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Race Reform in the Early Twentieth Century South:
The Life and Work of Willis Duke Weatherford

A thesis
presented to
the faculty of the Department of History
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Arts in History

by
Sara Trowbridge Combs
December 2004

Dr. Elwood Watson, Chair
Dr. Stephen Fritz
Dr. Dale Schmitt

Keywords: Race, Progressivism, Liberalism, Reform,
Southern Sociological Congress, Young Men's Christian Association

ABSTRACT

Race Reform in the Early Twentieth Century South: The Life and Work of Willis Duke Weatherford

by

Sara Trowbridge Combs

Willis Duke Weatherford, a liberal pioneer in Southern race reform, argued that the ethics of Christianity obligated Southerners to address the social and economic problems faced by blacks in the early twentieth century. His strategy for improving race relations centered on educating Southerners and promoting economic uplift for blacks. Weatherford advocated race reform through the Young Men's Christian Association, the Southern Sociological Congress, and other voluntary organizations. He published books, taught courses, preached sermons, organized conferences, and raised funds from Northern philanthropists. Through an analysis of Weatherford's published writings and of his papers archived at the Southern Historical Collection, the present study provides a biographical profile of Weatherford's life and career, examines the development of Weatherford's racial views in the social and political context of his time, describes Weatherford's program of race education developed for college students, and discusses an interracial conference held at the Blue Ridge Assembly in 1917.

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TO

My mother and father,
Claire and Jim Trowbridge,
who have always believed in me.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to the Department of History at East Tennessee State University for granting me the tuition scholarship and graduate assistantship that made it possible for me to pursue a graduate degree in history. Thanks are due to Dr. Stephen Fritz, Dr. Dale Schmitt, and Dr. Elwood Watson for serving on my thesis committee. I especially wish to thank the staff of the Manuscripts Department of the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina for their assistance in locating and retrieving documents from the collection of Weatherford's papers. Writing this thesis would have been a lonely process without the able assistance and constant companionship of Muffin, an extraordinary orange tabby cat. Many an evening, Muffin diligently posted herself on my lap where she watched every word appear on the computer screen. Finally, I wish to thank my husband, Jim, for his loving encouragement and support.

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INTRODUCTION

In April 1908, three white and four black southern leaders met in Atlanta to discuss strategies for improving race relations. Precipitated by the increase in racial violence across the South in the early 1900s, this unusual interracial meeting convened at the request of Willis Duke Weatherford. Appointed in 1902 to the position of International Student Secretary of the Young Men's Christian Association for Colleges of the South and Southwest, Weatherford had spent the previous six years traveling through the South visiting two hundred colleges in fourteen states. During his tours of the region, he witnessed the poor quality of housing, health, justice, and education available to blacks. Weatherford believed that college students in the South offered the best hope for leadership in race relations. He called the meeting in Atlanta to discuss strategies for involving young college men in race problems. Dr. W.R. Lambuth proposed that Weatherford write a book describing the condition of black life in the South. Two years later, Association Press published *Negro Life in the South*, the first of a number of books on racial issues by Weatherford.¹

The Atlanta meeting and the book that resulted from it represented the beginning of Weatherford's career as an advocate of race reform in the South. A deeply religious man, Weatherford argued that the Christian concept of the brotherhood of mankind obligated white Southerners to address the problems of lynching, intolerance, poverty, poor education, and economic injustice faced by blacks. He thought that racial problems stemmed from ignorance and possessed an enormous faith in the power of education to bring harmony and order to race relations. Widespread hostility toward blacks and popular support for strict segregation and disfranchisement in Weatherford's era closed the political arena as an avenue of reform. His strategy for improving race relations centered on educating Southerners and promoting economic uplift for blacks. Weatherford advocated racial reform through various positions that he held

¹ Willis Duke Weatherford, *Negro Life in the South* (New York: Association Press, 1910; reprint, Miami, Florida: Mnemosyne Publishing Inc., 1969), v-vi (page citations are to the reprint edition); Wilma Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty: The First Ninety Years of W.D. Weatherford* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1966), 66-68.

with the YMCA, the Southern Sociological Congress, and other voluntary organizations.

Through these institutions, he published books and articles, taught courses, lectured, preached sermons, organized conferences, and raised funds from Northern philanthropists to bring attention to the problem of race.

While Weatherford's most significant work occurred in the field of race relations, he also maintained an interest in other issues. He was deeply concerned about the status of religion in the early twentieth century. He believed that fundamentalism offered a poor response to the challenges of Social Darwinism and secularism. As a Christian intellectual, he worked to restore the integrity of religion. In his teaching and writing, he encouraged students, ministers, and Christian workers to engage in rational study and free inquiry. In the 1920s, Weatherford began to apply his principles of race reform to labor relations in industry. He believed that Southern factory owners who followed Christian teachings should pay workers a fair wage and create working conditions favorable to labor. He argued that this equitable treatment would increase worker productivity and efficiency and thus yield higher profits for industrialists.² Throughout his life Weatherford held an interest in the plight of the people of Appalachia. He was concerned by the poverty, inadequate schools, and poor economic opportunities in the region. Weatherford concluded his career at Berea College where he worked to recruit students from the poorest, most isolated high schools in Appalachia. In 1956 at the age of 81, he served as Executive Director of the Southern Appalachian Studies Project. He enlisted nineteen social scientists from eleven Southern universities to contribute to one of the first comprehensive studies of the Appalachian region.³

² W.D. Weatherford to F.J. McConnell, 18 December 1924, Willis Duke Weatherford Papers, collection #3831, folder 125, Manuscripts Department, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; W.D. Weatherford, "The American Cast Iron Pipe Company: An Adventure in Human Relations," Willis Duke Weatherford Papers, collection #3831, folder 3715, Manuscripts Department, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; W.D. Weatherford, draft conference proposal, Willis Duke Weatherford Papers, collection #3831, folder 1336, Manuscripts Department, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

³ Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 124, 215-234 passim; George Peter Antone, "Willis Duke Weatherford: An Interpretation of His Work in Race Relations, 1906-1946," (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1969), 200.

Willis Weatherford began his campaign to improve the condition of Southern blacks at the height of the Progressive Era. His approach to race reform reflects the philosophy and strategy followed by Progressives concerned with social justice issues. Arthur S. Link has described Progressives as liberals who promoted innovative political and humanitarian reforms to improve the political, economic, and social order. He distinguishes Progressives from more radical socialist reformers and observes that they hoped to achieve their goals within the existing economic structure of capitalism. Link also contrasts progressivism with conservatism, noting that conservatives defended the status quo and were generally adverse to change and innovation.⁴

In his account of the origins and development of progressivism, Link states that the movement began in Northern cities in the mid-1890s when educators, ministers, social workers, and settlement house workers addressed the problems created by industrialization and urbanization. The drive for reform began at the municipal and state levels and shifted to the national arena during the presidencies of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson. Progressivism was not a unified, coordinated movement but rather was characterized by “shifting coalitions of reformers.” Progressives sometimes formed alliances to tackle one issue but would regroup and form a different coalition for a new issue.⁵ Political Progressives campaigned to end the corrupt relationship between politicians and corporate interests and to restore political control to citizens. Their efforts brought about state and federal laws that regulated railroads, utilities, the banking industry, and corporations. Successful political reforms initiated by Progressives included the direct primary, initiative, referendum, and recall elections; the Australian ballot; the direct election of U.S. Senators; the federal income tax; and, the right to vote for women. Social Justice Progressives directed their interests towards factory and labor conditions, crime, tenement conditions, public health, education, prostitution, and temperance. According to their

⁴ Arthur S. Link, “The Progressive Movement in the South, 1870-1914,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 23 (April 1946): 172.

⁵ Arthur S. Link and Richard L. McCormick, *Progressivism*, The American History Series (Arlington Heights, Ill.: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1983), 9, 15-19.

view of justice, every American was entitled to an equal opportunity to enjoy a decent standard of living with adequate food and housing.⁶

While Progressives were a diverse group pursuing a wide array of reforms, they shared a number of common characteristics. Many were influenced by the Social Gospel, a reform tradition within American Protestantism that began in the 1880s and continued through the end of World War I.⁷ The Social Gospel developed in the North as ministers, educators, and journalists experienced direct contact with the poor and the unemployed in cities. Their firsthand encounters with the downtrodden convinced them that poverty and unemployment were caused by urbanization, industrialization, and social injustice. The identification of environmental factors as the cause of social problems distinguished the Social Gospel from pre-Civil War moral reform efforts. The earlier movements attributed poverty and other social ills to individual sin, moral failings, and character defects. Consequently, these movements were oriented toward individual salvation and moral reform. Adherents of the Social Gospel believed that corporate institutions were accountable for the social injustice they caused. They argued that social problems would be solved if political, business, and social conduct conformed to Christian principles. They believed that the ethical teachings of Jesus required individuals to combat social problems. The social gospelers' faith in the possibility of reform was rooted in their optimistic belief in the ultimate goodness and perfectibility of man. They maintained that through education people could be taught to abandon self-interest and work for the public good.⁸

Progressives also commonly held an optimistic view of progress and believed in the possibility of improving society through planned action. In this regard, Progressives rejected the

⁶ Link and McCormick, *Progressivism*, 32-34, 68, 84.

⁷ Link and McCormick, *Progressivism*, 23.

⁸ Robert T. Handy, ed. *The Social Gospel in America, 1870-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966) , 10; Paul A. Carter, *The Decline and Revival of the Social Gospel: Social and Political Liberalism in American Protestant Churches, 1920-1940* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1954; revised edition, Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1971) , 4-5; Henry F. May, *Protestant Churches and Industrial America* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1949) , 163, 181, 232; Ronald C. White, Jr., *Liberty and Justice for All, Racial Reform and the Social Gospel* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990) , xvii-xx; Ronald C. White and C. Howard Hopkins, *The Social Gospel: Religion and Reform in Changing America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1976), 121.

claim of Social Darwinism that human suffering and the economic dominance of corporate trusts were a natural part of an immutable social order. Lester Frank Ward, Richard T. Ely, John Dewey, and other intellectuals argued against the laissez-faire approach to social, economic, and political problems and asserted the necessity of human intervention. Like the social gospelers, Progressives rejected the view that poverty, crime, and unemployment resulted from the moral failing or character defects of individuals. They believed that environmental conditions created by industrialization and urbanization were the source of social problems. The Progressive formula for intervention was to organize a voluntary society, investigate a problem, gather data, and analyze the problem following the techniques of social science. Through this process, a solution would emerge that could be promoted through education and moral suasion. While Progressives initially attempted to change social and economic conditions by working through private, voluntary organizations, they gradually realized that significant reform would occur only through political action at the state and national levels.⁹

Progressives were disturbed by the social disorder that resulted from the migration of blacks from the South, immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, and native-born Americans from rural areas to cities.¹⁰ Link and McCormick maintain that Progressives hoped to exercise social control over the new city dwellers through their reforms.¹¹ Hofstadter notes that some Progressives were particularly concerned by the impact that European immigrant voters might have on American democracy. He states that Progressives hoped to assimilate immigrants into American culture through education, civic instruction, and other reforms.¹² Hofstadter describes the Progressive attitude toward immigrants by stating that

⁹ Link and McCormick, *Progressivism*, 21-22, 68-70.

¹⁰ Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, "An Overview of the Progressive Era," in *Who Were the Progressives?* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2002), 8-9.

¹¹ Link and McCormick, *Progressivism*, 96.

¹² Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform* (New York: Random House, 1955), 8, 177-181.

One senses again and again in the best Progressive literature on immigration that the old nativist Mugwump prejudice is being held in check by a strenuous effort of mind and will, that the decent Anglo-Saxon liberals were forever reminding themselves of their own humane values, of the courage of the immigrant, the reality of his hardships, the poignancy of his deracination, the cultural achievements of his homeland, his ultimate potentialities as an American, and above all, of the fact that the bulk of the hard and dirty work of American industry and urban life was his.¹³

For many years, historians neglected the study of progressivism in the South, maintained that Southern reform was a variant of Western progressivism, or held that progressivism had never existed in the South. In 1946, Arthur Link challenged this view and demonstrated the existence of a significant Progressive movement in the South. He argues that a large number of middle class Democrats, who were chiefly well-to-do farmers, small businessmen, educators, editors, and other professionals, worked for reform in the areas of public education, public control of state governments, and state government intervention in social and economic problems. Link notes that while Southern Progressives accomplished notable reforms for the benefit of whites, they failed to attend to the economic, social, and political problems of blacks.¹⁴ He maintains that Southern Progressives promoted segregation and disfranchisement for the dual purposes of controlling the black population and winning the political support of whites in order to accomplish their reform agenda.¹⁵

C. Vann Woodward concurs with Link's argument regarding the presence of a strong Progressive movement in the South. Woodward maintains that Southern progressivism developed a character unique to the region, although it exhibited many of the same features that characterized the movement in the North. He notes that Southern reformers viewed banks, insurance companies, public utilities, oil companies, and railroads controlled by Northern interests as the chief source of Southern economic problems. He attributes much of the success of Woodrow Wilson's progressive reforms to Southern congressional leaders and cabinet

¹³ Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*, 181.

¹⁴ Link, "Progressive Movement in the South," 172-173, 179, 194.

¹⁵ Link and McCormick, *Progressivism*, 97-99.

members. Woodward contends that the issue of race was the “blind spot” in both the Southern and national Progressive movements. He argues that the relationship between white supremacists and progressivism in the South was mirrored by the connection between imperialism and progressivism in the North. Woodward observes that progressivism in the South occurred simultaneously with the rise of racism. He states that Charles B. Aycock, Josephus Daniels, Hoke Smith, Carter Glass, Andrew J. Montague, Napoleon Broward, Braxton B. Comer, and other Progressive politicians “rode to power in the South on a disfranchising or white-supremacy movement.”¹⁶

Dewey Grantham contends that many Southern progressives believed that economic development provided the key to solving the South’s social problems. He maintains that Progressive reforms in education, race relations, criminal justice, industry, and agriculture were oriented toward restoring order, efficiency, and cohesion to the South in order for the economic rehabilitation of the region to occur. Grantham agrees with Link that disfranchisement and segregation served to control blacks, stabilize Southern communities, and thus provide an opportunity for Progressives to move forward with their program to regulate corporations and to reform education, child labor, and the criminal justice system.¹⁷

A number of scholars have drawn attention to the work of Southern progressives who campaigned for humanitarian or social justice reform. Herbert J. Doherty identifies Southerners who attacked the convict-lease system, child labor, and the crop lien system. He notes that J.C. Powell, who worked as a Florida prison guard, published a book in 1891 entitled *The American Siberia: or, Fourteen Years’ Experience in a Southern Convict Camp*. According to Doherty, Powell’s description of the barbaric conditions in prison camps surpassed earlier studies. John Berrien Lindsley, a Tennessee educator, physician, and minister, called for prison reform in his

¹⁶ C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913*, A History of the South, eds. Wendell Holmes Stephenson and E. Merton Coulter, Volume IX (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951; paperback reprint, 1971), 371-373 (page citations are to the reprint edition); C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 91-93.

¹⁷ Dewey W. Grantham, “The Contours of Southern Progression,” *The American Historical Review* 86 (December 1981): 1037-1038, 1044-1046, 1048.

1874 pamphlet “On Prison Discipline and Penal Legislation. Mrs. Rebecca Felton of Georgia and Julia S. Tutwiler of Alabama also published writings that exposed the convict lease system in their states.¹⁸

Wayne Flynt has provided evidence of a progressive wing among the Southern Baptist leadership in Alabama from 1900-1914. He states that Frank Willis Barnett, owner and editor of the *Alabama Baptist*, published editorials and articles that addressed the problems of worker exploitation, child and female labor, poor housing, prohibition, lynching, public health, conservation, and industrial accidents. Barnett also brought attention to the spread of poverty, slums, and social disintegration in Birmingham and other urban areas.¹⁹ The Reverend Augustus Cleveland Davidson, pastor of the Southside Baptist Church in Birmingham, wrote a series of articles for the *Alabama Baptist* in which he noted the work of Jacob Riis and argued that the urban environment caused poverty and crime. He called for temporary aid to the poor and for the establishment of agencies to provide occupational training. Davidson argued that churches should become active in the solution of urban problems by providing industrial schools for women, night schools for men, and mission stations for workers.²⁰

John Lee Eighmy provides further support for the view that Southern progressives actively promoted humanitarian reforms. He describes efforts to reform or improve public health, child labor, education, agriculture, and the convict lease system. Eighmy points to the career of Edgar Gardner Murphy, an Episcopal priest who left the church to lead campaigns to improve race relations and reform child labor and education. He also notes the work of Charles H. Otken and Clarence Poe who attacked the crop lien system and hoped to improve the status of

¹⁸ Herbert J. Doherty, Jr., “Voices of Protest from the New South, 1875-1910,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 42 (June 1955): 49-50.

¹⁹ Wayne Flynt, “Dissent in Zion: Alabama Baptists and Social Issues, 1900-1914,” 35 (November 1969): 524-525, 530.

²⁰ Flynt, “Dissent in Zion,” 530.

farmers through education, cooperation, and increasing reliance on scientific agricultural practices.²¹

While the majority of Southern progressive reformers and politicians ignored the problems of the black population and viewed segregation and disfranchisement as methods for maintaining social order, a minority of Southerners in the early twentieth century campaigned for racial justice.²² Morton Sosna's *In Search of the Silent South: Southern Liberals and the Race Issue* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987) provides an excellent account of the earliest critics of the Southern racial system. Sosna describes the work of George Washington Cable, Willis Weatherford, Will Alexander, Howard Odum, Virginius Dabney, and Lillian Smith. He also examines the Southern Conference for Human Welfare, the Commission on Interracial Cooperation, and the Southern Regional Council that were the chief organizations established by liberals to address race problems. Sosna notes that these early reformers were particularly disturbed by the escalation of racial violence and by the appalling condition of black housing, health, and education in the early 1900s. He argues that widespread popular support for segregation and disfranchisement forced liberal reformers to accede to these issues in order to reduce violence and improve the social and economic condition of blacks. Sosna identifies Weatherford as a key individual who participated in the development of the liberal strategy for race reform.²³

Wilma Dykeman and George Peter Antone have produced extended studies of Weatherford's life and career.²⁴ Dykeman's informal biography and Antone's dissertation were both written in the late 1960s. Both works were based partially on interviews with Weatherford.

²¹ John Lee Eighmy, "Religious Liberalism in the South During the Progressive Era," *Church History* 38 (September 1969): 362-365.

²² Grantham, "Contours of Southern Progressivism," 1048.

²³ Morton Sosna, *In Search of the Silent South: Southern Liberals and the Race Issue* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 16, 18.

²⁴ George Peter Antone, "Willis Duke Weatherford: An Interpretation of His Work in Race Relations, 1906-1946," (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1969); Wilma Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty: The First Ninety Years of W.D. Weatherford* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1966).

Following Weatherford's death in 1970, his papers were archived at the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina. The present study seeks to contribute to the understanding of Weatherford's role in race reform by examining selected documents from that collection of Weatherford's papers. Chapter 2 will provide a biographical profile of Weatherford's life and career. Chapter 3 examines the development of Weatherford's racial views in the social and political context of his time. Chapter 4 describes Weatherford's program of race education developed for college students. Chapter 5 discusses an interracial conference held at the Blue Ridge Assembly in 1917.

CHAPTER 2

THE LIFE AND WORK OF WILLIS DUKE WEATHERFORD

Wayne Fuller has observed that many Progressive era reformers shared a rural background. He notes that Jane Addams, Washington Gladden, Josiah Strong, Richard T. Ely, Edward Ross, John Commons, John Dewey, Charles Beard, Robert LaFollette, John A. Johnson, Albert Cummins, Joseph Folk, and James Cox were reared on family farms or in small towns. Fuller argues that the rural experience shaped the values and attitudes of these individuals and influenced their approach to social reform. He describes the reformers as highly independent individualists who believed that success should be based on ability and talent rather than special class privileges. Fuller attributes the reformers' independence and antipathy to upper class privilege to the fact that their parents tended to own their own farms or small businesses. He maintains that reformers learned the virtue of achievement through merit by working in the family business or on the farm. Fuller argues that the lessons regarding achievement learned in the family setting were reinforced by the fact that class lines in rural communities were virtually insignificant. According to Fuller, many reformers who wrote memoirs commented on the religious environment of their home communities. He notes that many reformers had a Protestant upbringing and believes this may explain the sense of moral obligation and duty that impelled them to improve social conditions.¹

Willis Weatherford's background was similar to the early experience of other reformers of his day. He spent his childhood and youth on the Texas frontier in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. His grandparents and parents were of Scotch-Irish descent and migrated from the mountains of North Carolina and East Tennessee to Texas in the mid-1800s. Weatherford identified with the frontier spirit of his parents. In *Pioneers of Destiny, The Romance of the Appalachian People*, Weatherford describes the character of the Scotch

¹ Wayne E. Fuller, "The Rural Roots of Progressive Leaders," *Agricultural History* 42 (January 1968): 2-6, 10-11.

Highlanders and Scotch-Irish of Appalachia. He writes, “. . . the rough life bred into the people a spirit of adventure, a form of self-discipline, a ruggedness, a heroism, an independence of spirit which made America unique.” After referring to his own family history, he comments, “I hope I have inherited at least a little bit of the independence and self-reliance of my ancestors.”²

Weatherford’s parents struggled to make a living on the frontier by ranching and farming. Two failed business ventures left the Weatherfords with limited financial resources. The family eventually achieved a comfortable standard of living and purchased a store operated by Weatherford’s father. From an early age, Willis Weatherford worked on his father’s farm and later in his store.

Weatherford’s parents were especially important in shaping his attitude toward blacks. He reminisces that he enjoyed visiting black tenant farmers who rented land from his father. He states that his parents, who were devout Methodists, taught him “all men had a right to fair treatment.” Weatherford recalls that his mother and father “. . . accepted race mores without question, but their deep religious convictions tempered their attitude. I never heard any bitter or critical comments about Negroes as I grew up. I am sure the general atmosphere of my home made a deep impression on me as a boy.”³

Weatherford’s life history taught him that through hard work and perseverance a young man of modest circumstances could achieve success. His father’s inability to become a prosperous rancher, his struggle to succeed as a farmer, and his business failures taught Weatherford that hardworking, virtuous people of strong character sometimes fail through circumstances beyond their control. These lessons shaped his approach to social reform.

² W.D. Weatherford, *The Romance of the Appalachian People* (Birmingham, Alabama: Vulcan Press, 1955), 33, 62-66.

³ W.D. Weatherford, “My Experience in Race Relations,” Willis Duke Weatherford Papers, collection #3831, folder 3678c, Manuscripts Department, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Willis Weatherford was born on December 1, 1875, near Weatherford, Texas, a small town thirty miles west of Fort Worth named for his uncle, William Weatherford.⁴ As the seventh of eight children born to Samuel Leonard and Margaret Jane Turner Weatherford, Willis Weatherford arrived at a time of relative stability in his family's history. His father, Samuel Leonard Weatherford, had migrated with his family from Tennessee to Texas in the late 1840s. Margaret Jane Turner, his mother, had arrived in Texas with her family from Georgia in the early 1850s. Following their marriage in 1857, Samuel and Margaret Weatherford worked to establish a home on the Texas frontier. They experienced the hardships and dangers common to many who settled the West. In untitled, undated notes, Weatherford relates several family stories that reveal his great admiration for his parents' fortitude and resilience.⁵

From 1860 until 1866 or 1867, the Weatherfords moved frequently in search of land for farming and raising cattle. Often they settled with only one or two other families in remote territory vulnerable to Indian attacks. In his family history, Weatherford includes two accounts of encounters with Indians that illustrate the immediacy of danger to his parents and their courage in facing that danger. During one period on the frontier, the Weatherfords settled seventy-five miles west of Fort Griffin near one other family, the Jameses. On one occasion, Samuel Weatherford and his neighbor left their families to drive cattle to the fort. The first evening their husbands were away, Margaret Weatherford and Mrs. James were visited by two patrolmen carrying mail. The patrolmen informed the women that Indians on a raid twenty miles away were moving toward their settlement. Under orders to deliver the mail on schedule, the men were unable to remain and offer their protection. They stayed overnight, but left the following morning. Recalling a story he must have heard many times as a boy, Weatherford writes,

⁴ George Peter Antone, Jr., "Willis Duke Weatherford: An Interpretation of His Work in Race Relations, 1906-1946" (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1969), 16.

⁵ W.D. Weatherford and Flora Weatherford, Untitled genealogy notes, Willis Duke Weatherford Papers, collection #3831, folder 3720, Manuscripts Department, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

That day and the next night the two women with loaded guns at their sides and the children around them were grouped (sic) in the one room but strong log cabin, waiting and watching. Tired of imprisonment and much against mother's advice Mrs. James took her gun and went out for a reconnoiter. The cabin set back some distance from the bank. From her point of advantage, she could see a fresh trail in the creek bottom. The Indians had already passed on. Why they were left unmolested they never knew. That was the occasion of father riding "Old Paint the Pacer" a hundred and fifty miles to exhaustion. When they reached Fort Griffin they met the news that the Indians were raiding in the vicinity of their home. So father retraced his road home in a hurry.⁶

On another occasion, when the Weatherfords lived near several families, two patrolmen passed through their settlement. Due to reports of Indian raids in the area, the men in the community implored the patrolmen to delay their travel until the threat of attack had passed. One patrolman rode a mule, and the men were concerned that he would not be able to outrun an attack by Indians on horseback. The patrolmen chose to leave and according to Weatherford were attacked within three miles of the fort. The rider on the mule was murdered and scalped. The men from the fort recovered his body and brought him back to the Weatherford's cabin where he was prepared for burial.

During the Civil War, Samuel Weatherford and his neighboring frontiersmen served as Indian fighters with federal troops. On one occasion, Weatherford was called on a mission to pursue a tribe of approximately one thousand Apache men, women, and children moving through Western Texas to New Mexico. Military planners underestimated the strength of the Indian forces. After ten days on the trail the men depleted their supply of rations. General Openchain, commander of the troops, ordered the men to continue the mission, forcing them to survive on raw, unsalted buffalo meat. The pursuit culminated in the Concho Creek Battle, which was, according to Weatherford, "the fiercest fought Indian battle in Texas' history." Samuel Weatherford avoided injury during the battle, but General Openchain died with Weatherford at his side.⁷

⁶ Weatherford, Untitled genealogy notes, folder 3720, Southern Historical Collection.

⁷ Weatherford, Untitled genealogy notes, folder 3720, Southern Historical Collection.

