10/25/20

Dear Colleagues and Fellow Participants in the Warren Center Fellowship,

I am looking forward to our discussion of the FCC's anti-lynching campaign. The chapter I will be presenting is chapter 2 of a larger work on the FCC's theological critiques of and projects to undermine racial discrimination (primarily against African Americans, though not limited to them) in the US from 1923 to 1950. I have included the full chapter titles below.

While I am hesitant to prescribe responses to an essay or chapter in progress, below I do want to ask for specific feedback on particular issues. Let me say that I am aware of the graphic nature of the topic I will be discussing and I can only offer an advance warning about the violent dehumanization of black bodies that you will read about in this chapter. I have tried to be sensitive to these concerns in writing and talking about this topic in other venues, and I remind myself of the somber subject matter in each instance. This warning is both about contents and about my own struggle to write, talk, and think about this extremely difficult topic without appearing too detached and accustomed to these violent incidents, however familiar I might be with the subject matter.

First, I would like suggestions or commentary on whether my situating the FCC's emerging anti-lynching campaign in the early 1920s is sufficiently historicized and contextualized. I will explain in person why I have chosen to narrate and organize the chapter as I have and why I decided to leave out details of broader anti-lynching activism that preceded the work of the FCC.

Second, I am still wrestling with the tone and stance of my approach to the FCC. As an historian and a scholar of religion, I don't want to come across as an apologist for any organization or movement such that I obscure important details or overlook aspects of a movement or historical moment that does not comport with my thesis. I have tried to aim in this and other works to tease out contradictions and tensions in the actions of historical actors, to allow ambiguities and ironies to remain in the stories I discover and examine, and not to impose a static and closed order on evolving conceptions of moral and social problems. Yet, in this project and especially in this chapter, I not only make a claim about an act of historical retrieval and significance, but I admit my admiration for the work undertaken by the FCC and I do this with awareness of contemporary critics (and activists' complaints) of the gradualism of the FCC and the NCC's approach to social change and racial justice. But I worry that in trying to rectify a problem and make a positive claim about a religious organization contributing to debates about cultural pluralism (in the larger project, beginning in the 1920s), I might seem too sympathetic. But I am less exercised about this issue in this chapter given the urgency that all activists had about action against the brutal and grim practice of lynching and how the work of the FCC was welcomed, even if there was not agreement about the fuller discussion of the nature of racism in the US and how to go about mitigating or trying to end it.

So to reiterate, I would like any advice about my tone and the approach I take to the FCC in this chapter.

I am eager to receive any and all other suggestions and commentary that you have to offer.

All the best,

Curtis Evans

Here are the tentative chapter titles of my book project:

“A Theology of Brotherhood: The Federal Council of Churches and the Problem of Race”

Introduction

Chapter 1: A Protestant Theology of Brotherhood

Chapter 2: “A Stain upon Our National Honor”: The Anti-Lynching Campaign

Chapter 3: Race Relations Sundays: Changing Persons and the Church

Chapter 4: The Church in the World: Interracial Workshops

Chapter 5: The Dynamics of Race and Interracialism within the Federal Council

Chapter 6: Ecumenical Protestantism and the Limits of Social Reform

Chapter 2: “A Stain Upon Our National Honor”: The Anti-Lynching Campaign

Introduction

From the inception of its Commission on Negro Churches and Race Relations in 1921, the FCC pledged to sway churches to speak out against lynching and committed itself to educating the public on the evils of lynching for at least five years.[1] This initial project of education and changing attitudes eventuated in full support of several federal anti-lynching bills and a massive public relations campaign to highlight the atrocities of lynching. The violence and brutality of lynching fundamentally challenged the FCC’s tendency to rely on publicizing factual information as a primary means of changing attitudes and swaying public opinion. Lynching symbolized the depths of racial oppression in America and indicated how hard it would be merely to get many white Americans to recognize the basic humanity of blacks. Yet, lynching served as a learning experience for the FCC, alerting it to the depths of racial oppression in America and yet causing it to highlight the necessity of its public pronouncements about brotherhood. The leaders of the FCC were forced in many instances to reconsider and rethink the appropriateness and efficacy of their proposals for changing the nation and addressing the country’s seemingly intractable racial problems.

In some ways, the FCC’s anti-lynching campaign was similar to the work of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), which had begun its attack on lynching a decade earlier than the FCC, though it was formed one year after the FCC. Both organizations realized the need to change the very language that was used to describe and frame lynching. As Philip Dray notes of the NAACP, “[It] set out to reverse the very language of lynching by emphasizing the criminality of lynchers and those who protected them, and to rub

[1] Presbyterian Historical Society (hereafter, PHS), Philadelphia, PA, RG 18 Box 57 Folder 3

America's face in the gritty business of hanging, shooting, and roasting defenseless human beings." [2] Like the NAACP, the FCC would condemn the American nation for allowing such atrocities to occur, but the FCC had a special message for churches, calling them out for their silence, hypocrisy and oftentimes for their refusal to address lynching as a crime and moral wrong. Both organizations published massive amounts of material to highlight the barbarism of lynching, and supported federal legislation to end the practice. The FCC was especially interested in goading churches to address the practice. Even so, the NAACP was the leading non-church organization to engage in a public and visible anti-lynching campaign and commanded greater resources to address race problems as its central reason for existence. The FCC was the most prominent religious organization outside of the South and in fact worked with the NAACP, often following its lead or collaborating with it to find better ways to end lynching. The FCC, though very much actively involved in the fight against lynching, had only one department devoted to racial issues and thus its very organization and limited resources ensured that it would address race as one among many other problems facing the nation.

Nonetheless, the public work of this major Protestant interdenominational body lent some respectability to the anti-lynching campaign. After all, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt chose to speak out against lynching at the 25th anniversary meeting of the FCC in 1933.[3] In contrast, it was not until 1947 that Harry S. Truman became the first president to address a gathering of the NAACP, almost a decade and a half after Roosevelt's address to the FCC.[4] The

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[2] On the NAACP's realization that an attack on lynching would in part be a "contest of language," see Philip Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America* (New York: Random House, 2002), 177. For a comparative treatment of lynching in two states, see W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

[3] PHS, RG 18 Box 8 Folder 22. On Roosevelt's tepid support for anti-lynching bills and the power of white southern senators and representatives in Congress fiercely opposed to any challenge to Jim Crow laws, see Dray, *At the Hands of Person Unknown,* 356-362, and Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time* (New York: Liveright, 2013), 161-182.

[4] On Truman and his policies against lynching, see Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown*, 383-387.

