Well-Tempered Women

Nineteenth-Century Temperance Rhetoric

Carol Mattingly

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Dissension and Division: Racial Tension and the WCTU

She is simply endeavoring to do what is impossible—please the anti-lynch people and not displease the south.

—"Frances, A Temporizer," The *Cleveland Gazette*

IN MANY WAYS, the women of the WCTU reflected the times and culture of which they were a part. Divisions apparent within the nation often surfaced among members. For example, Frances Willard made numerous overtures to Catholics despite the fact that the WCTU membership was almost completely comprised of Christian evangelists. She often met with opposition from members who represented a typical fear of "papists." Debates over whether and how to include immigrant populations also surfaced. In both cases, rhetoric differed according to where members lived. For example, in Minnesota, although there were many efforts to solicit membership among immigrants, members often spoke negatively of Germans because of their control over the growing brewing industry in that area; in Boston, members' disdain was directed primarily at Irish Catholics. Attitudes toward African Americans also reflected the regional and cultural background of members, but racial relations within the union, unlike other divisions, became a subject for national and international debate.

Frances Willard's biographers and others who have written accounts of the WCTU have ignored or glossed over many differences within the WCTU, including racial tensions aired publicly by the most vocal African American woman activist in the 1890s, Ida B. Wells. One biographer, Mary Earhart, does mention the Willard/Wells conflict; but Earhart does not seem to understand the seriousness of the charges made by Wells, and

she wonders that "criticism persisted" even after the 1894 presidential address Willard had hoped would put the matter to rest. Ruth Bordin, in *Woman and Temperance: the Quest for Power and Liberty*, also addresses the issue briefly, attributing the major criticism to "A British antilynching society," probably because Wells's charges were first published in *Fraternity*, the official newspaper of a British anti-lynching organization; but Bordin fails to mention Ida. B. Wells at all. Her efforts concentrate, instead, on providing evidence of black participation within the WCTU and on showing that "Black women appreciated the WCTU's limited acceptance" (84). Black women did often value their connection with the WCTU, but primarily for the agency it afforded them in fulfilling their own purposes.

Similarly, biographers of Ida B. Wells have relied almost solely on Wells's view of the WCTU in addressing any connection between black women and that organization. They have thus ignored the participation of other highly influential black women in the WCTU and the value those women placed on their membership, as well as the sometimes committed support of white WCTU members.

Although there was unquestionably racism within the WCTU, there was also acceptance, and many African American women found the organization beneficial for their own purposes. This chapter examines the Wells-Willard controversy but also goes beyond the controversy between these two powerful rhetors to explore other issues of race within the organization and to discern attitudes among members of both races.

In 1893, during her second anti-lynching campaign in England, Ida B. Wells accused Willard and the WCTU of complicity in the lynching of blacks. Wells told her English audiences of the failure of American religious and moral leaders to speak out in opposition to lynching. According to Wells, the press continually asked her about specific prominent leaders, such as Dwight Moody and Frances Willard, and she charged those leaders with a continued refusal to speak out against lynching. Wells was particularly critical of Willard, suggesting that Willard had not only failed to take a stand against lynching, but had seemed to condone it. She based her premise on a portion of an 1890 interview in which Willard praised Southerners and suggested that Northerners had unfairly judged the South. Willard had told a New York newspaper reporter,

> I pity the southerners, and I believe the great mass of them are as conscientious and kindly-intentioned toward the colored man as an equal number of white church-members of the North. . . . The problem on their hands is immeasurable. The colored race multiplies like the locusts of Egypt. The grog-shop is its center of power. The safety of women, of childhood, of the home is menaced in a thousand localities at this moment, so that the men dare not go beyond the sight of their own roof-tree. (Thompson 56)

While Willard did not mention lynching *per se*, the disparaging image equating African Americans with the multiplying locusts that plagued Egypt, and the suggested connection between blacks and saloons, were enough to have incited Wells's anger and shock today's reader. But even more problematic, Willard's juxtaposing the safety of women and children with the Southerners' "problem" supported exactly the kinds of racist myths and suppositions Wells was devoting her life to eradicating. As equally adept as Willard in rhetorical acumen, Wells made use of Willard's statement to draw international attention to her cause.

Wells created a maelstrom within the press with her accusations and continued to command attention by extending the confrontation. After her return to the United States, she persisted in her criticism of Willard and the WCTU in her public addresses; she also requested permission to address the national WCTU convention. Her request was denied, WCTU leader Anna S. Benjamin later told the *Baltimore Sun*, "on account of the rather too fervid language of her oratory" ("The Union" 8). The following year, Wells did attend the 1894 national convention as a fraternal candidate, having, according to Benjamin, "with the shrewdness of a politician . . . induced a society of some kind to send her" (8). Benjamin continues:

> The union, in courtesy, was thus compelled to receive the woman with other delegates and she seized the opportunity to soundly score the union as being indifferent in the welfare of the negro. Her violent attack was replied to at the time and assurance was made that the negro was the recipient of Christian Sympathy of the union. She refused to be convinced and she has since spoken against the WCTU. (8)

