

The National Council of Negro Women and South Africa: Black Internationalism, Motherhood, and the Cold War

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INTRODUCTION

Founded in 1945, the African Children's Feeding Scheme (ACFS) was established with the aim of providing black children in Johannesburg with at least one full meal a day.¹ Set up by the white English missionary Father Trevor Huddleston, this initiative was a direct response to the efforts of the apartheid government to slash state-subsidized school meals for nonwhite children.² Relying on voluntary contributions and often "on the brink of financial disaster," the charitable organization came to represent a small practical challenge to policies designed to dismantle black educational provisions during the early years of apartheid.³

In desperate need of funds and operating in a hostile political environment, by the 1950s representatives of the ACFS began to reach out to overseas organizations that they hoped would be able to offer financial assistance. As part of these efforts, Feeding Scheme officials approached the Washington, D.C.-based National Council of Negro Women (NCNW). In a letter to the African American women's organization written on July 4, 1955, ACFS organizer Pat Suttan asserted that, "it is our heartfelt wish that your association give our cause your sympathetic consideration, and help us to combat one of the worst evils—Hunger Amongst Children." Detailing their work in assisting more than five thousand children a day, the letter concluded, "Happily we all know that wherever there are women of goodwill, suffering and misery can be lessened."⁴ The NCNW responded to this gendered appeal with enthusiasm. Over the next year, the organization

dedicated a significant amount of time to the Feeding Scheme, making it the annual cause of its Junior Councils in 1955.⁵ Its members circulated pamphlets, initiated letter-writing campaigns, and held regular meetings to raise funds for the scheme, while in March 1956 the local Manhattan Council hosted Trevor Huddleston at a fundraising event held at the 137th Street YWCA.⁶

The NCNW's work with the ACFS is historically significant for a number of reasons, all of which shed light on the changing nature of black internationalism during the early cold war. First, the Council's efforts on behalf of black South African children serve as an important reminder of the organization's international outlook. Although historians have noted the NCNW's global vision, they have generally failed to analyze the race and gender concerns that shaped the Council's black international agenda.⁷ This has meant that the motivations that led NCNW leaders to forge connections with black women in Africa and throughout the black diaspora have largely been overlooked in accounts of African American anticolonialism following the Second World War.⁸

The Council's ties with the ACFS are also significant in that they illustrate how the repressive politics of the early cold war shaped transnational black activism. As a moderate anticommunist civil rights organization, the NCNW aligned itself with the United States government when seeking to expand its overseas activities. The Council's charitable contributions to the Feeding Scheme therefore seems to fit within what historians such as Penny Von Eschen and Gerald Horne have viewed as the general decline of radical anticolonial activism among African Americans following the Second World War.⁹

Responding to the efforts of the U.S. government to limit overseas criticism of its racial record, the NCNW rarely drew explicit links between race discrimination in the United States and South Africa when discussing the Feeding Scheme. In addition to this, their work lacked any specific critique of the U.S. government's cold war extensive diplomatic, economic, and strategic connections with the National Party that many in the State Department believed represented an important bulwark against the potential spread of communism in southern Africa.¹⁰ While the black internationalism of the NCNW was far from radical, these efforts on behalf of the ACFS nevertheless provide an important insight into how African Americans continued to promote an anticolonial agenda during the most repressive phases of the cold war. The recent traumas of World War II, America's expanding global influence, and the spread of colonial independence movements throughout both Asia and Africa made it hard for black activists of all political persuasions to ignore international politics during the 1950s.¹¹ Faced with the destabilizing effects of anticommunism, many African American organizations attempted to engage with, negotiate, and ultimately influence U.S. foreign policy toward movements for colonial independence in Africa.¹²

Finally, the NCNW's links with the African Children's Feeding Scheme speak to recent academic studies that have begun to explore the gendered nature

of black international activism. Work by Carole Boyce Davies, Eric S. McDuffie, Dayo F. Gore, and others has greatly contributed to our understanding of the internationalist politics of black women during the cold war.¹³ By uncovering the transnational activism of inspiring radical figures such as Claudia Jones, Esther Cooper Jackson, and Vicki Garvin, this scholarship has helped dramatically expand our knowledge of the leading role black women radicals played in agitating for race, gender, and class equality across national borders.¹⁴ This article will seek to build on this global analysis of black women's activism to include the more "moderate" organizing of the NCNW. Although the NCNW's particular brand of humanitarian black internationalism was constrained by its ties to the U.S. government, this nonconfrontational approach allowed the Council to forge links with black women across national borders at a time when radical expressions of black internationalism were severely restricted. The NCNW's decision to choose an organization dedicated to providing food for black South African children is also important within this context. Given the shared race and gendered discrimination black women faced in the United States and South Africa, the Council's work with the ACFS allows for an exploration of the gendered contours of black internationalism. By deliberately embracing their identity as black mothers—and the historical responsibilities and burdens associated with this role as part of the global black family—NCNW leaders were able to expand their domestic civil rights agenda to the African continent. Hunger and the care of black children in Africa ultimately played a key role in shaping the ways in which African American women extended their racial responsibilities to the other side of the Atlantic following the Second World War.

THE NCNW: BLACK INTERNATIONALISM AND THE COLD WAR

Mary McLeod Bethune founded the NCNW in 1935. A prominent national civil rights figure, Bethune had been the president of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) in the 1920s and, in the following decade, served as an advisor on racial issues to the Roosevelt administration. Critical of what she saw as the NACW's old-fashioned policies of race and class uplift, Bethune conceived of the NCNW as a new centralized body capable of bringing about real political change on the national level.¹⁵ Made up of regional and state affiliates, the NCNW brought black women's groups together from across the United States in order to "plan, initiate and carry out projects which develop, benefit and integrate the Negro into the Nation."¹⁶ From their headquarters in Washington, D.C., Council leaders lobbied a range of federal institutions on behalf of race and gender equality for African American women.¹⁷ As Joyce Ann Hanson has commented, "Bethune's vision was to create a mechanism that would train African American women to be insightful political activists and lobbyists, increase black women's collective political power, and give them

greater representation at the highest levels of government.”¹⁸ Boasting around 850,000 members by the 1950s, the NCNW worked hard to pressure federal institutions to live up to the rhetorical commitment of the United States to freedom and democracy, running campaigns that addressed inequality in black voting rights, education, employment, and welfare.

Although much of its early practical work was limited to the United States, the NCNW held a distinctly international focus that, in the years following the Second World War, inspired the council’s efforts to develop organizational ties with black women’s groups in Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America.¹⁹ Bethune firmly believed that “progress in one country should stimulate progress in another,” and she was acutely aware of the interconnected nature of race discrimination throughout the world.²⁰ Her relationship with Africa and her general interest in the plight of black women throughout the diaspora informed both the ideological focus and practical activities of the NCNW. Intensely proud of her own African heritage, as a student Bethune had hoped to “return” to the continent as a religious missionary.²¹ She maintained this interest in Africa throughout her life and during the 1930s and 1940s was a prominent supporter of the radical anticolonial organization the Council on African Affairs (CAA).²² Although she severed her ties with the CAA after it was alleged that communists had infiltrated the organization, her work with figures such as Paul Robeson, W. E. B. Du Bois, and William Alphaeus Hunton was symptomatic of her early interest in the struggle for African independence.²³

Bethune’s disavowal of the CAA is also symbolic of a broader shift in African American anticolonial politics during the early cold war. In 1943, Martin Dies and the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) publicly accused Bethune of being a communist.²⁴ Although she successfully fought the allegations, the episode provided her with firsthand knowledge of how anticommunism could ruin lives and destroy hard-earned reputations. At this time, American authorities targeted many African American activists who offered their support to colonial liberation movements.²⁵ Black radicals were harassed, censored, and often imprisoned for their criticism of U.S. foreign policy in Africa. Indeed, the CAA itself was eventually hounded out of existence in 1955, having been charged with violating the Foreign Agents Registration Act. Fearful that a similar fate might befall her own organization, Bethune made a concerted effort to follow the dominant anticommunist political line of the era. The NCNW’s anticommunism greatly affected its international outlook. As she noted, commenting on the global responsibilities of African American women in the postwar period:

