

**CONSIDERING WHAT OTHERS SAY I AM:
AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN AND FOREIGN MISSION,
1945-1960**

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After serving in India for three years as a short-term missionary, Pearl Bellinger wrote the Secretary of Missionary Personnel at the Woman's Division in 1953 to express her desire to "give my life for service in the church." She laid out her plans to study social work and race relations in the United States and then return to India to complete her language study and possibly spend time at Mohandis Ghandi's ashram in Wardha. To Bellinger's mind, "the day of the sparsely trained Missionary is over" and a "more indigenous interpretation" was essential to effective missionary service.¹

Bellinger grew up in Detroit, the daughter of a minister, and was persistent in her initial petitions for missionary service, despite the concerns of the Woman's Division over her lack of work experience. She was one of four African Americans out of a class of fifty graduates of the Kennedy School of Missions at Harford Seminary in Connecticut who were the first black missionaries sent to India in 1949. Julius Scott was assigned to Deccan, Tunnie Martin to Clara Swain Hospital in Barielly, and Bellinger's classmate at Spelman, Ellen Barnette², taught at Webb Memorial School in Baroda. At Bidar, Pearl Bellinger taught and worked with the youth groups at the Stanley Girls' High School where she was enchanted by the "romance, splendor and mystery - the allure of the East." Barnette and Bellinger exchanged letters while in India and

1. Information on Pearl Bellinger's term of missionary service can be found in , Missionary Correspondence Files, 1955-61 (United Methodist Church Archives. Drew University. Madison, New Jersey), General Board of Global Ministries. See especially, letter dated September 10, 1953.

2. Barnette's story is from Missionary Correspondence Files.

visited each other over school holidays. Together, they decided to become full-time, regular missionaries.

By integrating her experience as a black woman in America with her firsthand knowledge of Christianity in India, Pearl Bellinger astutely observed similar practices of discrimination despite professions of Christian belief. Noting “how poor Christianity produces social ills,” Bellinger drew a parallel between the discrimination experienced by Indian Christians and that by Negroes in America.

I am an American Negro. As such I am not entitled to the rights and the respect of being an American citizen. Because of this I live in a world of my own. I am not a part of the whole. It takes a great deal of imagination, at times, for me to remember that I am a woman first, and as such I am a part of the whole and a contributing member of our American society.

The same is taking place in India among Indian Christians. Indian Christian[s] are outside the total picture of Indian culture. In the minds of others they are a group apart, yet he is essentially, a contributor to the total culture of India, and he must have a religion that is so and produce a Christianity that is so. Such a separation[sic] from the total culture because of religion, in a country, by a Christian community in that country is disastrous.

Just as her status as a Negro separated her from the whole of American society, so too did the status of Christian separate members of that faith from the whole of Indian society. Bellinger laid the blame for these separations at the feet of missionaries who did not make their “work totally indigenous and truly [sic] Christian” thereby raising suspicions toward the Christian community as well as allowing caste distinctions to persist among Indian Christians. While writing only thankfully for the white women who “were threatened, disgraced and cut off from the majority of their friends and loved ones,” to come South and teach generations of women in her family, including her sisters and herself, Pearl Bellinger, nonetheless, identified the missionary work of Northern white women among Southern black women as a parallel to the situation in India. Implicit in her parallel, was the assertion that white Northern women failed to make their work among freed black women and children totally indigenous and thus perpetuated racial separation and stigma that remained into Bellinger’s generation and beyond.

These parallels were not lost on the Indians as reflected in her exchange with a government official.

You are here to show us how good America is to her minorities.

We are here as brothers in Christ.

The gentleman laughed and so did the others in the group. He then said, But you all have a 'checker-board' Christianity.

Remarkably, the extent of her experience of racism did not deter Bellinger from persevering in her desire to serve. "Considering what I mean in the world today, even considering what others say I am, still I can translate all of these things to mean for me a rare and unique opportunity to witness for Christ."

Unable to have her visa for India renewed due to increasing restrictions placed on incoming missionaries by the Indian government, Bellinger was asked to be the first African American appointed by the Methodist Church to serve in the Belgian Congo. "Willing to make the experiment," she was sent to a training center in Belgium where her experiences were quite positive and included a visit with Alberteen Ware, another African American missionary-in-training with whom she had become close while studying at Scarritt College for Christian Workers in Nashville, Tennessee.³ Bellinger spent close to a year in Brussels in language study, but, failed the exam twice. Discouraged, she resigned from the Woman's Division in December, 1956 after the first exam claiming, "Perhaps my particular talent does not fit into the field of Foreign Missions, but should be centered in, perhaps, the making of a Christian home." She was persuaded, nonetheless, not to abandon her calling and stayed on in Brussels to continue her studies. After failing the language exam a second time she wrote the Woman's Division in June, 1957 to say, "there is no mission field to which I would like to go even for a short-term."

The conclusion of Pearl Bellinger's missionary service reflects the dilemmas that shaped and restricted the decisions of African American women entering foreign missionary service at

3. See letters dated August 3 and 29, 1956 in Alberteen Ware file in Missionary Correspondence Files.

mid-century. The pressure to marry was felt by many college-educated black women in the mid-1950s who were aspiring to move into and demonstrate middle class status and believed marriage was one way of doing this. Unless they could convince their spouses to commit to missionary careers, however, their Christian service became confined to the background support offered through local mission societies. Yet, the departure from foreign missionary service was not driven solely by materialism or cultural pressures. The economic structures of racism in the United States mandated that many of these young African American women serve only as short-term missionaries and return to help support younger or older family members. Additionally, by the 1950s, job opportunities for college educated African Americans were on the upswing providing greater opportunities for supporting family members, while simultaneously curtailing the prestige granted missionary service in a previous generation and diminishing its financial desirability.⁴ These reasons, and no doubt others, meant that in many cases family members were palpably unsupportive of the missionary ambitions of their daughters or sisters not only because of the minimal remunerative prospects, but also because of the long periods of physical separation accompanying overseas missionary service.

While the vicissitudes of African American women's lives influenced the choices they made regarding missionary service, those circumstances also influenced the vision of mission that would serve as the framework shaping their missionary practice. Responding to the appeal for African Americans to go to international mission sites that had previously excluded them provided black Methodist women the opportunity to implement, and basically embody, the Christian principles of color conscious internationalism they believed would build a truly just

4. Report: The Minority Persons in Overseas Mission in the UMC and Its Predecessors 1942-1977 (Revised) 1978 (United Methodist Church Archives. Drew University. Madison, New Jersey), General Board of Global Ministries, p. 13. Two examples of financial pressure for the women examined here are : Ellen Barnette whose one-year furlough was extended to three so that she could help with family finances and Janet Evans who was discouraged by family members to enter full-time service because of the low wages.

