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“Sex-Ins, College Style”: Black Feminism and Sexual Politics in the Student YWCA, 1968–80

April Haynes

In 1970, the Young Women’s Christian Association of the United States, one of the largest and most influential women’s organizations of the twentieth century, committed itself to “One Imperative: to thrust our collective power toward the elimination of racism, wherever it exists and by any means necessary.”¹ Often perceived as a “Jesus in gym shoes” organization rooted in white Protestant women’s missionary efforts around the world, few twenty-first-century readers associate the YWCA with militant antiracism.² Yet between 1968 and 1970, young women organized within historically black colleges and universities across the South to make the elimination of racism the single most important goal of this powerful institution. Several hundred of these student leaders convened on the campus of Emory University in 1968, declaring that “no longer would they stand for middle class white values to be forced upon them” within the YWCA. They drew inspiration from students at Howard University, who had launched a widespread movement for self-determination in historically black colleges and universities.³ Women aligned with the Black University Movement worked within and through the Student YWCA, which had become the vanguard to transform the National Association. Having contributed their “fair share” to the national fund year after year, African American women expected to act in leadership roles, channel YWCA resources toward social justice campaigns of their choosing, and cultivate black feminist consciousness.

The Emory meeting and its eventual impact on the National YWCA reflected a larger trend. Rather than abandoning existing institutions—such as the university or the YWCA—many activists in black communities sought to take them over, redistribute their resources, and make them “of worth to the movement.”⁴ One Howard student, Vivian Lewis McCain, saw the campus YWCA as a resource for cultivating black *women’s* self-determination in particular. Soon after completing her master’s degree in Religious Studies, she joined like-minded members of black YWCAs across the American South in planning an intervention at the scheduled convention of the National Student Council at Emory.⁵

Black college women like McCain infused the YWCA of the United States with a political approach that Kimberlé Crenshaw has termed *intersectionality*. They defined the elimination of racism as a feminist issue: the same student leaders who wrote "Women's Liberation" into the "national priorities" of the YWCA also agitated for the adoption of the One Imperative. They repeatedly pointed out that hierarchies of race, gender, class, age, region, and sexuality structured the material conditions of young black women's lives and shaped the subjective constitution of their very identities. Students directly challenged these "interlocking structures of oppression," targeting events and discourses that clearly expressed mutually constitutive relations of racism, sexism, poverty, and US imperialism.⁶ After the Twenty-Fifth Annual Convention adopted the One Imperative in 1970, members also voted to implement an "Action Audit" that required every chapter in the United States to report regularly on the steps they were taking toward the elimination of racism. "If the Association has been working on feminist concerns," asked the Action Audit, "how have members been helped to understand the relationship of sexism to racism?" Moreover, auditors urged local YWCA chapters to act against "the international dimensions of racism" and to interpret the struggles of women of color in the United States in relation to those living in South Africa and Vietnam. Doing so inspired some Student YWCA members to identify themselves as "Third World Women" living in a context of internal colonialism. They also organized transnational solidarity actions in support of decolonization and against apartheid.⁷

When black college women brought transnational and intersectional feminist analyses to their campus YWCA, they drew on a long but largely forgotten history—one in which their forbears had focused on sexuality as an important locus of intersectional oppression and resistance. The YWCA had provided sex education for college women across lines of color and nation since the turn of the twentieth century; now black college women used its vast resources to conceptualize sexual empowerment in their own terms. Vivian Lewis McCain led this effort during the late 1960s. After completing her degree, she took a job in the Student YWCA and designed a "Sex-In"—a workshop that she facilitated on at least twenty-one predominantly black college campuses between 1968 and 1970.

Hundreds of young people attended the Sex-Ins, and after each one McCain met with smaller groups of women to "rap about the black student and human sexuality."⁸ The rap groups developed into consciousness-raising sessions in which women exchanged sexual information, recounted their experiences, and analyzed the politics of everyday life. Young black women spread the word about McCain's Sex-Ins because they saw problems in the sexual culture of their campuses and communities produced by and perpetuating institutional racism and sexism. Within the safe, well-resourced, and reputedly placid space of the campus YWCA meeting, they theorized sex while organizing to capture and revolutionize extant institutions.

This chapter interprets YWCA meetings in historically black colleges and universities, including the Sex-Ins, as formative spaces in the construction of black feminism in the southern United States. While presenting a case study of the YWCA of the USA, it also posits the confluence of sex education, feminism, and black women's activism as part of a longer transnational history. The YWCA became a major advocate for women's sex education during the early twentieth century in response to transatlantic cultural

currents and geopolitical developments. Soon after the First World War, students in black colleges across the American South asserted a “New Negro” politics: they sought autonomy from white administrators’ paternalism, improved educational resources, and a curriculum reflecting black histories and cultures.⁹ This trend both coincided with the creation of new YWCA groups on several black campuses and directly predicted the demands of later student movements. African American YWCA activists of the early twentieth century are usually understood as respectable clubwomen, who had little in common with the sexually assertive blues women more often identified with New Negro cultural politics.¹⁰ Yet on black campuses of the early twentieth century, YWCA leaders also built an institution that later students used to theorize, organize, and channel resources toward black women’s sexual liberation. Their intellectual heirs, the proponents of the One Imperative, capitalized on the YWCA’s investment in sex education to create spaces on campus in which female students could visualize social transformation.

This history calls into question a common narrative which holds that radical feminism emerged in the late twentieth-century United States when white women left the civil rights movement and the secular New Left. That origin story depends on and perpetuates a definition of feminism—a singular vision that foregrounds the liberal pursuit of gender equality over intersectional movements for structural transformation—which Chela Sandoval has characterized as “hegemonic feminism.”¹¹ Early critics of hegemonic feminism, such as Frances Beal, Angela Davis, Audre Lorde, Barbara Smith, Cherrie Moraga, and Gloria Anzaldúa, denounced racism within “the” women’s movement even as they confronted sexism from men in nationalist and Third World Liberation movements.¹² Because these arguments circulated widely during the late 1970s and reached full voice in the early 1980s, a mistaken perception lingers that women of color feminisms postdated the white women’s movement and emerged in response to it. More recently, Benita Roth, Kimberly Springer, Jennifer Nelson, Anne Valk, and Maylei Blackwell have documented the much earlier emergence of multiple and intersecting feminisms. Community studies yield fruitful evidence of consciousness-raising and self-help strategies within organizations formed by and for women of color at the same time that white women developed these tools.¹³ Close analysis of the National Student YWCA records adds new dimensions to this important historiography. Against the hegemonic narrative that correlates the rise of Black Power with a decline in women’s status, I contend that the turn toward Black Power on southern campuses facilitated rather than slowed students’ pursuit of sexual and gender politics. To recent scholarship on women of color feminisms I add an exploration of the unique and significant sexual politics that student activists developed in historically black colleges and the YWCA. Their conceptualization of Black Power rejected the pronatalism and homophobia endorsed by leaders such as Amiri Baraka and Eldridge Cleaver.¹⁴ By weaving calls for sexual liberation together with their own version of evangelical Protestantism, black YWCA feminists also departed from the secular orientation of the white- and male-dominated New Left. Hampton students, for example, argued that they could “participate in the revolution” and also “keep their Christian uniqueness.”¹⁵ Long before the advent of the phrase *sex-positive feminism*, black YWCA members confronted the real sexual dangers faced by women of color

while affirming pleasure as an integral component of total liberation. Even in the context of a revolution, when life and death were very much on the line, they did not consider sex a trivial issue.¹⁶

The World YWCA

The centrality of the YWCA in a story of sexual radicalism and woman of color feminism may surprise some readers, since the YWCA originated in a social purity movement led by white Anglo-Saxon Protestant women during the late nineteenth century. But almost immediately thereafter, African American women began struggling to transform the YWCA. After decades of activism, they succeeded in integrating the National YWCA, while struggling to maintain autonomy and authority in historic black branches.¹⁷ The college students who used their campus YWCAs as movement bases during the 1960s drew upon this tradition, often simultaneously asserting Black Power and striving to build interracial alliances.¹⁸

The Student YWCA—which, by the mid-twentieth century, had cultivated a more activist culture than the *National* YWCA—supported and even sparked women's movements. Radical feminists such as Charlotte Bunch had their consciousness raised in student YWCA meetings and learned to apply feminist analysis to transnational social movements.¹⁹ As one activist wrote, the "innocuous name has advantages ... Who would suspect the YWCA is full of commie, radical heathens?"²⁰ Such camouflage worked especially well on private, church-affiliated black campuses where time-honored Protestant traditions combined with "the politics of respectability" to make the YWCA a uniquely welcome women's space.²¹

While the association's vanilla reputation had tactical advantages during the 1960s, its perpetuation ignores more than a century of organizing by women of color *outside* the United States to make the World YWCA relevant to their lives. Diverse campaigns for reproductive justice and against sexual violence grew in tandem with sex education programs that rejected conformity to (white, American) Protestant understandings of sin.²² The African American students who participated in Sex-Ins at their campus YWCA during the late 1960s joined a global movement that linked sexual pleasure to women's liberation *and* spiritual fulfillment.