Currents of minority thought, of national thought, of world thought, are in motion all around us. They stir the lives of every one of us. We must be responsive without being overwhelmed into blind acceptance or equally blind

resistance. Sober thought must precede our every action. Leadership, in 1947, will need to be informed as never before.²⁶

This warning hints at the constrained nature of the NCNW's global vision. Bethune believed it was imperative that the NCNW made moderate and respectable choices regarding the type of international projects it pursued. The NCNW's involvement with the African Children's Feeding Scheme is illustrative of just what this particular brand of anticommunist black internationalism was able to achieve, as well as its shortcomings. In their initial response to the ACFS's representatives, the NCNW expressed sympathy for the cause but conceded that they would have "to find out from our State Department just what steps must be taken so that neither your group nor mine will be embarrassed."²⁷ Council leaders then passed on the details of the Feeding Scheme to the State Department, writing to the South African Desk, "We solicit your advice and assistance in getting this project of help from the United States underway."²⁸ After a series of meetings and written exchanges, the Council was finally given the go-ahead by the government to lend its support to the Feeding Scheme, ultimately receiving confirmation from the U.S. Consul General in South Africa that the ACFS was "a most worthy public welfare organization."²⁹

It was this desire to avoid embarrassment and minimize any risk that they might be labeled subversive that characterized the NCNW's international activities. The Council's work with the ACFS can therefore be seen as a product of the complex relationship between the desire of African American organizations to engage in anticolonial politics and the U.S. government's cold war efforts to stifle black international criticism of its foreign policy initiatives. For many African American organizers, cooperation with the state appeared to represent a safe and expedient way through which they could work across national borders in order to challenge racism both at home and abroad.

Focusing on the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), historian Carol Anderson has outlined how moderate African American organizations worked to advance a black international and anticolonial agenda within an anticommunist framework.³⁰ This attempt to correct what she refers to as the "screwed trajectory" of historical scholarship that privileges the African American left's involvement in colonial liberation movements is, at times, worryingly reminiscent of the anticommunist arguments of the era in that it has a tendency to cast radical black activists as unthinking agents of the Soviet Union. However, the assertion that we must explore the anticolonialism of moderate organizations such as the NAACP and NCNW is nevertheless significant. It is important to remember that not all manifestations of anticolonialism are necessarily Marxist, or indeed, could be described as "radical." As an anticommunist organization working with the

U.S. government, the NCNW was able to make anticolonial proclamations throughout this period, clearly outlining its desire to “respond to the legitimate aspirations and hopes of all [subject] peoples,” and to “use its influence to help colonial peoples toward self-government.”³¹ The NCNW genuinely believed that it could shape American foreign policy from the inside, ensuring that the U.S. government lived up to its anti-imperialist rhetoric. Although this reformist agenda was limited, and in many ways helped legitimize the state-sponsored hounding of radical African American activists, it is important to account for the efforts of the NCNW, and other moderate organizations, that functioned as an important anticolonial lobby in Washington throughout the cold war.³² African Americans who worked with the U.S. government should not be seen as passive figures that blindly followed the wishes of the state.³³ Black individuals and organizations that cooperated with the State Department challenged racism at home and abroad, while questioning aspects of U.S. foreign policy within the broader ideological conflict between “Western democracy” and “Soviet totalitarianism.”³⁴

THE BLACK INTERNATIONALISM OF THE NCNW

In her 1946 president’s message, Mary McLeod Bethune made clear her belief that NCNW women needed to reach out beyond the borders of the United States, stating:

For it is, truly, a new world in which we are now feeling our way. Barriers of all kinds are crumbling, and many of us are seeing, for the first time, how close we are to peoples and to problems about which we have known very little. *We shall have to know more; we shall have to face more; we shall have to do more—and this without flinching.*³⁵

It was this belief that African American women needed to greatly expand their knowledge of global political affairs that shaped the Council’s activities following the Second World War. As old colonial empires crumbled and the United States became a full-fledged superpower, the NCNW leadership attempted to position the organization as an international body capable of promoting political and cultural exchanges between black women around the world.

From their Council House headquarters in Washington, D.C., NCNW members were given the opportunity to keep up to date with the latest international developments, learn about different cultures, and directly engage with black leaders from Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America. The Council hosted a series of visiting dignitaries involved in a range of colonial liberation movements. Records show that during the 1950s the NCNW welcomed

individuals from Ghana, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Liberia, and South Africa, including prominent political figures such as Kwame Nkrumah and Madame Sékou Touré. As they toured NCNW headquarters, these leaders offered both Council members and the wider African American community a striking new image of Africa, one that emphasized black respectability, self-sufficiency, power, and, most importantly, freedom and self-government. The Council's annual conventions also had strong international and often specifically African themes. Taking place in Washington every November, these events, attended by invited foreign guests, included workshops, talks, and exhibitions aimed at familiarizing NCNW members with the global issues of the day.³⁶ The 1954 convention held at the Raleigh Hotel was an especially international affair, culminating with a workshop entitled "Women United in a Program of Action to Help and Understand the Peoples of Africa."³⁷ Presided over by Howard University historian Rayford Logan, speakers included the Nigerian activists Babs Fafunwa and Flora Azikiwe, as well as the founder of Operation Crossroads Africa, Reverend James H. Robinson.³⁸ The African American sociologist E. Franklin Frazier concluded events by providing a detailed summary of the discussions, after which the NCNW formally pledged its intention to forge organizational links with the women of Africa.³⁹

Vivian Carter Mason played a particularly active role in the development of the NCNW's international work in this period. A student of political science and social work at the University of Chicago and a former YWCA program director, Mason became the national president of the NCNW in 1953. Building on the work of her predecessor, Dorothy B. Ferebee, Mason strengthened the Council's organizational structures and made a concerted effort to set up a practical network of women's organizations throughout the black diaspora and Africa over her two terms in office.⁴⁰ Mason's political outlook appears to have been greatly influenced by her European travels in 1945 when, as a delegate of the NCNW, she attended the International Congress of Women in Paris.⁴¹ Organized by the Union des Femmes Françaises, the event marked the establishment of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF), an interracial alliance of progressive women's organizations from all over the world.⁴² Mason was impressed with what she saw at the six-day Paris meeting, commenting in her report of the congress that the "National Council of Negro Women must acquaint women in the Western Hemisphere and in Africa with the great task and opportunity before them—helping in every possible way to organize and expand activities of women in this country and the world."⁴³

Although the NCNW's initial enthusiasm for the WIDF was dampened due to its procommunist affiliates, Mason appeared to be inspired by the group's global mission and expressed her desire for the NCNW to actively promote links with black women overseas.⁴⁴ Upon her return to the United States, she headed up the

newly established permanent International Committee of the NCNW.⁴⁵ Stressing the need for African American women to develop “friendship ties with women of different countries,” this working group hoped to forge links with African representatives in Washington, D.C., and suggested a range of activities for local councils, including “international nights” where, as part of study groups, black women could “become more acquainted with what is happening internationally.”⁴⁶

As president of the NCNW, Vivian Carter Mason made it her priority to forge tangible networks with black women in Africa in particular.⁴⁷ In her January 1955 presidential address, she reaffirmed the NCNW’s postwar aim “of reaching across the seas to help and work with the women of Africa” and repeatedly stressed that black women in the United States and Africa could learn from one another in their shared struggle for race and gender equality.⁴⁸ Mason laid the groundwork for the organization’s black international work by developing networks that would bring African women leaders to the United States and eventually enable NCNW members to travel to in the opposite direction. She wrote to women in Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia, Ethiopia, Sudan, and South Africa in an attempt to open up lines of communication with African women and attract new affiliate organizations to the NCNW. The 1950s therefore saw the NCNW develop a clear and practical international program. Following Bethune’s original vision, Council leaders made it their mission to keep African American women educated and informed about international relations. They transformed the Council into a cosmopolitan space and made a concerted effort to forge organizational links with black women around the world. Indeed, at a time when black radicals fought accusations of subversion in the courts and the U.S. government successfully closed down a number of global black networks, the NCNW was able to actively expand its international activities.

