

THE ANTI-LYNCHING CRUSADERS: A STUDY OF BLACK WOMEN'S ACTIVISM

by

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(Under the Direction of Diane Batts Morrow)

ABSTRACT

In June 1922, the Anti-Lynching Crusaders created a mass social movement, led by black women, to eradicate lynching. Over the course of six months, ALC leaders, under the auspices of the NAACP, mobilized a network of experienced club and church women to harness the anger and vulnerability of the black community into a viable reform endeavor, to influence the moral consciousness of white Americans and to secure passage of the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill. Led by veteran clubwoman, Mary Burnett Talbert, members used prayers, newspaper ads, and community gatherings to compel its biracial audiences to broaden their view of lynching from a regional race problem to an issue of national import. They also pledged to raise one million dollars and mobilize one million supporters. The ALC used religious and moralistic language to refute any rationale for race violence. Their efforts succeeded in broadening the base of anti-lynching supporters.

INDEX WORDS: Anti-Lynching Crusaders, Black women's reform, Anti-Lynching Reform, NAACP, Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill, Mary B. Talbert

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DEDICATION

To Michael, Dawn, Josie and Orlando who keep me grounded and focused on what is really important in life.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I started this project several years ago because the short-lived campaign of the Anti-Lynching Crusaders intrigued me. Their ambitious goals of raising one million dollars and one million supporters in six months made me want to find out more about their motivations, their reform ideologies, and their impact on the anti-lynching movement. In my research, I found scant mention of their campaign in larger studies on anti-lynching efforts. Their relative absence from the historical record made me want to find out more about the black women who joined this idealistic campaign. When I first left graduate study at the University of Georgia due to family concerns, I found myself still looking out for the ALC in new scholarship and found that much of the scholarship that mentioned them at all rehashed the same encyclopedic facts. The women of the ALC and their campaign have remained with me even when I embarked on new personal and professional paths. In many ways I am grateful that little scholarship exists on their organization. I have often felt that these women waited for me to be able to tell their story. Personal and family considerations made me return to this project, years later. When I did, I became more determined to carve out a place for them in scholarship on anti-lynching and black women's reform efforts. I hope I have done them justice. There is far more that can be done to contextualize their efforts and I plan to do that in future academic endeavors.

This project could not have been completed without the support and encouragement of many people. I would like to thank Laurie Kane who helped be file

my Graduate School paperwork in a timely fashion. I would also like to thank my thesis committee: Kathleen Clark who agreed to be on my committee even though she had not been at UGA when I was a student. She has been gracious and encouraging even though she did not know me personally; John Inscoe who served as my mentor when I worked at a graduate assistant at the *Georgia Historical Quarterly*. He has always exuded kindness and sincerity and has helped my family in many ways as my husband and I attempted to finish our academic projects; Diane Batts Morrow, my thesis committee chair whom I met when I first arrived at UGA. She mentored me as a student and even after I left UGA. Her confidence in my abilities made me want to produce quality work. I have truly valued and trusted her advice and her understanding as a professional and as a friend.

Family has always been important to me. My parents have supported my academic pursuits. Their singular desire for me to be happy and fulfilled in my personal and professional life has been a great source of comfort. Their unflagging faith in me as a scholar and as their little girl, lets me know that I am extremely lucky to have them in my life. I know they would be proud of me no matter what, but I am glad that I can show them this completed project as evidence that I did not give up.

My daughters Dawn and Josie have been sources of inspiration to me as I worked on this project. I wanted to show them that they could accomplish anything they set their minds to even if it took them a bit longer than they had expected. I have enjoyed watching them grow up and develop into smart, beautiful young ladies. I encourage their curiosity and want them to find work that truly makes them happy. I love them dearly.

I could not have completed this project without the unconditional love and support of my husband, Ras Michael Brown. We met as graduate students at UGA and as we embarked on a new life together, we knew that we would have to find a way to successfully balance work and family. I have greatly admired his ability to complete his dissertation while teaching 5-6 courses a semester (each with a different prep) and not forsaking quality time with his family. He has a genuine love of teaching and research. His students love him and his colleagues respect him. As he works on publishing his book, I hope that I can be as supportive as he has been for me. He believed in me even when I found it difficult to believe in myself. As my biggest cheerleader, my coach, my editor, and my partner he has always known the right words to say to keep me going. We have created a beautiful family with our daughters and we are expecting our third child, Orlando. It is his upcoming birth that made completing this project a way for us to continue to focus more on our family.

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INTRODUCTION

The fight to secure passage of the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill in 1922 represented a concerted effort by many reform groups to eradicate lynching and mob violence in this country. The bill sponsored by Leonidas Dyer, Republican congressman from St. Louis, Missouri embodied the first genuine opportunity this country had to enact legislation to prosecute mob participants and the communities that sanctioned their extralegal actions. The Anti-Lynching Crusaders (ALC), an all black women's organization, joined the battle for the Dyer Bill in June 1922.¹ Their slogan "A Million Women United to Stop Lynching" exemplified an ambitious goal to create a nation-wide movement against lynching and mob violence. Inspired by Dyer's charge at the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's (NAACP) Annual Convention that his bill would pass if one million American citizens supported it, these predominantly middle-class black women, many of whom were already actively involved in anti-lynching work and other reform efforts, immediately conceived of the ALC as a fundraising organ and a moral campaign to make anti-lynching reform a national issue in America.²

Under the auspices of the NAACP, the ALC endeavored to raise public awareness about lynching and mob violence and to generate financial support for federal anti-lynching legislation. Their primary objectives included raising one million dollars to establish an NAACP legal defense fund, mobilizing one million women of both races to join the anti-lynching fight, exposing the deleterious effects of lynching on American society, and challenging the moral

¹ "Thirteenth Annual Conference in Newark," *Crisis* 24 (August 1922), 165. Minutes of the Board of Directors of the NAACP, July 10, 1922, Reel 1, Part 1 NAACP Microfilm Collection.

² Ibid.

propriety of lynching sympathizers and others who remained silent regarding these important issues. The ALC believed that lynching and mob violence constituted the most violent threats to the black community's advancement and survival in a post-Reconstruction era. To coincide with the Dyer Bill's upcoming vote in the Senate in December 1922, the ALC launched an intensive six month campaign to put pressure on the public and the nation's elected officials.

The Anti-Lynching Crusaders epitomized the influence of Victorian and Progressive reform strategies prevalent in the early twentieth century. Their emphasis on public exposure, fundraising, and moral suasion made their efforts notable in the overall fight for the Dyer Bill and in anti-lynching reform in general. The work of the Anti-Lynching Crusaders also illustrated the continuation of a long tradition of black women confronting lynching and mob violence. No strangers to reform activities, these women used their experiences as members of groups like the NAACP and black women's reform organizations to become a part of the effort to secure the most ambitious civil rights legislation of the time.

This project examines the Anti-Lynching Crusaders' campaign efforts from multiple angles and analyzes how their motivations and strategies shaped their crusade. The brevity of the ALC campaign belies its significance in the history of anti-lynching activism. These women organized at a time when enacting federal anti-lynching legislation had reached its greatest probability of passage. The nation's focus on the upcoming vote put the ALC's efforts on a national stage and gave them a broader and more attentive audience than previously possible. They, in turn, accepted the daunting task of crafting anti-lynching reform as an issue of national import instead of primarily a race issue. Broadening their message created avenues for all American citizens to become anti-lynching activists.

Chapter Outline

Chapter One, “A United Effort of Negro Womanhood,” situates the ALC’s efforts within the larger context of black women’s reform activities, particularly those focused on anti-lynching. As a 1920s organization, the ALC benefited from the ideological trails blazed by anti-lynching pioneer Ida B. Wells-Barnett and reform groups like the National Association of Colored Women (NACW). Since black women activists believed they had a special obligation to protect and advance the black community, their sense of commitment often crossed class, geographical and generational boundaries. Defending black women’s character and critiquing America’s unrealized democratic ideals remained essential to their anti-lynching rhetoric. Their shared dedication to race progress, however, did not always translate into a monolithic approach to reform. Black women expressed anti-lynching messages differently and revealed what they thought about these issues in complex ways. The differences in the rhetoric of Wells-Barnett, the NACW, and the ALC as illustrated in their selected writings, reveal a complex development of black women’s anti-lynching activism and the different ways in which they navigated imposed race and gender boundaries.

Chapter Two, “Organized for Specific Objects,” provides a thematic organizational history of the ALC. The ALC leadership constructed an ambitious and idealistic campaign, which they envisioned as a vehicle to spark nation-wide biracial support for anti-lynching reform. Utilizing ALC internal communiqués and external publications, this chapter highlights the accomplishments as well as the difficulties the organization faced throughout their seven months’ existence. Organized ostensibly as a fundraising organ of the NAACP, the ALC worked closely with the predominantly male leadership of the NAACP. While the ALC and NAACP did not experience the same gender tensions or rivalries that typically characterized

inter-gender reform efforts, competing organizational needs nevertheless strained their relationship. The NAACP's endorsement of the ALC did not eliminate their contest over money and membership especially when they attempted to draw from the same pool of donors. A study of the formation, organization and dissolution of the ALC reveals the complex emotional challenges the group faced as they endeavored to mount their nation-wide campaign.

Chapter Three, "Prayer and Sacrifice," analyzes the ALC's anti-lynching rhetoric. Focusing almost exclusively on its most influential circular, "Prayer for the Deliverance of the Colored Race," the chapter examines the themes and motivations behind the ALC's broad approach to anti-lynching reform. By employing religious and moralistic imagery, the ALC bridged the racial divide concerning lynching and mob violence. For them, lynching represented a national issue and not solely a race problem. "Prayer's" inclusive language encouraged rather than alienated potential supporters. Although it addressed race issues, it also used language that embraced humanist and patriotic ideals that resonated with white audiences.

Literature Review

This project grew out of a desire to learn more about the ALC's campaign because of its relative absence in the historical record, specifically in works on anti-lynching reform and black women's reform efforts. This scholarship has often neglected, minimized or distorted the importance of the ALC's involvement in influencing the movement to eradicate lynching and mob violence. Most studies of anti-lynching efforts by African-Americans center on the extensive drive of the NAACP to prosecute mob participants, lobby politicians, and secure federal legislation or on the pioneering efforts of Ida B. Wells-Barnett in crafting the quintessential anti-lynching strategy of public exposure, statistical analysis, and judicial redress. Two older but still influential scholarly works illustrate this trend. Robert Zangrando's

organizational study, *The NAACP Crusade Against Lynching, 1901–1950*, gives only cursory mention to the ALC as a “group of concerned women” and an “ad-hoc committee that the organization would occasionally utilize for fund-raising and special promotional work.”³ That unflattering characterization in one paragraph about the Dyer Bill neither distinguishes the organization as a black women’s group nor does it give any detail about the nature of their campaign. Claudine Ferrell’s *Nightmare and Dream: Anti-Lynching in Congress, 1917–1922* gives no mention of the ALC in its treatment of the NAACP’s anti-lynching campaign for the Dyer Bill.⁴

Numerous books and articles on Ida B. Wells-Barnett chronicle her epiphany that white fear of economic and political competition from black people fueled mob violence and not black men’s supposed proclivity to rape and sexually abuse white women.⁵ Although these works purport to be on Wells-Barnett, they do not provide a comparative analysis of other black women’s anti-lynching groups like the ALC. Instead they represent her as a singular voice in anti-lynching reform without fully contextualizing her reform strategies and methods within a larger context of black women’s anti-lynching activities.

³ Robert L. Zangrando, *The NAACP Crusade Against Lynching, 1909 – 1950* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980) 77-78.

⁴ Claudine L. Ferrell, *Nightmare and Dream: Anti-Lynching in Congress, 1917-1922* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1986).

⁵ This list is not exhaustive, but provides some of the leading scholarship exclusively on Wells-Barnett. Gail Bederman, “‘Civilization,’ the Decline of Middle Class Manliness, and Ida B. Wells’ Anti-Lynching Campaign,” *Radical History Review* 52 (Winter 1992) 5-30; Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: Bantam Publishing, 1984); Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, “‘The Mind that Burns in Each Body’: Women, Rape, and Racial Violence,” *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, ed. Sharon Thompson, Anne Snitow and Christine Stansell (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983) 328-349; Nellie Y. MacKay, “Alice Walker’s ‘Advancing Luna—and Ida B. Wells’: A Struggle Toward Sisterhood,” *Rape and Representation*, ed. Lynn A. Higgins and Brenda R. Silver (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991) 248-60; Jacqueline Royster, *Southern Horrors and Other Writings: The Anti-Lynching Campaign of Ida B. Wells, 1892-1900* (New York: Bedford Books, 1997); Patricia A. Schechter, *Ida B. Wells-Barnett and American Reform, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Mildred I. Thompson, *Ida B. Wells-Barnett, An Exploratory Study of An American Black Woman, 1893 – 1931* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Carlson Publishing, 1990).

Recent scholarship on lynching and anti-lynching activism, however, has mentioned the work of the ALC, but without fully contextualizing their participation in the movement. Phillip Dray's *At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America* gives an encyclopedic treatment of the ALC. He accurately describes them as a "national coalition of black women" and refers to their "Shame of America" newspaper ad, but he does not address one of their most salient reform endeavors: to build an interracial partnership with white women.⁶

The ALC has received more attention in recent scholarship written by women. Rosalyn Terborg-Penn's "African-American Women's Anti-Lynching Networks" highlighted the importance of the ALC as a black women's organization and the unique ways in which black women crafted their reform ideologies. However she erroneously attributes traditional inter-gender tensions as a reason why the ALC did not receive more support from the NAACP. She also cites a perceived difference in men's paid work and women's volunteer work as evidence that the NAACP devalued the ALC's work.⁷ In actuality the ALC, as discussed in Chapter 3, relished and promoted their role as self-sacrificing reformers.

In *Eradicating this Evil: Women in the Anti-Lynching Movement 1892–1940*, Mary Jane Brown discusses the impact black and white women had on influencing the debate on lynching and mob violence. She argues that anti-lynching became a women's issue because mob participants used the protection of white women as justification for lynching and because society's defamation of black women's character denied them access to protection despite their

⁶ Phillip Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America* (New York: Random House, 2002), 269-270.

⁷ Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, "African-American Women in the Anti-Lynching Crusade," in *Gender, Class, Race and Reform in the Progressive Era*, eds. Noralee Frankel and Nancy S. Dye, (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 199) 148 – 161, 159.

sexual abuse by black and white men. Brown cites the NAACP as a model of interracial reform efforts and devotes several pages in her discussion of the Dyer Bill to the ALC. She does not, however, deal with their public and private correspondence, but she does briefly try to situate them within the movement, as a “racially specific group” among many anti-lynching organizations. Because her focus remains emphasizing the level of interracial cooperation among reformers, she does not note the significance and complexity of the ALC as a black women’s group, but rather subsumes them as part of the overall NAACP campaign. Her article, “Advocate in the Age of Jazz: Women and the Campaign for the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill,” also does not contextualize the ALC as a black women’s organization but provides instead a stilted depiction of the organization’s efforts and does not address the group’s motivation to spark a national movement.⁸

Unlike Brown, Crystal Feimster’s dissertation “Ladies and Lynching: The Gendered Discourse of Mob Violence in the New South, 1880–1930” emphasizes the ALC as a black women’s reform group, although she does not examine their writings or analyze their efforts within the larger context of black women’s anti-lynching efforts. The scope of her project provides insight into the social and material conditions that created a racial climate in which many white people viewed lynching as an acceptable response to actual or perceived transgressions. Feimster examines the gendered implications of mob violence, expands the study of this issue, and reveals the complexities of black and white women’s contributions to the lynching narrative. In addition to chronicling the efforts of white women, she posits that black women’s personal experiences either as the relative or friend of a lynching victim, as a sexually assaulted woman, or as a sympathetic bystander, created a collective vulnerability to the

⁸ Mary Jane Brown, “Advocates in the Age of Jazz: Women and the Campaign for the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill”, *Peace and Change*, Vol. 28, No. 3, July 2003, 378 – 419.

capriciousness of lynch law. While white women sought to protect their privileged status in society and the overall social structure, even if it meant sacrificing a black man's reputation or life, black women sought to protect their femininity and their families by bringing attention to their historical sexual abuse by white men and by exposing the motives of lynch mobs to curb progress by the black community.

Patricia Schechter's contextualization of the ALC's efforts within black women's reform addresses the importance of the organization in the development of the anti-lynching movement. In *Ida B. Wells-Barnett & American Reform, 1880–1930*, Schechter tackles the ideological motivations that shaped the trajectory of Wells-Barnett's anti-lynching activism from premier pioneer to marginalized reformer. In *Ida B. Wells-Barnett* and an earlier article, "Unsettled Business: Ida B. Wells against Lynching, Or How Anti-Lynching Got Its Gender", Schechter compares Wells-Barnett's efforts with those of the ALC. She asserts that "the 'feminization' of antilynching culminated in the 1920s with the founding of the black women's Anti-Lynching Crusaders".⁹ The tone of her analysis casts an unfavorable evaluation of the work of the ALC and other black women's reform groups who disagreed with Wells-Barnett and her tactics even as they took up the cause that she made famous. While Wells-Barnett's assertive and often combative style exposed the racial, class, and sexual dimensions of lynching and race relations, it also alienated black and white audiences who considered her efforts as divisive. Schechter implies that Wells-Barnett's eschewing of traditional gender constructions made her activism more radical and akin to "masculine" reform efforts. The ALC, by emphasizing their roles as wives and mothers, and by using religious and moral imagery, stayed within traditional gender boundaries, in part because they learned from Wells-Barnett's experiences. Wells-Barnett's

⁹ Patricia A. Schechter, "Unsettled Business: Ida B. Wells against Lynching, or, How Anti-Lynching Got Its Gender" in *Under Sentence of Death: Lynching in the South*, ed. W. Fitzhugh Brundage, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 292 – 317, 309.

impatience with the pace of anti-lynching reform distanced her from participating in viable reform efforts. Compared to Wells-Barnett, the ALC proffered a non-threatening anti-lynching message to the nation that embraced inclusion and cooperation rather than assigned blame. Their approach represented a broadened and more politically expedient vision of reform.

Anti-lynching activism emerges as an important issue in the lives of black women, especially in scholarship that focuses on black women's reform efforts. The scope of these works frequently precludes specific mention of the ALC. Nevertheless, shared themes of defending black womanhood, race and uplift ideology, and black women's dual discrimination situate the ALC strategically within black women's reform efforts.¹⁰

¹⁰ This list is not exhaustive, but provides a sampling of works on black women's reform efforts. Mia Bay, *The White Image in the Black Mind: African-American Ideas about White People, 1830-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), Floris Barnett Cash, *African American Women and Social Action: The Clubwomen and Volunteerism from Jim Crow to the New Deal, 1896-1936* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001), Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896 – 1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Back Baptist Church, 1880 – 1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Darlene Clark Hine, *Hine Sight: Black Women and the Re-Construction of American History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), Jacqueline Jones *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family, from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1986), Michelle Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), Francesca Morgan, *Women and Patriotism in Jim Crow America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), Cynthia Neverdon-Morton *Afro-American Women of the South and the Advancement of the Race, 1895-1925* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), Jennifer Ritterhouse *Growing Up Jim Crow: The Racial Socialization of Black and White Southern Children, 1890-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), Lee Sartain *Invisible Activists: Women of the Louisiana NAACP and the Struggle for Civil Rights, 1915-1945* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, *Afro-American Women and the Struggle for the Vote, 1850 – 1920* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), Victoria W. Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability: African American Women in Interwar Detroit* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), Shirley Yee, *Black Women Abolitionists: A Study in Activism, 1828-1860* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992).

CHAPTER ONE

“A UNITED EFFORT OF NEGRO WOMANHOOD”: CONTEXTUALIZING THE ANTI-LYNCHING CRUSADERS WITHIN THE TRADITION OF BLACK WOMEN’S REFORM EFFORTS

In Buffalo, New York, on June 20, 1922, the Anti-Lynching Crusaders launched what they intended to be “the biggest and the swiftest movement ever undertaken by Colored women.”¹ Over the course of six months, ALC leaders, under the auspices of the NAACP, mobilized a network of experienced club and church women for the express purpose of securing passage of the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill, raising funds to prosecute mob participants, and crafting a coalition of anti-lynching activists that crossed racial and gender boundaries.² Mary Burnett Talbert, Executive Director and ALC visionary, conceived of a short, intensive campaign from July 1, 1922 to December 31, 1922, that would ultimately raise one million dollars and enlist one million anti-lynching supporters.³

The ALC’s primary strategies included mobilizing existing black support, galvanizing white women to the anti-lynching cause, and drawing America’s attention to the immorality of lynching and mob violence. These predominantly middle and upper

¹ Promotional letter from ALC leadership to black ministers to be read at Sunday church services, dated September 24, 1922, NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3 [Crusade. September 1-30, 1922].