In order to contextualize sex education in the Student YWCA, it is first necessary to briefly sketch the Association's transnational history more generally. The World YWCA emerged at the height of British and American imperialism during the late nineteenth century. White women affiliated with rival groups of Protestant missionaries organized YWCA chapters in North Africa, South and East Asia, the South Pacific, South America, and the Caribbean. Some claimed a maternalist responsibility to "rescue" women and girls from customs they associated with "primitive" patriarchy; others presented themselves as professional educators offering technical skills that would draw colonized women into Western industrial relations. Both groups claimed to represent the interests of indigenous women while elevating their own standing in imperial politics. At the same time, they found themselves beholden to male colonial authorities and worried that the YWCA might do little beyond supporting the spheres

of influence then being established through war, statecraft, and economic exploitation. They organized the World YWCA in 1898 in hopes of replacing the masculine model of imperial competition with one of Protestant women's cooperation. In the process, they created a new field in which Anglo-American women would exercise global authority. As European and white American women agitated to raise their own status in the colonies, the World YWCA provided a base from which to develop local women's movements along maternalist and imperial lines.²³

Indigenous women in India, China, Jamaica, and South Africa struggled from the outset to define the goals and priorities of organizations claiming to speak for them. Across disparate locales and colonial conditions, World YWCA conventions yielded opportunities to network, organize, and appropriate resources. Women of color gained offices in local YWCAs by holding European and white American women accountable to their own Protestant mission. Their collective activism produced a revised constitution in 1952 that prevented any policy from being "imposed from above."²⁴ While the demands of local women flowed through the World YWCA network, it became a major international organization by the mid-twentieth century. Members and leaders increasingly championed the causes of working women, religious pluralism, decolonization, and antiracism. The YWCA eventually became so politicized—and its missionary origins so remote—that some women of color rechristened it a global movement of "Young Women Committed to Action." In the United States, where an earlier generation of African American women had forced the desegregation of the National YWCA, black college students embraced the new label as an expression of pan-African solidarity and a sign of their own radicalization.²⁵

Transnational origins of YWCA sex education

Activists within the World YWCA and the YWCA of the USA consistently ranked sexual safety and health among their top priorities. Their advocacy changed, along with changes in the composition and goals of the global leadership, from imperial and maternalist frameworks during the early twentieth century to antiracist and feminist goals by the 1970s. Women of color harnessed and transformed the organization in both local and global contexts over these decades. This section traces the early history of sex education in the YWCA of the USA, which began amid transnational migration, became a temporary arm of the American nation-state, and then developed a consciously international feminist program. It was within this dynamic context that African American women began using YWCA sex education programs to challenge the racial and gender status quo.

During the period of British and Anglo-American dominance, YWCA officers strove to protect European immigrants and US-born factory operatives from "the traffic in women." It was within the context of a panic over transnational prostitution that the YWCA of the USA developed its public sex education program. The Social Morality Commission, founded in 1913, worked to "awaken among women and girls an appreciation for their responsibility for sex irregularities." Under its auspices the YWCA sent social morality lecturers into colleges, high schools, factories, and

women's clubs. They believed that only informed young women could avoid the traps of seduction, trafficking, premarital pregnancy, and sexually transmitted infections.²⁶

Early twentieth-century YWCA lecturers generally racialized the women they hoped to reach as potential victims of "the white slave trade."²⁷ Until 1918, the Commission employed an all-white bureau of lecturers and almost exclusively addressed young white women, whom they presumed to be the most sheltered from sexual information and therefore most at risk of exploitation. Yet these "preventive" lectures did more than simply dissuade listeners from vice: they also represented heteronormative pleasure as a positive good—a bulwark of social stability if restrained during adolescence and channeled toward marriage. For example, the YWCA employed Mabel Ulrich to instruct girls in what she called "the normal side of sex," that is, the physiology of heterosexual intercourse. She feared that merely warning white girls against seduction and disease could create a "sex antagonism" between women and men, and thereby encourage lesbianism in those who should have been shown "a straight path."²⁸ Ulrich promoted an ideal of "normal" white womanhood that spurned purity for its own sake and instead trained girls to anticipate—and hold out for—mutual satisfaction in companionate marriages. She assumed that adolescents needed practice to achieve this goal and insisted that the YWCA had as much a duty "to provide a girl with beaux as to provide her with a gymnasium." Supervised dating would strengthen girls' "moral backbone" and steel them against the blandishments of white slavers. Other social morality lecturers, such as Rachele Yarros, addressed Mexican-American women. But rather than striving to protect them from sexual trafficking or inciting heteronormative pleasure, Yarros aimed to prepare them for enlightened motherhood. The contrast illuminates the ethnic stereotypes that framed early YWCA sex education.²⁹

The outbreak of the First World War created new opportunities for women of color to take an active role in sex education. The Social Morality Commission expanded its purview beyond the prevention of "white slavery" when the War Work Council of the YWCA absorbed the sex education program. Military officials blamed young women for spreading syphilis and gonorrhea among the troops. Although critical of this one-sided directive, the YWCA seized the wartime opportunity to expand its sex education program both in the United States and overseas. Social morality lecturers became responsible for teaching women to abstain from casual sex with American soldiers. Now authorized and funded by the US government, the War Work Commission recruited several new educators, including African American doctors such as Ionia Rollin Whipper and Sarah Winifred Brown. They were charged with delivering lectures on "Patriotic Womanhood," a phrase intended to obscure the sexual content associated with the old social morality framework.³⁰

Under the auspices of keeping soldiers "fit to fight," YWCA lecturers actually offered a wide-ranging and transnational sex education program to women and girls.³¹ The records of the International Conference for Women Physicians, which met in New York City in 1919, reveal the diverse issues and perspectives of sex educators affiliated with the YWCA who had been working during the war years in the United States, Canada, Puerto Rico, Argentina, Uruguay, Japan, China, India, and several European nations. The YWCA organized this conference after the war in order to justify and coordinate their

continued investment in women's sex education now that the US Public Health Service would take charge of education for disease prevention. Freed from military oversight, the postwar YWCA could pursue "methods for cooperation in dealing with social problems affecting women of the world." But what, exactly, were those "social problems"? Participants revealed that they far exceeded the content demanded by US military leaders during the war. They addressed topics such as birth control, abortion, divorce, single motherhood, female orgasms, masturbation, same-sex "crushes," and transsexuality. By no means did all participants agree about any one of these subjects, but they shared a common conviction that young women had the right to discuss such issues so that each individual could develop her own ethical code.³² They also collectively protested military policies that perpetuated a sexual double standard in the name of patriotism. For example, several women openly challenged an army colonel who addressed them about "moral education in the army." They argued that "trying to get women to accept the status quo of sex morality is not the significance entirely of sex education for women."³³ On the contrary, young women demanded "a new sexual morality"—an ethos of respect, affection, and pleasure.³⁴ Sex education classes, the majority agreed, should be made into spaces in which women could imagine how to achieve that goal.

Ionia Whipper, for one, keenly felt the need to change the sexual status quo. Descended from elite black activists, she had been raised to understand the critical ways in which historic and continuing sexual discourses had shaped the Jim Crow conditions of the American South. Her great-uncle, William Whipper, was both a prominent black abolitionist and founder of the American Moral Reform Society, an organization that challenged stereotypes of black licentiousness as early as 1836. And her mother, Frances Rollin Whipper, studied under Sarah Mapps Douglass—the first African American sex educator—before becoming an activist for woman suffrage and black civil rights.³⁵ Ionia Whipper continued the family tradition when she lectured to black women and girls across the American South under the auspices of the YWCA Social Morality Commission in 1918 and 1919.

