotism with women's traditional civic and domestic responsibilities. During World War I, girls in troops and clubs supported the war effort by rolling bandages, tending “Victory Gardens,” canning food for conservation drives, and selling Liberty Loans. Girls fulfilled their civic duty during World War II through similar services, and by collecting scrap metal, providing childcare for working mothers, and hosting events for military personnel under the auspices of the U.S.O.⁶ As they had done during the first two world wars, the YWCA and the Girl Scouts imagined their young members to be foot soldiers in this new cold war as well.

As Truman outlined, however, support for this war would take a different form. Rather than rolling bandages or collecting scrap metal, girls coming of age in the postwar period figured centrally in a widespread social project to raise a generation of

⁵ Leta Galpin to Mrs. Harrison S. Elliott, 9 October 1950, Microdex 3, Reel 156, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC; Susan Brady, “Girl Scouts at the White House Conference,” *American Girl*, March 1951, 40-41, GSUSA; Girl Scout participant list in U.S. Government – Midcentury Conference on Children and Youth Box, GSUSA.

⁶ The YWCA was one of the six civilian agencies that made up the U.S.O when it was founded in 1941.

independent, self-reliant, and engaged citizens who would shore up the American democratic state. In this context, girls' organizations functioned as training grounds for democracy, where women applied contemporary psychological theories of personality development to mold "healthy" citizens who embraced the democratic system, and where girls practiced the workings of democratic institutions before taking their place in the body politic. Girl Scout and YWCA leadership claimed for themselves the important role of creating an active citizenry that would uphold the core values of the nation, a duty magnified as their membership expanded along with the baby boom. "Now, more than ever," President Truman told the Girl Scouts at their 40th birthday celebration in 1952, "America needs the training of youth for good citizenship, tolerance and international understanding to help in the building of a peaceful world."⁷

This chapter examines the contours of democratic citizenship education in the YWCA and the Girl Scouts in the late 1940s and 1950s. On two levels, girls' organizations sought to promote American values of individualism, self-reliance, and civic engagement. At the organizational level, YWCA and Girl Scout leaders began to incorporate girls into the governmental structure of their national bodies to create a sense of partnership between women and girls. At the local level, they allowed for self-governance in troops and clubs, and sponsored service activities that promoted education and civic improvement. In linking the planning and implementation of community service projects to education in democratic values, the organizations were responsible for innumerable service projects and activities on the local level meant to direct youthful

⁷ "Girl Scouts Honor Fortieth Birthday," *New York Times*, March 12, 1952, 23. See also May, *Homeward Bound*.

energy away from what was believed to be a juvenile delinquency epidemic and toward constructive, positive activity.

Internationalism was another critical component of postwar citizenship education. As imagined by the YWCA and Girl Scouts, global peace and security after World War II called for a robust female citizenship that would also export democracy abroad. Relying heavily on the rhetoric of international friendship, girls' organizations endorsed a liberal internationalism that understood the spreading of American values abroad to be the best hope for achieving a lasting peace after two world wars. Historian Elizabeth Borgwardt has called this widely held vision of postwar collective security a "global New Deal" that emphasized "the moral contrasts between . . . Anglo-American values and those of their fascist enemies" and looked to multilateral institutions and interpersonal diplomacy for solution.⁸ In the name of world citizenship, girls' organizations encouraged study of the American political system, visits to multilateral institutions like the United Nations, and participation in cultural exchanges with girls from foreign countries. Internationalism in girls' organizations reflected the concerns of women in a nation increasingly aware of its new role as an international superpower and supposed beacon of democracy in the world.

Citizenship education in girls' organizations in the postwar period can be read as a conservative project that reinforced traditional relationships: their internationalism sought to build support for America's cold war agenda abroad and was rooted in a maternalist philosophy characteristic of women's participation in the political realm.

⁸ Elizabeth Borgwardt, *A New Deal for the World: America's Vision for Human Rights* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 6. The Girl Scouts and YWCA shared a pluralistic postwar vision that also encompassed a progressive set of views on racial, religious, and ethnic tolerance meant to build a sense of American unity. The political utility of tolerance is discussed further in Wendy L. Wall, *Inventing the American Way: The Politics of Consensus from the New Deal to the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). See also Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

Casting girls as “homemaker citizens,” the YWCA and the Girl Scouts drew on a language of gender difference to situate women’s activism and engagement at the local, national, and international level in the context of their future duties as wives and mothers. Yet they translated the responsibility of homemaking, the traditional role for women, to civic engagement, encouraging girls to take an active role in their organizations and in their local communities and claiming for them the responsibilities of full citizenship. Though international friendship among girls remained largely a chimera, girls’ organizations nevertheless provided the space for their young members to imagine a future of service and vocational opportunities that assumed women’s interest in and influence over international affairs, in addition to local and national. Citizenship education in girls’ organizations in the postwar period contained expectations for girls’ futures that belies the assumption young women were directed solely toward motherhood and homemaking in the 1950s.

Moreover, as right-wing resistance to internationalism escalated in the early 1950s the nature of citizenship education in girls’ organization became uncomfortable for some. The public generally perceived civic youth organizations as safe spaces, where girls could spend their leisure time under the watchful eyes of responsible adults and learn to become well-adjusted and productive members of society through a variety of social and recreational activities. A backlash against both organizations during the anticommunist fervor of the early 1950s reveals a contested vision of American democracy, as right-wing activists sought to combat the concept of world citizenship they saw infecting their boys and girls in classrooms and in scouting troops and youth clubs. Consequently, the ability of the YWCA and the Girl Scouts to implement a more vibrant

youth program that challenged society's expectations for girls and women in the domestic-centered 1950s chafed against larger political divisions that extended well beyond the community center.

Youth in Cold War America

The years during and immediately after World War II were ones of significant expansion for girls' organizations, owing to demographic changes in the American population and the growing cultural importance of children and youth. After the war ended, American families grew at an impressive pace. Driven by the return of millions of veterans, a rise in real income, suburban expansion, and overall economic prosperity that followed the war, marriage and childbearing after 1945 occurred at rates unseen since the nineteenth century. By 1956, the median age of marriage for men dropped from an average of 26.7 in 1939 to 22.5, and from an average of 23.3 for women to an historic low of 20.1.⁹ Birthrates soared as well. Between 1946 and 1964, American men and women produced 75 million babies, a 50% increase in the birth rate over the preceding two decades, and an average of 3.6 children per woman.¹⁰ As one historian has written, "The sheer size of the baby boom forced the economy to regear itself to feed, clothe, educate, and house the rising generation."¹¹

⁹ Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage*, 21; Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat*, 42.

¹⁰ Richard A. Easterlin, *Birth and Fortune: The Impact of Numbers on Personal Welfare* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), chapter 3, and Mintz, *Huck's Raft*, 276.

¹¹ Mintz, *Huck's Raft*, 277. For more extensive statistics on postwar rates of marriage, reproduction, education, and work, see John Modell, *Into One's Own: From Youth to Adulthood in the United States, 1920-1975* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

These real rates of family growth accompanied an explosion of new consumer goods and popular culture directed at children and teenagers. New music and magazines targeted to teens exploited the purchasing power of 1950s adolescents by delivering countless radio hits by young heartthrobs and girl groups and by dispensing endless rounds of fashion advice and beauty tips. Popular movies with youthful protagonists such as *Blackboard Jungle*, *Rebel Without a Cause*, and *A Summer Place* drew hordes of young people to the theaters. These films offered new role models like James Dean, Elvis Presley, and Marlon Brando, who dressed differently, talked differently, and most importantly, rejected adult authority by flaunting accepted social behavior. The widespread expansion of the television sitcom made children and teens the centerpieces of home entertainment as well. Together, consumer goods and popular culture helped to define youth as an independent and essential element of American society.¹²

This sudden increase of a teenage-oriented popular and consumer culture reinforced the sense that children and teenagers were increasing in cultural importance as well as in sheer numbers. The word “teenager” itself was first published in 1941, and it quickly became the leading identifier for the subset of the population somewhere between the stages of childhood and adulthood.¹³ In an attempt to harness the energy of the growing youth population, a number of educational institutions, especially public schools, expanded to accommodate the increasing numbers of children in American cities, towns, and suburbs. For example, while in 1900 only 7% of all 14-17 year olds

¹² Thomas Doherty, *Teenagers and Teenpics: The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950s* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988).

¹³ The word “teenager” was first published in the magazine *Popular Science Monthly* in 1941. Grace Palladino, *Teenagers: An American History* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 37, and Thomas Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager* (New York: Perennial, 2000).

attended high school, by the 1950s at least four in five boys and five in six girls spent their days there.¹⁴

Like the American school system, youth organizations expanded rapidly after World War II. As families swelled, millions of children and teenagers inflated the membership rolls of scouting groups, recreational facilities, and summer camps. A recent study of Buffalo, New York, in the 1950s counted more than 35 recreation centers and youth organizations catering to the local community.¹⁵ Nationally, Girl Scout membership doubled in the 1950s, surging from one million in 1947 to more than two million by 1955, a trajectory similar to that of boy scouting.¹⁶ National Y-Teen club membership grew by a third in the 1950s, from 260,000 in 1943 to 370,000 by 1955, with even greater numbers of teens participating in health, physical education, and recreational activities hosted at community YW buildings.¹⁷

As these numbers suggest, girls' organizations played a significant role in helping the nation regroup and normalize after the disruption of World War II. Though the war had left the country itself physically unscarred, the American people nevertheless had a good deal of rebuilding to do. Within days after the Japanese surprise attack against the naval station at Pearl Harbor in 1941, the country had geared up for total war. What followed was a tremendous upheaval of the American population, as 16 million men

¹⁴ Modell, *Into One's Own*, 36; Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage*, 18-19.

¹⁵ Graebner, *Coming of Age in Buffalo*.

¹⁶ Girl Scouts of the U.S.A. Annual Report, 1947, GSUSA; Girl Scouts of the U.S.A. Annual Report, 1955, 7, GSUSA.

¹⁷ Sara P. Alyce-Wright, *Working With Teen-agers in the YWCA: A Guide for the Teen-Age Program Committee*, 1963, File 11, Box 566, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC; *Figures Talk Back, 1958-1959*, Microdex 6, Reel 229, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

headed overseas, millions of women went to work to fill the jobs vacated by those soldiers, and countless individuals packed up their belongings and moved to centers of war production along the west coast, in the industrial Midwest, and in the South. Communities like Mobile, Alabama, site of the Alabama Dry Dock and Shipbuilding company and the Alcoa metal processing plant, saw their population jump 64% between 1940 and 1950, and they struggled under the sudden burden of providing food, housing, and recreation for hundreds of thousands of new residents.

As the example of Mobile shows, the total war effort destabilized many American homes and communities. With fathers away and so many mothers at work, many Americans worried that children and teenagers had too little supervision, too much free time, and plenty of unchanneled energy that could be put to use for good or for ill. Rising reports of juvenile delinquency across the country beginning in the early 1940s set the nation on edge, and efforts to understand and deal with the “problematic” teen generation dominated newspaper headlines. According to James Gilbert, contemporaries understood this phenomenon as a “breakdown of generational communication and control” caused by the pressures of the war and by “a new peer culture spread by comic books, radio, movies and television.”¹⁸

In many ways, this concern about youth was nothing more than a persistent assumption of declining morals and values from generation to generation. But juvenile delinquency in the 1940s and 1950s was of a different nature from the past, making it a

¹⁸ Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage*, 3. Gilbert argues that the hysteria about juvenile delinquency in the 1950s, manifested in Senate hearings, feature films, and written media, reflected the anxiety of adults grappling with the shifting cultural terrain of the time period rather than an actual shift in youth behavior and could serve different individuals and groups of people in ways beneficial to the needs and desires of each. See also Eric C. Schneider, *Vampires, Dragons and Egyptian Kings: Youth Gangs in Postwar New York* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1999).

central concern of girls' organizations. Whereas in the early 1900s delinquency could be compartmentalized as primarily an urban, working-class issue, after the war the country viewed the increasing rates of delinquency in suburban, middle-class communities with alarm. As one historian has written, "Suburban delinquency seemed increasingly menacing," because it defied Progressive assumptions that delinquency was a product of poverty or poor environmental conditions.¹⁹

Anxieties about juvenile delinquency were intimately bound up with fears that, unlike the generation that had bravely fought and won the recent war, the growing youth generation would be unprepared for all the nation would need from them in the future. Though rising rates of male juvenile delinquency captured the attention of the American public, the Girl Scouts and YWCA rightly understood it to be a problem of both boys and girls. According to the U.S. Children's Bureau, the ratio of male to female juvenile delinquency narrowed from 8:1 in 1932 to 4:1 by 1949. Moreover, charges of a sexual nature constituted fewer instances of female juvenile delinquency than in the past, and arrests for offenses related to defiance of authority – truancy, running away, parental rebellion – increased.²⁰

In the minds of Girl Scout and YWCA leaders, girls' organizations would help the country to overcome the dislocations of the war by channeling the energy of the youth generation to productive ends. With their size and capacity for outreach, they could address the fear that America's children were abandoning the value systems of their

¹⁹ Cohen, "The Delinquents: Censorship and Youth Culture in Recent History," 255.

²⁰ U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Children's Bureau, *Juvenile Court Statistics*, (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1927-1965); Rachel Devlin, *Relative Intimacy: Fathers, Adolescent Daughters, and Postwar American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 48-77.

parents in favor of beliefs and attitudes transmitted through youth culture. As one Girl Scout representative insisted at a New York state conference on juvenile delinquency, “While our accent is on helping normal young people develop as happy worthwhile citizens, we have, we believe, a real contribution to make in the prevention of juvenile delinquency.”²¹ At the hearings of the Senate Committee Investigating Juvenile Delinquency in 1955, led by Senator Estes Kefauver, Girl Scout President Olivia Layton reinforced this notion: “For the child in trouble,” she warned, “[belonging] may be to a gang bent on mischief or worse.” For the “*normal* child,” however, “belonging may be to a Girl Scout troop.”²²

Contemporary observers also saw girls’ organizations as critical social institutions for postwar rebuilding and stability. In November of 1946, the *New York Times* ran a brief profile of the Girl Scouts, describing them simply as an organization that taught America’s daughters to “do their duty to God and country.” Carefully noting they did not create “instruments of the state,” but rather built “self-reliant” and “useful” girls, the short blurb asked for donations to the national office, calling a monetary contribution to the Girl Scouts an “investment in America.”²³

Girl Scout President Layton’s contrast between wayward children and “normal” children was no coincidence. As historian Wendy Wall writes, contemporary commentators depicted the postwar years as “a time of unusually deep and well-grounded national unity, a time when postwar affluence and the cold war combined to produce a

²¹ Program Department to National Field Staff, 14 September 1955, Juvenile Delinquency 1942-1964 File, GSUSA.

²² Dorothy Stratton to Regional Directors, 21 June 1955, Juvenile Delinquency 1942-1964 File, GSUSA. *Italics original.*

²³ “An Investment in America,” *New York Times*, November 25, 1946, 24.

remarkable level of agreement about the nation's core values.”²⁴ But unity was predicated on an image of the “normal” American, a loaded term that signified a certain way of living that conformed to what society deemed acceptable patterns of labor, leisure, and family relationships. Persons who lived their lives outside the accepted boundaries of American culture, as defined by psychiatrists, social commentators, and the government, found themselves increasingly labeled deviant and dangerous to the health of the society and the nation. Intense pressure to conform to the images of healthy, happy, and prosperous American families displayed on television, in film, and in magazines and advertisements – meaning white, middle-class nuclear families with a wage-earning husband and a stay-at-home mother – clashed with legally-sanctioned inequality and restrictive ideological and behavioral codes related to race and gender.²⁵

To girls' organizations and to the general public, “normal” children were those who would – with careful adult guidance – ultimately contribute to the strength of the nation by taking their place as active citizens and advocates for democracy. Though the social service agencies, sociological and psychological experts, and government representatives that attended the White House's Midcentury Conference on Children and Youth agreed the home was the primary site for nurturing healthy and well-adjusted children, community-based youth organizations like the YWCA and Girl Scouts also had a crucial responsibility to impart American values and democratic practices to the nation's daughters.

²⁴ Wall, *Inventing the American Way*, 5.

²⁵ Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Book, 1992); May, *Homeward Bound*.

Girls' Organizations as Democratic Training Grounds

The Midcentury White House Conference on Children and Youth provided important direction for citizenship education in girls' organizations. Though only a handful of days in duration, the conference consisted of six general sessions, thirty-one panels, thirty-six workshops, and endless debate among "experts." It drew from the preparatory work of 50 state and more than 1,000 local commissions established to study the needs of children, the resources of 460 national organizations that worked with children and youth, and thousands of pages of pre-conference reports. It generated its own 1700-page post-conference *Fact Finding Report*, described by one observer as "more a compendium of opinion than a book of facts."²⁶ Although the goal of the 1950 conference was to "synthesize the relevant findings of psychiatry, anthropology, physiology, and so forth, into a statement concerning the development of a healthy personality in children," the sheer size of the conference report and the proceedings themselves revealed far more uncertainty than resolution.²⁷

One thing was certain, however. By taking literally the mantra of working *with* youth, rather than *for* them, the Midcentury conference signified an important shift in thinking about how to best educate children and teens for active citizenship. Though a White House Conference on Children and Youth had been held each decade since 1909, when Theodore Roosevelt organized the inaugural gathering, the Midcentury conference was the first to invite young people themselves to participate in the proceedings. Five

²⁶ Dean W. Roberts, M.D., "Highlights of the Midcentury White House Conference on Children and Youth," *American Journal of Public Health and the Nation's Health* 41.1 (January 1951): 96-99; quote from 97.

²⁷ Hulbert, *Raising America*, 93.

hundred delegates between the ages of twelve and twenty-one, representing every state in the country, did so.²⁸ The inclusion of youth in the conference proceedings symbolized a renewed movement among child advocates, government agencies, educational specialists, and social scientists to instill in the next generation an appreciation for democratic participation by creating a sense of egalitarianism and partnership between adults and teens.

Working alongside rather than on behalf of girls had always been a stated goal of the YWCA and the Girl Scouts, but it was only after World War II that the organizations began to make the substantive organizational changes necessary to incorporate their young members into the governance structure of their national bodies. Like the Midcentury conference organizers, the YWCA invited Y-Teen delegates to attend the organization's 1949 national convention in Seattle for the first time. Likewise, the Girl Scouts invited girls to participate in the program of their biannual national Girl Scout convention for the first time in 1947.²⁹ In doing so, the YWCA and the Girl Scouts reflected and reinforced the movement toward shared authority between adults and youth in the postwar period, where increasing deference to young people's needs, desires, and ideas went hand in hand with youth empowerment.³⁰

²⁸ Dorothy Barclay, "The Youth at Midcentury," *New York Times*, December 31, 1950, SM9; *The Story of the White House Conferences on Children and Youth* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Children's Bureau, 1967), 16.

²⁹ Louisa W. Hager to staff working with the Y-Teen Program, 30 July 1956, Microdex 2, Reel 250, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.; "Senior Girl Scouts Go To National Convention," *Girl Scout Leader*, September-October, 1947, 10, GSUSA; "30th National Meeting Opens for Girl Scouts," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 16, 1949, A3; Sims, *The Purpose Widens*.

³⁰ For a fuller discussion of the changing presentation and perception of authority to children in the United States in the twentieth century, see Lassonde, "Age and Authority," 95-105, and Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland*.

Prior to 1946, the YWCA made no accommodations for girls under the age of 18 to attend their national conventions, which were held every two to three years. The chairman of the National Committee for the Teenage Program solicited the opinion of local association staff members in 1946 as to the advisability of including girls in conventions: “We have felt for a long time that our group was at a disadvantage in always having to be represented by adults on panels or in meetings . . . If girls could be seen and heard at Convention everyone would be more aware of them as a part of the YWCA family.”³¹ As a result of her work, in 1949 girls attended the YWCA’s convention in Seattle, meeting in a separate teenage assembly to discuss matters of importance for the teenage program and participating in the national convention proceedings as a whole.³²

YWCA leaders believed including girls at national events would inspire girls to feel like equal partners in the YWCA’s democratic body. In addition, it was hoped participation in convention would allow girls to feel an intimate connection to a wider movement of women working to improve their communities and their world. A teen delegate’s sentimental words describing her experience at the 1955 national convention bore witness to that hope: “After we had sung for some time all kinds of songs, we made a friendship circle—all of us in our dark skirts, white blouses, and flowered headdresses—and began to sing NO MAN IS AN ISLAND. The people who were standing around us seemed to watch in awe as though they were thinking we were just one big body of girls, united in one purpose and striving for one goal.”³³

³¹ Marjorie E. Mudge to local Committee for Teen-Age Program chairmen, 8 November 1946, Microdex 3, Reel 156, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

³² Sims, *The Purpose Widens*; Louisa W. Hager to staff working with the Y-Teen Program, 30 July 1956, Microdex 2, Reel 250, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

³³ “Y-Teens Report to Convention,” 1955, File 14, Box 574, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

Like the YWCA, Girl Scout leaders hoped girls' participation in national events would create an opportunity for young members to develop an attachment to democracy through a large-scale experience. The Scouts also held national conventions every two to three years, for the purpose of bringing together staff from local councils and members of the national office, electing the National Board of Directors, and deciding on program emphases for the years between conventions. Beginning with their 1947 convention in Long Beach, California the organization invited senior Girl Scouts over the age of 16 to attend and participate. By adding the voice of girls to convention proceedings, having girls "give their opinions, and to tell what they know," it was thought the national office could be more attune to adolescent interests and viewpoints. At the same time, girls were assured of their vital contribution to the decision-making process.³⁴

The organizations made symbolic overtures to partnership as well. In 1946, the YWCA replaced "Girl Reserves," the name under which their teenage program had operated since 1918, with the new name "Y-Teens." When the YWCA adopted the name "Girl Reserves" at the end of World War I, it self-consciously positioned girls as a reserve volunteer corps working for the benefit of the home front while men served abroad.³⁵ After the war, national staff members raised questions about a possible name change for the Girl Reserves as early as 1929, but not until 1940 did the proposal receive serious consideration.

By 1941, young Y members had begun to chafe against the traditional Girl Reserve name, seeing it as old-fashioned and, perhaps, demeaning. A survey distributed

³⁴ *Senior Girl Scouting*, 1952, 195, GSUSA; "Senior Girl Scouts Go To National Convention," *Girl Scout Leader*, September-October 1947, 10, GSUSA.

³⁵ "Steps Taken in Selecting a New Name to Replace 'Girl Reserve'," 26 July 1946, Microdex 7, Reel 155, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

by the national office that year revealed a substantial portion of girls in local communities who felt disconnected from the larger YWCA, as if their relationship to the national body rested tenuously on their use of the local Y's physical facilities. Some girls confessed not even knowing their Girl Reserve club was part of the YWCA, due to their lack of contact with adult members aside from their club adviser.³⁶ Others understood the program to be akin to similar community youth organizations such as the Girl Scouts, but thought the name itself indicated a period of stasis, of uselessness, a phase of waiting to grow up. One girl, Anne Shirley Born, dryly asked of the name, "In reserve for what?" Mary Ann Callahan, of the Tulsa Girl Reserves, shed light on girls' perception of the name in protesting it made her think of "a bunch of grim little ladies in waiting, she did not know what they were waiting on but evidently something."³⁷

In bridging this gap, renaming the Girl Reserves reflected broader shifts in the treatment of adolescents in American culture. Like the label "teenager," the name change established the teen program as a vital component of the larger organization, one with unique contributions to make, rather than simply a "reserve" source of future leaders for the YWCA. By contrast, local adult advisers felt the organization "should emphasize both that adolescence is a period of preparation for adult living and an important phase of life in itself." Criteria for a new name included one that would make the program seem more mature in the eyes of girls and would suggest more unity with the national YWCA. Finally, in May of 1946, the Younger Girls' Subcommittee recommended to the National Board for approval the use of the name "Y-Teen" to designate local clubs and

³⁶ "Girl Reserve Name Study," 1940-1941, Microdex 4, Reel 93, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

³⁷ Ibid.

departments working with girls.³⁸ The name change retooled the notion that girls' most important contribution rested in their potential as future leaders of the organization to instead "stress the idea of the part of the younger girl in the Association now."³⁹ Afterward, girls thought it was "catchy, more up-to-date," and the national executive director of the Girl Scouts, Constance Rittenhouse, praised the YWCA for being "sensitive to teen-age thinking."⁴⁰

In addition to modeling democratic cooperation between youths and adults, the Midcentury conference also stressed the importance of positive psychological development in children and teens to national strength. In doing so, the conference displayed a distinctly different understanding of how to build healthy citizens. Earlier conferences reflected their roots in the Progressive Era and focused heavily on the remediation of social ills believed to adversely affect children and youth, such as poverty, poor child welfare standards for orphaned or neglected children, and inadequate schooling and medical services for children and mothers. The network of progressive reformers who organized and directed the conferences, including the U.S. Women's and Children's Bureaus, showcased the latest research by childrearing experts, designed a government safety net around the more vulnerable members of society, and worked to educate the public in methods of childcare that emphasized efficiency and standardization. By contrast, the Midcentury conference abandoned structural issues concerning the wellbeing of children in favor of current psychological and

³⁸ "Steps Taken in Selecting a New Name to Replace 'Girl Reserve'," 26 July 1946, Microdex 7, Reel 155, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC; "Material for Inclusion in January Convention Bulletin – Younger Girls' Department," n.d., Microdex 7, Reel 155, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

³⁹ "Girl Reserve Name Study," 1940-1941, Microdex 4, Reel 93, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

⁴⁰ Gladys K. Southard, "Teen-Agers Come into Their Own," *Womans Press*, October 1946, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

anthropological theories of childhood development. Focusing instead on the individual, the conference pointed up new childrearing theories that stressed the promotion of individualism and self-expression.

This shift represented a remarkable transition away from childrearing models dominant in the early twentieth century that emphasized the scientific management of children's physical, mental, and emotional development.⁴¹ Taking their cue from social scientists and psychoanalysts whose work identified the psychological basis of the recent war, by 1950 leading figures in childrearing such as Margaret Mead, Benjamin Spock, and Erik Erikson supported the notion that models that accentuated efficiency and regulation too closely echoed totalitarian or Soviet societies.⁴² In response, the Midcentury conference confirmed a new standard of childrearing that supported the development of individual talents and encouraged self-expression and social cooperation. This transition was reflected in the conference theme, "The Healthy Personality," which posed the ill-defined and difficult question "How can we develop in children the mental, emotional, and spiritual qualities essential to individual happiness and responsible citizenship?"⁴³

These two components of a healthy personality, individual happiness and responsible citizenship, formed the key building blocks of the ideal postwar *American* citizen. As the Midcentury conference's post-conference report asserted, "We are speaking as Americans, then, and perhaps not for the rest of the world when we say that a

⁴¹ Hulbert, *Raising America*; Nicholas Sammond, *Babes in Tomorrowland: Walt Disney and the Making of the American Child, 1930-1960* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

⁴² See, for example, Theodor W. Adorno, Else E. Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel J. Levinson, R. Nevitt Sanford, *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1950).

⁴³ Roberts, "Highlights of the Midcentury White House Conference on Children and Youth," 96; *The Story of the White House Conferences on Children and Youth*, 16.

healthy personality is one in which individual happiness and responsible citizenship are combined.”⁴⁴ According to the report, “Personal autonomy, independence of the individual, is an especially outstanding feature of the American way of life . . . Not only parents, then, but everybody who has significant contact with children and young people must respect their desire for self-assertion.”⁴⁵ Responsible citizenship, the second component of a postwar healthy personality, depended on individualism for its very existence. Only happy individuals, able to reach the highest levels of personal development, could function as socially minded and active citizens in the American democracy. As Truman had insisted, the development of healthy personalities was part of a larger national project to promote the human qualities of democracy and to bolster the country against growing threats to its stability. In this climate, democratic citizenship education in youth organizations formed a political project.

A focus on individualism and responsible citizenship was also meant to attenuate the sense of anxiety and disruption many Americans felt in the postwar period, an era vastly different from the world they had known in the past. Theories of child development from which the Girl Scouts and the YWCA drew in shaping their program stressed the need for children to develop skills that would enable them to easily adapt and adjust to the vagaries of an unstable, constantly changing world. Programming that emphasized individualism and leadership would engender young women who were focused and grounded, “inner-directed” rather than “other-directed,” and capable of

⁴⁴ Helen Leland Witmer and Ruth Kotinsky, eds., *Personality in the Making: The Fact-Finding Report of the Midcentury White House Conference on Children and Youth* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952), xviii.

⁴⁵ Witmer and Kotinsky, eds., *Personality in the Making*, 14.

making independent decisions based on a foundation of solid values rather than herd instinct.⁴⁶ Margaret Mead's speech at the Midcentury conference reiterated this notion: "American children are growing up within the most rapidly changing culture of which we have any record in the world, within a culture where for several generations, each generation's experience has differed sharply from the last, and in which the experience of the youngest child in a large family will be extraordinarily different from that of the first born."⁴⁷ Echoing her sentiments, a speaker addressing an assembly of YWCA volunteers compared youth workers to "the driver of a swift-moving automobile," not because of any innate instability in the character of adolescents, but because "we live in an epoch distinguished by a rate of social change more rapid than at any other period of history . . ."⁴⁸

Aware of the importance of youth to the nation after World War II, adult women in the YW and the Girl Scouts viewed their assignment with a heightened sense of purpose. "Never has the job," according to the 1948 handbook for teenage program directors in the YWCA, "been more strategic or vital whether in the Association or in the community."⁴⁹ Mary Hayes, Chairman of the Girl Scout Executive Committee, reminded a group of 6,000 adult volunteers at the 1949 National Council that the Girl Scouts "is the largest voluntary interdenominational, nonpolitical organization of its kind in the world,

⁴⁶ David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950).

⁴⁷ *The Story of the White House Conferences on Children and Youth*, 19.

⁴⁸ Speech given by Dr. Goodwin B. Watson, professor at Teacher's College in New York City, to an assembly of YWCA youth workers in 1953, quoted in *Working With Teen-agers in the YWCA: A Guide for the Teen-Age Program Committee*, 1963, File 11, Box 566, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

⁴⁹ *Handbook for Teenage Program Directors*, 1948, 2, File 1, Box 566, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

and as such we have obligations and grave responsibilities” to serve as “a bulwark of democracy.”⁵⁰ Wrote Teenage Program Committee Secretary Elise Moller, author of the 1952 Y-Teen club adviser’s handbook, “The role we play in shaping the future of society cannot possibly be overestimated.”⁵¹

While girls themselves partook in recreational, educational, or service-oriented activities, and likely never probed beneath the surface for a deeper meaning, Girl Scout and YW leaders were acutely aware the goals of their programs extended far beyond cookie and bake sales, or camping and recreation. As youth-serving organizations, they compelled their adult members to understand that personality development in children was imperative to the safety and security of democracy. The 1948 training manual for YWCA teenage program directors informed women their job meant playing a role in the development of psychologically healthy, well-adjusted girls. But more importantly, the manual counseled, directors had the opportunity “to shape our world of the next few decades. For tomorrow’s citizens are being made today . . . Their ideas, attitudes, feelings, values, will mold patterns of tomorrow.”⁵²

Girl Scout and YWCA leadership imagined their troops and clubs to be a democratic training ground for girls, where education in democratic values and experience in civic engagement would be combined with principles of healthy adolescent development. The theory that underlay programming, therefore, emphasized process over product. Girls would put democracy in action through club work, for, as Elise Moller

⁵⁰ “Girl Scouts Plan Spiritual Drive,” *New York Times*, November 19, 1949, 12.

⁵¹ *Club Adviser’s Handbook*, 1952, 9, File 3, Box 566, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

⁵² *Handbook for Teenage Program Directors*, 1948, 1, File 1, Box 566, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

reminded Y-Teen club advisers, “it is in group activities that the growing young person develops those abilities essential to a democratic society—learns to get along happily with different kinds of people through the give and take of working and playing with others; learns to think, to make decisions, and to take responsibility for himself as part of a group.” Young girls and teenagers needed experience in democratic participation, gained by partaking in group governance and planning, for, as she exclaimed, “Basic life values and patterns of behavior are ‘learned’ long before one achieves the right to vote!”⁵³

The ideal Girl Scout troop and Y-Teen club would operate as a miniature democratic government body. YWCA training manuals urged women working as club leaders, or as local council members or program directors, to tread a narrow line between ceding authority to girls and maintaining the core structure of the program. As explained by one manual, “This is seen as a better medium for developing teenage youth leadership and for enhancing adult understanding of adolescent concerns and ideas.”⁵⁴ The 1955 guide for new Girl Scout leaders expressed similar sentiments about the function of the troop leader as a guide, stressing “leadership is first a partnership with girls.” The Girl Scouts declared girls’ participation in program building, defined as joint adult-girl program planning, to be the primary yardstick for judging success in Girl Scout programming on the troop level.⁵⁵ The troop leader served primarily to “help girls take responsibility for the troop’s affairs.”⁵⁶

⁵³ *Club Adviser’s Handbook*, 1952, 9-10, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

⁵⁴ *Handbook for Teenage Program Directors*, 1948, 3, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

⁵⁵ *Senior Girl Scouting*, 1947, GSUSA.

⁵⁶ *Girl Scout Leader’s Guide*, 1955, GSUSA.

In highlighting the desirability of partnership between adults and youth, the culture of these organizations in the 1950s stressed the difference between authority, meaning respect accorded to adult club and troop leaders based on their deference to girls' wishes, and authoritarianism, defined as unjustified domination. As women at the YWCA's national conference for teenage program directors in 1951 discussed, an adviser who flaunted her rank and failed to share decision-making with girls would be resented by youth as anti-democratic and rejected as an authoritarian. A program director's influence and authority would only flow from the respect she showed for girls' ideas and wishes.⁵⁷ The YWCA cautioned Y-Teen advisers to be listeners and observers, rather than managers, and counseled them to stand in the background at club meetings and social or service activities in order to quietly watch the group and interpret the needs of the girls. An accomplished club adviser would assert her guidance and influence upon the girls without making it obvious she was doing so. "Listen with an ear to understand rather than to tell or correct," the manual suggested, echoing Dr. Benjamin Spock, whose bestseller *Baby and Child Care* swept the country just two years prior, "and observe what teenagers do and how they do it."⁵⁸

An experimental Y-Teen club in Boston, Massachusetts illustrates the attempt to employ democratic principles in local activities. The "Sky Club," organized under the auspices of the Boston Young Women's Christian Association, began in 1946 as an afterschool program in which teenage girls could partake of a wide array of activities, ranging from recreational outings, to career exploration at local businesses, to planning

⁵⁷ "We Look Ahead: Findings of the National Conference for Teen-Age Program Directors," 18 December 1950 – 3 January 1951, File 23, Box 555, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

⁵⁸ *Club Adviser's Handbook*, 1952, 126, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

fundraisers for postwar reconstruction in Europe. Advisers described the program as “cooperative fun,” which they hoped, through activities that promoted individual development and community service, would “establish a pattern of cooperative behavior sufficiently strong to produce a sense of social responsibility in the individuals who join it. . .”⁵⁹ In pursuit of that goal, the advisers of the program left the structure of the club entirely up to the teens. Though they wished to see a constitution drafted and regular elections of officers to govern the club, “we have,” they noted, “not forced anything.” They continued, “We have purposely not pushed it, feeling that in a group of this sort it is wiser to interpret law more immediately than by reference to authority, feeling that our few necessary regulations must evolve through action and recognition of resulting human relations.” Despite difficulty adjusting themselves to this new form of adult-teen relations, the advisers offered hesitant optimism: “We have tried to work with people on the assumption of their freedom and our trust in them, and the response has not been too bad.”⁶⁰

Activities in local clubs and troops oriented around individual development and community service complemented the type of democratic education girls’ organizations wanted their members to receive. The Girl Scout badge structure encouraged the pursuit of personal interests, by which girls could reach new levels of self-realization. Through the badge structure, girls could select topics they wished to know more about from eleven fields of interest ranging from homemaking to sports to nature. Available badges ranged

⁵⁹ Program Report of the Teen Age Department, February 1947, 2, File 542, Box 33, Boston Young Women’s Christian Association, Records 1858-1988, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

⁶⁰ “General Description of the Sky Club,” July 1947, File 542, Box 33, Boston Young Women’s Christian Association, Records 1858-1988, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

from the familiar (including traditional domestic skills liked dressmaking, interior decorating, and hospitality) to the unexpected (athlete, aviator, life saver). Once a girl selected an interest to develop, handbooks carefully laid out suggestions for learning about and engaging with the topic under consideration.⁶¹ Community service projects, on the other hand, were hoped to inspire a lifelong concern for community wellbeing, a traditional realm of women's responsibility. Possible projects included volunteering in local hospitals and childcare centers, and fundraising for community chests, school projects, and UNICEF. Troops and clubs also collected clothes, school supplies, and blankets for disaster relief efforts at home and abroad. One girl, reflecting on her years as a Y-Teen in Long Beach, California in the 1950s, recalled a tremendous sense of confidence and accomplishment that accompanied her role as service chair in organizing a fundraising drive for Christmas gifts to a local children's hospital. For her, Y-Teens provided an education in democratic participation and individual development: "Parental sponsors were helpful but the girls themselves were the leaders."⁶²

Girls' organizations also urged girls to get involved in community-wide youth councils, a creation of the 1930s that flourished throughout the late 1940s and 1950s. Youth councils comprised a cross-section of teens in the community, including representatives from local youth organizations (educational, recreational, cultural, ethnic, religious, etc.), working together in a democratic and self-governing body to coordinate teen activities, community projects, and youth services within the local area. Girls were to learn through practice a respect for individuals, the skill of cooperation necessary to

⁶¹ See Statistics of Badges Sold, 1959-1977, Research and Statistical Division, Badges and Awards File, 1959-1977, GSUSA.

⁶² Priscilla Clement Ferguson, written interview by author, Boston, MA, 3 June 2008.

the functioning of democracy, and the placement of broader concerns of the whole community over individual desires. Participating in this sort of planning by and for the youth of the community was believed to be a crucial aspect of girls' citizenship training in the immediate postwar period, but overlaid upon it was the dual purpose of engaging with peers from different races, religions, and ethnicities, an important part of the liberal agenda after World War II. Both the Y-Teens and the Girl Scouts saw community youth councils as a dynamic part of their program. The "Intergroup Work" section of the 1952 *Senior Girl Scouting* handbook, an addition from the 1947 version, suggested girls serve as representatives to their local youth councils as an alternative to a senior planning board, which coordinated citywide activities for Girl Scout troops specifically.⁶³ Likewise, the Y-Teen handbook for teenage program directors devoted extensive coverage to interclub councils of Y-Teen girls, an executive body that collaborated with other organizations in the community through representation on a citywide youth council.⁶⁴

Citizenship education was not a new focus of girls' organization in the postwar era, but their endeavors in the years immediately following World War II merged with a national priority of creating strong democracies that could sustain international peace and stability. In re-imagining their role, the Girl Scouts and YWCA drew upon contemporary social science and childrearing theory developed and advanced amidst the pressures of global conflict and the emerging cold war. Including girls in national conventions and promoting self-governance in troops and clubs allowed girls to learn the workings of democratic institutions well before entering the political sphere as adults. For the vast

⁶³ *Senior Girl Scouting*, 1952, 188, GSUSA.

⁶⁴ *Handbook for Teenage Program Directors*, 1948, 3, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

majority of girls involved in Y-Teens and the Scouts who encountered citizenship education at the local level, rather than the national, service activities and youth councils promoted civic engagement and, it was hoped, built a sense of obligation among girls to work for the betterment of their communities. In doing so, YWCA and Girl Scout programming prepared girls to take their place as active citizens in the community and in the nation.

Homemakers of the World

Promoting democratic citizenship education in girls' organizations served the dual purpose of developing individualism and an affinity for American democracy. YWCA and Girl Scout leaders worked to instill in girls democratic principles and a sense of responsibility for the community and the nation, training "tomorrow's citizens" today. But the experience of World War II forced the country to abandon the notion its citizens could live independent of the affairs of the rest of the world. After the war, fear of the destructive power of the atomic bomb convinced many Americans, including girls' organizations, that international cooperation and dialogue was vital to global stability and peace. The YWCA and Girl Scouts adjusted their program in the postwar years to embrace the expectation of world citizenship for girls. In this, both organizations imagined an expansive role for girls that assumed their active knowledge of and involvement in world affairs, in addition to local and national. "Those democratic and Christian principles which we believe are necessary for tomorrow's world," the 1948 Y-

Teen adviser training manual asserted, “. . . are fundamental, too, to a United Nations in which [girls] will be both citizens and leaders.”⁶⁵

Citizenship for girls, however, began at home. Girls’ organizations sought to square the social and political education of their young members with 1950s culture. That meant charting a maternalist middle ground, between adhering to traditional gender roles that positioned young girls primarily as homemakers, and maintaining space for girls to envision a future as active participants on the world stage. The expectation that girls’ futures would include marriage, homemaking, and childbearing infused the programming of both the Y-Teens and the Girl Scouts from their very beginning in the early twentieth century and hung on tenaciously throughout the decades. Homemaking, the 1952 *Senior Girl Scouting* handbook asserted, “is the most fundamental and important job in the world.” Despite whatever activities a girl would engage in throughout her future, the handbook insisted, “The job of holding the family together through all the pressures of modern life is a tough one, but more challenging than any other.”⁶⁶

Framing women’s political participation in terms easily understood by society was not a new occurrence. White women active in the abolition, suffrage, and progressive social movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries often appealed to their status as wives, mothers, and homemakers to establish their moral authority first over the private sphere, and later over the public one.⁶⁷ Only rarely before the late twentieth

⁶⁵ *Handbook for Teenage Program Directors*, 1948, 1, File 1, Box 566, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

⁶⁶ *Senior Girl Scouting*, 1952, 145-169, GSUSA.

