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# OUR COLLECTIVE POWER

**A PERSIMMON PAPER ON THE  
YWCA USA MISSION TO ELIMINATE RACISM**



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Photo 1: Group at YWCA Student Conference, Waveland, Mississippi, 1931  
Cover Photo: 2010 Women of the Year Award Winners, YWCA Greater Austin

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# INTRODUCTION

The *Persimmon Paper on the YWCA USA Mission to Eliminate Racism* is the first in a series of Persimmon Papers designed to foster sharper mission clarity and insight for the YWCA collective. The concept of a Persimmon Paper is a YWCA USA adaptation of what is more commonly referred to as an organizational “White Paper.” The Persimmon Paper concept is a direct response to recommendations from a comprehensive organizational assessment completed in 2011 that encouraged the YWCA to clarify our mission and vision, and to increase the cohesion/ understanding of our various stakeholders of the YWCA USA brand. We believe that this series of papers is a necessary step that will empower us to make progress toward the fulfillment of these recommendations.

This inaugural Persimmon Paper is also a direct response to the need for racial justice capacity development identified by over 50 percent of local associations in the 2013 annual association profile survey, and anecdotal information gathered by the YWCA USA member services staff team that suggests an on-going concern by many associations that racial justice work at the local level requires separate and additional sets of resources (skills, finances, people,) that they do not have and/or a view that a commitment to racial justice always requires the creation of “new” programs and services rather than re-thinking existing programs and services from a racial-justice lens. As such, this Persimmon Paper is purposed and structured to:

- Highlight our history and involvement in addressing issues of race and racism.
- Outline the continuing relevance of and mandate for our organizational commitment to eliminating racism.
- Identify organizational assets and liabilities to our engagement in racial justice-related work.
- Identify organizational needs and opportunities related to deepening and measuring our mission impact as it relates to eliminating racism.
- Offer a 21st century vision for how we can strategically and effectively embody all components of the YWCA mission to eliminate racism, empower women and promote peace, justice, freedom and dignity for all
- Provide baseline common language and understanding of racial justice issues and terminology

By doing so, this Persimmon Paper is a “go to” resource for understanding our development as a **multiracial** women’s social justice organization, dedicated to addressing issues that emerge at the intersection of race, class and gender. Further, this paper provides data and a direction that serves as an example of how we can enhance our brand cohesion by remembering the crucial role of young women and women of color in the development of the YWCA movement and by further recommitting ourselves to a deeper engagement of women of color and young women in our current movement.

## The Persimmon Papers will:

Generate passionate and practical discussions of our mission and its impact

Foster and institutionalize mission impact mindfulness

Serve as primary internal resources on specified areas of our mission

- Be a primary source and subject of training and development materials
- Be used to onboard new staff and board members
- Be a primary source for the development of external communications materials

Be packaged, branded and electronically distributed to associations

Be housed on the YWCA USA intranet





Photo 3:  
Faces of Convention, 1973

Finally, this paper is also designed to function as a 21st century digital document. To enhance your experience with the paper we have embedded a few features: (1) Table of Contents shortcuts, (2) [external hyperlinks](#), and (3) [internal hyperlinks](#). You can advance to any section of the document by holding down the “control” button on your keyboard and “clicking” the desired page/section you want in the table of contents (for PC) or simply using the mouse to click the desired page/section (for Apple/Mac). Next, there are [traditional hyperlinks](#) embedded in the document that, if connected to the Internet, will take you to additional resources or information on that topic. Lastly, there are also [internal hyperlinks](#) that are both bold and persimmon, and these links will take you to the entry for that particular word or phrase in the racial justice glossary located in the final section of the paper. Please note, section headings which are both persimmon and bold are solely headings and are not internal document links.

YWCA IS DEDICATED TO ELIMINATING  
RACISM, EMPOWERING WOMEN, AND  
PROMOTING PEACE, JUSTICE, FREEDOM  
AND DIGNITY FOR ALL.

– Adopted by the YWCA Member Associations, 2009

# OUR MISSION TO ELIMINATE RACISM

It is now many years since the YWCA enunciated the principle that it is a movement with all kinds of women and girls. This principle grows out of the conviction that an organization with the corporate religious purpose of the YWCA cannot make distinctions of race or nationality or class or creed. The experience of the organization in acting on this principle has further established this conviction, for it has shown the enrichment and new understanding that have come to the organization itself and to the individuals who make it up, from the contributions of such varied groups.

– Constitution, YWCA City Associations, 1929.

The YWCA is a social justice organization and movement with over 150 years of experience providing direct service to, collaborating with, and advocating on behalf of the most vulnerable people in our society including low-wage workers, the unemployed, women and girls, people of color, English language learners, immigrants, survivors of abuse, as well as current military—and veterans. We have a deep and abiding commitment to working on issues of economic, gender and racial justice; particularly in the places where these systems of oppression overlap each other. Despite our long history as an anti-racist, multiracial women’s social justice organization, it is important that each generation of the movement assess our progress in mission fulfillment and explore new ways to enhance our capacity to efficiently and effectively increase our mission impact.

The need for periodic reflection on and assessment of our mission impact is intensified because of the intersectional orientation of our mission. We are not now and never have been an organization focused on a single issue. Rather, we focus on multiple issues because the lives of women and girls are complex, and exist across many categories of personal, social, and cultural identity. Given that women of color will constitute 53 percent of U.S. women by 2059, yet they continue to be marginalized economically, politically, and socially, it is clearer than ever that our mission can be fulfilled only by working strategically and vigorously to eliminate racism **and** empower women. If we are to fully embody a mission that compels us to thrust our collective power toward the elimination of racism, then we must build a sustainable and strategic infrastructure purposed to dismantle the institutional and structural forms of racism that continue to affect our lives, loved ones, and communities. Toward that end, the mission impact team of the YWCA USA offers this Persimmon Paper.

While addressing issues of race and race relations have been central to our organizational growth, we have not always done the best job of documenting and teaching this part of our mission. Sometimes, we have focused on the **women’s empowerment** area of the mission in a way that ignores or obscures our steady growth in and commitment to addressing issues of race and racism, both within our organization and in the larger society.

Photo 4: The San Francisco Chinatown Branch, est 1916, was the first YWCA with a mission to serve the Chinese community.



At the heart of this paper is our organizational development story because it is a complex narrative about race relations and racism in the history of women's organizing in the United States. Throughout our history, women of the YWCA movement have consciously and consistently labored to grow and expand our capacity to be an **inclusive organization**; encouraging us to extend our reach and scope through an affirmation of the sisterhood of all women. This internal organizational advocacy often lived in a creative tension with the realities of the social world. Evidence of the ongoing tension between our organizational desire to be more inclusive and the realities of living in a racially inequitable world can be seen in [our archive](#) materials. These materials reveal that the YWCA's growth in various communities of color happened in an isolated and uncoordinated fashion. In this sense the YWCA's "colored work," "Indian work," and "immigrant work" were understood as fundamentally different from one another. According to Maida Godwin, the YWCA archivist at Smith College,

In the early days (at least up to WWI), any local association that had a large enough membership & budget to support separate branches or programs for particular constituencies tended to establish them—whether that was for the African-Americans, Mexican-Americans, Japanese-Americans, Industrial workers, etc. New York City, for instance, had (among other things) a small French language branch, a branch for art students, and a branch for nursing students. **Because the YWCA was so focused on molding the Association to the needs of the time and place, YWCAs tended to take quite different forms depending on the local population.**

From the 1906 merger of two distinct YWCA organizations in the United States until the "One Imperative" Convention of 1970, our work among Mexican women and their communities in the southwest, Asian women and their communities on the west coast, and European immigrant women and their communities in the northeast and Midwest were considered part of the YWCA USA immigration-related work. Because this work as well the "Indian Work" were not framed as "colored" or "race" work, the leadership and participation of Native American, Latina and Asian American women in the YWCA tends to be even less documented or discussed than that of African American women. Although we do not know why the YWCA efforts in various communities of color were understood and approached separately, we can deduce that it was informed by (a) social conventions of the times and (b) the YWCA model of offering community-specific programs and services.

When we take a close look at our history, our organizational journey toward a cohesive racial justice strategy can roughly be divided into three stages: separation (1858–1914), interracial education (1918–1970), racial justice (1970–Present). From our founding until the onset World War I the work in various communities of color was carried on separately. World War I changed the YWCA in many ways, among them dramatically increasing the number of African-American members and staff. Between the two World Wars, the YWCA pursued an inclusion strategy of "interracialism"



or “Christian interracialism” that sought to undermine the racial status-quo by fostering meaningful relationships between black and white women—what the author Paul Harvey describes in his book *Freedom’s Coming* as “collective faith in a coalescing of moderate forces from religious communities” to bring about a “social revolution.”

Prior to the passage of the One Imperative in 1970, much of our efforts at racial/ethnic inclusion were highly decentralized and regional with the exception of the interracialism though this strategy primarily focused on the racial binary or the dynamics between Black and White people. The passage of the One Imperative marks a shift toward a centralized and national racial justice orientation focused on both the root causes and outcomes of racism across various communities of people of color and their allies. Although the involvement of women of color in the organization was divided across several YWCA divisions, our historical documents are also clear that women of color have been a major part of the YWCA story, nearly from its inception in the U.S. in 1858.

In this section of the Persimmon Paper, we have listed a few examples of the early involvement of women of color in the work of the YWCA USA and milestones in our development to remind us that the story of the YWCA is also fundamentally a story about the leadership of young women and women of color and how they shaped the consciousness of our organization.

It was the early presence, participation and leadership of women of color that expanded our organizational understanding of “poverty,” “labor,” and “women’s” issues by adding a race lens to our work. The passage of the Interracial Charter in 1946 and the development and implementation of a national [interracial education curriculum](#) began the institutionalization of their contributions to our organizational development. This curriculum, produced by the national staff, included a wide array of program materials: skits, articles, newsletters, study outlines, and books to inform us about race-related issues and offer effective techniques for group interracial work. The focus of much of this work was internal-seeking to increase our organizational capacity to live our social justice values. This era is marked by the intentional and strategic push for inclusive organizational practices. This strategy is most obvious in the aggressive membership and leadership training programs implemented after the passage of the Interracial Charter.

The story of the YWCA USA is a story of a women’s social change movement that sought to transform itself alongside its efforts to transform the world. Our history is one of women seeking to live their shared values and articulated beliefs about sisterhood, democracy and participation. The story of the YWCA is a story of women intentionally working together across categories of economic, generational, ethnic and racial difference, harnessing their collective [power](#) to combat the problems that plague the lives of women and girls.

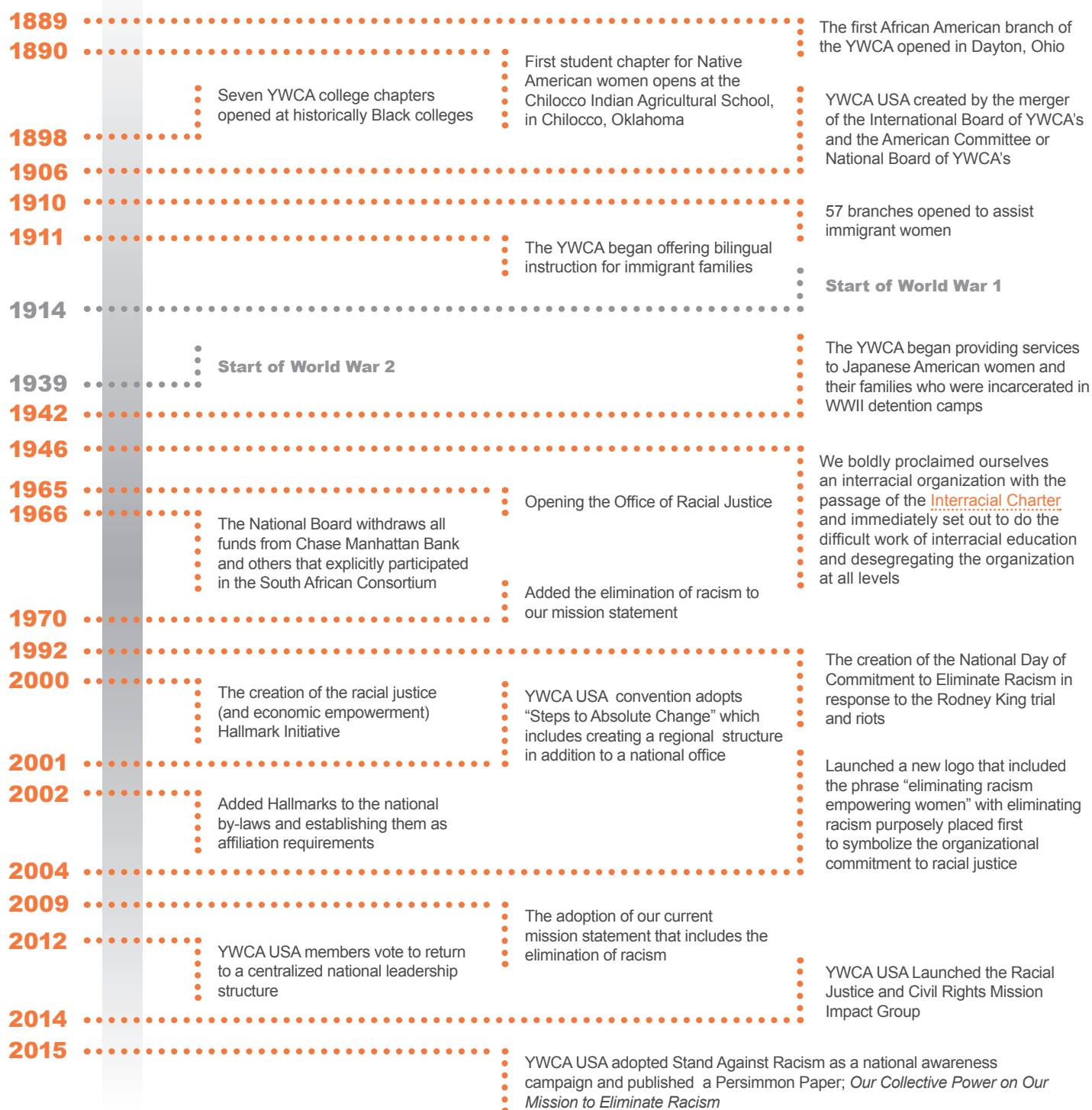
Our current mission commitment to eliminate racism is the direct result of our historical struggle to become an anti-racist and inclusive organization, at all levels of leadership and service. Our story is one of women becoming fully persuaded that it is impossible to empower all women without also addressing institutional and structural racism. Despite persistent social,

Photo 5: Eva Bowles, YWCA National Secretary for “Colored Work” and staff, New York 1915



political, and environmental inequities and our development as a women's social justice movement with a commitment to racial justice, in 2014 there are those who question the relevance of focusing on issues of race and racism. The next section of the paper seeks to lay out an argument for the YWCA's continued mission commitment to the elimination of racism.

