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Journal of Transnational American Studies

Title

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Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/46z2f4cc>

Journal

Journal of Transnational American Studies, 14(1)

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Publication Date

2023

DOI

10.5070/T814155235

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Peer reviewed

Mary Church Terrell, The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, and Germany's "schwarze Schmach" Campaign, 1918–1922

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On March 18, 1921, Mary Church Terrell wrote Jane Addams:

The most terrible crimes are said to be committed by these black troops against the German women. I belong to a race whose women have been the victims of assaults committed upon them by white men and men of all other races with impunity. ... I cannot sign a petition asking for the removal of the black troops, because I believe it is a direct appeal to race prejudice.¹

Mary Church Terrell was the only African American serving on the United States's national board of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) when her fellow board members asked her to sign a petition seeking the removal of French African colonial troops from Germany's Rhineland territory. Terrell's letter to her colleague Jane Addams, a well-respected white American feminist, expressed her opposition to Germany's racist propaganda campaign, launched in response to France's occupation of the Rhineland region following World War I.² The Germans directed the campaign against the so-called *schwarze Schmach* (Black Shame) or "Horror on the Rhine." Terrell's white colleagues claimed that the Rhineland campaign was a legitimate protest against French colonial military troops' sexual assaults on women in occupied territories, but Terrell believed otherwise. She sensed that the possible fear

of sexual liaisons between Black troops and white women motivated her colleagues' opposition.

Terrell's words to Addams echoed the concerns discussed in the African American press and among people of color around the world. It also demonstrated the conflicted dynamics between Black and white American activists involved in the early international feminist organizing. Along with her detection of racism, Terrell's sensitivity to the historical mistreatment of Black women in America alerted her to another bias implied in the petition and propaganda. White men fabricated the falsehood that Black women were "less womanly" than white women to justify the hypocrisies of white supremacy and sexual assaults on Black women in America.³ Terrell's statement implicitly defied the characterization of white women as pure. Her reaction to the petition conveyed Black women's commitment to bringing discussions on race and gender inequality to the international stage. Mary Church Terrell's involvement in the Rhineland Campaign and WILPF demonstrated the complexities of African American women's activism in the international sphere. As exemplified in the "Horror on the Rhine" case, Black women found themselves pressed between defending the humanity of their race and claiming respect for their sex when interwar politics demanded that they choose a side.

Although the "Horror on the Rhine" campaign began in 1919 and peaked by 1923, it attracted international attention. It stimulated racist rhetoric about the sexual practices of men of the "darker races," objectified men of color through media outlets, and raised uncertainty about the principles of racial equality that interracial cooperative women's organizations like WILPF claimed to uphold. The international campaign forced WILPF to engage in discussions about race and its intersection with gender. More than any other event during the early twentieth century, the Rhineland controversy was a nexus of African American women's international activism, racial strife, and ideals about womanhood and peace. While German propagandists sustained the Rhineland campaign by playing on whites' desires to preserve social and political supremacy over Blacks, it was partly Germany's commitment to restore honor to the nation after a humiliating wartime defeat that motivated their investment in the campaign. Cloaked in the racist and gendered geopolitics of the day, the Rhineland campaign linked Terrell's position against the "schwarze Schmach" campaign to German women activists' push for prostitution reform in Germany.⁴

Mary Church Terrell's approach to the international arena redefined African American women's potential role in transnational organizations and debates. Terrell's tenure in the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom provides evidence of African American women's influence in international politics. Up to this point, when and where Black women entered the international arena, they brought the issues confronting Black women and men in the United States with them (e.g., the anti-lynching movement).⁵ In the main, Terrell insisted on viewing the allegations against the French African troops in the context of sexualized racism. Her stance symbolized a notable transition in the Black women's international agenda and consciousness, and

it highlighted their new perception that all people of color in the world faced a similar dilemma.

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

White American leaders of the International Committee of Women for Permanent Peace (WPP) and European women suffragists had founded WILPF shortly after World War I to promote peace between leading nations and to strengthen a trans-Atlantic dialogue among women activists.⁶ Its membership consisted of women from around the white western world.⁷ WILPF created a space in which women activists could freely dialogue about what it meant to be a woman post-World War I. Members held the first official conference in Zurich, Switzerland, May 12–17, 1919, where approximately two hundred delegates representing seventeen countries had attended.⁸ Twenty-three women from the United States attended the conference as delegates. This group included Jane Addams (WILPF's first president), Emily Greene Balch (treasurer of WILPF), Dr. Alice Hamilton (Harvard University professor), Jeannette Rankin (former congresswoman), and Mary Church Terrell.⁹ In response to World War I, conference attendees agreed that the three founding principles of WILPF would be: suffrage for all women, pacifism needed to replace militarism, and transnationalism instead of internationalism.¹⁰

The emergence of transatlantic feminist organizing at the end of the nineteenth century offered Black women a new avenue through which to advance their own agenda for racial justice and gender equality by cultivating relationships with leading North American and European feminists. But practicing international sisterhood proved to be difficult, particularly when it came to matters involving race. African American women's participation in the early transnational women's movement often challenged white leaders to live up to the great principles the ICW and WILPF claimed to uphold.