² “Thirteenth Annual Conference in Newark,” *Crisis* 24 (August 1922), 165. Minutes of the Board of Directors of the NAACP, July 10, 1922, Reel 1, Part 1 NAACP Microfilm Collection.

³ Report of Mary Talbert to NAACP, undated. NAACP Microfilm Collection Part 1, Reel 3 [Crusade. 1922 undated].

class black women endeavored to broaden the dialogue about lynching in America. They wanted white and black audiences to move beyond a visceral reaction aroused by sensationalist and grotesque accounts of lynching deaths to arrive at a deeper understanding of the moral implications of sustained racist violence and to embrace a more compassionate and lasting response to the plight of lynching's victims and their families. They also wanted the general public, especially white people, to question the integrity of a nation that purported to be democratic and egalitarian while millions of its black citizens lived under the immense pressures of racist doctrine and the violent rule of lynch law. Through newspaper ads, prayers, letters, petitions, and community gatherings, the ALC both challenged lynching's presuppositions of black deviance and recast lynching and mob violence as a nationwide humanitarian crisis and not solely a racially motivated regional anomaly.

At the time the ALC formed in 1922, lynching and mob violence had already claimed the lives of nearly three thousand black men, women and children—not including the countless numbers of victims whose deaths went unreported.⁴ Although lynching had existed for generations before the post-Reconstruction era as a frontier method of punishment, lynching emerged as a decidedly racist practice aimed at cowering any individual and collective efforts for black advancement after the withdrawal of federal troops from the South in 1877. Black people, especially those residing in the Southern states, lived in constant fear that any real or perceived challenge

⁴ For more information about lynching statistics, see W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Phillip Dray *At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America* (New York: Random House, 2002); Stewart Tolnay and E.M. Beck, *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995).

to white hegemony could arouse the ire of a lynch mob. Even though most lynchings occurred in the former Confederate states, the black community's fear of mob rule extended far beyond that region's boundaries.⁵

Black people in all parts of the United States began to advocate race reform to condemn lynching and mob violence. In an effort to protect their community from imminent danger and to defend the integrity of their race, black women became a forceful and sustained voice in the anti-lynching movement. Through the pioneering efforts of Ida B. Wells-Barnett, the continued work of organizations like the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) and the concentrated campaign of the ALC, black women have "formed the backbone of the anti-lynching movement".⁶ Their diligence and continuous involvement as fundraisers and social critics on local, national, and international stages succeeded in making anti-lynching a prominent reform issue in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁷

The emergence of the Anti-Lynching Crusaders' campaign should come as no surprise. Although black men comprised most lynching victims, black women were not immune to the physical and emotional scars of this violent act. As the mothers, wives, sisters, daughters, and friends of black male victims and less frequently as victims themselves, many black women found it imperative that they organize to combat this

⁶ Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, "African American Women's Networks in the Anti-Lynching Crusade" in *Gender, Class Race and Reform in the Progressive Era* eds. Noralee Frankel and Nancy S. Dye, Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991, pp.148 – 161; 148.

⁷ Terborg-Penn, "African-American Women's Networks."

assault on their community's existence.⁸ In this vein, the ALC participated in a long tradition of activism by black women that dated back to the abolitionist movement of the eighteenth century and the informal resistance many black women exercised under plantation slavery. Historically, in both highly organized and informal groups, black women routinely tackled the social, political and economic issues that threatened their community's advancement and survival.⁹ As mothers, and as church and community members, black women provided guidance, resources and services to help the black community survive under the immense pressures created by white racism.

While black women's personal and historical experiences with racism and sexism created a sisterhood rooted in struggle and perseverance that often crossed class and regional lines, their singular commitment to race reform did not always translate into a monolithic view of the direction and scope of reform efforts. Differing and sometimes conflicting views on reform methodologies require that any examination of black women's efforts focus on the class, regional, and generational biases that informed their participation in the larger black women's reform movement. Black women, particularly those in the middle class, exerted their influence both inside and outside of the domestic sphere where matters of race reform were concerned. They often emphasized the predominantly middle-class values of thrift, cleanliness, piety and chastity and sought to create and preserve a positive and self-affirming history of the race for future generations of black Americans. While black women from different class strata supported race

⁸ During 1880-1921, the ALC reported that eighty-nine women (black and white women) had been lynched in the United States. They sought to publicize this fact in their "Shame of America" and "Lynching of Women in the United States", both published in 1922; Feimster, "Ladies and Lynching," 235-275.

⁹ Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1985); Shirley Yee *Black Women Abolitionists: A Study in Activism 1828 – 1860* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1992). For more information on black women's activism in the post-bellum era see note 9 in Introduction.

reform, this chapter deals almost exclusively with the transformative ideologies of a relatively small group of middle-class black women involved in anti-lynching activism.

This chapter will study anti-lynching participation from a perspective that privileges black women's experiences, reform ideologies and strategies. In addition to advocating educational, employment, political, and social reforms, black women gravitated to the issues of lynching and mob violence because of the enormous physical and psychic threats they posed to the entire black community. Exposing the race, gender, and class dimensions of the contemporary justification for lynching that posited the white damsel raped by the black brute and avenged by the white protector gave black women a voice in a dialogue that had previously excluded them. Influenced by their personal and historical experiences with racism, black women employed a variety of techniques to proclaim their anti-lynching message. While their specific approaches to anti-lynching reform differed, their efforts illustrated a focus on similar themes: a defense of black women's character, an emphasis on the importance of their roles as wives and mothers, and a critique of America's unrealized egalitarian ideals.

The purpose of this chapter is not to provide an exhaustive history of black women's involvement in anti-lynching reform, but to analyze the rhetoric black women used in conveying their anti-lynching messages. A thematic study of black women's efforts reveals a complex and tangled history of anti-lynching rhetorical strategies that ranged from Wells-Barnett's angry and aggressive defense of black men and women in *Southern Horrors* and *A Red Record* published in 1892 and 1895 respectively that stressed race and class differences to the ALC's pacifying and inclusive entreaties three decades later that emphasized the common humanity of black and white people as

transcendent of race, class and regional differences. The contributions of Ida B. Wells-Barnett, the NACW and the ALC as illustrated in the works discussed in this chapter reveal black women's understanding of the complexities of lynching and American race relations and show both black women's continuity and variation in defining the scope of the anti-lynching movement. Their efforts remain important components in explaining the trajectory of anti-lynching activism and in revealing black women's importance in both sustaining interest in anti-lynching and eventually getting black men and the white community involved in the movement.

Black women have historically dealt with the indignities of being black and female in a society that privileged white male patriarchy on a daily basis. As individuals and in both formal and informal networks, black women countered the legacy of shame and degradation rooted in the enslavement of their ancestors with an equally compelling history of survival and endurance steeped in race pride and self-help. This contest over the future and "proper" place of the black community characterized black-white race relations during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. From 1880 to 1925, post-Reconstruction racism in the form of Jim Crow segregation entrenched racist policies designed to keep blacks in a subordinate position.¹⁰ Those forty-five years also witnessed a significant increase in the numbers of blacks who gained educational and economic prominence and who adopted leadership roles within the black community and

¹⁰ Important works on this subject include Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890 – 1940*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1999); W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Leon Litwack, *Trouble Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Alfred A. Knoph, 1998); Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

intermediary roles between the black poor and the white community.¹¹

In response to the myriad social issues of the day, a Progressive ideology of reform and public service emerged as groups formed to combat the social ills of the day. Black men and women often organized in race-specific organizations and, in limited instances, with white people, to address the multitude of issues affecting the black community. A fundamental and consistent component of black reform ideology, however, lay in creating a positive and group-sustaining counter narrative of race pride to oppose the prevailing notions of inherent black inferiority.¹²

Black people chafed under the negative stereotypes that circumscribed their prospects for individual and group advancement. Whether explicitly stated in the regime of Jim Crow or implied with white society's reluctance to share equal opportunities, the pressures of racism affected all African-Americans. Images of black people as lazy, dirty, stupid, violent, promiscuous, and inherently inferior pervaded the social and ideological landscape of the United States during this time period.¹³ Those assumptions shaped virtually every black and white encounter, almost always to the distinct

¹¹For more information about the development and the philosophy of the black middle class see Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics in North Carolina, 1896 – 1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1996); Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); (Willard B. Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880 – 1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

¹² Michelle Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); E. Frances White, *Dark Continent of Our Bodies: Black Feminism and the Politics of Respectability* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001); Mia Bay, *The White Image in the Black Mind: African-American Ideas about White People, 1830 – 1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

¹³ Patricia A. Turner *Ceramic Uncles and Celluloid Mammies: Black Images and their Influence on American Culture* (New York: Anchor Books, 1994); George Frederickson *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971).

disadvantage of the former. This disadvantage was never more apparent than with the disturbing increase in lynchings and mob violence that characterized this turbulent period of race relations.

The mythology of the rape-lynch nexus that posited the black male brute impulsively assaulting the pure white lady and avenged by the valiant white male protector implicitly questioned the integrity of black women's characters as wives, as mothers and as feminine beings. Regardless of social standing or class achievement, black women had to contend with negative images or assumptions that damaged their collective reputation. Rooted in the legacy of slavery, images of black women as sex-driven Jezebels luring white men from the beds of god-fearing Christian white women, bad mothers who raised violent, degenerate, sex-crazed children, and bad wives who failed to keep clean Christian homes permeated society and created and sustained an environment that disrespected black women and denied their femininity.¹⁴

Perceived as females and not "ladies," black women experienced daily indignities that constantly reminded them of the low status accorded them by white society. "Their effect was to ascribe pathological uniformity onto black women as a group, such that every black woman regardless of her income, occupation, or education became the embodiment of deviance."¹⁵ Black women found it virtually impossible to press charges against men who raped and sexually mistreated them. This racial-gender hostility made black women responsible for their own victimization. The stereotype of the "bad black

¹⁴ Kathleen Thompson and Hilary Mac Austin, eds., *To Face our Past: Images of Black Women from Colonial America to the Present* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999); Patricia Morton, *Disfigured Images: The Historical Assault on Afro-American Women* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991); Beverly Guy-Sheftall, *Daughters of Sorrow: Attitudes Toward Black Women, 1880–1920* (New York: Carlson Publishing, 1990).

¹⁵ Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 190.

woman” held such racial and gender currency that it resulted in stigmatizing generations of black women.¹⁶

The pervasiveness of negative stereotypes as a justification for racism and discrimination necessitated that black women’s anti-lynching reform activities defend the character of their community members. Ida B. Wells-Barnett, considered by many scholars as the pioneer of anti-lynching activism, began her reform career in response to the lynching deaths of three of her friends, Thomas Moss, Calvin McDowell, and Henry Stewart in 1892. Moss, McDowell, and Stewart owned and operated the successful People’s Grocery Store in Memphis, Tennessee and their deaths revealed to Wells-Barnett the complex connections between Southern race relations and violence.¹⁷

Like most Americans at the time, Wells-Barnett had accepted the prevailing notion that lynching constituted a justifiable response to a touted increase in black men raping white women. After her friends’ deaths, however, Wells-Barnett began to question lynching’s rationale since neither Moss, McDowell or Stewart had been accused of rape. She concluded that it was their success as businessmen that aroused the fury of the lynch mob. After investigating other deaths, Wells-Barnett discovered that only one-third of all reported lynching deaths involved an accusation of rape or other sexual crime.¹⁸ Her anger and frustration resulted in a vitriolic editorial that eventually reached nationwide readership under the title of *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases* in 1892.

¹⁶ Morton, *Disfigured Images*; Guy-Sheftall, *Daughters of Sorrow*.

¹⁷ Wells-Barnett, *Crusade for Justice*, 47-52.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Wells-Barnett's daring exposé in *Southern Horrors* made public whites' anxiety over black political and economic progress rather than a sudden proliferation of black males raping white women as the real reason for lynching's increase in the South in the post-Reconstruction era. Her comments provided a forceful response to lynching sympathizers. Wells-Barnett succeeded in setting the tone and parameters for the anti-lynching debate in her writings and speeches because she challenged the prevailing notions of the black community as sexually deviant. Her use of statistics and public censure re-characterized the issue of lynching from a "justified" reaction to black male sexual predators and instead exposed it as a tool of racist white mobs to control a burgeoning post-Reconstruction black population.¹⁹

In *Southern Horrors*, Wells-Barnett mounted a direct challenge to the established racial order and the prevailing mythology of lynching and rape. She characterized lynching as brutal and ritualized murder designed solely to maintain white hegemony. Her strident comments questioned the sexual integrity of white women, exposed the historic abuse of black women by white men and castigated Southern white male honor as false and only proffered as an excuse to exercise terror over the black community.²⁰

Wells-Barnett saved her most stinging critique, however, for white women, the pinnacle of Southern society. In *Southern Horrors*, she contended that white women often cried rape in order to preserve their reputation when a clandestine, but consensual relationship with a black man was discovered by the white community. She further contended that white women sacrificed black men to preserve their respectable place in

¹⁹ Ida B. Wells, "Southern Horrors. Lynch Law in all Its Phases." Originally published on June 25, 1892, *New York Age*. Reprinted in Jacqueline Jones Royster, *Southern Horrors and Other Writings, The Anti-Lynching Campaign of Ida B. Wells, 1892 – 1900* (Boston: Bedford Books, 1997), 53.

²⁰ Ibid.

society. In attacking white women's sexual propriety, Wells-Barnett introduced an opening for the discussion of black women's abuse by white men. She refused to accept both the prevailing notion that any sexual liaison between black men and white women constituted rape and its adverse that any sexual relationship with black women could never result in rape. In *Southern Horrors*, Wells-Barnett wrote, "the truth remains that Afro-American men do not always rape (?) white women without their consent."²¹

Wells-Barnett's reference to consensual relationships between black men and white women revealed a nuanced understanding of the race, gender and sexual dynamics in the South. According to Wells-Barnett, white women were accomplices to the lynch mob and not innocent victims. She warned, "if Southern white men are not careful they will over-reach themselves, and public sentiment will have a reaction, and a conclusion will be reached which will be very damaging to the moral reputation of their women."²² In addition to her unveiled threats against the white social order, she argued sardonically that the white woman's cry of rape "closed the heart, stifled the conscience, warped the judgment and hushed the voice of press and pulpit on the subject of lynch law throughout this 'land of liberty.'"²³ Wells-Barnett advocated for a complex understanding of black-white sexual relations instead of an unquestioned acceptance of the archetypes that prevailed in the South. Her assertions not only embarrassed the South, but they so angered the white citizens of Memphis that they razed Wells-Barnett's newspaper, *The Free Speech*, and threatened violence were she ever to return to Memphis. Her

²¹ Ibid., 53.

²² Ibid., 52.

²³ Ibid., 61.

comments and the responses they incited exiled her from her adopted hometown for over thirty years. Her exile, however, did not keep her from critiquing lynching and Southern society. She continued to write and cast aspersions on mob perpetrators, the racist society that defended them, and anyone who refused to work ardently for anti-lynching reform.²⁴

In another of Wells-Barnett's early anti-lynching pamphlets, *A Red Record*, she recounted the history of white violence against black people begun under slavery which, she argued, created a fundamental disrespect for the black body and culminated in lynching's brutality and grotesque ritualism. Her publications gave a chance for "the Negro. . . to tell the world his side of the awful story." She again voiced her theory about the propagandistic connection between lynching and rape which only served to "put the [Negro] beyond the pale of human sympathy."²⁵

Wells-Barnett conceded that while all rape accusations may not be false, she did not miss an opportunity to further criticize white Southerners: "the Negro does not claim that all the one thousand black men, women and children, who have been hanged, shot

²⁴ Ida B. Wells, "A Red Record: Tabulated Statistics and Alleged Causes of Lynchings in the United States, 1892-1893-1894". Originally published in 1895. Reprinted in Jacqueline Jones Royster, *Southern Horrors and Other Writings, The Anti-Lynching Campaign of Ida B. Wells, 1892 – 1900* (Boston: Bedford Books, 1997). For more information on Ida B. Wells-Barnett's anti-lynching campaign and its impact on the fight to end racial violence against the black community see among others Wells' autobiography *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); Gail Bederman "'Civilization', the Decline of Middle-Class Manliness, and Ida B. Wells' Anti-Lynching Campaign," *Radical History Review* 52 (Winter 1992): 5-30; Mary Jane Brown, *Eradicating this Evil: Women in the American Anti-Lynching Movement, 1892 – 1940* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000); Feimster, Crystal. "Ladies and Lynching: The Gendered Discourse of Mob Violence in the South, 1880 – 1930, Ph.D. Dissertation. Princeton University; Royster, *Southern Horrors*, Patricia A. Schechter. *Ida B. Wells-Barnett & American Reform, 1880 – 1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Terborg-Penn, "African-American Networks in the Anti-Lynching Crusade"; Schechter, "Unsettled Business: Ida B. Wells Against Lynching, or How Antilynching Got Its Gender," *Under Sentence of Death: Lynching in the South*, ed. W. Fitzhugh Brundage (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997) 292-317.

²⁵ Royster, *Southern Horrors and Other Writings*, 78.

and burned alive during the past ten years, were innocent of the charges made against them. We have associated too long with the white man not to have copied his vices as well as his virtues.”²⁶ *A Red Record* also asserted the unequal treatment black women received in allegations of sexual abuse. As evidence, Wells-Barnett juxtaposed a case in Nashville, Tennessee in which a black man was lynched for allegedly raping a white woman, with a case of black girl widely known to have been sexually molested by a white man. She concluded, “The outrage upon helpless childhood needed no avenging in this case; she was black.”²⁷

Wells-Barnett’s direct and militant approach introduced a powerful response to racist violence and created a blueprint for any anti-lynching agenda. She worked as a “lone warrior” to publicize lynching incidents, compile and analyze lynching statistics, and criticize those who either actively or tacitly buttressed a racist regime. Although she continued to write against lynching and traveled nationally and internationally to keep lynching on the forefront of America’s reform agenda, *Southern Horrors* and *A Red Record* remain her most influential works. Both publications simultaneously captured Wells-Barnett’s disgust for present race relations and her strong-willed hope that those conditions would change. Her direct and aggressive approach won her many supporters as well as many detractors. She succeeded in shaping the anti-lynching debate for contemporary and future audiences; her critics had to address the issues she raised and all anti-lynching reformers’ strategies were influenced by her efforts, whether or not they chose to adopt the same tactics Wells-Barnett employed.

²⁶ Ibid., 153.

²⁷ Ibid., 129.

As the first national organization of black women, the NACW also recognized lynching and mob violence as threats to the black community. Their prominence as educated, middle-class black women and their commitment to race reform necessitated that anti-lynching become an important platform issue for the new organization. As a result, they organized Anti-Lynching Committees on local and national levels. Founded in 1895, the NACW's anti-lynching ideology was clearly influenced by Ida B. Wells-Barnett. Wells-Barnett was an inaugural member of the organization and worked very closely with other members to draft the NACW's response to lynching and mob violence. Mary Church Terrell, the NACW's first president, spoke against lynching in early writings and positioned the organization as a constant force in the reform arena. Terrell's comments in "Lynching from a Negro's Point of View", first published in 1904, echoed some of Wells-Barnett's most salient points voiced a few years earlier in *Southern Horrors* and *A Red Record*, but Terrell clearly did so with less intensity and vitriol.²⁸

As a national organization, the NACW adopted strong, but less aggressive rhetoric than Well-Barnett could alone. This shift in strategy resulted from the NACW's desire for the nation to recognize the pivotal and respectable roles black women played as wives and mothers in the advancement of the race. Lynching was one of many reform issues adopted by the NACW, and its approach, as evidenced in Terrell's "Lynching from a Negro's Point of View," revealed the organization's commitment to anti-lynching reform. The NACW sustained those efforts well into the twentieth century as they worked alone and with other groups to eradicate lynching and mob violence.

²⁸ Mary Church Terrell, "Lynching from a Negro's Point of View." Originally published in the *North American Review*, 178 (June 1904), pp. 853 – 868, Reprinted in Beverly Washington Jones, *Quest for Equality: The Life and Writings of Mary Eliza Church Terrell, 1863 – 1954* (New York: Carlson Publishing, 1990), 167-181.