FCC also saw itself in a custodial relationship with its member constituents, finding ways to move them on significant social and moral issues. The FCC tried to exert influence on local church bodies and communicated regularly with the Women's Missionary Council of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South before it threw its support behind the Costigan-Wagner bill in 1934.[5] Given the hostility to the NAACP in the South, even among churches, it can be safely inferred that the FCC's anti-lynching work was an important factor in convincing a number of southern religious leaders to support federal anti-lynching legislation. Not only that, but the vast missionary reach of the FCC and its work among different countries allowed it to regularly communicate information to its constituents, which often contained graphic rebukes of Christianity by leaders in other parts of the world, with lynching as the primary exhibition of Christian hypocrisy and brutality in America. The FCC shrewdly pushed against segregation and racial violence by labeling them major obstacles to the propagation and spread of the Christian gospel. While its message was not accepted by many churches, its role as a leading Christian organization emphasizing unity in the body of Christ as the visible witness of Christ's work in the world, gave some leaders pause when it offered its public pronouncements on the churches' responsibilities in the world. Thus its anti-lynching campaign was significant for its actual and symbolic impact.

What impact did the FCC's anti-lynching campaign have? The FCC, the NAACP, and other organizations were disappointed in their hopes for federal legislation to end lynching. Yet, the symbolic authority attached to this public face of the protestant establishment surely was an important advance in the anti-lynching campaign. By using its resources to end lynching, educating the public through many publications, speaking to church leaders and conferences, and

[5] PHS, RG 18, Box 59, Folder 22

engaging in a letter writing campaign, the FCC's work against lynching must be told alongside of that of the NAACP, the Commission on Interracial Cooperation (the most prominent southern organization working against lynching in the 1920s), and the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching in future general narratives. This Protestant ecumenical body spent over two decades fighting against lynching and yet the story has remained untold or simply has not gained the attention of historians. The theology of brotherhood that broke away from a dominant theology of segregation must gain place amid broader narratives of Progressivism, Social Christianity, and political liberalism that sought to widen the circle of citizenship beyond Anglo-Saxon white Protestants and that envisioned a more multicultural nation. White Protestant Christians who opened limited spheres and offices to black leaders and women in their inner circles joined with secular organizations and individuals to take on entrenched evils such as lynching, a development that certainly played a role in the FCC's full frontal attack on segregation by the late 1940s.

This narrative is not simply a story of historical retrieval, important as that is, but a reminder of how cultural authority wanes and attaches itself to certain groups at particular moments in time. Few today are aware of the FCC's anti-lynching campaign. Historians of American religion are apt to place the FCC within an anemic ecumenical tradition that lost out to evangelicals in the long-run, thus succumbing to a teleological narrative of inevitable decline because there was something supposedly inherently defective about the FCC. In some ways, we are still indebted to the critiques of the Niebuhr brothers (Reinhold and H. Richard) and a general Christian realist interpretation of the FCC and ecumenical strands of Christianity as being wildly naïve and hopelessly optimistic in their conceptions of human nature. Yet, this narrative fails to account for the FCC's pamphlets and detailed reports that described at length the brutality of

lynching, that stared evil and injustice in the face, calling down judgment upon the nation and the churches for their failure to eradicate this evil. The organization suffered great abuse and criticism for its unpopular stance on lynching and was drawn into local controversies after enlisting its own investigators to reveal the truth of these atrocities. Racial hatred and violence became powerful catalysts that shook the faith of FCC leaders in America as a "Christian nation" and were factors in developing what David Hollinger calls a "mood of self-interrogation" among ecumenical Protestants.[6] Time and again, lynching was held up as not simply an obstacle to evangelism and foreign missions, but a blot on the nation's character and a stain on its conscience. How could a Christian nation allow its most oppressed victims be burned alive was a constant refrain in this literature? How would America claim an exceptionalism rooted in Christianity and democratic fairness when black Americans suffered so cruelly at the hands of white Americans, especially in that part of the nation (the South) that claimed the highest rates of church membership? The anti-lynching campaign not only helped to change the nation, but it was also a factor in altering the FCC's conception of the nation and its churches.

Although scholars have argued that the Second World War was a transition point in American foreign relations in which domestic civil rights activists sought to expose the inconsistency of America's war against fascism and the racist policies of Nazi Germany and its racial oppression of blacks, the FCC, with its long international reach and its missionary work, had long exposed this contradiction. Even before the war against fascism, the FCC exploited the claims for democracy and fairness by pointing to the most brutal manifestation of American racism, the lynching of blacks. The call to churches to practice brotherhood at home to increase their credibility on the foreign mission field was another form of this rhetorical and political

[6]David A. Hollinger, *After Cloven Tongues of Fire: Protestant Liberalism in Modern American History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 22-23.

strategy of highlighting the nation's glaring internal contradictions over against its desired image of a beacon of democracy to other oppressed peoples. The anti-lynching campaign or the incipient civil rights activism of the 1920s did not lead to "extensive social change" (as historian Mary Dudziak argues), but it did loudly and insistently proclaim that there was a "conflict that inhered in American ideology and practice" fully two decades before the Second World War.[7]

Mob Murder and the Churches

In its first major publication against lynching, *Mob Murder in America: The Challenge Which Lynching Brings to the Churches* (1923), the FCC demonstrated its commitment to a number of different ways to end lynching (though the FCC did not formally endorse any specific legislation in part because of its worry about alienating its constituents and its lack of a strong theoretical explanation for church-state relations).[8] First, the shrewd public relations strategy of playing up Southern religious leaders' statements on the evils of lynching was put into motion. Three quotations condemning lynching in clear and unequivocal terms were published. All were major addresses from interdenominational gatherings in North Carolina, Arkansas, and Georgia. Prominently displayed at the end of the pamphlet were the names of all the personnel of the Commission on Race Relations. There was a considerable number of Southern religious leaders' names ranging from places such as Atlanta, Georgia to Orangeburg, South Carolina. The FCC was acutely aware of the fallout regarding the NAACP-backed Dyer bill, which had been introduced in the House of Representatives on April 11, 1921, to make lynching a federal crime,

[7] On the significance of the Second World War (and the ensuing Cold War) as a "transition point" and a catalyst for international attention to American racism, see Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War and Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 7.

[8] On church-state concerns, see John A Hutchison, "We Are Not Divided: A Critical and Historical Study of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America," (PhD. diss., Columbia University, 1941), 90-98, and William M. King, "The Reform Establishment and the Ambiguities of Influence," in William R. Hutchison, ed., *Between the Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment, 1900-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 132-134.

but was defeated in the Senate by December 4, 1922.[9] The question of states' rights was a very live issue, but the more specific concern of the FCC in this instance appeared to be a desire not to be seen as an outside organization meddling in the internal affairs of Southern churches. Thus its highlighting of its southern representatives and the public pronouncements of prominent Southern religious leaders. The perception of the FCC as an outsider persistently plagued the organization's attempts to change racial attitudes and practices in the South and its support of federal legislation created great difficulties in gaining the support of southern religious leaders.[10]

Second, graphic portrayals of the ghastly work of the lynch mob were presented alongside stark figures that indicated the number of lynchings that had occurred in the United States. There were 4,154 persons lynched between 1885 and 1922, the pamphlet grimly noted. Three out of four victims were Negroes. As high as these figures were, there were certainly "many more of whom no record was made [who] were similarly murdered." In 1919, 83 persons were lynched; in 1920, 61; in 1921, 64; and in 1922, "at least" 57.[11] Bleak statistics and numbers were set off against almost sensationalistic news headlines describing the sordid details of a lynching. One example included a Negro looking "on in dumb wonder" while bound to an iron

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[9] On the fate of the Dyer bill, see Robert Zangrando, *The NAACP Crusade Against Lynching, 1909-1950* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), ch. 3.