The international committee elected Jane Addams as their first International President. In this role, Addams, a well-known social reformer and executive committee member of the NAACP, reached out to African American women to join the WILPF. Addams and other progressive White women in WILPF recognized the hypocrisy of an organization that would advocate human equality and nonviolence while simultaneously excluding African Americans from membership.¹¹ The public recruitment of Black women into WILPF sparked tension among the first executive board members—Addams, Caroline Singer, Emily Greene Balch, Carrie Chapman Catt, and other “liberal” whites. In many ways, this conflict forced Addams and her white colleagues to reexamine their feelings about race relations. While some reluctantly accepted their Black colleagues, others left the organization.¹²

Prominent professional middle-class women such as Mary Church Terrell, Mary Morris Burnett Talbert, Charlotte Atwood, Dr. Mary Fitzbutler Waring, and Addie Waites Hunton were among the first generation of African American WILPFers.¹³ This group included an international lecturer, an educator and social activist, a dedicated

peace activist, a physician and writer, and a Pan-African Conference delegate, respectively. These women shared similar accomplishments: higher education, professional occupations, a history of activism, and high socioeconomic status. For Black activists, taking on membership in WILPF was not an easy task due to their continued involvement in other clubs and organizations. Being accepted into WILPF, however, elevated their status within the Black community and made these women, arguably, ambassadors for their race.¹⁴ Terrell and others understood their participation in WILPF as another outlet to contest white supremacy in the international sphere—which proved to be successful and had demonstrable impact.

As impressive as these African American feminist transnationalists were, concern about class distinction simmered under the surface of a supposed unified Black community. Black women's international activism, including that of Terrell, needs to be understood in the context of the post-Reconstruction revival of discrimination at home. Immediately after Reconstruction, members of the African American elite believed that gaining acceptance into white political and professional circles would increase their social standing and opportunities to achieve and maintain financial self-sufficiency. The rise of Jim Crow crushed hopes for assimilation and made it difficult for elite Blacks to distance themselves from working-class / poor Blacks.¹⁵ In response, Terrell and others embraced a middle-class racial uplift ideology that insisted that Black elites represented the potential of the race, and therefore were responsible for “uplifting” the masses by placing an emphasis on “self-help, racial solidarity, temperance, thrift, chastity, social purity, patriarchal authority, and the accumulation of wealth.”¹⁶

In her 1900 presidential address, Terrell's adopted motto, “Lifting as We Climb,” underscored the “duty” educated Black women felt to elevate their less fortunate sisters:

In no way could we live up to such sentiment better than by coming into closer touch with the masses of our women, by whom, whether we will or not, the world will always judge the womanhood of the race. Even though we wish to shun them, and hold ourselves entirely aloof from them, we cannot escape the consequences of their acts. So, that, if the call of duty were disregarded altogether, policy and self-preservation would demand that we go down among the lowly, the illiterate, and even the vicious to whom we are bound by the ties of race and sex, and put forth every possible effort to uplift and reclaim them.¹⁷

Terrell's statement not only confirmed class tensions within the African American community but underscored the hypersensitivity and urgency by which Black middle-class women sought to preserve their image as respectable women. Working-class Black

women's relationship with women like Terrell within the peace movement remains understudied, but historian Joyce Blackwell argues that although Black activists joined in hope for racial uplift, they also desired to be recognized as more "culturally advanced" than the Black masses.¹⁸

Despite the enthusiasm of some African American women ready to join WILPF, retaining Black members was difficult. In fact, WILPF never boasted a significant number of Black recruits at any one time. Jim Crow discrimination laws that imposed hard-hitting economic consequences against Black activists kept middle-class Black women especially mindful of their political affiliations. Black women feared that everything they had worked hard to achieve would be taken away by a surveillant state or employers. Unlike many of their white counterparts, African American women's incomes were needed to help support their families. The US Department of Justice sought to ruin the professional and social lives of those they considered a threat to "democracy" by labeling them communist.¹⁹ The Justice Department and War Department surveilled African American leaders and attempted to suppress African Americans' momentum toward civil rights during World War I in response to supposed pro-German sentiment among the Black community.

Mary Church Terrell: The "Perfect" Black Peace Activist

On April 9, 1919, Mary Church Terrell boarded the *Noordam* from New York with fellow delegates Jane Addams, Jeannette Rankin, and Dr. Alice Hamilton to attend the second International Congress of Women's conference in Zurich, Switzerland, to be held from May 12 to 17.²⁰ En route to the conference, Terrell and the other delegates worked on resolutions to be presented on behalf of the American delegation and discussed possible presentation topics. As was the case at the International Council of Women's meeting in Berlin 1904, Terrell's fellow American delegates selected her to address the Congress.²¹ Although the other delegates respected Terrell as an activist, they strongly suggested she omit comments making reference to America's racial prejudice and offered to help "improve" her resolution.²² Terrell's resolution called for protesting against discrimination not only towards African Americans, but also toward all people of color around the world. Her proposed resolution read:

We believe no human should be deprived of an education, prevented from earning a living, debarred from any legitimate pursuit in which he wishes to engage, or be subjected to any humiliation, on account of race or colour. We recommend that members of this Congress should do everything in their power to abrogate laws and change customs, which lead to discrimination against human beings on account of race or colour.²³

Emily Greene Balch, who was particularly persistent in discouraging Terrell from presenting such a controversial resolution to the rest of the world's leading women, went behind Terrell's back and submitted changes to her speech to the translators. To add to the insult, shortly before Terrell was to present her resolution, Balch informed her that some changes had been made to the resolution and had already been translated into French and German.²⁴ She was unaware that Terrell had also submitted her resolution to the Congress earlier that same day. Terrell felt frustrated that her resolution had been altered without her permission, however, just minutes before she was to present she realized that no changes had been made to her original speech: "I could scarcely believe that I was seeing a right, ... the translator had misunderstood the instructions given her and instead of translating the substitute [Balch's] resolution she had translated mine."²⁵ Terrell was able to deliver her original lecture as planned.

The WPP committee had asked Terrell to represent the US delegation by delivering the keynote address at the main conference. Later published in *The Competitor*, Terrell recalled her excitement to be at a conference that gathered women to discuss peace after the war, but then she quickly realized, as she had seventeen years earlier in Berlin, that she was the only woman of color in attendance:

On sober second thought it is more truthful to say that women from all over the "white world" were present, for there was not a single, solitary delegate from Japan or China or India or from any other country whose inhabitants were not white. Since I was the only woman present who had a drop of African blood in her vein, it was my duty and privilege to represent not only the colored women from the United States but the whole continent of Africa as well. In fact, I was the only delegate who gave any color to the occasion at all.²⁶

Terrell's decision to once again deliver such an important speech in German as a representative of her race and nation illustrates her dedication to the "uplift" of people of color around the world. She was the only American delegate to offer her address in German.