With a medical degree from Howard University and a post at Tuskegee University, Whipper in many ways embodied the politics of respectability. She expected perfect decorum from black women in her own family and condemned those who chose a Bohemian lifestyle over the responsibilities of motherhood.³⁶ She also shouldered the significant burden of traveling through the segregated South in order to make the social morality lectures that the YWCA had formerly reserved for white girls available to African American women. She knew that their exclusion resulted from the racist assumptions that black female sexuality was inherently deviant, could never be made "normal," and did not merit protection.³⁷ Whipper's war work afforded a highly visible opportunity to insist that "the same standards of conduct" applied to all women and that "colored girls must be protected."³⁸ Her listeners apparently agreed. Thousands of women of all economic classes flocked to Whipper's lectures in forty-five southern cities and towns. In Louisville, a group of thirty-five women organized their own lectures after her departure, going into "factories, churches, and other centers to educate the girls."³⁹ Whipper's cross-class appeal and insistence on black women's sexual dignity as a sign of race pride placed her squarely within a tradition of respectable African American activist women.

Yet in important ways, Whipper can also be seen as a foremother to Vivian Lewis McCain and the sex radicals of the 1960s. More than any other group, *students* gathered to hear Whipper's sex education lectures. Her visits to Fisk, Wilberforce, Lane, and Mississippi Industrial each drew more than one thousand listeners, while between three and five hundred attended her lectures at Storer College and the Lincoln Institute.⁴⁰ And these students were part of a radicalizing generation. As African American soldiers returning from Europe faced race riots, lynching, and enduring poverty, it seemed increasingly clear that upright behavior in itself did little to change white supremacy. The politics of respectability became vulnerable to critique, and students defied the paternalist policies of black colleges by combining race pride and sexual experimentation. Whipper shared her students' determination to confront white supremacy rather than accommodate it.⁴¹

In sexual as well as racial terms, Whipper defied convention. One of the earliest lecturers paid by the US government to provide sex education by and for black women, she was also unusual for daring to speak publicly about sex as an unmarried woman. During a period when the YWCA questioned sending *any* single women into the field, the risk was undoubtedly greatest for African American women. Nevertheless, her presence at the International Conference of Women Physicians suggests that she may have been among the YWCA staff who flouted military policy by giving students a more capacious sex education than the government intended. Finally, Whipper appears to have primarily engaged in "romantic relationships with other women."⁴² Combining an image of respectability with layers of radicalism, Ionia Whipper's story perfectly captures the YWCA legacy for women in black colleges.

African American Student YWCAs in the 1960s

Like the YWCA, historically black colleges and universities have a reputation for sexual and gender conservatism. During the 1960s, many private black colleges remained beholden to all-white boards of trustees and strictly adhered to the religious traditions of their founders. Students and administrators clashed throughout the decade over dress codes, curfews, and *in loco parentis* policies. Yet Methodist, Episcopal, and Baptist institutions overwhelmingly supported the student YWCA, even when they knew that members engaged in frank sexual conversation.

Administrators of historically black universities, especially private campuses that relied on denominational rather than state funds, supported the YWCA mainly in recognition of its racial liberalism. After integrating the National YWCA, African American women began pushing the organization to confront racism as a fundamental barrier to black women's health and well-being. Female luminaries of the civil rights movement, from Dorothy Height to Barbara Jordan, also worked with the student YWCA on voter registration and fair housing campaigns. In 1961, Ella Baker and Casey Hayden visited the Duke University YWCA together, modeling the national organization's commitment to integration in what was then an all-white university. They were only among the first of many interracial pairs of organizers hired by the National Student YWCA to traverse the South delivering workshops on racial justice.⁴³

As the student movement radicalized, the YWCA's Protestant image and social service pedigree endeared it further to administrators of private black colleges. When an interracial YWCA team spontaneously arrived at Tougaloo College, the Dean of Women publicized their presence and invited students to meet with them in her own office. Thirty young women did just that, engaging a YWCA representative and Dean Lillie Outlaw in an open discussion of black identity, the disciplinary process on campus, and the formation at Tougaloo of one of the first student groups to use the name "Young, Gifted and Black." Dean Outlaw built an excellent relationship with students by supporting their activism—and their "idea of sexual freedom." Above all, she encouraged students to become increasingly active in the National Student YWCA movement.⁴⁴

Meanwhile, *public* colleges across the South became increasingly hostile to the student YWCA. Dependent upon state funding, most predominantly white and several historically black universities distanced themselves from civil rights activists. On segregated, predominantly white campuses, students expected the YWCA to function as a white social club that organized mixers, evangelical missions, and charity drives. But in 1965, the council of the National Student YWCA voted to require local chapters to integrate and to foster social justice in their communities. They created an Office of Racial Justice and asked every college YWCA chapter in the nation to write this commitment into its constitution. A wave of student associations chose to disaffiliate instead. Some public institutions, such as the University of Mississippi and Mississippi State College for Women, doggedly preserved the all-white YWCA until the parent association formally disowned them.⁴⁵

Racial integration could be equally undesirable—and even more difficult to achieve—on some black campuses. South Carolina's Shaw University disaffiliated from the YWCA in 1965, citing an inability to comply with the new diversity criteria. Although Shaw was a private Baptist college, such resistance more frequently came from administrators of historically black campuses who relied on state monies. Of twenty-three predominantly black colleges and universities surveyed here, ten private colleges granted official permission for YWCA visits or offered other forms of institutional support to organizers, compared with only three public universities. Of the ten schools that actively opposed or passively resisted YWCA leaders, eight were public and only two private. Resistant administrators identified the Student YWCA as a civil rights organization and rejected visits from regional staff on those grounds before they ever learned that such visits might include sex education or feminist consciousness raising.⁴⁶

While conservative southern chapters fled the YWCA's National Student Movement, many northern and western students simply lost interest in the organization. Immersed in a counterculture against hegemonic Protestant values, students on multiracial urban campuses considered the YWCA "finky" and characterized its activism as "dabbling in important campus movements."⁴⁷ While these students could join a panoply of secular Left organizations, private black colleges usually supported only a handful of faith-based organizations, fraternities, and sororities. Administrative paternalism, white community control, the religious origins of a given institution, and church

acceptance of male dominance combined to make the YWCA the only viable space on many campuses in which black women could develop a distinctive agenda. As a result of these overlapping trends, students in historically black colleges and universities organized through the new YWCA chapters they formed after visitors from the national organization had departed. In the process, they pressured the National Student YWCA to build new chapters and foster extant associations on black campuses.

The Black University Movement

Many black colleges lacked stable funding, and students availed themselves of the resources that YWCA participation could offer without sacrificing one iota of their radicalism. By 1968, black students across the South were involved in a campaign to "save black schools." In the wake of *Brown v. Board of Education*, "many Whites rushed to the view that there'd be no need for black colleges."⁴⁸ African Americans in the South frequently remarked that interracialism for its own sake risked obscuring the value of black institutions, which in turn enabled white southern politicians to devalue the work of black educators. Radical students sought to transform the historically black college from an institution that had trained African Americans to survive Jim Crow racism into a revolutionary "Black University." The Black University Movement began in 1968, when police shot and killed three black students of South Carolina State College who had gathered to protest violations of the Civil Rights Act in Orangeburg. An all-white jury acquitted the officers, igniting protests at multiple historically black universities. Students demanded a role in university judiciary systems, an overhauled curriculum, improvement of physical buildings, and community-based hiring of faculty and staff. The movement reached its most idealistic phase with the creation of Malcolm X Liberation University, an experiment in community-based, student-run education. Advocates of Black Power sought to use the resources of the institution for long-term social change and to incorporate African Americans beyond the gates of a given campus in that process.⁴⁹

It was in this context that young black women transformed the YWCA. The mass flight of conservative students from integrated associations allowed the organization to broaden its horizons in multiple areas. Now organizers promoted the campus YWCA as a meeting space in which students could formulate "the sense of blackness in the U.S. today,"⁵⁰ a tool to confront administrative paternalism, and a woman-centered organization prepared to fight sexism on campus. Driven by student demand, the Sex-In served as a vehicle for recruiting new members to an association that organizers intended to serve female students of the ideal Black University.