Life on the frontier was especially difficult for Margaret Weatherford. From 1859 until 1867, she gave birth to five children, one of whom died at birth. In 1861, she was deeply affected when a second infant son died as a result of burns he sustained when the blankets of his cradle caught fire. She spent long periods of time alone while her husband was away on cattle drives or on expeditions with other frontiersmen to fight Indians. Reflecting on this time Weatherford wrote, "Six years of such a strenuous life, living every hour of daylight with a loaded gun at her side shattered mother's nerves and broke her health, so it became necessary to move her to a safer district." In the late fall of 1866 or early spring of 1867, Margaret and Samuel Weatherford left the frontier for the more settled environs of the town of Weatherford, named for Samuel's brother William.⁸

The transition from frontier to town led to the first of two failed business transactions that left the Weatherfords in reduced financial circumstances. When Samuel Weatherford sold his cattle to a Fort Worth financier, he received enough money to purchase a twenty-acre farm and a promissory note for the balance of the value of the herd. The financier subsequently declared bankruptcy and died before he was able to repay his debts. Sometime later, when Weatherford's success as a farmer had returned a measure of prosperity to his family, he engaged in a second disastrous business relationship. A local family invited him to operate a sawmill on the Brazos River in partnership with them. Weatherford entered the partnership and managed the daily operation of the sawmill while his partner conducted sales. His partner eventually declared bankruptcy, leaving Weatherford responsible for settling many debts. According to Willis Weatherford's notes, his family had to work hard and sacrifice a great deal for five years to pay the debts.⁹

When Willis Weatherford was born in 1875, his parents and five older siblings had settled into life in a two-room log house on a twenty-acre farm near the town of Weatherford.

⁸ Weatherford, Untitled genealogy notes, folder 3720, Southern Historical Collection.

⁹ Weatherford, Untitled genealogy notes, folder 3720, Southern Historical Collection.

On the farm, Willis learned the virtues and rewards of hard physical labor. He joined his family's enterprise at the age of six when he began working in his father's cotton, watermelon, corn, and sweet potato fields. At the age of ten, he began to cultivate a watermelon crop on a small piece of land his father had given him for the purpose of earning his own money. Young Willis was also responsible for cutting and gathering the family's firewood supply. As early as the age of eleven, he would sometimes drive a wagon to a wooded area inherited by his mother where he would stay for several days. Alone in the country, he cut wood, cooked his own food, and read books. In 1888, the family's economic status improved when Samuel Weatherford exchanged the farm for a store in Weatherford. At the age of thirteen, Willis began work as a cashier in his father's store.¹⁰

While Willis learned the agricultural arts from his father, his mother encouraged his intellectual development. When Samuel Weatherford considered purchasing a large estate in the country, Margaret opposed moving to a remote location where there were no schools.

Weatherford describes this moment in his family's history:

Father was known as one of the best farmers in the county. The Goforth Farm on Clear Creek rich in soil and well watered in an estate to be settled, was for sale. Father wanted to buy it because he thought he could through farming retrieve his past losses. He probably was right too in thinking so. Mother said no, the children needed good schools and there were none that far out in the country. We had a home of twenty acres in the edge of town and if we couldn't have money we could at least get some education. I for one have always been glad mother made that choice.¹¹

Willis's mother taught him at home until he reached the age of seven when he entered the fourth grade of the local school. His older sister Virginia and brother Robert left home to attend college. Virginia graduated from Peabody College, and at the age of thirteen, Willis determined to pursue a college education too. In 1890, he entered Weatherford College, an institution that combined high school and junior college courses. For the five years of coursework required to

¹⁰ Wilma Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty: The First Ninety Years of W.D. Weatherford* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1966), 13-14, 17-22.

¹¹ Weatherford, Untitled genealogy notes, folder 3720, Southern Historical Collection.

complete high school and earn a B.S. degree, Weatherford worked and borrowed money to pay the tuition costs. Following his graduation from Weatherford College, Weatherford taught school near his home for two years to pay his loans.

In spite of his father's opposition, Weatherford held fast to his resolve to continue his education and entered Vanderbilt University in the fall of 1897. He embarked on this adventure as a devoutly religious, thoughtful young man. During his childhood and youth, he had received a Methodist upbringing from his parents. Weatherford's parents, who named their first son John Wesley Weatherford, steered Willis toward a career in the Methodist ministry. He apparently intended to pursue an advanced degree in theology in the School of Religion at Vanderbilt, until 1899 when he completed his B.A. degree and began work toward a Ph.D. in Literature. Weatherford later said that he abandoned plans for a theology degree because he believed that the Ph.D. track provided an opportunity to study a wider array of subjects.¹²

Weatherford's decision to change his course of study occurred at a time when he suffered a serious crisis of faith. He gives an account of the crisis in a ten-page, untitled manuscript probably written late in his life when he was in his mid-eighties. He says that the crisis, which he describes as having "devastating power," began with his graduate study in 1900. He does not recall anything particular in his undergraduate or graduate studies that triggered the event, but he attributes it to

the whole general atmosphere of inquiry so characteristic of the time and of the university forced me to ask whether there was any reality in this experience we called religion, or, whether it might just be something put over on me from the past. Simply a superstition, handed down through my parents, or through the church.

He further says, "In my day in College the spirits of E.B. Taylor and Herbert Spencer—the earliest sociologists were walking the American campus and troubling the souls of youth."¹³

¹² Antone, "Willis Duke Weatherford," 15-18; Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 20, 23-25, 31; Weatherford, Untitled genealogy notes, folder 3720, Southern Historical Collection.

¹³ Weatherford, Untitled genealogy notes, folder 3720, Southern Historical Collection.

Weatherford's account of the crisis indicates that he was swept up in the intellectual currents of his day. From its beginning, Protestantism grounded its authority in the inerrancy of Biblical scripture. Throughout the nineteenth century, new developments in the natural and social sciences challenged traditional American Protestantism. In the early 1800s, August Comte argued that the scientific method should be applied to the study of human society. In *Course of Positive Philosophy* (1830-1842), he asserted that observable, empirical phenomenon provided the only source of knowledge. American Protestants were introduced to his philosophy, which he termed "positivism," in an abridged translation published in 1853. Comte's reliance on empiricism and his rejection of theology and metaphysics made him anathema to clergymen. According to Henry May, Comte was "known to American clerics as a dangerous infidel." May further states that although the controversy regarding Comte's views abated by the 1870s, "to accuse a book of being tinged with Positivism was still enough to damn it."¹⁴

With the publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859), the American religious community became embroiled in the controversy generated by his theory of evolution through natural selection. The foundations of American religion were further shaken by discoveries across the natural sciences as, "geologists and astronomers on the one hand, and biologists and anthropologists on the other, combined to present a historical picture of the earth's origin, and of man's habitation of it, which was wholly incompatible with the historical account in the Old Testament." Herbert Spencer compounded the dispute by arguing that Darwin's theory could be applied to human society. As the proponent of what became known as Social Darwinism, Spencer maintained that human society advanced through the survival of the fittest. In one of his earliest works, *Social Statics* (1850), he called for a minimalist state that performed very few functions, arguing that the strong should not help the weak. He further alienated American Protestants by arguing that his own views had been deduced from science, but that matters of religion were essentially "Unknowable."

¹⁴ Henry F. May, *Protestant Churches and Industrial America* (New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1963), 46.

American clergymen were for a time united in their opposition to the theories of Darwin, the revelations of other natural scientists, and the social science of Spencer, but by the early 1880s some liberal theologians succeeded in accommodating their religious beliefs with science. Henry Ward Beecher perhaps best typified those who reconciled science and religion when in 1883 he described himself as “a cordial Christian evolutionist.”¹⁵ Young intellectual men found it more difficult to square Darwin’s theory of evolution with their understanding of the Christian tradition. Donald Fleming maintains that this brought about a significant change in the history of the professions in the United States. This development may have had some bearing on Weatherford’s career. Fleming argues that Darwinism discredited the ministry as a vocation for Christian intellectuals unable to adjust their theology to the science of evolution. Beginning in the mid-1870s, these young men chose to enter the newly established graduate and medical schools. Repulsed by the corruption of the Gilded Age and by Spencer’s callous disregard for the downtrodden, they were motivated by a desire to serve others and improve society. Fleming maintains that through graduate and medical schools American intellectuals discovered

An exit from the acquisitive struggle . . . for most American intellectuals a more acceptable exit than expatriation, but partaking of the same revulsion from the main circumstances of contemporary American life. Attendance at the new graduate and medical schools was a form of internal expatriation from the Gilded Age.

Fleming contends that in the late nineteenth century American graduate schools deliberately fostered a climate of opposition to Spencer, favoring scholarship from Europe, and in particular Germany.¹⁶

Commenting on the reaction of the religious community to the controversies of the period, Paul Johnson writes, “. . . the intellectual advances of the nineteenth century (thrust) some Protestants into agnosticism, others into mindless fundamentalism, and yet others into a

¹⁵ May, *Protestant Churches and Industrial America*, 46-48; 142; Paul Johnson, *A History of Christianity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1976, First Touchstone Edition, 1995), 374-375.

¹⁶ Donald Fleming, “Social Darwinism,” in *Paths of American Thought*, ed. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. and Morton White (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963, Sentry Edition, 1970), 132-134.

heroic reappraisal of their theology . . .”¹⁷ Weatherford’s account of his spiritual crisis demonstrates that he chose the third alternative.

Weatherford was particularly disturbed by Taylor’s and Spencer’s views regarding the origins of religion. Both argued that modern religious systems originated in primitive man’s fear of natural forces and worship of ancestors. Weatherford proceeded to spend three years of graduate study searching for an explanation for the origin of religion. He sought answers to the questions “How did religion originally arise?” “What basic reality did it really have?” “Was it a source of power for life as I had always believed, or was that simply a psychological (sic) resultant of an inherited belief?” “After all what was religion?” An English professor at Vanderbilt guided Weatherford through the crisis by encouraging him to study the book of Job, Dante’s *The Divine Comedy* (1321), Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1667), Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus* (1833/1834), Tennyson’s *In Memoriam* (1850), and the works of Robert Browning. The contemplation of this body of literature helped him frame his questions and arrive at answers that settled his mind.

As he prepared his master’s thesis, a comparison of the Puritanism of Nathaniel Hawthorne and the Positivism of George Eliot, he studied the works of August Comte. Weatherford took issue with Comte’s view that “there is no such reality as a personal God, but humanity itself is the ultimate reality,” and that “there could be no knowledge outside the materialistic or scientific facts.” Weatherford comments,

I am bold to say this school of thought carried little conviction with me. If there was no superhuman but only humans, why should man be drawn to worship at all? If man had nothing beyond the human within his soul why should his soul go out longing and desire for fellowship?

During his second year of graduate study, Weatherford’s English professor directed him in an intensive study of the works of Tennyson. He found great comfort in his reading of *In Memoriam* where he discovered that the “young Tennyson . . . came to raise all the questions that were troubling my soul.” Weatherford identified with Tennyson’s struggle against doubt. In

¹⁷ Johnson, *History of Christianity*, 379.

particular, he agreed with the poet's affirmation that man must approach great questions through faith as well as reason. Weatherford complemented his study of Tennyson by reading the works of C.P. Ziele, a Professor of History and Philosophy of Religion at Leiden University. In volume two of a work titled *Elements of the Science of Religion*, Ziele argued that the origin of religion is based in the fact that all humans possess an element of the Infinite whether they are aware of it or not. From his reading of Ziele, Weatherford concluded that

Religion therefore is in origin and in fact, naught else but the response of the soul of man to the soul of God. The fact that religion is universal, that we have discovered no tribe so crude that it does not have to have had religion, seems to be proof that all men are made as the Bible says in the image (sic) of God. Religion therefore, while it may be a quest, is primarily a response—an answer to a call from without—Just as the sunflower turns to the sun because the sun has in it that which completes the nature of the flower, so man instinctively turns to that power above him, which has capacity to fulfill his nature.¹⁸

As Weatherford concluded his doctoral studies in 1902, the Young Men's Christian Association offered him a position that allowed him to combine his dedication to education with his commitment to Christian service. In April of that year, John R. Mott, national secretary of the Intercollegiate Committee of the YMCA, offered Weatherford the position of International YMCA Student Secretary for the Colleges of the South and Southwest. He accepted and held the office until 1919. Weatherford was well acquainted with the work of the YMCA. As a student at Weatherford College, he had been an active member of the school's campus chapter. Weatherford's interest in this organization continued at Vanderbilt where he served as president of the university's chapter for two years.¹⁹

College chapters of the YMCA emerged in the late 1870s as interdenominational organizations that served to support Christian students and to convert nonbelievers to the faith. They encouraged serious practice of the disciplines required of the Christian life: prayer, study, and service in the local community. Weatherford, along with John R. Mott, A.B. Williams, Jr., Ethan T. Colton, George Irving, Henry B. Wright, and A.J. "Dad" Elliott, provided leadership

¹⁸ Weatherford, Untitled genealogy notes, folder 3720, Southern Historical Collection.

¹⁹ Antone, "Willis Duke Weatherford," 18-19.

and inspiration to college students.²⁰ In his capacity as Student Secretary, Weatherford was responsible for overseeing the work of two hundred YMCA campus chapters in fourteen states. He visited approximately seventy-five schools a year, giving two to four lectures a day, and interviewing five to twenty faculty members and students a day. He was apparently a dynamic, effective speaker. During his first year he met and spoke primarily with the student members of YMCA chapters, but by the second year most schools opened his lectures to the whole student body.

Several people who heard Weatherford's lectures as students later recalled his influence. B.E. Mitchell, Professor of Mathematics at the University of Mississippi, remembered that Weatherford encouraged his classmates to set high goals for themselves and work to achieve them. Frank Graham, whose career included serving as President of the University of North Carolina, U.S. Senator for North Carolina, and special mediator for the United Nations, described Weatherford's tremendous energy and passion for excellence. At a convocation honoring Weatherford at the Blue Ridge Assembly on August 28, 1965, Dr. O.C. Carmichael recalled a speech that Weatherford gave in 1911 when he was a student at the University of Alabama. Carmichael served as Chancellor of Vanderbilt University from 1937-1946 and President of the University of Alabama from 1953-57. He remembered that Weatherford was promoted to the students as a great speaker, and that all classes were cancelled for the hour of Weatherford's address so that all students and faculty members could attend. Carmichael described Weatherford as an eloquent, sincere speaker.²¹

In addition to lectures and visits, Weatherford supported the work of campus YMCA secretaries by writing several handbooks. Through his campus visits, Weatherford became well

²⁰ C. Howard Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America* (New York: Association Press, 1951), 279, 627.

²¹ Weatherford Convocation, Document, Willis Duke Weatherford Papers, collection #3831, folder 3763, Manuscripts Department, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 45, 47, 49-50.

aware of the issues and questions regarding religion raised by college students. In a series of manuals, he addressed those questions.²²

During the late 1800s, the leadership of the International YMCA became convinced of the need for professional training for YMCA secretaries. The YMCA secretaries were salaried personnel responsible for the management of YMCA buildings and coordination of YMCA programs in cities and on college campuses. The YMCA leadership hoped to encourage young men to enter the YMCA secretaryship by elevating the position to the status of a profession on a par with law and medicine. In 1883, Robert Weidensall, field secretary for the International YMCA, suggested providing this training through summer schools. The first summer training program was offered at Lake Geneva, Wisconsin in 1884. Incorporated in 1886 as the Western Secretarial Institute, the Lake Geneva summer program quickly grew in popularity and became the model for similar conferences in New England and the South.²³

Summer YMCA conferences in the South were held at temporary locations from the 1890s through the early 1900s. The first Southern conference met at the University of Tennessee from 1892 through 1894, followed by meetings at various locations near Asheville and Waynesville, North Carolina. In 1904, Weatherford proposed to John Mott that the YMCA should establish a permanent conference center in the South. The International Committee of the YMCA gave Weatherford permission to explore the idea. Concerned that the project would detract from his responsibilities as Student Secretary, the committee required that he pursue this endeavor on his own time during his summer vacation. Weatherford discovered an ideal location for the conference center in October 1906. Accompanied by Dr. A.L. Phillips, a member of the Missionary Education Movement and the Presbyterian Sunday School Board, Weatherford chose

²² These manuals included *Student Secretaries in Training* (New York: Association Press, 1910), *Studies in Christian Experience* (New York: Association Press, 1910), *Personal Elements in Religious Life* (Nashville: Publishing House of the M.E. Church, South, 1916), *Introducing Man to Christ* (Nashville: Publishing House of the M.E. Church, South, 1911), *Christian Life a Normal Experience* (New York: Association Press, 1916) and *College Problems*, Vols. 1-3 (Nashville: Publishing House of the M.E. Church, South, 1907, 1908, 1909).

²³ Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A.*, 171-175, 616-617.

a site near Black Mountain, North Carolina. Weatherford's commitment to his cause is reflected in the considerable financial risk he took in acquiring land for the conference center. In order to purchase 952 acres from the Johnson estate, Weatherford and Phillips borrowed \$4,000.00 from an Asheville bank and gave personal notes for the balance owed.²⁴

In the spring of 1907, Weatherford began raising funds and developing plans for the conference center. He proceeded to raise the \$500,000.00 needed to purchase an additional 633 acres and to construct the center's facilities. He successfully petitioned Northern philanthropists for contributions to help him meet his goal. John D. Rockefeller, who donated \$50,000.00, and Grace and Cleveland Dodge, who each donated \$5,000.00, were among those.²⁵

The Blue Ridge Assembly held its first meetings in the summer of 1912. From its summer conferences in 1912 through its first decade of operation, the Blue Ridge Assembly steadily became the principal YMCA conference center in the South through Weatherford's leadership.²⁶ In a brochure dated 1924, Weatherford invited guests to the Assembly by writing, "Here hundreds of the choicest men and women of the whole South, leaders in thought and action, meet together in happy comradeship, in an ideal environment which tends to rest the body, inform the mind, fire the imagination, and renew the spirit." By 1924, the Assembly grounds included forty-eight buildings, a vegetable garden, apple orchard, and commercial bakery.²⁷ As the Blue Ridge Assembly grew in popularity during its first decade of operation, Weatherford gradually opened the facility to organizations other than the YMCA. Groups generally concerned with Southern culture, religion, human relations in industry, and Christian

²⁴ W. D. Weatherford, Manuscript describing the founding of Blue Ridge, Willis Duke Weatherford Papers, collection #3831, folder 372b, Manuscripts Department, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; W.D. Weatherford, "A Venture of Faith," Willis Duke Weatherford Papers, collection #3831, folder 2687b, Manuscripts Department, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

²⁵ Weatherford, "A Venture of Faith," folder 2687b, Southern Historical Collection; Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 57-60.

²⁶ Hopkins, *History of the YMCA*, p. 616.

²⁷ "Out of Doors in the Blue Ridge," brochure, Willis Duke Weatherford Papers, collection #3831, folder 46, Manuscripts Department, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

social service met at Blue Ridge.²⁸ Several organizations concerned with race, labor, or social problems in the South convened at Blue Ridge. These included the North Carolina Division of Cooperation in Education and Race Relations (1936); the Fellowship of Reconciliation (1936); the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen (1939); and the Textile Workers Union of America, Southern Worker's Defense League (1942).²⁹ During its first year, the Assembly hosted 1,452 guests; by 1920 the number had grown to an average of 5,000 each summer. By 1944, approximately 150,000 had participated in conferences at Blue Ridge.³⁰

While Weatherford developed plans and raised funds for the Blue Ridge Assembly from 1907 until 1912, he continued to work in his capacity as Student Secretary. This was also the period in which he began to establish his reputation as a leader in race relations. During this time he also experienced great personal tragedy. In 1903, Weatherford had married a young woman he had met while he was a student at Vanderbilt. He and Lula Belle Trawick, the daughter of a Nashville physician, enjoyed only a brief marriage. In June 1907, she died as the result of complications during childbirth.³¹

Weatherford's initial interest in race relations developed as he journeyed across the South as Student Secretary visiting college campuses. Traveling by train, he became acutely aware of the racial problems that existed throughout the region. The news of the day carried stories of lynchings and mob violence that gave evidence to the rising tension between the races.

²⁸ These conferences included the following: The Virginia Asher Business Women's Councils; the National Association of Travelers Aid Societies; the North Carolina Christian Endeavor Union; the Seventh Day Adventists; the Southern Writers' Conference; Carolina Art Education; the Vacation Conference on Gardening; the Art, Drama, Garden, and Music Week Conference; the North Carolina Education Association; the Southern Cooperative Art Education Conference; the Art Institute for Teachers and Amateur Artists; the Institute for Southern Culture; the North Carolina Forestry Association; Institutes for Southern Culture: Garden Institute, Music and Folk Festival, Visual Arts and Ceramics Institute; and the Southern Society for the Philosophy of Religion. See Weatherford Papers, #3831, Inventory, Southern Historical Collection.

²⁹ North Carolina Division of Cooperation in Education and Race Relations, folders 2353-2354; Fellowship of Reconciliation, folder 2611; Fellowship of Southern Churchmen, folder 2612; and Textile Workers Union of America, folder 2924, Willis Duke Weatherford Papers, collection #3831, Manuscripts Department, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

³⁰ Weatherford, "A Venture of Faith," folder 2687b, Southern Historical Collection.

³¹ Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, pp. 40, 51-52, 61.

Weatherford's understanding of Christianity led him to believe that white Southerners had a moral obligation to extend economic rights to African Americans, improve their living conditions, and end lynching and mob violence. Disturbed by the prevalence of racial violence throughout the South, Weatherford believed that "responsible elements" from both races should work together to discover solutions. Commenting on his decision to become involved in race problems, Weatherford writes, "I could not help asking what I could do to help these people who lived by my side and shared the common life of the South."³² In 1965, at the age of ninety, he elaborated further on this turning point in his life:

. . . . thank heavens I had sense enough to keep my eyes open and see what there was around me. And it showed me the terrible condition in which life was lived—in many cases in the South—particularly the life of the man who is a colored man; also I got my first glimmerings of the desperate struggle of the Appalachian people and the people who are in poverty regardless of race or class—and I said to myself, "I've got to do something about it . . ."³³

Weatherford began his campaign for reform with a program to educate southern college students on the subject of race. He lectured and taught courses on race at colleges across the South and at YMCA student conference meetings. Weatherford encouraged the development of YMCA study courses on racial issues on college campuses. His first book, *Negro Life in the South* (Association Press, 1910), served as a discussion text for Home Mission classes of college chapters of the YMCA. Through the publication of *Negro Life in the South*, his lectures to student groups, and his work with the YMCA, Weatherford emerged as a leader in racial reform. He became known for his liberal views on race relations and was a recognized authority on the condition of African Americans.³⁴ Weatherford was a founding member of the Southern Sociological Congress in 1912, served on the Congress's Committee on Race Problems, and was elected to the Board of Governors in 1915. Weatherford addressed an audience of black students

³² Weatherford Papers, "My Experience in Race Relations," folder 3678c, Southern Historical Collection.

³³ Weatherford Papers, "Convocation," folder 3673, Southern Historical Collection.

³⁴ George Brown Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945*, A History of the South, eds. Wendell Holmes Stephenson and E. Merton Coulter, Volume X (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), 175-177; Antone, "Willis Duke Weatherford," 76.

at the 1914 Negro Christian Student Conference in Atlanta where he delivered an address entitled, "Signs of Growing Interest on the Part of the Southern White Man." In 1919, he participated in organizational meetings for the Commission on Interracial Cooperation and the Interracial Commission in Tennessee. He was elected chairman of the Tennessee Commission on Interracial Cooperation in 1925,³⁵ and was a member of the Federated Council of Churches of Christ in America Commission on the Church and Race Relations.³⁶ Charles Brough, the first chairman of the University Commission on Race and governor of Arkansas in 1916, praised Weatherford's work during this period, describing him as "one of the most profound thinkers and virile writers on the Negro question . . ."³⁷

Weatherford complemented his organizational work by coordinating conferences that addressed racial issues at the Blue Ridge Assembly. He firmly believed that black leaders must be included in discussions of race problems. Weatherford thought that progress in race relations would not occur unless African American leaders had an opportunity to express their points of view and invited African Americans to participate in conferences at Blue Ridge. The Law and Order Conference, one of the earliest and most notable of the conferences on race held at Blue Ridge, was an interracial gathering of forty-nine educators, social workers, public officials, and theologians who met in 1917 to discuss the problem of lynching and other race issues. In 1939 the Fellowship of Reconciliation held an interracial meeting at Blue Ridge that included seven African Americans among its forty participants. Howard Kester, Arthur Raper, and James McWhirter addressed the conference on topics related to the theme "The Pacifist Message for the World Today, Pacifism and the Individual." Mrs. Charles S. Johnson, an African American,

³⁵ Antone, "Willis Duke Weatherford," 53, 68, 79, 101, 111.

³⁶ "Suggestions and Material for Race Relations Sunday," Document, Willis Duke Weatherford Papers, collection #3831, folder 3678a, Manuscripts Department, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

³⁷ Charles Hillman Brough, "Work of the Commission of Southern Universities on the Race Question," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, XLIX (September 1913): 50.

delivered a presentation entitled, “Pacifism and Race: The Rural South.”³⁸ African American leaders who participated in other conferences at Blue Ridge included George Washington Carver, James Weldon Johnson, Dr. Robert Russa Moton, Dr. Mordecai Johnson, and Mary McCleod Bethune.³⁹

During World War I, the Blue Ridge Assembly served as a training facility for YMCA War Work secretaries and volunteers. Prior to American entry into World War I, the International Committee of the YMCA initiated programs to serve Allied soldiers and prisoners of war in Europe.⁴⁰ By 1917, the YMCA had established a network of posts in France, Russia, Italy, Egypt, Palestine, Mesopotamia, Macedonia, and East Africa. Shortly after the United States declared war on Germany, Newton D. Baker, Secretary of War, granted official status to the role of the YMCA in providing support to military personnel in the United States and in Europe. Through an order issued on May 9, 1917, Baker directed officers to provide full cooperation and assistance to YMCA personnel.⁴¹

John R. Mott, General Secretary of the National War Work Council of the YMCA, coordinated the work of national, state, and local chapters of the YMCA in providing recreational, educational, and spiritual programs for Army and Navy personnel in the U.S. and in Europe. Mott administered YMCA military support programs through the National War Work Council, a body of approximately two hundred citizens from nearly all states, and through an Executive Committee of twenty to thirty members headquartered in New York. When the United States declared war on Germany, the International YMCA War Work Council called for

³⁸ Conferences—Fellowship of Reconciliation, Southern Regional Conference, Willis Duke Weatherford Papers, collection #3831, folder 2611, Manuscripts Department, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

³⁹ Wilma Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 97.

⁴⁰ The U.S. War Department assumed responsibility for personnel support and recreation programs following the conclusion of World War I. The YMCA War Work program for the Army ended on 1 November 1919 and for the Navy on January 1, 1920. See Hopkins, *History of the YMCA*, 577.