[10] For more on attempts to end lynching by southern moderates or liberals, most of whom rejected federal legislation and many of whom were church members, see Morton Sosna, *In Search of the Silent South: Southern Liberals and the Race Issue* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 30-41. For a negative assessment of southern liberals and a judgment of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation as a moderate force, see John Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day: The Generation Before the Civil Rights Movement in the South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), especially, 42-50, 301-307, and David L. Chappell, *Inside Agitators: White Southerners in the Civil Rights Movement* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), Part 1.

[11] PHS, RG 18, Box 59, Folder 20. The FCC relied mostly on the *Negro Year Book* for these figures, which was edited by Monroe Work, Director of Records and Statistics at Tuskegee Institute, which was the principal source of information on reliable lynching statistics. It also cited the NAACP's *Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States, 1889-1918* as a source for some of its conclusions. For recent attempts to get accurate numbers of the lynchings that occurred in the South and in the entire nation, see Stewart E. Tolnay and E. M. Beck, *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), and Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown*, vii-ix. For debates over the very definition of what constituted a lynching, see Christoper Waldrep, *The Many Faces of Judge Lynch: Extralegal Violence and Punishment in America* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), 1-12, and especially ch. 7.

post with logging chains as "stern visaged men" heated pokers and smoothing irons "until they were as fiery as the flames that licked them hot." A mob estimated in the thousands gathered, even as the merry voices of children on the outskirts of the area romped and played. When everyone finally gathered, the violent work began. The mob had allowed the Negro to squirm for half an hour as the pokers flamed red hot; now they were ready to sear his eyes, face, and body. A pile of wood and rubbish was heaped on the body of the Negro victim causing his "agonized body" to squirm and writhe beneath its load. When the fire finally consumed the wood and rubbish, the victim expired, probably welcoming death as a merciful release from his agony.[12]

The FCC dramatized the details of the lynching: the fury and seeming senselessness of the lynch mob as it carried out its organized work of torture. The procedures and tools of torture were also mentioned. One section of the report noted: "Some of the victims suffered indescribable torture, such as saturation of parts of the body with kerosene or gasoline so that they could be burned piecemeal, branding with hot irons, or the gouging out of eyes and ears with red-hot irons." Though "wild and savage," lynchings were planned and deliberately carried out. There was an order, structure, and ritual to these events.[13]

The third notable element of this pamphlet was its specific appeal to churches. The pamphlet began with an indictment: "It hardly seems credible that America, with its *great Christian churches and its missionary enterprises*, its homes, schools and courts, permitted" so many lynchings to occur (emphasis mine).[14] The report was careful to note that one lynching happened on a Sunday morning "not far from two churches." In bold face print, the pamphlet noted that in some cases, "these atrocities have been perpetuated within the sight of churches of

[12] PHS, RG 18, Box 59, Folder 20.
[13] On the ritualized nature of spectacle lynchings, see Amy Louise Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).
[14] PHS, RG 18 Box 59 Folder 20.

the community." Christians must awaken to the fact that mob murder mocks Christian ideals. All Christian profession was rendered hypocritical by allowing such a "savage practice" to exist. It flouted "the very foundation principle of human brotherhood for which the Christian church stands." Here then was the FCC reiterating its commitment to a theology of brotherhood that was fundamentally challenged by the dehumanizing lynching of another human being. The pamphlet raised the stark question of whether Christianity or savagery would rule in American communities. Finally, the problem that lynching posed to the efficacy and spread of the Christian Gospel was raised. It was noted that "its true power to the colored races of Asia and Africa" could never be realized "so long as the very land which sends the missionaries does not itself assure humane and Christian treatment for all its citizens." The "lynching evil" stood as a reproach against "Christian America" in places such as India, China and Japan, as missionaries and travelers attested. Noted Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore was reported to have been asked what he thought of America's missionary endeavors in India. He replied, pointing to a newspaper clipping showing that two blacks had been burned alive in America, "So long as this goes on in your own land, do you think you have any Christianity to export."[15]

[15] Ibid. This comment was actually based on a personal visit that Samuel McCrea Cavert, general secretary of the FCC, had made to India in 1917. Cavert mentioned in an article, "Will the Christian Conscience End the Lynching Evil?" (in the *Federal Council Bulletin*, August-September, 1919), that upon visiting Tagore at his home in Bolpur: "To my question as to his attitude toward the work of Christian missionaries in India, the poet replied: 'I received yesterday from America a newspaper which described the burning of two black men by a mob. Don't you think it would be well to practice brotherhood at home, at least in such elemental matters as protecting human life, before you presume to teach brotherhood in Asia?'" About which Cavert wrote, "What would one answer to such a question as that?" See PHS, RG 18 Box 80 Folder 16. Mark Twain wrote two decades earlier a moving piece, urging American missionaries in China to come back to the United States "into the lynching field" to Christianize white Americans. It was his satiric take on exporting Christianity to other nations when Americans had so many unsolved problems at home. See Mark Twain, "The United States of Lyncherdom," 1901, in *Mark Twain: Collected Tales, Sketches, Speeches, & Essays, 1891-1910* (New York: The Library of America, 1992), 479-486. For a helpful essay on Tagore's popularity among American and English suffragists, see Kathi Kern, "Spiritual Border-Crossings in the U.S. Women's Rights Movement," in Leigh E. Schmidt and Sally M. Promey, eds., *American Religious Liberalism* (Indiana: Indian University Press, 2012), 162-181.

Clearly, the FCC was deeply troubled about the obstacle that racial oppression, symbolized by and enacted most brutally through the practice of lynching, represented to an effective Christian witness. Its project of demonstrating the sufficiency of Christianity could never be even approximated in view of the public dehumanization of blacks that lynching signified. Yet, the concrete proposals and recommendations of the FCC should also be noted alongside its concern for the reputation of Christianity, which could often appear as if it were using injustices against blacks as a means to some higher end. Notwithstanding its overarching concern for the public reputation of Christianity, the FCC refuted all the common arguments for lynching, agreeing with all of the leading anti-lynching arguments going back to the points raised by Ida B. Wells in the late 19th century.[16] It noted that lynchers even took the lives of black and white women, despite the claims to protect womanhood and motherhood. The pamphlet emphasized in bold print that nearly four-fifths of all lynching victims in thirty-seven years had been killed for alleged crimes other than rape, the principal public justification for lynching in the South. Around twenty percent of black lynch victims were accused of rape or attempted rape.[17] All of this data was intended to inform the public about the brutal reality of lynching and to rob lynchers of any moral justification for their actions.

