

5-6-2016

Good Will Ambassador with a Cookbook: Flemmie Kittrell and the International Politics of Home Economics

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Good Will Ambassador with a Cookbook:
Flemmie Kittrell and the International Politics of Home Economics

Allison Beth Horrocks, PhD

University of Connecticut, 2016

In 1936, Flemmie P. Kittrell (1904-1980) became the first African American woman to earn a Ph.D. in Home Economics. Across her career, Kittrell taught Home Economics at a range of historically black institutions and traveled internationally on behalf of several Cold War agencies to develop programs abroad. Kittrell's flexible use of rhetoric about the home and the family made her an adept administrator stateside and an "effective" ambassador abroad. Charting her contributions, this dissertation challenges the assumption that African American women in the field were trained exclusively for service and the idea that the field was "homeward bound" throughout the 20th century. By bringing Kittrell's story to the fore, this dissertation also illuminates how women transformed a career in Home Economics into a means of entering into networks of higher education and state-based politics.

Heretofore, most histories of Home Economics have been divided along a color line and focused on the United States. A key scholarly intervention of this dissertation is its foregrounding of connections traceable across a range of sources from women at land-grant colleges, historically black colleges, and foreign institutions. In following this range of sources through Kittrell's archival trail, this project reevaluates the role of the home economist and considers why the traditions of outreach and internationalism exemplified by Kittrell have been forgotten. This study therefore challenges historiographical gaps that have made Kittrell not only unknown, but in various ways, unthinkable. Ultimately, this dissertation challenges the oft-invoked binary of being "at home or abroad," contributing to a new understanding of women's activism, gendered politics, and the meaning of what some in the field called the art of living.

Good Will Ambassador with a Cookbook:
Flemmie Kittrell and the International Politics of Home Economics

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B.A., Trinity College, 2009

M.A., University of Connecticut, 2011

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

at the

University of Connecticut

2016

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2016

APPROVAL PAGE

Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation

Good Will Ambassador with a Cookbook:
Flemmie Kittrell and the International Politics of Home Economics

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University of Connecticut
2016

Acknowledgements

In completing this project, I have been brought into contact with people and places that I did not imagine would be part of my graduate training. From Tuskegee, Alabama, to the National Archives in Kansas City, Missouri, I have met so many generous archivists and scholars who have supported this work. By leaving my home office and expanding my knowledge about the discipline of Home Economics, I found at least some greater understanding of the travels of Flemma Kittrell and the other subjects included in this project. In the end, I hope that this work does justice to their vision of the world.

This project would not have been possible without the sustained guidance and support of my committee. First and foremost, I owe a great debt to my advisor, Micki McElya. She has shown unflagging support for this dissertation and for my development as a scholar. Micki is truly a model mentor and I deeply admire her work within as well as outside of the academy. In charting the long trajectory of this work, I also owe so much to Christopher Clark. I am so grateful for his tremendous generosity, multi-point questions, and assistance with conceptualizing the overall structure of this project. For especially useful feedback in various seminars, a special thank you to Peter Baldwin is also due. Finally, I wish to thank my readers, Jelani Cobb and Margaret Rossiter of Cornell University. Professor Rossiter's investment in this project has made my work much richer.

I also extend my appreciation to the UConn History Department more broadly for financial and intellectual support. For their contributions to the department, I thank Kathy O'Dea and the late Nancy Comarella. For her kindness, wisdom, and deep knowledge, I also must acknowledge the incomparable Heather Parker. I am also indebted to two families who have given much to the History department: the Van Dusens and the Staves. One summer during my

graduate training, an Albert and Wilda Van Dusen Prize helped to support my housing costs for a public history internship. That year, I was honored to hear from a guest on one of my walking tours that the Van Dusens would be proud to see their gift to UConn extending into the future of public history. I also feel privileged to have received support from Sondra A. and Bruce Stave, two intellectuals who have shown a deep, abiding commitment to the history of Connecticut and its land-grant institution.

I have also come into contact with so many talented and gracious archivists working in special collections, governmental, and university archives over the past five years. For their guidance with special collections, I thank Christopher Harter at the Amistad Research Center, Frances Bristol at the Methodist Archives at Drew University, Margaret Hogan and Tom Rosenbuam at the Rockefeller Archive Center, and Amanda Strauss at the Schlesinger Library at Harvard University. In my work with governmental records, Kenneth Heger at the National Archives in College Park, MD and Pamela Anderson at the National Archives in Kansas City were especially helpful with navigating large record groups. I was also very fortunate to have met Diane Wunsch at the National Agricultural Library, who provided great assistance in finding largely untold histories of Home Economics in Beltsville.