⁴¹ John R. Mott, “The War Work of the Young Men’s Christian Associations of the United States,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 79 (September 1918): 204-207.

the establishment of training centers across the country to prepare YMCA staff for their work in Army and Navy camps. In addition to providing books, organizing recreation, offering devotional programs, and warning soldiers of the dangers of prostitution and drinking, an important function of the War Work secretaries and volunteers was to “assist in the harmonious induction of Negroes into the army.”⁴² The War Work program involved an estimated 26,000 volunteers, with 13,000 stationed in France. Eight War Workers’ Training schools, each lasting three weeks, were held at the Blue Ridge Assembly. These schools prepared 812 men for service. Weatherford taught a course on race relations to the personnel who were trained for War Work service at Blue Ridge.⁴³

At the conclusion of the war, black veterans returning from service expected an improvement in their social status and thought that whites would treat them as equals. Blacks who had migrated North to work in factories producing war materials or domestic goods expected an improvement in their economic status and employment opportunities. Whites assumed that the country would return to the pre-war racial status quo and resisted extending both social equality and economic justice to blacks. Whites turned to violence as a method for subjugating blacks. The Ku Klux Klan increased in membership and resumed its terror tactics. In the South, seventy blacks were killed by lynch mobs in 1919. In the summer of that year, twenty race riots erupted in Chicago, New York, Washington, Omaha, and other cities throughout the country. The Chicago riot, lasting over a week, resulted in 38 deaths and injuries to 537.⁴⁴

Weatherford and others anticipated this racial violence as early as the signing of the armistice. At Weatherford’s suggestion, the War Work Council sponsored a series of schools for the purpose of training white and black leaders to help them prepare their communities for the

⁴² Antone, “Willis Duke Weatherford,” 114.

⁴³ Weatherford, “My Experience in Race Relations,” folder 3678c, Southern Historical Collection; Antone, “Willis Duke Weatherford,” 114-121.

⁴⁴ Antone, “Willis Duke Weatherford,” 134; Alan Brinkley, *American History, A Survey*, 11th edition (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2003), 642.

return of black veterans. Whites were trained at Blue Ridge by Weatherford, while blacks were trained at Gammon Theological Seminary in Atlanta by Will Alexander. According to Weatherford's estimate, approximately 1500 citizens representing a cross section of business and professional occupations participated in the ten-day sessions.⁴⁵

In the early 1920s Weatherford developed an interest in the working conditions of Southern factory workers. Weatherford organized several conferences during the 1920s and 1930s at Blue Ridge that addressed the issue of "Human Relations in Industry." Weatherford's approach to labor relations was influenced by his association with John J. Eagan, a fellow member of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation. Eagan, the principal founder and owner of the American Cast Iron Pipe Company in Birmingham, believed that Christian principles should be applied to business practices. In 1922, Eagan offered an innovative profit-sharing plan to all of his employees, a large number of whom were African Americans. He also extended housing, medical, and recreational benefits to his workers. Following Eagan's death in 1924, Weatherford served on the board of directors of ACIPCO from 1927-1970. During Weatherford's tenure on the board, employee benefits were maintained and expanded.⁴⁶

In 1919, Weatherford's commitment to professional training for YMCA secretaries led to his role in the founding and establishment of the Southern College of the YMCA in Nashville. The YMCA sponsored two collegiate institutions for training workers: Springfield College in Springfield, Massachusetts and the Western Secretarial Institute and Training School in Chicago.⁴⁷ Only a small number of Southern students attended either of these schools. Southerners found the distance to Chicago and Springfield prohibitive, and the programs of both schools trained students for work in urban environments, rather than in the rural or small town settings where many Southern YMCA organizations were located. The favorable performance

⁴⁵ W. D. Weatherford, "Signs of Growing Race Cooperation," *The Survey* 45 (16 October 1920): 88-89.

⁴⁶ W.D. Weatherford, "The American Cast Iron Pipe Company: An Adventure in Human Relations," Willis Duke Weatherford Papers, collection #3831, folder 3715, Manuscripts Department, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 167.

⁴⁷ Hopkins, *History of the YMCA*, 175-178.

of the War Work training schools in the South and at Blue Ridge indicated that Southern students would enroll in college level training if it were convenient and oriented toward the needs of Southern communities.⁴⁸

In February of 1919, a meeting of the supervising secretaries of the YMCA chapters in the South was held at Blue Ridge to discuss methods for training YMCA workers and secretaries. The conference suggested the development of a set of recommended readings, a correspondence course, and the establishment of a YMCA college in the South. Weatherford, the Acting Secretary of the Central Training Committee, steered an executive committee of seven members in the planning of the college. Weatherford's vision for the school included a bold innovation. He believed that the school should train YMCA workers to lead the communities they served in solving social problems. In 1924, he described the mission of the school as an "institution that will send out into the social order trained leaders who will work for the Christianization of the world."⁴⁹ Although the YMCA had long been committed to the concept of social work programs, the organization had not provided YMCA secretaries with the training and education for serving as leaders in their communities.⁵⁰ According to Hopkins, "Weatherford's idea for his college—which Mott once characterized as 'prophetic'—was the most challenging and possessed of the greatest potentialities of the several professional educational ventures attempted by the Associations."⁵¹

Weatherford resigned as Student Secretary for the Colleges of the South and Southwest in 1919 and served as President of the Southern YMCA College from 1919 until its closing in 1936. Following Weatherford's proposal, the college was located in Nashville, at the intersection of Charles, 21st Avenue and 19th Avenue South in close proximity to three

⁴⁸ Hopkins, *History of the YMCA*, 612-613.

⁴⁹ W.D. Weatherford, "SC of YMCA," Draft document, Willis Duke Weatherford Papers, collection #3831, folder 46, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

⁵⁰ Antone, "Willis Duke Weatherford," 125-126.

⁵¹ Hopkins, *History of the YMCA*, 613.

established colleges. Through a consortium that included Vanderbilt University, Peabody College for Teachers, and the Scarritt College for Christian Workers, the Southern College program offered B.A., M.A., and Doctor of Physical Education degrees. The M.A. degree required eight quarters of coursework, the rough equivalent at the time of work required by theological seminaries. Students took Fall, Winter, and Spring courses in Nashville and their Summer quarter courses at the Blue Ridge Assembly. Weatherford taught courses on race relations, comparative religion, literature, and philosophy. In the 1920s, he initiated the development of a race relations department and established a library of books related to African American history, culture, and literature. According to Weatherford, this library was one of the first of its kind in the South. During his tenure at the Graduate School, Weatherford directed eight researchers in a study of a day in the life of the average African American boy in Nashville. This study was subsequently published as *A Survey of the Negro Boy in Nashville, 1932* (New York: Association Press, 1932).⁵²

When financial problems forced the National YMCA to withdraw its support in 1936, the school closed and merged with Vanderbilt University. Weatherford accepted a position with Fisk University and subsequently became Head of the Department of Religion and Humanities. In the same year, Weatherford experienced a second personal tragedy. In 1914 he had married his second wife, Julia McCrory, a Winthrop College student he had met at Blue Ridge. Julia Weatherford gave birth to a son in 1916, Willis Weatherford, Jr. The Weatherfords shared a happy marriage until 1936 when Julia became paralyzed. When the family dog was suspected of having rabies, Weatherford and his wife underwent a series of anti-rabies shots. Julia suffered a severe reaction, was hospitalized for several weeks, and emerged from the trauma paralyzed from the waist down. Weatherford took Julia to numerous specialists, spending several months

⁵² Hopkins, *History of the YMCA*, 613; Antone, "Willis Duke Weatherford," 128-132; Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 145-146, 150.

in New York in 1936 while she received treatment from a neurosurgeon. Her condition was incurable and she remained an invalid until her death in 1957.⁵³

Weatherford's tenure at Fisk University continued for ten years. During this time, he expanded the Department of Religion and Humanities and engaged in fundraising. In 1946, at the age of seventy-one, Weatherford resigned from Fisk and moved to Berea College where he worked in fund raising and student recruiting. Weatherford, who served on the Board of Trustees from 1915 until 1962, enjoyed a long association with Berea College. At Berea, Weatherford shifted the focus of his work from race issues to the problems of the Appalachian region. In 1956, he secured a \$250,000 grant from the Ford Foundation to launch the Southern Appalachian Studies Project, headquartered at Berea. As Executive Director of the project, Weatherford recruited social scientists from eleven Southern universities to contribute to the study. The results of the project were published as *The Southern Appalachian Region: a Survey* (University of Kentucky Press, 1962). To promote the study, Weatherford organized the Southeastern Jurisdictional Council Study Conference. Primarily a meeting of church leaders, Weatherford hoped that churches would serve as the agents of change in local Appalachian communities.⁵⁴ From 1965-1970, Weatherford was a member of the North Carolina Governor's Council on Aging. He died in Berea on February 21, 1970, at the age of ninety-four and was buried at the Blue Ridge Assembly.⁵⁵

⁵³ Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 91, 173, 175; Antone, "Willis Duke Weatherford," 172.

⁵⁴ Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 124, 215-234 passim; Antone, "Willis Duke Weatherford," 200.

⁵⁵ *Asheville Citizen*, 23 February 1970, 1.

CHAPTER 3

WEATHERFORD'S VIEWS ON RACE

W.E.B. DuBois published a review of Willis Weatherford's *The Negro from Africa to America* (New York: Doran, 1924) in the 10 September 1924 issue of the *Nation*. DuBois sharply criticized the work for its lack of style, organization, and interpretation. He took issue with Weatherford's sources, noting that he gave greater emphasis to studies by the Phelps-Stokes Fund than to those done by Atlanta University. DuBois stated that Weatherford's interpretation of black history was sometimes misleading. In reference to an issue of central importance to his own view of racial reform, DuBois pointed to Weatherford's scant attention to political rights. He found Weatherford to be well meaning but patronizing toward blacks and described him as "oleaginous." DuBois credited Weatherford for his liberal approach to racial issues but noted that his work contained outworn stereotypes and myths. He stated,

There is no doubt that Mr. Weatherford really represents an advance over the conventional Southern attitude. He is distinctly liberal toward the Negro and he believes in liberal Southern movements. But beneath the whole argument, old assumptions, old beliefs continually persist.

DuBois concluded his review by stating that his overall evaluation of *The Negro from Africa to America* was favorable, maintaining

It does not represent the heights of Southern white emancipation, but the average stay-at-home effort of the new "inter-racial" class. As such it is the best thing the white South has produced.¹

DuBois's review captured important elements of Weatherford's approach to racial reform. His evaluation of Weatherford as a liberal with his own racial prejudices and stereotypes was quite accurate. In much of his early writing, Weatherford evaded the issue of political rights for blacks. He did not seek political solutions for racial problems but favored economic uplift and an end to violence generated by educated, benevolent Southern whites. Weatherford often

¹ W.E.B. DuBois, review of *The Negro from Africa to America*, by W.D. Weatherford, *The Nation* 119 (10 September 1924): 267-268.

exhibited a paternalistic attitude toward blacks. He frequently described blacks as a backward race that needed the guidance and example of the white race in order to advance. Although he was a recognized authority on the African American condition, Weatherford's thought reflects his own biases and misconceptions. He once wrote that blacks in Africa and under slavery in America did not know the meaning of "home." On another occasion he stated that blacks should remain in rural areas because it was a "well known fact that Negroes are less able to bear the strain of city life."²

Given these features of Weatherford's thought, it is important to consider why DuBois regarded Weatherford as a liberal. Weatherford's interest in racial issues developed in a period that has been described as "in many ways the grimmest that blacks had faced since the end of slavery."³ From the 1890s through the second decade of the twentieth century, southern whites, who feared that the extension of civil rights to freedmen implied social equality, constructed a rigid caste system to keep blacks separated from whites in public places and to prevent them from gaining economic and political power. The caste system was enforced by law, custom, and violence. During the period from 1890 to 1920, the U.S. Supreme Court sanctioned segregation, state governments disfranchised blacks, and white supremacist politicians inflamed racial tensions. Lynching and other acts of violence against blacks increased during this period. In addition, blacks suffered discrimination in law enforcement, employment, and education.⁴

Weatherford and a minority of Southerners objected to this treatment of blacks and worked for reform. Sosna identifies this minority of reformers as liberals

who perceived that there was a serious maladjustment of race relations in the South, who recognized that the existing system resulted in grave injustices for blacks, and who either actively endorsed or engaged in programs to aid Southern blacks in their fight against

² W.D. Weatherford, *Negro Life in the South* (New York: Association Press, 1910; revised edition, Miami, Florida: Mnemosyne Publishing, Inc., 1969), 61; W.D. Weatherford, "Race Segregation in the Rural South," *Survey*, 33 (January 2, 1915), 376.

³ Morton Sosna, *In Search of the Silent South* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 11.

⁴ C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913*, A History of the South, eds. Wendell Holmes Stephenson and E. Merton Coulter, Volume IX (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951; paperback reprint, 1971), 209-212 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

lynching, disfranchisement, segregation, and blatant discrimination in such areas as education, employment, and law enforcement.⁵

Sosna maintains that Southern racial policies, and the climate of opinion supporting them, shaped and constrained the efforts of reformers such as Weatherford. In order to more fully appreciate the liberal character of Weatherford's career, it is important to describe the racial conditions and attitudes that prevailed in the early twentieth century south.

The poor economic and political status of Southern blacks and the alarming increase in racial violence that Weatherford hoped to reform were rooted in events that followed the Compromise of 1877 and continued through Weatherford's day. The promise of racial equality offered by the Civil War Amendments and the Civil Rights Act of 1875 began to unravel as early as 1878. Through a series of cases beginning in 1878, the Supreme Court supported state and private action that segregated the races in public places. The purpose of the Civil Rights Act of 1875 had been to protect the right of African Americans to equal access to public accommodations. In *Hall v. DeCuir*, 95 U.S. 485 (1878), the Supreme Court ruled that state laws requiring shared public accommodations in transportation were an unconstitutional regulation of interstate commerce. In *Civil Rights Cases*, 109 U.S. 3 (1883) the court nullified the Civil Rights Act of 1875, stating that the Fourteenth Amendment allowed Congress to limit state action but not discrimination by private individuals or businesses. The court protected the authority of states to require separate railroad accommodations in *Louisville &c. Railway Co. v. Mississippi*, 133 U.S. 587 (1890) and in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537, 544 (1896). In *Louisville &c. Railway Co.*, the court stated that an 1888 Mississippi law requiring separate facilities was within the provisions of the Commerce Clause because it applied to intrastate, rather than interstate, transportation. The court ruled in favor of the Louisiana law requiring separate but equal railroad accommodations challenged in *Plessy*. It maintained that state laws requiring segregation of the races in places of public accommodation did not violate the

⁵ Sosna, *In Search of the Silent South*, viii.

Fourteenth Amendment as long as the separate facilities were equal. *Plessy* thus provided the constitutional justification for segregation.⁶

The movement to deprive blacks of their voting rights began in Mississippi in 1890.⁷ In 1900, Southern politicians seriously debated the issue of repealing the Fifteenth Amendment.⁸ The Republican Party abandoned its platform plank calling for the enforcement of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments in 1908.⁹ By 1910 the disfranchisement drive had spread to South Carolina, Louisiana, North Carolina, Alabama, Virginia, Georgia, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Florida, Arkansas, and Texas through constitutional conventions, amendments, literacy tests, property qualifications, the grandfather clause, the poll tax or other methods. As the disfranchisement movement progressed, racial violence increased. Lynchings in the South rose from 82% of the national total in 1889-1899 to 92% of the total in 1900-1909.¹⁰ From 1900 to 1930 the yearly average number of lynchings in fourteen Southern states dropped from 138.4 in 1888-1899 to 57.7, while in the rest of the country the number dropped from 29.1 to 4.2. The percentage of lynching victims in the South who were black steadily increased from 1889-1919. For the period 1889-1899, 67.8% of those lynched were black, from 1899-1909 the number rose to 88.6%, and from 1909 to 1919 the figure increased to 91.1%.¹¹ Blacks were also threatened with assault, murder, and the destruction of property in race riots that erupted in Wilmington, North Carolina (1898), New Orleans (1900), New York (1900), Akron (1900), Atlanta (1906), and Springfield, Illinois (1908). Woodward has speculated that the increase in violence may be partially attributed to the tactics of the disfranchisers such as Charles Aycock, Ben Tillman, and

⁶ Louis Fisher, *American Constitutional Law*, 2d ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1995), 988-1004.

⁷ Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 321.

⁸ Sosna, *In Search of the Silent South*, 12.

⁹ Hugh C. Bailey, *Liberalism in the New South: Southern Social Reformers and the Progressive Movement* (Coral Gables, Fla.: University of Miami, 1969), 53.

¹⁰ Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 351.

¹¹ Bailey, *Liberalism in the New South*, 55-56.

Hoke Smith. To generate popular support for their campaigns, they organized white supremacist demonstrations and spread propaganda that exaggerated racial myths and stereotypes.¹²

Economic opportunities for blacks in the rural South were severely limited. Like most Southerners, blacks earned a living by farming. Many did not own the land they farmed but made a subsistence living as sharecroppers or tenant farmers. Blacks who migrated to industrial and mining areas in the South encountered hostility from working class whites who jealously protected their jobs. Between 1882 and 1900 Southern labor organized fifty strikes to prevent the hiring of black workers.¹³

From the 1880s through the early 1900s, few Southern voices advocated improvement of the black condition or criticized the emerging racial system of segregation and disfranchisement. Atticus G. Haygood, president of Emory College (now Emory University), asserted that Christian principles required Southerners to end violence and discrimination. In *Our Brother in Black*, he did not call for an end to segregation, but supported the extension of education and the franchise to blacks.¹⁴ Southern white churchmen conveyed their opposition to Haygood's views by refusing to invite him to speak in their churches and criticizing his work in their meetings and publications. They referred to him as "Nigger bishop" and "Nigger college president." Haygood was more favorably received in the North and was appointed general agent for the Slater Fund in 1882. He continued to campaign for the cause of education for blacks and played a central role in the establishment of Paine Institute in Augusta, Georgia. He also criticized white southern Methodists for their failure to provide financial and other support to the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church. In 1890, the Methodist Church elected Haygood to serve as the bishop of a

¹² Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 321-333, 350-352.

¹³ Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 205-211, 222, 330.

¹⁴ Sosna, *In Search of the Silent South*, 7-8.

California diocese. There was speculation that the Church withdrew him from the South because of his controversial views on race.¹⁵

George Washington Cable became the most celebrated critic of Southern racial policy in the late 1800s. Cable speculated that a minority of white Southerners did not endorse the system of racial injustice in the South. In his address “The Freedman’s Case in Equity” delivered to the American Social Science Association in September 1884, Cable argued that freedmen were not in reality free. He stated that while the law granted freedmen rights as citizens, they were not in fact free as long as they were denied the respect of white communities. Cable drew attention to Southern whites who regarded blacks as alien, menial beings. He argued that blacks would never gain self-respect or be motivated by ambition as long as they suffered the daily humiliations of segregation and discrimination. Cable maintained that white Southerners should abandon the caste system and their notions of white superiority and supremacy. He stated that when he promoted his views on the lecture circuit, that thousands of white Southerners greeted him following his addresses and conveyed their agreement with his ideas. Cable believed that he spoke in behalf of the “Silent South,” as he later referred to this minority, who would not protest because they believed to do so would be futile.¹⁶

When *Century* published Cable’s speech in January 1885, Southern journalists accused him of betraying the South, taking a provocative stance to promote his book tours, and promoting ideas that would result in intermarriage and race warfare. Cable attempted to assuage his critics in “The Silent South,” a subsequent article published by *Century* in September 1885.¹⁷ He believed his critics had misinterpreted “The Freedman’s Case” to mean that he advocated social equality. In “The Silent South,” Cable drew a distinction between social and civil rights.

¹⁵ Ronald C. White, Jr., *Liberty and Justice for All, Racial Reform and the Social Gospel (1877-1925)* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 48-49, 59.

¹⁶ George W. Cable, “The Freedman’s Case in Equity,” in *The Silent South* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1889; reprint, Montclair, New Jersey: Patterson Smith, 1969), 16-18, 21-22; Arlin Turner, “Introductory Essay,” in *The Silent South*, xxiv-xv.

¹⁷ Cable later published “The Silent South” and “The Freedman’s Case in Equity,” as a book in *The Silent South* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1889).

He maintained that he did not endorse social equality, but forcefully condemned segregation and defended the extension of civil rights to African Americans. To escape the criticism that ensued following the publication of his essays, Cable left his home in New Orleans in 1886 and spent the remainder of his life in Northampton, Massachusetts.¹⁸

In the 1890s, Southern opinion solidified to support segregation, white supremacy, disfranchisement, and the denial of economic opportunities to blacks.¹⁹ Southern intellectuals active from 1890 through 1914 shared many of the racist opinions of the mainstream public. Those who were interested in social improvement turned their attention to child labor, public education, and political reform but not to racial issues.²⁰ Racism was evident in Southern literature and in the scholarship of historians, anthropologists, and sociologists of the period. Woodward has noted that Southern literature prior to 1890 depicted blacks through characters that engendered feelings of respect, sympathy, and affection, while the novels of Thomas Dixon written in the early 1900s fueled white supremacists' bitter loathing of blacks.²¹ The fiction and essays of Thomas Nelson Page maintained that successful blacks were of mixed race, and that their accomplishments would be regarded as simply mediocre if achieved by a white man. Page stated that lynching should be prevented but justified the practice as a method of keeping an alien, degenerate race under control.²² The historian Philip A. Bruce stated in his writing that blacks were immoral, unethical, childlike, and possessed a natural tendency to steal. Bruce supported segregation and disfranchisement and argued that blacks should be deported.²³

¹⁸ George W. Cable, "The Silent South," in *The Silent South*, 53-56, 59, 62-63; Sosna, *In Search of the Silent South*, ix, 3-5.

¹⁹ Bruce Clayton, *The Savage Ideal, Intolerance and Intellectual Leadership in the South, 1890-1914* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1972), 5; Bailey, *Liberalism in the New South*, 17.

²⁰ C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974, 3d revised edition), 90-91; Clayton, *Savage Ideal*, 3-5.

²¹ Woodward, *Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 93-94.

²² Clayton, *Savage Ideal*, 187-188.

²³ Clayton, *Savage Ideal*, 24, 189-190.

The North sanctioned rather than challenged events and ideas in the South. Following the Spanish-American War, Northerners endorsed Southern racial policies and theories of white supremacy, finding in them a model for establishing relationships with non-white peoples in the new American empire.²⁴ Northern intellectuals influenced by the call of the White Man's Burden, the myth of Anglo-Saxon superiority, and Social Darwinism argued that blacks were innately inferior. The writers Alfred H. Stone, Walter F. Wilcox, Frederick Hoffman, and Raymond Pearl argued that the allegedly deteriorating physical condition of blacks indicated that the race would gradually become extinct. Rather than calling for reform, these writers maintained that blacks retarded the progress of the white race. Leading intellectuals such as Henry James, John Fiske, and Henry Adams failed to see the moral implications of the worsening status of blacks. Prestigious journals such as *Harper's*, *Century*, and *Scribner's* caricatured blacks in cartoons and stories.²⁵

In 1885, George Washington Cable castigated those in the South who claimed that the race problem was a small one that would eventually solve itself, writing, "Yes, like a roosting curse, until the outraged intelligence of the South lifts its indignant protest against this stupid firing into its own ranks."²⁶ The "intelligence of the South" did not immediately heed Cable's appeal to criticize racial policies and customs. Cable could not better have predicted the grave deterioration in race relations that occurred in the 1890s, or the development of a climate of opinion that suppressed protest. In the first decade of the twentieth century, a small number of Southerners came to agree with Cable's argument that an enlightened minority in the region did not support the extreme racism represented by the demagogues Hoke Smith, Ben Tillman, Cole Blease, and James K. Vardaman. This sentiment was reflected by Willis Weatherford; Edgar Gardner Murphy, noted for his child labor, race, and education reform work in Alabama; Walter

²⁴ Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 324-326.

²⁵ Bailey, *Liberalism in the New South*, 50-53.

²⁶ Cable, "The Freedman's Case in Equity," 21.

Hines Page, a North Carolina native who established a successful publishing career in New York; John E. White, a well known Baptist minister in Atlanta; and John C. Kilgo, president of Trinity College (Duke University).²⁷

Developing a strategy for reaching the “Silent South” proved to be a chief problem for those who wished to lead the region toward a more harmonious adjustment of race relations. Several events in the early 1900s influenced the course of liberal action. In July 1902, Andrew Sledd, a Latin professor at Emory College in Georgia, published “The Negro: Another View” in the *Atlantic Monthly*. Sledd’s article attacked segregation and argued that blacks were entitled to fundamental rights. Intense pressure from the Georgia press and its readership across the state forced Sledd to resign his position.²⁸ A similar case occurred a year later at Trinity College. John Spencer Bassett, a professor of history at Trinity, criticized the North Carolina Democratic Party for its white supremacist tactics, and attributed racial tension to an “inherent race antipathy” on the part of whites toward blacks. Bassett’s views appeared in the October 1903 issue of the *South Atlantic Quarterly*. His essay, “Stirring the Fires of Race Antipathy,” instigated a statewide controversy. A coalition of supporters, including the college president, faculty, and trustees, defended Bassett’s right to academic freedom and prevented his resignation.²⁹

Cable, Sledd, and Bassett challenged the racial status quo at great risk to their professional reputations. Public reaction to their criticism of segregation and disfranchisement served as a warning to Southern liberals. The 1906 riot in Atlanta may have compelled thoughtful Southerners to discover an alternative route to racial reform.³⁰ The four-day riot that

²⁷ Sosna, *In Search of the Silent South*, 13, 15-18.

²⁸ Henry J. Warnock, “Andrew Sledd, Southern Methodists, and the Negro: A Case History,” *Journal of Southern History* 31 (August 1965): 251-254, 261.

²⁹ William E. King, “John Spencer Bassett,” “The Bassett Affair,” and “Public Reaction to the Bassett Affair,” Duke University Archives, <http://www.lib.duke.edu/archives/history/j_s_bassett.html>, May 2004; John Spencer Bassett, “Stirring the Fires of Race Antipathy,” *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 2 (October 1903): 297-299, 302-303.

³⁰ Sosna, *In Search of the Silent South*, 16.

began in Atlanta on 22 September 1906 occurred in the wake of Hoke Smith's white supremacist campaign for governor of Georgia. Smith had stirred anti-black feeling to a fever pitch throughout his campaign. As editor of the *Atlanta Journal*, he inflamed white supremacists' hatred of blacks by sensationalizing the paper's stories of crimes committed by blacks. Other newspapers in Georgia followed a similar policy.³¹ Racial tension in Atlanta was further exacerbated by the production of Thomas Dixon's play *The Clansman*.³² The riot resulted in the deaths of ten blacks and two whites, and left sixty blacks and ten whites wounded. A committee of white civic leaders investigating the riot reported that the victims were not vagrants, but were gainfully employed, describing them as "honest, industrious and law-abiding citizens and useful members of society." In addition to the human toll, the riot weakened Atlanta's economy. The city's credit rating was threatened, and a labor shortage and increase in wages occurred when large numbers of blacks migrated to California or to the North.³³

In the aftermath of the riot, white and black leaders engaged in cooperative efforts to prevent future violence and restore confidence in Atlanta's economy. A committee of white business and professional leaders consulted five black ministers and the editor of the *Independent*, a black journal. According to Ray Stannard Baker, this was the first significant interracial meeting in the South held to seriously discuss racial problems.³⁴ As a result of the meeting, two notable organizations developed. Approximately 2,000 white business and professional men joined the Atlanta Civic League, while approximately 1,500 black business and professional men joined the Coloured Co-operative Civic League. Representatives from each league formed an interracial committee. Prominent ministers issued pleas for an end to violence through letters to the *Atlanta Constitution* and in their sermons. W.J. Northen, who preceded

³¹ Woodward, *Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 86.

