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# THE MISSIONARY ENTERPRISE, RACIAL CONFLICTS, AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF AMERICAN EVANGELICALISM, 1945-1980

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THE MISSIONARY ENTERPRISE, RACIAL CONFLICTS, AND THE  
TRANSFORMATION OF AMERICAN EVANGELICALISM, 1945-1980

By

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Dissertation

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THE MISSIONARY ENTERPRISE, RACIAL CONFLICT, AND THE  
TRANSFORMATION OF AMERICAN EVANGELICALISM, 1945-1980

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This dissertation examines the history of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship to understand the creation of a color-conscious theological discourse about racial identity and racial pluralism that emerged among evangelicals in the mid-twentieth century. Although a colorblind articulation of racial identity had wide currency among white and black evangelicals as a way to counter segregationists' claims of racial superiority, it had little effect in challenging the exercise of white hegemony even among those who advocated for racial equality. The limits of colorblindness came to light as black evangelicals forged new approaches to evangelization among African Americans and white evangelicals challenged the validity of those approaches.

The dissertation argues that racial conflicts—disputes about the meaning of race as well as disputes across racial lines—were a critical agent in the transformation of American evangelicalism in the postwar decades. It prompted the arrival of a movement among black evangelicals—a Black Evangelical Renaissance—defined by its vocal opposition to white hegemony and its commitment to disentangling evangelical faith from its use as a tool to maintain America's racial order. Color-conscious theology emerged from the Black Evangelical Renaissance, prompting a reorientation of the evangelical missionary enterprise around its racially plural constituency and allowing black evangelicals to negotiate more equitable terms for their participation in InterVarsity Christian Fellowship.

The Missionary Enterprise, Racial Conflicts, and the Transformation of American  
Evangelicalism, 1945-1980

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## Acknowledgments

This project took shape over the previous twenty years as I became more and more acquainted with America's legacy of racial oppression and with evangelical Christianity's halting and uneven support for racial equality in the twentieth century. In Dr. Konrad Hamilton's undergraduate course on the Civil Rights Movement at Knox College, I was troubled by the pervasive use of violence against African Americans and intrigued by the power of nonviolent action to enact social and political change. As a campus minister with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, I saw how efforts to expose racism and unseat white hegemony could be met with enthusiastic applause and tearful confessions that sometimes erupted in heated exchanges across racial lines. During a decade of work with InterVarsity, I thus observed America's racial order at play within the context of an evangelical organization—and, indeed, I partook in both the challenge to it and the reaction to sustain it. Although I could not have articulated it clearly at the end of my tenure with InterVarsity, I could see that America's racial order had a formidable presence in American society that severely hampered the operations of an evangelical ministry.

I took my experiences and the questions it raised to the academy to better understand the perennial contest among evangelicals to make racial equality a priority within its ranks. At the University of Montana's History Department, I found a community of scholars who equipped me to answer my questions while also urging me to locate my research in multiple strands of historical discourse. I am grateful for the faculty whose keen historical insights were backed by careful reading of the evidence and keen

awareness of historiographical debates; and whose seminars fostered that same approach to historical inquiry in students' research and discussions about the past. I am also grateful to the history graduate students— James Vaughan, April Gemeinhardt, Pat O'Connor, Clinton Lawson, Johnny Barber, Sorn Jessen, Bob Lambeth, Jared Norwood, Joshua Pretzer, Liz Barrs, and Hayden Nelson. Thank you for making my research stronger, conversations richer, and my days brighter.

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The dissertation is the final step in a historian's formal training, and my committee members warmly welcomed me to the profession. While writing the dissertation, Dr. Tobin Shearer kept my spirits up and my analysis sharp with his feedback and suggestions. Thank you for encouraging me to keep going when the task seemed too big to tackle. I'm also grateful for committee members' sincere intellectual engagement with this project during the dissertation defense. In turn, you each made a potentially stressful test of my competence into an enriching exchange that helped me to hone the project's argument and better express its conclusions.

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murky description of what I was trying to accomplish, as well as your enthusiasm for the topic of race in the history of evangelicalism. I'm especially grateful to Paul Robinson, who consistently pointed out the critical insight this project can offer to contemporary religious communities. Finally, my family has supported me in immeasurable ways as I completed this project. Thanks to my wife Jesse and my children Olivia and Benjamin for making this—and everything else in life—worth doing.



## Chapter 1

### The Missionary Enterprise: A Compelling and Confounding Vision

At the age of seventeen, Carl Ellis, Jr., was a veteran of civil rights campaigns to integrate public schools and to end employment discrimination in his hometown of Gary, Indiana. He had met Martin Luther King, Jr., and treasured his signed copy of *Stride Toward Freedom*. He had also joined demonstrations held in nearby Chicago. When Gary's African Americans began to mobilize a campaign in 1964 to establish a human rights commission, Carl Ellis, Sr., a Tuskegee Airman during World War II, volunteered to fly over the city to distribute leaflets about Gary Freedom Movement's activities and he invited his son to come along. Despite his years of involvement and despite being a novice pilot himself, Carl Ellis, Jr., hesitated to go along with his father.<sup>1</sup>

His hesitancy arose from his recent encounters with evangelical Christianity, a religious movement gaining momentum in the United States since the end of World War II. Having heard an offer of divine forgiveness from his peers, Ellis stepped into the stream of a very different type of campaign to bring about religious conversion among people in Gary, the United States, and around the world. In the past, enthusiastic expectations for religious conversion had undergirded social movements for abolition and

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<sup>1</sup> Carl Ellis, Jr., spoke about his civil rights activism on "What Changed for Evangelicals When MLK Was Killed," *Quick To Listen*, Podcast Audio, April 4, 2018. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2018/april-web-only/evangelicals-martin-luther-king-mlk-assassination.html>. Accessed November 12, 2018. Carl Ellis, Sr. is listed among Tuskegee Airmen at <https://www.tuskegee.edu/support-tu/tuskegee-airmen/tuskegee-airmen-pilot-listing>. Accessed November 12, 2018; see also Ronald D. Cohen, "The Dilemma of School Integration in the North: Gary, Indiana, 1945-1960," *Indiana Magazine of History*, Vol 82, No. 2 (June 1986), 161-184.

temperance as well as a foreign missionary enterprise, rooted in a belief that exhibiting contrition before God would transform the immoral into moral people. Since the 1940s, evangelicals revitalized this aspiration and believed that widespread conversion to Christianity—salvation from sin, in evangelical parlance—could bring about large-scale social change in a nation racked by the insecurities of the atomic age and in a world ravaged by war. American evangelicalism coalesced around the expectation that evangelization would make the nation and the world a better place.

Ellis came to find that vision both compelling for its possibilities and confounding for its limitations. Late in his high school years, he began attending activities sponsored by Youth for Christ where he was surprised to meet white students and ministers who did not exhibit the typical signs of racial prejudice towards him and other black attendees. The contrast of white evangelicals with white city officials and industry representatives who actively opposed integration was remarkable. Ellis attributed their lack of prejudice to God's intervention in their lives. Convinced of the viability of evangelical faith, he devoted his time to religious pursuits rather than to civil rights campaigns. He was likewise surprised to learn one implication of evangelicalism's exuberant trust in conversion as an instrument of change: they considered direct action campaigns to be misguided attempts to end racial discrimination. Ordinances, said evangelicals, were at best superficial remedies because they did not eliminate the prejudices of city officials, industry representatives, and residents of Gary. Such reasoning, Ellis could see, meant that the evangelical vision for addressing humanity's problems that had drawn him in was also at odds with the movement of African Americans across the nation not simply to end white people's prejudices but to gain for themselves legal equality. Setting aside his

momentary hesitation, Carl Ellis, Jr., refused to end his involvement in such a movement. He joined his father on the aviation mission. In 1965, thanks to efforts of the Ellis family and others in the Gary Freedom Movement, the city promulgated a human rights commission.<sup>2</sup>

More surprising perhaps than his momentary hesitation, Carl Ellis, Jr., did not steer clear of evangelicals after his plane ride with his father. In fact, his attendance at Youth for Christ was the first of many times over the next two decades that he would be compelled by the possibilities of evangelical faith but confounded by white evangelicals' failure to adequately speak to the issue of racial inequality. As a college student, he would confront white evangelicals who promoted mission work around the world but said nothing about escalation of violence against black residents in American cities. After graduating from college, he worked with other black evangelicals to create a distinctly black and evangelical ministry for college students at historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) in Virginia, challenging the authority of a white-led campus ministry that had previously operated there. In the 1970s, he would apprentice himself to a well-known white evangelical philosopher and evangelist; and in the 1980s, he would write a book about black evangelical theology and its contrasts with white evangelical theology.<sup>3</sup> In each of these instances, Ellis endorsed the evangelical vision to improve the world through evangelization, but his actions and ideas ran counter to prevailing

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<sup>2</sup> Ellis, Jr., "What Changed for Evangelicals When MLK Was Killed;" For Civil Rights campaigns in Gary, Indiana and MLK's visit there see James B. Lane, *"City of the Century: A History of Gary, Indiana"*, (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1978), 231-269; for details about the creation of Gary's civil rights commission, named the Human Relations Commission, see Lane, 278-282.

<sup>3</sup> Ellis, Jr., "What Changed for Evangelicals When MLK Was Killed;" Carl F. Ellis, Jr., *Free At Last: The Gospel in the African-American Experience*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983.)

strategies and theology undergirding them. He challenged those prevailing views in order to realize that vision, while his white opponents protected the status quo for ostensibly the same reason.

Ellis's story outlines the racial dimensions of the evangelical movement that took shape in the postwar decades. Despite a great deal of effort and ink spilled in support of racial equality, the topic remained contentious in evangelical circles. It sparked a number of conflicts and frequently divided white and black evangelicals who otherwise agreed that their faith should bring them together and should bring an end to racial strife. The prospect of evangelizing in African-American communities generated controversy. With relatively few resources spent on evangelization among African Americans compared to overseas expenditures, black evangelicals chided the movement for neglecting the obligation to preach everywhere. To shore up that neglect, black evangelicals took on the obligation themselves with evangelization programs that were socially conscious and directly appealed to potential converts' black identity. As white evangelicals questioned their approach, the dispute engendered a competition for attention and resources between foreign mission work and domestic mission work. Over the years, competition intensified around the claim that foreign mission work amounted to gross neglect of African Americans facing deprivation and discrimination at the hands of a racialized society. Few denied the urgency of the problem, but not all agreed that the redress of racial inequality ought to be a top priority for mission work. The appeal to black identity also became divisive. For some, the assertion of black identity enhanced evangelization and would promote unity among black evangelicals and white evangelicals. For others, the assertion

was counterproductive to evangelization and threatened to separate black and white evangelicals.

In the years following World War II, evangelicals frequently found themselves in conflicts across the racial divide. Given their frequency and intensity over three decades, this project seeks to understand what racial conflicts meant for the development of the evangelical movement. Although historians have acknowledged that American evangelicalism was racially plural and largely organized along racial lines, their interpretations do not fully appreciate the dynamic contest that evangelicals engaged in from across the racial divide in the postwar decades. Evangelicalism was a diverse movement with a vision to evangelize the world. Yet, as a result of racial conflict the missionary enterprise became bifurcated into competing spheres of foreign and domestic and the assertion of racial identity intensified the competition. The bifurcation and the conflict it engendered complicate the notion of a shared vision among a diverse constituency. They also complicate the conclusion that evangelicals prized cooperation above conflict in the missionary enterprise. While evangelicals did share a vision that mission work could improve the world, they disputed the content of the vision and the strategies for making it happen. Postwar evangelicals were thus engaged in a sustained and increasingly acute contest to define and carry out the missionary enterprise; and, as Carl Ellis's story suggests, racial conflict animated the contest at every turn. Calling attention to the dynamic nature of racial conflicts among evangelicals, this project places race at the center of the scholarly inquiry of postwar evangelicalism to better understand the nature of this complex and multifaceted movement.

Historians have typically situated the developments in the evangelical movement in the context of the political, social, and cultural currents that challenged the postwar liberal consensus. Scholars have studied a political movement among conservative evangelicals that became a key constituency in the formation of what historian Lisa McGirr calls “The New American Right” that culminated in the election of Ronald Reagan and signaled a diminution of New Deal measures that sought political and economic security for citizens.<sup>4</sup> David Swartz demonstrates that evangelicalism had liberal elements as well as conservative: a number of liberal-minded pastors and laypersons participated in demonstrations for racial equality and against the war in Vietnam or formed alternatives to technocratic society similar to the counter culture. In fact, Swartz argues that a political movement on the left materialized in the early 1970s but was eclipsed by the movement on the right after a few years.<sup>5</sup> Molly Worthen identifies the cultural dimensions of postwar evangelicalism. They cultivated cultural institutions—colleges, mission organizations, publishing operations—that drew selectively on the scientific episteme of modernism to support their religious beliefs and to engage intellectually with those they wished to convert.<sup>6</sup> With the erosion of the liberal

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<sup>4</sup> Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001), 217-261; Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2011), 326-361; Matthew Avery Sutton, *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 2014), 263-292. For an early study of conservative evangelical politics and a broad survey of religious politics since World War II, see Mark Silk, *Spiritual Politics: Religion and American since World War II*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 159-182.

<sup>5</sup> David R. Swartz, *Moral Minority: The Evangelical Left in an Age of Conservatism*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 1-112.

<sup>6</sup> Molly Worthen, *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1-14 and 220-240.

consensus, Robert Collins makes the case that American society in general made a turn to the right politically but a progressive turn culturally.<sup>7</sup> While evangelicals participated in that shift from a variety of positions, Steven Miller, argues that the movement itself stood at the crux of that shift, providing “a language, a medium, and a foil by which millions of Americans came to terms with political and cultural changes.”<sup>8</sup>

While race is often a secondary concern for scholars on postwar evangelicalism, a smaller body of scholarship has attempted to explain the persistent racial divide among evangelical Christians. Miles S. Mullin, II, argues that organizational and theological commitments mitigated efforts at racial integration and did little to reverse the pattern of racial separation present throughout American society. Interdenominational organizations formed to advance their faith had among their ranks both supporters of racial segregation and supporters of integration. Mullin argues that integrationists were often reluctant to press the issue because it could compromise the shared task of mission work.<sup>9</sup> Mullin also argues that emphasis on mission work kept integrationist efforts within the bounds of evangelical institutions. Interracial cooperation and integration served an “exemplary function”—urging Americans to consider that divine intervention might be the most effective means to achieve racial equality and the church might be the most promising sphere for its achievement. Since they also believed that scriptures obliged Christians to obey civil authorities, Mullin concludes that they asserted this approach as a more

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<sup>7</sup> Robert M. Collins, *Transforming America: Politics and Culture During the Reagan Years*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> Steven P. Miller, *The Age of Evangelicalism: America's Born Again Years*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 5.

<sup>9</sup> Miles S. Mullin, II, “Neoevangelicalism and the Problem of Race in Postwar America,” J. Russell Hawkins and Phillip Luke Sinitiere, eds, *Christians and the Color Line: Race and Religion After Divided by Faith*, (Oxford University Press, 2014), 28.

desirable alternative to the nonviolent direct action of the Civil Rights Movement.<sup>10</sup>

Edward Blum introduced another concern among evangelicals: integration could lead to interracial sex and multiracial families, a prospect that tested the standards of decency even among supporters of racial equality.<sup>11</sup> Along with Mullin and Blum, scholars have identified a number of factors that explain why the evangelical remained divided along racial lines despite efforts at racial integration and interracial cooperation.<sup>12</sup>

African Americans appear throughout the academic literature on the evangelical movement, but historians rarely make them the focus of their inquiry. As a result, the literature suggests that African-American evangelicals played a marginal role in the movement. By placing race at the center of the inquiry, this project challenges the tacit conclusions of previous scholarship about the marginal role of African Americans in the developments of the evangelical movement. As the presence of a sustained conflict across racial lines reveals, African Americans claimed an active stake in the missionary enterprise and drew on the black freedom struggle to make mission work more effective. At home, they preached in African-American communities about liberation from God's divine judgment of sin *and* from the deprivations instantiated under a regime of racial discrimination. Abroad, they sought an end to the exclusionary policies of white mission organizations or formed organizations specifically to send black missionaries. With these and other efforts, black evangelists, pastors, and lay leaders—mostly male but not

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 31-33.

<sup>11</sup> Edward J. Blum, "Beyond Body Counts: Sex, Individualism, and the Segregated Shape of Twentieth Century Evangelicalism," J. Russell Hawkins and Phillip Luke Sinitiere, eds, *Christians and the Color Line: Race and Religion After Divided by Faith*, (Oxford University Press, 2014), 161-177.

<sup>12</sup> See other contributions to the edited volume J. Russell Hawkins and Phillip Luke Sinitiere, eds, *Christians and the Color Line: Race and Religion After Divided by Faith*, (Oxford University Press, 2014).



exclusively so-created a flourishing culture with supporting institutions worthy of its own name—a Black Evangelical Renaissance. With the arrival of the Black Evangelical Renaissance, black evangelicals could more effectively define for themselves how they would participate in the missionary enterprise and negotiate the terms of their collaboration with majority-white organizations that they worked for or cooperated with. In the process of negotiating the terms of the collaboration, black evangelicals actively shaped the missionary enterprise and the evangelical movement that supported it.

Scholars have noted in many instances that certain theological commitments worked to sustain racial division, but the literature often treats those commitments as static. By contrast, this project brings to light the creation of a new theological discourse on the meaning of race and racial identity that accompanied the Black Evangelical Renaissance. This new discourse sought to resolve the incongruencies in a fraught and shifting discourse about race among postwar evangelicals. On the one hand, evangelicals rejected a system of racial classification to undercut the notion that racial identity indicated one's position in a divinely established racial hierarchy. On the other hand, evangelicals employed concepts of racial difference to order the missionary enterprise. In particular, agencies sent missionaries to distinctive racial communities and fashioned a strategy for evangelization around its distinctive cultural features.

Between a colorblind challenge to racial hierarchy and a color conscious mission strategy, the concept of racial identity had an ambiguous status vis-à-vis religious identity that evangelicals resolved in different ways. Expanding on the discourse of racial difference, African Americans and others around the world began to claim that their racial identity was a divine blessing and that understanding its God-given features could

undo the negative psychological effects of internalized racism. However, others—primarily white evangelicals—equated any assertion of racial identity—whether from white segregationists or from black evangelicals—with a negation of a shared religious identity. With competing claims about the status of racial identity, colorblindness became a point of contention and divided evangelicals largely along racial lines. Although it had effectively countered explicitly racist theology, the elision of supposedly divisive racial identities into a shared religious identity became increasingly problematic. A new theological discourse about race emerged that expressed the ontological complexities of a diverse, global Christian community using the language of racial identity and racial difference rather than colorblindness. In addition to affirming racial identity as divinely ordained, it defined the evangelical movement as a plural constituency comprised of various racial communities that cooperated to advance the missionary enterprise.

While other literature on race and the evangelical movement catalogs the persistence of racial division, this project demonstrates the constructive nature of conflicts across racial lines. The innovations of the Black Evangelical Renaissance provided a robust critique of the exercise of white control over the missionary enterprise in the evangelical movement. It pointed out how white control shaped the movement's debates on theological and strategic questions, especially the priority for foreign mission work and the skepticism about racial identity. It urged the movement to consider that its association with an entrenched racial order was a serious impediment—perhaps the most serious—to advancing Christianity in the United States and around the world. Finally, new theological reflection on race articulated a system of racial interdependence that could replace the system of racial hierarchy, shifting the basis for equality from ontological

unity that required the erasure of racial identity to an equitable distribution of authority among members of different racial identities. Along with a critique, the ideas and practices of The Black Evangelical Renaissance helped to disrupt the exercise of white control within the movement, creating different evangelization practices that distanced the movement from association with the racial order and established channels for carrying them that were outside the authority of white evangelicals.

The Black Evangelical Renaissance thus demonstrates that the postwar evangelical movement was an active site for contesting America's longstanding racial order and provides a fascinating counterpoint to other activism for racial equality. Scholars who study the Civil Rights Movement speak of a constellation of activity in the postwar era that challenged the racial order in a variety of ways. They conclude that its most tangible success came in the South, where activists used nonviolent direct action to overturn segregation laws and to lobby the federal government to secure voting rights for African Americans.<sup>13</sup> Activism had religious dimensions, relying on support from black Protestant institutions and on enacting the ethic of loving one's enemy to engineer the end of Jim Crow.<sup>14</sup> Following the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965, activists continued to mobilize against the political, social, and economic aspects of racial inequality in America, and they oriented their efforts around liberation from oppression rather than interracial cooperation.

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<sup>13</sup> Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 304; Adam Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King, Jr.*, (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 2-3.

<sup>14</sup> Aldon Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change*, (New York: The Free Press, 1986), 77-99; David L. Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 87-103.

Christianity came under greater scrutiny in these years, and some considered Christianity in any form to be incompatible with liberation. According to historians Martha Biondi and Ibram X. Kendi, black students across the United States took aim against Christian norms of moral comportment that operated as instruments of control on university campuses. It was one component of the Black Student Movement that attempted to reorient university education around liberation and dismantling the structures that supported the racial order.<sup>15</sup> According to Jennifer Harvey, the Black Economic Forum sought financial restitution from religious institutions that supported the racial order. With former sit-in activist James Forman as spokesperson, the group demanded \$500,000,000 from Christian and Jewish organizations to be applied to programs designed to liberate black communities from economic oppression.<sup>16</sup> The Black Evangelical Renaissance expressed similar concerns to the Black Campus Movement and the Black Economic Forum. Yet, it wrestled with Christianity's legacy of establishing and maintaining the racial order in a different way—by seeking reform within the movement and by re-articulating evangelical faith as a means toward the liberation of African Americans. While sentiments toward religion varied, activists found a variety of ways to critique it as a component of white control in American society and presented different means of addressing it. The Black Evangelical Renaissance, then, was addressing the foundational problem of race in America. It took aim at a specific manifestation of white control present within the evangelical movement.

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<sup>15</sup> Martha Biondi, *The Black Revolution on Campus*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012), 1-12; Ibram X. Kendi, *The Black Campus Movement: Black Students and the Racial Reconstitution of Higher Education*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 1-8.

<sup>16</sup> Jennifer Harvey, *Dear White Christian: For Those Still Longing for Racial Reconciliation*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 103-131.

While racial conflict played out in a variety of ways across a diffuse evangelical movement, this project uses the history of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship (InterVarsity) to provide a narrative structure that will demonstrate how racial conflict animated evangelical debates about the missionary enterprise. InterVarsity was a collegiate ministry where racial conflict unfolded in a variety of ways—on college campuses, at retreat centers, in boardrooms, at missionary conventions, and elsewhere over the span of thirty years—sometimes simmering beneath the surface and other times erupting in dramatic fashion. They may not have been more frequent or intense than in other organizations, but racial conflicts in InterVarsity are well documented and therefore lend themselves to a coherent historical analysis. Archival sources clearly lay out that racial conflict made a significant disruption to the regular operation of the organization and afforded an opportunity to implement the innovations from the Black Evangelical Renaissance. Sources also make clear that InterVarsity cultivated relationships with actively with church congregations, denominational organizations, and interdenominational mission agencies in the United States and around the world. InterVarsity was thus a place where the latest trends and ideas in mission work circulated and where participants could discuss them and even implement them in their own evangelization projects. In short, InterVarsity’s history provides a case study in how racial conflict unfolded that is situated at the nexus of interdenominational partnerships that carried out the missionary enterprise.

Founded just before World War II, InterVarsity was an organization that introduced college students to evangelical faith and prepared them to participate in its global missionary enterprise over the span of their lives. InterVarsity supported local chapters

on university campuses where students cultivated disciplines of piety so that they could commune with the divine individually and corporately. Daily quiet times involved reading scripture and prayer in solitude to seek God's guidance for life or forgiveness for sins. Daily prayer meetings involved reading scripture and prayer with other members to seek God's favor in the missionary enterprise on their campuses and around the world.

Local chapters primarily operated as lay missionary societies promoting evangelical faith among students and professors. Chapter members invited their friends and acquaintances to lectures on a wide variety of subjects or to discussions about the Bible. InterVarsity's campus ministers offered students a formal training program on- and off-campus so that students could effectively promote the disciplines of piety, organize evangelistic lectures, and lead bible discussions. To supplement their formal training, InterVarsity published magazines and books that circulated devotional material and the latest in evangelical public discourse. Sometimes publications presented many perspectives about an issue for students to sort out for themselves. On other issues, they urged students to take an orthodox view. Over the years, two subjects consistently fell into the latter category: the priority for foreign mission work and support for racial equality. Both issues had support within the organization, but they competed for attention and for resources and exacerbated the problems of a bifurcated missionary enterprise.

InterVarsity became an influential organization in the United States and around the world. With several hundred chapters over the span of forty years, InterVarsity introduced tens of thousands of American college students to evangelical faith, some of

whom attended briefly and others who became active members.<sup>17</sup> Many student members became pastors, missionaries, and lay leaders. As they led, they relied on the formative experiences and teaching they received in daily prayer meetings, bible discussions, or at InterVarsity training centers. They also encouraged evangelical youth to seek out InterVarsity while studying at college. InterVarsity had a large pool of donors underwriting the work. Over the years, campus ministers solicited donations from thousands of individuals, congregations, and foundations that provided InterVarsity with an operating budget ranging from under \$200,000 after World War II to more than \$14,000,000 by 1980.<sup>18</sup> In turn, InterVarsity directed its own resources to promote international cooperation among evangelicals. It was a founding member of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES), which established a federation of national movements committed to evangelizing in their respective university systems. InterVarsity chapters in the United States corresponded with lay missionary societies in other countries and supported them by praying for them and by raising money to send to them.<sup>19</sup> Every three years, InterVarsity hosted the Urbana Mission Convention that brought together several thousand evangelicals from around the world with a program intended to impress upon American university students the importance of the missionary enterprise. For three consecutive conventions between 1967-1973, racial conflict erupted

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<sup>17</sup> Keith Hunt and Gladys Hunt, *For Christ and the University: The Story of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship of the U.S.A., 1940-1990*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 387-407. From 1945-1980, numbers of chapters ranged from under sixty to over eight hundred. Chapters varied in size from a few members to more than one hundred members.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. Data provided is not adjusted for inflation. InterVarsity employed around ten people in the late 1940s and around five hundred in 1980.

<sup>19</sup> C. Stacey Woods, *The Growth of a Work of God: The Story of the Early Days of the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship of the United States of America as Told by Its First General Secretary*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 137-142.

in dramatic fashion as black and white evangelicals realized just how far apart their takes on the missionary enterprise were.

With InterVarsity's history providing a narrative structure, this project argues that racial conflict became a critical agent in the transformation of American evangelicalism in the three decades following World War II. At missionary conventions, in the press, and in the inner workings of InterVarsity, disputes between white and black evangelicals frequently animated the debate and complicated the question of how to address social problems. In particular, black evangelicals' use of evangelization as a vehicle to advance racial equality introduced new ideas and practices that became a multifaceted challenge to racial dominance in the movement. As the Black Evangelical Renaissance took root in InterVarsity, it exposed the use of colorblindness as a cover for white racial dominance in the organization and it issued a call to reconfigure organizational authority around its racially plural constituency. As a result, the Black Evangelical Renaissance disrupted InterVarsity's established racial order and established more equitable terms of participation within the organization.

Chapter 1 relates how the contest to define the missionary enterprise prompted the initial steps toward institution building and theological innovation among African Americans in the first two postwar decades. In the late 1940s, InterVarsity's campus ministers took steps against policies of racial exclusion so that African Americans could participate fully in the organization. In the 1950s, the organization also hired African Americans and sent them to start lay missionary societies at HBCUs in the South. Although few new chapters materialized, one minister named Ruth Lewis counseled a



number of HBCU students dealing with the negative effects of internalized racism. Along with others, Lewis continued to develop this type of counseling as a component of evangelization in years to come. The small-scale efforts to evangelize among black students paled in comparison to InterVarsity's efforts to mobilize students for foreign mission work, a fact that reflected the relative lack of attention and resources given to black evangelization across evangelicalism. In 1963, Lewis and other black ministers from across the United States formed the National Negro Evangelical Association (NNEA) to tend to the task that the movement had largely neglected. At the same time, black evangelicals partnered with white evangelicals to articulate what they called the whole gospel, a vision of the missionary enterprise that insisted on an obligation to preach conversion and to work for racial equality. By 1965, these developments inserted black evangelization and racial equality in general into the conversation about mission work, but both of these topics became highly contentious. Beneath the disagreements about how to best carry out the missionary enterprise lay unresolved questions: about the nature of racial identity vis-à-vis religious identity; and about whether evangelization could, or even should, address the problem of racial inequality.

Chapter 2 explores the escalation of racial conflicts within the evangelical movement that resulted in the arrival of a Black Evangelical Renaissance. Black evangelicals were stunned to see that the mounting discontent among African Americans in the latter 1960s was given no attention at two major missionary conventions. In fact, at the Urbana convention of 1967 black collegians staged what might be called the first evangelical sit-in, taking the form of a prayer meeting and an improvised disruption to formal proceedings at the convention in order to air their grievances and press for

changes. While President Johnson's Kerner Commission declared the nation separate and unequal and African Americans clashed with the police and the National Guard, black evangelicals sought with great urgency to articulate an authentic Christianity apart from its complicity in a regime of racial suppression. Following the 1967 convention, black collegians and black clergy—Carl Ellis, Jr., among them—sought to advance the gospel at universities and, in the process, sought to establish the terms of cooperation with white evangelicals in InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. Mindful of exceeding the bounds of orthodoxy, they devised their own ways to be black and Christian, drawing on evangelicalism and the black cultural revolution that was flourishing in the late 1960s.

The Black Evangelical Renaissance, with its socially conscious evangelization and reflection on black evangelical identity, became a contested symbol that represented to some the realization of the vision to change the world through evangelization and to others an abandonment of a distinctive evangelical faith. Chapter 3 shows how a contest took shape at missionary conventions and through the continued efforts to mobilize evangelical college students as lay missionaries. The Urbana convention of 1970 initiated the contest by showcasing the Black Evangelical Renaissance to an audience of twelve thousand college students and by competing with the convention's stated goal to mobilize them into foreign missionary service. Following the convention, factions of InterVarsity mobilized in different directions. Some continued to train students for lay mission work on college campuses in light of America's fever-pitched racial crisis. Others, convinced that attention to race issues would sap the vitality of the organization, worked to protect the primacy of foreign mission mobilization vis-à-vis a more expansive scope of the missionary enterprise. When the latter faction showcased a streamlined missionary

enterprise at the Urbana convention of 1973, the former faction decried the program as a reversal of a gathering consensus around an expansive missionary enterprise and as a betrayal of the partnership they had forged to advance mission work on college campuses and around the world. A number of black clergy, lay leaders, and students parted ways with InterVarsity after the contentious Urbana and hosted a separate national gathering for black collegians a year later. A small contingency of black campus ministers remained in InterVarsity and turned their attention to securing greater institutional support for their work.

Notwithstanding the controversy of the 1973 Urbana convention, the evangelical missionary enterprise had grown considerably in scope and in sophistication during its first three decades. The Lausanne Congress of 1974 provided evangelicals an opportunity to take the measure of those developments. Amidst optimistic appraisals about the prospects for missionary successes in the next ten years, Lausanne's plenary addresses and working groups finally achieved consensus that mission work can and should give attention to social concern. Chapter 4 examines how at Lausanne evangelicals constructed that consensus around strategic and theological innovations related to autonomy and identity. Thereafter, those innovations informed the efforts of InterVarsity's campus ministers to gain support for their work. Within a cohort of black campus ministers, they acknowledged their differing strategies for campus ministry—some preferred to work in racially homogeneous spaces while others preferred racially heterogeneous spaces. Clarifying the point afforded greater unity and stability for black ministers and students in the organization. Concurrently, InterVarsity engaged a white former missionary to do cultural training for white campus ministers. The training

employed a novel cultural exegesis of scripture that sought to displace whiteness from the center of the faith. It also introduced the premise of an essentially plural nature of Christian communities and emphasized the role that intercultural conflict and negotiation could play in spurring on mission activity. Lausanne and InterVarsity's training seminars defined unity as interdependent constituencies cooperating for the purpose of mission work.

The term assigned to interdependence was multiethnicity and it suggested a more complex religious identity than colorblindness had a decade earlier. Supporters of multiethnicity spoke of evangelicalism as a plural constituency and advocated autonomy for each group and cooperation to advance missionary activity. While multiethnicity remained contested in evangelical circles, the ideas and practices of interdependence put stress on a system of racial hierarchy and made evangelicals discuss openly the link between orthodoxy and race. Perhaps most significantly, multiethnicity helped to broaden conceptions of orthodoxy limited by a regime of racial hierarchy and at the same time pressed for more equitable terms of participation in a racially plural evangelicalism.

Given its frequency and intensity during the postwar years, racial conflict amounted to a crisis for the evangelical movement. For Ellis and a number of evangelicals working for racial equality, frequent, intense conflicts raised doubts about the expectation that evangelization could improve the nation and the world. Practicing evangelical faith did not necessarily stamp out discrimination among white evangelicals and in evangelical organizations—a fact that contradicted the claims that conversion brought about positive moral changes. For this reason, it seemed that converting to

evangelical Christianity would not bring any respite from racial discrimination for African American converts. These two circumstances prompted black evangelicals to revise and reinterpret the missionary enterprise so that it challenged white domination—creating more equitable conditions of participation in American evangelicalism that more accurately reflected the vision for improving the world through evangelization.

Compelled and confounded by the promise and limits of the missionary enterprise, the evangelical movement was the site they chose for contesting white racial domination.

Although parochial in tone and focus, the transformation of American evangelicalism that they strived for was one among many in the centuries-long black freedom struggle that reached a pinnacle in the late twentieth century.

## Chapter 2

### Sitting Out the Sit-Ins?: The Uneasy Conscience of African-American Evangelicals in Postwar America, 1945-1966

On September 15, 1963, Ruth Lewis sat with other worshippers at a Presbyterian church in Birmingham, Alabama, when the service was interrupted to make a grave announcement. Across town, a bomb had exploded at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. As the worshippers took in the horrible news and the nation came to terms with the death of four girls, Lewis sorted through her own unique proximity to the tragedy. That Sunday morning, she had been on the way to Sixteenth Street for worship but decided on another church before she arrived.<sup>1</sup>

Lewis had grown up in Birmingham, the daughter of a pastor and a devout mother. She had received spiritual nourishment from both black and white Christians in Birmingham as a youth, at black churches and at bible classes run by white lay ministers. Later she traveled north to study at Wheaton College, an institution that had educated evangelical Christians since 1860. After earning a graduate degree in counseling in 1957, Lewis returned to the South to work as a campus minister at HBCUs for InterVarsity. She was the third African American that InterVarsity had hired and the first African-American woman.

Fifty years later, she told the story about that fateful day in Birmingham to begin her reflection on her time as a campus minister. Given Lewis's evangelical credentials,

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<sup>1</sup> Ruth Lewis, Interview by Ned Hale, June 14, 2013, 1. Audio available in the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association Archive (BGEA) in Wheaton, Illinois, Box 404, Folder 33. Transcript obtained from Ned Hale, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship's archivist.

beginning her story of campus ministry by placing herself in the middle of the action of the unfolding Civil Rights Movement is curious. Sympathy for the movement and proximity to its college-aged foot soldiers had not prompted her to join in direct action campaigns to end segregation. One might wonder how she could be so close to the dynamic force moving against racial oppression and not join in. In other words, one might ask: why did Ruth Lewis sit out the sit-ins?

Lewis's peculiar proximity to the now iconic act of terror at Sixteenth Street Baptist Church points to the curious position of African-American evangelicals in the religious and social milieu of postwar America. Lewis spent her formative years in evangelical circles where, owing to a predominantly white majority, sympathy for racial equality was not universally accepted. Some evangelicals, though, had begun to articulate an obligation to deal with the world's intractable problems like racial inequality and expressed the possibility that evangelization programs might turn in that direction. Yet, implementing such programs made many uneasy about crossing over into modernist Christianity. In 1947, Carl Henry labeled this sense of possibility tempered by concern over unorthodoxy an "Uneasy Conscience" and urged evangelicals to move past their hang-ups. As it turned out, evangelicals' collective conscience remained uneasy for decades thereafter. Across the board, evangelicals agreed that liberal Christianity had abandoned orthodoxy with its emphasis on the social gospel. Attempts to deal with social concern consistently prompted discussion about how to do so without following in the footsteps of liberal Christianity. By 1963, evangelicals' collective uneasy conscience had not moved much beyond where it had been. At home, with SCLC and SNCC using the tools of civil disobedience to wage the fight for racial equality, all but a few evangelicals

refused to join in, wary of violating the scriptural imperative to obey civil authorities. Overseas, the missionary enterprise still focused largely on conversion to Christianity. At home and abroad evangelicals wavered over how to demonstrate their social concern without stepping across the bounds of prescribed orthodoxy.

In the postwar era, African-American evangelicals shared in the ethos of the emerging movement and it shaped their responses to entrenched racial inequality both in evangelical circles and in the nation at large. Like Henry, they believed that their faith ought to have an impact on social issues. To that end, individual African Americans found opportunities to take a stand against the racially exclusionary policies of evangelical institutions, often in conjunction with people of other races. While the Civil Rights Movement was taking shape in the 1960s, African-American evangelicals mobilized themselves into the National Negro Evangelical Association (NNEA), but the organization did not take direct aim against Jim Crow or even against their own exclusion from the center of evangelical authority. Instead, to fulfill their obligation to address society's ills, African-American evangelicals turned their collective attention to the many deprivations of African-American urban neighborhoods. They launched evangelization campaigns that merged the preaching salvation with programs that might materially improve the conditions of urban residents. As evangelicals, they were uneasy about the possibilities for political action to solve racial inequality. Yet, as African-American evangelicals, they were also uneasy about the prospect of challenging racial inequality without crafting a more robust approach to evangelization than evangelicals typically offered.



With an uneasy conscience shaped by evangelical sensibilities and ubiquitous racial discrimination, African-American evangelicals constructed a unique path through the minefield of America's separate and unequal society in the two decades following World War II. Their path crisscrossed with civil rights activists but they focused on socially conscious evangelization rather than political activism. Together with the formation of the NNEA, the development of socially conscious evangelization became the foundation for what would become the Black Evangelical Renaissance. The path they built for themselves would also put them at odds with white evangelicals, and conflicts across racial lines would become a catalyst for the Renaissance.