THE NCNW, SOUTH AFRICA, AND ANTI-APARTHEID POLITICS

On May 28, 1948, South Africa’s National Party took power from the United Party of Jan Smuts in a narrow election victory.⁴⁹ This triumph for Afrikaner nationalism dramatically altered the racial landscape of South Africa, as segregation and race discrimination, already the norm for the majority of black Africans, became even more rigidly enshrined throughout the country. As the National Party turned its slim parliamentary majority into a 157-seat majority in 1953, it was able to successfully push through a series of acts aimed at the control of the nonwhite population and the complete separation of the races.⁵⁰ In response, thousands took to the streets to defy the apartheid laws in protests that captured the attention of the world. Inspired by the mass civil disobedience of black South Africans, African American organizations were often at the forefront of international campaigns against apartheid.⁵¹

The NCNW was deeply concerned by the political situation in South Africa and clearly stated its opposition to the apartheid regime, adopting the following resolution in 1953:

RESOLVED: That the National Council of Negro Women urges the United States to exercise its strongest endeavors in the United Nations and through direct negotiations to convince the Union of South Africa that it should abandon Apartheid and adopt policies consistent with principles of the United Nations and with the democratic aims asserted by the free world.⁵²

The NCNW hoped that the United States would take a stand against the apartheid regime, using its influence in the United Nations to actively condemn racial inequality in the country. The Council's lobbying efforts on this front were backed up by its success in forging connections with black South African women throughout this period. Madie Hall Xuma, the African American wife of former African National Congress (ANC) leader Alfred Bitini Xuma, was an important early link for the NCNW in South Africa.⁵³ A graduate of Columbia University Teachers' College, she had moved to South Africa in 1940 with her new husband and was active in black women's politics as the first president of the ANC-Women's League (ANC-WL) and as the founder of the Zenzele Club movement, which focused on training black South African women as community leaders.⁵⁴ Throughout the 1940s, NCNW administrators sent Madie Hall material and reports on the situation of black women in the United States, which she then disseminated amongst the Zenzele clubs. Acknowledging the black international potential of the NCNW's interest in the Zenzele movement, Xuma noted, "It really is an inspiration to our people here to know and learn about the Negroes overseas. These articles coming through are very helpful to me for I am able to show them and tell them of current news about our people there [in the United States]."⁵⁵

The idea that black women could inspire one another and work for change across national borders can also be seen in the NCNW's efforts to affiliate with the National Council of African Women (NCAW). Established out of the Bantu Women's League, the NCAW saw itself as a nonpolitical organization dedicated to African "women's welfare."⁵⁶ Mary McLeod Bethune had first approached the NCAW in 1940, corresponding with its leader Minah Soga. In a letter to Soga, Bethune noted the similar problems facing black women in the United States and South Africa, adding, "We should like very much to have the National Council of African Women become a part of the National Council of Negro Women—incorporated so that together we could work for world freedom for all women."⁵⁷ In 1954, Mason wrote to Minah Soga inviting the NCAW to send a delegate to the NCNW 1956 annual convention in Washington, D.C.⁵⁸ Although the South African authorities tightly controlled black travel

in and out of the country, records show that Gertrude Mdledle, NCAW leader between 1955 and 1956, traveled to the United States to attend the event.⁵⁹ Introduced by Mason, Mdledle expressed her “great appreciation” at being invited to the convention and asked that NCNW women to “further cement [their] relationship with the women of South Africa.”⁶⁰

The NCNW’s motivation for establishing links with the NCAW can be seen in a letter Mason wrote to the Pretoria-based organizer Edith Nono Msezane in 1955. Articulating the NCNW’s desire to engage with the lives of black South African women, she wrote: “We desire to help in any way that we can. We desire to know about your problems, your activities, your programs, for in doing so we can be helped too by becoming more intelligent and more aware of our responsibilities for the women of your country.”⁶¹

Mason believed that NCNW members had a duty to black women in South Africa. As a black international organization operating from a position of relative privilege in the United States, the Council’s leadership argued that it was the responsibility of its members to find out about problems black South African women faced under apartheid so that they could offer practical assistance.

The links they developed with black women in South Africa laid the groundwork for the NCNW’s involvement with the ACFS. By communicating with figures such as Madie Hall Xuma, Minah Soga, Gertrude Mdledle, and Edith Msezane, Council members could claim a good working knowledge of the South African racial situation, allowing them to develop a practical program to assist black women living under apartheid. The Feeding Scheme, with its aim of providing black schoolchildren in Johannesburg with one full meal a day, must have appeared as an opportunity to make a difference in the lives of black women in South Africa. While these efforts would do little in terms of threatening the political system of apartheid, the NCNW’s involvement with the ACFS amounted to a symbolic expression of black international consciousness. By highlighting the plight of black South African children under apartheid, the NCNW contributed to ongoing global debates concerning the nature of freedom, democracy, and the right to self-determination during the early cold war.

THE AFRICAN CHILDREN’S FEEDING SCHEME

The work of the ACFS represented a much-needed intervention into the lives of black South African families. Its efforts to feed black children and ensure they were able to attend school directly confronted white supremacist policies of the National government. Across nine permanent feeding centers and in ten schools, the ACFS provided more than five thousand children with at least one full meal per day, consisting of two slices of fortified brown bread, with peanut butter and glucose, and a pint of skimmed milk.⁶² This intentionally

protein-heavy food appeared to have a transformative effect, with one Feeding Scheme report noting that, “the results have so far been gratifying where figures are available. At any rate there have been no more reports of children fainting in the schools now getting the A.C.F.S. meal.”⁶³

Claiming that “self-help is our motto,” the ACFS also aimed to provide the information and guidance it believed was necessary for black South Africans to look after their children.⁶⁴ Armed with a projector and a range of public health films, the organization disseminated information on subjects such as health, hygiene, and nutrition to African children and mothers attending feeding centers and visiting non-European clinics.⁶⁵ The ACFS requested a contribution of one pence from the family for every meal their child received. The rest of the cost of a meal, five pence in total, was raised through donations collected by volunteers. Feeding Scheme officials believed that the one-penny scheme would “inculcate a feeling of responsibility” in black South African parents.⁶⁶ This language of “self-help” was often paternalistic and at times seemed to echo racist beliefs concerning the perceived failings of African families. However, the scheme’s emphasis on grassroots organizing and the empowerment of women within the black community continued to undermine the “logic” of apartheid.

Evidence of the confrontational nature of the ACFS can be seen in a letter sent by Pat Suttan to Vivian Carter Mason, in which she outlined the National Party’s opposition to their activities. “I regret that our present government are not in sympathy with our work,” Suttan noted, adding, “with their policy of Apartheid . . . any attempt to bridge the ever-widening chasm between white and coloured races is viewed with suspicion and extreme irritation, to put it mildly.”⁶⁷ The ACFS established African committees dedicated to organizing and running feeding centers and promoted “the idea of service in the community” among the black workers they employed.⁶⁸ In areas such as Pimville, Moroka, and Kilptown, African women formed “Women’s Service Committees,” giving up their time on an unpaid and voluntary basis to play a vital role in the day-to-day management and operation of the feeding centers.⁶⁹ Furthermore, around 10 percent of the scheme’s finances came directly from black South African pockets. Both the one-penny contributions to each meal and general donations meant that black South Africans were investing more than £2,000 per annum into the feeding program at a time when the average yearly wage for an African family was £119.⁷⁰

The Feeding Scheme also encouraged interracial organizing as whites, usually women, worked alongside African volunteers in the townships. As Father Trevor Huddleston recalled about the daily operation of the feeding centers:

There were thousands of them. But the people who went out and cut up the wholemeal bread and spread the fortified peanut butter, mixed the skimmed

milk and opened up at 8:30 in the morning and stayed on until midday were white women from the white suburbs who stood alongside the black ones and did the same thing. And this was a tremendous thing—our committee was very multiracial.⁷¹

By bringing together black and white women dedicated to providing for black children, the African Children's Feeding Scheme represented a clear challenge to apartheid policies by working to empower black through interracial cooperation.