In addition to my research in special collections, this work is also deeply rooted in college and university archives. For their assistance with faculty papers from a distance, I am especially grateful to Sarah Coates at Oklahoma State University and Whitney Miller at Michigan State University. My work also owes much to the staff at Digital NC, including David Gwynn; without this initiative, a deep exploration of Bennett College would not have been possible. Aside from these three institutions, so much of this project has been grounded in visiting the spaces I write about in this project. While at Hampton University, Andrees A. Scott

shared her knowledge of the archive and the area most generously, greatly enhancing my experience. Similarly, Dana Chandler at the Tuskegee University Archives took the time to provide me with a tour of the campus that made the work I did within the reading room far more meaningful. At the Moorland-Springarn Research Center at Howard University, Tewodros (Teddy) Abebe and Dr. Ida Jones provided me with great insights. Any scholar who comes into contact with Dr. Jones will know that her work is the better for it. Finally, I gladly thank all of the archivists at Cornell University, and particularly Elaine Engst and Eileen Keating. With support from the College of Human Ecology at Cornell, I had the pleasure of spending six weeks in Ithaca researching files on Cornell and the larger Home Economics collections held there. Years ago, I sent an uninformed query to Eileen about women in Home Economics—her willingness to answer that email and to serve as a resource ever since makes me truly humbled.

Most recently, support from the University of Connecticut Humanities Institute made finishing this project far more pleasurable. I owe a particular debt to fellow graduate students Joanna MacGugan, Christiana Salah, and Hilary Bogert-Winkler for their wise counsel and support in using this finishing year. I am also acutely aware that much of this project is the product of conversations held in seminar rooms (and outside of them) with graduate students from the History Department. The insights of Erin Bartram, Danielle Dumaine, Jeffrey Egan, Matthew Guariglia, Olga Koullisis, Michael Limberg, Aimee Loiselle, Tanya R. Lane, Eric Sacco, and Amy Sopcak-Joseph have been instrumental to this work. Each one of these individuals has served as a model of scholarship for me. I truly believe that the hours we spent working with one another never took away from our solitary pursuits; time spent together grappling with history is what makes humanistic inquiry worthwhile.

This project has also been indelibly shaped by time spent outside of academe, particularly with my training as a public historian. Thinking about the significance of “place” in relation to Home Economics came as an extension of my work as an interpreter in various house museums. Thus, I must thank my former colleagues at Mystic Seaport, Newport Historical Society, and the Preservation Society of Newport County. I also extend my gratitude to Cindy Hunt Carroll, a genealogist from North Carolina who gave her time and expertise to solve a lingering mystery.

A discourse of friendship runs throughout this project. Perhaps this reflects the role that my own colleagues and friends had in shaping this work. A deep, incomparable debt is owed to Kevin Finefrock and Mary Mahoney, my officemates and far more importantly, my friends who have read every word—at least once. Both have been so encouraging of all of my historical pursuits. In particular, Mary has never failed to provide support or the sharpest insights.

Finally, I wish to credit my family. Without them, this project would not have been possible. In addition to my siblings and in-laws, a great deal of credit must be given to Mark Barone, whose belief in my work and aspirations has been a constant over the past six years. He has truly lived with this project and can testify to the lack of technical skill that has come from my extended study of Home Economics. Lastly, I wish to honor my parents. They share a commitment to a life of learning and discovery. I owe everything to them.