Vivian Lewis McCain conceived of the Sex-In in 1968, when at age twenty-five she accepted a position as southern regional director for the National Student Association of the YWCA and began traveling throughout rural Mississippi paired with white colleagues such as Sarah Jane Stewart and Marcia Perry. McCain, Stewart, and Perry organized students to confront racism in their communities and on their campuses. They also stressed that the YWCA could offer female students leadership training and a dedicated space in which to articulate their unique challenges and priorities.

McCain understood that while interracialism looked radical to many white southerners, it sometimes struck students in black colleges as quite conservative. At Bennett College in North Carolina, YWCA members were active in the Black University Movement. McCain described Bennett women as “together” and remarked of campus culture: “Black identity is hot.” Representatives of Black Students United for Liberation and the Student Organization for Black Unity invited McCain to campus but dismissed her partner Sarah Jane Stewart as a “honkey do-gooder.” In Mississippi, black administrators at Alcorn State University similarly rejected Marcia Perry, telling McCain that “no trash would be welcome on campus.”⁵¹ This resistance had a practical as well as an ideological basis. The presence of an unknown, single white woman invited scrutiny and increased the danger of racist violence—the brunt of which usually fell on black students.⁵² In addition, many students saw white women’s interest in black education as part of a long tradition of social control. Often the only other white women on campus were deans, philanthropists, or presidents’ wives—all of whom expected deference from students. The white member of an interracial YWCA team was sometimes perceived as a “typical authoritative white chick,” whether because of her own behavior or as a personification of this systemic problem. Though eager to fuse women’s liberation with the Black University Movement, students might refuse to attend a program that included any white YWCA representative and request “Black staff only” at future visits.⁵³

In 1969 McCain responded to this feedback by working separately from white women. She occasionally traveled with black male leaders of the YMCA, such as Charles Whitaker. Meanwhile, Sarah Jane Stewart and Marcia Perry concentrated on antiracism trainings at predominantly white women’s colleges in the South; they also presented on women’s liberation and abortion law reform. For her part, McCain made consciousness-raising an integral part of her all-black work. She sometimes found women “afraid and lonely, brainwashed by a rotten society and helpless.” But at other times, she found them to be informed, sophisticated, and radical—prepared to challenge moderate black faculty and conservative white benefactors alike. At several colleges, she met students who had already begun to organize Black Power groups for confronting administrators.⁵⁴

These confrontations ranged from cultural debates to militant actions. Students at Jackson State College complained that their “Negro” librarian did not make gospel music and spirituals accessible because she considered such music “low-class.” Mrs. Lipcomb, the librarian, believed that only European classical music held instructive value. Although McCain looked and acted the part of a mild-mannered YWCA visitor, she joined several students in promoting the Black Arts Movement on campus. “You are part of the brainwashing job done to us by whites,” she told Mrs. Lipcomb, “and this is what makes you feel the way you do.”⁵⁵ Students expected YWCA staffers to understand and reinforce the cultural politics of Black Power on campus.

In her reports to the National Student YWCA, McCain commented on the progress of students’ political consciousness. Especially on rural campuses, she studied their clothing and hairstyles for indicators of their isolation from—or involvement in—Black Power. The sight of “revolutionary clothes” such as army jackets indicated students’ ability to express themselves without a punitive dress code. It also raised

issues of gender politics. At Lane, a private Tennessee college, McCain discovered that the president had "granted permission for the boys to wear Afros but did not make this allowance for the girls." The policy followed on the heels of a "student revolt," led in part by YWCA members. The president suppressed future activism by expelling more than thirty students, including a YWCA leader whose Afro expressed her defiance. Her comrades, including a "young radical" named Joyce Wright, invited McCain to give a Sex-In at Lane in February 1969. The program lasted from 10 a.m. until 4 a.m. the following morning, breaking into groups as small as fourteen and as large as two hundred. Women discussed sex throughout the evening. But they also criticized the male-run Student Christian Association, which dominated campus life with the blessing of the administration. At the end of this consciousness-raising marathon, two more young women "tried the Afro move again."⁵⁶

Similarly, activists at Southern University invited McCain to give Sex-Ins in 1968 and 1970. They continued to use consciousness-raising in campus meetings long after she left. In 1972, students boycotted the campus in a protest of dilapidated buildings, white paternalism, and the Eurocentric curriculum. They met violent state repression, and the campus YWCA organized in defense of arrested students. Meanwhile, the Baton Rouge YWCA remonstrated against the involvement of any organization that shared their name. Radical black women led the student YWCA in a different direction from the moderate community organization.⁵⁷

Interpreting the Sex-In

McCain organized the Sex-In as a fundamental component of the Black University Movement during an especially contentious period in the history of sexuality. In 1965, Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan had described black families as matriarchal and responsible for a "culture of poverty." This myth of black matriarchy maintained a fiction that "the Black woman is already liberated," especially in terms of sexual behavior.⁵⁸ In addition to shaping policies that disadvantaged black women, the Moynihan report ignited a backlash within some black communities against women who asserted sexual independence from men. A particularly vocal strain of Black Nationalist discourse prescribed supportive heterosexuality and motherhood as women's primary duties within black communities; departures from these roles were deemed counterrevolutionary. This discourse responded to the very real crisis of forced sterilization among women of color in the United States and Puerto Rico, yet many women of color protested that patriarchy in the name of nationalism did not empower them. Toni Cade Bambara described feeling constant pressure to fend off "the Black Matriarch stick."⁵⁹ Frances Beal insisted that coerced domesticity and unlimited reproduction were not appropriate solutions to forced sterilization. These processes robbed black women of the chance to form "utopian visions" and reduced those active in revolutionary struggle by half.⁶⁰ In this context, creating space for young black women to define liberation on their own terms necessarily included the terrain of sexuality.

At the same time, white feminists linked sexual pleasure to social liberation. Anne Koedt critiqued sexologists such as Sigmund Freud and his popularizers, who argued

that normal women outgrew the clitoral orgasms of adolescent masturbation and became sexually responsive exclusively in vaginally penetrative sex. Koedt famously described the vaginal orgasm as a myth manufactured by psychoanalysts to keep women sexually dependent upon men.⁶¹ Ti-Grace Atkinson and Betty Dodson also argued that true liberation required sexual individuation. Atkinson's "The Institution of Sexual Intercourse" suggested that heteropatriarchy had so profoundly shaped American sexual culture that celibacy might be a necessary step in a woman's personal development.⁶² Dodson proposed that women should begin by "Liberating Masturbation." She convened a consciousness-raising session on masturbation in 1970 and became convinced that, without being taught *how* to masturbate, women could never discover their own sexual power or achieve social liberation. So Dodson organized Bodysex Workshops, in which she distributed images of female genitalia, sold vibrators, and provided live demonstrations.⁶³

White feminists increasingly narrated sexual liberation as a journey from a state of sexual passivity, dependence, and ignorance and toward one of self-actualization. This narrative revolved around their own experiences and mirrored the historical construction of white femininity in opposition to myths of black voraciousness and matriarchy.⁶⁴ Toni Cade Bambara questioned the new crop of white feminist "experts" on sex and challenged the implication that sexual experimentation was, by itself, inherently revolutionary. She urged black women to work together toward a politics of "sensuality" that addressed the conditions of their lives and prompted them to envision their own fulfillment.⁶⁵

By the time Bambara published this critique, Vivian Lewis McCain had been active for two years in precisely the same project. She later reflected that she had begun these workshops to meet the demands of students at Hampton, Rust, and Mississippi Industrial. Black college women in the South pressured the YWCA to send "someone who can communicate to us in our way; in language we are used to" about sexuality prior to the publication of the feminist texts that have since come to be considered foundational.⁶⁶ The feminist politics of the Sex-In should be seen as organic and unique—not derivative of those espoused by white-majority organizations such as the Boston Women's Health Collective. Although some scholars have credited the Collective with originating the Women's Health Movement, *Sex-In's*, *College Style* preceded the publication of *Our Bodies, Our Selves*.⁶⁷

Students continued to demand Sex-Ins on their campuses for the next three years. On several occasions, campus leaders spontaneously organized meetings with an attendance of several hundred, forcing McCain to repeat the workshop with little or no advance notice. At Jackson State, organizing a Sex-In proved to be the top priority of students, even though administrators opposed it. The Dean of Women explained that she and the president feared that "the community would associate a Sex-In with a Love-In" and "requested that it shouldn't take place due to the fact that Jackson State was a State school and *not* a private school."⁶⁸ McCain sometimes led two or three workshops during a single visit, then met individuals afterward to discuss their particular needs and goals until well after midnight. At the end of her visit to Southern University, she concluded her report to the regional YWCA: "Tired! Tired! Tired!"⁶⁹