Christian world order. Throughout the 1940s and 50s, women like Pearl Bellinger ventured into foreign mission fields which were developed nearly a century before within the framework of Western imperialism and its assumptions of Western cultural and racial superiority. Within that framework, missionaries, by virtue of their affiliation with Western colonial powers and their white skin which became a marker of their Western identity, acquired privileged status in the locations they served. Despite the fact that missionaries and indigenous Christians held common goals of building the indigenous church and improving the lives of native populations, these goals were hindered by what Jeffery Cox has called “imperial fault lines” that unmasked the gaps in racial and cultural power concomitant with missionaries’ privileged status.⁵

These fault lines produced relational crevices between missionaries and indigenous people and often between indigenous Christians and local cultures. As argued below, African American Methodist women entering newly opened fields of foreign mission, implemented variations of what Pearl Bellinger named an “indigenous interpretation” which began a process of filling in those crevices and eliminating separation. This was an interpretation that emerged from personal experience of living in those gaps of racial and cultural power in the US that were ignored and perpetuated by white missionary practice among African Americans. Thus, sometimes intentionally and other times incidentally, black Methodist women challenged the racial hierarchies on the foreign mission field and discovered relational connections with those they served.

In the wake of World War II, American missionaries and mission boards of mainline churches became acutely aware of and sought to diminish the gaps in power fostered by now-

5. Jeffery Cox, *Imperial Fault Lines: Christianity and Colonial Power in India, 1818–1940* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002). Cox’s aim is to counter post-colonial theories that either entirely elide the missionary presence, such as Edward Said, or assume a complete coherence with colonial governments such as Jean and John Comaroff. Instead, Cox argues that missionaries held ambiguous relationships to imperial powers, taking advantage of the imperial presence and resources in order to evangelize, yet knowing the success of their work would lead to their eventual relinquishing of power.

declining imperial relationships. They set out to shore up their fledgling Christian communities in the growing threat of communism, by refashioning their discourse on the practice of international Christian mission to align it with the work of diplomacy.⁶ In particular, church mission leaders came to recognize that the expansion of Western civilization through imperialism and increasing globalization could, and in fact had, “modify, weaken, or destroy the indigenous social organization,”⁷ leaving non-European cultures vulnerable to “confusion and chaos,” as well as the dangers of communism.⁸ Acknowledging the failure of Christianity to garner fully effective leadership in the West, mission leaders maintained that “divorced from Christian ideals,” international political and cultural contacts “can be fearfully destructive.”⁹ Sharing with government diplomats the goals of improved international relations and a just and durable peace, it would be the missionaries who, through their indigenous and long-range programs, could build the firm foundation of love of God and neighbor that would make the peace brokered by politicians last. Missionaries, then, assumed the role of diplomats, negotiating social relations and, now that the United States was the predominant world power, representing

6. See Howard W. Yoder, “Missions Versus Diplomacy,” *Central Christian Advocate* 120 (1 February 1945): 70–71. Yoder did not name missionaries as diplomats, but contended that missions made the work of diplomacy successful and held it accountable to its proclamations. I combine his thesis with recent scholarship to demonstrate the unique way African American missionaries did, indeed, work as diplomats.

7. G. Gordon Brown, “Missions and Cultural Diffusion,” *The American Journal of Sociology* 50, no. 3 (November 1944): 217.

8. Hugh Stuntz, “Christian Missions and Social Cohesion,” *American Journal of Sociology* 50, no. 3 (November 1944): 188 and Newell S. Booth, “It is not Too Late,” *Central Christian Advocate* 123, no. 40 (30 September 1948): 6–7. As one of the presiding Methodist bishops in Africa, Booth’s particular concern was the nations on that continent. The rise of nationalism and the subsequent infiltration of communism in African nations were of particular interest to Christian missionaries of this era. It is also noteworthy that Hugh Stuntz was the President of Scarritt College for Christian Workers in Nashville, TN, who oversaw the covert integration of Scarritt before the 1954 Brown decision.

9. Stuntz, “Christian Missions and Social Cohesion,” 188.

not only Christianity, but also America to nations of the world. Yet, unlike the politicians whose brief visits to foreign lands kept them isolated from the lives of the general population, missionaries spent years living among indigenous peoples forging, in their view, relations of tolerance and understanding.

As illuminated in Pearl Bellinger's experience, however, black women entering the foreign missionary field brought an alternative perspective to these diplomatic missionary-indigenous relations that was rooted in their personal history of missionary relations. As Bellinger alluded, white female missionaries were overwhelmingly earnest in their intentions to spread Christian "brotherhood" in the US and abroad, yet deep-seated assumptions about race and white, Western superiority prevented a "more indigenous interpretation" of missionary goals that could eliminate the resultant racial and religious separation. The inevitable result was a clash of assumptions about the nature of missionary work that exposed the imperial fault lines of the foreign missionary field as well as those embedded in US race relations. Examining the international missionary experience of African American women who served in a framework of color conscious internationalism will shed light on the ways in which the Christian mission field became a part of the global challenge to racism.

Possessing the Land

Pearl Bellinger took up the challenge of missionary service with the firm commitment to "serve in any humble position where there is need."¹⁰ When concerns were raised that she might not be prepared for foreign service because of her lack of work experience, she insisted, "If I never have the opportunity I never will learn....I am anxious that the church give me this opportunity to serve."¹¹ Having written the Woman's Division to convey her interest in mission

10. letter dated April 5, 1949 in Bellinger, Pearl Missionary Correspondence Files.

11. Bellinger, Pearl letter dated April 5, 1949 in Missionary Correspondence Files .

projects to Japan while still a student at Spelman College in 1948, she was instead assigned to India upon her graduation in 1949 since the open positions in Japan were filled. Bellinger, like many young men and women her age, was particularly interested in the new, short-term missionary programs designed by the Methodist Church called “3 programs.” The 3 programs were initiated in 1948 and designed to attract young adults into church service and the vision of building “world brotherhood.” After a six-week training period, young women and men were sent for a three-year term to places such as Japan, which was the first group sent in 1948, India, Latin America and Africa. These missionaries were identified by their assigned location: J-3, I-3, and so on. Since their numbers in missionary service dwindled dramatically after the 1920s, the aim of the program was to tap into the enthusiasm and idealism of young adulthood that had energized mission programs at the turn of the century, and Pearl Bellinger fit the mold. As she related to the Secretary of Missionary Personnel, “I am just like any other serious thinking young person. The aim is to find a place of service.”¹²

Yet Pearl was not entirely “just like any other....young person.” Her decision to enter foreign missionary service was clearly shaped by the denomination’s initiatives for recruiting young adults, but her persistence on being placed in the short-term program, despite the reluctance of mission leaders in the Woman’s Division, reflected the insistence of African Americans on equal participation in expanding opportunities. As noted earlier, many African Americans leaders interpreted World War II and its aftermath as a historical moment for action. As the United States stepped into the forefront of global leadership, African American leaders stepped up their pressure for racial justice as insurance for the efficacy of US diplomatic efforts. In the Methodist Church, the field of mission became a significant site for this challenge to the church to put into practice its avowals of “Christian brotherhood.” As the foreign mission field opened up for black missionaries, young men and women were encouraged to “make the

12. *ibid.*

experiment” and present themselves as representatives of a color conscious vision of Christian mission.