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Introduction: At Home in the World

“Shall the home be our world...or the world be our home?” – Charlotte Perkins Gilman, 1904.¹

In the summer of 1959, Flemma Kittrell, an African American Professor of Home Economics from Howard University, was traveling around Moscow, observing the home life of local women and children.² Though Kittrell was a frequent traveler, given the Cold War context, this time in Moscow might have been especially memorable. Kittrell had arrived in time to see the American National Exhibition, a forum of particular interest to an internationally minded home economist. Within the futuristic silver Exhibition dome, experts in a range of fields had put out examples of the best of American technology, including household appliances such as stoves and laundry machines. These domestic tools had taken on new meaning after the famous “Kitchen Debate,” held between Richard Nixon and Nikita Krushchev a month earlier.³ In addition to being an expert on domesticity, Kittrell served as a representative for several American Cold War agencies. The Exhibition was therefore an ideal venue for Kittrell; as one reporter suggested, she was there as “a good-will-ambassador-with-cookbook.”⁴

In the preceding weeks, Kittrell attended a conference on discrimination sponsored by the United Nations in Geneva and a meeting of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) in Stockholm. Kittrell’s travel itinerary from this summer was not exceptional in the context of her career, which spanned more than four decades and involved work in over a

¹ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Home: Its Work and Influence* (London: William Heinemann, 1904), i.

² “Women’s Peace Conference Closes in Stockholm, Sweden,” *Memphis World* (Memphis, TN), Aug. 2, 1959, 4; “Mrs. Stewart, Dr. Kittrell Fly to Russia,” *Afro American* (Baltimore, MD), Aug. 15, 1959.

³ Flemma Kittrell to Anna Johnson, 6 April 1959, Box 104-6, Folder 1; Howard University Press Release, June 24, 1959, Box 104-1, Folder 9, Flemma Kittrell Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University Archives. “Facts about the American National Exhibition in Moscow,” Folder: WILPF 1957, Box 2600, Flemma Kittrell Files, RG 39-School of Human Ecology Records, Howard University Archives.

⁴ “Cookbook Goes Along on Goodwill Mission,” *Salt Lake Tribune* (Salt Lake City, UT), Nov. 7, 1958, 71.

dozen nations on behalf of state-based agencies and non-governmental groups.⁵ That this trip was not altogether unusual for *her* reveals a cleavage between what was expected of home economists—and particularly minority women in the field—and what was possible. Raised in Henderson, North Carolina, Kittrell attended the Hampton Institute, earning a bachelor's degree in Home Economics in 1928. Subsequently, Kittrell became a teacher of Home Economics at Bennett College in Greensboro, North Carolina; later, Kittrell taught for nearly three decades at Howard University. While working as a professor, Kittrell also attended Cornell University for graduate study. In 1936, upon completing her doctoral work in Rural Education, Child Studies, and Nutrition, Kittrell became the first African American woman to hold a Ph.D. in Home Economics.

Flemmie Kittrell's story is not significant because she was a "first." Collections of firsts, borne out of the tradition of compiling lists and biographies of "great" often offer scant analysis of context or contingencies. Kittrell's papers open up a far more multifaceted, wide-ranging, and complex story. When viewed in a broader context, these archival traces reveal a figure bound up in strategic negotiations of separatism, striving for leadership and maternalist claims for power. They also suggest an expert who traded complicity with the military-industrial complex for achieving what she imagined to be larger social goals. Grappling with the complexities of Kittrell's life and career is a way of not only reconfiguring her story, but "rebell[ing] against the history books that spoke of black people only as sentimental 'firsts.'"⁶ Kittrell's expansive vision of what a home economist could be and do did not prove lasting. Thus she has often been

⁵ USIS Activities Report, August 31-September 6, 1958;" "USIS Activities Report, September 7-13, 1958," General USIS Records 1951-1958 - USIS Records from 1951-1956, Educational Exchange 1957, Box 1, Folder B, RG 84, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD.

⁶ Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2015), 43.

interpreted as an aberration, and an almost “unthinkable” social actor.⁷ A return to the buildings, departments, and institutions with which Kittrell was affiliated provides a new way of understanding how she came to be “a good-will-ambassador-with-cookbook”—and what that means for the past and future of higher education, constructions of race, and women’s politics.

Kittrell’s career points to largely unexplored connections between Home Economics, a discipline usually delimited in its association with “women’s work,” and state-based politics. The “Kitchen Debate” may have been a singular event, but for Kittrell and her colleagues, the constructs of the family and home were inherently political. Throughout her career, Kittrell shrewdly emphasized the links between family matters such as housing and hunger with “domestic” and international stability. While in Stockholm in 1959, for instance, Kittrell argued, “it is impossible to secure or to keep a peace when people are hungry anywhere in the world.”⁸ By studying family dynamics and issues such as children’s nutrition, Kittrell found Home Economics to be a meaningful path into arenas of national policy making and global affairs.⁹ Working at the intersection of Cold War and Civil Rights politics, Kittrell may have seemed to be engaged with apolitical terrain, but she was far from “homeward bound” in the postwar period.¹⁰ Troubling the oft-invoked binary of being “at home or abroad,” Kittrell found that a flexible notion of domesticity enabled her to be at home all over the world.