## FIGURE 1: THE DEVELOPMENT OF RACIAL JUSTICE MOVEMENT WITHIN THE YWCA



# RACE (STILL) MATTERS

FIGURE 2: Please Circle **Y for Yes** or **N for No**

<b>Y</b>	<b>N</b>	I am afraid every time my child leaves the house or goes through an airport that s/he will be stopped by law enforcement officers and harassed.
<b>Y</b>	<b>N</b>	I am afraid that I or a family member will be killed and no one will be held accountable.
<b>Y</b>	<b>N</b>	I am afraid that my son might be killed in the park while playing.
<b>Y</b>	<b>N</b>	I am afraid that my daughter might be disfigured or killed by an intimate partner.
<b>Y</b>	<b>N</b>	I am afraid my husband will be killed on our porch while storytelling with our neighbors.
<b>Y</b>	<b>N</b>	My underage drinking or smoking of marijuana landed me in jail as a youth
<b>Y</b>	<b>N</b>	My underage sharing of alcohol or marijuana created a police record that has impeded my employment for my entire life
<b>Y</b>	<b>N</b>	My house has appreciated in value significantly since we bought it, giving our family some financial security.
<b>Y</b>	<b>N</b>	My parents' post-World War II home grew in value by 10 times during their lifetime, giving our family some financial security.
<b>Y</b>	<b>N</b>	My parents' economic security helped fund my education or seed my entrepreneurial dreams.
<b>Y</b>	<b>N</b>	As a young person without a track record, a bank loaned me or my family money to start our business.
<b>Y</b>	<b>N</b>	I had an excellent public or private school education as a child.
<b>Y</b>	<b>N</b>	My children have access to excellent schools.
<b>Y</b>	<b>N</b>	There is a grocery store in my neighborhood where I can choose from an array of fresh foods.
<b>Y</b>	<b>N</b>	I have great flexibility in my work schedule
<b>Y</b>	<b>N</b>	People with less education than I have often have higher salaries and/or positions

We borrow the opening exercise from [Jaime Grant](#), Director of the Global Transgender Research and Advocacy Project, who uses this exercise to help inspire thoughts and dialogue about [racial justice](#) in the United States. When the activity is used among people of varying racial and ethnic identities, patterns in the answers tend to emerge. Exercises such as this can sometimes help us reveal the disparate impact that race and [racism](#) can have on our lives.

Given the history and development of the United States, there is little doubt that the subject of race has been and remains highly volatile, and despite the election of Barack Obama to the office of President of the United States in 2008 and his re-election 2012, the systemic oppression of people of color in the United States remains painfully alive. Even when we do not want to see it or speak of it, deep in our core we are quite aware that: (a) the rules and standards that govern our lives are skewed in favor of some and against others; (b) power and opportunity are distributed inequitably; (c) the basic rights of citizenship are unequally available, and (d) race and racism shape each of the three previous points.


Thinking about the ways race impacts our lives and the daily struggle to hold on to courage, resilience and hope in midst of a structurally racist society is physically and psychologically exhausting. Because of that, perhaps

the desire, of some, to believe we are now living in or moving toward a [post-racial](#) America is understandable. However, the documented [inequitable](#) life [outcomes](#) of people of color in this country does not allow us this luxury.

Our organizational history and development as well as current data will not let us forget that race **still** matters. Race still matters because [racism is only one component of](#)

[the complex system of oppression](#) that includes sexism, classism, ableism, ageism, and heterosexism—and each one supports and reinforces the other. Race still matters because the rules and standards of our society are not race neutral. Race still matters because if given the choice, most people who identify as White would not choose a racial identity as a person of color because doing so would mean choosing a life of racial struggle for themselves and their families where their basic humanity is constantly under assault.

Although the continued impact of race and racism may feel overwhelmingly obvious to us, it is helpful to ask “what evidence do we have that race still matters?” This section of the Persimmon Paper is intended to do just that. Here, in an exercise to demonstrate why race still matters, we will highlight national data concerning the impact and import of “race” in the 21st century.

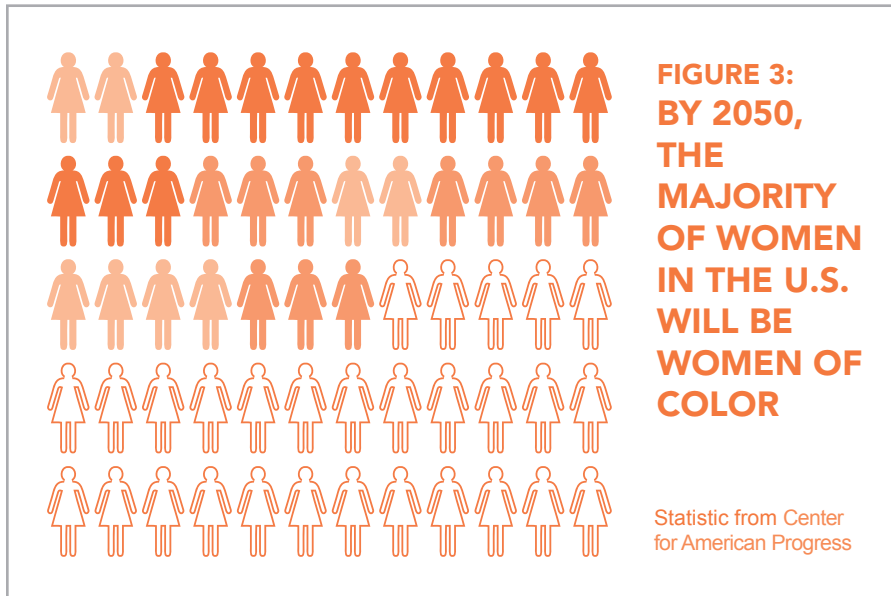


Social justice is both a process and a goal. ‘The goal of social justice education is full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. Social justice includes a vision of society that is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure.’

Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice, Adams, Bell, and Griffin, 1997

## CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE UNITED STATES

According to a recent report from the Center for American Progress, women of color will be the majority (53 percent) of all women in the United States by 2050.



For those of us interested in racial justice, this growing majority would be good news, if having a numerical majority was equivalent to having structural and institutional **power**. See fig. 4.

Unfortunately, a numerical majority does not automatically translate into a shift in power relations. If so, women would hold at least as much institutional and structural power as men. However, as fig. 4 demonstrates, they do not. If this is true for women in general, it would seem that we can also assume that an increase in the women of color population will not automatically translate into enhanced quality of life for women of color due to a systemic lack of institutional and

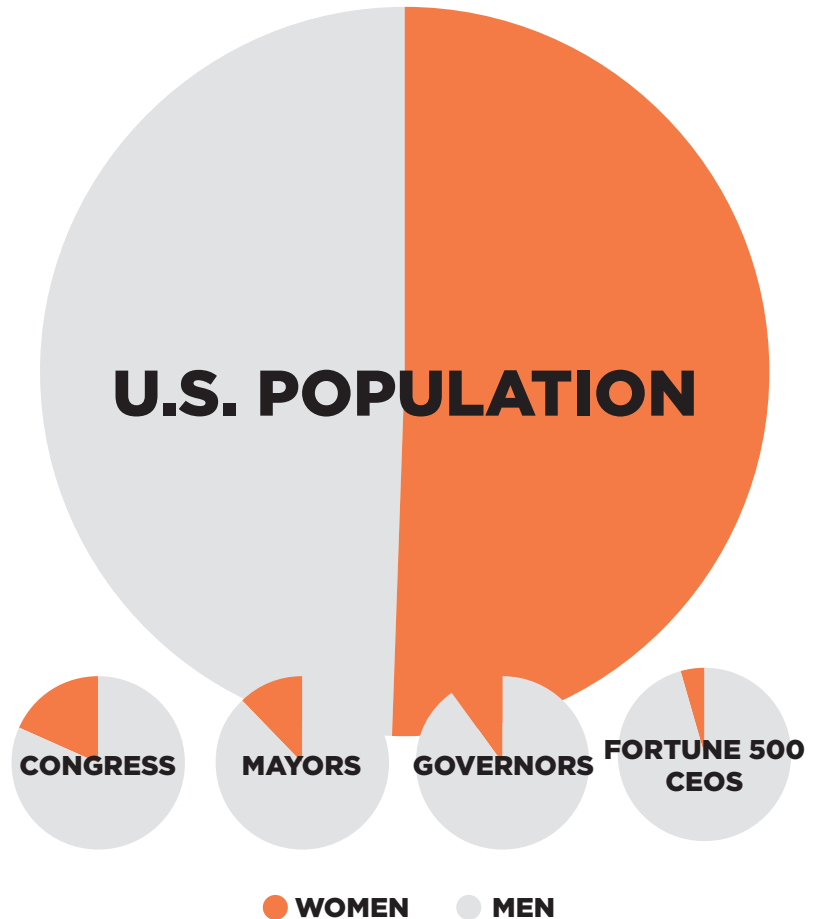
structural power. Here, in this section of the Persimmon Paper, we are using data concerning women of color (typically marginalized in conversations about both women and people of color), placing it at the center of our exploration, and using it as a window to explore the impact of race in our modern society. Why is this important; why should we pay closer attention to the growing population of women of color? As the YWCA USA, an organization dedicated to the elimination of racism and the empowerment of women, we know that women of color are overly represented in low wage jobs and industries that provide little to no benefits or professional development opportunities.

Hispanic women will lead this growth, increasing from a share of 16.7 percent of the female population in 2015 to 25.7 percent in 2050. Asian women's share of the female population will similarly grow by 80 percent, from 5.3 percent in 2015 to 7.8 percent in 2050. African-American women's share of the female population will grow from 12.8 percent to 13.3 percent during the same time period. The share of women who identify with two or more races will also grow, increasing from 2.1 percent in 2015 to 4.1 percent in 2050. White women, however, will drop from 61.8 percent of the female population in 2015 to 47 percent in 2050.

Center for American Progress, *The State of Women of Color in the US, 2013*

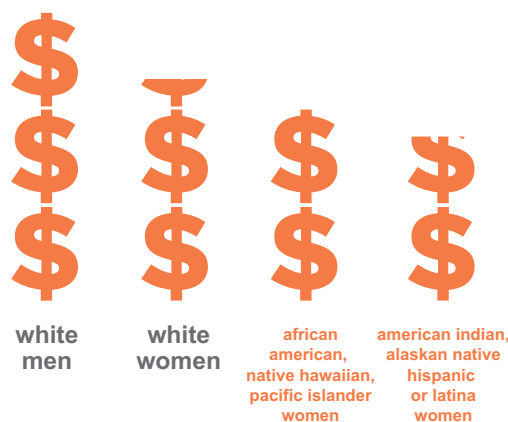


**FIGURE 4: NUMBER OF WOMEN IN POWER IS DISPROPORTIONATE TO THEIR NUMBERS IN THE GENERAL POPULATION**



Based on data from the Center for American Progress

Not only are women of color disproportionately employed in low wage jobs, we also know that wages for women are stratified by both gender and race.



**FIGURE 5:  
PAY GAPS BY  
GENDER AND  
RACE**

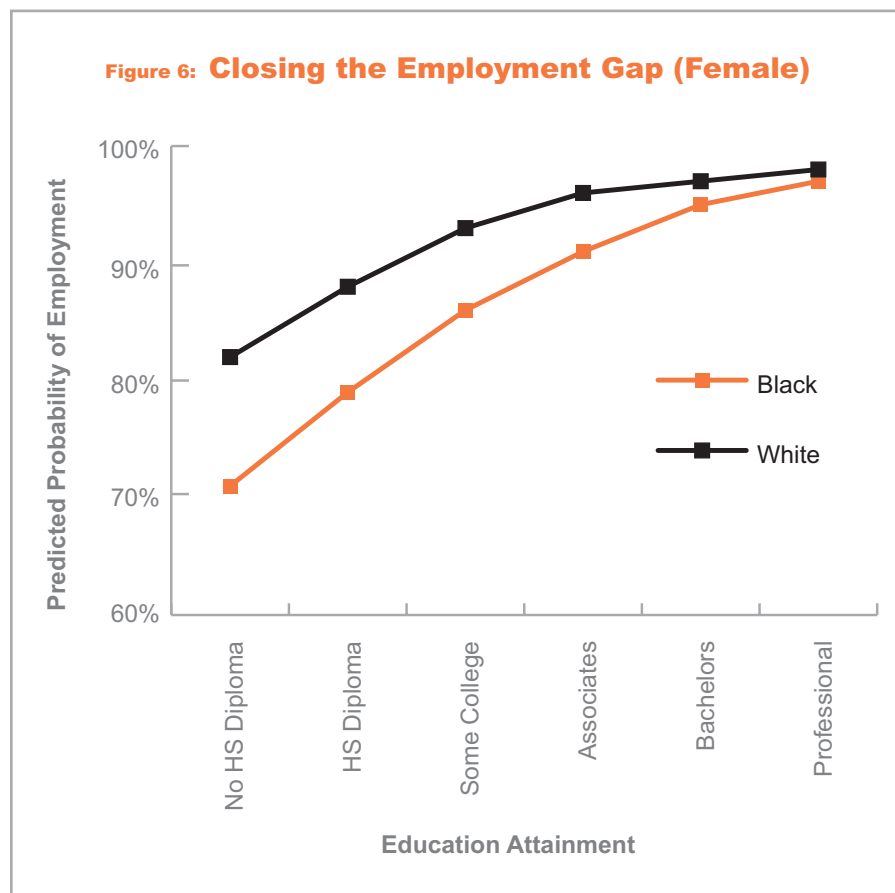
Based on AAUW Report,  
*The Simple Truth about the  
Gender Pay Gap*

Women of color currently make up nearly one-third of the workforce and are twice as likely as their white female counterparts to be employed in lower-wage sectors such as the service industry. In fact, in 2012, **all groups of women of color had higher rates of employment in the service industry than white women.** Annual averages for 2012 show that 28 percent of African American women, 32.2 percent of Latina women, and 22.3 percent of Asian women worked in the service sector, as opposed to only 20 percent of white women.