⁶⁷ Anne M. Boylan, *The Origins of Women’s Activism: New York and Boston, 1797-1840* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Freedman, “Separatism as Strategy,” 512-529; Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*; Baker, “Domestication of Politics,” 620-647; Rupp and Taylor, eds., *Survival in the Doldrums*.

century did female activists make claims to women's political and social importance without invoking a set of special qualities that distinguished them from men. In espousing this maternalist philosophy, the YWCA and Girl Scouts reflected a postwar political culture claimed by many women's organizations that eschewed feminist language but presumed women's involvement in national and international affairs.⁶⁸ Contrary to popular wisdom, the 1950s witnessed an explosion in activism among white, middle-class women's groups. Throughout the decade, hundreds of thousands of women joined a wide-ranging array of civic associations and organizations on both the right and the left that encouraged self-education on issues like disarmament, civil defense, civil rights, and tax reform, and provided women valuable experience in lobbying and political campaigning.⁶⁹ To different extents, national professional and civic women's organizations such as the American Association of University Women, the General Federation of Women's Clubs, and the League of Women Voters rested claims to women's public participation on a belief in essential gender difference that celebrated their unique qualities *as women* and rejected a public/private distinction between men's citizenship and women's citizenship. Drawing upon their presumed shared identity as caring wives, responsible mothers, and concerned community members, maternalist women couched their involvement in politics through the concept of the home.

Maternalism in girls' organizations, as one historian has argued, could be a fluid, adaptive tool that allowed them to adjust their programs to the demands of the

⁶⁸ Helen Laville, *Cold War Women: The International Activities of American Women's Organisations* (Manchester, Eng.: Manchester University Press, 2002); Meltzer, "Maternal Citizens."

⁶⁹ Alonso, *Peace as a Women's Issue*; Lynn, *Progressive Women in Conservative Times*; Meyerowitz, *Not June Cleaver*; Murray, *The Progressive Housewife*; Rupp and Taylor, eds., *Survival in the Doldrums*; Tilly and Patricia Gurin, eds., *Women, Politics, and Change*.

contemporary political and cultural context.⁷⁰ Still, the meaning of domesticity in girls' organizations could vary. A comparison with the Camp Fire Girls highlights the somewhat different meaning of domesticity for the latter. Martha Allen, National Director of the Camp Fire Girls between 1943 and 1966, also placed homemaking at the center of the Camp Fire program, but she emphasized the organization's romanticization of the mundane activities of domestic life and the feminine qualities of nurturance and beauty. In correspondence with the Boy Scouts, Allen carefully differentiated Camp Fire from the Girl Scouts, vehemently insisting "Our program is different. Throughout our history we have had a definite and unchanging conviction that homemaking is a CAREER," suggesting that, from her perspective, the meaning of domesticity for the Girl Scouts was more ambiguous and undecided. According to a recent history of the organization, Camp Fire administration largely rejected the expanded opportunities experienced by women during World War II, and played a conservative role in reorienting women away from politics in the postwar years.⁷¹

For the Girl Scouts and the YWCA, explaining women's political participation through a domestic framework didn't mean they should focus only on their own homes. Rather, girls' future duties as caretakers of the community meant they had a parallel responsibility to be knowledgeable about international affairs and to help build positive international relations. By extending the responsibilities of women and girls within the home to an international community, the YWCA and the Girl Scouts qualified the meaning of domesticity and distinctive gender roles, rejecting a simple equation of

⁷⁰ Helgren, "Inventing American Girlhood."

⁷¹ See chapter six in Helgren, "Inventing American Girlhood," 367-458. Quote by Martha Allen from 373.

gender difference to separate spheres of activity. Rather, whatever a girl's future held, "The YWCA believes that as girls today are becoming homemakers, workers in business and industry, and citizens, they need activities that will help them to see and to accept themselves as responsible and capable persons who must work side by side with men in an equal status to build a good society."⁷²

For girls to work on a par with men to build a peaceful and secure world, they needed education. The Girl Scouts and YWCA encouraged an expanded awareness of international institutions they believed would contribute to the development of democracy and freedom around the world. Their internationalism was expressed most clearly in their affinity for the United Nations, an institution one historian has aptly named the "secular religion" of cold war youth.⁷³ The concept of international cooperation embodied by the U.N. also resonated with the global networks of women the YWCA and the Scouts had built during the preceding decades through the World YWCA and the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGS).⁷⁴ Both organizations sponsored numerous trips for girls to tour the U.N. and to meet with government officials, to gain firsthand knowledge of the inner workings of the world's premier international body. Girl Scouts from Long Beach, California, journeyed to the east coast to serve as "junior" delegates, hosting the daughters of actual foreign U.N. delegates in New York City, while a troop from Rochester, New York, met with the chief

⁷² Sara P. Alyce-Wright, *Working With Teen-agers in the YWCA: A Guide for the Teen-Age Program Committee*, 1963, 8, File 11, Box 566, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC. The 1963 guide was written in 1954 and remained unedited through 1963.

⁷³ William Graebner, "The Cold War: A Yearbook Perspective," *OAH Magazine of History* 2.1 (Summer 1986): 13.

⁷⁴ Nancy Boyd, *Emissaries: The Overseas Work of the American YWCA, 1895-1970* (New York: Woman's Press, 1986); Kristine Alexander, "The Girl Guide Movements and Imperial Internationalism during the 1920s and 30s," *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 2.1 (Winter 2009): 37-63.

of the Section of Nongovernmental Organizations to learn about his work and deliver a pledge of support to his office.⁷⁵ A Y-Teen club from Washington D.C. traveled to the U.N in 1951 for a three-day tour and lecture series. While in New York, club members learned about the history and charter of the United Nations. Moreover, they learned that of the 600 delegates to the United Nations, only 16 were women, and that no woman had yet been appointed to the Security Council (a fact the speaker cleverly suggested may be “one reason that more progress has not been made in establishing collective security.”)⁷⁶ Ann Richert, a Y-Teen on the trip, credited the experience for piquing her interest in one day working for the U.N. as a delegate or journalist.⁷⁷

The expectation that girls would play an important role in the world, as young people and later as adults, found ultimate expression in the first Y-Teen National Conference. The week-long conference coalesced around the theme of youth’s role in national and world affairs, and two hundred girls, comprising sophomores, juniors, and seniors in high school, traveled to Washington D.C. to attend. Pre-conference readings sent to girls included publications on global economics, the social security system, and the work of the U.N., introducing girls to detailed programs like the “U.N. Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance,” which financed and coordinated international collaborative projects such as the development of the Port of Aqaba in present-day Jordan. The complexity of the program materials delivered to girls prior to the conference suggests the seriousness with which the YWCA approached the theme of the conference.

⁷⁵ “Hosts to Girls of 20 Nations,” *New York Times*, June 22, 1950, 29; “Girl Scouts Pledge Aid to U.N.,” *New York Times*, April 16, 1953, 33.

⁷⁶ “YW Y-Teens Will Visit United Nations,” *Washington Post*, March 30, 1951, C3.

⁷⁷ “D.C. Teen-Agers Learn How U.N. Ticks,” *Washington Post*, April 8, 1951, S8.

Conference organizers challenged girls to move beyond engaging in their own community and regional problems and really delve into critical questions about the nature of American democracy, to research the U.N. and the State Department, and to think about what it meant to promote peace in newly independent countries. To aid them in their exploration, girls heard speeches from such high level officials as the U.S. delegate to the U.N., the president of the National Board of the YWCA, and various representatives from the World Health Organization, the Supreme Court, the Women's Bureau, the AFL-CIO, and the NAACP.⁷⁸

For girls unable to travel to New York City to experience the U.N. firsthand, the organizations recommended personal study designed to promote critical reflection on world affairs in the aftermath of World War II. In the 1952 Girl Scout Handbook, for instance, the U.N. held a privileged place, and the organization wanted girls to be conversant with its mission: "Become more familiar with the work of the United Nations. If possible, visit the U.N. in New York or attend meetings of local U.N. discussion groups. Follow through some special problem which is on the U.N. agenda and see what final decisions are made. Know who is the United States representative at the U.N." Noting women were entering the foreign service in small numbers in recent years, the handbook also suggested girls consider careers in the State Department or the U.S. diplomatic service.⁷⁹ The YWCA's *The Bookshelf*, the monthly periodical for Y-Teens and Y-Teen leaders, contained articles detailing each branch of the U.N., illustrating the

⁷⁸ National Y-Teen Conference Program, 1956, File 12, Box 554, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

⁷⁹ *Senior Girl Scouting*, 1952, 85, 179, GSUSA.

interrelationship between each of its branches, and outlining the vision of world government embodied by the institution.⁸⁰

Challenging girls to think about world affairs and their role within them, the Scouts and Y-Teens encouraging critical thinking that sometimes questioned the primacy of national citizenship and the infallibility of the United States. The 1947 handbook for Senior Girl Scouts stressed that “The war has proved beyond doubt the impossibility of any one nation’s living unto itself alone and the necessary interdependence of all nations,” positioning awareness of world affairs as the duty of all girls. The organization advised girls to think about different political philosophies, try to define their own, and examine their local community to see if democracy truly functioned for *all* residents. The handbook also encouraged reflection on the meaning of war and the problems of maintaining peace, posing such questions as “Did the Allies win the war? Can the victor sometimes be the loser?” and “How could world wars be settled without war?” Girls could place the recent war in context by studying past wars and revolutions and distilling their fundamental similarities, and they could study other countries so as to understand their different perspectives on the war.⁸¹

In addition to study and travel, internationalism in girls’ organizations was often expressed through the concept of international friendship. International friendship embodied the “one world” ideal that underlined the Girl Scout and YWCA organizations, which both considered themselves global movements for women and girls. Handbooks for girls and training manuals for adult leaders, as well as actual club and troop activities, presented the Girl Scouts and the YWCA as simply the American piece of a much larger

⁸⁰ *The Bookshelf*, January – May 1945, File 1, Box 571, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

⁸¹ *Senior Girl Scouting*, 1947, GSUSA.

whole. Activity suggestions included taking foreign language classes at the local YWCA, or holding discussions on international affairs at troop meetings. Both organizations encouraged girls to develop a sense of international understanding by immersing themselves in the cultures of their foreign friends. In Scout troops and Y-Teen clubs, girls threw international theme parties where they studied foreign countries and brought foods representative of their cultures to share. International fairs provided girls the opportunity to study the language and history of another country and present their new knowledge to the public. With their leaders or advisers, girls might also participate in local ethnic celebrations, or invite guests from far-flung places to come and speak to them at meetings. Learning about foreign cultures was an important component of building international friendship.

In the name of international friendship, the Scouts and the YWCA also sponsored direct cultural exchanges between American girls and foreign girls. Through these experiences, girls could discover the similarities between the concerns of American adolescents and those of girls around the world. The YWCA conceived of programs like the World Friendship Project, by which Y-Teen clubs exchanged scrapbooks with girls from countries including Bolivia, Jamaica, and New Zealand, and connected girls through written exchanges as pen pals.⁸² Social service projects for Girl Scout troops included such activities as “Fill a School Bag for a Friend,” for which 65,000 troops collected pencils, notebooks, and various other school supplies for delivery through international relief agencies to girls in disrupted regions of the world.⁸³ Drawing upon the core of the

⁸² “Scrapbooks Continued,” correspondence from the Foreign Division of the YWCA National Board to Y-Teen Advisers, August 1956, Microdex 2, Reel 250, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

⁸³ “Girl Scouts to Send School Bags Abroad,” *New York Times*, November 16, 1949, 36.

scouting program, the Scouts also sponsored international encampments, placing American girls in intimate living situations with girls from other countries. Nicknamed “The Little United Nations,” the 1947 international encampment in Barree, Pennsylvania witnessed girls exchanging objects representative of their local communities and cultures, trading stories of their experiences during the war, and, as one newspaper headline read, discovering that “chores same in all lands.”⁸⁴

Through these exchanges, girls’ organizations could advance the nation’s cold war agenda by exporting American ideals to countries blighted by communism and fascism. This was an extension of their historical tradition of patriotism and national service, and the political purpose underlying cultural exchanges was sometimes overt. For instance, the Girl Scouts announced an initiative called “Clothes for Friendship,” which sent 100,000 kits of collected clothing to children in recovering areas of Europe and Asia, at their national convention in 1947. The speaker boldly declared the program “an opportunity to introduce healthy, democratic thoughts as a block to the deceptive totalitarian philosophies which are being projected at the youth of that nation.”⁸⁵ If communism and democracy were polar opposites, with one standing for repression and the other for freedom and prosperity, the ability of American girls to exchange goods with foreign girls was in and of itself an expression of freedom and a demonstration of the superiority of the American political system.

Overtly political or not, the internationalism of girls’ organizations promoted and protected women’s access to the rights and responsibilities of local, national, and

⁸⁴ Madeleine Loeb, “Girls Find Chores Same In All Lands,” *New York Times*, July 1, 1947, 23.

⁸⁵ Norma Goodhue, “Hoover Urges Girl Scouts to Help European Children,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 7, 1947, A5; Gladwin Hill, “Girl Scouts to Give Clothes to Europe,” *New York Times*, November 7, 1947, 26.

international citizenship in the face of widely held beliefs about women's place in the home. By encouraging education in international peacekeeping bodies like the U.N., and by seeking to foster global peace and understanding through international friendships and cultural exchanges, girls' organizations reworked older notions of women's moral guardianship and maternal duties for the postwar world. Among a growing body of right-wing conservatives, however, in the political climate of the 1950s internationalism became a code word for communism.⁸⁶ Critiques of citizenship education in girls' organizations showed that even seemingly innocuous forms of internationalism taught to America's youth in the late 1940s and early 1950s raised the indignation of activists with an alternative vision of postwar security.

Hiding Behind the Lace Curtains

The YWCA's and Girl Scout's internationalism and embrace of world citizenship for girls in the late 1940s and 1950s left them susceptible to the red-baiting that plagued many institutions in American society during the height of anticommunist fervor. The two organizations shared themes and program emphases in the immediate postwar period that promoted international friendship and global sisterhood (whether real or imagined), and faith in multilateral institutions like the U.N. Attacks on both organizations challenged their liberal definition of national strength, which relied on an ethos of tolerance and cooperation between individuals and between nations as the best hope for a secure future. As groups that worked with children and teens, girls' organization were

⁸⁶ For instance, groups of right-wing conservative women partnered with conservative leaders like William F. Buckley, Sr., on a crusade to eradicate internationalism in elementary and secondary school textbooks and curricula in the 1950s. See June Melby Benowitz, "Reading, Writing and Radicalism: Right-Wing Women and Education in the Post-War Years," *History of Education Quarterly* 49.1 (February 2009): 90-111.

particularly vulnerable when it came to accusations of communism or anti-Americanism. The hundreds of thousands of parents who sent their daughters off to troop or club meetings each week did so in large part because they believed their daughters would benefit from wholesome educational and social activities encountered at the Y or in scouting. As one woman recalled, when reflecting on her parents' opinion of her involvement in a local youth group in the 1950s, "It was fun. We went places, and it was just *good* fun. And we were safe there, so our parents allowed us to go."⁸⁷ Accusations of anti-Americanism and communist sympathies threatened this image of safety and wholesomeness, could prove detrimental to women's ability to work with youth, and had the unfortunate effect of actually inhibiting programming.

Communist charges against the YWCA hit the news wires in early spring of 1948, when two members of the Queens (New York) Association accused the national office of harboring communist sympathizers and resigned from the Board of Directors.⁸⁸ Much more worrisome, however, was a booklet published in late 1948 by Joseph P. Kamp, a conservative political activist, affiliate of the anticommunist Constitutional Education League, and author of a number of inflammatory right-wing tracts. Entitled "Behind the Lace Curtains of the YWCA," an unmistakable innuendo that likened a genteel symbol of the home to the iron curtain draped across eastern Europe by the Soviet Union, Kamp's imagery suggested a "Lace Curtain" hid the subversive activities of Y women from the world as they conducted a campaign of communist infiltration under cover of women's

⁸⁷ Alyce Littmon-Teale, interview by author, tape recording, Boston, MA, 28 May 2008.

⁸⁸ Their accusation eventually made its way to the House Un-American Activities Committee.

traditional place in the home.⁸⁹ Kamp's attack on the organization was motivated by the YWCA's history of progressive work on behalf of racial equality, workers' rights, and international cooperation, a set of progressive values dictated by their spirituality, which linked Christian principles with social reform. He accused the *Womans Press*, producer of the organization's monthly magazine, of publishing articles by more than thirty writers who had records with the U.S. government as suspected communists, and he charged the national office with employing two hundred women with "subversive Communist affiliations."⁹⁰

Kamp drew upon the specter of the corruption of girls in substantiating the gravity of his accusations, lighting the fire of indignation. "Just imagine some enthusiastic 'liberal' YWCA teen-ager conducting worship services," he cautioned, "and reading this Langston Hughes masterpiece: 'Good-bye; Christ Jesus, Lord, God, Jehovah; Beat it on away from here now; Make way for a new guy with no religion at all; A real guy named; Marx Communist Lenin Peasant, Stalin Worker, me.'" He expressed outrage over suggested reading lists for girls that included liberal authors and progressive educators and condemned international pen pal programs.⁹¹ And he reminded readers the Communist Party had explicit designs on the socialization of youth as a means of strengthening their movement in the United States, evidenced by a resolution passed by the Party in 1934 to organize "mass work in youth organizations controlled by the

⁸⁹ Joseph P. Kamp, *Behind the Lace Curtains of the YWCA: A Report on the Extent and Nature of Infiltration by Communist, Socialist and Other Left Wing Elements, and the Resultant Red Complexion of Propaganda Disseminated In, By, and Through the Young Women's Christian Association*, (New York: Constitutional Education League, 1948).

⁹⁰ Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood*, 170-171; Kamp, *Behind the Lace Curtains*, 8.

⁹¹ Kamp, *Behind the Lace Curtains*, 21, 42.

bourgeoisie.” Kamp painted the YWCA as a vehicle of radicalism, likening the organization to the American Youth Congress, a Popular-Front youth organization formed in the early 1930s by then-socialist, “prominent radical leader,” and self-described “full-time revolutionary” Joseph Lash, and the Young Communist League, the youth arm of the Communist Party.⁹²

Moreover, Kamp rooted the threat of the YWCA in the work of women reformers who moved outside of the domestic world into the world of politics. He alleged their sex made the YWCA “a much more dangerous propaganda vehicle for Marxism than any typical Communist front organization could possibly be,” borrowing Thomas Huxley’s words that “No witness is so dishonest as a really good woman with a cause to serve.” At the heart of his critique was not a simple or narrowly defined condemnation of communist or internationalist principles, but rather a wide-ranging assault suggestive of a deeper fear that an organization like the YWCA, which worked across generational lines, could overthrow the traditional order by instilling progressive beliefs in girls and then engaging them fully in the actual political sphere.⁹³

Mrs. Arthur Forrest Anderson, president of the YWCA during the publication of Kamp’s booklet, called his accusations “a sorry compilation of inaccuracies, insidious half-truths, perverted facts, and flagrant suppressions of the ultimate truth.”⁹⁴ But Anderson supported the notion that youth organizations were particularly targeted and

⁹² David E. Pitt, “Joseph P. Lash is Dead; Reporter and Biographer,” *New York Times*, August 23, 1987; Kamp, *Behind the Lace Curtains*. For more on communist youth organizations, see Paul Mishler, *Raising Reds: The Young Pioneers, Radical Summer Camps, and Communist Political Culture in the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

⁹³ Kamp, *Behind the Lace Curtains*, 5, 9.

⁹⁴ Memo from Mrs. Arthur Forrest Anderson, n.d., File 14, Box 129, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

perhaps vulnerable to communist infiltration, stressing the YWCA “has for years been alert to communist tactics, and the dangers that beset a youth organization.”⁹⁵ Other women’s organizations closed ranks with the YWCA in defense. The *New York Herald Tribune* ran a scathing article criticizing Kamp as an extremist, and quoted Rita V. Tishman, chairman of the women’s division of the America Friends of Democracy, speaking out in defense of the YWCA. Tishman described throwing her support to the YWCA “but another instance of ‘women helping women in the fight against subversive propaganda’,” turning the tables on Kamp by labeling his diatribe un-American and suggesting a longer history of hostility on the part of men toward women’s activism.⁹⁶ Publicly, the YWCA’s national office issued a simple statement of response, highlighting the organization’s purpose: “To build a fellowship of women and girls devoted to the task of realizing in our common life those ideals of personal and social living to which we are committed by our faith as Christian.” The national office considered this “sufficient answer to recent unfounded charges,” wrapping themselves in the protective cloak of their religion and their linkage of Christianity with democratic values to dispel the furor.⁹⁷

The Girl Scouts, too, encountered criticism of their program in March 1954, when libertarian Robert LeFevre, then a television newscaster in Florida and later the founder

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Quote from Rita V. Tishman in Judith Crist, “Women Dig Up Facts to Refute Charge That Reds Rule Y.W.C.A.,” *New York Herald Tribune*, November 7, 1948.

⁹⁷ Mrs. Arthur Forrest Anderson to National Board and National Staff, 10 February 1948, File 14, Box 129, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC; Joseph Hearst, “Y.W.C.A. Tightens Guard Against Inroads by Reds,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 10, 1949; Tony Smith, “Charge Commies Enter Churches to Destroy Them,” *New York World Telegram*, November 22, 1948; “Church Groups Deny Charge of Red Infiltration,” *New York Herald Tribune*, November 23, 1948; “Red Infiltration Found in Religion,” *New York Times*, November 23, 1948.

of the libertarian Freedom School, published an article entitled “Even the Girl Scouts” in the right-wing journal *Human Events*.⁹⁸ LeFevre’s article was provoked by a personal snub – in the year before publishing the article, his invitation to speak at a Fort Lauderdale Girl Scout Council meeting was revoked by members of the council who grew wary of his conservative political leanings. His article compared the 1940 Girl Scout handbook to the revised 1953 edition and charged that the later version privileged world citizenship over national patriotism.⁹⁹ After its publication, the Girl Scout national office received a flurry of letters and phone calls from concerned parents and financial contributors throughout the summer of 1954.¹⁰⁰ Representative Timothy P. Sheehan (R-IL) entered LeFevre’s article into the Congressional Record on July 2, 1954, sparking several energetic exchanges among congressmen as to the danger the organization posed to the country.¹⁰¹

Despite the personal provocation for the article, LeFevre’s charges had some factual basis. As discussed, the changes made in the 1953 edition of the Girl Scout handbook indeed encouraged girls to view their responsibilities as citizens in global terms, reflecting the altered world in which many girls found themselves growing up after World War II. For instance, the “World Neighbor” badge prompted Scouts to “Memorize the statement on neighborliness in the United Nations Charter,” and the “One World” badge contained a list of instructions almost entirely oriented around learning about the

⁹⁸ Robert LeFevre, “Even the Girl Scouts,” *Human Events*, March 31, 1954.

⁹⁹ The Girl Scout handbook underwent normal revision at least once a decade to keep the program current with the perceived needs and desires of girls.

¹⁰⁰ “Volume of Letters, Phone Calls, and Telegrams to Headquarters on LeFevre Article,” American Legion Controversy File, American Legion Attack Box, GSUSA.

¹⁰¹ *Congressional Record*. 83rd congress, 2nd session, 1954, 100-a: A4941.

structure of the U.N. The badge asked Scouts to discuss concepts such as “world mindedness” with troop members, to compare the World Association of Girl Guides and Scouts to the U.N., and to propose troop activities that “further[ed] the ideas of the United Nations.” Additionally, the handbook likened Girl Scouts symbols, like the trefoil, to “the flame of love of mankind, symbolizing the highest thoughts of international friendship,” and presented Juliette Gordon Low, the revered founder of the organization, as “the first true internationalist.”¹⁰² The handbook also encouraged Scouts to familiarize themselves with and form connections to networks of women active in the community and in politics. For girls interested in earning the “Under My Government” badge, the handbook suggested girls contact their local League of Women Voters (LWV) chapter for assistance, a group LeFevre considered to be too liberal to be appropriate for schooling American girls in the political process.

Consequently, the anti-subversive committee of the Illinois American Legion denounced the Girl Scouts at their annual convention in August of the same year. The committee introduced a resolution recommending “withdrawal of all support of the Girl Scout movement until such time as the responsible directors of the Girl Scouts of the U.S.A. give irrefutable proof to the American public that they have taken definitive measures to eliminate these un-American influences from the Girl Scout Handbook. . .” and “urge[d] that parents of our American youth keep a close watch on all organized youth activities in which their children are engaged. . .”¹⁰³ Again, the accusation that the Scouts privileged world citizenship over American citizenship formed the basis for the

¹⁰² *Girl Scout Handbook - Intermediate Program*, 1953, “International Friendship,” 207-228, 428-431, GSUSA.

¹⁰³ Resolution 33, American Legion Department of Illinois, 5-8 August 1954, American Legion Controversy File, American Legion Attack Box, GSUSA.

Legion's resolution, which was passed by the 2,000 delegates at the convention. While the national American Legion refused to officially endorse the resolution at their annual convention in September, the national body did issue a statement essentially in support of the Illinois chapter, urging the Scouts to take steps to rectify the discrepancies between the 1940 handbook and the 1953 edition and to privilege nationalism and American patriotism over internationalism.¹⁰⁴

The Girl Scouts reacted swiftly to the Legion's resolution. Like the YWCA, they largely relied on their unblemished reputation as a patriotic, nationalist, and all-around mainstream organization to defend themselves against the charges. Girl Scout President Olivia Layton publicly rejected the charges of anti-Americanism by the American Legion, telling one reporter "We deserve nothing less than the unqualified indorsement [sic] and support from the American Legion . . . I just defy any one to find a more American organization than the Girl Scouts of America."¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, behind closed doors Girl Scout staff expressed nervousness about the impact these charges could have on such a wide-ranging organization that sought to provide programs for girls from families of all political persuasions. A memo from Alice Wagener, Field Department Director, to public relations executive Mary Jo Shelly suggested the organization actually greatly feared repercussions from the attack: "The atmosphere is extremely serious. Jo [Otto] feels that our enemies are waiting to pounce at the next opportunity."¹⁰⁶ Ultimately, the staff launched a multi-pronged defense that included setting up a series of regional

¹⁰⁴ "Report on Issue of Americanism," American Legion Controversy File, American Legion Attack Box, GSUSA.

¹⁰⁵ "Girl Scout Official Angrily Protests New Attack by Legion," *Washington Star*, September 3, 1954.

¹⁰⁶ Alice Wagener to Mary Jo Shelly, August 1954, American Legion Controversy File, American Legion Attack Box, GSUSA.

conferences to reiterate the organization's patriotic activities, attempting to set up meetings with various congressmen and with FBI head J. Edgar Hoover, and meeting with the national staff of the American Legion.¹⁰⁷

In addition to a traditional public relations defense strategy of countering false claims, the national staff recommended hiding behind a veil of domesticity until the controversy blew over. Recognizing that the accusations by LeFevre and the Legion amounted to more than a simple dispute over the primacy of nationalism or world citizenship, staff members thought it fit to point out the national office had received no letters or complaints "of the LeFevre genre" from a woman, nor had any women's organization participated in criticizing the Girl Scouts.¹⁰⁸ Acknowledging the gendered dimension of the attacks on their organization, the Scouts consciously chose to downplay the components of its program that encouraged international friendship and global sisterhood, and instead display an image to the public that stressed girls' education in domestic skills. This was a dramatic reversal for an organization that usually promoted itself as a character education institution that instilled self-reliance and leadership skills in young girls and women. Instead, the national office outlined a strategy of defense that would emphasize the "simplicity of the program" – specifically, the fact that homemaking badges were the most popular pursuit for girls in the 1950s.¹⁰⁹

Throughout the 1950s, the majority of badges earned by Girl Scouts were in fact

¹⁰⁷ "Daily Log of Major Developments," American Legion Controversy File, American Legion Attack Box, GSUSA.

¹⁰⁸ "Bulletin to Board of Directors Covering Week of August 8-13," 1954, GSUSA.

¹⁰⁹ "Bulletin to Board of Directors Covering Week of August 8-13, 1954," American Legion Controversy File, American Legion Attack Box, GSUSA. In 1954, approximately 786,000 badges in the category "You and Your Home" were sold, approximately 200,000 more than the next most popular category, "Fun and Exploration in the Out-of-Doors." Statistics of Badges Sold, 1959-1977 File, Badges and Awards Box, GSUSA.

in women's traditional fields of homemaking, domestic skills, and soft sciences such as nutrition. But the conversation among national staff during the American Legion controversy suggests a simple reading of the Girl Scouts as an agent of domesticity during the 1950s overlooks the possibility the organization carefully crafted an image meant to be acceptable to a society in which the home, and women's place within it, stood as a symbol of safety and protection from a hostile postwar environment.

The accusations that girls' organizations harbored communist sympathies or taught girls anti-American ideals flew in the face of their self-assigned role as guardians of youth and promoters of girls' future participation in the American democratic system. Moreover, they had real consequences for the organizations themselves and for the girls they served. Both organizations received much of their funding from community sources – Community Chests (now the United Way), local fundraising drives that relied on community members' support, and various grant-making foundations. Red-baiting in the suspicious atmosphere of the 1950s placed this financing in jeopardy. In some communities, like Atlantic City, the local YWCA broke away from the national body altogether to avoid association with the accusations of "left-wing 'infiltration'." The president of the Atlantic City association sought to assure the local community of their separation from the national body, stressing all property and trust funds would be held "solely for the benefit" of the local association.¹¹⁰

The Girl Scouts took more decisive action, issuing a list of more than sixty revisions to be made to the 1953 Girl Scout handbook just days after the American Legion's resolution. The revisions were intended to "point up the emphasis on training

¹¹⁰ "Atlantic City YWCA Quits National Body," *New York Times*, March 4, 1949, 5; also quoted in Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood*, 171.

for good U.S. citizenship which is implicit throughout the Girl Scout program,” and “to clarify the part of our program that is directed toward building friendships between Girl Scouts and children of other nations,” an action which resulted, in some cases, in simply deleting whole passages in the handbooks that could be construed as overly political or objectionable, watering down the 1953 version of the handbook to dilute the world citizenship component. The revisions substituted references to the world with references to the community, bringing the scope of scouting down to the local level. Rather than reading “Service is your way of making this a better world in which to live,” girls read “service is a way of making a contribution to your community,” and rather than “preparing yourself for world citizenship,” girls were preparing themselves to be a “friend to all.” The “One World” badge became “My World.” By emphasizing the impact a Scout could have on her neighborhood rather than on the world, the handbook cast the concept of world citizenship in a more guarded light and diminished the sense that girls were equal citizens of a global community in which they would and should take part.¹¹¹

Conclusion

After 1945, the YWCA and the Girl Scouts adapted their educational work with girls to the vagaries of a postwar world. Turning their attention to democratic education and inculcating active citizenship among teenage girls at home and abroad, they reflected and reinforced the centrality of youth in postwar American culture and politics. While citizenship training had always been a component of girls’ organizations, the contours of their program in the years immediately following World War II bore a special

¹¹¹ “Revisions in the Fifth Impression of the 1953 Edition of the Girl Scout Handbook,” 9 August 1954, American Legion Controversy File, American Legion Attack Box, GSUSA; Ben H. Bagdikian, “What Happened to the Girl Scouts?” *Atlantic Monthly*, May 1955.

relationship to postwar anxiety over communism, global instability, and international rebuilding. Teaching girls about democracy meant creating spaces for them to experience democratic relationships firsthand and providing a venue to study the governmental structures and political institutions that gave shape to America's new role in the world. The need for this work – predicated on the importance of individualism to freedom, and on the importance of instilling democratic principles in the next generation to the continuation of national strength – dovetailed with a creeping political conservatism in the 1950s that turned away from internationalism in favor of Americanism. This history exposes larger transitions underway in American culture and politics, as groups with competing visions of national strength after World War II fought to control the education of America's children.

While program activities associated with democratic education and citizenship continued to be viewed through gendered notions of women's social role, the enriching possibilities present in their program are consistent with other histories of women in the postwar period. The YWCA's and Girl Scout's programming for girls walked a hazy line between buttressing domestic ideology and embracing leadership development and individual autonomy, offering contradictory expectations for the future in a decade when support for female independence and autonomy in other institutions like schools lay dormant. Tension between the maternalism of girls' organizations and their promotion of female independence and full citizenship, as the two operated along side one another, would present challenges in the coming decades.

The vision of democracy that inspired the YWCA and the Girl Scouts found equal expression in the other pillar of their postwar ethos – social justice enacted through racial

integration. The next chapter discusses the integration work of the YWCA and the Girl Scouts in the 1950s and 1960s, which connected democracy to interracial cooperation.

An article in the Girl Scouts' *American Girl* magazine explained:

National defense is not a one-man job. It is a job that needs the thinking and action of everyone in the nation – young and old. Now, ordinarily we think of national defense as a defense against physical forces. But in its broadest sense it is also a defense against unethical forces – the unkind word, the unsympathetic attitude, the thoughtless deed. Such forces divide groups of people whether these people are made up of members of families, races or creeds. Doing our best to cement the brotherhood of mankind is one of the most important contributions we can make to our defense effort.¹¹²

Drawing on more than twenty years of work by social science researchers who argued racial prejudice was damaging the personality development of America's children, and therefore threatening to the safety and security of the future, both organizations began integrating their programs to teach girls to value others as individuals rather than on the basis of color, a plan they expected would infuse the next generation with an appreciation for racial equality that would remake the future. Thus it was in these organizations, particularly in the South, where many girls, white and black, experienced their first interpersonal contact with peers of a different race, with important consequences for girls coming of age amidst the Civil Rights movement.

¹¹² Marie E. Gaudette, "World-mindedness," *American Girl*, February 1952, 10-11.



"Stand Fast, Men--They're Armed with Marshmallows,"
Washington Post, 11 August 1954
A 1954 Herblock Cartoon, copyright by The Herb Block
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CHAPTER 3

“TO RID TEENAGERS OF PREJUDICE”: INTEGRATING THE Y-TEENS AND THE GIRL SCOUTS IN THE ERA OF *BROWN V. BOARD*

“In a world where it means so much to take a man by the hand and sit beside him, to look frankly into his eyes and feel his heart beating with red blood; in a world where a social cigar or a cup of tea together means more than legislative halls and magazine articles and speeches,—one can imagine the consequences of the almost utter absence of such social amenities between estranged races, whose separation extends even to parks and streetcars.” – W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 1903¹

“It is hard to be simple enough about such a terrible social curse as racism and to recognize that the only positive approach to a world free of racism lies in seeing people as individuals.”—Ruth F. Benedict, “Racism is Vulnerable,” 1946²

Few images have struck the conscience of America quite so deeply as that of fifteen-year-old Elizabeth Eckford, with sunglasses on and schoolbooks in arm, stoically making her way toward the stately entrance of Central High in Little Rock, Arkansas in September 1957. Dressed in a smart, cotton summer dress trimmed with navy blue and white gingham, Elizabeth stared straight ahead as an ugly mob of white men and women, enraged at the federal government for challenging their vision of the natural social order and intruding on their community affairs, released their anger, frustration, and hatred on Elizabeth and her eight peers as they attempted to begin the 1957-1958 school year at the

¹ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1903).

² Ruth F. Benedict, “Racism is Vulnerable,” *The English Journal* 35.6 (June 1946): 299-303.

formerly all-white school, the pride of the city of Little Rock, three years after the Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* that declared racial segregation in public education unconstitutional.

The “Little Rock Nine,” as they’re known, retain a special place in American memory and imagery, but their struggle was not a singular one. In small towns, suburbs, and metropolitan areas across the South, this scenario was played out over and over again, with responses that ranged from mild discontent to outright fighting. Some cities, such as Charlotte, North Carolina, were able to implement comprehensive plans for integration that unfolded with little friction. Other unremarkable places in the South, like Oliver Springs, Tennessee, and Sturgis, Kentucky, were rocked by gunfire, explosions, and violence committed by angry white citizens’ groups protesting moves toward school desegregation. Some areas, such as Prince Edward County, Virginia simply closed down its public schools and attempted to establish an alternative, all-white private school system for its children in the late 1950s in a bid to circumvent court-ordered integration altogether. In the 1950s, the *Brown* decision, and the school desegregation efforts in the South that eventually followed it, became a deeply divisive issue for Americans.

Scholars have argued that, in the short-term, the *Brown* decision halted or slowed racial progress in many southern communities due to the virulent backlash that followed the decision. As the author of this controversial “backlash thesis” writes:

Brown crystallized southern resistance to racial change, which – from at least the time of Harry S. Truman’s civil rights proposals in 1948 – had been scattered and episodic. The unification of southern racial intransigence, which became known as massive resistance, propelled politics in virtually every southern state several notches to the right on racial issues; *Brown* temporarily destroyed southern racial moderation.³

³ Michael J. Klarman, “How Brown Changed Race Relations: The Backlash Thesis,” *The Journal of American History* 81.1 (June 1994): 82.

For certain, *Brown* had a dramatic and polarizing impact on the politics of many southern states. But the decision accelerated attention to matters of racial integration for many other Americans who felt it was urgently needed.

Charged by their mission to educate the postwar generation of teens in Christian friendship and democratic values, in the *Brown v. Board of Education* era girls' organizations made education about racial tolerance in their youth programs a priority. This purpose manifested itself in different ways. For the Girl Scouts, it meant making scouting more accessible to minority groups, as greater numbers of non-white women and girls expressed interest, and integrating camps and conferences in order to better align the rhetoric of democracy with practice. For the YWCA, it meant coming to terms with the findings of a 1946 internal study of race relations in the organization that underlined the value of the teenage program as a locus of integration work, and making integration and interracial cooperation the central focus and feature of Y-Teen summer conferences in the South. African-Americans, more than any other group, served as the focal point for race relations. For the YWCA, almost all references to racial justice or racial cooperation, prior to the adoption of the "One Imperative" to eliminate racism in 1970, meant African-Americans. And while the Girl Scouts intensified outreach efforts to several other groups in the 1950s and 1960s, including Hispanic Americans and Native Americans, integration of African-American groups generated both the greatest progress and the greatest difficulty.

Demographic shifts during World War II encouraged the YWCA and the Girl Scouts to think more seriously about their policies toward black members. Drawn by employment opportunities in the expanding defense industry, during the war years

roughly 1.5 million African Americans left the South for cities in the North and West, and the percentage of African Americans living in urban areas increased from 48.6 percent to 62.4 percent.⁴ The relocation of African Americans from the rural South to more urban locales put them in closer contact with established YWCA associations and Girl Scout councils, particularly in war production “boom towns.”⁵

The war also galvanized black political activism. While American war propaganda positioned the country as a guardian of democracy and a warrior against prejudice in the world, the contradictions between the rhetoric of equality and the reality of racial oppression, and the gross injustices visited upon African Americans, could be summed up by the continued segregation of black soldiers serving in the U.S. military. Urban riots broke out in concentrated centers of production like Detroit. Meanwhile, membership in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) multiplied tenfold during the war years, from 50,000 to almost 500,000, as the civil rights movement, long in the background of American political life, moved to center stage with its “Double V” campaign to end discrimination against African Americans at home while combating fascism abroad.⁶

The confluence of demographic shifts and increasing visibility of the burgeoning civil rights movement alone could not command a reexamination of race relations within girls’ organizations. But when the NAACP joined hands with American social scientists to define race relations as one of the most pressing issues of the postwar decades, an

⁴ William Tuttle, *Daddy’s Gone to War: The Second World War in the Lives of America’s Children* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 175.

⁵ Brooks Spivey Creedy, *Women Behind the Lines: YWCA Program with War Production Workers, 1940-1947* (New York: Womans Press, 1949).

⁶ Harvard Sitkoff, *The Struggle For Black Equality 1954-1992* 2nd ed. (New York: Hill & Wang, 1993), 11.

additional ideological pressure was exerted upon youth-serving organizations to espouse a greater rhetorical commitment to ending segregationist practices and to exact more frequent experiments with integration. Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma*, an exhaustive study of the second-class status of African Americans in the South and the psychological and structural barriers to full citizenship, reached millions of Americans after its publication in 1944. The study encapsulated an awakening consciousness of the failure of the nation to live up to its promises of liberty and equality for all. An upsurge in social science research on the psychological damage of race discrimination that focused particularly on the stunted development of healthy personalities in children (both black and white) placed the work of racial equality under the purview of women, as mothers, teachers, and civic members. Engaged in the business of producing healthy female citizens, the YWCA and Girl Scouts thus expanded their definition of democratic citizenship to include the elimination of racial prejudice, and worked to adapt their program for girls to promote interracial cooperation and understanding.

Postwar work of girls' organizations exemplifies a broader youth-centric racial liberalism that achieved a significant victory with *Brown* and helped shift the country away from sanctioned racial segregation. As historian Rebecca de Schweinitz notes, the *Brown* decision was, among other things, the result of a convergence of beliefs in the 1940s and early 1950s about the importance of education, the requirements of national security, and the rights of children.⁷ Before *Brown*, chief counsel Thurgood Marshall and the NAACP's Legal Defense and Education Fund turned their attention to systematically dismantling the legal basis for segregation in other areas of American life. After

⁷ Rebecca de Schweinitz, *If We Could Change the World: Young People and America's Long Struggle for Racial Equality* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

successfully partnering with grassroots activists in a series of court cases that struck down segregation in interstate transportation (*Morgan v. Virginia*, 1946) and racially restrictive housing covenants (*Shelley v. Kraemer*, 1948), the NAACP sought to chip away at the viability of “separate but equal” education for schoolchildren by litigating cases that forced state and local governments to live up to the spirit of the law.⁸ Marshall abandoned this strategy in 1950 in favor of a legal campaign that engaged more directly with public debates about childhood, segregation, and the future of American democracy. In *Brown*, the NAACP realized its desired results when the Supreme Court ruled “separate but equal” unconstitutional, citing the psychological harm state-sponsored segregation did to school-aged children.⁹

At its heart, *Brown* was a decision that defined American beliefs about the rights of children living in a democracy to enjoy social, as well as political, equality. Based on these beliefs, architects of the *Brown* argument attacked legal segregation, mistakenly expecting that racism would melt away as a result.¹⁰ Immediately following the Supreme Court’s decision, Marshall himself expressed optimism in estimating that school desegregation would be eliminated nationwide in “up to five years.”¹¹ Other commentators shared his optimism, claiming the *Brown* decision rode a wave of “larger

⁸ Under the rationale that equalizing teacher pay, facilities, and equipment would make segregated school systems unaffordable.