Home Economics is not often associated with foreign research assignments or ambassadorship, nor is it thought of as a path to academic power, particularly among minority women. For the better part of the last half-century, the discipline of Home Economics has been

⁷ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

⁸ Kittrell, “Economic Influences on Cultural Developments with Special References to Africa,” Box 2600, Flemma Kittrell Files, Howard University Archives.

⁹ Kittrell, “Family Needs I’ve Seen Around the World,” Box 104-12, Folder 35, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

¹⁰ Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988).

linked either to the rise of white women's professionalism or the "domesticating" and missionary efforts at institutions such as Hampton. In both instances, Home Economics has been presented as a system of education that compromised, rather than encouraged, women's political agency within racially segregated institutions. This assessment has more to do with a narrow view of Home Economics—and a focus on the early development of the discipline—than an understanding of the range of work professionals were undertaking across the twentieth century.

Professors of Home Economics *did* teach classes on homemaking and practices such as table setting; they also used the notion that "the homes of today build tomorrow's world" to expand their profession in relation to the growing state.¹¹ Along with the associated fields of Agriculture and Rural Education, Home Economics was integral to the development of public higher education and systems of expertise tied to the federal bureaus and state governments.¹² Pursuant to home economists' service to the United States Food Administration during World War I, the creation of a Bureau of Home Economics afforded the profession more credibility and a higher standing. In turn, an influx of funding from the Smith-Lever Act (1914), Smith-Hughes Act (1917), and the Purnell Act (1925) expanded the discipline in higher education. As collegiate level and secondary courses became more expansive and rigorous, more students could imagine Home Economics as a professional path.¹³

For students coming of age, there was also another lesson: aligning with the government enabled women in select fields to forge a meaningful—and largely separate—space within academia.¹⁴ Though often thought of in relation to the "apolitical" terrains of the home and

¹¹ "Today's Home Builds Tomorrow's World," Box 104-2, Folder 27, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

¹² Gabriel N. Rosenberg, *The 4-H Harvest: Sexuality and the State in Rural America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

¹³ Linda Marie Fritschner, "The Rise and Fall of Home Economics" (PhD Diss, University of California, Davis, 1973), 104; 109-111.

¹⁴ Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform 1890-1935* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

family, home economists were deeply embedded in state networks by the late 1920s and gradually, international missions and systems of power. This is partially because home economists were trained to know empirical methods *and* how to apply their findings to educate and work with the public.¹⁵ A tradition of translation and “extending” the classroom brought home economists into contact with the public through home demonstration clubs, the Extension Service, 4-H, the Bureau of Home Economics, and institutions of secondary and higher education. Papers from Kittrell and her network suggest that women took these opportunities to serve their communities out of a hope for self-advancement as well as a commitment to one’s place and one’s “people.” Through all of these forms of “service,” women in the discipline found ample state-sponsored avenues for their expertise.

While Home economists often invoked ideals about helping others and serving a community, these were not static concepts. Particularly in the context of historically black colleges, which did train many women to become servants early on, this language seems to suggest that Home Economics was always a rather limited academic and professional enterprise. In the 1920s, however, national curricular shifts and a boom in federal and state funded enabled schools such as Hampton change their programs of study. While at Hampton from 1919 to 1928, Kittrell was taught that taking a job in domestic service was now a “betrayal” of her degree. Instead of working in private homes, black students of Home Economics were encouraged to “serve” their communities as exemplars and teachers.