Defending black women's character and exposing the skewed sexual politics of the South remained a prominent feature in the NACW's anti-lynching arguments. The NACW represented a decidedly educated, middle-class approach to race reform issues. Their motto, "lifting as we climb," represented the method by which they hoped to direct race reform efforts.²⁹ The organization did not challenge traditional roles assigned to women and instead exalted the home and the domestic sphere as the best means by which members could support their race's advancement "believing that it is only through the home that a people can become really good and truly great, the N.A.C.W. shall enter that sacred domain to inculcate right principles of living and correct false views of life."³⁰ Although these elite black women had already achieved financial and economic success, they also realized that their status in society was judged by the actions of those less privileged.³¹ All of the NACW's formal measures were designed to garner the respect of white society and unfortunately put much of the burden of changing racist opinions on black women themselves, "the duty of setting a high moral standard and living up to it devolves upon us as colored women in a peculiar way."³² The NACW advocated kindergartens, settlement houses, and mother meetings to try to meet the needs of the majority of poor, uneducated blacks. As an organization, the NACW addressed lynching, the convict lease system, Jim Crow laws, and anything and everything that "degrade and dishearten us".³³

²⁹ Elizabeth Lindsay Davis *Lifting as They Climb* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1996).

³⁰ Jones, *Quest for Equality*, 135.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 144.

³² *Ibid.*, 148.

³³ *Ibid.*, 149.

In “Lynching from a Negro’s Point of View”, Terrell outlined the organization’s perspective on lynching and mob violence. In her essay, she commented on the vulnerability of all black people to the capriciousness of the lynch mob, “so great is the thirst for the negro’s blood in the South, that but a single breath of suspicion is sufficient....[that] once such a bloodthirsty company starts on a negro’s trail, and the right one cannot be found, the first available specimen is sacrificed to their rage, no matter whether he is guilty or not.”³⁴ Courageously and diplomatically, Terrell broached the issue of the moral character of white women, “it is too much to expect, perhaps, that the children of women who for generations looked upon the hardships and the degradations of their sisters of a darker hue with few if any protests, should have mercy and compassion upon the children of that oppressed race now.”³⁵ But where Wells-Barnett accused white women of complicity in lynching, Terrell offered white women a positive role they could play in social reform, “but what a tremendous influence for law and order, and what a mighty foe to mob violence Southern white women might be, if they would arise in the purity and power of their womanhood to implore their fathers, husbands and sons no longer to stain their hands with the black man’s blood!”³⁶ Like Wells-Barnett, Terrell also linked the staunch protection of white women with the sexual abuse of black women.

Throughout their entire period of bondage colored women were debauched by their masters. From the day they were liberated to the present time, prepossessing young colored girls have been considered the rightful prey of white gentlemen of the South, and they have been protected neither by public sentiment nor by the

³⁴ Ibid., 171.

³⁵ Ibid., 175.

³⁶ Ibid.

law.... In the South....white men are neither punished for invading [the negro's home], nor lynched for violating colored women and girls.³⁷

In "Lynching from a Negro's Point of View", Terrell characterized lynching as primarily a class issue whereas Wells-Barnett held all white Southerners accountable, even its prominent citizens. Terrell argued that lynching could never be suppressed in the South until the "masses of ignorant white people" are "educated and lifted to a higher moral plane."³⁸ The NACW sincerely hoped that an entreaty from educated middle-class black women would awaken the social conscience of educated white Americans and would influence them to join in the protection of black lives. Terrell concluded her treatise with a lament that the nation had continuously failed to protect its black citizens and seemed more focused on pointing out the non-democratic practices of other nations rather than addressing the race problem on its homeland, "For there can be no doubt that the greatest obstacle in the way of extirpating lynching is the general attitude of the public mind toward this unspeakable crime. The whole country seems tired of hearing about the black man's woes."³⁹

The ALC addressed the issue of lynching and mob violence to black and white communities in very different ways than did Wells-Barnett and even the NACW, although they were influenced by both efforts. Organized thirty years after the publication of Wells-Barnett's *Southern Horrors*, the ALC's publications represented a decidedly less aggressive approach to anti-lynching reform. While the ALC's pamphlet, "The Shame of America" printed in November 1922, reaffirmed Wells-Barnett's use of

³⁷ Ibid., 178.

³⁸ Ibid., 179.

³⁹ Ibid., 181.

statistical analysis and public exposure in lynching cases, the ALC toned down their rhetoric by focusing on the deaths of black *and* white women by lynch mobs. They wanted to shock the nation into action by emphasizing women's deaths instead of revisiting the deaths of black male victims. Their strategy stemmed from a desire to cast the lynch mob as group of rogue individuals capable of killing even women. According ALC strategy, if a lynch mob could kill women in the same grotesque fashion as its black male victims, then the nation could be compelled to stop their actions. Although the ALC did not address black male deaths in "The Shame of America" directly, their deaths were not ignored.

The ALC used inclusive and humanizing language in their publications in part as a direct response to Wells-Barnett. They did not want to risk alienating the white community, especially southern white women, by resorting to what they considered name-calling and divisive rhetoric. The ALC chose to recast anti-lynching as a humanitarian and moral imperative instead of focusing attention on it as a race issue. They could do so primarily because Wells-Barnett had so clearly defined lynching and mob violence as race issues thirty years earlier and the NACW had kept those issues on the American reform agenda. The efforts of the ALC, however, represent a broadened approach to anti-lynching reform. Many members, like ALC Director, Mary B. Talbert, were committed members of the NACW and contemporaries of Wells-Barnett. Although they were influenced by the efforts of their reform predecessors, the ALC consciously chose to emphasize different strategies for their campaign.

The ALC, like earlier black women's reform efforts, made countering the character assassination of all black women a top priority in their fight for racial equality.

The ALC, following in the footsteps of other middle-class black women's reform organizations, put much of the onus on black women for changing the way white society viewed the entire black community. Since directly challenging white hegemony was a dangerous proposition as evidenced by the violent threats against Wells-Barnett, the ALC further broadened the NACW's approach by focusing on the humanitarian and moral imperative of anti-lynching reform. The ALC conceived of a massive public awareness campaign led by black women that would shape the moral consciousness of America and protect the black community from racial violence.

The ALC's bold undertaking placed its members in the middle of the fight for the Dyer Anti-Lynching bill, the most ambitious civil rights legislation of the time period.⁴⁰ Congressman Leonidas Dyer (R-MO)'s statements at the NAACP 13th Annual Convention, "if 1,000,000 people were united in the demand from the Senate that the Dyer Bill be passed, there would be no question of its passage,"⁴¹ inspired Mary Talbert and fellow clubwoman, Helen Curtis, to take up the challenge. Already prominent members of the NACW and the NAACP, both women agreed that their publicity and fundraising efforts should directly aid the NAACP's on-going campaign for the Dyer Bill.⁴²

⁴⁰ The importance of the Dyer Anti-Lynching lay in its placing guilt not just on the individuals who participated in the lynch mob, but also with the communities and officials that allowed lynching and mob violence to take place under their jurisdiction. The bill proclaimed lynching a federal crime and proposed the stiff penalties for those convicted. "Anti-Lynching Bill," 1918, *Senate Reports* (7951), 67th Congress: 2nd Session, 1921-22, Vol. 2, 33-34.

⁴¹ "Thirteenth Annual Conference in Newark," *Crisis* 24 (August 1922), 165. Minutes of the Board of Directors of the NAACP, July 10, 1922, Reel 1, Part 1 NAACP Microfilm Collection.

⁴² The Dyer bill, before the U.S. Congress in 1922, represented a concrete chance for the NAACP to get the federal government involved in ending mob violence. The bill passed in the House of Representatives on January 26, 1922, but passage in the Senate remained uncertain. As the battle for the Dyer bill intensified in the Senate, the NAACP launched a final drive to put pressure on lawmakers and the American public. The women of the Anti-Lynching Crusaders became an important component of that effort. For more

While the ALC also defended black womanhood, it consciously chose to embrace the possibility of an interracial sisterhood with white women instead of attacking their sexual propriety as Wells-Barnett had done or to question their moral integrity as Terrell had alluded to in her “Lynching” essay. Success of the ALC campaign depended on the extent to which they could appeal to the moral consciences of white Americans to respect and protect the lives of black Americans. The ALC’s constant calls to prayer and their reliance on religious imagery elevated the dialogue on lynching from an issue of secular violence against “unruly” blacks to a question of societal immorality. The ALC did not just seek to condemn racial hatred and violence, but through their prayers and entreaties, they sought to undermine the entrenched racial divide that made lynching possible. As a result, securing support among upper and middle-class white women became a key element of the ALC campaign.

The ALC members focused their attention on convincing educated white women that their social standing compelled them to get involved in anti-lynching efforts. Whereas lynching remained a primary concern for black women, white women historically had failed to recognize it as a legitimate reform endeavor. The ALC urged white women to adhere to the Christian teachings of love and a common humanity and encouraged them to enlighten poorer whites.⁴³ Lynching and the racial hatred and indifference that buttressed it would only end if black and white women worked in their respective communities to promote a peaceful racial co-existence. But in order to enlist

information about the NAACP’s efforts to secure passage of the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill see Robert L. Zangrando, *The NAACP Crusade Against Lynching, 1909-1950* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980). For a history of proposed anti-lynching legislation see Claudine Ferrell, *Nightmare and Dream: Anti-Lynching in Congress, 1917 – 1922* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1986).

⁴³ ALC letter to potential white women supporters, “Plan Organization of 1,000,000 Women to Stop Lynching in the United States” undated. [NAACP Microfilm Collection Part 1, Reel 3 [Crusade. 1922 undated].

white anti-lynching supporters, the ALC had to work diligently to dispel the negative stereotypes of black men, women, and children ingrained in white American society.

The ALC chose to emphasize the historic service and loyalty of black women to the nation's prosperity in order to compel white women to join the anti-lynching movement, reminding them that, "white women know that no better group of women could be found than the colored women...for loyalty and support."⁴⁴ This rhetoric clearly departs from that of Wells-Barnett and Terrell in that the ALC commemorated its work with white women and used that connection to tell white women it was now their opportunity to return the favor to their black sisters. The ALC recast black women's service from a condition of subservience to a demonstration of dedicated, hard-work that almost resembled self-sacrificing volunteerism. The ALC's use of inclusive language illustrated their recognition that any successful anti-lynching campaign must include the support of white women. They did not want to risk alienating potential allies and therefore bolstered the position of black women, by emphasizing their natural bond with white women that could transcend racial and regional differences.

In its formal publications, the ALC encouraged the white community, particularly white women, to recognize the humanity of black Americans. It chose to address this issue from multiple angles. In its publication, "The Shame of America", a newspaper ad distributed nation-wide in November 1922, the ALC implored the nation to live up to its egalitarian ideals and succeeded in casting lynching as a national issue. "The Shame of America" graphically represented through a map of the United States that 3424 lynchings, including the deaths of 89 women, had occurred from 1889-1921 in nearly

⁴⁴ Mary Talbert letter to Mary White Ovington, dated October 21, 1922. [NAACP Microfilm Collection Part 1, Reel 3 [Crusade. October 1-31,1922].

every state in the union defying conventional delusion that lynching and mob violence were confined to the South. The ad also called lynching, “a terrible blot on human civilization” and insisted that whenever a lynching occurred there were “two victims—a human being and a civilization.”⁴⁵

Over the course of black women’s involvement in anti-lynching reform, activists articulated a variety of strategies for the black community to counteract racist violence. Those responses ranged from Wells-Barnett’s early calls for armed black self-defense to the ALC’s calls for nonviolent, interracial unity thirty years later. While both approaches criticized the incongruity of the nation’s democratic ideals with the harsh reality of racism and segregation, they chose to do so in decidedly different ways. Wells-Barnett voiced anger and retaliation, whereas the ALC expressed hope and promise. These different approaches, separated by thirty years, reveal a great deal about the women who supported them and the social conditions in which they found themselves.

When Wells-Barnett wrote *Southern Horrors* and *A Red Record*, she encouraged black people to refuse to accept the inferior position the white community tried to impose on them and to protect themselves actively from white violence. *Southern Horrors* even gave the black community a strategy for retaliation against angry mobs and a racist white citizenry. Wells-Barnett argued, “a Winchester rifle should have a place of honor in every black home, and it should be used for that protection which the law refuses to give.”⁴⁶ She encouraged blacks to boycott white businesses and to emigrate from the South which she believed would cripple the Southern economy. Her strong statements,

⁴⁵ “The Shame of America”, undated [NAACP Microfilm Collection Part 1, Reel 3 [Crusade. 1922 undated].

⁴⁶ Royster, *Southern Horrors*, 70.

especially coming from a black woman, challenged conventional white male hegemony. Wells-Barnett clearly stepped beyond the racial and gender boundaries prescribed by Southern society. Wells-Barnett risked her life and livelihood to protest the black community's mistreatment. And as a result, she had little patience for other reformers who did not adopt the same fervent strategy.

Not surprisingly, Wells-Barnett did not support the efforts of the Anti-Lynching Crusaders. She neither joined their organization nor did she offer advice or resources to the new group. She viewed their "prayer and sacrifice" rhetoric as too conciliatory and ineffective to deal with the issues of lynching and mob violence and she did not hesitate to downplay the ALC's contribution to the anti-lynching movement. Although Wells-Barnett had worked with the NACW and the NAACP, over time, personality conflicts and differences in reform strategies meant that neither Wells-Barnett nor the NACW and NAACP parted on good terms. In response to negative comments made by Wells-Barnett regarding the ALC, NAACP Assistant Secretary, Walter White encouraged Talbert to dismiss Wells-Barnett. "She has had a grouch on for years because she has not secured the recognition which her great ability (in her own opinion) warrants."⁴⁷

Although Wells-Barnett had initiated the direction of the anti-lynching reform movement, as reform groups like the ALC joined the movement, they emphasized a message of inclusion and unity that departed from that of Wells-Barnett. The ALC, in conjunction with the NAACP, tried to steer the movement away from guerilla tactics to more mainstream strategies. Whereas Wells-Barnett criticized and cajoled, which often frightened away potential black supporters, alienated possible white supporters, and

⁴⁷ Walter White letter to Mary B. Talbert dated October 24, 1922. [Crusade October 1-31, 1922].

further incensed those likely to support mob violence, the ALC did not want to distance themselves from a viable anti-lynching movement as they believed Well-Barnett had done.

The ALC learned from Wells-Barnett's early anti-lynching work and cautiously sought the support of white women. They, however, did not want to risk alienating potential white allies or to antagonize an American populace who still believed that there was a rational explanation behind the prevalence of lynching. The fact that the ALC did not have more support from white women can more likely be attributed to the relatively slow rate at which white women supported this issue at all, rather than to an inherent flaw in the strategy of the ALC. They did succeed, however, in planting the seeds for white women to get involved in the anti-lynching movement a decade later.⁴⁸

Wells-Barnett pioneered the anti-lynching struggle with her caustic commentary in *Southern Horrors*. Leaders of the NACW continued to keep anti-lynching as an important issue in their strong statements decrying lynching's practice and emphasizing the historic vulnerability and abuse of black women by white men. The ALC campaign thirty years later recast anti-lynching from solely a black issue to one that demanded the attention and action of all ethical, Christian, and patriotic American citizens. Whereas

⁴⁸ White women did not get involved in the anti-lynching movement on any large scale until the formation of the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching (ASWPL) in 1930. Although the ALC fell short of their goal of enlisting one million women in the anti-lynching fight and raising one million dollars for this cause, they did however succeed in awakening southern white women to the necessity for anti-lynching reform and were instrumental in the closest this nation has ever come to enacting federal anti-lynching legislation. The white women of the ASWPL owed some of its inspiration and organizational structure to the black women of the Anti-Lynching Crusaders. Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *Revolt Against Chivalry: Jesse Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign Against Lynching* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979, reprinted 1993, 165 – 166.

Wells-Barnett challenged the contemporary racial and gender roles ascribed to women, the ALC chose to work within those boundaries to effect change.

All three anti-lynching campaigns highlighted the contradictions between America's espoused ideals of democracy and equality and the prevalence of racism and racist violence in society. Each strategy challenged the racist precept of black life as inferior and therefore expendable. By pioneering and sustaining the battle for anti-lynching reform, black women laid the foundation for black and white men and white women to join the movement. Although the United States never adopted federal anti-lynching legislation, activists were instrumental in fundamentally changing the way the country viewed lynching victims and its perpetrators.

Black women's efforts succeeded in redirecting the American public's unquestioned acceptance of the guilt and justified punishment of the black criminal to its presumption that any lynching involved the racist and irrational actions of the lynch mob against a vulnerable and innocent black victim. That significant shift in public sentiment took time. In the end, the work of black women, and many others, created widespread anti-lynching public sentiment that refused to excuse the actions of the mob.⁴⁹ While a detailed study of black women's anti-lynching efforts lies beyond the scope of this project, it is definitely necessary. As pioneers, fundraisers, and grassroots supporters, black women reformers, particularly those from the educated, middle class, provide the essential history and context for any study of the anti-lynching movement.

⁴⁹ Major works on anti-lynching activism include Brown, *Eradicating this Evil*; Hall, *Revolt Against Chivalry*; Schechter, *Ida B. Wells-Barnett and American Reform*; Zangrando, *NAACP Crusade Against Lynching*.

CHAPTER TWO

“ORGANIZED FOR SPECIFIC OBJECTS”: THE FORMATION AND OPERATION OF THE ANTI-LYNCHING CRUSADERS

The ALC organized primarily to raise funds for the NAACP’s Anti-Lynching Fund and to help secure passage of the Dyer Bill. Their ambitious goals of raising one million dollars and mobilizing one million women signified their idealism and their desire to influence the debate on anti-lynching reform in America. They envisioned a campaign that would expose the immorality of lynching and would galvanize the nation’s black and white communities. ALC Executive Director Mary Talbert, explained in a letter distributed to the NAACP branches that the ALC organized as a “concentrated effort for specific objects.”¹ While their campaign represented one of many organized attempts to eradicate lynching, a study of the formation and operation of the ALC’s work reveals both the optimism and the difficulties these black women reformers faced when they embarked on a nation-wide moral campaign.

This chapter examines the efforts of ALC members to obtain federal anti-lynching legislation and the strategies they used in crafting their campaign. Although members clearly identified the ALC as a black women’s organization, they endeavored to build strong, cooperative relationships with black men and sympathetic white women and men. They believed they had a special role to play in the larger anti-lynching campaign and focused their efforts on fundraising and moral crusading. From the beginning, Talbert envisioned the ALC generating a mass movement of blacks and whites, primarily women, at the national, state and local levels as

¹ Mary Talbert letter to NAACP Branches, undated. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. 1922 – undated.]

committed and enthusiastic anti-lynching supporters. To achieve this end, ALC members appealed to the moral sensibilities of liberal and moderate whites interested in preserving the democratic integrity of the nation's ideals and race conscious black Americans who felt obligated to improve the economic, social and political conditions for the entire community. As the campaign continued, however, the scope and idealism of the ALC's mission became tempered by the difficulties of mounting a controversial, nation-wide campaign. From the ALC's inception, members struggled to negotiate the organization's peculiar relationship with the NAACP and the financial difficulties that it caused. This relationship entailed competition over donor dollars and the time of women who worked for both organizations, as well. Further, their commitment to forging an alliance with white women and their organizations met with little immediate success. Above all, the ambition of the ALC's founders set a standard of achievement that could not be met in the short time that the organization had to fulfill its mission. In the end they could not raise the money they pledged nor were they able to garner the number of supporters they intended to mobilize.

Assessing the legacy of the ALC is not simply a matter of enumerating their struggles and determining whether or not they achieved their stated objectives. Instead, we must consider how their efforts led to changes in the anti-lynching effort, especially among black women, and in the continued work of the NAACP. We must also take into account the vision of the organization and the effect their message had on the audiences they reached. Some of these changes took time to materialize, and a detailed examination of them lies outside the scope of this project. Nevertheless, we can see that the experiences of the ALC ultimately altered the trajectory of the work and lives of many attached to the anti-lynching campaign and this issue will be explored more fully in the conclusion of this project. Most notable among those affected

was the leader of the Anti-Lynching Crusaders, Mary B. Talbert, who invested significant time, energy, and resources in the movement and, it seems, paid the greatest cost for the movement's shortcomings.

Formation & Vision of the Anti-Lynching Crusaders

Led by veteran reformer and NAACP Board of Directors member, Mary B. Talbert, the ALC mobilized volunteers in 48 states to spread the message of anti-lynching reform. The ALC campaign focused on prayer meetings, newspaper ads, and social connections to generate support for the passage of the Dyer anti-lynching bill before the U.S. Senate. Their first organizational meetings and their use of religious rhetoric reveal that these women planned to emphasize the immorality of lynching and mob violence, to keep these issues in the forefront of American reform efforts, and to put pressure on white communities to commit to ending mob violence. The ALC stressed that “the main object is to get all the women praying together, working together, sacrificing together so that this accursed pastime of mob law and murder may be wiped out of America.”² In an effort to reiterate the grand purpose of the organization, Talbert signed the letter, “Yours for the Greatest Movement that has even swept America, embracing both white women and black women.”³

Talbert's letter inviting volunteers to serve as “key women” in charge of campaigns in cities across the country highlights several important issues regarding the foundational make-up of the ALC. First, she addressed the letter as “sister”. These were black women working together bonded by a kinship with the issue of anti-lynching. Second, she stipulated, “your work as a club woman is known” which illustrates that the ALC was to be made up of black women

² Letter from Mary Talbert to ALC State Directors, 1922 undated, NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3 [Crusade. 1922—undated].