The *Central Christian Advocate*, the newspaper of the Central Jurisdiction, was the primary arena in which the challenge and its outcome were displayed. Under the editorship of Rev. J.W.E. Bowen, the husband of Margaret Davis Bowen, President of the Central Jurisdiction WSCS, the *Advocate* kept its readers updated on developments in the field of mission in the Methodist Church. John Wesley Edward Bowen was born in 1862 and received a prestigious education attending Philips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire, Wesleyan University in Connecticut, and receiving a Master of Arts from Harvard in 1913. He was ordained a minister in the Methodist Church in 1918, served as a U.S. Army chaplain, 1918-1919, and was elected bishop in 1948. Before being elected bishop, Bowen taught at various black colleges and retired to teach at Gammon Theological School, the Methodist seminary in Atlanta established for African Americans. His editorial work at the *Central Christian Advocate* (1944-48) suggests that he and his wife, Margaret, shared similar perspectives and critiques of the American racial system.

After Executive Secretary of the Division of Foreign Missions, Ralph Diffendorfer, announced at the annual meeting of the Board of Missions in December, 1946, that “we must go beyond the sending of Negro missionaries only to Africa to serve among Negro peoples” and that doors were opening for African Americans to serve in India, China, and the Philippines, Bowen printed excerpts of the speech and challenged “the young people of the race” to respond quickly to this opportunity. Acknowledging that drastically limited opportunities for blacks in the foreign mission field had left many disillusioned and uninterested in foreign missions, Bowen asserted, it was “time to stop chewing on old bones....Our job now is to get ready to go in and possess the land.”¹³ Ironically, Bowen used the imperialist imagery that had tainted Protestant

13. J.W.E. Bowne, “New Missionary Opportunity,” *Central Christian Advocate* 122, no. 4 (23 January 1947): 3.

foreign missionary work to challenge African American Methodists to go out, not as western invaders, but as black Christians claiming their equality of space within the structures of the denomination. Like other African American race reformists, Bowen's provocative challenge to possess the land was meant to urge the rank and file to quickly act to take advantage of every benefit gained as world leaders dreamed of the new world order. For many years, leaders of the Central Jurisdiction had been pressuring the wider church body to grant equal representation to the black membership in all aspects of church life. Now, as black and white denominational leaders closely watched the progress of the United Nations and the World Council of Churches in their quests to develop international brotherhood and the new world order, and as the political implications of the Cold War loomed, doors began to slowly open for African American Methodists to possess that which, in theory, had been promised to them in American democracy and implied in a Methodist tradition that fervently evangelized and educated African Americans.

Once these doors opened, a vast network was put into motion to recruit men and women to fulfill the visions of the African American leaders within the Methodist Church. College Presidents, bishops, ministers and, of course, officers of the WSCS were on the lookout for willing young adults. While Bellinger was at Spelman, she and her co-missionary, Ellen Barnette, would have learned about the new opportunities in mission for black Methodists in myriad ways. The WSCS was an important source recruiting young women for missionary service. Most of the young women volunteering for missionary service during the 1940s and 50s remained active members of a local Methodist Church while attending college and were leaders of or participants in the WSCS on campus or at their church as well as participants in the young adult group, the Methodist Student Movement. Local leaders in the WSCS kept close tabs on these young co-eds and were ever on the lookout for those who were "missionary minded with a zeal to serve."¹⁴ In addition, the Woman's Division maintained a presence at national gatherings

14. Report, Secretary of Missionary Personnel, Women's Society of Christian Service, Minutes: Annual Meeting of the Women's Society of Christian Service, Central Jurisdiction, 1940-1951 (United Methodist Church Archives. Drew University. Madison, New Jersey), 1948.

of the Methodist Student Movement, where, in conjunction with the Methodist Church Board of Missions, displays of the 3 programs were set up and recruitment efforts were heavily directed toward black attendees. Additionally, administrators and faculty of Methodist-related black colleges were in frequent contact with the Woman's Division, notifying them of interested students and keeping tabs on their progress through the application process. Ministers and bishops, likewise, did their share of letter writing and personal recruiting. Janet Evans, the first African American to serve in Peru remembers the role her minister played in enlisting her for missionary service. Orphaned at the age of eleven, she was independent and self-supporting for much of her life. After graduating from Alabama State University in 1952, she started working at Tuskegee Institute and attended the nearby Bowen Methodist Church. Her pastor, Reverend Collie Moore, invited her to accompany him on a visit to a parishoner, "and I think he purposely left some interesting information on the front seat of his car and it was all about Methodist missions....Even before I could ask, the minister wrote for more information to be sent to me."¹⁵ After attending the Interdenominational Missionary Training Conference at Allegheny College in Pennsylvania, Janet left for Peru on September 18, 1954 to teach at Lima High School. She fulfilled her term as a "LA-3", and returned to the United States for further training to become a full-time regular missionary serving in Peru until her retirement in December, 1989.

The diligence with which this network was arranged and carried out points to the meaning and import race reformers invested in an integration policy for foreign missions. Not only was it a step toward the reversal of the Methodist Church's institutionalized segregation, it was, more importantly, an opportunity for the implementation of black leaders' Christian version of color conscious internationalism with its visions of world peace, religious unity and racial justice. In 1941, Florence Dyett of the WSCS linked an international outlook to the progress of

15. Janet Evans, *Foreign Missionary, 1954–57, 1961–89*, interview with the author, cassette tape recording (New York, NY, 2005) and Evans, Jeanette (Jan) Marion, *You Are a Child of God: a Memoir* as told to Nancy Morris Barden. Copyright, Jeanette (Jan) Marion Evans, 2002, p. 36-37.

black Americans by asserting that participation in the WSCS would counteract an attitude which perpetuated the belief that “our difficulties, our struggles, our chances for progress have been the worst” by a “broadening of outlook...and a developing of passion for others through consecrated study and service.”¹⁶ Nearly six years later, in his editorial position of the *Central Christian Advocate*, J.W.E. Bowen echoed Dyett’s assessment in his interpretation of the dual impact of the integration of the foreign mission field. Having black Americans in a greater variety of missionary sites would, first of all, he argued, bring an “enlargement of vision” and a “broadening of sympathies” of African Americans in the Methodist Church who were often unsympathetic toward far-off peoples as a result of “being shut off to ourselves.” Additionally, Bowen maintained that opening the foreign field was, indeed, “a great forward step in worldwide brotherhood” and pointing to the diplomatic potential of this move, went on to state, “The people to whom the church will send these Negro missionaries will come to see the sincerity of Methodism’s proclamations of brotherhood,” thereby making “the extension of Christ’s Kingdom” a reality.¹⁷

In linking an international perspective to domestic racial progress, as Dyett did, and connecting US integration with the efficacy of US diplomatic efforts, as Bowen did, the ambitions of Christianized color conscious internationalism clearly resonated with those of the internationalist race reformers outside the church. Yet there were important differences. Race reform internationalists outside the church contended that the war had imbued black Americans with an international perspective that energized them for activism on behalf of themselves and other oppressed peoples. Their vision of progress for black Americans resulting from this international perspective, especially at the peak of the Cold War, however, inhered within the

16. Florence Dyett. “Woman’s Society of Christian Service - Central Jurisdiction - Our Tasks.” *Central Christian Advocate*. June 5, 1941, p. 8.