Related to this flexible idea of service was yet another lesson Kittrell and her cohort took away from Hampton. In their training, they saw that teachers of Home Economics who were dedicated to domesticity. Yet these teachers saw the potential canvas for work on “the home” to

¹⁵ Kittrell, “Women of Africa and their Stance Toward Equal Opportunity of the Sexes,” Box 2603, University Howard Archives.

be much broader than the confines of four private walls. A clear example of how Kittrell further adapted these concepts was in her development of a community-oriented program known as the Home Making Institute. This Institute, which Kittrell began at Bennett in the 1930s, was integral to the cultivation of a tradition of activism at Bennett, including student-run initiatives on housing and voter drives.¹⁶ Through this program, students were taught to “serve” and connect with families in ways that defy usual characterizations of Home Economics, particularly within regards to black institutions.¹⁷

At Cornell, where Kittrell earned her graduate degrees between 1929 and 1936, she saw firsthand yet another function of a strong Home Economics program. In addition to working with local rural people, the professors at Cornell were invested in projects involving groups far beyond the borders of state and nation. Here, experts worked with the Federal Relief Emergency Administration and the League of Nations to broaden the utility of the profession.¹⁸ This interest in global outreach occurred simultaneously with an investment in training future leaders for black institutions. Though it is well known that Kittrell became a first, how she financed her way has been less carefully examined. Kittrell arrived at Cornell at a time when faculty in Home Economics, Rural Education, and Agriculture were training black students with the support of philanthropic sources such as the General Education Board (GEB) and the Rosenwald Fund.¹⁹ This initiative was not just about personal advancement for these students. Rather, there was a

¹⁶ Linda Beatrice Brown, *Belles of Liberty: Gender, Bennett College, and the Civil Rights Movement in Greensboro, NC* (Greensboro: Women and Wisdom Press, 2013).

¹⁷ Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform 1890-1935* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

¹⁸ Megan J. Elias, *Stir it Up: Home Economics in American Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), 90-91.

¹⁹ Peter Ascioli, *Julius Rosenwald: The Man Who Built Sears, Roebuck and Advanced the Cause of Black Education in the American South* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2006); Edwin R. Embree and Julia Waxman, *Investment in People: The Story of the Julius Rosenwald Fund* (New York: Harper, 1949); Raymond B. Fosdick, *Adventure in Giving: The Story of the General Education Board* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962); Mary S. Hoffschwelle, *The Rosenwald Schools of the American South* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2006).

vested interest in providing a “scientific” approach to uplift and meeting students’ rising expectations without revolutionizing black colleges.²⁰

With the entry of the United States into World War II, the meaning and scope of service would change again. Kittrell, who returned to her *alma mater* in 1940 and taught at Hampton for much of the war, was expected to do her part for the “home front.” Despite identifying as a pacifist, Kittrell oversaw major portions of the largely militarized campus while training the public about food rations and conducting research in nutrition. Kittrell’s work during this time was part of the mission for a “double victory” that many hoped would challenge Jim Crow. While other histories have chronicled the contributions of land-grant colleges and exceptional African American servicemen, such as the Tuskegee Airmen, far less is known about women at historically black colleges at this time, or within the land-grant college system overall. Reading Kittrell’s papers in relation to national trends, it is clear that she had a particularly fraught set of responsibilities due to the intensity of military training on campus. Still, much of what she was doing was also in line with other home economists’ projects with the USDA and War Department. In the long run, by working at Hampton, Kittrell was extending these programs of Extension even further by working with black communities—soon, her reach would be international.

After the war, the foreign policy of “containment” suggested a heightened effort to control subversive political movements both within the US and abroad. In histories of women and gender, this policy has often been linked to a repressive focus on homemaking and a return to “normalcy” through the baby boom. For some home economists, the buildup of technical expertise needed to “contain” communism actually meant new opportunities to expand their

²⁰ Raymond Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus: Black College Rebellions of the 1920s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).

work beyond their campuses, communities, and states.²¹ While various forms of local work continued, some figures were attracted to the notion that one could be a home economist and see the world.²² While many projects in Home Economics were funded by the government, both before and after the Cold War, philanthropists and mission groups also had a vested interest in the field. Thus some experts in the field, Kittrell included, worked with peace organizations, mission groups, and international NGOs as well as government agencies.

After 1945, Kittrell's work was furthered by philanthropy groups, WILPF, the Methodist Church, and UNESCO. For her, fellowships with the GEB, work with Point Four (an early Cold War technical assistance initiative), and the United States Information Service made for a coherent pattern of civil service and professional development. Some of Kittrell's affiliations came from her faith or activism, others from Howard's relationship with the State Department. Notably, Kittrell's first overseas assignment came in 1946, when she began a nutrition survey of Liberia under the auspices of the State Department. This contract came through channels at Howard, though Kittrell's earlier Home Economics work with the Office of Price Administration and pronounced dedication to public "service" also likely played a role.