³ Mary Talbert letter to State Director dated July 25, 1922 (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. June-August 1922].

already committed to race reform. The brevity and significance of the campaign necessitated that experienced reformers became involved in leadership positions. Talbert advised the prospective “key women” to “gather about you as large a group of women as possible with the object “to unite one million women to suppress lynching.”⁴ She also told them that membership was open to every woman and girl in her community. “Key women” were also asked to work closely with ministers and encourage them to give sermons against lynching, particularly on October 1st and November 5th. Talbert also asked “key women” to publicize “sacrifice weeks” during the first weeks of October, November, and December in which ALC members and other women in the community would forgo purchasing non-essential items like makeup, clothing, and jewelry and donate that money to the ALC anti-lynching fund. She asked the key women to sell buttons, which would form the basis of the ALC expense fund, for ten cents or more, and she encouraged ALC members to wear their buttons every day. She also asked these prospective key women to turn in monies to the State Director weekly and to send the names of all women involved in their local campaigns to the national ALC headquarters in Buffalo, New York.

Talbert signed the letter “yours for a united sisterhood”, and she continued to use this salutation throughout her correspondence with ALC members.⁵ Her reference to “sisterhood” represented a conscious effort to cast the ALC campaign in familial and non-threatening terms recognizable by white and black women. When she communicated to black women, “sister” connoted a supportive black family ready and willing to protect its members. For many black women, the anti-lynching movement was a race reform imperative and Talbert sought like-minded comrades in the struggle for race uplift. When Talbert reached out to white women,

⁴ Mary Talbert letter to prospective Key Women dated September 20, 1922. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. September 1-30, 1922].

⁵Ibid.

“sister” stressed the bonds of the human family committed to protecting and defending those abused and endangered by angry mobs. “Sister” was meant to transcend racial antagonisms and perceived racial differences.

Talbert clearly envisioned the ALC campaign reaching from “Maine to California” and worked tirelessly to try to make that happen.⁶ In another letter to Executive Board Members and State Directors dated September 30, 1922 Talbert wrote, “the uniting of one million colored people is a small consideration for every colored man and woman and baby in the cradle should wear one of these Anti-Lynching buttons and should sacrifice one dollar to put over this definite piece of legislation which will end mob violence and which will help to answer our prayers against lynching.”⁷ Talbert closed her letter, “I am yours to serve and to help unite womanhood. To your knees and don’t stop praying until God has answered our prayer.”⁸

Talbert’s enthusiasm about the campaign’s potential was evident in a letter to NAACP Executive Secretary, James Weldon Johnson, on July 23, 1922. She wrote excitedly that “the Campaign has started off with a greater degree of enthusiasm, than one could ever hope for, — and I now have thirty State Directors— a most wonderful number, when you consider that I have only been working two weeks.”⁹ She was convinced that the ALC could reach at least one million people and rally them around the anti-lynching cause. In addition to fundraising, Talbert clearly viewed the ALC campaign as a nation-wide crusade against racial injustice.

⁶ Talbert letter to James Weldon Johnson dated September 28, 1922. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. September 1-30, 1922].

⁷ Talbert letter to Executive Board member and State Director dated September 30, 1922. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. September 1-30, 1922].

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Mary Talbert letter to James Weldon Johnson dated July 28, 1922. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. June-August 1922].

Lynching represented an ever-present threat to the black community when the ALC organized in the summer of 1922. At the Annual NAACP Convention that year, Congressman Leonidas Dyer issued the charge that if one million organized in support of the Dyer bill, it could not fail. Inspired by this message, Mary Talbert, along with five other club women, conceived of a massive public awareness effort led by black women that would shape the moral consciousness of America and protect the black community from racial violence. The women proposed to launch a short and intensive campaign from July 1, 1922 to December 31, 1922, to mobilize existing black support, generate support among white women, put pressure on policymakers to pass federal anti-lynching legislation, and draw white America's attention to the immorality of lynching and mob violence. They planned their efforts to directly aid the NAACP's on-going work to secure passage of the Dyer bill before the United States Senate.

Once the founders conceived of the ALC, they proposed formal inclusion within the NAACP. These women, many of whom were already involved in anti-lynching committee work in various organizations, decided to band together as debate over the Dyer bill intensified in the U.S. Senate. The women's membership in the NAACP and their support of the NAACP's existing anti-lynching campaign made it a logical choice for working together. Even a majority of Crusaders at the state and local levels already had membership in the NAACP or had been openly sympathetic to the NAACP agenda. At the national level, Executive Committee members of the Anti-Lynching Crusaders included Mary B. Talbert, National Director, Helen Curtis, First National Vice-Director, Mrs. Butler R. Wilson, Second National Vice-Director, Lillian Alexander, Secretary, Grace Johnson, Publicity Chair, and Mary Jackson, National

Speaker. These six were already involved in anti-lynching work at the NAACP as well as with the NACW and other reform organizations.¹⁰

On July 10, 1922, the NAACP Board of Directors approved the formation of the Anti-Lynching Crusaders. The formation of the group as an ad-hoc committee meant that it could begin its campaign immediately and without the constraints imposed by the NAACP by-laws. Unforeseen by the organizers at that time, this status would eventually create significant tensions between the two organizations as the campaign wore on. In a formal agreement with the NAACP, ALC leaders outlined the organizational structure and ideological foundation of the organization. The group would “consist of a Central Committee, 48 state chairmen, key women in each city, and workers.”¹¹ Their slogan, “One Million Women United to STOP LYNCHING” illustrated their objective to gather massive support for anti-lynching legislation. They planned that “the Anti-Lynching Crusade shall begin on July 15th and end on or about December 31st, 1922.”¹² The group also maintained that, “It is a campaign for uniting of black and white women North, South, East and West against the most terrible of all crimes—lynching.”¹³

As Executive Director, Talbert outlined her vision for the ALC campaign and set ambitious benchmarks for the success of the movement. In a letter to newly volunteered State Directors, she clearly stated the purpose of the organization. She wanted the ALC to “unite one

¹⁰ Report from Mary Talbert to NAACP, 1922 undated. Minutes of the Board of Directors of the NAACP, July 10, 1922, Reel 1, Part 1 NAACP Microfilm Collection.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Letter from Mary Talbert to ALC State Directors, 1922 undated. NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3 [Crusade. 1922—undated].

million American women to stop lynching.”¹⁴ Religion and morality were central to that mission. These foci not only honored the spiritual background of ALC members, but they also represented the best opportunity for the organization to spread its message. Instead of emphasizing lynching as a racial issue that could easily be dismissed by racist or apathetic audiences, they focused on the immorality of lynching and mob violence. In the same letter to State Directors, Talbert pledged that “the crusading is to be conducted through prayer; and while we have designated the month of August as our month of organization, the month of September for instruction, our intensive campaign work will begin the first Sunday morning in October with sunrise prayer meeting, at which time, we hope that over a million women will unite in prayer to God for the stopping of this,--the greatest crime in America.”¹⁵

In addition to mounting a national anti-lynching publicity campaign, the ALC pledged to be a self-supporting organization. Talbert planned to have a convention of State Directors in early August in Richmond, Virginia to discuss strategies and to report on the progress of the ALC thus far. She advised State Directors that the most important task before them at the moment remained selecting key women in cities who would then assemble a local ALC team to carry out the grassroots activity of the organization. She also instructed that ALC buttons with the motto “One Million women united for the suppression of lynching” and in smaller words “to your knees and don’t stop praying” should be worn by all ALC members. State Directors would buy the buttons at cost and then sell them for no less than ten cents to raise funds for ALC operating expenses. She further wrote, “Let it be understood, that the expense necessary to carry on this crusade will be raised by a separate expense fund, for which we have decided, that no part

¹⁴ Mary Talbert letter to State Director dated July 25, 1922. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. June-August 1922].

¹⁵ Ibid.

of this sacrifice or self denial fund shall be used for any thing except for the purpose for which it has been raised.”¹⁶ State Directors could also decide on other fundraising activities to cover expenses for their area.¹⁷ The fact that the ALC had to be a self-supporting reform body in addition to raising one million dollars for the NAACP legal defense fund put their success in a precarious position and further strained their ability to meet their stated goal. The issue of maintaining two funds would continually present challenges on a local, state and national level throughout the campaign.

The ALC and the NAACP

The predominantly male leadership of the NAACP expressed support for the ALC campaign. James Weldon Johnson, Executive Secretary of the NAACP, applauded the formation of the ALC. In a letter to Mary E. Jackson, National Organizer for the ALC, Johnson wrote, “I wish to express to you the sincere thanks and congratulations of the National Office on the great work which you have undertaken as National Organizer for One Million Women United for the Suppression of Lynching.”¹⁸ Johnson also revealed his recognition of the historic role women have played in anti-lynching reforms when he further stated

Lynching, with its accompanying barbarities, such as has been perpetrated even upon women, will never be ended until the conscience of the nation is completely awakened...there is no means through which this awakening can be more thoroughly achieved than through a united and concerted effort on the part of the women of America. Much, if not most, of the work which has already been done along this line has been accomplished through the devotion of women to the cause which you are now starting to further.¹⁹

¹⁶ Mary Talbert letter to State Director dated July 25, 1922. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. June-August 1922].

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ James Weldon Johnson letter to Mary E. Jackson, July 25, 1922. NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3 [Crusade. June-August 1922].

¹⁹ Ibid.

Support of the ALC remained critical to the NAACP's overall campaign against mob violence. In a letter to NAACP branches throughout the United States, Johnson endorsed the ALC and urged all members to support their efforts. "Nothing can go further to awaken the conscience of America to the iniquity, the danger and the shame of lynching, especially the lynching of women, than a national crusade against lynching carried on by the women of the country."²⁰ Walter White, Assistant Secretary of the NAACP, also enthusiastically supported the ALC. In a letter to a potential supporter, White wrote, "The Anti-Lynching Crusaders movement is one of the most splendid and unselfish evidences of cooperation ever known and it is certainly the most splendid thing that the N.A.A.C.P has ever had offered to it."²¹ As two of the ALC's most vocal advocates, Johnson and White demonstrated their belief that the ALC could galvanize support among women and keep the issue of mob violence a priority on the moral conscience of America.

The ALC had to expend valuable time and energy legitimizing the organization to the public, and at times, the NAACP leadership stepped in to help. The ALC not only had to publicize its message on the controversial issues of lynching and mob violence, but it also was burdened by its association with the NAACP, considered by its critics as an upstart race organization. Even NAACP supporters seemed skeptical of the ALC and its connection to the larger organization. Walter White repeatedly clarified the relationship between the ALC and the NAACP in order to dispel rumors that the campaign of the ALC constituted an attempt to solicit money for a rival of the NAACP. One instance of White's efforts came when he wrote a letter in

²⁰ James Weldon Johnson letter to NAACP Branch Directors dated August 4, 1922. NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3 [Crusade. June-August 1922].

²¹ Walter White letter to Dr. A.M. Rivera dated November 1, 1922. NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3 [Crusade. November 1-30, 1922].

response to comments from Dr. A.M. Rivera, a prominent North Carolina physician and NAACP supporter, in which Rivera tried to ascertain the relationship between the ALC and the NAACP. Rivera wanted to know if the NAACP had supported the ALC with a \$30,000 contribution, if the ALC was an auxiliary group of the NAACP, and if the funds raised would be used to further the NAACP legal defense fund.²² White reiterated that the ALC operated as an independent organization, that the group was formed and organized by women and not the NAACP leadership, and most importantly that the NAACP did not give that sum of money to the ALC.

While the endorsement of the NAACP leadership lent the ALC credibility in the anti-lynching fight, both groups were careful to emphasize their differences. To answer critics who believed that the ALC and the NAACP constituted the same organization, Talbert reiterated in a letter distributed to the NAACP branches that the ALC did not “seek to duplicate organizations...the one object of the Crusaders is to stop lynching and mob violence.”²³ She hoped that this firm statement would quiet concerns about the newly formed organization.

Although the NAACP expressed support through organizational and personal communications, the leadership of the NAACP did not issue a formal statement about its involvement with the ALC until several weeks after the ALC formed and only did so after Talbert asked Johnson and White personally to do it. Her request came after receiving numerous inquiries from prospective donors curious about this new organization of women and their claims to raise money for the NAACP and the anti-lynching campaign. Mary E. Jackson, ALC National Organizer, requested that NAACP Executive Secretary James Weldon Johnson make clear that the ALC was fully endorsed by the larger group to answer concerns from prospective members

²² Dr. A. M. Rivera letter to James Weldon Johnson dated October 30, 1922. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. November 1-30, 1922].

²³ Letter from Mary Talbert to NAACP Branches, undated 1922. NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3 [Crusade. 1922—undated].

and donors. She wrote on July 21, 1922, "Will you please send me a letter indicating the attitude of the Association? Make it as strong as possible."²⁴ That the ALC leadership had to urge the NAACP to publicly endorse their organization revealed shortsightedness on the part of the NAACP leadership to provide adequate support for the ALC campaign. They could have headed off much public criticism and speculation about the ALC and its agenda had they given a full, public endorsement at the time of the ALC's formation. The NAACP's delay in issuing a formal announcement supporting the efforts of the ALC caused the nascent organization valuable time and effort that could have been directed toward raising funds and mobilizing volunteers.

From the beginning the ALC was to operate as an independent organization and serve as a source of funds for the NAACP. However, the reality that the ALC lacked an initial infusion of funds to begin the campaign greatly hampered their ability to be successful. The NAACP initially promised to give one thousand dollars as start-up funds for the organization, but their own strained finances prohibited fulfillment of that commitment and in the end they only gave half of that amount, five hundred dollars. Although the NAACP did not live up to its full financial pledge to the ALC, it allowed the ALC to use its printing and mimeograph equipment for prayer and letter-writing campaigns, provided advice on publicizing their activities and making connections with potential allies and donated NAACP materials on lynching statistics.²⁵

Although the NAACP's own lack of funds limited their ability to lend financial support to the ALC, the NAACP leadership did give the ALC advice about how to organize effectively and how to spread the anti-lynching message to a nation-wide audience. Robert Bagnall,

²⁴ Mary E. Jackson letter to James Weldon Johnson dated July 21, 1922. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. June-August 1922].

²⁵ "Agreement between the Anti-Lynching Crusaders and the N.A.A.C.P.," [1922], NAACP Papers, Part 7: The Anti-Lynching Campaign, 1912-1955, Series B: Anti-Lynching Legislative and Publicity Files, 1916-1955, Library of Congress (Microfilm, Reel 3).

Director of Branches, wrote in a letter to Talbert of the necessity of publicity in any reform endeavor “interest is always aroused when the press begins to comment on a movement....a publicity committee in each community whose business would be to get into the papers...would undoubtedly stimulate the interest of the women in those communities.”²⁶ He also encouraged the ALC to organize women’s mass meetings and women’s parades as well as make contacts with women’s magazines and editors of the women’s pages of newspapers in order to publicize their activities and gain supporters. Bagnall suggested that all publicity be directed from the ALC national office. Finally, he also agreed with their proposal to deemphasize race especially when reaching out to prominent white women. “The campaign should emphasize that the work is being done not as a racial but as a national and patriotic service directed to sustaining orderly government.” On this matter, he encouraged the ALC to contact the prominent white women in the South who had begun speaking out against lynching.²⁷

Tensions arose, however, between the ALC and the NAACP whenever the ALC tried to organize in communities where NAACP branches already existed. Even though the ALC and the local NAACP branches shared a commitment to anti-lynching reform, unfortunately in many cases the local branches viewed one dollar in support of the ALC as one dollar less for the local NAACP chapter. They feared losing not just much-needed money but also valuable volunteers. This fear was not unfounded because the vast majority of members at the local level were the same black women likely to support ALC efforts. The national NAACP leadership tried to appease both entities. While it expressed support and appreciation for the ALC and pledged to “do all it can to stir up the enthusiasm and cooperation of all the branches” it did not compel its

²⁶ Robert Bagnall letter to Mary Talbert dated September 7, 1922. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. September 1-30, 1922].

²⁷ Memorandum from Hebert J. Seligmann to Mesdames Mary B. Talbert, Butler Wilson and Helen Curtis dated June 27, 1922. [Crusade. June-August 1922].

local branches to work with the ALC.²⁸ James Weldon Johnson, in a letter to local NAACP branches, explicitly stated the relationship between the two organizations:

This is not in any sense a movement of the N.A.A.C.P. or its branches; it is separate and distinct from the National Office and the branches. The offer of the women who are interested in the movement is wholly voluntary and the undertaking was launched entirely on the initiative of the women who are heading it. This movement is, however, in the interest of the cause for which we have long been fighting and all the money raised is to be turned over to the N.A.A.C.P. The National Office, therefore, bespeaks for it the encouragement of the branches and their cooperation in whatever way they may see fit to give it.²⁹

Johnson added of the significance of the ALC, “This is the first time in the whole history of the Association that any such voluntary offer...to aid this organization has been made.”³⁰ Johnson also explained that the ALC had pledged to raise much needed funds for the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, for which the national organization had not been able to do because they had to direct much of their donor contributions to operating expenses. He closed, “We feel, therefore, that you will rejoice in the gaining of these powerful allies to the cause in which we are so deeply concerned.”³¹ Johnson’s comments seemed designed to stir up interest within his base for the ALC, but they did little to dissuade skeptical NAACP branch supporters that an ALC campaign would not hurt their existing reform efforts.

In a letter to Walter White, prominent Minnesota physician and NAACP supporter, Dr. Valdo Turner expressed concern that the work of the ALC would conflict with the efforts of the

²⁸ Robert Bagnall letter to Mary Talbert dated September 7, 1922. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. September 1-30, 1922].

²⁹ James Weldon Johnson letter to Branches dated August 4, 1922. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. June-August 1922].

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

local NAACP branches to raise money and mobilize members.³² His letter dated October 30, 1922, stated strong reservations with the formation of the ALC. “In my opinion, it is going to conflict greatly in the securing of members for the association, since a large number of the members is [sic] women. They will not feel like paying one dollar for that, and one dollar for their membership in the association...It would have been better to put this extra effort in increasing the membership of the association rather than starting another organization.”³³ White responded that “all work is to be done by the women independent of the N.A.A.C.P. but all amounts raised by it to be turned over to the N.A.A.C.P. for carrying on its work.”³⁴ Even though White tried to reconcile the two organizations, he did acknowledge this potential conflict and wrote that for this reason alone the Board of the NAACP insisted that the ALC campaign end by December 31, 1922.

Tensions arose again when Walter White wrote to Mary Talbert in early November 1922 to try to quell concerns that the NAACP would begin its membership drive ahead of its usual January schedule and therefore infringe on the ALC’s capability to gain members and raise funds. Talbert had written earlier that Robert Bagnall’s trip to Chicago to start the NAACP membership drive early was detrimental to the success of the ALC. “If we are to do the work, we must get the people—When this drive ends, then we must lay plans to hold these people as members. I believe I can do this without any trouble, but the membership drive anywhere now will hurt both, however that is not up to me or for me to decide. My job is to put this over, and I

³² Walter White letter to Dr. Valdo Turner dated November 2, 1922. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. November 1-30, 1922].

³³ Dr. Valdo Turner letter to Walter White dated October 30, 1922. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. November 1-30, 1922].

³⁴ Walter White letter to Dr. Valdo Turner dated November 2, 1922. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. November 1-30, 1922].

will.³⁵ In response, White cautioned that Bagnall had been instructed not to interfere with the efforts of the ALC.³⁶

The comments about the ALC from two prominent black doctors and ardent NAACP supporters illustrated the tensions between the male dominated leadership of the NAACP and the female-led ALC. These men did not want competition for members or donor dollars. They felt threatened that the women of the ALC might have an advantage in mobilizing female support and since most of the NAACP members at the local level were women, many male members feared a sense of female solidarity could challenge their ability to influence the NAACP directly.