17. J.W.E. Bowne, “A New Missionary Challenge,” *Central Christian Advocate* 122, no. 28 (10 July 1947): 3.

parameters of civil rights as reformists argued that Jim Crow policies and practices were a liability to America's effective presence on the world stage, and therefore must be eliminated. Color conscious internationalists in the church, on the other hand, inserted a Christian vision of personal transformation into their vision of international racial progress. While the achievement of civil rights remained a key element, the result of black Americans' connections with a global outlook and experience would be an internal change through which they would be connected with other oppressed people through passion and sympathy. Furthermore, as the races mingled across the globe, a harmony of races and nations would be accomplished and the Kingdom of God expanded, which would naturally include freedom from oppression and civil rights for all.

When the implications of Pearl Bellinger's conception of an "indigenous interpretation of an improved life" are considered, the distinctions between Christian and political color conscious internationalism acquire greater saliency and the black missionary-diplomat's complex assignment of representing Christianity and America is revealed. As noted above, Bellinger believed an indigenous interpretation was missionary service that eschewed separation - such as that fostered by white missionaries and that which, as implied in her encounter with the government official, was characteristic of diplomatic relations. Grounded in the aims of color conscious internationalism, an indigenous interpretation of Christian missionary service cut through the limitations of politically oriented color conscious internationalism as well as those of Christian internationalism because of the grassroots location and the long term nature of its work. Penny von Eschen has shed light on the "politics of symbolism" that emerged with the onset of the Cold War in which race reform leaders advocated an increased presence of African Americans in foreign service positions as "good for American diplomacy."¹⁸ Their presence was

18. Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 148. See pages 146-150 for a full discussion of this move by race leaders which von Eschen argues was a significant curtailment of earlier anticolonial activism toward a push for civil rights as a defense against the spread of Communism.

intended to represent the true extent of American democracy to nations perceived to be under threat of Communist influence. Just as governmental and United Nations agencies recruited black representatives for diplomatic tours, the Woman's Division did likewise. In 1954, Theresa Hoover, Central Jurisdiction field worker, was sent on a tour of India and Pakistan as "An Apostle of Widening Fellowship." Her visits to village churches, hospitals, schools, and even chapters of the WSCS were "evidence of an ever expanding [fellowship], as she helps us here in the homeland see these new friends through her sympathetic and discerning eyes."¹⁹ While Hoover's tour certainly represented African American ambitions for civil rights and white mission leaders' desires to display their solidarity with those ambitions, it also genuinely represented the Christian missionary vision of a world friendship that was constituted by a racial harmony built on civil rights. It was the blending of these two purposes that distinguished African American mission leaders' Christian version of color conscious internationalism from that of their non-Methodist counterparts.

Nonetheless, Theresa Hoover's diplomatic tour of India and Pakistan, like those taken by political leaders, was limited by its lack of indigeniety. Unlike missionary-diplomats, African American political diplomats, as well as Hoover, did not live among local populations for extended periods of time, bridging inter- and intracultural gaps, and hence could represent little more than the political utility of their presence. Three-month visits like Hoover's, even among poor villagers, could not bridge the separation Bellinger identified as the result of a lack of "truely[sic] indigenous" work. Government officials in the nations visited by African American

19. "An Apostle of Widening Fellowship," *Methodist Woman* 15 (May 1954): 19. It should also be noted here that J.W.E. Bowen traveled to the Holy Land and Africa in 1951 as a representative of the Council of Bishops, and also went to India and Pakistan in 1954. It would not be unreasonable to assume that his wife, Margaret Davis Bowen, former President of the Central Jurisdiction WSCS, accompanied with him. If so, she too, would have been, like Hoover, an apostle of widening fellowship.

diplomatic representatives were well aware of “American notions of democracy”²⁰ reflected in Jim Crow practices and the corrective efforts that sent African American ambassadors abroad. Thus, officials like the one in Bellinger’s account, who were also familiar with the work of white missionaries, were skeptical of the purpose of a black missionary’s presence, assuming, “You are here to show us how good America is to her minorities.”

Yet, Bellinger’s response to this government official is a clear indication of her motives for a missionary-diplomatic presence which represented the Christian underpinnings of her color conscious internationalism. Replying, “We are here as brothers in Christ,” Bellinger indicated that her motives were to build racial brotherhood, not to improve America’s global image. The circumstances of living and working with the people of Hyderabad for three years or more allowed her to move beyond the representative political work of state diplomacy toward the building of racial brotherhood and harmony that could even exceed the work of Christian internationalism. While all missionaries of the Methodist Church lived among the people they served for three years or more, thus affording them a relationship beyond that of a political diplomat, and all were likewise schooled in the vision of interracial and religious harmony constitutive of Christian internationalism, white missionaries were often unable or unwilling to bridge the gaps that existed between missionaries and native people. Jeffery Cox has aptly named these places as “imperial fault lines.” He illustrates them as places where missionary, imperial and indigenous cultures and aims collide so that gaps in power are exposed and

20. a critique offered by Mohandis Gandhi in reference to the treatment received by African Americans. quoted in Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 32. Many sources document the exchange between African American leaders and leaders in the colonized world. My principle sources have been, Von Eschen and Jonathan Rosenberg, *How Far the Promised Land? World Affairs and the American Civil Rights Movement from the First World War to Vietnam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005). Additionally, historians of African American missions have noted how black missionary presence in colonial Africa at the end of the 19th and early decades of the 20th century internationalized US racism. See especially, the collection of essays in Sylvia Jacobs, ed., *Black Americans and the Missionary Movement in Africa* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982).

negotiated, in the context of the shared goals of missionaries and indigenous Christians for the growth and development of the church and community.²¹ Imperial fault lines were laid across the international mission field as missionaries built hospitals and schools and established networks of churches that were almost universally maintained by the oversight of white men and women. The result was that the “combination of white skin with control over resources” was perceived by indigenous people as “a source of gratification for missionaries, one that provided a sense of superiority in their everyday encounters with nonwhites.”²²

Pearl Bellinger pointed to the sense of superiority inherent in these fault lines when she noted, “Many feel that they have left the best behind when going to the foreign field...this attitude is the chief hinderance to a more indigenous interpretation of an improved life.” She went on to assert,

Some people in India are worried more about their own comfort and about caste distinctions than they are about divided loyalties, the growth of the Christian community or seperation[sic] from a total culture. It is natural that if a man becomes accustomed to a higher way of life it is harder to force him into the lower brackets....Untouchability is not an outgrowth of Christianity.²³

Bellinger understood that privileges enjoyed were difficult to relinquish. This was as true for Indian Christians, many of whom tenaciously held on to caste distinctions, as it was for white missionaries whose skin color and seemingly endless resources imbued them with an ambiance of superiority. Bellinger’s Christian interpretation of color conscious internationalism led her to conceive of an indigenous interpretation as the remedy for the separation engendered by privileged status. It was an interpretation that called for missionary practice that united with the people being served through cultural immersion and thorough study. As an African American woman, she had little privilege to claim, yet it was precisely the translation of that

21. Cox, *Imperial Fault Lines*.

22. Cox, *Imperial Fault Lines*, 222.

23. Letter dated September 10, 1953, Pearl Bellinger file in Missionary Correspondence Files.

segregated status which led her to believe she had a particular contribution to make.