The issues Terrell brought to the attention of her primarily white European audience related to her long-standing activism and leadership in organizations in the US as a civil rights advocate, educator, and lecturer on rights for women and African Americans.²⁷ However, factors such as socioeconomic status, educational background, nationality, and an ambiguous racial identity shaped Terrell's experience in Berlin more than current scholarship suggests. Though invited to Berlin based, in part, on her activist reputation in the US, Terrell enjoyed an unusual social position for an African American at the turn of the twentieth century that distinguished her from other African American feminist transnationalists at the time. As the daughter of one of the

wealthiest African American families in the South, Terrell had a very privileged upbringing. She attended an integrated secondary school, earned postsecondary degrees from Oberlin College, and studied abroad for two years in Paris, Lausanne, Florence, and Berlin. This upbringing and social position made her as conversant in the world as her affluent white American and European counterparts, a necessary precondition for her role at the Congress in Berlin. The ICW was an organization comprised of well-connected women—whose wealth, national prominence, education, and aristocratic lineage qualified them as elites.

On Thursday, May 15, 1919, at 8:30 pm in St. Peter's Cathedral, Terrell addressed some of the world's leading women. Comparable to Terrell's earlier speeches in front of white audiences, she highlighted both the progress of African American women, as well as the incessant social injustice suffered by most Blacks in America:

When Colored people travel in the South, they always face an indefinite amount of difficulties and often can hardly get anything to eat. They are not tolerated in the sleeping carriages. They are packed in dirty carriages and not allowed to complain. Colored men and women, even children, are lynched. They are burned at the stake and hanged, not always because they have done something wrong, as one would like the Europeans to believe, but only because they were only guilty of some minor infraction or even because they were bold enough to insist on their rights.²⁸

Terrell's impassioned speech at the WILPF conference increased her foreign audience's awareness of the plight of African Americans in the United States. It also demonstrated Black internationalists' strategy to use international platforms as a tool to gain support for their cause. What differentiated Terrell's Zurich speech from those of the rest of the presenters was her discussion of African American men who fought courageously in World War I to secure freedom for others (whites) overseas that they themselves did not enjoy.²⁹ Terrell preached straight to the moral conscience of the attendees' benevolence in helping the victims of discrimination: "You may talk about permanent peace till doomsday, but the world will never have it till the dark races are given a square deal."³⁰ The importance of Terrell's appearance was twofold. First, it afforded her the rare opportunity to assert her concerns about people around the world living in horrible conditions from an African American woman's point of view. Second, it positioned her to bring awareness to those unaware of the importance race played in war and peace.

With nearly three thousand people present, Terrell delivered her speech in German because she "wanted to let as many foreign people as possible hear the truth and get the Colored man's side of the story."³¹ Terrell's success abroad was celebrated

by leading African American newspapers such as the *Chicago Defender*.³² No white American newspapers covered her address. Her moving speech earned her invitations to speak all over Europe, but she turned them down to visit old friends from her study abroad years and professional acquaintances from her trip to the ICW Congress in Berlin 1904.³³ Following the congress, Terrell became an official member of WILPF in 1918 and was elected to the national executive board.

Terrell's very presence at the conference in itself was remarkable and extremely progressive for the early twentieth century. Yet racial prejudice within WILPF was an issue from the beginning. It reared its ugly head at the Zurich conference, and resurfaced in an exchange of letters between Terrell and Black and white WILPF members, including Balch, Mildred Scott Olmstead, and Addie Hunton in 1928 and 1929 about Terrell supposedly not returning to the executive board due to race prejudice.³⁴ Although white and Black WILPF members disagreed on race issues, their mutual devotion to social justice is what sustained this sometimes tension-filled environment. WILPF often held a conservative point of view on race issues, but it offered a space for Black women to express themselves and therefore the opportunity to enlighten others on race as a peace issue. For this reason, WILPF continued to attract some of the most prominent and more radical African American women activists. White WILPFers wanted to build an organization that would be powerful enough to have an impact on national policy to end international war and also to bring about the equality of women. Black WILPFers shared those goals, but also needed a powerful organization into which they could channel their demands for an end to social and institutional racism.

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom was the first organization of its kind in which African American women were a part of the leadership. Nonetheless, a true test of the organization's dedication to "keeping the peace" arose just two years after Terrell's distinguished lecture in Zurich, Switzerland in the form of Germany's polemical "schwarze Schmach" (Black Shame) campaign.

Mary Church Terrell and Germany's *schwarze Schmach* Campaign: A Notable Shift in Black Women's International Agenda

Mary Church Terrell's understanding of racism and gender discrimination informed her position against the removal of French colonial troops from Germany's Rhineland. She considered the propaganda against French African troops to be yet another weapon used by whites to perpetuate the caricature of Black men's supposed lust for white women. For Terrell, the entanglement of race with ideas of gender and sexuality drew her to the campaign. Through her intervention, Terrell helped shift Black women's international activism from one mainly concerned with solving the US race problem to one with a more transnationally focused agenda. Simultaneously, Terrell's repositioning of Black women's function within an international feminist organization such as WILPF made visible the incongruity of a so-called international sisterhood. This last section demonstrates that the two arguments described above crystallized Terrell's rela-

tionship with the “schwarze Schmach” campaign even as they put her in opposition to German women activists, who used the campaign to argue against regimented prostitution in Germany. Terrell’s own perspective on the “schwarze Schmach” as a sexualized racist attack on Black men seemingly kept her from realizing other significant implications in the campaign, namely German women’s investment in prostitution reform.