In addition to dealing with financial strains, being disappointed about the ambivalent support they received from the NAACP national leadership, and being sensitized to the adversarial stance taken by some local NAACP leaders, the ALC also had to focus on the difficult task of galvanizing its base membership and maintaining its enthusiasm for the movement. The numerous commitments that black women activists had thwarted ALC recruitment efforts. One of the problems with mobilizing members, state directors, and “key women” materialized because many ALC members already had involvements in other reform activities. For example, Hallie Brown, prominent clubwoman and former president of the NACW, reluctantly declined being Ohio State Director because she was busy with a Republican gubernatorial campaign. Many of the women most likely to be involved with the ALC had

³⁵ Mary Talbert letter to James Weldon Johnson dated November 30, 1922. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. November 1-30].

³⁶ James Weldon Johnson letter to Mary Talbert dated December 4, 1922. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. December 1-31, 1922].

previous obligations which hampered the ability of the ALC to organize quickly. By the end of July, only twenty-eight women had accepted positions as State Directors.³⁷

One letter from Kansas State Director Beatrice L. Childs attributed the delay in getting the Kansas ALC campaign fully implemented to personal and family illnesses. She apologized to Talbert and wrote “I am determined to finish my work...Trusting that you will understand that I am doing every thing possible under the circumstances.”³⁸ She hoped to finish the campaign by April. Given that the letter was dated March 3, 1923, over two months after the official ALC campaign was to have ended, she would only be able to devote a small amount of time to fundraising and public awareness. She also wrote that she was chair of the NAACP Membership drive in Kansas that got underway in January. It seems that many of the State Directors and key women were overextended in terms of the amount of time and energy they could devote to the ALC and that their previous reform group engagements in addition to work and family obligations complicated their involvement with the brevity and intensity of the ALC campaign.

Struggles to negotiate running a controversial campaign laden with race issues with not upsetting the volatile racial dynamics in the turbulent South or the delicate racial sensibilities of moderate and liberal white women further compounded the ALC’s frustrations. Because of the backgrounds and the relatively calm racial landscape of other regions, the ALC concentrated the vast majority of its work in the Northern and Midwestern states. The ALC did recognize, though, that a successful anti-lynching campaign must secure support from Southern blacks and liberal whites. While cognizant of that reality their inexperience with organizing in the South presented some challenges for disseminating the group’s message. Two exchanges with

³⁷ Mary Talbert letter to Walter White dated July 28, 1922. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. June-August 1922].

³⁸ Mrs. Charles L. Childs letter to Mary Talbert, dated March 3, 1923. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. January—April 1923].

Southern activists quickly highlighted the dangerous and precarious position of race reformers in the Southern states. Mrs. Emma B. Miller from Yazoo City, Mississippi, declined Talbert's invitation to be a key woman for the ALC. She remarked that although she had given the matter serious thought, she concluded the "risk is too great. Anything that bears the stamp of the N.A.A.C.P. arouses the ire of the people of this section instantly."³⁹ She also feared that the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan would result in violent reprisals for anyone actively and publicly fighting against lynching. She mentioned that a Mrs. Thompson came to the area periodically to garner support for the NAACP and that she would be a better judge of whether Mississippi could handle an ALC campaign. She also remarked that Mrs. Thompson came to the area quietly and did not make a big production of her visits. Miller suggested that Talbert contact Mrs. Thompson. She also urged Talbert not to misunderstand her decline of the offer because "my heart is in anything for the betterment of my people and their [for our] condition down here and I'm anxious that any step that is taken be done in such a manner as to bring about more friendly relations without sacrificing the manhood or womanhood of the race.... Whatever your plans in this campaign I shall do, in a quiet way, see that I can promote them and, of course, I shall contribute."⁴⁰

Mrs. Miller's letter expressed the fear and reservation of many southern black women reformers. Her hesitation revealed the reality that public race activism carried dangerous and immediate consequences and must not be entered into lightly. Those black Americans living in the South had constant reminders and evidence in the form of Jim Crow discrimination and lynchings of the fury of white racists. Black residents in the Midwestern and Northern states,

³⁹ Emma B. Miller letter to Mary Talbert dated July 20, 1922. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. June-August 1922].

⁴⁰ Ibid.

because of the more episodic nature of race riots and turmoil in these regions, remained somewhat removed from the harsh reality that any real or perceived activism could put one's life or one's community in the kind of danger activists in the South lived with on a daily basis.

Correspondence between M. Ashby Jones, Pastor of Ponce de Leon Baptist Church in Atlanta and ALC member Mrs. E. R. Boutte revealed the intensity of racial hostility in the Southern states and the delicate approach that any race reform required in that region. In early August 1922 Boutte had sent a telegram asking for Jones' approval of the ALC campaign and the telegram mistakenly read 'strike.' Jones wrote back, "we have in the South just at this time the most hopeful and yet the most delicate racial situation in our history. Some of the most outstanding and influential women of the South have, with splendid daring and admirable tact and intelligence, taken the leadership for a finer sympathy and better justice for the Negro woman."⁴¹ He also remarked that they have made inroads with prominent white women and local churches and he did not want the ALC's campaign to jeopardize that burgeoning relationship. He did not hide his fears about the "strike"

I am unable to imagine any form in which it would not arouse the most bitter antagonism throughout the Southland, and put in jeopardy all the work which our women have so carefully done. In their name, and in the name of all the delicate and precious interest of an ever-improving racial situation, I beg that your enterprise shall not be made public before consulting with your friends in the South.⁴²

Pastor Jones made it clear that outsiders not fully cognizant of the tense racial balancing act that reformers in the South constantly confronted would undo any good work already done in the region and unnecessarily put lives in danger. In his mind a strike would "greatly embarrass the

⁴¹ M. Ashby Jones letter to Mrs. E. R. Boutte dated August 5, 1922. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. June-August 1922].

⁴² Ibid.

work of the Inter-racial Committee.”⁴³ He applauded the work of the Committee on Interracial Cooperation, a liberal Southern organization organized to fight for racial reform, and its work with the Georgia legislature to secure an anti-lynching bill. Regional tensions became evident when Jones commented that “I can think of nothing that would more certainly defeat this bill than the mere rumor that there was to be an organized “strike” of white and Negro women with its origins north of the Potomac.”⁴⁴ He further admonished, “Those who are interested in this question must exercise a great deal of patience and self-control.”⁴⁵ In closing he entreated, “I am sure that the motive of the good women who are back [sic] of your plan is the same as that which inspires the work which we are trying to do,... I am asking that you, who also have this cause at heart, shall not make our work harder.”⁴⁶ When Pastor Jones was informed by Mrs. Boutte that the word “strive” was mistyped by the telegram operator his attitude changed dramatically. He wrote in a subsequent letter, “I am quite sorry that I should have been thus misled in regard to your plans. Of course the difference in those two words makes all the difference between wisdom and lack of wisdom.”⁴⁷ He wrote that he was in “sympathy with the motives and the spirit of the movement.”⁴⁸ Pastor Jones promised to quietly mention the ALC’s activities during his sermons, but the ALC records do not show that he gave public or monetary support for the organization.

The Anti-Lynching Crusaders & White Women

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ M. Ashby Jones letter to Mrs. E. R. Boutte dated September 7, 1922. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. June-August 1922].

⁴⁸ Ibid.

While the ALC organized as black women ostensibly to end lynching and mob violence, they also launched a massive public awareness campaign to transform white America's racial views that tolerated and, in some cases, condoned lynching. A cornerstone of the ALC campaign remained to create an interracial coalition with liberal, civic-minded, Christian white women. The ALC leadership tried to reach out to white women's organizations to impress upon them the need for federal anti-lynching legislation. In that regard, the ALC members, in their public pronouncements and writings minimized the racial nature of lynching and mob violence and instead emphasized the common humanity of blacks and whites under God. Talbert enlisted the help of Mary White Ovington, Chairman of the NAACP Board and a white woman, to introduce other white women to the ALC. Talbert recognized that white women would likely be more inclined to support the ALC if the initial entreaty came from another white woman instead of the ALC's black leaders. Talbert also tried to appeal to white women's sense of patriotic duty when she wrote, "The hour has come in America for every women, white and black, to save the name of her beloved country from shame by demanding that the barbarous custom of lynching...be stopped now and forever."⁴⁹ She enclosed a prayer to "tell you how from the agony of our hearts, we are asking your God and our God to lead us on in this crusade. We are anxious that southern white women as well as northern white women shall join us."⁵⁰ "We are asking for your support and endorsement. We believe that every Christian woman in America stands against lynching and mob violence."⁵¹

Getting white people to view lynching victims as fathers and mothers, husbands and

⁴⁹ Mary Talbert letter to Mary White Ovington dated October 21, 1922. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. October 2-31, 1922].

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

wives, and sons and daughters whose families mourned their deaths remained a challenge for the organization. To the Anti-Lynching Crusaders, most white people fell into one of two categories, those who vocally condoned lynching and those who tacitly accepted its brutality as “just” punishment for the commission of a heinous crime. Many white people still accepted the prevailing notion that lynching constituted a just punishment for rape. The ALC, like other reformers, refuted that claim and the ALC instead focused their efforts on trying to convince open-minded white people that lynching was unequivocally murder, tarnished the country’s democratic image and exposed the hypocrisy of its founding ideals of freedom and equality for all its citizens.

The ALC worked tirelessly to get white women to support their anti-lynching movement by donating money and educating their communities about the ill effects of mob violence on both races. They employed every rhetorical strategy at their disposal to try to rally white women to the anti-lynching cause. In order to be successful, the ALC needed to convince the vast majority of white women who either remained reticent on the issue or who believed that the notion of black depravity justified lynching that this movement was not solely based on race, but on a protection of human rights, a sense of patriotism and a commitment to upholding familial values. They emphasized a common humanity and used religious language of blacks and whites as God’s children to spark white women’s involvement. They also urged white women to recognize the historical contributions black women made to the country’s development and respectfully told them that it was their turn to support a cause championed by black women. “This is the first time in the history of colored women that they have turned to their sister white organizations and asked for moral and financial support and as we have never failed you in any

cause that has come to US, we do not believe that YOU will fail us now.”⁵²

From the campaign’s beginning, Talbert and the ALC realized that a successful anti-lynching movement had to include white women. Early on Talbert encouraged members to nominate prominent white women they could contact to get involved. While their hopes for igniting widespread participation by white women did not materialize, the ALC did succeed in getting some white women involved. They did secure a resolution on anti-lynching from the National Women’s Council.⁵³ Two notable white women also pledged support for the ALC. Novelist and playwright Zona Gale and Margaret Garrett Hay became active in the organization and tried to get more white women involved.

In a national press release the ALC wrote of the support received from Gale and other prominent white women and emphasized the effect of lynching on white and black women. In the release, Grace Johnson, ALC Publicity Chair, called the ALC a “mass movement of American women.”⁵⁴ She also spoke of anti-lynching reform as a national imperative and a patriotic duty. “American women are realizing that until this crime is ended, no home is sacred from violence, no part of the country from race clashes, and the fair name of our country is soiled throughout the civilized world.... We urge every woman who is determined to do her share toward ending American lynching, to communicate with the Anti-Lynching Crusaders.”⁵⁵ This release aimed at getting support from white women sympathetic to social reform issues illustrated the importance the ALC placed on white women’s involvement and the strategies they employed to try to gain widespread support.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³ ALC Press Release, dated November 7, 1922. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. November 1-30, 1922.]

⁵⁴ ALC National Press Release, undated. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. 1922 undated.]

⁵⁵ Ibid.

Despite numerous entreaties, the ALC's efforts to mobilize a mass movement of white women yielded minimal success. The majority of white women, especially those in the South, were not ready in 1922-23 to get involved with the anti-lynching crusade either because they did not recognize lynching and mob violence as a national problem, they did not want to ally themselves with black women, or because they had very different views on the kind of solution needed. It was not until the formation of the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching (ASWPL) in 1930 that white women got involved in the anti-lynching struggle in any large measure.

Although the ALC remained committed to garnering support among white women, their historical and personal experiences with white women's hesitation or refusal to form biracial coalitions, meant that ALC members, especially Talbert, had a heightened sensitivity to perceived racial slights. One example of the complicated nature of seeking help from white women came during an exchange with Mary White Ovington about a donation from Mrs. W. C. Gannett of Rochester, New York. In this exchange the competition for donor dollars and a latent interracial suspicion about white women's motives strained Talbert's relationship with Ovington. Gannett, and her husband William, a prominent white Unitarian minister, had been reform advocates for decades. They supported race reform, women's suffrage, settlement houses, and children's welfare programs among other issues. Mary Gannett also supported the Anti-Lynching Crusaders and gave a donation of \$5 dollars. While appreciative of the monetary support, Talbert expressed disappointment in a letter to Ovington that Gannett had not given more to the ALC cause. "It struck (sic) me rather peculiar that a rich woman like Mrs. Ganet (sic) would only give five dollars when a number of colored women have given fifty, twenty-five and ten dollars, who are very poor by the side of Mrs. Ganet (sic). However that is a personal

matter and people do with their own money as they please.”⁵⁶ Ovington may have wanted to diffuse the interracial tension in Talbert’s statements and vouch for Mrs. Gannett’s commitment to race issues when she wrote to Talbert a few days later, “Perhaps the reason she did not give more to the Anti-Lynching Crusaders is that she is a member of the N.A.A.C.P. and I imagine gives to a long list of other Negro activities.”⁵⁷

The Demise of the Anti-Lynching Crusaders and Mary B. Talbert

Among the many obstacles the ALC faced in organizing its campaign, financial difficulties proved by far to be their most pressing concern. This constant impediment strained the ALC’s relationship with the NAACP and contributed to the eventual disillusionment of its leadership, particularly Mary Talbert. Both organizations attempted to establish a simple structure for the flow of funds at the outset. Unfortunately, the realities of fund-raising undermined the original intent of the ALC’s role. During the early stages of the movement, the NAACP agreed to provide \$1,000 seed money to the group and, in turn, the ALC pledged to become self-supporting through bake sales, selling buttons, and holding charity benefits. In a formal agreement with the NAACP, the group pledged to raise one million dollars by encouraging women of all races to contribute one dollar to the cause, “every cent of which shall go to the Anti-Lynching Fund.”⁵⁸ To further clarify its relationship with the NAACP, Talbert continued in her letter

The one clear and practical program so far outlined for the accomplishment of this end is that of the N.A.A.C.P. viz. to pass the Dyer Bill and enforce it...The Anti-Lynching Crusaders have, therefore, determined to raise \$1,000,000 dollars or as

⁵⁶ Mary Talbert letter to Mary White Ovington, dated January 30, 1923. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3 [Crusade. January—April 1923].

⁵⁷ Mary White Ovington letter to Mary Talbert, dated February 3, 1922. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3 [Crusade. January—April 1923].

⁵⁸ Letter from Mary Talbert to NAACP Branches, undated 1922. NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3 [Crusade. 1922—undated].

much thereof as is possible by January 1st and turn this sum over to the Anti-Lynching Fund of the N.A.A.C.P. in trust to be used to pass and enforce the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill and to put down mob violence.⁵⁹

The NAACP, in turn, outlined how it intended to allocate the monies raised by the Crusaders. NAACP leaders contended that a successful and long-term campaign against mob violence required publicity, pressure upon Congress and state legislatures, investigations, and legal processes all of which required an infusion of funds.⁶⁰

In addition to fundraising for the NAACP Anti-Lynching fund, Talbert made clear that “In the raising of these funds, no salaries are being paid, and no commissions of any sort. The work of the Crusaders, both officers and others, is entirely voluntary and uncompensated in any way.”⁶¹ To adhere to this mandate, the Anti-Lynching Crusaders kept an expense fund and an anti-lynching fund. The expense fund with monies raised from bake sales, charity benefits, and button sales was intended to offset such daily expenses as postage, printing, office supplies, limited travel and incidentals. Each “key woman” in every city would maintain an expense fund and make her small group of Crusaders self-supporting. Monies raised specifically for the anti-lynching fund would be set aside and turned in to the state directors who would send the money to the ALC national headquarters in Buffalo, New York. Talbert and National Treasurer and fellow club woman Helen Curtis would deposit funds in the Guaranty Trust Bank and give one check to the NAACP in January 1923 at the end of the ALC campaign.

⁵⁹ Letter from Mary Talbert to NAACP Branches, undated 1922. NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3 [Crusade. 1922—undated].

⁶⁰ Letter from Mary Talbert to NAACP Branches, undated 1922 NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3 [Crusade. 1922—undated].

⁶¹ Letter from Mary Talbert to NAACP Branches, undated 1922 NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3 [Crusade. 1922—undated].

Unfortunately, the issue of generating sufficient operating funds greatly hampered the ALC's ability to get their anti-lynching message to broad audiences. The ALC's commitment to maintaining the expense fund and the anti-lynching fund essentially meant that they had to fundraise for two causes. The ALC continued to struggle to maintain the fiscal integrity of their campaign which led to frustrations within the organization and tensions between the ALC and the NAACP governing bodies. Talbert estimated the costs of operating the ALC national headquarters as \$150 per month for rent, stenographer, typewriter, telephone and telegram services.⁶² This amount did not include postage or express charges or literature and buttons. All six members of the ALC Executive Committee donated \$50 dollars each to the ALC to get operations going and the NAACP contributed \$500, \$500 hundred less than originally promised. These initial funds were to be augmented by button sales and charity events to be administered under the state directors and 'key women'. The National office sold buttons to State Directors and key women for ten dollars per thousand and instructed them to sell them to the public for fifteen cents each. Deficits for the expense accounts arose however when various Crusaders either gave buttons away to people who had pledged support for the ALC or sold them at five or ten cents apiece.

The lack of uniformity with the primary means of generating funds for the ALC meant that the organization had to make late payments or payment arrangements to creditors since they were instructed not to use any funds collected for anti-lynching as expense money. For example, their largest printing bill due to the Herald Square Press amounted to \$796.36. NAACP head offices received letters and phone calls requesting payment and they instructed creditors such as the Standard Emblem Company and Herald Square Press to contact Helen Curtis, ALC

⁶² Mary Talbert letter to Walter White, dated October 4, 1922. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. October 1-31, 1922].

Treasurer. In a quick letter before her speech at the National Baptist Convention in St. Louis, an organization that supported the ALC, Talbert expressed concern to Walter White over the mounting bills and the personal expenses she incurred to keep the office operational. “The postage is awful, and really works a hardship on me—but it is the price one must pay if they are trying to do a big piece of work.”⁶³ Since all the ALC members “agreed to give their services without compensation or salary” much of the financial burden fell to Talbert and, to a lesser extent, to other Executive Board members.⁶⁴ In a moment of frustration when she tried to urge members to turn in monies, Talbert wrote to other ALC members that “the entire expense of conducting this Crusade had fallen on me.”⁶⁵ By October she had only received \$180 from the ALC when she had stipulated at the beginning of the campaign that monies were to be turned in regularly on a weekly or monthly basis. Talbert described herself and the ALC as “terribly handicapped” by a lack of funds although in October she still remained optimistic about reaching their goal.⁶⁶ The ALC also had to compete with the NAACP annual spring membership drive since “we have been requested not to solicit funds in communities where the drive is on.”⁶⁷

The NAACP did intervene on behalf of the ALC on a few occasions when the latter could not meet their financial deadlines. One such example occurred very early in the campaign when the ALC could only pay half of the balance for their first shipment of buttons. Helen Curtis, the

⁶³ Mary Talbert letter to Walter White, dated December 6, 1922. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. December 1922].

⁶⁴ Mary Talbert letter to Winifred Putman, dated December 6, 1922. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. December 1922].

⁶⁵ Mary Talbert letter to Member of Executive Committee of Anti-Lynching Crusaders, dated December 11, 1922. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. December 1922].

⁶⁶ Mary Talbert letter to James Weldon Johnson dated October 21, 1922. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. October 2-31, 1922].

⁶⁷ Report of the National Director, undated. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. June-August 1922].

ALC Vice President, asked Walter White to ask the Standard Emblem Company for a delay in payment, but to send the buttons anyway so that they could hand them out at the first national meeting of the state directors in Richmond, Virginia in mid-August. Walter White wrote a letter to Mr. Stark, president of Standard Emblem Company, endorsing the ALC “for the obligations you may contract in the purchasing of buttons.”⁶⁸ He also suggested that the ALC negotiate more stringently with the company to secure a better deal and that if that cannot be agreed upon that Curtis should let him know.

Also, the NAACP allowed the ALC to use its printing company so that it could get reduced printing charges. In September 1922 the ALC placed an order for 10,000 eight-page pamphlets and 5000 letters at a cost of \$147.50.⁶⁹ In a foreshadowing of the problems incurred by the ALC campaign, Talbert wrote NAACP Executive Secretary Johnson in a frantic telegram that her work had been delayed because the pamphlets and telegrams were late, they could not meet the demand of requests for ALC literature and that there were only ten days before the campaign kicked into high gear.⁷⁰ It is unclear what caused the printing delay, but the pamphlets were shipped six days later from the printing company. Although the ALC received reduced printing charges, it did little to alleviate the financial strain on the organization. Additionally, Talbert wrote to Executive Secretary Johnson in late October of the need for additional money for postage. She believed a minimum of \$200 to cover postage costs was

⁶⁸ Walter White letter to Helen Curtis dated August 1, 1922. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. June-August 1922].