⁹ James T. Patterson, *Brown v. Board of Education: A Civil Rights Milestone and Its Troubled Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Gilbert Jonas, *Freedom's Sword: The NAACP and the Struggle against Racism in America, 1909-1969* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

¹⁰ John P. Jackson makes this point in *Social Scientists for Social Justice: Making the Case against Segregation* (New York, New York University Press, 2001), 63. Whether legal change or social change should come first was a point of debate among legal experts and social scientists.

¹¹ As quoted in Patterson, *Brown v. Board of Education*, 71.

progressive forces” that “almost nothing could stop.”¹² Although many agreed that the difficult work of ensuring African-American civil rights was hardly over, few anticipated the episodes of massive retaliation, the popular backlash, and the decades of struggle that still lay ahead.

This chapter extends the analysis of Chapter Two by discussing the work of girls’ organizations for racial cooperation in the postwar period. The Girl Scouts and YWCA shared a pluralistic postwar vision that encompassed a progressive set of views on racial, religious, and ethnic tolerance meant to bolster the sense that the nation harbored a diverse, free, and democratic society. To many Americans, racism at home seemed to breed the same sort of intolerance that had led to the atrocities committed by communist and fascist governments. Moreover, promoting tolerance at home was important to closing the gap between American ideals of freedom and equality and persistent discriminatory racial practices, a gap that could be exploited by America’s enemies as the cold war escalated.¹³ Much like their internationalism, the pluralism of the YWCA and the Girl Scouts was a reflection of their Christian spiritual beliefs and was progressive on face, but it was also firmly planted in the context of national strength. The organizations framed their efforts in a liberal political language that linked national interest to equal rights for African Americans and defined citizenship as inclusive and color-blind.

Efforts to desegregate and to educate girls about the dangers of racial prejudice to individuals and to the nation after World War II intensified compared to the interwar years. In practice, however, the Y-Teens and Girl Scouts remained far more segregated

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*; Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

than integrated. Moving beyond a simple rhetoric of openness to all races presented significant challenges to the national offices, whose weak authority over local bodies limited their ability to effectively monitor and enforce meaningful integration in each association, council, club, and troop. Nevertheless, both organizations advanced the idea that the performance of democratic citizenship, a vital part of girls' preparation for their role as future keepers of the nation's well-being, required participation in integrated groups and a sustained focus on advancing racial equality. Only through experience could America's girls face the country's racial problems squarely as adults.

In examining interracial cooperation as an extension of postwar citizenship education in girls' organizations, I advance two arguments. First, the YWCA and Girl Scouts created a safe space, in the midst of the turbulence of the civil rights movement, for white and African-American girls to meet, converse, eat, sleep, and live side by side, a significant and important personal experience that had positive implications for racial justice. As the anecdote at the beginning of this chapter illustrates, experiences sponsored by girls' organizations opened space for girls to consider the politics of previous generations and negotiate messages about whiteness and prejudice with an eye toward the future. Second, I offer a contextualized reading of the race work of these girls' organizations that positions it as part of a broader postwar racial liberalism that understood racial prejudice and inequality as a psychological issue, rather than a structural one. This was unconditionally a positive development, but also ultimately limited the ability of the organizations to impart to girls a deeper understanding of "the color line." Compelled by the same logic that informed the *Brown* decision, women who

advanced an agenda of racial tolerance in the YWCA and the Girl Scouts embraced the promise of postwar racial liberalism while overlooking its limitations.

“Putting Our House in Order”: Reversing Segregation

After World War II, growing international awareness of America’s racial divide, domestic unrest, and the growing momentum of the civil rights movement forced many Americans to face the political reality that segregation, by differentiating whites and blacks along the lines of color and declaring them fundamentally different, damaged the image of the United States as a leader of tolerance, individual freedom, and democracy in the world. Girls’ organizations were no exception. As discussed in the previous chapter, by the late 1940s the YWCA and Girl Scouts were invested in instilling an appreciation for democracy and knowledge of the individual responsibilities of citizenship in the rising generation of women. Their definition of citizenship in the postwar world was embedded in an individualistic approach to civil rights that asserted the dignity of the individual and the fundamental equality of all persons regardless of race. A constitutional expansion in 1946 of the Girl Scouts’ purpose – to prepare girls “for their responsibilities in the home *and as active citizens in the community and in the world*” – took place alongside another revision that emphasized the Girl Scout program as “open to all girls” regardless of race, religion, or ethnicity.¹⁴ As Alice C. Carney of the Community Relations Department explained at a national staff conference in 1948,

We believe in a democratic social order; we want to see other nations adopting it throughout the world. The international spotlight is turned on America, because of the new importance of our role in the world. The magnifying glass of world opinion is focused on the principles we profess and the practice we observe . . . As a consequence, many who were formerly more or less apathetic about the

¹⁴ Blue Book of Girl Scout Policies & Procedures, 1946, 74, GSUSA. New language italicized.

discrepancies between the democracy we profess and the actual operation of that democracy, are now very much disturbed about gaps between theory and practice. We are determined to put our own house in order.¹⁵

The 1940s thus marked a turning point for both organizations with respect to race relations, as they rethought policies and traditions that had established a “separate but equal” paradigm for expansion to minority groups in the first decades of the twentieth century. Abandoning segregation in favor of active integration was no easy task, however. For the Girl Scouts, it meant reexamining racial policies that had effectively denied African-American communities the opportunity to form troops for their girls and shut them out of Girl Scouting almost entirely. For the YWCA, which had a biracial branch system of Associations in place, it meant affirming a new racial policy that tried to reform the segregated branch system into a truly integrated system, and recruiting and incorporating African-American women and girls into the organization at all levels, from Y-Teen clubs to national staff.

The Girl Scouts made no real sustained efforts to expand scouting throughout African-American or other minority populations in its early decades. The organization’s founding constitution affirmed “that the Girl Scout movement shall be open to all girls and adults who accept the Girl Scout Promise and Law,” but in practice it was overwhelmingly white and middle-class, with racial and ethnic inclusion an afterthought.¹⁶ The existence of a handful of troops for African-American girls in northeastern cities in the late 1910s and a Native-American troop organized near Syracuse, New York around 1922 allowed the national office to claim racial and ethnic

¹⁵ Alice C. Carney, Report on Segregation, August 1948, 2, Diversity 1945-1949 File, History of Diversity Box, GSUSA.

¹⁶ Preamble, Constitution of Girl Scouts of U.S.A., 1912, GSUSA.

diversity. Not until the 1920s did the Girl Scouts create policies specific to race, as it began to receive increasing numbers of requests from African-American women for permission to form local troops and to participate in staff training at the Scout's national training institute, Camp Edith Macy.

Early actions, such as approving segregated leader training for African-American women at Camp Macy in 1929, set the precedent for "separate but equal" race relations within scouting.¹⁷ In 1931, the National Board finally established an official policy on race that restricted the formation of non-white troops to areas with an existing local (white-run) council, with the local council holding "full authority over all local troop organization."¹⁸ The limits of this policy were immediately exposed when women in St. Helena Island, South Carolina asked the Charleston Council to establish a troop for African-American girls, and the white Charleston Council refused. It was a predictable decision, since several years earlier southern councils had issued a joint statement to the Girl Scout national office announcing their resistance to extending scouting to African-American girls even on a segregated basis. Thinly veiling their opposition as altruism, in 1927 the "Dixie" region declared: "We believe, due to the pride and self-consciousness of the negro race, it would be unwise and unfair to impose upon them the program and obligations of an organization formulated without regard to their needs." Instead, the southern councils suggested African Americans form a separate organization altogether,

¹⁷ Williams, *A Bridge to the Future*, 10.

¹⁸ Blue Book of Girl Scout Policies & Procedures, 1932, 21, GSUSA; Williams, *A Bridge to the Future*, 13.

one “designed to meet their own particular needs,” and perhaps called the “Booker T. Washington Aids.”¹⁹

The early racial policies of the Girl Scouts mirrored those of the Camp Fire Girls, the larger of the two girls’ organizations until 1930. Camp Fire leaders formulated a policy on African-American groups in 1913, shortly after the organizations’ founding, authorizing them “only in cities where the work has already been established among the white girls.” The policy explicitly discouraged the promotion of Camp Fire groups “among colored girls especially in the [S]outh.” Unlike the Girl Scouts, however, the Camp Fire Girls had a marginal presence in the South (only 9% of groups resided in the South in 1930, concentrated in Texas and Missouri), and their higher membership fees excluded more girls along the lines of class as well as race.²⁰ In comparison, African-American Girl Scout membership jumped more than 200% between 1939 and 1943 (from 5,311 to 17,517), more than four times the rate of growth for white Girl Scout membership in the same period, and another 220% from 1943 to 1947 (from 17,517 to almost 39,000). By 1947 African-American girls made up approximately 4% of total Girl Scout membership.²¹

¹⁹ “Recommendation to National Executive Board,” First Regional Conference of the Dixie Region, 27 January 1927, General Correspondence 1928-1948 File, Civil Rights Box, GSUSA.

²⁰ Helgren, “Inventing American Girlhood,” 274-282; “Racial Policies and Practices of National Organizations in the Educational Field,” n.d., General Correspondence 1928-1948 File, Civil Rights Box, GSUSA. The 9% figure comes from the year 1930, but Helgren adds that “All indications suggest that these patterns continued into the 1950s and 1960s.” (282)

²¹ Black membership was still dwarfed by white membership. In 1943, statistics compiled by the national office counted 17,517 black Girl Scouts and 657,796 white Girl Scouts; in 1947, statistics reported roughly 39,000 black Girl Scouts and 981,000 white Girl Scouts. See “Report to the National Girl Scouts Board,” Special Committee on Girl Scouts Racial Policy, November 1944, General Correspondence 1928-1948 File, Civil Rights Box, GSUSA; 1947 Girl Scouts of the U.S.A. Annual Report, GSUSA; Memo from Florence McClure, Research and Statistical Section, to Directors of Departments, Divisions and Sections, and to National Staff in the Regions, 13 June 1951, General Correspondence 1949-1961 File, Civil Rights Box, GSUSA.

By contrast, the YWCA's attention to racial equality before World War II significantly outweighed that of the Girl Scouts and Camp Fire Girls. As historians have documented, the YWCA, while far from perfect, was unique in its early efforts to build meaningful alliances across racial boundaries, particularly at the national level and in the Student YWCA.²² Unlike other prominent white women's organizations (such as the National Woman's Party and the General Federation of Women's Clubs, which subordinated or even expressed outright hostility to addressing issues of racial discrimination), the YWCA offered African-American women positions of leadership, social and recreational opportunities, and an institutional home for civil rights activism throughout the 1920s and 1930s in all regions of the country, including the South. The YWCA was also politically vocal on issues facing black Americans. The organization mandated integrated seating at its own national conventions in 1922, and disbanded its National Council for Colored Work in favor of "Interracial Work" in 1931. Delegates to the 1932 National Convention voted, with little opposition, to endorse a resolution against lynching, and YW women lobbied congress during the New Deal to outlaw the poll tax and to establish a fair employment practices commission. The YWCA's outspokenness on issues like lynching and poll taxes, and the opportunities available for African-American women to exercise leadership in the national organization and in their local communities, appealed to many African-American women who, by 1940, comprised 10% of the YWCA's overall membership.²³

²² Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood*; Lynn, *Progressive Women in Conservative Times*.

²³ See chapter six of Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood*, for a full discussion of race relations in the YWCA in the 1940s; *Figures Talk Back*, 1940, Microdex 6, Reel 130, Y.W.C.A. of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

The YWCA's racial progressivism was spiritual in basis. It emanated from their belief in the Social Gospel, which called for the creation of God's world on earth through political action and reform. The organizations' diverse membership base included working-class women and union activists in Industrial Clubs, women of color, and students operating campus YWCAs, all of whom contributed to its progressive nature.²⁴ By the 1940s a larger cross-section of Americans working toward interracial cooperation and racial equality had caught up with the YWCA, but the organization continued to lead many mainstream institutions whose efforts at integration remained either nonexistent or minimal throughout the 1950s and 1960s.

The YWCA's early progressive record on racial justice seems at odds, then, with the reality that the organization remained largely segregated within community associations in the 1940s. The explanation lies in the fact that since the turn of the century, the national organization encouraged the development of a dual-association structure in many cities whereby African-American "branches" operated under the authority of a "central" white association. This structure was very much alive in 1940, when 73 black branches operated alongside 417 white community YWCAs. In those locations where separate black branches did not exist – usually areas with a small African-American populations – strict segregation in program (such as adult classes and Y-Teen clubs) and in facilities use (especially pools and residences) prevailed. As a 1944 internal study of race relations in the YWCA revealed, practices toward racial integration in local associations ranged from vaguely worded policies against exclusion of any

²⁴ Marion W. Roydhouse, "Bridging Chasms: Community and the Southern YWCA," in *Visible Women: New Essays on American Activism*, Nancy A. Hewitt and Suzanne Lebsock, eds., (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 270-295; Dorothea Browder, "A 'Christian Solution of the Labor Situation': How Workingwomen Reshaped the YWCA's Religious Mission and Politics," *Journal of Women's History* 19.2 (Summer 2007): 85-110.

persons from YWCA facilities, to policies of inclusion contradicted by exclusionary practices, to outright bans on African Americans using YWCA facilities.²⁵

The system of segregation that marked community associations in the 1940s extended to the Y's work with girls. Teenage clubs successfully drew significant numbers of African-American girls into the organization, but they continued to operate primarily on a segregated basis. While in 1944 80% of local associations existed in areas of the country without legally mandated segregation, only 7% of associations documented integrated girl groups. Though many associations boasted interracial Younger Girl or Girl Reserve Departments (precursor to Y-Teens), the authors of the 1944 internal study reined in such claims, asserting that most teenage clubs were "not interracial, but biracial." The authors of the study (Juliet O. Bell, an independent, white researcher, and Helen J. Wilkins, later Helen Wilkins Claytor, the first African-American president of the YWCA) warned, "we seem too often to forget that the separate group was conceived as a bridge into the inclusive life of the movement and that the separate club becomes established as a tradition in the minds of both white and Negro constituency."²⁶

Segregated Girl Scout troops and YW associations were not entirely without benefits. For instance, the Girl Scout national office attempted to circumvent white councils who were unwilling to support troops for African-American girls by adding a provision to their racial policy in the 1930s that allowed communities to establish "lone troops" sponsored by a local school. For the "lone troop" model to work, the school had to provide a troop leader and set up a supervisory committee to monitor the troop. It was

²⁵ Juliet O. Bell and Helen J. Wilkins, *Interracial Practices in Community Y.W.C.A.'s* (New York: Womans Press, 1944). See 25-27, 54-56, and Table Nos. 1 and 2.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 61-62.

a burdensome process that continued to limit troop expansion, but one that, when successful, promoted greater community support and investment in scouting for African-American girls.²⁷ Segregated YWCA branches often served the African-American community with inferior facilities and funding compared to the central association. But branches also provided an important base for provisioning neighborhood services, for combating stereotypes of black women's immorality, and for offering positions of leadership for African-American women shut out of other local, white- or male-dominated organizations.²⁸ Finally, sanctioned segregation allowed the YWCA and Scouts – national organizations with a central administrative body that served hundreds of local associations, councils, and troops beholden to the needs and opinions of the local community and local funding sources – to alleviate regional differences. Espousing openness at the national level but condoning segregation at the local level allowed southern members, in particular, to remain affiliated with their respective national body and comply with racial policies without upsetting the locally accepted social order.

Still, a system of segregation in troops, clubs, associations, and councils defied the concept of true interracial work and the organizations' mutual philosophy of openness to all women and girls who supported their core values. African-American women pressured the YWCA and the Girl Scouts alike to abandon segregated arrangements in favor of integration throughout the 1930s and 40s. Women in both the North and the South peppered local Girl Scout councils and the national office with questions related to

²⁷ Williams, *A Bridge to the Future*, 13; see also Perry, "From Achievement to Happiness," for a discussion of how this policy operated in Nashville.

²⁸ Judith Weisenfeld, *African American Women and Christian Activism: New York's Black YWCA, 1905-1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Michelle Busby, "'The Price of Integration': The Story of the Charlotte YWCA in the 1960s," in *Men and Women Adrift: The YMCA and the YWCA in the City*, Nina Mjagkij and Margaret Spratt, eds. (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 206-230.

establishing troops and camps for their girls, registered objections to racial caricatures such as “picaninny” in Girl Scout songs, and lodged protests against segregated camp facilities in local newspapers.²⁹ Similarly, throughout the 1930s African-American women in the YWCA (and the Student YWCA in particular) protested the disparity between the YWCA’s rhetoric of Christian sisterhood and racial equality and the actual level of integration within the several hundred community associations that made up the national YWCA, placing pressure on the organization to eliminate segregation in community associations and in hiring decisions.³⁰

In the early 1940s, this steady pressure prompted both organizations to turn their attention more fully to examining the meaning of true interracial work. In 1942, the Girl Scouts dropped its earlier policy on the establishment of non-white troops, but the absence of a racial policy only weakly affirmed a commitment to interracial cooperation. According to an internal report from the Special Committee on Racial Policy, the general belief that Girl Scouts should be open to all girls, without sustained support or examination, didn’t seem “at all different.”³¹ In response, the organization created an Interracial Work Group and a Community Relations Bureau charged with studying the vast overrepresentation of white girls and women in the organization and assisting

²⁹ “Voice of the People,” *Paterson Evening News*, 5 November 1947, General Correspondence File, 1928-1948, Civil Rights Box, GSUSA; Fjeril Hess to Margaret Kilmer, 13 December 1945, General Correspondence File, 1928-1948, Civil Rights Box, GSUSA; Williams, *A Bridge to the Future*.

³⁰ Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood*; Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *Revolt Against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women’s Campaign Against Lynching* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979).

³¹ “Report to the National Girl Scouts Board,” Special Committee on Girl Scouts Racial Policy, November 1944, General Correspondence 1928-1948 File, Civil Rights Box, GSUSA; Intercultural – Integrated Project, 3 October 1946, 1, Diversity 1945-1949 File, History of Diversity Box, GSUSA.

councils throughout the country with integration work.³² The Research and Statistics department acknowledged a “seriously inadequate representation of non-White groups in our membership,” calculating that white girls were overrepresented within the Girl Scouts at a rate of 4 to 1.³³ To underscore a policy of nondiscrimination in the founding document of the organization, the Girl Scout Constitution was revised. Whereas before 1946 the Constitution merely described the organization as “non-sectarian and non-political,” Article II of the 1946 Constitution boldly opened with the pronouncement that “The program of the Girl Scout movement is open to all girls.”³⁴ Though an ever-so-slight increase in the presence of integrated troops followed, from 2% of all troops in 1947 to 2.3% in 1949, such statistics suggested a long road ahead in recruiting African-American members and integrating troops and other Girl Scout facilities.³⁵

For the YWCA, 1946 was an important year as well. Following the 1944 publication of *Interracial Practices in Community Y.W.C.A. 's*, an in-depth, comprehensive, and honest look at racial integration and racial practices in the organization, the YW adopted an Interracial Charter at its National Convention in 1946, which read: “Wherever there is injustice on the basis of race, whether in the community, the nation, or the world, our protest must be clear and our labor for its removal vigorous

³² Intercultural – Integrated Project, 3 October 1946, 1, Diversity 1945-1949 File, History of Diversity Box, GSUSA.

³³ Memo from Florence McClure, Research and Statistical Section, to Directors of Departments, Divisions and Sections, and to National Staff in the Regions, 13 June 1951, General Correspondence 1949-1961 File, Civil Rights Box, GSUSA.

³⁴ Blue Book of Girl Scout Policies and Procedures, 1932, 124, GSUSA; Blue Book of Girl Scout Policies and Procedures, 1946, 74, GSUSA; Girl Scouts of the U.S.A. Annual Report, 1946, 7, GSUSA.

³⁵ Memo from Florence McClure, Research and Statistical Section, to Directors of Departments, Divisions and Sections, and to National Staff in the Regions, 13 June 1951, General Correspondence 1949-1961 File, Civil Rights Box, GSUSA; “Race of Troops, 1931-1949,” in Williams, *A Bridge to the Future*, 60.

and steady. And what we urge on others we are constrained to practice ourselves.”³⁶

Described as “a call to action,” the Interracial Charter firmly overturned the precedent established by the YWCA in the early decades of the twentieth century that the concept of separate but equal was compatible with their Christian purpose and their commitment to political and social action for interracial cooperation.³⁷

As a constituent group of the larger Association, the Y-Teens shared the YWCA’s postwar priority of racial justice. In fact, the 1944 *Interracial Practices* report stressed that integration among teenage girl groups provided the most promising base for carrying out interracial cooperation into the future, since fully one third of African-American participants in local YWCA educational, recreational, and service programs were under the age of 18.³⁸ Despite the study’s admonition that segregated girls’ clubs far outweighed integrated clubs, the authors asserted that work with girls “tend[s] to prod the rest of the Association to interracial thinking and action,” and “tend[s], to a greater degree than other departments, to work with negroes in non-branch situations.”³⁹

In 1943, the Girl Scout’s Special Committee on Racial Policy proclaimed they were “deeply concerned that girls of all religions, of all races, and of all political heritage, shall have equal opportunities to experience democracy and brotherhood through Girl Scouting.” Many Americans who questioned whether democracy could gain a foothold in

³⁶ Bell and Wilkins, *Interracial Practices in Community Y.W.C.A.'s* ; Sims, *The Purpose Widens*, 4.

³⁷ Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood*, makes this point in her in-depth discussion of the adoption of the Interracial Charter, 153-174.

³⁸ Other constituencies and services included Industrial Women, Business and Professional Women, Home Women, YWCA Residences, Camps, and Health Education. Bell and Wilkins, *Interracial Practices in Community Y.W.C.A.'s*, 59, Table No. 4.

³⁹ Bell and Wilkins, *Interracial Practices in Community Y.W.C.A.'s*, 57, 61-62.

the world when intolerance continued at home shared their concern. By revisiting older racial policies that endorsed, and even encouraged, segregation within their clubs and troops under the concept of separate but equal, both the Girl Scouts and the YWCA committed themselves to pursuing greater interracial cooperation as World War II came to a close.

Girls' Organizations and Racial Liberalism

After 1946, the YWCA and the Girl Scouts turned their attention more fully to educating girls in Christian friendship, democratic values, and racial cooperation. Their educational strategy primarily took the form of integration. Integration meshed well with their spiritual beliefs; as Girl Scout leaders discussed, becoming “an intelligently participating citizen in a democratic social order” meant applying the Golden Rule principle of “learning to love one’s neighbor as one’s self.”⁴⁰ Integration also reflected what historian Susan Lynn has called a “specifically female ethic” in postwar women’s activism that emphasized experiential and emotional strategies coded as female, such as forging interpersonal connections and personal relationships. According to Lynn, “postwar women . . . experimented with newer strategies and styles of organizing” that tended to “emphasize connectedness to others and to devote more energy toward nurturing personal relationships.” This gendered ethic, she argues, led women “to build bridges *across* racial lines.”⁴¹

⁴⁰ Progress Report of Inter-Group Relations, May 1950, General Correspondence 1949-1961 File, Civil Rights Box, GSUSA.

⁴¹ Lynn, *Progressive Women in Conservative Times*, 3-4.

The YWCA's and Girl Scout's approach to building positive interracial relationships between girls was also informed by arguments developed by the social science community in the two decades preceding *Brown*. In much the same way the organizations drew on the national political climate to bolster their mission as a democratic training ground for a postwar generation of girls, they ascribed their integration work to the potential injury caused by a two-tiered race system in America. Their reasoning was influenced by contemporary social scientists who issued sharp warnings about the permanent damage to an individual, and by extension to the state as a whole, wrought by prejudices that magnified divisions between Americans based on race, class, ethnicity, and religion. As such, the Girl Scouts and YWCA reflected a broader "intellectual milieu" that thought to engender peace and national accord at home while combating fascism and despotism abroad by uniting Americans around assumingly shared beliefs about equality and justice.⁴²

National staff members in both organizations often shared an academic background in progressive education and social science. For instance, Sara-Alyce P. Wright, the National Consultant for the YWCA's Teenage Program from 1951-1963, earned a bachelor's degree from State Teachers College in Pennsylvania before completing two master's degrees, one in education from the University of Pennsylvania and the other in social work from the University of Pittsburgh, before devoting herself to teen education in the YWCA for the greater part of her career. Resource leaders working with Y-Teen conference staff in the South included social workers, educators, and civic

⁴² Wall, *Inventing the American Way*, 95.

organizers, many with specialties in “Intergroup” or “Human Relations.”⁴³ Dorothy Stratton, national executive director of the Girl Scouts from 1950 to 1960, earned her master’s degree in psychology from the University of Chicago and a doctorate from Columbia University, and taught at a number of public high schools around the country before becoming a professor of psychology and dean of women at Purdue University.⁴⁴ Olivia Layton, the Girl Scout’s national president during the same decade (1952-1958), studied education at Teacher’s College, Columbia University, a bastion of progressive educational theory and liberal political views.⁴⁵

These women were no doubt familiar with the work of psychologists, anthropologists, psychoanalysts, and sociologists who had, by the 1940s, thoroughly discredited the scientific racism of the nineteenth century. “Culture and personality” theorists, as they were known, many of them pupils of Franz Boas at Columbia University, drew on their anthropological work with tribal groups in America and Pacific islands to argue that culture and environment played a more significant role in personality development than biology and heredity. As a group, they turned away from biological explanations for racial difference in favor of cultural explanations that assigned all Americans responsibility for the economic and social inequality of African Americans.

⁴³ Sara-Alyce P. Wright Biography, File 14, Box 52, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC. Resource leaders at southern Y-Teen summer conferences counseled program staff and participants, conducted training sessions for adult leaders in managing racial tensions, and consulted on program content. Leaders included Dr. Jeanne Noble, Professor of Education (and the first tenured female African-American professor) at New York University, and then-president of Delta Sigma Theta; Dr. Alex Rosen, Dean of the New York School of Social Work at Columbia University; Dr. Betty Orr, Assistant Professor of Child Study at the University of Maryland; Dr. Guion G. Johnson, a historian and civic worker from North Carolina, and Eleanor Krimmel, faculty member of the School of Applied Sciences at Western Reserve University. See Lillian H. Jackson, *A Study of the Effects of the Interracial Aspects of the Programs of Six Y-Teen Summer Conferences in the Southern Region on Girls Who Attended from 1958 Through 1962*, 1964, File 8, Box 556, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

⁴⁴ “Dorothy Stratton, 107, Coast Guard Leader,” *New York Times*, September 25, 2006, B7.

⁴⁵ “Mrs. Roy Layton, Girl Scouts Chief,” *New York Times*, October 11, 1975, 34.

These Bosnian anthropologists reasoned that character traits of individuals and groups were embedded not in biology, but in cultural patterns that were transmitted through generations by behaviors and attitudes learned as children.⁴⁶

They used this line of reasoning to attack nineteenth-century notions of biological race that contributed to racism and xenophobia. Notable among them was Ruth Benedict, a student of Boas and close friend of Margaret Mead, whose 1934 *Patterns of Culture* brought Bosnian ideas about cultural relativism to popular consciousness. In writings like *Patterns of Culture* and *Race: Science and Politics* (1940), Benedict firmly separated biological race from racism. She affirmed biological race as “a classification based on traits which are hereditary,” but resolutely distanced acquired behavioral traits, such as intellect and culture, from genetics. Racism, by contrast, was a human construct, “a modern superstition” that served political purposes and benefited one social group at the expense of another. According to Benedict, racism distorted the “facts of race” in order to “justify persecution in the interest of some class or nation.”⁴⁷

Benedict and her contemporaries found an ally in behavioral specialists who gave important direction for how to dispel racism in American life. For example, Neal Miller and John Dollard, both psychologists at Yale University, examined the process of children’s learning through the imitation of behavior in *Social Learning and Imitation* (1941) and advanced the thesis that culture was not instinctive, but rather transmitted

⁴⁶ Carl N. Degler, *In Search of Human Nature: The Decline and Revival of Darwinism in American Social Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

⁴⁷ Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1934); *Race: Science and Politics* (New York: Viking Press, 1959; reprint), and “Racism is Vulnerable,” *The English Journal* 35.6 (June 1946): 299-303. Quotes from 98, 128, 147.

from one generation to another through the social habits of adults.⁴⁸ Their work, and others like it, suggested that if racism was created by humans and transmitted through social learning, children could be taught to unmake racial prejudice as well.

Rejecting a theory of racial hierarchy rationalized by biological difference meant undermining earlier eugenicist arguments that had supported the social and physical separation of blacks and whites. In the place of scientific racism rose a theory of prejudice that located responsibility for America's racial problems not in biological difference, but in the psychology of the individual. In other words, racism was understood to be an issue of individual maladjustment and was perpetuated from generation to generation by a tradition of segregation that imprinted white children with feelings of intolerance and black children with feelings of inferiority and hopelessness.

The most obvious example of this was the work of Kenneth B. Clark. A New York-based psychologist and ardent integrationist, Clark aided Gunnar Myrdal with his research for *An American Dilemma* and later served as the social science consultant to the NAACP's Legal Defense Fund in the series of Supreme Court cases leading up to the *Brown* decision. His personal research on black children's learned sense of inferiority, demonstrated through his famous doll experiments, proved pivotal in the Supreme Court's decision to overturn the separate but equal precedent of *Plessy v. Ferguson*.⁴⁹ Clark's research, which undergirded Chief Justice Earl Warren's proclamation that state-

⁴⁸ Neal E. Miller and John Dollard, *Social Learning and Imitation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941).

⁴⁹ Kenneth B. Clark, "Effect of Prejudice and Discrimination on Personality Development," *Fact Finding Report of the Midcentury White House Conference on Children and Youth*, (Children's Bureau, Federal Security Agency, 1950); Kenneth B. Clark, *Prejudice and Your Child* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955); Kenneth B. Clark, Isidor Chein, and Stuart W. Cook, "The Effects of Segregation and the Consequences of Desegregation: A Social Science Statement," *The Journal of Negro Education* 22.1 (Winter, 1953): 68-76; Witmer and Kotinsky, eds., *Personality in the Making*, 134-148.

sponsored racial segregation in schools “generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone,” insisted behavioral patterns were set in childhood under the influence of schools, families, and social institutions.⁵⁰

Other research supported his conclusion that African Americans suffered psychological damage as a result of racism. In one of many examples, John Dollard’s psychoanalytical study of human relations in the South, *Caste and Class in a Southern Town* (first published in 1937 and again in 1949), put forward the thesis that inferiority had become embedded in the psyche of southern African Americans after generations of hostile social interaction. A series of sociological studies of black children in the South generated by the American Council of Education’s American Youth Commission in the early 1940s examined “the effects upon the personality development of Negro youth of their membership in a minority racial group.” Conducted by prominent social scientists, including E. Franklin Frazier and Charles S. Johnson, these studies spotlighted the vulnerability of children raised in a racist and segregated society.⁵¹ *Caste and Class* and the American Youth Commission studies painted a bleak portrait of African-American life that stood in stark contrast to idealized images of American childhood. As a whole they served, on the one hand, to pathologize the black psyche. But the authors also drew

⁵⁰ *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

⁵¹ John Dollard, *Caste and Class in a Southern Town* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937). The AYC studies included E. Franklin Frazier, *Negro Youth at the Crossways: Their Personality Development in the Middle States* (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1940), Charles S. Johnson, *Growing Up in the Black Belt: Negro Youth in the Rural South* (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1941), Allison Davis and John Dollard, *Children of Bondage: The Personality Development of Negro Youth in the Urban South* (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1940), and W. Lloyd Warner, Buford H. Junker, and Walter A. Adams, *Color and Human Nature: Negro Personality Development in a Northern City* (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1941). Quote from Davis and Dollard, v.

attention to the second-class status of African Americans and the failure of the nation to live up to its promises of liberty and equality for all, and had a definitive impact on public policy and scholarly debates.

The sum of these works was to cultivate a racial liberalism that linked race prejudice with unhealthy personality development in youth. For youth-serving organizations like the Girl Scouts and the YWCA, however, an important piece of Clark and his contemporaries' research was that segregation and prejudice harmed black *and* white children alike. The consequences of discrimination toward African-American children were unequivocal: the research generated by Clark, the American Council on Education, and others advised that black children internalized feelings of inferiority and unworthiness. Self-deprecation could lead to self-hatred and lowered personal ambition, to coping strategies that included violence and aggression toward their own social group (i.e. race riots), or to anti-social or delinquent behavior. These sorts of behavioral patterns, resulting from racial prejudice, could then be used by broader society to justify a continued cycle of segregation.

But social scientists also warned of the potential damage of prejudice to *white* children. White youths who imitated the racial prejudice of society, it was believed, might internalize feelings of superiority, producing two equally unfortunate outcomes. When adults espoused tenets of democracy like liberty and equality, yet flagrantly supported discriminatory and racist practices like segregation, the conflict experienced by children could lead them to reject authority figures altogether, resulting in delinquent behavior. Alternatively, this conflict could have the opposite effect, leading children to an

“uncritical idealization of all authority figures” and an unquestioning obsequiousness.⁵²

Thus, social scientists suggested that racial prejudice not only perpetuated a two-tiered racial system in American that produced anti-social behavior in youth, but it left the country susceptible to the excesses of Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia. Adolescents caught in between childhood and adulthood, researchers believed, were particularly susceptible to the effects of prejudice. Teenagers might possess the mental wherewithal to recognize and understand racism but lacked the tools needed to envision an alternative future. In Clark’s words, a teen who exhibited prejudice risked becoming an “emotionally maladjusted individual who has achieved social adjustment by taking pleasure in obedience and subordination.”⁵³

The language of Girl Scout and Y-Teen correspondence and training materials situates them firmly on this terrain of postwar racial liberalism. A report issued by Alice C. Carney, a member of the Community Relations Division of the Girl Scouts, reflected on the system of “separate but equal” that had shaped the organization’s early racial policy. Though Carney tried to minimize blame, noting “Some rather complacent citizens condemn discrimination but defend segregation on the ground that this system can provide substantially equal opportunities and facilities for the segregated troop,” she avowed “No one who thinks the problem through could logically support this thesis for they know that imposed segregation and equal opportunity are fundamentally incompatible – they are really a contradiction in terms.” Segregation, she counseled to other members of the national staff, is “crippling to the mind and spirit and frequently to

⁵² Clark, Chain, and Cook, “The Effects of Segregation,” 68-76.

⁵³ Witmer and Kotinsky, eds., *Personality in the Making*, 134-148; Clark, “Effect of Prejudice and Discrimination,” *Fact Finding Report of the Midcentury White House Conference on Children and Youth*; Clark, *Prejudice and Your Child*; Clark, Chain, and Cook, “The Effects of Segregation,” 68-76.

the physical well-being of the isolated group or individual.”⁵⁴ Likewise, the YWCA counseled Y-Teen club advisers that a young person who “finds in a club warm friendliness and acceptance, a chance to use and develop latent ability, experiences that counteract feelings of rejection and inadequacy acquired at home or in school—such a person is less likely to accept and propagate prejudice toward others or to resort to delinquent behavior to satisfy his own needs.”⁵⁵

The organizations’ pluralism connected democracy and national strength to interracial cooperation. As another Girl Scout report expressed, “A citizen of a democracy believes in the worth and dignity of the individual . . . She has a willingness and a desire to understand and to learn from different kinds of people and to work with them . . . She learns to know a variety of persons from different backgrounds, whether economic, religious, racial, or other, and recognizes their assets and problems.” The value of the organization, ultimately, rested in its contribution to the health of the nation. Girl Scouts were to work toward the “improvement of intergroup relations to the end that prejudice and discrimination against particular groups as such be lessened [sic] and ultimately eliminated,” because the mandates of democracy required it: “the building of a better understanding of the true meaning of democracy . . . implies acceptance and respect for people of different cultures, either as individuals or as groups.”⁵⁶ The future of the nation and future of democracy were intertwined with the movement for racial tolerance.

⁵⁴ Alice C. Carney, Report on Segregation, August 1948, 1, Diversity 1945-1949 File, History of Diversity Box, GSUSA.

⁵⁵ *Club Adviser’s Handbook*, 1952, 9, File 3, Box 566, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

⁵⁶ Progress Report of Inter-Group Relations, May 1950, General Correspondence 1949-1961 File, Civil Rights Box, GSUSA.

As citizens united in a common cause of peace and justice, democracy meant understanding each member of a community – no matter how broadly defined – as an equal partner in that pursuit. In carving out space to educate girls in the workings of democratic structures and institutions, the organizations defined democracy as a governmental process *and* as a way of approaching human relationships. Leaders discussed democracy as a guiding principle that should infuse the way girls interacted with members of different racial, religious, and ethnic identities. “The teen-age program of the YWCA,” the Handbook for Teenage Program Directors stated, “includes girls from all social, economic and racial groupings . . . Experience in understanding and accepting difference is essential for effective living in a nation based on democratic concepts.”⁵⁷ Likewise, “Active democratic citizenship,” according to the Scouts, “demands of the individual, first, a respect for every other individual . . . and second, participation with others in bringing about mutually desirable goals.”⁵⁸

For girls’ organizations, the solution to racism lay in forging interpersonal, interracial relationships. The elimination of prejudice was the ends; interpersonal interaction was the means. Racial understanding was not to be the focus of integrated troops, clubs, and events necessarily, but rather the byproduct of the democratic process experienced by adolescents in their participation in such activities. As a memo from one local YWCA association outlined to its members, “The helping hand is not the real answer to genuinely good human relations. A fairly even give and take is the basis of the

⁵⁷ *Handbook for Teenage Program Directors*, 1948, 10-11, File 1, Box 566, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

⁵⁸ Intercultural – Integrated Project, 3 October 1946, 2, Diversity 1945-1949 File, History of Diversity Box, GSUSA.

soundest and most satisfactory personal relationships.”⁵⁹ The Girl Scouts echoed similar sentiments: “Since one cannot acquire a respect for, or be friends with, or participate with other individuals without knowing and understanding them, it is therefore and [sic] obligation of the Girl Scout National Organization to provide opportunities for its members to know, to understand, to be friends with and to participate with others.”⁶⁰ As organizations working with youth, solving the complex issues associated with structural inequality in American life was not in their purview. In commonplace activities, however, interpersonal interaction could give rise to the rhetorical and philosophical linkage of democratic citizenship and interracial cooperation.

Racial liberalism and theories of youth development produced a racial discourse that fit neatly with the YWCA and Girl Scouts’ mission of educating youth, an old mission newly configured for postwar demands. As a matter of personal relationships, teaching racial tolerance was “women’s work,” appropriate for women to undertake in voluntary youth organizations. That educating girls about racial equality could solve racism and its associated problems of American youth was good news indeed. Thus informed by contemporary social scientists, the YWCA and Girl Scouts turned a critical eye toward the lack of cross-racial youth work in their local associations, councils, youth camps and conferences.

Putting Theory into Practice

⁵⁹ Community Relations Committee Newsletter, April 1950, File 539, Box 14, Young Women’s Christian Association of Cambridge, Records 1881-1981, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

⁶⁰ Intercultural – Integrated Project, 3 October 1946, 2, Diversity 1945-1949 File, History of Diversity Box, GSUSA.

As they soon discovered, however, a commitment to integration was one thing; carrying it out was another thing entirely. In practice, liberal racial theories conflicted, failed, and succeeded in complicated ways. Efforts to generate more regular contact between African-American and white girls exposed a number of tensions, especially between local associations and councils and the customs and prejudices of the communities in which they operated. Local resistance limited the ability of girls' organizations to create a common interracial girls' culture and disrupted the neat formula whereby the means (integration) would manifest the ends (racial equality). Furthermore, while the organizations designed programs to educate girls in racial understanding, records suggest that girls themselves, like the women guiding them, struggled to negotiate whiteness and the meaning of racial prejudice in ways that complicated straightforward claims of progress.

Significant tensions were generated when an organization's actions conflicted with the preferences of a local community. Integrated sleeping arrangements provoked particularly strong reactions. The Girl Scout Camp Bureau offered ambivalent advice about integration to volunteers and camp staff; a memo issued in 1946 on how to provide camping for African-American Girl Scouts suggested starting with day camping, considering it to be "the easiest way to mix racial groups, since there is no problem about sleeping."⁶¹ Similarly, when the Girl Scouts acquired the Juliette Gordon Low House in Savannah, Georgia, in the early 1950s, the national office envisioned using the historic home as sleeping quarters for any troops visiting the founder's birthplace irrespective of

⁶¹ Memo from Camp Bureau, "How We Can Provide Camping For Black Girls," 17 October 1946, General Correspondence 1928-1948 File, Civil Rights Box, GSUSA.

race. Savannah's segregation laws made the use of the house on an integrated basis problematic, however. Sleeping arrangements were the sticking issue for the Savannah Council, which feared "that 'New York' would move in with no understanding of local problems and insist on interracial housing immediately." Sidestepping the heart of the matter, the Savannah Council suggested that integrated meals could probably be accommodated in the house, but that the best course of action was to leave the sleeping quarters undeveloped for the time being, so neither African-American nor white troops could use the house for overnight stays.⁶²

Activities associated in any way with dating culture and sexuality also provoked strong feelings. When the Foothills Area Council, made up of segregated African-American and white Girl Scout troops, organized an integrated council-wide dance, the event sparked tremendous controversy. Mothers of white Girl Scouts protested vehemently against the mixing of African-American and white girls and boys in the intimate social space of a dance. Though Senior Scouts had asked for and planned the event themselves, unprepared for the unpleasant reaction the dance would incite, the council ultimately bowed to pressure and cancelled the event.⁶³ In another instance, the Tulsa Council contacted the national office for advice on including in their annual calendar a photograph of an integrated Scout activity that had boys and girls mixing. They feared the photo might be particularly explosive, but this time the national staff

⁶² "Use of [Juliette Gordon Low] House," 4 May 1954, Diversity 1954-1959 File, History of Diversity Box, GSUSA.