“Considering what I mean in the world today, even considering what others say I am, still I can translate all of these things to mean for me a rare and unique opportunity to witness for Christ.”²⁴

As a black woman living in the world of 1953, Pearl Bellinger knew that to many, she had little meaning or significance in the world. Moreover, the meaning she claimed through missionary service was discounted by others as a token representation of America’s feeble attempt to expand civil rights. Yet in the context of the Christian underpinnings of her color conscious internationalism, Bellinger translated her imposed marginalization into a force for change. In other words, there was a duality to her meaning in the world of the 1950s - the meaning imposed on her by the structures of American racism, and the meaning she claimed in her Christian missionary service to break down those same structures. She seized the opportunity to present her Christian witness for a just world.

It is important to note here that experiences of racism and segregation or adherence to the principles of what I have described as a Christian version of color conscious internationalism, did not always or completely translate into a non-racist or non-exploitative practice of mission on the part of African American women and men. Missionaries, black or white, often “managed to be racist and anti-racist simultaneously,” while they worked side by side with indigenous Christians to build the Kingdom of God.²⁵ As already noted, the assumption of America’s special role in the shaping of the world political order was elemental to color conscious internationalism, as was the belief in Christianity’s distinctive task for the building of a new world order. Hence, African American missionaries’ perspectives on their vocation were as shaped by notions of US and Christian ascendancy, as well as stereotyped notions of those outside the perceived bounds of Western Christianity, as were those of all missionaries. Pearl

24. *ibid.*

25. Cox, *Imperial Fault Lines*, 16.

Bellinger, for example, found herself captivated by “a place which has always spelled in the minds of Westerners – romance, splendor and mystery - the allure of the East,” while missionaries serving in other Eastern nations sent home detailed descriptions of exotic, local dress and “delightful” customs that “might not blend according to western standards of harmony and good taste.”²⁶ Additionally, African American missionaries did not exempt themselves from the common practice of hiring local men or women as housekeepers or cooks to assist them in the midst of what were admittedly overwhelming responsibilities. Doris Wilson, who served in Malaya from 1958-1961, wrote to the Woman’s Division requesting an additional \$100 per month to “hire a servant.” “I am doing all my cooking, washing and ironing which is too much and teach with the other church activities I have.”²⁷ Not only did such a practice potentially reinscribe the separation which Christianized color conscious internationalism sought to diminish, the hiring of a “servant” by an African American woman bore particular irony in an era when black women in American were purposefully striving to move beyond the work culturally assigned them.

Missionary work in Africa produced particularly ambivalent responses for African Americans. Black Americans’ at times condescending and paternalistic attitudes toward the degraded condition of the African continent has been documented elsewhere, as has the compliance with the structures of colonialism by missionaries working on behalf of both black and white denominations.²⁸ The discriminatory and exploitative treatment of native Liberians by

26. letter dated February 1, 1951, Pearl Bellinger file; and letter dated September 12, 1960, Doris Wilson file in Missionary Correspondence Files.

27. letter dated January 6, 1959, Doris Wilson file Missionary Correspondence Files . It is important to note here, however, that female missionaries in the Woman’s Division of the Methodist Church were notoriously overworked. It was not an uncommon practice, therefore, to hire a “servant” for household duties.

28. See for instance the essays in Jacobs, *Black Americans and the Missionary Movement in Africa*, especially Donald F. Roth, “The ‘Black Man’s Burden’” The racial Background of Afro-American Missionaries and Africa,” pp. 31-38 and Lillie M. Johnson, “Missionary-Government Relations: Black Americans in British and Portuguese Colonies,” pp. 197-215;

Americo-Liberians and their collaboration with the Firestone Rubber Company to provide forced labor in the 1920s and 30s is a notorious example of black Americans' ability to adopt the mores and practices of Western imperialism. The embarrassment over the incidents in Liberia was compounded by degrading portrayals of Africans in the popular media and led many African Americans to reject their African heritage.²⁹ This ambivalence persisted in various forms throughout the colonial and post-World War II eras as African Americans continued to juggle feelings of racial and "spiritual" connectedness with a paternalistic vision of redemption for "the dark continent." Since the end of the 19th century, when mission and immigration to Africa were gaining momentum, black Americans believed that Africa was crying out to her kin in America for the leadership that would "rouse the genius of [her] slumbering people."³⁰ The cry of Africa became urgently persuasive during the Cold War as Africa became an ideological and temporal battleground between democracy and the forces of Communism. Writing in 1948, Bishop Newell S. Booth, a white American Methodist presiding as bishop over Methodist churches and mission posts in one region of Africa, warned that nationalism and communism were threatening to turn Africa into a "destructive power" against a world a Christian brotherhood. A "greatly accelerated program of missionary activity" could prevent the religious breakdown and lack of education that were hindering the continent's positive development.³¹

Walter Williams, *Black Americans and the Evangelization of Africa, 1877–1900* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982); and James Campbell, "African American Missionaries and the Colonial State: The AME Church in South Africa," in *Christian Missionaries and the State in the Third World*, edited by Holger Brent Hansen and Michael Twaddle (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2002).

29. see James H. Meriwether, *Proudly We Can be Africans: Black Americans and Africa, 1935–1961* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002) for a discussion similar to Jonathan Rosenberg's only focused on Africa. My reference above to the incidents in Liberia is from page 23-24.

30. quoted from the 1899 student prize essay at Wilberforce University in Williams, *Black Americans and the Evangelization of Africa, 1877–1900*, 176.

31. Booth, "It is not Too Late."

The experiences of two missionaries in Angola, however, caution against any attempts to reduce this ambivalence into a simple dichotomy of spiritual affinity or condescending paternalism by adding in the reactions of the Angolans to the presence of African American women. Alberteen Ware had decided as a young teenager that she wanted to be a missionary, and because of her ancestry “never wanted to serve anywhere but Africa.”³² While in Angola, she reflected, “...it is comforting to think that this is the land of my ancestors; and the sadness they suffered in crossing the Atlantic only fulfills the joy of my return.”³³ On the day of her arrival in 1956, in fact, Ware had discovered the joy of her “return” was shared. When she arrived in the train station at Quessua, it was packed and Ware found out later that word of her arrival had been circulating for a week. “They couldn’t believe that this was really going to happen....They were touched that a black American would come.”³⁴ Ware’s close friend, Rose Thomas, decided to go to Angola after receiving an article from Ware entitled, “Angolans Want to Read. Who Will Teach Them?” Deciding she would be the teacher, Thomas sailed to Angola the next year, and received the same special treatment. She was greeted at the dock in Luanda to cheers of, “Rosa! Rosa! Rosa!” and at a reception at the school house, Angolans laid out gold fabric and insisted she down it. “We’re so happy that you’ve come back,” they told her.³⁵ While the Angolans were grateful to the white missionaries as well, indeed, many were in fact, imprisoned by the Portuguese during the revolution on suspicions of aiding the Angolans, clearly, they had a unique relationship to these two African American missionaries who represented a group the Angolans believed had forgotten them.

32. Alberteen Ware Lambert, interview with the author, cassette tape recording (Irvine, CA, 2006).

33. Letter dated February, 1958 in Alberteen Ware file, Missionary Correspondence Files .

34. Lambert, interview with the author.

35. Rose Thomas Watson, foreign missionary, 1958–1961, interview with the author, cassette tape recording (Mountain View, California, 2006).