During World War II, African-American labor activists had promoted a Double V campaign—a victory over fascism abroad and a victory over racial discrimination at home. In 1945, as the United States celebrated its victories over Germany and Japan, African Americans anticipated that the end of racial discrimination was on the near horizon.<sup>2</sup> However, white Americans had spent decades enacting laws, signing neighborhood covenants, writing organizational policies, and otherwise conspiring to limit where African Americans and others could live, work, go to school, or otherwise participate in civil society.<sup>3</sup> These laws and customs created a racial order that was a defining feature of modern America. The racial order competed with other features of modernity, especially the forces of industrial production and communication that had drawn Americans

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<sup>2</sup> Ronald T. Takaki, *Double Victory: A Multicultural History of America in World War II*, (Boston: Little, Brown and, 2000), 22-57.

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 241.

together into urban areas and stitched together disparate geographies into a national economy and culture. It would take thirty years of activism to unseat the many laws and customs that excluded them. Throughout those thirty years, the mere presence of African Americans could trouble white Americans because it violated the boundaries of a racial order and its system of exclusion.

Such was the case in the final year of World War II, when a group of African-American students from Hunter College affiliated with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. InterVarsity chapters from across New York City gathered each month in the Manhattan home of Mrs. F. Cliffe Johnston for hymn-singing, sermons, and to meet others involved in InterVarsity in the region. Just days before the December 1945 gathering was to take place, Mrs. Johnston received some information that troubled her. The newly affiliated Hunter College students wanted to attend the gathering. On her authority as the host of the event as well as a member of InterVarsity's national board of trustees, she phoned InterVarsity's campus minister Jane Hollingsworth to say that she would not welcome African-American students in her home. The phone call troubled Johnston all the more. Hollingsworth did not share her view on the matter. Instead, the campus minister retorted that other board members would not support Johnston's exclusion of InterVarsity's newest students. She also said she would find a new location for the gathering if Johnston would not permit students to attend. Sometime after the phone call, the two knelt in prayer and had a personal reconciliation, though Johnston did not change her mind.

Hollingsworth had to find another place for the monthly meetings where all InterVarsity students could gather.<sup>4</sup>

Johnston, Hollingsworth, and the students from Hunter College were all participants in a quintessentially evangelical organization formed just before the war began. Local chapters of InterVarsity comprised student members, a campus minister, and supportive professors who met to promote private devotional practices like Bible reading and prayer among its members, to engage in corporate worship together, and to evangelize the campus. Chapters operated as lay missionary societies on the campuses they attended and the priority on evangelization signaled their intent to distance themselves from the contentious battles between fundamentalist and modernist Christians as well as fractious disputes among fundamentalists. In the interwar years, fundamentalist scholars had taken an oppositional posture toward modernist opponents by defending doctrinal positions like the inerrancy of the Bible or the historicity of Jesus' bodily resurrection and by contesting modernist curricula used to train future pastors and theologians. In their dealings with modernist Christianity, however, InterVarsity's evangelization campaigns presented doctrinal positions that audiences might congenially discuss rather than argue over.<sup>5</sup>

InterVarsity chapters sought to undercut contentious disputes and instead focused on the benefits of Christian living as a means to motivate potential converts. The chapter at the University of Michigan took this tack when a group of professors asked the

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<sup>4</sup> Keith Hunt and Gladys Hunt, *For Christ and the University: The Story of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship of the U.S.A., 1940-1990*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 116.

<sup>5</sup> C. Stacey Woods, *The Growth of a Work of God: The Story of the Early Days of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship of The United States of America as Told by Its First General Secretary*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 16-17.

institution's president to put an end to one of InterVarsity's evangelistic presentations on the grounds that it was intellectually indefensible. When the president met with members of InterVarsity, they told him that their intention was to promote morality among the student body. Faced with a recent spate of unruly students at football games, the president allowed the event to go forward.<sup>6</sup> As students formed InterVarsity chapters across the country during the 1940s, they took a similar approach to evangelization campaigns framing the prospect of becoming a Christian as an invitation to experience God's moral transformation upon conversion.<sup>7</sup>

Between evangelistic events, bible studies, and prayer meetings, InterVarsity chapters introduced collegians with varying levels of curiosity about religious topics and with various religious affiliations to evangelical faith; and, on occasion, chapter meetings brought students together across racial lines. Prior to organizing lunch counter sit-ins in Peoria, Illinois, C.T. Vivian studied the Bible with InterVarsity members while he was a student at Western Illinois University. After accepting the persistent invitations of a white faculty member, Vivian found himself the only black person discussing bible passages with her and several other white InterVarsity members. This pattern of participation was typical for black collegians on the public and private universities where InterVarsity operated, owing to the large majority of white students and professors at those institutions. As at Hunter College, some black students sought out evangelicals to

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<sup>6</sup> Gordon Govier, "InterVarsity's First Chapter President," <https://intervarsity.org/news/intervarsity's-first-chapter-president>, accessed January 28, 2019.

<sup>7</sup> Hunt and Hunt, 86-106.

associate with when the matriculated; like Vivian, other black students simply happened across an InterVarsity chapter.<sup>8</sup>

Like American society in general, the evangelical movement had drawn together a racially plural constituency that was divided over the practice of racial exclusion yet still subject to its rules. African-American evangelicals saw those rules in play among white evangelicals irrespective of their position on integration or segregation. Bob Harrison got his first experience with racial exclusion in evangelical circles when Bob Jones University declined his application because of its stated policy against admitting black people. Located in the South, Bob Jones University unabashedly indulged in the custom of racial separation. Harrison had not been apprised of the policy before applying and had to look elsewhere for a seminary. When he enrolled as the first black student at an upstart seminary near his home in California, he and the white students, faculty, and administrators had their first close encounters with evangelicals of another race. Though the second school did not have a policy to exclude African Americans, Harrison suffered a number of indignities from white people while studying there. As Harrison and Hunter College students became keenly aware, white evangelicals were divided on the question of racial inclusion. Moreover, aside from affirmations against racial discrimination, white evangelicals exhibited the same patterns of de jure and de facto exclusion that white

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<sup>8</sup> Vivian told the story of his encounter with InterVarsity at a celebration in his honor in his hometown of Macomb, Illinois. The author has possession of a video recording of Vivian's address to Mount Calvary Church of God in Christ in Macomb, IL given September 24, 2003. See also "C.T. Vivian Street Designation," September 19, 2013, accessed January 29, 2019, [http://www.wiu.edu/news/newsrelease.php?release\\_id=2049](http://www.wiu.edu/news/newsrelease.php?release_id=2049); For Vivian's later encounters with InterVarsity as a college chaplain, see Tony Warner, "Bearing Our Burdens: Mingling Hope With Hardship—Reflections On Black Campus Ministry 1970-1990 Within Inter Varsity Christian Fellowship," n.d., 12-13; obtained from Tony Warner.

Americans had constructed over many years and in the various regions of the country. Thus, black evangelicals regularly came across persons and policies that stood in the way of their full participation in the evangelical movement. In contrast to African Americans involved in the labor movement or in legal challenges to racial exclusion, black evangelicals endured such obstacles in relative silence for the first two decades of the evangelicalism's existence before finally mobilizing against them.<sup>9</sup>

Although black participants did not confront the issue head on, InterVarsity students and ministers had several run-ins with those who wanted exclude African Americans. In early 1946, Hollingsworth again had to make new arrangements in short order when she discovered a conference center had a policy of racial exclusion. In another instance, the organization's head official, C. Stacey Woods, took it upon himself to challenge a camp that refused to let African Americans stay during a weekend gathering. When Woods threatened to expose him as a bigot, the camp director made an exception for InterVarsity but did not change the policy for others who requested to use the camp.<sup>10</sup> Soon after, Woods initiated a policy of his own to ensure that the organization would be racially inclusive across the country. Approved by the board and sent to campus ministers across the country, it stated that "national...conferences shall be held on a non-segregated basis;" it also instructed ministers to accept an application for affiliation from "a Christian group at a Negro College...without distinction."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Bob Harrison, "Who Would Room With A Negro?," *When God Was Black*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1971), 16-20. Bob Jones University belongs more solidly in the fundamentalist orbit, but Harrison's application highlights that its circles of exchange and ideas overlapped with evangelicalism.

<sup>10</sup> Woods, 115.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

In taking a stand against racial exclusion, the policy reflected the arrival of social concern among members of the nascent evangelical movement who had had lived through two very different but very taxing wars: one waged against modernists for control of the reins of America's Protestant institutions and another against the advances of fascism across the world. Arising from discontent among fundamentalist churches, the evangelical movement sought intellectual respectability to better defend orthodoxy against what they saw as modernist accretions to Christianity.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, widespread physical destruction, demographic displacements, and economic collapse across the world after World War II pricked their collective conscience and stoked their discontent with fundamentalism's otherworldly focus. As InterVarsity's anti-segregation policy suggested, some were keenly aware that indifference about human suffering had hindered evangelization efforts. Evangelicals did not jettison the conviction that individuals needed to repent from sin, but they began to push for active engagement to solve the nation's and the world's most pressing problems.<sup>13</sup> In 1947, Carl Henry expressed the mounting sense of obligation among evangelicals in *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*. "The cries of suffering humanity today are many," he wrote, "[E]vangelicalism must be armed to declare the implications of its proposed religious solution for the politico-economic and sociological context for modern life."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Molly Worthen, "Errand from the Wilderness," *Apostles of Reason: Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 15-35.

<sup>13</sup> Miles S. Mullin, II, *Postwar Evangelical Social Concern: Evangelical Identity and the Modes and Limits of Social Engagement*, PhD Diss., Vanderbilt University, 2009.

<sup>14</sup> Carl F.H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, (Grand Rapids, MI, 1947), 84.

With this obligation in mind, evangelicals endeavored to convert the world to Christianity while also anticipating that salvation would bring about tangible improvements in the world's most pressing problems. In fleeing the orbit of fundamentalism's otherworldly posture, Henry also urged cautious and critical engagement with national and international issues that also staked out its differences with liberalism. On questions of labor, he urged "seeking justice for both labor and management...while protesting the fallacy that man's deepest need is economic"; on issues of race, he envisioned evangelicals "condemning racial hatred and intolerance, while at the same time protesting the superficial view of man which overlooks the need of individual regeneration."<sup>15</sup> Henry's conservative political outlook notwithstanding, he believed that the problems of the world required a specific kind of divine intervention—an individual's salvation from sin. Yet, his book encouraged evangelicals to attach new possibilities to what salvation could achieve for society. At the same time, he warned that attention to these possibilities should never lose sight of the need for individuals to repent from sin. As David Swartz argues, Carl Henry and evangelicals in general shared in the uneasy conscience of fundamentalism. Reconciling optimism about the possibilities with an uneasy conscience animated fierce debates about just how much social concern should drive evangelization efforts. They sought to address social ills but to also keep them within the bounds of prescribed orthodoxy.<sup>16</sup>

Despite its clear demonstration of social concern, InterVarsity's policy curiously renounced segregation while also placating segregationists like Johnston. In one section

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<sup>15</sup> Henry, 87.

<sup>16</sup> David Swartz, "Carl Henry and Evangelical Social Engagement," *Moral Minority: The Evangelical Left in an Age of Conservatism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 26-46.



of the policy, Woods explained why the policy was necessary: since African Americans associated evangelicalism with “segregationist Christianity,” InterVarsity needed to “demonstrate that in Christ there is neither black nor white.”<sup>17</sup> The statement emphasized the strategic dimension of the policy. Without clearly denouncing racial prejudice, Woods understood, African-American college students would not join InterVarsity chapters or find their evangelistic message credible. However, in order to “avoid serious repercussions, particularly among our constituency in the South,” the policy continued, “[it] should not be the subject of propaganda.”<sup>18</sup> Woods understood that reveling in the new policy could alienate those who did not share his views on racial inclusion; furthermore, he understood that some might interpret the policy as a move away from evangelization and toward political activism. Given the strategic concerns it addressed, the ambiguous policy was an attempt to forestall further conflict over the question of including African Americans so that the organization could maintain its focus on the task of evangelization on college campuses. Yet, Woods gave every indication that he was sincere in efforts to make InterVarsity a racially inclusive organization and he would have a second clash with board members to make it happen.

Turning from the organization’s events for students to its employment practices, Woods hired InterVarsity’s first African-American and Chinese-American campus ministers. In New York City, Woods appointed two ministers to short-term positions while they finished professional ministry training. An African-American minister named Eugene Callendar briefly oversaw Hunter College and other chapters of African-American students in New York City, and then moved on to pastor a congregation. A

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<sup>17</sup> Hunt and Hunt, 117.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

Chinese-American minister named Hong Sit briefly oversaw chapters of Chinese-American students in New York, and then pursued a career as an overseas missionary.<sup>19</sup> In 1951, Woods also appointed Gwen Wong, a Chinese-American former chapter member in California and graduate of a New York City seminary, to do ministry among high school students in Hawaii.<sup>20</sup>

All three had been subject to board approval, but no objection was raised until Woods hired Ivery Harvey, an African American, to a full-time position at HBCUs in the South. One year after approving Wong, the board initially refused to approve Harvey; later they consented with the condition that Harvey would have the title “Negro Staff Worker,” a conspicuous title indicating a subordinate status to white campus ministers who held the title “Staff Worker.”<sup>21</sup> Woods was appalled by the decision and again challenged the prejudices of board members. He threatened to resign. Equally appalled, many campus ministers made the same threat. Faced with the loss of almost every employee of the organization, the board approved Harvey’s hire and afforded him an equal status to white campus ministers. Thus, with an anti-discrimination policy and with inclusive employment practices, Woods and other white ministers supported the participation of African Americans and Chinese Americans and managed to keep overt racial prejudice on the periphery of the organization.<sup>22</sup>

Like the anti-discrimination policy, the appointment of Callendar, Sit, Wong, and Harvey had a strategic component tied to the missionary enterprise. Woods believed intra-racial cooperation between students and campus ministers would benefit existing

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>21</sup> Woods, 116.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. Mrs. Johnston served on the board of trustees for much of the 1950s.

chapters and would attract more African Americans and Chinese Americans who would start new chapters on other campuses. Considering that chapters operated as mission societies, Woods expected that the measures for greater inclusion would bring evangelical faith to more university campuses and to more students. Appointing missionaries from among a racial constituency would become a celebrated strategy in decades to come. Donald McGavran, an American missionary to India, brought it to the attention of American evangelicals in the 1950s and suggested that indigenous missionaries would bring in far greater numbers of new Christians than western missionaries.<sup>23</sup> McGavran touted it for its superior strategy, but the practice became associated with a challenge to white hegemony in the late 1960s and white evangelicals saw the potential for it to take the missionary enterprise beyond its evangelical bounds. However, during the 1950s, the strategy's relationship to the racial order did not occupy much of the public discussion about mission work in evangelical circles.

With the appointment of Harvey, InterVarsity employed the strategy of intra-racial mission work to advance evangelical faith at HBCUs in the South, an approach that ran counter to Harvey's own conversion to evangelicalism as a college student in Detroit. He had attended an African-American congregation affiliated with the Disciples of Christ as a youth, but he began to think there was more about his faith to explore as a student at Wayne State University. After class on one occasion, he noticed a bible verse on another student's briefcase that read, "What shall it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose

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<sup>23</sup> *Bridges of God: A Study in the Strategy of Mission* (London: World Dominion Press, 1955), 69-99. McGavran went on to found a center for the study of missions at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. His approach to mission work is explored further in chapters 4 and 5 of this dissertation.

his own soul?”<sup>24</sup> The ostentatiously placed ancient text signaled the briefcase owner’s contemporary evangelical belief in the necessity of personal salvation and that he had a Christian duty to share his faith with his peers. It also spoke to ambient feelings of optimism and anxiety in America’s postwar decade. The briefcase owner, Gordon Heimann, wanted his peers at Wayne State to have a personal relationship with Jesus that would temper the excesses of an affluent society and succor fears about nuclear annihilation; or, in more mundane moments, to guide them through the uncertainties of young adulthood. When Harvey inquired about the verse, Heimann invited him to a bible study put on by InterVarsity. Like Vivian in Illinois, Harvey was the only African American in a group of white students.<sup>25</sup>

After months of friendship, Heimann asked Harvey if he had ever made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ. The question had not come up at the church of his youth, but Harvey was eager to do it. The following summer, Harvey attended InterVarsity’s lay ministry training camp and became an active leader in the Wayne State chapter. He also was introduced to evangelical students from across the country, some of whom had determined to serve as overseas missionaries. Harvey met Stacey Woods while at camp. Recognizing Harvey’s mature approach to faith, Woods offered Harvey a job upon his graduation in 1951. After some consideration and negotiation with Woods, Harvey left a position with the Federal Housing Authority to work for InterVarsity, presumably a cut in pay given InterVarsity’s small stipends at the time. Although Harvey was not aware of it, Woods’s tussle with board members was more than a token gesture

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<sup>24</sup> Ivery Harvey, Interviewed by Keith Hunt, Ann Arbor, MI, June 17, 1988, BGEA Collection 300, Box 378, Folder 39, 1.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 1-2.

toward racial inclusion. It was an endorsement of Harvey himself, of his commitment to Jesus and of his ability to ask college students to follow suit. Harvey did a brief apprenticeship with another minister in Denver in 1952, and then moved to Atlanta to start staff work in his own right.<sup>26</sup>

Woods had personally recruited Harvey, believing he was the ideal candidate for campus ministry at HBCUs in the South; but Harvey would soon discover that HBCUs in the South were not ideal places to cultivate evangelical faith. Upon arriving in Atlanta, a man from the American Bible Society warned Harvey that his evangelical faith would be out of place among African Americans in the South. In two years of itinerating across the South, Harvey discovered how true the warning was. He found many students who wanted to deepen their Christian faith but few willing to start an InterVarsity chapter. InterVarsity had succeeded elsewhere by taking up the mantle of religious education at state schools where interest in denominational programs was waning or at private institutions that had an ecumenical or secular orientation. By contrast, many HBCU students were actively involved in chapel programming and in local congregations. These students enjoyed their exchanges with Harvey but saw little need to add something to the rich heritage of religious education supported by black southern denominations like the National Baptist Convention and the African Methodist Episcopal Church.<sup>27</sup> Only a few were interested in probing the specifics of evangelical faith with him. The most receptive students had a stake in the fundamentalist-modernist controversy. At one school, Harvey

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> For religious tenor of HBCUs in the 1950s, see Martha Bioni, *The Black Revolution on Campus*, (Berkeley, CA: The University of California Press, 2012), 13-41; Ibram X. Kendi, *The Black Campus Movement: Black Students and the Racial Reconstruction of Higher Education, 1965-1972*, (New York: MacMillan Palgrave, 2012), 59-65.

provided an alternative outlet for students whose chaplain actively challenged their literalist approach to interpreting scripture. By and large, though, Harvey found evangelical faith had little appeal at HBCUs.<sup>28</sup>

During Harvey's tenure with InterVarsity, he had to constantly contend with white evangelicals divided over whether to include African Americans. As a member of the Wayne State University chapter, he had arrived at a Christian conference center along with white members and was told by the proprietor that he could not stay the night. When Woods appointed him to a campus ministry position, InterVarsity's board had sought to keep him from the job. And, while traveling across the South in the mid-1950s, Harvey again encountered those who wanted to include him as well as those who wanted to keep him out. White students from a missionary society at Columbia Bible College in South Carolina invited Harvey to speak to them, but on arrival the administration would not allow him to address an audience of white students. Such indignities from fellow evangelicals took a greater toll than his unsuccessful itineration among HBCU students. In the fall of 1954, Harvey left his ministry position and went to graduate school at Alabama A & M.<sup>29</sup>

While Harvey traveled across the South, another African-American evangelical had moved from the South to the North to attend Wheaton College and thereafter would take the reins of InterVarsity's ministry to HBCUs in 1958. Ruth Lewis grew up in Birmingham where her devout parents worshipped in a black church and also attended bible classes sponsored by white evangelicals. The bible classes extended a paternalistic

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<sup>28</sup>Harvey, 3-4.

<sup>29</sup> Woods, 116-17; Harvey, 5. In his account of Harvey's tenure with InterVarsity, Woods declined to identify the Columbia Bible School by name but Harvey refers to it in the interview.

hand to African Americans, but the Lewis family still found them spiritually enriching. At nine years of age, Ruth made a commitment to Jesus after studying her parents' lessons along with them. After high school graduation, she was determined to attend a bible school to prepare for Christian ministry, but her father declined to pay for her education unless she went to an accredited college. A teacher from her bible class recommended she apply to Wheaton College. She was an alumna and helped Lewis secure admission and financial aid. This flagship evangelical institution satisfied her father and she matriculated in the fall of 1952.<sup>30</sup>

Lewis suffered indignities and exclusions at the hands of white evangelicals in Birmingham, at Wheaton College, and elsewhere. As a teenager, someone rebuked her for walking with her white bible class teacher on a public sidewalk, saying such behavior was unwise.<sup>31</sup> As a college student, her relationship with a white roommate soured after one semester. The roommate's parents disapproved of her rooming with an African American and told their daughter to move out.<sup>32</sup> The brief friendship floundered after that. Although churches did not bar her from worship services, Lewis was particularly appalled that Moody Church in nearby Chicago would not accept her as a member. The newly installed pastor of the church, Reverend Alan Redpath, indulged in hearing her grievance but told her he could do nothing to change the church's policy.<sup>33</sup>

Despite encounters with prejudice, Lewis thrived at the epicenter of American evangelical education. She pursued an undergraduate degree in psychology, and stayed on at Wheaton to earn a Master's degree in counseling. During that time, she heard

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<sup>30</sup> Lewis, 1-3.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 4.

Stacey Woods speak at a chapel service, who asked her to consider campus ministry. She declined at the time because she had not completed her studies. But, she subscribed to InterVarsity's student magazine and was impressed with articles that boldly declared racial prejudice a sin.<sup>34</sup> Once she had her counseling degree in hand, she recalled the personal invitation from Woods and the magazine's stance on race issues and inquired about a job.<sup>35</sup>

In 1958, Lewis moved to Atlanta to begin ministry with HBCU students. Like Harvey, Lewis itinerated across the South speaking in chapels and dorm lounges looking to interest people in InterVarsity chapters. Although she found the same indifference to evangelicalism as Harvey, she gained the trust of many students through her training as a counselor. Everywhere she traveled, she encountered negative attitudes about black identity among students and sought to bolster their sense of self-worth. At Spellman College, some women divulged to her that they did not want to marry black men so that their children would not be black.<sup>36</sup> Lewis offered students psychological insights to loosen the power of these negative attitudes. She also counseled students who had devastating encounters with white people. A Morehouse student had come to the United States from Nigeria through the sponsorship of an American church in Atlanta, but the congregation refused to allow him to worship with them. After encountering such profound religious hypocrisy, the student disavowed his faith. The man's experience of

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<sup>34</sup> Mullin, 23-4. Mullin identifies an increase in articles about racial equality among certain evangelical magazines following the *Brown v. Board of Ed.* decision. InterVarsity's *His* magazine was among them.

<sup>35</sup> Lewis, 4-5.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 7. The statement comes from Lewis recollection and is unclear. Given the taboos on interracial marriage at the time, it seems more plausible that Spellman women had in mind light-skinned African Americans as future spouses rather than white men.



conversion through the influence of white ministers echoed Lewis' own experience. Drawing on her own past, then, Lewis convinced the man to remain a Christian despite the prejudices of the sponsoring congregation.<sup>37</sup>

Lewis's approach to ministry with HBCU students intersected with some of the ideas that animated the Civil Rights Movement. The field of psychology had featured prominently in the *Brown v. Board of Ed.* decision to overturn school segregation laws. Citing research that showed African-American children preferred white dolls over black dolls, the team of NAACP lawyers argued that separate education had caused black children to accept the racial inferiority of black persons, a phenomenon referred to as internalized racism.<sup>38</sup> In mass rallies and sit-in campaigns that followed the *Brown* decision, ministers and activists preached that loving one's enemies would overcome racism in society and bring an end to segregation. Nonviolent direct action, they said, had a redemptive power to transform enemies into friends. The ability of activists to elicit and redirect violent acts against them helped to bring an end to municipal segregation laws and, in the process, suggested how potent loving your enemies could be—even among activists who otherwise eschewed religion.<sup>39</sup> Like the Civil Rights Movement, Lewis's ministry challenged internalized racism among students and also counseled them to love those who had excluded them. Her tenure as a campus minister also brought her in close proximity with the students and others involved in desegregation campaigns. Yet, as an

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Historian Gwen Bergner writes about the role of psychological tests in *Brown v. Board of Ed.* and also explores the validity of its premise. Gwen Bergner, "Black Children, White Preference: Brown v. Board, the Doll Tests, and the Politics of Self-Esteem," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 61, No. 2 (June, 2009), 299-332.

<sup>39</sup> For a representative sermon of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. see "Loving Your Enemies" in Clayborne Carson, ed., *A Knock at Midnight: Inspiration from the Great Sermons of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.*, (New York: Grand Central, 1998), 37-60.

evangelical Christian, she intended her ministry among HBCU students to bring them into the evangelical fold rather than to mobilize them against Jim Crow.

In the opening years of the Civil Rights Movement, Harvey and Lewis improvised an evangelical ministry to black students at HBCUs. While Harvey gave a few students a means to shore up their faith against modernist challenges, Lewis devised a new approach to evangelical ministry with her attention to internalized racism and to loving one's enemy. By providing comfort to students coming to terms with the psychological consequences of racism, she blended social concern with evangelization. While evangelical faith did not penetrate the well-established religious culture of HBCUs, Lewis's approach would become an important component of the Black Evangelical Renaissance a few short years later. Lewis ended her tenure as a campus minister in 1963 to tend to an ailing parent. Thereafter, she built a professional career helping college students deal with the psychological pain and imposed limitations of racism. She earned a doctorate in Psychology, one of the first African-American women at an Alabama university to do so. She went on to head up counseling departments during the 1970s when Affirmative Action policies accelerated enrollments from black and Hispanic students. She remained active in evangelical faith, as well. Around the time of the Birmingham tragedy, she attended the inaugural meeting of the National Negro Evangelical Association at Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, California. Along with Rev. William Bentley, she developed a black-nationalist-inflected evangelical theology that would bring her back to campus ministry in a different capacity a decade later.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Lewis, 39.

InterVarsity had taken a bold stance against the practices of racial exclusion by hiring Harvey and Lewis, but that fact did not seem to gain evangelical faith a hearing among HBCU students. Woods had insisted that InterVarsity treat its students and campus ministers equally and believed that was a necessary condition to advancing the faith on university campuses. Yet, the lack of appeal among black students meant that a mere denunciation of racism had been insufficient. Aside from prior religious affiliations with black denominations, the persistence of racial discrimination from white evangelicals—experienced by both Harvey and Lewis while serving as campus ministers—likely contributed to the lack of appeal. The momentum of the Civil Rights Movement likely dampened the appeal, as well. As historian David Chappell argues, the Civil Rights Movement was a religious revival in its own right, convincing religious and irreligious activists alike that racial equality was the divine destiny for America.<sup>41</sup> It is possible that InterVarsity would have had more black student participants if they had sent Harvey and Lewis to another area of the nation. Both campus ministers had formative religious experiences outside the South, and black students in the North or the West may have responded more favorably to black ministers presenting an evangelical gospel. Finally, the small scale of effort among black students likely stifled any momentum among the few students that were interested. The few resources allocated to promote missionary societies among black students did not match the bold stance against segregationists.

Aside from the specific challenges to include African Americans in InterVarsity, the social conscience among InterVarsity's ministers competed with the organization's

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<sup>41</sup> David L. Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 87-103.

goal of promoting foreign missionary service among its students. Beginning in 1946, InterVarsity hosted a student missionary convention during the Christmas holiday on a triennial basis. Held most often on the campus of the University of Illinois, the convention came to be known as Urbana. It offered five days of sermons, lectures, hymn singing, bible studies, and informal gatherings with missionaries all intended to impress upon Christian university students the importance of the international missionary enterprise. Throughout the convention, students heard somber calls from well-known evangelists or little-known missionaries asking them to devote themselves to foreign missionary work and to sustain it with their financial contributions. The first convention, held in Toronto Canada, revived the tradition of missionary mobilization among college students that had been dormant since the demise of the Student Volunteer Movement (SVM) during the 1930s.<sup>42</sup> It drew 576 students and had a profound influence on their lives. They donated \$3500 to support mission work. Back on campus, many chapters' prayer meetings and bible studies focused on mission, too. Around three hundred students signed a written pledge to become overseas missionaries. Many of those become a first generation of evangelical missionaries, who in turn would shape the tenor of the missionary enterprise for decades after.<sup>43</sup>

One future missionary who attended the first convention was Jim Elliot, a student from Wheaton College. Elliot epitomized the missionary devotion of postwar evangelicals that InterVarsity cultivated among college students in subsequent missionary conventions. Prior to the convention, Elliot had discerned that God wanted him to

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<sup>42</sup> Clarence Prouty Shedd, *A Century of Christian Student Initiative*, (New York: Association Press, 1945), 5-10. The dissertation explores the legacy of the SVM and its relationship to InterVarsity in chapter 3.

<sup>43</sup> Hunt and Hunt, 127-8.

translate the Bible for the benefit of a remote tribe in Ecuador. A decade later members of the tribe killed Elliot and his four companions while trying to establish contact. Despite the sudden end to their lives, Elliot's widow Elizabeth committed herself to completing the task her husband had begun along with the widowed spouses of the other men. When some tribe members converted to Christianity, evangelicals celebrated the efforts of Jim and Elizabeth Elliot for their remarkable dedication to mission work—and, more precisely, to God—in the face of danger and even death.

Jim Elliot considered his life a worthy sacrifice if he and others could gain salvation. For decades following his death, evangelical youth measured their own devotion by a diary entry of Jim Elliot written as a college student: “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.”<sup>44</sup> In Elliot's case, he could not keep his life but he could gain his own salvation and the salvation of others. Elliot's muse for the statement was the Gospel of Matthew 16:26. Around the same time he recorded those words in his journal, Ivery Harvey had noticed that verse on Gordon Heimann's briefcase at Wayne State University. After Elliot died, his restatement of the biblical passage rang in the ears of missionary candidates as they prepared to make material sacrifices to bring Christianity to other parts of the globe and considered the prospect of their own deaths. InterVarsity's triennial missionary conventions and other chapter activities urged students to imitate the example of Jim Elliot by spending their lives overseas to gain salvation for themselves and others.

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<sup>44</sup> Biographical material taken from Steve Hoke, “An Interview with David Howard,” March 1, 2013, from <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/an-interview-with-dr.-david-howard> accessed May 20, 2018; Howard was Elizabeth Elliot's brother; see also Elizabeth Elliot, *Through the Gates of Splendor*, (New York: Harper Press, 1957).

For African Americans, the emphasis on foreign mission that InterVarsity and other organizations promoted came increasingly to represent the neglect of evangelicalism's social conscience and, more acutely, its indifference to the suffering of black people. InterVarsity's conventions gave only minimal attention to issues outside the scope of foreign missions that might otherwise have engaged students, though there were a few elective seminars on theological debates or social issues. Ruth Lewis headed up one such seminar at the 1961 convention to discuss racial discrimination.<sup>45</sup> Yet, the convention's call for commitment to foreign mission eclipsed any encouragement that Lewis or others might give to work for racial equality. Outside of InterVarsity, an African-American minister from Detroit, B. M. Nottage, expressed the sense of neglect and indifference this way: "White pastors and churches have been most diligent in seeking to reach the poor blacks of Africa ...and at the same time have refused to do anything about the same kind of people at home."<sup>46</sup> Nottage had in mind the material neglect as well as spiritual neglect, as white Americans had moved out of cities to make their homes in suburban neighborhoods, leaving behind severe economic consequences for African-American urban residents to deal with.<sup>47</sup> Nottage also bemoaned the results of sending missionaries overseas rather than to African-American communities: mainline denominations, Catholics, and new religious movements had made great strides among

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<sup>45</sup> Lewis, 10

<sup>46</sup> The article is excerpted in Fred A. Alexander, "You Have Neglected My People," *Freedom Now*, Vol. 1 No. 1, August 1965, 6-7. Alexander wrote that he had reprinted it from an article he had saved by Nottage with the same name from *Eternity* magazine in 1957.

<sup>47</sup> On postwar suburbanization in general see Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage, 2004), 166-256; On the racialized effects of suburbanization, see Arnold Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University press, 1983), 1-38.

African Americans whereas evangelicals had a negligible presence. According to black evangelical clergy, the relative priority of foreign mission and the lack of attention to social issues meant that evangelicals had little presence and little appeal in black communities.

In response, black evangelicals organized to give greater attention to evangelization among African Americans. In 1963, they founded the National Negro Evangelical Association (NNEA) with the purpose of implementing evangelization programs that merged social concern with a call to conversion. The small gathering brought together pastors, evangelists, professors, and missionaries—mostly black, but with a few white attendees—to discuss the best methods of evangelizing in black communities. Aware that traditional methods had not yielded many converts, the NNEA pondered how to adapt programs like mass rallies and youth activities to appeal to black audiences. The meeting had a pragmatic urgency to it. Black evangelicals hoped that if they could find effective means of evangelization that they could improve conditions in black communities<sup>48</sup>

Despite the many instances of racial discrimination that they had suffered, NNEA attendees steered clear of confronting racial prejudice and discrimination. This is most surprising considering the ways that evangelical organizations managed to exclude and marginalize them. Exacerbating the primacy of foreign mission work, mission agencies often refused to hire black graduates of bible schools and some had explicit policies against it. The decision to mobilize in African-American communities was at least an

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<sup>48</sup> William Bentley, “Factors in the Origin and Focus of The National Black Evangelical Association,” *Black Theology: A Documentary History*, Gayraud Wilmore and James Cone, eds., (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1979), 310-321.

implicit recognition of this imposed limitation, but NNEA members did not raise the issue. Even so, the urgency with which they approached the task of evangelization was an unspoken indictment that the evangelicalism's prevailing priorities severely impeded mission work in black communities. Black evangelicals were restating Henry's call for evangelicals to abandon their uneasiness but with greater urgency and authority. In bringing together social concern and conversion, they reframed fears about violating evangelical orthodoxy. Black evangelicals re-positioned social concern as an urgent missiological issue and inverted the suggestion that social action might minimize the call to conversion. They claimed instead that ignoring social concern amounted to a kind of abrogation of an essential duty to preach conversion. They believed the missionary enterprise lacked sufficient credibility without tending to needs of potential converts. In other words, the NNEA had attached missiological consequences to evangelicalism's failure to realize its impulse toward social concern. The organization then took it upon itself to shore up the credibility of evangelicalism among African Americans with evangelization efforts that addressed the consequences of racial inequality.<sup>49</sup>

The inaugural NNEA gathering demonstrates that evangelicalism's uneasy conscience shaped the ways that African Americans dealt with issues of racial equality. While they did not hesitate to bring together salvation with social programs, they still endeavored to stay within the boundaries of evangelical orthodoxy. Primarily, this meant that the NNEA mobilized its members for evangelization rather than to challenge *de facto* and *de jure* segregation in the nation or against racial discrimination within evangelical circles. Tethering race issues to the missionary enterprise limited the scope of the NNEA

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.



in another way, too. Reverend William Bentley, one of the conveners of the meeting, had envisioned the organization as a place for greater reflection on black evangelical identity—how America’s regime of white supremacy had shaped their understanding of themselves and their faith. Ruth Lewis, who was also in attendance at the first convention, had begun to reflect on this in her ministry with students. However, an address on the topic during the meeting gained little traction. Most attendees to the first NNEA gravitated toward practical concerns related to the task of evangelization and steered the conversation away from the complexities of race. The issue would resurface with greater urgency at the close of the 1960s along with the decision to replace ‘Negro’ with ‘Black’ in the organization’s name.<sup>50</sup>

The creation of the NNEA is significant for two reasons. First, it brought together evangelization and social concern within a movement that struggled against its best intentions to do so. Second, despite the NNEA’s decision not to openly contend with white evangelicals over discriminatory practices, the organization undermined the racial order that governed the evangelical missionary enterprise. It established an institutional base for black evangelicals to participate in the missionary enterprise and it rejected the implicit claim that white evangelicals had made to being the final arbiters in the movement’s priorities.

Following the establishment of the NNEA, some evangelicals attempted to place the issue of racial equality at the center of the discussion about how to incorporate social concern into mission work. In 1965, a father and son pair of ministers, Fred Alexander

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

and John F. Alexander, launched a publication called *Freedom Now* to convince readers to make concern for the plight of African Americans the top priority in evangelical circles.<sup>51</sup> *Freedom Now* took on two staples of evangelical discourse that had made racial equality a secondary issue. First, it urged readers to abandon the presumption that social reform was misguided. Second, it urged readers to reject the premise of white racial superiority that had undergirded segregation and all manner of racial discrimination throughout the twentieth century. *Freedom Now* reprinted articles penned by white and black ministers and lay leaders and sprinkled editorial pieces in among them to make their case. As circulation grew, the Alexander family printed the favorable and critical responses from readers. The result was a homespun periodical that gave a bi-racial group of evangelicals a forum to discuss their collective uneasy conscience.

While Carl Henry had made the suggestion to venture in to the field of social reform, *Freedom Now* articles spoke about it with great clarity of purpose and with great urgency. The periodical's deliberately provocative title borrowed its name from a popular slogan that had appeared on the placards of Civil Rights demonstrators. In the first edition, John Alexander wrote to readers of *Freedom Now* that conversion and racial integration were complementary goals that evangelicals ought to pursue.<sup>52</sup> Seeking to put to rest the longstanding antipathy for the social gospel, the periodical encouraged evangelicals to preach the whole gospel by calling individuals to seek salvation from God

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<sup>51</sup> David Swartz has an extended analysis of John F. Alexander in "John Alexander and Racial Equality," *Moral Minority: The Evangelical Left in an Age of Conservatism*, (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 26-46.

<sup>52</sup> John F. Alexander, "Freedom Now Policy," *Freedom Now*, Vol. 1 No 1., August 1965. The policy was reprinted in subsequent editions as well. A selection of *Freedom Now* editions are digitally preserved at <http://archives.livedtheology.org/node/1254>, accessed March 20, 2019.

and to work for social reform as well. One article by a Baptist minister acknowledged that the battles with liberalism of the previous generation had successfully defended the necessity of preaching salvation. Having won the battle, wrote the author, “negative reaction to liberalism” was “no longer warranted.”<sup>53</sup> Instead of railing against liberalism, the article urged evangelicals to obey the scriptural mandate to care for others.<sup>54</sup>

Under the aegis of the whole gospel, *Freedom Now* asked readers to set aside their suspicions about social concern and to treat it as an important obligation for Christians to fulfill. In particular, wrote Alexander in another editorial, working for racial equality constituted the “proper application of biblical doctrine to human relations” rather than a violation of orthodoxy.<sup>55</sup> Judging from published letters, readers had a range of responses to the whole gospel. Some letters thanked the editors for pressing them to think about social reform and salvation together; others chided the editors for unnecessarily complicating the simple task of preaching salvation.<sup>56</sup>

*Freedom Now* also sought to dispel the presumption of white racial superiority that thrived in many corners of evangelicalism. As Harrison, Harvey, and Lewis had experienced firsthand, congregations across the United States had policies that excluded African Americans from attending worship services and from membership. Moreover, many evangelicals espoused the belief that the Bible not only allowed for segregation but also described a divinely ordained racial hierarchy. Alexander wrote that many segregationists he knew were “sensitive to their Christian duties,” and he believed he

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<sup>53</sup> Robert G. Krueger, “Evangelical Retreat from the Social Gospel,” *Freedom Now*, Vol. 1 No. 3, December 1965.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. Krueger referred to Matthew 25’s injunction to care for the hungry, thirsty, naked, and those in prison.