⁶⁹ Robert Bagnall letter to Herald Square Press dated September 14, 1922. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. September 1-30, 1922].

⁷⁰ Mary Talbert telegram to James Weldon Johnson dated September 16, 1922. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. September 1-30, 1922].

essential “if I am to do the intensive hard work in Nov. and Dec. to pull this over.”⁷¹ Talbert ended up donating these funds to the organization to ensure that the ALC campaign could continue.

Throughout the campaign, ALC members had to use personal funds and their meager expense fund to run the organization. Talbert’s travels in the beginning of the campaign as well as printing, mimeograph and postage expenses took its toll on the Executive members, primarily Talbert. Talbert commenced work at the National Office in Buffalo, New York on July 16th 1922. She then began an intensive six week travel schedule to Virginia, Indiana, Delaware, Pennsylvania, and New York to try to generate support for the ALC. By mid-August, the ALC had distributed 22,000 letters, 75,000 press releases, 200 foreign press releases, 1,850 letters to white women and thousands of leaflets and prayers to various church and women’s groups across the country. They endeavored to cast a wide web of support and they had to do so with an extremely limited staff—the six member executive board, including Talbert and one stenographer. Talbert instructed Executive Board members as well as the key women and state directors to turn in receipt books and money regularly and no later than January 15th so that she could prepare her final report and have it published in the March issue of *Crisis*. Talbert called the ALC campaign, “extremely laborious and tiresome,” but she was proud of the fact that the ALC would in the end contribute over \$10,000 to the NAACP.⁷² She also reminded the NAACP leadership that ALC Executive Board members had donated personal funds to support the campaign and that she wanted them to be reimbursed. As the campaign intensified Talbert’s

⁷¹ Talbert letter to James Weldon Johnson dated October 21, 1922. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. October 2-31, 1922].

⁷² Talbert letter to James Weldon Johnson dated January 27, 1923. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. January – April 1923].

concerns over money became more pronounced. “I am forced to work until 10, 11, 12, 1 a.m. to get out the day’s mail. We are hampered (lack of funds). If we only had some money, I could employ another stenographer (I need another). But what am I to do trying to put over a million dollar campaign with one stenographer—No money—I am buying stamps out of my own pocket—gave my own personal check of \$50.00 to help with buttons.”⁷³ Talbert foreshadowed the inability of the ALC to reach their million dollar goal when she closed “I can’t ream a ton of wheat from one tea cup of grains.”⁷⁴ White wrote back two days later and lamented, “glad to know things are going so well though sorry to hear of how much you are being hampered by lack of funds. I wish there was some way by which I could be of assistance but I confess frankly at the moment I can think of none.”⁷⁵

Another major challenge the ALC faced lay with the short amount of time they had to organize. As the December 31st deadline loomed, some ALC members, including Talbert, wanted to continue the fundraising efforts. They fervently believed that all they needed was more time to persuade potential allies, particularly white women who had remained slow to join the anti-lynching movement, and that given more time the ALC could achieve its goal of massive nation-wide support. Talbert wrote, “the work of the Crusaders has in reality just begun.”⁷⁶ As the campaign for the Dyer Bill intensified and Senate Democrats organized for a filibuster,

⁷³ Mary Talbert letter to Walter White dated October 4, 1922. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. October 2-31, 1922].

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Walter White letter to Mary Talbert dated October 6, 1922. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. October 2-31, 1922].

⁷⁶ Mary Talbert letter to Executive Board Member and State Director dated December 5, 1922. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. December 1922].

Walter White described the situation as “critical.”⁷⁷ He urged Talbert in November to turn over all funds now in her possession. “We have got to strike hard now with other ads....We have got to hit now so hard that Northern Senators will not dare let the Southern defenders of lynch law succeed in their dastardly efforts to block the bill. If we only had “10,000 to spend.”⁷⁸ There was enormous pressure on the ALC to come through for the NAACP and given the former’s relatively short campaign that pressure and the NAACP’s reliance on the ALC proved unreasonable. Unfortunately, Talbert could not turn over all funds immediately as White requested. While the ALC leadership, state directors and “key women” worked hard to raise the nation’s consciousness on lynching and mob violence, the logistical operations of their organization made it difficult for monies to be sent up the chain of command as instructed by Talbert in her August memorandum. Talbert lamented that while the ALC “agreed to organize during the month of August, educate during the month of September and make our drive for funds during October, November and December, ending the drive December 31st, 1922. October did not find us completely organized and some of the states are organizing now during the month of December.”⁷⁹ In November, there was simply no money to turn over to the NAACP because the campaign could not operate according to its self-imposed schedule.

After the threat of a Democratic filibuster and the de facto defeat of the Dyer Bill in the Senate in December 1922, Talbert urged ALC State Directors and key women to keep raising funds. She adjusted the million dollar goal to one hundred thousand in the hopes that that figure could be raised if one hundred cities gave one thousand dollars. She pleaded that the Dyer Bill

⁷⁷ Walter White telegram to Mary Talbert dated November 29, 1922. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. November 1-30, 1922].

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Mary Talbert letter to Winifred Putman, dated December 6, 1922. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. December 1922].

defeat should not stymie anti-lynching reform efforts, but rather its activists should be emboldened because “No Negro’s life is safe anywhere in America, now.”⁸⁰ She also urged blacks to stop in-fighting so that they could unite to end lynching. “Look at the colored men and women in your community, who have failed to give you their moral support and have failed to put up the measly sum of one dollar to stop this terrible crime.”⁸¹ She also encouraged, “The Anti-Lynching Crusaders may disband December 31st but their work will go on, like the suffragettes, until we win the victory.”⁸²

As December 31st drew closer questions about how to effectively end the ALC arose. The brevity of the ALC campaign and the disappointment at not achieving its target goal of raising one million dollars inevitably led to questions of whether the ALC should extend their efforts beyond the December 31st end date. Members of the ALC voiced opinions on both sides of the issue. Some felt that the ALC had only just started building momentum and that for it to be truly effective the organization needed to continue. They cited that some branches like those concentrated in the South had only begun reaching out to women in local communities and raising funds. Others countered that the ALC should adhere to the guidelines of the organization’s charter and that members should continue anti-lynching efforts within the NAACP and other reform groups. They did not want the ALC to become a competing organization further splintering the limited time and money of those committed to improving the conditions of the black community. The reality that so many ills continued to plague the black community such as poverty, lack of educational opportunities, restrictive employment options in

⁸⁰ Mary Talbert letter to Executive Board Member and State Director dated December 5, 1922. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. December 1922].

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Mary Talbert letter to Chairman and Members of the Executive Board of the N.A.A.C.P., dated December 5, 1922. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. December 1922].

addition to lynching and mob violence, among others necessitated that black reformers and potential donors carefully consider the myriad causes to champion.

Talbert proposed that the NAACP adopt the ALC as a Branch-at-Large so that it could continue its intensive campaign.⁸³ Talbert reiterated the ALC's commitment to the NAACP and used language designed to persuade NAACP leadership, "We have all counted it a rare privilege (sic) to be able to help the association in this small piece of work and stand ready to assist you in any way that you may further ask of us."⁸⁴ In early December they brought the issue before the NAACP Board of Directors. On December 11, the NAACP Board expressed the desire "to retain the interest and support of the women who are actively working in the drive of the Anti-Lynching Crusaders," but noted that its present constitution did not allow for the creation of at-large Branches.⁸⁵ It encouraged the ALC Executive Committee to outline a plan to keep the ALC that did not conflict with "the Association's present constitution and constitutional provisions for membership."⁸⁶

On December 16, ALC Secretary Lillian Alexander requested that the ALC be allowed to continue until February 15 to "give us time to collect all possibly outstanding monies and gather in all books out for that purpose"⁸⁷ after which the Executive Committee needed sufficient time to prepare final reports. This request came out of discussions about possible conflicts with the ALC and the NAACP annual campaign. Walter White met with the Executive Committee of the

⁸³ Mary Talbert letter to Chairman and Members of the Executive Board of the N.A.A.C.P., dated December 5, 1922. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. December 1922].

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ James Weldon Johnson letter to Mary Talbert, dated December 16, 1922. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3). [Crusade. December 1922].

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Lillian Alexander letter to Walter White dated December 16, 1922. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. December 1922].

ALC and communicated the dilemma that “preparations for the annual drive of the Association began in January, and further, that a breathing space should be given between the drive of the Crusaders and the N.A.A.C.P. drive.”⁸⁸ The NAACP agreed to let the ALC collect monies until February 15, 1923, except in areas “where intensive work of preparation for the annual membership drive makes it advisable that the campaign of the Anti-Lynching Crusaders (that is, the actual solicitation of funds) be ended no later than December 21, (sic) 1922.”⁸⁹ The NAACP’s proviso exposed the on-going problems many reform groups faced over the competition for donor dollars. The ALC’s status as a separate organization to raise money for the NAACP meant that monies collected would have to be earmarked for anti-lynching work whereas if donors contributed directly to the NAACP those dollars could be used to offset NAACP operating expenses at the national headquarters and the local branches as well as be used for other NAACP reform projects.

Tensions over money and settling outstanding debts characterized the final days of the ALC. In her final report, Talbert suggested in reference to the estimated \$2000 in outstanding expenses the ALC had yet to pay that “the N.A.A.C.P. shall immediately assume the \$2000 indebtedness so that the creditors shall not be made to wait longer for their money.” The NAACP agreed to do so under the condition that “the Anti-Lynching Crusaders be urgently requested to raise that amount by a special entertainment, the proceeds of which are to be used to reimburse the N.A.A.C.P.”⁹⁰ Walter White cautioned in a letter to ALC Secretary Lillian

⁸⁸ Extract from the Minutes of the Conference of Executives, dated December 19, 1922. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. December 1922].

⁸⁹ Walter White letter to Lillian Alexander, dated December 26, 1922. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. December 1922].

⁹⁰ Walter White letter to Lillian Alexander, dated February 15, 1923. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. January—April 1923].

Alexander, “It, of course, is unnecessary to emphasize the obligation under which the executive committee of the Anti-Lynching Crusaders is to raise and to refund this expense money in order to keep full faith with the public.”⁹¹ This final statement underscored the adjunctive relationship the ALC had with the larger NAACP. The NAACP benefited from a much needed infusion of funds for its anti-lynching campaign and it anticipated an increase in membership from former ALC supporters. The ALC, on the other hand, enjoyed the endorsement of the NAACP but only received ambivalent support from the national organization, especially when it became expedient for the NAACP to distance itself from the financial woes of the ALC or any perceived threat of competition among the local branches.

Still, as the ALC campaign closed, Director of Branches Robert Bagnall continued to echo the praises of the NAACP for the work of the ALC and of Mary Talbert in particular. In a letter dated February 20, Bagnall stated, “I sincerely hope that something will be done very shortly by the Crusaders to reimburse you for your expenditures of over \$600. You certainly have thrown your whole heart and mind in the work in a way which I do not believe any other woman in the country could have done.” He goes on to add, “Those of us who realize what the work means are immensely proud of your accomplishments... You can be comforted with the realization that there are those who find inspiration in your name.”⁹² Bagnall’s comments were at once both profoundly congratulatory and representative of the hands-off approach the NAACP exercised concerning the financial problems of the ALC.

This stance further frustrated Talbert when she solicited Bagnall’s assistance in communicating with thirteen state directors who had yet to submit a final report and all

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Robert Bagnall letter to Mary Talbert, dated February 20, 1923. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. January—April 1923].

donations. “I have been unable to hear from them and perhaps a letter from you would speed up their reports. Suggested letter attached....I have exhausted every means that I know.”⁹³

Bagnall’s response once again reiterated the reluctance of the NAACP to get involved.

I realize the difficulties which you are facing....However, it would be utterly out of place for me, as Director of Branches of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, to write to your Crusader State Directors, demanding that they send in their reports. As you know, the Crusaders’ organization was formed, as a separate body, and could not be interpreted as being under the Association. A letter from me demanding a report would be resented, and would give rise to considerable ill feeling against me as an individual, and against the Association.⁹⁴

Talbert’s request to Bagnall to intervene revealed her level of desperation to conclude all aspects of the ALC campaign. The difficulties she experienced with getting all final reports and turning in final monies only compounded the immense work she had already put into the campaign. The enormity of the undertaking as well as the extremely short amount of time given to launch a national campaign, made it evitable that there would be problems. The ALC essentially operated as several mini-campaigns since each state director and “key woman,” aside from general guidelines and the national prayer directives, organized her own community. As evidenced by the disparity in submitting reports and collecting donations, some State Directors and key women were better organizers than others. To be sure Talbert was greatly disappointed by Bagnall’s refusal to get involved, because it meant that Talbert, and by extension the ALC, remained on their own to resolve their issues. Bagnall’s remarks conveyed the notion that the NAACP did not want to jeopardize losing potential members and donations by getting involved with the difficulties of the ALC denouement.

⁹³ Mary Talbert letter to Robert Bagnall, dated February 21, 1923. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. January—April 1923].

⁹⁴ Robert Bagnall letter to Mary Talbert, dated February 20, 1923. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. January—April 1923].

As part of her report to the NAACP Board of Directors dated February 9, 1923, Talbert made clear the outstanding issues regarding the organization. As of the February 14th the ALC had collected \$10,909.78 and anticipated that an additional \$2,000 would be turned over to the NAACP Anti-Lynching Fund. Talbert further reported that the ALC expenses totaled \$4,000 of which they were able to offset about \$2,000 through the sale of buttons and other endeavors. She also admitted to the continued problem of state directors and key women mixing the expense fund with the anti-lynching pledges and the difficulty the ALC Executive Committee encountered to determine what monies needed to be turned over the NAACP and what must be used to pay off outstanding printing and postage debts. She wrote, “The Executive Committee of the Crusaders called off further solicitation December 31st, 1922, but decided not to disband until pledges given were collected and expense accounts paid.”⁹⁵

Mary Talbert’s frustration with the tedious and investigative work involved in accounting for all monies raised and spent by the Anti-Lynching Crusaders and her exhaustion at the end of its intense campaign is evident in her correspondence with NAACP leaders in February 1923 and beyond. She also cited at least 100 key women who failed to submit final tallies of donations garnered. She wanted it to be known that, “in the last analysis it clearly shows that some of the women, who wished to be ranked as high grade club women after all are dishonest.” These harsh words illustrated the extent of Talbert’s frustration with the conclusion of the ALC campaign. In seven months, the confidence exuded by Talbert at the launch of the ALC campaign deteriorated into isolation, weariness, and suspicion. She concluded her letter to Bagnall by stating, “It is a heartless, thankless job and I expect that I will throw up my hands

⁹⁵ Mary Talbert letter to NAACP Board of Directors, dated February 9, 1923. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade January—April 1923]. Although the letter is dated February 9th it is clear that Talbert did not send the letter until after February 14th because there was a hand-written correction to reference that date.

after this and say, ‘never again.’”⁹⁶ Once again addressing the NAACP’s request for ALC membership roles and endorsement letters, Talbert retorted in a letter to Robert Bagnall, “I am now over \$600.00 out on account of money spent for this crusade....You can get out the letters in the office, as you have the stenographer, the postage and the help...I would not think of doing it myself. I have worked very hard since last July, giving about seven months of my time without remuneration, which certainly shows that my heart was in the right place....”⁹⁷

In another series of letters, Talbert wrote to Bagnall to clear up a few issues. She again expressed disappointment that he would not intervene with ALC state directors and key women to get outstanding monies. She also wanted to stipulate that she did not give Beatrice Childs of Kansas permission to extend fundraising efforts of the ALC and that she agreed it should not interfere with the NAACP spring membership drive that was already underway. She also complained to him that some ALC members had refused to turn in monies because they wanted to donate those funds to their local NAACP branch. Her comments were adamant, “I do not want them to have one penny of it....The local branches have no right to use it to bring up their quota.”⁹⁸ This frustration emanated from the slow trickle of money coming in to the Crusaders and the fact that state directors like Mrs. Butler Wilson of Massachusetts and Bessie Waites of New Jersey among others intended to turn over funds to the local NAACP branch. Again the competition for a scarcity of funds among reform agendas, even those ostensibly working for the same cause, contributed to the tensions between the NAACP and the ALC. Those in particular communities may have deemed it more important that the money stay where it could help people

⁹⁶ Mary Talbert letter to Robert Bagnall, dated February 21, 1923. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. January—April 1923].

⁹⁷ Mary Talbert letter to Robert Bagnall, dated February 15, 1923. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. January—April 1923].

⁹⁸ Mary Talbert letter to Robert Bagnall, dated March 22, 1923. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. January—April 1923].

they came in direct contact with instead of being pooled for a national campaign to help the entire black community. Such a need for resources, unfortunately often conflicted with an attention to broader reform efforts. Aside from Talbert's charges which may be attributed more to exasperation at the apparent dragging on of the campaign than anything else, there was no evidence in the correspondence that any of the ALC state directors or key women were guilty of graft or nefarious activity. Talbert also wrote that she would remain diligent in requesting that funds be turned in and that she anticipated that when the final figures were tabulated, the ALC would have raised over \$12,000 for the NAACP Anti-Lynching Fund. In this letter, Talbert regretted, "Our colored women are so long in getting awake. I see now that if I could have had the drive lasting six or eight months, we could have got in a nice lot of money for the association."⁹⁹ This is the first sign in official correspondence that Talbert communicated that possibly the scope of the ALC was too ambitious for the relatively short fundraising time. Organizing, running and concluding a national-wide campaign in six months did not adequately account for correspondence delays, members' previous commitments, and turning in funds in addition to actually generating awareness and garnering support for a nation-wide fundraising campaign.

Talbert wrote back to Beatrice Childs, State Director for Kansas and lamented the delays in the campaign but urged her to write Bagnall to request to extend their ALC fundraising efforts in the middle of the NAACP annual drive. She wrote, "I would not want for one minute to do anything to hurt the drive of the N.A.A.C.P."¹⁰⁰ Talbert respectfully declined the invitation to

⁹⁹ Mary Talbert letter to Robert Bagnall, dated March 22, 1923. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. January—April 1923].

¹⁰⁰ Mary Talbert letter to Mrs. Charles L. Childs, dated March 22, 1923. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. January—April 1923].

speak at the Kansas state meeting about ALC efforts because “my finances will not permit it and I am not a bread winner and have to depend solely upon my husband. I have worked since last July for the Crusaders given my time lecturing in various cities and turning in everything to the Crusaders’ fund. This means that I have worked eight months without earning a dollar for myself...”¹⁰¹ Talbert’s parting statements in this letter illustrated the prevalence of middle class involvement in race reform. Talbert, although she gave much of her time, energy, and money to the ALC, was only able to do so because her husband worked as a prominent businessman and continued to support the household.

In a final letter to Mrs. Butler Wilson of Massachusetts who had yet to turn in a final report and monies collected, Talbert implored, “We are nearly three months behind and I am very anxious to finish up this work.”¹⁰² She also reiterated that all monies collected for the anti-lynching fund must be turned in to the ALC and could not be used for any other purpose even to augment their local branch of the NAACP. Talbert also continued communication with Robert Bagnall to let him know about the outstanding funds. She even suggested that the NAACP’s Bureau of Investigation issue a warrant for the financial records of the ALC from the state directors and key women who refused to turn in money. “I wouldn’t hesitate for one minute to publish these crooks and let the world know that they cannot be trusted in the handling of funds.”¹⁰³ Bagnall again turned down Talbert’s request to get involved in an ALC matter and tried to calm her down because he did not want these financial tensions to cast a dark cloud over the larger NAACP campaign. In a letter dated April 10, Talbert resigned herself to the fact that

¹⁰¹ Mary Talbert letter to Mrs. Charles L. Childs, dated March 22, 1923. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. January—April 1923].

¹⁰² Mary Talbert letter to Mrs. Butler Wilson, dated April 2, 1923. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. April—July 1923].