The pamphlet concluded with specific suggestions for measures to prevent lynchings. It called upon states to enact special laws against lynching, noting that though the Dyer bill had been killed by a filibuster in the Senate, some still felt a federal law against lynching should be enacted so long as states refused to curb it. The pamphlet urged more effort by local authorities

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[16] For a helpful introduction to and compilation of Wells' major anti-lynching work, see Jacqueline Jones Royster, ed., *Southern Horrors and Other Writings: The Anti-Lynching Campaign of Ida B. Wells, 1892-1900* (Boston: Bedford Books, 1997).

[17] PHS, RG 18, Box 59, Folder 20. It is estimated that at least one hundred fifty women were lynched and thousands more assaulted by white mobs in the South between 1880 and 1965, the majority occurring before 1930. About 130 of these women were African Americans. See Crystal N. Feimster, *Southern Horrors: Women and the Politics of Rape and Lynching* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), ch. 6.

and courts to capture and convict participants in lynch mobs, even if this required a change of venue to make trials easier. Governors should be given power to remove sheriffs who had proven derelict in their duties, and "a mounted police force" must be provided by the state to local governments to contain the fury of the lynch mob. "Public spirited citizens" must back up sheriffs and prosecutors who performed theirs duties against the mob and oppose those who failed. Public opinion, especially in the public press and newspapers, must be used to move officers and instruments of the law. The pamphlet noted the powerful role that editorials and news columns played in shaping public opinion and inciting crowds about issues of race.[18]

For the FCC, no recommendations for the elimination of lynching would have been complete without a direct message to churches. It reminded Christians that as voters they could help to secure legislation against lynching in their local communities. They could contribute funds for the legal aid of competent legal counsel to acquire secure and necessary evidence to convict those involved in lynch mobs (specific reference was made to the Commission on Interracial Cooperation in Atlanta, GA, the leading southern organization against lynching). Christians should help to create better public opinion by influencing local newspapers to take a fair and just approach to racial issues. In their "organized capacity" churches could also hold up the Christian ideal of appropriate relations between the races. That included ministers in the pulpit speaking against lynching and stirring the conscience of their congregations to abhor this form of violence. Churches must persuade people that the "Christian way" of positive goodwill, mutual respect, and friendly cooperation "will really work." They must "impress the dangers of lynching atrocities and their awful effects upon the people, the communities, and the Nation by a distribution of literature against these evils." They should provide educational talks and lectures

[18] Ibid. On the important role of newspaper editors in inciting white lynch mobs, see Waldrep, *The Many Faces of Judge Lynch*, 128-131.

on black progress and the "better side of race relations." Conferences and meetings must be held with recommendations on how to prevent lynchings and for formulating plans "to secure the cooperation of all the moral forces of the community or commonwealth." Churches should also observe Race Relations Sundays, a newly created FCC annual holiday held on the second Sunday of February, where blacks and whites came together to get a better understanding and deeper appreciation of each other.[19] In short, the FCC recommendations for churches and its suggestions on how to end lynching represented a central part of its project for better race relations.

Rituals of Penitence and Repentance

Religious organizations are known for their rituals. Religious rituals often tell us more about the nature and mission of organizations than their public creeds and statements of beliefs. Prayers, poems, and annual calls of penitence marked the structured rituals of the FCC's Department of Race Relations, especially around the reality of lynching and mob violence. As already noted, the FCC's anti-lynching campaign was launched in 1922, beginning with a study of the problem of lynching. Much emphasis was placed on publicizing factual information and changing public opinion. The principal means of doing so was the Honor Roll of States Free of Lynching, which was published annually until 1934. In announcing the report each year, George Haynes would document recent trends and note the significance of shifts in public opinion. The Honor Roll also regarded and recognized lynching as a national problem and thus made little distinction between southern and other states. By tracing trends and the growth or decline of a "mob spirit," it made reference to the state of the nation and its moral progress or decline. The

[19] PHS, RG 18, Box 59, Folder 20.

Honor Roll was a way of highlighting or questioning the extent to which the United States was truly a civilized Christian country of law and order.[20]

Yet, the Honor Roll was a part of the ritualization of the FCC's race work and its tendency to memorialize and sacralize certain times of the year. Yearly reminders, monthly events, and recurring messages functioned as a way of incorporating what were normally regarded as "secular" practices into the sacred Christian year. The Honor Roll, studded with statistics and numbers, was alternately a progress report or indictment of the nation. It was a yearly reminder of where the nation stood in its ability and willingness to rid itself of this stain upon its reputation. It was a condemnation of the practice of Christianity in the United States. The Honor Roll sought to portray a reverse image or perverse inversion of American exceptionalism. America, professedly a Christian nation and a beacon of democracy, allowed its poorest and most despised minority to be tortured, mutilated and burned alive in the presence and with the active support of thousands of fellow citizens. What kind of nation would allow this level of brutality and violence in its midst and not hold responsible those who committed such atrocities?

Prayers of penitence seemed fitting in view of the growing problem of lynching. On Race Relations Sunday, February 12, 1928, Haynes released a public call to penitence and prayer, noting the "sobering fact that more than four thousand people have been victims of lynching in our country" and that this fact "has filled all people of goodwill with a sense of horror and shame." He wrote that thirty persons had been lynched in 1926, which almost doubled the number for 1925, a fact that was "so flagrantly opposed to the progress of right and brotherhood that all who are committed to the way of Christ are asked to observe a day of penitence and

[20] For one example among many, see "Honor Roll of States Free From Lynching in 1931," PHS, RG 18, Box 60, Folder 1.

prayer that our American nation may be purged of this blot upon our civilization."[21] The prayer expressed a desire for a change of attitude, a way of viscerally and emotionally identifying with the horror of this brutal act. As Haynes wrote: "In entering into the deep realities of penitence and prayer we take upon ourselves the guilt of those who blindly lead mob violence and the suffering of those who are its victims." An entreaty was made to God, that the "Living God" would have mercy upon the nation, check the "mad passions" that arise within all in the nation, establish moral discipline and self-control in the midst of the nation, teach true tolerance and brotherhood, grant clear knowledge of the nation's failures, and enable a vision for new possibilities. The entreated concluded that "we may have fearlessness in facing intrenched [sic] wrongs and unflagging energy in striving for a social order permeated by the spirit of love and fellowship."[22]

In offering this prayer of penitence, the FCC returned to its foundational theology of brotherhood. It requested a deeper sense of God's fatherhood and human brotherhood, especially praying for a purging of all false pride of race, all prejudice and suspicion, and all arrogant self-assertion. A deep sense of the precariousness of black life in the nation and of the fragility of human connectedness was noted in this entreaty, beseeching God "that none may need to live in fear of violence or feel unsafe in his brother's presence, but that the life and liberty of all people may be held sacred and secure." The FCC recognized that the churches' teachings and practices regarding human brotherhood and connectedness would have to be revised and radically transformed in some cases. It implored God "that the church of Christ may gain standards of