The purpose of the Rhineland campaign was contradictory and at times confusing. The “schwarze Schmach” thrived on accusations of Black French troops raping German women.³⁵ As a direct consequence, the campaign reified negative stereotypes about Black men’s sexual proclivities, and heightened the scrutiny under which German women’s sexual freedoms had been placed in German national debates.³⁶ Campaigners used the supposed victimization of German women as a symbol of a defenseless German nation, and at the same time socially condemned German women who struck up relationships with Black troops by labeling them a “white shame.”³⁷ The Rhineland campaign exacerbated tensions between German men and women about postwar gender roles, policed German womanhood, and agitated discussion about how Germany’s fate as a nation depended on maintaining a genealogically and racially pure national body. As argued by sociologist Iris Wigger, “the purity of both German womanhood and the German nation were identical.”³⁸

The campaign against France’s Black occupation troops exploded in the midst of an ongoing struggle over prostitution reform in Weimar Germany.³⁹ Though the majority of German feminists shared the same racist and nationalist resentments as their male counterparts, feminists used female sexual victimization in the “schwarze Schmach” controversy as a tool to oppose against Germany’s state-regulated prostitution. German reformers aimed to create a negative association with state-regulated prostitution through France’s Black colonial troops’ occupation of the Rhineland.⁴⁰

Since the nineteenth century, numerous cities in Germany had regulated prostitution. They instituted policies to not only control sexuality, but also to maintain an image of German society based on respectable morals and values.⁴¹ The methods used to regulate prostitution varied. Some cities, for example, accepted brothels only if they held a license. German feminists took issue with policies that required sex workers to register with the German moral police (die Sittenpolizei). If sex workers registered, they were protected from facing criminal charges. Yet feminists argued that such ordinances still stigmatized women in society. Registered sex workers were subject to mandatory testing for STDs and if found infected they had to seek treatment as inpatients at the hospital. These women enjoyed little personal freedom. They were banned from major public areas and had to obtain permission to travel. Men, by contrast, were under no such scrutiny. They were not held responsible for their “immoral” sexual activities, required by law to seek medical attention if infected, or subject to criminal charges if caught visiting a brothel, legal or illegal.⁴² This sexual double stan-

dard against women played an integral role in German women activists' approach to the Rhineland campaign.

German women agitators' participation in the Rhineland propaganda hinged on racist and nationalist impulses. The most successful women's group in spreading propaganda was the Rheinische Frauenliga (The League of Rhenish Women).⁴³ The RFL was a semiofficial organization founded in 1920 in the Reich Ministry of the Interior by Margarete Gärtner. Gärtner was an administrator from Berlin who had joined the department for occupied territories in 1919. Although Gärtner had not been involved in the women's movement, she managed to secure support from leading women's groups such as the BDF (Bund deutscher Frauenvereine), the bourgeois women's association and umbrella organization for nonsocialist women's clubs, and conservative religious women's groups.⁴⁴ Gärtner revealed in her memoir that she wished to make the RFL into "a mouthpiece for propaganda directed at foreign countries."⁴⁵ She reported and recruited women to the Reichstag and Prussian state parliament, and provided women with "facts" and briefings in preparation for them to go on speaking tours to rally support for the "schwarze Schmach" campaign.⁴⁶

The RFL collected and published information on rape and assault cases involving French African occupation troops. The pamphlets were so popular that by 1923 four editions had been released and translated into five languages.⁴⁷ The 1920 edition of the RFL pamphlet was also published in Chicago and sold under such titles as, for example, "Colored Frenchmen on the Rhine: An Appeal of White Women to American Womanhood."⁴⁸ The Rheinische Frauenliga provided charts that showed exponential growth in venereal disease cases and described reported attacks with sensationalized headings such as "crime against a boy," "breach of morals," and "attack."⁴⁹ German editions also included a breakdown of the occupying troops according to ethnicity (i.e., Moroccan, Senegalese, Algerian, or Tunisian) to distinguish different kinds of Africans and French colonials.⁵⁰

The RFL's main objective was to stop occupation brothels from operating. RFL representatives used racist rhetoric in their propaganda to mobilize women and attract an international audience to the Rhineland campaign. Though the RFL was not directly responsible for prostitution reform, German women's groups across the political spectrum supported the RFL because the organization's propaganda made occupation brothels a significant issue in the "Horror on the Rhine" protest. With this, German feminists and others connected sexual violence against "honorable German women" and Black French occupation to discredit state-regulated prostitution.

Rhineland Campaign Intersects with US Race Politics and WILPF

To incite white American outrage towards the stationing of French African colonial troops in the Rhineland region, German propagandists discussed the "Horror on the Rhine" campaign in the context of American race politics. In March 1920, "schwarze Schmach" advocate Ray Beveridge, who worked at the German embassy in Washing-

ton, DC, gave lectures to Americans in Berlin about the threat of Black troops in occupied territory.⁵¹ She spoke in Germany and the US at protest meetings and stirred crowds by referencing the “increased immoral greed of the American negro for the American white woman.”⁵² Beveridge’s dislike for African Americans was well known. She encouraged German men to protect their women by the same means white men had in the South, “German men! ... Your weapons have been taken from you, but there is always a rope and a tree! Take up the natural weapons used by our men of the South: lynch! ... And even if you have to die as martyrs, then you die as heroes—worthy of Germany.”⁵³

Beveridge manipulated the Rhineland issue, which was about French African colonials, to mean something threatening to white Americans. She needed to not only convince Germans and white Americans that Black American and French African men were one and the same but also that white German and white American women were one and the same. To further complicate Beveridge’s entrance into the Rhineland debate and her motivations for speaking out, it is unclear whether she was a German citizen. Scholars believe that it was plausible that though Beveridge held a German passport, during her time in DC she passed herself off as an American journalist and in Germany as a government official.⁵⁴