This is not to say that the Feeding Scheme was immune from the hierarchies of race and class. On the whole, wealthy white women managed the ACFS, while black volunteers worked in the kitchens or as servers. Additionally, the scheme's insistence that black South Africans needed education and assistance in order to care for their families occasionally resonated with the apartheid government's belief that black South Africans were incapable of looking after themselves. While the Feeding Scheme seemed to reinforce ideas that black South Africans needed to be raised up to "white" standards, its work was invested with an important political meaning in the context of apartheid South Africa. The driving ideological belief behind the ACFS was that black South African children had just as much right to an education as their white counterparts. By launching a program designed to assist black South African families with feeding their children, and crucially making black women an integral part of this process, the ACFS ultimately questioned myths of black helplessness that were central to white supremacist thought of the era. The African Children's Feeding Scheme can therefore be read as a small but practical initiative through which black South African women could symbolically challenge racist ideas about their supposed inability to care for their children.

THE NCNW AND THE ACFS

After receiving the "all clear" from the State Department, the NCNW immediately began to work on how they could best support black South African children through the ACFS. At the 1955 annual convention, it was announced that the Feeding Scheme would be made the national project of the NCNW's Junior Councils.⁷² Made up of NCNW members under the age of twenty-one, it was hoped that the Junior Councils would take the lead in a national fundraising effort that would be seen as a symbolic gift to the children of South Africa.⁷³ Although the response was occasionally slow, there is evidence that Junior Council members responded to this call in a variety of creative ways.⁷⁴ Under the direction of Margaret G. Simms, Junior Council members were asked to collect five cents each from schoolchildren in the community as part of the South African fundraising drive.⁷⁵ In addition to this, local

councils held a range of fundraising events, including food collection drives, white elephant sales, African discussion evenings, art exhibitions, and musical performances, occasionally complete with an appearance from an African student studying in the U.S.⁷⁶ Simms also circulated ACFS pamphlets, initiated letter-writing campaigns, and held regular meetings to publicize the NCNW's fundraising efforts.

The Council's fundraising for the ACFS was not limited to its junior members. Having been forced to leave South Africa due to his political work, in 1956, Trevor Huddleston visited the NCNW's Manhattan Council, where he spoke about the Feeding Scheme's dire need for donations.⁷⁷ After this event, Vivian Carter Mason wrote to Huddleston noting that "we want to do everything possible to help and hope this project here in the United States spreads and grows until the committee is able to extend the work because of our concern."⁷⁸ At ACFS fundraising events, NCNW members often received donations of tinned food and clothes. Not wanting these to go to waste, the Council's leadership met with CARE and the American Friends Service Committee to ensure that these reached South Africa. An NCNW member and former president of the Los Angeles Metropolitan Council, Artishia Jordan also played an important role in expanding the NCNW's involvement with the ACFS. The wife of AME Bishop Frederick Jordan, she had visited South Africa as a missionary in 1954.⁷⁹ As a result of her AME connections, Jordan was able to transport to South Africa three hundred dollars' worth of clothes that had been collected as part of the Feeding Scheme appeal through Chief Berung Monyake of Basutoland, who was in America attending an AME Church Conference.⁸⁰

In total, after its first year of fundraising between November 1955 and November 1956, available NCNW records show that the organization raised more than six hundred dollars for the ACFS and donated more than four hundred dollars' worth of clothes.⁸¹ While by no means inconsequential, Margaret Simms and Vivian Carter Mason both expressed frustration that more money had not been sent and instructed local councils to continue to fundraise over the next year.⁸² Despite the disappointing results, fundraising for the ACFS represented a key initiative in the annual program of the NCNW, while the Council's leadership repeatedly stressed the worthiness of the cause.

Limited in terms of size and resources, the NCNW's work with the Feeding Scheme had a negligible impact on the racial discrimination black South Africans faced. However, by choosing to engage in South African politics through the important issue of food, the NCNW made both symbolic and practical contributions to the lives of black South African families in Johannesburg. The NCNW's fundraising on behalf of the Feeding Scheme is particularly significant in terms of understanding the role gender has played in the development of black international networks. As Jacqueline Nassy Brown

has noted, it is important to interrogate how particular diasporic practices and processes “come to be infused with gender ideologies (or become ‘gendered’), and how such gendering effectively determines the different positionalities men and women can occupy.”⁸³ By asking African American women to assist black South African families, the ACFS effectively brought together the race and gender concerns of black women in both countries.

MOTHERHOOD AND GENDERED BLACK INTERNATIONALISM

The African American family has been a key site of racial contestation throughout U.S. history. During slavery, white owners deliberately disrupted black familial ties in order to reinforce strict racial hierarchies, while efforts to maintain these kinship networks were central to black efforts to resist the slave system.⁸⁴ In the mid-twentieth century, debates about the family continued to permeate civil rights protests, as black activists challenged racist ideas that excluded African American men and women from what were deemed respectable, white, middle-class gender identities.⁸⁵ During this period, liberal sociologists such as E. Franklin Frazier argued that the inability of African Americans to adhere to “normal” patriarchal gender roles caused a form of “Negro pathology” that had damaging implications for the black community as a whole.⁸⁶ Many leading civil rights organizations responded to these arguments by promoting an idealized image of the black family that adhered to “traditional,” and often, white-defined gender roles. Representations of black motherhood played a central role in this. As cold war ideals of “domestic containment” privileged conservative notions of the nuclear family, African American women were encouraged to embrace the identity of the caring, responsible, and respectable mother as a way of advancing the race.⁸⁷ Popular black publications reinforced this view, praising the ability of African American women as loving and caring mothers dedicated to the uplift of the black family.⁸⁸ As a 1947 *Ebony* editorial entitled “Goodbye Mammy, Hello Mom” put it, when imagining the theoretical return of black women to the home after the war, “The cooking over which the ‘white folks’ used to go into ecstasies is now reserved for her own family and they really appreciate it.”⁸⁹ While obscuring the harsh reality of their labor both inside and outside the home, this reified image of the postwar black mother enabled African American women to challenge white racist myths that deliberately denigrated the black family unit, and, by extension, to claim political and moral authority in the public sphere.⁹⁰

Historically, African American women strategically embraced this notion of black motherhood in order to challenge race discrimination.⁹¹ Black women worked hard to establish themselves as “good mothers” in order to assert their political agency and to challenge widely held racist stereotypes about the

black family. As Patricia Hill Collins noted, “Since women typically carry the burden of childcare responsibilities within African American households, conceptualizing family as intricately linked within both community and nation effectively joins women’s activity in socializing the young in individual households to that of transmitting the symbols, meanings, and culture of the Black nation itself.”⁹² Collins’s view of black motherhood as a “dynamic and dialectical” institution suggests that black women were able to redefine the gendered identities and responsibilities that they had been assigned in progressive ways.⁹³ Repositioning the personal as political, African American women embraced an expansive idea of black motherhood that emphasized self-reliance.⁹⁴ By assuming the role of the caring, respectable mother they were able to radically challenge racist stereotypes that positioned black women as immoral, overbearing, and unable to properly care for their children.⁹⁵ This notion of “good” black motherhood not only allowed African American women to place themselves at the forefront of civil rights activism in the United States, but also provided a universal gender identity around which transnational racial alliances could be forged. Influenced by the traditions of the black women’s club movement, the leaders of the NCNW embraced their identity as mothers in order to actively engage with black domestic life in South Africa. Through their work with the ACFS, the NCNW invested the duties and responsibilities of the black mother with global political meaning.