³² Ray Stannard Baker, *Following the Color Line, An Account of Negro Citizenship in the American Democracy* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co, 1908): 4.

³³ Baker, *Following the Color Line*, 3, 9-10, 14-15.

³⁴ Baker does not provide a date for this meeting. It was held sometime following the September 22-26, 1906 riot and prior to 25 December 1906.

Hoke Smith as governor of Georgia, organized an interracial prayer meeting of approximately 20 whites and 20 blacks at the Coloured YMCA building in Atlanta. Northen launched a statewide speaking tour through which he urged Georgians to form law and order organizations and end mob law and lynching. These attempts at interracial cooperation were temporary. According to Baker, the appeals for an end to violence and the cooperative efforts to improve race relations diminished as memory of the riot faded.³⁵

While the Cable, Bassett, and Sledd cases demonstrated the danger of attacking segregation and disfranchisement, the Atlanta riot illustrated the high social cost of remaining silent. Following the riot in Atlanta, Southern liberals believed that if they acceded to segregation and did not press for social equality that they could curb racial violence and improve the housing, health, and economic conditions of blacks. Willis Weatherford became a leading advocate of this middle path to reform. Sosna emphasizes that the climate of opinion in the early 1900s forced Southern liberals to compromise on the issue of social equality and segregation. He notes that Weatherford, James Hardy Dillard, Charles Hillman Brough, W.O. Scroggs, Will Alexander, M. Ashby Jones, and Mrs. Lily Hardy Hammond, leading members of the Southern Sociological Congress and the University Commission on Southern Race Questions, accepted segregation.³⁶

Weatherford and other liberals were influenced by the thought of George Washington Cable and Booker T. Washington. Cable and Washington argued against Northern intervention in Southern affairs. They asserted that native Southerners possessed an intimate knowledge of the race conditions, traditions, and customs of the South and were better equipped to resolve the region's problems. While Cable called for an end to segregation and the extension of political rights to blacks, Washington asserted that industrial education and economic opportunity were more important immediate goals. Although they disagreed as to the immediate aims of racial

³⁵ Baker, *Following the Color Line*, 20-21, 24-25.

³⁶ Sosna, *In Search of the Silent South*, 16, 18.

improvement, both Washington and Cable dismissed social equality as an immediate goal of racial reform. To persuade white Southerners of the merits of reform, Cable and Washington appealed to Southern white self-interest, stating that the economic progress of the South depended on improving conditions for blacks.³⁷

Weatherford agreed with Cable and Washington that race issues should be resolved by Southerners rather than Northerners. In his writings and addresses, Weatherford frequently asserted his Southern credentials. He stated that his origins and career in the South gave him a first-hand knowledge of race problems.³⁸ However, Weatherford challenged the argument that white Southerners fully understood racial issues and the circumstances in which blacks lived. He maintained that educated white Southerners did not know the most basic facts about the living conditions of blacks. His first two published works on race, *Negro Life in the South* and *Present Forces in Negro Progress* were written for use in YMCA college study courses. In these two works, Weatherford carefully described the economic, religious, social, health, and economic conditions in which blacks lived.

In *Negro Life in the South*, Weatherford attempted to present a balanced evaluation of the economic condition of blacks. He characterized the lower classes as lacking a strong work ethic, possessing few skills, and exhibiting a tendency to be immoral, lazy, and untrustworthy. He noted the presence in Southern cities of “hundreds of listless, idle and dirty-looking negroes, who not only do not know how to work well, but do not want to learn,” and pointed to the “dead indifference of thousands of negroes to all the laws of cleanliness, ambition, and efficiency.”³⁹

In assessing the status of African American farmers and skilled laborers, Weatherford implied that their poverty and lack of skills resulted from environmental circumstances rather

³⁷ Sosna, *In Search of the Silent South*, 6; Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 356-359.

³⁸ Weatherford, *Negro Life in the South*, vi, 3-4; Weatherford, "Race Relations in the South," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 49 (September 1913): 164; Weatherford Papers, Collection #3831, W.D. Weatherford to D.B. Raulins, 13 July 1928, Willis Duke Weatherford Papers, collection #3831, folder 773, "Negro Delegates," Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

³⁹ Weatherford, *Negro Life in the South*, 36-37, 55.

than character defects. He referred to the dismal portrait of farm life drawn by W.E.B. DuBois in the *Souls of Black Folk*. Weatherford observed that black farmers had inherited their blighted land from white Southerners who had long practiced unscientific agricultural techniques. He also mentioned the problems created by the tenant and crop-lien systems. Weatherford stated that exclusion from labor unions in the North and unequal wages in the South were the chief obstacles faced by black laborers.⁴⁰

Weatherford counterbalanced his account of the problems in the economic condition of blacks by enthusiastically pointing to signs of promise and progress. He stated that while African Americans in the lower classes tended to lack ambition and resourcefulness, there were many who were honest, truthful, wise, responsible, and self-disciplined. He maintained that white Southerners were partially to blame for the poor work habits of their servants. Weatherford suggested that blacks from the lower classes could become trained, efficient servants if Southern women would play a more active role in their training and demonstrate a concern for their health and family life. Weatherford found encouraging signs of hope among farmers. He noted that many were beginning to practice scientific techniques learned through programs sponsored by the United States Department of Agriculture, the Tuskegee and Hampton institutes, and agricultural colleges. Citing studies by Booker T. Washington and others, Weatherford stated that land ownership among black farmers was increasing. However, he soberly speculated that two generations would probably pass before a majority of black farmers owned their land. Weatherford was greatly encouraged by the progress of the black middle and upper classes. He described the diversity and extent of businesses owned by blacks and the wide variety of occupations in which blacks were engaged.⁴¹

Weatherford suggested a number of recommendations for improving the economic efficiency and productivity of black labor. In 1910, he called for economic justice and equal opportunity in employment for blacks. Weatherford stated that white Southerners should

⁴⁰ Weatherford, *Negro Life in the South*, 39-40, 45, 48.

⁴¹ Weatherford, *Negro Life in the South*, 10, 18, 43-44, 50-54.

maintain high standards of skill and should admit into employment any person who could meet those standards. He further argued that white Southerners should give blacks equal pay for equal work. Weatherford referred to the tension engendered between white and black labor over the willingness of blacks to work for lower wages than white workers. He suggested that raising the black standard of living would benefit the South by reducing conflict between white and black labor and contributing to the development of more efficient, ambitious black workers. Weatherford concluded his recommendations for improving economic efficiency by calling for equal training facilities for blacks. He wrote, "Surely no one can begrudge any man, whether white or black, a chance to get that training which will make him a better workman, a greater producer of wealth, a more reliable and law-abiding citizen, a greater force for righteousness, a more self-respecting man."⁴²

Weatherford argued that the reform of black education was one of the most vitally pressing needs in the South. He began his discussion of education reform by exploring the reasons for white opposition to black education. He noted in 1910 that education and social intermingling of the races were the two most widely debated questions in race relations discussions. Weatherford speculated that the two issues were related. He believed that low support for black education among Southern whites was based on the view that education would increase social intermingling and would enable blacks to play a dominant role in Southern politics. He observed that whites would not endorse education reform until they had been persuaded that these two consequences would not occur. Weatherford evaded discussion of the future political role of blacks. With regard to social intermingling, he simply said that it was not a goal sought by most blacks and that white Southerners should abandon their concern about the issue.⁴³

In his discussion of black education, Weatherford addressed a misperception held by many Southern whites. According to Weatherford, Southerners commonly believed that the

⁴² Weatherford, *Negro Life in the South*, 56-57.

⁴³ Weatherford, *Negro Life in the South*, 7, 87, 92.

introduction of education for blacks during the Reconstruction Era had led to a degeneration of the race and made blacks unsuitable for manual labor. He quoted at length a study by the North Carolina Superintendent of Public Instruction maintaining that an absence, rather than an excess, of education, training, guidance, and leadership was responsible for any discernible decline among postwar blacks. Weatherford noted that since 1865 education for blacks had been restricted to literacy and industrial training. He argued that education limited to literacy did not constitute true education. He sympathetically argued that literacy was a crucial first step, but that it must be combined with a broader education in order to enable blacks to fully develop as human beings. Weatherford wrote,

To be able to read and write opens up an entirely new world to men. It is as though one opened the eyes of the blind or unstopped the ears of the deaf. But I can easily understand that the discordant noises of the world would break with great harshness on those ears which had always been closed, and the soul with this new gateway of knowledge suddenly opened would be completely bewildered and fail to understand the meaning of all these conflicting noises. So it is with the negro who has just come into possession of the use of these strange symbols that we call an alphabet. He is not at once transformed into a man with a cultured mind; he must be bewildered by much that he reads, having no key to its real understanding. Education for the negro has not been tried, for the little smattering of knowledge which he has may well have bewildered him rather than cleared his thought.⁴⁴

Weatherford called for the provision of three types of education for blacks. He stated that all black children should attend public elementary schools. He evaluated the status of public school education for white and black children by comparing per capita expenditures, teacher salaries, length of school term, and condition of facilities. He commented on the superior quality of education for white children, noting that the poverty of the region had made it difficult to spend more on black schools. He characterized efforts to provide elementary education for black children as “pitiable” and stated that school taxes should be increased to correct the situation. Weatherford advocated industrial school education as the second type of education that should be made available to the majority of blacks. He believed that blacks trained in manufacturing and agricultural skills would become an important part of the southern labor force. Weatherford

⁴⁴ Weatherford, *Negro Life in the South*, 88-90.

pointed to the success of the Tuskegee and Hampton institutes, and called for more spending for industrial education. Weatherford discussed higher education as the third type of education that should be extended to a black elite. Noting the existence of white opposition to college level education for blacks, Weatherford stated that training an indigenous class of leaders had long been a principle of foreign mission work. He maintained that the progress of blacks depended on the development of a leadership class trained to serve as ministers, teachers, doctors, dentists, and in other professional occupations.⁴⁵

In *Present Forces in Negro Progress*, Weatherford drew attention to the poor, unsanitary conditions of black neighborhoods. His outrage is clear in his condemnation of white civic leaders for neglecting and impairing the health of blacks. He wrote,

A city council which allows any land owner to do what I saw done in one Southern city recently—build a long row of shabby houses inside the corporate limits, in a marsh, without drainage or sewerage, putting the houses up on posts to keep them out of the water, and rent those houses at 40 per cent interest on his investment—any city council that will allow this is either a set of civic imbeciles or a set of civic knaves. Nay, more, they are a set of civic murderers.

Weatherford accused the city council of gross hypocrisy, writing,

The fact that these men go to church on Sunday and subscribe to the Y.M.C.A. on Monday, and make a civic righteousness speech on Tuesday, and lead the parade for the “City Ad” Club on Wednesday, and so on through the week, does not make them any less criminal. The truth is that in our day the criminal most to be feared is not the red-handed murderer or the pad-footed robber, but the men who, clothed in all their high respectability, sit in their fine offices and smile, while poor devils all around them are dying for want of protection from the greed of the money shark, the lust of the landlord, and the chicanery of the cheap politician. The weeping of this people ascendeth to high heaven, and we raise not our hand to stay the cause of their lamentation.⁴⁶

Weatherford based his call for the reform of the black condition on moral arguments, pragmatic factors related to the self-interest of white Southerners, and the economic benefits that would accrue to the region. He maintained that the future economic success of the South depended on the development of a black workforce. Discounting proposals to replace black

⁴⁵ Weatherford, *Negro Life in the South*, 96-98, 100-106, 110.

⁴⁶ W. D. Weatherford, *Present Forces in Negro Progress* (New York: Association Press, 1912), 74.

labor with European immigrants, Weatherford argued that blacks would serve as the primary source of labor for Southern industry and agriculture.⁴⁷

Weatherford also developed an argument for racial reform that appealed to the self-interest of white Southerners. He argued that their health, moral life, and intellectual standards would be at risk as long as blacks were denied proper health care and education. He pointed out that blacks who worked in domestic service cooking, laundering clothes, and tending children could spread disease to white families if they suffered from poor hygiene or ill health. He maintained that the quality of education for blacks should be improved to prevent domestic servants from teaching white children superstitions, ignorant fears, and immoral ideas.⁴⁸

In *Negro Life in the South*, Weatherford argued that it was within the self-interest of whites to pursue an objective study of the problem of race friction. He attributed the racial tension of the day to the demise of the plantation system and to the inflammatory behavior of the “prejudiced Southern white man,” the “radical negro,” and the “Northern enthusiast.” Weatherford described the “prejudiced Southern white man” as a social type who refused to acknowledge the virtues and positive accomplishments of blacks. He included white supremacist politicians in this group and urged whites not be manipulated by their claims that blacks sought social equality or would come to dominate the white race. In his discussion of the radical negro, Weatherford stated his preference for the approach of Booker T. Washington as opposed to W.E.B. DuBois. He criticized DuBois and the Niagara Movement for demanding rights rather than working for the advancement of blacks. He argued that the radical negro was as racially biased as the prejudiced Southern white man. Weatherford described the Northern enthusiast as one who believed that he could easily solve the South’s race problems in a few years.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Weatherford, *Negro Life in the South*, 40-43.

⁴⁸ Weatherford, *Negro Life in the South*, 7-10, 16.

⁴⁹ Weatherford, *Negro Life in the South*, 10-14.

Weatherford developed a forcefully stated moral argument for racial reform in *Negro Life in the South*.⁵⁰ Two years after the publication of *Negro Life*, Weatherford addressed the first meeting of the Southern Sociological Congress in Nashville. In his speech he further developed the moral argument for reform and asserted that it was paramount to all other reasons for improving conditions for blacks. Weatherford's subsequent speeches and writings referred to the economic benefits of reform, but from his 1912 address in Nashville through his last publication on race in 1957, he passionately proclaimed the moral reasons that compelled an end to intolerance, discrimination, lynching, economic injustice, and inequality in housing, education, and health care.⁵¹

Weatherford's moral argument may have been his greatest contribution to the cause of liberal race reform. He was greatly concerned by the racial myths and stereotypes that pervaded Southern thought through the middle of the twentieth century. In their studies of Southern culture, Weatherford, Howard, and Dollard reported many of the same stereotypes. They found that Southern whites commonly believed that blacks were innately inferior and incapable of improvement. When confronted with examples of successful blacks, whites maintained that they were of mixed race and attributed their accomplishments to the presence of white blood. Southern whites often regarded blacks as subhuman animals or brutes who were unable to control their baser instincts. They thought that lust and a propensity to commit theft and other crimes were genetic traits of all blacks.⁵² A popularly held view among Southerners was that blacks in the twentieth century were more immoral, had fewer labor skills, and a poorer work

⁵⁰Weatherford, *Negro Life in the South*, 149-158, 168-172.

⁵¹ W. D. Weatherford, "The Negro and the New South," in *The Call of the New South: Addresses Delivered at the Southern Sociological Congress Held in Nashville, Tennessee 7-10 May 1912*, ed. James E. McCulloch (Nashville: Southern Sociological Congress, 1912; reprint, Westport, Connecticut: Negro Universities Press, 1970), 222-225 (page citations are to the reprint edition); W.D. Weatherford, *American Churches and the Negro* (Boston: Christopher Publishing House, 1957), 289, 297.

⁵² George Elliott Howard, "The Social Cost of Southern Race Prejudice," *The American Journal of Sociology* 22 (March 1917) : 578-588; W.D. Weatherford, "Education the Antidote for Prejudice," *The Southern Workman* 42 (January 1933): 5-7; John Dollard, *Caste and Class in a Southern Town* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1937; second edition, 1949): 370-386.

ethic than slaves under the plantation system. They thought that the introduction of education for blacks at the conclusion of the Civil War had brought about this degeneration of the race, and thus believed that education had a deleterious rather than a beneficial effect on blacks.⁵³

Dollard maintains that a consequence of regarding blacks as inferior, subhuman beings was the denial of personality to blacks. He states that once personality was denied to blacks they became anonymous figures. He notes that the whites in his study did not understand that blacks were

. . . enmeshed in a system of personal relationships, that they have friends, write and receive letters, have memories over years, hold grudges, have personal preferences, pain, exultation, immediate objectives, and urgent needs.

Dollard observed that a further consequence of dehumanizing blacks was that it released whites from the obligation to extend to them human and political rights.⁵⁴

Weatherford's moral argument was intended to shatter these stereotypes, restore the concept of personality to blacks, and compel educated Southerners to become activists for racial reform. He centered his argument on the Christian concepts of the brotherhood of mankind and the sacredness of all human personality. Weatherford maintained that current thinking in science and philosophy posited the existence of a supreme element in nature. He argued that this element, referred to by Christians as God, and by science as force, unified all beings into one whole. He developed his view of the sacredness of the individual by stating that since all beings were part of one supreme life that "each individual is enhanced in value because it is a part of the all inclusive and the universal." He stated that since all men were sons of God, or part of the universal, that all men were united in brotherhood.⁵⁵

Weatherford believed that the sacredness of personality was "the supreme teaching of Jesus."⁵⁶ In 1910, he quoted Henry Churchill King who stated in *The Ethics of Jesus*⁵⁷ that the

⁵³ Weatherford, *Negro Life in the South*, 89-90; Howard, "Social Cost of Prejudice," 585.

⁵⁴ Dollard, *Caste and Class*, 370-371.

⁵⁵ W. D. Weatherford, *Personal Elements in Religious Life* (Nashville: Publishing House of the M.E. Church, South, 1916), 13; Weatherford, *Negro Life in the South*, 149-150.

⁵⁶ Weatherford, *Negro Life in the South*, 150.

principles of Christianity did not allow barriers based on race or class and required each man to regard all other men with reverence, faith, and love.⁵⁸ Weatherford thought that this teaching was especially relevant to the Southern attitude regarding blacks. He reflected that if Southerners applied the ethics of Jesus to their relationships with others that they would learn to see the value and worth in all people, the potential in the most unworthy, take an interest in everyone, and never despise or condescend to anyone. In a statement reflecting the importance Weatherford ascribed to the role of religion in race problems he commented, “if we would be followers of him (Jesus) we must have his attitude toward persons. If we could get that attitude as Christians we would solve the race issue.”⁵⁹ In an address to the Negro Christian Student Conference in 1914 Weatherford stated,

. . . the final solvent of this race relation is Christianity. There is no other force in the world which can do it. Education alone will not do it. Privileges and rights for either or both races will not do it. The final argument will be transformed lives . . . Religion alone can make us considerate of each other.⁶⁰

Weatherford believed that lynching was one of the most tragic consequences of the dehumanization of blacks. He thought that white Southerners tended to regard all blacks as brutes based on the behavior of the criminal class. Weatherford cautioned whites against judging all blacks by the conduct of a few. He emphasized the idea that blacks were a diverse people with many different social types. He noted that many were of good character and were hardworking, successful citizens. He pointed out that while some blacks were brutal criminals that there were also many brutal white men.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Henry Churchill King, *The Ethics of Jesus* (New York: Macmillan, 1910).

⁵⁸ Weatherford, *Negro Life in the South*, 149-150, 152.

⁵⁹ W.D. Weatherford, “Christianity and the Race Problem,” AMs, Willis Duke Weatherford Papers, collection #3831, folder 3669b, Manuscripts Department, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

⁶⁰ W.D. Weatherford, “Signs of Growing Interest on the Part of the Southern White Man” in *The New Voice in Race Adjustments: Addresses and Reports Presented at the Negro Christian Student Conference Held in Atlanta, Ga. 14-18 May 1914*, ed. A.M. Trawick (New York: Student Volunteer Movement, 1914), 178.

⁶¹ Weatherford, *Negro Life in the South*, 157-158.

Weatherford maintained that lynching and race hatred engendered moral consequences that threatened civilized order in the South. He believed that violence corrupted the character of white Southerners. He argued that the denial of justice to blacks led to a “general lawlessness” in Southern society. Weatherford described this lawlessness as an absence of respect for law and order that ranged from the most serious offenses of lynching and mob violence to minor infractions such as violating game laws. For Weatherford, this lawlessness was exemplified by a particular lynching incident in an unnamed Southern city. He reported that seventy-five parents requested that the principals of the local public schools excuse their children from school so that they could attend the lynching. In reference to this story, Weatherford stated, “We must not only stop lynching in order to give life to the Negro, we must stop it to save our own souls from the blackest death.”⁶²

Weatherford hoped that a renewed sense of the value and integrity of each individual would bring an end to white exploitation of black labor. At the first meeting of the Southern Sociological Congress in 1912, he related two stories that indicated the type of attitude he sought to change. Once in conversation with a plantation owner, Weatherford mentioned the rising number of farms owned by blacks. The plantation owner complained that this had reduced the labor supply available to work his plantation. Weatherford pointed out that the South benefited from black farm ownership through increased agricultural production and a better quality of life for blacks. The plantation owner grudgingly conceded Weatherford’s point but held to his self-interested position. On another occasion, Weatherford encountered a white woman who decried the loss of a black servant in her employment. The servant, a young woman, had attended school, learned homemaking skills, and married. Weatherford defended the young woman, stating that her husband was gainfully employed and that she was entitled to the right to have her own home. When he pointed to the contribution the young woman could make to her race by keeping a good home, the woman rejoined that, “the only contribution that girl could really make to humanity was to cook in some white woman’s kitchen.” Weatherford observed that white

⁶² Weatherford, “The Northern Migration,” 9-10.

Southerners must learn to respect blacks as human beings. In his conclusion to the congress he stated

The supreme question is whether we, the white South, will so value humanity as humanity, that we will have a kindly sympathetic attitude toward the negro as a part of humanity. . . . an Old South cannot become a New South until every man, woman and child in that South has a value as a person, and not simply as a thing, as an economic tool or a piece of animal machinery.⁶³

Weatherford's views on segregation were rather complex. In 1910, he supported public school segregation in order to protect the advanced position of the white race and instill a sense of race pride and ambition in black children. Weatherford justified the segregation of white and black schools by pointing to the advantages of segregation for both races. He admitted that the costs of maintaining a dual school system resulted in a poor quality of education for blacks. However, he pointed out that if the races were combined in public schools, that children would be taught by white instructors. He believed that black children benefited from having teachers of their own race who served as role models. Weatherford believed that segregated education was necessary to protect the superior status of the white race. He argued that in a system of combined education black children would retard the development of white children.⁶⁴

Although Weatherford supported segregated education, he did not favor proposals to segregate blacks in separate residential areas of rural communities. In 1915, he addressed a plan that would allow voters to decide by ballot whether to prevent the sale of land to people of a particular race in order to maintain peace and security in their community. Weatherford immediately dismissed this scheme. He maintained that it was inherently unfair because the formal and informal disfranchisement of many blacks made it impossible for them to prohibit the sale of land to whites. Weatherford further argued against rural segregation by discounting the advantages cited by advocates of the policy. He noted that those in favor of the plan claimed that

⁶³ W.D. Weatherford, "The Negro and the New South," in *The Call of the New South: Addresses Delivered at the Southern Sociological Congress Held in Nashville, Tennessee 7-10 May 1912*, ed. James E. McCulloch (Nashville: Southern Sociological Congress, 1912; reprint, Westport, Conn.: Negro Universities Press, 1970), 223-225.

⁶⁴ Weatherford, *Negro Life in the South*, 95-96.

black farmers were not good neighbors, threatened the social and moral life of communities, and impaired the ability of farmers to form cooperative associations. To gain a true understanding of the issue, Weatherford corresponded with 740 farm demonstration agents in the South. The agents who responded indicated that white farmers did not seriously oppose land ownership by black farmers. They maintained that blacks were better members of the community as farmers, rather than as tenants or day laborers. The agents also stated that black farmers increased the economic productivity of their communities, and that black farm ownership did not decrease land values.

In examining the disadvantages of rural segregation, Weatherford pointed out the effects of the policy on both white and black communities. He noted that it would decrease the labor supply available to white farmers. He argued that the plan would increase friction between the races because blacks would interpret rural segregation as a new form of discrimination. Weatherford maintained that the economic progress of the South depended on the productivity of black farmers. He stated that in order to succeed black farmers needed the leadership, guidance, and cooperation of white farmers. Weatherford concluded by arguing that white farmers had a moral obligation to serve their generation by uplifting black farmers. He wrote, “The question is not whether the Negro is as moral, intellectual, or as strong as the white man or as advanced. The question is whether we will so deal with the Negro as to prove to the rest of the world we are men with brotherly spirit—worthy to be trusted with a great responsibility in the development of human life.”⁶⁵

In his writing on segregation and social equality, Weatherford did not call for the dismantling of the Jim Crow system but advocated a theory of race relations that would make legal segregation obsolete. In *Negro Life in the South*, Weatherford called on whites to encourage black progress and to help blacks develop a sense of race consciousness and identity. Weatherford maintained that once blacks gained a sense of pride in their race, they would not

⁶⁵ W.D. Weatherford, “Race Segregation in the Rural South,” *Survey* 33 (January 2, 1915): 375-377.

seek social intermingling with whites.⁶⁶ He continued this argument in his second book, *Present Forces in Negro Progress*. In this work, Weatherford stated, “Race pride, race consciousness, and race cooperation do not mean race segregation.” He explained that all races are part of the collective human family and that each race should take an interest in and value the dignity of all other races. Weatherford noted that the development of a sense of race pride would increase the efficiency of blacks.⁶⁷ Weatherford discussed the merits of Edgar Gardner Murphy’s concept of parallel civilizations⁶⁸ in his third major work, *The Negro from Africa to America*. Weatherford agreed with Murphy that the white and black races could peacefully coexist as two socially separate, distinct races. He stated that the relationship between the two races should be characterized by cooperation in the mutual interest of advancing each race. Weatherford argued that cooperation would not lead to social intermingling. He affirmed that whites and blacks did not want social equality.⁶⁹

In his fourth study of the black condition, *Race Relations*, Weatherford analyzed twentieth century arguments for colonizing blacks in Africa, allowing blacks to become extinct, and completely segregating blacks in separate communities. He also commented on proposals to informally subordinate blacks through social custom. Weatherford rejected these solutions to the race problem because they were impractical, based on the myth of black inferiority, and were contrary to the ethic of brotherhood among races. He returned to Murphy’s theory of parallel civilizations as an ideal social arrangement of the races. Weatherford concurred with Murphy that each race possessed distinct characteristics that could be most fully developed through social separation. He believed that Murphy’s proposal would benefit society because it assumed the

⁶⁶ Weatherford, *Negro Life in the South*, 173-175.

⁶⁷ W.D. Weatherford, *Present Forces in Negro Progress* (New York: Association Press, 1912), 37.

⁶⁸ Murphy developed his theory of dual civilizations in *The Basis of Ascendancy* (New York: Longman, Green & Co., 1909).