<sup>55</sup> John F. Alexander, “Integration Now,” *Freedom Now*, Vol. 1 No. 3, December 1965.

<sup>56</sup> See various letters in *Freedom Now* Vols. 1-4.

could persuade them that treating black Christians as equals was a duty.<sup>57</sup> Recognizing that segregationists had come to their belief in white racial superiority in part through their respect for biblical authority, Alexander asserted the authority of the Bible to challenge them. In several articles, *Freedom Now* took aim against a persistent biblical justification for the belief—The Curse of Ham. In Genesis 9, God cursed Noah’s son Ham for defiling his father. With the advent of racial classification in the modern era, some interpreted Ham as the progenitor of the black race and interpreted a curse against him as a divine act of subjugating the black race to the white race in perpetuity. Collectively, the articles sought to expose the curse as a series of tenuous exegetical conclusions. One article offered several reasons why Ham could not definitively refer to a race of black people. Another argued that the curse—whatever it might mean—did not apply to generations in perpetuity but only to Ham.<sup>58</sup> In addition, Alexander called attention to evangelical denominations—Southern Baptists, General Baptists, The National Fellowship of Brethren Churches, and the International Fundamentalist Churches of America (IFCA)—that had recently adopted a policy of racial equality.<sup>59</sup> In debunking The Curse of Ham and publicizing congregational policies, Alexander wanted to show segregationists

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<sup>57</sup> John F. Alexander, “Integration Now,” *Freedom Now*, Vol 1 No. 3, December 1965, 3.

<sup>58</sup> John F. Alexander, “Ham and the Curse,” *Freedom Now*, Vol. 1 No. 2, October 1965; John F. Alexander, “Noah’s Curse,” *Freedom Now*, Vol. 1 No. 3, December 1965; “The Meeting of the Minds,” *Freedom Now*, Vol. 1 No. 3, December 1965. For discussion on the provenance of the Curse of Ham among American evangelicals see also Mark Noll, *The Civil War as Theological Crisis*, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006); David L. Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow*, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

<sup>59</sup> “Southern Baptists on Race Relations,” *Freedom Now*, Vol. 1 No. 2, October 1965, 12; “Two Irrepressible Problems,” *Freedom Now*, Vol. 1 No. 2, October 1965, 6; “Current Race Issues and the IFCA,” *Freedom Now*, Vol 1 No.3 December 1965, 11; “Conference Report on the Special Committee on Race Relations,” *Freedom Now* Vol. 2 No. 1, February 1966, 11.

that they had not acted in accordance with biblical instruction or with the contemporary practice of other evangelicals.

Although the case against racial superiority generated less mail than did the whole gospel, one white minister from Ohio wrote to say that the articles had not convinced him to change his mind on either count. “I enjoyed reading...*Freedom Now*,” he wrote, “[but] I am of the old school of equal but separate [sic].”<sup>60</sup> Nonetheless, he sent along \$1 for a year’s subscription and told Alexander that he was “praying that you will be able to lead many of the colored to a saving knowledge of Christ as Lord.”<sup>61</sup> The letter represented unnumbered evangelicals who sought to steer clear of the social gospel or to maintain the established racial order. As *Freedom Now* indicates, the status of social concern as well as the status of African-American evangelicals remained topics of debate among evangelicals in the postwar decades.

Commitment to the missionary enterprise energized all sides of the debate in *Freedom Now*. Perhaps surprisingly, segregationists like the Ohio minister often divulged a willingness to abide evangelicals who supported integration so long as they preached conversion to African Americans. Other aspects of debate were more contentious. Those skeptical of social concern argued that prioritizing racial equality distracted from the message of repentance from sin. As one correspondent put it, “Your aim, as written in your policy, is integration...[but] our aim must be...the spreading of the Gospel message.”<sup>62</sup> Conversely, others pointed out that ignoring issues of race hindered the message. John Perkins, a black minister from Jackson, Mississippi, pleaded with readers

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<sup>60</sup> Herbert T. White, Letter to the Editor, *Freedom Now*, Vol. 2 No. 1, February 1966, 12.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Anonymous, Letter to the Editor, *Freedom Now*, Vol. 2 No. 1, February 1966, 12.

to end discrimination against black evangelicals for the sake of the missionary enterprise overseas. Citing distraught missionaries, Perkins said that the demonstrable lack of equality in the United States damaged the credibility of the American Christians who sought converts across the globe.<sup>63</sup> Others rebuked white evangelicals for refusing to bring the message to African Americans. John Alexander noted that American evangelicals sent relatively few ministers and spent relatively little money to evangelize in African-American communities compared to foreign missionary work. His observation echoed the sentiments Detroit minister B. M. Nottage years earlier. Perkins and Alexander offered different insights, but both juxtaposed foreign missionary work with missionary work among African Americans. From different perspectives, then, the two utilized evangelicals' shared commitment to the missionary enterprise to argue that neglect of African Americans hindered the advance of the gospel in America and around the world.

*Freedom Now* also reveals evangelicals wrestling with the meaning of racial identity. Segregationists invested a great deal of meaning in racial identity as an indicator of superiority or inferiority. By contrast, integrationists attached little meaning to racial identity except as a barrier to equality. Denominational policies declared they would make "no distinction" on the basis of race when admitting congregations; or that "membership is based on faith, not race."<sup>64</sup> Instead of disparate racial identities, they referred to a common religious identity. John Perkins asserted that "an individual who

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<sup>63</sup> John Perkins, "The Oneness of Believers," *Freedom Now*, Vol. 1 No. 3, December 1965, 5.

<sup>64</sup> The Baptist General Conference policy appeared in "Two Irrepressible Problems," 6; The National Fellowship of Brethren Churches policy appeared in "Conference Report on the Special Committee on Race Relations," 14.

accepts Christ...loses all racial ties. At that moment he becomes a member of the family of God.”<sup>65</sup> Tom Skinner, a black evangelist based in Harlem, similarly explained that Christians “belong to a new race. Not the white race or the black race, but a third race of men known as sons of God.”<sup>66</sup> Rhetorically, a third race comprised of Christians might have transcended the racial order of the day but integrationists continued to use racial identity to describe the evangelical community and the world that had been shaped by that order. The IFCA admitted congregations regardless of its racial composition, but in doing so it catalogued them as “black” or “ethnic” congregations.<sup>67</sup> As *Freedom Now* articles and the NNEA had proposed, the neglect of African Americans warranted a special allocation of resources targeting that group of people. And, in general, evangelicals organized the missionary enterprise into discrete campaigns among specific groups of people defined by their racial, ethnic, and culture features. For a variety of reasons, then, attempts to transcend the racial order of the day through a common religious identity reinforced rather than diminished the significance of racial identity.

Despite the lively debate in *Freedom Now* and the earnest bi-racial efforts of some to pursue racial equality, leaders of evangelical organizations frequently avoided any substantive discussion of race issues. Even at a 1966 conference in Berlin whose theme was “One Race, One Gospel, One Task,” the plenary sessions and workshops managed to say virtually nothing about racial equality. Carl Henry, who had urged greater attention to social issues in the 1940s, organized the Congress on World Evangelization for leaders from across the globe to commiserate about the missionary

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<sup>65</sup> Perkins, 4.

<sup>66</sup> Tom Skinner, “A White Man’s Religion,” *Freedom Now*, Vol 2. No 1. February 1966, 11.

<sup>67</sup> IFCA policy appeared in “Current Race Issues and the IFCA,” 11.

enterprise. Sessions during the congress spoke optimistically about the prospects for conversion: the political and social crises of the day—the spread of communism, the decline of moral standards, the onset of decolonization—had exposed the sinfulness of humanity; mounting dissatisfaction in various regions of the world had primed people for a favorable response to the message of repentance. A keynote address entitled “One Gospel” affirmed Christianity’s singular message that humanity must repent from sin.<sup>68</sup> A second keynote address entitled “One Task” affirmed the missionary enterprise as a necessary effort to elicit repentance.<sup>69</sup> Yet, in a conspicuous bout of asymmetry, the program had no third keynote address entitled “One Race” to match the third element of the conference theme.

Bob Harrison, the erstwhile applicant to Bob Jones University, wondered along with other African-American attendees and those from Latin America, Asia, and Africa why the proceedings had lacked a declarative statement about racial equality. When Harrison confronted Henry about the glaring omission, Henry offered a sincere apology and suggested that Harrison write a statement about “One Race.” The published conference proceedings contained an amended keynote address that was fraught with evangelicalism’s ambiguity toward racial inequality and, indeed, its complicity in maintaining it. On the one hand, the amended “One Race” statement acknowledged “the failure of many of us in the recent past to speak with sufficient clarity and force upon the

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<sup>68</sup> Carl F. H. Henry and W Stanley Mooneyham, *One Race, One Gospel, One Task*, (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1967), 6.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.



biblical unity of the human race.”<sup>70</sup> On the other hand, the statement had no attribution of authorship. Readers had no way of knowing that Henry asked an African American to pen words of contrition that effectively applied only to white evangelicals. Harrison did not publicly chastise Henry for it, but the omission illustrated that white evangelicals had relegated issues of race to the purview of black evangelicals. By and large, racial equality was an afterthought for white evangelicals and the interventions of black evangelicals to effect changes in their community of faith were rendered invisible.<sup>71</sup>

If, like Lewis, most black evangelicals sat out the sit-ins, they were nonetheless engaged in a struggle against a particular instantiation of America’s racial order that placed them on the margins of the evangelical movement. Their faith and their commitment to the missionary enterprise informed the path that they took. They articulated the neglect of African Americans as a problem that hindered the missionary enterprise at home and abroad. They addressed the problem by devising new evangelization programs for black communities that pitched the message of salvation specifically to experiences of racial discrimination and deprivation. Mobilizing for evangelization did not directly confront the discrimination and prejudices they faced from white evangelicals. Yet, the creation of the NNEA and the increased attention on black evangelization did undermine the exercise of white control within the movement in a

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<sup>70</sup> References to neglect from *One Race, One Gospel, One Task* also include “We ask forgiveness for our past sins in refusing . . . to love our fellowmen with a love that transcends every human barrier and prejudice,” 5.

<sup>71</sup> Robert Harrison, *When God Was Black*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1971), 144-146. Harrison identifies a team of black ministers who wrote the statement on “One Race” with him: Jimmy MacDonald, Dr. Howard Jones, Ralph Bell, Reverend Lewis Johnson, and James E. Massey.

small way. When they made charges of racial discrimination explicit, as in the pages of *Freedom Now*, black evangelicals articulated a hope that attention to common religious identity and the obligation to love other Christians would bring about racial equality. Their hopes were also tied to the missionary enterprise, as they stressed the importance of achieving racial equality in order to improve the appeal of the evangelical message at home and abroad. Making the issue of racial equality a component of the missionary enterprise did afford it a greater sense of urgency. Yet, it also sparked debates about whether it was an essential component or a distraction from preaching conversion. Twenty years after Carl Henry proposed that mission work should demonstrate social concern, evangelicals still could not agree how, or if, to make it happen. Moreover, disputes involving issues of race seemed to be *the* topic that animated debates and sustained the movement's uneasiness about merging social concern with the missionary enterprise.

In discussing how to work for racial equality without exceeding the bounds of orthodoxy, evangelicals frequently bumped up against the contradictory ways they had used race to understand themselves and the world around them. At its founding in the early 1940s, evangelicalism encompassed segregationists and integrationists who attached different meanings to racial identity. The former sanctioned racial hierarchy as ordained of God and thus attached remarkable significance to racial identity as an indicator of superiority or inferiority; the latter sanctioned racial equality as ordained of God and attached little significance to racial identity except as a barrier to equality. By 1965, integrationists embraced a colorblind articulation of racial identity wherein Christians set aside their disparate racial identities to take on a common religious identity.

As InterVarsity's policy stated, "in Christ there is neither black nor white." Compared to religious identity, racial identity was both incidental and inconsequential: humans, not God, had conceived of racial identity; when becoming a Christian, one's religious identity subsumed one's racial identity. Colorblindness as an expression of racial equality had wide currency among white and black evangelicals alike in postwar decades as a counter to segregationists' sense of racial superiority, but racial identity remained important as a means to organize the missionary enterprise and as a means to locate an idiom appropriate for communicating the evangelical message. Furthermore, since colorblindness relied on the erasure of racial identity, it could be wielded to challenge prejudice and discrimination or, just as likely, to conceal the exercise of white racial dominance.

Colorblindness was thus an insufficient tool to deal with racial inequality in the movement. By eliding racial identity into a religious identity, colorblindness did little to explain or challenge the reality of prejudice and de facto segregation that defined evangelicalism and America's separate and unequal society. It also masked the complicity of white evangelicals in a system of racial hierarchy that they did not fully acknowledge. Consequently, colorblindness underwrote the marginalization of black evangelicals within evangelical circles and the evasion of complex racial dynamics. In substantive debates about how to define the missionary enterprise, whites implicitly asserted their authority at the top of the racial order. If postwar evangelicals were uneasy about how to demonstrate social concern, a fraught discourse about race and the protection of the racial order were as much a factor as misgivings about exceeding the bounds of theological orthodoxy.

Four years after Lewis left campus ministry, evangelically-minded students from HBCUs would seek out InterVarsity. In an odd twist of events, evangelical faith would find a home at HBCUs just as other students were dismantling the religious suppositions that had undergirded black higher education for nearly a century.<sup>72</sup> Their efforts helped give rise to a Black Evangelical Renaissance that would make the racial dimension of evangelicalism's uneasy conscience explicit. In the late 1960s, black evangelicals would sharpen their critique of white evangelicals for the persistence of prejudice and discrimination; they also would seek a measure of independence from white authority from within the organizations they worked for or from newly formed black organizations; and, though evangelical theology had provided little validation to the search for black identity in its first twenty years, black evangelicals would also find ways to celebrate their identity and come to see it as a divine gift. On university campuses, students would use these three elements to define themselves as black *and* Christian—staking a claim to the importance of both religious and racial identity.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibram H. Kendi, *The Black Campus Movement: Black Students and the Racial Reconstruction of Higher Education, 1965-1972*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 67-160.

## Chapter 3

### Coming of Age in InterVarsity: Black College Students and the Formation of the Black Evangelical Renaissance, 1966-1970

In December of 1967, around two hundred black university students attended the Urbana Mission Convention. Near the end of the gathering, some of them sought each other's company to discuss their disappointment with what they had experienced. The stories from missionaries had convinced them that God was at work in far-off Asia, Africa, Europe, and Latin America. However, the convention made no mention of work among African Americans. Perhaps more startling, the convention did not acknowledge the clashes between African Americans and law enforcement in American cities in the previous summer or the foment of racial conflict across America that still lingered five months later. The omissions disheartened them and sparked a crisis of faith. Could it be that God was present everywhere in the world except for in America's black communities? Did God not know the dire circumstances of African Americans? Late into the night, the students prayed together asking God these very questions and seeking divine favor for their plans to present their complaints to InterVarsity's campus ministers.

Black students took on a larger role in InterVarsity in the years following the impromptu prayer meeting. Campus ministers responded to their complaints by asking for their input in shaping a campus ministry for black students. They used that position of influence to create new avenues of participation that combined their religious commitments with their racial identity. They created avenues for interracial fellowship with white InterVarsity students that they hoped demonstrated the power of Christian love to achieve reconciliation between black and white. Sometimes this involved displays

of unity and courage that challenged the waning Jim Crow regime of racial separation. Other times it involved uncomfortable conversations about the persistence of racial prejudice among evangelicals. Although they believed that Christian love could eventually reconcile racial strife, they also came to see that their efforts to advance the faith among black collegians suffered from its association with so-called white man's religion. Consequently, InterVarsity's black participants created a second avenue for participation that involved fellowship among themselves to discuss shared concerns and to cooperate on campaigns to evangelize other black collegians. In pursuing these two avenues with equal enthusiasm and commitment, InterVarsity's black students defined for themselves how to be black *and* Christian in the era of Black Power.

To sustain the efforts of black students, InterVarsity partnered with a black evangelical organization headed by an evangelist named Tom Skinner who stood at the vanguard of an emerging Black Evangelical Renaissance. Skinner crafted equally provocative responses to racial discrimination in evangelical circles and anti-religious sentiment in black communities. However, as proximity to white organizations increasingly challenged the credibility of evangelistic efforts, Skinner made plans for his own campus ministry to run independent of InterVarsity. Although his plan did not come to fruition entirely, Skinner and black students forged a new kind of campus ministry fit for the era of Black Power with support from InterVarsity. By 1970 the partnership initiated at Urbana 1967 seemed to have reshaped InterVarsity's priorities. The organization asked its black students and TSA to design a program that would allow black evangelicals to explore their distinctive religious and racial identity at the next Urbana Convention. It would bring unprecedented attention to the concerns of black

evangelicals in a national forum and signaled a potential end to issues of race being eclipsed by the movement's emphasis on the foreign missionary enterprise.

From 1966-1970, InterVarsity became a site for black evangelical students to encounter America's racial order and to contest its hold on American evangelicalism in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement. Although the specter of violence was less acute in evangelical circles, black evangelical students' encounters with the evangelical movement were formative experiences similar to youth involved in direct action campaigns that brought an end to Jim Crow. In an autobiography published in 1968, Ann Moody recounted the many facets of struggle in which she and other young activists engaged: they defied segregation laws; they renounced the passivity of their parents' generation; they challenged the authority of preachers to set the direction of the movement; and they tested the will of federal officials to protect the rights of American citizens. With the title *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, Moody's account focuses less on accomplishments and more on the ways that the full breadth and depth of America's racial order gradually unfolded before her with each new phase of activism. Black evangelical students struggled in a different context but their struggle also had many dimensions to it: they refused to accept the eclipse of racial equality by the foreign missionary enterprise; they also renounced the passivity of an earlier generation; they rejected the binary that other black students had constructed between practicing Christianity and working for racial justice; in pursuing a faith that was black and Christian, they asserted their authority within the evangelical movement to speak on matters of race and evangelization. Like young Civil Rights activists, too, their

accomplishments would uncover just how strong a hold the racial order had on the American evangelical movement.<sup>1</sup>

Carl Ellis, Jr., had played only a small role in establishing Gary's Human Rights Commission, but he would play a much larger role in shaping collegiate ministry for black students, first as a student in an InterVarsity chapter and then as a campus minister. In the fall of 1965, Ellis traveled to the coast of Virginia to begin his freshman year at Hampton Institute, a historically black college founded a century earlier. Although he was a veteran of civil rights campaigns, Ellis sought out the company of Christian students during his first year of college. He met a few others who shared his enthusiasm for evangelism: a sophomore named Gladys Reed and two freshmen named Jerome Brewster and Tommy Blackwell. When their efforts to evangelize stalled, Ellis spoke about his predicament with the pastor of his church and asked what to do next. The pastor gave him a phone number for Bill York, a campus minister for InterVarsity who served as an advisor to evangelical students at other universities in Virginia. Ellis had read with interest about InterVarsity's Urbana Mission Convention in *Time* magazine but had not known how to get in touch with the organization prior to meeting with his pastor. After the two of them got acquainted by phone, York invited Ellis to visit Old Dominion University to observe how a well-established InterVarsity chapter operated.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ann Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, (New York: Dial Press, 1968), 424. Moody closes the autobiography with a tone of uncertainty rather than triumph. As she travels to Washington, D.C., to testify before Congress, Moody wonders whether the words of the iconic Civil Rights song "We Shall Overcome" will come true.

<sup>2</sup> Information about InterVarsity's chapter at Hampton come from two sources: Documents from Bill York's work at Hampton in BGEA Collection 300, Box 187, Folder 9; Carl Ellis, Jr., interviewed by Tim Ballard, September 4, 2017.



On March 19, 1966, York drove with Ellis and two other freshmen from Hampton across the Chesapeake Bay to attend a presentation from a missionary who had recently returned from a trip to Europe. As the audience took in slides of European scenes projected onto the front wall, the missionary took in another interesting scene: three black collegians sat in a lecture hall at Old Dominion University among several white collegians and a white campus minister. The battle to desegregate Virginia's educational institutions had only just begun, but the white members of Old Dominion's InterVarsity raised no objections to their black visitors.<sup>3</sup> After a cordial exchange between the established lay missionaries of Old Dominion and the aspiring lay missionaries from Hampton Institute, York drove Ellis and his two friends back to Hampton Institute.<sup>4</sup>

The phone call to York and the short drive across the Chesapeake Bay marked the start of Hampton Institute's InterVarsity chapter. York dictated a report for his supervisor about the evening while driving home to Richmond that night. Of the several thousand students involved in InterVarsity chapters across the United States, almost all of the students were white. York saw the possibility that his relationship with Hampton students might give InterVarsity another opportunity to support missionary societies at HBCUs after Ruth Lewis's departure. He was particularly impressed with Carl Ellis. On the drive to Old Dominion, Ellis had told York that he would like to work with InterVarsity to start chapters at other historically black schools. York's report noted Ellis's precocious

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<sup>3</sup> Steven J. Rosenthal, "Symbolic Racism and Desegregation: Divergent Attitudes and Perceptions of Black and White University Students," *Phylon* Vol. 41, No. 3, (Fall, 1980): 257-66. Rosenthal outlines Virginia's state government in negotiations with the federal Department of Health, Education, and Welfare from 1969-1979 to establish a formal plan for desegregating Old Dominion and other public institutions of higher education.

<sup>4</sup> Bill York, "IVCF Staff Weekly Letter," March 21, 1966, BGEA Collection 300, Box 187, Folder 9.

initiative—a rare trait even among the most active student leaders—saying that Ellis was “God’s man for Hampton Institute...and perhaps in the future he will be God’s man for a wider ministry.”<sup>5</sup> After that evening, York treated him as a campus-minister-in-training who could increase the number of black students in InterVarsity chapters.<sup>6</sup>

Bill York groomed Carl Ellis to work as a campus minister for InterVarsity, though Ellis would not graduate for another three years. To prepare him for the task, York suggested that Ellis attend a camp for InterVarsity’s student leaders at the end of the summer of 1966. At camp, Ellis had conversations with theologian Clark Pinnock that broadened his knowledge about the evangelical community to which he belonged. He surprised Ellis with evangelical critiques of humanism and secularism that Ellis had not heard on Sunday mornings at church or from other Christian students at Hampton. Pinnock had recently returned from a retreat center in Switzerland called L’Abri Fellowship. Francis and Edith Schaeffer, American-born but living abroad, ran L’Abri as a kind of evangelical hostel for the devout and the curious alike. Visitors could hear Schaeffer, Pinnock, and other lecturers-in-residence waxing eloquent about Jesus or offering a Christian counterpoint to the topics of existentialism and alienation that marked philosophical discourse in the mid-twentieth century. Ellis would visit L’Abri later in his life and considered conversations with Pinnock an initiation into a cohort of evangelical intellectuals whose faith motivated them to engage with the philosophical issues of the day.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Schaeffer’s popularity and influence among evangelicals grew during the 1970s. See Molly Worthen, “God’s Idea Men,” *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 220-240.

Pinnock also surprised Ellis with stories about Tom Skinner—a Harlem gang leader brought to his knees in surrender to God after hearing a Christian radio program. Since his conversion, Skinner became an evangelist preaching the gospel in New York City and in black communities around the United States. Some had read his thoughts on race in the pages of *Freedom Now*. In speaking of Skinner, Pinnock gave Ellis a glimpse of the rich participation of African Americans in evangelicalism. Ellis’s mentors within evangelical circles had been white. He became a Christian through a program for teens run by the predominantly white Youth for Christ organization; a white campus minister had helped to get Hampton’s InterVarsity chapter started; and, indeed, a white theologian was introducing him to Skinner. Pinnock pointed Ellis to a burgeoning movement among black evangelicals who were championing a new approach to evangelization among African Americans and were urging others to make racial equality the priority for American evangelicalism. Ellis would find his way into this movement in the coming months and would eventually work alongside Skinner to develop a campus ministry for black collegians. In the interim, Ellis’ introduction to intellectual evangelicals and to a black evangelical movement bolstered his confidence in his evangelical faith. He returned to Hampton in the fall of 1966 and channeled his energies into a budding InterVarsity chapter.<sup>8</sup>

With Ellis’s ambition and York’s guidance, Hampton’s InterVarsity chapter became a gathering place for evangelical students and faculty in spite of the objections of Hampton’s official chaplain, Reverend Dr. V. P. Bodein. In May of 1966, Bodein had opposed InterVarsity’s application to the school’s administration for official recognition.

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<sup>8</sup> Carl Ellis, Jr., Interview, September 4, 2017.

Bodein had met with Ellis and with Gladys Reed on separate occasions to dissuade them from organizing an InterVarsity chapter. York sought out Bodein to find out why, but the chaplain did not keep the appointments. “My impression of Dr. Bodein,” York surmised in a memo, “is that he does not want anything going on at Hampton in the realm of religion which he cannot control, and he is afraid he would not be able to control an InterVarsity chapter.”<sup>9</sup> Beyond York’s impressions of the chaplain’s motives, Bodein may have acted to protect Hampton Institute from the designs of its self-appointed lay missionaries. At Hampton and many tertiary institutions with religious programming chaplains promoted modernist Christianity which, to say the least, did not share with evangelical Christianity the sense of urgency about the need for conversion. Mindful of other InterVarsity chapters who had faced similar circumstances, York reacted to Bodein’s opposition as a small skirmish in the battle between evangelical and modernist Christianity. He advised InterVarsity members to locate supportive faculty who could negotiate on their behalf. A year after their initial application, InterVarsity students and their allies on the faculty—around thirty in number—had yet to receive the administration’s approval for a chapter at Hampton.<sup>10</sup>

Nonetheless, by May of 1967, Hampton Institute’s InterVarsity chapter resembled chapters at other campuses around the country in almost all respects except for the racial identity of its members. Like Old Dominion’s lay missionaries, Hampton InterVarsity members attended bible studies and prayer meetings on a regular basis; they had even had twelve new converts join them in the preceding year. And, like InterVarsity chapters at other campuses, they had sparred with modernist Christianity to shore up their presence

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<sup>9</sup> York, “IVCF Weekly Staff Letter,” May 15, 1966 and May 7, 1967.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

on campus. Their racial identity had not gone unnoticed by Old Dominion's members in March of 1966; nor by Pinnock at the camp in August of 1966; nor by Bill York who anticipated more participants at Hampton and more chapters of black students in the upper South in the fall of 1967. Likewise, Hampton students observed that their affiliation with InterVarsity brought them in contact almost exclusively with white students and campus ministers. Nonetheless, in these key moments of development for the new chapter, racial identity had been largely incidental to Hampton students and to their InterVarsity peers.

After late summer uprisings among black residents of urban communities, though, Hampton InterVarsity students grew increasingly dissatisfied and distraught about the incidental nature of their racial identity as they became more aware of a seeming contradiction between their identity and their religious affiliation. In the summer of 1967, weeks before a few Hampton students were scheduled to attend InterVarsity's camp, an arrest of a black taxi driver in Newark, New Jersey, prompted a bloody conflict between black residents and law enforcement. The conflict quickly escalated into a frenzy of activity in a number of directions across the United States. Black residents in other cities took to the streets in defiance of racial discrimination and met with National Guard troops attempting to quell the so-called riots. Alarmed by the violent exchanges that brought damage to property and several deaths, President Lyndon Johnson appointed a Commission on Civil Disorders, with Illinois Governor Otto Kerner as chair, to uncover the sources of the conflagrations and to advise the nation on how to address it. The Kerner Commission made race central in their investigation and attributed civil disorders to systemic racial inequality. The nation, said the Kerner Commission report, was racially

separate and unequal despite the hard-won legal and legislative victories of the previous decade. And, even before the official pronouncement arrived in March of 1968, African Americans continued to employ civil rights organizations, self-defense organizations, community organizing, and political action to alert the nation that race was anything but incidental in American society. Many among them, echoing Stokely Carmichael's call for Black Power, promoted black autonomy and the celebration of black identity as the centerpiece of their resistance to America's racial hierarchy.<sup>11</sup>

On university campuses, black students and faculty began to question the implicit paternalism of collegiate education for African Americans. Since the Civil War, the institutions that educated African Americans—a system of education that Ibram X. Kendi calls the black academy—had attempted to ‘civilize’ them with an imposed moral system; to isolate African-American students and faculty from white people and from the reins of authority in higher education; to reinforce the implicit normativity of whiteness as a lived experience and an object of study; and to embrace the education of a few African Americans as a measure of progress out of endemic political, economic, and social inequality. As the questioning peaked, black students and faculty promulgated the academic discipline of Black Studies as a means to undermine the paternalistic education of American universities. In the fall of 1967, with the Black Campus Movement

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<sup>11</sup> On Detroit “riots” and the political response, see Steven M. Gillon, *Separate and Unequal: The Kerner Commission and the Unraveling of American Liberalism*, (New York: Basic Books, 2018), ix-xvi. On the crescendo of Black Power in the late 1960s see Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 215-228.

beginning to take shape, black collegians across the United States expressed solidarity with the summer uprisings and their frustration with an unresponsive nation.<sup>12</sup>

Following the uprisings of the summer, Hampton InterVarsity members became more worried about anti-religious sentiment among the student body than the lack of official status from the administration. In the previous year, twelve members of the thirty had joined as a result of a conversion experience at InterVarsity's meetings. In the fall, though, Hampton's student body responded to the summer uprisings by speaking against racialized authority structures. Some rejected religious authority outright, asserting that Christian faith—whether modernist or evangelical—was incompatible with the struggle against racial inequality. As a result, Hampton's InterVarsity members noticed a precipitous drop in the level of interest for bible discussion groups in the fall of 1967. While they shared the frustrations of their peers, they found that their faith had put them at odds with the growing anti-religious ethos on campus. Criticism of Christianity did not diminish the membership roles, but Hampton InterVarsity students did not quite know how to answer the formidable challenge to their faith coming from Black Power. When the fall semester ended, Carl Ellis traveled to the Urbana missionary convention demoralized and looking to elders for answers. If evangelicals could spar intellectually with Jean-Paul Sartre and Herbert Marcuse, Ellis wanted to know what they would say to Stokely Carmichael and H. Rap Brown.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ibram H. Kendi, *The Black Campus Movement: Black Students and the Racial Reconstruction of Higher Education, 1965-1972*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); For Detroit riots as a catalyst for action among black university students, see Martha Biondi, *The Black Revolution on Campus*, (Los Angeles: 2012), 82.

<sup>13</sup> Carl Ellis, Jr., Interview.

On December 27, 1967, Ellis joined a group of nine thousand two hundred evangelicals for the Urbana Convention.<sup>14</sup> The crowd of students, campus ministers, pastors, and missionaries had an international composition but students outnumbered those in professional ministry and white attendees outnumbered attendees of other races. Around two hundred attendees were black collegians from InterVarsity chapters. A few African Americans in professional ministry were also in attendance. For Ellis and a contingent of about twenty black attendees, each day of the convention brought greater frustration. After an evening session near the close of the convention, Ellis noticed a few black students making their way from their seats near the auditorium stage toward his seat near the exit. They approached him and asked what he thought about the proceedings so far. He told them he was sorely disappointed with the convention and they told him they shared his disappointment. Among the group that approached him, as Ellis would later find out, was a recent graduate of Harvard University named Paul Gibson; and a freshman from Shaw University in North Carolina named Elward Ellis—who shared a last name with Carl Ellis but was not related to him.<sup>15</sup>

The newly acquainted group took the next several hours to talk through their disappointment in a dormitory lounge. The convention had portrayed a compelling story

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<sup>14</sup> The number of attendees to all Urbana Convention through 1987 provided in Keith Hunt and Gladys Hunt, *For Christ and the University: The Story of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship of the U.S.A., 1940-1990*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 413.

<sup>15</sup> Carl Ellis, Jr., Interview; InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, “Black Campus Ministries History,” [bcm.intervarsity.org/history-0](http://bcm.intervarsity.org/history-0) (accessed November 7, 2017). The impromptu nature of the prayer meeting excluded the majority of black students in attendance. InterVarsity’s website records two hundred black students attended the convention, while Ellis recalled a prayer meeting with around twenty students. The statement has not been preserved in InterVarsity’s corporate records or other archival collections available to the author.



of divine activity around the world yet made no mention of unrest in black communities nor of Black Power's scathing critique of Christianity. The silence troubled the students who pondered what to make of it. Caught up in their profound disappointment, the students initially overlooked the possibility of an oversight on the part of convention planners and entertained the disturbing thought that God had little concern for black communities; or, that they had committed themselves to a white religion that did not merit the allegiance of black people. These prospects overwhelmed the group and they turned from conversation to prayer, calling out their fears to God and seeking divine insight. Then, sobered by prayer, the students spent the very late hours of the night deciding what to do next. By morning, they had drafted a statement expressing their disappointment and had convinced their InterVarsity campus ministers to read it in front of several thousand students assembled for the final session the convention.<sup>16</sup>

The decision to read the statement disrupted a meticulously planned program and InterVarsity's campus ministers responded with a mixture of alarm and hand wringing. They were familiar with student protests from their proximity to the university, but it surprised them that an evangelical gathering would give occasion for one. The students' disruption, minor as it was, suggested that they lacked in Christian decorum at least and may have raised suspicions in some about their commitment to evangelical orthodoxy. However, Bill York and the campus ministers who worked directly with the few black students in InterVarsity chapters avoided discussion of censuring the students and chose to engage the students in conversation. In speaking with students, the campus ministers admitted that the convention had failed to address widespread discontent among African

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<sup>16</sup> Carl Ellis, Jr., Interview.

Americans and had given the students no help in answering the challenge of Black Power to Christian faith. When the students asked what InterVarsity would do in the future, the campus ministers solicited the students' help saying they could not do an adequate job without them. Before leaving the convention, they asked Carl Ellis, Elward Ellis, and Paul Gibson to serve as advisors to InterVarsity. They also proposed the idea of hiring one of them to work for InterVarsity as a campus minister after graduation. Gibson, who had begun graduate theological courses, considered the request and made arrangements to serve as a campus minister in southern California beginning in the fall of 1968.<sup>17</sup>

In the span of a long night, the students had moved beyond disoriented introspection about their personal faith to confronting their faith community about issues of race with an unprecedented maneuver. With the reading of their statement before a crowd of thousands, they had mounted a small disruption at an evangelical gathering that resembled the disruptions of civil rights demonstrations. In the era of widespread tactical civil disobedience against racial discrimination, black evangelicals had typically shared in the uneasy conscience of evangelicalism that saw such maneuvers as ill advised at best and against scriptural mandate at worst. Instead of civil disobedience, the NNEA had responded to racial discrimination within the bounds of evangelical decorum with intensive evangelization in black urban communities to shore up the consequences of gross neglect by white society. Black evangelicals intervened at the Berlin Congress to ensure that the gathering made a definitive statement against racial prejudice, but it happened without disrupting its proceedings and without disclosing their intervention. By contrast, black collegians at Urbana 1967 made their discontent known publicly and used

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<sup>17</sup> Bill York, "Hampton Follow Up," *Involved: For Those Involved in Reaching the Campus for Jesus Christ*, BGEA Collection 300, Box 187, Folder 9, 1.

their statement to insert the issue of race into the convention program. As in the sit-ins, the disruption allowed the students to call those in authority to discuss the organization's evasion of the topic of race and to negotiate a remedy.

Moving forward from the convention, black evangelical students would expand on their improvised disruption, utilizing their participation in InterVarsity to push against the prevailing evangelical views on racial and religious identity. Certainly, this involved efforts to expose racist policies and attitudes that limited their participation. On a more basic level, though, black students were motivated to address their tenuous position as a minority within the evangelical community and among other black collegians. Unwilling to compromise their black identity or their religious commitments, black students used their InterVarsity chapters to define for themselves how to be black *and* Christian. These efforts would look different at HBCUs, newly integrated institutions in the South, and on New York's city's multiracial campuses. Along the way, they garnered a greater share of authority within InterVarsity as chapter leaders and, in a few cases, as campus ministers. At their initiative, InterVarsity would prepare a program for black collegians for the next missionary convention in 1970.

Following the Urbana convention, InterVarsity's campus ministers proposed a way for students at HBCU campuses to engage with anti-religious sentiments. Paul Little, InterVarsity's itinerant evangelist who had visited Hampton Institute, specialized in a mainstay evangelistic event for collegiate ministry known as apologetics. Used by Schaeffer and Pinnock and many others, the apologetic approach to evangelization presented audiences with an intellectual defense of Christian doctrine in the hopes of winning over philosophical or scientific minded students. Little put the students at

Hampton in touch with black evangelicals who could bring new energy to their stalled evangelistic efforts and engage directly with the objections to Christianity that exponents of Black Power raised. In short order, InterVarsity enlisted Harlem evangelist Tom Skinner for a March engagement at Hampton Institute.<sup>18</sup>

Bill York spent February of 1968 making preparations—communicating with Skinner, arranging his travel and accommodations, and contacting InterVarsity’s financial supporters to secure \$100 to advertise the event. Hampton’s InterVarsity chapter booked an auditorium and invited the campus to hear the story of a former Harlem gang leader who turned his life around. At the event, Skinner hedged against his audience’s suspicion toward religion with a provocative opening. He got them to promise they would not to leave when he revealed how he left the gang. After attributing his turnaround to Jesus, the auditorium erupted and Skinner sparred with audience members for the remainder of the evening. Skinner had modest success defending Christian commitments against an adversarial crowd; but InterVarsity students had a greater success in making Skinner’s acquaintance. They found in him what they had hoped to find at Urbana. Skinner spoke an evangelical message inflected with the black experience that matched the intensity of Black Power.<sup>19</sup>

The event at Hampton reveals the developing contours of black collegians’ evangelical faith that defined itself vis-à-vis the burgeoning black campus movement. The isolation of black Americans from white society that Kendi identifies applied to higher education and to a white-dominated network of evangelical institutions. Black

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<sup>18</sup> Bill York, “Dear Friends of InterVarsity,” BGEA Collection 300, Box 187, Folder 9.