– The Center for American Progress, The State of Women of Color in the U.S., 2013

Not only are women as a whole earning less income than their male counterparts, but Latina (53 percent), Native American (60 percent), African American (64 percent), and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (66 percent) women are earning an even lower income percentage than their White (78 percent) and Asian American (87 percent) counterparts.

Current data have also taught us that the race and gender wage gap holds even when women of color have the same level of education/experience as their white female and male counterparts across all industries (not just in the low-wage job sector). The report Closing the Race Gap, Young.



NOTE: the reference to this data is not to suggest that Black women's experiences can be universalized to all women of color. Rather, this study, is used to highlight the extreme nature of the employment gap.

[Invincibles](#) demonstrates that African American Millennials (18–34 years old) face a 16.6 percent unemployment rate, which is well over twice the unemployment rate for a White Millennial in the same age range (7.1 percent); the national unemployment rate for this group is 8.5 percent.

But what is most troubling in the report, as represented in fig. 6, is that African-American women need “two more levels of education to have the same chance of employment” as White men or White women. This data are even more disturbing when we consider the following:

Unemployment rates for all groups increased due to the Great Recession, the effects of which were primarily seen during the beginning of the recovery in July 2009. But the impacts on all groups have not been the same and diverge along both gender and race and ethnic lines. Men lost the majority of jobs during the recession—primarily because half of all job losses during that time were in construction or manufacturing, which disproportionately employ men. But the gains during the recovery have gone to men. According to a study by the National Women’s Law Center, all of the growth in jobs during the first two years of the recovery went to men; men gained 93,700 jobs, and women lost 102,000 jobs.

Additionally, this graph from the Pew Research Center reveals that Latina/o and Black households absorbed a disproportionate amount of the economic loss during the “Great Recession.” Further, [this study](#) reveals that the median wealth of White households is 20 times that of Black and Latina/o households. According to Pew, this wide margin of wealth disparity is the largest ever to be recorded and is double the size of the wealth disparity that existed before the Great Recession. In other words, because Black and Latina/o Americans had less median wealth before the recession, the impact of the recession was exponentially harsher on them economically. The recession reduced the wealth of Black and Latina/o Americans twice as much as it did White Americans.

Let’s recap. Women of color will comprise the majority of all women in the future. However, current research tells us that women of color: (a) are overly represented in low-wage sectors with few benefits or opportunities for professional growth, (b) continue to earn less money than both their White female counterparts and men of color, (c) need twice as much education to get the same job as White men or White women, and, (d) due to historical wealth inequities, their communities bear the brunt of

negative impacts during economic downturns and are the last to feel any relief during economic recovery. The data does not paint a pretty picture. The picture appears exponentially grimmer if we begin to ponder the simultaneous inequities in [educational outcomes](#), [health outcomes](#), and [incarceration rates](#).

**FIGURE 7: Median Net Worth of Households, 2009**



Based on data from Pew Research Center

(First 2 house icons by Freepik)

Yes, despite any and all “signs of racial progress” just this scant review of the economic picture for women of color confirms that race, indeed still matters. So:

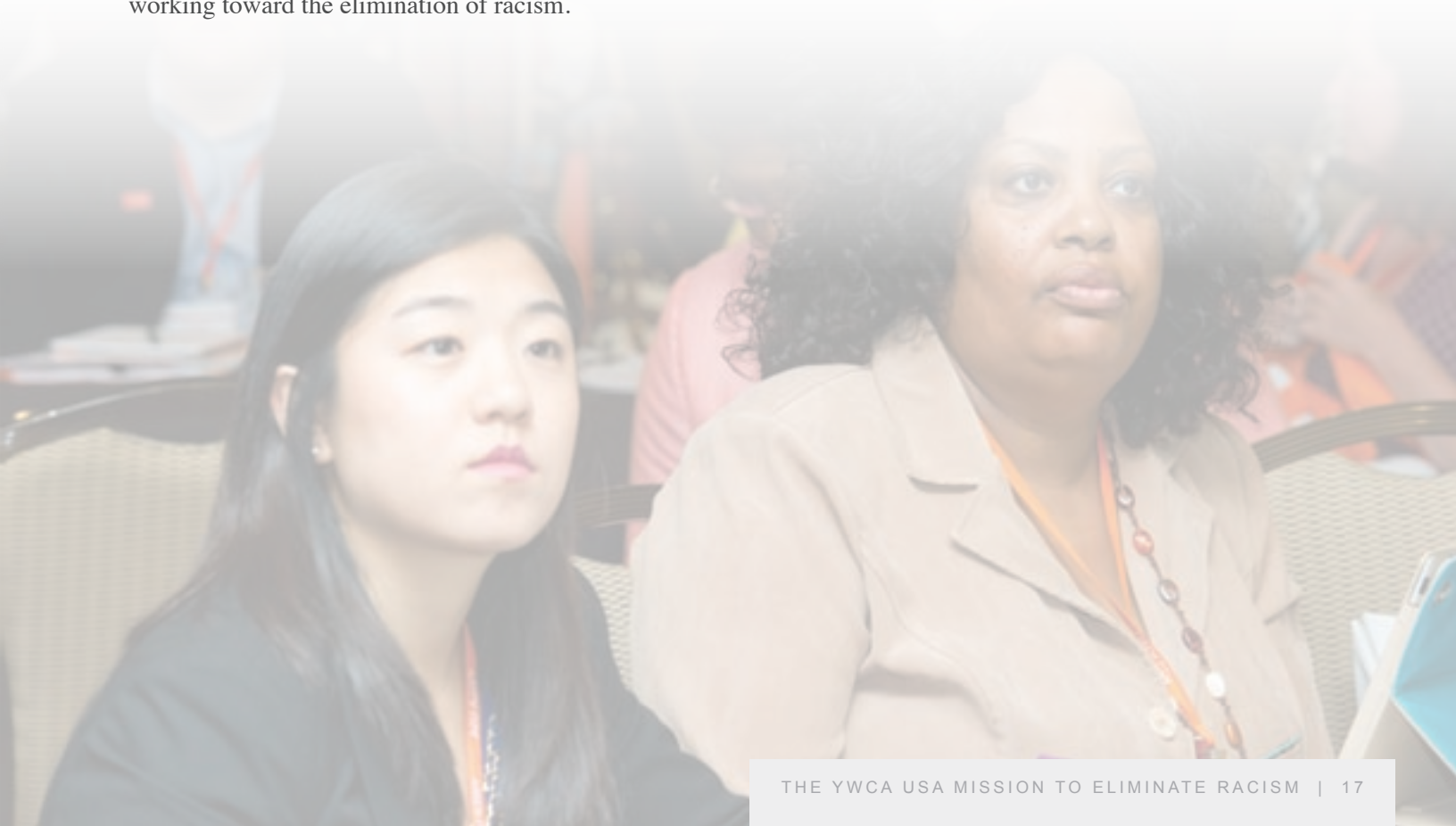
- **What happens to the United States if we do not reverse these trends by 2050, when women of color are the numerical majority?**
- **How will this impact our relationships, communities, and economies?**

As the YWCA, we believe “it is in our best interest to close racial gaps so we can begin to create a society and workforce that will sustain U.S. competitiveness on the global stage” (CAP, State of Women of Color, 2013) and create a healthier social, political, and economic environment for millions of women and girls, allowing them to live self-determined lives and pursue happiness unfettered by oppression.

After all, is that not what the YWCA USA does best? Is not our story rooted in women using their minds, hearts, and resources to address growing needs among a vulnerable population of women? Is not our story one of women organizing themselves across lines of difference, joining with those vulnerable women to build an association designed to harness their collective power in service of social transformation? Can we not do the same in our time?

In the first two sections this Persimmon Paper we have explored the historical foundation for our mission commitment to the elimination of racism and the contemporary need to maintain that commitment. The following two sections of this paper contains the heart of our organizational analysis, where we explore assets and liabilities to maintaining and deepening our racial justice work in the 21st century, followed by a discussion of organizational needs and opportunities related to strategically working toward the elimination of racism.

Photo 6:  
YWCA 2013 Annual Conference



# ASSETS & LIABILITIES

The YWCA has never been content merely to state its beliefs in words.

The record shows that it has worked and is working constantly to translate its philosophy into action.

## – Interracial Policies of the YWCA USA, 1948

At this point, we have discussed the historical development of our mission commitment to **racial justice** and the ongoing need for racial justice in our current world. Now, we must contemplate our future. What is the future of the YWCA movement? How will we adapt to this world that is so rapidly changing? How can we deepen our efforts to eliminate **racism** in the 21st Century in a way that is meaningful, efficient, effective and relevant on both national and local levels? What is our way forward? In this section of the Persimmon Paper, we will highlight a few items that function as either assets or liabilities to our forward movement.

## ASSETS: THE YWCA USA THEORY OF CHANGE 1.0

The primary assets of the YWCA for engaging in racial justice work is embedded in our organizational history and development. The story of the YWCA USA is a story about women developing, adopting, and implementing clear ideas about how to best transform the world around them. In organizational language, we call this a **theory of change**.

A theory of change is a system of beliefs about how change and transformation happen. For the bulk of our history, the YWCA USA has been invested in particular theories of change:

- religious faith or principles require us to actively engage with the social issues and concerns of our present world
- democratic practice and plurality are key to social transformation
- an association of women working together across lines of difference can transform and improve life for all women
- social problems must be addressed in multiple levels- direct service, issue education, and public policy advocacy - to end social inequities
- all women cannot be empowered if we do not address issues of race and racism.

These ideas or beliefs about how social change happens are the framework around which the YWCA USA's policies and practices were built. However, the organizational prevalence of ideas a) and e) have changed over time.

Photo 7: 1970 Triennial Convention, Houston, TX





FIGURE 8:

# YWCA USA THEORY OF CHANGE 1.0



\* Due to the participation and leadership of women of color, this idea gained traction and became more central to the mission and work of the YWCA over time and was first institutionalized in 1946.

Whereas, religious identity and the concept of “Christian Sisterhood” functioned as a core shared identity for YWCA women in the early days of the movement and well into the 1970s, over time the importance of a single, shared religious identity lost importance. The opposite is true for the import of addressing issues of race and racism as a core mission commitment. Although this idea was not explicitly present in the early days of the movement, our story demonstrates that it gained momentum over time.

Organizational ideas about social change and transformation are a primary asset for the YWCA’s work in the area of racial justice. As a movement, the YWCA began with an impulse to meet the needs of young women who were moving into urban centers to work and live independently. Despite any religious motivations of the early movement, our history is clear that our movement is rooted in women working together across various lines of difference (class and age) as older, often married and wealthy women began advocating for and eventually became allies to younger, single working women.

## WORKING ACROSS LINES OF DIFFERENCE

In 1920 the YWCA adopted a national platform that called for a minimum wage, a living wage, a limited work week, collective bargaining, and retirement protections. See fig. 9.

**FIGURE 9:**

*The Social Ideals of the Churches,  
Adopted as The YWCA USA Social  
Platform at the 1920 Convention*

- I. Equal rights and Justice for all men in all stations of life.
- II. Protection of the family by the single standard of purity, uniform divorce laws, proper regulation of marriage, proper housing.
- III. The fullest possible development of every child, especially by the provision of education and recreation.
- IV. Abolition of child labor.
- V. Such regulation of the conditions of toll for women as shall safeguard the physical and moral health of the community.
- VI. Abatement and prevention of poverty.
- VII. Protection of the individual and society from the social, economic and moral waste of the liquor traffic.
- VIII. Conservation of health.
- IX. Protection of the worker from dangerous machinery, occupational diseases and mortality.
- X. The right of all men to the opportunity for self-maintenance, for safeguarding this right against encroachments of every kind, for the protection of workers from the hardships of enforced unemployment.
- XI. Suitable provision for the old age of the workers, and for those incapacitated by injury.
- XII. The right of employees and employers alike to organize; and for adequate means of conciliation and arbitration in industrial disputes.
- XIII. Release from employment one day in seven.
- XIV. Gradual and reasonable reduction of hours of labor to the lowest practicable point, and for that degree of leisure for all which is a condition of the highest human life.
- XV. A living wage as a minimum in every industry, and for the highest wage that each industry can afford.
- XVI. A new emphasis upon the application of Christian principles to the acquisition and use of property, and for the most equitable division of the product of industry that can ultimately be devised.

NOTE: This document also goes on to state in the resolution section: “That an ordered and constructive democracy in industry is as necessary as political democracy, and that collective bargaining and the sharing of shop control and management are inevitable steps in its attainment.

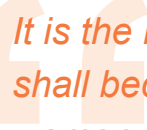
By adopting this platform the women of the YWCA USA, across the lines (social categories) of class, generation, and (increasingly) race were demanding rights that many of us are still calling for in the United States.

It is this history of women working for and with one another across social categories of class and generation that prepared us to expand our vision for **social justice** and to begin to actively engage issues of race and racism. As we seek to move our efforts ahead and engage in racial justice work in the 21st Century, we must remember our organizational foundation. As more and more women of color became involved with the YWCA and brought their time, talent, treasure, and insight to the table of ideas, the organization was changed and transformed for the better. In fact, **the YWCA may be one of the earliest examples we have in the United States of a predominantly White organization intentionally transforming itself into a multiracial organization by developing and implementing organizational strategies specifically designed to address issues of race, racism, prejudice and bias within the organization.**

As a national organization we actually have a history and legacy of actively engaging the difficult and working across lines of difference, despite the struggles that come with it. Our story is about various types of women working together to address issues of racial difference, racial tensions, interracial cooperation, advocacy, **ally-ship**, and solidarity.