Demand for the Sex-In grew as students advertised it by word of mouth. Though designed for members of collegiate YWCAs, those who attended campuses in predominantly black towns occasionally invited friends, neighbors, and community members. In some instances, young men joined them or requested a separate workshop for male students. McCain overcame her initial discomfort and occasionally addressed young men. Doing so afforded a precious opportunity to raise *their* consciousness about the politics of sex, as well. After facilitating a workshop for eighty-five young men until 2:00 a.m., she noted "I tried to instill in them (the guys) a sense of responsibility" about their sexual behavior with women.⁷⁰ These forays into young men's sex education in no way diluted the feminist implications of her work, particularly on campuses where YWCA members would go on to lead the particular actions inspired by the Sex-In after McCain left town. Although repeating workshops for multiple groups beyond the campus YWCA could be exhausting and unpredictable, it fulfilled the Black University ideal of making the knowledge produced in academic settings relevant and accessible to surrounding communities.⁷¹

Within the Sex-In, McCain shared a wide range of graphic sexual information. At Rust College, a Methodist black campus in Holly Springs, Mississippi, she asked Dean Annie M. Hall "how free" she could be with women students. Dean Hall gave her "the go ahead to be as frank as frank can be." McCain did not hold back. "Unmarried love can be as just as married unlove," she told YWCA members. Next, she described a variety of contraceptive methods, diagrammed the clitoris, explained several methods for pleasurable lesbian sex, and even described more varied activities "of interest" such as "sixty-nine," "sadism," and "anilingus." Many of her topics overlapped with those that were being simultaneously explored in many white feminist spaces. Sex-In participants discussed contraception, abortion, clitoral sensation, and female masturbation again and again, but they often treated these issues differently from white-majority consciousness-raising sessions. On one occasion, McCain openly disagreed with Koedt about vaginal and clitoral orgasms.⁷² More often, however, she presented both sides of a debate and withheld her own opinion unless students asked for it. Above all, she strove to present YWCA members with a smorgasbord of sexual information to use in making their own ethical decisions. McCain reported the content of these conversations to the National Student YWCA and produced her own program materials tailored "to special requests made by college students in the Southern region." Her pamphlet, *Sex-In's: College Style*, became an organizing tool beyond her own region.⁷³

The Sex-In also departed from contemporary sex education programs the YWCA offered at predominantly white universities. The YWCA had continued to offer sex education programs on college campuses since the Social Morality lectures of the 1910s, but their mid-century curriculum emphasized "Love and Marriage." By 1969, many white students who remained affiliated with the national association had turned these sex education sessions into activist meetings dedicated to the decriminalization of abortion. They pressured the YWCA of the United States to advocate abortion law repeal and support the Equal Rights Amendment. But few white student YWCA leaders addressed the race and class dimensions of reproductive politics. Some organizations, such as the University of Nebraska YWCA, came into conflict with

the national leadership because they “isolated women’s liberation from the masses of women, namely Third World Women.” This tension became most clear in 1970 when the executive director advertised her support for population control programs that many women of color considered genocidal on a global scale. YWCA programs in other predominantly white institutions also linked the issues of contraceptive access and abortion law repeal to the idea of a “population explosion.”⁷⁴

McCain consciously rejected the discourse of population control because the student activists with whom she worked considered the YWCA useful to the extent that it served them as part of a broader movement for “Third World Women’s Liberation.”⁷⁵ For example, the YWCA’s Black Affairs Committee resolved in 1970 to fight for Angela Davis, then a political prisoner held in solitary confinement on trumped-up charges. The resolution was adopted first by the national student association, then by the YWCA of the United States as a campaign to fulfill the One Imperative. Student chapters organized rallies and teach-ins in support of Davis.⁷⁶ At the local level, women in historically black colleges helped to organize the Southwest Georgia Project, a nationalist movement to reclaim control over a designated territory of twelve black-majority counties that they intended to redeem from internal colonialism in the form of economic, political, intellectual, religious, and cultural domination by state and national governments. Student YWCA members also aligned themselves with the Red Power movement “in their fight to reclaim freedom” and expressed solidarity with women active in the Young Lords and the Angolan revolution. Black YWCA leaders consistently expressed a Third World feminist consciousness that transcended the imagined borders of colonized communities as well as the political borders of the United States.⁷⁷

Thus, when McCain facilitated discussions of contraception and abortion, she did so in direct relation to Black Power and Third World Women’s movements. At South Carolina State College, she played a recording in which educator Barbara Sizemore argued that a black man could “be killed with birth control pills or be killed after he is born—it doesn’t matter with the whites.” The students laughed bitterly at this statement, but when pressed to verbalize their opinions they expressed only partial agreement. Several black women described the pill as “a form of racial genocide” but clarified that they were “not completely opposed to all forms of birth control.” They were mainly concerned about the health risks then being publicized by news coverage of the controversy surrounding Barbara Seaman’s *The Doctors’ Case against the Pill*. Those risks struck them as especially likely to affect southern black women, who often lacked access to high-quality health care and accurate medical information. Suspicious that the pill was being tested on women of color without their consent, the students feared that black and Puerto Rican women were being “forced into something of which they have little knowledge of the dangers and implications involved.”⁷⁸ *Sex-Ins, College-Style* endorsed the pill as a safe and effective choice but also promoted reliable alternatives such as condoms and diaphragms. When students at another college asked McCain about the IUD, she called it a controversial and potentially dangerous method.⁷⁹ In general, black YWCA members wanted safe contraceptive methods and protested their lack of access to trusted contraception as a symptom of institutional racism and sexism.

YWCA workshops at historically black colleges encouraged members to think in systemic, rather than individual, terms about sex and reproduction. They discussed the pill amid debates concerning the draft, capitalism, and African decolonization movements. The institutional context raised a different problem of access during a Sex-In at Rust College. When McCain asked students, "What do you think of abortions?" one woman answered, "What the hell [do] I care about abortions? I want to know how you prevent getting pregnant. If this is done you won't have abortions to worry about." She pointed out that Mississippi made abortion a crime, but it also censored contraceptive information. Vivian McCain was rare in her willingness to risk jail and fines in order to bring sex education to young black women in the Deep South. She encountered students who considered the embargo against sexual information symptomatic of internal colonialism—a measure adopted by a remote, white-supremacist state legislature that did not reflect the will of disenfranchised black communities.⁸⁰

Still other YWCA members, including some who met McCain at Virginia's Hampton Institute, expressed concerns that restricted access to abortion constituted a major threat to black women's health. Their university president, Jerome Holland, directed the local Planned Parenthood chapter and supported Hampton students who joined the nascent southern campaign for abortion law repeal.⁸¹ Black students used sex education workshops as spaces in which to debate and organize around the issues of contraception and abortion, which they interpreted in light of the intersections of race, class, and gender.

In addition to agitating for reproductive justice, Sex-In participants resisted *in loco parentis* policies that codified the sexual double standard, perpetuated white cultural dominance, and suppressed participation in the Black Freedom Struggle. YWCA members at Lane fought the rule requiring women "to be in their dorms every night at 10:00 p.m., including weekends," while young men received greater leeway.⁸² At Bennett, the politicized student body demanded the resignation of administrators who "wanted to take a brush and straightening comb to get rid of the kinks in their students' lives so they could be good little polished grinning Aunt Mabels for whiteness." Determined to take charge of their own sexual lives, several Bennett women demanded a "coaching period" in which McCain taught them how to facilitate Sex-Ins after she left. They further requested "a display of contraceptives and sex articles" to use in student-run sessions, believing themselves capable of presenting such information in a way that was perfectly compatible with Black Power.⁸³

Sex-In participants also addressed the racial politics of rape, mobilizing both to defend black men from false accusations and challenging white women to combat sexual violence against women of color. On one occasion, McCain publicly confronted a white YWCA member in Greensboro whose "old man" was known in the community for sexually harassing black women. Bennett students encouraged McCain by telling her that they had approached the same woman more than once about her husband. They considered such confrontations a step toward honest reconciliation. The "truth hurts like hell," one Bennett student remarked, but it "opened up the way" for white women to address their own racism and face the sexual politics of white supremacy in the South. Students of historically black colleges participated widely in the antirape

activism that Danielle McGuire has described as central to the mid-twentieth-century Black Freedom Struggle; many of these same students were campus YWCA members.⁸⁴