At the convention, WCTU leaders had minimized Wells's effect, not only by limiting her time for speaking, but also by positioning her address after that of two members of her own race who praised Willard and the WCTU. Rev. Wm. Boyd, former minister of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, had been introduced and spoke briefly (*Minutes of Twenty-First* 36). Then, Lucy Thurman, "representing the colored people, presented a bunch of yellow and white chrysanthemums tied with yellow and white ribbons" to Frances Willard (39), "chosen, Mrs Thurman said, because Miss Willard is queen of women, the chrysanthemum is queen of the autumn and that particular variety queen of all ("WCTU" 1). Shortly after, Wells was introduced and permitted to speak

briefly. The 1894 *Minutes of the Twenty-First Convention* make only brief mention of Wells's appearance at the convention: "Miss Wells, fraternal delegate from the African M.E. Mite Society, was here introduced" (39), providing no details about the content of her speech. In addition, I have been able to find no mention of Wells's presentation in then contemporary newspaper reports.

At the same convention, Willard attempted to defend herself in her presidential address by explaining that "Much misapprehension has arisen in the last year concerning the attitude of our unions toward the colored people, and an official explanation is in order" (129). After referring to her own background as the daughter of abolitionist parents and her long-time loyalty to and support of blacks, Willard elaborated on the "State rights" policy of the WCTU, by which the details of organization were left to the states.

> It is needless to say that in the Northern and Western States colored women join the same local unions as white women, and that they have always been among our national superintendents. The President of a colored State WCTU is a full voting member of our Executive Committee, just the same as the President of the white WCTU who comes from the same State. (129)

In truth, although occasionally both races formed one union even in the South, many black unions chose to be separate, not only in the South, but in the North and West as well.[1] And apparently the equal treatment Willard suggests, while the letter of the law, often failed in practice, especially in the South. However, while separate unions in the South provided one issue for Wells's accusations, the more volatile issue was that of lynching.

Willard's defense became even more precarious as she tried to justify other segments of her earlier remarks. She commented on less controversial issues, such as educational qualifications for the ballot and corrupt political practices, sandwiching the more sensitive rape issue briefly between those matters and her indictment of white men. Still, Willard's efforts appeared awkward as she tried to appease her critics without really acknowledging any mistake on her part:

> Some years ago on my return from the South I was interviewed by a representative of the New York *Voice*, and stated that as one result of my observations and inquiries I believed that it would be better if not only in the South but throughout the nation we had an educational rather than a color or sex limit put upon the ballot. To this opinion, without intending the slightest discrimination against any race, I still adhere. I also said that in the South the colored vote was often marshalled against the temperance people by base political leaders for their own purposes, and still hold to that statement. Furthermore, I said that the nameless outrages perpetrated upon white women and little girls were a cause of constant anxiety, and this I still believe to be true; but I wish I had said then, as I do now, that the immoralities of white men in their relations with colored women are the source of intolerable race prejudice and hatred, and that there is not a more withering curse upon the manhood of any nation than that which the eternal laws of nature visited upon those men and those homes in which the helpless bondwoman was made the victim of her master's base desire. (130)[2]

Willard's efforts at silencing her critics was ineffective for a number of reasons. Frances E. W. Harper (plates 21, 22) and other black women leaders had also expressed concern about universal suffrage that included the illiterate, although they most often suggested that an answer lay in educating them, and black women leaders had long expressed concern about the enormous alcohol problem within the black community. The associated abuse of alcohol and politics among both races was well-known; election day was a dangerous day to be on the streets in many places because of the free flow of alcohol, given that polls were often located in saloons and politicians purchased alcohol freely for potential voters. But in her comments, Willard again pointed specifically to black voters as the primary problem, and Willard's first two reaffirmations reveal her white, middle-class assumptions.

But Willard's reassertion that outrages were perpetrated against women and children—the implication being that black men posed a danger to innocent white women and children—must have infuriated many black leaders. The fact that Willard included a reprimand to white men—situated primarily in the past and associated with the evils of slavery—could hardly assuage anger at this kind of accusation. After all, white men were not likely to be lynched.

Later in her address, Willard explained that "It is inconceivable that the WCTU will ever condone lynching, no matter what the provocation" (133), placing her on record as opposing lynching; but the inclusion of the phrase "no matter what the provocation" suggests her stubborn adherence to the notion that black men were raping white women and children. Willard then offered a resolution stating the union's opposition to lynching, but her near repetition of earlier inflammatory rhetoric undercut the formal condemnation of lynching, and the southern delegation blocked formal passage of her suggested resolution.

The confrontation between Wells and Willard continued for several years. Willard had made personal reference to Wells in her 1894 annual

address. When Wells suggested that, in situations in which rape was given as the reason for lynching, often "the relationship between the victim lynched and the alleged victim of his assault was voluntary, clandestine and illicit" ("Miss Wells" 1), Willard seized upon Wells's statement to charge that Wells, by her statements "concerning white women having taken the initiative in nameless acts between the races . . . has put an imputation upon half the white race in this country" (*Minutes of Twenty-First* 131).