## HISTORY OF EXPANDING MEMBERSHIP BASE

When we compare two versions of the YWCA Mission Statement, see figs. 10 and 11, between 1909 and 1970, there is an obvious shift from language of religious dogma (knowledge of Jesus Christ as Savior) to one of communal **inclusion** (barrier breaking love of God). Although the YWCA began as an exclusively (protestant) Christian membership organization, what we see in the historical changes to our mission, constitution, and bylaws is that most changes were done such that we could **expand our membership** (i.e., who was welcome to the table). Changes in our policies and practices reflect a change from (a) members/leaders must be Christian and affiliated with a congregation, to (b) members simply need a personal profession of faith (congregation association not needed), to (c) members can be non-Christian if they support the work/mission of the YWCA but not vote, to (d) voting members/leader can be of any or no faith/religious tradition. These membership changes related to religious identity/affiliation reveal an organization that was working to make itself as inclusive as it could be.



*It is the ideal of the Association that... people shall because of it begin to think differently about women..., especially young women may begin to think more consideringly about themselves—their place in the work of the world and in their homes.*

*What is the Young Women's Christian Association?,  
Membership Leaflet, circa 1924*

In addition to changes in membership rules, another way the YWCA USA created and expanded its base of leaders, members and stakeholder was through the **college chapters and branches that were created specifically by and for people of color:** African American, Native Americans, Chinese Americans, Japanese American, and various migrant communities. In

## FIGURE 10: YWCA MISSION STATEMENT, 1909

“The immediate purpose of this organization shall be to unite in one body the YWCAs of the U.S.A.; to establish, develop, and unify such Associations; to participate in the work of the World’s YWCA; to advance the physical, social, intellectual, moral and spiritual interest of young women.

“The ultimate purpose of all its efforts shall be to seek to bring young women to such a knowledge of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord as shall mean for the individual young women fullness of life and development of character, and shall make the organization as a whole an effective agency in bringing in of the Kingdom of God among young women.”

## FIGURE 11: YWCA MISSION STATEMENT, 1970

### Purpose

The Young Women’s Christian Association of the United States of America, a movement rooted in the Christian faith as known in Jesus and nourished by the resources of that faith, seeks to respond to the barrier-breaking love of God in this day. The Association draws together into responsible membership women and girls of diverse experiences and faiths that their lives may be open to new understanding and deeper relationships and that together they may join in the struggle for peace and justice, freedom and dignity for all people.

### One Imperative

To thrust our collective power toward the elimination of racism wherever it exists and by any means necessary.

many communities, Black women created their own YWCA organizations, which functioned independently, to serve their communities. Often, these community organizations operated with little connection to the White local associations. Eventually, those groups became official branches of the local associations. Our YWCA story is also about the **untold stories of women of color**, their work, their leadership, and their ingenuity. Despite the limitations of institutional and structural racism, the work that women of color did in college chapters, branches and local associations created generations of empowered women and girls of color as well as White allies. Our organizational story should foreground the lives and leadership of these women of color, whose legacy of involvement in the YWCA goes back three and four generations. We must acknowledge that much of the history

we have easy access to concerning women of color in the YWCA is heavily focused on African American women, with some information concerning Native American and Asian American women. **In order to tell a full story of the involvement of women of color, we must engage in an excavation of our national and local archives paying particular attention to: the memberships of college chapters, and YWCA efforts categorized as “Indian work” and “immigration work.”** Even with the limitation of our records, it seems more than clear that our practice of expanding the boundaries of membership can be traced back to our foundational beliefs in (a) democracy and plurality, (b) women working across lines of difference, and (c) addressing issues of race and racism. If we are to honor this legacy and improve our mission impact in the area of racial justice, **we must continue to provide visionary leadership among women’s organizations in upholding a vision and practice of racial justice.**

## CONTINUUM OF RESPONSE

The earliest work of the YWCA involved providing services for young single women who flocked to urban centers to work and live on their own away from their families. These services included affordable lodging, employment bureaus and job training. However, it was not long into our organizational journey, 1911 according to the quote below, that the YWCA USA realized that to best serve women and girls we had to commit ourselves to providing a continuum of response to their needs. Our continuum of response includes direct services, issue education, and public policy advocacy.

It is a unique aspect of our organization that we combine direct services, programming and advocacy in order to generate institutional change. In many instances, YWCA associations provide a direct service or program, such as affordable day care, in order to remove barriers encountered by community stakeholders, such as women with children who need to seek and secure employment. In this way, the association treats both “symptoms” and “root” causes of a social problem.

YWCA associations throughout the country provide programming, services and events in their local communities to address the unique needs of the population. Depending on local needs, these may include:

child care, rape crisis intervention, domestic violence assistance, shelters for domestic violence victims and their families, job training, adult education and financial literacy, career counseling, women’s preventative health care, services for women active in the military and veterans, entrepreneurial training for teens and fitness training.

Because our associations are “on-the-ground” direct service providers for women and families who need them, and tailor services to the needs of the

The history of social action in the YWCA begins in Indianapolis, IN in 1911, when the national convention of the YWCA of the U.S.A. took a formal vote committing itself to educating the public on the need for a living wage for women and the need to support legislation which would regulate hours and wages of women workers.

*The Past is Prelude: Fifty Years of Social Action in the YWCA*





Photo 8: Jacqueline Left Hand Bull at YWCA Convention, 1973

community, including women, girls, low-income communities, seniors, the disabled, and communities of color, the YWCA is often the first to witness societal problems and the real-world effects of government legislation. Because of this relationship with members of the community, we are better equipped to focus our advocacy efforts to help local, state and federal governments shape effective public policy and legislation on gender equality and racial justice issues.

Our story is a story about an organization that was not designed simply to respond to social ills and crises, but to also work strategically to address the root causes of those social problems by educating the

public on the issues and by advocating for public policies that enhance the quality of life for the most vulnerable people in our society.

As we prepare to reimagine fulfilling our mission mandate to eliminate racism, we must draw upon our legacy of responding to social issues in a comprehensive way, using a continuum of response: direct service, issue education, and public policy advocacy. In this vein, as a movement, we need to ponder and reflect on the following questions:

- What would a continuum of response orientation to addressing racism look like?
- Are we addressing racism via direct service, issue education and advocacy?
- How do the experiences of multiracial/multiethnic people complicate our understanding of and efforts at doing racial justice?
- Do we address racism structurally, institutionally, and socially?

## COMMUNITY SPECIFIC PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

The history of the YWCA is a story of the “Association Idea.” Our story is about a national movement of associations whose programs and service are uniquely tailored to meet the needs of the local community that it serves. We have never taken a “one-size-fits-all” approach to serving our members.

The autonomy of associations has fostered within our movement a type of organizational adaptability and creativity that has made us a staple organization in many communities across the United States, yet for very different reasons: affordable housing, child care, employment and job skills, fitness facilities, domestic violence and sexual assault services, ESL and literacy programs, and the list goes on. As we build our 21st century mission impact strategy, we must imagine how to capitalize on our heritage of local specificity and strategically apply it to our racial justice efforts.

The strength of the YWCA is that our movement was built upon some very high ideals: the sisterhood of women, plurality, democracy, and the value of women working together across lines of difference. These ideals and our historical theory of change indeed laid a foundation for the YWCA USA as it stands some 150-plus years later, and can serve us today as a powerful resource as we retool our movement to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of our local and national impact in the core areas of our mission. Despite these organizational assets, we must also acknowledge that we have organizational liabilities that can deter or detract us from harnessing our collective power toward the elimination of racism.

## LIABILITIES

In the first half of this section of the Persimmon Paper, we outlined some organizational assets associated with our history, development, and ideas about social transformation that can aide us in increasing our mission impact in the area of racial justice. In other words, the foundational principals of the YWCA movement and the organizational structures and practices that were implemented in service of those beliefs provide us a roadmap or guide to think about how we strategically refine our racial justice work. However, despite the legacy of these ideals, we are more than aware that the road to social transformation and organizational development is a bumpy one. We can think of these bumps in the road as our organizational **liabilities**. **In the simplest terms, we could say that most of the items that have been previously identified as organizational assets also can be (or have been) a liability to our overall mission impact.**

The movement changes to meet the needs of the time, the girl, and the group. Every year brings new demands, new responsibilities and new perplexities to women, therefore the Association cannot remain static. It keeps its direction and its great, tried principles but revises its ways of working. Meanwhile it tries to learn more; to think more deeply and truly what its aim and purpose may mean in the life of each new organization.

## WORKING ACROSS LINES OF DIFFERENCE

As laudable as it is that the YWCA from its earliest development in the United States, sought to be a movement of various types of women working together across lines or social categories of difference, it cannot go unstated that this type of organizational and cultural practice is rife with the possibilities of tokenizing and patronizing those who have been historically marginalized. When we choose to work across lines of difference, the WADeS (Working Across Differences) Survey encourages us to engage in a power analysis first by asking some basic questions of ourselves:

- Who sets the agenda?
- Who has the most access to institutional and structural power?

From Membership Leaflet, Volume I, Number 1:  
*What is the Young Women's Christian Association?*  
*A Christian Movement of Women and Girls*, circa 1924

- Who has the least access to institutional and structural power?
- How can we avoid replicating the power inequities of the society around us?
- Whose resources are being used?
- Whose labor and contribution is rendered invisible?
- Are we seeking to be advocates only or allies working in solidarity with those most impacted by the social issue or concern?
- How will we negotiate the necessary but difficult conversations that must occur?
- Are we comfortable knowing that interpersonal conflict is inherent to this type of **social justice** enterprise?
- Does our process and structure embody the ideals we profess?

Whether we are exploring our organizational merger of 1906 between two YWCA faction organizations—one heavily run by older women and the other by younger women—or we think about the passing of the interracial charter in 1946, there is little doubt that those milestones were reached only after great deal of emotion and conflict on all sides. Organizational change and transformation is not to be taken lightly and even when it is done with extreme care and intention, working across lines of difference is a difficult

and dangerous task. **The moment we fail to remember this, is the moment our legacy as an intergenerational, multiracial, cross-class movement becomes a major liability.**

## HISTORY OF EXPANDING MEMBERSHIP BASE

Just as we should celebrate our story as an organization that was formed by various women working across lines of difference, we should also be inspired by the long process of membership expansion that made it possible for so many different types of women to participate in and lead the YWCA USA movement. However, this asset, too, can be and has been a liability for our movement.

As noted in the Theory of Change 1.0 graphic (fig. 8), in the earliest iteration of our movement the core shared identity among members was that of “Christian Sisterhood.” Our history tells us that it was this

Photo 9:  
YWCA Membership drive



shared core identity that often enabled the members to work through and across the many other lines of difference. However, as the organization moved away from the import of this shared identity of Christian Sisterhood in service of a desire to make the movement more accessible to and welcoming of women representing various religious faiths or those with no religious tradition at all, we as an organization lost our shared core identity.

From an organizational perspective, such a loss is indeed a liability. This is not to say that this shift was not a good one or even a necessary one but from an organizational perspective we failed to explicitly replace this shared core identity. As we seek to deepen our work in racial justice, what is the shared core identity that will enable the YWCA USA to lean into the difficult tasks of organizational change? What is the bridge that will enable us to passionately, yet lovingly and justly, work across lines of difference in service of our vision of a world without racism and sexism? As a movement, what would bind us together once we relinquished the the shared core identity of Christian Sisterhood and the Social and Liberation Gospel theology that undergirded so much of our practices and policies over the first hundred years or so of our history? If we are to increase our mission impact, such that our movement continues well into the 21st century, **we must determine what idea or concept grounds our mission commitment to eliminating racism and empowering women. We must answer the question: what is our current shared core identity?**

## COMMUNITY SPECIFIC PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Finally, as we consider what our organizational liabilities are in the context of meaningful racial justice work, we must also acknowledge that one of the challenges of the “association idea” is the autonomy, flexibility, and specificity of the programs and services of local associations. Although the local responsiveness of our associations is a documented strength of the YWCA USA, it is and has also been a liability. Because of the emphasis on local responsiveness, there are no two YWCA’s that look alike from a program or service delivery perspective. As a result, stakeholder opinions about the YWCA are typically rooted in their experience with a specific local association regardless of stated ideals and preferred practices of the larger movement.

From a racial justice perspective, we know that even well after the passing of the interracial charter in 1946, there were many local associations whose programs, services, and organizational practices did not embody in spirit or deed the interracial charter. From a people of color perspective, this means that in certain areas the YWCA was held in high esteem and in others it was reviled. As a movement, such variation in organizational practice is highly detrimental to increased growth and effectiveness.

As we construct a new infrastructure around mission impact in the area of racial justice, how will we address the variance of experience people are likely to have depending on which local association they come into contact with? **Can we build credibility as an organization committed to eliminating racism without some meaningful and measureable standard across the movement for racial justice?**

FIGURE 12:

**1850s–  
1970s**  
**“Christian Sisterhood”**

## HISTORICAL SHAME

Finally, the story of the YWCA is a microcosm of the story of the United States; both were founded upon high ideals of freedom and democracy. However, from our inception, there has been a chasm between our stated ideal and the everyday reality. Just as the United States has a difficult time admitting, discussing and intentionally dealing with the harsh and ugly realities of our terrible national track record when it comes to honoring the basic humanity of people of color, so has the YWCA USA had great difficulty speaking about our racial and racist realities. This “historical shame,” that often manifests as White guilt, can be one of the most lethal of organizational liabilities. This shame seems most obvious anytime the subject of “segregated” YWCA branches enter the conversation.

If we are to work genuinely and credibly toward the elimination of racism, then as an organization we must own and tell our full story. This story must also include the less flattering components. We should do so, not to create a spectacle of ourselves but to live in truth. One of the byproducts of our historical shame is a lack of sophisticated conversation about the work women of color were doing in their own communities. Somehow, we have failed to fully explore, document, and/or honor the work of women of color and their contribution to the development of this organization.