At the same time, YWCA women held black men accountable when they promoted or engaged in disrespectful sexual behavior. One group debated Eldridge Cleaver's discussions of rape, lynching, and interracial sex in *Soul on Ice*, questioning whether Cleaver "really" spoke for "a majority of Blacks."⁸⁵ In the pages of the *Black Dispatch*, black student YWCA members registered anger at "The Black Man-White Woman Thing." Assured that "Black is Beautiful," women had "discarded our straightening combs, bleaching creams, wigs and peroxides," only to find that black men increasingly pursued sexual relationships with white women in order to assert their liberated manhood. "The same speed with which they ran from lynch mobs, they use now running to white women," wrote Georgia Mary Darby. White women also seemed to have little appreciation for "the suffering and the degradation Black women have gone through" when they organized Women's Liberation meetings.⁸⁶ Darby's anger stemmed from a source deeper than simple jealousy: scholars of the Civil Rights movement have shown that white southerners used the specter of interracial sex to discredit the movement and, at times, incite the murder of activists.⁸⁷ While black men and white women enjoyed breaking a long-standing taboo, black women faced violent recriminations as well. In the protected space of the black YWCA, they could collectively voice feelings of betrayal and contemplate the kind of sexual revolution they wanted to create instead.

Southern black college women prioritized *both* black self-determination and the egalitarian possibilities of sexual revolution. Well aware of sexual danger, they nevertheless embraced pleasure. Tougaloo students practiced "shacking," in which women spent the weekends in the men's dormitory. In doing so, they used the sexual double standard against itself: administrators who sporadically searched female students' rooms seemed more reluctant to invade male students' privacy.⁸⁸ Bennett students invited McCain to give a Sex-In, during which they informed her that "the 'in thing' on the college campus" at the time of her visit was "'The French' (Fellatio, Anilingus, Cunnilingus)." These activities were not mere substitutes for heterosexual intercourse intended to avoid pregnancy. Bennett was a women's college; three YWCA members revealed to McCain that they had sex with female partners.⁸⁹ In any case, students across the South repeatedly sought education about nonheteronormative activities. In response to "special requests made by college students in the Southern region," McCain described oral sex and genital contact between women, bisexuality, "troilism" (multiple partner encounters), and mutual masturbation. She also recalled having once accidentally surprised "two girls" in the midst of sexual contact and called it "a liberating scene." While attending to issues of sexual power and reproductive injustice, Sex-In participants also carved out a space on campus in which to explore desire and reframe their sexuality as "something profound and beautiful."⁹⁰

McCain stopped submitting visitor reports in 1970, when she moved to Washington, DC, to become associate director of the National Student YWCA. The promotion reduced her interactions with students. Her withdrawal did not spell the end of feminist sexual discourse on predominantly black campuses, for her work had

bespoke a broader trend all along. Many of the same young black feminists who had used YWCA meetings for consciousness-raising during the late 1960s rose to positions of leadership during the 1970s and carried on the work at a national level. In 1969, the Black Affairs Committee of the National Student Movement urged the YWCA "to hire more black staff and directors" and asked in particular "that they be held responsible to the black constituency." Women appointed to these offices defined the elimination of racism—not integration for its own sake—as a core component of women's liberation.⁹¹

The end of an era

Throughout the 1970s, the national student YWCA continued to depend on the involvement of women at historically black colleges and universities. A form letter sent to inactive YWCAs in 1980 remarked on a "current resurgence of the YWCA activity at predominantly Black Institutions of Higher Learning" and urged them to participate in this exciting "National Student Movement."⁹² But despite these efforts, the student YWCA declined during the early 1980s. The emphasis on black schools tied the organization's fate to institutions which were themselves increasingly endangered as economic recession combined with conservative resistance to Civil Rights organizations. For example, the YWCA at Mississippi Industrial College, organized in 1919, had thrived through the 1970s but foundered in 1982 when the entire college folded due to financial strain.⁹³

In the wake of Title IX in 1972, some black campuses disaffiliated their YWCAs for fear that any gender-specific programming would endanger their tenuous claim on federal funds. Male students on any campus without a Student YMCA could object that the very existence of a YWCA discriminated against them on the basis of sex. When a campus responded to this possibility by closing its YWCA, members were expected to merge into a coed Student Christian Association instead. Men tended to hold leadership positions in such groups, and the politics of respectability prevailed over participation in the sexual revolution. Virginia State College in Petersburg, "the only state supported school that is Black" in 1978, typifies the pattern. There, Rev. Harold Braxton, the student activities advisor, phased out the campus YWCA in favor of a coed group led by himself and several male students. Students Denise Jones and Maxine Brown—both of whom "had concerns with sexism on campus"—objected, but to no avail. Braxton already felt pressured to recruit "other races" to the faculty, and he feared further reprisal on Title IX grounds if the campus sponsored a women's student organization.⁹⁴ Given the context of antifeminist backlash during the Reagan years, the decline of the student YWCA after Title IX may be compared to southern states' cynical disinvestment in historically black colleges and universities after *Brown*.

During its heyday, radical black women used the student YWCA to network with each other, develop feminist politics, and debate sexual ethics. Vivian Lewis McCain's *Sex-In* bridged the sexual revolution to student power, women's liberation, and the Black University Movement. Because she responded to the demands of students, her reports represented a larger and more persistent trend. To this day, the National YWCA remains committed to the twin goals of "empowering women

and eliminating racism.” Although in many areas, the YW has merged with the YM and become valued primarily as a gym, in Southern and Midwestern cities, local YWs continue to provide crucial social services primarily by and for women of color. Moreover, on college campuses where it continues to thrive, young activists have found it uniquely supportive of feminist, queer, and gender-nonconforming students. Nevertheless, the deeper challenges once envisioned by young women ensconced in historically black colleges and universities have largely fallen victim to economic sanctions. From Texas to Nebraska, student YWCAs were red-baited and removed from the funding rolls of community chests during the Reagan years.⁹⁵ As the organization has declined in prominence and potential, its legacy has been misunderstood.

Notes

- 1 Dorothy I. Height, *The YWCA's One Imperative, Eliminate Racism: The Story of How a Long-established Voluntary Organization in American Life, the Young Women's Christian Association, Is Coming to Grips with Institutionalized racism in Itself and the Communities It Serves* (New York: YWCA National Board, 1971).
- 2 Scholars have acknowledged a long history of African American women's efforts to harness the resources of the YWCA against racism; however, these works generally address an earlier period, when those efforts focused primarily on integration and seldom took a militant approach. See Judith Weisenfeld, *African American Women and Christian Activism: New York's Black YWCA, 1905–1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Nancy Marie Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood, Race Relations, and the YWCA, 1906–46* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007).
- 3 On the Howard demonstrations and the Black University Movement, see Martha Biondi, *The Black Revolution on Campus* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).
- 4 McCain, Visitor's Report, Rust, November 13–14, 1969, YWCA University programs, Sophia Smith Collection (hereafter SSC).
- 5 Vivian Lewis married Robert McCain, a man who evidently supported her activism, in 1969. For the sake of clarity, I have referred to her as Vivian Lewis McCain throughout this chapter. McCain's account of the Emory meeting is drawn from her Visitor's Report dated November 13–14, 1969 at the Rust College YWCA, YWCA SSC. She also documented her work in *Sex-Ins: College Style* (Atlanta: YWCA, 1970).
- 6 Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics,” *The University of Chicago Legal Forum* 140 (1989): 139–67; Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990); Jackson State College Visitor's Report, November 17, 1969; Height, *The YWCA's One Imperative*.
- 7 YWCA, “Student Action Audit for Change, 1970–1980,” Box 788, Folder 10 YWCA SCC; Student Association Review, n.d., ca. 1970–75, Bennett College YWCA SSC; Dorothy Height, *Open Wide the Freedom Gates: A Memoir* (New York: Public Affairs, 2003).
- 8 McCain, Visitor's Report, Bennett, March 21, 1971, YWCA SSC.