[21] PHS, RG 18, Box 60, Folder 11. Sixteen lynchings had occurred in 1927. Perhaps because Haynes was writing at the very beginning of 1928, the most recent statistics had not come out on the previous year.
[22] PHS, RG 18, Box 60, Folder 11.

aims and values more in accord with the spirit of Christ, so that it may not merely preach brotherhood but may exert a mightier influence in making it a reality in our daily lives."[23]

In incorporating an entreaty and call to repentance and prayer alongside a frank discussion of the "evils of lynching and mob violence," the FCC immersed itself into the nitty gritty of human sin and brokenness. The work of the lynch mob, torturing, mutilating, and burning its victims, was narrated in graphic detail in the same release calling for prayer and divine help. No separation of secular and sacred was made here. No claim that this was outside the sphere of the work of the churches. Rather, the release argued, as it had done so many times before, that "every lynching that occurs is an indictment of Christianity before the world." This "savagery unthinkable among civilized people" was a reminder that Americans must "Christianize ourselves or stand condemned in our efforts to Christianize others."[24] Though it is difficult to know how many in the South actually read releases of the FCC, which were quite widely disseminated in newspapers and in church press materials, the FCC tailored its message specifically to Christians by highlighting how the United States must have looked to other parts of the world and how incongruous it was to send missionaries to other parts of the world when people were being brutally murdered by mobs in greater numbers in the very part of the country where Christianity was widely practiced. Included in these rituals of repentance then were indictments of the nation (asking God for forgiveness for "our national sin of lynching and lawlessness") for this stain upon its "national honor" and a critique of the Christian churches for their silence and failure to incarnate beliefs and practices that would deprive lynchers of any moral justification for their actions. The FCC work against lynching thus reflected a prophetic

[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.

strand of Christianity within the ecumenical movement. It was principally a witness against the nation for tolerating evil.

Exploring the Meaning of Lynchings

The public relations campaign was quickly seen as insufficient to deal with the intransigence of mob violence. By the 1930s, the FCC threw its support behind a federal anti-lynching bill and began hiring its own investigators to get a more accurate assessment of the causes of lynchings in local communities. For the most part, it had deferred to the Tuskegee Institute and the NAACP for statistics on lynchings and their causes, but the more the problem persisted, the deeper the FCC was drawn into an analysis of the causes and nature of lynching, which was evident to some extent in its very first pamphlet on the topic. But by the 1930s, the FCC was taking a more active and independent stance, becoming more drawn into the local and political controversies that surrounded the practice.

Twenty-two lynchings took place in 1930, doubling the eleven that occurred in 1929. Many were deeply troubled by this spike, for lynching deaths had been on the decline throughout the 1920s. The year 1930 was a significant development in the anti-lynching campaign. In response to the uptick in lynchings in early 1930, the Council on Interracial Cooperation (CIC) created its Southern Commission on the Study of Lynching, which was an effort to get a deeper understanding of not simply the factual and narrative details of a lynching, but the social and economic factors involved. On November 1, 1930, the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching (ASWPL) was formed in Atlanta, Georgia, under the leadership of Jessie Daniel Ames, who was director of the CIC's Women's Division. The International Labor

Defense (IDL) commenced its work in the South, having formed its first southern conference in Charlotte, North Carolina, in December 1929. One of its goals was to abolish lynching.[25]

The 1930s represented the culmination of years of reform efforts to end lynching. Most of the leading anti-lynching groups grappled with the need to bring the brutal reality of lynching before the public even as they sought to dramatize the violence against and dehumanization of black bodies wrought at the hands of the lynch mob. Detailed investigations became the rage during the Great Depression years. In part because of the economic hardships of these years and the particular social and economic problems the South faced, studies of lynching began focusing on the illiteracy, poverty, and cultural stagnation of the South, pointing to them as the root causes of mob violence.[26] But the principal thrust, especially in the efforts to garner support for federal anti-lynching legislation, was to rob lynchers of claims to moral superiority (by allegedly protecting "white womanhood") and to reveal lynching as a "most deplorable act of moral barbarism."[27] The FCC's message to the churches and its changing tactics to get at the truth of lynchings were part of these developments in the broader anti-lynching campaign.[28]

In the 1930s, the FCC began to send investigators to local communities after a lynching had occurred. Usually, these were persons "who had previous knowledge of general conditions in the area," though some were trained sociologists and academics hired by the FCC to conduct a study of the area. These persons were commissioned to investigate the underlying social and

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[25] Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown*, 303-362. On the formation of the ASWPL, see Jacqueline Dowd Hall, *Revolt Against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign Against Lynching* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), ch. 6. On the origins of the IDL and the work of Communist groups in the South, see Glenda Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2008), ch. 2.

[26] Brundage, *Lynching in the New South*, 245-251, and Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown*, 303-304.

[27] See Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle*, 262.

[28] It should be noted that though some of its personal investigators pointed to social and economic factors as causal factors in lynchings, the FCC officially represented racial violence against blacks as a moral problem, as a stain upon the nation's moral character.

moral causes of the lynching and to ascertain what the various constructive forces of the community, especially churches, had done to prevent a lynching or to condemn it after it occurred. Some effort was made to determine discreetly who brought before the legal system the names of those who participated in it. The investigator was also charged with observing the general conditions or relations between the races and the nature of the community out of which the lynching arose. Many of the extracts from these reports were printed in news releases for the local newspapers. These reports evoked passionate responses, especially among local residents who often criticized these "outside" investigations as biased and unfair to their community. In two separate contexts (Maryville, MO, and Salisbury, MD), the FCC was brought face to face with the prejudices and constraints of local communities. These experiences with local communities became one of its many confrontations with the tenacity and depth of racial oppression.

A vivid example of the FCC's investigative reporting on lynching was published in 1931 in its *Information Service*, a weekly newsletter of the Department of Research and Education. Dr. Gilbert Cox, minister of the First Methodist Church in South Bend, Indiana, who had held a pastorate in Maryville, MO, where the lynching occurred on January 12, 1931, was chosen by the FCC's Commission on Race Relations to conduct the investigation. Cox had also been active in interracial work for a number of years during his pastorates at Columbus, Ohio, Chicago, Illinois, and South Bend. Raymond Gunn, a black man who was pronounced "mentally defective," had been accused of murdering a 19-year old white school teacher, Velma Colter. After his investigation, Cox concluded that Gunn, who had been previously convicted of an assault on a woman and had served a prison sentence for it, was guilty beyond a shadow of a doubt, mentioning Gunn's confession as only one piece of evidence. Cox presented an

unvarnished account of the lynching. He estimated that people came from a radius of about forty miles either to witness or participate in the lynching and that over two thousand whites were present during its execution (in a town of five thousand people). Gunn had been chained to the roof of the schoolhouse, which was saturated with gasoline and set on fire. A number of men in the group fired into the burning schoolhouse. A mother held up her little child and said, "Look, honey" as the flames destroyed the schoolhouse. Remnants of Gunn's charred body in addition to furniture and unburned timber were carried off as souvenirs. Neighboring town reports indicated that mothers had asked doctors if there was danger of infection to the school children from handling pieces of Gunn's bones and flesh.[29]