⁶³ "Intergroup Relations: Interracial Boy-Girl Social Problem," n.d., Integration File, Civil Rights Box, GSUSA.

reinforced that publications “should truthfully represent our organization which . . . is open to all girls.”⁶⁴

In order to minimize tension in southern communities over the interracial work being done among girls, the organizations took measures to keep their interracial activities hidden from the public. Both the YWCA and the Girl Scouts made a pointed effort to shield the extent of their integration efforts at camps and conferences from the media to protect themselves from the public relations fallout they imagined would come from widespread knowledge of their activities. African-American and white women alike favored this practice, as it could serve multiple ends. Those women against integration had little interest in discussing progress with the local newspapers. On the other hand, women who earnestly supported integration believed (perhaps rightly) that an uncontrolled press might slow their progress, if not halt it altogether, by drumming up antagonistic public awareness.

A letter from an Ohio camp director illustrates the strategy of silence that circumvented local and familial opposition to integration. Marjorie Gullberg wrote to the national Girl Scout office in 1954 for advice on how to proceed with her plans of establishing an integrated overnight camp in Toledo, where one had not existed before. Her greatest fear, she admitted, was adverse reactions of white parents, and she related that she hoped to avoid any conflict by simply not forewarning them. Her optimism carried her forward, as did her hope that after their daughters experienced a harmonious camp session, parents would adopt Gullberg’s own convictions about racial equality (though she offered no explanation for achieving this result, outside of her faith in the

⁶⁴ Olivia Layton to Mrs. Joseph S. Bottler, 8 December 1954, General Correspondence 1949-1961 File, Civil Rights Box, GSUSA.

ultimate goodwill of human nature). While the outcome of her experiment is unknown, her fears resounded with many troop leaders and counselors across the Midwestern and southern regions.⁶⁵

Likewise, fear of local opinion drove the Girl Scouts of Memphis and Shelby County, Tennessee (where one-third of the population was African American), to intentionally avoid publicity about their integration efforts. In Memphis, the council only reached out to local social service agencies they trusted would support their movement to integrate what had essentially been two independent councils divided by race operating in the early 1950s. “We are dependant as an organization on public sympathy and support,” the council’s report to the national office read. “What will be the reaction of the public if we go ahead of race relations?” Minimal reaction against the integration of the two segregated councils was attributed to the fact that the public knew very little about it all. “Probably this absence of any public opposition is due in part to the discretion used as to publicity. There has been very little and race has been de-emphasized,” the report continued, a tactic with which “Editors of the Negro newspapers are highly sympathetic.” Finding their strategy of silence a working one, the women of the council planned to continue with it. Since arousing “dormant emotions” of “reactionary whites” in the area could mean the death of their achievements, the council proclaimed “we merely do not intend to publicize our integration processes by press or radio or any other mass media—we are deliberately not doing it. We intend to rely on individual interpretation to selected

⁶⁵ Marjorie Gullberg to the Camping Division of the GSUSA, 17 March 1954, Integration File, Civil Rights Box, GSUSA.

individuals and groups capable of understanding and accepting, and for the rest to let actions speak for themselves.”⁶⁶

If girls’ organizations carefully pursued a strategy of silence with local media, a popular strategy with girls was to promote as much discussion about race as possible. One method used to teach girls about racial prejudice was discussion scripts. Role-playing scripts on racial tolerance developed by the YWCA worked to combat definitions of integration that embraced tokenism but missed the larger picture of individualism and racial equality. Commonly used with girls attending Y-Teen summer conferences, the scripts were based on a series of discussions held by one Y-Teen club in Norfolk, Virginia on how prescient issues like school desegregation affected their daily life, and how they could shape the future through personal choices. The discussion scripts guided girls to act out dramatically the difficulties they experienced in their homes and their community with respect to integration of schools and social life. Following along with the twists and turns of the conversation among the Norfolk Y-Teens, girls alternately defended the value of integration and resisted the prospect of eventually becoming the minority in what they considered “their” club if too many African-American girls joined. As an open-ended conversation, however, these scripts trailed away without resolution, leaving girls to discuss the validity of the arguments made by their peers.⁶⁷ Through discussion scripts like these, or through other vehicles of discussion such as buzz groups or break-out sessions, girls pondered their ability to make choices different from the choices made by their adult authority figures.

⁶⁶ Margaret C. McCulloch, “Report on Integration, 1950-1952, Girl Scouts of Memphis and Shelby County,” Diversity 1950-1953 File, History of Diversity Box, GSUSA.

⁶⁷ Jean Grambs, “The Case of the Possible Member,” 1959 Y-Teen Discussion Script, Microdex 7, Reel 320, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

Girls were also asked to make personal choices related to racial equality when their involvement in integrated youth organizations ran up against *Brown* backlash. Since many Y-Teen clubs operated in schools, the clubs felt tension over school desegregation acutely. Families, schools, and communities all exerted pressure on Y-Teens, and often girls and their parents faced the choice of abandoning Y-Teens altogether or lying to the community about the interracial character of their clubs or summer conferences. In one southern town, the high school principle (who doubled as a member of the White Citizen's Council) "threatened to revoke permission of the Y-Teens to meet in his school if they were to attend an integrated conference." The Y-Teens in his school debated whether or not to simply "forget" to mention their participation in an integrated summer conference. There was not a singular debate, as clubs in other areas throughout the South lost their meeting space to angry school officials.⁶⁸

At times, however, efforts to create interracial understanding could seem like a curiosities session for white girls more than anything else. At a Y-Teen summer conference in Oklahoma, white girls expressed surprise to discover that African-American girls had their own popular magazines, like *Ebony*, which featured black models and contained stories about black women holding desirable jobs, such as working as an airline stewardess. African-American girls also served as witnesses to civil rights events they participated in first-hand. One girl was described as the "star" of a conference for talking about her experience with a sit-in protest and her subsequent arrest and night spent in jail for her convictions. According to the YWCA, discussions like these "tended

⁶⁸ "Report of the 1959 Y-Teen Summer Conferences and Supportive Adult Training in the Southern Region," File 9, Box 556, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC; "Comments on 16 Y-Teen Summer Conference, 1949," File 9, Box 556, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

to give the Caucasian girls a better understanding of the racial problem in general . . .” but said little about what integration was doing for African-American girls.⁶⁹

Moreover, reorienting camps and conferences as spaces for education and experience in interracial cooperation could unintentionally reinforce difference. Often white women took extra pains to praise African-American girls in a way that singled them out for their exceptional behavior, manners, and decorum.⁷⁰ This tendency extended to white girls as well. In reflecting on her youth growing up in Texas in the 1950s, a former Girl Scout clearly recalled the Girl Scout day camp she attended one summer because it was her first experience with integration. A self-described white, middle-class, Christian girl, she recalled the camp staff notifying her and her fellow campers on the first day that an African-American girl would soon be joining them at camp. Campers were advised to treat her “just like any other Girl Scout.” As soon as the new camper arrived, the rest of the girls immediately bonded with her (aided by a mutual love of Elvis – the new campers’ ability to really belt out the star’s songs won her instant admiration). While the former Scout pinpointed that relationship as the beginning of her consciousness of racial equality, she nevertheless suggested the solo African-American camper was treated as different and special. The YWCA voiced similar concerns about this phenomenon, noting in a 1961 report, “White Y-Teens are, for the most part, paternalistic

⁶⁹ Virginia-Carolina Conference Report, 1960, Microdex 9, Reel 249, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC; Report to the Field Foundation, 1964, 26-26, Microdex 6, Reel 319, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

⁷⁰ An analysis of Y-Teen Summer Conferences written after 1968 suggests that expectations of girls from African-American staff were high as well. It reads “The anger and displeasure that was instantly registered on the faces of Negro adult leaders when a group of Negro girls became boisterous or one acted up, was quite different from the mild indignation and annoyance when a white girl misbehaved and the white adult observed such behavior.” Jean Grambs, “A Sociological Analysis of Y-Teen Summer Conferences: Past, Present and Potential,” 7, Microdex 10, Reel 318, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

and even effusively sentimental toward the negro Y-Teens . . . As long as such attitudes prevail it is not possible to have or to try to create a ‘natural’ situation . . .”⁷¹

Meanwhile, the work of building integrated Girl Scout troops and Y-Teen clubs moved forward haltingly. White resistance was not the only roadblock. While recruiting African-American girls and expanding clubs and troops into areas of concentrated African-American populations, the YWCA and Girl Scout national staffs continued to offer girls a middle-class ideal of girlhood, and African-American women disagreed about the benefit to their daughters. Some rejected white-dominated youth organizations for their middle-class bias, viewing them with suspicion or apathy and feeling they had little to do with or offer to their lives. In other African-American communities, black women found merit in associating their daughters with a long-standing and reputable youth organization linked with middle-class values. These women pushed hard for clubs and troops for their daughters, organizing integrated troops where possible and segregated troops where necessary. They recognized girls’ participation in Y-Teens and Girl Scouts as a tool of racial uplift, serving the dual purpose of advancing racial equality and supporting the development of strong, empowered African-American women. As one Girl Scout recruiter working in inner-city Newark in the early 1960s recalled, “The mothers who became the troop leaders felt very strongly, there was a real commitment there, to try and get their children to a step beyond where they were in the community . . .

⁷¹ Carol Phelps, written interview by author, Boston, MA, 3 May 2008; Report to the Field Foundation on Y-Teen Summer Conferences in the Southern Region, 1961, 12-13, Microdex 6, Reel 319, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

these were parents who really saw this as a way of getting their kids out of the projects ultimately.”⁷²

Middle-class African-American women active in their communities were instrumental in recruiting African-American girls into Scout troops. For example, in Atlanta in the 1940s the Northwest Georgia Council turned to Grace Hamilton, executive director of the Atlanta Urban League, and Bazoline Estelle Usher, Supervisor of Education for Minority Students for the Atlanta school system, for assistance with incorporating African-American girls into the organization.⁷³ Hamilton had a long and distinguished career of activism in Georgia. She was active in developing interracial YWCA programs on college campuses throughout the South and taught psychology at Clark College and the Atlanta School of Social Work. Usher, who had grown up in Georgia, studied under W.E.B. du Bois at Atlanta University (now Clark Atlanta University) in the early twentieth century. Together, they turned to their networks in the school system to find troop leaders. Usher ultimately increased the number of African-American troops in Atlanta from 36 in 1948 to 57 in 1954.⁷⁴

⁷² In 1962, the Girl Scouts held a recruitment drive in the inner city of Newark, where they sought to reach the more than 25,000 African-American girls in the city within scouting age (more than half of the total 50,000 girls in the city). One of the recruiters hired to work in Newark, a Jewish woman raised in Brooklyn, described the hurdles the organization faced: as a child, she remarked, the Girl Scouts seemed “an alien culture . . . not something I ever belonged to, ever considered belonging to, ever even had particularly high regard for.” Nevertheless, she joined the Girl Scout recruitment team after failing to find a job organizing workers in the southern textile industry, a position that union managers reserved for men. Civil rights attorney Janice Goodman, interview by author, tape recording, New York, NY, 30 May 2008; “Jersey Girl Scouts Seek New Members,” *New York Times*, December 1, 1963, 172.

⁷³ Lorraine Nelson Spritzer and Jean B. Bergmark, *Grace Towns Hamilton and the Politics of Southern Change* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997) and Interview with Grace Towns Hamilton by Jacquelyn Hall, 19 July 1974 (G-0026), Southern Oral History Program Collection #4007, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

⁷⁴ Interview with Bazoline Estelle Usher by Gay Francine Bates, 4 February 1977 and 22 March 1977, *Black Women Oral History Project*, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts; Phyllis W. Dews, “Atlanta Girl Scouts Close Fruitful Year; Look

African-American girls in other southern cities benefited from the dedication of black women who fought to create opportunities for their daughters in girls' organizations. Women like Josephine Groves Holloway began organizing unofficial Girl Scout troops in Tennessee in the 1930s, "going door-to-door to recruit women in her community to help her" since the local council would not sponsor African-American troops. The local council hired her to implement formal integration in the area in 1942, and Holloway successfully organized more than two thousand African-American girls and women into scout troops in Nashville by 1963, working tirelessly to ensure opportunities for the girls of her community. Women like Holloway viewed girls' organizations as unique, girl-centered spaces that could play a role in racial advancement while simultaneously empowering young girls and teens by promoting independence, education, and community service. At the same time, she set an example of determination, persistence, and leadership for the growing generation.⁷⁵

The rapid growth of the Y-Teen program among African-American girls in places like Charlotte, North Carolina in the postwar years also flowed from the volunteerism of the African-American middle class, who devoted their free time to the individual development of girls. In a city where African Americans only made up only about a third of the population, in 1958 the African-American Phyllis Wheatley branch of the Charlotte YWCA had a lively Y-Teen program with almost as many members as the white associations (736 vs. 850), reflecting the vitality of the local African-American

Ahead," *Atlanta Daily World*, January 10, 1948, 2; "Girl Scouts Note Membership Rise," *Atlanta Daily World*, January 19, 1954, 3.

⁷⁵ Perry, "From Achievement to Happiness," 87. Holloway was organized the first African-American troops in Middle Tennessee, and was the first African-American professional employee at the Cumberland Valley Girl Scout Council (Nashville). See also Jessie Carney Smith, ed., *Notable Black American Women, Book II* (Detroit: Gale Research, 1996), 295-297.

community. Indeed, by 1955 every African-American school in Mecklenburg County, which included the city of Charlotte, boasted a Y-Teen program for girls.⁷⁶ A former teacher and community activist, Elizabeth Randolph, attributed this vitality to the fact that so many African-American women in the community were “intent on seeing that black kids got everything that they could give them.” Teachers, churchwomen, and community members who volunteered as Y-Teen club advisers and program leaders considered this additional workload simply “part of their weekly chore,” a necessary part of building strong communities and strong women.⁷⁷

If program growth among African-Americans in cities like Atlanta, Charlotte and Nashville indicated greater diversity in the organizations, it also signaled stagnation in integrating clubs and troops. Despite lofty intentions, by the end of the 1950s the vast majority of activities for girls remained segregated by race. A 1957 study on “Racial Inclusiveness in Community YWCAs” painted a picture of moderate progress among local YWCAs. Since 1946, 28 segregated branches had been absorbed into central associations, 72% of YWCA camps hosted both racial groups, and only 3% of reporting associations admitted to lacking any diversity at all in staffing, facilities, programs, camps, and volunteer leadership. However, “inclusiveness” continued to conflate integrated and segregated groups, with the latter the norm rather than the exception. A more detailed assessment of the Y-Teen program conducted in 1959 revealed 73% of associations conducting integrated activities for teenagers, but only 52% considered themselves a racially “inclusive” association. When asked whether associations offered

⁷⁶ Busby, “The Price of Integration,” in *Men and Women Adrift*, 206-230.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 214-15.

program specifically designed to increase interracial understanding, 70% of associations left the answer blank altogether.⁷⁸ Unlike the YWCA, which attacked the complexity of integration work by keeping carefully detailed statistical reports of association membership and facilities use, the Girl Scouts discontinued any sort of systematic evaluation of diversity in their organization altogether as of the 1950s.

A Case Study: The YWCA Southern Y-Teen Summer Conference Program

Concerned about the state of school desegregation in the country and about the slow pace of integration in local associations, the National Board of the YWCA viewed their annual summer Y-Teen conferences as an ideal setting to advance their method of experiential integration, or breaking down the borders between racial groups by forming personal relationships. The Y-Teen summer conference program in the South was the centerpiece of the YWCA's interracial education efforts for girls, providing a testing ground for postwar theories of racial prejudice and youth development. Week-long summer conferences for Y-Teens living in southern states were divided into six regional meetings that took place annually and generally drew one to two hundred teenage delegates. Conference staff brought discussions of race issues into conference program content, but the real value, as they saw it, was having young white and African-American girls living, eating, sleeping, worshipping, and talking together. Girls and adults alike agreed that conferences were an ideal venue where girls could "come to grips with some

⁷⁸ Department of Data and Statistics, National Board of the YWCA, "The Extent of Certain Practices Relating to Racial Inclusiveness in Community YWCAs," 1957, 6, File 2, Box 542, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC; "Some Findings of the 1959 Teenage Program Study," Microdex 2, Reel 250, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

of the controversial issues of the day which the young people will so soon be called upon to decide by vote and action.”⁷⁹

Away from the watchful eyes of wary parents and the media, relieved of the pressure of local opinion, and hosted by institutions sympathetic to their integration efforts, the organization was able to successfully create safe spaces for white and African-American girls to meet and live side by side. Summer conferences provided for a controlled setting, where the YWCA could carefully orchestrate the physical setup of communal sleeping and dining areas in such a way as to provide intimate experiences in everyday living for girls from different racial backgrounds. Daily activities at conferences complemented the integrated living experience. Discussion groups and lectures led by educators, social scientists, and religious figures promoted dialogue about the meaning of racial prejudice in American life. Group activities included role-playing scripts and brainstorming groups on how to best adapt the Y-Teen’s program and image to appeal to African-American girls. Recreation extended the concept of communal living to adventure and play, and devotionals encouraged girls share in a common spirituality.

Many girls experienced their first interpersonal contact with peers of a different race at Y-Teen summer conferences. Particularly in the South, where interracial contact continued to be limited for years after the *Brown* decision, these experiences created opportunities for girls to form positive relationships with girls of a different color. Integrated camps and conferences had the potential to break down racial barriers, as the YWCA urged girls to question the segregated patterns of socializing, education, and recreation that permeated their society. Tellingly, it was this very type of experience –

⁷⁹ “Comments on 16 Y-Teen Summer Conference,” 1949, File 6, Box 556, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

sharing the mundane yet intimate routines of sleeping, eating, and living – that the South’s complex Jim Crow legal structure was designed to prevent.

The idea of sending your child away to a summer camp began in the late nineteenth century and quickly became a familiar feature of American life. Children from all racial, ethnic, class, religious, and gender groups had access to summer camps, often sponsored through community organizations serving various identity groups and political persuasions, such as the YW and YMCA, Boy and Girl Scouts, the Catholic Youth Organization (CYO), Young Pioneers, Camp Fire Girls and Woodcraft Indians, to name only a few. Summer camps united girls in intimate living spaces and created a sense of community through shared rituals, romantic primitivism, and fun. On the other hand, camps also served to reinforce difference and hierarchy, as strict racial segregation for both campers and staff typified summer camps throughout the first half of the twentieth century. In the 1920s and 1930s the YWCA and the Girl Scouts occasionally experimented with the practice of sharing camps with white and African-American girls, usually meaning African-American girls would be granted a special block of weeks either early or late in the summer to use the site. Actual integrated camping was approached slowly and ambivalently, if at all, before 1945.⁸⁰

Early summer camps built group culture by removing children from their home communities and transplanting them to a “manufactured wilderness” in homogenous

⁸⁰ The body of scholarship on children’s summer camps, almost nonexistent a decade ago, is growing rapidly. See Paris, *Children’s Nature*; Miller, *Growing Girls*; Philip Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Jay Mechling, “Children’s Folklore in Residential Institutions: Summer Camps, Boarding Schools, Hospitals and Custodial Facilities,” in *The Handbook of Children’s Folklore: A Source Book*, eds. Brian Sutton-Smith, Jay Mechling, Thomas W. Johnson, and Felicia R. McMahon (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1995); Mechling, *On My Honor*; Abigail Van Slyck, *A Manufactured Wilderness: Summer Camps and the Shaping of American Youth, 1890-1960* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); and Mishler, *Raising Reds*.

groups that reinforced the concept of difference along lines of race, class and gender. In addition to their social homogeneity, early summer camps were often characterized by their use of “cross-racial play” marked by the romanticization and performance of Native-American and African-American culture, history, and lore through mediums like minstrel shows, fireside storytelling, costumes and ceremonies. The co-optation of often wildly inaccurate representations of Indianness and blackness, historians have argued, served to create group identity predicated on whiteness in opposition to the romanticized or ridiculed “other.”⁸¹

After World War II, however, the symbolic function of race lost favor across the spectrum of youth organizations, and practices like minstrel shows subsided. Girls’ organizations increasingly looked to camps and conferences as appropriate places for the socialization of youth in principles of racial equality and cooperation. The intimate nature of overnight camps and conferences, and their physical removal from the family and the local community, created conditions ideally suited to youth socialization. As Leslie Paris writes in *Children’s Nature: The Rise of the American Summer Camp*, camps were “places where new kinds of culture and community could be produced, and new social identities generated.” But, “if camps could be sites of conservatism, they could also be springboards for experiments in racial equality.”⁸²

⁸¹ For an excellent analysis of the meaning of the performance of racial primitivism in interwar summer camps, see Paris, *Children’s Nature*, especially “Tans, Teepees, and Minstrel Shows: Racial Primitivism and Camp Community,” 236-296, as well as Deloria, *Playing Indian*, and Helgren, “Inventing American Girlhood,” 166-317. Jay Mechling extends the analysis of the acculturative functions of boys’ summer camp to the performance of masculinity and heterosexuality in *On My Honor*; see also Van Slyck, *A Manufactured Wilderness*.

⁸² Paris, *Children’s Nature*, quotes from 3 and 285.

Southern Y-Teen conferences had begun to desegregate, albeit slowly, in 1947, when the segregated black and white Virginia-Carolina conference planning committees agreed to a trial exchange of delegates. That year, ten white girls traveled to the African-American conference held at Bennett College, and ten African-American girls traveled to the all-white conference held at a camp in North Carolina.⁸³ Following the successful exchange in the Virginia-Carolina region, other Y-Teen conferences in the South began to desegregate as well: Oklahoma, Arkansas, Texas and Louisiana in 1950, Kentucky and Tennessee in 1953, and “GAF” (Georgia, Alabama and Florida) in 1958. The YWCA was proud of the level of desegregation in their Y-Teen summer conferences in the majority of the southern region by the early 1950s, judging the interracial experience available to girls “distinctly above average for work done by organizations with this age group.”⁸⁴

YWCA leaders believed educating girls about the artificiality of racial prejudice was necessary to instill an appreciation for racial equality in the next generation, and summer conferences provided an ideal setting for this sort of work.⁸⁵ At conference, Y-Teens could develop their own opinions on the value of racial integration and the fundamental equality of all human beings, away from the influence and pressure of their family and community. YWCA staff agreed that young people generally recapitulated the attitudes of their parents and their community, except for “young people who have had

⁸³ Leta Galpin to Mary Jane Willett, 1 April 1947, Microdex 2, Reel 156, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

⁸⁴ “Comments on 16 Y-Teen Summer Conference,” 1949, File 6, Box 556, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

⁸⁵ Lynn, *Progressive Women in Conservative Times*, 57.

opportunities for experiences in interracial groups, or special projects.”⁸⁶ Sleep-away experiences thus gave girls the opportunity to reach out across barriers of race that often proved too great for their parents.

Making choices about a personal stance toward prejudice could be an empowering experience for teenage girls. In keeping with their progressive educational beliefs, conference advisers sought to provide this space by deferring to the decisions of girls, a strategy that could produce surprising results. For example, an adviser working at the 1962 GAF (Georgia-Florida-Alabama) Y-Teen regional conference relayed her conversation with a white girl who approached her in tears on the first night of the week-long event. The girl was distraught about the prospect of dining in the same room as African-American girls, a behavior her community had taught her was wrong. Upset and uncertain, the girl confided she believed her father would throw her out of the house if he knew she was attending an integrated conference (a fact her mother presumably had kept from him), much less eating alongside African Americans. Rather than force the issue, the adviser assured the girl she could eat dinner in her room if she chose. In the following hours, however, the girl resolved to reject the prejudice of her father, proudly asserting “it’s the first time in my life that I ever made a decision of my own.”⁸⁷

Yet, the physical distance between a girl’s home and the conference site could not always stave off parental or community opinion. Despite the YWCA’s efforts to maintain conferences as safe spaces, a Y-Teen delegate to the 1957 southeastern regional summer conference found herself hauled away from the conference site by the local sheriff and

⁸⁶ Major Problems Study, 1939-1940, 5, File 19, Box 74, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

⁸⁷ Report of Y-Teen Conference in the Southern Region, Summer 1962, File 11, Box 556, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

placed on a train back to her hometown of Miami in the early morning hours. While she was aware African-American and white girls would share sleeping quarters and had indicated on her conference registration card that she did not care about the color of her roommates, her family was less quiescent. Back in Miami, the girl's aunt served as treasurer of the local White Citizens' Council, an organization in which her parents actively participated as well. When her parents learned she was sharing a bedroom with three African-American roommates, they sent the local sheriff to remove the girl from the conference and return her home.⁸⁸

Conferences had other limits as well. The "Mid-South" region (comprised of parts of Alabama, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Mississippi) proved intransigent to change, steadfastly refusing to desegregate their summer conferences throughout the 1950s and 1960s despite constant pressure from the YWCA's National Board. The National Board tried to circumvent the Mid-South's resistance to desegregation by urging teenage girls from that region to attend integrated summer conferences in other areas of the South. The national office attributed the Mid-South region's stubborn resistance to change to the lack of staff turnover. As of 1965, half of the adult conference staff in the Mid-South region had held their positions in the YWCA for more than 10 years and for the duration of that time had firmly turned their back on what they considered to be undue interference by the national association.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Southeastern Y-Teen Summer Conference Report, 10-16 June 1957, File 7, Box 556, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

⁸⁹ Report to the Field Foundation on the Y-Teen Conferences in the Southern Region, Summer 1965, File 16, Box 556, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

Even with the failure of the Mid-South, YWCA women saw themselves in the vanguard of teaching young people about tolerance and racial equality. This was especially true in the South, where many school systems were working harder to evade school desegregation than to honor it. By 1958, the National Board had sharpened its perspective on the usefulness of summer Y-Teen conferences as sites of political engagement, describing them as “one of the prime instruments available to the YWCA to develop positive interracial attitudes and relationships as a contribution toward ongoing school desegregation.”⁹⁰ To further the objective of integrating southern Y-Teen conferences, that year the organization applied for and received a substantial grant from the Field Foundation, a liberal institution that financed projects directed at improving race relations in the United States. The grant supported the hiring of field consultants and staff to the southern region to support integration of the Y-Teen summer conferences, and ran from 1958-1965.⁹¹

The Field Foundation grant catalyzed the summer Y-Teen conferences, and in the years after 1958 the organization made great headway in providing interracial experiences for African-American and white girls. In the words of a YWCA consultant, “Each conference . . . became a laboratory in work with interracial groups in a southern atmosphere where this type of activity was little practiced in some communities – and not at all in others.”⁹² While northern and western Y-Teen summer conferences increasingly

⁹⁰ Report of the 1959 Y-Teen Summer Conferences and Supportive Adult Training in the Southern Region, File 9, Box 556, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

⁹¹ Jackson, *A Study of the Effects of the Interracial Aspects of the Programs of Six Y-Teen Summer Conferences in the Southern Region on Girls Who Attended from 1958 Through 1962*, 1964, File 8, Box 556, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 2.

weaved race relations into their programs, integration became the primary focus and feature of the southern conferences in a way that it had not been in preceding years. The extent of integration at these conferences proved the organization could successfully move beyond tokenism. Between the years 1958-1965 almost 2,500 white teens and more than 1,000 black teens attended a southern summer conference. By 1965 all southern Y-Teen conferences (save the segregated Mid-South) counted at least one-quarter African-American participation, and some conferences, like Virginia and the Carolinas, boasted almost as many African-American participants as white participants.⁹³ These conferences provided a model of integration in a region committed to “massive resistance” of court-ordered school desegregation.

While a definitive meaning cannot be ascribed to the experience, the integrated conferences had an appreciable impact on the girls who attended them. In 1963, the YWCA solicited feedback from almost 2,000 girls who had attended Y-Teen summer conferences in the southern region between 1958 and 1962. Vaguely worded, the survey made no mention of race or of civil rights, instead simply asking girls open-ended questions such as “What do you remember as being the most important part of conference?” and “What concerns you most in your present community and world?” With only a few exceptions, the former teen delegates responded that civil rights and race relations were among the top priorities on their mind. From the five integrated divisions,

⁹³ Report to the Field Foundation on the Y-Teen Conferences in the Southern Region, Summer 1965, File 16, Box 556, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

one-quarter to fully one-half of the girls responded that *the most* personally important part of their conference experience had been its integrated nature.⁹⁴

Significantly, the responses from delegates who attended the still-segregated Mid-South conference differed drastically from those of girls from other parts of the South. Most girls at the Mid-South conference failed to mention race at all. Of the 35% who even considered race relations a concern, only 13% expressed support for integration. Whether or not girls from outside of the Mid-South region agreed whole-heartedly with tenets of racial equality, after their integrated conference experience they exhibited an awareness of race as one of the compelling issues of their day, and a national struggle of which they were a part. By contrast, girls who attended the segregated Mid-South conference lacked a sense of race consciousness that girls who had attended integrated conferences demonstrated. Race seemed to have little to no impact on Mid-South delegates' experience because its tension was largely absent from their summer conference, signaling that where the YWCA pressed integration at conferences and made it a program priority, girls took notice and pondered racial questions with sincerity.⁹⁵

For white girls who attended segregated conferences, responses that reflected on race relations evoked suspicion and hostility. One girl referred to the "integration horror"; another insisted she believed in "separate but equal rights." Others framed the conflict over race in the South as an impingement of states' rights, hoping for "a president to be fair to the South." Some responses alluded to YWCA integration work directly, blasting integrated summer conferences and programs on race relations as "brain-washing

⁹⁴ Jackson, *A Study of the Effects of the Interracial Aspects of the Programs of Six Y-Teen Summer Conferences*, 8, 15-30.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 20-23.

techniques and single-minded efforts of national resource leaders to force Mid-South to be an integrated conference,” and “discrimination against white girls who probably wouldn’t be allowed (by parents) or would have no desire to attend an integrated conference.”⁹⁶

For white girls who attended integrated conferences during the height of the civil rights movement, their involvement in Y-Teens provided an instance – however brief – to rethink their attitudes toward race and to try to make sense of the various difficult and unanswered questions associated with desegregation. After conference, girls reflected on being “more broad-minded in my racial views” and trying “to live my life without prejudice.” By living with one another at conference, girls waded through preconceived assumptions about race, breaking stereotypes down to the level of the individual. In the words of one white girl, “It was my first contact with Negroes and I was impressed that racial segregation is needless and stupid.” Another commented, “I will never forget how wonderful Negro girls were to me.” Likewise, an African-American girl noted “I learned to mix with white girls and discovered all whites are not prejudiced,” while another reflected that it “removed my prejudice to know Caucasians.”⁹⁷

Girls also carefully differentiated themselves from adults, insisting on an independent worldview that, perhaps naively, left the prejudices of their parents in the past. As one girl insisted, “The youth of America can show the adults that we get along in mixed groups.” Another expressed her dismay at the increasingly violent state of race relations in the South, noting wistfully, “People make it worse. At conference we got

⁹⁶ Ibid., 21-22.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 15, 24, 25.

along just fine.” Though it was the first interracial living experience for many girls, the lesson that it was “both enjoyable and possible” served as a springboard for further activism, and several girls indicated that, upon returning home, they began working with their local NAACP and CORE chapters to continue supporting racial equality in their communities.⁹⁸

The goal of altering racial attitudes underlying the YWCA’s southern Y-Teen summer conferences in the late 1950s and early 1960s signaled a broader cultural shift that would ultimately redefine American society. Critics of racial liberalism, however, rightly point out that emphasizing individual prejudice elided the far more insidious structural racism built into the country’s political and economic systems and vastly underestimated the difference between legislating racial integration and realizing racial equality. As Harvard legal scholar Lani Guinier has written, “racial liberalism influenced the legal engineers to treat the symptoms of racism [segregation], not the disease.”⁹⁹ The YWCA’s southern Y-Teen summer conference program faced similar limitations imposed by their approach to racial justice as a matter of interpersonal relations. But this should not diminish the fact that urging interracial contact among girls coming of age in the 1950s and 1960s, however flawed, provided significant opportunities for white and black girls to engage in dialogue on racial prejudice and consider the message that good citizenship meant rejecting inequality.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 17, 25.

⁹⁹ Lani Guinier, “From Racial Liberalism to Racial Literacy: *Brown v. Board of Education* and the Interest-Divergence Dilemma,” *The Journal of American History* 91.1 (June 2004): 92-118.

Conclusion

After World War II, the YWCA and Girl Scouts, to different degrees, placed an emphasis on youth socialization for the elimination of racial discrimination. Despite claims to inclusiveness, however, both organizations struggled to move beyond a simple rhetoric of integration. To be sure, the practice of implementing integration in their organizations raised many difficult questions that lacked clear answers. Moreover, white women at the local and leadership levels failed to examine the role of whiteness inherent in their ideal of womanhood, making assimilation of African-American girls a dictate of female citizenship, but falling short of true inclusion. In terms of making the transition from simply proclaiming to be open to all girls, to actually making the substantive programming and structural changes necessary to draw African-American girls into Girl Scout troops and Y-Teen clubs, both organizations faced an uphill battle, sometimes aided and sometimes hampered by legislation and emotions driven by the successes of the civil rights movement in America. From leaders of the organizations down to local volunteers, women navigated an uncertain path in linking social adjustment and responsible citizenship with racial equality.

The construction of female citizenship coming from the YWCA and the Girl Scouts in the postwar decades was predicated upon the assumption that racism was a critical issue for the nation. The gestures on the part of girls' organizations to social equality between races brought together postwar concerns about national strength, peace, and the preservation of democracy. Conspicuously absent from their rhetoric, however, was any discussion of social equality between the sexes. In the 1950s and 1960s, the YWCA and the Girl Scouts continued to insist on an ideal of girlhood and a character

education program grounded in a belief in gender difference, and their activism continued to operate within a set of societal expectations that identified women's primary responsibility to the home. Teaching girls to be good citizens – by making their homes, their communities, and their world a better, safer, and happier place to live – was a task to which girls' organizations were uniquely fitted. But as the midcentury drew on, girls' organizations worried they were less fitted to the task of educating girls for their futures as American women.

CHAPTER 4

INTERPRETING THE HOME IN ITS BROADEST SENSE: THE CONTRADICTIONS OF GIRLHOOD IN POSTWAR AMERICA

“In light of the growing importance of women’s role in the country . . . the YWCA has a new awareness of the significance of its own responsibilities as a women’s movement. It is faced with a new urgency to help women and girls find meaning in their own lives, develop to the full their capacity for leadership, and play an effective and constructive part in the life of today.” – Statement of the 22nd National Convention of the YWCA, 1961¹

In 1956, Y-Teens around the country celebrated 75 years of YWCA work with girls since the original Little Girls’ Christian Association in Oakland, California. A lucky few attending the National Y-Teen conference in November of that year marked the occasion at a 75th Anniversary Recognition Ceremonial sponsored by the YWCA’s National Board. Hundreds of teenage delegates gathered after a whirlwind tour of the nation’s capitol to listen to Janet G. Harbison, a 40-year old National Board Member, Smith College graduate, civil rights advocate, and mother of three, deliver a thoughtful speech that offered words of advice on what girls “should be asking questions about.” Taking a stab at the age-old question of what women want, she gave a surprisingly feminist answer for 1956, a year more redolent of Betty Freidan’s *Feminine Mystique*

¹ “Responsibility of the YWCA in the Sixties,” Actions, 22nd National Convention, May 8 – May 13, 1961, Microdex 4, Reel 42, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

than Aretha Franklin's "Respect": "We know we wish to be wives and mothers, we wish to be able to take jobs for pay, and equal pay at that, and to have careers if that is our bent." Moreover, "[w]e wish to have our notions and our attitudes respected, our contributions to home, to the community, to business and government accepted." But then, Harbison faltered. "How to combine this whole into a balanced breakfast dish," she admitted, "we know not . . . It is for you, in the living out of your lives, to find a better balance."²

This may have seemed a strange sentiment, coming from a woman who, at least on paper, had clearly found a successful balance of these things in her own life. But Harbison's words were prescient. The 1950s and early 1960s were a time of great psychological struggle for women and girls, as expanding educational and vocational opportunities for women contrasted sharply with intense ideologically-driven expectations that women would subordinate their own self-realization in favor of devotion to the American home and family. The achievement of the idealized American Dream – the nuclear family with a breadwinner father and nurturing mother raising their children together in the comfort and security of a suburban community – posed a tremendous burden to many women who soon discovered this Dream offered them little in the way of self-expression and personal satisfaction. Harbison encapsulated one of the greatest problems middle-class women and girls would encounter in the midcentury (as many do even today) – how to take full advantage of new personal and professional opportunities available to women in the postwar period without abandoning the responsibilities to home and family assigned to them by virtue of their sex.

² "Shaping the Future," speech published in *The YWCA Magazine*, May 1957, 9-10, Microdex 2, Reel 250, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

Girls' organizations faced this challenge in deciding what roles exactly they should be preparing girls to take on as adults. As the YWCA and the Girl Scouts comprehended (and similarly contributed to), being a girl in the midcentury involved facing a dizzying array of messages about what it meant to be an American woman. Popular magazines like *Ladies Home Journal*, *McCall's*, and *Reader's Digest*, among others, printed tips for throwing successful dinner parties and entertaining husbands' coworkers. Advertisements for new cleaning products featured smiling, carefully coifed June Cleaver types, and suggested that women's best use of their time was in scrubbing sinks and making floors shine. A special place was reserved in newspapers around the country for social columns that announced engagements, marriages, and births, presumably women's greatest achievements.

Magazines targeted to teenage girls, like *Seventeen*, a publication with a circulation in the millions, delivered a steady diet of dating, romance, fashion, and beauty tips, contributing to the sense that postwar girls were superficial, romantic, and flighty.³ Still, as historian Joanne Meyerowitz has found, postwar mass culture also "included a celebration of nondomestic as well as domestic pursuits and a tension between individual achievement and domestic ideals."⁴ These same magazines featured articles that lauded the public accomplishments of women in work, politics, and the arts, and often included annual lists that recognized women's successes outside of the domestic sphere, such as *Mademoiselle's* "Merit Awards." Moreover, teenage girls in the 1950s encountered a new

³ Kelly Schrum, *Some Wore Bobby Sox: The Emergence of Teenage Girls' Culture, 1920-1945* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Ilana Nash, *American Sweethearts: Teenage Girls in Twentieth-Century Popular Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

⁴ Meyerowitz, "Beyond the Feminine Mystique," 1465.

array of bold, self-assured, and assertive role models, like the Shirelles, *Gidget*, and Sandra Dee, who began popping up on radio stations, television sets, and movies.⁵

These contradictory cultural messages and emboldened role models reflected the reality of broadening opportunities for women in the 1950s and early 1960s that blurred the lines of traditional gender roles. In work and education, women were increasingly moving outside of the home in a permanent fashion. For example, at the turn of the twentieth century only one in five women worked for wages, and which women worked depended heavily on a variety of factors including race, class, ethnicity, age, and marital status.⁶ World War II marked a watershed for women's participation in the paid labor market, when six and a half million women, married and single, entered the workforce. Though roughly four and a half million left (or were relieved of) their jobs by 1946, working married women again outnumbered working single women by the end of 1947, signaling an enduring trend.⁷ In the booming postwar economy, labor demands drew more married women, including those with young children, into a sex-segregated workforce to fill female professional positions, such as clerical work and teaching, and service positions, like waitressing and sales. By 1960, more than one third of all women in the country worked for wages either full- or part-time, and the number of married working women with children at home exceeded those without children at home by two to one.⁸

⁵ Douglas, *Where the Girls Are*.

⁶ Julia Kirk Blackwelder, *Now Hiring: The Feminization of Work in the United States, 1900-1995* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1997); 3 and Table 1.1 (15). In 1900, one in four married African-American women worked for wages, but only one in 300 white married women did so. African-American women, immigrant daughters, and native-born working-class white women were most likely to hold paid labor positions. White married women and middle-class daughters were least likely.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 123-124.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 151-162 and Table 7.3 (195).

While the choice about working outside of the home continued to be shaped by class and racial privileges, the reality that greater numbers of middle-class wives and mothers would spend part or all of their adult life doing so was undeniable.

Like the recognizable expansion of women's participation in the paid labor force, women's participation in institutions of higher education expanded after World War II. In 1944, 576,000 women were enrolled in colleges and universities. By 1960, that number had more than doubled, reaching 1,339,367.⁹ Educational reformers differed on the *type* of higher education young female coeds should receive; some pushed for "domestically-oriented" education considered suitable to young women's expectations (and, presumably, their interests) that would train them in home economics, child-care, and marital relationships. Others acknowledged the multiplicity of women's talents and interests and pushed for greater financial and professional support for women, issuing calls to help women better integrate careers and family responsibilities.¹⁰ Notable attempts at reaching consensus on women's education, such as the American Council on Education's Commission on the Education of Women (1953-1962), floundered in their effort to comprehend how to harmonize women's responsibilities to family, to the nation, and to themselves.

Expanded opportunities for women may have blurred traditional gender roles but in no way signaled their demise. Women in the 1950s and early 1960s were generally still understood to be temporary members of the workforce and remained of secondary concern in education. Though women's numbers on college campuses were increasing,

⁹ Linda Eisenmann, *Higher Education for Women in Postwar America, 1945-1965* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 45 and Table 2.1.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 65-83.

their relative proportion was dropping thanks to a surge in men's college attendance following the GI Bill.¹¹ While female college enrollment grew by 800,000 between 1944 and 1960, women's percentage of undergraduate enrollments dropped from 49.8% to only 37.1%. As a result, as historian Linda Eisenmann writes, "women became increasingly incidental on campuses while their numbers actually grew," resulting in postwar educational policy-making and campus practices that "developed without consideration of women's needs."¹² Women's presumed calling as wives and mothers first made sustained focus on "women's needs" in education and professional development of little concern.

Moreover, rather than being revolutionary, women's increased participation in higher education and the workforce fit neatly into postwar discourses about womanhood and women's contributions to the nation during the cold war. After World War II ended, women were encouraged to embrace domesticity and rededicate themselves to stabilizing the home, considered the foundation of a robust American society. The idealization of the white, middle-class nuclear American family and suburban home in the postwar years did important cultural work for the nation as it imagined itself in opposition to the Soviet Union. In this milieu, women's greatest contribution to the nation was understood to be their devotion to the home and the family. Of course, as the previous chapters have suggested, instead of disappearing behind the doors of suburban homes, domestic

¹¹ The GI Bill is acknowledged as the beginning of the "Golden Age" of American higher education, when colleges and universities expanded rapidly to accommodate a flood of new students, particularly veterans. Thanks to the Bill, men's college attendance rose much more dramatically than women's: in 1944, 1,155,000 men were enrolled in college, and in 1960, 3,610,007 were. See Eisenmann, *Higher Education for Women*, 45.