<sup>19</sup> Carl Ellis, Jr., Interview. *Freedom Now* published Skinner’s thoughts on African Americans rejecting Christianity in “A White Man’s Religion?,” Vol. 2 No 1, 10.

evangelical collegians and the black campus movement each sought to remedy the situation through greater autonomy from white control but in different arenas and to different ends. After Ellis and his cohort secured a greater measure of authority within InterVarsity with a small disruption, they wielded it to advance Christianity. The black campus movement at Hampton and elsewhere attempted to shut down the normal operations of the campus, hoping to construct a new regime of authority in higher education.<sup>20</sup>

One major point of difference between the two was the perspective on Christian morality. The black campus movement objected to Christianity's "moral contraption" as an instrument of racial control. According to Kendi, "moral contraption" was "a system of rules...that regulated [black] students freedom and agency...meant to Christianize and civilize [them] into a white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal American order."<sup>21</sup>

Students in the black campus movement believed that prescriptions for moral comportment—such as mandatory chapel services and curfews—served to subjugate them, forestalling any changes to their material conditions and redirecting attention away from their unequal standing in society. Considering their encounters with racism in evangelical circles and elsewhere, black evangelical collegians were not naïve about the use of Christianity to maintain the racial order in the past or the present; yet, they saw this as a distortion of their faith rather than its essential function. Through practices of piety and

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<sup>20</sup> Kendi's *The Black Campus Movement* relates many stories of disruptions on campuses across the United States—both proactive and responsive—in the process of remaking higher education; Carl Ellis also spoke about the radical tenor of Hampton students. Few details of Hampton Institute in the wake of the summer of 1967 are available in journalistic sources. In an email to the author, Darrah Rogers, an archivist at Hampton University, stated that due to student protest the school's president stopped the publication of the student newspaper *The Hampton Script* during the fall of 1967.

<sup>21</sup> Kendi, 7.

evangelization, black evangelical collegians held themselves and others to Christian standards of morality believing that exercising such moral comportment would improve society. The commitment to morality as an engine for social change fueled the students' evangelization of their peers. At the same time, their desire to end the racial isolation imposed upon them fueled their confrontation with white ministers at the Urbana convention, and would continue to fuel their pursuit of greater autonomy from white authority. Together, the two pursuits helped to define evangelical faith for black collegians in the era of Black Power.

The event also marked the beginning of a tenuous partnership between InterVarsity and Skinner's organization, Tom Skinner and Associates (TSA). Skinner's appearance at Hampton had prompted some in attendance to join the InterVarsity chapter. Counting the new students as an evangelistic success, Bill York sought to engage Skinner for a series of appearances at several HBCUs in the fall of 1968. He asked Skinner, Carl Ellis, Elward Ellis, and an African-American pastor from Norfolk named Reggie Winbush to attend a July meeting to determine what those appearances would become. York envisioned Skinner's sparring with skeptical students as one element of a semester-long campaign at several campuses in the South that would also include informal discussion in dorm lounges, musical performances, and return visits to tend to any prospective new chapters. Skinner found the opportunity to expand the horizons of TSA to collegiate audiences appealing, having built his ministry career on evangelization campaigns in black residential communities. Prior to the July meeting, though, the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. rekindled public tensions between white and

black Americans, causing Skinner to re-consider the terms of his potential partnership with InterVarsity.<sup>22</sup>

Martin Luther King, Jr., divided evangelicals in his life and after his assassination, but the combination of apathy and antipathy for King compounded the grief some evangelicals felt over the murdered civil rights champion. John Alexander of *Freedom Now* expressed his grief as an urgent call to end polite discussion of issues and to commit extensive resources to combatting racial inequalities in evangelical churches and the nation at large. He implored readers to “ask your church [denomination] for a million dollars and their hundred best men” for that purpose.<sup>23</sup> In the same issue, Fred Alexander, his co-editor and father, issued a poignant battle cry: “Mr. King, you have won my heart to your cause. I am in this war with you. I am at war with any man, black or white, who is practicing injustice. I am at war with any man, Christian or non-Christian, who is not showing by his deeds that he is concerned. May God grant that not too many more men will have to die in this just war.”<sup>24</sup> Reverend Bill Pannell also paid homage to King as the “conscience of [the] nation” whose life had “unscrambled the neat patterns of complacency in many a community” and whose death stood as a grim reminder that “blackness...in America has meant a daily confrontation with death—death of mind and spirit, death of hope and ambition.” Pannell offered no prescriptions but he declared that it was time for “those whose eloquent silence has contributed to this ghastly problem” to reject the recourse to the National Guard and instead commit to bringing an end to the

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<sup>22</sup> Bill York, “Letter to Tom Skinner, May 16, 1968,” BGEA Collection 300, Box 187, Folder 9.

<sup>23</sup> John F. Alexander, “A Time to Act,” *Freedom Now*, Vol. 4, No 3, May-June 1968, 3.

<sup>24</sup> Fred Alexander, “Obituary Comments,” *Freedom Now*, Vol. 4, No 3, May-June 1968, 7.

encounters with death that African Americans faced on a daily basis.<sup>25</sup> In these and other articles responding to King's assassination, *Freedom Now* contributors vented their grief and laid bear, in language that eschewed the typical diplomatic tone of the periodical, their collective frustration that evangelicals would not commit to themselves to working for racial equality.

The bolder tone in *Freedom Now* echoed a changing dynamic between white and black evangelicals and the changing tenor of discussion about racial discrimination. At the start of 1968, black collegians had disrupted a missionary convention to voice their discontent. As the year continued, Pannell, Skinner, and other black clergy would sharpen their critique of white evangelicals' failure to deal with racial inequality. In his book *My Friend, The Enemy*, Pannell wrote openly about the pervasive practices of racial discrimination that African Americans had endured in relative silence for two decades within evangelical circles. The numerous indignities white evangelicals visited on their African-American "brothers and sisters" had been largely absent from evangelical public discourse—even at the annual meetings of the National Negro Evangelical Association. Pannell made it explicit what the NNEA had indirectly responded to and what readers of *Freedom Now* had tacitly acknowledged in their letters to the editor: White evangelicals gave verbal assent to racial equality but had devised a set of policies and practices that limited the participation of African Americans. Pannell recounted patterns of discrimination in evangelical institutions: Seminaries frequently paired up the few black students on their campuses as roommates to spare white students from uncomfortable living situations; overseas mission organizations rarely hired black candidates who had

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<sup>25</sup> William Pannell, "Memorial to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.," *Freedom Now*, Vol. 4, No 3, May-June 1968, 4-5.



taken the same training courses in seminaries as white students; few evangelicals gave full-throated support for interracial marriage and they bemoaned the hardships that it could place on a couple; white evangelicals quietly endorsed de facto segregation in evangelical congregations through their flight from urban to suburban areas. In his manifold examples, Pannell pointed the finger at self-described integrationist leaders of denominations and organizations instead of at ardent segregationists. He asked his readers to understand these instances as systemic problems enmeshed in organizational policies and even in theological orthodoxy rather than an individual's ill will toward the black race.<sup>26</sup>

Pannell also exposed patronizing attitudes that dismissed black Christian's concerns. Pannell remarked that "at the moment in history when a black man insists on regarding his blackness as a badge of honor, the white man insists on regarding him as a colorless person."<sup>27</sup> Black-only congregations and venues for fellowship celebrated blackness, Pannell explained, in order to counter the presumption of black inferiority enmeshed in American law and society.<sup>28</sup> For Pannell, the ethos of colorblindness, combined with suspicion of black-only fellowship, betrayed an unwillingness to take the concerns of black Christians seriously. Instead of listening to those concerns, Pannell observed, white Christians wanted to assuage their feelings of guilt over the disparate conditions of American life.<sup>29</sup>

Near the end of the book, Pannell invoked James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*. He insisted that his white evangelical friends fight with him rather than evade difficult

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<sup>26</sup> William Pannell, *My Friend, The Enemy*, (Waco, TX: Word, 1968).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

discussions about the exclusion and marginalization of black evangelicals. He also asked white evangelicals to engage with black evangelicals on substantive debates that black activism had engendered in the nation—particularly on issues of systemic racial inequality and black autonomy. In his bold exposé of white neglect and intransigence, Pannell had not discarded his belief that bi-racial fellowship could authenticate the truth of Christianity; yet, he demanded white and black evangelicals work for “a wholesome...fellowship with the courage and humility to confront fellow believers honestly about attitudes that divide them.” He also stressed that organizational leaders needed to “plan, push, and pray” for such confrontations rather than wait for them to happen.<sup>30</sup>

Tom Skinner began to reassess his partnership with InterVarsity in light of Pannell’s scathing indictment of white evangelicals. As he sought to define his partnership with InterVarsity, he increasingly saw the perception of evangelicalism as white man’s religion as a prohibitive obstacle for evangelization. He began to argue that dependence on white organizations fatally undermined the credibility of evangelistic appeals among black collegians. In the spring of 1969, he proposed that InterVarsity and TSA divide up the task of campus ministry along racial lines—InterVarsity would work with white students and TSA would work with black students. In hopes of launching an independent ministry, he offered Carl Ellis a job as TSA’s first campus minister after his graduation from Hampton. Ellis had anticipated that Bill York would ask him to work for InterVarsity, but Skinner’s call preempted any offer that might have been forthcoming. In negotiations over Skinner’s proposal, it became clear that the plan was not practicable.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 123.

For one thing, Paul Gibson had begun work in southern California and preferred to work with InterVarsity rather than TSA. Gibson's preference complicated the request for InterVarsity to cede black students in its chapters to TSA. In general, though, TSA had less experience and fewer resources than InterVarsity to oversee a large-scale campus ministry. Rather than replicate ministry programs, TSA arranged for its students from Hampton to attend InterVarsity's training programs and for Ellis to serve along with InterVarsity campus ministers. In addition, Ellis trained with InterVarsity's newly hired campus ministers before starting his work with TSA. The collaboration between InterVarsity and TSA would bring a number of confrontations between white and black participants for a number of years. Some were planned and others were spontaneous. Some were between organizational leaders and some were between students. As Pannell had anticipated in his book, participants fought over the proper balance between bi-racial cooperation and black autonomy.<sup>31</sup>

As with many social movements, 1968 became a pivotal year for black evangelicals. Spurred on by the escalation of racial tensions in America, black evangelicals took a new tack against racial prejudice and discrimination. Whereas they previously denounced segregationists, they now took aim against the broad exercise of white control that had limited their participation in the evangelical movement and rendered their contributions invisible. While the NNEA's emphasis on black evangelization shored up the consequences of racial discrimination, black evangelicals now openly named and confronted its source—the system of racial suppression that had accompanied the arrival of modern, urban society. As they exposed the exercise of white

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<sup>31</sup> Hunt and Hunt, 262; Carl Ellis, Jr. Interview; "Pannell Stresses Need for Sophisticated Strategy," *The I-V Vine*, Vol 1 No 3, [n.d.], BGEA Collection 300, Box 187, Folder 12.

dominance within evangelicalism, they also sought out greater independence from majority-white organizations. And, although the exploration of black evangelical identity had been of little interest at the inaugural NNEA meeting, it would increasingly find its way into gatherings of black evangelicals and into black evangelization campaigns. In fact, with greater reflection on the meaning of black evangelical identity, the NNEA changed its name to the National Black Evangelical Association (NBEA) in 1969.<sup>32</sup>

The combination of a sharper critique of white dominance, efforts for autonomy, and the exploration of black identity gave greater coherence to black evangelical faith and marked the arrival of a Black Evangelical Renaissance. Crucially, the Black Evangelical Renaissance took shape through debates about how to carry out the missionary enterprise. When the Urbana convention of 1967 offered no message of salvation relevant to the experiences of African Americans, black students mounted an improvised disruption. In his book, Pannell suggested that correcting the practices of exclusion would mobilize more people into the missionary enterprise and accelerate the advance of evangelical faith around the world. Likewise, Skinner's desire for an independent black campus ministry sought to improve the appeal of evangelical faith among African Americans by demonstrating that it was not by definition a tool for racial subjugation. After 1968, the ideas and practices arising from the Black Evangelical Renaissance allowed black evangelicals to challenge racial dominance in the context of their commitment to the missionary enterprise. It would allow them to establish the terms

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<sup>32</sup>William Bentley, "Factors in the Origin and Focus of The National Black Evangelical Association," *Black Theology: A Documentary History*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1979) 310-321. Bentley notes that there was a debate before members reached an agreement on the new name.

for their participation in it rather than abide by the de facto racial exclusion and marginalization that marked the missionary enterprise since the movement's inception in the 1940s.

At the close of summer in 1969, one of Carl Ellis' first assignments was to serve at the camp where he had met Clark Pinnock three years earlier. Ellis and nineteen HBCU students formed the largest contingent of black attendees in the history of the camp. They joined around seventy white students and ten white campus ministers. Each year, the camp featured bible expositions and discussions to encourage personal piety and to hone students' skills as chapter leaders. Likewise, each year campus ministers anticipated that the challenges of one hundred people living in close quarters in bunkhouses would bring opportunities to coach students in forbearance and forgiveness. In preparation for the camp in 1969, campus ministers expanded the curriculum to include sessions on "blackness" for black collegians to discuss issues of black identity and Christian faith. Carl Ellis would oversee the sessions along with William Pannell who had also joined TSA.<sup>33</sup>

The opportunities for conflict expanded along with the curriculum. White and black students alike had anticipated harmonious fellowship but found themselves divided along racial lines even before the official program began. White students had taken notice of the sessions reserved for black students only and in the first days of their arrival they peppered black students with questions about it. As black students responded to their

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<sup>33</sup> The events of the camp are recorded in a bulletin with the title *The I-V Vine* that attendees published periodically throughout the two-week period. BGEA Collection 300, Box 187, Folder 12 and Box 193, Folder 8.

peers, the conversation escalated into a heated exchange that would set the tone for the next two weeks. They came away from the conversation eager to talk more about “blackness” but they were wary of the possibility of further division between them.<sup>34</sup>

Students scheduled a second conversation about “blackness” for a few days later. They decided on a question-and-answer format where white students would submit written questions to a panel of three black students and Carl Ellis. A white student would serve as moderator. Some anticipated an adversarial tone to the forum by likening it to a popular talk show with a caustic host, *The Joe Pyne Show*.<sup>35</sup> Carl Ellis thought the white students would treat the forum like “a psychedelic trip” with no lasting impact, but some of his students held out more hope.<sup>36</sup> Connie Walker, a student from Shaw University, expressed her desire that white students would understand the challenges she faced as a minority in InterVarsity circles and the struggles she endured navigating a racist society.<sup>37</sup> Kay Coles, a student from Hampton, asked white students to see her as a peer and as a human being. She wanted white students to engage in the give and take of relationship and not let strong emotions silence conversation or stifle friendship.<sup>38</sup> No one recorded the forum’s proceedings, but students revealed in their responses to the forum that it had not erased the divide between white and black on the topic of black identity.

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<sup>34</sup> Ken Ripley, “Black Forum Set for Wednesday,” *I-V Vine*, Vol 1 No. 1, Aug 26, 1969, 1 & 3, InterVarsity Corporate Records, Box 187, Folder 12.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 1. For a description of The Joe Pyne show see Kevin Cook, “Joe Pyne was America’s First Shock Jock,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, June 2017, accessed at [www.smithsonianmag.com/history/joe-pyne-first-shock-jock-180963237](http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/joe-pyne-first-shock-jock-180963237) on March 26, 2019.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

Some appreciated the frank discussion but everyone acknowledged that “uptight” feelings continued for the remainder of the camp.<sup>39</sup>

White and black students clashed primarily over the legitimacy of “blackness” within Christian ranks. White students saw the assertion of black identity as a source—perhaps the chief source—of the racial division they experienced at camp. Black students and ministers countered with attempts to connect the immediate experience of division at camp to the reality of racial division elsewhere in American life. During the camp, they presented the exploration of “blackness” as a means of navigating that reality rather than a desire for self-imposed separation from white Christians. Eric Payne, a student from Fisk University, reminded his peers that students at HBCU campuses had no opportunity to form integrated InterVarsity chapters.<sup>40</sup> Building on his insights from *My Friend, The Enemy*, Bill Pannell explained TSA’s strategy of “creative separatism” for black fellowship and black evangelism. Black evangelicals sought independence from white culture and autonomy from white influence because it gave them credibility among black students. Pannell assured white students that his commitment to this strategy did not mean he was less committed to unity with white evangelicals.<sup>41</sup>

Carl Ellis also linked the pursuit of “blackness” with his commitment to unity. Ellis spoke of black evangelicals’ racial and religious identity as a “Christo-centric redeemed blackness” forged by those who were the objects of racial oppression and recipients of divinely revealed truth. Black evangelicals asserted their “redeemed

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Eric Payne, “Black Witness Overcomes Handicaps to Spread Gospel,” *I-V Vine*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 3, BGEA Collection 300, Box 187, Folder 12.

<sup>41</sup> Ken Ripley, “Pannell Stresses Need for Sophisticated Strategy,” *I-V Vine*, Vol. 1, No. 3, BGEA Collection 300, Box 193, Folder 8.

blackness” in order to expose the “racist guilt” of both white and black people. White people were guilty of “beliefs and actions...toward black people...that keep them in inferior positions within society.” Black people were guilty of “defensive or paranoid responses to white racism...[that] improve[d] [their] chance of survival.”<sup>42</sup> While Payne and Pannell defended “blackness” as an authentic spiritual pursuit and as an effective evangelization strategy, Ellis turned the tables on the objections to black separatism. The existence of racial identity, said Ellis, arose from white people imposing a regime of exclusion upon black people. “Redeemed blackness” was not the source of division but rather the necessary ingredient to bringing black and white Christians together and to overcoming America’s race problem.

Payne, Pannell, and Ellis had the last word on the legitimacy of “blackness” at the North Carolina camp but it is difficult to know whether they satisfied the white students’ objections entirely. One poem printed in the camp bulletin suggested that black students had convinced at least one white student about the importance of “blackness.” The poem’s first and second stanzas depict God turning away from the poet because he had ignored a “colored man” and pitied the plight of a “negro.” In the final stanza, though the poet

...stared  
and saw myself.  
'Dear God! He's Black like me,' I cried  
and took his hand in mine.  
Then, when I said 'You're Beautiful,'  
God turned to me with pride.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Carl Ellis, Jr., “Black Definitions,” *I-V Vine*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 4, BGEA Collection 300, Box 193, Folder 8.

<sup>43</sup> Ken Ripley, “Chrysalis,” *I-V Vine*, Vol 1, No. 3, 5, BGEA Collection 300, Box 193, Folder 8.



The poem uses the shifting nomenclature for racial identity—colored, negro, and black—to convey the poet’s discovery of blackness. With the phrase “Black like me” and with God’s assent to the beauty of blackness, the poem gives a basic affirmation of the legitimacy of pursuing black identity. However, judging from other sentiments expressed in the camp bulletin, this poem did not dissipate the uptight feelings that discussion on race had engendered.

Whatever insights white students gained or affirmations they offered, they understood the exploration of black identity in different terms than their black peers. For the latter, exploration of black identity was a means of finding an authentic Christianity apart from its utility in maintaining the racial order. White students, by contrast, saw black identity through the lens of colorblindness. Even the poem adopted a presumption that racial identity is inconsequential. The poet’s identification with blackness is intended as a statement of contrition for ignorance and apathy regarding racial discrimination. However, it also functions as an erasure of racial difference. Both the poet and the subject of the poem are black in the final stanzas, but the meaning of blackness and of racial difference more generally is left unexplored and is thus divorced from its relationship to America’s historic racial order. The erasure of racial difference, while incidentally touching on the constructed nature of racial identity, made no recognition of the disparities of power invested in different racial identities that underwrites racial subjugation. In questioning the pursuit of black identity as an orthodox practice, white students exercised the arbitrary power that the racial order had granted to them. Initially, they attempted to deny to black students autonomy to explore the topic of black identity;

and, the statements of contrition ignored the demand for autonomy and for greater authority to shape InterVarsity's leadership programs.<sup>44</sup>

Despite the systemic disparities of power, the experience at camp was formative one for black students and for the new campus minister Carl Ellis. In sessions for black students, Ellis had led them in exploring evangelical faith from the perspective of the black experience, a first for an InterVarsity event. In conversations with white attendees, students had articulated to white attendees why the exploration of black identity was important and how it fit into the strategy of lay missionary work on college campuses. They had also prompted people to consider evangelicalism's role in maintaining America's racial separate and unequal society. The dialog about racial issues was also a refreshing contrast to the evasion of race that marked evangelicalism's public dialog in previous years. Dialog also struck them as more constructive than the posture of open defiance that exponents of Black Power exhibited. Although they had not discussed substantive plans to combat racial discrimination, Ellis felt a gratifying sense of authority and accomplishment following the camp. The dialog signaled a potential end to the evasion of race in evangelical circles, and the potential to practice a more authentic Christianity not beholden to the dictates of America's racial hierarchy. Ellis and other TSA ministers would continue to develop programming for HBCU students that reflected insights gleaned from the summer of 1969.<sup>45</sup>

As TSA took the reins of collegiate ministry at HBCUs in the Mid-Atlantic, black students in other chapters sought to define how to be black and Christian in different

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Carl Ellis, Jr., Interview.

contexts. As public education became newly accessible to African Americans in the South, InterVarsity's campus minister Pete Hammond created an atmosphere of bi-racial fellowship for about one hundred and fifty students on around fifteen campuses in Louisiana and Mississippi. Under Hammond's supervision, InterVarsity had a few integrated campus chapters and conferences that challenged the social convention of racial separation and gave many students their first significant encounter with someone of another race. At conferences, black and white students shared bunkhouses and dining halls for the first time in their lives. They heard black and white pastors preaching from the same pulpit. Black students, both men and women, had their first experiences of authority over white students when they led integrated Bible studies. Likewise, white students like had their first experiences under the leadership of black peers.<sup>46</sup>

After substantial effort and personal risk to create bi-racial fellowship, Hammond invited TSA to connect the black participants with the Black Evangelical Renaissance. Bill Pannell, Tom Skinner's newly hired associate, traveled to the University of Southern Mississippi to meet with chapter member named Melvin Miller. The looming presence of Jim Crow in the Hattiesburg school had disturbed Miller. Fraternities remained segregated and the campus had no black representatives in the student government. InterVarsity was the only group that Miller could find on campus where black and white students met together. He attended an integrated bible study where he prayed for

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<sup>46</sup> For information on InterVarsity in Louisiana and Mississippi, see *For Christ and the University*, 235-64; For an encounter between black and white students see see "Urbana-Message" *His Magazine*, Vol 31 No 6, March 31, 1971; "Urbana-Response," *His Magazine*, Vol 31 No 6, March 31, 1971; "Integration Against the Odds," filmed 2001, [vimeo.com/104719903](https://vimeo.com/104719903) accessed November 8, 2017. Hammond referred to the difficulty and personal risk in locating a site for conferences that would accommodate an interracial gathering.

members to grow in their concern for one another. Miller developed a firm commitment to bi-racial fellowship and willingly endured the hardships that came with it. En route to a conference, Miller and a white student from his bible study were threatened by a gas station attendant waving an ax handle. The incident mimicked the actions of businessman Lester Maddox during a sit-in campaign a few years earlier. Miller and his friend avoided a serious incident on that particular day, and members of InterVarsity at The University of Southern Mississippi did not let the prospect of violence against them alter their participation in an integrated fellowship.<sup>47</sup>

Pannell visited Hattiesburg to help Miller consider how to involve more black students in InterVarsity chapters. Along with his commitment to integration, Melvin Miller considered himself a lay missionary to the few black students at Southern Mississippi. During Pannell's visit, Miller and Pannell hosted informal gatherings for black students to gauge their interest in bible study meetings just for black students. Miller's desire for integration and black evangelization echoed HBCU students' efforts to define black evangelicalism. He eagerly participated in bi-racial fellowship and, at the same time, looked to create venues for black students to discuss Christianity without white students present. Miller sought out the wisdom of white campus ministers to learn the disciplines of piety and lay missionary work while also seeking out black ministers to parse out true Christianity from the false Christianity whites wielded as a tool of racial subjugation. Miller's connection with InterVarsity and TSA helped him to provide some definition to his position as a small minority in a white evangelical organization. For

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<sup>47</sup> "Integration Against the Odds" film.

Miller, being black and Christian meant pursuing racial equality and exploring the meaning of black identity.

Miller's participation in the University of Southern Mississippi's InterVarsity chapter elicited a more tangible response from white evangelical students than did the dialog at camp. Randy Pope, a white student at the University of Southern Mississippi, unexpectedly became an advocate for integration after befriending Melvin Miller. His life had reflected the typical racial separation of Mississippi in the late 1960s. He was a senator in the white-only student government, a member of a white-only fraternity, and worshipped in church with no black congregants. At the invitation of his girlfriend, he attended an InterVarsity bible study where he met Miller. Miller's enthusiasm for his faith and his commitment to interracial unity impressed Pope. Months after befriending Miller, Pope went to his church's pastor to demand he invite a black pastor or student to speak to the congregation about their isolation. For Pope, encounters in a bi-racial campus group pushed him to engage with members of his own race to confront the legacy of racial exclusion.<sup>48</sup>

In the northern metropolis of New York City, one InterVarsity chapter had a number of African-American leaders who did not respond to the militancy of student protest with the same impulse to distance themselves from white religion or to invest in evangelization to black students. In contrast to homogeneous HBCU chapters and bi-racial chapters in the South, campuses in New York City had a multiracial constituencies,

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<sup>48</sup> "Urbana-Response" and "Integration Against the Odds." Pope's account of conversations with his church does not identify whether his church had a policy of excluding African Americans from worship, though many congregations maintained such policies well after the end of Jim Crow.

owing to the recent implementation of the city university's admission policies intended to ensure access to education for Hispanic and black residents. Revised admission policies were just the beginning of what historian Martha Biondi called New York City's transformation of higher education for which black and Puerto Rican students fought. There was a contentious process across racial lines to implement a new curriculum and programs to support first-generation college students, playing itself out between students, college administrators, and law enforcement.<sup>49</sup>

InterVarsity students touted themselves as an attractive contrast to the oppositional relationships exhibited on campus and elsewhere in New York City. The chapter at Brooklyn College began serendipitously when a small group of six Asian, black, and white students affiliated with InterVarsity in spring of 1969. The students sought out a faculty member named Barbara Benjamin as their sponsor after learning that she had served as a missionary in Ecuador. As she relates the story in a published account of the chapter, she explains that they came to value their multiracial composition as a testament to the authenticity of the Christian message. As the students' mentor, Benjamin sought to sustain InterVarsity's diverse constituency, believing that diversity would benefit InterVarsity members and could potentially motivate others to consider converting to Christianity. She encouraged members to attend InterVarsity's events so they could expand their cultural horizons and so they could address animosity between members of different racial and ethnic groups. She recognized that a common faith had brought students to InterVarsity meetings, but they otherwise lived and worshipped in

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<sup>49</sup> Martha Biondi, "Brooklyn College Belongs to Us: The Transformation of Higher Education in New York City," *The Black Campus Revolution*, (Berkeley, CA: The University of California Press, 2012), 114-141.

ethnically and racially distinct neighborhoods across the city. Thus, Benjamin sought to guide students through the difficulties they encountered as a multiracial group on a college campus in a newly diverse area of Brooklyn.<sup>50</sup>

Benjamin believed that closer proximity would help students expand beyond their own cultural horizons and work against de facto isolation. In actuality, proximity prompted conflicts between students. Benjamin alluded to an ongoing dispute between black and Caribbean students and between white and black students.<sup>51</sup> Although she does not elaborate on the substance of the disputes or how they may have been resolved, Benjamin suggests in her book that working through these conflicts helped students better understand one another. She welcomed conflicts because they revealed students' prejudices and self-centeredness, motivating them to seek God's forgiveness for these sinful behaviors and attitudes and God's aid in remedying them.

Benjamin also believed that proximity afforded some students beneficial resources to which they did not otherwise have access. She was especially pleased that Hispanic students received lay training in biblical interpretation so that they could assist pastors who had little formal preparation for ministry.<sup>52</sup> In some cases, Benjamin took unusual measures to ensure that the diverse constituents of Brooklyn College InterVarsity could attend training events. For instance, students from Hispanic and Asian communities had more difficulty attending InterVarsity's weekend conferences held outside of the city. Like many students, they had family and employment obligations that sometimes

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<sup>50</sup> Barbara Benjamin, *Impossible Community: A Story of Hardship and Hope at Brooklyn College in New York*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 1-30.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-30. In these pages, Benjamin offers an informal ethnology of the white, black, Asian, and Hispanic constituencies in InterVarsity.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

prevented them from going. Yet, Benjamin explained that weekend conference were more problematic for Hispanic and Asian students because it was not common for them to travel without people from their families. To overcome this obstacle, Benjamin met with students' parents to explain what their child was attending. Often parents gave permission provided that a sibling or cousin could accompany the student to the conference.<sup>53</sup>

As she wrote about these experiences in her book, Benjamin established that the relational hardships Brooklyn College InterVarsity participants endured gave them the hope of greater personal piety as well as greater cooperation across racial and ethnic lines. As the group grew from six to twenty participants by December 1970, it represented the racial and ethnic diversity of Brooklyn College, including a few Jewish students who converted to Christianity.<sup>54</sup>

Believing that Brooklyn College's InterVarsity was a remarkable contrast to the simmering racial and political conflicts on the campus, Benjamin encouraged members to be agents of harmony. On one occasion they responded to a clash between black and Jewish students. An argument over jukebox music in a student lounge escalated quickly, bringing members of the Black Panthers and Jewish Defense League onto campus. When InterVarsity members saw what was happening, they made an impromptu call for peace. Benjamin and students walked the campus hanging hastily scrawled posters that read "Love your Neighbor as Yourself" and "Love Your Enemies." They also prayed for a swift end to the conflict—all while police were arriving to make arrests. On another

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 30

<sup>54</sup> These conversions correspond with a movement among evangelical Christians to convert American Jews—initiated by converts from Judaism—that created conflicts between the two groups at Brooklyn College and elsewhere around the United States



occasion, InterVarsity's street-theater-style evangelistic program undercut the violent rhetoric of a leftist demonstration against the Vietnam War. Benjamin recalled that the students' singing, skits, and preaching won the crowd's attention over the SDS's staged hanging of President Nixon in effigy.<sup>55</sup>

In contrast to Ellis and Miller, black students in Brooklyn College's chapter used more typical methods of evangelization. Russell Weatherspoon, an African-American chapter leader, shared in the growing consensus against the war in Vietnam and was disturbed by the deaths of students at Kent State in the spring of 1970. Along with Benjamin, Weatherspoon urged the chapter to gear their evangelization to speak to the sense of discontent among college students. The result was the street theater event held the following fall. Weatherspoon concluded the event with a message drawn from Francis Schaeffer's critique of New Left radicals. Weatherspoon called war protestors in the audience to tend to their own dishonesty rather than denounce the misdeeds of the government. An act of repentance could make them more honest people and, in turn, would make the nation more honest. Likely, demonstrators in the audience would have given little credence to evangelical street theater with a conservative and individualist tone. However, unlike on campuses in the South, students in Brooklyn College's InterVarsity did not express despair that their message was inadequate to reach their peers; nor did black evangelicals seek to engage black students exclusively. Likely, the approach to evangelization reflected the influence of Benjamin. In later years, after

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 31-8.

becoming acquainted with the Black Evangelical Renaissance, Brooklyn College InterVarsity would tailor their evangelistic programs for black students.<sup>56</sup>

Although mentioned only briefly in the historical record, elsewhere in the metropolitan area black evangelical students did urge InterVarsity chapters to deal directly with issues of race. According to Paul Gibson, a group of black InterVarsity participants hoped to give greater attention to racial division in the nation by boycotting a training event for New York City students. In response, the regional director approached Gibson, InterVarsity's sole African-American campus minister. Gibson had tried unsuccessfully to launch chapters for black students in southern California. The director invited Gibson to relocate to New York City to address the concerns that African-American students had raised.<sup>57</sup>

The partnership between white and black evangelicals set in motion at the 1967 convention had produced moderate success in the South and there was potential to apply the insights elsewhere. Gibson's move to New York made him available to black students at Brooklyn College and to black students at other colleges who were looking for more substantive engagement with race issues. There were also small contingents of black students in various InterVarsity chapters around the country—some who occasionally attended and some who served as leaders. With input from Carl Ellis, Elward Ellis, and Paul Gibson, InterVarsity laid plans to extend the reach of black collegiate ministry to more students and more campuses. The centerpiece of the plan was recruiting black

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 33-4.

<sup>57</sup> Paul Gibson, interviewed by Keith Hunt, June 16, 1988. Audio available in BGEA Collection 300, T115. Transcript obtained from InterVarsity archivist Ned Hale.

students to the next Urbana convention to be held in December 1970. The three emphasized that the convention should build on the successes at campuses in the South. They wanted to bring together black evangelical students in other regions of the country who were isolated from one another and mobilize them for lay missionary work on their campuses. The three also pushed to rectify the neglect of racial division that had caused them so much consternation at the previous convention. To that end, the three steered the planning team to revise elements of the convention program that would allow them to tend to the tasks that black evangelical collegians had developed after 1967. They prepared a plenary session that would feature Tom Skinner speaking about America's racial crisis and a black gospel band to perform. They also planned a symposium for black students during the convention's afternoon and evening sessions that looked similar to the programming that TSA had used on campuses in the South. Rather than an impromptu disruption, the three orchestrated a convention that would showcase the Black Evangelical Renaissance.

During the fall of 1970, InterVarsity used a 20-minute promotional film shown in dorm lounges and lecture halls to recruit black students to the convention held at the end of December. The film opened with a two-minute montage of contemporary events. To the sounds of a djembe drum, audience members saw Black Panther Party members toting guns, police officers in riot gear, a woman wearing a gas mask, and a stained glass image of Ho Chi Minh. As the djembe slowed to a stop, a voice said "Interested in

solutions? Urbana '70: The Ninth InterVarsity Christian Fellowship Missionary Convention.”<sup>58</sup>

Following the opening images, the film featured black collegians rapping informally about the problems they faced as evangelicals in the era of Black Power. The students spoke against the charge that they were practicing a religion expressly designed to oppress them. The conversation also presented a lively exchange on the question of African Americans serving as missionaries in other countries. With so much racism and neglect of Black communities, said one woman, black Christians ought to commit themselves to American cities. Another woman announced her decision to serve as an overseas missionary under the auspices of a black missionary organization. At the close of the film, Elward Ellis, the director and the on-screen host, once again invited viewers to go to the Urbana Missionary Convention, saying that attendees could look forward to a black student caucus during the convention, as well as an address from Harlem’s gangster-turned-preacher Tom Skinner. The rap session was transparently scripted, but it effectively conveyed to its audience that the Urbana Missionary Convention was *the* place for young black evangelicals to gather to discuss these pressing issues. By mid-December, around seven hundred black students had registered for the convention, more than three times the number that had attended in 1967.<sup>59</sup>

Urbana 1970 would become a watershed moment in the history of collegiate ministry and in the course of evangelicals’ reckoning with their legacy of racial discrimination. On the one hand, the interjection of a distinctive programming for African

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<sup>58</sup> “What Went Down at Urbana ’67,” Vimeo video, <https://vimeo.com/42230364>, posted 2011.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

Americans at a missionary-themed convention was a significant accomplishment, brought into being by the disruption at the 1967 convention. Moreover, the recruitment of seven hundred black evangelical students boded well for promulgating a national movement of black evangelical collegians. On the other hand, the juxtaposition of race issues with the missionary enterprise jeopardized the successes since 1967. Supporters of foreign missionary mobilization challenged the use of the Urbana convention as a venue for discussing America's racial crisis. Their objections precipitated a debate about the importance of racial identity formation in evangelical communities, a heated conversation that exposed both the substantive disagreements about what defined the missionary enterprise and a troublesome connection between evangelicalism's uneasy conscience and its ongoing patterns of racial discrimination and exclusion. In forcing deeper debate and reflection on these issues, Urbana 1970 would prove to be an even bigger disruption than 1967.

From 1966-1970, black evangelical students had an enriching but complicated engagement with evangelical faith as participants in InterVarsity chapters. They found in their chapters a connection to a larger evangelical world that deepened their sense of belonging to it despite the preponderance of white participation and influence.

InterVarsity acquainted them with essential elements of evangelicalism: the cultivation of a personal relationship to God through devotional practices; the belief that conversion to Christianity held the power to rectify personal shortcomings as well as the political and social challenges that humanity faced; and the urgency of mission work to bring about conversion around the world. InterVarsity motivated them to work as lay missionaries

among their black peers, but their evangelization efforts met with fierce objections that evangelical faith was a white man's religion and thus antithetical to the struggle against racial inequality. Perceived as an anomaly to white evangelicals and to black activists, black evangelical students used their participation in InterVarsity chapters to determine for themselves how to be black *and* Christian. In turn, their position of influence within InterVarsity continued to undermine the specific claim that foreign mission work was the priority for American evangelicalism, as well as the presumed authority of white evangelicals to define the movement's priorities.

## Chapter 4

### A Nexus of Conflict: America's Racial Crisis and Mission Mobilization in InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, 1969-1974

In the first twenty-four hours of the 1970 Urbana convention, evangelical students heard two very different takes on the missionary enterprise. David Howard, a former missionary to Latin America, argued that mission work would not be effective *unless* it prioritized preaching repentance to potential converts. Tom Skinner, a Harlem-based evangelist, argued that mission work would not be effective *until* it addressed the problem of racial inequality. Howard and Skinner's attempts to reconcile the incongruent elements of their positions did not satisfy students. Instead, compelled by Skinner's address, many of the twelve thousand in attendance sought out more opportunities to discuss what Skinner called America's "racial crisis."<sup>1</sup> White students tried to attend the sessions set aside for black students. Black students pressed to abandon the scheduled program and focus exclusively on race issues. With these actions and in other ways, students essentially turned the missionary convention into a forum for discussing race issues. By the end of the convention, excitement mingled with uncertainty as attendees—students as well as campus ministers, missionaries, and pastors—tried to make sense of the events in which they had just participated. Everyone wondered if the evangelical movement might at last put its full weight behind working for racial equality. However, they were divided about the implications of such a decision. Some anticipated that it

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<sup>1</sup> Tom Skinner, "The U.S. Racial Crisis and World Evangelization," John Stott, ed., *Christ, The Liberator*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1971), 189.

could accelerate the advance of the faith, while others forewarned that it could spell the demise of the missionary enterprise altogether. The convention reignited evangelicalism's uneasy conscience that would once again bring black and white evangelicals into conflict.