However, Willard's 1894 defense explains Wells's charge that Willard promoted the lynching of black men. Wells had long insisted that whites used the notion that black men raped white women as a myth to excuse lynching. She had provided statistics to show that the majority of reasons given for lynchings were actually for reasons other than rape. In suggesting that "nameless outrages" were "perpetrated upon white women and little girls," Willard had, Wells believed, supported the lynching of black men, because the rhetoric of Willard's statement, even if not explicitly justifying lynching, did in fact support the assumptions on which lynching was based.

Wells continued her criticism of Willard. Immediately following her appearance before the 1894 national WCTU convention, Wells presented a lecture before the Tawawa Literary Circle, which the *Cleveland Gazette* had labeled "a perfect success" and "one of the most thrilling talks against, and exposes of, lynching the people of to-day can possibly listen to." The newspaper then printed Wells's specific references to Willard:

> "I pointed out to Miss Willard," said Miss Wells, "her error. We did not expect this from one who has stood so long for humanity. We have to give the facts. *In giving them no imputation is cast upon the white women of America, and it is unjust and untruthful for any one to so assert.* I wish it were possible not to make such allusions, but the Negro race is becoming as to its honor as the white race." ("Miss Wells" 1)

Wells was both an eloquent orator and sophisticated rhetorician. She had carefully chosen the time and place to criticize Willard for her racist comments. Willard had made her pejorative comments in 1890 to the reporter of a New York temperance newspaper. Not until late in 1893, while she was in England where the press more willingly examined accusations about lynching, did Wells choose to include Willard in the controversy. In the U.S., as evident in her Tawawa address, Wells carefully avoided *ad hominem* attacks, crediting Willard by noting that such rhetoric was unexpected from someone with Willard's history of work for humanity; she continued that "she had the greatest respect for Miss Willard personally, and heartily indorsed her great temperance work,

but she thought some of her positions on the lynch question untenable" (1). Wells left more direct attacks to others. Both Rev. R. C. Ransom, who shared the Tawawa platform with Wells, and the editor of the *Gazette* leveled stronger criticism at Willard personally.

At the Tawawa address, Rev. Ransom criticized "a scheme of a few misguided Afro-Americans who were foolish enough to want to present Miss Willard a bouquet in the name of the Afro-American ladies of Cleveland, that, too, in the face of her adverse comment upon Miss Wells and the race's cause in her (Miss Willard's) annual WCTU address" ("Miss Wells" 1).

The *Gazette*, a black owned newspaper, reported the audience's recognition that such an act "would have been not only a back-handed 'blow in the face' for Miss Wells and the race movement she leads, but a rank insult to every Afro-American lady in the city." The newspaper then went further in criticizing directly those black women members of the WCTU who did publicly support Willard, noting the

> peculiar conduct and actions of the two "colored" delegates (from Michigan)—Madams Preston and Thurman. Strange to say these women sided with Miss Willard as against Miss Wells and the race, and therefore in no sense were they representatives of our people. . . . Afro-Americans should remember (them) as woman [*sic*] who forsook Miss Wells, their race and its greatest cause at present to cling to a woman (*white*), Miss Willard, portions of whose annual address is an insult to the race. (1)

The outrage expressed at those black women who honored Frances Willard is intensified by the specific use of the term "Afro-American" for black women generally, but of "colored" in reference to those felt to be complicit with denigration of the race.

In an accompanying editorial, "Frances, A Temporizer," the *Gazette* criticized Willard because she

> waited a long time and then "beat all about the bush" before going in on the lynch question. When she did go in (not far either), Miss Willard could not refrain from doing two things which neither add to her prestige nor accomplish what she desired. They were her covert attack upon Miss Ida B. Wells and the cause she represents at present, and the casting of a little "sop" to the south when she said in substance that she didn't believe there were white women in the south who encouraged Afro-Americans there to make certain advances to them.

The newspaper became even more explicit about Willard's not taking a stronger stand against lynching:

> The fact is, Frances E. Willard is a *temporizer* as far as our people's interests are concerned. Her views on lynching and the color line in temperance work do not, as she thinks, need further explanation, but they do need and badly, too, revision and change. They stamp her plainly as a *temporizer*, pure and simple. (2)

Willard continued her efforts to rescue her image. After 1894, she recognized and praised Lucy Thurman's work as the national Superintendent of Work among Colored People each year in her presidential addresses. She announced that she had sent resolutions against lynching each year to every state in the union, explaining that they had generally been adopted and "in no instance so far as I can learn have they ever been voted down" (*Report of National Twenty-Second*, 90). She also called for such resolutions from the national WCTU in both 1894 and 1895. When the executive committee proposed doubling Willard's salary to $2000, Willard asked that the additional thousand be apportioned instead to WCTU works, with $200 of the amount to be an additional appropriation to the Department of Work among Colored People (61).