Regardless of questions about her citizenship, Beveridge was fully aware of white Americans’ racial animus toward Black Americans and the likely consequences of her inflammatory remarks. But Beveridge’s strategy was nothing new; she weaponized racial intolerance in the US just as her fellow Germans had done throughout World War I. German propagandists wasted no time leveraging the race-related riot in 1917 in East St. Louis, Illinois, to “spread lies far and wide that Negro soldiers were being sacrificed at the front; they were put in the most dangerous places, and when wounded were left to suffer and die unattended on the battle-field.”⁵⁵ The efforts of German propagandists to recruit African American troops were also well-documented in notes dropped from German balloons:

TO THE COLORED SOLDIERS OF THE UNITED STATES ARMY: Hello, boys, what are you doing over there? Fighting the German? Why? Have they ever done you any harm? ... What is democracy? Personal freedom, all citizens enjoying the same rights socially and before the law. Do you enjoy the same rights as the white people do in America, the land of freedom and democracy, or are you not rather treated over there as second-class citizens? ... Now, all this is entirely different in Germany, where they do like colored people, where they treat them as gentlemen and as white men and quite a number of colored people have fine positions in business in Berlin and other German cities ... [C]ome over to the German lines.⁵⁶

Of equal importance, the impetus for Beveridge's race baiting was not only about peddling the "schwarze Schmach" controversy but was also antagonizing the US. All told, the US government was still a political enemy to a disappointed, militarily defeated, economically and politically vulnerable German nation state.

Among other things, for Beveridge—and white American WILPFers who believed the charges against Black French African troops—the Rhineland Campaign was not a matter of guilt or innocence. They understood that white women's political leverage was all in the accusation of the mythical "Black rapist" trope; the truth simply did not matter. By contrast, Mary Church Terrell's discernment in the allegations against the French African troops was informed by intersecting and mutually informing phenomena, namely the 1918 Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill, "anti-Negro" sentiment through unprecedented acts of violence spread across the US referred to as Red Summer 1919, and the rebellion of other oppressed groups against imperial powers following the war around the world.⁵⁷

Mary Church Terrell made the sexualized racism against Black men an international women's issue. In this instance, Terrell's gendered analysis focused on Black men rather than Black women, though she was aware of the abuses women of color had suffered in war-occupied territories.⁵⁸ It was Terrell's sex that, paradoxically, allowed her to boldly object to the charges against the French African troops in a way that Black American men could not. In the United States, white men claimed that lynching Black men was a response to Black men's sexual advances and intended to protect white women. Lynching was about maintaining white power through the sexual objectification of Black men. For white men, lynching served as both a visual and psychological reminder of Black men's subordinated position. The Rhineland campaign echoed similar undertones. For Black men, entering a debate about white women's sexual activities would have warranted violent backlash. Terrell was enacting Black feminist intersectional politics: she was emphatic that gender, race, and sexuality were entwined in ways that demanded the attention of Black feminists.

Despite the successful propaganda campaign by the RFL, Gärtner, and Beveridge, not all German women shared the same sentiments. A well-documented dissenter was German pacifist Lilly Jannasch, who argued that the reports of Blacks' assaults on German women were trumped up by German propagandists and that the cases were actually isolated incidents. Jannasch stated that she was never assaulted during the year she lived in the occupied region of Taunus.⁵⁹ Jannasch highlighted the role some German women played in relation to the French troops: "this type of behavior [entertaining Black troops] by German women is by no means new. Indeed, in all levels of society there are white women who are only happy to grant blacks their favor."⁶⁰

Jannasch presented a strong case against propagandists who denied the possibility of consensual relationships between the colonials and German women. And as a counterargument to male agitators who depicted German women fraternizers as traitors to their nation and race, Jannasch questioned German men's concern for German

women's lives. As evidence, she pointed to the lack of social welfare resources available to impoverished women and their children immediately after the war. She asserted that these women became sex workers out of necessity. Though Jannasch did not take a position on prostitution reform, her article sought to correct manipulated information disseminated by the German press and propagandists about Black French colonials' and German women's sexual behaviors. German WILPFers Anita Augspurg and Lida Gustava Heymann agreed with Jannasch.⁶¹ This allyship was important, as Augspurg and Heymann were established leaders of the radical left bourgeois feminists within the German women's movement and pacifists who believed that overcoming militarism and war were the real solutions to obtaining women's equality, not just suffrage.⁶²

Although Jannasch's "Schwarze Schmach und Weiße Schande" appeared in just a few local newspapers and small feminist periodicals, her unorthodox position caught the attention of one of the leading African American journals at the time, W. E. B. Du Bois's *The Crisis*. *The Crisis* printed a translated version of Jannasch's article concerning the "white disgrace."⁶³ The "Horror on the Rhine" propaganda circulated worldwide and, for some, signaled a chance to be recognized as an influential political force. This was best captured in the case of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.

WILPF Concludes on Rhineland Campaign and Passes Resolutions

In her letter to Addams on March 18, 1921, Terrell expressed sensitivity to the possibility of German women victims, but also clarified that Black troops were being singled out:

However, I am certain that the black troops are committing no more assaults upon the German women than the German men committed upon the French women or that any race of soldiers would probably commit upon women in occupied territory. Our own American soldiers treated the Haitian women brutally.⁶⁴

According to Terrell, her reliable source of information about the Rhineland campaign was Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt, the former president of the National American Women's Suffrage Association (NAWSA), who told Terrell she had discussed the issue with three German delegates at the 1921 Geneva conference, which Terrell did not attend. The German delegates promised Catt that they would investigate the charges against the Black troops.⁶⁵ In the periodical *The Woman Citizen*, Catt reported that once reunited with the three German delegates at a conference in London, they confirmed the presumed charges to have been false, verifying Terrell's position. Catt concluded:

In view of these facts, it seems clear to me that someone, somewhere, sometime, started a willful propaganda, in-

tended either to stir the racial feeling in this country [US], or to use it to arouse an antagonism toward France, or both.⁶⁶

Though Jane Addams initially believed there was some truth to the accusations, Terrell's testimony about the innocence of the Black troops convinced Addams not to sign the petition.⁶⁷ Addams responded to Terrell in a letter on March 29, 1921, agreeing with the latter's evidence and proposing "that we should fight against the occupation of enemy territory—not against any special troops."⁶⁸

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom eventually came to a consensus on the Rhineland controversy. At the Third International Conference of Women in Vienna, Austria, in July 1921, WILPF adopted a policy titled "Military Use of Native Populations of Colonies."⁶⁹ When Emily Greene Balch presented the proposal, she avoided the issue of racism and rape. Fortunately, Terrell's "Resolution on Race Prejudice," which she had presented in Zurich in 1919, passed at the Vienna conference and received the support of German delegates. Terrell's resolution made WILPF take an official and public stance against race intolerance.