¹² *Ibid.*, 5-6.

ideology framed women's civic and political activity in the postwar period, shaping it in specific ways but also giving urgency to their maternal activism.

In the name of fostering healthy homes and families, women could help meet a variety of national needs. For instance, the country's booming postwar economy required numbers of people in the workforce too great for men alone to provide. Women's increased participation in the workforce, government officials and businessmen noted, would support the nation's expanding economy. As a bonus, the extra income women brought home could afford their families the consumer goods and suburban ideal so crucial to the nation's understanding of its superiority. Women could help in other areas besides the economy. After the Soviet Union demonstrated supremacy in the space race by launching *Sputnik* in 1957, commentators criticized the American public school system for allowing its children to fall behind the Soviets in math and the sciences. Not just boys, but girls too, were expected to rededicate themselves to education to reestablish the nation's preeminence in science and technology. This sentiment, of national defense and progress as a responsibility of boys and girls alike, was given forceful support with the publication of the National Manpower Council's 1957 *Womanpower* report, which criticized the country for failing to develop and utilize the talents and abilities of half of its population. The federal government weighed in with the 1958 National Defense Education Act, which delivered funding to colleges and universities to help Americans compete with the Soviet education system. These competing pressures left many women in the postwar era struggling to reconcile new opportunities, personal desires, and social expectations.

In response, as Eisenmann writes, women's advocates in the 1950s and early 1960s "relied on the notion of individual choice rather than on collective action" to aid women and girls in navigating "the complicated set of decisions facing postwar females" with respect to careers, vocations, education, and family.¹³ Girls' organizations followed a similar approach. In between the first and second waves of the women's movement, the Girl Scouts and the YWCA helped sustain a form of women's activism rooted in local communities and in self-education. Publications and special events sponsored by girls' organizations directed girls to engage in careful planning for careers and provided vocational education and counseling to help them discover their personal pathways to fulfillment. Club and troop activities, such as badge work, fundraising, and social service projects, focused on leadership development, skill-building, and personal accomplishment. And in a single-sex structure that fostered and celebrated a shared women's culture, girls' organizations encouraged girls to make carefully considered personal choices about the future. Taken together, they show a strong commitment to several of the grassroots elements of feminist action. Without rejecting essential gender difference, girls' organizations like the YWCA and the Girl Scouts incorporated elements of advocacy and education for women and girls that forged a link between the first and second waves of the women's movement.

Like many progressive women's organizations in the 1950s and 1960s, the YWCA and the Girl Scouts wrapped an agenda for expanding and supporting women's opportunities within a gendered worldview that believed in the essential nature of women's reproductive role. However, they resolutely rejected domestic education alone

¹³ Ibid., 5.

as adequate preparation for girls' futures. The challenge for the organizations in these decades, then, was to identify a model of girlhood that would help girls adapt to their multiple roles. What kind of future could America's daughters expect to have? How central would marriage and family be to that future, and how could girls make considered decisions about balancing domestic responsibilities, education, and work? What types of jobs or careers should girls be preparing for, and how should they expect their identity as women to constrain their choices? These are questions girls needed answers to, and the answers offered by the YWCA and the Girl Scouts reveal ambivalence about domesticity as a means of female participation in the life of the nation and tension between domesticity and feminism in postwar middle-class girls' education.

Often cast as uncertainty about whether girls' organizations were "meeting the needs of today's girl," traditional domesticity and feminism were at odds with one another in the character education and social experience offered to girls. This chapter examines the tensions and contradictions of postwar American girlhood through the lens of the YWCA's and Girl Scouts' life planning programs for girls. It begins with a discussion of the growing generation gap and the differing visions of postwar womanhood among American women. Extending the analysis of their maternalist philosophy, it then explores the Girl Scout's and YWCA's attempts to translate their philosophy into practical career and vocational planning programs to aid girls in embracing expanding opportunities for women by balancing personal interests with resilient social expectations about women's domestic responsibilities. It ends by considering the meaning of participation in these organizations for girls in the 1950s and early 1960s and points to the limits of continued deference to domestic ideology.

Understanding the “Needs” of Postwar Adolescent Girls

“Why do today’s teen-agers seem so different?” The question posed by marketing pioneer Eugene Gilbert in the pages of *Harper’s Magazine* in the waning days of 1959 voiced the concern of millions of parents who found it increasingly difficult to locate themselves in the culture and the attitudes being forged by their sons and daughters. Gilbert listed numerous sources of conflict between the older and younger generations, including teenagers’ economic independence, their indifference to parental decision-making, and their unconventional ideas about dating and marriage. “Our salient discovery,” Gilbert noted about his adult contemporaries, “is that within the past decade the teen-agers have become a separate and distinct group in our society,” so much so that “if you are under twenty, there may be good reason for you to regard your elders as a peculiarly insensitive, outmoded, and irrational tribe.” Gilbert’s article was not a disparagement of the emergent teen culture or an expression of longing for “the way things were,” both fashionable critiques of youth in the mid-twentieth century, but rather a defense of the changing times and a warning to his generation of the need to adapt to whatever the future held. “Possibly it is time that parents, too, started shifting their sights,” he urged. “Instead of bemoaning the queer ways of their young, it might be more useful to take a hard look at the society in which they [teenagers] are growing up. After all, we made it for them.”¹⁴

The characterization of the younger as “queer” had much to do with a growing uneasiness about the stability of traditional gender roles in middle-class American society. Educators, social scientists, politicians, and other commentators in the 1950s and

¹⁴ Eugene Gilbert, “Why Today’s Teen-agers Seem So Different,” *Harper’s Magazine*, November 1959, 76-79.

1960s debated the utility of sex in establishing expectations for the future, particularly for girls. Dorothy Barclay, a regular columnist writing about youth and family life for the *New York Times* in those decades, captured this gender-specific feeling in her 1957 article, “What is a Girl?” According to Barclay, confusion regarding gender roles was throwing society into disorder: “Boys take cooking and sewing, girls go to shop. Both get training in child care. Both are encouraged to train for the same careers . . . In pursuit of the admirable aim of developing a ‘true, equalitarian partnership,’ men and women individually and jointly have blurred the old distinctions between male and female that once made life more orderly.”

While Barclay overdrew the extent to which school curriculum trained boys for domesticity and girls for skilled manual labor in the late 1950s, the sentiment drew out strong emotions. A YMCA staff member interviewed for her article lashed out at efforts to rethink elements of boys’ and girls’ preparation for adulthood. In resolutely insisting that “Whether the causes are biological or social is immaterial – Boys and girls are different; they still face different expectations for the future,” he defended the commonly held view that backed traditional education and character training for both sexes befitting of their future roles. But Barclay dismissed the assumption that the education and training needed to prepare for the future was self-evident for girls. “Before her, as matters are tending today,” she wrote, “lies a most unsettled future. She has a many-faceted role open to her, no aspect of which will be under her sole control. A major ingredient in her future happiness and success will be the expectations and standards of feminine behavior with which some unknown little boy is now being imbued.”¹⁵ Barclay’s words pointed up a

¹⁵ Dorothy Barclay, “What is a Girl?” *New York Times*, August 18, 1957, SM26.

growing disconnect between the “standards of feminine behavior” expected of women, and an expanded set of personal, professional, and political opportunities available to the growing generation of girls. However, the personal satisfaction girls could derive by seizing new opportunities hung on their ability to reconcile their choices with society’s understanding of gender.

The postwar teenage girl was indeed a debated and mysterious figure to many public commentators. Teenage magazines such as *Seventeen*, *Modern Teen*, and *Glamour* encouraged an obsessive interest in romance, consumption, conformity, and self-scrutiny. Based on these magazines, some observers criticized middle-class girls as superficial and flighty, unprepared to fulfill the roles and responsibilities of their mothers in the home and the family. By contrast, psychologists and psychoanalysts pointed to earlier marriage rates, the practice of “going steady,” and a fixation with dating culture as evidence that girls were maturing faster, a trend experts like Margaret Mead feared was “pushing little girls into precocious sexuality” and causing them to “see married women as the only kind of women they want to be,” keeping them “fixed on the absolute necessity of catching man.”¹⁶

A national study commissioned by the Girl Scouts in the late 1950s sought to help adult women cut through the morass of opinion to understand the “typical” adolescent girl. Carried out by the Survey Research Center of the University of Michigan’s Institute for Social Research in 1957, the purpose of the study was to provide a nationwide profile of the average teenage girl, which could then serve as a basis for determining how social institutions like girls’ clubs could best meet their needs. University of Michigan researchers interviewed almost 2,000 girls between the ages of 11-18 on their personal

¹⁶ Margaret Mead, “Let Your Children Be Just That – Children,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 21, 1961, F8.

and social interests and their leisure-time activities. Called “one of the largest and most influential studies of teenage girls conducted in the 1950s” by one historian, the study was a standard bearer for youth organizations, including the YWCA, who recommended staff members and volunteers consult the study to find out the interests and needs of teenage girls when developing program in the 1960s.¹⁷ The girls who comprised the study represented a cross-section of the country, the only limiting factor being that all were enrolled in school. Not all girls in the study belonged to youth organizations, but a large percentage currently did or had belonged to the Girl Scouts, the YWCA, YWHA, 4-H, or an unspecified church youth group at some point in their life. Questions delved into girls’ hopes and fears, their family relationships, their friendships and dating patterns, and their recreational preferences. The study also asked girls to report on their plans for the future, allowing us to examine how gender constrained or defined girls’ expectations for themselves at the end of the 1950s.¹⁸

In commissioning the study, the Girl Scouts sought to measure how well girls were *adapting* to cultural expectations of women, in forming an identity that “integrates her own talents and individual goals with the goals that are defined for her by virtue of

¹⁷ Devlin, *Relative Intimacy*, 117; “Suggestions for Developing a Plan to Meet the Changing Needs in Program with Teenagers in the YWCA,” n.d., Miscellaneous [Y-Teen] Material, 1957-60, Microdex 2, Reel 250, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

¹⁸ Survey Research Center, Institute for Social Research, *Adolescent Girls: A Nation-Wide Study of Girls Between Eleven and Eighteen Years of Age* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1957), and Marguerite M. Dixon, “Adolescent Girls Tell About Themselves,” *Marriage and Family Living* 20.4 (November 1958): 400-401. The demographics of the study sample are as follows: 1,925 girls age 11-18, chosen randomly from school classrooms in 66 counties across the nation, were interviewed from a standard questionnaire. The study was limited to girls in school; 85% of girls “did not live on a farm,” the standard of measurement for rural vs. urban living, while approximately 15% did. The majority of girls lived in counties without a nearby city of more than 50,000 people, and the minority lived in metropolitan areas or metropolitan suburbs; 91% were white, 7% were African-American, and the remaining 2% were categorized as “other.” Questions about parents’ employment indicated that the girls came from both white- and blue-collar backgrounds.

being female.” Authors Elizabeth Douvan and Carol Kaye frankly acknowledged the dilemma of the modern American woman: “Whereas in many societies, and even in small parts of our own society, personal goals and feminine goals are identical for women, the dominant pattern in the United States is for the two sets of goals to be distinguished and even, to some extent, contradictory.” “On the one hand,” the authors continued:

girls are encouraged – often even through the adolescent period – in the pursuit of personal goals very like those set for boys. They are taught to seek personal achievement through competitive effort, to develop skills in some area of work, to broaden and deepen their experience through education and work . . . Juxtaposed with this set of expectations, we require of the girl another whole series of behaviors and characteristics generally classifiable as feminine traits.”¹⁹

Framed in such a way, the study revealed the nature of activism on the part of girls’ organizations, which sought to help girls individually navigate personal ambitions and social expectations as they made their way to adulthood.

The interviewed girls painted an image of their future that reflected the contradictions of postwar womanhood. Almost universally, they assumed they would one day be mothers with their own family responsibilities. Social commentators like Marynia Farnham and Ferdinand Lundberg, whose 1947 *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex* emblemized fears that women were abandoning their traditional responsibilities to husband and home (despite record-high marriage rates and a rising so-called epidemic of teenage marriages), had little basis for their concerns.²⁰ Almost 90% of girls anticipated being married some day, and the middle-class ideal of a husband with a respected, well-

¹⁹ Ibid., 1-2. The study is broken down into 9 sections, in the following sequential order: “The Hopes and Fears Girls Live With,” “Future Plans and Aspirations,” “The Family Setting,” “Friendship and dating Patterns,” “Activities and Interests,” “Group Membership,” “The Non-Members,” “Some Contrasts Between Boys and Girls,” and a summary section.

²⁰ Marynia Farnham and Ferdinand Lundberg, *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947).

paying white-collar job was overwhelmingly desired. Only one quarter of the girls interviewed indicated an aversion to changing their habits and mannerisms for their future husband, and the majority agreed they would readily change aspects of their personalities to accommodate marital harmony. The survey also showed that on a day-to-day basis, girls placed considerable emphasis on their physical appearance and exhibited a great deal of concern with their popularity among and appeal to boys. The responses suggested that, whatever else their personal goals, girls expected to pursue them within the context of a heterosexual married relationship.²¹

The study also showed that teenage girls had internalized expanding educational and vocational prospects in their personal aspirations. Girls exhibited ambition and independence in spheres of life outside of personal relationships. For instance, a significant portion of the girls surveyed expected to go to work. To the question “What is the most wonderful thing that could happen to you?” girls privileged career and educational achievement over more traditional “feminine goals” of marriage, love, and childbirth. Two-thirds of girls surveyed anticipated making important choices about attending college and choosing an occupation or career in the coming years. Less than half expected to make decisions about marriage in the near future, which researchers proposed indicated “a period of autonomous self-choice” that girls anticipated as young adults. Only 2% of girls surveyed responded to the question “What do you want to do after you get out of school?” with “marriage alone.” While researchers determined that girls expected to make decisions about paid labor based on “feminine values” – tending towards traditionally female careers in service and helping occupations (like teaching and nursing) and avoiding occupations driven by competition and self-interest – girls

²¹ Survey Research Center, Institute for Social Research, *Adolescent Girls*: see 14, 50-56, and 117-118.

prioritized choices about work or careers over marriage and motherhood, at least in the short term. Their expectations for the future clearly incorporated education, economic independence, and personal achievement alongside motherhood and homemaking.²²

What the survey demonstrated most clearly was that girls generally failed to perform the mental leap from daydream to actualization. These tensions within their own notions of femininity – between a willingness to sublimate their personal interests for the sake of marital accord and their ambition to pursue personal and professional development – foreshadowed that they would eventually face the same sets of difficult and painful choices their mothers had, a generation of women whose feelings of malaise and spiritual disquiet was brought to light by Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*.²³

Though it was published in 1963, Betty Friedan’s landmark *Feminine Mystique* chronicled the life experiences and personal emotions of her fellow Smith College classmates as they graduated from college in the early 1940s and gradually took up adult lives as suburban, middle-class mothers in the 1950s. Relying on a series of surveys filled out by women in her class of 1942, as well as an analysis of popular magazines and psychoanalytic theory, Friedan “discovered” an illness plaguing a significant portion of American women. This illness, which Friedan called the “problem that has no name,” was a “deep-seated and confused dissatisfaction that her classmates felt but could not fully articulate.”²⁴ According to Friedan, their confusion and self-doubt stemmed from

²² Ibid. The Institute for Social Research also drew conclusions about the contribution of youth organizations, noting that girls who belonged to organized groups like the Girl Scouts or Y-Teens rated themselves more highly on their own perceived communication skills and self-confidence, and tended to have more well-defined education plans than girls who did not belong to voluntary youth groups.

²³ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Norton, 1963).

²⁴ Daniel Horowitz, *Betty Friedan and the Making of the Feminine Mystique: The American Left, The Cold War, and Modern Feminism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998), 193.

their unrealized professional ambitions and unmet personal expectations, which many had sacrificed to conform to society's promises of feminine fulfillment in domesticity and motherhood.

To be sure, Friedan's book had a polemical purpose. Critics have noted her narrative relied on sweeping generalities, an imbalanced and monolithic picture of white, middle-class women's experience, and the intentional elision of her own history as a left-leaning social activist.²⁵ Yet this feeling of dissatisfaction among adult women in the 1950s resonated strongly with millions. Advocates of career planning and higher education for women, including girls' organizations, sought to treat the cause of the "feminine mystique" by helping girls to make the transition from teenage girl to adult woman with a full awareness of her options, her opportunities, and her special challenges.

As *The Feminine Mystique* would later prove beyond a doubt, mothers in the 1950s and early 1960s provided a problematic model of femininity for their daughters. For instance, Friedan's book sparked a strong emotional response from a generation of young women who were deeply ambivalent about the examples set by their mothers. As one woman later confided to Friedan, "My mother has stayed at home for twenty-three years and raised four children . . . The emptiness of her life appalls me."²⁶ The feeling went both ways; as a mother wrote to Friedan about her choice to drop out of college and marry young, "I would be heart-broken to see any of [my daughters] make the mistakes I've made."²⁷

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Letter to Betty Friedan, 23 July 1970, quoted in Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 37.

²⁷ Letter to Betty Friedan, 17 May 1963, quoted in Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 43.

Ruth Rosen, historian of the second wave women's movement, documented countless instances of what she termed a "Be like me, don't be like me" relationship between mothers and daughters, recorded in surveys, studies, memoirs, interviews, and magazine articles of the period.²⁸ A 19-page spread in the pages of *The Saturday Evening Post* in 1962 on the self-image of American women indicated that while 96% of married women polled considered themselves to be happier overall than unmarried women, only 25% rated themselves as "extremely satisfied" with their accomplishments in life. A mere 10% of mothers hoped their daughter's lives would follow the contours of their own. In response to the question, "As your daughter grows up to your age, what would you like her to do differently from what you have done?," women expressed regret about rushing into marriage and childbearing at the expense of education.²⁹ The sentiment wasn't simply an issue of personal conflict; it was fed by omnipresent and ambivalent messages about femininity surrounding women and girls in television shows, songs, fiction, short stories, magazines and movies of the decades. As one *Life* magazine article summarized, "In New York City the 'career' woman can be seen in fullest bloom, and it is not irrelevant that New York City also has the greatest concentration of psychiatrists . . ."³⁰ Scholars have attributed the timing of the emergence of the second wave women's rights movement, in part, to the schizophrenic undertones of education and popular culture in the decades preceding it.³¹

²⁸ Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 43.

²⁹ Dr. George Gallup and Evan Hill, "The American Woman," *The Saturday Evening Post*, December 22, 1962, 15-32.

³⁰ Robert Coughlan, "Changing Roles in Modern Marriage," *Life*, December 24, 1956, 116.

³¹ Breines, *Young, White, and Miserable*, 12; Douglas, *Where the Girls Are*; Meyerowitz, "Beyond the Feminine Mystique," 1455- 1482.

The inability of the older generation to provide a model for the younger generation sat firmly on the minds of girls' organizations. A conference that took place for two days in January of 1960 at the YWCA National Board headquarters in New York City reflected this concern. Consultants from the Girl Scouts and from the YWCA's Family Life, Health, Physical Education, Recreational Services, and Teenage Program departments met with representatives from a host of youth organizations and government agencies, including the National Social Welfare Assembly, UNESCO, the Boy Scouts, and the Children's Bureau, as well as education specialists at New York University, to discuss "Today's Teenagers." As a group, the represented youth-serving agencies elicited a consensus on a complete breakdown in relationships between adults and youth and the impact of rapidly changing expectations of girls. Sharing similar anxieties about gender role ambiguity, they debated the questions and challenges of growing up female in the mid-twentieth century United States. Conference participants agreed, "there is so much inconsistency in adult behavior in the world around them that young people have no moorings. Even in homes with established values or church-taught ideals there is a flouting of values by adults that in turn causes confusion in the minds of youth."³² How were girls to grow up as well-adjusted and useful citizens when "the increasingly complex and confused role of women" permeated social relations?³³

Girls' organizations faced the challenge of socializing young girls within this set of shifting social and cultural expectations and opportunities that neither cultural commentators, sociologists and psychologists, women's advocates, nor millions of

³² "Consultation on Today's Teenagers," 14-15 January 1960, 8, held at the office of the YWCA National Board, New York City, Microdex 5, Reel 249, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

³³ Helen W. Mahon, recap of "The Role of the YWCA in a Changing Era," also known as the Dodson Report, published in 1960, File 8, Box 174, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

middle-class mothers fully understood. Their sense of urgency was compounded by the fact that in the 1950s and early 1960s, Girl Scout and Y-Teen membership reached the highest levels they would ever achieve in the twentieth century. Girl Scout membership ranged between two and three million girls in these decades, and Y-Teen club membership hovered between 300,000 and 400,000 girls. To help girls navigate the competing pressures of postwar gender ideology and grow up to be useful and well-adjusted members of American society, girls' organizations promoted individual solutions to "the problem that has no name." They did so by providing encouragement and occasions for careful preparation and planning so girls might find a more harmonious balance between domestic responsibilities and personal aspirations than their mothers' generation had achieved.

Domesticity or Careers for Girls?

The Girl Scouts and the YWCA held fast to a definition of femininity that considered women as homemakers in both the literal *and* figurative sense. Publications created for girls by the YWCA and the Girl Scouts in the 1950s and early 1960s considered marriage and homemaking central elements of women's identity and social role. Advice manuals, program handbooks, and correspondence never hinted at the possibility that girls would substitute careers for families. While "thousands of jobs are listed by the United State census," the 1952 Girl Scout Handbook for Seniors cautioned, "never lose sight of the fact that the greatest career is homemaking and that everything you do in your Girl Scout troop is useful to a homemaker."³⁴ Yet evidence suggests

³⁴ *Senior Girl Scouting*, 1952, 168-169, GSUSA.

homemaking was interpreted broadly. While the 1947 edition of the handbook had told girls, “homemaking is woman’s most fundamental and satisfying occupation,” the authors of the 1952 edition asserted, “homemaking is the most fundamental and important job in the world.” This subtle shift in language suggested that, in the 1950s, the Girl Scouts interpreted women’s domestic identity as a basis for women’s public work rather than an end in itself.³⁵ Throughout the 1952 handbook, the authors linked women’s responsibility to the home with women’s care of the community, nation and world. The reminder to girls, “of course, you look forward someday to having a home and a family,” mingled with numerous discussions of female activism and civic and political engagement.³⁶

Evidence of an even broader reading of homemaking in the Girl Scouts occurred in 1963, when the organization divided their program into four age levels rather than three. That year, the Scouts launched a new age stratification system that established two groups for young girls under the age of 11, and two groups for older girls between the ages of 11 and 17. This reorganization allowed Scout officials to reorient the program for older girls to focus more explicitly on education and career exploration. The organizing framework of the 1963 Girl Scout Senior Handbook, “Wider Opportunities,” underscored the efforts of the organization to introduce girls to a more expansive set of future possibilities. “Wider Opportunities” continued to reflect core components of the Girl Scout program, including volunteerism, skill-building, and education. The Handbook also advocated for vocational preparation, encouraging girls to begin developing an awareness

³⁵ See Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

³⁶ *Senior Girl Scouting*, 1952, 140, GSUSA.

of work possibilities and workplace issues. While the Handbook continued to insist, “you will be a homemaker one day – perhaps not too long from now,” the concept of “homemaker” took on an even more ambiguous meaning. Divorcing the concept of homemaker from the physical act of caring for the husband and family, the handbook stated, “You will be a homemaker whether you get married or not, for a woman makes a home out of any place in which she lives.”³⁷ And rather than imagining a future as a stay-at-home wife or mother, or a homemaker and civic volunteer, the 1963 handbook asked girls to reflect on the multifold paths their lives might take, as full-time homemakers, working wives, or career women.

Unvaryingly, homemaking served as a way for the organization to make sense of women’s public activity throughout the 1960s. Staff members with the national office spent two years planning a national conference for Girl Scout Seniors that took place in 1966, entitled “Home Values in Action.” The national office framed the conference as an opportunity for the Girl Scouts to create national awareness of “the many influential roles of the home and women in these times,” and intended it to be a pilot project that individual councils could replicate on the local level. Based on the premise that the home was “a fundamental force in democracy in which women could find fulfillment, and exert influence from her home to international relations,” the training guide for the conference urged volunteers and troop leaders to subscribe to an “interpretation of the home in its broad sense,” as a foundational place for the development of girls’ identities. The program brochure boldly announced a “revolution” taking place in American women’s lives, “a ‘revolution’ which begins to form in the early teens.” A central component of this “vast change” in girls’ experience was their “preparation for the dual role of

³⁷ *Senior Girl Scout Handbook*, 1963, 121, GSUSA.

homemakers and workers . . . Increasingly women are seeking the right to choose how they will make their contribution to their family and their community.” Still, the organization insisted the “home” exerted primary influence in shaping girls’ attitudes, goals, and values, echoing the 1963 handbook: “You will be a homemaker whether you get married or not, for a woman makes a home out of any place in which she lives.” Within this context, girls at the conference attended forums on the community, and explored the multiple functions women served in sustaining and supporting community life, community institutions, and family life, as well as the roles of mothers in other countries and cultures.³⁸

The YWCA shared a vision of womanhood that assigned primary responsibility for childcare and homemaking to women, yet encouraged girls to balance domestic responsibilities with personal fulfillment outside of marriage and motherhood. Marion Cuthbert, author of *Maturity and Me*, a guide for adolescent girls that was widely distributed among Y-Teen club advisers and used as a resource material at Y-Teen summer conferences, expressed this dual vision of women’s role. As an Associate Professor Emeritus and former Dean of Women at Brooklyn College, Cuthbert filled many shoes in the YWCA; she was a member of the National Board staff and the World YWCA, an advisory committee member of the National Student YWCA, and a prominent African-American psychologist and educator of women and girls.³⁹

Maturity and Me exhibits much of the ambivalence contained in advice for girls

³⁸ Program Committee Meeting Minutes, 18-19 May 1964, and Bulletin #1 for Senior Girl Scout Participants, 23 February 1966, in National Senior Girl Scout Conference on the Home (1964-1966) File, Conferences Box, GSUSA.

³⁹ Cuthbert Biographical File, Box 35, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC; *Notable American Women: A Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Susan Ware (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 146-147.

in the mid-twentieth century. Cuthbert, who herself never married, outlined what public wisdom considered key elements of a full and fulfilling life for women. Marriage, of course, was of central importance. Tips for girls included polishing personal appearance and manners to be as attractive as possible to boys: “Starting with your own body, you want it as right and as prettily clothed as possible. You would like for your voice to have a nice ring, and to be able to say things in a way to have others listen to you with pleasure.” Girls were instructed to learn how to dress themselves in a manner pleasing to men, learning what types of looks men were attracted to and what types of looks painted them as less desirable. Seemingly without irony, several pages later Cuthbert criticized adults for “giving girls the idea that they are entertainers for men; prizes for them, or exhibits. Girls are taught to dress to catch a man’s eye, to please men in whatever way men say they want to be pleased.” While Cuthbert extended traditional understandings of girlhood that emphasized appearance and modest desirability to attract a marriage partner, she nevertheless insisted, “the most important thing about you is that you are a person, first, and a girl, second.”⁴⁰

Catching a mate aside, Cuthbert’s book offered a more feminist view on the life that girls should be preparing for as adult women, stating, “women in all societies and at all times have always worked. In our society, today, the difference is that much of their work is now done outside the home and women get a wage.” Cuthbert outlined the structural reasons for women’s increased participation in the work force after World War II, including an expanding labor market that required ever more numbers of paid laborers, the desire of women to contribute financially to the care of the household, and a rising

⁴⁰ Marion V. Cuthbert, *Maturity and Me* (New York: National Board of the YWCA, 1963), 11-24, File 14, Box 568, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

standard of middle-class living in the postwar era that encouraged many women to go to work so their families could partake in it. Cuthbert also insisted on girls' preparation for wage labor as a measure of self-protection, perhaps influenced by the reality that many African-American women had always worked outside the home for wages, and not just in the postwar decades. Sketching a world where women no longer relied on a man's income for personal security, Cuthbert declared, "The first fact is that every girl should qualify herself to hold a job, regardless of marriage. The second fact is that well over half the women who marry will work at some time outside their homes. You are most likely to be among those who do."⁴¹

Significantly, she also insisted on women's participation in wage labor as individuals. She insisted that the movement of women into the workforce could also be justified simply on the basis of the personal fulfillment working provided to the individual, writing, "A job is not just a way of making money but more and more comes to be thought of as a way of following a personal interest." While Cuthbert urged girls to educate themselves about professional training in traditionally female professional careers, including nursing, teaching and social work, she also urged girls to expand their horizons beyond these limits. And Cuthbert hinted that women's segregation into "soft" subjects, like literature and languages, could be explained by social pressure rather than natural abilities. Though women "have shied away from mathematics and sciences," she wrote, the cause might lay in the fact that "women did not expect to go into engineering and laboratories . . . today the need is very great for *good minds*, and science and industry beg all such persons – men and women, all races and classes – to consider preparing

⁴¹ Ibid., 33.

themselves to work in our fascinating new world.” This new world was one where girls “will need to learn to work under other women; or supervise them, perhaps. Or supervise men and women.”⁴²

Pursuing college and a career for personal fulfillment, rather than for economic or utilitarian purposes, was an idea only being articulated by a small group of educators in the 1950s concerned with equal opportunity for women.⁴³ Prominent among these educators was Jeanne Noble, Professor of Education at New York University. Noble earned her doctorate in education from Teacher’s College at Columbia University in 1955 and subsequently became the first female tenured African-American faculty member at New York University. As an educator concerned with the advancement of women, Noble also served as a member of the Girl Scout Board of Directors from 1960 to 1972, and as a consultant for the YWCA in their integration of Y-Teen summer conferences in the South in the 1950s and 1960s.⁴⁴ Noble’s research in the 1950s and 1960s was particular to African-American women, who, she argued, had for decades sought to balance vocational needs with the self-growth that accompanied a vibrant liberal arts education. Noble eschewed proposals for women’s higher education that sought to segregate them into domestic science or home economics courses designed to prepare them for their domestic role in life, instead crafting an argument for the psychological benefits of higher education for women – black and white alike – that considered the development of personal potential. “A college should seek ways of cultivating the seeds of self-reliance,

⁴² Ibid., 34-36.

⁴³ Eisenmann, *Higher Education for Women*, 65-80.

⁴⁴ “Jeanne L. Noble, 76, Pioneer in Education,” *New York Times*, November 2, 2002; Jeanne Noble - Personalities File, GSUSA; “Jeanne Noble,” in Jessie Carney Smith, ed., *Notable Black American Women, Book II* (Detroit: Gale Research, 1996), 295-297.

self-expression and of human warmth and understanding,” she professed. Preempting Betty Freidan’s case for women’s self-realization in *The Feminine Mystique* by several years, Noble insisted “college education should, above all else, help a person to know herself, accept herself and reach self fulfillment.”⁴⁵

Cuthbert’s and Noble’s presentation of work expectations and higher education for girls, and those being incorporated into Girl Scout publications, just scratched the surface of the many of the very serious issues facing women workers in the 1950s and 1960s, including unequal pay, sex discrimination in employment ads, and intense cultural pressure to enter a sex-segregated workforce in family-friendly (coded as “less serious”) occupations. Nevertheless, they reflected the increasing expectation among women’s activists and among girls themselves that higher education, paid labor, and even life-long careers, would be an important and enduring component of women’s lives. Girls’ organizations attempted to solve the dilemma of the modern American woman by encouraging girls to adapt to the competing pressures operating upon them through careful planning. Their program materials sought to introduce girls to the variety of options available to them, engendering early consideration of vocational and educational plans.

Other publications directed at girls encouraged them to begin planning for their vocational and educational futures. The Girl Scout magazine for girls, *American Girl*, was, like many other publications targeted to young women in the 1950s and 1960s,

⁴⁵ Jeanne L. Noble, “Negro Women Today and Their Education,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 26.1 (Winter 1957): 15-21. Quotes from 21. See also Jeanne L. Noble, “Future Educational Emphasis: Psychological or Sociological,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 25.4 (Autumn 1956): 402-409; Jeanne L. Noble, *The Negro Woman’s College Education* (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1956); and Margaret B. Fisher and Jeanne L. Noble, *College Education as Personal Development* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1960).

replete with ads for the latest clothing, makeup, and skincare products, beauty tips, and articles on home decorating and party planning. In addition, *American Girl* highlighted significant achievements of Girl Scouts, included numerous articles on career possibilities, and reported on contemporary Girl Scout programs and activities to keep members up to date with activities within the national organization and local councils. And it was widely read – as the popularity of teen magazines exploded in the 1960s, a 1967 article published in the *Wall Street Journal* ranked *American Girl* in the top five most popular girl magazines, a category that included the influential *Seventeen*.⁴⁶ The *Wall Street Journal* lauded the publication for “daring to depart from the timid, super-pure and often banal content that typifies youth publications.”⁴⁷ Articles such as “That First Business Interview,” “Lots of Room in Space for Women,” “Adventures in High Finance,” and a recurring series titled “Look Ahead to College” encouraged girls to follow the Girl Scout law of “being prepared” by planning ahead and considering a range of career options, while couching non-traditional vocations in the scouting language of adventure and exploration.⁴⁸

The YWCA’s teen magazine *The Bookshelf* enjoyed a much smaller readership than *American Girl*, but likewise served as the primary mode of communication between the national staff and individual girls. Articles such as “The World and Work: What Will I Be and How Do I Prepare?” encouraged girls to reflect on higher education and careers

⁴⁶ Kent MacDougall, “Some Teen Magazines Switch to Candor In Rapidly Growing Field Founded on Pap,” *Wall Street Journal*, December 14, 1967. The Girl Scouts of the U.S.A. estimated readership in the 1960s at one million girls; see Girl Scouts of the U.S.A. Annual Report, 1965, GSUSA, and Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, 24 May 1967, Reel 26, GSUSA.

⁴⁷ MacDougall, “Some Teen Magazines Switch to Candor.”

⁴⁸ *American Girl*, May 16, 1961, GSUSA; *American Girl*, December 12, 1961, GSUSA; *American Girl*, May 24, 1963, GSUSA.

as essential parts of a full and fulfilling life, but also as decisions that should be carefully balanced alongside domestic responsibilities. Citing statistics from the National Manpower Council's 1957 *Womanpower* report, girls learned that 28 million of all women and girls over the age of 14 already participated in wage labor. Thus, girls were encouraged to inquire about "pioneering opportunities for this generation of girls," and to seek out facts and advice from parents, teachers, counselors, and Y-Teen club advisers to establish that careful balance between marriage, family, education and work.⁴⁹

Girls' organizations also forged relationships with other women's organizations devoted to women's personal and economic advancement, such as the National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs [BPW], a network of educated, middle- and upper-class women that supported women's rights initiatives like the Equal Pay Bill. The Equal Pay Bill, according to scholars, was "the earliest objective of the [BPW] and one that had received continuous support since the group's founding in 1919," making the BPW a consistent advocate for women's equality in the workplace, though their legislative efforts were shaped by their class experience.⁵⁰

Business and Professional clubwomen, whose membership often overlapped with the Girl Scouts and the YWCA, believed the organizations shared a mutual interest in advocating vocational and educational planning for girls. Dorothy Lockwood Graham, the chairman of career advancement for the Santa Monica BPW Club, shared her reflections on her joint volunteer work with the Girl Scouts in the pages of the BPW's national magazine, *National Business Woman*, in 1961. She reflected, "I was a Girl Scout

⁴⁹ "The World and Work: What Will I Be and How Do I Prepare?" *The Bookshelf*, January-February, 1959, 3-5, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

⁵⁰ Rupp and Taylor, *Survival in the Doldrums*, 175.

leader before I became a member of the Santa Monica BPW Club several years ago . . .

The concerns of the organization with the problems of women in business and professions that so closely paralleled my own professional interests first attracted me to BPW. My Girl Scout activities, I always considered, were a thing apart.” She began to question that separation as her tenure with both organizations lengthened. “As we work for legislation and conditions to create a more equitable place in the world for women, must we not also produce the women to justify and benefit from our efforts?” Graham viewed her BPW membership and Girl Scout leadership as complementary, even mutually dependent, activities. The Scouts, she asserted, gave girls exposure to a wide array of vocational activities, which has “possibly a greater influence on the shaping of her future than any other vocational guidance or counseling available to her.” The goals of the two organizations, she concluded, “are identical.”⁵¹

Special events also provided ways for the YWCA and the Girl Scouts to translate their educational goals into tangible experiences for girls. National Y-Teen conferences and annual summer Y-Teen conferences that focused on alleviating racism and promoting internationalism also carved out space and time for girls to undertake career consultations with men and women in a variety of professional fields. These events introduced girls to women working abroad in venues like the U.S. State Department and the Peace Corps, and in a range of professional occupations from teaching, to law, to medicine.

Conceptually similar to Y-Teen conferences, Girl Scout Roundups also generated important opportunities for girls to meet and greet working women with non-traditional

⁵¹ Adelaide Burks Brady, “The Girls in Green are Fifty,” *National Business Woman*, March 1952, 4-5, 28; Dorothy Lockwood Graham, “Career Advancement Begins at Seven,” *National Business Woman*, March 1961, 24-25.

professional training. Roundups were giant “mega-camps” held every three years between 1956 and 1965 (a Roundup was scheduled for 1968, but was discontinued when the escalation of the Vietnam War strained the ability of the U.S. military to donate labor and supplies to the event). Attended by more than 8,000 Girl Scouts and an additional 1,000 to 2,000 adults, these massive camp gatherings represented the epitome of girl scouting in the 1950s and 1960s. Each girl who attended a Roundup underwent a careful selection process, and acceptance to the event was one of the highest achievements in scouting, available only to Senior Scouts between the ages of 15-17. Drawing upon the organization’s roots in outdoor adventure, the Girl Scouts billed the camps as the “largest gathering of women in the free world” and were meant to be the peak experience for girls in scouting. As such, Roundup was considered a leadership opportunity, drawing only the most committed girls, and was meant to serve three purposes: to provide girls an opportunity to meet and live alongside girls from different racial, religious, and regional backgrounds, to inspire a sense of belonging to a worldwide women’s movement, and to enhance girls’ practical experience in self-direction and skill-building. (As part of the selection process, each girl had to demonstrate the ability to build a fire and keep it going in adverse weather, to use knives, hatchets, and an ax, and to tie knots and lash a tent. In addition, she had to be endorsed by her troop as an active community member and avid service volunteer.) Of course, Roundups had certain limits; the cost of the program and the additional cost of travel to the Roundup location limited girls’ participation to the well-off or the exceptionally dedicated.⁵²

While exceptional in the sense that they included only a fraction of girl members, Roundups nevertheless embodied the spirit and vision of the organization. Roundups

⁵² Senior Roundups Overview File, Senior Roundups Box (1), GSUSA.

were held as a celebration of the Girl Scouts' history, but also as a celebration of women's culture in general, a forerunner to the public celebrations of womanhood associated with the second wave women's movement. Logistically, Roundups were huge affairs, requiring the services and cooperation of the army to provide supplies and support staff. To erect a city of 10,000 people for two weeks, security and medical staff had to be hired, roads were built to accommodate army and delivery transport to the Roundup site, water systems were updated or installed to handle capacity, sanitation systems were put in place, and thousands of pounds of food and other daily supplies had to be delivered. Because of their sheer size, Roundups also served as spectacular public relations tools for the Girl Scouts, drawing a rash of news coverage each year they occurred. Each gathering adopted an Americana theme like "New Frontiers" and "On the Trail to Tomorrow," drawing upon romanticized notions of an idealized pioneer heritage linking the past and future.

The spectacular size of the event, the overwhelming assortment of activities, and the sweeping descriptions of Roundup issued by the national office were meant to create a sense of amazement, and arouse in participants a feeling of belonging to an international sisterhood. Pam Charles, a Scout from Monmouth, Oregon, wrote to her Girl Scout council three days into her Roundup experience in Colorado Springs in 1959. Her letter was full of the wonderment and inspiration Scout officials hoped Roundup would produce in girls, as she reported, "Every girl here is widening her 'frontiers' and the frontiers of others. . ."⁵³ While the details of her particular Roundup experience are

⁵³ Pam Charles to Santiam Girl Scout Council, 6 July 1959, Senior Roundups 1959 File, Senior Roundups Box (1), GSUSA.

lost, we can recreate a typical day from a preserved schedule of events at the 1965 Roundup to understand what her experience might have been like.

If Pam Charles had attended Roundup in 1965, she would have arose up slightly before 7:00 am, most likely to the sound of a bugle calling her camp to consciousness, and stumbled out of her tent to attend a religious celebration based on her respective faith. At 9:30 am, she would have participated in a flag-raising ceremony, as the summer sun began to heat up the event site in Idaho, and thousands of scouts set in motion, crisscrossing the boundaries of Farragut State Park. Weaving through groups of girls planting trees with their troops or patrol units, past exhibit areas where girls displayed cultural items such as food and crafts from their region of the country, at 10:00 am she may have proceeded to Tent 424 for an individual career consultation on professional opportunities in the Girl Scouts of the U.S.A, or to the Forums Center for a career consultation on the field of legal work, discussing the profession with Mrs. Evans, a female practicing attorney, and Mrs. Hess, a “homemaker with legal training.” If neither of those opportunities interested Pam, she might have attended a 10:15 am forum in the Camp A-4 assembly tent asking “Do Minorities have Equal Rights?” led by Dr. James Eagan, president of the National Conference of Christians and Jews, or to a career consultation on social service work in Camp A-2 with Dorothea Spellman, a professor at the University of Denver. After taking a break to go swimming during the heat of the midday, Pam may have wandered to the Forums Center at 2:00 pm to listen to Julia Davis Stuart, president of the League of Women Voters, speak on how young people could become engaged with their government, or she may have attended a career consultation

on the Peace Corps, meeting with women who had traveled and worked abroad under President Kennedy's new international volunteer service program established in 1961.⁵⁴

The heart and soul of Roundups, and the aspect girls expressed greatest appreciation for year after year, were the conference forums that treated girls as active participants in the life of the nation and the world. Forums were held in both the mornings and in the afternoons, and girls brought the debates and questions back to their patrols to continue discussing issues as they cooked dinner over campfires. Post-Roundup evaluations from campers consistently highlighted their interest in forums and called for greater access to Forum panelists.⁵⁵ Forums such as "I Shape the World," at the 1962 Roundup in Button Bay, Vermont, sought to introduce girls to women who had made a wide array of personal decisions about their roles in life by inviting forum panelists that included a "young career woman," a "young mother," and a woman serving in the American Field Service Exchange. This combination of women was intended to highlight the forum's message that "there is more than one way to serve."⁵⁶ To underscore the diversity of options available to women, the Girl Scouts invited a broad range of career consultants to be on hand at Roundup, including representatives of traditional women's occupations, like teachers and education specialists, housewives, librarians, and secretaries, as well as representatives from nontraditional fields and organizations, like the FBI, the army and navy, a meteorologist, members of the foreign service, chemists, and veterinarians.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Daily Schedule, Thursday, 22 July 1965, Program-Forums File, Senior Roundups Box (4), GSUSA.