¹⁰³ Mary Talbert letter to Robert Bagnall, dated April 2, 1923. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. April—July 1923].

she would not get all monies collected on behalf of the ALC. “I am working away on this long drawn report. I think I see light in the distance and will be able at the next meeting of the Board to wind up my financial statement. What we don’t get I will have to either leave in the hands of the Lord or in your hands to collect.”¹⁰⁴

The mounting pressures of completing the ALC final report took its toll on Talbert’s emotional and physical health. As a result, she was unable to appear at the May NAACP Board of Directors meeting to present her account of the efforts of the ALC. Lillian Alexander, ALC Secretary went in her place. At that meeting the NAACP voted to officially thank the Anti-Lynching Crusaders and Talbert for their contributions and they also formally decided not to intervene with the ALC attempts to collect final funds from state directors and key women.¹⁰⁵

The NAACP clearly wanted to subsume the connections made by the ALC to strengthen its anti-lynching committee efforts. Here the unique relationship the ALC shared with the NAACP became muddled once again. After the ALC disbanded and began the difficult process of compiling final reports and collecting outstanding donations Johnson, White and other NAACP leaders viewed the strides made by the ALC as a golden opportunity to augment state and local support for the NAACP. NAACP leaders asked Talbert to turn over ALC membership lists and to make a “personal appeal” to “every person who has contributed in the Crusade and ask them to give their support to the National.”¹⁰⁶ This request by NAACP leaders signified their acknowledgement that the connections made by the ALC, principally among black women,

¹⁰⁴ Mary Talbert letter to Robert Bagnall, dated April 10, 1923. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. April—July 1923].

¹⁰⁵ James Weldon Johnson memorandum to W.E.B. DuBois, dated May 17, 1923. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. April—July 1923].

¹⁰⁶ Robert W. Bagnall letter to Mary Talbert, dated February 2, 1923. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. January –April 1923].

could strengthen the ability of the NAACP to penetrate local communities, especially in the South, and foment reform activity on a grassroots level. It also represented a more pragmatic move by the NAACP leadership to increase its membership roster and donor base by appealing to the former ALC supporters to “join a local branch in their home town or to help establish a branch.”¹⁰⁷ Talbert agreed to write this letter to ALC state directors and key women in local communities and send her membership roster within the week because she believed in the NAACP, but her financial frustrations and personal exhaustion at the end of the campaign were evident when she also stipulated that the NAACP cover the cost of postage and printing.¹⁰⁸

A subsequent letter from Robert Bagnall pledged to bring the issue of funding these letters before the Board and seemed confident that there would be no problem. He also reiterated that a letter of endorsement for the NAACP from Talbert would go much farther in getting former ALC members to join than any singular correspondence sent from the NAACP National office. He urged, “I am anxious to make permanent the interest of the women in such communities as have not branches, and get through them branches established.”¹⁰⁹ Bagnall’s letter to all former ALC members dated March 7, stated, “I am sure that you would like to make permanent the work done by the Crusaders, and to increase and intensify its effect.”¹¹⁰ He urged his audience that the best way to continue the fight against racism and injustice would be to organize an NAACP branch in their community. He included directions on organizing an

¹⁰⁷ Robert W. Bagnall letter to Mary Talbert, dated February 2, 1923. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3 [Crusade. January –April 1923].

¹⁰⁸ Mary Talbert letter to Robert Bagnall, dated January 30, 1923. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3 [Crusade. January—April 1923].

¹⁰⁹ Robert W. Bagnall letter to Mary Talbert, dated February 2, 1923. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. January –April 1923].

¹¹⁰ Letter from Robert Bagnall to ALC Members, dated March 7, 1923, (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. January – April 1923].

NAACP branch and details about NAACP history and activities. The NAACP seemed ready to continue its anti-lynching and other race reform activities and wanted to enlist the help of the black women who supported the ALC.

As the Executive Secretary of the NAACP, James Weldon Johnson formally thanked the ALC for all its efforts in the anti-lynching campaign in a letter dated May 21, 1923. In the end, the ALC officially contributed \$13,207.15 to the NAACP Anti-Lynching fund.¹¹¹ Johnson's words echoed the extent to which the NAACP appreciated the work of the ALC and put their fundraising and impact on the larger anti-lynching fight into perspective. "Though the Anti-Lynching Crusaders failed to reach their objective of one million women and one million dollars, yet the tremendous interest aroused by the campaign is such that it cannot be measured in dollars and cents." Johnson also commented that the struggle for anti-lynching legislation must continue and viewed the former ALC membership as crucial to that endeavor. "We sincerely hope that the interest aroused in this manner may be kept alive until we have all reached that goal for which we are striving—protecting of the sacredness of human life throughout America regardless of race or color."¹¹²

Conclusion

Organized ostensibly as a fundraising organ of the NAACP, the Anti-Lynching Crusaders sought to extend their influence further and to use their community standing as middle-class black women to lend respectability and complexity to the anti-lynching debate. The organization and its relationship to the NAACP provide insight into the gender dynamics between the male-

¹¹¹ The two hundred fifty dollar addition resulted because of a mis-assignment of funds from the ALC to the NAACP. That money was originally listed as an expense item, but should have been included in the funds contributed to the anti-lynching fund. Mary Talbert letter to James Weldon Johnson, dated May 26, 1923 and Robert Bagnall letter to Lillian Alexander, dated May 31, 1923. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. April—July 1923].

¹¹² James Weldon Johnson letter to Lillian Alexander, dated May 21, 1923. (NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3) [Crusade. April—July 1923].

dominated leadership of the NAACP and the female leadership of the ALC. The work of the ALC also reveals the importance of anti-lynching and mob violence in the lives of black women and the pivotal role they played in helping to frame the anti-lynching debate for contemporary and future audiences. The ALC brought attention to the issue of violence against women, a subject often ignored when exposing instances of mob violence. The women of the ALC and the male dominated leadership of the NAACP shared a common mission to eradicate violence against the black community and their efforts illustrate the extent to which men and women were able to work together on a specific issue of great import to their community.

The ALC did not challenge the traditional gender boundaries between men and women. They allowed the men of the NAACP to concentrate on political lobbying while they concentrated on fundraising and more importantly crusading against the immorality of lynching and mob violence. They clearly relished their role as the voices of moral certitude and used that status to try to effect change. This approach differed greatly from other black women anti-lynching activists who openly challenged traditional gender boundaries. The ALC viewed their efforts as a necessary complement to the political maneuverings of the male-dominated NAACP leadership and certainly did not view themselves as subordinates. However, this approach did not preclude tensions between the ALC and NAACP.

Clearly the NAACP benefited more from its connection to the black women of the ALC. Although this dynamic was the intent of both organizations at the inception of the ALC and helped to diffuse potential inter-gender conflicts, instances when the ALC would have benefited from more practical support by the NAACP inevitably led to frustrations, albeit ones not characterized by gendered language. The financial strain of the ALC, especially in its final days, caused more stress within the ALC and especially with Talbert than it did with the NAACP.

While the NAACP leaders voiced sympathy with Talbert's woes, they continually refused to get involved because of the potential negative impact it could have on a future influx of NAACP donors and volunteers. The conflicts between the two organizations stemmed not from an obvious devaluing of the ALC as a women's organization, but from an intense self-interest by the NAACP that wanted solely to reap the benefits of an affiliation with the ALC without expending much effort. The NAACP did not view the ALC as an equal organization and in many cases saw the ALC as a competing reform organization which is why they were adamant that the campaign disband on schedule.

The NAACP essentially left the ALC to its own devices when it came to problem-solving and the prospect for a mutually supportive collaboration disintegrated into frustration and disillusionment for the ALC and Mary Talbert. Talbert's vision of the ALC as not just a fundraising organism, but as a vehicle to generate mass participation among black and white women in the anti-lynching fight set an ambitious and ultimately unrealistic goal for the short-lived organization. The ALC faced several insurmountable challenges that kept them from realizing their goal of raising one million dollars and mobilizing one million anti-lynching supporters. The ALC tried to reach disparate audiences and used various approaches to gain their attention. A cornerstone of their campaign lay in re-crafting the anti-lynching debate by deemphasizing race and focusing on the immorality of lynching and mob violence. They wanted to find a way to connect with white women and believed that an appeal to their Christian values and their sense of patriotic duty would compel them to get involved in the movement. They also needed to shore up support within the black community by stressing the responsibility of all black Americans to join in a cause to protect their community. Reaching both audiences proved to be a daunting task.

ALC members invested time, energy and personal funds to keep the organization solvent and no one contributed more than Mary Talbert. Her donation of over \$600 and countless hours in the office and traveling around the country demonstrated her commitment to the ALC. Her idealism and the sheer force of her will kept the group going when it became encumbered by a lack of funds, overcommitted members, half-hearted support from the NAACP and lackluster participation from white women. A reading of Talbert's correspondence with ALC members and NAACP leaders sadly illustrated the declination of her optimism in June when the organization was conceived to the desperation and suspicion she voiced at the close of the ALC collections.

While Talbert still shared the vision of the NAACP as a national reform organization and anti-lynching as a valuable cause, the disappointment with the relatively short reach of the ALC campaign, the minutiae of settling the accounts of the ALC and the burden of dealing with members who did not adhere to her deadlines or instructions certainly taxed her. Mary Talbert literally worked herself to death. While she was widely recognized as a committed race woman, Talbert ultimately viewed her leadership of the ALC as a failure. Although she could intellectualize the difficulties faced by the organization, she could not stem her emotional disappointment that the movement did not generate more interest. Her constant work with the ALC exacerbated an existing heart condition and after several complications she died on October 15, 1923 at the age of 42.¹¹³

Despite their best efforts, the confluence of their self-imposed campaign parameters, the nature of the organization's relationship with the NAACP, the competition of donor dollars and their reluctance of white women to get involved in the movement en masse greatly hindered the ALC's ability to meet its stated goal. The ALC struggled to overcome these obstacles and gave

¹¹³ Brown, Hallie Q. ed. *Homespun Heroines and Other Women of Distinction*. Xenia, OH: Aldine Publishing Co., 1926, pp. 217-219.

lynching and mob violence more exposure in the nation's media. In the end the ALC organized over 900 members nation-wide and contributed over \$13,000 to the NAACP Anti-Lynching Fund. While those figures fell far short of their goal of one million, these women clearly demonstrated by their personal sacrifice and tireless effort their commitment to race reform. Their previous experience as club women and race advocates made them logical choices to lead a crusade against lynching and mob violence. They chose to organize as black women in support of a cause that would protect their community and give them an opportunity to showcase their talents as race and social reformers. As discussed in a previous chapter, their philosophy greatly differed from more militant reform tactics employed by Ida B. Wells, although the ALC clearly benefited from her pioneering work in anti-lynching reform. The ALC also succeeded in planting the seeds for southern women who eventually formed the ASWPL. The ALC women believed that the presence of black women in the larger anti-lynching movement was essential to its success. In many ways, their movement proved successful because they used relatively non-threatening rhetoric to awaken the consciousness of America. A detailed review of their campaign materials and public pronouncements in the next chapter sheds more insight into the kind of reform movement the ALC envisioned creating.

CHAPTER THREE

“PRAYER AND SACRIFICE”: THE REFORM RHETORIC OF THE ANTI-LYNCHING CRUSADERS

“Let me impress upon you very seriously that the campaign is to be one of prayer and sacrifice absolutely devoid of bitterness and any attempt to stir up friction between races.”¹ Anti-Lynching Crusaders’ Executive Director Mary Talbert used these words in an opening letter to ALC State Directors to clarify the mission and focus of the newly formed organization. Talbert envisioned an organization led by black women that would promote a peaceable and legal solution to the proliferation of violence that plagued American race relations during the early twentieth century. ALC members organized nation-wide prayer and sacrifice days to emphasize the immorality of lynching and mob violence, to keep these issues in the forefront of American reform efforts, and to put pressure on white communities to commit to ending violence against the black community. In addition to raising one million dollars and mobilizing one million supporters to secure passage of the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill, the ALC endeavored to broaden the dialogue on lynching and mob violence by reshaping the issue from a regional race problem to a national imperative.

Religious and moralistic language figured prominently in ALC public and private correspondence. Even their name “Crusaders” signified their belief in the campaign as more of a spiritual vocation rather than a secular reform effort. ALC members

¹ Mary B. Talbert, Letter to ALC State Directors, undated, 1922, NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 7, Reel 3 [Anti-Lynching Crusade, 1922].

deliberately chose moral suasion as the best means to bring the need for anti-lynching reform to the attention of a nation-wide biracial audience. Their ambitious plan of enlisting one million black and white anti-lynching supporters meant that they had to broach the controversial topics of racism and racial violence delicately. Since the historical and contemporary experiences of black and white communities often differed significantly where they concerned matters of race, the ALC had to craft a cohesive rhetorical strategy that resonated with these disparate audiences without alienating either group. The ALC accepted the daunting tasks of simultaneously trying to harness the anger and frustration of the black community into seeking a peaceable solution to combat mob violence and trying to convince the white community that it held a stake in eradicating racial violence. Conveying each message required skillful intra- and inter-racial diplomacy.

This chapter will analyze the words and sentiments of the ALC and will illuminate their vision of an anti-lynching campaign that disavowed violence and retaliation and embraced intra and interracial unity, civic responsibility, and democratic patriotism. In their six month campaign, the ALC produced a small number of internal communiqués and external publications, which serve as sources in this chapter. These publications underscored their faith that education and an appeal to the nation's moral conscience would ameliorate race discrimination and eradicate racial violence. In stressing race unity and interracial coalition-building, the ALC employed rhetorical strategies that promoted an inclusive reform movement that could cross racial and regional boundaries.

Although the ALC attempted to garner support among the white community, they clearly considered their group a black women's organization. In much of their internal communications, Talbert and other ALC executives referred to themselves as black women and as the driving force behind the anti-lynching movement. Talbert always concluded her internal ALC correspondence with the complimentary close, "yours for a united sisterhood."² She also encouraged her members and ALC supporters to embrace the spiritual focus of their campaign when she reaffirmed the righteousness of their cause, "To your knees and don't stop praying until, the voice of negro women is heard and their petition for the suppression of mob violence is accepted by the American People and lynchings and [the] slaughter of Human beings be made a crime."³ By characterizing ALC supporters as "earnest, sincere race women, actuated only by a spirit of race loyalty," Talbert acknowledged the significance of race and the desire to ameliorate racist conditions as guiding the reform impetus for black women.⁴ As the foreign and domestic press began to cover the efforts of the ALC, the group relished the portrayal of anti-lynching as a black women's reform initiative.

It is Negro women themselves who have seized upon this opportunity, not only to enforce justice for their race, but to remove one of the ugliest stains that has been put upon the United States by its own people. For this service, all the citizens of the democracy should be grateful to its Negro women.⁵

² Mary Talbert letter to ALC State Directors, undated, 1922, NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 7, Reel 3 [Anti-Lynching Crusade, 1922].

³ Mary B. Talbert, Letter to ALC State Directors, undated, 1922, NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3. [Crusade. 1922—Undated].

⁴ Mary Talbert letter to ALC Crusaders, undated. NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3. [Crusade. November 1-13, 1922.]

⁵ The Foreign Press Service, "One Million American Women Crusade Against Lynching" undated. NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3. [Crusade. 1922—undated].

As black women, the Crusaders viewed lynching as the most violent threat to their community's survival. The brutality inflicted on the mob victim for violating an arbitrary racial code of conduct and the lack of legal recourse for the victim and his or her family signified the vulnerability of the black community to mob violence and other forms of racial discrimination. The Crusaders believed that the prevalence of lynching and mob violence that occurred across the country constituted a "national shame"⁶ and not merely a race condition which the black community must endure and address alone.

In order to secure their support base among the black community, the ALC stressed the need for race unity. Talbert used strong language to counter critics and reluctant supporters who challenged the newly formed organization, "Any colored man or woman who attempts to block our crusade is a FOE to the race and a FRIEND of the lynchers."⁷ Talbert also urged the black community to put aside its "petty disagreements" in order to present a united front against race violence.⁸

Although the ALC published campaign materials that closely resembled the statistical analysis used by Ida B. Wells-Barnett in *Southern Horrors: Lynching In All Its Phases* and *A Red Record*, they also attempted to broaden their anti-lynching message.⁹ In "The Lynching of Women," the ALC focused on the violence meted out against black and white women which resulted in the lynching deaths of eighty-three women since

⁶ "The Shame of America," *New York Times* (November 23, 1922).

⁷ Mary Talbert letter to ALC Crusaders, undated. [Crusade. November 1-13, 1922.] NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3.

⁸ Mary Talbert letter to ALC Crusaders, undated. [Crusade. November 1-13, 1922.] NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3.

⁹ Royster, *Southern Horrors*.

1889.¹⁰ Their findings gave details about each incident and revealed that these women died either because they crossed racial and gender boundaries individually or because they sought to protect the intended victim. The grotesque nature of their deaths, according to the ALC, exposed the viciousness of the lynch mob because they dared to abuse and kill women. The mob's violence against women illustrated the dire need for anti-lynching reform.

While "The Lynching of Women" was well received, the ALC's widely circulated "Prayer for Deliverance of the Colored Race," eloquently and holistically illustrated the group's anti-lynching rhetorical strategies and their vision for reform. The group emphasized the cohesion of the black community against lynching and mob violence as a necessary component of their anti-lynching campaign. By its title and its opening, "Prayer" made clear that it represented a singular appeal by the black community: "Our Father who art in Heaven. Hallowed be thy Name. Hear now, we beseech the prayer and petition of ten million American citizens of African descent, who this day approach thy presence with one heart and voice."¹¹

Talbert and ALC Executives crafted "Prayer" to accomplish multiple goals. In "Prayer" the ALC contended that lynching and mob violence affected all American citizens and that its purpose lay not with administering justice, but with terrorizing the black community. It also emphasized that the impact of lynching went far beyond the death of the actual victim and succeeded in scarring generations of black Americans.

¹⁰ Anti-Lynching Crusaders. "The Lynching of Women." undated. [Crusade. 1922—undated.] NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3.

¹¹ Prayer for Deliverance of the Colored People," undated. [Crusade. 1922—Undated.] NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3.

According to the ALC, every black person felt a historical and sociological kinship with the victims and their families because of the reality that it could happen to them or someone they knew.

Whenever such atrocity is perpetrated upon any one of our number, because of his race, it is done unto us all. Vengeance and wrath are not invoked for the fit atonement of a [*sic*] committed crime, nor yet for the just punishment of an [*sic*] evil doer' but the sinister aim is to cower our spirit, enslave our soul and to give our name an evil repute in the eyes of the world.¹²

While “Prayer” recognized the violent and precarious conditions under which the black community suffered, it encouraged contemporary black Americans to learn from the patience and perseverance exercised by their ancestors under the harsh conditions of enslavement: “May our faith in thy power of deliverance be as simple and sincere and as soul-deep as theirs.”¹³ “Prayer” cautioned middle and upper class black people who had attained a level of educational or financial success and poorer black people who exclusively focused on their daily struggles in a racist regime to remain vigilant in their fight against discrimination and race violence: “amidst the distractions and allurements of this worldly day, may we preserve the ...faith of our fathers.”¹⁴ According to the ALC, since racism, mob violence and discriminatory practices affected every black person whether directly or indirectly, they believed that each community member had a vested interest in improving racial conditions, and should therefore rally behind the ALC campaign as a viable element in the black community’s overall struggle for race progress.

Despite the prevalence of lynching and mob violence and the historic mistreatment of the black community, “Prayer” entreated, “remove from our hearts all

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

feelings of bitterness and revenge.”¹⁵ The ALC firmly believed that education and moral suasion instead of vengeance and retaliatory violence comprised the best anti-lynching messages. This approach may have seemed naïve to the ALC’s critics, but it signified their belief in a peaceful solution and demonstrated their attempt to create a more politically expedient strategy. The ALC did not want to antagonize the white community unnecessarily by advocating that black people take up arms to defend themselves, as anti-lynching pioneer Ida B. Wells-Barnett had done in her early writings.¹⁶ Instead of reifying the racial divide by stressing difference, “Prayer’s” inclusive language focused on the “American” identity of the black community as evidence why the nation’s public should become emotionally and actively engaged in the fight to end lynching. “We are slain all the day long in the land of our nativity, which is the land of our loyalty and of our love.”¹⁷ The ALC wanted to minimize perceived racial differences to try to embolden the black community to advocate against race violence and to stress that the black community deserved all the protection and rights accorded American citizens.

This emphasis on black people’s citizenship and national loyalty represented the ALC’s attempt to dispel the conventional racial hierarchy. They no longer wanted the black community to remain a denigrated group in American social relations. By emphasizing commonality, the ALC delicately, but assertively, placed the black community on equal standing with its white counterpart: “thou hast made of one blood all

¹⁵ "Ibid.

¹⁶ Royster, *Southern Horrors*.