As evangelicals answered those questions in various ways, two factions within InterVarsity mobilized themselves to different ends: one focused on America's racial crisis and another focused on foreign mission mobilization. Along with Skinner's address, the prominent display of the Black Evangelical Renaissance at the convention had sparked the curiosity of students and their desire to reorient the conference around race issues. To these students and to others, the Black Evangelical Renaissance represented the possibility that evangelicalism could finally realize the vision to change the world through socially conscious evangelization. Some students and campus ministers looked to sustain InterVarsity chapters that would address the racial crisis as a component of their mission work on university campuses. Yet, to David Howard and supporters of foreign mission mobilization, the Black Evangelical Renaissance represented an imminent drift away from a distinctive evangelical faith. To protect against that possibility, Howard led a group of campus ministers in lobbying leaders of InterVarsity to re-establish mission mobilization as the top priority for the organization. At the close of 1973, the Urbana convention program studiously avoided the topic of racial inequality and the two factions would square off in a conflict that jeopardized InterVarsity's cooperation with black evangelicals. Many black students and pastors ended their affiliation with InterVarsity, while those who remained had to figure out how they would move forward in an organization whose leaders had used orthodoxy to justify the exclusion of African Americans from the reins of authority.



In his first year on the job with InterVarsity, David Howard came across a pervasive distaste for the missionary enterprise both outside and inside of evangelical Christianity. He had spent more than a decade as a missionary in Colombia and, upon returning to the United States in 1968, took a position as the Director of Missions. He was tasked with facilitating students' participation in the missionary enterprise through their chapter prayer meetings, with their donations to missionaries, and with solicitations to become missionaries upon graduation. On a visit to the University of California-Berkeley, he had attended an academic conference that rejected the premise of mission work as an extension of colonial rule. As a veteran missionary, he was also aware that some governments had policies that restricted or forbade missionary work. In fact, he became a missionary in Colombia only after such restrictions had been lifted. Howard had also been apprised of the growing criticism among black evangelicals whose protests had now prompted InterVarsity to add a symposium for black students to the upcoming missionary convention of 1970.<sup>2</sup> Carl Ellis and Paul Gibson had initiated a protest at the Urbana Mission Convention in 1967. They now worked as campus ministers—Ellis at historically black institutions and Gibson at colleges in New York City. Howard met Ellis, Gibson, and other campus ministers in the summer of 1969 at InterVarsity's orientation session for its newly hired staff.

After a brief presentation, Howard's pleas to support mission work in InterVarsity chapters struck the youthful crew of new ministers as woefully out of touch with the

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<sup>2</sup> David Howard, Interview by Paul Erickson, May 21, 1993, BGEA Collection 484, audio file T8, 38:55, available online at [archon.wheaton.edu/?p=collections/findingaid&id=1723&q=&rootcontentid=364634#id364634](http://archon.wheaton.edu/?p=collections/findingaid&id=1723&q=&rootcontentid=364634#id364634), accessed March 26, 2019.

contemporary social and political upheavals of the day. As they chided him in their private conversations over lunch, their impressions of Howard reached the ear of John W. Alexander, president of InterVarsity and, at that current moment, head of the orientation sessions for new ministers.<sup>3</sup> InterVarsity had encouraged missionary work at its triennial Urbana convention since 1946 and its chapters operated as missionary societies to university campuses. The new ministers' objections indicated to Alexander and Howard a naiveté about a basic Christian doctrine; or, more alarming, it could spell a sea change within the organization if such objections became commonplace among ministers and students. So, Alexander put other sessions on hold and had Howard again make a case for the importance of mission work. For the rest of the day, the two generations of evangelicals hashed out their differences. The younger generation said that ignoring the social unrest in the world limited the credibility of Christianity, while the older generation said that the focus on social unrest might distract potential converts from more essential elements of the faith. As they talked, they all affirmed their belief that the Bible obliged Christians to advance their faith, and they all expressed their commitment to that end. However, agreement about the need to advance the faith did not resolve the dispute. Young ministers did not soften their criticism that foreign mission work was a misplaced priority; nor did the conversation ease Howard's anxiety about the potential for a new and insidious trajectory for the evangelical college ministry.<sup>4</sup>

The discussion between David Howard and the new campus ministers had taken place in one form or another between evangelicals many times but had grown more

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<sup>3</sup> John W. Alexander came to his position as head of InterVarsity in 1964 after serving as the chair of the Geography Department at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. He is not related to Fred and John F. Alexander, the publishers of *Freedom Now*.

<sup>4</sup> David Howard, Interview, 39:50.

contentious in recent years, especially on matters of race. In InterVarsity, black students had already confronted advocates of foreign mission work for ignoring racial conflict in American cities and for having no effective response to anti-religious sentiments among black activists. As indicated by Ellis, Gibson, and other white campus ministers who sparred with Howard, support for that position had increased since 1967 even among the organization's leaders. Ellis, Gibson, and other black ministers had been asked to retool the next Urbana convention so that it would directly address America's unfolding racial crisis. It would be the first time that InterVarsity gave this level of attention to issues of race at a missionary convention. Despite the interventions of black students and ministers, it was becoming clear to those present at the new ministers' orientation that the question of merging social concern with evangelization remained an unsettled issue. Few among them might have anticipated it at the time, but the Urbana convention of 1970 would make that disagreement very public, bringing the intensity of evangelicalism's uneasy conscience to new heights and igniting conflicts between white and black evangelicals for years afterward.

Howard's experiences during the first year on the job—especially his day-long defense of mission work to otherwise committed professional campus ministers—would shape his tenure as InterVarsity's Director of Missions. While objections from outside evangelical circles were not new, the severe criticism of the missionary enterprise in 1969 was a marked departure from the first two decades of InterVarsity's collegiate ministry that had no small part in mobilizing young men and women into foreign missionary service. David Howard himself had arrived at his career as a missionary in part because of InterVarsity's first missionary convention in 1946. Following graduation in 1949,

Howard worked for InterVarsity to encourage students to enter missionary work—the very task he hoped to encourage among the newly hired ministers. He then became a missionary himself in Latin America. Jim Elliot, Howard’s friend and brother-in-law, had epitomized the missionary devotion of postwar evangelicals that InterVarsity hoped to cultivate in college students. Howard brought that level of devotion to his own career as a missionary and recognized the role that the missionary convention had played in directing his generation of college students to missionary work.

Howard thus fashioned his position as Missions Director to become the steward of InterVarsity’s historic role in mobilizing college students for foreign missionary service. He hoped to resuscitate the waning interest in mission work and also to ensure that the Urbana convention continued to recruit missionaries. To that end, Howard turned to the history of the American missionary movement. He observed that students had been among the most influential in shaping it and the most willing to volunteer for foreign missionary service. He wrote a book to reignite such passions among current collegians. The publication of the book coincided with the 1970 Urbana convention. Attendees received a copy of the book, entitled *Student Power in World Missions*, and also heard Howard give an abridged version to start the gathering.

When students arrived to the Urbana convention on December 27, 1970, they would take in a rich and engaging program freighted with multiple agendas conveyed by many voices. As at past conventions, Howard would issue a call for students to commit themselves to foreign missionary service. Missionary agencies would also counsel students about how to make good on their commitments. With social and political upheavals in the United States and around the world still simmering, other speakers

would present social concern as a necessary element of mission work, hoping that greater attention to the topic than in years past might stoke students' commitment. Samuel Escobar was slated to give a plenary address on social concern from his perspective as a Peruvian minister working with the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students. Unlike at past conventions, Skinner would speak at length about racial unrest in the United States and ask the evangelical movement to do something about it. With Carl Ellis and Paul Gibson facilitating, the convention would also address black students directly with a symposium intended to bolster a nascent collegiate ministry that had taken shape since 1967. Despite the disparate agendas and voices, convention planners intended to present a cohesive picture of evangelical mission work and demonstrate that a new consensus on unresolved questions was on the horizon. The convention program did bring about lively discussion among many of the students as planners had anticipated. However, the convention managed to stoke as much controversy about the missionary enterprise as enthusiasm. After their encounters with the Black Evangelical Renaissance, students focused their attention on addressing America's historic legacy of racism.

Of all the voices slated to speak at the convention, students heard from David Howard first. He gave the opening plenary address in which he articulated the commitment to foreign mission that had shaped his life and marked the convention for more than two decades. Hoping to stir that same commitment in college students, Howard told the audience that students of past generations had consistently been among the vanguard of leaders training the attention of American Christians on the importance of mission work: students from Andover College had mediated the creation of the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Mission in the early nineteenth century;

decades later, a new generation of students involved in the YMCA formed the Student Volunteer Movement (SVM) with the express purpose of mobilizing themselves and their peers into foreign missionary work. Howard pointed out that the students' commitment to God and their belief that people everywhere needed God's salvation lent the missionary task its urgency and vitality. In fact, Howard claimed that these dual commitments had been the vital energy of evangelical Christianity for more than a century.<sup>5</sup>

Having outlined the source of evangelicalism's strength, Howard then turned to the question of an expansive missionary enterprise. Drawing on the history of the SVM, he expressed his belief that social concern could sap evangelicalism's vital energy. Like InterVarsity, SVM had held numerous conventions for students to apprise them of the state of mission work around the world and solicit their participation in it. In the interwar years, Howard told students, SVM's conventions introduced new topics for consideration such as how to address the nation's economic and racial inequality. SVM saw a precipitous decline as these topics became fixtures within the organization. Fewer SVM members committed themselves to foreign mission work and, in general, students abandoned the organization that Howard described as the proverbial sinking ship. Over little more than a decade, SVM had expanded its scope and almost ceased to exist. Howard saw the same possibility in the questions entertained at the present Urbana convention. In his address, he spoke with some authority and great sympathy about contemporary social and political issues, but he insisted that the key to InterVarsity's vital energy lay in maintaining a priority on preaching repentance to the world. Whatever

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<sup>5</sup> David Howard, "Student Power in World Mission," John Stott, ed., *Christ the Liberator*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1971). Howard later published an extended form of the address in a book: David Howard, *Student Power in World Mission*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1970).

efforts evangelicals might advise to address social concern, Howard urged students not to wander too far afield from what he saw as the core missionary task.<sup>6</sup>

On the following evening, as Tom Skinner prepared to deliver a different take on the missionary enterprise, he felt the need to clear the air. “There has already been some attempt at this convention to put me in direct opposition to a previous speaker,” he said, “and, I want you to know, that is not the case.”<sup>7</sup> Since there had only been a few speakers so far, attendees probably understood that Skinner meant David Howard. Some may have even seen a handbill distributed outside the convention arena earlier in the day that had prompted Skinner’s extemporaneous comments. A small group of students had printed a denunciation of Howard that carried a fabricated endorsement from Skinner.<sup>8</sup> Although Skinner did not directly refer to the incident, his opening words put to rest any presumption of enmity for Howard. He reminded his audience that the convention purposefully presented different points of view, but all the speakers were nonetheless committed to “communicating the lordship of Jesus Christ to the world.”<sup>9</sup> Then, for the next hour, Skinner gave an address that had been three years in the making. Before an audience of twelve thousand evangelicals, Skinner made a case that the severity of America’s race problem demanded a new approach to missionary work wherein evangelicals counteracted racial discrimination. At the same time, Skinner set out to

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> The text of the address is published in Tom Skinner, “The U.S. Racial Crisis and World Evangelization,” John Stott, ed., *Christ, The Liberator*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1971). Extemporaneous opening comments accessible in an audio recording <https://urbana.org/message/us-racial-crisis-and-world-evangelism>, 1:49, accessed May 20, 2018.

<sup>8</sup> David Howard relates the story of the plagiarized endorsement from Skinner. Howard, Interview, 18:15.

<sup>9</sup> Skinner, “The U.S. Racial Crisis and World Evangelization” audio, 2:05.

challenge evangelicalism's view of itself as a beneficent force in the world that acted outside the fray of racial conflict.

He began his address with a history of racism in America that exposed evangelical Christianity's complicity in the oppression of African Americans. Over the past three hundred and fifty years, said Skinner, the nation's political, economic, and religious institutions had conspired against African Americans with a pernicious rhetoric of racial inferiority and a powerful regime of subjugation. Skinner described how the rhetoric and regime dehumanized African Americans and corrupted American society through the immoral practice of breaking families apart under slavery; through the violent practice of lynching once slavery ended; and through the implementation of discriminatory housing policies in Northern cities during the Great Migration.

Throughout his address, Skinner held up a mirror for the mostly white audience to see their historic and ongoing participation in racial discrimination. "To a great extent," he exclaimed, "the evangelical church has supported the status quo. It supported slavery. It supported segregation. It preached against any attempt of the black man to stand on his own two feet."<sup>10</sup> Skinner declared that evangelicals had been directly responsible for providing a religious justification for racial inferiority in their embrace of the curse of Ham; nor was the issue irrelevant for evangelicals in the present. "I can name to you right now," Skinner announced to the audience, "at least five Christian colleges and at least a dozen Bible institutions in this country that still teach that in their classroom today."<sup>11</sup>

Skinner reserved his strongest words to reprimand evangelicals in the present who glossed over the grievances of African Americans with a call for law and order. With

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<sup>10</sup> Skinner, 194.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 191-2.



allusions to meeting urban unrest with military force, Skinner observed that law and order always applied to frustrated black teens and never to the agents of exploitation in black communities such as landlords who charge high rents for dilapidated apartments, building inspectors who ignore deplorable conditions, and police in the service of racketeers not residents. Amidst his account of corruption in urban communities, Skinner railed against white evangelicals who offered African Americans salvation while ignoring the system that oppressed them on a daily basis. He told them that “any gospel...that does not speak to the issue of inequality, any gospel that does not want to go where people are hungry and poverty-stricken and set them free is not the gospel.”<sup>12</sup> For Skinner, the expansive missionary program was a much-needed corrective among evangelicals who ignored the various manifestations of racial inequality in deference to preaching eternal life.

In his unflinching and wide-ranging rebuke of evangelicalism, Skinner wanted to rouse his audience from their indifference to the oppression of black people. Repeating the critique of other black evangelicals, Skinner presented evangelical complicity as a severe obstacle to the missionary enterprise. “How do you...communicate the message of Jesus Christ to a society that has been cut off from the rest of society,” Skinner asked, “when those people who wish to proclaim Christ have participated in their oppression?”<sup>13</sup> In his first foray into campus ministry, Skinner believed that whites could not effectively evangelize African-American students. Having reflected on the issue further, he now offered a reinterpretation of the missionary enterprise rather than a prohibition on whites evangelizing in black communities. He told the audience that the missionary enterprise was a divine program of liberation for the oppressed and the oppressor alike. He insisted

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 205.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 197.

that evangelicals preach to the oppressed about divine liberation from desperate circumstances as well as from sinfulness. He also insisted that evangelicals preach divine liberation to the oppressor—that is, not simply forgiveness for the sinfulness of oppressive acts but liberation from the role as an agent of oppression.

Through his reinterpretation, Skinner expanded the scope of the missionary enterprise to encompass the contrasting conditions of black and white Americans. He sought to validate the contemporary call from African Americans for liberation and asked white audience members to see themselves as in need of liberation as well. He also sought to resolve the reluctance to engage in social issues. As divine liberation, Skinner claimed, the missionary enterprise would simultaneously preach a gospel of salvation to the sinner and of hope to the suffering. More provocative, though, Skinner spoke of missionary work as a subversive act meant to disrupt the status quo not to support it. He argued that the missionary enterprise is best understood as a fifth column action that could dismantle systems of oppression such as racial subjugation by liberating both the agents and objects of oppression.<sup>14</sup> Given the contemporary political climate, audience members must have associated his statements with any number of radical attempts to disrupt America’s political and social institutions.

As Skinner advanced an argument that mission work was essentially the work of radicals, he also took pains to distinguish the radicalism he proposed from the destructive tenor of contemporary radicalism. To this end, he portrayed Jesus as a revolutionary figure who had challenged Roman subjugation of those living in ancient Palestine. However, Jesus stood out from other revolutionaries who had “burned down buildings”

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 204.

to get “the Roman honkey off [their] backs.”<sup>15</sup> Such phrases indicate that Skinner had in mind black students in the audience who had sympathy for or perhaps endorsed contemporary radicalism. Whereas he wanted to convince white audience members of the necessity of radicalism to overturn racial subjugation, Skinner wanted to steer black students toward what he saw as Jesus’s version of radicalism. Jesus, said Skinner, did not seek the destruction of Rome but instead undermined Roman authority with subversive acts and statements that liberated people and earned him the scorn of governing officials. Evoking the specter of revolution that some welcomed and others feared, Skinner claimed that Jesus’s resurrection was “one of the greatest political coups of all time.”<sup>16</sup> In his final moments at the pulpit, he gave a booming imperative calling audience members to be radicals in Jesus’s new order: “Go into a world that’s enslaved, a world that’s filled with hunger and poverty and racism...Proclaim liberation to the captives. Preach sight to the blind. Set at liberty them that are bruised. Go into the world and tell men [sic] who are bound mentally, spiritually, and physically ‘The Liberator has come.’”<sup>17</sup> Skinner thus commissioned white and black evangelicals to the radical work of a liberative missionary enterprise. The audience received their commission with thunderous applause as well as few enthusiastic whistles.<sup>18</sup>

Skinner had provided a stunning synthesis of black scholarship and activism to reinterpret mission work as liberation. His incisive gloss of evangelical complicity in racial oppression depended on the work of Lerone Bennett, Jr., and others who placed

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 205.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 208.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>18</sup> Extemporaneous response found on Skinner, “The U.S. Racial Crisis and World Evangelization” audio, 57:17.

race and racial conflict at the center of their study of America history.<sup>19</sup> As a means to bring down America's system of racial privilege, Skinner's program of divine liberation was less insistent than other African Americans about the need to keep white Americans at a distance. Skinner applied his insights about liberation more broadly and universally than James Cone. In a nascent black liberation theology, Cone had emphasized the liberation of African Americans from the specific elements of a widespread and longstanding regime to subjugate them. Skinner had articulated a gospel that could liberate African Americans from subjugation and could liberate white evangelicals from their complicity in subjugating others. The key to liberation in these and other circumstances was religious conversion. In contrast, Cone's idea of liberation gave little attention to conversion and averred any utility beyond the liberation of African Americans.<sup>20</sup> James Forman, a seasoned provocateur on behalf of Black Power, had no patience for a theology of liberation or for cooperation with white Americans. Instead, Forman had made a series of disruptions to congregational worship services in 1969 to demand financial restitution in the amount of \$500 million from the religious institutions that had played a central role in creating and maintaining racial subjugation. Working with the National Black Economic Development Conference, Forman earmarked the

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<sup>19</sup> Skinner provided no overt references to his sources, but the information he presents appears in Lerone Bennett, Jr., *Before the Mayflower: A History of Black America*, (Chicago: Johnson Publishing, 1962). Bennett and other black authors appeared frequently on recommended reading lists circulated in InterVarsity and in other evangelical organizations. For an example that was reprinted in various publications see Lois Ottoway, "Read, Baby, Read: A First Step to Action," *Christianity Today*, December 19, 1969, 7.

<sup>20</sup> James Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, (New York: Seabury Press, 1969), 116-134.

funds for an ambitious program for the economic benefit of African Americans but managed to collect only around \$500 thousand.<sup>21</sup>

While Skinner's posture never matched Cone or Forman's toward white religion, their sentiments informed his agenda to bend evangelicalism's resources and will toward ending racial inequality. Skinner had brokered a partnership with InterVarsity with less extractive terms than Forman had demanded from denominational institutions. Although Skinner might have preferred to run an independent operation, InterVarsity and TSA agreed to pool their resources toward the advancement of black collegiate ministry. As he addressed the missionary convention, he used the compelling image of liberation and adapted it to take the missionary enterprise in new directions.

Upon hearing Skinner's message of liberation, many students in attendance turned their attention to freeing the convention from its stated theme of foreign mission mobilization. In fact, a small group of white evangelical students had come to the convention with that intention. Their complaints against the missionary enterprise matched those of the newly hired ministers but this group had adopted the tactics of the destructive radicalism that Skinner had warned against. After attempting to drive a wedge between Howard and Skinner with handbills, the group of students followed the convention director Paul Little back to his hotel room to issue their demands to him in-

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<sup>21</sup>James Forman, "The Black Manifesto: To the White Christian Churches and the Jewish Synagogues in the United States of America and All Other Racist Institutions," (Belmont, Massachusetts: American Opinion, 1969). See also Jennifer Harvey's treatment of the churches' responses to the Manifesto in *Dear White Christians: For Those Still Longing for Racial Reconciliation*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2014), 103-131; For the amount collected from religious institutions, see "Black Manifesto," *Encyclopedia of African-American Culture and History*, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/biographies/historians-us-biographies/black-manifesto> accessed May 2, 2019.

person. They wanted the convention to mobilize evangelicals to protest the war in Vietnam rather than for foreign mission service and to take an even stronger stand against racial and economic injustice. One member of the group declared to Little that he would shed his blood to achieve their aims. Little's associate, a former college hockey player of large stature, volunteered to do the shedding if the students would not stop pestering Little. Throughout the week, municipal and campus authorities were on alert lest the group make good on their threats of violence.<sup>22</sup> Apart from this group, though, Skinner's message motivated students to look for ways to delve more deeply into the topic of America's racial crisis.

Brooklyn College's InterVarsity chapter had sent a multiracial delegation to the Urbana Convention where Skinner's address and the symposium for black students redirected their approach to campus evangelization. Through the influence of their faculty sponsor Barbara Benjamin, Brooklyn College's InterVarsity promoted a typically evangelical message that devotion to God could put to rest conflicts between groups of people. As they encountered the Black Evangelical Renaissance at Urbana, the chapter came to see that positioning evangelicalism above the fray of racial and political conflict might signal a certain disregard for the pressing issues of the day. Moreover, they recognized the problem that the colorblind approach to evangelization posed for black members of InterVarsity caught between evangelicalism and the black revolution.

Throughout the convention, black students from Brooklyn College confided in their mentor Benjamin sharing the insights, questions, and concerns about the wide variety of topics from the sessions. One student approached Benjamin one evening to say,

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<sup>22</sup> Information about white students provided in Howard, Interview, 18:15.

“I just received Christ as my savior!”<sup>23</sup> Though an active chapter member, she told Benjamin, she had committed herself to God for the first time. Other disclosures were more somber. In one session, Skinner gave a presentation about internalized racism and its effects on the self-worth of African Americans. The session prompted black students to recount to others in their chapter stories of their demeaning encounters with white people. They spoke of suspicious looks while walking in white neighborhoods; a teacher refusing to call on a black student in class; poor treatment on the job from white employers. One chapter member applying to medical school related that a professor at Brooklyn College told her that he did not write recommendations for black students.<sup>24</sup> The response to these stories surprised Benjamin who had expected the topic might stir up animosity between black students and other chapter members. Instead, she observed that the black symposium and the forthright discussion about discrimination was bringing Brooklyn College students closer to God and to each other. Reflecting on the convention years later, Benjamin wrote that the positive results from Urbana 1970 had convinced her of the necessity of exploring black evangelical identity and to tailor evangelization for black students.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to conversations between chapter members, students found other ways to explore America’s racial crisis during the convention. Black students relished Skinner’s denunciation of racial discrimination and the intense camaraderie of the black symposium. For them, the convention was primarily about exploring black identity in evangelical circles while mission mobilization was one piece of their conversation. With

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<sup>23</sup> Benjamin, 49.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 39-55.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 54-5.

a black-only policy for symposium sessions, white students wondered what was going on in racially exclusive sessions. Skinner's address had piqued their interest and a few of the most curious tried to enter symposium sessions only to be turned away at the door.<sup>26</sup> At one point during an informal conversation in a dormitory lounge, black students asked white students to leave so they could commiserate on the topic at hand among black students only. The white students complied but determined to find some venue for discussing race issues. Since the convention had not provided such an outlet, white students created one for themselves. They requested a forum to talk things over with their black peers. In a five-hour session that lasted into the late hours of the night, white students aired their grievances in a question and answer session that resembled a much smaller forum in North Carolina sixteen months prior and suggests Carl Ellis's hand in shaping its format. As the session unfolded, white students laid aside their offense and began asking for help to overcome their racism. "How do I know where I'm prejudiced?" asked one white student, "What kind of mistakes should I avoid as I try to relate to blacks?" Black students fielded these types of questions with encouragement to "make mistakes" that might prompt more genuine interracial friendships.<sup>27</sup>

Given black and white students' immense appetite for the topic, America's racial crisis became the most important aspect of the convention for many attendees and essentially eclipsed Urbana's traditional emphasis on mission mobilization. With input from Carl Ellis and Elward Ellis, convention planners had responded to objections about Urbana 1967 by creating a program with not a little attention to the racial crisis, particularly in a symposium to explore black evangelical identity. They had thus added

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 46-47.

<sup>27</sup> *His Magazine*, "Urbana in Black and White," Vol 31, No 6, March 1971, 7.



two ambitious goals to the convention that typically had a single-minded focus: they intended the program to broaden support for the importance of social concern and to gain momentum for black collegiate ministry, all without detracting from the task of mobilizing missionaries. However, the convention had engendered among black students greater opposition to foreign mission mobilization—in spite of Howard and Skinner’s attempts to locate racial equality within the missionary enterprise and their magnanimous spirit toward each other. Some members of the black symposium maintained that the emphasis on foreign mission minimized America’s racial crisis. They made a similar request of Little that radical white students had made, although without the threat of violence. They asked him to drop the scheduled plenary sessions in order to focus the remainder of the time on the issues that Skinner had discussed in his address though without the threats of violence.<sup>28</sup>

With two separate groups asking for changes, Little must have realized just how ambitious and perhaps foolish it was to try to address America’s racial history while also mobilizing students for foreign mission work. By the end of the convention, the two agendas must have seemed diametrically opposed. Howard himself had said that working toward racial equality had been detrimental to evangelicalism in the past and could potentially be so again; while Skinner had said that refusal to work for racial equality had been and would continue to be detrimental to evangelicalism. Although the details of deliberations between Little and students were not recorded, Little likely felt himself in a no-win situation. The convention was well equipped to present opposing viewpoints but had no means to arbitrate when issues remained contentious. Whatever response he gave

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<sup>28</sup> Hunt and Hunt, 276-7.

to students, Little would seem to take one side over the other in an unresolved dispute about the nature and scope of mission work. In the end, Little must have considered that rearranging the program in the middle would have been too disruptive to a large and meticulously planned gathering and that Skinner's address and black symposium would be the extent of the formal attention Urbana could give to America's racial crisis. He declined their request and black students did not take steps to press the point further.<sup>29</sup>

The American racial crisis was the most contentious subject during the convention, but other plenary sessions brought to light new developments in the missionary enterprise from around the world that also pushed against the status quo. Samuel Escobar gave an address arguing that social concern was important on a global scale and not just in the United States. Speaking about collegiate ministry in Latin America, he explained that liberation theology informed students' evangelization efforts at their universities and in their society. If audience members associated Skinner's message with black radicalism, Escobar's message would have brought to mind Catholicism and Marxism—two mainstays of evangelical suspicions.<sup>30</sup> Byang Kato, a Nigerian theologian, presented the growing trend among formerly missionized Christians toward autonomy from Western missionaries. While many around the world rejected the missionary enterprise out of hand as a tool of colonization, missionized evangelicals sought to extend their faith to others and also insisted on doing so without the overweening influence of Westerners. Kato made clear that Africans, Asians, and Latin Americans did want Western missionaries but in supporting roles. He even directed comments to African Americans urging them to come alongside African churches and not

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Samuel Escobar, "Social Concern," John S. Stott, ed., *Christ, The Liberator*, 103-12.

to wait until America's racial crisis was solved to consider the invitation.<sup>31</sup> At least one student obliged Kato. Ron Mitchell, an African-American student and member of the gospel band Soul Liberation, served as a missionary in Sierra Leone after the convention.<sup>32</sup>

As with African-American evangelicals, Escobar, Kato, and many others outside the West placed the issues of social concern and autonomy at the center of their understanding of themselves as evangelicals and of the missionary enterprise. In many ways, the questions about how best to do mission work in a corrupt and volatile world sprang from a postcolonial moment following World War II wherein formerly missionized communities from around the world vied for greater participation and influence in global evangelicalism. They created indigenous congregations and leadership structures to establish autonomy from Western agencies and missionaries. Pius Wakatama, a theologian from Rhodesia, proposed a moratorium on mission work from the West. Like Kato, he believed that indigenous Christians should develop independent institutions for theological education and missionary training. At the local level, the move toward autonomy changed patterns of worship and upset conventional lines of authority that flowed from western missionary to indigenous congregations. In some places, indigenous congregations replaced mission stations and inverted the demographic makeup from missionaries worshipping with a few converts to converts worshipping with

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<sup>31</sup> Byang Kato, *Christ, The Liberator*, 163-170; see also Francis Manana, "Kato, Byang Henry," *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*, <https://dacb.org/stories/nigeria/kato-legacy/> accessed May 16, 2018.

<sup>32</sup> Ronald G. Mitchell, "What's Next?" *Believing and Obeying Jesus Christ: The Urbana 1979 Compendium*, (Downers Grove, IL: 1980), 19-25.

a few missionaries. Likewise, indigenous pastors and lay members replaced missionaries as teachers and leaders of congregations.<sup>33</sup>

Across the globe, the move for autonomy had introduced new questions about the relationship between Christians in the so-called first and third worlds. What influence would indigenous pastors and teachers have in defining evangelical orthodoxy and advancing the missionary enterprise? How would Westerners respond to their authority in disputes over orthodoxy and mission strategy? Indigenization gained a great deal of traction among evangelicals across the world as a matter of greater efficiency in the missionary enterprise. Reporting the benefits of indigenization for a Western audience, Donald McGavran claimed “people like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic, or class barriers.”<sup>34</sup> The maxim became known as the homogenous unit principle, and it fueled missionary work into the twenty-first century. As the logic of the homogenous unit principle took hold in evangelical circles, some evangelical congregations arranged themselves into narrow demographic constituencies that appealed to potential converts similar to its members. Yet the motivations of indigenous congregations had less to do with efficiency than with establishing a measure of independence from Western missionaries. Embracing indigenous mission work for its

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<sup>33</sup> See Wakatama’s various publications: He presented the need for theological education at the 1966 Berlin Congress on World Evangelization and published a mature articulation of his vision in *Independence for the Third World Church: An African’s Perspective on Missionary Work* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1976).

<sup>34</sup> The phrase summarizing the homogenous unit principle comes from Donald McGavran and C. Peter Wagner, *Understanding Church Growth*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), 163. C. Peter Wagner elaborated on the utility of homogenous congregations in his dissertation “Culturally Homogenous Churches and American Social Pluralism: Some Religious and Ethical Implications,” (PhD, University of Southern California, 1977).

efficiency muted those motivations in public discourse and thereby blunted its attack on white hegemony.

In the decades following World War II, indigenization had an ambivalent status as both an expedient means of advancing the missionary enterprise and as a severe disruption to well-established conceptions and institutions. Thus, evangelicalism's open question about of an expansive missionary enterprise—with the correlative issues of social concern and autonomy—was intricately linked to the historic enterprise to establish Western dominance over the world and the countervailing struggle to dismantle it. To resolve the question of whether and how to expand the missionary enterprise, evangelicals engaged in substantive debates about orthodoxy and strategy as well as a contest to establish a more equitable base of authority between the first and third worlds. The contest played out in a number of arenas during the 1970s as evangelicals attempted to come to terms with the opportunity and challenge that indigenization presented.<sup>35</sup>

InterVarsity became one arena of contestation as the convention triggered responses to the Black Evangelical Renaissance at the 1970 convention. For David Howard, Urbana 1970 had confirmed his misgivings about social concern. In his address, he had implored students not to treat social concern and world evangelism as a binary choice but to embrace both, intending not to squash earnest efforts toward equality but to temper the sentiments against foreign mission. However, the two requests to redirect the convention suggested to Howard that sentiments were nearing a crisis moment. In response, he devoted the next years of his career to ensuring that InterVarsity did not go

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<sup>35</sup> This is the topic of forthcoming scholarship from David Swartz. The project's tentative title is *From the Ends of the Earth: How Global Encounters Have Transformed American Evangelicalism* and is outlined at <https://davidrswartz.com/from-the-ends-of-the-earth/> accessed April 1, 2019.

the way of the Student Volunteer Movement. He visited with student chapters across the country to rekindle enthusiasm for mission work. He also accepted the job of director for the next Urbana Mission Convention to be held in 1973, indicating to InterVarsity's president and board members that it would "sound a clear note of hope for world evangelization."<sup>36</sup> Wary of further dissent at the next national student gathering, Howard resolved to return the convention to its singular focus on mission mobilization and keep unresolved questions out of the limelight.<sup>37</sup>

To black campus ministers, Urbana 1970 seemed a qualified success. Skinner and Escobar had given social concern a more prominent place as a part of the conversation about how best to do mission work. On the speaker platform and in the actions of white and black students, there was widespread acknowledgement of America's racial crisis and its grave effects on mission work in the past and the present. The convention had also generated a great deal of enthusiasm among black collegians about their evangelical faith that boded well for the future of black collegiate ministry. The program gave black students a picture of their potential for participation in the missionary enterprise, validating those who desired to work acutely on the racial crisis in America and those who wanted to go overseas. The symposium helped students make sense of their black evangelical identity, validating their sense that liberation from racial oppression was at the center of their faith. Little's decision did not dampen students' enthusiasm. However, Howard had cast some doubt on black collegiate ministry's defining practices—

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<sup>36</sup> David Howard, "Annual Report of Missions Department—IVCF/SFMM," November, 1971, BGEA Collection 300, Box 91, Box 4.

<sup>37</sup> Elsewhere David Howard did contribute to the changing shape of mission work, notably at the Lausanne Conference in 1974 that hashed through the substantive questions and issues of shared authority.

confronting America's racial crisis and exploring black identity. In the long-term, black campus ministers would take on the suspicions of Howard and other colleagues. In the short-term, they looked for ways to advance black collegiate ministry among the seven hundred attendees dispersed on campuses across the United States.

Tom Skinner's organization, TSA, oversaw the operations of black collegiate ministry at HBCUs in coastal Virginia. TSA employed three black campus ministers in the area to maintain one well-established chapter at Hampton Institute and to establish other chapters near Norfolk. In an era of Black Power, TSA had oriented its collegiate ministry and its other endeavors around cultivating black evangelical leadership that would speak authoritatively to issues African Americans faced. Following Urbana, they continued training students to speak of the gospel as divine liberation from racial subjugation. Although TSA's collegiate chapters did attend InterVarsity's regional and national programs, its campus ministers scrupulously managed their partnership with InterVarsity so as to make clear to chapter members and potential converts that black evangelicalism was not a warmed-over version of an oppressive white religion. Because the campuses were structured as communities of black students, HBCU schools provided ideal conditions for TSA to develop a new generation of black evangelical leaders while keeping white influence at a distance.

InterVarsity oversaw black collegiate ministry in the Deep South but relied on TSA's campus ministers on matters of black evangelical identity formation. Prior to Urbana, a white campus minister named Pete Hammond had helped students at HBCUs to start InterVarsity chapters and encouraged black students on other campuses to join

established InterVarsity chapters. Black and white students met together in opposition to de facto segregation in the wake of Jim Crow's demise both on campus and at regional gatherings. Even so, Hammond asked TSA ministers to train black students in lay missionary work among their black peers. At their suggestion, InterVarsity's southern chapters at HBCUs and at integrated institutions held Bible studies and other events for black students in addition to integrated gatherings. Hammond hoped to hire campus ministers from among black student participants in order to bring black collegiate ministry to other campuses in the Deep South.

Urbana's black symposium inspired black students at Brooklyn College as well. Caribbean-American students and African-American students more readily spoke of their common identity as black people who were subjected to the same regime of discrimination, a turn that softened acrimony between the two groups. It also gave them common cause to talk about God's divine liberation with other black students at Brooklyn College. Skinner had suggested that because of the severity of America's racial crisis, black collegians needed to hear a message of liberation from another black collegian. The strategy had worked well in the South, but Brooklyn College's InterVarsity had taken a different tack in their evangelistic appeals. Barbara Benjamin, the chapter's faculty sponsor, believed that the chapter "transcended sociological patterns, rules [and] expectations" for a multiracial group in the midst of a racial crisis.<sup>38</sup> She attributed the transcendence to God's divine work among them and believed the surprising existence of a harmonious multiracial community would pique the curiosity of others at Brooklyn College and might win them over to the Christian faith. While some

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<sup>38</sup> Benjamin, 51.



had found the community worth joining, black chapter members had to point out to Benjamin that many black students steered clear of InterVarsity because it was multiracial. They convinced Benjamin and other chapter members to prepare an event just for Brooklyn College's black students. They planned an evening to showcase black evangelicalism with the music and stories of Soul Liberation, the gospel band that had performed at Urbana. Benjamin counted the event a modest success: around one hundred people had attended, many of whom stayed afterward to discuss what they had heard; and the band's informal altar call at the close of the performance moved one person to respond. Evangelistic events for black students became a regular part of Brooklyn College InterVarsity. While they did not win over many skeptical black collegians, the new approach to evangelism helped establish InterVarsity as a place for black evangelicals—and for other members of this multiracial group—to nurture their faith in a diverse setting.<sup>39</sup>

The initiative of Brooklyn College students impressed InterVarsity's campus ministers who were looking to make New York City another hub of activity for black collegiate ministry. Paul Gibson, who came to work for InterVarsity after Urbana 1967, wanted to adapt the program that TSA offered at HBCUs for black students in an urban and pluralist context. In contrast to other regions of the United States, New York City had an active group of black clergy and many black students involved and even leading InterVarsity chapters. With a critical mass of black clergy and students, Gibson had ample resources to provide training in black evangelical identity and evangelization events for black collegians. He could also use those resources to mitigate the suspicions

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 50-54.

that came along with the chapters' close affiliation with a white organization. Like TSA's work in the South, Gibson wanted chapters to prepare leaders who could advance evangelicalism among African Americans in general and among black collegians more specifically. He set a goal to hire five promising black students by August of 1973. He hoped to assign some to New York City and others to locations where they could create new hubs for black collegiate ministry.<sup>40</sup>

Outside of these hubs of activity, most black collegians found themselves isolated from the vibrant black evangelicalism they had seen at Urbana. TSA did not operate on campuses outside of the South, and most InterVarsity chapters had white ministers and white students with only a few black participants. Many of the white ministers recognized that black chapter members needed mentoring in black evangelical identity, but few were prepared—by disposition or by training—to realize that need. In reports to InterVarsity board members, President John Alexander noted small signs of progress such as black students serving as leaders in majority white chapters. In some areas, ministers made adjustments to their summer training programs along the lines of Skinner's expansive definition of missionary work. Programs on the East Coast and in Denver sent students to African-American neighborhoods to volunteer in social service efforts and to see firsthand the detrimental effects of America's racial crisis. In the Midwest, ministers made adjustments to their program to make it more amenable for black students wary of spending their summers in the unfamiliar setting of a rural camp

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<sup>40</sup> Paul Gibson and Neil Rendall, "Proposal for Black Staff Training Program," BGEA Collection 300, Box 78, Folder 5.

in the company of white students.<sup>41</sup> Uncertain how to effectively mentor black students, InterVarsity's campus ministers gave more attention to the primarily white base of participants. In various ways, they sought to inform white students about the black experience and about the persistence of America's racial crisis. InterVarsity monthly publication, *His Magazine*, featured recommendations to read black authors and advice from black InterVarsity students on how they could overcome prejudices.<sup>42</sup>

The ad hoc efforts to mentor black evangelical students after the Urbana convention provide a measure for black evangelicalism's influence on InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. The premise that black students required a distinctive type of collegiate ministry had gained greater currency and, in a few places, chapters had adapted new approaches to evangelization and training accordingly. Within the hubs of activity for black collegiate ministry, TSA and InterVarsity had prepared black chapter members to enter professional ministry as missionaries and clergy upon graduation.<sup>43</sup> By 1974, InterVarsity had hired three more black campus ministers. Barbara Brown had served as a leader of a mostly white chapter at Wayne State University in Michigan. She took a job in New York City to work with Paul Gibson. Tony Warner had been in Brooklyn College's InterVarsity chapter. He took a job to work with students at HBCUs in Atlanta, a new initiative under Pete Hammond's supervision. Watson Omulogoli came to the United States from Kenya to attend seminar at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in

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<sup>41</sup> John W. Alexander, "Annual Report to the Board," November, 1972, BGEA Collection 300, Box 91, Folder 4, IVCF Archive.