⁵⁵ Evaluations-Program File, Senior Roundups Box (2), GSUSA.

⁵⁶ Girl Scout Forum Guide "I Shape the World," Program-Forums File, Senior Roundups Box (4), GSUSA.

⁵⁷ "Career Consultants," Program-Forums File, Senior Roundups Box (4), GSUSA.

Relying on similar methods of interpersonal interaction and sharing of personal experiences, the YWCA's national Y-Teen conferences in 1959 and 1965 similarly sought to expand the horizons of the hundreds of girls who attended the events. The National Conference in 1965 featured seven hundred girls shuttled between New York City and Washington, D.C. to visit state agencies and centers of government. Covered by the *Washington Post*, ABC, *Life*, *New York Times*, UPI, CBS, and the Associated Press, girls fortunate enough to be nominated to attend a national conference enjoyed speeches by and conversations with notable women like Mary Dublin Keyserling, Director of the Women's Bureau, and Dorothy Height, president of the National Council of Negro Women. National luminaries like Vice President Hubert Humphrey also spoke, and girls participated in forums and dialogue groups on issues of employment and women's educational advancement. In conjunction with the national conference, girls across the country were invited to participate in a Y-Teen Folk Song Project, a contest advertised to girls through *The Bookshelf*. Tapping into youth culture, the purpose of the project was to "Sing about life as we see it today—the things we feel, the things we want to say about school, jobs, family, freedom, civil rights, war, peace . . ." ⁵⁸

While national Y-Teen conferences garnered a great deal of attention within the Association and the media, scores more girls attended events at the regional level, which, as discussed in the previous chapter, often targeted an agenda of racial liberalism. During the early 1960s, however, the YWCA increasingly incorporated discussion groups, speeches, and workshops exploring the topic of women's dual role as mothers and workers in American society. Some regional Y-Teen conferences were devoted

⁵⁸ Report of Music Consultants' Meeting, 24 February 1965, File 27, Box 628, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

exclusively to the topic of “Being a Woman” and included forum and discussion topics such as “Women in the U.N.,” the “History, Status, Role of Women,” and “Problems of Women.” At the 1961 New England Y-Teen Summer Conference, for example, Lillian Bye and Dean Joan McDowell of the Boston University School of Social Work educated girls on the history of higher education for women and on the status of women in education in 1961, highlighting the pay disparity between men and women who had attained the same educational levels.⁵⁹

Yet, participants in regional and national events like Roundups and Y-Teen conferences were carefully selected for their leadership potential and commitment to civic activism. The events in which Girl Scouts and Y-Teens participated in on the local level likewise included planning for careers and vocational education. As one example, Covington, Kentucky Y-Teens attended a career conference conducted by the regional director of the Delta Kappa Gamma Society, an honors society for professional female educators. At the conference, topics discussed included the low wages and low status assigned to teachers (a particularly outspoken girl stood up and boldly declared her opinion on the matter: “I wouldn’t be a teacher for \$10,000 a year . . . I make my spending money babysitting and I wouldn’t be shut up in a room with 30 kids all day long for anything.”).⁶⁰ Du Page County Girl Scouts in Illinois received vocational counseling at a two-day “Talkback” conference sponsored by the local council. In an interview with a reporter from the *Chicago Daily Tribune* who covered the event, girls

⁵⁹ Y-Teen Summer Conference Report, New England Region, 1961, Microdex 318, Reel 5, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC; Y-Teen summer conference reports are too numerous to list – reports for each region during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s can be found in the microfilmed portion of the YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

⁶⁰ Marie Smith, “Why Do Teachers Quit? Hot Debate Splits Teachers,” *Washington Post and Times Herald*, August 7, 1957, D3.

commented on their desire to learn skills that would make them self-sufficient: “anything that’ll help us make the transition from home or school into the world outside” including programs in “hospital service, merchandising, journalism, library, finance.”⁶¹ In a compilation of YWCA programs from the early 1960s, local associations showed they were doing their part to keep women’s issues at the forefront of girls’ consciousness. Programs highlighting educational opportunities for girls, conducting college tours, and discouraging early marriage were peppered throughout the reports to the YWCA’s Bureau of Research.⁶²

At the individual troop or club level, girls’ organizations promoted leadership development, skill-building, and personal accomplishment through everyday activities, such as badge work, classes, community service, and travel. Troops and club members across the country volunteered time at local hospitals to observe staff members; collected clothing, school supplies, and blankets for the American Friends Service Committee; donated household supplies to disaster relief efforts; raised money for UNICEF or the United Nation’s Children’s Fund with fundraisers like craft or cookie sales, or by putting on plays or talent shows.

Why were these activities, and thus these organizations, attractive to middle-class girls? Why did those who stayed involved in the Girl Scouts or the Y-Teens throughout their teenage years think these organizations worthwhile? For many, it likely wasn’t the career planning or community service per se that appealed to them, but rather the intangibles – a sense of achievement, feelings of independence and accomplishment in a

⁶¹ Mary Merryfield, “Today’s Girl Scout Talks Back,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 10, 1963, F1.

⁶² “Community YWCA Program in 24 Selected Subject Areas,” October 1961-October 1962, File 18, Box 243, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

female-only environment, and a sense of sisterhood and shared experience that were difficult to find in other venues and settings in the 1950s and early 1960s.

One former Girl Scout reflected on the lessons she took away from badge work and camping, traditional Girl Scout activities done with her troop in Nanuet, New York. A typical scout, she had earned badges in first aid, toy making, cooking, photography, art, hiking, sports, music, and hospitality, and numerous others. As an adult now, she commented, “I used to think we were being prepared to be homemakers, but I’m not so sure about that anymore.” As a girl, Scouting to her meant “having fun” and “learning new things.” Yet, she continued, at camp, “I learned to trust myself to stretch beyond what I thought I was capable of doing. I learned to hike, canoe, swim better, build fires cook outdoors, etc. I learned . . . how to really take care of myself.”⁶³ Activities like participating in an annual craft contest allowed her to develop her skills and exhibit them in a competitive framework, and let her celebrate her individual achievement when she won the craft contest.

Girls’ organizations could serve to balance the scales when other socializing institutions, such as schools, came up light. Growing up in a suburb of New Jersey, another former Scout recalled “sports day at school and watching boys do things that we were not allowed to participate in because we were girls. I vividly recall my grade six teacher lecturing us in health class about our duty to become mothers . . . It was all pretty oppressive and deadening and designed to make us accept our place.” On the contrary, her Girl Scout troop leader “did not seem aware that there were rules for girls . . . she was happy to have us pitch tents and sing loudly and stand up for ourselves. I think Girl

⁶³ Peggy Brady-Amoon, written interview by author, Boston, MA, 11 June 2008.

Scouts made me feel I could be independent and competent and serve others” all at the same time.⁶⁴

Another woman recalled that scouting in the 1960s afforded her the satisfaction of finishing badges and embarking on fun trips she might not otherwise have taken. Yet, she noted, “as I grew into my teens my appreciation of the organization changed. I still loved it for the chance to do fun things,” but the appeal of the organization shifted. She commented that she “also found an acceptance of myself as I was that I found no where else . . . I owe much of the self confident person I became to Scouts. I went on to go the [sic] college, pursued a career in nursing, and joined the military. Scouting challenged me to do something I did not think I could do whether it was rappelling down a cliff or making a public speech.”⁶⁵

Seemingly mundane activities like cookie sales also provided practical experience for girls in the skills of business – fundraising, salesmanship, and setting and meeting goals. For a former Girl Scout in New York, selling cookies “was a big deal for me as I was somewhat shy. I developed confidence in [Girl Scouts], by practicing in my troop meetings and with my mother, figuring out strategies, and then doing it! It certainly felt good when I exceeded my own goals – and got recognized for that!”⁶⁶ Another former scout recalled fundraising with her troop consistently for four or five years to finance a six-week long trip to Europe one summer in her high school years. Though she came from a relatively well-off family, other members of her troop came from varied class

⁶⁴ Pamela Walker, written interview by author, Boston, MA, 30 April 2008.

⁶⁵ Joanne Dumar, written interview by author, Boston, MA, 26 May 2008.

⁶⁶ Peggy Brady-Amoon, written interview by author, Boston, MA, 11 June 2008.

backgrounds, and fundraising was a conscious choice by the group to equalize the burden. The experience was an education in determination: “Instead of a situation where families were supposed to put up, probably hundreds of dollars . . . we spent all those years working together and doing fundraisers . . . all working toward that particular goal,” she recalled.⁶⁷

Traveling, in a group or alone, could be both exciting and liberating, and coordinating one’s own travel as a teenager could be empowering. Upon return from several weeks of travel through Europe with her club in 1960, a Los Angeles Y-Teen called the trip “the most valuable experience of my life.”⁶⁸ Fundraising for travel afforded girls opportunities to situate their lives in a global context; one woman recalled fundraising with her troop for four years to earn the money to travel to Switzerland, France, England, Germany and the Netherlands as a teenager. The same former scout, as a girl during the 1960s, attended a “Wider Opportunities” Girl Scout-sponsored event in Oklahoma, and coordinated her travel to the conference independently. After being dropped off at a bus depot 30 miles from her house by her Girl Scout leader, she threw her bags on a Greyhound bus for the trip from her home in Iowa to Oklahoma to meet another Girl Scout attending the event with whom she had corresponded but never met, and carpooled with this stranger’s family for the last leg of the journey. On the way home the next week, she boarded a plane for the first time and flew to Des Moines, hopped on another Greyhound, and returned home. The successful planning and execution of her

⁶⁷ Janet Kniffin, interview by author, tape recording, Cambridge, MA, 30 May 2008.

⁶⁸ “Y-Teens Abroad,” *The Bookshelf*, May-June, 1960, 4-5.

adventure led her to discover her love of travel, which has since taken her to more than 65 countries.⁶⁹

While coeducational recreational activities increasingly suffused programming for Y-Teens and Girl Scouts in the 1960s, girls also appreciated troop and club activities that maintained a female environment and valued women. A Girl Scout in the late 1950s recalled the joys of hiking and camping around the woods and lakes of Northern Minnesota, where she and her girlfriends could become “satisfyingly dirty” each spring at Camp Austin. Recalling a particular camping trip around the age of 11 or 12, she lamented, “either that trip or the next year’s, girls started to talk about boys and who liked whom, and ruined it all . . . I remember coming home dispirited and feeling something special had been lost,” as dating culture and heterosexual norms began to infuse her all-female space. Prior to that spring, “I enjoyed being part of an all-girls’ group that felt safe. We were just girls together having fun.”⁷⁰

The YWCA and the Girl Scouts fostered a sense of shared women’s culture among girls in a multitude of ways, from sponsoring large gatherings of women and girls at conventions, conferences, Roundups and camps, to sustaining a conversation about women’s issues in decades that lacked formal symbols of women’s rights. Girls themselves found independence and empowerment in the nurturing environment of female-only troops and clubs. By sponsoring a range of activities from regional and national events to individual conversations between professional women and girls, the Girl Scouts and the YWCA hoped to provide girls with a sense of the broadening range

⁶⁹ Jeanne Elbe, written interview by author, Boston, MA, 16 May 2008.

⁷⁰ Martha Tomhave, written interview by author, Boston, MA, 19 May 2008.

of options available to them as adult women in the 1960s and help them perform the mental leap from daydream to reality.

Conclusion

In the 1950s and early 1960s, expanding opportunities for women in education and work conflicted with a strong domestic ideology and a teenage world full of dating, dreams of romance, and the likelihood of early marriage. Helping girls coming of age in these years to grapple with the contradictory cultural messages that infused American womanhood figured centrally in the mission and program of girls' organizations. As demonstrated in the previous chapters, girls' organizations imagined themselves as constructing strong and well-adjusted female citizens who could lead the nation into the future. Applying their liberal maternalism to personal life, girls' organizations encouraged girls to develop individualized, personal solutions to competing cultural pressures.

Like many contemporary women's groups, the Y-Teens and the Girl Scouts rejected a uniform vision of womanhood that celebrated domesticity to the exclusion of other pursuits; instead, their version of womanhood combined domestic responsibility with support for expanding vocational and educational opportunities. They insisted on the primacy of women's role as homemakers, but likewise insisted on the need for women to find personal fulfillment in public activity, whether in civic activism or in paid labor. In doing so, they resisted identification with contemporary feminists, whose small cadre was widely considered militant and reactionary in the 1950s. But their purpose had feminist implications; rather than resisting broadening expectations and public opportunities for

women, they embraced them and sought to help to break down the psychological and cultural barriers keeping women from achieving both personal and professional fulfillment. In addition, girls' organizations continued to provide an outlet for individual achievement, leadership development, education, and female mentorship and friendship.

Girls benefited from this subtle form of activism that pushed to widen the boundaries of women's experience. Yet underlying the YWCA's and the Girl Scout's advocacy was a current of unease that their solution to the problems of "today's girl" was really no solution at all. Despite the rapid expansion of the organizations and their continual increase in members, Girl Scout executives took note as membership increase rates fell from 60% between 1950 and 1955 to less than 5% by the end of the 1960s.⁷¹ In spite of the 1963 restructure, which divided the program into four age levels rather than three, the organization repeatedly expressed concern and confusion about the difficulties of retaining the interest of older girls, particularly those in the 14-17 age range. Teenage program staff and volunteers in the YWCA displayed similar concerns. A nationwide study of the teenage program as the 1960s began, which documented membership growth in 85% of the 287 reporting community, also included troubling responses from Y-Teen staff members around the country who issued warnings of lagging teen interest in Y-Teen clubs. Numerous associations expressed concern about a lack of engaging program ideas, and a general sense that the needs of adolescents were not being met by the present program.⁷²

⁷¹ National Executive Director's Report, Board Minutes, January 26-28, 1966, 73, GSUSA; *Highlights in Girl Scouting, 1912-2001*, 55, GSUSA.

⁷² "Some Findings of the 1959 Teenage Program Study," Microdex 2, Reel 250, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

This sense of unease would compound as women's rights and civil rights activists began to develop more codified critiques of discrimination in the late 1960s and 1970s. The contributions of girls' organizations were tempered by a continued adherence to maternalism that subordinated individualism and independence to domestic ideology, a position that would become less tenable amidst a climate of reform.

CHAPTER 5

FROM MATERNALISM TO FEMINISM: GIRLS' ORGANIZATIONS IN THE 1970S

“The difficulties of helping girls prepare for an adult life which will tap the fullest potentialities of their womanhood can hardly be overestimated, chiefly because we have for so long been unwilling to face squarely the magnitude of the changes which have occurred in women’s lives, changes which seem to run directly counter to cherished stereotypes of the ‘feminine role’.” – Dr. Esther M. Westervelt, “Counseling Today’s Girls for Tomorrow’s Womanhood,” 1965¹

When Betty Friedan joined the Girl Scout Board of Directors in 1974, no one was more surprised than she was. “I was sort of amazed when I was asked,” she admitted to a reporter from the *Long Island Press*, a daily on the island where she vacationed in the summertime. “I was amazed because it is an establishment organization, or thought of that way.” But Friedan was certainly no stranger to shaking up and redefining the establishment, and she continued, “the more I thought of it, the more interesting it

¹ Dr. Esther M. Westervelt, “Counseling Today’s Girls for Tomorrow’s Womanhood,” in *New Approaches to Counseling Girls in the 1960s: A Report of the Midwest Regional Pilot Conference* (University of Chicago, Center for Continuing Education, February 26-27, 1965). The conference, co-sponsored by the Women’s Bureau and the Office of Education of the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, grew out of the recommendations of President Kennedy’s Commission on the Status of Women to enhance vocational and educational counseling for girls beyond “stubbornly persistent assumptions about ‘women’s roles’ and ‘women’s interests’ . . .”. See President’s Commission on the Status of Women, *American Woman* (Washington, D.C., 1963), 7-16, quote 13. Dr. Westervelt was an Assistant Professor of Education, Teacher’s College, Columbia University.

became . . . I see a lot of vitality in the Girl Scouts as an institution.”² As a young girl growing up in Peoria, Illinois, Friedan had been a member of the organization, and as a young mother in Rockland County, New York, she had shuttled her son to Cub Scout meetings. The Girl Scout Board now sought her advice on how they could better help girls “break through the sex role stereotypes toward fully equal participation in society and partnership in the home.”³ She went on to assist the organization for seven years, from 1974 through 1981, advising the Program and Training Committee on matters related to gender roles.⁴ This new relationship between the Girl Scouts and Friedan, whom many considered to be the founding mother of the modern women’s movement, had symbolic dimensions that went far beyond simple volunteerism.

Friedan’s nomination to the Board sent competing waves of elation and dismay throughout the Girl Scout organization. For many observers, the Girl Scouts seemed a bastion of Americanism, a mainstay of traditional, Judeo-Christian values in an increasingly secular and socially liberal nation. To them, girls’ organizations like the Scouts taught girls how to be “women” in the traditional sense of the word, by socializing

² Patricia McCormick, “Ms. Betty Friedan Joins the Girl Scouts,” *Long Island Press*, November 19, 1974; John Corry, “About New York: ‘The Great Earth Mother’,” *New York Times*, October 25, 1974, 33; Janice Mall, “Betty Friedan Rejoins the Girl Scouts,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 17, 1974. Clippings held in Betty Friedan Personality File, GSUSA.

³ “Biographical Information on Board Nominating Committee Nominee,” Board of Directors Meeting, 23-24 October 1974, Betty Friedan Personality File, GSUSA.

⁴ Jean E. Tuerck to Betty Friedan, 16 December 1974, File 1446, Box 120, Papers of Betty Friedan, 1933-1985, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts; Mrs. Howard A. Sprague, Chairman, National Nominating Committee, to Betty Friedan, 6 February 1981, File 667, Box 25, Betty Friedan, Addenda, 1952, 1960-1993, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

them in society's standards of femininity.⁵ Friedan's election to the Board of Directors signaled a drastic departure from that purpose and exposed the ideological rift at the very heart of voluntary girls' organizations – between their roots in traditional religious and civic values and their liberating messages of opportunity, adventure, and self-determination. While Friedan's election was a source of alarm for some, others expressed delight at her presence. One mother from Florida penned a letter to the national office proudly describing how her teenage daughter, after seeing a newspaper article announcing Friedan's election, "clipped the article and posted it prominently for all to see."⁶

Friedan's term on the Girl Scout Board of Directors came on the heels of renewed discussions about whether the Girl Scouts should continue as a single-sex organization. Whether they could have been called into question by the 1972 Education Amendments, whose landmark Title IX clause barred exclusion or discrimination based on sex in any educational program or activity receiving federal funds.⁷ Before the Education Amendments were revised in 1974 to specifically exempt voluntary youth organizations, the Girl Scouts revived discussions about merging with the Boy Scouts. Though the YWCA had considered, and then rejected, the idea of a coed merger with the YMCA in 1960, in recent years two other prominent youth organizations had bent to the winds of

⁵ See, for example, Mrs. B. L. Seglem to the Editor, *Odessa American*, March 26, 1977, and Annette Stern, "Girl Scouts Worse Off for Betty Friedan," *Ossining Citizen-Register*, March 26, 1977, Clippings File, Legislation, State and Federal – Equal Rights Amendment 1972-1977 Box, GSUSA.

⁶ Marian B. Fulton to Betty Friedan, 7 March 1975, Betty Friedan Personality File, GSUSA.

⁷ *Education Amendments of 1972*, Public Law 92-318, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 86 (1972): 373. Section 901, also known as Title IX, June 23, 1972. Title IX was amended on December 31, 1974, in Public Law 93-568, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 88 (1974): 1862, to exclude voluntary youth organizations. See Section 901 (a)(6)(B): "this section shall not apply to membership practices of the Young Men's Christian Association, Young Women's Christian Association, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, Camp Fire Girls, and voluntary youth service organizations which are so exempt, the membership of which has traditionally been limited to persons of one sex and principally to persons of less than nineteen years of age."

change and abandoned their sex-segregated structure. The Boy Scouts admitted girls to its Explorer program for teenagers in 1969, and the Camp Fire Girls, who voted to admit boys in 1971, reorganized its entire identity around a coed basis in 1973, becoming Camp Fire, Inc.⁸ If the Girl Scouts' National Director for Education Services, Dr. Gloria Fauth, had her way, the Girl Scouts would not go down the same path. She delivered a carefully prepared statement to the Board of Directors at their regular meeting in October 1973, making a case for why the Girl Scouts should remain an all-female organization despite the possibility of losing federal funds.

Fauth summarized a number of arguments in favor of the Girl Scouts remaining a single-sex organization, many of them increasingly familiar tropes by the 1970s. She pointed to the ever more indistinct boundaries of women's social role, as the number of middle- and working-class women in the workforce crept closer and closer to fifty percent. She noted the rapidity of cultural and political change in American society, which she alleged, more than ever, young people needed guidance to navigate. And she pointed out that beliefs about femininity in primary and secondary school education and counseling continued to leave girls with a limited understanding of their opportunities. Moving beyond these tropes, her language took on an unfamiliar political tone. Slipping between the third person and the first person, Fauth revealed her personal feelings on the matter: "The psychological rationale for remaining a women's organization should be clear: women need to see themselves as whole human beings, not only as an extension of the opposite sex. We need to be taught, at an early age, to be more independent. Dependence makes women passive, and tends to limit their motivation to fully explore

⁸ "Boy Scouts Let Down Bars to Girls," *New York Times*, October 18, 1968, 21; Helgren, "Inventing American Girlhood," 464-465.

their uniqueness as people.” Drawing on the language of the women’s movement, a provocative, diverse, and influential force by 1973, Fauth called upon the Girl Scouts to continue to “provide a rich source of liberated person-power for the future of our country.”⁹

As the Girl Scouts bent their heads in deliberation about how, exactly, to continue educating girls while acknowledging their inability to fully grasp how feminism was changing women’s expectations, the YWCA was reeling from the aftershocks of their 1970 National Convention. At the convention, a contingency of several hundred young women, many of them college age, blew the generation gap wide open by demanding the organization adopt a more radical agenda supporting unrestricted access to abortion, the legalization of marijuana, and the provisioning of adequate day care for working mothers. Pepper Schwartz, the spokeswoman for these “Young Women Committed to Action,” hardly expected to win support for all of her demands. But she hoped to “do a lot of educating in the process,” and transmit to the older generation of Y women a “consciousness of the movement.” The “young militants,” as the media cast them, threatened walkouts “if conservative forces prevail on all important questions,” and endured angry confrontations by older women who felt the younger generation was asking for too much change too quickly.¹⁰ Ultimately, despite tension and disagreement, the convention endorsed many of the viewpoints of the women’s movement, avowing

⁹ Presentation by Dr. Gloria C. Fauth, National Director of Educational Services to GSUSA Board of Directors Meeting, 24-25 October 1973, File 1446, Box 120, Papers of Betty Friedan, 1933-1985, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

¹⁰ Sue Kincaid, “For the YWCA – An Evolutionary Convention,” *The Cleveland Press*, April 17, 1970; Diane Monk, “Radicals Make YWCA a Target,” *Chicago Daily News*, April 9, 1970; Helen Fogel, “They’re Seeking to ‘Revolutionize’ the YWCA,” *Detroit Free Press*, November 8, 1969; “A YWCA Rebellion – Youth for Legalizing Pot,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 10, 1969; “Hand Out the Pill, ‘Y’ Urged,” *Dallas Times Herald*, November 10, 1969.

that the female sex was indeed subject to “myths, stereotypes and hang-ups that handicap women.” The 1970 convention body acknowledged that “If, as a group, we women could better understand these and the cultural, political and economic upheaval of our day, we would see beyond simplistic solutions and would rebel against the dwarfing profile of our sex that is etched by the media today and imprinted on society, one that reflects stereotypes and unsupported myths.”¹¹

As these anecdotes illustrate, the language and the ideas of the women’s movement profoundly affected how organizations working with girls understood, described, and conducted their program after 1970. The previous chapters have demonstrated that before the 1970s, the YWCA and Girl Scouts held a particular conception of womanhood that clung to an ideology of gender difference and women’s domestic responsibilities. Though their maternalism undergirded a liberal construction of female citizenship and often allowed the YWCA and the Girl Scouts to push the boundaries of girlhood throughout the 1950s and 1960s, their gender ideology lacked the reformist intent that would characterize their programs after 1970.

In espousing gender difference in the 1950s and 1960s, they mirrored many other groups working on behalf of women in those decades. The final report of the President’s Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW), published in 1963, demonstrated that even the highest circles of men and women working on women’s issues felt highly uncomfortable with the concept of equality between men and women. In analyzing the work of the PCSW, historian Alice Kessler-Harris concluded, “Whether traditional family roles were thought of as natural, as some argued, or as socially developed and

¹¹ YWCA Workbook, 25th National Convention, April 13 – April 18, 1970, File 2, Box 285, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

culturally desirable, as others suggested, mattered little.” Pretty much everyone agreed that women’s primary commitment was to the care of the home and family, and this assumption constricted the debates and discussions among commission members, much as it did in all other facets of society.¹² By the late 1960s, however, activists, legislators, and opinion-makers began to draw persuasive analogies between racial discrimination and sex discrimination, giving voice to the modern women’s movement. These analogies, combined with the domestic unrest and changing political landscape of the late 1960s and early 1970s, also gave the YWCA and the Girl Scouts new language to think about their purpose.

By the 1970s, the YWCA unequivocally embraced many of the tenets of the modern women’s movement and publicly articulated the complex interaction of race and gender in shaping women’s second-class status. Its mission of empowering women and girls through education and social services found expression in a number of new measures. These included endorsement of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA)¹³, increasingly strident support for women’s reproductive choice and repeal of abortion restrictions, and the extension of job training and career counseling programs among lower- and middle-income girls in schools and in Y-Teen clubs. The YWCA’s national body established an Office of Racial Justice and a Women’s Resource Center for

¹² Alice Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity: Women, Men, and the Quest for Economic Citizenship in 20th-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), quote 219. Kessler-Harris persuasively argues that getting officials, employers, and government organizations (such as the Women’s Bureau and the EEOC) to recognize sex discrimination in employment as a matter of structural discrimination rather than a matter of gender difference and personal choice constituted one of the women’s movement’s greatest challenges. The way they did so was to continually draw connections between racial bias and gender bias, an argument that many then found dubious.

¹³ The YWCA historically opposed the ERA, primarily because it saw the ERA as a threat to federal protective legislation put in place for working women. The YWCA reversed its position in 1973. See the Report of the 26th National Convention of the YWCA of the U.S.A., March 1973, San Diego, File 11, Box 287, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

disseminating information on women's issues and the women's movement, and centralized their teen program, making it smaller, more self-directed, and more attuned to developing teen leadership within the association. This action aligned with the program priorities for 1970-1973 voted upon at the YWCA's 1970 National Convention, which called for "intentional involvement of youth" in leadership and decision-making.¹⁴ Furthermore, the YWCA dropped their voting age to 15 and announced the creation of the National Teen Organization, a semi-independent wing of the YWCA directed by teenagers that drew on the momentum of youth activism. Taken together, these actions marked a new level of attention to the women's movement, to battling racial discrimination, and to fostering youth empowerment.¹⁵

The Girl Scouts, too, re-imagined their program as a complement to the women's movement. While they rejected the radical aspects of feminism associated with women's liberation, they aligned themselves with the moderate wing of the movement and formed direct ties to many of its institutions. For most of its history, the Scouts had maintained a policy of neutrality in politics, a practice mandated by their incorporation as a 501(c)(3) non-profit group and, more importantly, by a tradition that acknowledged the disparate political, social, and religious beliefs of its membership. Relaxing this long-standing custom, in the 1970s the Girl Scouts publicly endorsed the ERA.¹⁶ Concurrently, local councils developed controversial new badges, such as the "To Be a Woman" badge, which suggested activities for learning about women's bodies, the processes of

¹⁴ Convention Actions on Resolutions, Bulletin No. 5, 22 May 1970, File 2, Box 285, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

¹⁵ Report of the 25th National Convention of the YWCA of the U.S.A., April 1970, Houston, File 6, Box 285, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

¹⁶ Girl Scout Board of Directors Meeting Minutes, 29-30 January 1977, GSUSA.

reproduction, and birth control, and introduced new programs like “Woman and her Environment,” which experimented with consciousness-raising sessions for Senior Scouts.¹⁷ Programs like “Woman and her Environment” were initiated to “keep girl scouting alive,” according to Barbara Strong, Girl Scout Education Director for New York’s Suffolk County. Strong explained to the *New York Times*, who reported on the changes in the organization throughout the 1970s, “what was relevant 20, 30 years ago is no longer important today, and what we are trying to do is recapture that relevancy by meeting the needs of today’s girl.”¹⁸ Marjorie Ittman, national president of the Girl Scouts from 1972 to 1975, summed up the new tenor of the organization in 1974, declaring “That old, familiar cartoon of a small Girl Scout or Boy Scout guiding a feeble old lady across the street, clearly needs updating . . . Those of us who are committed to Girl Scouting have got to be flexible, able to change to the way we do things. We have to be flexible enough to see the world as girls see it—not as we remember it.”¹⁹

¹⁷ Joyce Barnes, “People’s Forum: The Girl Scouts,” *News-Sun*, Springfield, Ohio, April 3, 1977; “Battle of the Badge: Philadelphia’s Proposed Womanhood Badge,” *Newsweek*, July 23, 1973, 50; Peggy Anderson, “Father Schmidt vs. The Girl Scouts,” *Ms. Magazine*, March 1976, 16-18; “Suffolk’s Girl Scouts Becoming a Feminist Force,” *New York Times*, November 17, 1974, 147.

¹⁸ Quote in “Suffolk’s Girl Scouts Becoming a Feminist Force,” 147. Throughout the 1970s, the media reported consistently on the changing nature of the Girl Scout organization: Susan Nelson, “Scouting in the ‘70s – Is It Still Relevant?” *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 27, 1972, E3; Barbara Marhoefer, “Girl Scouts Learning Karate,” *New York Times*, March 18, 1973, 109; Chip McGrath, “The Gang in the Red Berets,” *New York Times*, December 21, 1975, 208; Leslie Maitland, “Girl Scouts Are Hailing 64th Year,” *New York Times*, March 8, 1976, 54; Jean D. Peale, “Girl Scouts Are Tracking New Course,” *New York Times*, January 22, 1978, WC1; Barbara Delatiner, “Suffolk Girl Scouts Now Stress Innovations, Not Badges,” *New York Times*, May 7, 1978, LI4; Nancy Rubin, “New Face of Scout Leaders,” *New York Times*, November 25, 1979, WC1; Mark Landsbaum, “Girl Scouting Rouses Its Social Conscience,” *New York Times*, March 29, 1981, SG1; Maria Shao, “Be Prepared; Girl Scouts Make Many Changes to Stay Viable in the 1980s,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 15, 1982, 1.

¹⁹ “Changing World Poses New Challenge for Girl Scouts,” *Chicago Defender*, November 18, 1974.

Oh the Times, They Are A-Changin' . . .

Debates about the purpose and function of girls' organizations took place when the foundations of women's legal, social, and economic status were being fundamentally challenged by the second wave women's movement. Historians typically point to the year 1963 as the beginning of the movement, when the simultaneous publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* and the final report of President Kennedy's Commission on the Status of Women, *American Women*, marked two important channels from which a diverse coalition working for women's equality would spring.²⁰ Friedan and her peers – generally white, middle-aged, middle- and upper-class women – comprised one of the major constituent groups that would drive the modern women's movement by creating the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966 to lobby the federal government for enforcement of sex discrimination laws and for new legislation to expand and protect the rights of women.²¹ The Commission on the Status of Women, which met in seven subcommittees on issues such as education, fair employment, and civil rights, initially did little more than urge for greater attention to women's vocational and educational needs in their final report. But the Commission itself served an important symbolic purpose by signifying a new level of commitment by the federal government to considering questions of women's equality, and by providing an institutional model for women at the state and local level to address issues in which they shared a common interest.

²⁰ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*; President's Commission on the Status of Women, *American Women*.

²¹ Friedan somewhat exaggerated her suburban housewife identity, having worked for years as a journalist for a left-wing labor union and having experimented with cooperative childcare in her early years as a mother in New York. See Horowitz, *Betty Friedan and the Making of "The Feminine Mystique."*

YWCA and Girl Scout leadership built formal ties with the women's movement early in its development by contributing to the work of the PCSW. Several representatives from both organizations sat on the various subcommittees of the commission. Dorothy Height, president of the National Council of Negro Women and long-standing member of the YWCA's National Board, and Dr. Cynthia Wedel, member of the Girl Scout National Board of Directors and former vice president of the National Council of Churches, served as members of the commission itself. In addition, Dr. Jeanne Noble, Girl Scout National Board member, worked on the committee on Federal Employment Policies and Practices; Barbara Phinney, director of the Girl Scout Personnel Department, joined the consultation on New Patterns in Volunteer Work; Mrs. Clarence E. Cortner and Miriam Healy, Girl Scout national staff members, worked on the consultation on Private Employment Opportunities; Mildred Jones, vice president of the YWCA's National Board, worked for the committee on Protective Labor Legislation; and Mildred Persinger, of the YWCA's National Public Affairs Committee, contributed to the committee on Social Insurance and Taxes.²²

After these women finished their work with the PCSW and returned to their respective organizations, the women's movement gained momentum. At the policy level, the 1963 Equal Pay Act and the insertion of sex into Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act fed the creation of the Equal Opportunity Employment Commission (EEOC) and finally extended the full protection of the 14th Amendment to women. These legal platforms aided women as they began to develop a language of sex discrimination that drew from the language of racial discrimination so effectively argued by the civil rights

²² Memo detailing GSUSA participation in the PCSW in President's Commission on the Status of Women Box, GSUSA; see also President's Commission on the Status of Women, *American Women*, for a full list of participants.

movement. A series of Supreme Court cases, beginning with *Griswold v. Connecticut* in 1965 and culminating with the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision, buttressed women's arguments for privacy and self-determination in access to birth control and in reproductive choice, further altering the legal landscape for women. And the ERA, which was originally drafted in 1923, began to see new light of day in Congress. Though the amendment ultimately was never ratified by the states, it passed out of the House of Representatives in 1971 by an overwhelming 354 - 24 majority vote, and was adopted by the Senate in 1972 after a similarly one-sided vote of 84 - 8.²³

In tandem with these legal victories, women began to challenge cultural discrimination in the form of gender stereotypes and sexual harassment. A younger generation of activist women who cut their teeth on the civil rights and student movements – members of the postwar baby boom generation – fed a liberation movement that was less focused on the legal and political work of organizations like NOW and more focused on the politics of cultural change. Activists in communities across the nation pursued a grassroots strategy of consciousness-raising, gathering women in small groups to talk about their common life experience *as* women. Consciousness-raising allowed women to begin to draw connections between their personal experiences, sex stereotypes, and gender hierarchy. Together, they forged a new understanding of their individual problems as systemic issues of sex discrimination, codified in law and reinforced in popular culture, education, and social relationships.²⁴

²³ John R. Vile, ed., *Encyclopedia of Constitutional Amendments, Proposed Amendments, and Amending Issues, 1789-2002* (California: ABC-CLIO, 2003), 177.

²⁴ Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Knopf, 1979) and *Tidal Wave: How Women Changed America at Century's End* (New York: Free Press, 2003); Alice Echols, *Daring To Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

The agenda of the women's movement included a number of initiatives that significantly transformed the experience of modern American girlhood. For instance, few public policy decisions have so profoundly affected the landscape of gender and public school education as Title IX of the 1972 Education Amendments. By far, the aspect of this law that had the greatest consequence for girls was its application to school sports programs. Sports are a fundamental development vehicle for the personal qualities of competitiveness, self-confidence, cooperation, and achievement, yet in 1971, only one out of every 13 high school athletes was a girl. After Title IX required that schools provide "equitable opportunity to participate" in sports, the number of high school girls playing sports jumped dramatically, from approximately 300,000 in the 1970-1971 school year to 1,645,000 in 1977-1978. By 1978, girls represented almost a third of all high school athletes.²⁵

The women's movement also targeted high school curricula. Activists worked with the federal government through the Women's Educational Equity Act (1974) to correct the segregation of girls into "soft" subjects like literature, art, and home economics, and called for the integration of women's history into textbooks and curricula.²⁶ Federal funds began supporting research to understand why girls generally failed to excel in math and science and what role inadequate counseling played in perpetuating the income-gap between working men and women. Other activists like Marlo Thomas, creator of *Free to Be . . . You and Me*, the best-selling compilation of

²⁵ Women's Sports Foundation, "Title IX Q&A," <http://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/Content/Articles/Issues/Title%20IX/T/Title%20IX%20Q%20%20A.aspx> (accessed May 4, 2009); Susan Birrell, "The Woman Athlete's College Experience: Knowns and Unknowns," *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 11.1-2 (December 1987), Table 1.

²⁶ David Tyack and Elizabeth Hansot, *Learning Together: A History of Coeducation in American Public Schools* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 257.

songs, stories and poems for children, fought gender stereotypes that were deeply woven into the fabric of children's books, television shows, and music. *Free to Be . . . You and Me* harnessed the power of pop culture to encourage young girls to develop as individuals, assuring them that it was okay not to conform to rigid expectations based on their sex. More straightforward texts like *Girls Are Equal Too* sought to present the history of women's rights movements in simple terms and communicate the ideas of the contemporary women's liberation movement to young girls.²⁷

As the women's movement slowly changed the landscape of girlhood, the grassroots nature of much of the movement's politics reflected broader social and cultural trends. On their televisions and in their newspapers, older Americans watched a national drama unfold in the 1960s as young baby boomers threw themselves into social and political activism for reforming society, often drawing on the language and spirit of participatory democracy, active citizenship, and individualism that had infused postwar education.²⁸ The energy and sway of youth activism was embodied by the four African-American college freshmen who, in 1960, planted themselves at the segregated lunch counter at a Woolworth's in Greensboro, North Carolina, and refused to leave. Their actions sparked a sit-in movement to fight segregation in public establishments that spread throughout the South. College students eventually joined their collective power

²⁷ Marlo Thomas, Carole Hart, et al., *Free to Be . . . You and Me* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974); Dale Carlson, *Girls Are Equal Too: The Women's Movement for Teenagers* (New York: Athenaeum, 1974).

²⁸ See Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland*, a study of the roots of the sexual revolution in Lawrence, Kansas. Bailey finds that college students in the 1960s challenged official rules and unofficial norms governing their sexual behavior "with the very same arguments about responsibility and democratic citizenship that university officials had used to buttress that system" during the 1950s. (50) Bailey's argument is consistent with my research on girls' organizations, although because her study focuses on colleges, she fails to take note of how a similar cold war-era language and approaches to social control extended to younger ages well.

under civil rights leader Ella Baker and formed the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), which quickly became one of the leading civil rights groups of the 1960s and attracted white and black college students of both sexes.

Beyond the civil rights movement, girls could look to an expanding number of young activists, many of them coming from the American middle-class, for inspiration and example. On college campuses across the country, young men and women began protesting what they perceived as antiquated behavioral codes (*in loco parentis*), restrictions on freedom of speech, and, eventually, the military-industrial complex and the war in Vietnam. Members of both sexes flocked to the politics of the student New Left, and organized within Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) to rewrite the concept of the social contract in America. Meanwhile, women of the New Left began applying carefully conceived criticisms of racial discrimination and anti-colonialism to their own experience as females within these supposedly egalitarian, forward-thinking organizations.

Popular culture, literature, and the media also reflected the politicization of the younger generation. Listening to folk music sung by the youthful and earnest Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, and Mary Travers, and reading books of rebellion and nonconformity like Beat legend Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* and Helen Gurley Brown's *Sex and the Single Girl* gave teenagers new role models for casting off the customs and politics of their parents' generation. Novels like Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* that satirized human society and harshly critiqued established authority further fed the conceptual separation between youths and adults, often referred to as the "generation gap."

In sum, as the 1970s dawned, political, legal and cultural challenges to women's second-class status demonstrated to girls' organizations that feminist ideology was successfully changing the meaning of being a woman in America. In some cases, girls' organizations were active participants in national politics and policy-making through their representatives. At other times, they were passive observers who witnessed the turbulence of the 1960s with an eye to the flood of girls who continued to cycle through their programs. In a flurry of conferences, conventions, and debates described in this chapter, girls' organizations reevaluated their own assumptions about maternalism as the foundation of female citizenship and reconsidered the consequences for girls of adhering to an ideology of domesticity and gender difference.

Two sets of fresh voices participated in this conversation. Like their slightly older counterparts on college campuses, teenage girls played an active part in redefining the outlook and purpose of youth organizations. By the 1970s, however, this interaction was far less a measure of postwar social science and educational theory than it was the culmination of broader cultural trends of youth empowerment, as girl members demonstrated comfort with using youth organizations as a site of political involvement and education. Through special working groups, conferences, conventions, and intimate conversations, girls sounded off on their concerns, including understanding the concepts of women's liberation, accessing non-gendered employment opportunities, and improving race relations. In doing so, they helped push the YWCA and the Girl Scouts more fully into the women's movement and helped them to embrace a more feminist definition of American womanhood.