Members also tried to improve perceptions of the union and of their leader. Although the southern delegates had opposed Willard's 1894 antilynching resolution, the 1895 convention passed the resolution without dissent, sending a copy to the *New Era*, "the organ of the colored women's association" (20). The resolution barely cloaks members' anger at what they obviously believed to be unjust accusations:

> *Resolved*, That white ribbon women who wear the badge of peace, ought never to have been placed in the position of having to defend themselves from the charge that they favored the lynching of any human being, anywhere, under any circumstances; and we keenly feel the false position in which we have been placed, and repudiate any imputation inconsistent with the law of Christ, which, as everybody knows, is totally at variance with the torture or killing of any human being without opportunity to have his case fairly presented and to be tried by a jury. We do not multiply epithets on this subject, because it is not necessary. We leave that to those who have misrepresented our position; but we have never hesitated, and do not now, to place ourselves squarely on record in regard to lynching and other lawless proceedings in our own or any other country, now and always, and we believe that when women have a share in making laws such atrocities will disappear from the face of the earth. (12)

But, immediately prior to this resolution, the union had passed a resolution declaring the organization's intent to build public sentiment against and to work for laws to prevent "the awful outrages" committed against women and little girls. Although the union had always stood for the protection of women and had worked diligently to raise the age of consent in state laws, and although the defining modifier "white" was eliminated and no mention was made of special concern for the South or of black men, the placement of such language before the lynching resolution appears to be an attempt to mollify southern white women.

Despite assertions that they should never have to defend themselves on such charges, the union included such resolutions for a number of years after the 1894 convention. After that year, financial support for Lucy Thurman's work increased, both in the amount allocated her department and in individual donations. In 1895, she reported that "last year I could not report one penny that had been given to the work," but in the current year $175 had been "placed in my hand" (*Report of National Twenty-Second* 208).

Emilie M. Townes attributes the roots of Willard's uncharacteristic racial rhetoric to the 1890 Atlanta convention, where Willard was influenced by wealthy and influential white southerners. It does appear that her inflammatory remarks began upon her return from that convention. Townes also suggests that Willard was unable to understand Wells's criticism: "The issue was not one of temperance or illiteracy but the effects of radical racism and disenfranchisement. Blacks died due to the charge of rape that was actually a subterfuge for white southern and northern hegemony" (165). Willard did seem unable or unwilling to understand the deep implications of her suggestions and how they might support the lynching mentality. And she was unquestionably infatuated with the attention of southern whites, choosing, either consciously or unconsciously, to court their favor.

After 1885, Willard was obviously aware of the growing dissension within the union, and she struggled to combat divisiveness. However, she failed to completely squelch prejudicial rhetoric toward blacks and other minority groups, which was surprising in light of her earlier record of support for and praise of minorities, and she eventually began to contribute to such rhetoric herself. Her efforts at uniting northern and southern white women seem to have superseded her concerns for unity between black and white members.

Wells was not alone in leveling racist charges against Willard. Perhaps the most notable opposition came from Frederick Douglass, a long-time friend and mentor of Wells and an acquaintance of Willard. Douglass criticized Willard, along with other high-profile religious and political leaders, for naming African Americans a "problem." But while Douglass

also charged Willard specifically with implying that black men posed a danger to white women and children, he stopped short of making the explicit charge linking Willard with lynching.

Douglass later, in February of 1895, signed a letter to the British press in defense of Willard. The statement began

> It has come to our knowledge that wrong impressions concerning the attitude of Miss Willard toward the colored people in America have been made in certain quarters, and as an act of justice we desire to put on record that no such criticisms would be for a moment received in her own country by those who have any adequate knowledge of Miss Willard's character and career. (Earhart 361)

The letter continued with an explanation of why WCTU state organizations managed their own "internal affairs," acknowledged the work of the WCTU as a "society . . . of wide range and womanly beneficence," and ended in noting the good Willard had achieved in her work as a reformer:

> In view of these facts we feel that for any person or persons to give currency to statements harmful to Miss Willard as a reformer is most misleading and unjust. Through her influence many of the State Unions have adopted resolutions against lynching, and the National Union has put itself on record in the same way, while the Annual Addresses of the President have plainly indicated her disapproval of such lawless and barbarous proceedings. (361)

Douglass's was the first signature appended to the document, but the note was also signed by other very prominent personages: authors Julia Ward Howe, Edna Cheney, and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps Ward, abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, and five others.

Willard's problems with the South and with the treatment of African American members had begun much earlier than the 1893–94 conflict with Wells. The organization had special departments for any group members deemed in need of unique attention. To that end, two departments, the Department of Southern Work and the Department of Work Among Colored People, existed throughout most of the 1880s.

In 1889, however, white union members from the South balked at being represented by a separate department. By that time, apparent dissatisfaction was surfacing among some black members as well, and Willard's efforts to placate southern white members increased anger among blacks members.