The NCNW recognized the importance of motherhood as a highly contested political category, and a strong maternalist politics ran through much of the organization’s work in the United States. While primarily working to increase the collective political power of African American women as activists on a national level, the NCNW maintained a keen interest in the black family and actively provided care for the extended black community.⁹⁶ For example, the NCNW’s 1954 annual report bemoaned the erosion of black family structures and, pointing to the high percentage of “neglected” black children in foster care, hoped that this would, “challenge every Negro woman into action.”⁹⁷

In the 1950s the NCNW extended this gendered notion of community uplift to its international activities. The Feeding Scheme’s program mirrored NCNW welfare initiatives in the United States, while the provision of food to black South African children resonated closely with the Council’s emphasis on the role of black women as community organizers. NCNW members embraced their motherhood in order to transcend the domestic sphere and engage in global discussions about the need for black self-determination. Although lacking a radical anti-imperialist focus, the NCNW’s brand of moderate black internationalism promoted ideas of self-reliance and respectability that challenged racist assumptions about the black family both in the United States and South Africa. Based around the assumed responsibilities of the black mother,

the NCNW's work with the Feeding Scheme represented a conscious effort to extend the political influence of black women to the international arena, which simultaneously placed them at the heart of ongoing discussions relating to the nature of U.S. foreign policy debates.

“FOR WE, THE HUNGRY, DO NOT FEAR”: FOOD AND ANTI-APARTHEID PROTEST

The NCNW's focus on food in South Africa was especially significant within the context of its gendered black international organizing. Differences between those who could provide for their families and those who could not helped establish racial hierarchies in both the United States and South Africa. Historically, African American slaves, living on meager food allowances on Southern plantations, invested both the attainment and preparation of food with great significance. Taking control over the food they ate was a form of resistance, a way of reclaiming control of a key part of their daily lives.⁹⁸ As Doris Witt has demonstrated, this politics of black hunger continued well into the twentieth century.⁹⁹ The type of food African Americans consumed, and the circumstances under which they consumed it, continued to be invested with certain social meanings that were used to determine the racial status of an individual or group.¹⁰⁰

In South Africa too, food was closely linked to racial politics. Diana Wylie has argued that in the twentieth century, scientists, policymakers, and the South African state used the dietary deficiencies of the African population to prop up racist myths of black inferiority. Evidence of black malnutrition, she continues, paved the way for segregation in South Africa by propagating “an image of an ignorant, nonscientific Africa that dominated popular attitudes by the 1950s and helped accommodate even non-NP supporters to the policies of apartheid.”¹⁰¹ White officials chastised black South Africans for their “obsolete” methods of securing and distributing food, while pointing to these methods as evidence of the unsuitability of the African for modern life.¹⁰² By the mid-1950s it was found that in the townships around 71 percent of boys and 67 percent of girls were malnourished.¹⁰³ The newly elected apartheid government repeatedly denied that the state should bear the burden of feeding black South African children, arguing that this reduced parental responsibility and brought about “state pauperism.”¹⁰⁴

Black women in particular bore the brunt of this criticism and were often admonished for their perceived inability to properly care for their children. In the 1950s, black South African women responded to these criticisms by drawing attention to the oppressive race and class structures that underpinned the pressures placed on the black family. The issue of securing food played an important role in the radical maternalist politics of the Federation

of South African Women (FEDSAW). At the 1954 FEDSAW conference, the organization's vice president, Lilian Ngoyi, outlined how food costs and wage differentials in the Transvaal impacted the procurement of nutritional foodstuff:

We are told that we must eat proper food, we must have fats, proteins, vitamins. We should like to have these things, we want them, but we have to eat mealie meal because we cannot buy other foods. Although our wages are low, we must pay the same price for food as the Europeans. . . . The Kaffer will put Malan in *his* place—by fear. For we, the hungry, do not fear. We want to live and be able to work like others. And our men must be fed well for their work.¹⁰⁵

FEDSAW viewed the ability to access food as both an indicator of racial hierarchies and a symbolic issue that legitimated black women's protest. In insisting that "our men must be fed well for their work," Ngoyi and FEDSAW used their inability to live up to their status as mothers to challenge the racist political and economic structures of apartheid. The absence of nutritious food acted as a daily reminder for Africans of the discrimination they faced and helped drive movements for political change.

The NCNW's work with the ACFS was therefore implicitly tied to broader racial debates in apartheid South Africa. Concentrating specifically on the issue of food, Council organizers drew on their understanding of themselves as "good" black mothers dedicated to providing care for black children both at home and overseas. As Vivian Carter Mason wrote in a letter to Artishia Jordan when discussing publicity for the ACFS, "The problem of feeding people is certainly one that must find great sympathy here in America."¹⁰⁶ The political significance of hunger in the United States attracted the NCNW to the Feeding Scheme. Aware of the ways in which access to food had been used to further control and disenfranchise African Americans, the NCNW attempted to challenge these forces both at home and abroad. This was achieved through a global reimagining of the responsibilities of African American women that encompassed South Africa.

The images associated with the African Children's Feeding Scheme give further insight into how the NCNW extended its visions of a global black motherhood to South Africa. ACFS pamphlets directly appealed to the ideals of care, social welfare, and racial uplift that informed the NCNW's work in the United States. Disseminated widely amongst NCNW members through letters, memos, newsletters, and press releases, these materials presented a highly gendered image of its work in Johannesburg.¹⁰⁷ African children were often represented as being without adult supervision. Pamphlets contained pictures that depicted crowds of children at feeding stations, clutching empty

containers, underlining the scale of the task facing the ACFS as well as the importance of the organization's work. It was these "motherless" children that NCNW members were being asked to assist. Images of neglect promoted maternal ideas that related to the traditional role of women in the family. In the absence of adult supervision, it was implied that it was up to the supporters of the Feeding Scheme to assist black children in South Africa.

Laura Briggs has identified how images of the foreign "waif" and "Madonna with Child" became increasingly prevalent in American visual culture following the Second World War. These images questioned the stability of the black family while producing "an ideology of rescue by white people of non-white people."¹⁰⁸ Adopted by organizations such as UNICEF and regularly reproduced throughout the media, Briggs argues that these ubiquitous images of black hunger, poverty, and need were, in turn, used to legitimize U.S. foreign policy interventions during the early cold war.¹⁰⁹ It is tempting to see the NCNW's involvement in the Feeding Scheme as being part of this broader narrative of liberal interventionism used to validate America's foreign policy. At times the pamphlets promote an idea of black African helplessness that seems to privilege the role of the Feeding Scheme's white organizers and undermine the independence of black South African women. The scenes that they presented were a far cry from the militant activism of Ngoyi and the Federation of South African Women, who emphasized how black South African women themselves could overthrow and challenge the racist structures that prevented them from fulfilling their roles as mothers. Indeed, the very fact that the NCNW avoided groups such as FEDSAW, whose members included communists and trade unionists, is illustrative of the limitations of their moderate internationalism.

However, the NCNW's fundraising efforts on behalf of the Feeding Scheme also demonstrate how African Americans maintained their anticolonial outlook when faced with the repressive politics of the early cold war. Reluctant to challenge the U.S. government on the international stage, moderate black organizations like the NCNW worked with the state in an attempt to influence American attitudes toward white supremacy in Africa. Small and limited in nature, the NCNW's early engagement with South African politics is representative of how black liberals worked to pressure U.S. policymakers into taking a stand against the apartheid government.¹¹⁰ By emphasizing their identity and responsibilities as black mothers, NCNW members were able to present their work as part of an acceptable and respectable endeavor designed to help black South African families living under the apartheid regime. This organizing is also significant in terms of thinking through the gender politics of black internationalism as it sheds light on the extent to which NCNW leaders were invested in challenging negative portrayals of black motherhood on a global scale. African American women were cast as the dominant partners in this

trans-Atlantic relationship, responsible figures with the necessary skills and experiences uplift black South African families.