Likewise, the presence of African-American women and girls in the YWCA and the Scouts was instrumental in the organizations' efforts to retool themselves as socializing institutions with a more expansive definition of womanhood unmoored from a white, middle-class identity. African-American women questioned the usefulness of maternalism and domesticity as frameworks for understanding girlhood and female citizenship in the 1970s and pushed for fundamental changes that paid deference to differences among women. Together, African-American women and girls insisted on understanding and interpreting the ideas of the women's movement within the context of the ongoing movement for civil rights and racial equality. In doing so, they vocally pointed out the structural and ideological barriers to African-American girls' participation in youth organizations, which white leadership had difficulty identifying. By insisting on a definition of womanhood that incorporated the needs and experiences of women and girls of color, African-American women and girls urged the organizations to move beyond maternalism and interracial cooperation toward programming to correct historical inequalities.

African-American Women and Girls Call For Change: 1965-1970

The national prominence of white-dominated liberal feminist groups like NOW obscures the fact that African-American women also were active participants in the policy-making activities that would advance women's rights in the 1960s and 1970s. Longstanding national organizations like the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW; founded in 1935) and the National Association of Colored Women (NACW; founded in 1896) coordinated the activities of African-American women from the black

elite and professional classes as they sought to “uplift” members of their race and their sex by providing educational and social services on the local level and by lobbying for an end to economic discrimination against African Americans on the national level. Though later criticized and marginalized for their class prejudices by some of the radical voices coming out of the Black Power and black feminist movements in the early 1970s, African-American clubwomen and their voluntary associations worked to keep women’s issues part of the struggle for African-American equality, insisting for much of the twentieth century that “a race could rise no higher than its women.”²⁹

African-American leaders in the YWCA and the Girl Scouts held long, distinguished careers in social service and policy-making that extended well beyond the boundaries of a single organization. Women like Dorothy Height, who led the YWCA’s Office of Racial Justice, were representative of professional African-American activists who worked for gender and racial equality through women’s organizations in the twentieth century. Height was in the YWCA’s Girl Reserves as a teenager, and her remarkable career began to develop in the early 1930s. Upon graduating in 1933 from New York University, where she earned a master’s degree in educational psychology, she became active in the United Christian Youth Movement. Through the Youth Movement, she met Mary McLeod Bethune, her future mentor and founder of the NCNW. Height became heavily involved in the NCNW, eventually ascending to the office of president in

²⁹ Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994* (New York, W.W. Norton, 1999), 24. Perhaps even more so than for white women, community organizations – the church in particular, but also the neighborhood association or the community center – have served as important sites of African-American activism in the struggle for racial uplift and equality throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. See also Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church: 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Anne Firor Scott, *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991); Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: Bantam Books, 1984).

1957, a position she held until 1998. At the same time that she was working with the NCNW, Height began developing her long career with the YWCA, hired initially as the assistant director of the Emma Ransom House in Harlem. She later moved from Harlem to become the executive director of the Phyllis Wheatley House in Washington, D.C., and then on to the national staff. She was eventually appointed Director of the Office of Racial Justice at the YWCA in 1965. According to one historian, the YWCA “impressed her because it had been the first predominantly white organization to offer positions of leadership to black women . . .”³⁰ Height’s lifelong career in social justice found a home in women’s organizations like the NCNW and the YWCA, and she served on the staff of the National Board of the YWCA for 33 years, from 1944 to 1977.³¹

Height moved fluidly between African-American women’s organizations like the NCNW and white-dominated, yet racially inclusive, associations like the YWCA, a talent that was shared by Dorothy Ferebee, Chairman of the Girl Scouts’ Task Group on Race Relations. The grandniece of suffragist and early civil rights leader Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, Ferebee volunteered tirelessly with both the YWCA and the Girl Scouts in addition to her professional career as a physician and medical director of Howard University Health Services. Like Height, Ferebee worked for several civil rights and women’s rights organizations simultaneously, spanning the American Association of University Women, the National Urban League, and the NCNW. Before her retirement in 1972, she also served as national president of Alpha Kappa Alpha, a prominent national

³⁰ Lynn, *Progressive Women in Conservative Times*, 15.

³¹ Ibid.; Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood*; Dorothy Irene Height, *Open Wide the Freedom Gates: A Memoir* (New York: Public Affairs, 2003); Interview with Dorothy Irene Height by Polly Cowan, 11 February 1974 – 6 November 1976, *Black Women Oral History Project*, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

sorority for African-American women, and as the national president of the NCNW between Mary McLeod Bethune and Dorothy Height. In addition, Ferebee served as a member of the Girl Scout Board of Directors from 1955-1972, and as chairman of the Scout's Task Force on Race Relations (formed in 1970), organizing a number of important initiatives at the national level.³²

Sara-Alyce P. Wright, who would eventually become the first African-American Executive Director of the YWCA's National Board in 1974, also favored racially diverse women's organizations for enacting social reform. Wright focused her efforts primarily on the problems facing girls, although she, too, held overlapping membership in another important African-American women's sorority, Delta Sigma Theta. Wright was introduced to the YWCA when she joined the Phyllis Wheatley branch of the Harrisburg YWCA as a young girl. As a grown woman, she devoted herself to teen education in the YWCA for the greater part of her career as its national consultant for the teenage program from 1951-1963.³³

Women like Height, Ferebee, and Wright believed strongly in the value of women's voluntary associations in effecting progressive social reforms. Yet throughout their lives they struggled under the difficulty of making white-dominated organizations truly inclusive and proactive about the different pressures faced by African-American

³² Paula J. Giddings, *In Search of Sisterhood: Delta Sigma Theta and the Challenge of the Black Sorority Movement* (New York: Morrow, 1998); Interview with Dorothy Celeste Boulding Ferebee by Merze Tate, 1979, *Black Women Oral History Project*, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts; Dorothy Ferebee – Personalities File, GSUSA; *Notable American Women: A Biographical Dictionary*, ed. Susan Ware (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 203-205.

³³ Lynn, *Progressive Women in Conservative Times*; "Sara Wright Buried, First Black to Head YWCA," *New York Amsterdam News*, November 5, 1994, 49; Wright Biographical File, Box 52, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

women and girls. Their criticisms mirrored the tensions between African-American and white women active in the women's movement in the late 1960s and 1970s.³⁴ As legislators, women's advocates, and the courts began to grapple with the limits to opportunity historically placed upon women by sex stereotypes and static gender roles, African-American women viewed their barriers to full citizenship in the context of sex *and* race discrimination, which were inextricably linked. Though some well-known women like Shirley Chisholm testified before Congress that "my sex has been a far greater handicap than my skin pigmentation," the majority insisted that a movement for increased rights and equality for women had to be sensitive to the ongoing struggle of black women who faced the double burden of racial and sex stereotypes.³⁵

Thus, rather than restricting their work to all-black civil rights organizations or voluntary associations, African-American leaders in the YWCA and Girl Scouts tried to highlight the relationship between sex discrimination and racial discrimination in American society. For example, throughout her career Height relentlessly urged the YWCA to translate its concern for racial equality, which in the 1950s took the form of integration, into a broader view of society. By pointing out the "organizational aspects of racism," such as the domination of leadership positions in the YWCA by white women, Height highlighted examples of discrimination and inequality that could be easily applied to sex discrimination.³⁶ She continued this work in her position as director of the

³⁴ Wini Breines, *The Trouble Between Us: An Uneasy History of White And Black Women in the Feminist Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); White, *Too Heavy a Load*.

³⁵ Chisholm quote in Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity*, 286. Chisholm's testimony was part of the House Hearings on Discrimination Against Women held in April 1970.

³⁶ Susan Lynn, "Gender and Post-World War II Progressive Politics: A Bridge to Social Activism of the 1960s," in *Not June Cleaver*, 114. Lynn notes that in 1966, the year that the Office of Racial Justice

YWCA's Office of Racial Justice, established in 1965. According to Height, the very establishment of the Office of Racial Justice marked a heightened commitment on the part of the association to equality; she commented that the Office moved the Y "from solving problems to changing systems . . . from simply 'giving equal opportunity' to creating an equitable society."³⁷

Both were a matter of import for the YWCA, which established a Resource Center on Women as a clearinghouse for information on the women's movement in 1970. It was hoped that the Resource Center would catalyze Y women's activism on behalf of gender equity by providing an education in cultural and institutional forms of sex discrimination. Teenage representatives assisted the Center in bringing "together into one place information on emerging trends in the women's movement, providing a place for an interchange of ideas and program aids among YWCAs around the country and the national organization, [and] giving impetus to studies, workshops and preparation of new materials in line with the program emphases of the National YWCA."³⁸ Ultimately, the Center functioned as a touchstone for local associations and clubs, providing reading lists (that recommended works like William O'Neill's *Everyone Was Brave*, Cellestine Ware's *Womanpower*, Robin Morgan's *Sisterhood is Powerful*, and the Women's Bureau's *Expanding Opportunities for Girls*), training sessions, news bulletins, and data

launched their "Project Equality," racial minorities made up only 25% of staff members in the national office, and held only 10.4% of professional staff positions.

³⁷ Height, *Open Wide the Freedom Gates*, 126.

³⁸ "Attention is Needed, Action is Called For: Teen Women Tell About Their Needs," Report on Teen Counseling Project Workshops, 1974, File 3, Box 558, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

and statistics to keep women and girls apprised of the successes and priorities of the women's movement.³⁹

Thanks to the efforts of Height and her colleagues, the YWCA's National Board understood the Resource Center on Women as a complement to their work for racial justice. Helen Southard, director of the Center, proclaimed that the Center was "concerned with the liberation of all women," but, she warned, "freeing them does not mean settling for equality with men who . . . may be perpetuating the kind of system in which all women can't have viable options." White women, she continued, could also be their own worst enemy by remaining blind to personal racist practices and assumptions that left "millions of both sexes . . . trapped in a societal oppression and sapped of the vitality needed to work for their own liberation."⁴⁰

With this understanding, the YWCA's national office introduced the Resource Center to their membership through a special issue of the YWCA magazine in January 1971. The feature article by Mary Abbot White, a member of the National Board and of the steering committee for the Resource Center, outlined the YWCA's position on the linkage between race and sex. "Both racism and sexism are systemic evils that must be eliminated," Abbott instructed, but, she cautioned, "women must set out to eliminate racism before they can effectively combat sexism. . ." The YWCA, she argued, was in a unique position to "revolutionize society's expectations of women," and, as an organization of and for women, could "bring a unique force that understands the

³⁹ Helen F. Southard, "Readers' Guide: Good 'News' re Women," *The YWCA Magazine – Special Issue on Women*, January 1971, 22-28, SSC.

⁴⁰ Helen F. Southard, "National YWCA Resource Center on Women," *The YWCA Magazine – Special Issue on Women*, January 1971, 4, SSC.

interrelation of these oppressions and the priority of struggle.”⁴¹ Any conversations about women’s liberation in the YWCA would have to take place with careful attention paid to the oppressive forces of racial discrimination.

Yet, the promises extended by these new offices remained unfulfilled in the YWCA’s work with girls. In spite of their efforts to use girls’ clubs as a site for eradicating segregation and racial prejudice in American life, as the 1970s began the YWCA continued to primarily serve white girls. More importantly, a notion of womanhood shaped by the white, middle-class experience continued to inform many of the programs girls encountered. This is not to say the YWCA was hostile to the needs of women of color, but rather the vision of leadership and personal development that the organization promoted often assumed, for example, that whether or not a girl planned to attend college was a matter of personal choice and planning rather than a matter of family income or of access. In this manner, as African-American women pointed out, the definition of girlhood constructed by the YWCA excluded black women and girls on an ideological level just as firmly as the segregationist policies and practices of the pre-World War II era.

Black girls in the YWCA vocally pointed out these shortcomings too, by issuing calls for the organization to reevaluate its vision of girlhood to account for their own needs and experiences. For example, seven teenage girls attending the 1970 Y-Teen summer conference in the TRYAC (Western Pennsylvania and West Virginia) region issued a statement of concern to the conference planning committee that made its way up to the National Board. In their statement, the delegates imagined future conferences

⁴¹ Mary Abbot White, “Racism and Sexism,” *The YWCA Magazine – Special Issue on Women*, January 1971, SSC.

where equal consideration was given to “both groups, BLACK as well as white,” with special attention to “BLACK awareness and identity,” as well as “HISTORY and cultural experiences.” To illustrate their point, the girls protested that in the conference fashion show, white standards of beauty and clothing and makeup designed for the white consumer left them with little opportunity for participation. More importantly, however, they noted that the seminar on “Sexuality and Womanhood” failed to address what they felt were the different relationships and gender norms between black men and women. Finally, they observed that the sessions on college counseling failed to take into account “another whole set of things we [as black girls] need to plan for and to accomplish before we can get to college.” While this other “set of things” remained unarticulated, the delegates clearly demonstrated the ways in which programming for girls grew out of a conception of womanhood based on white norms. Calling for “definite change within the program,” black Y-Teens made their dissatisfaction known to the leadership of the YWCA.⁴²

Dissatisfaction among African-American women and girls in the Girl Scouts was peaking around 1970 as well. The determination of national African-American Girl Scout leaders to work for greater racial equality in the organization was propelled by two seemingly positive developments. One, called ACTION 70, was a nationwide minority outreach and recruitment initiative directed at increasing diversity in the organization’s membership. The other, called Promise in Action, set up a plan to expand the number of African-American women sitting on the National Board by rotating white members off.⁴³

⁴² “Statement Made by the Black Delegates,” 1970 TRYAC Conference Report, Microdex 1, Reel 317, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

⁴³ Degenhardt and Levey, *Highlights in Girl Scouting, 1912-2001*.

Thanks to these new programs, optimism among African-American women was running high, but it stopped short at the Girl Scout national convention in Seattle in the fall of 1969.

The Girl Scouts considered the 1969 convention a public relations opportunity for enhancing their reputation in the African-American community. Wishing to broadcast their ACTION 70 program, the Scouts invited guests from several African-American groups, including the Urban League, the Alpha Kappa Alphas, and the NAACP, to attend the convention. NBC sent the host of their Seattle affiliate's morning talk show, a young, African-American female, to cover the event with her camera crew.⁴⁴ Much to the dismay of African-American Girl Scout attendees, however, the opening ceremonials set an unfortunate tone for the rest of the convention. Organizers had assembled a one hundred-person choir to entertain the convention delegates and guests, and when the curtain rose on the first evening, one hundred white faces looked out onto the assembled crowd. The paucity of African-American participation in the ceremonials, and in the rest of the convention's opening proceedings, generated palpable tension that lasted for the rest of the weekend and indicated to many that diversity and equality in the Girl Scout organization remained a hope, rather than a reality.⁴⁵

To address the shortcomings of the 1969 convention, Dorothy Ferebee asked the national Girl Scout office to set up a special task force on race relations, a request that was approved at the January board meeting in 1970. The first order of business for the

⁴⁴ Interview with Dr. Gloria Scott by Dr. Lillian S. Williams, videotape, n.d., during research for *A Bridge to the Future: The History of Diversity in Scouting* (New York: Girl Scouts of the U.S.A., 1996), History of Diversity Box, GSUSA.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

task force was to organize yet another conference, this one dedicated to “Scouting for Black Girls.” According to Ferebee, the mission of this conference was to “bring about a frank and open discussion of the Scouting program to determine more ways to attract black girls,” and to “identify ways in which the organization can make the program more responsible to needs of black girls.”⁴⁶ Not without controversy, the task force met resistance from some. Three board members (two white and one African-American) resigned over what they believed to be a blatant instance of intentional segregation. Women from one southern council drafted a somewhat ironic letter to the Girl Scout president protesting their exclusion: “If you happen to be a member of any other racial or ethnic group [other than black], you are by that fact alone barred from participation, and from the selection of those who are to go as delegates.”⁴⁷ But the conference went forward nonetheless. Pre-conference meetings in 40 cities enabled African Americans to draft and submit position papers outlining their local situations and detailing their suggestions for improvement. When it convened on a warm summer weekend in early spring in Atlanta, the conference counted 150 girl delegates, guests, staff members, and members of the national office.⁴⁸

The tension between the Girl Scouts’ white, middle-class vision of girlhood and the experience of African-American girls weighed heavily on the minds of the conference participants. To underscore the diverse experiences of black women in America, conference planners organized a panel comprised of “a woman from the urban ghetto . . .

⁴⁶ “Three Attend Black Scouting Conference,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, March 28, 1970, 21.

⁴⁷ Mrs. John T. McCallen, President, Tenn-Ark-Miss Girl Scout Council, to Mrs. Douglas H. MacNeil, GSUSA President, 29 January 1970, Position Papers File, Scouting for Black Girls Box, GSUSA.

⁴⁸ “Conference on Scouting Held For Negro Girls,” *Atlanta Daily World*, March 1, 1970, 2.

who knows the needs of girls forced to grow up in poverty,” a “Senior Girl Scout who knows the special interests and needs of black teenagers and the ways in which Girl Scouting meets or fails to meet these needs,” and Etta Horn, a former leader of the National Welfare Rights Organization.⁴⁹ These panelists uniformly declared the Girl Scouts to be “concerned with the women of yesterday.” While some noted immediate, practical concerns, such as the cost of uniforms prohibiting low-income girls from joining, others emphasized that girls’ organizations like the Scouts failed to truly prepare girls for the challenges they would face as they grew into women. Recommendations for improvement included educating girls on public policy related to health, education and poverty, since “any female who does not come from a financially well-endowed family, who marries and has children, is a potential welfare recipient.” Other proposals suggested forging ahead with meaningful sex education programs and embracing programs for assisting teenage mothers.⁵⁰

The conference provided a national forum for African-American girls to debate the meaning of girlhood in the Girl Scouts. Some girls agreed with the panelists, judging that “the way our organization is set up and the thinking that we have . . . is mostly built for that – the white girl – and it’s about time we tried to make a change so that it will benefit us more . . .” Others disputed the notion that an organization devoted to citizenship, leadership and education spoke to one racial group more than another: “Baby,

⁴⁹ Dorothy B. Ferebee, “Opening Statement,” Conference on Scouting for Black Girls, Atlanta, 13-14 March 1970, 9, Speeches File, Scouting for Black Girls Box, GSUSA.

⁵⁰ Conference on Scouting for Black Girls, Atlanta, 13-14 March 1970, 9, Speeches File, Scouting for Black Girls Box, GSUSA.

I didn't join Girl Scouts to turn white, that's for usre [sic], so you've got to define for yourself what is Black . . . You can take what you want and leave the rest of it.”⁵¹

Throughout the course of the conference, the girls identified a number of important differences between African-American and white families and communities that contributed to lingering discrimination and lagging minority membership. While African-American families were somewhat better off economically than they had been prior to the 1960s civil rights legislation, economic conditions continued to be worse for blacks than for whites.⁵² Thus, they noted, African-American girls faced structural barriers to membership. For example, since more African-American women and mothers worked, fewer had extra time to volunteer. Moreover, African-American communities had fewer funds to distribute among social service and recreational organizations, and families often struggled to afford “extras,” like uniforms and trips. Conference participants also agreed that the Girl Scout program failed to inspire pride in and recognition of African-American culture and images. To rectify this, they called for increased incorporation of black history, art, and culture into badge requirements.⁵³ Until the organization recognized these structural differences and unfulfilled needs, they argued, the Girl Scouts would continue to struggle in reaching African-American girls.⁵⁴

⁵¹ “Proceedings,” Conference on Scouting for Black Girls, Atlanta, 13-14 March 1970, 5, Proceedings File, Scouting for Black Girls Box, GSUSA.

⁵² According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 54.9% of black families with two adult heads lived below the federal poverty line in 1959. That number had dropped to 30.9% by 1969. See U.S. Census Bureau Historical Poverty Tables, <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/histpov/hstpov2.html> (accessed July 27, 2009).

⁵³ Dorothy Ferebee, Preliminary Report on the Conference on Scouting for Black Girls, presented at the May 20-21, 1970, Board of Directors Meeting, Speeches File, Scouting for Black Girls Box, GSUSA.

⁵⁴ “Proceedings,” Conference on Scouting for Black Girls, Atlanta, 13-14 March 1970, Proceedings File, Scouting for Black Girls Box, GSUSA.

Ultimately, the conference delivered a message to the Board of Directors that the very image of Girl Scouting – “the image of the middle class white Protestant girl” – needed revision and modernization through a variety of structural and symbolic changes.⁵⁵ At the heart of the debate was whether the Girl Scout program really encouraged African-American girls to take an active role in alleviating the needs of their local communities, or served to isolate African-American Girl Scouts from their community by encouraging them to embrace an idealized and unrealistic version of womanhood. As one Senior Scout put it, members of her community “say that [joining the Girl Scouts] makes us think we are better or we’re white.” Another girl declared that “you look like something sitting on a pedestal with your nice clean uniform on and with your promise and your laws and you’re no good to nobody but the Girl Scouts.”⁵⁶ Though “the Scouting program is a road to independence,” one position paper noted, “this picture, devoid of all social concern, does not speak to the solution or involvement in any of the real social issues of the day.”⁵⁷

Y-Teens after 1970

The combined influence of the women’s movement and the appeals of African-American women and girls prompted the YWCA and the Girl Scouts to consider innovative organizational structures, new modes of communication, and fresh political

⁵⁵“Preliminary Report,” Conference on Scouting for Black Girls, Atlanta, 13-14 March 1970, Speeches File, Scouting for Black Girls Box, GSUSA.

⁵⁶ “Proceedings,” Conference on Scouting for Black Girls, Atlanta, 13-14 March 1970, Proceedings File, Scouting for Black Girls Box, GSUSA.

⁵⁷ “Position Paper of the Concerned Black Membership of the Angeles Girl Scout Council,” Conference on Scouting for Black Girls, Atlanta, 13-14 March 1970, Position Papers File, Scouting for Black Girls Box, GSUSA.

positions in the 1970s. Individually, the organizations experimented with programs that challenged sex stereotypes and gendered assumptions, in particular by initiating new career counseling frameworks that strongly questioned the “natural” basis of a sex-segregated workforce. It was a process that happened over several years and took place through negotiations between girls and adults. Above all, it resolved some of the tensions between “domesticity and feminism” – the two “central themes” of girls’ organizations – and resulted in a turning away from constructions of girlhood and womanhood based on gender difference in favor of those based on equality.⁵⁸

Women’s rights and civil rights took center stage at the YWCA’s National Convention in Houston in 1970. Major priorities at the convention included the ongoing struggle to eliminate racism, the alignment of the YWCA with the women’s movement, and the facilitation of meaningful youth involvement, suggesting a relationship between the three. Conference planners invited a keynote speaker to address the organization on “revolutioniz[ing] society’s expectations of women and their own self-perception.” After considering a number of speakers, including Gloria Steinem, Barbara Walters, and Shirley Chisholm, convention planners selected Dr. Kathryn F. Clarenbach, a professor of political science at the University of Wisconsin, an organizer of the National Women’s Political Caucus, and the chairman of the board of the NOW.⁵⁹

Clarenbach set the tone for the convention by establishing a sense of continuity between the YWCA’s long history of work with women and girls and the present women’s movement, urging the Y to join in this “era of protest.” Deploring what she

⁵⁸ Rothschild, “To Scout or To Guide?,” 115.

⁵⁹ Convention Steering Committee Minutes, 17 November 1969, File 9, Box 284, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC; Ellen Chesler, “Lives Well Lived: Kathryn F. Clarenbach, NOW, Then,” *New York Times*, January 1, 1995.

called the “accommodationist or adaptive model of womanhood” that had dominated the past several decades, and which guided much of the YWCA’s teenage program, she told the audience that “No one, no woman at least, is asking any longer: ‘Are women discriminated against?’ . . . ‘Can marriage and career be combined?’” According to Clarenbach, those questions had been “responded almost to death.” Instead, she emphasized, “We are all moving beyond them to action.” She then turned to an exhaustive list of new ways that women were conceptualizing gender. Calling for equality in all realms of life – public, economic, and domestic – Clarenbach insisted that “women and men can no longer be assigned categorical ‘places’ – for example, ‘at home,’ ‘head of household,’ ‘bread-winner,’ ‘decision-maker’ – but that each individual human being must be encouraged and enabled to function fully in whatever combination of outlet his or her capacities dictate.” Somewhat bemusedly, she dismissed the small but growing backlash against the feminist movement that held up the specter of non-gendered children as a major threat to society. She remarked, “I, for one, have no fear of this kind of unisex. To those who worry about not being able to tell the boys from the girls I say: ‘For most purposes, we may not even need to; for those where we do, I have every faith we will indeed have no problems’.”⁶⁰

After Dr. Clarenbach concluded, Henrietta Tolson, an African-American executive from the Seattle YWCA stood up to speak on behalf of the 500 African-American convention delegates who had convened in a separate National Conference of Black Women just prior to the YWCA’s 1970 national convention. These women, from 141 Associations, met for three days to reflect on “what it means to be a black woman,

⁶⁰ Report of the 25th National Convention of the YWCA of the U.S.A., April 1970, Houston, 79-85, File 6, Box 285, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

developing a sense of our own black consciousness,” and how, in turn, the YWCA could meet the needs of black women and girls while increasingly empowering them within the national organization. To some, the separate meeting seemed to go against the organization’s historical commitment to integrated affairs. But, as one woman explained, the meeting of black women alone was “*imperative*. . . to deal with the questions urgent to our survival and liberation.”⁶¹

As Tolson and the 500 African-American conference delegates pointed out, challenging gender stereotypes that discriminated against women was a start, not a singular goal. Tolson declared:

We, as black people, have watched this rebellion develop with hope, concern, and suspicion. We cannot afford to accept a white middle-class program . . . I’m very much in favor of the liberation of women in terms of educational opportunities, the way they see themselves, and the way they see others . . . At the same time, I have to recognize what the nation is really in immediate need of and that is broad social reform which includes the liberation of the black women . . .”⁶²

The National Conference on Black Women came to the 1970 convention with a unified call for the “full force” of the organization to gather under One Imperative: “the elimination of racism wherever it exists and by any means necessary.”⁶³ For the African-American delegates, this meant finally addressing internal matters such as enforcing sanctions on local Associations that continued to exclude black women and girls from positions of leadership, increasing the number of black staff members and volunteers, and securing adequate financial support for YWCAs in black communities. It also meant committing the collective will of the organization to many of the goals of the women’s

⁶¹ Ibid., 55-56.

⁶² Ibid., 86.

⁶³ Ibid., 55-56.

movement, which had been goals of the civil rights movement for even longer. These included equal access to education and job training programs, enforcement by the EEOC of equal opportunity employment and equal pay for women, establishment of adequate child care services that recognized the social value of women's reproductive labor and wage labor, and affirmative action to increase women's presence in government and in public policy. It also meant making the organization more attentive to the needs of African-American girls, by offering study halls and tutoring sessions to bridge the education gap between black teens and white teens, incorporating black history and culture into teen programs and conferences, and providing more job training opportunities for low income girls through partnerships with federal programs like the Neighborhood Youth Corp.⁶⁴

African-American delegates weren't the only group meeting separately before the 1970 convention. A day before the convention began, 500 Y-Teens and their advisers met in the Grand Ballroom of the Rice Hotel in Houston to review their proposal for a National Teen Organization (NTO), a new assembly for teens.⁶⁵ Two spokespersons for the teenage delegation, Polly Povejsil and Lila Miller, unveiled to the assembly in the second day of convention the plans that girls had forged to transform the YWCA's engagement with young members. Povejsil and Miller led 40 girls in a short procession down the aisles and gathered in front of the audience holding placards reading "Teen Power."⁶⁶ Povejsil began by explaining the purpose of a new teen organization. Drawing

⁶⁴ Ibid., 258.

⁶⁵ "Convention: Teens Speak Out!" *Y-Teen Scene*, Summer 1970, File 1, Box 572, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

⁶⁶ Report of the 25th National Convention of the YWCA of the U.S.A., April 1970, 48.

on the language popularized by the youth movements of the 1960s, she expressed girls' desire for "a new kind of authority which makes possible our authentic involvement in determining and implementing the course of the YWCA . . . we call for more deliberate and decisive participation than is possible for us now."⁶⁷ The teens who consulted on the NTO set forth an agenda that they believed would provide for more "authentic" participation in the life of the Association, beginning with a bid to lower the voting age at conventions and in local association affairs to fifteen. Next, girls proposed to align the priorities of the teenage program with those of the national association – working to eliminate racism and to revolutionize society's expectation of women. Adoption of the same program priorities, according to Lila Miller, "indicated that the teens intend to become seriously involved in policy-making and are no longer content to be considered just a social club."⁶⁸

Whether they had ever been "just a social club," the NTO sought to transform the Y-Teens from a social, educational, and recreational club with leadership components into an activist political body with leadership development and equality as its primary focus. The formation of the NTO brought the postwar rhetoric of the YWCA's work with teens as citizenship education and an equal, active partnership between adults and girls to its full expression. The NTO was entirely self-governing; while adults and advisers were welcomed to sit in on meetings and convention discussions, the charter read that "[a]dults may not vote, but they can participate in discussions at the discretion of the chairwomen. They can serve as advisers and resources," but "it is requested that they work with teens

⁶⁷ Ibid.; "Convention: Teens Speak Out!" *Y-Teen Scene*, Summer 1970, File 1, Box 572, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

⁶⁸ Report of the 25th National Convention of the YWCA of the U.S.A., April 1970, 49.

and support their actions.” Y women agreed that the NTO would provide teenage girls with a more effective means for involvement at the policy-making level within the national body and would enhance communication among teenagers in local associations.⁶⁹

The announcement of the incipient National Teen Organization fulfilled a centerpiece of the YWCA Program of Action decided upon at the 1970 national convention, which was a commitment to youth empowerment. This commitment found expression in two separate resolutions about intentional youth involvement. The second resolution was an explicit program of action for teen empowerment, which read:

“RESOLVED, That the YWCA in Convention assembled, bring about empowerment of young women by

MANDATING the National Board to bring to the 26th Triennial YWCA Convention the constitutional change empowering any girl of the community, 15 years of age or older, who joins the YWCA, with the privilege of voting

ELIMINATING “seniority” (earned leadership) as a primary requirement for selecting leaders

PROVIDING leadership development for young members, including training in use of the YWCA structure to achieve goals

INFORMING the wider community of young women about the rights and responsibilities of YWCA membership

ASSURING young women under 17 of decision making power, locally and nationally

BUILDING into Association Review measures to assess the degree to which Associations fulfill the empowerment of young women.”⁷⁰

⁶⁹ “National Teen Organization,” 1973, File 13, Box 551, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

⁷⁰ “Convention Actions on Resolutions, Bulletin No. 5,” 22 May 1970, File 2, Box 285, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC; Report of the 25th National Convention of the YWCA of the U.S.A., April 1970, 273.

Following the convention, the NTO operated in an unofficial capacity until it was introduced for formal ratification at the YWCA's national convention in San Diego in 1973. Once ratified, the NTO became an authorized group, much like the campus-based Student YWCA. As an authorized group, the NTO established priorities for itself and all Y-Teen groups around the country that were in harmony with, but separate from, the priorities of the national YWCA, making it a self-directed and self-governing body responsive to the interests of teen members of the YWCA.⁷¹ The NTO laid out an equal rights agenda that translated into Y-Teen programs on the local level such as bringing African-American and "third world studies" into high school curriculums, and challenging "unequal high school counseling, curriculum and recreation" that continued to curtail opportunities for teenage girls.⁷²

Besides representing the wishes of teenage girls at triennial YWCA conventions, the NTO created new channels of communication between girls. The NTO replaced *The Bookshelf*, the publication produced by the YWCA national office for Y-Teen club members and advisers, with *Y-Teen Scene*, a new publication created, directed, and distributed by girls. Published four times a year and sent to members and to youth program leaders in local associations, *Y-Teen Scene* allowed girls to communicate directly with one another through articles and through a "Dear Panel" column for "teens who want to present a problem they are having in their group of YWCA and who are asking for assistance."⁷³ The new publication included artwork, creative writing, and

⁷¹ "National Teen Organization," 1973, File 13, Box 551, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC; "What is NTO?" File 2, Box 289, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ida Sloane Snyder, Director of Communications, to YWCA Staff, File 6, Box 572, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC. After 1973, *Y-Teen Scene* was renamed *Teen Freedom*.

journalistic articles written by teenage girls and was used as a tool to communicate the activities of local associations that furthered the elimination of racism, the equality of women, and the empowerment of girls. In one article, Peoria, Illinois teens described the Black Culture Center they created for the youth in their community. Funded by the local United Way and through various charitable organizations, the Center provided social services to teens such as running buses in the summer to local parks, offering personal counseling services, and holding classes and workshops on African-American history, arts, and culture.⁷⁴ Within the early issues of *Y-Teen Scene*, girls like Elaine Toth, of Easton, Pennsylvania, also wrote in to request more editorial and article space “in the magazine informing the readers what, when and where the women’s movement stands for and its progress,” in the interest of “contin[uing] and build[ing] a movement in the YW of youth empowerment. . .”⁷⁵ Articles like “Teen Viewpoints on Women’s Liberation” appeared in response, opening debates on prescient issues such as whether equality could be achieved without access to legal abortion and free day care.⁷⁶

Taking their lead from the NTO, adult women in the YWCA turned to teenage girls to identify their own program needs in the 1970s. To do so, the Resource Center on Women sponsored a series of workshops around the country in the early 1970s known as the “Teen Counseling Project.” The project looked remarkably like consciousness-raising for girls. Across the country, Y-Teens met in small groups to share stories of keenly felt sex discrimination affecting their daily lives. For example, one girl described the insult

⁷⁴ “Ashanti Umoja: A Black Culture Center for Teens of the Inner City,” *Y-Teen Scene*, Summer 1970, File 1, Box 572, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

⁷⁵ Elaine Toth, Letter to the Editor, *Y-Teen Scene*, Summer 1971, File 1, Box 572, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

⁷⁶ Barbara Nunes, “Teen Viewpoints on Women’s Liberation,” *Y-Teen Scene*, Summer 1971, File 1, Box 572, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

she felt when her school treated her basketball team differently than the boys team. She began, “Our high school made Public City Champs, right? . . . We went up to city finals and made the papers and all, and the school told us ‘good luck’! . . . The boys go all over, they get banners, n’ pins, n’ everything,” and yet, she cried, “we get a ‘good luck’ letter.” One after another, the girls sounded off on issues that merely a decade before would have been unheard of, such as gaining access to reliable sex education and to birth control without parental consent, and to career counseling and education free from racial and sex discrimination.⁷⁷

Through the Teen Counseling Project, girls overwhelmingly identified employment discrimination as their biggest concern. This priority gave direction to the YWCA’s work with teens in the late 1970s. As 16-year-old Fredi Brown wrote in the pages of *Y-Teen Scene* in 1971, “teen females have a valid gripe in terms of women’s liberation. In school we are urged to become nurses and secretaries . . . why not doctors and lawyers? . . . Some say that women are falling off their pedestal. I think it should be considered that a pedestal wasn’t asked for in the first place – not a pedestal that would close the doors of advancement to women.”⁷⁸ Taking issue with high school and college classes that continued to channel them into women’s traditionally lower-wage jobs, girls around the nation shouted, “We need help in finding *good* jobs, not maid’s work.” School systems provided little relief, according to girls who related stories of guidance counselors who failed to make them aware of the requirements necessary for college or

⁷⁷ “Cause for Action: Report of the Proposal for Determining the Needs if Teenage Women and the Educational Services They Require in a Changing World,” 1973, File 4, Box 558, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

⁷⁸ Fredi Brown, Letter to the Editor, *Y-Teen Scene*, Winter 1970-1971, File 1, Box 572, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

other post-graduation endeavors. One girl described being turned away by potential employers because “they said it was ‘a guy’s’ job.” As another summed the matter up by bemoaning, “The counselors deal mostly with boys.”⁷⁹

Based on the input of the NTO and the Teen Counseling Project, the YWCA determined that career planning and assistance was among the greatest needs of girls in the 1970s. It was also a familiar program area that could be adapted to the current social and political climate.⁸⁰ Moreover, employment discrimination was an issue that faced girls of all racial and ethnic groups, and African-American and white women in the YWCA could agree upon the centrality of economic inequality in the lives of both black and white girls. Thus, Y leaders advocated for attention to the cultural forces that worked against girls’ realization of economic independence and personal fulfillment. To this end, the national office organized a job training and career counseling initiative among local associations beginning in 1974. Consultants from local associations around the nation attended a meeting on “The Job Market and Career Development for Teen Women” at the national headquarters to “come up with guidelines for the establishment of centers in local associations, where these needs could best met.”⁸¹ On the first day, conversations focused on current job forecasts and how racism and sexism affected a girl’s ability to find good employment. The second day delved deeper into counseling, education, and

⁷⁹ “Attention is Needed, Action is Called For: Teen Women Tell About Their Needs,” a report of the Teen Counseling Project Workshops, 1974, File 3, Box 558, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC; “Cause for Action: Report of the Proposal for Determining the Needs if Teenage Women and the Educational Services They Require in a Changing World,” 1973, File 4, Box 558, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

⁸⁰ Report of the Teen Counseling Project, 1974, File 2, Box 558, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC. The report summarizes the findings of 1,112 questionnaires sent out to a diverse group of teens in four different regions of the US. It presents data that supports the conclusion that the primary concern of teenage girls was job training, which was ranked first by all racial and ethnic groups.

⁸¹ “Consultation on the Job Market and Career Development for Teen Women,” 1974, File 14, Box 553, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

training, as well matters such as union membership. The third day was a collaborative workshop focused on building program models for local associations. Guests included women from the Women's Bureau, the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, and the group Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW). Juliet Brudney, Executive Director of the Boston YWCA, also spoke on behalf of her association's "Project Model," along with women from the Los Angeles and Denver YWCAs.⁸²

Brudney spoke of the Boston YWCA's nascent vocational education program called "Fortune Telling: A Program for Girls about Women, Work, and Nontraditional Occupations," which was eventually unveiled in 1977.⁸³ "Fortune Telling" consisted of a series of "conversations" designed to acquaint girls with non-traditional careers for women. Each "conversation" directed girls to resources about educational requirements, skills, and wage scales, and prompted them to research colleges and vocational schools appropriate to their career interests. Workbooks asked girls to research the special difficulties women faced in securing jobs traditionally coded as "male." Developed within the Boston YWCA and piloted within the Boston Public School Department, "Fortune Telling" eventually gained funding through the federal Women's Educational Equity Act.⁸⁴ The "Fortune Telling" program filled a crucial gap in women's education; according to Marcie Hershman, a Boston YWCA spokesperson, "[Y]oung women need

⁸² "Consultation on the Job Market and Career Development for Teen Women," 1974, File 14, Box 553, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

⁸³ Boston Young Women's Christian Association, "Fortune Telling: A Program for Girls about Women, Work, and Nontraditional Occupations," 1977, Box 82, Boston Young Women's Christian Association, Records 1858-1988, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

⁸⁴ "Fortune Telling: A Program for Girls About Women, Work, and Nontraditional Occupations," File 2032, Box 82, Boston Young Women's Christian Association, Records 1858-1988, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

help undoing the pervasive cultural bias that has steered them toward solely female work options. All occupational preparation programs are now open to both sexes, but teenage girls lack the knowledge and confidence to break away from old patterns and pursue fields new to women.”⁸⁵

“Fortune Telling” also included an overview of recent sex discrimination legislation, which suggests just how far the legal landscape for women had changed in the past decade. The educational materials discussed the implications of recent state ERAs and efforts to eliminate sex biases in job training and hiring. The program stressed that combating “stereotypical attitudes concerning sex roles” required careful and sustained support of girls by educators, counselors, and community institutions like the YWCA. Girls were to become conversant with overt forms of sex discrimination, such as the wage gap between men and women. For example, the workbook asked girls to consider questions such as “Are working women who are the sole support of their children able to support their families adequately?”⁸⁶ Other conversations sought to expose more implicit discrimination based on gendered assumptions of ability, deconstructing static categories of labor and value based on gender: “‘Male’ skills produce a better paycheck than ‘female’ skills. But don’t be discouraged. You can turn those BAD NEWS cards around. When you and your Fortune Teller talk together next

⁸⁵ Press Release, 14 November 1977, 3, File 2029, Box 82, Boston Young Women’s Christian Association, Records 1858-1988, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

⁸⁶ Student Notebook, 8, in “Fortune Telling: A Program for Girls About Women, Work, and Nontraditional Occupations,” Box 82, Boston Young Women’s Christian Association, Records 1858-1988, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

time, you'll hear some GOOD NEWS . . . about women learning 'male' skills . . . and earning as much as men.”⁸⁷

The “Fortune Telling” program was a model for job training and career counseling programs for teen girls in YWCAs nationwide. It, and other locally-developed programs like it, built on the YWCA’s traditional efforts in engendering career planning and skill building among teenage girls. However, in seeking to overcome sex stereotypes rather than working within them, “Fortune-Telling” marked a significant change in the way that girls’ organizations understood womanhood in the 1970s, and pointed up a new understanding of their purpose as a socializing institution working with young women, black and white. Though the national YWCA already advocated for the ERA and other legislation to eliminate sex biases in job training and hiring, they knew from experience that “the vast majority of girls and women still suffer the effects of long-standing and pervasive sex bias, and until these effects are overcome, their occupational prognosis remains grim.”⁸⁸ The rationale was simple: “however excellent the mandates, laws alone cannot improve understanding among students of newly broadened educational and occupational options or change stereotypical attitudes concerning sex roles.”⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Student Notebook, 11, in “Fortune Telling: A Program for Girls About Women, Work, and Nontraditional Occupations,” Box 82, Boston Young Women’s Christian Association, Records 1858-1988, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

⁸⁸ Guidelines for Fortune Tellers, 5, in “Fortune Telling: A Program for Girls About Women, Work, and Nontraditional Occupations,” Box 82, Boston Young Women’s Christian Association, Records 1858-1988, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

Girl Scouts After 1970

While changes in the YWCA and its teen program in the 1970s were quite grassroots in nature, changes in the Girl Scouts came primarily from the top, spearheaded by their first African-American president, Gloria D. Scott. Scott combined sustained attention to racial inclusivity in the organization with a ready willingness to update the organization as an appendage of the liberal feminist movement. An educator and noted lecturer, Scott had organized campus Scout groups at Knoxville College in the late 1960s, where she worked as a dean of students after receiving her Ph.D. in higher education from Indiana University in 1965. She joined the Girl Scout Board of Directors in 1969 and served for six years, until she was elected as national president at the young age of 37. Scott was instrumental in driving many changes in the Girl Scouts' program in the 1970s, incorporating principles from both the civil rights and women's movements.⁹⁰

Her connection with the organization began in her youth. Scott initially became involved with the Girl Scouts around the age of 13 in her hometown of Houston, Texas, where she was also a member of various other community organizations (including the Y-Teens from 1949-1955). Because the cost of a Girl Scout uniform was prohibitively high for her family, she had to wait to join the organization until she could work part-time and could pay dues and expenses out of her own earnings. At the time, Houston's Girl Scout Council operated under a segregated structure, with one executive director for white troops and an African-American executive director for African-American troops, and an all-white Board of Directors. Her all-black troop was sponsored by the local

⁹⁰ Gloria D. Scott – Personalities File, GSUSA.

congregational church in Houston and was only one of several troops in her neighborhood, the third ward.⁹¹

The leadership ethos of the Girl Scouts resonated with Scott's community during her childhood in Houston. Her mother and other women in the community embraced the educational opportunities and character development that the Scouts and other middle-class girls' organizations offered to their daughters. The substance of their beliefs was that "You have to learn, because once you learn, no one else can take that from you." Because of the double burden of her color and her sex, Scott reminisced, "They would say to us, 'You have to know more, you have to be better, and so we're going to try to equip you to do this'." The adults around her, and later Scott herself, understood the presence of strong girls' organizations in her community as vital to the work of respectability and racial uplift. Scott attributed her later successes in life to the adults in her community who felt keenly the political potential of organizations like the YWCA and the Girl Scouts. The expectation that she would develop into a confident, active, and intelligent young woman was "a powerful, driving force" in her life, and was advanced by her teachers, her mother, and her church-members alike. That her role models and motivators were largely women, she noted later, set a powerful example for her about a construction of womanhood that valued self-sufficiency, leadership, knowledge, and love.⁹²

⁹¹ Interview with Dr. Gloria Scott by Dr. Lillian S. Williams, videotape, n.d., during research for *A Bridge to the Future: The History of Diversity in Scouting* (New York: Girl Scouts of the U.S.A., 1996), History of Diversity Box, GSUSA.