At the sixteenth national meeting in Chicago, southern members presented the Executive Committee with the following proposal signed by forty-three members from thirteen southern states:

> Dear Sisters: —The Southern delegates, whose names are subjoined, after careful deliberation, address to you the appeal that the Department of Southern Work be abolished for the following reasons:
>
> 1. The South is in no sense a missionary field; each State supports its own work and pays money into the national Treasury: and, so far as we know, none of our States have ever received aid to the amount of one dollar from outside, except in the gratuitous labors of Miss Willard and Mrs. Buell.
>
> 2. It is painful to be reported as a missionary field, as are the colored and Foreign work.
>
> 3. The Southern States occupy positions identical with States of other sections, and prefer to come into National Conventions under identical conditions.
>
> 4. The Southern Unions believe it is contrary to our platform, "No Sectionalism," to make special provision for Southern work. (*Minutes of National Sixteenth* 56)

The WCTU had courted southern women and had merited high praise for its ability to join North and South after the divisive war that had so ruptured the nation. Willard often called for acceptance and understanding "between North and South, Protestant and Catholic, of white and black, of men and women equally" ("Decoration Day Speech" 450). And she had been praised profusely for her efforts toward unification. A typical example is that of Col. Bain of Kentucky: "Miss Willard in the South, and Mrs. Chapin [Superintendent of Southern Work] in the North, have done more to bring together the divided sections, than all the politicians who have ever gone to Washington" (*Minutes of National Ninth* lv).

But the word "equally" in Willard's invitation began increasingly to show a disparity, and the Southerners most courted were southern white women. Signs of discontent began to surface well before 1889, but the southern delegation's admonition that its own classification with "colored and Foreign Work" caused pain among its members implies a prejudicial superiority that must have increased the rupture.

Frances E. W. Harper also made a formal statement at that convention. Harper had been an officer of the Philadelphia and of the Pennsylvania State WCTU since 1875, and Frances Willard introduced her formally to the national convention in Newark in 1876. By 1883, Harper was listed as national Superintendent of Work among Colored People, and by the 1889 meeting, she had an associate, Sarah J. Early. Both Harper

and Early gave routine reports at the 1889 convention, but Harper also offered the following recommendations:

> 1. That the Superintendent of this department be sustained in the work by the local unions.
>
> 2. That the Superintendent of this department be informed by State Corresponding Secretary or otherwise of the appointment of State Superintendents.
>
> 3. That in dealing with colored women that Christian courtesy be shown which is due from one woman to another. (*Minutes of National Sixteenth* 26)

Harper had made her recommendations prior to the proposal offered by the southern delegation; they suggest Harper's already growing frustration with members and officers who refused to work closely with her or other black leaders. The first two items imply poor cooperation on the part of state and local officers with their national superintendent; the third suggests unequal treatment of black members, despite the union's claim of equality.

Harper, a strong feminist and advocate of temperance reform, had hoped that the WCTU could provide leadership that would promote both the cause of women and of her people. In an 1888 essay entitled "The Woman's Christian Temperance Union and the Colored Woman," Harper provides a history of the Woman's Crusade for her black audience and explains her involvement with the union:

> For years I knew very little of its proceedings, and was not sure that colored comradeship was very desirable, but having attended a local Union in Philadelphia, I was asked to join and acceded to the request, and was made city and afterwards State Superintendent of work among colored people. Since then, for several years, I have held the position of National Superintendent of work among the colored people of the North. When I became national Superintendent there were no colored women on the Executive Committee or Board of Superintendents. Now there are two colored women on the Executive Committee and two on the Board of Superintendents. (Boyd 205)

Although Harper seems to want to be optimistic about the possibilities for African Americans within the WCTU, she candidly admits to the mixed results she herself has experienced:

> Some of the members of the different Unions have met the question in a liberal and Christian manner; others have not seemed to have so fully outgrown the old shards and shells of the past as to make the distinction between Christian affiliation and social equality, but still the leaven of more liberal sentiments has been at work in the Union and produced some hopeful results. (205)

The issue of mixed or separate unions itself seems not to have been problematic for Harper. She tells of her "pleasantest remembrances of my connection with the Woman's Christian Temperance Union" in the state of Missouri. There, state president Clara Hoffman "declared that the color line was eliminated." Although black members were given the option of joining the same union as their white counterparts, "There was self-reliance and ability enough among them to form a Union of their own." Members named the union the Harper Union, after the national superintendent. In this case, black members did have the option of joining an existing white union or forming their own. Black women in the South were seldom given that choice.

Harper relates other instances where unions "have been opened to colored women," but complains of prejudicial treatment in the South:

> Southern white women, it may be, fail to make in their minds the discrimination between social equality and Christian affiliation. Social equality, if I rightly understand the term, is the outgrowth of social affinities and social conditions, and may be based on talent, ability, or wealth, on either or all of these conditions. Christian affiliation is the union of Christians to do Christly work, and to help build up the kingdom of Christ amid the sin and misery of the world, under the spiritual leadership of the Lord Jesus Christ. (Boyd 206)

Harper, while supporting and retaining hope for possibilities within the WCTU, did not hesitate to take the union to task for its failure to live up to promises of equality, and especially for refusing to offer the Christian fellowship that members professed was at the very heart of their organization—a fellowship they repeatedly claimed to extend to all groups.