Conclusion

Mary Church Terrell's interpretation of the campaign confirmed two important points: first, that Black women's heightened awareness of issues concerning race and gender in the international arena related to their domestic predicament, and second, that she sought not only the social justice and mobility of Black women, but also the dignity of men of color. Terrell's personal involvement in the wake of the Rhineland campaign is an exemplary example of Black women's unique impact in the international sphere.

Terrell's impact within WILPF did not go unnoticed. While her outstanding record of activism in the organization was well respected, her unwillingness to compromise on the Black troop situation later proved too contentious for some white members, putting Terrell's executive member board status in jeopardy. In 1923, Terrell was not reelected to the board. According to historian Melinda Plastas, white WILPFers such as Amy Woods and Belle La Follette were "distressed" by the news while others such as Emily Greene Balch and Lucy Biddle Lewis claimed that Terrell had not contributed much during her two-year membership anyway. Not to make her prejudice too obvious, Lewis clung to the assertion that Terrell's discussion of Black soldiers in the Civil War and World War I was proof that "at the bottom of her heart she has not the fundamental understanding of our ideals I am sure."⁷⁰ A few years later in a letter to Black WILPFer Addie Hunton, Terrell revealed that the real reason "the National Board left her" was because she refused to sign the Rhineland petition. Terrell closed her letter by noting, "I know I was as 'valuable' as I could be under the circumstances, though I might not have been as 'valuable' just in the manner some people wanted me to be. ... Perhaps I was too 'valuable' to suit a few people."⁷¹

Notes

- ¹ Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman in a White World* (Washington, DC: Randsell, 1940), 361–63.
- ² France occupied Germany's Rhineland territory (1918–1930) as a result of post-World War I agreements made through the Versailles Treaty of 1919 between the Allied powers of France and Great Britain, and the United States of America. I use the "United States of America" and "America" interchangeably.
- ³ Challenging the stereotypical images and negative intellectual theories of Black women was one of the core issues predating the American Civil War in which Black women invested their energies.
- ⁴ The debate on prostitution reform was one of many controversial issues concerning sex reform in 1920s Germany. See Atina Grossman, *Reforming Sex: The German Movement for Birth Control and Abortion Reform, 1920–1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) and Ute Frevert, *Frauen-Geschichte: Zwischen bürgerlicher Verbesserung und neuer Weiblichkeit* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986), published in English under the title *Women in German History: From Bourgeois Emancipation to Sexual Liberation* (Oxford: Berg, 1988).
- ⁵ African American woman activist Anna Julia Cooper described the power of Black women's presence with the phrase, "when and where I enter ...," to a group of Black clergymen in 1892. See Paula Giddings's *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: Perennial Press, 1984).
- ⁶ This kind of crossnational organizing and communicating between white American and European women activists first began in the 1880s. The Women's Peace Party changed its name to WILPF after World War I.
- ⁷ Although WILPF professed to represent "women from around the world," this was not the reality. WILPF did not have members from Latin America, Asia, the Middle East, or Africa until the interwar period. Minority groups were looked at as "third world" women; white WILPFers often refused to hold conferences in countries outside of Europe or the US. For a fuller discussion, see Chapter 4, "Who's In, Who's Out" in Leila Rupp's *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).
- ⁸ Anja Schüler, *Frauen und soziale Reform: Jane Addams und Alice Solomon im transatlantischen Dialog, 1889–1933* (Munich: Steiner Verlag, 2004), 146.
- ⁹ Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, *Report of the International Congress of Women: Zurich, Switzerland May 12–17, 1919*, 461–64.

- ¹⁰ Melinda Plastas, *A Band of Noble Women: Racial Politics in the Women's Peace Movement* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2011), 10
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1j1woc3>
- ¹¹ WILPF (US) was originally referred to as the Women's Peace Party (WPP), WPP was changed to WILPF at the Zurich, Switzerland meeting in 1919. The German WILPF branch goes by Internationale Frauenliga für Frieden und Freiheit (IFFF).
- ¹² Linda K. Schott, *Reconstructing Women's Thoughts: The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom Before World War II* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 37.
- ¹³ Joyce Blackwell, *No Peace Without Freedom: Race and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 1915–1975* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004), 40.
- ¹⁴ Blackwell, *No Peace Without Freedom*, 41–44.
- ¹⁵ Jacqueline M. Moore, *Leading the Race: The Transformation of the Black Elite in the Nation's Capital, 1880–1920* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1999), 32 and 213.
- ¹⁶ Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996). Also see Brittney C. Cooper *Beyond Respectability: The Intellectual Thought of Race Women* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017) for additional context on Black middle-class women's respectability politics.
- ¹⁷ Mary Church Terrell, "The Duty of the National Association of Colored Women," *AME Church Review* (January 1900). This essay along with others by Terrell is found in *Quest for Equality: The Life and Writings of Mary Church Terrell, 1863–1954*, Black Women in the United States History 13, comp. Beverly Washington Jones (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, 1990), 144.
- ¹⁸ Blackwell, *No Peace Without Freedom*, 41.
- ¹⁹ Schott, *Reconstructing Women's Thoughts*, 20.
- ²⁰ Terrell, *Colored Woman in a White World*, 331.
- ²¹ The International Council of Women (ICW) was founded in 1888 in Washington, DC at the fortieth anniversary of the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention. Leading US and European suffragists established the organization to foster a more formal relationship between women of the North Atlantic. The ICW was an umbrella organization comprised of National Councils representing independent women's groups from each respective country. Mary Church Terrell was the first African American woman invited

to attend and speak at the 1904 ICW Congress in Berlin. For a comprehensive study on the making of the international women's movement, see Rupp, *Worlds of Women*.