⁹² Ibid.

As a college student at Indiana University in the late 1950s, Scott joined her campus Delta Sigma Theta sorority chapter, and it was through this organization that she tapped into the network of African-American women who would become important mentors in her life, including Dr. Dorothy Ferebee, Dorothy Height, and Dr. Jeanne Noble. Scott first formed a relationship with Dr. Noble when Noble came to Indiana University to speak to Scott's Delta Sigma Theta chapter. It was through her relationship with Dr. Noble that Gloria Scott began working with the national office of the Girl Scouts.

She was initially cautious when Noble suggested her nomination to the Girl Scouts' Board, but Scott unhesitatingly built on the momentum for change within the organization that ACTION 70, Promise in Action, and the Conference on Scouting for Black Girls provided when she took the reins as president in 1975. While in office, Scott set in motion plans to carry out the recommendations of the Conference on Scouting for Black Girls. Under her watch, the number of African-American volunteers and paid staff expanded and African-American girl membership grew. The Girl Scouts forged relationships with Delta Sigma Theta, the NAACP, and the NCNW, attending the annual conventions of the latter two groups in 1977.⁹³ The national office established a Special Committee on Minority Presence that reviewed Girl Scout publications, resulting in a new handbook in 1977, entitled *Worlds To Explore*, which featured multiracial and multiethnic groups of girls.⁹⁴ Through new affirmative action policies, minority staff membership grew significantly, jumping to 26.4% by February of 1975.⁹⁵ The

⁹³ Williams, *A Bridge to the Future*.

⁹⁴ *Worlds To Explore*, 1977, GSUSA.

organization also reinstated the collection of racial data of girl members in 1977. By 1979, African-American girl membership had climbed to 7.2%, more than triple what it had been in 1949, the last year data was collected.⁹⁶ In some locations, such as the Spanish Trails Council in California, minority membership reached 24% of the council's 13,540 girls.⁹⁷

In keeping with this spirit of equality of opportunity, Scott also urged the Girl Scouts to align itself with the feminist principles embodied by the women's movement. A press release announcing her election as national president established the tenor of her administration. Quoting Scott, the press release noted that the Scouts "had its birth in 1912 during the height of the struggle for women's rights," and would certainly have "a significant role to play in the present search for full human development."⁹⁸ Scott, whom the news media described as "personify[ing] the feminist attitude many see implied in the nonadmission of boys to the organization,"⁹⁹ entered her term as president in 1975 with a ten-point agenda committed to "anticipat[ing] and initiat[ing] change." Her agenda outlined her commitment to the women's movement, including "Understand[ing] the difference between the words political and partisan and thereby not let[ing] the decade of

⁹⁵ Girl Scouts of the U.S.A. Annual Report, 1975, GSUSA.

⁹⁶ Maria Shao, "'Be Prepared': The Girl Scouts Make Many Changes to Stay Viable in the 1980s," *Wall Street Journal*, July 15, 1982, 1; Florence McClure, Research and Statistical Section, to Directors of Departments, Divisions and Sections, and to National Staff in the Regions, 13 June 1951, General Correspondence 1949-1961 File, Civil Rights Box, GSUSA.

⁹⁷ Mark Landsbaum, "Girl Scouting Rouses Its Social Conscience," *Los Angeles Times*, March 29, 1981, SG1.

⁹⁸ Press Release, 29 October 1975, Gloria D. Scott – Personalities File, GSUSA.

⁹⁹ Tom Zito, "No Room for Boys in Girl Scouts," *Washington Post*, date unknown. Clipping received by the Girl Scout National Board Office on 16 December 1975, GSUSA.

the international women's year and contemporary women's movement pass us by.”¹⁰⁰

Her major initiatives focused on the concept of relevancy: to “provide for self renewal of Girl Scouting as the major dynamic organization providing for the development of all American girls,” to “be involved in change rather than simply existing in it and being shaped by it,” and to “be on the cutting edge of pushing ahead to new horizons.”¹⁰¹ While none of these initiatives articulated a concrete plan for actualizing the ideals laid forth, Dr. Scott's language stressed themes of modernity, relevancy, and adaptability. For support, Scott offered the words of Joan Bennet, a high school senior and Girl Scout in Racine, Wisconsin who commented that “relevancy” in girls' organizations meant “bending a little away from tradition and letting some modern ideas that come from the girls themselves be the guiding light . . . It means ending up in tears arguing at a meeting about abortion, women's liberation, and the right to life with someone you thought you knew completely.”¹⁰²

Scott was comfortable with this considerably more political vision of the Girl Scouts. But the extent to which the organization would align itself with the agenda of the modern women's movement had been, and would continue to be, the subject of intense public debate among its large, diverse adult membership. Scott began her administration shortly after a national uproar over the “To Be a Woman” badge that was developed in

¹⁰⁰ Gloria D. Scott, “The Challenge of Possibility: Revisited,” speech delivered at the Presidents' and Executive Directors' Meeting, October 1976, Gloria D. Scott – Personalities File (Letters of Congratulations, Speeches/Writings), GSUSA.

¹⁰¹ “New Girl Scout Leader Looks to the Future,” *New Pittsburgh Courier*, December 6, 1975; Gloria D. Scott, “The Challenge of Possibility: Revisited,” speech delivered at the Presidents' and Executive Directors' Meeting, October 1976, Gloria D. Scott – Personalities File (Letters of Congratulations, Speeches/Writings), GSUSA.

¹⁰² Gloria D. Scott, “The Challenge of Possibility: Revisited,” speech delivered at the Presidents' and Executive Directors' Meeting, October 1976, Gloria D. Scott – Personalities File (Letters of Congratulations, Speeches/Writings), GSUSA.

the early 1970s by a group of volunteers in the Philadelphia Girl Scout Council. The purpose of the proposed badge was to create “a vanguard women’s studies program for teenagers,” and it consisted of four parts: Know Our Bodies, Know Our Heritage, Know Our Situation, and Know Our Opportunities.¹⁰³ Wide-ranging, the badge focused on “the things that make women different from men.” That included, among other things, education on women’s physical reproductive health, including hysterectomies, mastectomies, birth control, pregnancy, and the medical procedure of abortion.¹⁰⁴ When the badge was initiated in 1973, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* ran a story noting inaccurately that the Girl Scouts were encouraging girls to visit abortion clinics. While Muriel Lehman, local council president, tried to correct the record and stress the educational value of the badge, the story splashed across the news wires and generated a flood of angry letters and phone calls from members of the public disturbed by this new “sex badge.”¹⁰⁵ The response from the Roman Catholic Archdiocese in Philadelphia, headed by Father Francis X. Schmidt, was equally swift and decisive.¹⁰⁶ The local council tried to reach a compromise with Schmidt during the next year, but in 1975, he severed relations between the archdiocese and the Girl Scouts, announcing that the girls of Philadelphia would have to switch to the Camp Fire Girls, who the Archdiocese

¹⁰³ Peggy Anderson, “Father Schmidt vs. the Girl Scouts,” *Ms. Magazine*, March, 1976, 16.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 17.

¹⁰⁶ According to Schmidt, hundreds of Catholic churches in Philadelphia housed weekly meetings and troop activities for the roughly 8,000 Girl Scouts in the city. Girl Scout Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, 19 March 1975, GSUSA.

described as “more God-conscious,” if they wished to continue using church facilities for meetings.¹⁰⁷

Always careful to balance the disparate political views of their vast membership, the national office of the Girl Scouts under President Marjorie Ittman backed away from the conflict, essentially treating it as a local blowup. Ittman struck an agreement with the Catholic Church allowing them input on future badges with a religious dimension.¹⁰⁸ This decision earned the Scouts sharp criticism from *Ms. Magazine*, who opined that the organization had seriously “compromised its potential as an organization for today’s woman.”¹⁰⁹ Yet, in the next major battle, this one about the organization’s endorsement of the ERA, the national office under Scott was far less willing to back down.

Whether or not to issue a public statement of support for the ERA after the amendment was sent to the states for ratification was a recurring discussion held by the Girl Scout executive committee and Board of Directors in the 1970s. Many board members, including Scott, were in sympathy with the language and sentiment of the ERA, but others feared alienating part of their membership base (and losing their tax-exempt status).¹¹⁰ Despite their concerns, the Board voted to publicly endorse the

¹⁰⁷ “Catholic Officials in Philadelphia Cut Ties to Girl Scouts,” *New York Times*, February 27, 1975, p. 13; Peggy Anderson, “Father Schmidt vs. the Girl Scouts,” *Ms. Magazine*, March, 1976.

¹⁰⁸ “U.S. Catholic Group, Girl Scouts Agree on National Policy,” *New York Times*, September 7, 1975, 23; “Catholics End Rift with Girl Scouts,” *Chicago Tribune*, September 3, 1975.

¹⁰⁹ Anderson, “Father Schmidt vs. the Girl Scouts,” 18.

¹¹⁰ Girl Scout Board of Directors Meeting Minutes, 24-25 October 1975, GSUSA; The Girl Scouts corresponded extensively with legal counsel prior to endorsing the ERA – counsel agreed that an endorsement of the ERA represented only an expression of opinion, and provided it was not followed by political lobbying or promotional activity, would not violate the boundaries of federal law restricting political activity of tax-exempt organizations. See Thomas W. Kelley of Breed, Abbott & Morgan to Marie T. Spann, 9 April 1974, 1972 – 1976 File, Legislation, State and Federal – Equal Rights Amendment 1972-1977 Box, GSUSA; and Francis R. Hesselbein to Patricia A. Hegarty, 4 November 1976, 1972 – 1976 File, Legislation, State and Federal – Equal Rights Amendment 1972-1977 Box, GSUSA.

amendment in January, 1977, a “political ‘first’ for the group” and a noteworthy event in the eyes of the *New York Times* and the various other publications that reported on it.¹¹¹ Of course, endorsing the ERA in 1977 hardly placed the Girl Scouts on the cutting edge of the women’s movement, but it came at a sensitive moment. After the ERA passed through Congress in 1972, twenty-two states almost immediately ratified the amendment. By 1977, thirty-five states had ratified, leaving three more needed to reach the required two-thirds majority. Yet, by that time state ratification of the ERA had all but stopped, and pro- and anti-ERA activists were gearing up for a final showdown.

As board members anticipated, their expression of sympathy with the women’s movement sent ripples through the membership and wasn’t without consequences. When the Board announced their endorsement, it very publicly situated the Girl Scouts on the liberal side of the heated debates about family values, touching off another political firestorm. The organization weathered a barrage of protest, as thousands of letters and phone calls poured into the national headquarters. “Dear Person,” one woman wrote. “Have you taken leave of your collective senses? What will you rename your group, Person Scouts? Or some such Liberal Nonsense?”¹¹² Another worried that “Courts could invalidate sodomy and adultery laws: statutory rape laws protecting underage young women could be struck down: and also the Mann Act, the Federal White Slave Traffic Law.”¹¹³ Still another was certain that “It will destroy family life and we’ll all have a

¹¹¹ “E.R.A. Endorsed by Girl Scouts, A Political ‘First’ for the Group,” *New York Times*, January 31, 1977, 18.

¹¹² Ann M. Vallette to the Girl Scout National Headquarters, 1 February 1977, 1/77 – 2/06/77 File, Legislation, State and Federal – Equal Rights Amendment 1972-1977 Box, GSUSA.

¹¹³ Mary Cabaniss to the Girl Scout National Headquarters, September 1976, 1972 – 1976 File, Legislation, State and Federal – Equal Rights Amendment 1972-1977 Box, GSUSA.

terrible abortion mess on our hands.”¹¹⁴ These letters represented a range of common responses to a legislative initiative that, in the eyes of those opposed to it, threatened to remove gender as a primary category of social organization and override God’s natural plan for men and women in American life. That the premier girls’ organization in the United States, responsible for the socialization of millions of young American girls, supported the ERA, was simply too much for conservative women who were committed to traditional family values and gender roles.

Many of these women who wrote letters of protest to the national office drew on their own experiences in scouting, beginning their missives by describing their former loyalty to the organization. These women tended to see the conservative side of organization, including its traditions of service, Christianity, and patriotism. They expressed concern that the organization was ignoring the wishes of its primary constituency, “traditional” families who believed in the benefits of community-sponsored youth organizations, and they questioned whether or not to continue allowing their daughters to be involved in the Girl Scouts.¹¹⁵ STOP ERA activists in Savannah, Georgia went so far as to initiate a “cookie boycott” in protest. The group urged local consumers to boycott the annual Girl Scout cookie sale, a significant fundraising source for the organization. In a microcosm of the larger battle over the ERA, pro-ERA forces in Savannah rallied behind the Girl Scouts and purchased every single box of cookies for sale.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Text of phone conversation between James Keegan and Ara Warren, 16 February 1977, Phone Log, Legislation, State and Federal – Equal Rights Amendment 1972-1977 Box, GSUSA.

¹¹⁵ See letters in Legislation, State and Federal – Equal Rights Amendment 1972-1977 Box, GSUSA.

¹¹⁶ “Cookie Boycott,” *South Bend Tribune*, February 7, 1977; “Scout Cookies Are Sold Out,” *Savannah Press*, February 25, 1977; “Boycott Helps Cookie Sales,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, February 6, 1977.

Letters in support of the Board's endorsement were scarcer, likely because those who agreed with the endorsement felt little need to correspond with the national office. Women who sent letters in praise of the Board's action argued that support for the ERA was entirely appropriate based on the Scouts' mission. Interestingly, these letters also tended to draw upon these women's experiences in scouting, but focused instead on the feelings of personal empowerment that scouting had advanced in their own lives. Aside from correspondence, the debate also played out in newspapers around the country. One editorialist encapsulated the view of anti-ERA advocates: "If she wants to grow up to be a homemaker, in the gentle, competent, gracious, loveliest sense of the word, that should be her right. And no one, including the Girl Scouts of America, should be implying there is something abnormal or substandard in her wish."¹¹⁷ On the other hand, "A constitutional guarantee that [girls] are going to be able to . . . create their own opportunities when their scouting days are behind them," a pro-ERA editorialist argued, "seems more important than learning how to build a campfire."¹¹⁸

In fact, the controversies engaged in by the Girl Scouts in the 1970s were not out of step with the pressure, questions, and lives of its girl members. A series of "Senior Speakouts" held with thousands of Senior Scouts across the country in 1968 demonstrated that the right to be a homemaker was far from the minds of many teenage girls. In 1969, a National Speak Out Working Party made up of representatives of all regions of the country met in New York to review the results of the Speakouts and compile a final report for the national office. Topics that concerned girls ranged from

¹¹⁷ F.A. Bernard, "Better Things To Do Than Plug For ERA," *Port Huron Times Herald*, February 24, 1977.

¹¹⁸ Mike Doll, "Girl Scout Leaders Cast a Vote for the Girls," *Binghamton Sun-Bulletin*, February 18, 1977.

Vietnam, birth control, and the death penalty to whether or not to make scouting coed. The consensus of the Speakouts was that girls “wanted an image change from ‘goodie goodie cookie girl’ to ‘action girl’.”¹¹⁹ Other conferences and events happening around the country in the early 1970s demonstrated the same. For instance, in March, 1972, Senior Scouts gathered in Los Angeles for a conference titled “Marriage: Promise or Prison.” The invited speaker, Lucille Goldback, admitted to reporters being taken aback when girls cut short her presentation on customs of courtship and instead “barraged her with questions about living with your boyfriend and renewable marriage contracts.”¹²⁰

The Girl Scout headquarters also gained a clear message about the types of issues and questions impacting girls’ daily lives through the pages of *American Girl*, which included article submissions from girl readers and a letter section entitled “Penny For Your Thoughts.” Like the YWCA’s *Y-Teen Scene* and *Teen Freedom*, young members exchanged their ideas and observations about the world around them in the pages of *American Girl*, and the magazine functioned as a link between the national office and girl members as the national office sought to implement changes within the organization. Letters published in *American Girl* in the early 1970s reveal a population of teenage girls actively engaging with one another in contemporary political issues. For instance, in November, 1970, a young member wrote, “I’m interested in other girls’ opinions on the Women’s Liberation movement. I think that women have enough freedom. Women can go to college, work, vote, anything. I don’t see the sense in trying to get women drafted

¹¹⁹ Report of the National Speakout Working Party, 18-22 January 1969, Senior Speakout File, GSUSA.

¹²⁰ Lanie Jones, “Girl Scouts: New Issues for New Image,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 26, 1972, C1.

into the Army so they can be ‘equal’.”¹²¹ In January, 1971, two girls shot back, “It’s a fact that women occupy lower echelon jobs while men are executives who run companies. When they do hold the same job, women are paid one-third as much as men . . . How many women sit in Congress? Men are taught to be strong, dominant, and superior to women, while women learn passivity.” “They continued, “A woman can be a nurse, teacher, secretary, or clerk, beautician, or waitress. What else? True, there are female doctors and lawyers, but too often they are considered less capable, or abnormal because they work rather than keep house.” Echoing the language of the women’s liberation movement, one of the girls concluded, “Don’t impose your rules on me and I won’t force you to accept your liberation. We can have a peaceful coexistence.”¹²²

Still, the blow-ups over the “To Be a Woman” badge and the ERA demonstrated to Girl Scout leaders that getting involved in issues like reproductive choice and abortion lay too far outside the scope of their mission. So, like the YWCA, in 1978 the Scouts unveiled a new career exploration program for girls between the ages of 12 and 17. Called “From Dreams to Reality: Adventures in Careers,” the program was an extension of their 1960s vocational education initiatives that connected early vocational planning and self-knowledge with personal fulfillment. Consisting of an activity book and a series of 95 “career” cards covering a variety of professions – from sportswriter, to stockbroker, to police officer – “Dreams” encouraged girls to seek out information about potential career options and choices. Each career card included an interview with a woman working in the profession, as well as practical information such as an average salary range, educational requirements, and resources for further information. Based on the

¹²¹ “Penny for Your Thoughts,” *American Girl*, November 1970, GSUSA.

¹²² “Penny for Your Thoughts,” *American Girl*, January 1971, GSUSA.

traditional Girl Scout system of badges and achievement, if a girl completed certain activities in her workbook, she could then earn an award, which the program guide suggested could be a valuable addition to a job or college application. The program encouraged reflection, exploration of options, self-awareness, and “creative solutions to some of the career-related problems women and minority groups face.”¹²³

Beyond helping girls navigate the muddy waters of balancing family life and personal fulfillment, which underlined vocational counseling for girls in the 1960s, “Dreams” directed girls to question society’s assumptions about sex roles and the function of gender in determining women’s employment patterns. For example, one exercise asked a girl to think about the toys she played with as young child, as an indication of what type of job she might find appealing as an adult. But the authors prefaced the exercise with a discussion of how “a youngster’s play toys may very well influence a stereotyped career choice . . . Now, as women and men become increasingly aware of the influence of play toys, the distinctions between boy toys and girl toys are disappearing.” Rather than assuming housework and childcare remained entirely a women’s responsibility, other exercises had girls “determine the daily household chores and activities that must be done by you and your husband on a typical working day,” and “decide who will do each chore,” raising the possibility of alternative domestic arrangements.¹²⁴

In addition, the workbook offered up examples of career paths and career choices for women at all stages of life, including examples of non-traditional women. It presented

¹²³ Elizabeth M. Fowler, “Girl Scouts Offer Guide on Jobs,” *New York Times*, February 6, 1980, 95; *From Dreams to Reality: Adventures in Careers*, 1978, 5, GSUSA.

¹²⁴ *From Dreams to Reality: Adventures in Careers*, 1978, 18, GSUSA.

all types of women as potential role models, including unmarried career women, single mothers, and married career women with young children. It allowed that a large income or a high level of responsibility, rather than flexibility, might be the primary determinants in a girls' career choice. Finally, the workbook included a section on "you and the law," which highlighted various pieces of recent legislation related to equity in women's employment, explaining changes in minimum wage laws, Social Security treatment, and anti-sex discrimination laws such as the Equal Pay Act, the Equal Employment Opportunity Act, and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act.¹²⁵

"Dreams" represented the Girl Scouts' new take on education and socialization for girls after the 1970s. It was informed by the objectives of the women's movement – ensured equality of opportunity under the law for women in education, leadership roles, and the workforce – and made explicit that a woman's sex need not define her future. While these objectives mirrored the original mission of the Girl Scout program, they were built on a new foundation of equality that eroded the maternalist philosophy informing Girl Scout program in earlier years. The organizations' increasing sympathy toward the women's movement was not inevitable. It was the result of a combination of forces, including fresh leadership, pressure from African-American women and girls, and motivation from girl members who, pushed by the organization to develop leadership skills and active citizenship, responded in kind.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

Conclusion

The YWCA's and Girl Scouts' career planning efforts unveiled in the late 1970s tried to instill in girls a sense of possibility about their futures unhindered by the constraints of gender ideology. This stood in contrast to the expectation that girls would be homemakers and mothers, a belief that had helped girls' organizations to rationalize and organize how to prepare girls to provide leadership in local, national and international affairs and to best live out their lives the years after World War II.

As the previous chapters have demonstrated, the maternalism guiding girls' organizations had progressive implications. In the postwar years, it provided girls an avenue to imagine themselves as full participants in postwar rebuilding, social improvement, and world citizenship. It opened up spaces for girls to bridge the boundaries of race in their formative years, and provided means, however flawed, to imagine a commonality with girls of different races and nationalities. It made explicit that girls, despite their futures as homemakers and mothers, were vital members of their communities, their voluntary associations, and their country. But it proved less useful as the women's movement successfully began challenging the legal and cultural barriers to full female participation in educational and economic opportunity. Gendered notions of women's social role, which had guided the construction of female citizenship and the educational activities of girls' organizations in the postwar period, gave way in the 1970s as the organizations embraced a more fluid understanding of sex and sex roles.

In the 1970s, girls' organizations reoriented themselves toward the future, as sustainable and viable institutions in the late twentieth century, while making sure not to turn their back on past traditions and values. The changes in girls' organizations in the

1970s represents a reiteration of their foundational principles, first voiced by the women who created and structured these spaces in the early twentieth century. As Gertrude Gogin, the force behind the creation of the YWCA's Girl Reserve, described in 1917, the essence of her work was: "To understand the girl of 1918 . . . [to] understand the conditions in which she is living and realize the pressure, the emotional appeal, and the unrest which are involved."¹²⁶ The objectives remained the same, yet the social context had changed.

¹²⁶ Annual Report of Gertrude Gogin to the Department of Method, 1917, File 38, Box 355, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, SSC.

CONCLUSION

“You didn’t sign up, at least not in fourth grade, as a Girl Scout, so that you could become a radical feminist. You signed up to be a group of girls of together, you signed up to have fun, you signed up for friendship.” Somewhere along the way, “we learned what we could do as a group.” –Janet Kniffin, Center for New Words, 2008¹

As the Girl Scouts and the YWCA settled into their modern incarnations, leaders of the women’s movement codified their ambitions in 1977 at the First National Women’s Conference (NWC) held in Houston, Texas. The idea for the event originated with the declaration by the United Nations of 1975 as “International Women’s Year,” which prompted a small circle of prominent female politicians and ERA advocates – namely, Bella Abzug (D-NY), Patsy Mink (D-HI), and Margaret Heckler (R-MA) – to issue a call for a federally-funded national conference devoted specifically to discussing the diverse needs of women in the United States. With the support of a handful of sympathetic senators and President Jimmy Carter, Congress approved the event, allocated a budget of \$5,000,000, and charged the conference organizers with developing a National Plan of Action detailing a comprehensive legislative agenda to be submitted to Congress that would finally identify and tackle the chief concerns of American women.

¹ Janet Kniffin, interview by author, tape recording, Cambridge, MA, 30 May 2008.

In the year leading up to the NWC, approximately 150,000 men and women gathered in 56 preliminary state and territorial meetings met to debate and discuss the issues they wished to see included in the National Plan of Action. After much debate, the National Plan of Action ultimately presented for consideration at the NWC consisted of twenty-six proposals meant to address the needs of a diverse body of women, including poor women, women of color, and lesbian women. The Plan of Action spelled out for the country the objectives of the women's movement, including such items as winning the ratification of the federal ERA, protecting a woman's right to reproductive choice, extending federal benefits like Social Security to housewives, and creating public awareness about physical and sexual abuse of women.²

On September 29, 1977, two months before the conference began, a twenty-six hundred mile torch relay bound for Houston left from Seneca Falls, New York, the symbolic home of the nineteenth-century American women's rights movement. More than two thousand torch-bearers representing multiple generations of women, including high school students, Olympic athletes, and housewives, carried the flame through small New England towns like Auburn and Oneida, and through urban centers like New Haven, New York City, and Washington D.C., passing through the chilly, wet air of the early New England fall to the warmer climes of the South. Slogging through rain for much of the way, the caravan of runners and support staff arrived in Houston fifty-one days later, on November 18, one day before the formal conference proceedings began. The torch arrived to great ceremony and celebration. Bringing the past and present full circle, the runners delivered the flame to the three First Ladies in attendance, Rosalyn Carter, Betty

² National Commission on the Observance of International Women's Year, *The Spirit of Houston: The First National Women's Conference* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1978).

Ford, and Lady Bird Johnson, and finally to Susan B. Anthony, the grandniece of famous nineteenth-century suffragist.³

By the time the torch reached Houston, a mass of people had descended upon the city. In attendance were 1,400 conference delegates elected at state and territorial meetings, 370 delegates-at-large appointed to ensure accurate demographic representation, celebrities of the women's movement like Gloria Steinem, Betty Freidan, and Billie Jean King, as well as thousands of volunteers, media correspondents, and official guests.⁴ The breadth of people present in Houston reflected the strength and diversity of the women's movement, which, by 1977, counted a dynamic assortment of women and organizations, including the YWCA and the Girl Scouts, broadly working for individual rights, equality, and an end to various forms of discrimination and exploitation.

Delegates and observers packed into the crowded Sam Houston Coliseum on the morning of Saturday, November 19, the first day of official conference business. The atmosphere inside the vaguely art-deco building in the center of downtown Houston positively reverberated. According to one account, "The roar of thousands of conversations, chanting, shouting above the din, walkie-talkies, a stentorian public address system, and singing" competed with "10,000 people inside, waving, carrying, or wearing a kaleidoscope of slogans and buttons, ribbons, T-shirts, hats, shopping bags, signs, banners, and balloons."⁵ When the conference opened at 9:00 am, a troop of girls

³ "The Torch Relay," *The Spirit of Houston*, 193-203.

⁴ Caroline Bird, "Houston Day By Day," *The Spirit of Houston*, 119-125.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 136-137.

from the San Jacinto Girl Scout Council in Houston paraded the U.S. flag down the center of the Sam Houston Coliseum and led the delegates in the pledge of allegiance. When they finished, Gloria Scott, Houston native, national president of the Girl Scouts, and national commissioner of the National Women's Conference, brought the opening session to order. Scott banged a gavel that the National American Women Suffrage Association had presented to Susan B. Anthony in 1896, on loan to the Women's Conference from the Smithsonian, whereupon she turned the conference program over to Bella Abzug, former U.S. congresswoman from New York, for the business of the day.⁶



Gloria C. Scott presiding over the National Women's Conference, November 19, 1977

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Over the next three days, the conference delegates worked tirelessly to create a more unified front out of the multifaceted factions of the women's movement, eventually

⁶ Ibid., 137.

adopting twenty-five of the original twenty-six proposals in the National Plan of Action.⁷ Creating consensus on so many hot-button issues among pro-life women, labor activists, elected public servants, and radical feminists, all in attendance, generated a great deal of tension. In the weeks leading up to the NWC, some had already expressed concern that the event would “create a public impression of even more discord [in the movement] than actually exists.” Others had feared that broadcasting the differences in perspective among women might confirm “some of the most harmful stereotypes of women in politics.”⁸ Major news outlets and small, ideologically-driven publications alike geared up for a public clash between groups of women with differing agendas. Warnings of an impending implosion of the women’s rights movement were fueled by public statements made by Phyllis Schlafly, architect of the STOP ERA movement and founder of the conservative Eagle Forum, who proclaimed to reporters that the NWC would be an opportunity for the American public to “really find out what the movement is” and hasten its demise.⁹

Nevertheless, an atmosphere of cooperation and goodwill prevailed in Houston. The rapid pace of the conference proceedings left the organizers somewhat susceptible to charges that the opinions and views of the more conservative wing in attendance – those against the legalization of abortion, the ratification of the ERA, and the “Sexual Preference” plank that addressed the concerns of lesbian women – had been railroaded. But for the majority of delegates and observers, the conference was considered a great

⁷ “Epilogue,” *The Spirit of Houston*, 172-173.

⁸ “Women’s Voices,” *The Washington Post*, November 18, 1977, A18.

⁹ “The Nation: Women on the March,” *Time Magazine*, November 28, 1977; Carolyn Kortge, “Schlafly Says Women’s Movement is Dying in an Anti-Feminist Surge,” *Eagle & Beacon*, August 3, 1977.

success. Capturing the optimism of the moment, reporters for *Time* noted that “a new-found confidence visibly emerged during the conference; women were suddenly put together with others sharing their views, hopes and anxieties. Alliances were forged for the battles that lie ahead. The women knew that their political skills were on trial, and they passed the test with flying colors.”¹⁰

Activists considered the momentum and cooperation of the Houston conference as the hallmark of a social movement come-of-age. Eleanor Smeal, president of NOW, viewed the conference as “a rite of passage.” Ruth Clusen, president of the League of Women Voters, claimed other far-reaching consequences of the assembly, announcing, “Even for women who are outside organizational life, who don’t see themselves as part of the women’s movement, something has happened in their lives as a result of this meeting, whether they realize it or not.”¹¹ Pam Faust, executive director of the California State Commission on the Status of Women, echoed Clusen’s words, claiming, “Whether or not you’re for the women’s movement, it has changed your life.”¹²

The presence of those directly related to the welfare of girls – Gloria Scott; Mildred E. Persinger, long-standing member of the YWCA’s National Board; and others, like Carole Oglesby, president of the National Association of Girls and Women in Sports (NAGS) – affirmed the truth of these statements. In particular, the Girl Scout national president standing up as national commissioner at the Women’s Conference in Houston served an important symbolic function, signaling the cementing of the modern women’s movement in the mainstream of American life. When then-Girl Scout President Olivia

¹⁰ “What Next for U.S. Women,” *Time Magazine*, December 5, 1977.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² “The Nation: Women on the March,” *Time Magazine*, November 28, 1977.

Layton, defending the Girl Scout organization against charges of anti-Americanism during the red scare in 1954, challenged reporters to “find a more American organization than the Girl Scouts of America,” little did she know the special meaning her statement would take on when her organization, and others like it, claimed their common ground with the struggle for women’s equality.

Present Day

The legislative changes and shifts in cultural attitudes and social practices that the women’s movement precipitated have exploded any idea of a uniform, middle-class womanhood, and, by extension, a singular, middle-class girlhood. A variety of community action programs supported by local and national nonprofit groups devoted to girls have arisen to meet the perceived needs of girls coming of age during the turn of the twenty-first century. They perform an astonishing array of services, including funding sports and recreation, encouraging the development of life skills, providing mental and sexual health programs, teaching computer skills and providing homework assistance, and pairing child and adolescent girls with older mentors, to name just a few.¹³ In some ways, they have supplanted the role of national girls’ organizations whose roots run deep in the early twentieth century.

Two trends have shaped the YWCA in the present day. First, the YWCA’s historical commitment to serving the needs of women and to advancing interracial cooperation was refined and intensified over the last several decades to drive their current, narrowly articulated mission: eliminating racism and empowering women

¹³ See, for examples, Francisco A. Villaruell et al., *Community Youth Development: Programs, Policies, and Practices* (California: Sage Publications, Inc., 2003).

through economic advancement.¹⁴ By the 1980s, the YWCA was targeting a host of social issues specifically related to these two priorities. Much of their work with girls aimed at the links between women and poverty, most notably the connections between poverty, limited sex education, and inadequate access to healthcare and childcare. Still considered a progressive social service organization, these priorities are evident in national initiatives such as the YWCA Week Without Violence, which brings awareness to the problem of domestic violence in American homes and communities. Local YWCAs continue to exert great control over the activities and programs offered in their local communities; the influence and reach of the National Board has actually diminished greatly, especially after a significant reorganization approved by the organizations' membership in 2000 that substantially downsized the national staff and closed the New York-based headquarters.

Second, the YWCA's ability to sustain vibrant community program-building has been hindered by a number of troubles. Most markedly, the YWCA has suffered considerably from financial woes. By no means a new concern, this trend has been developing since the 1950s, but it accelerated after federal funds to social service organizations dried up in the 1980s. Many local associations have disaffiliated from the national body due to financial pressures or disillusionment with the organization, meaning that dwindling resources and diminishing membership have characterized the end of the twentieth century for the YWCA. Moreover, women's changing employment patterns have upset the volunteer labor model that, ironically, tied women's organizations like the YWCA to a gender system and family order reliant on male breadwinners. Few

¹⁴ The current YWCA mission can be found on their website at <http://www.ywca.org/site/pp.asp?c=djISI6PIKpG&b=284783>, accessed by author on May 29, 2009.

records exist for the organization after 1980, as the national body struggled to hold together its network of local associations and constituent groups, suggesting that the YWCA has witnessed severe decline in the last several decades.

These two trends are manifested in the teen program. Local associations, with the help of the national office, have increasingly turned away from diverse programming for girls meant to develop individualism, self-reliance, and leadership, and toward programs narrowly targeted to groups of girls considered at-risk for teenage pregnancy and for the juvenile justice system. A series of videos produced by the national office in the 1980s with titles such as "It's Okay to Say No Way!" and "Lovesick" were intended to promote discussion about sexuality. Local associations have targeted their efforts at preventing teenage pregnancy by establishing pregnancy clinics in urban areas, advocating for the repeal of abortion restrictions, and conducting sex education classes and workshops. Programs like "Moms and Mentors," run in El Dorado, Arkansas, matched volunteer women with teen mothers to encourage the formulation of education and employment goals, while other associations instituted programs to continue educating teens on sex role stereotyping and responsible decision-making, as well as HIV/AIDS awareness and education. Y women also began increasingly paying attention to matters we as a society now recognize as "girl problems," such as body image issues and subtle forms of discrimination against girls in schools. These activities grew out of the National Teen Organization's explicit activism in studying laws, pursuing grants for action projects, and educating members on issues.¹⁵

¹⁵ Survey of Adolescent Programs in YWCA Member Associations, 1998-1999, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass., Box 575, Folders 2-33; Teen Sexuality Education Project, 1982, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College,

While the YWCA's work with girls has morphed to respond to pressures faced by the organization as a whole, the Girl Scouts today remain as visible as ever. The organization has made headlines several times over the past several decades for a number of controversial policies enacted to live up to its promise of openness to all women and girls. For instance, in 1993 the organization opted to support the individual substitution of the word "God" in the Girl Scout Promise with whatever best reflected the belief system of individual members.¹⁶ In contrast to the Boy Scouts, who in 2000 won a high-profile lawsuit decided in the U.S. Supreme Court to keep gay men out of the organization, the Girl Scouts generally follow a nondiscrimination policy with respect to sexual orientation.¹⁷ Lesbian women are not formally excluded from the organization for their sexual identity, even if it is publicly known, and indeed many have found a welcoming haven in the all-female organization. The organization established a Research Institute in 2000 to promote research on female development and influence public policy. It has experimented with new, progressive programs like "Girl Scouting Behind Bars," which organizes troops for girls with incarcerated mothers, and holds troop meetings in prisons to maintain relationships between jailed women and their daughters. Overall, the organization has continued to develop programming that encourages skill-building, social responsibility and knowledge, and the development of individual talent and leadership.¹⁸

Northampton, Mass., Box 559, Folder 1; Reel 250: Microdex 2; telephone conversation with Harriet "Skip" Dockstader, National Teenage Program Consultant for the YWCA in the 1970s, December 2009.

¹⁶ Thom Mrozek, "Girl Scout Promise to 'Serve God' Challenged," *Los Angeles Times*, November 19, 1991; "Girl Scouts Revising Pledge to Accept Religious Diversity," *New York Times*, October 25, 1991.

¹⁷ *Boy Scouts of America et al. v. Dale*, 530 U.S. 640 (2000); Linda Greenhouse, "Supreme Court Backs Boy Scouts in Ban of Gays from Membership," *New York Times*, June 29, 2000; Jay Mechling, *On My Honor*, 207-235.

Current program is still based on principles of feminism, though spokespeople for the organization generally express discomfort with the label in the current political climate. A comment by Mary T. Stroock, chief executive of the Girl Scouts of Westchester, to the *New York Times* in 2002 is typical of Girl Scout executives. She explained, “If you define feminism as a girl being strong-minded and independent and making decisions for herself, then yes, it’s feminism . . . But I don’t think that’s necessarily feminism. I think it’s just life now.”¹⁹ Nevertheless, their liberal-leaning philosophy has enraged some conservatives groups, who have since established a new scouting organization called American Heritage Girls, dedicated to the idea of fixed, God-ordained, traditional family values and gender roles.²⁰ Conservative groups like Concerned Women for America have accused the Girl Scouts of “purging materials of positive references to homemakers,” and take issue with their promotion of “empowerment,” which they consider “a narcissistic devotion to self” that takes girls away from a more appropriate focus on the family.²¹ Concerned Women for America has also issued calls for the YWCA to drop the “C” from its name, highlighting the fact that the liberal Christianity that anchored the YWCA’s social justice program in the early to mid-twentieth century has no place in the current national political climate, where

¹⁸ Abby Goodnough, “Behind Bars, a Girl Scout Troop Brings Mothers and Daughters Together,” *New York Times*, July 30, 1995.

¹⁹ Lisa Foderaro, “Beyond Crafts and Cookies, Girl Scouts are Prospering,” *New York Times*, December 25, 2002.

²⁰ Kathryn Jean Lopez, “The Cookie Crumbles,” *National Review*, October 23, 2000; Hans Zeiger, “Pro-Abortion Feminist Scouts,” <http://www.intellectualconservative.com/article3139.html>, February 16, 2004, accessed by author on May 29, 2009.

²¹ Robert Knight, “Girl Scouts National Conclave to Feature Pro-Abortion, Pro-Lesbian Speakers” Concerned Women for America, August 29, 2005, <http://www.cwfa.org/articles/8808/CFI/family/index.htm>, accessed by author on May 29, 2009.

“Christian” has become increasingly coded as “conservative.”²²

Yet, despite their ups and downs, national girls’ organizations have maintained their place in the American imagination as vehicles of citizenship. Recently, the *New York Times* described newer immigrant groups – from Africa, the Middle East, and Asia – forming Girl Scout troops in their neighborhoods as a means of assimilating into American culture and accelerating acceptance into local communities. Many of these girls come from cultures that continue to adhere to strict spatial and behavioral gender codes, making their participation in activities like camping just as revolutionary as the first Girl Scouts who traipsed around Georgia in 1912 in their bloomers. A 12-year-old Muslim immigrant from Somalia described to reporters that, when she rides the light rail in her city of Minneapolis, she throws her Girl Scout sash on over her long skirt and head scarf, because, as she explains, “[People] are more comfortable about sitting next to me on the train.”²³

If the public continues to perceive voluntary girls’ organizations as hallmarks of Americanism, girls’ organizations continued to perceive themselves as important sites for transmitting to girls a sense of social responsibility, leadership, and possibility. That purpose has manifested itself in different ways at different times. Yet throughout their history, and certainly by the 1970s, clubs for girls engaged in far more than simply selling cookies, holding bake sales, and making arts and crafts in weekly club and troop meetings – wholesome images that popular imagination tends to link with girls’ organizations. The inconsequential nature of these assumed activities reinforces common

²² “Conservative Groups Oppose New Leader Chosen by Y.W.C.A.,” *New York Times*, May 22, 2003.

²³ Neil MacFarquhar, “To Muslim Girls, Scouts Offer a Chance to Fit In,” *New York Times*, November 28, 2008.

stereotypes of girls' culture in American history. Without a history of girls' organizations that fleshes out their motivations, their inconsistencies, their philosophies, and their expectations for girls, we are left with a view of girlhood in the mid-twentieth century that is little more than, as one recent history describes, "love, doll play, relationships, hairdressing, and grooming."²⁴

²⁴ Mintz, 284.

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