In fact, we are so ashamed about the period of segregation that we forget to acknowledge that college chapters and many of the local organizations

founded by women of color (like most White local associations) began independently as an effort by local women to address pressing issues in their community. Instead, we seem to only speak of these branches as “missionary” extensions of the White local associations, and by doing so, we negate and render invisible the ingenuity, labor and leadership of women of color, not only in their specific racial or ethnic community, but to the movement that is the YWCA USA.

The Young Women’s Christian Association specializes in girls. As the American woman has grown and developed, the Association has enlarged the scope and nature of its work, keeping pace with her progress. Its national organization is the source of ideas, methods, and programs. Through the ... local association centers these ideas, methods and programs are made concrete accomplishments.

*Doings and Dollars, YWCA USA 1921*

racism and empowering women it is imperative that we be aware of our organizational needs and maximize current opportunities to enhance our racial justice efforts.

If we are going to be perceived as a credible national leader committed to eliminating



# NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The story of the YWCA is a story of an “unfolding sisterhood” of women working together across lines of difference in service of making the world a better place for all women, girls and their families. One of the reasons this sisterhood movement has been characterized as “unfolding” is because race and **racism** remain deeply entrenched in the fabric of U.S. culture, practices, and policies.

Within this Persimmon Paper, we have sought to highlight our organizational milestones in addressing race and racism, proclaim the continued relevance of our mission to eliminate racism and its relationship to the empowerment of women, and outline some of the organizational assets and liabilities to deepening or mission impact in the area of **racial justice**. This section of the Persimmon Paper seeks to name or articulate some of our organizational needs and opportunities related to doing meaningful and effective racial justice work.

## ORGANIZATIONAL NEEDS

What do we need to enhance our mission impact in the area of racial justice? Given the information contained in this Persimmon Paper, data mined from our annual profile of local associations, and ongoing feedback from various stakeholders, **there are four things we need to enhance our mission impact in the area of racial justice:**

- Explicitly identify our core shared identity
- Re-engage young people in the movement at all levels
- Build partnerships with credible organizations and institutions around racial justice issues
- Develop a national strategy for racial justice work

## SHARED CORE IDENTITY

Earlier in this paper we discussed how the import of a shared religious identity lessened over time as the organization sought to be more inclusive of women and girls from many different backgrounds and experiences. As we have previously acknowledged, this organizational transformation has had both positive and negative impacts on our movement. On one hand, we have increased our organizational capacity to have a broad diversity of members (volunteers, staff, leaders, and board members). However, the trade-off for the organization was the loss of the core shared identity of a “Christian Sisterhood.” Regardless of one’s personal religious/non-religious orientation or feelings about the religious heritage of the YWCA USA, we must acknowledge that (for a very long time) this core shared identity provided the women of the YWCA movement with a tool or experience that they could draw upon to get through the rough and trying times of building an intergenerational, cross-class, multiracial, women’s organization.

From a mission impact perspective, the problem was not that we became less of a “religious” organization or an organization where shared religious

FIGURE 13:

1850s–  
1970s

“Christian Sisterhood”

1980s–  
2040s

“Social Justice”

FIGURE 14:

## YWCA USA THEORY OF CHANGE 2.0

### YWCA FOUNDATIONAL BELIEFS



**Social justice requires us to transform unjust practices and policies.** ✱

Democratic practice and plurality are fundamental to the YWCA association model.

Women working together across lines of difference can transform and improve life for all women.

Social problems should be addressed on multiple levels.

All women cannot be empowered if we do not address the issues of race and racism.

### METHOD: CONTINUUM OF RESPONSE



Direct Service

Issue Education

Advocacy & Public Policy

### SIGNATURE PLATFORMS: AREAS OF FOCUS



Racial Justice & Civil Rights

Empowerment & Economic  
Advancement of Women & Girls

Health & Safety of Women & Girls

### MISSION

YWCA is dedicated to eliminating racism, empowering women and promoting peace, justice, freedom and dignity for all.

\* As the mission of the YWCA USA has evolved, a social justice orientation has taken the place of religious identity.

identity or values were less central, the problem is that **we did not explicitly identify a new core shared identity** that could serve the same function that “Christian Sisterhood” did for such a long period. What could we have replaced shared religious identity and/or values with? **What is our current shared core identity? What term or concept could we draw upon that would be true to our history, our present, and our future as a movement?**

## YWCA USA THEORY OF CHANGE 2.0

In the revised YWCA USA Theory of Change diagram in fig. 14, we suggest that the most appropriate concept to articulate our present and future shared core identity is Social Justice. Why do we believe that “Social Justice” best describes our current core shared identity?

1. The YWCA movement at its core is a multi-issue, multiracial, social change organization and movement that intentionally seeks to improve the lives of women and girls by working at the intersection of race, class, and gender. Even before the centrality of racial justice to the movement, we were a **social justice organization** addressing social injustices at the intersection of gender and class.
2. The YWCA USA has a vision of the world where all groups of people can live (and be perceived) as fully human on all levels—personal, social, institutional, and structural; a world not rooted in the dominance of one group. The world that we envision recognizes the inherent worth and connectedness of all people and resources of our planet.
3. The YWCA USA has developed and strives to maintain an anti-oppression orientation to our work, internally and externally. It is our tradition to transform ourselves even while we seek to transform the world around us. We do so as an expression of our commitment to social justice and as one means by which we change the world around us.
4. As revealed through our historical efforts to expand our capacity to be an inclusive organization, the YWCA USA is dedicated to the process and goal of addressing both the symptoms and root causes of institutional and structural “isms.”

Individuals who fight for the eradication of sexism without struggles to end racism or classism undermine their own efforts. Individuals who fight for the eradication of racism or classism while supporting sexist oppression are helping to maintain the cultural basis of all forms of group oppression.

*Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, bell hooks, 1984

When we fully consider the foundational beliefs and historical practices of our organization, it is clear that **at our core, the YWCA USA is a social justice organization**. By articulating our core shared value and identity as social justice, we create a foundation of understanding, credibility, and accountability for ourselves. By declaring social justice as our core shared identity we also provide ourselves a standard to measure our practices, policies, programs, and services against—adding to our ability to increase our mission impact, internally and externally. The reclamation of a core identity returns to the YWCA USA an institutional touchstone that can support us in doing the difficult work of racial justice (strategically addressing institutional and structural racism), while seeking to be just with one another at the same time.

## CREDIBLE NATIONAL PARTNERS

As an organization that clearly states in our mission that we are committed to the elimination of racism, we have not built long-term national partnerships with institutions and organizations to support and to aide us in this area of mission impact. In order to for us to be taken seriously as a social justice organization, it is vitally important that we are in partnership with others who are doing credible work in racial justice and/or who can share resources with us that can enhance our organizational pursuits in racial justice.

## RE-ENGAGE YOUNG PEOPLE (18–29)



Photo 10: The Mayor of Charleston Addresses the crowd while a supporter carries a sign, during the YWCA's Stand Against Racism 2010

The story of the YWCA USA is also a story about the role of young people as leaders. The story of the YWCA is the story of young women of color organizing college chapters on their campuses where they developed their leadership skills and pushed the YWCA USA movement to become more inclusive in its practices and to address issues of race and racism alongside issue of class and gender. When reviewing the history of the YWCA USA it becomes more than apparent that the movement owes a great debt of gratitude to young people in general, and young women of color, for their leadership within the movement, particularly around worker's rights and racial justice.

Currently, the YWCA USA movement does not have the robust engagement and leadership of young people between the ages of 18 and 29 as it once did. If we are to seriously deepen our mission impact in the area of racial justice, **we must create meaningful pathways for young people and women of color to be involved in the YWCA movement and create pathways for them into paid staff, executive, and board leadership in the YWCA and the whole of the nonprofit sector.**

## NATIONAL RACIAL JUSTICE STRATEGY

Finally, we must develop a national racial justice strategy that maximizes our organizational assets, minimizes our liabilities and can be engaged by all YWCA USA associations regardless of their size or geographic location. If our work is to have credibility, two tactics of this strategy must include:

- Telling the story of the participation and leadership of women of color in the YWCA USA movement, locally and nationally. The YWCA of Greater Portland has a digital exhibit that is a good example of doing this. In the digital exhibit "[A World of Difference](#)," they include sections on the contributions and involvement of [Asian American](#), and [African American](#) women to the association as well as a section on the role [of religion, race and reform](#) to the story of their association. Because the work and membership of YWCAs are deeply connected to the community where an association exists, we can assume that that there were sizeable African American and Asian American communities in Portland during formative years of the association and that women from those communities were deeply involved in the life of that association, as well.
- Addressing issues that are specific to women of color, particularly in light of the 2050 demographic shift approaching

So far in this section of the Persimmon Paper, we have discussed some of the organizational needs of the YWCA USA in relationship to our work in racial justice. In the remainder of this section, we will share a few opportunities that are before us that align with our needs.

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## ORGANIZATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

The story of the YWCA is the story of a forward thinking organization. Building a national racial justice strategy and infrastructure for a movement that is rooted in the autonomy of local associations is no small task. However, there are a few opportunities before us that we are excited about: (1) the launch of a national Mission Impact Framework from YWCA USA and, (2) opportunities to create partnership with credible organizations and institutions that can deepen our racial justice work, address the protracted issues that women of color face, and enable us to build a leadership pipeline for people of color.

### MISSION IMPACT FRAMEWORK

In the spring of 2015, YWCA USA will launch our mission impact framework. This strategic framework will allow the YWCA collective to coordinate mission impact work, and also acknowledges that each YWCA local association responds to the unique needs of its respective community. Additionally, the framework optimizes the YWCA’s competitive advantage as an organization providing systemic advocacy and with a local presence across the nation.

### YWCA USA SIGNATURE PLATFORMS

The YWCA USA has three signature platforms that support the YWCA mission: *YWCA is dedicated to eliminating **racism**, empowering women and promoting peace, justice, freedom and dignity for all.* The three platforms are: racial justice and civil rights, women’s and girls empowerment and economic advancement, and women’s and girls health and safety. The signature platforms are focus areas of the YWCA’s collective mission impact work, including services and programs, as well as advocacy and public policy.

### SIGNATURE OUTCOMES

The YWCA USA will identify at least one signature metric for each signature platform that both the national office and local associations work to realize over a period of years.

### ADVOCACY PRIORITIES AND POLICIES

Additionally, the focused nature of a multiyear signature outcome in each platform area will allow YWCA’s advocacy efforts added focus and with the adoption of related policy priorities, further align all mission impact areas.

### YWCA USA EVENTS AND CAMPAIGNS

Special events, campaigns, and initiatives will support a signature platform and/or outcome. In the area of Racial Justice and Civil Rights, **Stand Against Racism** is our first signature campaign. Founded by the YWCA Trenton and YWCA Princeton, Stand Against Racism™ is designed to build




community among those who work for racial justice and to raise awareness about the negative impact of institutional and structural racism. As a signature campaign of YWCA, Stand Against Racism is one part of our larger national strategy to fulfill our mission of eliminating racism.

## MISSION IMPACT AFFINITY GROUPS

YWCA Mission Impact Groups engage YWCA leaders around mission-focused initiatives or projects in order to increase operational capacity. Mission impact groups are strategic in nature and allow for the entire YWCA network to participate in the planning and implementation of goals in impact areas. The [Racial Justice and Civil Rights Mission Impact Group](#) (RJCR) was launched during the 2014 YWCA Annual Conference. Additionally, 11 members of the group served as the first review committee of this document. Currently, the RJCR Mission Impact Group gathers quarterly for a conference call, interacts via social media and meets at the Annual Conference.

## MODEL PROGRAMS



The YWCA has been from its beginning a membership-participating organization in which final responsibility rests in the ... membership. ... [It] is organized as a democracy and not as a welfare organization in which one group of more privileged women works for another group of less privileged girls ... All of this means very careful attention to the way in which decisions are reached and plans built up, and a continuing effort to draw upon new sources for members who will share in carrying Association responsibility. This is a slow, painstaking work but is essential if our democracy be more than a theory.

– Constitution for YWCA City Associations, 1929

YWCA USA will identify best-practice programs that have activities and outcomes in alignment with a signature outcome. In the coming year, YWCA will be identifying racial justice programs that fulfill our identified Racial Justice and Civil Rights Signature outcomes and we will share those programs with our associations

## COMMITMENTS

The YWCA USA has historically been involved in leadership development, the empowerment of young women and girls and advocating for women's rights on the global stage. Those three commitments influence all aspects of the YWCA USA's Mission Impact Framework and priorities.

In addition to providing us a clear path forward in all three signature platform areas, using this framework will yield us the type of data that will greatly enhance our ability to discuss how we do our work (like eliminate racism) in a coherent and concise way and it will also provide us the opportunity to collect concrete data on the impact we are making. It is this type of mission-based clarity and concrete data that will also greatly enhance our development efforts and mission impact at both the local and national level.

## PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

In addition the launch of the Mission Impact Framework, building strategic partnerships with other national entities and leaders will galvanize our collective to effect change. There are innumerable partnership opportunities for YWCA USA. The new mission-impact framework will allow us to hone the partnerships we wish to pursue and grow. As such, our relationship building will be prioritized once we have established the outcomes for each signature platform.

Ultimately, it will be the combination of our articulated organizational needs to (a) explicitly identify our core shared identity, (b) re-engage young people in the movement at all levels, (c) build partnerships with credible organizations and institutions around racial justice issues, and (d) develop a national strategy for racial justice work at the YWCA USA, along with the (to be identified) **signature outcomes** of the **Mission Impact Framework** that will determine our new partners.

Creating strategic partnerships with credible organizations and institutions will go a long way in helping us deepen our impact in the area of racial justice. Further, all potential partnerships should not only align with our three **signature platforms**, but should also honor our **organizational commitments to leadership development, young women and girls, and global engagement** as identified in the **Mission Impact Framework**.

After exploring our organizational history, the current need for racial justice work, and analyzing our organizational assets/liabilities and needs/opportunities related to our mission, the concluding section of this Persimmon Paper provides us the shared language that we need around issues of race and racism so that we can effectively move forward in our racial justice work.