⁶⁹ W.D. Weatherford, *The Negro from Africa to America* (New York: Doran, 1924), 431.

value and worth of each race, affirmed that each race could make a unique contribution to society, and recognized the potential of each race to advance and progress.⁷⁰

In his writings and addresses, Weatherford frequently assured Southern whites that the full development of blacks into a separate, independent race would not lead to social equality. He most fully expressed this point of view in 1913 and subsequently repeated it many times. In 1913 Weatherford wrote,

When the Negro has become economically efficient, intellectually more advanced, racially self conscious, there will be far less friction, for he will then feel as the white man feels that racial integrity and social separation are best for both races. Indeed most of the best trained Southern Negroes I know at present feel as the white man does about this matter—that each race can make its largest contribution to humanity if it develops its own race life and race consciousness. It has been the fear on the part of the Southern white man that development of the Negro intellectually and economically would mean race amalgamation. But as this race consciousness grows stronger and stronger in the Negro race this feeling will be allayed and the two races will dwell side by side in a spirit of increasing brotherhood.⁷¹

While Weatherford declared that whites and blacks alike opposed social equality, he emphatically stated that social separation did not release whites from the obligation to extend social justice to blacks. When he addressed the Law and Order Conference at the Blue Ridge Assembly in August 1917, Weatherford asserted, “We believe that the two races will be stronger in their own civilization and not through social intermingling, but we must never forget that separate race life does not mean banging the doors of justice, opportunity and freedom in the face of anyone, white or black.” Weatherford defined social justice as the fair administration of law and equal access to government services. He argued that inadequate police protection,

⁷⁰ Weatherford, *Race Relations*, 523-527, 529-531.

⁷¹ W.D. Weatherford, “Race Relationship in the South,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 49 (September 1913), 172. For other references to this theme see W.D. Weatherford, “Education the Antidote for Prejudice,” *The Southern Workman* 42 (January 1933), 8; W.D. Weatherford, “First Steps in Solving the Negro Problem,” *The Southern Workman* 39 (November 1910), 590; Weatherford, *Negro from Africa to America*, 426; Weatherford, *Negro Life in the South*, 7, 173-175.

sewerage systems, and street maintenance in addition to discriminatory practices on public conveyances were among the chief reasons for the migration of blacks from the South.⁷²

In *The Negro from Africa to America*, Weatherford expanded his definition of social justice for blacks to include the eradication of lynching, the appointment of blacks to juries, the provision of more parks and libraries, justice in legal proceedings, improvements to schools, and courteous treatment. Most significantly, Weatherford called for electoral reform that would guarantee the right to vote to blacks who met property and intellectual qualifications. He maintained that large numbers of blacks were able to vote, but observed that the practice was far from universal. He suggested that states require white and black voters to complete a certain grade level of school in order to vote. Weatherford believed that electoral reform should occur gradually on a state-by-state basis.⁷³

Weatherford addressed the political, economic, and moral reasons for reform of the franchise. He stated that blacks could not be expected to obey laws that were forced upon them without their consent. He noted that many blacks migrated from the South because they could not vote. Weatherford observed that this loss of black labor posed a serious economic threat to the South. He attacked the grandfather clause as an unjust method that allowed unqualified whites to vote and increased feelings of injustice among blacks. He stated that enfranchising illiterate white voters increased the political power of demagogues who skillfully exploited the racial prejudices of the uneducated. Weatherford also developed an argument for reform based on the classic democratic principle that participation in civic affairs is essential to the full development of individual character. Weatherford commented, “We want for the Negro a chance for the fullest expression of himself, and we want him to share to the fullest in his own self control.” He referred to Murphy’s argument in *The Basis of Ascendancy* that the political repression of an entire class of citizens subverted the Constitution. Murphy had stated that the

⁷² Weatherford, “The Northern Migration,” 10.

⁷³ Weatherford, *Negro from Africa to America*, 436-437, 439.

creation of “fixed and permanent populations of ‘the inferior’” amounted to the transformation of American politics from a democracy to an aristocracy.⁷⁴

Weatherford concluded his discussion of the franchise with reflections that may indicate the reasons he addressed this issue for the first time in 1924. He was keenly aware that black veterans returning from service in World War I expected an improvement in their political and social status. In 1920 he wrote, “The fact that Negroes had a share in the great war, that a large number of them got overseas and consequently got a broader outlook, means that there is a distinctly new situation as to inter-racial relations in America.”⁷⁵ Following his treatment of social justice and the franchise in *The Negro from Africa to America*, Weatherford quoted Dr. Isaac Fisher, who noted that during World War I blacks heeded Wilson’s message justifying the war as a mission to defend democracy. Fisher stated that blacks fought in the war to extend rights to all nations, and gained a new understanding of brotherhood from their experience in Europe.⁷⁶ Weatherford then proceeded to argue that blacks should be given a larger role in civic affairs. He questioned the assumptions that whites were the sole possessors of political wisdom and that blacks were incapable of contributing to community life. He conjectured that blacks had not made significant contributions to public life because whites had denied them the opportunity to do so. Weatherford candidly acknowledged that “Perhaps we have jumped to our conclusions about his inability to govern, largely on the basis of our own desire to govern.” He refuted a common statement of the day that America was “the white man’s country,” arguing instead that “it is the country of all those who by character and loyal endeavor help to make it the land of happiness, plenty, and freedom.” Weatherford maintained that giving blacks a larger role in public life was essential to the progress of the South. However, he emphasized the fundamental

⁷⁴ Weatherford, *Negro from Africa to America*, 432, 433, 436, 438.

⁷⁵ W.D. Weatherford, “Growing Race Cooperation,” *The Survey* XLV (October 16, 1920), 88.

⁷⁶ Isaac Fisher, “Christian Justice and the Negro,” *The Intercollegian*, quoted in Weatherford, *Negro from Africa to America*, 439-440.

commitment to the value and worth of all people as the higher reason for the extension of civic rights.⁷⁷

In *Race Relations*, published in 1934 and co-authored with Charles S. Johnson, Weatherford continued his discussion of race relationships and the franchise. His views remained essentially the same as those expressed in *The Negro from Africa to America*. He continued to favor Murphy's concept of parallel civilizations but emphasized that the relationship between the two races should be characterized by cooperation and goodwill. Weatherford argued that legal segregation had not resolved the race problem but had served to increase racial tension by creating feelings of oppression and distrust among blacks toward whites. He returned to his argument that the solution to harmonious race relations could be found in changing southern attitudes. Weatherford stated that the South needed a new set of social mores that reflected "a sense of value of all persons . . . a sense of fair play, of justice and of good will." Weatherford was pessimistic that this change could be brought about through legislation. He argued, "It certainly cannot be done by working out elaborate codes. Men are not changed that way. It cannot be done by legislating on the status of all parties concerned." He reaffirmed his belief that attitudes could best be changed through a program of education combined with practical service projects that brought whites and blacks into contact with one another.⁷⁸

Weatherford addressed the issue of black political rights more fully in *Race Relations* than in his previous works. In a chapter titled, "Civic and Political Status of the Negro," he traced the history of the civic rights of free blacks and slaves from the early colonial period through the early 1930s. Weatherford's discussion of the conditions of his own period included further development of his argument for protecting the right of blacks to vote. His views on the extension of the franchise to blacks are somewhat inconsistent. In the chapter's concluding paragraph, he reasserted his view that white and black voters should be required to meet strict

⁷⁷ Weatherford, *The Negro from Africa to America*, 440-441.

⁷⁸ W. D. Weatherford and Charles S. Johnson, *Race Relations* (Boston: D.C. Heath & Co., 1934), 75-76, 529-532.

property and intellectual qualifications. However, the line of argument throughout the chapter drifts toward encouraging broader participation by blacks in the voting process. Weatherford concurred with Lewinson⁷⁹ that increased support for the black franchise among whites, the development of a class of black leaders, and growth in the economic and cultural progress of blacks justified “a larger enfranchisement of the Negro.” Weatherford then stated “. . . these factors have not made it possible for all Negroes to vote freely and without intimidation.”⁸⁰

Weatherford examined the forces that disfranchised blacks. He described the lily-white movement in the Republican Party, the white primary engineered by the Democratic Party, unfair registration practices, the intimidation and harassment of potential black voters, and the unequal administration of the poll tax and literacy tests. Weatherford addressed the negative consequences of denying the franchise to blacks. For the first time in his writing, he linked the social injustice suffered by blacks to their inability to vote. He described the unequal conditions and practices in education, transportation, justice, and business that existed in the early 1930s. He stated that Du Bois, and many other blacks, attributed these inequalities to disfranchisement. Weatherford agreed with Du Bois, writing,

So long as the Negro does not have full power of suffrage he is helpless to protect himself against the discriminations which arise If the Negro has no vote for municipal officers, he has no way of seeing that men are elected who will be just in their treatment of the Negro. He can do nothing about the unpaved streets, the lack of sewerage, and the lack of street lighting in the Negro section.

He continued by stating,

Far too long we have looked to the good will of the white man to protect the Negro in his rights. Let us hope that the spirit of *noblesse oblige* will never die out of the heart of our best white people in their dealings with the Negro people, but we must not count on that to give full justice. The Negro must become a man in his own right in taking his own responsibilities and carrying his privileges.

⁷⁹ Paul Lewinson, *Race, Class and Party* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1932).

⁸⁰ Weatherford and Johnson, *Race Relations*, 418.

This statement represents a significant change in Weatherford's thought. In his earlier works, Weatherford placed great faith in the benevolence of whites to uplift and extend social justice to blacks. His call for expanding the franchise to blacks may reflect his disillusionment with Southern whites. In 1934, he found that tolerant, liberal attitudes toward blacks were limited to Southern white leaders. He maintained that the attitudes of the white majority had not changed since the Civil War.⁸¹

Weatherford examined the policies of major American denominations toward blacks from the pre-Civil War period to 1957 in *American Churches and the Negro*. Published three years after the Supreme Court ordered the desegregation of public schools, this work served as a platform from which Weatherford boldly challenged churches to accept black members and take the leadership in the desegregation of American society. In a statement that must have gained the full attention of the book's readers, Weatherford declared, "If our children can be educated in desegregated schools, surely mature Christians cannot be overwhelmed by the idea of some colored people wanting to join white churches which may be near to their place of residence. If the Church cannot set the pace in race relations, it would seem it ought to at least remain in calling distance of the State in any advanced thinking and action."⁸²

In the first paragraph of the foreword, Weatherford described the Supreme Court's 1954 desegregation order as a bomb that should awaken the Church to its responsibility to address the race problem. He described the racial practices of the Episcopal, Quaker, Methodist, Baptist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Congregational, and Catholic churches in eight separate chapters. From his study of these denominations, he concluded that Southern churches prior to the Civil War observed greater religious equality and held a greater interest in the spiritual welfare of blacks than churches of the modern era.⁸³

⁸¹ Weatherford and Johnson, *Race Relations*, 418-420.

⁸² W. D. Weatherford, *American Churches and the Negro*, (Boston: The Christopher Publishing House, 1957), 288.

⁸³ Weatherford, *American Churches*, 11, 13, 21, 286-288.

Weatherford concluded *American Churches and the Negro* with a chapter that argued for an end to segregation. He asserted that the two world wars had ushered in an era that called for a new relationship between the races. Weatherford maintained that confrontation with Nazism and Fascism compelled Americans to extend equal treatment to blacks. He noted that the United States could not defend democracy in other countries and exclude some of its own citizens from full enjoyment of all democratic rights. Weatherford stated that maintaining the racial status quo of inequality would impair America's ability to lead other nations. He argued that the non-white peoples of Japan, China, India, and Africa would not fully trust a nation that denied equality to a racial group within its borders.⁸⁴

While Weatherford addressed the political reasons for ending segregation, his primary line of argument centered on moral factors and the role of the Church. He returned to his position, first stated in *Negro Life in the South*, that Christian teachings asserted the value and sacredness of all human personality. Weatherford accused the Church of hypocrisy, stating that it professed adherence to the principle of universal brotherhood while supporting racial prejudice and the caste system of segregation. He criticized American churches for remaining segregated, stating that the Church should not be a "closed corporation," but a "society of friends interested in all persons." Weatherford validated his position by referring to the policies of national denominational organizations. He noted that segregation had been condemned by the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in 1946, the World Council of Churches in 1954, and the General Conference of the Methodist Church in 1956.⁸⁵

Weatherford proclaimed that the Gospel message of Christianity, particularly with regard to the universal brotherhood of mankind and the sacredness of all personality, should be reflected in church action and practice. Specifically, he called on Christians to support equal pay for equal work, an end to discrimination in employment, equal justice before the law, and equal opportunity in education. Weatherford especially emphasized the imperative to treat blacks with

⁸⁴ Weatherford, *American Churches*, 287-290.

⁸⁵ Weatherford, *American Churches*, 290-294.

equal respect and courtesy. He challenged white ministers to speak the truth about segregation from the pulpit and encouraged interracial cooperation between white and black churches. He stated that white ministers should invite black ministers to preach in their churches and participate in citywide ministerial association meetings.⁸⁶

Weatherford closed the chapter by reflecting on the social and moral consequences of segregation. He referred to Gunnar Myrdal's argument in *An American Dilemma* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1944) that segregation was an expensive experiment that diverted Southern intellectual and cultural progress. Weatherford maintained that the North continued to advance more rapidly than the South because of the tremendous amount of time and energy spent in the South maintaining and defending segregation. He concurred with Myrdal that segregation forced Americans to compromise their moral principles. He observed that in a segregated society Christians who wanted to apply the teachings of their religion to everyday life found it difficult to do so. Weatherford stated,

We as Christians claim that all men are equal in the sight of God, and yet our caste system makes it impossible to live up to our Christian convictions. . . . If the Christian is really honest, he wants to do what his religion demands; namely, respect and serve every person he meets. . . . But on every hand he finds himself thwarted. He cannot pay full respect to the womanhood of the Negro race without being accused of being a Negrophile and without being shut out from many of the opportunities of normal life. He cannot stand squarely for the Negro adult being given full political rights, without being called a mugwump or a traitor to his own "white supremacy."

He maintained that this moral compromise damaged the inner souls of white southerners and prevented the full development of their character and personality. He argued that it was mandatory for the Church to oppose racism in order for its members to have a "full-fledged Christian experience."⁸⁷

Weatherford sympathetically described the effect of segregation and discrimination on blacks. He encouraged white Christians to put themselves in the place of black Christians and

⁸⁶ Weatherford, *American Churches*, 291, 294-295.

⁸⁷ Weatherford, *American Churches and the Negro*, 298-300.

Imagine for just an hour how one would feel if one could not be addressed with the respect indicated by the simple title of Mr., or Miss, or Mrs. How would one feel if he was always “Jim Crowed” in his travel; how would he feel if he could not enter the chief hotels or theaters; how would one feel if he could not enter even many of the churches of his community? What would be the effect on one’s personality if he was constantly reminded that he was considered inferior, that he could not have all the privileges of being a real man?

Weatherford maintained that such treatment engendered desperation, bitterness, and sickness of soul among black people. He charged that the Church had a “definite responsibility to see to it that every Negro as a human being has a chance to grow in richness of character.” He stated that segregation prevented the Church from serving this vital role and issued a plea to the Church to take action and oppose all evil that prevented the growth of Christian character.⁸⁸

Reviews of *American Churches and the Negro* in the denominational press ranged from neutral, cautious recommendations to strong admiration and praise. The *Southern Presbyterian Journal* commented, “Southerners will reject a great deal of what Dr. Weatherford has to say in this book, but should be benefited by much of the data presented.” A Methodist quarterly, *Bible Teacher for Adults*, observed, “Those who have a concern for present-day race problems will find this a challenging helpful book. . . . The government by its Supreme Court decision of 1954 has responded regarding this important issue. The writer challenges the churches of today to face the issue and assume their responsibility.” *The Christian Evangelist*, a publication of the Disciples of Christ, noted “Chapter Ten is where Dr. Weatherford puts on the ‘rousements.’ He has a point of view. He has a long record as a prophet. This book and this chapter will add to his stature.” The *Duke Divinity School Bulletin* described Weatherford’s book as “a valuable research tool for students.” The *Bulletin* further noted, “The book contains a section on attitudes and programs to meet the changing conditions of our time. It helps to set in clear perspective the Christian’s dilemma and his need to work out a Christian procedure in dealing with this powerful character-changing issue. . . . This timely book should be used by churchmen and church teachers in helping church people to understand the relation of our churches to the Negro.”

⁸⁸ Weatherford, *American Churches and the Negro*, 300-301.

Writing in *Social Order*, a publication of the Catholic Church, Raymond Bernard, S.J., listed twelve Southern writers and intellectuals who had expressed “unorthodox” opinions on racial issues. He included Weatherford among the twelve for his publication of *American Churches*. Bernard maintained that the work of the twelve Southern writers contradicted the view that liberal southerners were too discouraged or too intimidated to challenge the status quo. He speculated that the writers reflected the views of thousands of Southerners. Benjamin E. Mays, President of Morehouse College, reviewed *American Churches* for *The Berea Alumnus*. Mays noted Weatherford’s comparison of the racial attitudes of the Church in the pre-Civil War era with the modern period. He also drew attention to Weatherford’s description in Chapter Ten of the degrading affects of segregation on blacks. Mays concluded his review by stating, “Most men become conservative with the years and do not take courageous positions—not so with W.D. Weatherford.”⁸⁹

In 1925, Guy B. Johnson reviewed Weatherford’s book *The Negro from Africa to America* for the *Journal of Social Forces* as one of the five most outstanding books written on blacks between 1923 and 1925. Johnson noted the book’s faults but maintained that

In Weatherford’s *The Negro from Africa to America*, we have the best historical and descriptive study of the Negro ever written by a Southerner. Doctor Weatherford . . . is one of the few men in the South who have made a scientific study of the Negro.

He praised Weatherford’s description of the black condition with regard to health and housing, law, education, leadership, and religious and economic life. However, he believed that Weatherford was overly optimistic in his assessment of contemporary race relations. Johnson believed that in spite of its flaws, the work was of great merit and value. He stated,

. . . the book is a triumph of the scientific attitude over prejudice. It is a great improvement over most of the books on the negro in use in Southern colleges, and as such should go a long way toward putting the spirit of toleration and the scientific interest into Southern college students.⁹⁰

⁸⁹These reviews may be found in Weatherford Papers, Collection #3831, folder 3671: The American Church and the Negro—Reviews, ca. 1958-1959; Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.

⁹⁰ Guy B. Johnson, review of *The Negro from Africa to America*, by W.D. Weatherford, *Journal of Social Forces* 3 (January 1925): 316-317.

Weatherford attributed white antipathy to blacks and white disinterest in the living conditions of blacks to prevailing myths and stereotypes. Weatherford was convinced that changing the public's perception of blacks was an important first step in improving race relations. He optimistically believed that a positive adjustment in race relations would occur if white Southerners understood the facts of the black condition. Weatherford began his campaign for race reform by developing a program to educate college students on race issues and problems. Chapter 4 will examine Weatherford's plan for educating college students on the subject of race.

CHAPTER 4

WEATHERFORD'S CAMPAIGN FOR RACE EDUCATION

In the spring of 1909, Carl Holliday, an English professor at Southwestern Presbyterian University in Memphis, required forty-eight students to write essays on the African American future. Holliday's students, who were white Southern men from prosperous families, demonstrated that they shared the racist views of their parents' generation and that they would perpetuate the system of discrimination that kept African Americans in a subservient, second-class status. In their essays, the young men expressed their bitter hatred of social equality for African Americans. Thirty-one believed that African Americans should permanently remain in servitude to whites. Two students asserted the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon people by comparing African Americans to mules. A third student commented, "The two races are placed together, — the Anglo-Saxon, the most pure, proud, noble race that ever walked the earth, and the black African, the most vile, degraded, and filthy race living, . . ." A majority of thirty-nine students opposed higher education for African Americans, with twenty-five favoring education limited to reading, writing, and a trade. Twenty-five students agreed that African Americans did not possess the capacity for self-government; thirty stated that African Americans should be denied all political rights.¹

Reflecting on his students' determination to maintain the racial status quo, Holliday pessimistically forecast a bleak future for African Americans in the South. He was appalled by the thought that the views expressed in the essays typified those of the wider population of students at Southwestern Presbyterian University, where ninety-six percent of the students identified themselves as Christians and forty-percent were candidates for the ministry. Holliday was particularly concerned that his students represented the future leadership of the South. He

¹ Carl Holliday, "The Young Southerner and the Negro," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 8 (April 1909): 117-119, 121, 130-131; Morton Sosna, *In Search of the Silent South: Southern Liberals and the Race Issue* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 12.

predicted that they would return to their communities as preachers, lawyers, and politicians who would promote their views and block the course of progress for African Americans.²

Writing in 1909, Holliday's students were the product of their culture and of their time. In his work as YMCA Student Secretary for the Colleges of the South and Southwest, Willis Weatherford undoubtedly encountered college men and women across the South who shared the racist opinions and attitudes of Holliday's students. However, rather than joining Holliday in his despair, Weatherford planned to educate students on the subject of race, change their opinions, and mold them to lead their communities toward race reform. As the views of Holliday's students indicate, Weatherford faced a monumental task. Two spectacular controversies on Southern college campuses in the early 1900s indicate that Weatherford confronted obstacles more formidable than student opinion. These controversies may have influenced Weatherford's strategy as well as the content of his message to students.

Andrew Sledd, a Methodist minister and Latin professor at Emory College (Emory University), was forced to resign his position for publishing an article in the *Atlantic Monthly* in July 1902. In his article, "The Negro: Another View," Sledd argued that blacks were entitled to fundamental rights and privileges, maintained that discrimination based on race was wrong, attacked segregation and Southern social customs intended to dehumanize blacks, and attempted to dismantle the prevailing justification of lynching as a practice necessary to defend Southern womanhood.³

Sledd's article drew the attention of Mrs. W.H. Felton, columnist for the *Atlanta Journal* and wife of a Georgia legislator.⁴ A powerful woman with an established reputation throughout Georgia for excoriating politicians with her pen, Mrs. Felton was a moderate to liberal activist for government reform and women's rights but held radically conservative views with regard to

² Holliday, "The Young Southerner," 118, 131.

³ Andrew Sledd, "The Negro: Another View," *Atlantic Monthly*, 90 (July 1902): 67-71.

⁴ Mrs. Felton became the first woman U.S. senator on 3 October 1922 when Governor Thomas Hardwick appointed her to the seat vacated by the death of Tom Watson. She was replaced in the November election of the same year.

race. On August 3, 1902, she directed her wrath toward Andrew Sledd, attacking him through a letter published in the *Atlanta Constitution*. Mrs. Felton's letter tapped a wellspring of public animosity toward Sledd for his criticism of the Southern social system. The *Atlanta Constitution* reprinted Sledd's *Atlantic Monthly* article, and for two weeks, Sledd and Emory College were the subjects of news stories, editorials, and letters in the Atlanta newspapers. The public and Atlanta journalists were generally hostile toward Sledd. The *Atlanta News* accused Sledd of treason against the South, while the *Journal* stated that he was not fit to teach Southern college students. In Covington, Georgia, Sledd was burned in effigy by a group of boys.⁵

As public criticism of Sledd grew, administrators and trustees of Emory College were pressured to take action. J.E. Dickey, president of Emory College during the controversy, noted that the president of the board of trustees, along with seventeen members of the board, thought that Sledd had become a liability to the college. Several of the trustees pledged that their sons would not attend Emory as long as Sledd remained on the faculty. The precise details of how Dickey extracted a letter of resignation from Sledd are unknown, but on August 12th he submitted Sledd's resignation to the executive committee of the board.

In spite of the controversy and his forced resignation, Sledd enjoyed a successful academic career. The Emory College faculty convinced the board to grant Sledd one thousand dollars to allow him to pursue his doctoral studies at Yale University. He subsequently acquired a teaching position at the University of Florida and became president of that institution. When Emory College reorganized as Emory University, Sledd returned as a faculty member in the Candler School of Theology in 1914.⁶

The year following Sledd's forced departure from Emory College, a controversy similar to Sledd's erupted in North Carolina at Trinity College (Duke University). In 1902, John

⁵ Henry Y. Warnock, "Andrew Sledd, Southern Methodists, and the Negro: A Case History," *Journal of Southern History*, 31 (August 1965): 257-258, 261.

⁶ Warnock, "Andrew Sledd," 251, 254-255, 261-263, 268; W.J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1941; Vintage Books, 1969), 331 (page citation is to the reprint edition); Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 445.

Spencer Bassett, a professor of history at Trinity, founded and edited the *South Atlantic Quarterly*, a journal published under the auspices of the college. Through October 1903, Bassett wrote a number of editorials and articles on race issues. He was disturbed by the North Carolina Democratic Party's exploitation of the race issue to win votes, and particularly opposed the party's practice of promoting racism and white supremacy in local newspapers. Bassett published an article in the October 1903 issue of the *South Atlantic Quarterly* that examined the causes of the rise in racial tension that had occurred during the previous five years. In "Stirring the Fires of Race Antipathy," he placed the blame on white southerners. He asserted that the chief causes of racial tension were an "inherent race antipathy" on the part of whites toward African Americans, the progress of African Americans, and political party tactics. While Bassett's writings had been admired by southern liberals and northern scholars, his progressive views on race had escaped the attention of conservative leaders and the majority of southerners. To provoke a wider reaction to his views, he deliberately included a statement comparing Booker T. Washington to Robert E. Lee. He wrote, "Now, Washington is a great and good man, a Christian statesman, and take him all in all the greatest man, save General Lee, born in the South in a hundred years; . . ." ⁷

Bassett's strategy was successful. He indeed won the attention of conservative political leaders and the public in North Carolina. As in Andrew Sledd's case, powerful political and journalistic forces called for Bassett's resignation. Leaders of the North Carolina Democratic Party pressured the Trinity College Board of Trustees to fire Bassett. Josephus Daniels, publisher of the *Raleigh News and Observer* and Democratic Party activist, stirred public opposition to Bassett. Daniels reprinted Bassett's article on November 1, 1903, and fueled the controversy for six weeks through daily editorials and front page, headline stories. Newspapers throughout North Carolina joined the offensive against Bassett by attacking him personally,

⁷ William E. King, "John Spencer Bassett," and "The Bassett Affair," Duke University Archives, <http://www.lib.duke.edu/archives/history/j_s_bassett.html>, May 2004; John Spencer Bassett, "Stirring the Fires of Race Antipathy," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 2 (October 1903): 297-299, 302-303.

urging the Methodist Church to remove its support of Trinity, and recommending that parents should not send their children to the college.

As opposition to Bassett developed during the month of November, a coalition of forces defending Bassett's right to academic freedom emerged. Most of Bassett's supporters pointedly noted that they did not agree with his views on race but asserted the need to defend his right to free expression. Those who came to Bassett's defense included the president of the college, the board of trustees, the faculty, many alumni, and many students. The entire faculty of Trinity submitted letters of resignation to John C. Kilgo, president of the college, to be tendered to the board if the board demanded Bassett's resignation. Bassett also benefited from the support of John F. Crowell, a former president of the college, and Walter Hines Page, a North Carolina expatriate with a successful editing career in New York and Boston. Through the efforts of Bassett's defenders, he was able to hold his faculty position at Trinity. The controversy ended on December 2nd when the college board voted in Bassett's favor and decided not to ask for his letter of resignation.⁸

Although the Bassett case established an important precedent in the development of academic freedom, southern college personnel continued to risk dismissal for advocating unorthodox views with regard to race. Enoch M. Banks, a professor at the University of Florida, was fired from his position in 1911 for his criticism of the South in an article published in the *Independent*. John Hammond, president of Paine College, a Methodist-affiliated African American school in Augusta, Georgia, was forced to resign his position for his progressive views on race in 1912.⁹

Willis Weatherford's decision in 1908 to educate college students on race issues and involve them in solving race problems is intriguing, given the climate of opinion that existed in the early 1900s. He was most certainly aware of the controversies at Emory and at Trinity. The

⁸ William King, "Public Reaction to the Bassett Affair," "The Bassett Affair," and "John Spencer Bassett," Duke University Archives, http://www.lib.duke.edu/archives/history/j_s_bassett.html, May 2004.