By extending their care across the Black Atlantic, it was implied that African American women had the potential to secure and safeguard the future of black children globally. Often hierarchical, issues of motherhood, care, and family responsibilities traveled and therefore became an important way through which black women could relate to one another across national borders. As Collins has suggested, black women sometimes responded to pressures that were placed on the black family by embracing the identity of the “community othermother”—a role that placed them at the center of broad kinship networks. The NCNW’s work in South Africa suggests that the concept of the community othermother also has an important diasporic significance.¹¹¹

CONCLUSION

Throughout its history, the National Council of Negro Women made efforts to engage with international political issues while actively developing networks between black women across national borders. Although the NCNW’s activities in South Africa were limited, both in terms of financial contribution and ability to mount an effective challenge to the rapidly expanding apartheid state, they are nevertheless significant in terms of understanding the changing nature of black internationalism during the early cold war.

As white governments attempted to forcibly remove radical black voices from the global political arena, moderate organizations such as the NCNW were able to expand their international networks. It is therefore tempting to dismiss the NCNW’s black internationalism as part of broader, state-directed efforts to tackle communism. However, this line of argument overlooks the ability of African Americans to shape cold war debates on race and ultimately leaves us with the impression that black activists simply capitulated to the demands of the U.S. government. This was not the case, as black organizations consistently lobbied on behalf of oppressed people in Africa and the black diaspora throughout the worst years of anticommunist suppression.

By working with the U.S. government, African Americans attempted to place issues of self-determination at the center of U.S. foreign policy initiatives through their welfare and humanitarian work. Although this was an imperfect compromise, the NCNW’s work in South Africa represented an active contribution on behalf of African American women to resist the impact of apartheid on the day-to-day lives of black South Africans. Furthermore, as its first sustained engagement in Africa, the NCNW’s work with the ACFS was a pioneering enterprise that helped lay the groundwork for the organization’s considerable charitable work on the African continent throughout the second half of the twentieth century.¹¹²

Finally, the NCNW's particular brand of black internationalism is also illustrative of how highly gendered representations of the African family worked to promote a diasporic consciousness amongst African Americans. During the 1950s, images such as the oppressed African mother, the poor and malnourished African child, and the African family in need of protection were deliberately employed as gendered motifs around which black women could build international alliances. The NCNW's own ideological emphasis on social welfare, child care, and religious respectability was reflected in the work of the African Children's Feeding Scheme. This organization, dedicated to tackling apartheid policies that left black children malnourished, called on African American women, as mothers, to extend their organizing in order to assist the South African family.

By tackling hunger in South Africa, the NCNW invested in the image of a healthy and self-sufficient black family across national borders. These activities had important political resonance in both the United States and South Africa in that they challenged white racist images of black incompetence and powerlessness used to maintain racial hierarchies. By contributing to the feeding of black South African children in Johannesburg, African Americans offered an alternative vision of the black family that contradicted the racial ideologies of apartheid. NCNW members embraced and extended their gender roles in order to actively engage in the lives of black children overseas. Through the Feeding Scheme, the NCNW articulated a form of global black motherhood that symbolically linked African American and black South African women in ways that reinforced ideals of self-reliance and independence.

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NOTES

1. Although Feeding Scheme officials claim that the initiative started in 1947 in their correspondence with the National Council of Negro Women, Father Trevor Huddleston has claimed he first started the ACFS in June 1945. See Trevor Huddleston, "Holiday Feeding for African Children," *Bantu World*, July 14, 1945,

- p. 4; “Feeding of African Children During Holidays,” *Bantu World*, October 13, 1945, p. 1; “School Feeding Scandal Exposed: African Children Get Less,” *Guardian*, June 30, 1946, p. 1.
2. At this time, as a result of deliberate policies of the ruling National Party, the average African child was receiving a school meal that cost just one-sixth of the price of those provided for white children. See Pat Suttan to Mary McLeod Bethune, July 4, 1955, Records of the NCNW, NABWH, Washington, D.C., Series 7, Box 1, Folder 3, pp. 3, 1; Records of the NCNW, NABWH, Washington, D.C. Series. 7, Box 1, Folder 3; “School Feeding: Grant For White Children To Be Doubled?” *Guardian*, July 21, 1949, p. 3.
 3. The ACFS relied heavily on financial donations and struggled to balance the books throughout this period. See Pat Suttan to Mary McLeod Bethune, July 4, 1955, Records of the NCNW, NABWH, Washington, D.C. Series 7, Box 1, Folder 3, p. 2. In the financial year 1954–55, the ACFS spent a total of £6,452.5s.5d.; food that was largely covered by charitable donations amounted to £5,833 9s.7d. See “African Children’s Feeding Scheme Income and Expenditure Account for the Year Ended 28th February, 1955,” June 1, 1955, Records of the NCNW, NABWH, Washington, D.C., Series 7, Box 1, Folder 3. The dismantling of state provision for black education was enshrined in the 1953 Bantu Education Act.
 4. Pat Suttan to Mary McLeod Bethune, July 4, 1955, pp. 1–3.
 5. Vivian Carter Mason to William McKinley Johnson Jr., South African Desk, State Department, December 19, 1955, Records of the NCNW, NABWH, Washington, D.C., Series 7, Box 1, Folder 3; John L. Kuhn to Vivian Carter Mason 02/02/1956 Series 7, Box 1, Folder 3; Margaret Simms to NCNW members, January 12, 1955, Records of the NCNW, NABWH, Washington, D.C, Series 7, Box 1, Folder 3.
 6. “With Our Councils . . .,” *Telefact* 15.2 (May 1956): 6.; Trevor Huddleston to Vivian Carter Mason, March 22, 1956, Records of the NCNW, NABWH, Washington, D.C., Series 7, Box 1, Folder 3.
 7. Deborah G White, *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894–1994* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), see especially chapter 5.
 8. The notable exception to this is Julie A. Gallagher’s chapter, “The National Council of Negro Women, Human Rights and the Cold War,” in *Breaking the Wave: Women, Their Organizations, and Feminism, 1945–1985*, ed. Kathleen A. Laughlin and Jacqueline L. Castledine (New York: Routledge, 2011).
 9. Penny Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937–1957* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); Gerald Horne, *Black and Red: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Afro-American Response to the Cold War, 1944–1963* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1986).
 10. Thomas Borstelmann, *Apartheid’s Reluctant Uncle: The United States and Southern Africa in the Early Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); William Minter, *King Solomon’s Mines Revisited: Western Interests and the Burdened History of Southern Africa* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).

11. Robin D. G. Kelley, "But a Local Phase of a World Problem": Black History's Global Vision, 1883–1950," *Journal of African American History* 86:3 (Winter 1999): 1075–76.
12. Carol Anderson, *Bourgeois Radicals: The NAACP and the Struggle for Colonial Liberation, 1941–1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).
13. Carole Boyce Davies, *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Dayo F. Gore, Jeanne Theoharis, and Komozi Woodard, eds., *Want to Start a Revolution?: Radical Women in the Black Freedom Struggle* (New York: New York University Press, 2010); Gerald Horne, *Race Woman: The Lives of Shirley Graham Du Bois* (New York: New York University Press, 2000); Erik S. McDuffie, *Sojourning for Freedom: Black Women, American Communism, and the Making of Black Left Feminism* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2011); Kate Weigand, *Red Feminism: American Communism and the Making of Women's Liberation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), see especially chapter 5.
14. For a discussion of the state of the literature on radicalism and black left feminism, see Gore et al., *Want to Start a Revolution?* and McDuffie's *Sojourning for Freedom*.
15. Joyce Ann Hanson, *Mary McLeod Bethune and Black Women's Political Activism* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2003), 164–65.
16. Bettye Collier-Thomas, *N.C.N.W., 1935–1980* (Washington, D.C.: The National Council of Negro Women, 1981), 30–34; White, *Too Heavy a Load*, 148–50.
17. "Annual Report of the National Council of Negro Women, 1954–1955," November 11, 1955, Records of the NCNW, Series 2, Box 8, Folder 85, p. 26.
18. Hanson, *Mary McLeod Bethune and Black Women's Political Activism*, 168. Brandy T. Wells argues that the NCNW often exaggerated the extent of its ties to women's groups in the Caribbean and Latin America. See "*She Pieced and Stitched and Quilted, Never Wavering nor Doubting*": *A Historical Tapestry of African American Women's Internationalism, 1890s–1960s*, Ph.D. diss. (Ohio State University, 2015): 378.
19. In 1941, the NCNW held a conference on the theme of "Women Facing New Frontiers." At this conference the need for "closer cooperation" with countries with a "large Negro Population" was discussed, whilst it was noted that there was a particular need to work "with the women of closely allied ethnic groups in Cuba, Haiti, South America and the Orient." See "High Lighting the Conference," *The Aframerican Woman's Journal* 4 (1941): 6–12.
20. Mary McLeod Bethune to William Alphaeus Hunton, August 2, 1943, Records of the NCNW. NABWH, Washington, D.C., Series 5, Box 10, Folder 1.
21. "Another Dream Realized," *Telefact* (January 1952): 1.
22. Hollis Ralph Lynch, *Black American Radicals and the Liberation of Africa: The Council on African Affairs 1937–1955* (Ithaca: Cornell University, Africana Studies and Research Center, 1978); Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*.
23. Mary McLeod Bethune to Max Yergan and Paul Robeson, June 14, 1948. Max Yergan Papers, Manuscript Division, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Box 3, Folder 12.