The editor of the *Information Service* newsweekly saw the lynching as giving "a terrifying sense of the weak foundations upon which our modern social structure seems to rest." Of the five ministers in the town, only one mentioned the lynching from the pulpit. One minister spoke of the need to "quiet our minds and turn our thoughts to making our lives the best we can," in the hopes of "doing what God would want us to do." The sermon was about Christians giving evidence of the grace of God in their daily living, illustrated by the story of the conversion of a drunkard. What was clear from the FCC's report is that the churches would do little if anything to stop the practice of lynching. But Cox's recommendations were included in the newsletter. He called for a "race relations committee" in every community, where various problems such as crime, housing and employment could be discussed. A social or medical agency was needed for the "mentally diseased" like Gunn. Changes in the law were necessary to give the governor the power he needed to send agents to provide for the security of prisoners in these kinds of circumstances where a lynching was likely. Participants in the lynching must be brought to

[29] PHS, RG 18, Box 59, Folder 20.

justice. Schools "must teach the consequences of such acts and the churches must show by word and deed that such atrocities under any circumstances whatsoever constitute a betrayal of everything that can be called Christian."[30] Apparently the irony was lost on the editor who concluded this description of the lynching with the suggestions of Cox directed to churches when the newsletter had just indicated the complete failure of most churches to even acknowledge that a lynching had occurred. For all of its analysis of the social, economic, and historical causes for the lynching, the newsletter's report leaves one with the feeling that whites were determined to carry out this act no matter what risk was involved. After all, it was acknowledged that there was "almost universal sanction of the plan before it was carried out and of the deed after it was done."[31] What confidence then did the FCC have that schools and churches would prevent lynchings in such an environment? This failure to dig deeper and recognize the tenacity and depth of racial oppression was a constant struggle for the FCC with its tendency to rely on moral suasion, reasoning, and the presentation and dissemination of facts as the principal means of addressing racial problems.[32]

In another incident, the FCC found itself defending not only its choice of who conducted the study, but its very reputation as an impartial Christian organization. On December 4, 1931, a lynching occurred in Salisbury, Maryland. Matthew Williams, described as a "mentally defective Negro," after having shot and killed his white employer, tried to take his own life while at Salisbury Hospital. A white mob took him from the hospital and hanged him by a rope in a court

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[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.
[32] A long tradition of vigilantism and even violent popular sovereignty has been noted by scholars as powerful forces in local communities in the United States and partly explains the justifications for lynchings. The demand for public executions persisted in the South into the 20th century. See Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle*, 23-33, Michael J. Pfeifer, *Rough Justice: Lynching and American Society, 1874*-1947 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), ch. 4, and Margaret Vandiver, *Lethal Punishment: Lynchings and Legal Executions in the South* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006), ch. 6.

yard. Williams' body was dragged by a rope tied to the back of a truck and taken to a gas station. The body was drenched with gasoline, pulled to the section of Salisbury where most blacks lived, and dragged around the streets before it was set on fire. Williams' fingers were then cut off and distributed as souvenirs alongside short lengths or sections of the rope on which he had been hanged. The FCC hired Professor Broadus Mitchells of the Department of Political Economy at John Hopkins University. Mitchell's study was an attempt "to discover the conditions in the community which made a lynching possible and the effects of the lynching upon the attitudes of citizens." He interviewed more than a dozen black and whites in the area, including the chief of police, the county sheriff, the mayor, the nurse in charge of the hospital staff from which Williams was taken, and two ministers. Mitchell concluded that the Chesapeake Bay's cultural environment contributed to the lynching and that the "geographical isolation" of the Eastern Shore region of the state left it in "rather backward conditions." Making an argument about the distinctiveness of the region, he argued that the area had become "backward in its moral and spiritual development." [33]

Mitchell especially noted that he was struck by the public justifications and "excuses" for the lynching, made fully two weeks after it occurred. No one from among the intelligent and fair-minded citizens exerted any significant effort to stop the lynching, even though he granted that "some ignorant townsmen and countrymen" were responsible for carrying out the lynching (two citizens made some effort to stop the mob). The chief of police, his three patrolmen on duty, and the sheriff and his deputies offered no resistance to the mob and it was known in the town an hour or more beforehand that a lynching was likely. Mitchell wrote: "The impression was received by the inquirer [that is, Mitchell] that the public spirit of Salisbury is far below what is

[33] PHS, RG 18, Box 59, Folder 20.

desirable. Those whom one would expect to be leaders in a crisis decided to fall in with the ignorant, the prejudiced, the frightened, the sullenly boastful." To be sure, he claimed that very few leaders had remained in the community and many of the ablest young men had left the region for employment and other reasons. After chiding the city for its "lack of civic morality" and its weak "public spirit," Mitchell recommended an "active local interracial committee."[34]

The Reverend George W. Dawson, pastor of the Centreville M. E. Church, rejected the conclusions of Mitchell. Dawson called the FCC's report "ridiculous and absurd." He argued that the intellectual capacity and moral responsibility of Salisbury citizens was as good as anywhere else in the United States. For him the report brought disrepute to the FCC's Department of Race Relations. Others accused the FCC of acting outside its realm and without the full facts. Few if any of these reports had much to say about the lynch mob and virtually no condemnation of the townsmen for conducting the lynching.[35] In a letter dated, March 17, 1932, the FCC's administrative committee wrote to Mitchell indicating that despite all of the fallout and criticisms of the report, they stood with him. Though that they were "severely criticized" in certain quarters, the leaders of the FCC expressed gratification for the work Mitchell had done. Nonetheless, it seems a bit odd that the FCC asserted that it did not feel a public statement was necessary. If some were not only denying its validity and publicly raising doubts about its "official authorization" by the FCC, then surely the report deserved some public comment from the FCC. Mitchell was asked if he had seen the March 10 edition of the *Salisbury Times*, which claimed that the FCC had repudiated Mitchell's report.[36] Though the FCC did communicate by letter to the *Times*, it would appear that some vocal public support of Mitchell and a clarification

[34]Ibid.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid.

of his being authorized to write the report were necessary. So troubled was the FCC by all the ruckus created in response to its report that it tightened its policies on selecting investigators of lynchings. In a meeting held in New York City, in April 1932, it was emphasized that great care must be taken in selecting the person to conduct such studies (a virtual concession to criticisms of Mitchell), making it necessary to get the prior approval of the chairmen of the Race Relations Department, the Administrative Committee, and the Policy Committee of the FCC before someone was finally chosen. Public statements and the actual results of the study were to be given extra scrutiny and would have to go through a more rigorous process of internal examination.[37]

Perhaps the FCC felt it had not done enough homework on Mitchell. Critics accused Mitchell of suspect associations. Newspaper editorials and ministers sought to link him with the America Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), which they regarded as a communist organization. *The Salisbury Times* editorial queried: "It is not easy to understand why any member of the Federal Council of Churches would employ a man noted for his socialistic leanings to investigate and report upon a community where more than 90 percent of the white inhabitants are active church members or have a stated religion reference, except that the Council did not know the type of man they were assigning to this mission."[38] In reality, it mattered little who did the investigation, but the criticism of the townspeople for their participation in and justification of a lynching invariably evoked heated criticisms of "outsiders" and debates about biases of the investigator and the motives of those sponsoring such studies. Some vehemently asserted that prejudiced and

[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.

violent Communists were using these reports to stir up animosity between the races.[39] Surely, only proponents of federal legislation that would restrict states' rights would be interested in these issues, others asserted.