¹⁷ Prayer for Deliverance of the Colored People," undated. [Crusade. 1922—Undated.] NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3.

racess and nations.”¹⁸ The ALC warned in “Prayer” that anyone who refused to acknowledge the common humanity of black and white people risked the wrath of God, “hate and hostility among the children of men are an abomination in thy sight.”¹⁹

In “Prayer,” the ALC linked the dehumanization of the black lynching victim during the ritualistic and grotesque manner in which mobs exacted their vengeance with the dehumanization of the white mob perpetrators and the white communities who condoned or ignored that violence. The historical abuse of the black community begun under slavery succeeded in creating a fundamental disregard for black life and a pervasive sense of white entitlement and superiority. The ALC reasoned that lynching and mob violence grew out of generations of entrenched racial divisions and proliferated when real or perceived threats to white hegemony arose. Violence against the black community replicated white people’s attempt to exercise the kind of physical control over black bodies that had existed under slavery. In that sense, any black body, in times of intense white racism, sufficed to reset the racial hierarchy.²⁰ “Prayer” addressed the capriciousness of the lynch mob and its quest to annihilate the victim or a convenient proxy in an effort to exercise a reign of psychic terror over the black community: “Any convenient victim identified with our race suffices to slake the accursed thirst. Our

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ For more information about the white community’s motivations behind lynching and lynchings connection to the white community’s attempt to reassert control over a post-Reconstruction black population see among others Feimster, “Ladies and Lynchers”.

bodies are bruised, burned and tortured and torn asunder for the ghoulish mirth of the blood lusty multitude.”²¹

Although black communities, especially those in the southern states, lived with a constant fear of random outbursts of white violence, the ALC encouraged black people to pray for deliverance from their trials and tribulations instead of seeking revenge: “May we not fear those who have the power to kill the body, but may they never be enabled to humiliate or destroy the soul.”²² “Prayer” likened the continued suffering of the black community to those of Christ: “O Christ, who has felt the pangs and agonies of man, hear us out of the depth of our distress....Without thy help the burden is more than we can bear.”²³ By not seeking revenge, black people could maintain the moral high ground and not stoop to the level of bloodthirsty white mobs. Patience and perseverance would show God and Christ that black people were worthy of protection. In these ways, “Prayer” mirrored the religious rhetoric used by abolitionists and early black reformer that sought to salve the physical and psychic wounds of an abused population. By enduring physical abuse in this life, the black community would earn salvation in the hereafter. These sentiments allowed black people to persevere under the pressures of enslavement and Jim

²¹ Prayer for Deliverance of the Colored People," undated. [Crusade. 1922—Undated.] NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3.

²² National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, *Thirty Years of Lynching in the U.S., 1889-1918* published in April 1919, categorized lynchings by state, geographical region, gender, race, alleged crimes, and chronologically.²² This 105-page document provided details about the prevalence of racial violence culled from local newspaper accounts and their own on-site investigators. Although not statistically comprehensive due to the likelihood that some lynchings went unreported, the data illustrated that during this thirty year period lynching claimed over 3,405 victims, of which 2,650 were black and it confirmed the widely-held belief that most lynchings (2,834) occurred in the states of the former Confederacy. p 7.

²³ Prayer for Deliverance of the Colored People," undated. [Crusade. 1922—Undated.] NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3.

Crowism.²⁴ However, the overarching message of “Prayer” encouraged black people to learn from the spiritual might of their ancestors without forsaking the quest for equality in the present.

The ALC recognized that whites maintained an inordinate amount of power in the political, economic and social arenas in American society. As a result, they approached anti-lynching activism knowing that in order for it to be successful they had to convince large numbers of white people that they should care about protecting the lives of the nation’s black citizens. The ALC appealed to the white community’s sense of patriotism and American chauvinism. They also needed to make white Americans believe that lynching and mob violence tarnished the image of the United States as the greatest nation on earth.

The ALC’s strategy to get white communities involved in their quest to secure federal anti-lynching legislation rested with the group’s ability to expose the hypocrisy of America’s democratic principles as far as it concerned its black citizenry while still providing an avenue for the nation to correct its racist practices. These daunting tasks required the use of patriotic and moralistic language that appealed to white Americans’ sense of Christian duty and national pride. To accomplish these goals, the ALC deliberately used broad and inclusive language to introduce non-threatening anti-lynching activism to the nation’s white communities, particularly white women, who had been slow to speak out against lynching and mob violence.

While black women’s pioneering and unwavering efforts “formed the backbone of the anti-lynching movement,” white women for the most part had remained outside

²⁴ Shirley Yee, *Black Women Abolitionists: A Study in Activism, 1828-1860*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992.

anti-lynching reform circles during this time.²⁵ Their absence from anti-lynching debates occurred for a variety of reasons.²⁶ White women figured most prominently in lynching scenarios as the assailed victim. The white female victim and her family often “confirmed” the identity of her accused assailant and recounted the gory details of her assault to further incite the lynch mob. Some white women actively participated in lynch mob activities and contributed to the carnival atmosphere of many lynchings by bringing their children to these events, preparing food for those present, spewing racist invectives at the dying victim, and seizing the victim’s body parts as souvenirs. Large numbers of white women, especially in the South, shared the same racist sentiments as the lynch mobs and viewed the mob’s actions as a necessary antidote to what they perceived as an out-of-control Negro population. Still other white women, who may have viewed the lynch mob’s activities as too extreme, remained silent for fear that the white community would ostracize them if they appeared to be Negro sympathizers. These myriad reasons why white women had not join anti-lynching reform efforts in large numbers until much later required that the ALC approach this potential support base with racial tact in 1922.²⁷

Instead of characterizing white women’s lack of involvement as evidence of a character flaw, as some early anti-lynching activists had done, the ALC viewed the challenge of engaging white women as an untapped opportunity to form a powerful

²⁵ Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, “African-American Women’s Networks in the Anti-Lynching Crusade”, in *Race, Gender and Reform in the Progressive Era*, eds. Noralee Frankel and Nancy S. Dye (Lexington: University of Kentucky, 1991), 148 – 161, 148.

²⁶ Brown, *Eradicating This Evil*; Feimster, “Ladies and Lynching”.

²⁷ A relatively small number of white women participated in anti-lynching activism through organizations like the NAACP and the Committee on Interracial Cooperation, but it was not until the formation of the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching in 1930 that a significant number of white women spoke out against lynching practices in the United States. Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *Revolt Against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women’s Campaign Against Lynching*, New York: Columbia University Press, reprinted edition 1993.

biracial coalition.²⁸ The ALC recognized white women's high status in the nation's racial hierarchy and their perceived monopoly on feminine virtue, although they did not accept its counter social perception that posited black women as morally bankrupt. As an organization of black women, ALC members believed themselves to be the social and ethical equals of white women, but they also knew that gaining widespread support among these women would be critical to the success of their campaign. As a result, the ALC appealed to white women as sisters in struggle, as concerned mothers and as patriotic citizens because they believed these messages of unity and morality provided an avenue for white women to get involved in anti-lynching.

The ALC's rhetoric sought to educate and empower Christian, liberal-minded white women to voice their disgust for violence, especially violence exacted on the black community and perpetrated on behalf of white women. The ALC carefully crafted their anti-lynching message to invite white women to join the movement. They did not want to risk alienating those who by virtue of their standing in society, could lend further credibility to the anti-lynching reform effort.

By appealing to white women's sense of patriotism, the ALC used a shared sense of national pride and Christian duty to impress upon white women the need to eradicate lynching. In doing so, they also attempted to remove white women's racial bias as a rationale for remaining silent on the issue and allowing lynching to continue. "The hour has come in America for every women, white and black, to save the name of her beloved country from shame by demanding that the barbarous custom of lynching and burning at

²⁸ In *Southern Horrors*, Ida B. Wells, questioned the integrity of white women when she accused them of crying rape when the white community discovered their clandestine, but consensual relationships with black men. Wells' comments enraged white communities, especially those in the South because she challenged the moral superiority and feminine virtue of white women.

the stake be stopped now and forever.”²⁹ Mary Talbert hoped that by making a sincere petition to white women in language they could understand and embrace would garner their much-needed support. She wrote in a letter to NAACP board member and white woman, Mary White Ovington, “We believe that every Christian woman in America stands against lynching and mob violence...we are asking that you give your endorsement to this country wide movement among women to abolish this great shame and danger to the nation.”³⁰ Talbert also announced that the ALC planned to sacrifice non-essential items in the first week of October, November or December and to donate that money to the campaign. She further explained their plan to organize a nation-wide prayer Sunday in November by distributing prayers to black and white ministers. Talbert concluded, “Yours for a better country with a fuller and truer meaning of democracy for which black as well as white boys died during the world war.”³¹

The ALC also appealed to white politicians to use their power to pass the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill. In “Prayer,” the ALC entreated: “We pray thee to enlighten the understanding and nerve the hearts of our law makers with the political wisdom and the moral courage to pass the Dyer Bill, now hanging on the balance of doubt and uncertainty.”³² Since they recognized that politicians had many of the same racial biases as their constituencies, the ALC complemented the NAACP’s lobbying efforts by emphasizing national pride instead of focusing on lynching as a race issue: “Have mercy

²⁹ Letter from Mary Talbert to Mary White Ovington, dated October 21, 1922. NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3 [Crusade. October 1-31, 1922].

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Prayer for Deliverance of the Colored People," undated. [Crusade. 1922—Undated.] NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3.

upon any of our legislators who may be so embittered with the gall of race hatred and fettered by the bonds of political iniquity as to advocate or apologize for lynching rapine and murder.”³³ “Prayer” also encouraged lawmakers to make America live up to its democratic ideals: “Thou didst set apart this nation in the wilderness of the new world to be an example unto all people of the blessings of liberty and law. May our nation measure up to the fulfillment of this high privilege.”³⁴ The ALC reiterated its hope that the nation would enact federal anti-lynching legislation with the following statement, “the land of lynchers can not long remain in the land of liberty.”³⁵

To illustrate the integrity of their organization and the purity of their mission, Talbert made clear that “In the raising of these funds, no salaries are being paid, and no commissions of any sort. The work of the Crusaders, both officers and others, is entirely voluntary and uncompensated in any way.”³⁶ To adhere to this mandate, the Anti-Lynching Crusaders kept an expense fund and an anti-lynching fund. The expense fund with monies raised from bake sales, charity benefits, and button sales would offset such daily expenses as postage, limited travel and incidentals, printing and supplies. Each key woman in every city maintained an expense fund and tried to make her small group of Crusaders self-supporting. Monies raised specifically for the anti-lynching fund would be set aside and turned in to the state directors who would, in turn, send the money to the ALC national headquarters in Buffalo, New York. Talbert and ALC National Treasurer,

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Letter from Mary Talbert to NAACP Branches, undated 1922 NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3 [Crusade. 1922—undated].

Helen Curtis would deposit in to the Guaranty Trust Bank and give one check to the NAACP in January 1923 at the end of the ALC campaign.

Despite a shortage of funds the ALC remained undaunted in their advocacy against mob violence. They carefully crafted their campaign literature and language to reflect the importance of morality in a female-centered reform approach. The volatile racial tensions in the early-twentieth century necessitated that the ALC broach the subject of white culpability delicately. They did not want to risk alienating upper and middle class whites who were instrumental in setting social and political policy nor did they want to cast lynching as solely a black issue. As a result they emphasized a common humanity that bonded all of God's children. In doing so, they offered white America a path to redemption. They stressed equality between the races as divine design and any action to the contrary as an affront to God.

In addition to emphasizing the importance of race unity, "Prayer" also embraced the oneness of the human family under God. This additional message was meant to reach millions of white people who believed in fundamental racial differences and subscribed to the notion of a racial hierarchy where white people occupied the highest position and black people occupied the lowest strata, "thou hast made of one blood all races and nations of men to dwell in peace and good will on the face of the earth."³⁷

The women of the ALC continually framed their anti-lynching arguments in the language of religious and moral certitude. In this way their strategy differed from the reliance on statistics and political maneuverings of the NAACP and other anti-lynching

³⁷ Prayer for Deliverance of the Colored People," undated. [Crusade. 1922—Undated.] NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3.

reformers.³⁸ The ALC viewed their strategy of prayer as a necessary component in the overall anti-lynching effort. They believed that prayers would directly appeal to white women and professed Christians in a way that lobbying and petitions would not.³⁹ By emphasizing that the campaign must be one of “prayer and sacrifice”⁴⁰, the ALC committed to supporting the anti-lynching cause from a conventionally female reform perspective.

The ALC stressed that “the main object is to get all the women praying together, working together, sacrificing together so that this accursed pastime of mob law and murder may be wiped out of America.”⁴¹ They also reiterated that theirs was a “campaign for uniting of black and white women North, South, East and West against the most terrible of all crimes—lynching...It makes no difference where you live, you cannot possibly fear to engage in a campaign of prayer and self-sacrifice against the most wicked of all crimes.”⁴²

While the ALC did not succeed in mobilizing widespread support among white women, they did manage to get endorsements from a few prominent white women. Among them were noted novelists Margaret Deland and Zona Gale and prominent women’s organizations like the Women’s Christian Temperance Movement (WCTU). Their support of the ALC and its mission gave nationwide credibility to the movement.

³⁸ Koritha Ann Mitchell, “A Different Kind of ‘Strange Fruit’: Lynching Drama, African American Identity and U.S. Culture, 1890-1935, (Dissertation, University of Maryland, 2005), 103 – 112.

³⁹ Mitchell, “A Different Kind of ‘Strange Fruit’”, 112.

⁴⁰ Mary B. Talbert, Letter to ALC State Directors, undated, 1922, NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 1, Reel 3. [Crusade. 1922—Undated].

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

Deland's comment, "I think that lynching, irrespective of circumstances and of color, is a menace to our democracy, and that it is an absolute denial of the first principles of Christian religion," captured the kind of effect the ALC hoped their campaign of moral suasion would have on their white counterparts.⁴³ The ALC succeeded in getting the WCTU to pass a resolution denouncing lynching. Talbert composed the resolution which the WCTU membership approved at its national convention.⁴⁴ Securing support among larger numbers of white women proved a challenging undertaking throughout the ALC's campaign, but these endorsements did help to keep up the group's optimism that they could bring white women en masse to the anti-lynching movement.

The pious language of "Prayer" illustrated the organization's commitment to using a moral platform to influence social and political conditions. "These things can and must be righted, the nearest way to the conscience of the American people is by way of the Throne of God. We are going that way and then we are going to put our appeal and our money for Justice and Protection under the Law, Squarely up to the American People."⁴⁵

The ALC's public and private correspondence included messages that promoted both race unity and the possibility of an interracial partnership. They used religious and patriotic language to try to shore up support among black and white audiences. In many ways the ALC's "Prayer" resembled the works of other anti-lynching activists who used

⁴³ NAACP Press Release, "Women of America Respond to Ca of Anti-Lynching Crusaders: Margaret Deland Writes, Denouncing Lynching as Contrary to Christianity" dated November 24, 1922. NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 7, Reel 3. [November 1-30, 1922].

⁴⁴ Mary Talbert letter to Mrs. Frances P. Parks, dated November 14, 1922. NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 7, Reel 3. [November 1-30].

⁴⁵ Mary Talbert letter to ALC State Directors, undated, 1922, NAACP Microfilm Collection, Part 7, Reel 3 [Anti-Lynching Crusade, 1922].

drama, poetry and other art forms to try to reframe the ways in which America viewed lynching, its victims, and its perpetrators. Their efforts countered the racist propaganda circulated by lynch mob participants and sympathizers.

For anyone who cared to listen, these works offered an alternative and contributed to a shift in American public opinion that led to the eventual demise of lynching and mob violence. For African Americans, especially, refocusing attention toward the brutality of the mob and not the degradation of the victim helped to change the debate about lynching. The pioneering and courageous work by anti-lynching activists made the American public begin to focus on the savagery of lynching and to presume that the mob was lynching an innocent black victim. This extraordinary shift took decades, but it meant that anti-lynching activists had succeeded in changing the cultural and spiritual debate on this issue.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Dora Apel, *Imagery of Lynching: Black Men, White Women and the Mob* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 3-17; Anne P. Rice, ed., *Witnessing Lynching: American Writers Respond* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 9.

CONCLUSION

The Anti-Lynching Crusaders fell far short of their ambitious goals of raising one million dollars and mobilizing one million anti-lynching supporters. A campaign that had started off with such exuberance and optimism in June 1922, ended seven months later with ALC Executive Director, Mary Talbert saying “never again.”¹ Talbert’s frustration with the group’s meager fundraising results stemmed more from their inability to overcome the surfeit of difficulties inherent in mounting a short, controversial nation-wide campaign rather than a lack of loyalty to the anti-lynching reform effort. Although the NAACP endorsed the ALC campaign and benefited from its infusion of funds and publicity efforts, it could only offer moral support because of its own fledging budget. As a result, the ALC had virtually no start-up money, except those funds donated by its own members. The group also had to contend with members overextended in other reform endeavors. ALC leadership deliberately chose experienced club and church women to lead ALC campaigns on the state and local levels because it hoped to capitalize on their established connections and credibility with local ministers and community members. Instead, these previous commitments in other political, social, and reform organizations greatly hampered members’ ability to concentrate fully on the ALC’s specific reform activities.

The ALC’s greatest accomplishment, however, resulted not from their fundraising efforts, but from the ways in which they broadened the anti-lynching debate. Their focus on themes of moral suasion, race unity, interracial alliance, and national pride resonated with black and white audiences in ways that other anti-lynching rhetoric did not. Their most influential

¹ Mary Talbert letter to Water White, dated January 15, 1923. [Crusade. January-April 1923.]

publication, “Prayer for the Deliverance of the Colored Race,” articulated these themes eloquently and broadened the anti-lynching dialogue. By utilizing inclusive language, the group succeeded in expanding the role of the anti-lynching activist, particularly in terms of encouraging white women’s involvement. Because of the ALC’s invitations to join anti-lynching reform, white women could begin to voice their disapproval of lynching and mob violence and did so in large numbers in the 1930s.

As a black women’s organization, the Anti-Lynching Crusaders faced race and gender specific obstacles that informed the development of their reform strategies and campaign efforts. Their experiences also provide a standard by which to judge their actions. Simply quantifying the results of their campaign does not adequately tell their story. Yes, they did fall short of their stated objectives, but they also successfully carved out a place for black women to speak vocally and non-threateningly about lynching and mob violence without overtly challenging traditional race and gender boundaries.

Despite their overtures to white men and women and black men, the ALC clearly conceived of their organization as an anti-lynching movement directed by black women. As “a united effort of Negro womanhood,” ALC members attempted to create a civic, moral, and cultural environment that normalized anti-lynching activism instead of allowing it to remain as a fringe issue. The fact that Talbert and other ALC members wanted to continue the organization beyond December 1922 signaled their belief that progress had only just begun. Like their contemporaries and other black women reformers who came before them, they strongly believed that as black women, they had a unique role and, more importantly, an obligation to work for race advancement.

Black women came to reform from different historical and personal circumstances than did white men and women and black men. By examining black women's motivations, strategies, and reform ideologies from a perspective that privileges the complex and sometimes contradictory ways issues of class, race, and gender shaped their lives, scholars can broaden reform literature, particularly the history of anti-lynching activism. Black women's consistent involvement in anti-lynching reform necessitates a detailed and comprehensive study to understand the development and trajectory of anti-lynching activism.

As individuals and in groups black women voiced their concerns about the threats of lynching and mob violence from the beginning and they sustained those efforts long before others got involved and long after other groups no longer considered them politically viable issues. Their use of a variety of strategies, from invective and retaliation to moral suasion, unity, and artistic interpretations in art, music and literature underscores their influence in ameliorating race violence in this country. However, the literature on anti-lynching activism has typically subsumed black women's efforts within discussions of interracial anti-lynching reform efforts, focused on Ida B. Wells-Barnett as an anti-lynching pioneer, given cursory mention to black women as auxiliary or "ad-hoc" groups or discussed them as a prelude to participation by larger organizations like the NAACP, the CIC, or the ASWPL.

Anti-lynching activism represented a unique opportunity for black women to address issues of race, sexuality, class, and morality from a standpoint that privileged their experiences. It also gave them a much-needed voice in a lynching dialogue that sought to exclude them. While Ida B. Wells-Barnett essentially founded the anti-lynching movement with *Southern Horrors* and *A Red Record*, countless numbers of black women, through their involvement in multiple organizations, remained a constant and unwavering presence. They worked as

fundraisers, lobbyists, grassroots organizers, and moral arbiters to try to get the nation to eradicate lynching. When the Anti-Lynching Crusaders disbanded in January 1923, members returned to other organizations to continue the battle for federal legislation. Although Talbert expressed disappointment and frustration with how the campaign ended, had she not succumbed to illness later that year, there is little doubt that she would have resumed her anti-lynching activism after a period of respite. Her firm belief in the righteousness of the cause and black women's important role in sustaining race reform efforts would not have kept her away from activism for long. The story of the Anti-Lynching Crusaders represents but one instance in which black women banded together to advocate for anti-lynching reform. There are many more stories to tell.

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