The most problematic segment of Harper's essay for Frances Willard and for the WCTU addresses the notion of equal membership for African Americans. As national superintendent, Harper had received a request for information from a black union in Atlanta, asking "if black sheep must climb up some other way" and requesting information about proper procedure if that were the case. In her essay, Harper related Willard's opinion "That the National could not make laws for a State. If the colored women of Georgia will meet and form a Woman's Christian

Temperance Union for the State, it is my opinion that their officers and delegates will have the same representation in the National" (Boyd 206). Thus, Willard maintained support for the states' rights policy of the organization, but offered an "equal but separate" strategy by which African American unions were recognized; in fact, African American state unions in the South were usually referred to as number 2, as in Georgia State Union #2. State presidents served on the national executive committee, and, at times, other state officers served on various national committees.

Harper could accept separate unions on the state and local level, recognizing that black members might choose to create their own unions and that separation was not always a result of discrimination. But she expected Christian fellowship at all levels and equal authority for black members on the national level.

The request of the southern delegation that the Department of Southern Work be abolished was problematic in another sense. In claiming that each southern state "supports its own work and pays money into the national Treasury," the delegates were simply echoing claims Harper had made for her constituency earlier. In her departmental report to the 1887 convention in Nashville, Harper made clear that, although she had given more than one hundred addresses during the year,

> I have neither asked, that I remember, nor received pecuniary aid at any time from the national Union since I have been Superintendent of this Department, except that at one time I received some circulars for my work from headquarters which were not charged to me, and at present my department is paying its own expenses. (*Minutes of National Fourteenth* ccxiv)

Implications of racial tension are discernible in other rhetoric at the 1887 convention. Harper had asked for clarification on several matters. She asked that the parameters of her work be defined. Here, she again stated that her department paid its own way. In addition, Harper asked that she be allowed to "aid in securing items for the letter to be prepared for the colored people" (57). A successful author of both poetry and prose, she apparently felt that her expertise, both in writing and in knowledge about her own people, was not fully appreciated.

At times, the official rhetoric of the convention also seemed to equivocate on such important matters. In response to a communication from a local black union's request for representation at the national convention, the executive committee recommended "that the General Officers be requested to give particular attention to the work among colored people, and address to them at the earliest possible moment a letter explanatory of plans and our relation one to another" (23). Such phrasing defers any real answer to the legitimate request of the local union. In a

move that might have further frustrated black members, the union passed the following resolution with regards to the Department of Work among Colored People several days later:

> Whereas, the colored vote is an important factor in the future success of Prohibition and we are impressed with the importance of educating the colored women; therefore,
>
> *Resolved*, That we give our hearty approval and sincere sympathy to the department of work among this people, and that we recommend the States to push the work of organization among them, and as a National WCTU we will co-operate to the extent of our power. (45)

Such supportive rhetoric, without material practice, would have further disheartened Harper and her constituency.

Harper must have noticed other discouraging signs in attitudes regarding race. At early conventions, Harper was presented to the convention formally and with praise. After the mid-eighties, however, Sallie Chapin and other southern white women were most often singled out for special recognition. Harper must have noted the change in tone as southern whites became an increasingly important focus of the convention. Her growing realization that the WCTU would not provide the equal access she envisioned for members of her race must have been painful. In her 1888 essay for the *A. M. E. Church Review*, Harper wrote,

> Believing, as I do, in human solidarity, I hold that the Woman's Christian Temperance Union has in its hands one of the grandest opportunities that God ever pressed into the hands of the womanhood of any country. Its conflict is not the contest of a social club, but a moral warfare for an imperiled civilization. Whether or not the members of the farther South will subordinate the spirit of caste to the spirit of Christ, time will show. (Boyd 206)

The official minutes of the 1889 national convention contain no reference to discussion about eliminating the Department of Work among Colored People, or of Harper's or Early's refusal to continue as superintendents, but in a copy of the minutes for that year at the WCTU headquarters, its owner, Cornelia B. Forbes, President of the Connecticut WCTU, has marked through the names of both women. In this and in other yearly minutes, Forbes had drawn through the names of women who no longer held offices and had written in names for replacements; or she had simply crossed through some names, suggesting they no longer held official positions. On page 9 of the 1889 minutes, she has crossed

out the names of both Harper and Early, suggesting that some action was taken, either pertaining to the status of the department or to the two women's positions. Since both Early and Harper continued with the union in official capacities, it is likely that they were protesting the separate departmental status for African Americans.

In 1890, the Department of Work among Colored People was officially dropped and the field incorporated into the Department of Organization. Fourteen women were named national organizers, including Sallie F. Chapin and three designated specifically for "work among the colored people": Harper, Early, and Mary Marriage Allen (*Minutes of WCTU Eighteenth* 315).