Not only did critics attempt to delegitimize the findings of the FCC and who they chose to conduct these kinds of studies, but they cast aspersions on the organization as being out of touch with everyday church people, as an organization that did not appreciate or understand the practice of Christianity among local folk. This led not simply to rebuttal in the form of a valorization of the alleged hospitality and open-heartedness of the people of Salisbury or some other local community, but blatant disregard for the substance of the findings and hardly any reflection on the reasons such a violent mob act would occur, except for occasional passing references that the event was unfortunate. What often followed was a theological critique of the FCC as having an inauthentic or misguided religion and a regional critique that it was an elitist New York organization that wanted to make local people look badly. No matter how hard it sought to partner with organizations such as the CIC and the ASWPL, the FCC could never quite successfully shield itself from these criticisms when it became more actively and locally involved in the campaign against lynching. Its very attempt to learn the mores and practices of a local community inspired criticisms of it as an outside meddler. This was all the more painful for the FCC because it billed itself as a representative Protestant organization, which worked on behalf of all denominations, regardless of their location. As an ecumenical strand of Protestant which emphasized Christian unity, it earnestly hoped to heal the rifts among major Protestant bodies, especially those that had taken place among Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians over

[39] Mitchell noted later in his life that local people carped that a "heathen had come among them and scolded them." See Broadus Mitchell, August 14 and 15, 1977, Interview B-0024, Southern Oral History Program Collection, #4007, Chapel Hill.

slavery. Contrary to the claims of local critics, in reality the FCC exerted great effort to work alongside and defer to local church bodies and pastors, but active support for its project was simply weak in the South and thus it was forced to accept the fact that the problem of lynching would never be solved if left solely to southern and local authorities and churches. Federal support would be needed.

The Fate of the Campaign for a Federal Anti-Lynching Bill

Although the FCC did not formally support or endorse the Costigan-Wagner bill introduced in 1934 (or any of its following variations), it was in general support of federal legislation to criminalize lynching. Its many years of anti-lynching work made it clear that southerners' were not going to address the problem without outside pressure or coercion. In fact, as all of its own reports indicated, vocal support for many lynchings was not lacking on the part of southerners and the local customs that fostered and bolstered the practice, rooted in a system of racial segregation, led increasingly to a broader critique of segregation in the South and racial oppression in the entire nation. Even so, the anti-lynching campaign often took attention away from the deeper nature of racial oppression in America by looking at its ugliest manifestation. Lynching was such a visibly and notably barbaric practice by the 1930s that it was increasingly defended only by Southerners rehashing the same arguments about sexual assault and chivalry that had been discredited by all the leading anti-lynching groups decades earlier (and conclusively by the ASWPL in the 1930s). Yet, the brutal taking of a human life was easier to condemn and elicit support than a frontal assault on segregation and the everyday slights that black people endured in the South. Economic and political oppression received some attention by the Department of Race Relations, but it was only after the anti-lynching campaign ceased that greater attention was focused on the broader interlocking system of racial oppression.

Nonetheless, the anti-lynching campaign was an educational experience in the limitations of public pronouncements and schooling the FCC in the difficult and messy work of soliciting support for legal and political change, especially through the tedious and slow-moving legislative process of the national Congress. Only with the help of these allies would the fight against racial oppression make any substantive progress.

Quietly, the FCC ended its Honor Roll of States with no lynching in 1934. Apparently, because lynching was spreading to different states outside of the South, it was deemed pointless to highlight an honor roll. The anti-lynching campaign had acquired an array of new players who made this honor roll seem antiquated, even though for insiders and for its educational goal of changing Christians' attitudes, there was always a ritual dimension to the honor roll, calling the nation to account, reminding Christians of their moral duties, and lamenting wanton destruction of black victims and praying for divine justice for the lynch mobs. Was the FCC ashamed of its Honor Roll? Given the public visibility of the anti-lynching campaign and the involvement of so many prominent groups, it seems that the FCC was more self-conscious about the efficacy of the Honor Roll and its public perception. One can only speculate given that not much discussion took place surrounding its quiet passage.

The ending of the Honor Roll coincided with much more active work on behalf of federal legislation and a public relations campaign to get Christian churches to throw their weight behind the renewed assault against lynching. In the hearings before the subcommittee on the judiciary of the US Senate, February 20, 1934, Samuel McCrea Cavert, general secretary of the FCC, testified on behalf of the work of the FCC against lynching. Cavert noted that though the "educational effort" to end lynching was under the direction of the Department of Race Relations, the FCC "as a whole has again and again given voice to its deep conviction that the

prevalence of lynching in the United States is a black stain upon a civilization that is called 'Christian'."[40] Perhaps anticipating the criticism that it was pointless to award an Honor Roll, he stated that the FCC was appalled to discover that only five states had no lynching record, thus indicating that lynching had spread to more states by 1933 than in any of the eleven years since the Honor Roll system was founded. Cavert reminded those gathered that of the recorded 1880 lynchings between 1900 and 1930, there were only twelve known cases when a conviction was secured. This was conclusive proof that state and local authorities were not adequately dealing with the problem of lynching. After listing a number of church bodies that had condemned lynching, he indicated that the FCC had called Christians "to penitence for this national sin" and more vigorous and effective legislation against lynching, which amounted to a general support of a federal bill.[41]

No new development in the FCC's anti-lynching campaign emerged in the 1930s, besides its employment of investigators, whose findings were often published in the *Information Service*. As with Cavert's testimony before Congress, public and private efforts were made to get churches to support local and federal bills against lynching. Pamphlets and publications continued to be part of the educational effort to change attitudes and alert church people to the evils of lynching. Cavert signed a letter sent by the NAACP to President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, US Attorney General Homer S. Cummings, and Governor David Sholtz of Florida, protesting the lynching of Claude Neal in Marianna, Florida, and requesting enactment of a federal anti-lynching law, investigation of the liability of lynchers under a kidnapping law, and indictment and prosecution of the guilty in light of the investigation.[42] The FCC carried on

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[40] *Congressional Record*, 73rd Congress, 2nd Session, p. 171, (February 20-21, 1934).
[41] *Cong. Rec.*, 73rd Cong., 2nd sess., pp. 171-173, (February 20-21, 1934).
[42] The lynching of Claude Neal is regarded as the end of spectacle lynching, even though the gruesome deaths of Roosevelt Townes and Robert Mc Daniels, who were whipped with a chain and tortured with the flames from

extensive correspondence with southerners on the Marianna lynching in an effort to garner support for its attempts to secure prosecution of the lynchers by Attorney General Cummings. In November, 3, 1934, a statement in the *Information Service* appeared about the Marianna lynching.[43]