⁹ Cash, *Mind of the South*, 332; Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 446; Sosna, *In Search of the Silent South*, 14.

Sledd and Bassett cases were extensively covered by newspapers and journals. Interest in the Sledd case spread to the northern press and was discussed by the *Literary Digest*, the *Independent*, the *Boston Transcript*, and the *New York Times, Journal, and Evening Post*.¹⁰ Weatherford most likely read the letters and editorials in southern newspapers stating that Sledd's and Bassett's views on race made them unfit to teach in Southern colleges. Weatherford began his work as YMCA Student Secretary for Colleges of the South and Southwest in April 1902, four months prior to the Sledd case. During his visits to college campuses, he undoubtedly discussed the Sledd and Bassett controversies with administrators, faculty, and students. He must have fully understood the potential consequences of addressing race questions on college campuses.

Weatherford may have been emboldened to engage college students in the race issue by the emergence of reform elements in the Southern Methodist Church and in the YMCA in the early 1900s. Beginning in the 1890s, the Baptist, Presbyterian, and Methodist churches launched social improvement campaigns in the South. Of these denominations, the Southern Methodists were the leaders of Protestant social activism.¹¹ Southern Methodists initiated the first denominational education programs for blacks as early as the 1880s.¹² The campaign to support education for blacks continued into the early 1900s as Methodist women organized a training school and community centers for blacks. The Southern Methodist Church also increased its funding for Paine College. During this period, a small segment of the Southern Methodist membership called on the church to provide philanthropic assistance to African Americans.¹³ It is significant that Andrew Sledd, John Spencer Bassett, and John Hammond were Methodists connected to Methodist affiliated colleges. While Willis Weatherford was not formally

¹⁰ Warnock, "Andrew Sledd," 265.

¹¹ John Lee Eighmy, "Religious Liberalism in the South During the Progressive Era," *Church History*, 38 (September 1969): 369-370.

¹² John O. Fish, "Southern Methodism and Accommodation of the Negro, 1902-1915," *Journal of Negro History*, 55 (July 1970): 201.

¹³ Warnock, "Andrew Sledd," 252-253.

associated with the Methodist Church in an official capacity, he had contemplated a career as a Methodist minister and continued to identify himself as a Methodist.

Weatherford's interest in race problems commenced at a time when the YMCA had begun a campaign to involve college students in social problems. From 1895 through 1915, college chapters of the YMCA expanded their study of social issues as well as their programs to address social problems in their local communities. During this period, student chapters organized boys' clubs, home missionary projects, employment services, social and recreational activities, industrial work, and rescue missions. This development occurred largely through the leadership of John R. Mott, national secretary of the Intercollegiate Committee of the YMCA. Mott challenged students in college campus chapters to examine national and local social problems. In 1895, he recommended that campus chapter libraries adopt leading social gospel titles.¹⁴ He subsequently emphasized the importance of social service in several annual reports. In 1909, Mott noted that during the years 1907 and 1908 that approximately five thousand students had studied *The Political and Social Significance of the Life and Teachings of Jesus*.¹⁵

Weatherford's position as International YMCA Student Secretary for the Colleges of the South and Southwest provided him with the institutional support to open the issue of race on college campuses. Whereas Bassett and Sledd had acted as individuals, Weatherford chose to work through the organizational structure of the International YMCA. In 1908, Weatherford hoped to channel the upsurge of YMCA student interest and activism in social problems toward the issue of race. In April of that year he called a meeting in Atlanta of four African American and three white YMCA leaders. The African Americans who attended the meeting were John Hope, President of Atlanta Baptist College; John Wesley Gilbert, a professor at Paine College;

¹⁴ These included Richard T. Ely, *Social Aspects of Christianity* (New York: T.Y. Crowell & Company, 1889), Samuel Lane Loomis, *Modern Cities and Their Religious Problems* (New York: Baker & Taylor, 1887), Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1890), and Josiah Strong, *Our Country* (New York: Pub. by Baker & Taylor Co. for the American Home Missionary Society, 1891).

¹⁵ C. Howard Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America* (New York: Association Press, 1951), 635-636; Jeremiah W. Jenks, *The Political and Social Significance of the Life and Teachings of Jesus* (New York, The International Committee of Young Men's Christian Associations, 1906).

and W.A. Hunton and Jesse E. Moorland, Secretaries of the Colored Department of the International Committee of the YMCA. The white participants were Dr. W.R. Lambuth, Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South; Dr. Stewart R. Roberts, professor of physiology in the Atlanta School of Physicians; and Weatherford. The purpose of the meeting, sponsored by the YMCA, was to discuss the role that college students could serve in improving relations between the races.¹⁶

Weatherford has stated that during the course of the six-hour meeting, the participants “discussed what we could do to bring about better understanding between the races . . . and how to get white and colored students to know more about each other.”¹⁷ The committee decided that students in the Home Mission classes of the College Young Men’s Christian Associations should study and discuss a textbook that explained the facts of the African American condition.¹⁸

Lambuth suggested that Weatherford write the book.¹⁹ According to Jesse Moorland, the committee in Atlanta developed an outline for the book that Weatherford subsequently ignored. Moorland contends that Weatherford did not present a draft of the book to the committee for its approval, and that the publication included material that the committee would have excised.²⁰

To gather information for the book project, Weatherford read extensively, visited black colleges, and interviewed black leaders such as Booker T. Washington and Robert Russa Moton. Weatherford’s book, *Negro Life in the South* was published by the Association Press in 1910.

¹⁶ Willis Duke Weatherford, *Negro Life in the South* (New York: Association Press, 1910; revised edition, Mnemosyne Publishing Inc. Miami: 1969), v-vi ; George Peter Antone, Jr., "Willis Duke Weatherford: An Interpretation of His Work in Race Relations, 1906-1946," Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1969, 32; John Wesley Gilbert is identified as a professor at Paine College in The United Methodist Church, General Board of Global Ministries, “The Democratic Republic of Congo,” http://gbgm-umc.org/country_profiles/country_mission_profile.cfm?Id=241, May 2004.

¹⁷ Willis Duke Weatherford, Weatherford Collection, #3831, “My Experience in Race Relations,” folder 3678c, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.

¹⁸ Weatherford, *Negro Life in the South*, v.

¹⁹ Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 68.

²⁰ Jesse Edward Moorland, “The Young Men’s Christian Association Among Negroes,” *Journal of Negro History* 9 (April 1924): 136.

Cleveland Dodge, then chairman of the Student Committee of the National YMCA, was highly impressed with the work and requested that Weatherford meet with him in New York to discuss the book. During the meeting, Dodge pledged to donate \$10,000.00 a year for ten years to help Weatherford promote the study of the book.²¹

In the opening pages of *Negro Life in the South*, Weatherford expressed his great confidence in the capacity of young college men to address the race problem. He dedicated the book “to the college men of the South, in whose tolerant spirit and unselfish interest lies the hope of the Negro race.” He underscored his hope in college men in the preface, writing

It is difficult always to think calmly and to speak without passion on a problem such as this, but a deliberate attempt has been made to state the facts in all fairness and calmness. It is believed that the educated men of the South will be glad to study these facts in the same spirit. In them alone do we have any large hope, for most of the untrained men are too full of prejudice to face fairly or solve justly such a momentous question. On the college men, therefore, rests the burden of responsibility in this matter.²²

Weatherford’s work was studied by college students throughout the South. In 1909, Weatherford used a draft of *Negro Life in the South* to teach a summer college conference course on “The Negro Problem.” Approximately half of the students at the conference voluntarily enrolled in the course. In 1911 the book was studied by two hundred seven Wake Forest College students and by a high number of students at the University of Virginia. During the following years the number of students who read the work continued to grow. By 1912, ten thousand students had studied *Negro Life in the South*.²³ By 1916, three printings of *Negro Life in the South* had been distributed to fifty thousand students.²⁴

Jerome Dowd has stated that Weatherford’s work in race relations by 1912 established the groundwork for the Southern Sociological Congress and the University Commission on

²¹ Weatherford Papers, “My Experience in Race Relations,” folder 3678c, Southern Historical Collection.

²² Weatherford, *Negro Life in the South*, iii.

²³ Ronald C. White and C. Howard Hopkins, *The Social Gospel: Religion and Reform in Changing America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1976), 107-108.

²⁴ Antone, “Willis Duke Weatherford,” 52.

Southern Race Problems.²⁵ During the first meeting of the Southern Sociological Congress, James Hardy Dillard launched the University Commission on Southern Race Questions to promote the study of race issues at white colleges and universities. Dillard indicated to Weatherford “that the success of *Negro Life in the South* was really the basis in organizing the University Race Commission.” Weatherford further maintained that in 1913 the popularity of *Negro Life in the South* influenced the University Race Commission to recommend that college courses in Sociology, Economics and History include a component on race questions.²⁶ Charles Brough reported in 1913 that most of the member colleges of the University Commission on Southern Race Questions had adopted *Negro Life in the South* and Alfred Holt Stone’s *Studies in the Race Problem* (New York: Doubleday, Page, 1908) as primary texts in their courses on race.²⁷ Although he did not have a formal position with the commission, it is to Weatherford’s credit that the mission of the organization was based on his concept of engaging college students in the study of race problems.²⁸

While students read and discussed *Negro Life in the South*, Weatherford lectured on race problems at black and white colleges across the South. He spoke to students in sociology, economics, history, and literature classes.²⁹ As an educator, Weatherford was an advocate of experiential learning. He believed that in order to bring about significant change in the racial attitudes of southern white students, the study of race issues had to be combined with direct involvement in the lives and problems of blacks. In 1933, Weatherford stated that “Some years ago I came to the conclusion that the most important thing to be done for the Negro was to create

²⁵ Jerome Dowd, *The Negro in American Life*, The Century Social Science Series, ed. Edward Alsworth Ross, (New York: The Century Co.), 550.

²⁶ W.D. Weatherford to Robert Eleazer, Educational Director of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation, 3 April 1942, Willis Duke Weatherford Papers, collection #3831, folder 3674, Manuscripts Department, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

²⁷ Charles Hillman Brough, “Work of the Commission of Southern Universities on the Race Question,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, XLIX (September 1913): 49.

²⁸ Antone, “Willis Duke Weatherford,” 68-69.

²⁹ Weatherford to Robert Eleazer, 3 April 1942, folder 3674, Southern Historical Collection.

an open- minded sympathy for and understanding of him on the part of the white people.”

Weatherford noted that part of the approach to bringing about a sympathy and understanding for blacks was to “get people to undertake specific tasks of betterment The educational process is indispensable but it is not adequate, if thought of in a purely academic sense.”³⁰

As he lectured to students in Southern colleges and universities following the publication of *Negro Life in the South*, Weatherford encouraged students to engage in practical service projects for blacks within their college communities. He specifically suggested that they form discussion clubs or recreation programs for janitors and other workers, visit African Americans in jail, and provide assistance to African American churches. In describing student reaction to his suggestions, Weatherford stated that there was a “widespread, enthusiastic response.” He recounted that students at various schools put his suggested program into action by offering night classes and discussion clubs for janitors and maids. Weatherford particularly noted projects at two universities. Faculty wives joined students in converting an old house for use as a meeting place at one school, while students at another institution formed a city welfare association for African American skilled workers. Weatherford believed that the student projects succeeded in changing the attitudes of white students. He quoted one student who said, “Formerly I just did not think of the Negro. He was not a part of my responsibility. Now I feel like fighting when I see a street car conductor acting rudely toward one.”³¹

Weatherford’s efforts to educate college students on race issues and involve them in solving race problems increased his stature among reform minded Southerners. However, he did encounter opposition to his pioneering work in race relations. Some of his best friends, concerned that he would ruin a promising career by speaking and writing on race, attempted to discourage him. They asked, “Why destroy your hearty welcome to Colleges in the South by publishing on the Negro?” A sociology professor at one Southern college rejected a request by the YMCA leaders at his school to teach *Negro Life in the South*. When Weatherford later

³⁰ W. D. Weatherford, “Changing Attitudes of Southern Students,” *Journal of Negro Education*, 2 (April 1933): 147.

³¹ Weatherford, “Changing Attitudes of Southern Students,” 148.

appeared at that college to give a lecture, the sociology professor, sitting with other faculty members on a stage, turned his back to Weatherford while he spoke. However, Weatherford found most college faculty to be cooperative. He wrote, “While many faculty people thought me a little queer for being so interested in the Negro, they were fair enough to invite me into their classes to discuss the subject and I gained far more than I lost in standing among college professors.”³²

In 1912, Weatherford began his tenure as President of the Blue Ridge Assembly, a position that he held until 1944. The original mission of Blue Ridge was to provide training and religious instruction for YMCA college students, secretaries, and other Christian workers. As the founder of the Assembly, Weatherford envisioned the facility as an “interdenominational training institute for the building of Christian community.”³³ From the beginning he intended that the conference center would be far more than a summer camp that provided light inspirational Bible study and recreation. Blue Ridge provided a forum through which Weatherford continued to educate college students on the subject of race relations. Each summer he coordinated a program of courses and lectures that included the study of race as well as religion, sociology, economics, and politics. These courses and lectures were offered by prominent educators, theologians, politicians, and businessmen from across the country.³⁴

Weatherford believed that race relations in the South would be improved if “the better elements” of both races encountered one another. International YMCA policy made contact between black and white college students difficult by segregating summer college conferences. While white students gathered for the first time in the summer of 1912 at the Blue Ridge

³² Weatherford, “My Experience in Race Relations,” folder 3678c, Southern Historical Collection.

³³ Weatherford, “A Venture of Faith,” folder 2687b, Southern Historical Collection.

³⁴ Wilma Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, provides a list of educators who taught courses or lectured at Blue Ridge from 1912 to 1944. See pages 107-113. These included John Mott, O.E. Brown, Dean of the Vanderbilt School of Religion; Edwin Mims; John Kesler; William J. Hutchins, President of Berea College; Samuel Chiles Mitchell, President of the University of South Carolina; W.L. and E.M. Poteat, of Wake Forest and Furman Colleges; William Jennings Bryan; Thomas Bickett and Robert Glenn, Governors of North Carolina; C.H. Brough, Governor of Arkansas; A.H. Roberts, Governor of Tennessee; Clarence Poe; Charles Brown, Dean, Yale University; Henry Sloan Coffin, Union Theological Seminary; Harry Emerson Fosdick; Richard Niebuhr; and, Sherwood Eddy.

Assembly, black students held their first summer conference at Kings Mountain, North Carolina in the same year.³⁵

Correspondence between Weatherford and Booker T. Washington indicates that in the early planning stages of Blue Ridge, Weatherford hoped to include black college women on his staff as waitresses and maids. Weatherford may have been motivated by his own prejudice that black women were more suited to working as servants than white college students. However, he clearly believed that this method of bringing white and black students together would be of great value in improving race relations. In a letter to Booker T. Washington, Weatherford explained his reasoning:

Knowing that many of your girls have to work during the summer in order that they may put themselves through the winter, I thought that we might be able to use a number as waitresses and chambermaids in these buildings. I am very anxious to have a group of very high grade, industrially trained negro girls for two reasons. First, they will enable some two thousand of the most open-minded and best trained white people in the South to come into contact with the high grade of work which these girls, who have had genuine training, do. This, in my judgment, will be worth a tremendous amount, inasmuch as practically every college in the entire South will be represented in this Conference this summer.

In the second place, I believe it will be a great blessing to these girls to find how open-minded a group of college men and women can be and are. This would help on the other side in giving confidence to your girls in the best type of Southern white men. We, of course, cannot pay them princely wages, but will be glad to pay a little more than is generally paid in that section.

I shall be on hand the first month of this Conference, and if your girls would like to have a series of lectures on some practical, religious or intellectual themes, I would be glad to undertake to give these myself. I think you can trust us to give to your girls the kind of treatment they ought to have.³⁶

In his reply to Weatherford, Washington expressed a willingness to cooperate with Weatherford's plan. Washington responded:

³⁵ Hopkins, *History of the YMCA*, 638. Ronald White notes the establishment of an exchange program that allowed interracial meetings at the two centers. He does not explain how or when the program was created. See Ronald C. White, Jr., *Liberty and Justice for All, Racial Reform and the Social Gospel (1877-1925)* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 195.

³⁶ W.D. Weatherford to Booker T. Washington, 20 April 1912. The Booker T. Washington Papers, Vol. 11, 523-524, University of Illinois Press. <http://www.historycooperative.org/btw/Vol.11/html/523.html> May 2004.

As soon as your letter was received I promptly took it up with Mrs. Washington to see what could be done in the way of providing you with the help you need at your conference. Mrs. Washington feels that she can provide you with as many as fifteen or twenty girls, and that she can provide all of the chambermaids during the vacation period.

. . . . I thank you sincerely for giving us the opportunity of supplying girls for this work and I am sure it will be helpful to them and to the persons with whom they come in contact. I should think the lectures which you mention as willing to give to these girls would be a most helpful thing and I very much hope you can see your way clear to do this.³⁷

Weatherford's plan to bring Tuskegee and Hampton Institute students to Blue Ridge apparently failed. Primary source documents for the Blue Ridge Assembly prior to 1917 are scant. Weatherford's papers in the Southern Historical Collection begin with the year 1917. There are no references to black students working at Blue Ridge in Weatherford's writings or in secondary sources. The evidence indicates that from 1912 through 1944, the staff at Blue Ridge came from white colleges. Weatherford's inability to recruit black students for his staff may have resulted from the problem of providing separate dining and lodging accommodations.

At Blue Ridge Weatherford applied the principles of experiential learning to the race education of Southern white college students. Weatherford recruited approximately one hundred college men and women to staff the Blue Ridge Assembly each year. Weatherford's high standards for his staff required that they had completed two years of college, had a "B" average or better, and were actively engaged in the religious life of their campuses. Staff members worked five hours a day without pay, and were required to take two college level courses in subjects such as Religion, Social Problems, or Economic Problems during their three months at Blue Ridge. The courses on social or economic problems usually included a component on race issues.³⁸

Weatherford believed that one legacy of slavery was a division of labor in the South intended to keep African Americans in an inferior status. He thought that by custom Southern whites refused to do many types of manual labor that they regarded as "the slave's province" and

³⁷ Booker T. Washington to Willis Duke Weatherford, 27 April 1912. The Booker T. Washington Papers, Vol. 11, pp. 530-531, University of Illinois Press. <http://www.historycooperative.org/btw/Vol.11/html/530.html> May 2004.

³⁸ Hopkins, *History of the YMCA*, 616-617; Weatherford, "A Venture of Faith," folder 2687b, Southern Historical Collection.

as such beneath their status. A student at Southwestern Presbyterian University in Memphis expressed this view of manual labor in 1909 in his prescription for solving the race problem in the South. He commented that African Americans should be denied all political rights and all education except manual training. The student concluded that once this occurred, “the negro will not be the detestable brute that he is today, but will realize his dependence on the white race and will do that class of work which a white man is above doing we do not want them slaves; but what we do want is for them to constitute the entire class of common laborers”³⁹

Weatherford thought that blacks, aware that manual labor kept them in an inferior status, resented labor. He believed that this conception of labor held by whites and African Americans contributed to racial tension. Weatherford also thought that the refusal to engage in manual labor would have a deleterious effect on the character of white southerners. As one who had worked hard at manual tasks as a child on his parents’ farm, Weatherford observed that

Labor seems to bring out the best qualities of human nature; it seems to give stability and strength to character. No nation or individual can hope to build real character where labor is despised. Perhaps this is one reason for the frequent degeneration of the idle rich.⁴⁰

Weatherford hoped to change the attitudes of white southerners with regard to race and labor by requiring his staff members to do kinds of work that many of them were unaccustomed to doing. Weatherford sought “to raise up a new generation who believed that any task which added richness to human existence was a sacred task.”⁴¹

Weatherford has recounted that when Blue Ridge opened in 1912, “white college women did not work in public places.” His friends told him “you can’t get college women to come down here and work.”⁴² Weatherford and the students he recruited proved his friends wrong.

Weatherford forbade his staff members from saying the word “nigger,” and required them to

³⁹ Holliday, “The Young Southerner and the Negro,” 123.

⁴⁰ Weatherford, *Negro Life in the South*, 32.

⁴¹ Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 84.

⁴² Weatherford, “Convocation,” folder 3763, Southern Historical Collection.

carry baggage, wait on tables, and help maintain the grounds. He recalled two occasions when students refused to do their tasks. A young man assigned the job of loading luggage into an elevator refused to do so because he said it was “nigger’s work.”⁴³ A young woman serving as a waitress in the dining hall left her station and returned to her room. When Weatherford found her, she tearfully explained, “I can’t serve a table. That is what niggers do in my home.”⁴⁴ Weatherford counseled both students and emphasized that if they wanted to continue at Blue Ridge they would have to do the work they had been assigned. The majority of college students recruited by Weatherford cooperated with his program. In fact, the Blue Ridge Assembly became so popular that Weatherford usually had a waiting list of students who wanted to serve on the summer staff.⁴⁵

Weatherford took great pride in the men and women who served at Blue Ridge. Writing in 1939, he commented that the men and women of the Blue Ridge staff constituted “perhaps the largest single contribution to the South.” Of the twenty-six hundred who had served by 1939, eight hundred chose professions in the ministry, foreign missions, social work, or as YMCA secretaries. He wrote, “This contribution alone would justify every cent ever spent on Blue Ridge.”⁴⁶ Weatherford believed that the Blue Ridge staff would play an important role in improving race relations throughout the South. He commented, “The spirit of cooperation developed there (Blue Ridge) has sent thousands of the choicest College students back to their respective Colleges or out into the world as advocates of better racial understanding.”⁴⁷

Although Weatherford organized courses and conferences on race at Blue Ridge and invited blacks to speak to students, the interracial gatherings apparently did not generate a great deal of local opposition. Conferences at Blue Ridge were regularly reported in the most

⁴³ Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 86-87.

⁴⁴ Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 87.

⁴⁵ Hopkins, *History of the YMCA*, 617.

⁴⁶ Weatherford, “A Venture of Faith,” folder 2687b, Southern Historical Collection.

⁴⁷ Weatherford, “My Experience in Race Relations,” folder 3678c, Southern Historical Collection.

prominent local newspaper, the *Asheville Citizen*. News accounts of meetings mentioned the fact that delegates studied race questions and were addressed by representatives from organizations such as the University Race Commission and the Commission for Inter-racial Cooperation. The stories also listed the names of black speakers such as George Washington Carver.⁴⁸

Weatherford attributed one fire at the Assembly to the work of an arsonist, and had to contend with occasional anonymous threats, but otherwise did not record any instances of violence. The absence of protest may have been due to the remote location of Blue Ridge, which afforded interracial conferences a degree of privacy that would not have been possible in a Southern city. Also, Weatherford apparently exercised some control over media coverage of conference events. Once when a reporter photographed three black conference delegates in conversation with a white southern university professor, Weatherford took possession of the photograph and the negative.⁴⁹

Although the Blue Ridge Assembly seems to have been free from opposition in the local community, controversies related to Assembly policies developed among students. The students who participated in YMCA and YWCA conferences at Blue Ridge held a range of opinion with regard to race questions. The presence of African Americans at Blue Ridge was an issue that divided YMCA and YWCA students. The majority of YMCA and YWCA students supported the policy of inviting black speakers; however, there were students who objected. The division among students is reflected by an incident that occurred in 1924. The YMCA segregated its student summer conferences. White students in the South met at Blue Ridge, while black students met at centers in Kings Mountain, North Carolina and at Wavelands, Mississippi. In 1924 Howard Kester, a YMCA student worker at Lynchburg College and later an activist associated with the Highlander Folk School, proposed that the student conferences should be integrated. His recommendation was rejected during a YMCA policy meeting at Blue Ridge.

⁴⁸ "Y.M.C.A. To Begin Summer Activities at Blue Ridge Assembly Grounds Friday," *Asheville Citizen*, 15 June 1923.

⁴⁹ Dykeman, *Prophet of Plenty*, 98-99.

Kester and the liberal students who supported his proposal were forced to settle for the compromise of inviting blacks to speak at their conferences. The compromise was tested during the summer of 1924 when George Washington Carver arrived at Blue Ridge to participate in a student conference. Students from Florida and Louisiana objected so strenuously to Carver's presence at Blue Ridge that they declared that they would walk out during his keynote address. The walk-out was avoided through the intercession of Will W. Alexander. Alexander, the director of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation, was in attendance at the conference and convinced the students not to protest. Carver delivered his address without incident and received a standing ovation from the students.⁵⁰

During Carver's visit to Blue Ridge, liberal students opposed Weatherford's policies of accommodating black guests. In an era when law and custom forbade blacks and whites from sharing lodging or dining facilities, Weatherford worked out various arrangements for accommodating blacks. Weatherford set up a private dining area adjacent to the main Assembly dining hall where blacks took their meals. However, at least until 1939, black conferees were responsible for making their own lodging arrangements in Asheville.⁵¹ Kester felt that this policy insulted Carver's dignity and convinced his fellow delegates from Lynchburg to rent a cottage at Blue Ridge for Carver where they also served his meals. Carver and Kester established a lifelong friendship during his stay at Blue Ridge.⁵²

⁵⁰ Anthony P. Dunbar, *Against the Grain: Southern Radicals and Prophets, 1929-1959* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1981), 21-22; Robert F. Martin, "A Prophet's Pilgrimage: The Religious Radicalism of Howard Anderson Kester, 1921-1941," *Journal of Southern History* 48 (November 1982): 514-515.

⁵¹ Willis Duke Weatherford Papers, Collection, #3831, Letter from Willis Duke Weatherford to V.L. Roy, 25 May 1928; Letter from W.C. Jackson to V.L. Roy, 21 June 1928, folder 773, Weatherford Papers, #3831, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina. On 27 June 1939, Weatherford sent a letter to Constance Rumbough regarding her accommodations for a Fellowship of Reconciliation Regional Conference at Blue Ridge. Weatherford anticipated that Rumbough, who was white, would bring an African American woman with her. Weatherford forwarded a copy of the letter to Rumbough to H.W. Sanders, a staff member at Blue Ridge. At the bottom of the letter, Weatherford wrote a note to Sanders instructing him that if an African American woman came with Ms. Rumbough he should provide her with a private room with a bath. Copy of Letter to Constance Rumbough from Willis Weatherford, 27 June 1939 forwarded by Weatherford to H.W. Sanders, Blue Ridge Assembly, folder 2611, Weatherford Papers, #3831, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.

⁵² Dunbar, *Against the Grain*, 22; Martin, "Religious Radicalism of Howard Kester," 515.