Harper continued her association with the union as both organizer and lecturer throughout the century, but the position proved an uncomfortable one at times, especially at the height of the Wells-Willard controversy. In 1894 when Wells spoke at the national WCTU convention, Harper's report as organizer both encouraged and chided white members. Harper noted that African American women, also interested in organized efforts on behalf of women, more likely joined the King's Daughters, Christian Endeavor, and other organizations. "And yet," proclaimed Harper, "if the work of temperance was vigorously and patiently pushed among them by women in whose friendship they could trust" their numbers within the WCTU might increase. She also implicitly referred to the Wells-Willard conflict:

> Were it true that the worst things said against the negro are sad, and frightful verities; that from his presence such dangers lurk around peaceful and happy homes, as make it unsafe for fathers and husbands to go far beyond their roof tree, then I hold that the deeper the degradation of the people the louder is their call for redemption. ("Mrs. Harper's")

By acknowledging charges against black men without acceding to their verity, Harper used the hypothetical to insist that white women work with greater compassion and acceptance toward the African American race. Refusing to side with either Wells or Willard by explicitly and deliberately diminishing the significance of their quarrel, she called instead for understanding and directed effort on behalf of her race. She presented as a proper example the work of whites among freed African Americans on South Carolina's Sea Island of St. Helena, where whites "act as friends, advisers and teachers" and where only one murder in thirty years had been committed. She insisted that "Between every branch of the human race in the Western Hemisphere there is a community of interests, and our interests all lie in one direction, and we cannot violate the one without disserving the other" ("Mrs. Harper's"). She concluded

by asking that work among African Americans be carried on "not as a matter of charity but as a means of self-defense for the country." Thus, Harper chose not to join the controversy but to mediate toward improved relations between the races.

If Harper found prepared presentations rhetorically difficult during this dispute, how much more problematic were occasions when she was questioned directly about her perspective on the great controversy? In 1895, a reporter recounted her reply to explicit questions about Ida Wells's lectures on southern lynchings, noting that "Mrs. Harper replied slowly and apparently measuring the effect of her words." Harper responded,

> I do not approve of Miss Wells' vehemence in dealing with the subject. She is a little too sweeping in her charges. I think that she is unable to discuss the matter salmly [*sic*], because some of her friends were shot down in the Nashville affair and her mind has been set unduly against the whites. I look at the lynchings as the eruptions of a disease lingering in the body politic, caused by the war. The old-time prejudice still remains, but I believe that it is growing less and less day by day. I do not believe lynchings of negroes who assault girls are brought about alone by the color of the criminals for I have noticed that some white men when accused of similar offenses have had the summary punishment meted out to them. No, I believe that the white man is coming to treat the opposite race more as brothers.
>
> That the better class of whites in the South do not uphold the indiscriminate hanging of negroes was evidenced by the action of the Governor of Georgia a year or two ago in offering $200 for the apprehension and conviction of parties guilty of such a crime. I am only sorry that meetings of the colored people were not held and the reward increased by their subscriptions. ("About")

Harper had been a friend of Wells; she had even titled her novel *Iola Leroy* after Wells (Wells used the pseudonym "Iola" for much of her early writing). Thus, Harper carefully chose her words, distancing from Wells's attacks while offering a sympathetic understanding of Wells's position. She also acknowledged the lingering prejudice and discrimination toward blacks. As she often did, however, she held open her hope for cooperation between the races, recognizing an effort toward achieving justice among "better" whites, a move that might also encourage other whites to seek that classification. Typical of her rhetoric throughout her career, she recognized problems in racial relations, but chose to advance a notion of hope as she mediated among diverse and contradictory positions.

In 1893, the Department of Work among Colored People was reinstated at the request of Lucy Thurman of Jackson, Michigan, who also requested that "its superintendent shall be a colored woman." The motion carried "after considerable discussion," but specifics as to that discussion are not included in convention minutes (*Minutes of National Twentieth* 37–38). Thurman was chosen national superintendent of the department, and eventually, by the end of the century, two associates had joined her: Margaret Murray Washington of Alabama and Frances Joseph of Louisiana.

Washington's accession to national superintendency within the union reflects divergent approaches among black activists as well. Margaret Murray Washington was the third wife of Booker T. Washington, whom Wells consistently criticized for promoting prejudice against higher education for African Americans as well as for encouraging a reduced curriculum for African Americans in elementary and secondary education. She claimed that he aided the white South "to establish and maintain throughout the country a color line in politics, in civil rights and in education" (Thompson 259). The disagreement between black leaders, such as Wells and Washington (or more publicly debated, that between Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois), reflects differing philosophical underpinnings with regards to the best course for advancing rights and improved conditions for blacks. In fact, this disagreement has continued through the twentieth century for black leaders, most notably in the leadership styles of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. The disagreements between black leaders resemble those between temperance women and suffrage leaders, making it understandable why these women chose to affiliate with the organizations they did. Like temperance women, Washington chose a more pragmatic, less confrontational position than that of Wells. Like Stanton, Wells had little patience for the gradualism Washington supported, insisting instead upon immediate equal treatment and equal rights for her people.

Despite the controversy within the WCTU and the criticism Wells and some other black leaders leveled at the union, black membership in the organization continued to grow, and many of the leading black women in the country retained their association with the union, usually becoming officers. The reasons for this must have been complex, but some motivations seem likely.