²² Terrell, *Colored Woman in a White World*, 333.

²³ Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, *Report of the International Congress of Women: Zurich, Switzerland May 12–17, 1919*, 260. All quotes from Terrell's 1919 speech in Zurich are my translation from the original German.

²⁴ Terrell, *Colored Woman in a White World*, 333.

²⁵ Terrell, *Colored Woman in a White World*, 334.

²⁶ Mary Church Terrell, "My Experience Abroad as Delegate at the International Congress of Women held in Zurich, Switzerland," *The Competitor*, January 1920, 38.

²⁷ Terrell was the first Black woman to be appointed to the Washington, DC Board of Education in 1895, where she served a total of eleven years (1895–1901 and 1906–1911), and was involved in a wide range of organizations, such as the Colored Women's League, Afro-American Council, and Young Women's Christian Association. For a comprehensive study of Mary Church Terrell's domestic activism, see Alison Parker, *Unceasing Militant: The Life of Mary Church Terrell* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020).

²⁸ Mary Church Terrell, (title of speech is unknown) in the *Report of the International Congress of Women, Zurich, Switzerland, May 12–17, 1919* (Geneva: Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 1920).

²⁹ Michelle M. Rief, "'Banded close together': An Afrocentric Study of African American Women's International Activism, 1850–1940, and the International Council of Women of the Darker Races" (PhD diss., Temple University, 2003), 128.

³⁰ Terrell, *Colored Woman in a White World*, 375.

³¹ Letter from Mary Church Terrell to Robert H. Terrell, "International Congress of Women," Mary Church Terrell Papers, Box 2, Series II, Oberlin College Archives.

³² "Mrs. Mary Church Terrett [sic]," *Chicago Defender*, June 20, 1919.

³³ Terrell, *Colored Woman in a White World*, 376.

³⁴ Letter from Mary Church Terrell to Addie Hunton, February 1, 1929, reel 6, Mary Church Terrell Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC. Terrell later became suspicious of Balch's intentions towards her and expressed her awareness that Balch never liked her in the first place to fellow WILPF member and Black club woman, Addie Hunton.

³⁵ Major German newspapers reported regularly on the allegations, for example: "Gegen die Schwarze Schmach," *Frankfurter Zeitung*, June 4, 1920; "Die

Frauenvereine gegen die “Schwarze Schmach,” *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, June 24, 1920; “Die Schwarze Schmach,” *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, January 5, 1921; “Gegen die Schwarze Pest,” *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, January 11, 1921; “Neuer Protest gegen die Negertruppen,” *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, January 22, 1921; and “Nigger in Darmstadt einmarschiert,” *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, March 4, 1923.

³⁶ Iris Wigger, “‘Black Shame’—The Campaign Against ‘racial degeneration’ and Female Degradation in Interwar Europe,” *Race & Class* 51, no. 3 (2010): 36 and 38.

³⁷ Wigger, “‘Black Shame,’” 40. Also note that Wigger does not draw gender distinctions for “campaigners.”

³⁸ Wigger, “‘Black Shame,’” 38.

³⁹ Julia Roos, “Women’s Rights, Nationalist Anxiety, and the ‘Moral’ Agenda in the Early Weimar Republic: Revisiting the ‘Black Horror’ Campaign against France’s African Occupation Troops,” *Central European History* 42, no. 3 (2009): 493.

⁴⁰ Julia Roos, *Weimar through the Lens of Gender: Prostitution Reform, Woman’s Emancipation, and German Democracy, 1919–33* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 192. Notable scholars who have also written on the Horror on the Rhine include Tina Campt, *Other Germans: Black Germans and the Politics of Race, Gender, and Memory in the Third Reich* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2004); Sara Lennox, ed., *Remapping Black Germany: New Perspectives on Afro-German History, Politics, and Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016); Peter Campbell, “‘Black Horror on the Rhine’: Idealism, Pacifism, and Racism in Feminism and the Left in the Aftermath of the First World War,” *Journal of Social History*, 47, no. 94 (2014): 471–93.

⁴¹ For a comprehensive study on German women and the politics of sexuality and sex reform in Germany see Ute Frevert, *Women in German History: From Bourgeois Emancipation to Sexual Liberation* (Oxford: St. Martin’s Press, 1989).

⁴² Roos, “Women’s Rights,” 489–90.

⁴³ I will be using RFL when referring to the Rheinische Frauenliga going forward. Other organizations like the German League against the Black Shame, The Hamburg Association for Combating the Black Shame, and German Emergency Association against the Black Shame (*Deutscher Notbund gegen die schwarze Schmach*) formed at the same time as the RFL, but I found nothing about their function and activities in the campaign.

⁴⁴ Anja Schüller, Kathryn Kish Sklar, and Susan Strasser, eds., *Social Justice Feminists in the United States and Germany: A Dialogue in Documents, 1885–1933* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018), 26. The BDF (League of German Women’s Associations) was founded in 1894. The organization also made German women eligible to be members of the ICW.