There was, then, a “cry of Africa,” and perhaps some missionaries answered what they believed was a cry for redemption. By the 1950s, however, as African nations were churning toward independence the cry of Africa had become a cry for solidarity as many African American women soon learned. And though their sense of Christian mission bore remnants of Western and Christian superiority, their experience of marginalization offered them the opportunity for solidarity with those they served. While black women may have been unable to entirely shed their attitudes of Western superiority, the compassion fostered through their Christian faith and the commonality shared with non-white people fostered by their color conscious internationalism was not completely elided. Their desire to provide an indigenous interpretation remained a combination of the belief that “It is the spirit of Jesus Christ within me” which “lets me....embrace a child so dirty,”³⁶ with the capacity to “see [the aspirations of indigenous people] a little differently through the experiences I had in my life.”³⁷

An Indigenous Interpretation

Frequently the indigenous interpretation provided by African American women, however, served simultaneously to bring the gap between missionaries and indigenous Christians into greater relief, as well as expose the chasm between black and white Americans. White leaders of the Woman’s Division were aware that they had grown “accustomed to using a certain type of leadership,” and hoped that weaving non-white women into the mission field would craft a more representative presence to “young Christians.”³⁸ Yet the onus of representation and negotiation of missionary relations would rest on the shoulder of the women of color sent into

36. letter dated February 15, 1956 in Janet Evans file, Missionary Correspondence Files.

37. June Green Pembroke, Foreign Missionary, 1957–60, interview with the author, cassette tape recording (Chicago, IL, 2005).

38. Dorothy McConnell, “An Untapped Source of Strength,” *World Outlook* 5, no. 5 (May 1944): 16.

the field. As Janet Evans, missionary in Peru (1954-57, 1960-89), points out, “Everything was segregated here - on the field it wasn’t.....because I was black [the white missionaries] didn’t expect me to know certain things.” She, like other African American female missionaries, sensed an over protectiveness on the part of white missionaries who, despite being aware of Evans’ membership in the Central Jurisdiction and corresponding with her before her arrival “didn’t quite know what to do with a black that was coming in.”³⁹ In addition to renegotiating US race relationships that had been transplanted onto foreign mission sites, African American missionary women discovered the universality of white racial authority in their encounters with native people. June Green Pembroke recalled the startled responses of the Congolese when she arrived for her three-year term in 1957.

We were standing at the front of the ship and this huge crowd of people had gathered on the shore...and I figured they were looking at all of us...and one of the [drivers] on the ship said, ‘they’re looking at her.’...And it was because I was with these white people and they had never seen anything of that sort before.⁴⁰

Although black missionaries had served in the Congo in the latter 19th and early 20th centuries, expanding colonial authority, particularly after World War I, led to the exodus and expulsion of most by the 1920s. No doubt, the Congolese were as curious and eager to see the new black American missionary as the Angolans were to greet theirs. Moreover, in a colony renowned for its exploitation and abuse of native people, cooperative work between blacks and whites was uncommon to say the least, especially in 1957 as the Belgian Congo was marching toward revolution.

The experience of Pearl Bellinger’s Spelman classmate and co-pioneer in mission, Ellen Barnette, reveals the myriad ways in which African American women’s color conscious internationalism, indeed their very presence, laid bare the racial relations upon which missionary practice was constructed. Barnette trained at Hartford Seminary with Bellinger and, like her,

39. Evans, interview with the author.

40. Pembroke, interview with the author.

was one of the first four African American Methodist missionaries to work in India. They corresponded before their training, during and after their service, and visited each other during school holidays in India. Inevitably, they shared their experiences as African American women serving in India side by side with white women and Indians, as well as their understandings of an indigenous interpretation of missionary service. After serving as an I-3 from 1949-52, she returned home to help with the family finances and from 1956-64 taught in Lahore Pakistan as a full-time missionary. A summary of her work, written upon her return from India in 1952 illumines the particular quandary her presence presented.

Evidently she did not get on well with the older missionaries with whom she lived - - from them there is some criticism of close friendships with Indians and attempts to identify with the people. She wore Indian dress; she is a Negro. She seems to have been popular with the Indians generally. Her work as a teacher was not outstanding; she seemed more interested in working with the people in the villages.⁴¹

Barnette's "close friendships and attempts to identify with the people" may have caused friction with the older missionaries, but such relations were not unique to Barnette. All entering missionaries in the post-World War II era were schooled in a mission theory emphasizing appreciation of and cooperation with indigenous cultures which not infrequently put younger missionaries at odds with those trained in an earlier generation. White missionaries in this new generation also had to be cautioned about relationships with indigenous people that appeared "too friendly." What lay at the crux of the anxieties surrounding such close friendships, though, was not merely a generation gap but more precisely, it was a racial, and often sexual, boundary. It was a boundary predicated on the assumption of separation between missionaries and their protégés, which in turn was founded on the presumption of a separation of races. White missionaries were seen as crossing this racial divide whenever they became "too friendly" with native people, and in these cases the anxious responses of fellow white missionaries stemmed as

41. Ellen Barnette file, letter dated 5/9/56 in, Missionary Correspondence Files .

much, if not more, from taboos surrounding interracial sexual relations.⁴² Black missionaries, however, were seen as crossing the line simply by being present. Behind the straightforward declarative, “She wore Indian dress; she is a Negro,” is the reality that while white women became friendly with indigenous people and wore native dress, their white skin retained for them their separate, missionary status. In the eyes of the older, white missionaries Ellen Barnette’s missionary status was compromised not only by her attempts to identify with the people, but even more so by her dark skin wrapped in the folds of a sari.

From the moment of her arrival at the mission school in Baroda, Barnette’s identity generated confusion. Wearing a sari she had purchased while in language courses in Bombay, she was not immediately recognized by the white missionaries as a new co-worker but rather was assumed to be an Indian. Her decision to wear a sari, in fact, generated confusion at more than one level.

During my time in Baroda, Indians and foreigners, mistaking me for Indian, differing hair texture and features notwithstanding, used to ask my “mother” tongue. It amused me to watch their reactions as they learned I was an American from Georgia. Indian villagers had not heard of Blacks and one elderly village woman insisted that I was an Anglo-Indian trying to pass myself off as an American. This was highly amusing to me for two reasons: 1) Most Anglo-Indians have lighter skin coloring than my deep chocolate tones and 2) Those Anglo-Indians who considered fair skin the badge of privilege would certainly have blanched at my being dubbed Anglo. Yet, on the other hand, an American suggested that perhaps I should not wear the sari so often since it would lower my prestige. I had not come to India for prestige or power; I had come to serve and share. I remember wondering what had been the true motivation for that woman’s decision to work and serve in another country.⁴³

42. see for instance, letters dated November 8, 14, 15, 1951 in Dora Lee Allen file and letter dated November 24, 1951 in Sallie Lewis Browne file in Missionary Correspondence Files . Allen was a white missionary whose close relationships with Liberians caused enough friction with her senior missionaries that she resigned. While she became friendly with many Liberians, her relationship with a Liberian man was the major source of contention.

43. quoted in Women’s Division United Methodist Church Board of Global Ministries and Task Group on the History of the Central Jurisdiction Women’s Organization, *To a Higher Glory: The Growth and Development of Black Women Organized for Mission in the Methodist Church, 1940–1968* (1978), 39–40.