24. *Hanson, Mary McLeod Bethune and Black Women's Political Activism, 187–88.*
25. Erik S. McDuffie, “For Full Freedom of . . . Colored Women in Africa, Asia, and in These United States . . .’: Black Women Radicals and the Practice of a Black Women’s International,” *Palimpsest: A Journal on Women, Gender, and the Black International* 1, no. 1 (2012): 19.
26. Mary McLeod Bethune, “The President’s Message: Without Flinching,” *The Aframerican Woman’s Journal* (Winter 1947): 3.
27. Vivian Carter Mason to Pat Suttan, June 12, 1955, Records of the NCNW, NABWH, Washington, D.C., Series 7, Box 1, Folder 3.
28. Vivian Carter Mason to William McKinley Johnson, Jr., South African Desk, State Department, December 12, 1955, Records of the NCNW, NABWH, Washington, D.C., Series 7, Box 1, Folder 3. See also Anderson, *Bourgeois Radicals*.
29. John L. Kuhn to Vivian Carter Mason, February 2, 1956, Series 7, Box 1, Folder 3.
30. Carol Anderson, “Rethinking Radicalism: African Americans and the Liberation Struggles in Somalia, Libya, and Eritrea, 1945–1949,” *Journal of The Historical Society* 11, no. 4 (December 1, 2011): 385–423.
31. Resolutions Passed in the 19th Annual Convention, November 13, 1954, Records of the NCNW, NABWH, Washington, D.C., Series 2, Box 6, Folder 72, pp. 6–7.
32. See Gerald Horne, “Who Lost the Cold War? Africans and African Americans,” *Diplomatic History* 20, no. 4 (October 1, 1996).
33. Helen Laville and Scott Lucas, “The American Way: Edith Sampson, the NAACP, and African American Identity in the Cold War,” *Diplomatic History* 20, no. 4 (October, 1996): 567.
34. Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Carol Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944–1955* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line*.
35. Mary McLeod Bethune, “The President’s Message: Without Flinching,” *The Aframerican Woman’s Journal* (Winter 1947), Records of the NCNW, Series 13, Box 1, Folder 23, p.3.
36. Vivian Carter Mason, “Letter of Thanks for Workshop on Africa - 19th Annual Convention 1954” (08/12/1954), Records of the NCNW, NABWH, Washington, D.C., Series 2, Box 6, Folder 70. The flags of these independent African nations were also displayed for the duration of the workshop and convention: National Council of Negro Women, 19th Annual Convention. Workshop Summaries, November 8–13, 1954, Records of the NCNW, NABWH, Washington, D.C., Series 2, Box 6, Folder 12, p. 7.
37. National Council of Negro Women, Inc. 19th Annual Convention, November 8–13, 1954, Washington, D.C, Workshop Summaries, Records of the NCNW, NABWH, Washington, D.C., Series 2, Box 6, Folder 72, pp. 1–7.

38. Annual Report of the National Council of Negro Women, 1954–1955, November 11, 1955, Records of the NCNW, NABWH, Washington, D.C., Series 2, Box 8, Folder 85, p. 13. “Highlight Review - 19th Annual Convention,” *Telefact* (December 1954): 3.
39. Annual Report, p. 7.
40. For more on the life of Dorothy Ferebee and her work with the NCNW, see: Diane Kiesel, *She Can Bring Us Home: Dr. Dorothy Boulding Ferebee, Civil Rights Pioneer* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015).
41. Vivian Carter Mason, “Report of Meeting in Paris of the Women’s International Democratic Federation,” *The Aframerican Woman’s Journal* (March 1946): 3.
42. Helen Laville, *Cold War Women: The International Activities of American Women’s Organizations* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002).
43. Vivian Carter Mason, “Report of Meeting in Paris,” 17.
44. Vivian Carter Mason to Dorothy J. Bellanca, January 30, 1946, Records of the NCNW, NABWH, Washington, D.C., Series 5, Box 18, Folder 13, p. 1; Mason, “Report of Meeting in Paris,” 3.
45. Hanson, *Mary McLeod Bethune and Black Women’s Political Activism*, 188.
46. International Committee Program, NCNW International Committee Meeting Minutes January 28, 1946, Records of the NCNW, NABWH, Washington, D.C., Series 5, Box 18, Folder 14, pp. 1–2.
47. Annual Report of the National Council of Negro Women, 1954–1955, Records of the NCNW, NABWH, Washington, D.C., Series 2, Box 8, Folder 85.
48. “President’s Address,” *Telefact* 14, no. 1 (January 1955): 1.
49. Saul Dubow, *Racial Segregation and the Origins of Apartheid in South Africa, 1919–1936* (London: Macmillan, 1989).
50. Nigel Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa: Conquest, Apartheid, Democracy* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2007).
51. Clare Corbould, *Becoming African Americans: Black Public Life in Harlem, 1919–1939* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009); Gerald Horne, *Mau Mau in Harlem?: The U.S. and the Liberation of Kenya* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); James H. Meriwether, *Proudly We Can Be Africans: Black Americans and Africa, 1935–1961* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).
52. “Resolutions Passed in Biennial Convention,” *Telefact* (December 1953): 2.
53. Madie Hall had first met Mary McLeod Bethune in her twenties, maintaining a close personal relationship with the NCNW leader up until Bethune’s death in 1955. Iris Berger, “An African American ‘Mother of the Nation’: Madie Hall Xuma in South Africa, 1940–1963,” in *Extending the Diaspora: New Histories of Black People*, ed. Dawne Y. Curry, Eric D. Duke, and Marshanda A. Smith (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 127.
54. Walker, *Women and Resistance In South Africa*, 89; Iris Berger, “An African American ‘Mother of the Nation’: Madie Hall Xuma in South Africa, 1940–1963,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27 (2001): 547–66.