<sup>42</sup> *His Magazine*, Volume 34, various issues January-December 1971.

<sup>43</sup> Melvin Miller, member of University of Southern Mississippi's InterVarsity went to work at Voice of Calvary Ministries, an organization devoted to racial reconciliation. Russell Weatherspoon, member of Brooklyn College's InterVarsity, became a chaplain for a private high school in New York. Ron Mitchell, a Soul Liberation band member, served as a missionary in Africa.

Deerfield, IL. He used his seminary training and experience mentoring Kenyan university students as a campus minister for InterVarsity in Illinois and Wisconsin. Thus, the strategy of concentrating efforts in hubs of activity had paid small dividends and suggested that in the near future other campuses across the United States might have an evangelical collegiate ministry oriented specifically for African Americans.<sup>44</sup>

It also seemed that InterVarsity might advance collegiate ministry through chapters oriented to other ethnic and racial communities. Evangelical students from a variety of ethnic and racial identities participated in InterVarsity chapters. In San Francisco, Donna Dong began her career in campus ministry by helping a community of Chinese students affiliate with InterVarsity.<sup>45</sup> In the summer of 1973, InterVarsity gave formal recognition to the ad hoc efforts of black campus ministers and Donna Dong with a new category of campus minister—Campus Staff Member-Ethnic Group (CSM-EG).

The new position indicated how the organization responded to the influence that black evangelicals had exerted since 1968. In the 1950s, Stacey Woods had to take drastic measures to ensure that Ivery Harvey would be designated a Campus Staff Member (CSM) and not a Negro Staff Worker. In the era of Black Power though, the new designation of CSM-EG acknowledged the existence of distinctive ethno-religious identities. In announcing the designation to InterVarsity, President John Alexander endorsed the strategic advantage of advancing ministry through ethnically oriented chapters and also spelled out how the organization would mitigate potential disturbance to current administrative structures. His memo reminded them that ethnic chapters

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<sup>44</sup> Tony Warner, “Bearing Our Burdens: Mingling Hope With Hardship Reflections On Black Campus Ministry 1970-1990 Within Inter Varsity Christian Fellowship,” 2001, unpublished and obtained from Warner by the author.

<sup>45</sup> Donna Dong, interviewed by Tim Ballard, January 12, 2016.

presented an opportunity to extend collegiate ministry to “all...ethnic groups...Blacks Chicanos, Chinese, etc.”<sup>46</sup> CSM-EGs would facilitate this type of growth in two ways, “build[ing] a sense of community” in a specific ethnic chapter as well as “sensitiz[ing] the IVCF [InterVarsity] national movement to his [sic] ethnic group, and vice versa.”<sup>47</sup> He informed the supervisors that advancing ethnically oriented chapters would operate as regional initiatives with minimal oversight at the national level. He encouraged them to “aggressively recruit” CSM-EGs but did not require them to do so.<sup>48</sup>

The guidelines for CSM-EGs reveal InterVarsity’s growing commitment to moving beyond the status quo as well as a lingering uncertainty and discomfort about what it meant. On some level, the need for ethnically oriented chapters arose because students from these designated ethnic groups were less likely to actively participate in a campus ministry with mostly white students and ministers. Moreover, black and white participants seemed to have tense relationships that required sensitizing to overcome. In this climate, Alexander had issued a formal endorsement of ethnic chapters while deflecting the responsibility for their successes away from national leaders and onto regional supervisors. The decision was a calculated risk to provide space for these types of chapters to flourish without upsetting those like David Howard who saw ethnic chapters as a potential disruption to collegiate ministry. In trying to satisfy proponents and skeptics of ethnic chapters, Alexander’s decision placed the heaviest burden on CSM-EGs themselves to whom InterVarsity assigned the equally challenging tasks of

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<sup>46</sup> Keith Hunt, “Ethnic Ministry and IVCF,” June 15, 1973, BGEA Collection 300, Box 29, Folder 2.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

building community among college students and mediating the uneasiness between ethnic groups that pervaded the organization.<sup>49</sup>

In contrast to the ad hoc initiatives to sustain black collegiate ministry by relatively few campus ministers, David Howard led a broad-based initiative as the director of InterVarsity's Mission Department to involve InterVarsity students and chapters in overseas mission work. In 1970, David Howard revived a summer program called Overseas Training Camp (OTC) that InterVarsity had not offered for several years. Summer programming provided intensive training in lay ministry in a variety of places but most of them focused on nurturing students' personal piety and motivation to evangelize their campuses. OTC took students to Costa Rica for several weeks to let them participate in some modest way in foreign missionary work alongside professional missionaries. With an eye to the changing trends in mission work featured at Urbana 1970, OTC's program acknowledged the expansive definition of mission work that tended to social concern. Participants divided their time between seminary-style lectures and visits with Costa Ricans living in poverty. OTC thus gave students an appealing and tangible way to involve themselves in missionary work and quickly became a well-attended program. During the school year, Howard visited with InterVarsity chapters encouraging them to take up the mantle of evangelical students of past generations in leading the charge for missionary work. He used campus visits to promote OTC and also to help establish formal relationships between campus chapters and missionaries that

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

involved regular correspondence and, in some cases, financial support for missionaries from InterVarsity chapters.<sup>50</sup>

For David Howard, the years following what he called “InterVarsity’s most challenging Urbana convention” were replete with examples of how prioritizing foreign mission mobilization had again become the driving force behind InterVarsity’s collegiate ministry. He observed a remarkable turn-around in the organization’s enthusiasm for foreign missionary work in just three short years. Campus ministers who had expressed opposition to missionary work became vocal supporters of OTC.<sup>51</sup> In turn, campus ministers reported that students no longer reflexively challenged the legitimacy of missionary work but rather looked for ways to participate. Along with OTC’s rise in popularity, student registrations for Urbana 1973 looked to exceed those of the previous convention.<sup>52</sup> According to John Alexander, the organization benefitted from the greater emphasis on mission. He wrote to InterVarsity’s board members, “The entire staff [of InterVarsity] are concerned about missions” and they have “higher than ever morale.”<sup>53</sup> It was a stunning reversal in a short amount of time. At Urbana 1970, the planned symposium for black students and the developments during the convention had contested the importance of foreign mission work. In November of 1973, enthusiasm among staff and students for foreign mission work dominated InterVarsity’s annual report. Looking ahead to the upcoming Urbana convention in December, Alexander celebrated the high

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<sup>50</sup> Information about Howard’s initiative provided in annual reports to the board of directors. John W. Alexander, “Annual Report to the Board,” Collection 300, Box 91, Folder 4.

<sup>51</sup> David Howard, Interview, 46:58.

<sup>52</sup> John W. Alexander, “Annual Report to the Board,” November 1974, Box 91, Folder 4, IVCF Archive.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 9.

numbers of student registrants to Urbana and high organizational morale. However, he did not include the comparatively modest growth of black collegiate ministry nor the new initiative to advance ethnic chapters. With the omission, Alexander rendered the efforts to develop ethnic ministry invisible. Moreover, his actions demonstrated that he had accepted Howard's premise that too much emphasis on issues of race and social concern could derail the organization.

When it came to preparations for Urbana 1973, David Howard steered a team of convention planners toward a program that would continue encouraging students' participation in foreign mission work. They selected topics for plenary sessions that still presented a variety of perspectives on missionary work. Roughly half of the invited speakers came from Africa, Asia, and Latin America, and Elizabeth Elliot would give the first-ever address by a woman. By January 1972, just over a year following the upheaval at Urbana 1970, Howard had in place a well-rounded presentation of evangelical mission work—though not exhaustive—for the next convention scheduled for December 1973. In the intervening months, as student registrations mounted, Howard worked to keep the more controversial and contested issues out of the limelight of the convention program. The convention's plenary sessions would not deal with America's racial crisis and the black symposium was scaled back to a series of seminars on black evangelical theology. Howard also turned down requests from other ethnic and racial groups who wanted their own symposium at Urbana 1973.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Howard, Interview, 27:05. Howard mentioned "American Indians" and "a dozen minority pressure groups." No corroboration of the requests exists in InterVarsity's official archive.



In addition, Howard revised the theme of the convention to downplay the portrayal of missionary work as a subversive task that Skinner had given at the last convention. Initially, convention planners agreed to use a phrase from the book of Acts in which Jesus informs the disciples that they will be witnesses “in Jerusalem, in Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”<sup>55</sup> The biblical passage pointed to an obligation to missionary work with equal attention to arenas that were nearby and on the other side of the world. It appealed to the planners because it ostensibly mitigated the competition between foreign mission and social and political upheaval that played out at the previous convention.

Carl Ellis, who planned the black symposium in 1970, endorsed the theme along with his fellow convention planners because it drew attention to a shameful fact of evangelicalism’s history: neither home mission agencies nor foreign mission agencies had accepted full responsibility to evangelize African Americans, resulting in the neglect that Skinner spoken about and about which other African Americans had written. Ellis saw that the theme afforded an opportunity to correct the longstanding neglect and also to continue including contemporary social issues in the conversation about mission work. Using a trope made familiar in the 1960s, Ellis identified African Americans as contemporary Samaritans because of their status on the margins of American society. He urged his fellow planners that the convention ought to make another strong statement to reveal the plight of African Americans and to re-visit the conception that missionary work should challenge the status quo. After the meeting where Ellis made this suggestion, Howard decided on a different theme for the convention that would minimize

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<sup>55</sup> Convention planners referred to the Book of Acts 1:8.

potential for disruption. Ellis was surprised at a subsequent meeting in 1973 to see that the theme he thought the convention planners had agreed to had been replaced without consulting him. In stark contrast to the 1970 theme “Christ, The Liberator,” Urbana 1973’s theme “Jesus Christ: Lord of the Universe, Hope of the World” pointed potential missionaries to the task of winning the world’s allegiance to Jesus rather than to working towards their divine liberation.<sup>56</sup>

Edward Plowman, a writer for *Christianity Today*, attended Urbana in December 1973 and reported that the convention felt like “a return to [InterVarsity’s] good old days.” With attendance nearing fourteen thousand, Plowman observed that the convention presented a variety of ways for students to participate in foreign missionary work. Attendees by and large showed little interest in entertaining controversial ideas or disrupting the convention as in 1970. Students seemed to have left radicalism behind. One told Plowman “I used to be heavy into the political thing, but it didn’t go anywhere. Now I’m in to Christ, and I find he’s leading me someplace.”<sup>57</sup> Speakers from third world regions also distanced themselves from radical politics and directly criticized Marxism and militaristic liberation movements as misguided and even “obstructionist to church growth.”<sup>58</sup> This marked a change in emphasis for Escobar. He had not advocated these versions of radicalism at the 1970 convention per se but found it useful to discuss them in order to communicate the need to expand the missionary enterprise. Representatives from missionary agencies, who attended in order to hire students, celebrated the lack of radicalism at the convention that had severely hampered recruitment efforts three years

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<sup>56</sup> Carl Ellis, Jr., Interview.

<sup>57</sup> Edward Ploughman, “Urbana ’73: ‘A Way I Can Help,’” *Christianity Today*, February 1974, 41.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

prior. One mission agency representative remarked, “I have a less pessimistic view of American Christianity” having seen the students’ supportive attitude toward the missionary enterprise.<sup>59</sup>

For many African-American attendees, the convention did not improve their perspective on American Christianity, and they once again clashed with convention planners over the inadequate attention to issues of race. Alex Anderson, a student from southern California, had decided to attend because he had heard from others how powerful the convention of 1970 had been.<sup>60</sup> Despite the visibility of third-world evangelicals and seminars on black evangelical theology, many black students like Anderson found the topic of foreign missions to be irrelevant to the circumstances of African Americans. Carl Ellis and other black clergy also noticed the relative silence on issues that the previous convention had placed at the fore. One black campus minister requested a meeting with Howard so he and InterVarsity president John Alexander could hear the students and clergy’s concerns directly. At a late night gathering, Howard listened patiently but, like Paul Little in 1970, was unwilling to reorient the convention program. Instead, he offered the black delegation an explanation that Urbana was a mission convention that they had elected to attend.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Warner, 21.

<sup>61</sup> Details of the meeting come from two persons present. Carl Ellis, Jr., interview by the author, September 4, 2017; David Howard, Interview, May 21, 1993, BGEA Archive Collection 484, audio file T9 accessible online at <https://archon.wheaton.edu/?p=collections/findingaid&id=1723&q=&rootcontentid=364634#id364634>. Howard did not name the black campus minister who initiated the meeting at Urbana 1973. Likely it was Carl Ellis who had clashed with Howard in several instances since the new staff orientation of 1969. However, Ellis did not relate a phone call to Howard in his recollection of the clash at Urbana 1973. Alternatively, it may have

Rebuffed by Howard's dismissive posture, black attendees drafted "A Statement from the Afro American People" expressing their dismay that InterVarsity's mission convention had once again ignored the ongoing problem of racial inequality. The statement chided InterVarsity's leaders for not heeding black people's input before and during the convention. It drew attention to the superficial level of discourse about racial inequality and asked for the convention to speak more forcefully against the discrimination in evangelical organizations. It also chastised the white evangelicals for giving attention to mission work in urban centers overseas while white families and congregations had abandoned American cities. Declaring black Christians the conscience of the American evangelical movement, the statement demanded white evangelicals repent from acts of prejudice and for not "forsak[ing] participation in dehumanizing institutions that encourage negligence and ignorance."<sup>62</sup> The statement ended on a note of exasperation: "We cried Oppression in '67. We cried oppression in '70. We are crying oppression in '73."<sup>63</sup> For black students and ministers who had cooperated with InterVarsity, the statement sounded their disappointment at the organization's stunning public reversal of its work on behalf of black evangelicals over the last six years. Nearly two-hundred-fifty black pastors and students wore black armbands to the final session of

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been Paul Gibson who would have also fielded students' complaints during the convention.

<sup>62</sup> "Statement from: The Afro-American People," December 30, 1973, BGEA Collection 37-Evangelicals for Social Action, Folder "1974 TW Aftermath." David Swartz provided a digital version of the statement to the author. Hunt's *For Christ and the University* is conspicuously silent about the Statement and on African American's disruption at the 1973 convention. However, he discussed it with Paul Gibson in interview conducted for the book and archived in InterVarsity's official collection. Tony Warner also makes reference to the disruption at the 1973 convention and the statement in "Reflections on Black Campus Ministry within InterVarsity, 1970-1990," 20-1.

<sup>63</sup> "Statement from: The Afro-American People."

the convention—a visible display of discontent that coincided with the taking of communion.<sup>64</sup>

African Americans reflected on their experiences at Urbana 1973 in a variety of ways. Bill Pannell took a diplomatic approach to the slight against black evangelicalism by acknowledging the strategic necessity of Urbana’s emphasis on mission mobilization. In a private conversation prior to the convention, Pannell gave Howard a stern warning not to “let any...group deviate you from the purpose of Urbana.”<sup>65</sup> Carl Ellis, on the other hand, despaired that white evangelicals had again neglected the central concerns of black evangelicals. Ellis had already distanced TSA’s collegiate work in Virginia from InterVarsity. He renewed his commitment to a separate black collegiate ministry following Urbana 1973 and also decided that he would no longer participate in the triennial convention.<sup>66</sup> Like Pannell and Ellis, black clergy’s attitudes toward proximity to white evangelicals varied. The National Black Evangelical Association, newly renamed from the National Negro Evangelical Association, continued to promote the need for black evangelical institutions and to develop a more cogent black evangelical theology, all while allowing black evangelicals to voice their disagreements with one another.<sup>67</sup> Ruth Lewis, former InterVarsity minister and at that time a psychologist for college students in Chicago, helped the NBEA develop a conference for black students modeled on the innovations introduced at Urban in 1970 and 1973.<sup>68</sup> For black students,

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<sup>64</sup> Ruth Lewis, Interview by Ned Hale, June 14, 2013, 40.

<sup>65</sup> Howard, Interview, 26:31.

<sup>66</sup> Ellis, Interview.

<sup>67</sup> William H. Bentley, “Factors in the Origin and Focus of The National Black Evangelical Association,” *Black Theology: A Documentary History*, James Cone and Gayraud Wilmore, eds., (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1979) 310-321.

<sup>68</sup> Lewis, 24.

the convention made them more aware of the potential for clashes between black and white evangelicals but also more motivated for lay missionary work. Much like Carl Ellis after leadership camp in 1967, Alex Anderson invested his energy in an InterVarsity chapter for black students at the University of Redlands in southern California.<sup>69</sup>

As for InterVarsity's black campus ministers, the clash at Urbana 1973 had made all the more clear their precarious position as African Americans in a predominantly white organization. In summer of 1974, the four of them met together and compiled a short report about their experiences over the past year in InterVarsity. In their report, they expressed a commitment to InterVarsity's campus ministry as well as a request for their white peers and supervisors to share the burden of sustaining black collegiate ministry with them. The report expressed appreciation for InterVarsity's lay ministry training that the four of them had benefitted from and that black students continued to find enriching, since the style of bible study and corporate prayer they found in InterVarsity was not readily available to black collegians elsewhere. It also explained how black collegiate ministry suffered from the tension between white and black evangelicals. On the one hand, white evangelicals did not fully appreciate their black evangelicals peers. White students exhibited "apathy toward the racial struggles and social issues facing non-white American students."<sup>70</sup> White campus ministers exhibited "ripples of white backlash" in their responses to "the protests of Black Christian students."<sup>71</sup> Moreover, white evangelicals conflated the variety of perspectives among African Americans as "a

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<sup>69</sup> Responses of African American participants in Urbana 1973 also drawn from Howard, Carl Ellis, and Tony Warner.

<sup>70</sup> Barbara Brown, Paul Gibson, Watson Omulogoli, and Tony Warner, "Letter to John Alexander and Peter Hammond, July 15, 1974," BGEA Collection 300, Box 78, Folder 5.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

homogenous militant Black perspective.”<sup>72</sup> Though the report did not elaborate, it refers to white evangelicals’ inability to distinguish between the radicalism of James Forman and Tom Skinner, or to recognize degrees of militancy between Carl Ellis and newly hired campus ministers Tony Warner and Barbara Brown.<sup>73</sup>

The group of four made policy recommendations that would advance InterVarsity’s collegiate ministry among black students and also directly address the lack of understanding between black and white participants in InterVarsity. In general, they hoped that InterVarsity would “integrate (not assimilate) African peoples into the InterVarsity chapters and organization from the lowest to the top echelons.”<sup>74</sup> More specifically, they outlined “measures of counter-discrimination...to overcome the effects of past discrimination.”<sup>75</sup> Since black ministers had a harder time raising money for their salaries, they suggested new financial policies to improve fund raising efforts among African-American churches unfamiliar with InterVarsity. They also suggested implementing cross-cultural training to help white ministers and students relate to black participants in InterVarsity. While they offered to train white staff in “effective ministry to Blacks and other ethnic groups,” the recommendation emphasized the need for initiative at the national scale rather than local and the need for white ministers “who feel from their souls the racial crisis in America” to lead training.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Tony Warner, 20-21. Warner wrote that he and Brown they found themselves in an untenable position. They agreed with the substance of the statement but were not comfortable with the militant posture of some signatories. John Alexander approached both Warner and Brown to ask whether they had signed and to gauge their level of militancy.

<sup>74</sup> Brown et al.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

Over a four-year period, InterVarsity's attempts to articulate racial equality as a component of missionary work created a nexus of conflict involving overlapping issues of ministry strategy, orthodoxy, and race. At the Urbana 1970 convention, attempts to harmonize the issues through the lens of a redefined missionary enterprise served to clarify and intensify points of conflict about how best to advance evangelicalism at home and abroad. African Americans sensed the racial crisis still did not receive adequate attention from white evangelicals, while many whites perceived the Black Evangelical Renaissance as the most pressing threat to the vitality of evangelicalism. The convention did enliven ad hoc efforts to advance collegiate ministry among African Americans. Yet, at the same time a national effort to involve student chapters in foreign missionary work challenged the relative importance of black collegiate ministry and circulated suspicions that too much emphasis on the racial crisis could spell out the demise of InterVarsity. At the Urbana convention of 1973, efforts to mobilize students as missionaries once again clashed with efforts to develop black collegiate ministry. The possibility of harmonizing the nexus of conflict became less likely as foreign mission and black collegiate ministry competed for priority within the organization. Nonetheless, black collegiate ministry—as well as ethnic-oriented chapters—remained a viable means to advancing evangelicalism on college campuses with support from white and black ministers, though for different reasons. As in debates on indigenous congregations, some ministers saw black collegiate ministry as an effective means to evangelize black collegians while others invested black collegiate ministry with the possibility of rectifying the patterns of racial discrimination that pervaded the global evangelical community.



Despite the best of intentions, InterVarsity's attempt to rectify the organization's neglect of racial inequality at the 1967 convention only served to exacerbate unsettled disputes about the missionary enterprise at subsequent conventions. The Black Evangelical Renaissance lay at the center of conflict as conventions rendered it a highly visible symbol of what might happen if evangelicalism merged social concern and evangelization. As evangelicals debated the meaning of that symbol, white evangelicals continued to exercise the authority afforded them at the top of America's racial order to cast doubt on or to undermine the contributions of black evangelicals to the debate. In turn, black evangelicals continued to engage in substantive debates about mission strategy while also trying to oppose white evangelicals' pretense to final authority over disputed matters.

Wearied by contentious exchanges, InterVarsity's black campus ministers would look for a way to move the organization past the stalemate. Their recommendations called for a disentangling of the nexus of conflict so that ostensibly substantive debates about mission strategy would not derail efforts to work for racial equality. In order to move beyond the predicament of years past, InterVarsity's black staff proposed a program of education and interracial cooperation. They hoped to establish a greater degree of trust between black and white participants in the organization; and they hoped InterVarsity would route the same vital energy to their vision for collegiate ministry as to foreign mission mobilization.

## Chapter 5

### From America's Racial Crisis to InterVarsity's Racial Crisis: The Creation of Black Campus Ministry, 1974-1980

After a contentious Urbana 1973, InterVarsity's four black campus ministers were uncertain about the future of ministry to black students as well as the organization's commitment to racial equality. As they expressed in a memo to InterVarsity's president, they appreciated InterVarsity's distinctive approach to campus ministry, but they had also witnessed its inconsistent support for black student ministry and had encountered the ignorance and apathy of their white colleagues. Most perplexing, InterVarsity had actively promoted foreign mission mobilization while circulating the notion that too much attention to race issues was unwarranted for its collegiate chapters. To move forward, they informed Alexander, InterVarsity needed to actively work against racial discrimination within the organization. It needed to revise hiring practices and fundraising strategies that favored white ministers. It needed to include cultural training for all white ministers so that their racial prejudice or ignorance would not be an obstacle for black ministers and students to participate. Along with these structural changes, the four called on their white colleagues to take on the burden of ending racial discrimination and to make racial equality a priority as they pastored evangelical collegians. In short, the four of them were calling for a change of tack—from hosting conferences that expounded on America's racial crisis to enacting policies that combatted InterVarsity's racial crisis.

While responses to the Black Evangelical Renaissance had erupted in conflict across racial lines, evangelicals in the 1970s were in other ways putting to rest their uneasy consciences about merging social concern with evangelization. In the same

summer that InterVarsity's black ministers composed their memo, a few thousand evangelical leaders from around the globe gathered for another missionary conference—this time in Lausanne, Switzerland. Like the Berlin Congress of 1966, the Lausanne Congress provided the evangelical movement an opportunity to take the measure of the missionary enterprise that had grown in size and in sophistication since the 1940s. In stark contrast to Urbana 1973, Lausanne did not present the idea that social concern was a potentially insidious turn away from a commitment to the missionary enterprise. Believing that they could complete the task of world evangelization within a decade, delegates to the Congress endorsed a comprehensive set of strategies that resembled those the Black Evangelical Renaissance had applied to black evangelization.

Drawing on an emerging consensus after Lausanne, InterVarsity's black ministers and other advocates for racial equality would find new ways to disentangle the questions of mission strategy and orthodoxy from the exercise of white hegemony in the organization. Among their efforts, they devised a program of training for white ministers using a cultural exegesis of the Bible. They countered colorblind presumptions of the nature of Christian community by pointing to the plural constituency of ancient Israel and of Christians as represented in scripture. They also presented instances from the Bible where focusing on conflict between groups of people had spurred on the missionary enterprise for the first generation of Christians. Their cultural exegesis of the Bible directly contradicted Howard and would help to bring an end to the fierce protection of foreign mission mobilization within the organization.

Much like Howard had done for foreign mission mobilization, black ministers built a coalition among InterVarsity's ministers that pursued the plans they had laid out in

their memo. Along the way, the coalition had to sort through competing impulses represented in those plans and different ideas about what campus ministry ought to look like. Black ministers sought flexibility to depart from the norm of campus ministry in order to serve black students, and even the flexibility among themselves to employ various strategies for ministry with black students; at the same time, they sought standardized practices and policies that would make their ministry less complicated and less difficult to sustain. They also asked for InterVarsity's assistance in providing for the material needs of black ministry while also courting other black evangelicals to make black ministry self-sustaining. Given the complex and disparate pieces of black ministry and the scope of white intransigence on issues of race, the success of black ministry or of efforts to make InterVarsity a more equitable organization were not a certain outcome.

Social action and indigenous missionary activity had caused disagreements between evangelicals for nearly a decade but had gained greater currency in the 1970s. Concurrently, the competition to prioritize foreign and domestic missionary work found a resolution as evangelicals increasingly focused on crossing cultural boundaries rather than geographic boundaries. These were the issues that Carl Ellis had asked to put front and center at Urbana 1973 but David Howard had rejected. In the summer of 1974 in Lausanne, Switzerland, an international group of evangelicals attended the Congress on World Evangelization where they discussed and essentially ratified the expansive definition of the missionary enterprise that Ellis had wanted to present at the student

convention. After Lausanne, the high stakes protection of mission mobilization became less of an obstacle to black collegiate ministry within InterVarsity.<sup>1</sup>

The Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization marked a significant truce in the long-running dispute about social concern. Social action among some evangelicals combined with a global surge for political and social justice had tempered objections about social concern's orthodoxy or its efficacy in mission work. Opponents found common ground with advocates of social concern at Lausanne. The convention's summary document spoke of "Christian Social Responsibility" in close proximity to the hallmarks of evangelical orthodoxy like the need for salvation and the authority of the Bible.<sup>2</sup> Surprisingly, it named "socio-political involvement" as a "Christian duty" on par with evangelism.<sup>3</sup> Three decades of debates and experiments had made Carl Henry's tentative and inchoate impulse for social concern into a well-established component of evangelicals' engagement with the world. Lausanne's statement acknowledged that reality but also gave voice to the lingering sentiments of supporters and detractors of social concern. It spoke of neglecting this duty in the past in deference to the priority for evangelization, as African-American and third world evangelicals had criticized in the past. At the same time, it delineated social action and evangelism as distinctive tasks as David Howard had articulated. Debates about orthodoxy and efficacy continued, but, upon departing Lausanne, social concern was no longer in direct competition with

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<sup>1</sup> The proceedings of Lausanne are documented in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice: Official Reference Volume, Papers, and Responses*, James Dixon Douglas, ed. (Minneapolis, MN: World Wide Publications, 1975).

<sup>2</sup> *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, 698-712.

<sup>3</sup> The text appears in a synopsis of Lausanne 1974 known as the Lausanne Covenant on the Lausanne Movement's website <http://www.lausanne.org/content/covenant/lausanne-covenant> (accessed October 7, 2018).

evangelization in the minds of many decision-makers, clergy, missionaries, and lay leaders.<sup>4</sup>

Lausanne also recognized the use of cultural exegesis as a tool for missionary work and defused the contest to establish foreign mission work as a priority. In the context of decolonization, third-world and African-American evangelicals tried to disentangle the missionary appeal to converts from its association with colonial control. They sponsored indigenous mission programs where the message and the messenger were located within the cultural milieu of the people they hoped to convert. To that end, they used a more expansive cultural exegesis than Western missionaries had typically employed: rather than denounce the sinfulness of a culture writ-large, they drew on Christian sacred texts to identify a specific culture's divinely inspired elements as well as the corrupt elements. Evangelicals embraced indigenous mission, but some missiologists sidestepped the implicit challenge to Western authority and instead offered a maxim about its efficacy for conversion. Donald McGavran had developed his theories about the efficiency of indigenous evangelization at a school of Missions at Fuller Seminary. Indigenous missionaries worked, he claimed, because "people like to become Christians without having to cross racial, linguistic, or class barriers."<sup>5</sup> Given its efficacy, cultural exegesis became an important tool for exogenous missionary work as well. In particular, areas that in their estimation remained un-evangelized required cross-cultural missionaries to translate the Christian message into a culture idiom because no

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Donald McGavran and C. Peter Wagner, *Understanding Church Growth*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), 163; See also Molly Worthen, *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 126-135.

indigenous Christian community existed. Understanding and interpreting culture thus became a crucial skill in the missionary enterprise in both indigenous and exogenous contexts. Reflecting the new emphasis on culture, the published papers of the Lausanne conference introduce the phrase “cross-cultural evangelism” as a new label for the missionary enterprise.<sup>6</sup>

In scores of seminars and informal discussions, Lausanne’s participants engaged in cultural analysis of all sorts to identify the best of course of action to evangelize the world’s many cultures that were variously oriented: some around broad geographic locations—Latin America, Asia, and Western Europe; others around religious affiliation—Buddhists, Occultists, animists, and atheists; some around proximity to the city, as in rural and urban cultures; some around specific affinities—thinking people or Hippies and other sub-cultures; some around social location such as secondary or college students; others around physical conditions such as deaf and blind.<sup>7</sup> As in indigenous evangelization, they utilized the Bible as the arbiter of cultural practices to identify what was syncretistic; yet, this task also aimed at maintaining the cultural identity of converts vis-à-vis a Christian identity. Oddly, Lausanne participants discussed maintaining the cultural identities of both historically missionized peoples in Asia, Latin America, and

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<sup>6</sup> Lausanne Covenant, Section 5.

<sup>7</sup> *Let The Earth Hear His Voice*, 713-799. The topic of thinking people as a culture was presented by Francis Schaeffer’s associate Os Guinness who elsewhere refer to it as secular humanism. The attributes of a culture of secular humanism arise from the rejection of Christianity’s truth as the basis for society and for knowledge. See Worthen, 221.

Africa as well as historically missionizing peoples in Europe and—most curiously—in “The Anglo-Saxon World.”<sup>8</sup>

Emphasis on the cultural tools for evangelization presented new vectors for the missionary enterprise that challenged the hegemony of white authority in the evangelical movement. Under the label of foreign missions, the enterprise had consisted of Western people carrying a message outward from Western societies to other spots on the globe. Under the influence of indigenous evangelicals, the enterprise followed the same outward vector but displaced Western missionaries as the sole carriers of the message. The transition from foreign mission to cross-cultural evangelism further displaced Western missionaries and opened new possibilities for indigenous Christians. Given the urgency to evangelize unreached peoples, paternalistic restrictions on indigenous missionaries dissipated in favor of mobilizing as many missionaries as possible. Indigenous Christians continued to work as missionaries within their culture, but some mobilized themselves to carry the message to other regions of the world. In addition to new practices, then, the missionary enterprise had new participants and new geographic and cultural vectors to travel.

Lausanne thus welcomed a newly conceived missionary enterprise that had an expansive scope, diverse participants, and a multiplicity of directions. The reconception suggested the possibility for more equitable participation in mission work and, consequently, the potential to establish new vectors of power as well. Lausanne’s participants had acknowledged that any evangelical could be a cross-cultural missionary,

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<sup>8</sup> *Let The Earth Hear His Voice*, 483-984. The use of Anglo Saxon was likely a geographic expedient for The United Kingdom and the United States, but the term had also been used to denote a category at the top of a racial hierarchy.



not only Western evangelicals. Also, they had asserted that cultural identities could, and perhaps should, co-exist along with evangelical identity. Lausanne had laid the theoretical groundwork to unseat Westerners' exclusive claims to authority in global evangelicalism, but it had not provided the means to speed along those possibilities. While Lausanne's participants primarily directed their insights outward in an effort to bring salvation across the world, the newly arrived primacy of culture in the parlance of missionary work would allow some to actively challenge inequity among evangelicals.

Tony Warner was one of the four black staff that had signed the memo to John Alexander outlining what InterVarsity must do to work for racial equality. After graduating from Brooklyn College in 1973, he accepted a position to work at HBCUs in Atlanta. The invitation came from Pete Hammond, the minister who oversaw the first interracial chapter at newly desegregated University of Southern Mississippi. Hammond was eager to have a black minister in his region. After Warner's first year of working in Atlanta, Hammond hired two more black ministers to form a team.

The three-member team of African Americans operated as mediators bringing white evangelicals and black evangelicals together in a number of ways in order to support black collegiate ministry in the Southeast region. Most often, they acclimated black students to InterVarsity's lay missionary approach to campus ministry with which most were unfamiliar. At regional conferences, they continued the tradition of discussing racial inequality that Pete Hammond and Carl Ellis had introduced and added elements of cultural exchange. They also encouraged white and black evangelicals to extend their resources in new directions, asking white donors to invest in black campus ministers and

black clergy to recommend InterVarsity to their congregants attending universities. Along the way, the team of three had to negotiate with colleagues from InterVarsity and from other organizations to coordinate the black collegiate ministry project on a larger scale. As mediators, the team of three had ample opportunities to address the questions raised in the memo sent to John Alexander in the summer of 1974.

InterVarsity's campus ministers worked diligently to integrate black students from Atlanta University Center into a white organization. The de facto segregation of evangelicalism meant that black Christian students did not recognize InterVarsity as an organization worthy of their participation, and the Black Campus Movement had brought a measure of scorn and suspicion upon anything associated with white-led institutions. Nonetheless, the novelty of InterVarsity's lay missionary training set it apart from chapel programs and local black congregations for at least some of the Christian students at Morehouse, Spelman, and Clark. When Bowens and Williams arrived in Atlanta in 1975, they had around sixty students to train in the practices of personal piety and campus evangelization. Regional conferences offered more lay training and made clearer the organization's association with white evangelicalism.