Simultaneously ascribed the high cultural status of an Anglo-Indian by Indian villagers and a lowered prestige by a white missionary, Barnette found herself living in the depths of an imperial fault line in which power was negotiated across barriers of skin color. With dark skin and a sari operating as a marker for indigenous identity, Barnette's status as a culturally and racially superior missionary was perceived to be at stake. Since her skin color could not identify her as a missionary, Western dress, according to her co-worker, would have reserved for her some prestige. Yet her Western mannerisms led some Indians to believe that not only did she hold prestige within Indian social norms, but that she was also trying to "pass" as someone even more prestigious - an American.

Of course, the irony of "passing" was not lost on Barnette as is suggested in her reference to her own skin color. Not only would her "deep chocolate tones" have prevented her from posing as an elite, lighter-skinned Anglo Indian, they likewise would have prevented her from posing as a white woman in the US. Moreover, as Thomas Borstelmann points out, the falseness of the American racial caste system was being laid bare in the post-World War II era with the increasing frequency of Third World visitors arriving in the United States as representative to the United Nations and being granted freedoms of white people as they toured the country.⁴⁴ Stories of black Americans testing racial lines by donning African or Indian garb and gaining access to restaurants or first-class train passage ran frequently in the black press, including the story of "The Turbaned Traveller" in the *Central Christian Advocate*. Concluding an account of a black preacher from New York who donned a turban and traveled the South "free from the bedevilment....of the jim-crow provisions," J.W.E. Bowen sardonically remarked, "This is done more often than is generally recognized."⁴⁵

44. Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 61–62.

45. J.W.E Bowen, "Turbaned Traveller," *Central Christian Advocate* 123, no. 1 (1 January 1948): 3.

In this connection, Barnette likewise used non-Western dress to challenge the assumptions of racial hierarchy. By means of a color conscious internationalist interpretation of Christian mission her skin color became for her a tool of subversion in an imperial fault line that exposed gaps of racial and cultural power. Her amusement at the confused responses to her presence reveals that Barnette was well aware that she was subverting traditional racial boundaries between missionary and native, and between high caste status granted Anglo-Indians and low caste borne by many of the villagers with whom she worked. And while older missionaries may have despaired over the confusion of identities, Barnette, it seems, believed the confusion represented a positive move. Her determination to wear a sari blurred established racial boundaries and brought to light their embeddedness in missionary practice. Her sari-ed presence called into question the motivations of other missionaries who seemed interested in maintaining prestige, as well as the racial and cultural assumptions of the Indians themselves. In the end, Ellen Barnette's exercise of an indigenous interpretation proved a stimulus for the renegotiation of the racial ordering behind missionary relations.

The First Question

While Barnette's wearing of the sari can be construed as an intentional undermining of colonial racial dividing lines, it was also very much an extension of the challenge to racial barriers taking place in the US. Clearly, wearing the sari echoes the same masquerading taking place in the US that was noted in the story of "The Turbaned Traveller," but moreover, what it points to is the fact that working as foreign missionaries transplanted onto the international mission scene black America's challenge to the church and the world for integration. Hovering in the back of Christian missionary service framed by the visions of color conscious internationalism was the reality of the American racial system in which the participation of black Americans in society was circumscribed by Jim Crow regulations in the South and the more insidious discrimination of the North. Frequently challenged to respond to the incredulous questions of the indigenous people they served, African American female missionaries found

their work on the foreign field shaped by the international community's cognizance of racial conditions in the US.

African American missionaries in the post-World War II era were not the first to bring the word of US racism to the world. While the NAACP and Pan-African Congresses had made great strides in uniting colonized people around the globe and connecting their struggles with the battle against Jim Crow conditions in the United States, black Americans' missionary work to African nations at the end of the nineteenth century and into the early decades of the twentieth century also illumined, in more implicit ways, the substance of American race relations. Racial tensions and frequently segregated work stations revealed to native Africans the nature of race relations in the United States. Additionally, some mission stations, the Galangue mission in Angola, for instance, held subscriptions to *Crisis*, the *Brownie's Book*, the children's periodical of the NAACP, and the *Chicago Defender*, thereby alerting Africans to the similarities between their experiences as colonized Africans and the experiences of missionaries in Jim Crow America.⁴⁶ In 1950, Pearl Bellinger would include in the library at her school in Bidar a subscription to *Crisis* as well as a supply of fifty copies of "Lift Every Voice and Sing," the "Negro national anthem." Bellinger's inclusion of these materials in the library suggests her intention to remind the newly independent India of its continuing connection to the freedom struggles of those in other lands. Another contributing factor in the globalization of American racism was the practice of "reverse missionaries," a term mission historian Dana Robert uses to describe the practice of sending indigenous Christians as "ambassadors" to the West as part of

46. Lillie M. Johnson, "Missionary-Government Relations: Black Americans in British and Portuguese Colonies," in *Black Americans and the Missionary Movement in Africa*, Sylvia M. Jacobs (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982), 208. Carrying these subscriptions was more than likely quite rare, for as Johnson observes, the Portuguese who colonized Angola, were more amenable to black American missionaries than were the British. By 1919, she notes, the door was virtually closed to black American missionaries in British African colonies.

the post-World War I mission vision of World Friendship.⁴⁷ Christians from Asian and African countries who were engaged for speaking tours to the US or given scholarships to attend American universities quickly were familiarized with the rules of Jim Crow and shared these stories on their return home.

After World War II it became increasingly evident that the awareness of American racial conditions around the globe was going to be an impediment, not only to American diplomacy, as race reformers outside the church argued, but also to the building of a Christian world order. As America found itself moving into the forefront of the global stage, criticism was waged from multiple directions. At a symposium on “Culture and Missions” held at historically black Fisk University in 1944, Ako Adjei, leader of the Ghanaian independence movement and himself a graduate of historically black Lincoln University in Philadelphia, laid out the reasons why the Christian church had become suspect to African young men and women, and the growing number of nationalist thinkers, in particular. Primary among these reasons was “a contradiction in theory and practice” among white Europeans and Americans exhibited in their economic exploitation of Africans, the poverty in many parts of Europe and America, and “the inhuman atrocities and endless humiliation which decent and innocent people suffer in American civilization....by the simple reason of their race and color.” Adjei went on to boldly state,

I am not quite certain of the kind of Christianity which Americans are anxious to preach in Africa. I wonder whether it is the southern white man’s Jim Crow edition of Christianity or the Christianity that was exemplified in the earthly life of the Lord Jesus Christ himself.....I often wonder why Americans are so enthusiastic about sending Christian missionaries to Africa, while in America our cousins - I mean the black Americans of African descent - are segregated and subjected to all forms of endless humiliation.