- 9 Raymond Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus: Black College Rebellions of the 1920s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975); Joy Ann Williamson, *Radicalizing the Ebony Tower: Black Colleges and the Black Freedom Struggle in Mississippi* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2008); for a primary source critiquing eurocentrism and paternalism in black colleges in the early twentieth century, see Nella Larsen, *Quicksand* (New York: Norton, 2007 [1928]).
- 10 Angela Y. Davis, "Blues Legacies and Black Feminism" Gertrude 'Ma' Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday, 2nd ed. (New York: Knopf, 2011); Erin D. Chapman, *Prove It on Me: New Negroes, Sex, and Popular Culture in the 1920s* (London: Oxford University Press, 2012).
- 11 Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Knopf, 1979); Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2000); Winifred Breines, *The Trouble Between Us: A History of White and Black Women in the Feminist Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).
- 12 Frances Beal, "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female," in *The Black Woman: An Anthology*, ed. Toni Cade Bambara (New York: Washington Square Press, 1970), 109–22; Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race and Class* (New York: Vintage, 1981); Audre Lorde, *Sister/Outsider* (New York: Crossing Press, 1984); Combahee River Collective, *The Combahee River Collective Statement* (New York: Kitchen Table Press, 1986 [1982]); Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, *The Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Boston: Kitchen Table Press, 1984).
- 13 Jennifer Nelson, *Women of Color and the Reproductive Rights Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2003); Benita Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Kimberly Springer, *Living for the Revolution: Black Feminist Organizations, 1968–1980* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); Anne M. Valk, *Radical Sisters: Second-Wave Feminism and Black Liberation in Washington, D.C.* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008); Maylei Blackwell, *Chicana Power!: Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement* (Austin: University of Texas, 2011).
- 14 Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice* (New York: Dell Books, 1968); Amiri Baraka, "Black Woman," in *Raise, Race, Rays, Raze: Essays since 1965* (New York: Random House, 1971). For an important exception by a male Black Power author, see Huey Newton, "To the Revolutionary Brothers and Sisters about the Women's Liberation and Gay Liberation Movements," in *Smash the Church, Smash the State!: The Early Years of Gay Liberation* (San Francisco: City Lights, 2009), 252–4.
- 15 Vivian Lewis McCain, Visitor's Report, February 4–5, 1969, Hampton Institute YWCA SSC.
- 16 Michele Mitchell has described a similar situation during the height of Jim Crow racism in *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).
- 17 Paula J. Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper Collins, 2009); Height, *Open Wide the Freedom Gates*; Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood*; Weisenfeld, *African American Women*.
- 18 Christina Greene argues that this ideological balance characterized black women's activism more generally. She also documents the resistance of white community YWCA members to sharing power with African American women in Durham,

- North Carolina. See Christina Greene, *Our Separate Ways: Women and the Black Freedom Movement in Durham, North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005). Such tension likely tarnished the YWCA name in Durham and may account for the relative inactivity of the Student Y at North Carolina Central University during the period of this study. "YWCA of NCCU, Historical Background," 1981, YWCA of the USA records, Box 798, Folder 10, SSC.
- 19 Ethel Brooks and Dorothy L. Hodgson, "An Activist Temperament: An Interview with Charlotte Bunch," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 35, 3/4 (2007): 60–74.
 - 20 Duke University YWCA Annual Report, Box 797, Folder 18, YWCA SSC.
 - 21 Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham coined the phrase "Politics of Respectability" in reference to historically black colleges. See Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880–1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994). On the racial politics of women's space in United States Second Wave Feminism more generally, see A. Finn Enke, *Finding the Movement: Sexuality, Contested Space, and Feminist Activism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).
 - 22 Carole Seymour, *Journey of Faith: The History of the World YWCA, 1945–1994* (London: Allison & Busby, 1994).
 - 23 Seymour, *Journey of Faith*, 10. On maternalist and imperial feminism, see Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865–1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Margaret Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race: Settler Colonialism, Maternalism, and the Removal of Indigenous Children in the American West and Australia, 1880–1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011); Mrinalini Sinha, *Specters of Mother India: The Global Restructuring of an Empire* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).
 - 24 Seymour, *Journey of Faith*, 79–80.
 - 25 Winston-Salem State University YWCA records, Box 799, folder 5, SSC; Sara Evans, *Tidal Wave: How Women Changed America at Century's End* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010), 37.
 - 26 *Association Monthly* Vol. XII (New York: YWCA, September 1919). Emma Goldman was the first to describe "The Traffic in Women" as a moral panic rather than an objective reality. See her "The Traffic in Women" in *Anarchism and Other Essays* (New York: Mother Earth Publishing Association, 1911), 183–200.
 - 27 White slavery discourse included European immigrants to the United States; see Kathy Peiss, "Charity Girls and City Pleasures: Historical Notes on Working Class Sexuality," in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, ed. Anne Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 74–87.
 - 28 Mabel Ulrich, "Constructive Preventive Work," Fourth Lecture. Monday, March 1, 1915; and "Social Morality," July 12, 1917, YWCA of the USA, Box 625, Folder 12, SSC.
 - 29 Rachele Yarros described her lectures to "Mexican mothers" in a group of YWCA-affiliated sex educators on October 22, 1919. See *Proceedings of the International Conference of Women Physicians*, Vol. V (New York: The Woman's Press, 1920), 171–4. For more on Yarros, see Robin E. Jensen, *Dirty Words: The Rhetoric of Public Sex Education, 1870–1924* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010). For more on the intersection of whiteness, heterosexuality, and normalcy, see Julian Carter, *The Heart of Whiteness: Normal Sexuality and Race in America, 1880–1940* (Durham: Duke

- University Press, 2007); and Christina Simmons, *Making Marriage Modern: Women's Sexuality from the Progressive Era to World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).
- 30 Social Morality Committee of the War Work Council, *Suggestions to Local Committees on Social Morality* (New York: National Board of the YWCA, March 1918), 6–7; Social Morality Committee, War Work Council, *Report: June, 1917 to July, 1919, Government Lecture Program Included* (New York: National Board, YWCA, 1919); YWCA of the USA, International Conference of Women Physicians, Attendees, Box 594, Folder 13.
 - 31 Social Morality Committee, *Report*, 3.
 - 32 *The Proceedings of the International Conference of Women Physicians*, Vols. I–VI (New York: The Woman's Press, 1920).
 - 33 "Discussion," *Proceedings*, Vol. V, 156.
 - 34 Clelia Lollini, M. D., "A New Sexual Morality," *Proceedings*, Vol. IV, 30–36.
 - 35 Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., "'The Remarkable Misses Rollin': Black Women in Reconstruction of South Carolina," *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 92, 3 (July 1991): 176; April R. Haynes, *Riotous Flesh: Women, Physiology, and the Solitary Vice in Nineteenth-century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015); Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, "Rollin Sisters," in *Black Women in America*, ed. Darlene Clark Hine, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).
 - 36 Lelia Frances Whipper, *The Pretty Way Home* (Bloomington: Writers Club Press, 2003); and Carole Lone, *Pride of Family: Four Generations of American Women of Color* (New York: Broadway Books, 2007).
 - 37 On representations of black women as heterosexually "deviant," see Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2000), 123–48. On black activist women's commitment to "protective work" in the early twentieth-century South, see Susan K. Cahn, *Sexual Reckonings: Southern Girls in a Troubling Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).
 - 38 "Committee on Work among Colored Girls and Women," *Colored American Women in War Work* (New York: War Work Council, National Board YWCA, July 1918), 2; Jane Olcott, *The Work of Colored Women* (New York: The Woman's Press, 1919).
 - 39 Olcott, *The Work of Colored Women*, 61.
 - 40 Social Morality Committee, *Report*, 34, 39, 46, 52, 57, 89, 101, 115, 176, 197.
 - 41 Whipper, *The Pretty Way Home*, 20–21.
 - 42 Lillian Faderman, *To Believe in Women: What Lesbians have done for America, a History* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), 270.
 - 43 Visitor's Report, Duke University, October 18, 1961; Lenice Larkin, Visitor's Report, September 25, 1964, Texas Southern University; Sara Evans, ed., *Journeys That Opened Up the World: Women, Student Christian Movements, and Social Justice, 1955–1975* (Newark: Rutgers University Press, 2003); Height, *Open Wide the Freedom Gates*.
 - 44 McCain Visitor Reports, November 19, 1969 and February 6, 1970; Mollie Blackmon to Sandra Holmes, January 25, 1974, Tougaloo College, YWCA SSC.
 - 45 Administrators at these universities may have hoped that the mere existence of a YW, with its interracial credo, would create an impression of compliance with the Civil Rights Act of 1964 at the bureaucratic level (to ensure funding) without the political costs of actual compliance (which would be visible to local whites). Examples of disaffiliation due to the interracial movement include Furman (1964), Barber-Scotia