Under Warner's influence, the conferences took on an air of cultural exchange through music. During times of corporate worship, black students led attendees in singing Negro Spirituals such as "Swing Low Sweet Chariot" and "Since I Laid My Burdens Down;" at another session, white recording artist Jim Ward performed his original songs that extolled God's praises through jazz harmonies on an acoustic piano. Through musical exchange, Warner brought a new dimension to the bi-racial encounters that Pete Hammond and Carl Ellis had nurtured in the region. The act of corporate singing itself

tempered the intense discussion of racial inequality that occupied some conference sessions and informal conversations. It also made white and black evangelicalism more visible to students who usually worshipped with members of their own race. The visibility of black students broadened the conference's previous representations of African American beyond their status as oppressed people. Musical exchange thus facilitated the integration of black students into the predominantly white organization because it placed black students a position of authority at the conference, giving those students a greater stake in the gathering, while also communicating to white students' that black participation in InterVarsity extended beyond black campus chapters. A reading list on "The Black Experience" sent home with students suggested that there was more for whites to learn and that it was there Christian duty to do so. As valuable as it may have been to make black evangelicalism more visible, it did not directly confront racial hierarchy. In deed, the rich theme of divine liberation from oppression contained in "Swing Low Sweet Chariot" may just as easily have conjured paternalistic feelings as fraternal upon the ears of white attendees.<sup>9</sup>

Integrating black students into InterVarsity also meant asking students to rearrange their schedules in order to partake in InterVarsity's summer programs. Week-long and month-long camps such as the Overseas Training Camp were staples of InterVarsity's collegiate ministry, but were a greater commitment for college students compared to on-campus seminars and weekend conferences. Many black students were especially reluctant to surrender time and lost wages to attend. The Atlanta campus

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<sup>9</sup> "InterVarsity Christian Fellowship Song Sheet" and "Songs from the Black Culture," BGEA Collection 300, Box 181, Folder 1. Incidentally, the song sheet ostensibly mitigated against the paternalistic interpretations of Negro spirituals by not using dialectical spellings.

ministers found alternative ways to provide InterVarsity's many training modules in a more fitting context for black students. Their most ambitious alternative was a conference called Koinonia in Black that they conducted along with Paul Gibson and TSA ministers working in Virginia. They modeled the conference on a similar venture under the auspices of the NBEA. At the initiative of former campus minister Ruth Lewis, the NBEA held the first National Black Christian Students Conference (NBCSC) in April of 1974. In the throes of conflict at Urbana 1973, Lewis had asked InterVarsity to help put on the conference but Alexander and Howard declined the offer. Instead, the NBEA partnered with Black Baptists and other African-American denominations—an interesting turn of events given Lewis's efforts in the past to bring HBCU students into the evangelical fold. The NBCSC conference replicated Urbana's black symposium in thematic material and featured many of the same clergy. Rather than foreign mission mobilization, the conference sought to mobilize black students as "change agents for Christ."<sup>10</sup> Evangelical pastors and students at the NBCSC would have made conversion to Christianity part of the conversation, but the focus for all attendees was on addressing racial inequality in America's black communities. With the NBCSC, the Black Evangelical Renaissance was moving in new directions. Although it had alarmed David Howard and John Alexander, it continued inspire Warner and others in InterVarsity.<sup>11</sup>

Seeing the success of the NBCSC, Warner hoped the Koinonia in Black conference would help InterVarsity and TSA to advance collegiate ministries among

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<sup>10</sup> Lewis, Interview with Keith Hunt, 45.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. Reverend William Bentley also touches on ecumenical elements of the NBEA in his account of the organization's development. William Bentley, "Factors in the Origin and Focus of The National Black Evangelical Association," *Black Theology: A Documentary History*, James Cone and Gayraud Wilmore, eds., (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1979), 314.

black students. Despite a year of intensive planning and preparation, attendance ran low and costs ran high making a large conference less feasible as an annual event. Thereafter, Atlanta staff experimented with summer programs that combined the seminar content of Koinonia in Black with a practical component. One year, students volunteered with social service organizations in Atlanta; another year they worked on a community farm at Voice of Calvary, an interracial community outside of Jackson, Mississippi.<sup>12</sup>

Warner asked white and black evangelicals to redirect their financial resources in order to sustain and expand InterVarsity's ministry to black students in the Southeast. At Hammond's suggestion, Warner approached donors to white chapters about also giving to chapters at HBCUs and to conferences such as Koinonia in Black.<sup>13</sup> Hammond had made similar appeals for donors to support the black students in the late 1960s. Warner's letters to prospective donors communicated that the new work in Atlanta was the fruit of their earlier donations that they now had another opportunity to sustain. While white chapters typically had financial support of white evangelicals, black evangelicals typically donated to denominational efforts for black collegians and were unfamiliar with InterVarsity. Warner sought to convince black clergy that InterVarsity could supplement or even exceed what these provided. He solicited their support for campus ministers in Atlanta as well as prospective sites in five other cities in the Southeast region.<sup>14</sup> Warner did not always receive precisely what he asked for, but the team did receive financial support from white and black donors for their work. Warner thus secured a modest

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<sup>12</sup> untitled conference material, BGEA Collection 300, Box 187, Folder 5.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Tony Warner, "Letter to IVCF Atlanta local Committee, February 17, 1976," BGEA Collection 300, Box 187, Folder 5; Peter Hammond, "Letter to Clark Breeding, May 12, 1976," BGEA Collection 300, Box 187, Folder 5.

measure of bi-racial buy-in for black collegiate ministry at HBCUs within a white-led organization that cut against the grain of giving patterns for white and black donors. On a small scale, Warner's solicitations to white and black communities mitigated the unfamiliarity and suspicion between white and black evangelicals that InterVarsity's black staff had identified after Urbana 1973.

The innovations in student training and fundraising appeals were motivated in part by demographic trends that presented bright possibilities for the Atlanta team to advance collegiate ministry at other HBCUs and at historically white institutions newly open to black student enrollment. The United States Census Bureau reported that more than eight hundred thousand African Americans attended college in 1974—an increase of 56% over a four-year period—with a majority of them concentrated in schools in the South. The increased enrollment in the South suggested to Warner that within a few years InterVarsity might grow from four chapters with roughly sixty students to several active chapters in six cities across the South. The Atlanta staff identified three tasks to achieve the growth they anticipated: locating interested students in prospective cities; hiring campus ministers to oversee new chapters; and securing sufficient financial backing to pay for the expansion. To that end, Koinonia in Black Koinonia served as a recruitment tool, much like Urbana 1970 had. It offered a program intended to attract black collegians from prospective new cities. The team spent a year publicizing the conference to students through targeted mailings and advertisements in black media outlets. They planned for a conference of five hundred students—more than eight times the number of students involved in InterVarsity chapters in the South and about three times the number of black students participating in InterVarsity and TSA chapters across the country. InterVarsity

could hire new campus ministers from among the expanded cadre of black evangelical students. Fund raising appeals also aimed at advancing collegiate ministry in new directions. Warner sought donations among white clergy and congregations toward a \$60,000 budget over a three-year period that would train new ministers. In appeals to black evangelicals, Warner asked them to encourage their college-aged congregants to attend Koinonia in Black and, if needed, to provide the registration fees for those who could not afford it. They also involved InterVarsity's white campus ministers in recruitment efforts, asking them to publicize Koinonia in Black on their respective campuses.<sup>15</sup>

Even as Warner sought students, ministers, and donors with whom to advance InterVarsity's collegiate ministry, he continually revised his estimate of what might be achieved. He planned to train five new campus ministers over a three-year period without knowing whether five qualified people would apply or whether donors would supply the \$60,000 it would cost. To ensure some level of progress, Warner created three contingency budgets to implement the training program if there were fewer new ministers or less funds than required. He had also planned to host five hundred students at the Koinonia in Black conference, a miniscule proportion of the eight million black students but a reasonable expectation given the seven hundred black attendees at the Urbana convention of 1970 and 1973. Yet, in spring of 1976 registrations remained below one hundred. Low attendance worried Warner because it diminished the prospects of launching chapters at new campuses; it also meant less in registration fees to cover the

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<sup>15</sup> Tony Warner, "Letter to donors, August 1975," BGEA Collection 300, Box 187, Folder 5; Tony Warner, "Letter to Dr. Dennis Spear, November 17, 1975," BGEA Collection 300, Box 187, Folder 5; Tony Warner, "Team Newsletter, May 14, 1976," BGEA Collection 300, Box 187, Folder 5

costs of the conference. Warner spent March and April rallying InterVarsity and TSA staff to get the word out about the conference. With little change in the number registrants, he spent the month of May proposing cuts to the conference budget in the form of reduced honoraria to speakers and asking InterVarsity and TSA to absorb more costs.<sup>16</sup>

In June, after hosting a conference with fewer than eighty students, Warner attributed the disappointing turn out to logistical challenges. In a memo to Pete Hammond, he wrote that it was difficult to oversee InterVarsity and TSA staff across a wide distance and to respond to urgent circumstances like low registration numbers. It was also difficult to unify the various components of the conference—seminars, sermons, workshops, and rap sessions—that had been parceled out to various campus ministers, pastors, and evangelists. The conference banked on the celebrity of Tom Skinner and John Perkins to attract students, but they were not part of the conference planning. Warner felt that he ought to have communicated more clearly with them how the sessions fit together. He also wrote that with more time to publicize the conference students might have more easily arranged their summer schedules with the conference in mind. Warner then cautiously recommended to Hammond that InterVarsity make a second attempt at a national conference for black students in the near future that would address the logistical challenges.<sup>17</sup>

Warner's comments reveal that, for him, expanding the number of student participants was key to advancing collegiate ministry and that refining and coordinating

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<sup>16</sup> untitled conference material, BGEA Collection 300, Box 187, Folder 5.

<sup>17</sup> Tony Warner, "Reflections on Koinonia n Black," June 1976, BGEA Collection 300, Box 187, Folder 10.



administrative tasks could improve InterVarsity's publicity efforts. If they could attract students with compelling and enriching campus activities and conferences, the other ingredients for black collegiate ministry—staff and donors—would follow. However, in the focus on administrative efficiency, Warner left unexamined other factors in a poorly attended conference. InterVarsity and TSA had, in fact, spent considerable effort over nine months to prepare for and publicize Koinonia in Black. Conceivably, there was more to do or more efficient means to do it; however, Warner did not consider whether the goal of five hundred students was a realistic estimate of interest in a conference on black Christianity. Furthermore, Warner also did not speak about what role race might have played in influencing students' decisions to attend. Even as the conference was designed for black students, unfamiliarity with the sponsoring organization InterVarsity may have made the invitation less appealing; or, familiarity may just as easily made students' wary of association with InterVarsity given its lackluster response to "The Statement from the Afro American People" at Urbana 1973. As a signatory to the statement and as a campus minister for two years, Warner knew the predicament he faced recruiting black students to InterVarsity but did not consider it prohibitive.

Warner's assessment of Koinonia in Black communicated with guarded confidence that he would eventually locate sufficient numbers of students, staff, and donors and that InterVarsity's majority-white constituency would not deter the advancement of black collegiate ministry in the long run. His confidence came from the flourishing of African Americans within the university and, to a lesser degree, the progress he had made in sustaining ministry to black students in the South. The increase in students boded well for black participation in campus chapters. Moreover, Warner

believed that the three black campus ministers now working in the region could reverse the pattern of mistrust that had marked relationships between black students and white ministers. He reminded his white colleagues that, in the past, “tensions and misunderstandings” surfaced when “blacks s[aw] the need to assert themselves and develop black independence” causing “each [to] go their separate ways.”<sup>18</sup> Warner acknowledged that “cross-cultural ministry” had been and would continue to be “extremely difficult.”<sup>19</sup> Yet, Warner told his colleagues that if they would initiate relationships with black students, then he, Bowens, and Williams could step in to guide the impulse for independence and keep them from separating from InterVarsity. Through cooperation, Warner envisioned increased participation at HBCUs and among students “at top [public] schools in each state” within the region.<sup>20</sup>

His request for cooperation was light on details: He did not recount where, when, how or with whom trust had eroded in previous encounters—though likely he had in mind Urbana mission conventions as well as Pete Hammond’s bi-racial chapter in Hattiesburg and York’s partnership with Hampton students. He also did not lay out precisely what programs black staff might do when called on to help; nor did he reflect on how stepping in would resolve mistrust between white and black participants in InterVarsity or whether it might simply keep the problem at bay by limiting participants’ interracial encounters. At root, then, Warner placed his confidence in the fact that the authority for InterVarsity’s black collegiate ministry in the South lay in the hands of black ministers. Warner believed that advancement might be slow, but greater responsibility and authority

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<sup>18</sup> Tony Warner, “Opportunities and Need’s for IV’s Ministry to Blacks,” n.d., BGEA Collection 300, Box 187, Folder 5.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

lent greater credibility to Warner, Bowens, and Williams among black evangelicals to establish a solid foundation for black ministry in the South.

By summer of 1976, Warner had less to show for two years in Atlanta than he might have hoped for, but the team had accomplished some aspects of what it set out to do. They worked directly with chapters at three HBCUs in Atlanta—Morehouse, Spelman, and Clark—and a chapter of black students at the University of Georgia. While Koinonia in Black did not draw new students, InterVarsity and TSA had administered a national conference for black students that did not conform or adapt to the agenda of mission mobilization. The Atlanta team did not have sufficient resources to work in six cities; but Fred Williams had laid the groundwork to launch campus ministry among black students in Raleigh-Durham, one of the cities that Warner had identified in his plan for collegiate ministry in the South. After Koinonia in Black, Williams relocated to oversee chapters at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, at his alma mater Shaw University, and at other HBCUs and white institutions.<sup>21</sup>

Warner's administrative role allowed him to build on Gibson's proposal for the gradual expansion of black collegiate ministry through concentrating on strategically selected cities. Both men linked the expansion of collegiate ministry with the flourishing of black life and culture in the 1970s. In 1971, Gibson focused acutely on getting one center of activity off the ground by connecting a few black students to Skinner and other black evangelicals in New York City. His efforts were successful in gathering a cohort of black evangelical students in the city and in hiring two campus ministers. When Warner moved to Atlanta, he planned for multiple sites that would draw from the growing

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<sup>21</sup> Tony Warner, "Letter to Dr. Dennis Spear, November 17, 1975," BGEA Collection 300, Box 187, Folder 5.

numbers of black college students in the South. Gibson had given most of his efforts to innovative programs that would attract students and prepare some for careers in campus ministry. Warner did the same while also assuming the administrative tasks of supporting the prospective expansion. He had the responsibilities of a supervisor overseeing black students and staff in the region and raising funds for his current and future team members in the process of expanding black collegiate ministry. In his role as an administrator, he implemented new fundraising policies for black ministers who could not secure them from among their personal and professional contacts. In short, Warner himself became more integrated into InterVarsity's management structures, as laid out in the memo of 1974.

Along with integration, black ministers had insisted that white colleagues share the burden of working for racial equality within InterVarsity. Without help from white ministers, they believed that InterVarsity would continue to exhibit the ignorance and apathy about racial equality. To that end, black ministers asked InterVarsity to provide all white ministers, supervisors, and board members with cross-cultural training. Alternately, they referred to training as "consciousness raising," a phrase connected with the celebration of African-Americans' cultural identity and, elsewhere, with mobilizing women against sexism.<sup>22</sup> They envisioned white colleagues leading InterVarsity cross-cultural training, but, in the short-term, they had to find other means of consciousness-raising to supplement white staff's efforts among African Americans.

Upon hearing of the need for cross-cultural training, white ministers in Illinois sought Gibson's input on ministering to black students in their state. Gibson suggested

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<sup>22</sup> Paul Gibson et al., "Letter to John Alexander and Peter Hammond, July 15, 1974." BGEA Collection 300, Box 78, Folder 5.

that they attend the annual meeting of the National Black Evangelical Association for a first-hand encounter with black evangelicalism. NBEA founder Bill Bentley had pioneered an evangelical brand of consciousness-raising among African Americans that featured prominently at the organization's annual conventions. The gathering brought together clergy and lay-leaders to celebrate black evangelicalism, to define its identity vis-à-vis white evangelicalism, and to establish an agenda to challenge racial inequality. NBEA members debated the relative merits of separatism, but conventions did not exclude white attendees. The overwhelming majority of black participants at the NBEA and the few white participants, and fewer Asian-American and Latino participants, was a contrast to American evangelicalism's racial composition. Gibson believed this environment would help InterVarsity's staff from Illinois to heighten their sense of urgency about racial issues.

Brett Lamberty, the administrator in Illinois who had asked Gibson for help, came away from the 1976 NBEA convention with a new perspective on black evangelicalism and its implications for campus ministry. Throughout the convention, he heard how theological reflection on black identity helped black evangelicals to mobilize against racial prejudice and inequality. The emphasis on social programs in black communities and on autonomy sprang from their understanding of themselves as people divinely liberated from racial oppression. By contrast, social programs and autonomy had only recently gained broader acceptance among white evangelicals and were still debated. The theme of justice had a profound effect on Lamberty while at the convention. Since the convention was held in Chicago, the NBEA discussed racial disparities in the city's housing—a perennial problem that Martin Luther King, Jr. and the SCLC's campaign a

decade earlier had little effect on.<sup>23</sup> Leaving the convention, Lamberty expressed a desire to work for justice in housing issues in his own metro-Chicago neighborhood. And, as he pondered his own complicity in racial inequality, Lamberty also expressed a new sense of the seriousness of America's racial crisis. Given "the depth of oppression that blacks have experienced," he wrote that racial oppression against African Americans was a singular crisis with "no parallel" among other important social and political issues such as ecology and women's equality.<sup>24</sup> Lamberty anticipated that "if we take the ethic of justice and compassion from the Scripture...it will mean that the evangelical church...will place the highest priority on caring for the needs of blacks and seeking to change oppressive structures."<sup>25</sup> These ideas had wide currency among African Americans and had circulated among white evangelicals, but such a frank assertion from Lamberty about the primacy of America's racial crisis in evangelicalism must have been the kind of consciousness raising that Gibson had hoped for. He was starting to feel the racial crisis from his soul.

Lamberty also learned what NBEA members thought about the thorny question of cooperation with white evangelicals. He heard again and again that white evangelicals had been ineffectual in ministry to and with African Americans. White evangelicals simply did not attract a hearing for the gospel with inadequate attention to black identity, social programs, and black autonomy; and disagreement about those elements had affected professional relationships between white and black evangelicals. As Reverend

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<sup>23</sup> Adam Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King, Jr.*, (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press), 279-308.

<sup>24</sup> Brett Lamberty, "1976 NBEA Reactions," n.d., BGEA Collection 300, Box 187, Folder 6.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

Clarence Hilliard put it: “Blacks are catching hell all the time, they just ask that whites be willing to catch it, too.”<sup>26</sup> From Hilliard’s perspective, few white evangelicals were willing to endure rejection and misunderstanding for working against racial inequality. Lamberty met some at NBEA who had chosen to limit their cooperation with white evangelicals; he met others who called for white evangelicals to make a greater commitment to ministry among African Americans and to not wither in the face of criticism or conflict. Several black leaders of evangelical youth organizations Young Life and Youth for Christ in Chicago expressed to Lamberty their desire to cooperate with InterVarsity to steer black collegians to a congregation or campus ministry where they could thrive.<sup>27</sup>

The variety of perspectives on interracial cooperation impressed Lamberty, yet he discovered that the desire for autonomy from white evangelicals guided decisions about whether and how to cooperate with white evangelicals. NBEA members had wearied of justifying the orthodoxy of their work in black communities to white evangelicals. Reliance on funds from white evangelicals exacerbated the problem of dependence, since it brought to bear the power of the purse over programs deemed unorthodox. NBEA members looked to foster black leadership and a solid funding base within the black community to sustain their various endeavors among African Americans without the overweening influence of white evangelicals. In the field of ministry to black collegians, Tom Skinner had opted for limited and occasional participation with white organizations, while Gibson and Warner had opted to work within the auspices of InterVarsity. Separation or cooperation in each case was a means of negotiating the terms of

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

independence from white authority; or stated more directly, to establish the terms of black authority and leadership in evangelical circles. Lamberty recognized that the overtures for cooperation in Chicago came freighted with similar expectations. These leaders were not looking to cede black collegiate ministry to InterVarsity, but to partner with Lamberty in their goal of increasing the participation of black students in collegiate ministry across the city.<sup>28</sup>

In New York City, Gibson had become acquainted with a former missionary to East Africa who had also begun to feel America's racial crisis from his soul. Thom Hopler did missionary work with Africa Inland Mission (AIM) in the 1960s and relocated to New York in 1973 to oversee a new type of missionary endeavor. After nearly a century of sending Americans to evangelize people in eastern Africa, AIM had decided it would send African missionaries to the United States in order to evangelize in African-American urban neighborhoods. They intended to put to rest the assumptions that Christianity was a white religion and to undercut the racial conflict that accompanied encounters between white missionary endeavors in black communities in the United States. AIM's missionaries, almost all white, expressed grief about the issue, having had their own tense encounters with the race problem. The agency's African congregants expressed a sense of possibility that their efforts could make headway where white missionaries could not.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Associated Press, "Agency Plans to Bring African Missionaries to the United States," *Gadsden Times*, August 4, 1973; "African Missionaries May Serve U.S. Black Ghettos," *Jet Magazine*, Nov 24, 1973. The Associated Press story tells of a Kenyan seminary student in the United States who had experimented with evangelization among African Americans and endorsed the project.



Although initially tasked to mobilize African missionaries in the United States, Hopler spent his home assignment—and, as it happened, the final years of his life—helping American evangelicals address the problem of American race relations. He applied the insights from his experience as a missionary in Kenya to the persistent racial conflicts that permeated American evangelicalism. He had engaged in disputes between indigenous Kenyans and American missionaries affiliated with AIM and frequently referred to a clash over marriage practices. Missionaries had staunchly opposed the custom of men marrying multiple wives but indigenous Christians argued successfully that AIM should not exclude such households from participation in worship. Hopler applauded AIM for the decision to negotiate a solution rather than impose a sanction against an unorthodox practice. He had this success in mind as he became increasingly familiar with the heated debates among American evangelicals. He believed that a better understanding of cross-cultural exchanges could help bring a satisfying resolution to these thorny problems.<sup>30</sup>

From 1976 to 1978, Hopler taught seminars that framed the nexus of conflict that InterVarsity and other American evangelicals experienced as a problem of cultures in conflict. Using his strong command of missiological trends and a surprising cultural exegesis of the Bible, Hopler’s seminars examined biblical and contemporary examples of conflict between cultures. During the seminars, Hopler typically aimed his insights and his critiques at white participants rather than black, Asian, and Hispanic participants. He believed that a deeper understanding of culture would help white participants in InterVarsity—and white evangelicals in general—to better navigate their conflicts with

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<sup>30</sup> Thom Hopler, *A World of Difference: Following Christ Beyond Your Cultural Walls*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1981), 11-21.

others. His seminars provided an extensive cultural exegesis of biblical passages that challenged contemporary examples of white ethnocentrism. On a more foundational level, he hoped cultural exegesis of scripture would imbue cross-cultural encounter and conflict with new meaning and new possibilities. In fact, Hopler argued that cross-cultural encounters and conflicts had defined the development of early Christianity and took center stage throughout the text of scripture. He presented a compelling parallel between the cultural conflict in scripture and contemporary racial conflicts and asked his audience to imagine what evangelical faith might look like if they followed examples from the Bible. In a stark contrast with David Howard, Hopler believed evangelicals ought to prioritize work for racial equality *and* that doing so would invigorate the missionary enterprise.

Hopler reveled in cultural exegesis of biblical passages. In one seminar lecture, he shared an unconventional take on the apostle Stephen that stemmed from his identity as a Hellenistic Jew. He explained that Stephen received his position of authority in the thick of a cross-cultural dispute. The nascent Christian community in Jerusalem had overlooked Hellenistic widows and appointed Stephen and three other Hellenistic Jews to ensure that Hellenistic widows would receive the same allotment of aid as Hebraic widows. Soon after, said Hopler, Stephen met his end in a second cross-cultural dispute with powerful opponents of Christianity. Stephen defended himself from the charge of blasphemy with an unusual retelling of Jewish history that drew inspiration from the unexpected cultural *mélange* of Christianity that followed Pentecost. According to Hopler, Stephen's speech to the Jewish Council essentially recast the patriarchs and Israelite kingdom as a multicultural community with ethnic ties to Mesopotamia through

Abraham and cultural ties to Egypt through Moses. The speech provoked the prejudices of Stephen's listeners who embraced ritual and ethnic purity as the basis for Judaism. Hopler interpreted Stephen's words as a denunciation of ethnocentric religion. From its very beginnings, Hopler concluded, Christianity articulated "the truth of a universal gospel that is not bound by culture."<sup>31</sup>

For Hopler, Stephen's story served as a warning for white evangelicals that the "universal gospel" challenged white ethnocentrism.<sup>32</sup> Like Hebraic Jews or the Jerusalem Council, white ethnocentrism had already blinded whites from noticing the problems of African Americans and deafened them to the critiques about neglect. Hopler reminded his audience that Tom Skinner's address at Urbana 1970 had shocked white evangelicals though it gave voice to what black students had already observed about racial discrimination. He urged whites not to dismiss ostensibly radical statements from those of other cultures but to treat them as opportunities to loosen the grip of white ethnocentrism on evangelicalism.

While rebukes of white ethnocentrism appeared throughout his seminars, it was only one of many points Hopler made. Building on his lectures on Stephen, Hopler turned to the book of Acts to convince his audience of the centrality of culture in the Bible. Christianity came into being, he said, as a universal church comprised of many ethnic and cultural constituencies. It grew from a small Judaic sect in Palestine to become a multicultural community stretching across the Mediterranean world. At Pentecost in the book of Acts, a nascent Christianity extended beyond Palestinian Jews to Hellenistic Jews who spoke Greek and practiced a distinctive version of Judaism with less emphasis

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 89-95.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 98.

on temple ritual. Christianity spread among Jewish communities in several cities but also attracted the notice of Gentiles. At first, Christians gathered within ethnic communities for worship. In some cities, though, Jews and Gentiles began to worship together. Hopler explained that the book of Acts first applied the term Christian to a community in Antioch where the practice originated, since the unprecedented gathering warranted a new label. For Hopler, the creation of a new term to describe Christians at Antioch suggested the importance of multicultural communities in Christianity. As Hopler taught about the book of Acts in his seminar, he presented the multicultural constituency of the church as its defining feature. He argued that culture was not incidental or insignificant to the advance of Christianity. Rather, Christianity developed through the crucible of ethnic and cultural encounters between Christians.<sup>33</sup>

Hopler observed how frequently cross-cultural encounters in the early church challenged prejudice as Christianity moved outward from a Jewish center. Stephen was just one of many examples from the book of Acts that Hopler turned to. He also spoke about the apostle Peter who, after a series of miraculous visions, visited with a Roman centurion's household. When they spoke in tongues—a sign of divine presence—Peter abandoned his belief that God did not communicate with Gentiles. In these and other moments throughout the narrative, the advance of Christianity across ethnic and cultural boundaries undercut the premise that God acted exclusively through Jewish people and on their behalf. Hopler said that contact between people of different cultures who nonetheless had experienced the same type of divine activity convinced the protagonists

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<sup>33</sup> Hopler, 108. He used an analogy to make the point: “If you have peaches and pears, and put them in the same bowl, you have to come up with a new word to describe them. If you have Jews and Gentiles and put them in the same place, you have to come up with a new word, too. You have a phenomenon that has to have an identity.”

of Acts that Christianity could not remain confined within a particular ethnic or cultural group nor define itself exclusively from within a particular ethnic or cultural perspective.<sup>34</sup>

Hopler also observed that the process of negotiation between ethnic and cultural constituencies narrated within the book of Acts became the vital energy for the development of Christianity. In several instances, decisions to delegate authority through ethnic and cultural channels resolved cross-cultural disputes and simultaneously extended Christianity in new directions. This happened with the appointment of Stephen as deacon. It also happened in Antioch when the church appointed a man named Barnabas with a bi-cultural identity—Jewish and Gentile—to serve in the first formally commissioned missionary endeavor of Christianity. In each case, said Hopler, the protagonists of Acts had negotiated a solution to the problem at hand that respected cultural differences and resulted in more people joining the Christian fold.

As with the example of Stephen, Hopler found a lesson for white evangelicals in the examples of negotiation from the book of Acts. Given the importance of cultural channels for advancing Christianity, Hopler combined current practices within InterVarsity and his own suggestions to call for white evangelicals to delegate authority to other cultural groups. He asked whites to consider ways to mobilize black chapter members for ministry among black students on college campuses. He also asked white staff members to consider how to give practical acknowledgment to the authority of black

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<sup>34</sup> Hopler, 102

leaders. He proposed a quota system for seminary admission where black leaders could designate promising black students for a set number of spots.<sup>35</sup>

Having placed culture at the center of the development of the church, Hopler then argued that the early church's plural constituencies served to distinguish divinely revealed truth from cultural practices. The definitive example for Hopler occurred during a climactic dispute over how Jewish purity laws would apply to Gentile Christians. Some congregations enforced the laws as a divine mandate while others insisted that Gentiles has no obligation to keep them. Through a fierce debate, said Hopler, the churches decided collectively that abiding by purity laws was a Jewish cultural practice not an essential part of Christianity. They issued a letter to congregations authorizing them to make their own decisions about the matter. Yet, the churches also decided that Jewish laws in aggregate had communicated a universal truth that impurity and immorality damaged one's relationship to God. Thus, the letter also contained specific instructions for Christians to steer clear of idolatry and unchastity. Through a process of collective discernment, Hopler argued, early churches had determined what was cultural and what was universal about their faith.<sup>36</sup>

Throughout his lectures, Hopler suggested how the insights from a cultural exegesis of scripture should inform contemporary evangelicalism. Most consistently, he used cultural exegesis to challenge the cultural chauvinism of white evangelicals. Like the Hebraic Jews of early Christianity, white evangelicals' sense that they had exclusive access to divine truth had limited their ability to recognize the authority of evangelicals in other cultures and had truncated a universal faith within a circumscribed cultural

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<sup>35</sup> Hopler, 94-101.

<sup>36</sup> Hopler, 110-112.

construct. He asked white evangelicals to set aside their chauvinistic assumptions and see themselves as one culture among many. While the attack on white ethnocentrism was not new, Hopler based his opposition on Christianity's essentially plural nature whereas others had highlighted an ethical imperative against racism. He also provided another basis of support for ethnic ministry. For some missiologists, ethnic ministry was simply a useful mission strategy to advance a fixed universal truth further around the globe.<sup>37</sup> For David Howard and other proponents of foreign mission mobilization in InterVarsity, ethnic ministry spelled a compromise with Christianity's universal truth and a potential departure from orthodoxy. But Hopler insisted that ethnic ministry was neither an expedience nor a compromise. It was rather the necessary means of discerning the full scope of Christianity's universal truth and disseminating it to all cultures.

Hopler attached theological meaning and stakes to racial identity through his linking of race to culture. He presented racial categories, particularly black and white, in terms of membership in a distinctive cultural community. With culture operating as an approximation for race, Hopler suggested that knowledge of culture could reveal divine wisdom since the components of each culture—the distinctive values and practices of the cultural community—contained a portion of universal truth gifted to it by God. Cultural exchange could also reveal divine wisdom as the process of collective discernment helped to identify what portion of truth each culture contained and helped to arrive at a more complete understanding of truth.

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<sup>37</sup> The chief exponent of this view was C. Peter Wagner who developed Donald McGavran's insight about homogenous congregation in a doctoral dissertation at The University of Southern California and as a professor of mission at Fuller Theological Seminary. The next draft of chapter 2 will add a discussion of Wagner's ideas as it relates to the "nexus of conflict" that erupted over the Urbana 1973 convention.

In focusing on cross-cultural exchange, Hopler interjected a logic of interdependence into racial discourse that countered colorblind presumptions of the nature of Christian community. He used the phrase “unified, not uniform” to describe Christianity as a plural constituency of interdependent cultures whose constructive interactions helped to set the boundaries of orthodoxy.<sup>38</sup> Emphasis on a plural constituency allowed for the coexistence of religious and racial identity rather than insisting on the erasure of racial identity. With this in mind, InterVarsity began to employ the term *multiethnicity* when discussing the concept of interdependence and the practices that supported it. Multiethnicity undercut ethnocentrism and an implicit racial hierarchy that treated white cultural expressions of Christianity as the measure of acceptable doctrine and practice. It also undercut the assertion that racial identity was of little importance within a Christian community. On the contrary, the logic of interdependence relied on difference to discern between orthodox and syncretistic practices. Thus, the various cultural practices and perspectives were no longer inconsequential but essential in two important ways. Pragmatically, difference was an essential aspect of the process of discernment. Rhetorically, difference was divinely ordained since God had gifted to each culture its distinctive practices and values and had revealed the process of discernment to Christians through the Bible.

Thom Hopler’s seminars provided a crucial warrant for a program of racial equality in InterVarsity, allowing its leaders set aside any lingering concerns that compromised their commitment to mission mobilization. The cultural exegesis of scripture and the logic of interdependence that Hopler found its pages continued to

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<sup>38</sup> Hopler, 99.



inform InterVarsity's training events. InterVarsity published the content of his seminars in 1981 to disseminate his ideas to evangelical collegians and to others engaged in the missionary enterprise. During the last two decades of the twentieth century, many sermons and Bible studies would reprise Hopler's cultural exegesis of the early church and promote the logic of interdependence in support of a more expansive and equitable missionary enterprise.

From 1974-1978, Warner, Gibson, and other black staff implemented the ideas from their memo in various ways and with help from white colleagues like Hammond and Hopler. These ad hoc measures had worked to integrate African Americans, to secure funds for black ministry, and to train white staff in cross-cultural ministry; yet they operated only within a small band of a large national ministry. Warner, Gibson, and Hammond began to push for implementation at the national level that would put black collegiate ministry on firm ground for the long term. In 1978, Pete Hammond arranged for a large delegation of InterVarsity staff to attend the NBEA convention. He recruited white ministers as well as managers for an immersive cross-cultural experience with black evangelical faith. They would also hear Hopler speak about multiethnicity during the week. Black ministers attended the convention along with white colleagues. They scheduled additional meetings among themselves together to clarify what exactly black collegiate ministry ought to look like in InterVarsity.

The NBEA convention brought together InterVarsity's twelve African-American campus ministers from the Northeast, the Southeast, and southern California to assess the state of black collegiate ministry and discuss the prospects for further growth. They were

four women and eight men. Most of them had become campus ministers immediately following their time as leaders in student chapters. A few of them did so after starting or completing seminary training. Two veterans among them, Paul Gibson and Tony Warner, had formative experiences in New York where African-American students participated as a sizable majority or plurality in chapters with multi-ethnic compositions. Both had also attended Urbana 1970 and Urbana 1973. When these two left the area to establish chapters among black students in Southern California and Georgia respectively, Doreen Fox, Barbara Brown, and Bob Hunter oversaw black collegiate ministry in New York City and state. Gibson moved to Los Angeles for seminary training, where he and Keith Bolton worked with black students and cooperated with white and Asian campus ministers to help collegians explore racial identity from an evangelical orientation. In Atlanta, Tony Warner led a staff team working primarily at HBCUs in the Southeast. The team consisted of former student leaders in the region Felicia Bowens and Valerie Walden as well as Alex Anderson and Fred Williams who relocated to Atlanta from Los Angeles and North Carolina respectively. In addition, two staff did not work directly with black colleagues: Lem Tucker worked at Jackson State University in Mississippi and Stan Long at universities in Baltimore, Maryland. Two former student leaders, Elward Ellis and Carl Ellis, joined the twelve. Along with Gibson, they had turned a protest at Urbana 1967 into a nascent ministry to black collegians. Both pursued seminary training after their stint with InterVarsity and remained engaged with black collegiate ministry in InterVarsity and other evangelical organizations. Elward Ellis was a chaplain at Norfolk State University, an HBCU, and had helped Warner organize the Koinonia in Black conference two years prior. Carl Ellis followed in Clark Pinnock's footsteps, living at

Francis Schaeffer's L'Abri Center in Switzerland as a philosopher-preacher for disaffected youth. Two local pastors, supporters of InterVarsity chapters in Atlanta, brought the total number in attendance to sixteen.<sup>39</sup>

Demographic trends at universities continued to fuel ambitions for a vibrant ministry to African-American students. In just four years, the number of student participants grew from a roughly a couple hundred to more than one thousand; the number of black staff also tripled over that time from four to twelve. Warner highlighted the opportunity to prepare a new generation of black evangelical lay leaders who, upon graduation, joined the growing ranks of black professionals. Some of them expressed interest in working for InterVarsity. The higher numbers had attracted the attention of erstwhile students like Elward Ellis and Russell Weatherspoon who also considered joining the twelve staff to help expand black participation further. Recognizing the momentum of the previous four years generated enthusiasm for the future and steered the conversation toward how to manage the growth they anticipated.<sup>40</sup>

Association with a white organization had been an obstacle to growth and loomed large over the conversation. Their initiatives had mitigated InterVarsity's apathy about the racial crisis and its racially discriminatory fund raising policies enough to attract greater participation among black students. Yet, it remained uncertain if association with white evangelicals would keep black collegiate ministry from realizing its full potential in the future. As Skinner had done a decade prior, Elward Ellis encouraged the group to consider whether an independent organization might better serve African-American

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<sup>39</sup> Pete Hammond, "Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship at NBEA 1978," n.d., BGEA Collection 300, Box 187, Folder 6.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

students in the long run. Discussion about how or whether to remain affiliated with InterVarsity revealed that they did not have the same idea about what exactly black ministry was. The term black ministry referred most readily to InterVarsity's black participants—both students and ministers—but it did not recognize the different contexts of those participants. Chapters at HBCUs had only black participants while at historically white institutions (PWIs) black participants belonged to bi-racial or multi-racial chapters. Moreover, the ministers identified how their own choices to work with InterVarsity reflected agendas that did not necessarily overlap. Some had chosen work at HBCUs as a way of preparing black students for participation in black evangelical institutions. Others had chosen work within InterVarsity to advance racial equality within the organization.<sup>41</sup>

Although all of them supported both agendas, they each chose how much of their own energy to invest in the two. Alex Anderson, who worked with black students in Georgia, had an almost singular focus on training them for personal evangelism. As an administrator, Tony Warner attended to issues of racial equality that directly affected the staff and students in his region. In New York, Gibson had mentored black students and initiated programs for InterVarsity's white staff and students to work against racial discrimination. Bob Hunter also took on both agendas by shaping the ethical compass of young evangelicals of all races on racial equality and a number of other social concerns. The choices of InterVarsity's black staff carved out a multiplicity of paths for black

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<sup>41</sup> Tony Warner, "Role Choices of Black IVCF Staff," n.d., Box 187, Folder 6, IVCF Archive.

ministry to take, similar to the many trajectories suggested by a newly expansive missionary enterprise after Lausanne.<sup>42</sup>

Having laid out the complex components of their ministry with InterVarsity, black staff had to decide how to manage growth in a manner that would support the full scope of activities under the aegis of black collegiate ministry. The suggestion to dissociate from InterVarsity, although not all staff thought it was the right choice, prompted the group to clarify the various contexts and agendas among them and heightened their enthusiasm for the possibility of growth. With adequate planning, they estimated they had could double or triple the number of black ministers again within the next five years. As they sharpened their awareness of the still tenuous relationship between InterVarsity and the black campus ministry, they seemed willing to address the problem as part of their plans to move forward. In fact, by the end of their discussions at the NBEA convention, Elward Ellis reversed his position on dissociation. If InterVarsity would grant formal recognition of black ministers' authority in the organization, Ellis told those present that he would be willing to work under the auspices of InterVarsity to help flesh out a plan for growth. Following the NBEA convention, he accepted the newly created position of Director of Black Campus Ministry (BCM) in InterVarsity.<sup>43</sup>

While InterVarsity's black ministers discussed the direction of black ministry, their white colleagues settled in for a weeklong cross-cultural experience among the members of the National Black Evangelical Association. John Alexander set a somber

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<sup>42</sup> Bob Hunter's family had ties to John F. Alexander and the publication of *Freedom Now*. The publication was mimeographed in the Hunter family's home. Daniel Hunter's photograph appears in the first issue of the publication. Bob Hunter, Interview with the author, January 27, 2017.