Dunbar's interpretation of the incident regarding Carver's accommodations at Blue Ridge implies that Weatherford, with an established reputation as a liberal, was a hypocrite for complying with state segregation laws. Egerton's account suggests that Blue Ridge administrators were negligent and states that no provisions were made for Carver. Martin indicates that Weatherford believed that an African American of Carver's stature deserved accommodations that were more hospitable than the standard policy allowed. He suggests that Kester's plan of renting a cottage for Carver was a compromise condoned by Weatherford. Because Weatherford, as the president of Blue Ridge, had to approve the rental of the cottage, Martin's interpretation is highly credible.⁵³

The issue of the presence of blacks at Blue Ridge emerged again in 1928. During the late spring and summer of that year, Weatherford encountered serious opposition to his program at Blue Ridge from a number of Southern college presidents. The presidents were alarmed by the content of the race education courses and were concerned about the contact between white students and black conference participants.

In May 1928, V.L.Roy, President of the State Normal College in Natchitoches, Louisiana, corresponded with a number of presidents of southern colleges and universities to warn them of the training that women students received at Blue Ridge during YWCA conferences. He was particularly concerned by a complaint registered by three students at the State Normal College. The women, who had attended a YWCA conference at Blue Ridge, reported that blacks had been served in the dining hall and housed in dormitories at the Assembly.⁵⁴

⁵³ John Egerton, *A Mind to Stay Here; Profiles from the South* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 75; Dunbar, *Against the Grain*, 22; Martin, "Religious Radicalism," 515. Martin and Egerton do not mention Weatherford by name, but since he was the president of the Blue Ridge Assembly he was responsible for accommodations for guests.

⁵⁴ Roy corresponded with James H. Kirkland, President of Vanderbilt University; John C. Calfee, President of the Asheville Normal School; J.L. Beeson, Acting President of Georgia State College for Women; Joe Cook, President of the State Teachers College in Hattiesburg, Mississippi; Pierce Butler, President of Newcomb College, New Orleans; and D.B. Raulins, President of Mansfield Female College, Mansfield, Louisiana. See Weatherford Papers, Collection #3831, "Negro Delegates," folder 773, Manuscripts Department, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

In a letter dated May 2, 1928, Roy informed John C. Calfee, President of the Asheville Normal School, that for two years the administrators of Louisiana colleges and universities had been concerned about race issues that had arisen with regard to YWCA conferences. Roy noted that Louisiana college administrators had held two conferences at Newcomb College of Tulane University to discuss the situation. He expressed his alarm about the “association of the white college girls of the South with negro delegates.” Roy described the situation as a grave one and stated that most college presidents were probably unaware of the practices at Blue Ridge. He encouraged Calfee to interview students at the Asheville Normal School who had attended a conference in 1927.⁵⁵ During the same month, Roy sent a similar letter to James H. Kirkland, President of Vanderbilt University. He suggested that Kirkland question his students about a proposal to integrate dining and lodging accommodations for YWCA delegates at Blue Ridge.⁵⁶ Joe Cook, President of State Teachers College in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, also received a letter from Roy. In his reply to Roy, Cook stated that personnel at the State Teachers College had been concerned about the teachings on race issues at Blue Ridge for some time.⁵⁷ Cook complained that following their return from a conference at Blue Ridge, a group of students at his college invited several black teachers to speak on race issues in the lobby of a dormitory. The students organized this discussion without the permission of the college. Cook brought this incident to the attention of the YWCA leadership and received an unsatisfactory response.⁵⁸ J.L. Beeson, Acting President of Georgia State College for Women, corresponded with Weatherford and

⁵⁵ V.L. Roy, Natchitoches, Louisiana to John C. Calfee, Asheville, North Carolina, 2 May 1928, Willis Duke Weatherford Papers, collection # 3831, folder 773, Manuscripts Department, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

⁵⁶ V.L. Roy, Natchitoches, Louisiana to James H. Kirkland, Nashville, Tennessee, 15 May 1928, Willis Duke Weatherford Papers, collection #3831, folder 773, Manuscripts Department, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

⁵⁷ Joe Cook, Hattiesburg, Mississippi to V.L. Roy, Natchitoches, Louisiana, 12 May 1928, Willis Duke Weatherford Papers, collection #3831, folder 773, Manuscripts Department, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

⁵⁸ Joe Cook, Hattiesburg, Mississippi to W.D. Weatherford, 12 May 1928, Willis Duke Weatherford Papers, collection #3831, folder 773, Manuscripts Department, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

requested that he clarify the position at Blue Ridge with regard to the subject of social equality. Kirkland, Calfee, Cook, and Beeson forwarded their letters from Roy to Weatherford. Calfee indicated sympathy with Weatherford's position in a handwritten note at the bottom of his letter in which he said, "My dear Dr. Weatherford: Please read and return. Make suggestions concerning reply I shall make."⁵⁹

Weatherford addressed the issues raised in the letters in correspondence to Roy dated 25 May, 1928. He stated that the National Council of the YWCA planned conference programs and scheduled speakers for their conferences at Blue Ridge. He noted that occasionally a speaker or student might say something that he did not agree with, but he argued that the Blue Ridge Assembly and the YWCA could not be held responsible for the statements of students, YWCA personnel, or guest speakers. He strongly supported the YWCA, stating that their programs were sound and useful. Weatherford emphasized that the YWCA and other organizations meeting at Blue Ridge did not promote social intermingling between the races but encouraged students to respect the personality and value the work of all peoples. Weatherford strongly defended the practice of inviting blacks to Blue Ridge. He stated that Blue Ridge as an institution promoted the idea of understanding race problems from the black perspective. He noted that this principle required providing black leaders with opportunities to discuss race issues in public settings with white leaders.

Weatherford clarified Blue Ridge policy with regard to seating blacks in the Assembly dining room. Weatherford related an incident that had occurred a few years prior to 1928. He stated that a young woman affiliated with a college in the South requested permission to allow a black speaker to dine in the main Assembly hall. Weatherford refused the request, saying that he believed to do so would be "dogmatizing," given the current opinion in the South. He undoubtedly included this story to provide evidence that he enforced the policy of not allowing blacks in the main dining hall. However, it also illustrates that young people from the South were sometimes the source of progressive ideas. Weatherford made a special point of the fact

⁵⁹ V.L. Roy to Calfee, 2 May 1928, Southern Historical Collection.

that the woman in this case was a native of Georgia. Weatherford stated that blacks took their meals in a private dining room at Blue Ridge.⁶⁰

Roy's reply to Weatherford clearly indicates that he did not accept Weatherford's explanation. He insisted that YWCA programs at Blue Ridge and two other conference centers had corrupted the views of State Normal College students with regard to race issues. Roy stated that, ". . . these young women have, every one of them, returned to us as thoroughly and fully unsound on the question of social equality between the races as the most ardent negrophile could desire." He insisted that students from his school had witnessed white members of the National YWCA eating at the same table with blacks at Blue Ridge. To Weatherford's mild admission that a student or speaker might occasionally say something controversial, Roy countered that lecturers at Blue Ridge made statements that were ". . . directly subversive of the views that we hold regarding the race question in this part of the country." Roy stated his conviction that the National YWCA personnel and administrators at Blue Ridge were obligated to respect the views of the South with regard to the issue of social equality. Referring to the National YWCA headquartered in New York, Roy angrily concluded by stating that they ". . . do not know how right the white people of the South are regarding the negro question or how determined they are to uphold the standards that now exist."⁶¹

The controversy continued into the summer of 1928. D.B. Raulins, President of Mansfield Female College in Mansfield, Louisiana, requested an explanation of Blue Ridge policy from Weatherford in a letter dated 3 July, 1928. Raulins stated that he had received numerous communications with regard to race teachings at Blue Ridge from Dr. Pierce Butler of Newcomb College and others. He requested that Weatherford provide him with more information regarding the situation. Raulins's comments indicate that he was not as conservative as Roy and Butler. He thoughtfully commented,

⁶⁰ W.D. Weatherford to V.L. Roy, 25 May 1928, folder 773, Southern Historical Collection.

⁶¹ V.L. Roy to W.D. Weatherford, 28 May 1928, folder 773, Southern Historical Collection.

Certainly we cannot sidestep the issue of race relationships. To be christians we are compelled to face it as such. I feel that much is at stake at this point. Whatever we do regarding it will go far toward determining the attitude of our student generation. For us to ignore it is to brand our religion as far less courageous than the type that must appeal to our young people. . . . Your attitude, hitherto, has led me to feel that you are both intelligent and christian in your method of dealing with the question, especially as it relates to the negro.⁶²

In his reply to Raulins, Weatherford noted that he had “received several letters from others on the subject.” He stated that since his first letter to Roy dated May 25, 1928, that two YWCA conferences had been held at Blue Ridge. Weatherford pointed out that during one conference, a black representative of the YWCA discussed race issues and that her comments were of a constructive and helpful nature. Weatherford stated that W.C. Jackson, the instructor of a recent YWCA conference session on race problems, was a southern college professor who respected the traditions of the South. Weatherford continued by asserting his own credentials as a southerner and stating that he had no intention of subverting the best interest of the South.⁶³ Raulins replied to Weatherford and assured him that he was satisfied with Weatherford’s explanation. He wrote,

It is exasperating to me for people to keep raising these matters, especially college people, and more especially those pretending to be Christian. Seemingly there is an inability or an unwillingness, perhaps both, on the part of some to see the matter calmly. I suppose we shall come to find that Christians are doing the business of the Kingdom as much damage as any others. . . . Again thanking you for your reply, and assuring you of my deep interest in your work . . .⁶⁴

W.C. Jackson, Chairman of the North Carolina Commission on Inter-Racial Cooperation in 1928 and Vice-President of the North Carolina College for Women in Greensboro, was the instructor in question in Roy’s and Raulins’s letters. Jackson had directed a session at Blue Ridge entitled “The Changing South.” Jackson’s program, which placed “considerable emphasis on inter-racial matters,” was attended by several of Roy’s students. Jackson defended Weatherford’s program in a letter to Roy dated June 21, 1928. Jackson prefaced his explanation

⁶² D.B. Raulins to W.D. Weatherford, 3 July 1928, Southern Historical Collection.

⁶³ W.D. Weatherford to D.B. Raulins, 13 July 1928, Southern Historical Collection.

⁶⁴ D.B. Raulins to W.D. Weatherford, 17 July 1928, Southern Historical Collection.

by confronting Roy's claim that southern students were being corrupted by northern outsiders. Jackson countered by declaring his character and identity as a Southerner. With regard to the presence of blacks at Blue Ridge during the conference he attended, Jackson stated that the delegates had made their own food and lodging arrangements in Asheville. He justified the policy of inviting blacks by writing,

I am fully convinced that, as a result of the presence of these delegates, the students have a much more intelligent comprehension of what the inter-racial situation is than they had before It will not contribute to the inter-mingling of white and black or lead to inter-marriage and eating together. Their presence contributes to knowledge and understanding. The policy at Blue Ridge is to invite fraternal delegates and keep them separated. The presence of fraternal delegates at the Conferences is a fruitful source of such understanding, and, in my opinion, will help rather than hurt the situation in the South and the Nation.⁶⁵

Leslie Blanchard, director of the Council of Christian Associations, Student Division of the YMCA, wrote a letter of support to Weatherford on 28 July, 1928. Blanchard concluded the letter by saying, "I hope the Louisiana presidents will settle down before the college year begins."⁶⁶ The flurry of letters slowed by the end of July. Weatherford's and Jackson's explanations of Blue Ridge policy apparently ended the controversy.

V.L. Roy's failed attempt to unite college presidents in opposition to Weatherford's race education program at Blue Ridge is interesting for a number of reasons. It demonstrated the presence of conservative, racist opinion among academic leaders that circumscribed the race education program at Blue Ridge. Weatherford, mindful of this body of thought, was unable to fully integrate accommodations at the Assembly. The incident also demonstrates a lack of consensus among university educators with regard to race education. While Roy feared that education would lead to social equality and fought to maintain the racial status quo in the South, Kirkland, Jackson, and others supported Weatherford's approach. The support of prominent educators such as Kirkland was critical in that it allowed Weatherford to continue his work. The fact that young women were returning to their colleges "thoroughly and fully unsound on the

⁶⁵ W.C. Jackson to V.L. Roy, 21 June 1928, folder 773, Southern Historical Collection.

⁶⁶ Leslie Blanchard to Willis Weatherford, folder 773, Southern Historical Collection.

question of social equality,” and inviting African Americans to speak in their dormitories provided evidence that Weatherford’s program was indeed changing the attitudes of southern white college students.

In 1919, Weatherford’s campaign to provide race education for southern college students moved from summer conference instruction at the Blue Ridge Assembly to the more formal academic environment of the Southern YMCA College in Nashville, later renamed the YMCA Graduate School. As founder and president of the college from 1919-1936, Weatherford’s ambition called for the school to provide YMCA secretaries with a well-rounded graduate education. According to Weatherford’s conception, the mission of the college was to prepare students to administer YMCA facilities, provide a thorough grounding in religious instruction, and offer graduate level liberal arts courses.⁶⁷

Throughout his involvement with the YMCA, Weatherford had ardently promoted the view that YMCA secretaries should work to resolve social problems endemic to the communities they served. He believed that the YMCA Graduate School should educate students on social problems and help them develop the leadership skills necessary to serve this vital role. In particular, Weatherford expected YMCA secretaries to help communities address and resolve issues related to race. Weatherford articulated this view in a 1925 letter to John D. Rockefeller, Jr. in which he stated that the mission of the Southern College was to provide special training for secretaries in the fields of racial understanding, industrial relationships, and rural problems. He emphasized his conviction that the South needed broad-minded leaders who approached these social issues from a religious perspective.⁶⁸

The need for community leadership in race relations was critically important in 1919. As African American veterans returned home following World War I, communities across the United States experienced a resurgence of racial violence. Through the YMCA Graduate

⁶⁷ Antone, “Willis Duke Weatherford,” 126, 133.

⁶⁸ W.D. Weatherford to John D. Rockefeller, Jr., 30 January 1925, Willis Duke Weatherford Papers, collection #3831, folder 105, Manuscripts Department, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

School, Weatherford attempted to change the racial attitudes of southern students and prepare them for community leadership. He sought to accomplish these goals by following the model of education he had developed at the Blue Ridge Assembly. He engaged students in a program that combined experiential learning with the study of sociology, anthropology, and black culture and history. During the college's first year of operation, Weatherford developed and taught "Applied Anthropology." This course was required of all Graduate School students and served as an elective for Vanderbilt University and Peabody College students.⁶⁹ Students enrolled in this course were required to participate in a field trip to a Rosenwald school. Among other assignments, they were also instructed to read twenty-four poems by black authors, be prepared to recite selected poems, and to study the biographies of each author.⁷⁰ Antone notes that given the climate of racial hostility in 1919, requiring southern students to take a course on race was a rather bold move on Weatherford's part.⁷¹ According to Weatherford, the Graduate School's courses on race indeed broke new ground in education. In a letter dated 1924 he stated, "the school stands for an open-minded attitude on all great religious, social and interracial problems. . . so far as I know, our College is the first institution in America to put on a graduate course on race problems."⁷² Weatherford iterated his belief that the YMCA Graduate School offered the first graduate level courses on race in a letter to Robert Eleazer, Educational Director of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation in 1942. Weatherford stated,

In the early years—1909 on—I spoke in a great many of colleges to the classes in Sociology, Economics and occasionally History, and occasionally Literature on Race Problems; and in a good many institutions there were lectures on Race Problems in these

⁶⁹ Antone, "Willis Duke Weatherford," 134.

⁷⁰ W. D. Weatherford, Course Assignment, May 5, 1924, Willis Duke Weatherford Papers, collection #3831, folder 16, Manuscripts Department, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

⁷¹ Antone, "Willis Duke Weatherford," 134.

⁷² Willis Duke Weatherford to Ashby Jones, 1 May 1924, Willis Duke Weatherford Papers, collection #3831, folder 38, Manuscripts Department, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

courses with reference material. The first graduate courses, as far as I know . . . ,were at the YMCA Graduate School under my direction.⁷³

In subsequent years, Weatherford taught other courses on race at the Graduate School. These included “Studies in Racial Problems,” “Psychological Anthropology,” “Sociological Anthropology,” and “Studies in Racial Understanding.” The collection of Weatherford’s papers includes the descriptions for these courses developed by Weatherford. These course descriptions indicate Weatherford’s point of view and reveal what he hoped to accomplish through teaching these courses. Summer quarter courses for the Graduate School were taught at the Blue Ridge Assembly. In 1924, Weatherford taught “Studies in Racial Problems” as a three-hour summer course at Blue Ridge. He described the course as follows:

Studies in Racial Problems, with special reference to the Negro. An attempt will be made to evaluate the present economical, social, and religious movement among Negroes. Also, an attempt to work out a possible basis of cooperation between the races.⁷⁴

During the regular terms of the Graduate School in 1925, Weatherford taught two courses listed under the Anthropology Department. He described these courses as follows:

11 (b) Psychological: A study of elements entering into the present mental development and cultural status of the African Negro. The influence of climate, isolation, and economic relations will be studied to discover the origin and growth of the social and religious mental attitudes of the African. This African background will be used as a starting point for the study of slavery and the introduction of the Negro into America.

11 (c) Sociological: A study of the present status of the Negro in America. His economic, educational, religious and social status will be considered. First hand supervised investigation of Negro life and institutions will enter into the quarter’s work. The question of proper relations between white and black will be carefully considered. Full discussions will be had of the great issues involved.⁷⁵

An assignment sheet for one course included a list of readings and asked students to consider the questions “Is civilization mainly a matter of capacity or of environment?” “Is race prejudice

⁷³ W.D. Weatherford to Robert Eleazer, 3 April 1942, Willis Duke Weatherford Papers, collection #3831, folder 3674, Manuscripts Department, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

⁷⁴ W.D. Weatherford, College Courses documents, folder 16, Southern Historical Collection.

⁷⁵ W. D. Weatherford, College Courses documents, folder 16, Southern Historical Collection.

acquired or innate?” and “Have all races a contribution to make to civilization?”⁷⁶ In the 1930-1931 academic year, Weatherford directed a correspondence course entitled, “Studies in Racial Understanding.” Offered in conjunction with the YMCA Graduate School in Chicago, the goal of this course was:

to help secretaries and others discover the sources of racial antipathy and racial prejudice; present forms which such reactions take and the possible ways of correcting them.⁷⁷

In addition to teaching courses, Weatherford directed a number of master’s theses. Four theses directed by Weatherford that addressed racial topics included, “The Origin of Racial Attitudes in the Adolescent Boy” (1925), “The Recreation and Leisure of the Negro Boy in Nashville” (1932), “How Do the Attitudes of Students Toward Persons of Other Races Change and Develop?” by Virginia Neel (1933), and “The Treatment of the Negro Woman During Slavery,” by Josephine Abrams (1936).⁷⁸

During his tenure as president of the Graduate School, Weatherford sought to make the college “a center for race studies in the South.”⁷⁹ To accomplish this goal, Weatherford established a library of books and other documents related to race and engineered the development of a race relations department. Weatherford appealed to northern philanthropists for the funding to carry out his program. Several of Weatherford’s allies petitioned philanthropic organizations on his behalf. These letters indicate that southern leaders highly regarded Weatherford’s work in race relations. In 1924, C.B. Wilmer wrote Charles Henry Brent, member of the Board of Trustees of the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Fund, in an appeal for funds to underwrite a course on race relations at the Graduate School. Wilmer’s letter was a

⁷⁶ W.D. Weatherford, Topics for Theses documents, Willis Duke Weatherford Papers, collection #3831, folder 115, Manuscripts Department, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

⁷⁷ W.D. Weatherford, Correspondence courses documents, Willis Duke Weatherford Papers, collection #3831, folder 1226, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

⁷⁸ W. D. Weatherford, YMCA Graduate School thesis documents, Willis Duke Weatherford Papers, collection #3831, folders 1544, 1761, 2158, Manuscripts Department, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

⁷⁹ Antone, “Willis Duke Weatherford,” 136.

testimony to Weatherford's personality and to the need in the South for his approach to resolving race problems. Wilmer expressed his support for Weatherford's program stating,

. . . the work of the YMCA calls, in this crisis of the church and of the world . . . for a class of leaders who are trained to love the Lord their God . . .; and who shall be able to exhibit in their several communities a type of Christian manhood which shall reflect the spiritual-humanness of Him who was Son of Man and Son of God. . . the only solution of race relations here in the South—a problem which is interwoven with our whole society—lies in the training of selected white men who shall be able to combine conservatism with progress; and while respecting the traditions of the past and present feelings and local conditions, can feel sympathetic with the needs and aspirations of colored men and keeping, so to speak, one eye on the Kingdom of God as a goal, can yet, from the evolutionary point of view, and in conference with Colored leaders, work out plans of living together which are practical and idealistic. . . . I know by experience and observation what can be done in one community by the right sort of men, white and black, getting together; and I am told by those in position to know that our young men at college are ready and anxious to learn. They are more open minded than their fathers. . . . If any set of men are in possession of trust funds for the benefit of our Southern country, I do not happen to know of any wiser way of expending it than along these lines.⁸⁰

Richard Hogue, Director of the Department of Education for the Pennsylvania Federation of Labor, also corresponded with Brent on Weatherford's behalf. Hogue expressed his support for Weatherford's request for financial support for the Graduate School writing,

I know Dr. Weatherford intimately, and there are few men for whom I have as high regard. He is a man of the highest calibre, mentally and spiritually, and with unusual executive ability. From years of work in the South, I can sincerely say that I believe no man is destined to make a larger contribution, in scholarship, Christian ideals, and service to social justice and right racial relationships in the entire South.⁸¹

W.L. Poteat, President of Wake Forest College, conveyed his confidence in Weatherford in a letter to John D. Rockefeller, Jr. in June 1924. Poteat wrote,

The institution has the right religious, social, and interracial attitude, and in this period of agitation is able to develop the right type of leadership in the South. It is genuinely Christian and sanely progressive. It believes in the compatibility of Christianity and intelligence.⁸²

⁸⁰ C.B. Wilmer to The Right Reverend Charles Henry Brent, D.D., Bishop of Western New York, Buffalo, New York, 16 May 1924, Willis Duke Weatherford Papers, collection #3831, folder 36, Manuscripts Department, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

⁸¹ Dr. Richard Hogue to Charles H. Brent, 8 May 1924, Willis Duke Weatherford Papers, collection #3831, folder 37, Southern Historical Collection University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Weatherford's attempt to create a department of race relations continued through the 1920s. In 1925 he requested financial support from Cyrus McCormick "to endow a Chair of Social Study with special reference to race problems."⁸³ From 1930-1935 he coordinated a lecture program with Fisk University that involved an exchange of faculty members between the two schools. James Weldon Johnson and James Frazier were among the Fisk professors who delivered lectures at the Graduate School.⁸⁴ In 1930, the Rosenwald Fund contributed \$50,000.00 to subsidize the establishment of a race relations department that would include a teaching and research professorship in race relations and a race relations curriculum.⁸⁵

In 1925 Weatherford began his campaign to establish a library of books, manuscripts, and other documents related to racial issues as well as African American history and culture at the YMCA Graduate School. During the early planning stages of the library, Weatherford corresponded with several colleges to determine whether such a library already existed in the South. In a letter to Howard Odum at the University of North Carolina, Weatherford inquired as to whether Odum was acquiring such materials. Weatherford explained that he was in the process of organizing a collection, and said he believed that a "collection of manuscripts and old editions on the Negro in the South could be used to advance understanding between the Negro and the white man at the present."⁸⁶ Odum's reply to Weatherford stated that there was no collection of race materials at the University of North Carolina.⁸⁷

⁸² W.L. Poteat to John D. Rockefeller, Jr., 11 June 1924, Willis Duke Weatherford Papers, collection #3831, folder 36, Manuscripts Department, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

⁸³ W.D. Weatherford to C.J. Hicks, 11 February 1925, Southern Historical Collection.

⁸⁴ Antone, "Willis Duke Weatherford," 150.

⁸⁵ Antone, "Willis Duke Weatherford," 148.

⁸⁶ W.D. Weatherford to Howard Odum, 26 February 1925, Willis Duke Weatherford Papers, collection #3831, folder 94, Manuscripts Department, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

⁸⁷ Howard Odum to Willis Duke Weatherford, 28 February 1925, Willis Duke Weatherford Papers, #3831, folder 94, Manuscripts Department, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Weatherford appealed to philanthropists for funds to launch and maintain the library. In March of 1925, Weatherford wrote the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Fund for a contribution to support the library. His letter to Mr. Leonard Outhwaite, an agent of the fund, noted that he had explored the idea of the library with Dr. James Hardy Dillard of the Jeanes and Slater Boards, Jackson Davis from the General Education Board, Professor Odum at the University of North Carolina, and Will Alexander and Robert Eleazer of the Interracial Commission. Weatherford reported that all of these individuals had endorsed the idea for the library. He stated that the purpose of the library would be to provide “up to date material on race relations throughout the world and on the background of the Negro in the United States and other countries.” Weatherford commented that he received “a request a day for information about present race relations or background.”⁸⁸ Weatherford was successful in his request for funding. The Laura Spelman Rockefeller and Julius Rosenwald Funds each contributed \$15,000.00 in matching funds.⁸⁹

The library that Weatherford developed ultimately included eleven thousand titles. He speculated that it was perhaps the “fullest collection on the Negro and the Old South in the country.”⁹⁰ The collection proved to be a valuable resource for graduate students in the consortium of Nashville colleges affiliated with the Graduate School. From 1930 through 1935, the research for fifty-nine master’s theses and twelve doctoral dissertations that addressed the subject of race was conducted at the Graduate School’s library.⁹¹

Weatherford’s dream of establishing a college where YMCA secretaries could receive graduate level training and race education failed in 1936. During that year, several factors combined to bring about the closing of the school. As the depression continued, it became

⁸⁸ W.D. Weatherford to Mr. Leonard Outhwaite, 24 March 1925, Willis Duke Weatherford Papers, collection #3831, folder 105, Manuscripts Department, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

⁸⁹ Antone, “Willis Duke Weatherford,” 147-148.

⁹⁰ W.D. Weatherford, “My Experience in Race Relations,” folder 3678c, Southern Historical Collection.

⁹¹ W.D. Weatherford, “My Experience in Race Relations,” Southern Historical Collection; Antone, “Willis Duke Weatherford,” 149.

increasingly difficult for Weatherford to acquire funds. Perhaps most damaging was the fact that the YMCA leadership in the South became unconvinced of the need for graduate level training for YMCA secretaries. Finally, the college lost the support of James Kirkland, Chancellor of Vanderbilt University. Vanderbilt held the \$155,000.00 mortgage on the YMCA Graduate School, and in 1936 Kirkland foreclosed the mortgage. The YMCA Graduate School then merged with Vanderbilt University. With the closing of the college, Weatherford's career took a new direction. During the summer of 1936, he accepted a position at Fisk University where he worked primarily in raising funds for the school and teaching in the Department of Religion.⁹² Weatherford continued his race reform work through research, writing, lecturing, and community and organizational leadership. However, his campaign to engage college students in race work and education and to make the study of race an integral component in the curricula of Southern universities ended.

⁹² Antone, "Willis Duke Weatherford," 175-177.