- College (1965), the University of Mississippi (1972), William Woods College (Missouri, 1970), Millsapps (1972), Mississippi State College for Women (1978)—all documented in YWCA University Programs, SSC.
- 46 The sample includes supportive institutions: Allen, Bennett, Fisk, Hampton, Howard, Rust, Mississippi Industrial, Livingstone, Morris, Lane, Tougaloo State, Virginia State (Norfolk), Southern University (Baton Rouge); unsupportive institutions: Alcorn, Jackson State, Knoxville, South Carolina State College, Tennessee State Agricultural and Industrial, Texas Southern University, Virginia State (Petersburg), Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial, Morristown (students supported; administration opposed), and Vorhees. Compiled from research in the archives of the YWCA USA University Y series, SSC.
 - 47 SMU Box 802, Folder 16, YWCA SSC.
 - 48 John Hope Franklin, interview in "Brown v. Board is . . .," *Teaching Tolerance: A Project of the Southern Poverty Law Center* 25 (Spring 2004) accessed via <http://www.tolerance.org/magazine/number-25-spring-2004/feature/brown-v-board>.
 - 49 Biondi, *The Black Revolution on Campus*; Bennett Banner (Greensboro: May 5, 1970), 1; *Black Collegian* 4,2 (November–December 1973), 8, 14–16, 54.
 - 50 Visitors' Report, November 17–19, 1968, Jackson State College, YWCA SSC.
 - 51 McCain, Visitor's Report, Bennett College, November 3, 1969; Alcorn, March 25, 1969, YWCA, SSC.
 - 52 Belinda Robnett, *How Long, How Long? African American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights* (New York: Oxford, 2000); Chana Kai Lee, *For Freedom's Sake: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000).
 - 53 McCain, Visitor Reports, Bennett, November 3–5, December 5, 1969; Mississippi Industrial, November 14, 1969; Tougaloo, November 19, 1969, YWCA SSC.
 - 54 McCain, Visitor Report, Alcorn State College (Louisiana), March 25, 1969; South Carolina State College, January 23 and 24, 1970; Sarah Jane Stewart's visitor reports at Millsapps, November 17–19, 1969 and 1970; and Randolph Macon Women's College February 9–13, 1970, YWCA SSC.
 - 55 McCain, Visitor Report, November 17–19, 1969, Jackson State College, YWCA SSC
 - 56 McCain, Visitor Reports, February 19–20, 1969 and February 21–22, 1969, Lane College and Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial College, respectively. YWCA, SSC.
 - 57 General information, Southern University Louisiana, YWCA SSC.
 - 58 Barbara Smith, ed., *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* (Boston: Kitchen Table Press, 1983), xxviii.
 - 59 Bambara, *The Black Woman*, 6, 204.
 - 60 Beal, "Double Jeopardy," 113.
 - 61 Anne Koedt, "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm," in *Notes from the Second Year*, ed. Anne Koedt and Shulamith Firestone (New York: New York Radical Feminists, 1970 [1968]).
 - 62 Ti-Grace Atkinson, "The Institution of Sexual Intercourse," in *Notes from the Second Year*.
 - 63 Betty Dodson, *Liberating Masturbation: A Meditation on Self Love, Dedicated to the Women* (New York: Published by the author, 1974).
 - 64 Deborah Gray White explores the origins of these myths in nineteenth-century slavery. See *Ar'n't I a Woman: Female Slaves in the Plantation South*, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1999).
 - 65 Bambara, *The Black Woman*, 2, 4–6, 207.
 - 66 McCain, Visitor's Report, Rust College, November 13–14, 1969, YWCA SSC.

- 67 Sandra Morgen, *Into Our Own Hands: The Women's Health Movement in the United States, 1969-1990* (Newark: Rutgers University Press, 2002); Wendy Kline, *Bodies of Knowledge: Sexuality, Reproduction, and Women's Health in the Second Wave* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).
- 68 McCain, Visitor's Report, Jackson State SCA, December 11-12, 1969, YWCA SSC.
- 69 McCain, Visitor's Report, Southern University, April 6-8, 1970, YWCA SSC.
- 70 McCain, Visitor's Report, Rust College, February 4, 1970, YWCA SSC.
- 71 Charles V. Hamilton, "They Demand Relevance," *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science* 30,1 (May 1970), 15-27.
- 72 McCain, Visitor's Report, Queens College, December 5, 1969, YWCA SSC.
- 73 McCain, *Sex-Ins: College Style*, YWCA SSC.
- 74 Twig Daniels to Cabinet and Board members, September 1970; Eula Redenbaugh, Visitor's Report, October 22-23, 1970; C. W. McPherson, Visitor's Report, April 26-28, 1972, University of Nebraska, YWCA SSC. See also Janice Childress, "Salem Graduate Counsels Women about Abortion," undated [1971] newspaper clipping in Salem YWCA SSC. For racial and transnational analyses of population control policies, see Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres, eds., *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty* (New York: Vintage, 1999); Nelson, *Women of Color and the Reproductive Rights Movement*.
- 75 Student Association Review, n.d., ca. 1970-75, Bennett College YWCA SSC.
- 76 *Black Dispatch* 1,3 (January 1971); *Bennett Banner* (February 23, 1971), 5.
- 77 *Bennett Banner* (November 4, 1969) 2; (February 23, 1971), 4; "Sexuality: Third World Women's Perspectives" (New York: YWCA, 1974).
- 78 Vivian McCain, "Leadership Workshop," January 23-24, 1970; February 3, 1970, South Carolina State College YWCA SSC; Barbara Seaman, *The Doctors' Case against the Pill* (New York: P. H. Widen, 1969); Morgen, *Into Our Own Hands*; Elaine Tyler May, *America and the Pill: A History of Promise, Peril, and Liberation* (New York: Basic Books, 2010); Jennifer Nelson, *More than Medicine: A History of the Feminist Women's Health Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2015).
- 79 McCain, Visitor's Report, December 5, 1969, Queens College, YWCA SSC.
- 80 McCain, *Sex-Ins, College-Style*; visitor's report, November 13-14, 1969, Rust College, YWCA SSC.
- 81 McCain, Visitor's Report, February 4-5, 1969, Hampton Institute YWCA, SSC.
- 82 McCain, Visitor's Report, February 19-20, 1969, Lane YWCA, SSC.
- 83 McCain, Visitor's Report, January 28-29, 1970; and March 21, 1971, Bennett YWCA SSC.
- 84 McCain, Visitor's Report, November 3, 1969, Bennett College, YWCA SSC; Daniel McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance—A New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (New York: Vintage, 2011).
- 85 Cleaver, *Soul on Ice*; McCain visitor report, January 23 and 24, 1970, SCSC YWCA SSC.
- 86 *The Black Dispatch: A Publication of the National Student YWCA* 1,3 (January 1971).
- 87 Robnett, *How Long, How Long?*; McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street*.
- 88 McCain, Visitor's Report, December 3, 1969, Queens College, Box 799, Folder 2, YWCA SSC.

- 89 McCain, Visitor's Report, November 3–5, 1969; January 28–29, 1970, Bennett College YWCA SSC.
- 90 McCain, *Sex-Ins: College Style*; Visitor's Report, December 3, 1969, Queens College, YWCA SSC. Queens College was a predominantly white women's college, the only white group in which McCain facilitated a Sex-In. Afterward, she reflected that "unlike the black girls, they did not look at sex as something profound and beautiful."
- 91 Marcia Perry, "Women's Liberation: Black Liberation, White Liberation," Rust YWCA November 13–14, 1969; Suggested constitution, n.d., [early 1970s] Box 788, Folder 8, YWCA SSC.
- 92 See for example, the correspondence of Fisk University, Knoxville College, Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial University, Hampton Institute, and Wiley College in YWCA SSC.
- 93 Mississippi Industrial YWCA SSC; similarly, Daniel Payne and Morristown Colleges folded under financial strain during the 1980s.
- 94 Rose Marie Roybal, Visitor's Report, December 4, 1978; Harold Braxton and Wesley Wells to Rose Marie Roybal, December 8, 1978. Virginia State College, Petersburg, YWCA SSC.
- 95 SMU, U of Nebraska records, YWCA SSC; this trend echoes that of the 1920s documented by Robertson in *Christian Sisterhood*.