Letter writing, public gatherings and marches, and public and private efforts to gain support for legislation to end lynching and prosecute lynchers on the local and especially the federal level continued to increase throughout 1934 and 1935. But national politicking assumed a greater role by 1935. The FCC sent a letter to interracial committees and key people across the nation, asking that letters be sent to President Roosevelt and their senators to resist filibuster of the anti-lynching bill before Congress. Telegrams were sent to southern women in particular, requesting that they repudiate South Carolina Senator "Cotton Ed" Smith's defense of lynching as "necessary for protection of womanhood."[44] Katherine Gardner, a very active associate secretary in the Department of Race Relations, not only made a special trip to Washington, D.C. to observe the debate on the anti-lynching bill, but she probably expended more efforts to end lynching than any other member of the Department. As a white woman, Gardner's working alongside George Haynes, an African American, was intended to model the FCC's interracialism in action (which was especially notable in view of the rhetoric associated with the justification of lynchings). She wrote letters to church bodies, sent out fundraising letters, tried to persuade

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gasoline blowtorches before being burned alive and shot, respectively, took place in Duck Hill, Mississippi in 1937, at the hands of a crowd of three to four hundred. Neal was tortured in the backwoods over a period of ten hours by a mob of one hundred white men, who castrated his genitals and forced him to eat them. After he was killed by a blast from a shotgun, his body was paraded before a much larger crowd who dragged, mutilated and urinated on his lifeless body before it was hung on a tree. The kidnapping charge came about because he was taken across state lines from local authorities, transported from Alabama to Florida, where he was murdered. See Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 222-227, and Dray, *The Lynching of Black America*, 344-354, 359-361.

[43] RG 18 Box 59 Folder 22.

[44] RG 18 Box 59 Folder 23. By relying on already established networks to communicate information quickly, the FCC engaged in tactics similar to the women of the ASWPL. See Dowd, *Revolt Against Chivalry*, 239-240.

church women, especially on women's committees of various denominational boards to make anti-lynching a priority, wrote letters to the editors of magazines such as *Christian Century, Nation,* and the *Survey* to highlight the tragedy of lynching, and worked alongside the NAACP by helping to coordinate joint meetings and marches to garner support for anti-lynching.[45] By 1938, Gardner was known on a first name basis by Walter White, then executive secretary of the NAACP.[46] Her efforts were a major force in the FCC's tactics to end lynching and she was a key person in presenting detailed information on lynching during the meetings of the Department of Race Relations. Her active work and that of many other women challenges other women behind the scenes challenges older scholarship that focuses primarily on the work of white men in the internal dynamics of the FCC, especially in the less public or "respectable" work of race relations as opposed to foreign policy and international goodwill issues.[47]

Though the FCC and other organizations did not succeed in getting Congress to pass a federal anti-lynching bill, they did much to publicize the nature and extent of lynchings. The FCC was particularly keen to point to the hypocrisy of Christians who professed peace to allow this form of brutal violence as a "solution" to alleged instances of violence against whites. In writing about and highlighting the evils of lynching, the FCC revealed the depth of the racial oppression of black Americans. Lynching challenged its faith in the nation and compelled it to critique the churches for their failure to come together and eliminate this national problem.

Yet, leaders of the FCC could point at the end of 1946 with some relief to the release of President Harry Truman's Committee on Civil Rights as partial vindication of their campaign.

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[45] RG 18, Box 59, Folder 23.
[46] Ibid.
[47] For a look at the male "decision makers," which neglects the activity of women, especially in race work, see Robert A. Schneider, "Voice of Many Waters: Church Federation in the Twentieth Century," in Hutchison, *Between the Times*, 104.

When the committee submitted its report, *To Secure These Rights*, to the president on October 29, 1947, the FCC could claim a partial victory in its vision of educating the public about violence against blacks and in its call for a federal anti-lynching bill. The report opened with a forceful assertion of the essential "right to safety and security of the person," depicting "lawless violence" and "arbitrary arrest and punishment" as key threats to such a right.[48] In a style very similar to over two decades of FCC pronouncements, the President's report tallied the number of lynchings that had occurred since the 1920s. It deplored the fact that too many black Americans still lived "under the harrowing fear of violence or death at the hands of a mob or of brutal treatment by police officers."[49] The report's theory of social change was very similar to the FCC's model. It argued that legislation and education must work together to eliminate prejudice and intolerance, that education was a "means of improving civil rights" and that private organizations and individuals should help to educate and shape public opinion. However, the report insisted, though it may be impossible to overcome prejudice solely by law, "many of the evil discriminatory practices which are visible manifestations of prejudice can be brought to an end through proper government controls."[50] Its concluding remarks on lynchings turned to their lasting impact and their national and international repercussions. The worry that lynchings would tarnish the character of the nation was a version of the FCC's longstanding claim that they were a stain on the moral soul of the nation. The report put it this way:

> A lynching in a rural American community is not a challenge to that community's conscience alone. The repercussions of such a crime are heard not only in the locality, or indeed only in our nation. They echo from one end of the globe to the other, and the world looks to the American national government for both an explanation of how such a

[48] See Steven F. Lawson, ed., *To Secure These Rights: The Report of President Harry S Truman's Committee on Civil Rights* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2004), 52. See also PHS, RG 18 Box 56 Folder 20 where the FCC called the President's report a "notable contribution to our progress toward a working democracy" and commended it to churches for careful study and reflection.
[49] Lawson, *To Secure These Rights*, 61.
[50] Ibid, 129-130.

> shocking event can occur in a civilized country and remedial action to prevent its recurrence.[51]

While it is true, as these words indicate, that the Cold War led to a heightened concern with the US's moral reputation over against the claims of international Communists about universal brotherhood transcending color lines, the FCC's anti-lynching campaign shows a much longer record of using American race relations for international purposes and to shame the nation before an international audience.[52] It is thus not surprising to see the FCC supporting Truman's report and its strategy for civil rights, which represented the kind of vision held by the FCC.

Small victories were celebrated in the long fight against lynching, which continued into the 1940s, mostly by public calls for federal anti-lynching bills. But perhaps just as important was the realization and claim that witness was central to the church's mission, even if influence could not be tangibly measured. Lynching stood as the real and symbolic evil that had to be protested against and to which the nation and its churches must be held accountable. Though sometimes it was a voice crying in the wilderness, the FCC cried out long enough that it was joined by other religious partners who once eschewed this kind of difficult work. In this regard, the FCC could see the fruit of its labors as a goad to the conscience of the churches, though its attempts to change attitudes and uproot old customs remained an uphill struggle.

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[51] Ibid., 127.

[52] For more on how the "treatment of African Americans became a matter fraught with international implications" in the Cold War years, see Lawson's introduction, *To Secure These Rights*, 9.