Ako Adjei made clear that African Christians, like their “cousins” in America, believed that a realignment of American race relations was pivotal to the forging of a “world fellowship of

47. Dana Lee Robert, “The First Globalization: The Internationalization of the Protestant Missionary Movement Between the World Wars,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 26, no. 2 (April 2002): 1–29, HighBeam Research(February 7, 2006).

peace.” His frequent references to African nationalists throughout his presentation, moreover, reveals his awareness that Western leaders believed the future of Africa was potentially up for grabs in the post-war world, and suggests Adjei believed their actions would be a deciding factor in the political decisions of those nationalist leaders.⁴⁸

Adjei’s frank discussion of African’s suspicions of Western civilization and its Christianizing mission was no doubt an allusion to the Soviet Union’s interest in the future of Africa. As a number of scholars have noted, to gain the interests of the aspiring nationalist leaders, the USSR reveled in the contradictions of American democracy revealed in its treatment of racial minorities. The Jim Crow system became a propaganda tool of the Soviet Union, yet America’s European allies also found it helpful. Wanting desperately to hold on to their crumbling colonial empires, European nations couldn’t resist advertising “American double standards” as the US criticized European colonial practices while ignoring their own segregated practices.⁴⁹ This was most likely the reason why, shortly after her arrival in Elizabethville, Belgian Congo in September, 1957, June Green found a picture of the Little Rock Nine on the front page of the newspaper. That the infamous story of the nine African American students who were blocked from entering Little Rock Central High School by the Arkansas National Guard should travel across the ocean to sub-Saharan Africa was, arguably, due in large part to the Belgain colonial government’s desire to demonstrate America’s hypocrisy.

In the end, African American women missionaries found that colonial governments’ and the United States’ treatment of dark skinned people were not, in fact, all that disparate. Evacuated from the Congo with the outbreak of the revolution in 1960, June Green traveled with

48. Ako Adjei, “Imperialism and Spiritual Freedom: An African View,” *American Journal of Sociology* 50, no. 3 (November 1944): 189–98. Adjei’s paper, along with others presented at the conference, were published collectively in the November 1944 issue of the *American Journal of Sociology*.

49. Borstelmann, *Cold War and the Color Line*, 75.

white missionary friends anticipating a visit to South Africa. She refused to enter when they were told the only way she could receive a visa was as a servant.⁵⁰ Similarly, while travelling from Angola to the conference meeting of the Methodist Church in Africa, Rose Thomas, was forced to travel in a second class train car. She was present with the white missionaries who purchased the tickets, yet none of them had noticed that the ticket agent, assuming Thomas was Angolan, issued her a second class ticket. During the day, Thomas was allowed to sit in first class with her friends, but at night was “evicted,” despite the white missionaries’ protestations. For Thomas, this was “a humiliating experience,”⁵¹ and it ironically reflects the experiences of African or Indian travelers to the US who were “mistaken” for black Americans.

In other ways, Thomas’ experience suggests that living outside the United States afforded the opportunity to gain new perspectives on the direct connections between US segregation and colonialism, potentially imbuing some women with a more militant posture toward race reform in America. For instance, Thomas could make a vivid connection between her experience on the train in Africa and one she had in her hometown of Cincinnati before leaving for language study in Portugal. After stopping in a store to buy a soft drink, she was told she would have to drink it outside; Thomas put down her drink and walked out. This event was likely in mind while she was studying in Portugal and met with Angolan and Mozambiquan students in Lisbon. One of these students was Agostinho Neto, the future President of Angola who shared his vision of an independent Angola and the lifting of racial barriers in the United States. It was through encounters like this that Rose Thomas “began to recognize that what was beginning to happen in the United States was not only happening there but it was happening in Europe and that colonization was also synonymous with segregation.”⁵²

50. Pembroke, interview with the author.

51. Rose Thomas Watson, interview with the author.

52. Rose Thomas Watson, interview with the author.

During her three-year term in Malaya, Doris Wilson utilized the provocations of the Malaysians as an opportunity to boldly reflect back to the black and white Methodist women's mission societies in America the international scope of American racist practices and their implications for the forging of the Christian world order. A graduate of Philander Smith College in Arkansas, Wilson sailed for Taiping, Malaya in 1958 and served until 1961. Writing to her sponsoring churches in America she related,

Undoubtedly your first question would have been: 'What do they think of the racial question in the United States and South Africa?' They think plenty about it, for it is inconsistent with Christianity. The students often come up with Time, Life and clippings from the newspaper and say: Did this really happen in your country?....Many Malaysians ask these questions: Why do you feel that you are justified in coming to our country to encourage us to be Christians when in your country you have such great racial inequalities and problems?

Yes, the United States is the leading power of the World but their attitude toward race is a very backward one. This harms the Christian mission work; slows it up years and years.

When you or we feel tempted to point a finger at white South Africa. [*sic*] We Americans should hang our heads in shame, not only for Little Rock, but for the discrimination in all our towns and cities.⁵³

Assuming the first question on her readers' minds was naturally the international interpretation of US race relations, Wilson drew all her readers, black and white, into her color conscious framework for Christian mission which directly linked American racial practices to the church's global effectiveness. She reminded her readers that American racial discrimination was on public display to international students, many of them in the US through the generosity of Methodist women's scholarship programs, whenever they were "attending church, traveling by means of public transportation, eating in restaurants and attending movies."⁵⁴ Her reference to Little Rock not only suggests that the story of the Little Rock Nine spread to the South Pacific as well as the Congo, but Little Rock and the racism it represented further served as an axis around

53. letter dated September 12, 1960 in Doris J. Wilson file in Missionary Correspondence Files .

54. *ibid.*

which America's shame rotated. The reality of racial discrimination, which was not limited to Southern communities, was a disgrace presented to the world and established America as no better than apartheid South Africa.

Perhaps recognizing that the frankness of her letter may have been a bitter pill to swallow for some of her readers, Wilson closed by appealing, "May this letter mean something to you other than just black words on white paper." Clearly trying to impel her sponsors' to corrective action that could preserve the integrity of Christian overseas mission, a deeper connotation can also be construed from Wilson's entreaty. Wilson was aware that, like the words on paper, black women stood out against the white backdrop of American society, and were often considered disposable. She was doubtlessly petitioning that her words be heard and taken seriously by a white audience, and that she, therefore, be accorded more meaning than expendable words on paper. Wilson, like Pearl Bellinger, was aware of what she meant in the world, but rather than translating that into a new meaning for herself, as Bellinger did, Wilson insinuated that she expected white women to recognize the meaning she already knows she has.

Most importantly, Wilson's assertions are distinguished from race reformers outside the church by their lack of reference to political or democratic change. In comparison to Pearl Bellinger's critique of missionary practice in India discussed above, Doris Wilson seemed to reflect the shift away from an anticolonial critique toward a focus on American racial injustices that was charted by Penny von Eschen. Her focus is on the international perceptions of US racism, not its interconnections with global racism. Yet, Wilson still cohered with the broadness of vision of the Christian version of color conscious internationalism which understood America's backward attitude toward race as impeding Christian mission work. Her critique did not become an argument for the justification of civil rights as an end in itself, but rather looked to the granting of civil rights as a step toward the mission vision of "world fellowship." It was this aspiration of building a Christian world order founded on international racial justice that bestowed African American women's theory and practice of mission with the potential for greater effectiveness than their counterparts who stood outside the church. As they carried this

vision of mission into the global field, African American women missionaries joined the struggle for racial justice in the United States with the struggles for justice of the world's marginalized, thereby transforming the international mission field into a field of racial challenge. It would remain for the home missionaries to carry out that transformation within the boundaries of the US.

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