Photo 11: YWCA USA and YWCA Nevada Leaders with Rep. Dina Titus, YWCA Capitol Hill Day, 2014



# SHARED LANGUAGE FOR RACIAL JUSTICE

Without a shared system of symbols/words how would humans be able to convey meaning to one another or work in groups? Shared language is a basic building block of all human communities. All forms of collective work or movement building require three things among those involved: shared language, shared values and a shared commitment to strategic collective action. The purpose of the following section of this Persimmon Paper is to provide the YWCA movement a common or shared language around racial justice.

Far too often, conversations about “race” become frustratingly circular and unproductive because those involved in the conversation do not share a language of “race.” For example, it is extremely difficult to address racism when one person believes that racism is primarily an issue about individual feelings, choices and experiences whereas another person understands racism to be primarily about institutional and structural aspects of our society that have a disproportionately negative impact on people of color.

The collection of terms and definitions in this glossary is our shared language of race and racial justice across our movement. It is only by fully committing to this shared language that we will be able to effectively and efficiently harness our collective thinking and move toward meaningful action and measurable impact.

Language is power, life and the instrument of culture, the instrument of domination and liberation.

— Angela Carter

The terms here have been defined with the YWCA USA commitment to social justice and our mission in mind. Some of the definitions may seem familiar to you while others may not. All terms are

oriented around an analysis of **power** (what is power, who has it, how is it distributed/accessed, etc.). A power analysis approach to understanding social and racial justice work allows us to think, speak and address racial justice in concrete, tangible and measurable ways. It reminds us that the existing order is not “natural” but indeed the product of labor/work. The knowledge that the system is “built” or constructed, rather than “natural,” gives us a reason to be hopeful. It encourages us to harness our collective power to build a better world—one that tilts toward justice, dignity and freedom for all people.

We know that language is not fixed or static. Language shifts and changes across time and space. Moreover, some may not understand or personally agree with the terms as laid out in the YWCA racial-justice glossaries. However, this shared vernacular will allow us to speak to and with one another more clearly and these terms are defined in ways that also enable us to interact with other social/racial justice organizations—increasing both our credibility and accountability in this critical area of our mission.

Please note that the terms are not organized alphabetically, rather, they appear in a topical/sequential order designed to enhance understanding. The terms below have been grouped together because of their relationship to one another. The grouping is to help us see how words that have quite different meanings are often used interchangeably, which adds to the dysfunction of race relations and dialogue.

## RACIAL/SOCIAL JUSTICE GLOSSARIES

### POLITICS, POWER & PRIVILEGE

- **Politics** - 1. The struggle for or over power. 2. The struggle to attain, maintain, build or take power.

**Power** - 1. The ability to name or define. 2. The ability to decide. 3. The ability to set the rule, standard, or policy. 4. The ability to change the rule, standard, or policy to serve your needs, wants or desires. 5. The ability to influence decisions makers to make choices in favor of your cause, issue or concern.

- **Types of Power**

Each of these definitions of power can manifest on personal, social, institutional, or structural levels.

- a. **Personal Power** - 1. Self-determination. 2. Power that an individual possesses or builds in their personal life and interpersonal relationships.

*Example: When a person chooses a new name for themselves rather than the one given to them, this is an act of personal power.*

- b. **Social Power** - 1. Communal self-determination. 2. A grassroots collective organization of personal power. 3. Power that social groups possess or build among themselves to determine and shape their collective lives.

*Example: Over the last few years individuals who identify as multiracial or multiethnic have used their social power to name themselves into existence and build a community around the shared experience of being multiracial or multiethnic. The growing social power of the multiracial/multiethnic community is a direct challenge to institutions premised on a binary understanding of race (i.e., you are either this or that.)*

- c. **Institutional Power** - 1. Power to create and shape the rules, policies and actions of an institution. 2. To have institutional power is to be a decision maker or to have great influence upon a decision maker of an institution.

*Example: A school principal or the PTO of a local school have institutional power at that school.*

Photo 12: 50th Anniversary -  
March on Washington



**d. Structural Power** - To have structural power is to create and shape the rules, policies, and actions that govern multiple and intersecting institutions or an industry.

*Example: The city school board, mayor, and the Secretary of Education have structural power in the educational industry.*

- **Minoritized Population** - 1. A community of people whose access to institutional and structural power has been severely limited regardless of the size of the population. As a result, the community is constantly being disenfranchised and disempowered by the Majoritized population. 2. Also referred to as a subordinated population.
- **Majoritized population** - 1. A community of people whose access to institutional and structural power has been structurally guaranteed, regardless of the size of the population. As a result, the community routinely disenfranchises and disempowers the most vulnerable communities known as the **Minoritized populations**. 2. Also referred to as a **dominant** population.
- **Cultural Default** - 1. The status quo; a category or reality specific to one group of people that is used as a rule or standard for all people and groups. 2. Taking the preferences, practices, and policies of a ruling elite and universalizing them so that they feel “natural” or function as social norms. 3. Often referred to in academic circles as hegemony.

*Examples: Racial justice movements address the cultural default of Whiteness: beauty standards; definitions of culture, civility and humanity; what counts as knowledge; etc.*

- **Eurocentrism**- 1. The process and product of the cultural default of Whiteness. 2. The utilization of European cultural standards as universal standards that all should be judged by. 3. To orient to European people and cultures as the benchmark of: humanity, culture, truth, virtue, style, beauty, civility, knowledge, and ethics; a deification of European people and their cultures.

**Privilege** - 1. The unearned social, political, economic, and psychological benefits of membership in a group that has institutional and structural power. 2. Living and existing in a world where standards and rules are premised upon your needs wants and desires. 3. To identify with or be identified as a member of a dominant social group (as opposed to a Minoritized group).

- **White Privilege**- 1. The unearned privileges associated with identifying as or appearing White in a racist society. 2. Living and existing as a White (appearing) person in a world that operates on the cultural default of Whiteness. 3. A tool that a White ally can use to challenge racist oppression in the spaces and places they have access to.
- **Oppression** - 1. A system for gaining, abusing and maintaining structural and institutional power for the benefit of a limited dominant class. 2. The inequitable distribution of structural and institutional power. 3. A system



where a select few hoard power, wealth and resources at the detriment of the many. 4. The lack of access, opportunity, safety, security and resources that Minoritized populations experience; a direct result of a vacuum created by privilege. 5. A state of being that is the opposite of social justice.

- **Community Organizing** - 1. The art and science of social movements. 2. The theories, practices and skills that people use to create movements for social transformation. 3. A communal process of using, building and demonstrating power in order to influence decision makers to get things the community needs or wants. 4. The ultimate response on the continuum of responses to social injustice. It is a communal process of building power (often by developing a broad coalition of stakeholders) to put an extraordinary amount of pressure on a person that has institutional or structural power to change a policy or practice that negatively impacts the stakeholder communities.

*Example: The famous Montgomery Bus boycott is a primary example of community organizing. Unfortunately, rather than focusing on all the work the locals did to build power in their community, we instead tell a depoliticized story about Rosa Parks as an elder with tired feet. The truth of the situation is that she was a trained community organizer; she was a member of the local NAACP and a primary organizer of the Boycott movement; and that what she did that day in refusing to yield her seat was a deliberate and planned direct action (tactic) of the Boycott Movement.*

# Multi-issue Literacy

- 1. A cross-movement approach to social justice work. 2. The ability to “read” (code and decode) information from the vantage point of more than a single social justice concern/issue. 3. The result of intentional efforts to develop an understanding of the “root causes” of all oppression. 4. An understanding of the points of convergence and divergence of various concerns/issues that most affect particular communities. 5. The history, mission, and values of the YWCA call us to be organizationally literate across issues of age, gender, class, and race.

- **Ally** - 1. One who is not (most) directly impacted by an issue but works in solidarity with those who are most directly impacted by the issue. 2. One who understands that their primary role is to: a) educate themselves, b) educate their community, and c) lend their support to the leadership of those most directly impacted by the issue.

*Example: A White racial -justice ally would be someone who has educated themselves on the issue of racial justice, seeks to be anti-racist in their everyday life, participates in the education of other White people about racial justice, actively works to use their White Privilege to support the cause of racial justice, seeks to transform spaces where they have power or influence, and supports people of color leadership on racial justice issues and in racial justice movements. There is a difference between being an ally and being an advocate; allies work closely with*

*and in support of those most impacted by an issue. However, one can be an advocate and not work with or know any of the people or groups that you are advocating for.*

- **Theory of Change** - A system of beliefs about how change and transformation happen. Our current theory of change revolves around five basic assumptions: (a) a social justice orientation demands that we actively seek to transform unjust social policies and practices in our present world; (b) democratic practice and plurality are key to social transformation; (c) women working together across lines of difference can transform and improve life for all women; (d) social problems must be addressed on multiple levels (direct service, issue education, policy advocacy) to end social inequities; (e) all women cannot be empowered if we do not address issues of race and racism.
- **Women of Color** - 1. Political (not biological) identity of solidarity among and across Minoritized ethnic communities historically referred to as ethnic minorities or non-White people. 2. A term used to disrupt the Black/White racial binary in the U.S. 3. A linguistic tool of **inclusion** and reminder that people of the African diaspora are not the only people who have been racialized or have been impacted by institutional and structural racism; common variations include: people of color, youth of color, students of color, queer or LGBTQ people of color. Please click on the hyperlink to view an interview with [Loretta Ross](#), co-founder and national coordinator of [SisterSong - Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective](#), sharing one of the birthing moments of the term “women of color.”

**Note:** Our use of this term is not to suggest that all Women of Color are the same, or that the term is accepted and used by all. The creation of the Women of Color framing came out of political discussions among social activists about how to represent the common needs of various women from Minoritized racial/ethnic communities.

- **Xenophobia** - Fear and/or loathing of people who have social group identities or memberships that are different from your own; the “other” or “those people.”

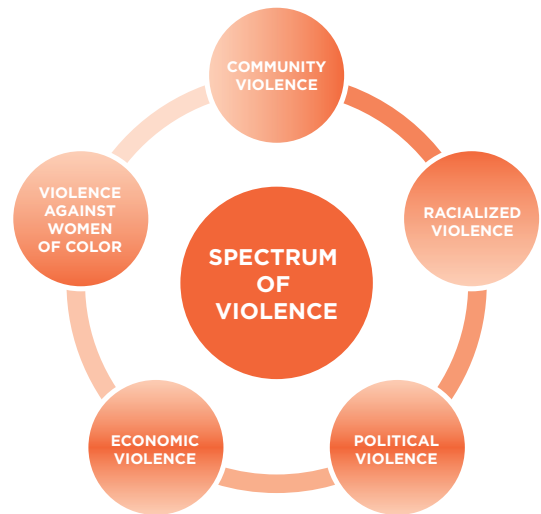
*Example: Since Sept. 11, 2001 and the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, American people and policy have become explicitly xenophobic. This xenophobia is directed at people who identify as or “appear” to be Muslim. This specific xenophobia is also known as **Islamophobia**.*

## **SPECTRUM OF VIOLENCE**

- **Spectrum of Violence** - See fig 15. 1. A model or understanding of violence built upon the assumptions that not all violence is: physical, visible, and/or valued equally. 2. An acknowledgement that there are many types of violence in the world and not all of these types of violence are acknowledged or responded to equally. 3. Beginning with Community Violence, the spectrum, goes clockwise, ordering types of violence from the most “visible” to the least “visible” (noticed in the mainstream). However, each point on the spectrum has “visible” and invisible aspects.

*Example: violence against women and girls of color (sex trafficking, murder, sexual assault domestic violence or [police brutality](#) receives less attention*

**FIGURE 15:**



(invisible) than police violence against men and boys of color (visible).

- **Violence** - 1. A primary tool of oppression. 2. A coercive spectrum of tools used to acquire, build and/or maintain power. 3. A continuum of economic, political, cultural, religious, psychological, and physical resources, behaviors and practices used as vehicles of violence
  - **Community Violence** - A combination of violence directed at communities, such as police violence, war, and colonialism, and violence within communities, such as sexual and domestic violence.
  - **Political Violence** - 1. A tool in the spectrum of violence used to exploit the most vulnerable people and communities in our society. 2. The targeted coercive or abusive use of political systems, policies and/or practices in the service of acquiring, maintaining, and/or building power (institutional or structural) for a majoritized community.
  - **Economic Violence** - 1. A tool in the spectrum of violence used to exploit the most vulnerable people and communities in our society. 2. The targeted coercive or abusive use of economic systems, policies and/or practices in the service of acquiring, maintaining, and/or building power (institutional or structural) for a majoritized community.

**Racialized Violence** - 1. A tool in the spectrum of violence used to exploit the most vulnerable people and communities in our society. 2. A form of racialized community violence. 3. Tool of oppression directed against communities of color, such as economic policies, cultural practices, political maneuvers, police brutality, war, criminal justice systems, hate crimes, genocide, and colonialism used in the service of acquiring, building, or maintaining institutional and structural power at the expense of people of color.

- **Violence against women of color** - A combination of violence directed at women of color and their communities, such as police violence, war, and colonialism, and violence used within communities against women of color, such as sexual and domestic violence.
- **Hate Crimes** - 1. A form of community violence that targets the most vulnerable populations. 2. Committed when a perpetrator intentionally selects and commits a crime toward someone based on actual or perceived membership in a particular group, usually defined by race, religion, ability, ethnic origin, gender identity or sexual orientation. Current federal laws make it a crime to commit bias-motivated acts against individuals or property. Hate crimes not only cause direct harm to the victim, but have an intimidating and isolating impact on the larger community than targeted originally.