CHAPTER 5
THE BLUE RIDGE ASSEMBLY:
FORUM FOR INTERRACIAL DEBATE

The summer YMCA conferences at the Blue Ridge Assembly afforded Weatherford an opportunity to implement his bold program of educating southern students on the subject of race. Although the original mission of the Assembly was to provide a summer meeting place for YMCA students and workers, Weatherford believed that Blue Ridge could serve an important role by providing a forum for white and black leaders to discuss race relations in the South. Weatherford organized and chaired a major conference on racial problems at Blue Ridge in 1917. From August 4-6 of that year, forty-eight educators, ministers, social workers, clubwomen, church workers, doctors, judges, public officials, and YMCA/YWCA personnel convened at Blue Ridge to discuss lynching and other racial issues. Representing nearly every state in the South, the participants included twelve women and several blacks. A committee chaired by Weatherford selected and invited conference delegates.¹ Weatherford noted that the meeting was “the culmination of the efforts and the study of that growing body of citizens of the South who have long realized the perils of the situation and who are moved by the compulsion of Christian conscience and the call of an obligation that is founded on justice and brotherhood.”² Weatherford edited and published a record of the addresses presented at the conference and the discussion that followed each presentation.

Speakers at the conference addressed the reasons for the migration of blacks from the South, the economic impact of the loss of black labor on the southern economy, methods for

¹ “Another Blue Ridge Conference Closes,” *Sunday Citizen* (Asheville, NC), 12 August 1917, 3. For a list of the participants see Willis Duke Weatherford, ed., *Lawlessness or Civilization—Which?, Report of Addresses and Discussions in the Law and Order Conference, Blue Ridge, North Carolina, August 4-6, 1917* (Nashville: Williams Printing Company, 1917), 125-126.

² Willis Duke Weatherford, ed., *Lawlessness or Civilization—Which?, Report of Addresses and Discussions in the Law and Order Conference, Blue Ridge, North Carolina, August 4-6, 1917* (Nashville: Williams Printing Company, 1917), 3.

reforming the criminal justice system to improve the prosecution of lynchers, strategies for changing public attitudes toward lynching, and the role of religion in racial reform.

Gilbert T. Stephenson and C. Fletcher Quillian addressed issues related to law enforcement and lynching. Quillian proposed strategies for strengthening the role of law enforcement personnel in preventing mob violence.³ Stephenson outlined the rules of criminal court procedure followed in North Carolina for prosecuting lynchers, identified problems in the implementation of those procedures, and offered recommendations for improving the process of conducting the trials of lynchers. In particular, he noted the problem of finding an impartial jury to hear lynching trials. Stephenson pointed out that those accused of lynching were often prominent members of a community who enjoyed the support of their friends and neighbors. He stated that North Carolina procedure provided prosecutors with the option of either moving a trial to an adjoining county or securing the jury from an outside county. Stephenson stated his preference for holding lynching trials in the county where the crime occurred. He believed that the trial process was an important way of communicating the message to the public that lynchers would be prosecuted.⁴ Stephenson also discussed the merits of private trials for lynchers with a limited number of citizen observers. He stated that lynch mobs often justified their action by claiming to spare rape victims the humiliation of a public trial. Stephenson maintained that private trials would blunt that argument.⁵

Stephenson concluded his remarks by arguing that lynching trials should be held in the county where the lynching occurred and according to the standard rules of procedure for all criminal assault trials. He maintained that trials performed an important function in educating the public, convincing the public that the law would be enforced, and in instructing the public on

³ C. Fletcher Quillian, "Officers of Justice as Preventives of Mob Violence," in *Lawlessness or Civilization—Which?* Report of Addresses and Discussions in the Law and Order Conference, Blue Ridge, North Carolina, August 4-6, 1917, ed. W.D. Weatherford (Nashville: Williams Printing Company, 1917), 23-32.

⁴ Gilbert T. Stephenson, "Relation of Criminal Court Procedure to Mob Violence," in *Lawlessness or Civilization—Which?*, Report of Addresses and Discussions in the Law and Order Conference, Blue Ridge, North Carolina, August 4-6, 1917, ed. W.D. Weatherford (Nashville: Williams Printing Company, 1917), 12-14.

⁵ Stephenson, "Relation of Criminal Court Procedure," 15-16.

its important role in reporting lynchers to law enforcement personnel. Stephenson elaborated on the potential effectiveness of a trial judge's charge to a grand jury on lynching laws and the responsibility of the grand jury in enforcing those laws. He argued that

The charge of the trial judge to the grand jury is the most weighty and impressive message that the crowd that fills the courtroom during the call of the criminal docket ever hears. People who have a habit of attending criminal court seldom hear sermons or addresses on law and order, seldom read books or papers on law and order, and seldom hear the matter discussed in such a spirit as to encourage them to stand by the law.

Stephenson proposed that if all trial judges would charge grand juries on the law regarding lynching that it would

arouse them to discover lynchers, report lynchers, and investigate and report lynchers. When the newspapers report this it will create a compelling sentiment among people to let the law take its course. . . . The mob spirit can be overcome soonest by constant emanation from the Court that no crime is too heinous for the court in its regular procedure to deal with adequately.⁶

According to Weatherford's record of the conference, Stephenson's proposal was applauded and debated by the audience. James Hardy Dillard and W.F. Tillett spoke in support of Stephenson and asked how to implement his idea. Stephenson suggested that the members of the Law and Order Conference pass a resolution calling for trial judges to charge grand juries on lynching, publish the resolution in a pamphlet, and distribute the pamphlet to "every trial judge in the South."⁷ The conference adopted a set of seventeen "Constructive Conclusions." One of these conclusions addressed Stephenson's proposal and stated, "We urge the importance of regular and fearless charges to grand juries by trial judges on the evil of mob violence."⁸ It is unknown whether the conference published and distributed a pamphlet following Stephenson's suggestion.

E.C. Branson and Arthur Spear spoke on economic aspects of the race problem. Spear, director of the Welfare Department of the YMCA chapter at the Alabama Cast Iron Pipe

⁶ Stephenson, "Relation of Criminal Court Procedure," 19-21.

⁷ Stephenson, "Relation of Criminal Court Procedure," 21-22.

⁸ Weatherford, *Lawlessness or Civilization*, 122.

Company (ACIPCO) in Birmingham, Alabama, discussed the relationship between justice and labor productivity. In his speech, “Justice the Basis of Efficient Labor Supply,” Spear noted that the South’s economic productivity depended on a sound, well-educated labor force. He argued that blacks would become more efficient workers when southerners extended full economic and legal rights to them.⁹

In his presentation, “Liberty and Security of Life, The Basis of Economic Progress,” E.C. Branson, Professor of Rural Economics and Sociology at the University of North Carolina, discussed the economic aspects of the migration of blacks from the South. He compared the status of blacks who migrated with those who remained in the South. Branson believed that the migration could have a long term beneficial impact on the economy of the South. He speculated that the loss of black labor would lead Southern agriculture to make a needed transition from small farms to larger, more mechanized farms and to shift from crop production to raising more livestock.¹⁰

Branson argued that blacks would not be truly free and secure until they attained a degree of economic independence. He sympathetically maintained that the ethics of Christianity required that white Southerners help blacks become self-reliant. Branson argued,

While it is true that the Negro must win liberty and security for himself by his own efforts through long periods of time; that he must lift himself up by tugging at his own boot straps, that he must bear his own burdens and work out his own salvation in fear and trembling, it is also true that I must help him bear these burdens, and decrease his fear and trembling, and get a friendly lever under his boot heels, and struggle in his behalf for the liberty and security that ought to be his in a Christian land in the year of our Lord, 1917.¹¹

⁹ Arthur Spear, “Justice the Basis of Efficient Labor Supply,” in Weatherford, *Lawlessness or Civilization—Which?*, Report of Addresses and Discussions in the Law and Order Conference, Blue Ridge, North Carolina, August 4-6, 1917, ed. W.D. Weatherford (Nashville: Williams Printing Company, 1917), 35-36.

¹⁰ E.C. Branson, “Liberty and Security of Life,” in *Lawlessness or Civilization—Which?*, Report of Addresses and Discussions in the Law and Order Conference, Blue Ridge, North Carolina, August 4-6, 1917, ed. W.D. Weatherford (Nashville: Williams Printing Company, 1917), 35-36.

¹¹ Branson, “Liberty and Security of Life,” 40.

He stated further,

The Christian conscience is called to the task of giving the Negro the very best possible school facilities and advantages, exact and equal justice before the courts, humane treatment in jails and convict camps, sanitary housing surroundings, fair rents, farms with fair, long-term leases, helping him into possession of farms and homes of his own, comforts fully equal on railroad lines, and guarding his life with our own when mobs assemble to lynch him.

Branson concluded by stating, “We have never yet tried real Christianity in solving problems of race relationships.”¹²

In the discussion following Branson’s address, Dr. W.H. Mills of Clemson College concurred with Branson’s argument regarding the relationship between freedom and economic independence. However, he frankly admitted his reluctance to fully endorse Branson’s call for white Southerners to help blacks. Mills stated,

We as Christians must sell land to the Negro. . . . It means that the civilization of the South is changing. It is harder and harder for the white family in the South to maintain itself under the present tendency. . . . I don’t know how all this is going to turn out. . . . I must swallow my own prejudices and the opposition of my neighbors and sell the colored man the bit of land if he wants it. It makes it hard for me and my white neighbors but we must do it in the hope that ultimate good will come of it, but I confess I cannot see the end.¹³

Weatherford briefly responded to Mills by stating that he could not predict the future of the South and implied that they must address the reality of the present. Weatherford relied on an argument that he often made and stated that a “fatal law of civilizations” established that any time “two races were side by side, the lower race always wins out.” By this statement, Weatherford meant that if present conditions continued, blacks would serve as a drag on the progress of the white race. Weatherford hoped that this argument would compel white Southerners to help blacks out of their own self-interest.¹⁴

¹² Branson, “Liberty and Security of Life,” 40-41.

¹³ Branson, “Liberty and Security of Life,” 42-43.

¹⁴ Branson, “Liberty and Security of Life,” 43.

Dr. Thomas Jesse Jones, from the U.S. Bureau of Education in Washington, D.C., offered a moderating opinion. In response to Mills's concern that land ownership would create black majorities in some places in the South, Jones pointed out that

The property that they acquire is a great hope for their future, but the amount compared with the amount white people own is so comparatively small that I can't see there will be any trouble about adjustment and it will be so gradual that white people won't suffer.¹⁵

Kate Herndon Trawick, General Secretary of the YWCA in Nashville, delivered a presentation at the conference entitled, "The Exposure of Womanhood through Lynching." Trawick examined common myths about lynching and methodically challenged each one. She addressed the assumption that lynching served as a deterrent to crime. Trawick argued that rather than preventing crime, lynching actually created an endless cycle of violence and crime by leading to more lynching and increasing race hatred. She maintained that

For every black criminal put to death at the hands of a mob, hundreds of white criminals are made. Lynching for one crime leads to lynching for others, and furnishes grounds for an appeal to public sentiment to condone the practice . . . Lynching serves as an incentive, not a restraint. Often after a public lynching, there are new and atrocious outbreaks in the same neighborhood, aggravated by racial antagonism and suspicion. As long as the white man overrides the law, he must expect to find in the Negro a spirit of desperation, vindictiveness and reprisal. Equality before the law.¹⁶

Trawick challenged the popular view that rape was a crime committed exclusively by black men and that rape was a relatively recent crime. She cited census reports and other records to illustrate the occurrence of rape across time, in other countries, and by other races and ethnic groups.¹⁷

Lynchers commonly justified their actions by claiming that lynching was an act of chivalry to defend Southern womanhood and to protect women from the humiliation of a public trial. Of this claim, Trawick argued, "It is the same sort of chivalry that denies to woman the

¹⁵ Branson, "Liberty and Security of Life," 43.

¹⁶ Kate Herndon Trawick, "The Exposure of Womanhood through Lynching," in Weatherford, *Lawlessness or Civilization, Which?, Lawlessness or Civilization—Which?, Report of Addresses and Discussions in the Law and Order Conference, Blue Ridge, North Carolina, August 4-6, 1917*, ed. W.D. Weatherford (Nashville: Williams Printing Company, 1917), 56.

¹⁷ Trawick, "The Exposure of Womanhood," 57.

right to vote, to think, to work, to develop initiative anywhere save in a man-regulated and relegated sphere.” She noted that statistics for the period 1884-1900 reported that fifty-one women had been lynched. Of this she asked, “Is this chivalry?”¹⁸ Trawick commented that a rape victim’s privacy was most violated when a crowd brought a black suspected of the crime into her home for identification during “her hour of agony.” She observed that it was difficult for a woman to correctly identify her assailant under such circumstances. Trawick argued that by comparison a private trial would be “quiet and dignified.”¹⁹ Trawick also called for more discretion on the part of the press in protecting the privacy of women. She adopted Henry Bushnell Hart’s term for reporters and chastized

. . . the Buzzard Journalist who publishes the name, place and gruesome details of the revolting crime. Where is the Southern chivalry and respect for womanhood, when we allow every item of the story to be given to a gloating public, and when we condemn the victim to a life sentence of humiliation because she feels that she is known and branded?²⁰

To further dispel the notion that Southern women were frail flowers who required the protection of Southern men, Trawick presented statistics and examples to illustrate that women had a capacity for obscenity, violence, cruelty, and race hatred equal to that of men.²¹

In her concluding argument, Trawick raised the issue of sexual relations between white men and black women as a chief source of racial conflict. She commented that “for generations white women of the South have kept silent on the subject of racial integrity.” Trawick maintained that illicit sexual relations between black women and white men had engendered feelings of bitterness and hatred on the part of white women toward black women. With regard to black women, Trawick observed, “The Negro woman remembers the assaults by white men on the women of her race. . . The women of both races have much to forgive the Southern white

¹⁸ Trawick, “The Exposure of Womanhood,” 58.

¹⁹ Trawick, “The Exposure of Womanhood,” 60.

²⁰ Trawick, “The Exposure of Womanhood,” 60

²¹ Trawick, “The Exposure of Womanhood,” 62.

man.” Trawick charged Southern white women with the responsibility to bring about an end to the practice:

White women must refuse to accept the double standard. . . . They must demand that further degradation of the white and Negro races be stopped, that lynchings be abolished, and that the personality of white and colored women be respected. White and colored women can never come to a place of mutual respect, understanding, and sympathy until the white man ceases to build higher the barrier between them.²²

In the discussion that followed Trawick’s presentation, Mrs. J.D. Hammond took issue with the notion that white women must challenge white men to end the practice of illicit sexual relations with black women. She said it would

. . . not do any good just to turn women against men. The thing the white woman has got to do is to step up with the colored woman and stand by them and with them. There is something bigger than being a white woman or a colored woman or a yellow woman—and that is just being a woman. We have just got to see them as women, as mothers, as homemakers. . . . It rests with the privileged women of the South and thank God that He has so tied us together that white womanhood cannot be protected until colored womanhood has been protected.

Mrs. Hammond called on privileged white women to teach their sons proper moral conduct toward African American women. She believed it was important to observe the courtesy of extending the title of “Mrs.” to married African American women to distinguish between the “decent Negro woman and the mother of the haphazard family.”²³

John Wesley Gilbert, a black Professor at Paine College in Augusta, Georgia, addressed the conference on “The Effects of Injustice and Mob-Violence on the Negro Race.” In his speech, Gilbert twice stated that blacks did not seek social equality. He commented that “self-respecting Negroes wished to remain as separate from whites as the fingers on the hand, but in civic and community affairs united with whites as fingers on the hand.”²⁴ Gilbert maintained

²² Trawick, “The Exposure of Womanhood,” 63.

²³ Trawick, “The Exposure of Womanhood,” 64-65.

²⁴ John Wesley Gilbert, “The Effects of Injustice and Mob-Violence on the Negro Race,” in Weatherford, *Lawlessness or Civilization, Which? , Lawlessness or Civilization—Which?, Report of Addresses and Discussions in the Law and Order Conference, Blue Ridge, North Carolina, August 4-6, 1917*, ed. W.D. Weatherford (Nashville: Williams Printing Company, 1917), 70, 73.

that southern opinion leaders contributed to racial tension. He noted that ministers had failed to speak out against lynching and mob violence, and characterized politicians “who abuse the Negro and breed hate between the races” as the “worst enemy” of blacks.²⁵ Gilbert argued that journalists and authors were “subservient to public sentiment,” and catered to the public’s demand for sensational news reporting and fiction that exaggerated racial stereotypes and further inflamed racial tension. He expressed his particular concern about recent novels such as Charles Carroll’s *The Negro a Beast* (1900) and Thomas Dixon’s *The Leopard’s Spots* (1902) and *The Clansman* (1905). He also mentioned *Birth of a Nation* (1915), D.W. Griffith’s film adaptation of *The Clansman*. Gilbert described these works as “cruel and poisonous.” He noted that journalists humiliated blacks by following the practice of spelling Negro with a lowercase “n,” and perpetuated racial stereotypes by emphasizing the negative characteristics of blacks rather than their virtues. Gilbert urged the press to “make the Negro more respectable” and to call for more equitable railroad car accommodations.²⁶

Weatherford delivered the concluding address at the conference. He described lynching and the migration of blacks as the “most vital social topic that now faces the whole country.” Weatherford stated his hope that the publication of the conference proceedings would “open the way to freer discussion and more heroic action.”²⁷ Weatherford recognized mob violence and lynching as paramount reasons for the migration of blacks, but in his presentation, “The Northern Migration and Lynching in the South,” he drew attention to the importance of social and economic factors.

To gain an understanding of the reasons for the migration, Weatherford studied northern, southern, and black newspapers. While southern papers stressed economic reasons, northern and

²⁵ Gilbert, “The Effects of Injustice,” 70, 73.

²⁶ Gilbert, “The Effects of Injustice,” 71-73.

²⁷ W.D. Weatherford, “The Northern Migration and Lynching in the South,” in Weatherford, *Lawlessness or Civilization, Which?, Lawlessness or Civilization—Which?, Report of Addresses and Discussions in the Law and Order Conference, Blue Ridge, North Carolina, August 4-6, 1917*, ed. W.D. Weatherford (Nashville: Williams Printing Company, 1917), 2.

black papers emphasized the social and legal factors, although the black papers did so with “extra bitterness.” Weatherford stated that black ministers in Birmingham had passed resolutions encouraging blacks to leave the South. They cited prejudice, disfranchisement, Jim Crowism, lynching, maltreatment, the boll weevil, and floods as the reasons for migrating. Weatherford stated that this point of view was reflected in the African American newspapers, which were “flooded with this type of justification of the migration North.”²⁸

In addition to his analysis of newspaper content, Weatherford surveyed the opinions of fifty-seven black leaders in the South. Through a questionnaire distributed by Weatherford, these leaders ranked in order economic, legal, social, and educational factors as the chief causes for the migration.²⁹ In his comments on the poor social conditions that led blacks to leave the South, Weatherford stated,

I do not mean by this that Negroes are seeking for social intermingling; far from it. They resent the thought as strenuously as do we. I mean the handicaps of an unjust administration of law which puts them at social disadvantage, to wit, the failure to extend the sewerage system to the Negro section of a city, although it is within the city limits; the lack of street paving in their section of the city; poorer police protection; poorer accommodations on railway trains even though they pay the same fare; and unfair treatment on street cars and in other places of public business. These are among the most galling things in the life of the Negro.³⁰

A committee of seven delegates to the conference drafted a set of seventeen “constructive conclusions” that were appended to the report of the conference proceedings.³¹ In a moderate, balanced statement preceding the list of conclusions, the committee stated that the conference had not met to condemn white Southerners or blacks. Furthermore, the committee expressed the view that mob violence did not permeate the entire South. The report noted that a “spirit of helpfulness North and South” had contributed to great improvements for blacks in their

²⁸ Weatherford, “The Northern Migration,” 5, 8.

²⁹ Weatherford, “The Northern Migration,” 5.

³⁰ Weatherford, “The Northern Migration,” 6.

³¹ The committee included E.C. Branson, Richard Hogue, C.C. Menzler, Kate Herndon Trawick, Jackson Davis, W.F. Tillett, and W.D. Weatherford. See *Lawlessness or Civilization, Which?*, 24.

economic prosperity, education, and moral integrity. The committee pointed out that taxes paid by white Southerners subsidized public schools for blacks, and acknowledged the important work of black colleges and industrial schools.³²

The committee identified economic justice as the key to improving the status of blacks and to resolving the race problem. In the second constructive conclusion, the committee frankly stated that blacks had been exploited by “the strong . . . for their own advantage and aggrandizement.” In a statement reflecting the liberal emphasis on the obligation of society to provide individuals with the opportunity to develop to their greatest potential, the committee stated,

When in the new era that is dawning the strong shall use their powers not to exploit the weak, but to serve them, then the Negro along with other weak and backward races, shall receive not only a square deal, but help and encouragement to develop to the fullest their native capacities for the enlargement and enrichment of all human life.³³

In a subsequent conclusion affirming the importance of economic justice, the committee stated that home ownership for blacks was “the basis of security, stability of citizenship, full-statured civic responsibility, law and order and social progress.”³⁴

Several of the constructive conclusions addressed issues related to law enforcement. The committee suggested that law enforcement officials who succeeded in controlling mob violence should be recognized by their communities, that judges instruct grand juries on the seriousness of mob violence, and that defendants in criminal trials be given psychological and physical examinations.

Through a number of conclusions, the committee outlined a comprehensive civic education program designed to create a climate of public opinion that respected law and order and discouraged lynching and violence. The committee placed responsibility for controlling mob violence on communities and encouraged the development of Law and Order Leagues.

³² Weatherford, *Lawlessness or Civilization*, 121.

³³ Weatherford, *Lawlessness or Civilization*, 122.

³⁴ Weatherford, *Lawlessness or Civilization*, 122.

These leagues would discourage mob violence, and identify and resolve problems in local communities such as poor sanitation, poverty, and crime. The committee believed that public school students should be taught the civic virtue of obedience to law and order. To promote this program, the committee intended to develop a monograph on law and order to be distributed to public schools through state boards of education. In addition, the committee hoped to prepare resolutions that encouraged obedience to law and condemned mob violence that would be circulated to the public through state teacher, political party, press, and church organizations. To further educate the public, the committee recommended that public libraries acquire books on racial problems, and called for the establishment of a Southern Speakers Bureau of Law and Order.³⁵

³⁵ Weatherford, *Lawlessness or Civilization*, 121-123.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

As a young boy, Willis Weatherford read Henry Stanley's account of his search for David Livingstone. Stanley's description of Livingstone's work so inspired young Willis that he contemplated becoming a foreign missionary.¹ Rather than leaving the South to work for the spiritual and physical welfare of blacks in foreign countries, the course of Weatherford's career led him to boldly crusade for social and economic justice for blacks in his native region. Weatherford's determination to challenge the system of racial injustice in the South is remarkable. The leading Southern intellectuals of his day promoted the reform of public education, child labor, and many other social issues but neglected or opposed the improvement of the black condition. Thomas Nelson Page, William Garrott Brown, Philip A. Bruce, A.J. McKelway, William P. Trent, and others reflected the hostile, racist views of the mainstream public. They were uninformed and uninterested in the black condition, believed that blacks were innately inferior, supported white supremacy, and justified lynching and other acts of violence against blacks. Bruce Clayton notes that these intellectuals came from prosperous middle and upper class families in Virginia, North Carolina, and Georgia. He states that a number of these Southerners were educated in private preparatory schools where their total immersion in Civil War history was reinforced by the wearing of Confederate gray uniforms. Clayton contends that the myths of Reconstruction exercised a dominant influence on their racial views²

By contrast, Willis Weatherford came of age in rural Texas. He admired his father's heroism as an Indian fighter as well as his industry as a rancher, farmer, and merchant. He thought that he had been inculcated with the frontier spirit of his parents and grandparents. Perhaps the independence, self-reliance, ruggedness, spirit of adventure, and self-discipline that

¹ Willis Duke Weatherford Papers, Collection #3831, folder 3678c, "My Experience in Race Relations," Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina.

² Bruce Clayton, *The Savage Ideal: Intolerance and Intellectual Leadership in the South, 1890-1914* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), 3, 5-6, 19, 20, 24, 29, 187-195.

he believed he had learned from his ancestors contributed to his courage and motivation to champion the cause of Southern blacks.

Weatherford challenged the Southern racial system by developing a unique approach to reform. In the early stages of his career, the climate of Southern opinion precluded direct attacks on segregation and disfranchisement. Weatherford conceded these issues in the interest of ending racial violence and improving the poor condition of black housing, health, and education. The study of his writings reveals that he was a sincere, deeply thoughtful man. His views on segregation and the franchise changed over time. He initially favored segregated schools and avoided discussion of civic and political rights. He began to engage the issue of black political rights in the 1920s. Through the 1930s he remained confident that educated white southerners would lead the South to end discrimination and extend justice to blacks. However, his view that the racial attitudes of the mass of white southerners had not changed since the Civil War convinced him that blacks could not depend on social uplift provided by benevolent whites. He argued for an enlarged franchise for blacks to allow them to exercise self-government and become advocates for their own interests. The most dramatic change in his views is evident in his argument against segregation in 1957.³

Weatherford's strong commitment to Christian ethics contributed to his motivation to seek racial reform and formed the core of his argument justifying the need for change. He rejected the popular view that blacks were innately inferior and turned to Christian teachings and the techniques of social science to disprove this theory. Weatherford maintained that poverty, crime, and unemployment among Southern blacks were caused by historical factors, discrimination, and unjust social policies. He placed a high value on the potential of education to improve the lives of blacks and to convince Southern whites to adopt a more tolerant attitude. He eschewed politics as a method of reform and chose to work through private organizations such as the YMCA and the Southern Sociological Congress.

³ W. D. Weatherford, *Negro Life in the South*), vi, 3-6, 157-158.

Weatherford's emphasis on education, reliance on social science, optimistic view of progress, and preference for working through voluntary organizations rather than political institutions reflect the outlook and strategy of Progressivism. The study of his life and work indicates that Progressivism in the South was indeed a complex movement. Progressive politicians exploited the race issue to gain political power and to bring about reforms that benefited Southern whites. Many Southern social justice progressives directed their work toward child labor, agricultural reform, penal reform, public health, and education but ignored the problems of the black population. Willis Weatherford was part of a minority of reformers motivated by a humanitarian interest in the welfare of Southern blacks. He played a critical role in the development of a liberal strategy to reduce racial violence and improve the quality of life for blacks within the constraints of the Southern racial system.

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“Return to Twelve Oaks: *Southern Living* Magazine and the Old South Myth,” Midwest Popular Culture Association, Louisville, Kentucky, November 1988
“The Politics of Generation X,” Popular Culture Association of the South, Charlotte, North Carolina, October 1996
“The Puritan Persecution of the Quakers in Nineteenth Century Fiction,” Conference of Tennessee Historians, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee, October 2002
“Willis Duke Weatherford: Race Education in the South, 1912-1936,” Conference of Tennessee Historians, Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee, September 2003

Honors

and Awards: Outstanding Adjunct Teacher Award, Virginia Highlands Community College, Abingdon, Virginia, May 2000