<sup>43</sup> Pete Hammond, "Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship Black Staff Fellowship," March 1978, BGEA Collection 300, Box 187, Folder 6.

tone for their attendance that recalled the contentious Urbana conventions without naming them. During the first evening's meeting, he acknowledged that whites had been inattentive or apathetic to racial discrimination in evangelical ranks. Pete Hammond primed his colleagues for an intensive experience of learning from black evangelicals. To ensure minimal intrusion into the convention proceedings from the thirty-six white staff, he instructed them to refrain from asking questions or making comments during the formal sessions. He also encouraged them to engage in a "cultural fast" where they would limit contact with other white attendees in favor of conversations with black participants.<sup>44</sup> Anticipating their discomfort, he suggested that they record their feelings in a diary so they could discern which ones arose from misunderstanding about black people and black culture. In the evenings, Thom Hopler led white staff in discussing what they had seen and heard. He offered them his insights on ethnocentrism and lessons of interdependence from the Bible. Gibson and Warner also attended and on a few occasions and shared with them their optimism about the developing plans for black collegiate ministry. With white staff expectations primed to learn from their encounters with black evangelicals, many of them were surprised at having divine encounters during the week. Hammond later wrote that the sermons, singing, and seminars had been "a very meaningful and wholesome experience with our God."<sup>45</sup>

Two months after the NBEA, a smaller group of ten staff members convened again in Atlanta to plot out the next steps for black ministry in InterVarsity. Of the

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Hammond, "Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship at NBEA 1978," n.d., BGEA Collection 300, Box 187, Folder 6.

sixteen African-Americans at the previous meeting, four prospective leaders of black ministry were present: the veteran black staff Paul Gibson and Tony Warner, along with veteran campus ministers Elward Ellis and a part-time volunteer campus minister Russell Weatherspoon. Of the thirty-nine white staff who had attended the NBEA gathering, six regional managers were present. One of the six managers, Pete Hammond, facilitated the one-day meeting.<sup>46</sup>

By the end of the day, the group had outlined an initiative called “Fifty in Five for Three Point Five” intended to hire fifty more black ministers over a period of five years at a cost of \$3,500,000. The initiative introduced new funding policies to raise money for new campus ministers. New ministers would have an obligation to raise a portion of their own salaries, but not the entire amount as InterVarsity’s policy dictated for its campus ministers. The rest of the money would come from other types of fund raising efforts. White staff would ask current donors to give additional funds toward black ministry. The national office would also solicit major donors and seek out grants from foundations. The initiative also established new structures for managing black ministry. The four black staff at the strategy session would become mid-level managers with the duties of a staff director to manage current staff and to hire new staff in a given geographic area. Gibson, Warner, and even Ellis had taken on administrative duties in the past; the new positions formalized their authority as leaders of InterVarsity’s black ministry. As managers they had positions of authority on regional leadership teams. The initiative also identified cross-cultural staff—those black staff who did not prioritize ministry with black students as well as those white staff who had shown themselves effective in ministering to black

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<sup>46</sup> Hammond, “IVCF Ministry to Blacks,” n.d., BGEA Archive Collection 300, Box 187, Folder 6.

students. The three elements would provide financial resources and autonomous leadership for the complex vectors and agendas of black ministry.<sup>47</sup>

“Fifty in Five for Three Point Five” sought to implement ad hoc initiatives from previous four years in a comprehensive way. It formalized the integration of black ministers into every echelon of the organization and underwrote the move with new funding policies. It thus acknowledged that management and funding apparatuses had been insufficient and offered tangible remediation for the lack of black staff authority in the organization and for the perennial challenges in developing donor support for black ministers. In short, the initiative secured a greater commitment from InterVarsity’s top leaders to black ministry. John Alexander had endorsed ethnic ministry back in 1973, but, with the new initiative, the organization took on a greater share of the burden to sustain black ministry and loosened the formal channels of paternalistic control over its direction.

After the two Atlanta meetings of 1978, circumstances speeded the process for black leaders to take the practical reins of authority that had been outlined in the initiative. Pete Hammond, who had played a crucial role in convening the meetings and advocating the importance of the initiative, would be away from InterVarsity for a year while teaching in a seminary in Asia. Ellis, Gibson, and Warner had an opportunity now to speak directly to John Alexander on behalf of black ministry. In addition, Thom Hopler died of a heart attack while at an InterVarsity event in June of 1978. Responding to the unexpected loss, campus ministers who had worked closely with Hopler lobbied to shape InterVarsity’s ethnic ministry with Hopler’s powerful synthesis of cultural exegesis and missiological trends. They also worked with Marcia Hopler, Thom’s widow, to publish the seminar

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<sup>47</sup> “Fifty in Five for Three Point Five: Ministry to Black Collegians,” May 1978, BGEA Collection 300, Box 187, Folder 6.



lectures to give his ideas wider circulation among evangelicals.<sup>48</sup> The two events afforded the opportunity and the urgency for implementing the initiative in order to sustain black campus ministry.

Ten years after black students' prayerful disruption, InterVarsity established BCM as an official component of the organization and incorporated black ministers into its formal channels of authority. From their position as newly appointed leaders, Ellis, Gibson, and Warner saw BCM thrive in many ways. A group of twelve black ministers continued to offer venues for exploring black evangelical identity without white students present; and they connected black students to a still thriving Black Evangelical Renaissance—as well as to other strands of Christianity practiced among African Americans.<sup>49</sup> In collaboration with their InterVarsity colleagues, they helped students of all races incorporate social concern into lay mission work on college campuses and elsewhere. Whereas in the past foreign mission work had eclipsed domestic mission work, InterVarsity's black ministers also created a new type of convention that mobilized evangelical youth for socially conscious evangelization in American cities.<sup>50</sup> Meanwhile, InterVarsity secured a grant from the McClellan Foundation that would supplement black ministers' salaries and bring the proposal to hire fifty new ministers by 1984 closer at hand.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Campus Minister Neil Rendall prompted discussion of implementing Hopley's ideas after his death. See Gladys and Keith Hunt, *For Christ and the University: The First Fifty Years of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 301. Fryling's account of publishing the seminar lectures appears in the foreword of Hopley's *A World of Difference*.

<sup>49</sup> See correspondence and untitled conference material in BGEA Collection 300, Box 187, Folders 7 & 8.

<sup>50</sup> See correspondence and untitled conference material in BGEA Collection 300, Box 117, Folder 3.

<sup>51</sup> See correspondence and material related to managing the grant in BGEA Collection 300, Box 230, Folder 7 and Box 117, Folder 7.

Nonetheless, black ministers continued to wrestle with the challenges of operating within a majority-white organization. Alex Anderson had great success pastoring students at HBCUs but had trouble meeting the minimum requirement to raise money for his salary. His position within InterVarsity was uncertain for several years until he eventually found a steady base of donors to rely on.<sup>52</sup> Also, racial conflict did not disappear with the creation of black collegiate ministry, and managerial decisions still pitted white leaders and black ministers against each other. As Ellis considered whether to take the position as head of black collegiate ministry, he had insisted that his office be located in Philadelphia because of its proximity to black students and supportive institutions. After accepting the position, he bowed to pressure from Alexander to operate out of InterVarsity's national headquarters in Madison, Wisconsin.<sup>53</sup> The decision called into question Ellis's authority over black collegiate ministry, though it was also a compromise that favored the efficiency of standardization across a national organization over flexibility for its various departments and regions. Furthermore, even the successes of black collegiate ministry brought to bear new dimensions of racial inequality. Like all InterVarsity employees, black ministers were obliged to attend Urbana every third December. However, black ministers had also taken on an additional obligation of running the domestic missionary convention they had devised. With these and other aspects of black collegiate ministry, black ministers had a larger list of obligations attached to their work than white ministers.

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<sup>52</sup> See correspondence and Alex Anderson's reports to supervisors in BGEA Collection 300, Box 169, Folders 22 and 23. Anderson spent more than two decades with InterVarsity and served as the director of Black Campus Ministry in the 1990s.

<sup>53</sup> See correspondence and material in BGEA Collection 300, Box 187, Folder 8.

In the 1980s, they would press white ministers to share the burden of working for racial equality and demand a more manageable and equitable workload for themselves.<sup>54</sup>

Against sizable odds and unfavorable precedents, black ministers managed to turn the attention of InterVarsity to the racial crisis within its ranks. They did so first in a memo that called the organization to commit itself to racial equality and outlined a plan for doing so. Then, they implemented the plan on an ad hoc basis and gathered the support of other ministers for what they were doing. As more students participated in InterVarsity, black ministers pressed to implement their plan at the national level. As a result, by 1980 InterVarsity provided greater institutional support for ministry to black students with the creation of Black Campus Ministry. Shortly thereafter, it did the same for ministry to Hispanic and Asian students who had begun to participate in greater number during the 1970s, too. InterVarsity also established formal channels of authority for black ministers and—as their numbers increased—for Hispanic and Asian ministers. In addition to these tangible measure of equality, InterVarsity’s cultural training had prompted more white ministers to make racial equality a priority when pastoring students and in their work with colleagues. A revised vision of the missionary enterprise—coming out of the Lausanne Congress and brought to InterVarsity by Thom Hopler—undergirded those changes. Rooted in a cultural exegesis of scripture, the vision explained the complexities of a diverse, global community using the language of racial identity and the logic of interdependence in a way that undercut the language of colorblindness and the logic of racial domination that colorblindness concealed. Although it remained a topic of

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<sup>54</sup> See material related to InterVarsity’s new domestic mission mobilization convention in BGEA Collection 300, Box 119, Folder 13.

debate, the revised vision of mission work undermined white hegemony operating in InterVarsity and in evangelicalism, allowing for more equitable terms of participation and leadership in the movement.

If the Lausanne Congress paved the way for InterVarsity's transformation, the Black Evangelical Renaissance also informed and sustained the organization's work for racial equality throughout the 1970s. InterVarsity's black ministers relied on a network of black evangelicals for Koinonia in Black and other training programs, and they reciprocated by participating in or leading black evangelical events regionally and nationally. Also, NBEA conventions inspired many of InterVarsity's white ministers to share the burden of working for racial equality with their black colleagues. Furthermore, the presence of a flourishing black evangelical faith sometimes allowed black ministers to leverage negotiations with white leaders in their favor. Faced with the prospect of black ministers continuing their work outside the confines of InterVarsity, Alexander accepted Elward Ellis's counterproposal, giving formal recognition to Black Campus Ministry and appoint Ellis as its director. The tactic resembles Stacey Woods's tussle with segregationists on InterVarsity's board of trustees in 1952; most ministers threatened to quit unless the board recognized Ivery Harvey's status as their equal. In 1978, after a decade of sustained efforts of black ministers, Ellis had the authority to negotiate for equitable conditions directly and without the mediation of white ministers.

Although racial conflict had initiated InterVarsity's transformation and it continued every step of the way, there were fewer contentious moments in the latter 1970s. Nonetheless, the détente between white and black evangelicals in InterVarsity reveals the nature of white racial dominance and spells out just what supporters of racial

equality were up against. Quite surprisingly, David Howard did not remain steadfast to his ideas about the insidious possibilities an expansive missionary enterprise held for InterVarsity. In fact, no one seems to have raised objections to the increased attention on racial equality in the late 1970s—though there were small disputes across racial lines among staff members during that time. The arrival of consensus about an expansive missionary enterprise at home and abroad played some role in this, softening the intensity that Howard and others felt about the need to protect foreign mission mobilization. In 1980, the competition diminished further when InterVarsity offered its first national convention to mobilize students for mission work in American cities. Yet, these new developments carried the support of white ministers who had partnered with black ministers to make racial equality a priority in the campus ministry. In some instances, black evangelicals successfully negotiated on their own behalf. Nonetheless, to realize the plan that black ministers had outlined and initiated, Pete Hammond, Thom Hopler, and a few other white managers in the organization pressed to make changes on a national scale. In other words, a new consensus about mission work and pressure from black evangelicals was insufficient to sway InterVarsity’s leaders without the additional endorsement of white ministers. Aspiring to achieve racial equality in InterVarsity, the small cadre of white managers paradoxically used their place at the top of the racial order to earn a hearing for the orthodoxy of those aspirations.

With the creation of Black Campus Ministry, InterVarsity’s black ministers and their white colleagues succeeded in undermining a particular regime of authority made possible by America’s racial order. They mounted a complex contestation against white racial dominance in InterVarsity that unfolded over the course of a decade. The contest

involved clashes between black and white evangelicals. With the help of those in the Black Evangelical Renaissance, InterVarsity's black ministers exposed the protection of white authority that lay underneath ostensibly theological and strategic debates and hindered the campus ministry's work. At the same time, white and black colleagues challenged policies and practices that favored white ministers and students and cooperated to introduce policies that redistributed authority addressed inequality. In the process, they introduced new ideas about the expansive scope of the missionary enterprise and about the essentially plural nature of Christian community. The transformation of InterVarsity did not eliminate racial conflict nor prevent white ministers and students from making recourse to the racial order. Nonetheless, by 1980 InterVarsity had rearranged itself to accommodate its racially plural constituency and to promote equitable participation in its missionary enterprise.

## Chapter 6

### Race and the Uneasy Conscience of American Evangelicals

In the thirty years following World War II, the evangelical missionary enterprise grew in size and scope. Missionaries made complex analyses of potential converts that informed a variety of evangelization strategies; missionized communities initiated indigenous evangelization and sent missionaries to points around the globe. The homogenous unit principle underwrote indigenous missionaries' partial displacement of western missionaries. The concept of cross-cultural evangelism displaced the primacy of foreign mission work by treating geographic boundaries as just one of many types of boundaries that missionaries might cross. In the process, evangelicals seem to have put aside their uneasy conscience about social concern as it became one of many potential components for missionaries to employ.

Nonetheless, the changes in the missionary enterprise were punctuated by racial conflict. During the 1960s, black evangelicals were among the vanguard pressing the movement to realize their vision for a missionary enterprise that would make the world a better place. They mobilized themselves for evangelization in black communities, going to places that white evangelicals had assigned a lower priority and presenting their commitment to faith to other African Americans as proof that evangelical Christianity was not simply a tool in the service of racial subjugation. At the same time, black evangelicals demanded that the movement put to rest its uneasiness about social concern in general and commit itself to working against racial inequality. They underscored the ethical imperative to do so and the ways that it would accelerate the advance of the missionary enterprise. White evangelicals registered their objections along the way. Some

of the objections involved overt racial prejudice and discrimination, but many white evangelicals challenged or dismissed black evangelicals' contributions to the missionary enterprise as outside the bounds of orthodoxy. In particular, some claimed that the celebration of black identity accompanying the Black Evangelical Renaissance contravened the colorblind understanding of religious identity that had wide purchase among evangelicals; some claimed that prioritizing racial equality would compromise the importance of preaching conversion. Crucially, black and white evangelicals alike acted as participants in the movement's ongoing conversation about how to define and carry out the missionary enterprise, and they did so with the aim of maintaining evangelical orthodoxy. As they came into conflict, substantive theological and strategic debates comingled with the exercise of white racial dominance.

The ensuing racial conflicts were a critical agent in the transformation of American evangelicalism in the postwar years. In InterVarsity, it prompted African Americans to take collegiate ministry in new directions and to secure support for racial equality. To do so, they tapped into the Black Evangelical Renaissance, itself the product of clashes across racial lines. Racial conflict also introduced the evangelical movement to a cultural exegesis of scripture along with the logic of interdependence and a new understanding of the significance of racial identity. These new practices and ideas challenged white hegemony and reconfigured the missionary enterprise around its plural, global constituency.

The creation of Black Campus Ministry in InterVarsity is a rich manifestation of American evangelicalism's transformation from 1945 to 1980 spurred on by racial conflict. BCM came about as a result of a sustained, complex contestation of white racial



domination and efforts to disentangle evangelical faith from the historic role Christianity played in maintaining it. Beginning in 1968, black students and ministers implemented new practices and incorporated new ideas associated with the Black Evangelical Renaissance to advance the faith among black collegians; while they had help from white students and ministers, they also they endured inconsistent support for their work and even efforts to undermine it. In response, they sought support from InterVarsity and the Black Evangelical Renaissance to place ministry to black students on a more secure foundation for the long-term. They also implemented programs to combat racial prejudice and discrimination among white participants. As these efforts disrupted the exercise of white authority in the organization, the objections and obstacles to their work diminished. The creation of BCM was the culmination of those efforts. It signified InterVarsity's growing commitment to racial equality by establishing formal channels of authority for African Americans and by providing new measures of financial support for black ministers. In the two decades after the creation of BCM, InterVarsity established similar structures for Asian-American students and for Hispanic students.

The Black Evangelical Renaissance had supported the creation of InterVarsity's BCM and it continued to flourish through the close of the twentieth century. In the postwar years, it had offered theological and strategic perspectives on the missionary enterprise that challenged prevailing views and it created alternative lines of authority to carry out the missionary enterprise. Both of these weakened the exercise of white racial dominance, affording black evangelicals the opportunity to set for themselves the terms of their participation in a movement where white people predominated. After 1980, the Black Evangelical Renaissance remained a loose network of professional and lay leaders

representing a variety of views who continued to practice evangelical faith informed by their experiences as African Americans and their commitment to the missionary enterprise. In some fashion, black evangelicals continued to challenge racial inequality within the evangelical movement while they evangelized in black communities and around the world.

In the late 1980s, black evangelicals orchestrated a large-scale missionary convention called Destiny with the intention of mobilizing black Christians—not just college students—into mission work at home and abroad. Many organizers had come of age in InterVarsity, TSA, or NBCSC in the 1960s and 1970s. Although the convention was explicitly for black evangelicals, convention organizers worked with InterVarsity’s ministers—some who were white and some who were black—and drew on the organization’s four decades of experience running missionary conventions.<sup>1</sup> The Destiny conference may have been a high watermark for the Black Evangelical Renaissance as its organizers achieved a balance between autonomy and cooperation in their partnership with white evangelicals. During the 1990s, when the acquittal of police officers who had assaulted Rodney King escalated conflicts across racial lines, black evangelicals again confronted white evangelicals about the regime of white racial dominance that still shaped the movement. However, the robust plan for achieving racial equality that they proposed was diminished in the hands of white evangelicals. Rather than provide

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<sup>1</sup> Various conference material, BGEA Collection 300, Box 229, Folder 5 and Box 239, Folder 9.

sustained attention to institutional barriers to equality, white evangelicals sought out brief, emotional encounters with black evangelicals at conferences.<sup>2</sup>

While full analysis is beyond the scope of this project, the brief outline of the Black Evangelical Renaissance's trajectory since 1980 suggests two possible topics for further study. First, initial evidence seems to indicate a contrast between what happened in the 1980s and the 1990s. This may suggest that the Black Evangelical Renaissance had run its course by the late 1980s and a new phase in the development of black evangelical faith began thereafter. Second, the historical record under consideration indicates that men dominated the Renaissance—although men and women contributed to it. This project has called attention to Ruth Lewis as a pioneer in InterVarsity's black collegiate ministry and a leader in the NBEA. Yet, many other black women ministers, college students, and lay leaders appear in the historical record. Brenda Salter-McNeil began her professional ministry life with InterVarsity in the 1980s and worked as the director of an urban immersion program for college students. She spoke at the Urbana convention of 2000 and, as of 2019, worked as a pastor of a church and as an associate professor of Reconciliation Studies at Seattle Pacific University, a Christian institution.<sup>3</sup> Felicia Bowens-Anderson began a career as a campus minister for InterVarsity in the Southeast and still worked for InterVarsity as of 2019.<sup>4</sup> From the lives of these two and many

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<sup>2</sup> For contemporary presentations of a plan for racial equality see Spencer Perkins and Chris Rice, *More Than Equals: Racial Healing for the Sake of the Gospel*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993). For material on brief, emotional encounters see a discussion of Promise Keeper rallies in Miller, 111-113.

<sup>3</sup> Warner, 40; Salter-McNeil's address to the Urbana convention is available at from InterVarsity's multimedia archive <https://vimeo.com/87899915> accessed April 8, 2019; Biographical information taken from Salter-McNeil's personal website <https://www.saltermcneil.com/about-dr-brenda> accessed April 8, 2019.

<sup>4</sup> Warner, 22; BGEA Collection 300, Box 170, Folders 2 through 5.

others, there is ample material for scholars to discover the voices and assess the contributions of black women in the evangelical movement.

Advocates for racial equality created new interpretations of scripture to challenge the racial order and call evangelicals to action. Biblical exegesis thus played a role in dividing evangelicals across racial lines *and* in mediating conflict. In his address at Urbana 1970, Tom Skinner presented a surprising interpretation of the events of Jesus's resurrection as a political coup and asked evangelical youth to join in a revolutionary missionary enterprise to dismantle systems of oppression. Some welcomed the portrayal as a realization of an expansive scope for mission work while others railed against it for touting social action over conversion. Hopler offered a novel cultural exegesis of the book of Acts. Pointing to the experience of the earliest Christian communities as a model to follow, he warned that leaving white ethnocentrism unchecked would limit their understanding of Christian faith. He also argued that tending to issues of equality would accelerate mission work rather than slow it down. Attaching the authority of scripture to the agenda to work for racial equality was a necessary step in the creation of BCM. Although not everyone in InterVarsity agreed with all of Hopler's conclusions, his cultural exegesis provided a biblical warrant for BCM that put to rest the suspicion that ethnic ministry would take InterVarsity beyond the bounds of orthodoxy.

Hopler's cultural exegesis introduced the logic of interdependence into the evangelical movement to challenge the exercise of white hegemony. Thereafter, evangelicals applied the logic of interdependence to other circumstances—congregational growth, interpersonal relationships, and gender. Fuller Theological Seminary professor C. Peter Wagner designed an assessment tool that helped congregants identify their

distinctive “spiritual” assets from a list found in the New Testament. Congregations could then arrange the church’s ministry around their complementary gifts and thereby improve their effectiveness. Wagner and proponents of “spiritual gifts assessments” promoted them as a tool for pastors to mobilize their congregations for evangelization. It was a kind of second wave of what became the church growth movement along with the homogenous unit principle.<sup>5</sup> InterVarsity Christian Fellowship utilized the Myers-Briggs personality inventory to promote positive interpersonal relationships in campus chapters and on teams of campus ministers. In training sessions for students and in employee orientations participants took a questionnaire to identify their preferred modes for processing information and making decisions. With this knowledge, individuals could more effectively participate in teams and teams could operate more effectively.<sup>6</sup> The logic of interdependence also applied to gender, though the topic tended to polarize evangelicals divided about how much authority women should have. Some articulated the complementarian point of view wherein God had ordained a supposedly benign inequality between men and women. Others articulated the egalitarian point of view wherein God had ordained equality between men and women. Despite the debates between them, the logic of interdependence operated within both camps. Both posited an

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<sup>5</sup> C. Peter Wagner, *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow*, (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1979). Wagner’s Church Growth Movement was a frequent topic of discussion in evangelical circles throughout the 1970s and 1980s in *Christianity Today* and in InterVarsity’s periodicals and books.

<sup>6</sup> See Steve Stuckey et al, *Student Leader Handbook*, available online at <https://intervarsity.org/handbooks/large-group/largegroupmeetingshandbookindex> accessed March 5, 2018.

essential difference between men and women and advised interdependent relationships between spouses and between men and women in general.<sup>7</sup>

The recourse to the logic of interdependence in these instances—race, congregational life, interpersonal relationships, and gender—reveal a pattern to the ways that evangelicals grappled with the increasingly plural nature of their own religious communities and the world beyond it. The Church Growth Movement borrowed from the trend of market segmentation. It provided a strategy to advance Christianity along a variety of geographically and culturally defined segments of a global religious market. Myers-Briggs and other interpersonal workshops had broad utility in corporate training in the late twentieth century as well. The intersection suggests that, like other sectors of American society, evangelicals tried to manage difference by categorizing it into identifiable, complementary components. The logic of interdependence sometimes served to disrupt regimes of power and at other times left them undisturbed.

The term *multiethnicity* introduced evangelicals to a new understanding of race as a category of human identity in the late twentieth century. *Multiethnicity* did not supplant colorblindness among evangelicals, but it became effective shorthand for the logic of interdependence that InterVarsity taught to students and employed to make the organization more equitable. The term also celebrated the dynamic nature of evangelicalism's plural constituency. As Hopler had articulated, a *multiethnic* community would keep in check ethnocentrism and, in the process, provide momentum to the missionary enterprise. The logic of interdependence relied on racial difference as a means

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<sup>7</sup> Like Church Growth, the debate over the place of women in evangelicalism was a frequent topic of conversation. For a discussion of the various positions in the debate at the end of the twentieth century, see Bonnidell Clouse and Robert Clouse, eds, *Women in Ministry: Four Views*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989).

to achieve equitable participation and leadership, as ministry was targeted to specific racial communities and authority was distributed along racial lines. Although *multiethnicity* recognized the various religious-racial identities within an evangelical community, it articulated racial identity as static. Racial groups, referred to as ethnicities or cultures, contained a fixed set of features that elucidated some aspect of the divine nature. Knowledge of those features also helped to resolve racial conflict.

While *multiethnicity* circulated in InterVarsity during the 1990s and into the twenty-first century, other concepts about human identity emerged that contested regimes of social control in other ways. Scholars and social activists observed that categories of identity such as gender, race, class, and sexuality intersected in individual persons to form a complex identity. One's membership in a privileged category could mitigate the effects of social control while membership in multiple categories that faced disadvantages could multiply those effects. This observation complicated the critique of social control and underwrote new campaigns for social activism.<sup>8</sup>

In the twenty-first century, the issue of equality for lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, and transgender, and queer persons (LGBTQ) became a source of conflict between evangelicals. In 2014, World Vision—an evangelical humanitarian aid organization—established a policy to extend employment benefits to same-sex partners of employees. When a large number of donors canceled their sponsorship to protest the policy, World

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<sup>8</sup> Kimberle Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1241-299; Kimberle Crenshaw, ed., *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed a Movement*, (New York: The New Press, 1995), xiii- xxxii.

Vision reversed their decision to ensure no interruptions in their aid operations.<sup>9</sup> In 2016, InterVarsity issued a policy prohibiting employees from teaching or espousing the position that LGBTQ identities were permissible by evangelical faith. In response, former students, ministers, and donors signed a petition demanding a reversal of the policy.<sup>10</sup> These conflicts were just as contentious as issues of race had been previously and similarly involved disparate understandings of the significance of identity—in this case related to sexuality rather than race—as well as a disputed status of equality. Like racial conflicts in previous decades, this conflict involved theological debates comingled with protection of the status quo.

If American evangelicals expressed uneasiness about crossing the boundaries of orthodoxy, the frequency and intensity of conflict between white and black evangelicals in the postwar years indicate that the prospect of violating the racial order lay at the center of the movement's uneasy conscience. Like white evangelicals, black evangelicals defined their evangelization programs vis-à-vis modernist Christianity, a sign of their uneasiness about orthodoxy. Nonetheless, their initiative in mission work and exchanges with white evangelicals created new practices and new structures outside the control of

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<sup>9</sup> Laurie Goodstein, "Christian Charity Backtracks on Gays." *New York Times*, Mar 28, 2014, A12.

<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth Diaz, "Evangelical College Group to Dismiss Employees Who Support Gay Marriage," *Time Magazine*, October 6, 2016; "Petition Calling for the Reversal of #InterVarsityPurge," <https://www.change.org/p/intervarsity-christian-fellowship-calling-for-the-reversal-of-intervarsitypurge> accessed April 11, 2019. InterVarsity has made available to its employees and student leaders two pamphlets entitled "Theology of Human Sexuality" and "Human Sexuality Resources" but had not made them available outside the organization as of April 2019. <https://collegiateministries.intervarsity.org/resources/human-sexuality>, accessed April 14, 2019.



white evangelicals; increasingly, they mounted an explicit challenge to white evangelicals' claim to being the stewards of the movement's institutions and the final arbiters of its disputes. White evangelicals' objections to those initiatives had substantive theological and strategic aspects, but their arguments served to reinforce the racial order and to protect the unwarranted authority that it afforded them. In these instances, the protection of orthodoxy operated as a proxy for the protection of white racial dominance. For that reason, white racial dominance became enmeshed in the debates about defining and carrying out the missionary enterprise. The failure of white evangelicals to recognize that element in their exchanges with black evangelicals intensified their conflicts. In the postwar era, American evangelicals had many dimensions to their uneasy conscience, but they were perhaps most uneasy about the existence of America's racial order. Some, uneasy about losing their monopoly on power, maneuvered to maintain it; others, uneasy about inequality among evangelicals and about its cost to the missionary enterprise, worked to undo it.

In spite of the transformation of InterVarsity during the postwar years, the Urbana convention continued to ignite conflict over race issues into the twenty-first century and the uneasiness of white evangelicals continued to temper work for racial equality. Attendees had experienced the Black Evangelical Renaissance in 1970, and in 2015 they heard from supporters of the Black Lives Matter Movement (BLM). Standing before an audience of sixteen thousand at the American Center in downtown St. Louis—just 11 miles from the spot where a white police officer Darren Wilson had shot an African American named Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, a year before—African-American preacher Michelle Higgins railed against white evangelicals for ignoring and forgetting

the history of racial suppression. Like Skinner before her, Higgins related stories from America's history and its contemporary headlines to rouse them out of their indifference to the suffering of African Americans. While Skinner chided his audience for supporting law-and-order politicians, Higgins confronted the politics of abortion that had arisen since the 1970s. She claimed that anti-abortion activists made a "spectacle" in order to secure "mercy for the unborn," but "with[held] mercy for the living."<sup>11</sup> Exposing a new manifestation of the evangelical uneasy conscience, she said that the association of BLM with liberal positions such as support for abortion was an unacceptable excuse for not joining in the fight for justice with BLM and for African Americans. Like Skinner, she used scripture to argue for an expansive scope to the missionary enterprise, explaining that mission work was God's divine plan for bringing about justice in the world. At the end of her address, she led the audience in a call-and-response chant similar to those that BLM activists had employed over the previous year of street demonstrations, saying "I believe that we will win."<sup>12</sup> With that hopeful sentiment, she commissioned her audience as missionary-activists in the work of establishing justice for African Americans and for others around the world.

Not everyone found hope in the message she gave. In fact, Higgins and the Black Lives Matter Movement divided evangelicals in 2016 in much the same way that Skinner and the Black Evangelical Renaissance had divided evangelicals four decades earlier.

During the month of January, the conflict played out in the new medium of digital

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<sup>11</sup> Michelle Higgins, untitled address, December 28, 2016, Vimeo video, 13:50, <https://vimeo.com/150226527> accessed April 14, 2019 Higgins.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 26:16; For a sample of chants used in Black Lives Matter protests see "Abundant Activism Chant Sheet," n.d., <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5005e87c84aedff146247d9c/t/57f419e0e4fcb587af0c3c40/1475615201512/ChantSheet.pdf> accessed April 14, 2019.

communication with 140-character-long expressions of support or denunciation for Higgins and of BLM.<sup>13</sup> As in the past, some registered objections about the proper scope of mission work, and others defended an expansive definition of the missionary enterprise. InterVarsity minister Ram Sridharan reminded disputants that the protection of white hegemony lay behind many of the objections.<sup>14</sup> Members of the anti-abortion movement mistook Higgins's comments as promoting abortion and thereafter reiterated objections about the insidious possibilities of working for racial equality from years past and adapted them for present circumstances.<sup>15</sup> Janet Mefford, an InterVarsity alumna and broadcast personality, voiced a number of fears: about the acerbic tone of BLM's demonstrations against police procedures and policies; about Higgins's reference to standing on the shoulders of scholar-activist and former Black Panther Party member Angela Davis; and about the participation of LGBTQ persons in the Black Lives Matter

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<sup>13</sup> The author performed a digital search of twitter.com for messages that Michelle Higgins from December 28, 2015 through January 30, 2016. [https://twitter.com/search?q=AfroRising%20since%3A2015-12-26%20until%3A2016-01-30&src=typed\\_query&f=live](https://twitter.com/search?q=AfroRising%20since%3A2015-12-26%20until%3A2016-01-30&src=typed_query&f=live) accessed April 14, 2019.

<sup>14</sup> Ram Sridharan, "Three Criticism of Michelle Higgins' Urbana 15 Talk That Are Gifts to White Evangelicals," January 6, 2016, <https://sriramsridharan01.wordpress.com/2016/01/06/3-criticisms-of-michelle-higgins-urbana-15-talk-that-are-gifts-to-white-evangelicals/>, accessed April 14, 2019. For another assessment of Higgins's divisive address by another InterVarsity staff member see Sean Watkins, "Why Michelle Higgins Matters," December 31, 2015, <https://smwatkins.com/2015/12/31/why-michelle-higgins-matters/>, accessed April 14, 2019.

<sup>15</sup> Mark Oppenheimer, "A Debate Over Black Lives Matter," *The New York Times*, January 22, 2016, A13; Harry Bruinius, "College Evangelicals Embrace Unlikely Cause: Black Lives Matter," *The Christian Science Monitor*, December 31, 2015, <https://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Society/2015/1231/College-evangelicals-embrace-unlikely-cause-Black-Lives-Matter>, accessed April 14, 2019. On the inaccurate reports that Higgins promoted abortion see Kevin Porter, "Urbana 15's Speaker Under Fire for Criticizing Pro-Life Activism," *Christian Post*, January 2, 2016, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/urbana-15-blacklivesmatter-speaker-under-fire-pro-life-group-abortion.html>, accessed April 14, 2019

movement.<sup>16</sup> *Christianity Today*, the magazine launched in the 1950s by the man who coined the term uneasy conscience, struck a conciliatory tone between evangelicals who supported BLM and those who held anti-abortion positions. Accompanied by a photograph of an African-American women holding a protest sign reading “Unite Here!,” it published an article urging the two sides to learn from one another.<sup>17</sup> Sojourners, an organization of evangelical activists founded by progressive Jim Wallis in the 1970s, commended InterVarsity for “being the first evangelical ...organization to take a strong stand in support of the message of the Black Lives Matter movement.”<sup>18</sup>

Even before the month-long flurry of exchanges on digital media, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship and Michelle Higgins each responded with public statements affirming their “pro-life” position while reasserting their support for BLM. InterVarsity’s president Jim Lundgren issued a statement that reflected his forty-year career as a white minister working to build a multiethnic campus ministry: “Scripture is clear about the sanctity of life. That is why I’m both pro-life and committed to the dignity of my black brothers and sisters.”<sup>19</sup> He also explained why InterVarsity featured the Black Lives

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<sup>16</sup> Janet Mefford, “When #BlackLivesMatter Went to a Missions Conference,” January 6, 2106, <https://janetmefford.com/2016/01/when-blacklivesmatter-went-to-a-missions-conference/>, accessed April 14, 2019.

<sup>17</sup> Morgan Lee, “What Can the #BlackLivesMatter and Pro-Life Movements Learn From Each Other?,” *Christianity Today*, January 18, 2016, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2016/january-web-only/what-can-blacklivesmatter-and-pro-life-movements-learn-from.html>, accessed April 14, 2019.

<sup>18</sup> “Dear Leadership of Urbana15 and InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, January 5, 2016,” available online at <https://sojo.net/articles/open-letter-leadership-urbana15-and-intervarsity-christian-fellowship>, accessed April 14, 2019. For the origins of Sojourners and Jim Wallis see David Swartz, *Moral Minority: The Evangelical Left in an Age of Conservatism*, (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 47-67.

<sup>19</sup> Jim Lundgren, “InterVarsity and #BlackLivesMatter,” news release, December 31, 2015, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, <https://intervarsity.org/news/intervarsity-and-blacklivesmatter>, accessed April 14, 2019.

Matter movement at their mission convention, writing that “many black InterVarsity staff and students report that they are physically and emotionally at risk in their communities and on campus...InterVarsity chose to participate in this conversation [about BLM] because we believe that Christians have something distinctive to contribute in order to advance the gospel.” In Higgins’s public statement, she expressed her view that “babies are fully human from conception” but refused to back down on her critique of the pro-life movement.<sup>20</sup> Higgins spent 2016 engaged in BLM demonstrations and continued to rally evangelicals to join her in the fight for justice for African Americans.<sup>21</sup> For its part, InterVarsity earned the peculiar distinction of implementing a policy that denied the legitimacy of LGBTQ identity less than a year after hosting a convention that implored American evangelicals to treat black lives with dignity.

In that same year, Carl Ellis, Jr., also weighed in with his assessment of Black Lives Matter through the lens of his experiences in the Black Evangelical Renaissance. Recalling the intervention that he and others had made in evangelical Christianity over the past fifty years, Ellis wrote that black lives matter to God and that Christians “ought to have a healthy concern for matters that touch on black lives [such as] ... just

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<sup>20</sup> Higgins’s public statement is not available in full but a portion appears in Mark Oppenheimer, “A Debate Over Black Lives Matter,” *The New York Times*, January 22, 2016, A13.

<sup>21</sup> For Higgins’s continued involvement in demonstrations and for events in support of racial justice see Michelle Higgins, “Weaponized Whiteness and the Ethic of Disarmament,” *Faith for Justice*, September 24, 2016, <https://www.faithforjustice.org/blog/2016/09/25/weaponized-whiteness>, accessed April 4, 2019. See also Aaron Cline Hanbury, “Why the Church Should Support #BlackLivesMatter: A conversation with Michelle Higgins,” *Relevant Magazine*, January 14, 2016, <https://relevantmagazine.com/reject-apathy/why-church-should-support-blacklivesmatter> accessed April 14, 2019.

policing.”<sup>22</sup> Nonetheless, he advised black evangelical youth not to involve themselves in BLM demonstrations. Reprising Tom Skinner’s rebuke of the radicalism of the late 1960s, he said that BLM sought to destroy an unjust system without offering a replacement. Rather than cooperate with BLM, said Ellis, evangelicals should strive to “abolish the unjust system in order to establish a more just system.”<sup>23</sup> His advice reflected the process of creating InterVarsity’s Black Campus Ministry. In the 1960s, black InterVarsity students distinguished their style of activism from other black students activists. In the 1970s, they introduced new ideas, practices, and policies that both challenged white hegemony and established tangible measures of racial equality. Yet, in counseling against radical activism, Ellis neglected a crucial element of evangelicalism’s postwar transformation. The elements that made up a complex contest to white hegemony—in effect, the ideas, practices, and policies that became a more just system within InterVarsity—were not readily available for Ellis and others to draw upon from the start. Instead, they were forged in the crucible of racial conflict over the span of several years.

The conflict over Black Lives Matter at InterVarsity’s flagship mission convention helps to evaluate the nature of evangelicalism’s transformation during the postwar decades. In the years since 1980, evangelicals had a set of ideas, practices, and policies—created and revised in the crucible of racial conflict—to continue to confront white hegemony. Nonetheless, the racial dimensions of the movement’s uneasy conscience continued to pit white evangelicals against evangelicals of other races. The

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<sup>22</sup> Carl Ellis, Jr., “Reflections on Black Lives,” July 16, 2016, <https://drcarlellisjr.blogspot.com/2016/07/reflections-on-black-lives.html?m=1>, accessed April 14, 2019.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

persistence of white racial domination did not erase the accomplishments of evangelicals who reconfigured their faith around its racially plural constituency. Yet, it underscores the immense size and scope of the regime of racial suppression that marked American society throughout the twentieth century and continued in to the twenty-first century. In addition, the transformation of evangelicalism had its beginnings in a vision for the missionary enterprise to improve the world. A shared commitment to the mission work brought white and black evangelicals into conflict, exposing the exercise of white hegemony and initiating a complex challenge against it. As they disentangled the strategic and theological questions from the protection of the racial order, these efforts allowed for more equitable participation in the missionary enterprise. While many American evangelicals embraced work for racial equality and other types of social action, they considered such activity as a component of the missionary enterprise.