- ⁴⁵ Roos, “Women’s Rights,” 479.
- ⁴⁶ Roos, “Women’s Rights,” 480.
- ⁴⁷ Richard S. Fogerty, *Race and War in France: Colonial Subjects in the French Army, 1914–1918* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008): 276.
- ⁴⁸ Schüler, “The ‘Horror in the Rhine,’” 7.
- ⁴⁹ The Rheinisch Women’s League, ed. *Colored Frenchmen on the Rhine* (Chicago: The New Times, 1920). Translated from the Rheinische Frauenliga by author.
- ⁵⁰ Rheinisch Women’s League, *Farbige Franzosen am Rhein*, 48. It was not mentioned, nor apparent what the purpose or significance behind the breakdown of the occupation troops was. Algerians and Moroccans were grouped together with Black Africans, who were also identified as “Negroes.”
- ⁵¹ Sally Marks, “Black Watch on the Rhine: A Study in Propaganda, Prejudice and Prurience,” *European Studies Review* 13 (1983): 312.
- ⁵² Schüler, “Horror on the Rhine,” 8.
- ⁵³ Schüler, “Horror on the Rhine,” 9.
- ⁵⁴ See Keith L. Nelson, “The “Black Horror on the Rhine”: Race as a Factor in Post-World War I Diplomacy,” *The Journal of Modern History* 42, no. 4 (December 1970): 615; Marks, “Black Watch on the Rhine”; and Schüler, “Horror on the Rhine.”
- ⁵⁵ “The Looking Glass,” *The Crisis*, December 1918, 80. Also see Nina Mjagkij, *Loyalty in Time of Trial: The African American Experience During World War I* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2011), 49. The East St. Louis riot was the bloodiest and deadliest race riot of the twentieth century, claiming the lives of two hundred and fifty Black people. In response, the NAACP staged a silent parade in New York City in which ten thousand people participated.
- ⁵⁶ W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Black Man in the Revolution,” *The Crisis*, March 1919, 222.
- ⁵⁷ Mary Church Terrell, “The Racial Worm Turns” [ca. 1920], reel 21, Mary Church Terrell Papers, Manuscripts Division. Library of Congress, Washington, DC.
- ⁵⁸ Terrell, *A Colored Woman in a White World*, 403. Terrell is referencing white American soldiers’ brutal treatment of Haitian women during the US occupation of Haiti from 1915–1934.
- ⁵⁹ Lilly Jannasch, “Schwarze Schmach und schwarz-weiß-rote Schande,” *Flugschriften des Bundes Neues Vaterland* (Berlin: Verlag Neues Vaterland, 1921), 11–12, my translation. Jannasch’s essay was published in the newsletter of the pacifist organization she recently helped found and held the role of secretary, the League for

a New Fatherland (des Bundes Neues Vaterland). When authorities learned of the nature of the organization, Jannasch was arrested and charged with treason. It unclear if Jannasch was sentenced to prison. Also see Regina Braker, "Bertha Von Suttner's Spiritual Daughters: The Feminist Pacifism of Anita Augspurg, Lida Gustava Heymann, and Helene Stöcker at the International Congress of Women at The Hague, 1915," *Women's Studies Forum* 18, no. 2 (March–April 1995): 106.

- ⁶⁰ Jannasch, "Schwarze Schmach und schwarz-weiß-rote Schande," 11. My translation.
- ⁶¹ See Erika Kuhlman, *Reconstructing Patriarchy after the Great War: Women, Gender, and Postwar Reconciliation between Nations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 67. Jannasch was a pacifist, but not a German WILPF member. It is also unclear if she held membership in other political or women's organizations.
- ⁶² Jennifer Anne Davy, "Pacifist Thought and Gender Ideology in the Political biographies of Women Peace Activists in Germany, 1899–1970," *Journal of Women's History*, 13, no. 3 (2001): 35–36; and Braker, "Bertha Von Suttner's Spiritual Daughters," 107.
- ⁶³ "Blacks Defended in German Paper," *The Crisis*, March 1921, 222. African American newspapers regularly reported on the "Horror on the Rhine" propaganda: "French Make Few Complaints against Africans in Germany," *Washington Bee*, February 19, 1921; "Surprises French Nation: Move to Protest Senegalese Troops on Rhine—Soldiers Complained of by Germans have been Absent from Occupied Area for better than Six Months," *Washington Bee*, February 26, 1921; "'Lie' Given to Charges against France's Colored Troops by Weeks: No Truth in Rhine Atrocities," *New York Amsterdam News*, December 13, 1922; "Seek Aid in America: Preach 'Black Horror' Poison to Wean Americans from the French People," *Chicago Defender*, September 16, 1922; and "Outcry Against the 'Black Horror' and an Urgent Appeal to Americans," *Chicago Defender*, September 23, 1922.
- ⁶⁴ Terrell, *Colored Woman in a White World*, 403.
- ⁶⁵ Historians are unsure who the "three German women" exactly were, but they speculate they may have been Anna Lindermann, Marie Elisabeth Lüders, and Adele Schreiber because they all attended the 1921 IWSA conference in Geneva.
- ⁶⁶ Carrie Chapman Catt, "The Truth about the Black Troops on the Rhine," *The Woman Citizen*, March 5, 1921. Catt does not provide a date or name of the conference the German women she attended; I believe this conversation took place between late 1919 and 1921.
- ⁶⁷ Addams and a few other white American WILPFers believed the allegations in the beginning because when the controversy first started, Agnes Flehinghaus and other unknown members convinced Addams of the horrible treatment of German women on the Rhine. See Erika Kuhlman, *Reconstructing Patriarchy after the Great War:*

Women, Gender, and Postwar Reconciliation between Nations (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 62–63.

⁶⁸ Terrell, *Colored Woman in a White World*, 405.

⁶⁹ Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, *Report of the Third International Congress of Women, Vienna, Austria, 1921*. Also see Schüler et al., eds., *Social Justice Feminists*, 282–84.

⁷⁰ Melinda Plastas, *A Band of Noble Women*, 24.

⁷¹ Letter from Mary Church Terrell to Addie Hunton, March 27, 1929, reel 6, Mary Church Terrell Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

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