For one, personal contact among white and black leaders must have been an important factor in the attitudes of black women leaders. While Harper did not hesitate to take WCTU members to task, and did so on a number of occasions, her personal relationship with many of the women seems to have been rewarding. Harper once wrote, "One of the pleasantest remembrances of my connection with the Woman's Christian Temperance Union was the kind and hospitable reception I met in the Missouri State Convention, who declared that the color-line was eliminated" (Boyd 205). Harper noted other reports from state superintendents of instances in which white members had "invited the colored sisters to join them" (Boyd 206). And Harper knew many white women leaders, as she was sometimes their guest as she travelled the country in her official capacity as superintendent. Her acceptance and kind treatment among some leaders must have helped to sustain her.

Further, black women were accepted into many of the local WCTU unions in the North, and white women helped to organize separate black unions when that was the choice of black members. In the South, separate unions provided a means of networking and of gaining the respectability black women found imperative at the end of a century that questioned their integrity and morality.

WCTU membership afforded other benefits to African American women. In the South, the separation of unions provided a substantial number of leadership roles for black women. By the end of the century, Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas all had black women state presidents and officers who assumed responsibility for their unions;[3] the state presidents were also national vice-presidents and members of the Executive Committee. Some also served on other national committees as well. Lucy Thurman acknowledged the value of such leadership opportunities for black union members, noting that she "always favored the organization of unions among the colored women for it will be to them just what it has been to our white sisters, the greatest training school for the development of women" (*Report of National Twenty-Second* 208).

Association with the widely respected WCTU afforded an avenue for many black women to move around the country as lecturers and organizers, and as representatives of their unions to the national and international conventions. In addition to Frances Harper and Sarah J. Early, other influential and noted black women became national organizers and lecturers, including Rosetta Douglass Sprague, daughter of Frederick Douglass, Frances Joseph [Gaudet], Amanda Berry Smith, Mary Cordelia Montgomery Booze, Mary A. Lynch, Frances E. L. Preston, and Lucy Thurman. Membership afforded opportunities for international travel as well. Lucy Thurman was a delegate to the World WCTU in England in 1896, and Frances Joseph served as a delegate to the international WCTU convention in England in 1900. Jessie Carney Smith's note regarding Frances Preston would have applied to other organizers and lecturers as well: "This position [national lecturer for the WCTU] facilitated her speaking engagements and recitations before lecture associations, clubs, churches, lyceums and other groups" (871).

For some African American women committed to improving conditions for their race, the WCTU structure offered a measure of support for achieving those goals. According to Dorothy Salem, "the WCTU offered black women an organized vehicle through which they could improve family life, health and morality" (36). Harper also pointed to the good provided some black communities. She appreciated union efforts at helping African Americans become independent of the curse of alcohol, and she was pleased that the organizational structure aided some black unions in founding orphan asylums for African American children (Boyd 206).

There were other positive aspects to WCTU membership for African Americans as well. Such associations afforded opportunities to influence and change negative attitudes about blacks, especially among those who had the power to model and expedite the change in such attitudes. In 1896, while in England as a delegate to the World WCTU, Lucy Thurman was the house guest of Lady Henry Somerset. In 1900 when Frances Joseph served as representative to the international organization, she too was the house guest of British nobility and met with Queen Victoria in private audience. Joseph also met with President and Mrs. McKinley during the national convention in Washington. According to Jessie Carney Smith, M. A. McCurdy—secretary of the Atlanta city and county WCTU, and later secretary of the state organization and superintendent of press-work for the second Georgia WCTU—"became widely known throughout the state and in major cities" (702) through the WCTU and the *Woman's World*, "a newspaper that focused on the intellectual, moral, and spiritual progress of people" (701). These leaders had a unique opportunity to present a positive image of African Americans to powerful people.

By the end of the century, African American women had organized the many members of black women's clubs into the powerful National Association of Colored Women. Many of the leaders of this and earlier organizations were strong leaders well before they joined the WCTU. But the exposure and experience permitted black women in their relationship with the WCTU might have seemed valuable, even to these women as they formed their own organizations, and would certainly have been helpful to the less experienced. Hazel Carby has noted black women's recognition of the "necessity of systematic organization for their own protection" at the end of the century, but suggests also that "despite the apparent plea for the autonomous organization of black women as black women . . . [many] knew that in order to transform the social and political condition of black women alliances with white women were important, if not crucial" (118). The WCTU was, in many ways, the perfect organization for forming such alliances. Darlene Clark Hine notes similar realizations for Harper:

> In this capacity she tried to help those who wished to join the white group to do so and those who preferred to organize themselves separately to do that. For Frances Ellen Watkins Harper it was a matter of coalition building. She recognized and did not apologize for racism among some of the individuals with whom they might need to affiliate but declared this a "relic . . . from the dead past!" (1: 535)

Although racism was practiced by some inside the WCTU, many black women had positive experiences in their association with the organization, and they often used the union for their own benefit, making use of the organizational structure and the reputation of the WCTU to serve their own purposes. The controversy between Wells and Willard, while angering most members, nonetheless heightened racial sensitivity within an organization that had always professed to invite all members equally. The southern states still maintained primarily separate unions, but the national union went on record against lynching. Whether to improve its own image, or out of sincere concern for African Americans (probably some of both), the attention given to black women at the national level increased, and black members were increasingly selected as delegates in favored capacities, such as representatives at international events and the honor guard at Willard's funeral.