- **Microaggressions** - 1. Racial microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color. 2. The “normalized” (verbal and non-verbal) violent behaviors that daily challenge the full humanity and dignity of people who are or appear to be members of a minoritized population. Due to their frequency, microaggressions have a cumulative (negative) impact on the psychological, emotional, and/or physical well-being of the recipients of these assaults.
- **Racial Profiling** - 1. A form of racialized community violence. 2. Structural and institutional racial xenophobia. 3. Refers to the practice of a law enforcement agent or agency relying, to any degree, on race, ethnicity, religion, national origin in selecting which individuals to subject to routine or investigatory activities such as traffic stops, searches, and seizures. 4. A manifestation of racial prejudice that materializes on institutional and structural levels. 5. The systemic targeting, surveillance, policing, and harassment of people of color that begins with the

# Racial Profiling

- The systemic targeting, surveillance, policing, and harassment of people of color that begins with the assumption that people of color are more likely to be criminals. At the community level, the discriminatory practice of racial profiling has emerged as a national concern. African-Americans, Native Americans, Latinos, Asian-Americans, and Arab-Americans, have reported being unfairly targeted by police who use race, ethnicity, national origin, religion and even gender when choosing which individuals should be subjected to stops, searches, seizures, and frisks on the streets, during routine traffic stops, at national borders and in airports.

assumption that people of color are more likely to be criminals. At the community level, the discriminatory practice of racial profiling has emerged as a national concern. African-Americans, Native Americans, Latinos, Asian-Americans, and Arab-Americans, have reported being unfairly targeted by police who use race, ethnicity, national origin, religion and even gender when choosing which individuals should be subjected to stops, searches, seizures, and frisks on the streets, during routine traffic stops, at national borders and in airports.

*Example: In the aftermath of Sept. 11, law enforcement agents at the federal, state and local levels are permitted to engage in racial profiling to prevent terrorist related activities. Arabs and Muslims, and in many cases, any individual who “appears” to be Arab, Muslim, South Asian or Sikh are vulnerable to unfair treatment at the hands law enforcement who have the dual responsibility to protect communities they work in, while respecting the civil liberties of all those they serve.*

- **Human Trafficking** - 1. A form of (targeted) community violence involving kidnapping, forced relocation, and forced labor. 2. The illegal and/or immoral forced relocation of people, typically for the purposes of forced labor and/or commercial sexual exploitation.

*Example: a) The kidnapping, transport and selling of African people across the Atlantic Ocean (Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade) to be used as free labor in the “New World.” b) The kidnapping, transport and selling of women and girls across state lines and international borders (often to be used as sex workers); also referred to as sex trafficking.*

## BIAS, PREJUDICE, STEREOTYPE AND RACISM

- **Bias** - An orientation toward something or someone, this orientation can be positive, negative or neutral; a bias can be informed by a previous experience. In other words, biases can be rational.

*Example: Any distrust of the U.S. Government that Native American communities have could be considered a rational bias rather than prejudice because there are actual historical and contemporary reasons for indigenous people not to trust the government: desecration of sacred land, genocide, forced relocation, biological warfare, and broken treaties to name a few.*

- **Prejudice** - An assumption of knowledge about something or someone not rooted in personal experiences with the particular something or someone in question; prejudice is informed by stereotype rather than experience.

*Example: A White woman clutching her purse when a person of color gets on the elevator with her could be bias but given the prevalence of racism in US culture is more than likely prejudice.*

- **Stereotype** - 1. A trait and/or characteristic assumed to be true of all members of a particular social group. Many American cultural practices and public policies are rooted in racial, gendered and class based stereotypes such as Asians are the model minority; meaning submissive, assimilating, and accommodating (e.g., honorary White people). 2. Stereotypes focus on one aspect of a person’s identity to the exclusion of their full humanity.

**Racism** - 1. A form of racialized community violence (economic, political, cultural, and/or physical) that targets or has disproportionate negative impact upon people of color (POC). 2. When one's use of institutional or structural power is premised upon racial stereotype/prejudice or when one's use of institutional/structural power creates, maintains or reinforces policies and practices that further racial inequity. 3. Racial prejudice/stereotypes are symptoms of racism, not racism itself. 4. “Not liking” someone because of their race is a form of bias or prejudice which can exist solely on an individual basis but racism exists on institutional and structural levels. 5. institutional/structural power + racial bias/prejudice/stereotype = Racism; 6. Institutional/structural policies and practices + disproportionate negative impact on POC = Racism.

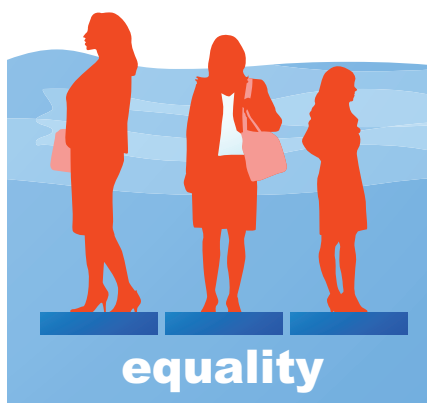


- **Reverse Racism** - If we apply a power analysis, then reverse racism is not possible because people of color do not have enough institutional and structural power to be racist; though they can be biased or prejudiced. The same is true of “reverse sexism.” Despite any bias or prejudices that women may have, they do not have enough institutional/structural power to “oppress” men.
- **Islamophobia** - A form of racism rooted in stereotypes that label all Muslim or Muslim “appearing” people as “terrorist.” This form of racism manifests itself in hate crimes, federal actions such as the “Patriot Act” and increased surveillance or racial profiling of Muslims, Arab-Americans or anyone who “appears” to be either.

*Example: Post-Sept. 11, islamophobia has been linked to an increase in targeted violence (hate crimes) against Sikhs, who many mistakenly interpret to be Muslim due to their traditional religious garb.*

## DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION

FIGURE 16:



- **Diversity** - A variety of things. Recognition of difference alone does not equal justice or inclusion. A diversity focus emphasizes “how many of these” we have in the room, organization, etc. Diversity programs and cultural celebrations/education programs are not equivalent to doing racial justice. It is possible to name, acknowledge, and celebrate diverse cultures without doing anything to transform the institutional or structural systems that produce, and maintain racialized injustices in our communities.
- **Equality** - To treat everyone exactly the same. An equality emphasis often ignores historical and structural factors that benefit some social groups/communities and harms other social groups/communities. Often as a response to racism, people will claim a “colorblind” orientation or seek to create “colorblind” policies that will treat all people equally. However, “colorblindness” often leads to inequity because it does not acknowledge the historical and contemporary systemic forces of oppression that do not allow all of us to be our full selves equally.
- **Equity** - To treat everyone fairly. An equity emphasis seeks to render justice by deeply considering structural factors that benefit some social groups/communities and harms other social groups/communities. Sometimes justice demands, for the purpose of equity, an unequal response.
- **Inclusion** - 1. An intentional effort to transform the status quo by creating opportunity for those who have been historically marginalized. 2. An inclusion focus emphasizes outcomes of diversity rather than assuming that increasing the amount of explicit diversity of people automatically creates equity in access/opportunity, or an enhanced organizational climate. 3. Begins with the needs, wants, and quality of life of the historically Minoritized population rather than the historically privileged.
- **Social Justice** - 1. An anti-oppression orientation to social and political organization. 2. The process and goal of addressing the root causes of institutional and structural “isms.” 3. A vision of the world where all groups of people can live (and be perceived) as fully human on all levels (personal, social, institutional, and structural). 4. A vision of the world not rooted in the dominance of any one group over all others. Such a vision would include recognizing the inherent worth and connectedness of all people, animals,

# Inclusive Organization

- An organization that proactively enlists intentional strategies to remove barriers to access, participation and success of those who were historically or are currently systematically excluded by or marginalized within the organization.
- 2. An organization that actively seeks the transformation of its organizational policies and practices, to foster the involvement and success of those who have been excluded or marginalized.

plants, and all other resources of our planet and universe. Additionally, this vision of the world would not be rooted in a scarcity model that devalues things that are abundant (many can have access to or can acquire) and highly values that which is scarce or rare (very few can have access to or acquire).

- Continuum of Response to Social Injustice - 1. A multipronged or holistic response to addressing social injustices. 2. A belief that social transformation requires a spectrum of responses from meeting immediate needs (via direct service provision) to transforming institutional and structural policies and practices (via public policy advocacy). 3. The YWCA continuum of response includes: direct services, issue education and advocacy.
  1. **Direct Service** - The highest priority in the continuum where you help individuals navigate a current crisis situation. This is the most immediate form of response to a social injustice. Direct service may also include skill or capacity development opportunities that are longer term rather than immediate such as leadership development or enhanced vocational skills.
  2. **Issue Education** - To supply people with information or educational materials or other opportunities to learn more about a social justice topic or issue.
  3. **Advocacy** - To work on behalf of those most negatively affected by a specific policy or practice. Those who are being advocated for may not have any idea that this action is taking place.

## CULTURE, ETHNICITY & RACE

- **Culture** - A shared way of life among a social group. This shared way of life includes commonalities in: geography, language, history, traditions, rituals, belief systems, etc.
- **Ethnicity** - 1. Membership in a particular cultural group. 2. Often confused with race; ethnic groups are self-formed and identified whereas racial groupings were created by a single group and imposed on everyone else.

*Example: U.S. indigenous people are often referred to collectively as Indians, American Indians or Native Americans, however, the indigenous people of North America exist as many separate nations and ethnic groups that have different languages, histories and cultural practices.*
- **Social Construction** - An unreal “real” thing. Social constructions are not “natural”; they do not exist outside of language and human imagination;

in this sense they are unreal. However, our way of life is built upon the belief in or dedication to socially constructed categories such as “race.” As such, though “unreal” social constructions have real world consequences for all of us. The movie “The Matrix” is often used to teach people how social constructions work.

## VARIATIONS ON RACE & RACISM

- **Racialization** - 1. The ongoing process by which we all are shaped by racial grouping or “racialized” by structural policies/practices, institutional/organizational cultures, and interpersonal interactions. 2. Our daily experiences of being “raced” or “racialized.” 3. An acknowledgment that these daily experiences look and are experienced differently across various communities and category of identity.
- **Post-Racial** - 1. A belief that we as a society have moved beyond race; that race and racism are no longer relevant because as a society we have addressed all of the racialized barriers to full and equal participation in American society. 2. The election of Barack Obama as President of the United States marks for many the moment America became a post-racial society.
- **Racial Justice** - 1. A social justice orientation with a focus on dismantling the root causes of racism (institutional and structural policies and practices) rather than merely the symptoms of racism (racial bias, racial prejudice, racial stereotypes). 2. Requires a focus on and commitment to the communities most directly negatively impacted by racism.

**Race** - 1. A social rather than biological construction. 2. A theoretical invention of a European scientist used to separate and rank human beings into three distinct biological categories: Caucasoid (European), Negroid (African) and Mongoloid (Asian). According to this “science” these three species of humans evolved completely separate from one another with no common ancestors. The science of race proclaimed that White/ Europeans (Caucasoid) are the most evolved of the three human species and Black/Africans are the least evolved. 3. The term race as applied to humans was invented as equivalent to the term species used to reference (non-human) animals and plants. 4. An umbrella term used to minimize ethnic variety and emphasize broader group identity markers most often rooted in appearance, skin tone, and ancestral homelands or origins.

Example: The racialized term Asian includes numerous ethnic groups and nationalities such as Hmong, Korean, Pilipino, Taiwanese, Laotian, Vietnamese, Chinese and Japanese. Despite the fact that some of these nations and people were colonizers and other were colonized, the concept of “race” draws our focus to similarities of these diverse groups of people rather than the many ethnic/cultural differences among the group.

- **Racial Binary** - The Western/U.S. tendency to only think and talk about race and racism in terms of Black and White people; thus making invisible the racialization of other people of color including bi/multiracial and bi/multiethnic people.
- **Multiracial/Multiethnic** - 1. Of or pertaining to two or more racial/ethnic identities. 2. An identity category growing in usage and popularity by those who understand their racial/ethnic identity and heritage to be rooted in more than one racial/ethnic tradition. 3. Made up of, involving or acting in the interest of more than one racial/ethnic group. Example: In 1946 when the YWCA passed the Interracial Charter, our organization officially became a multiracial organization. Although we know that women of color have been involved in the YWCA movement since 1889, it is at this point in history that the YWCA began to enlist intentional strategies to remove barriers that hindered the full participation of women of color in the movement, at all level of leadership.

Photo 13:  
YWCA San Antonio Rally





# CONCLUSION

It is our hope that this Persimmon Paper on the YWCA USA Mission to Eliminate Racism will serve as one important step in harnessing **Our Collective Power**. May this paper serve as a call to action that encourages us learn and grow together even as we deepen our efforts to live our mission *to eliminate racism, empower women, and promote peace, justice, freedom and dignity for all*.

MAY THIS PAPER SERVE AS A CALL TO ACTION THAT ENCOURAGES US LEARN AND GROW TOGETHER EVEN AS WE DEEPEN OUR EFFORTS TO LIVE OUR MISSION TO ELIMINATE RACISM, EMPOWER WOMEN, AND PROMOTE PEACE, JUSTICE, FREEDOM AND DIGNITY FOR ALL.

This Persimmon Paper is about our story. The story of the YWCA USA is a complex and fascinating one. It is a story that is filled with inspirational acts of bravery, audacity, and progressive insight. Our legacy is one of risk taking and bold action. Our legacy is also one of organizational change and transformation. Change and transformation always come with a price. Despite the prevalence of “Christian Sisterhood” as the core shared identity

of the YWCA (for much of our history) sometimes that shared identity was not enough to bind us together. Along this journey of growth and development we have lost relationships with individual members and whole associations and this too is a part of our story.

In 2015, the YWCA USA reclaims our full story. We are clear that **our organizational commitment to the elimination of racism** is an institutional **legacy of the many women of color, young women,**

**and their allies** who labored within this movement to help us grow our capacity to be an inclusive organization. We are also clear that despite any “racial progress” in the United States, **our mission to eliminate racism remains** as **necessary** today as it ever has. We also affirm that in order to be effective in our mission to eliminate racism, **we must maximize our organizational assets, minimize our liabilities, and strategically work on organizational needs** such that we are **effective in seizing current and emerging opportunities**. Lastly, **we must increase our capacity as practitioners of racial justice**, starting with **learning and using a shared language of race, racism, and racial justice**. By doing so, we exponentially increase our local relevance and national leadership. When we do so, we are inspired and we inspire others. When we reclaim our full story we are compelled to corporately acknowledge our shortcomings and recommit ourselves to doing the hard work of the mission; seeking to be just, and compassionate (with others and ourselves) as we do. **When we reclaim our full story, we harness “Our Collective Power.”**



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# APPENDIX C: SOURCES AND RESOURCES

## YWCA USA HISTORY

[A World of Difference: Portland Women of the YWCA 1901–2000](#) [Digital Exhibit].  
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- \_\_\_\_\_. [History and Mission](#) (2010)

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## WEB-BASED OR DIGITAL RESOURCES

[#FergusonSyllabus](#): Talking and Teaching About Police Violence. [Prison Culture: How the PIC Structures our World....](#) [Blog] Aug. 31, 2014. Police violence is very much in the news lately and many young people want to address the issue (they always do). I and several of my comrades have created resources that can assist in those conversations.