55. Madie Hall Xuma to NCNW (c. 1946), Records of the NCNW, NABWH, Washington, D.C., Series 5, Box 18, Folder 13, p. 1; Cherryl Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1991), 89.
56. Cherryl Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa*, 35.
57. Mary McLeod Bethune to Miss M. Soga, September 28, 1940, Records of the NCNW, NABWH, Washington, D.C., Series 5, Box 18, Folder 14.
58. Vivian Carter Mason to Minah Soga, June 30, 1955, Records of the NCNW, NABWH, Washington, D.C., Series 7, Box 1, Folder 2, p. 1.
59. Minutes NCNW Annual Convention, November 15, 1956, Records of the NCNW, NABWH, Washington, D.C., Series 2, Box 9, Folder 102. For more on the restrictions placed on the travel of black activists between the U.S. and South Africa during the early cold war, see Nicholas Grant, "Crossing the Black Atlantic: The Global Antiapartheid Movement and the Racial Politics of the Cold War," *Radical History Review* (2014): 72–93.
60. Minutes of the 21st Annual Convention, November 14–17, 1956. Including the minutes of the Board of Directors Meeting, November 14 and 18, 1956, Records of the NCNW, NABWH, Washington, D.C., Series 2, Box 9, Folder 102, p. 11.
61. Vivian Carter Mason to Edith Nono Msezane, June 29, 1955, Records of the NCNW, NABWH, Washington, D.C., Series 7, Box 1, Folder 2, pp. 1–2.
62. African Children's Feeding Scheme: Chairman's Report 1953–1954 (ACFS, 1954), Community of the Resurrection Records, Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, Bro, p. 4; "Feeding of African Children During Holidays," *Bantu World*, October 13, 1945, p. 1.
63. Suttin to Bethune, July 4, 1955, 1–2.
64. *Ibid.*, 5.
65. *Ibid.*, 2.
66. The decision to request a one-penny contribution from parents may also have been a way of identifying the most at-risk children. As Pat Suttin stated when writing to Mary McLeod Bethune: "Should the child come without its penny, particulars are taken by the workers, and if necessary the case is handed over to Child Welfare, who investigate it and help the family." *Ibid.*, 2.
67. Pat Suttin to Vivian Carter Mason, December 13, 1955, Records of the NCNW, NABWH, Washington, D.C., Series 7, Box 1, Folder 3, p. 2.
68. *Ibid.*, 1.
69. African Children's Feeding Scheme: Chairman's Report 1953–1954 (1954), Community of the Resurrection Records, Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, Bro, p. 2.
70. *Ibid.*, 5. Pierre L. Van den Berghe, *South Africa, a Study in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 184.
71. Pippa Stein, "Father Trevor Huddleston Interview," January 1986, Sophiatown Interviews, Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, p. 9.

72. Margaret Simms to NCNW members, December 1, 1955, Records of the NCNW, NABWH, Washington, D.C., Series 7, Box 1, Folder 3.
73. Margaret Simms, "Circular Re. African Children's Feeding Scheme," December 1, 1955, Records of the NCNW, Series 7, Box 9, Folder 8.
74. There is evidence that Junior Council members occasionally resented the level of control that the NCNW executive exerted over their activities. This sometimes resulted in the slow take-up of official NCNW initiatives. For example, the response to the Feeding Scheme amongst Junior Council members in New York City was hampered by these tensions, specifically the belief that Junior Council members were being asked to make too large a financial contribution to activities that were conceived of at a national level. See Daisy S. George to Vivian Carter Mason, March 20, 1956, Records of the NCNW, NABWH, Washington, D.C., Series 6, Box 4, Folder 33. I am indebted to Brandy T. Wells for providing me with a copy of this letter.
75. Margaret Simms, "Memo to local councils and junior councils," February 20, 1956, Records of the NCNW, NABWH, Washington, D.C., Series 7, Box 1, Folder 3.
76. "Junior Council Assists Needy African Children," *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, December 29, 1956, p. 3.
77. "With Our Councils . . .," *Telefact* 15, no. 2 (May 1956): 6; Trevor Huddleston to Vivian Carter Mason, March 22, 1956, Records of the NCNW, NABWH, Washington, D.C., Series 7, Box 1, Folder 3.
78. Vivian Carter Mason to Trevor Huddleston, January 26, 1956, Records of the NCNW, NABWH, Washington, D.C., Series 7, Box 1, Folder 3.
79. Artishia Jordan to the NCNW, April 16, 1956, Records of the NCNW, NABWH, Washington, D.C., Series 7, Box 1, Folder 3; "Bishop Jordan Finally Admitted to South Africa," *Atlanta Daily World*, August 1, 1954; "Bishop Jordan to Defy So. Africa Ban on AMEs," *Chicago Defender*, August 4, 1953; "Bishop Jordan Leaves for South Africa," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, November 4, 1954; "Bishop Closes AME Conference in South Africa," *Atlanta Daily World*, December 21, 1954.
80. Margaret Simms, Annual Report of Junior Councils Presented by National Director at the Annual Convention at the Willard House, November 14-18, 1956, Records of the NCNW, NABWH, Washington, D.C., Series 2, Box 10, Folder 103, p. 2.
81. Minutes of the 21st Annual Convention, November 14-17, 1956, including the minutes of the Board of Directors Meeting, November 14 and 18, 1956, Records of the NCNW, NABWH, Washington, D.C., Series 2, Box 9, Folder 102, p. 3; Vivian Carter Mason to Eleanor Ponsonby, August 14, 1956, Records of the NCNW, NABWH, Washington, D.C., Series 7, Box 1, Folder 3.
82. Vivian Carter Mason to Margaret Simms, April 30, 1956, Records of the NCNW, NABWH, Washington, D.C., Series 7, Box 1, Folder 3, p. 1; Margaret Simms to Vivian Carter Mason, December 17, 1956, Records of the NCNW, NABWH, Washington, D.C., Series 7, Box 9, Folder 8.

83. Jacqueline Nassy Brown, "Black Liverpool, Black America, and the Gendering of Diasporic Space," *Cultural Anthropology* 13, no. 3 (August 1998): 301.
84. John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); Herbert George Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750–1925* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977). For more recent work that assesses the historical significance of the black family for African Americans, see Bell Hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Toronto: Between-the-Lines, 1990), 42; Jean Fagan Yellin, *Harriet Jacobs: A Life* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2004), 9; Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).
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94. Molly Ladd-Taylor, “Community Mothering,” 9.
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96. Hanson, *Mary McLeod Bethune and Black Women’s Political Activism*, 168.
97. National Council of Negro Women, “Annual Report of the National Council of Negro Women, 1954–1955” (NCNW, November 11, 1955), Records of the NCNW, Series 2, Box 8, Folder 85, pp. 26–27.
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100. Andrew Warnes, *Hunger Overcome?: Food and Resistance in Twentieth Century African American Literature* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 3.
101. Diana Wylie, *Starving on a Full Stomach: Hunger and the Triumph of Cultural Racism in Modern South Africa* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001), 234.
102. *Ibid.*, 59, 127.
103. “Children of South Africa: A Report Compiled by the Federation of South African Women” (1955), Jack and Ray Simons Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, University of Cape Town, Folder R9.3.2, pp. 9–10.
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105. Lilian Ngoyi Speech, FEDSAW Report: Transvaal Region Rent Increases Conference, 1954, Records of FEDSAW, Historical Papers, William Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, Ba4.1.5. pp. 5–7.
106. Vivian Carter Mason to Artishia W. Jordon, A.M.E. Church, March 5, 1956, Records of the NCNW, NABWH, Washington, D.C., Series 7, Box 1, Folder 3.
107. Margaret Simms was directed to use pictures provided by the ACFS in national press releases that detailed the NCNW’s work with the Feeding Scheme. See Vivian Carter Mason to Margaret Simms, January 26, 1956, Records of the NCNW, NABWH, Washington, D.C., Series 7, Box 1, Folder 3. In January 1956 Vivian Carter Mason wrote to Pat Suttan requesting that she send one hundred copies of the ACFS’s pamphlets and yearly reports for circulation throughout the NCNW’s local councils: “Please remit by airmail about one hundred of the pamphlets and yearly reports.”

108. Laura Briggs, "Mother, Child, Race, Nation: The Visual Iconography of Rescue and the Politics of Transnational and Transracial Adoption," *Gender & History* 15, no. 2 (August 2003): 180–81.
109. *Ibid.*, 191–93.
110. Anderson, *Bourgeois Radicals*, chapter 2.
111. Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 189–90.
112. The NCNW has been involved in a range of charitable activities in Africa from the mid-1950s to the present day. The NCNW records at the NABWH in Washington, D.C., are a testament to the organization's African organizing.