[Center for Media Justice Toolbox](#): Learn communications strategies for a 21st-century progressive movement such as messaging, framing, media planning, and campaign building

---

[Center for Third World Organizing](#): Organizer training programs such as, Community Action Trainings, Movement Activist Apprenticeship Program, and Black Organizing for Leadership and Dignity

---

[Forward Together](#): Tools and media that support reproductive justice organizing and movement building work

---

[IGNITE! An Anti-Racist Tool Kit](#): A key principle in the creation and selection of materials for this toolkit is the use of an anti-oppression framework based on a structural and historical approach ... both anti-oppression and popular education see individual people as part of larger systems, shaped by our context. They assume we can change our institutions, culture and other systems of power only through collective organization and action.

---

[Labor Community Strategy Center](#): Think tank/act tank for movement building rooted in working class communities of color

---

[Media Empowerment Project Organizing Manual](#): Resource providing a framework for organizing around media. Available in English and Spanish

---

[Media Justice Resource Library](#): Collection of downloadable publications and resources on media policy and media justice

---

[New Organizing Institute \(NOI\)'s Organizer's Toolbox](#): Videos, templates and resources for your organizing, campaigning and training work

---

[Organizing Upgrade](#): Editors from different parts of the social justice movement develop regular content within their sectors to deepen strategic dialogue and promote big-picture thinking

---

[PICO National Network Organizing Tools](#): PICO is a national network of faith-based community organizations working to create innovative solutions to problems facing urban, suburban and rural communities.

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[Progressive Communicators Network](#): Communication tools and strategy for racial and economic justice and forum for communications professionals in the social justice field

---

[Progressive Technology Project](#): Notes on how to integrate technology into community-led organizing work in low-income communities and communities of color

---

[Racial Equity Tools](#): This site offers tools, research, tips, curricula and ideas for people who want to increase their own understanding and to help those working toward justice at every level – in systems, organizations, communities and the culture at large.

---

[Sistersong: Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective](#): A network of local, regional and national grassroots agencies representing five primary ethnic populations/indigenous nations in the United States: African American, Arab American/Middle Eastern, Asian/Pacific Islander, Latina and Native American/Indigenous

---

[Social Justice Leadership Resource Library](#): Articles, tools, and curricula to refine your practice of transformative organizing

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[Sociologist for Justice](#). [Blog]. We are an independent collective of sociologists troubled by the killing of Michael Brown. We are troubled by the excessive show of force and militarized response to protesters who rightfully seek justice and demand a change in the treatment of people of color by law enforcement.

---

[SOUL Free Training Resources](#): Download exercises demonstrating power and oppression, organizing, self-assessment, and accountability.

---

[Study Guides: The New Jim Crow](#) Drawing from and expanding on the themes of Michelle Alexander's acclaimed best-seller, *The New Jim Crow*, this in-depth guide provides a launching pad for groups wishing to engage in deep, meaningful dialogue about race, racism, and structural inequality in the age of mass incarceration.

---

[The Praxis Project](#): Tools and publications for organizers, advocates, and researchers developing policies and coalitions at the state and local level

---

[Understanding Race](#): Looking through the eyes of history, science and lived experience, the RACE Project explains differences among people and reveals the reality—and unreality—of race. The story of race is complex and may challenge how we think about race and human variation, about the differences and similarities among people.

---

## TRAINING AND CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

---

[Highlander Research and Education Center](#): Highlander serves as a catalyst for grassroots organizing and movement building in Appalachia and the U.S. South. Through popular education, participatory research, and cultural work, we help to create spaces—at Highlander and in local communities—where people gain knowledge, hope and courage, expanding their ideas of what is possible.

---

[Midwest Academy](#): Organizing for social change training. [USSA offers a similar training for student organizers](#).

---

[School of Unity and Liberation](#) (SOUL): Helps develop a new generation of organizers rooted in a systemic change analysis, especially people of color, young women, queer and transgender youth and low-income people.

---

[Social Justice Training Institute \(SJTI\)](#): Through community activities, race caucus work, core group discussions, and exploring the impact of in-the-moment situations, participants expand competencies as social justice change agents.

---

[Spin Academy](#): Teaches people working for social change how to use communications to achieve their organizations' goals.

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## APPLIED RESEARCH, POLICY STUDIES, AND THINK TANKS

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[ACLU](#): The ACLU works to extend rights to segments of our population that have traditionally been denied their rights, including people of color; women; lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgender people; prisoners; and people with disabilities. If the rights of society's most vulnerable members are denied, everybody's rights are imperiled.

- [Immigrants' Rights Project](#)
- [Racial Justice Program](#)
- [School to Prison Pipeline](#)

---

**Advocates for Youth:** Advocates for Youth's publications include information on involving communities to improve programs and policies for youth, discovering the facts about adolescent sexual health, involving youth in peer education, and educating young people.

- [Youth of Color Publications](#)

---

**Black Women's Roundtable:** an intergenerational civic engagement network of the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation. BWR is at the forefront of championing just and equitable public policy on behalf of Black women; a component of the [National Coalition on Black Civic Participation](#).

- [Black Women in the U.S. 2014: Progress and Challenges](#)

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**Center for American Progress:** an independent nonpartisan educational institute dedicated to improving the lives of Americans through progressive ideas and action.

- [The State of Women of Color in the US](#) (2013).

---

**Girl Scout Research Institute:** Run by GSUSA, the Girl Scout Research Institute publishes reports about current issues affecting our girls and volunteers.

- [The State of Girls: Unfinished Business](#) (2014)
- [The Resilience Factor: A Key to Leadership in African American and Hispanic Girls](#) (2011)

---

**INCITE! INCITE! Women, Gender Non-Conforming, and Trans people of Color\* Against Violence** is a national activist organization of radical feminists of color advancing a movement to end violence against women of color and our communities through direct action, critical dialogue and grassroots organizing

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**NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund.** The NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. is America's premier legal organization fighting for racial justice. Through litigation, advocacy, and public education, LDF seeks structural changes to expand democracy, eliminate disparities, and achieve racial justice in a society that fulfills the promise of equality for all Americans. LDF also defends the gains and protections won over the past 70 years of civil rights struggle and works to improve the quality and diversity of judicial and executive appointments.

- [Unlocking Opportunity for African American Girls: A Call to Action for Educational Equity](#) (2014)

---

**NCLR:** The primary aim of research at NCLR is to compile an accurate picture of the Latino population in order to build a comprehensive body of knowledge and identify solutions to the many challenges facing our growing community.

---

**Policy Institute, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.** The Task Force's Policy Institute conducts groundbreaking research and policy analysis on hot-button issues affecting the LGBT community. We have everything from full reports to fact sheets to our very popular graphic issue maps. (Now in black and white AND color!)

- [A La Familia: Our Families, the Bible, Sexual Orientation, and Gender Identity](#) (2012)
- [Injustice at Every Turn: National Transgender Discrimination Survey](#) (2011)
  - [Asian American, South Asian, Southeast Asian, and Pacific Islander Respondents](#) (2012)
  - [American Indian and Alaskan Native Respondents](#) (2012)
  - [Black Respondents](#) (2011)
  - [Regional Report](#) (2013)
  - [State Report](#) (2013)
  - [Latina/o Respondents](#) (2012)
  - [Multiracial Respondents](#) (2013)

---

Pew Research Center: Non-partisan “fact tank” for information around issues, attitudes, and trends nationally and globally

- Twenty to One: Wealth Gaps Rise. (2011)
- Drop Out Rate Reaches Record Low, Driven by Hispanics and Blacks (2014)
- 5 Facts About Indian Americans (2014)
- US Hispanic and Asian Populations Growing, for Different Reasons (2014)

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Race Forward: Research focused on the continued significance of race and ethnicity to social and economic outcomes in our society

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SAALT: South Asian Americans Leading Together creates a number of resources to share with community members, partners, policymakers, funders, and other stakeholders.

---

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights: The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights is a coalition charged by its diverse membership of more than 200 national organizations to promote and protect the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States. Through advocacy and outreach to targeted constituencies, The Leadership Conference works toward the goal of a more open and just society – an America as good as its ideals.

- Falling Further Behind: Combatting Racial Discrimination in America (2014)

---

WADeS Survey. Hilliard, D. Nebi and S. McCoy. Cross+Roads Consulting (2014)

---

Young Invincibles. Young Invincibles grew up in a law school cafeteria in Washington, D.C., after co-founders Ari Matusiak, Aaron Smith and a few friends realized that young people’s voices were not being heard in the health care debate.

- Closing the Gap (2014)
- 

**Photo 14: YWCA Tucson’s 22nd annual “Women’s Leadership Conference” speakers**

Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, “Women -Taking Power Seriously” and Naomi Tutu, “Building Gender Coalitions Across Racial Lines.”



FIGURE 16:

## APPENDIX D: YWCA USA THEORY OF CHANGE 2.01

The legacy of the YWCA is a story about women developing and adopting a vision to transform the world around them. In organizational language, we call this a theory of change. The YWCA theory of change is comprised of three components: (1) Five Foundational Assumptions, (2) Our Method or Continuum of Response to Social Issues, and (3) Three Signature Platforms. The YWCA Theory of Change informs the Mission Impact Framework.

### FIVE FOUNDATIONAL BELIEFS

These are the basic assumptions that inform the philosophy, work, style and structure of the YWCA.

Social justice requires us to transform unjust practices and policies. \*

Democratic practice and plurality are fundamental to the YWCA association model.

Women working together across lines of difference can transform and improve life for all women.

Social problems should be addressed on multiple levels.

All women cannot be empowered if we do not address the issues of race and racism. \*\*

### METHOD:

#### CONTINUUM OF RESPONSE

To effect lasting change, the YWCA is committed to addressing the needs of women and girls via direct-services in tandem with strategies of community issue education and public policy advocacy.

Direct Service

Issue Education

Advocacy & Public Policy

### PLATFORM ISSUES:

Over time, the work of the YWCA has settled into three primary areas of focus or signature platforms:

Racial Justice & Civil Rights

Empowerment & Economic  
Advancement of Women & Girls

Health & Safety of Women & Girls

### MISSION IMPACT FRAMEWORK:

The new mission impact framework is an intentional strategy designed to further focus our work in our platform areas through selected signature outcomes. These metrics will provide us the opportunity to track, measure, and articulate our mission impact, locally and nationally.

YWCA is dedicated to eliminating racism, empowering women and promoting peace, justice, freedom and dignity for all.

\* As the mission of the YWCA has evolved, a social justice orientation replaced the centrality of religious identity.

\*\* This belief was institutionalized in 1946 with the passage of the Interracial Charter and the implementation of the YWCA "Interracial Education" campaign.

## APPENDIX E: REFLECTIONS ON YWCA ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

1. In the early days (at least up to WWI), any local association that had a large enough membership & budget to support separate branches or program for particular constituencies tended to establish them—whether that was for the African-Americans, Mexican-Americans, Japanese-Americans, Industrial workers, etc. New York City, for instance, had (among other things) a small French language branch, a branch for art students, and a branch for nursing students. Because the YWCA was so focused on molding the Association to the needs of the time and place, YWCAs tended to take quite different forms depending on the local population.
2. World War I changed the Association in a lot of ways, among them dramatically increasing the number of African-American members and staff. Between the two World Wars, the YWCA pursued a strategy of “interracialism” or “Christian interracialism” that sought to undermine the racial status-quo by fostering meaningful relationships between black and white women—what the author Paul Harvey describes in his book *Freedom’s Coming* as “collective faith in a coalescing of moderate forces from religious communities” to bring about a “social revolution.”
3. There have always been (and probably always will be) parts of the Association that move ahead of the the curve and others that lag way behind. In race relations, for instance, there was amazing interracial work going on in the Student YWCA in the 1920s and 1930s, so I don’t think it’s accurate to characterize that era as only “separation and segregation.” Basically resolutions that came out of Conventions tend to codify stuff that’s already been happening for some time.
4. The Interracial Charter in 1946 is a moment when the Association as a whole agrees to take a big step forward, but meaningful implementation is actually very slow many places. The 1970 Convention is another moment with the entire Association commits to change. It represents a strategic shift away from the slow-moving “interracial” work to one more in line with the various freedom struggles going on in society at large. And just as they were way ahead in the 1920s and 30s, the Student YWCA was at the forefront—participating in civil rights struggles in the 1950s and 60s and pushing to bring the issues to the 1970 Convention. Other minority or ethnic groups enter the equation for the YWCA at a moment in time when they were becoming fully engaged in the freedom struggles in U.S. society at large.



5. Another big thing that's going on in the YWCA is that budget constraints after World War II drastically reduced the size and capacity of the national staff. Given that reality, the Association decided to limit its program-related activities emanating from National to those that benefited the Association "as a whole." This meant the Association pretty much abandoned—at the national level—all of the different program activities it had pursued in the first half of the 20th century, such as industrial, immigrant, etc. Among the very few that remained were Y-Teens & Student. **National's** involvement in racial justice work from the late 1940s would have been primarily through public advocacy and working internally to foster a more racially inclusive YWCA. **Local** YWCAs continued to design and run their own programs.

Maida Goodwin

Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, MA 01063

Photo 15: Elementary-age children receive educational, cultural and life skills enrichment; 2008 Talent Show; Youth Services program participants; YWCA Bucks County Summer Camp



## APPENDIX F: YWCA USA MISSION IMPACT STAFF

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Photo 16: National Board President, Helen Claytor and other YWCA Leaders at the Wounded Knee Demonstration, 1973





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**eliminating racism**  
**empowering women**  
**ywca**

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