In subsequent decades, Kittrell continued to work for WILPF and to maintain a role with the Board of Missions for the Methodist Church. Most often, however, Kittrell worked for Cold War agencies in the 1950s, lecturing, teaching, and researching abroad in nations referred to as "hot spots" for communism.²³ Though still invested in peace, Kittrell chose to work with larger structures of power to achieve her aims of establishing more programs in Home Economics. For

²¹ Edna P. Amidon, "Our Program Together," *Journal of Home Economics* 50, no.8 (1958): 645; Lynn Koehneke, "Maryland Goes International," *Journal of Home Economics* 55, no. 9 (1963): 715.

²² Peggy Walton, "Be a Home Economist and See The World," Box 15, International Activities—Home Economics International, American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences records, #6578. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library. Hereafter cited as AAFCS Papers.

²³ Joyce Blackwell, *No Peace Without Freedom: Race and The Women's International League For Peace and Freedom 1915-1975* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004).

her, the postwar emphasis on “better homes” was not about constricting her options, but a new way to work on global education and health projects.²⁴ Through these ties to religious networks, peace groups, and the state, Kittrell was part of a longer tradition of spreading educational systems through “missions” in the South and in the world. Rather than see herself as a *subject* of such a mission, Kittrell led her own—not just among “her people” but through “technical” work abroad.²⁵

Kittrell and other minority experts who went abroad for the State Department were seen as valuable agents in ideological battles.²⁶ Along with colleagues from Hampton, Howard, Tuskegee, and various A&M colleges, Kittrell was commissioned to do this work because she could be presented as an exemplar who had thrived within the (segregated) US education system. Kittrell was especially highly regarded by officials at various embassies and within the State Department due to her race politics. Throughout her career, Kittrell was associated on-and-off with leadership groups such as the Southern Negro Youth Congress and later, the American Committee on Africa, a US-based coalition created to support liberation movements in Africa. In most public talks, however, Kittrell focused on messages of “progress” and non-violence. Her general approach and affiliation with groups that valued nationalism and state solutions—as opposed to radical or transnational movements—made agents regard her as a highly loyal ally. For her range of work abroad, Kittrell has been seen as an exceptional home economist, indeed

²⁴ National Archives, “Race Relations in the United States and American Cultural and Informational Programs in Ghana, 1957-1966,” *Prologue Magazine* 31, no.4 (1999).

²⁵ Frank Guridy, *Forging Diaspora: Afro-Cubans and African Americans in a World of Empire and Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Hampton Institute, *Twenty- Two Years’ Work of the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute at Hampton, Virginia* (Hampton: Normal School Press, 1893); Paul Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, and the Philippines* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Andrew Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

²⁶ Nick Cullather, *The Hungry World: America’s Cold War Battle against Poverty in Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

an exceptional academic. Kittrell, who did not configure herself as an outlier, relied instead on the language of exceptionalism to advance her aims.

With all of this work within the US and abroad, “domestic” issues were not seen as incongruous with politics, nor were students in the field taught just how to run a home. From the 1920s through the 1970s, the emphasis on serving people beyond the campus gates of a given institution did not change, except in scope. This legacy of negotiating power from within a framework of service has not often been considered in analyses of Home Economics. Instead, there has been far greater focus on how home economists came to work for corporations, or how the field lost traction as an area of study. Given the predominance of people identifying as female in the field, there has also been an assumption that it was always undervalued—these experts *did* also do “women’s work” on campus, such as running cafeterias. Kittrell’s rich archival trail points to the fact that home economists also conceived of a global, plastic vision of domesticity from within these quasi-domestic campus spaces and departments.

Yet to many outsiders, Home Economics was simply a “ghetto” for women in higher education.²⁷ This racially coded language, which first appears in the 1970s, has been used to suggest that women in the field were set apart from other academics and generally undervalued. This phrasing has also been marshalled to distinguish between “liberating” homosocial academic arenas, such as Women’s Studies, and those that were seen as delimiting, namely, Home Economics.²⁸ The popular backlash against Home Economics that began in the late 1960s was further compounded by (and mirrored in) the rise of contemporaneous scholarship on early

²⁷ Warren Belasco, *Food: The Key Concepts* (New York: Berg, 2008); Paulette Olson and Zohreh Emami, *Engendering Economics: Conversations with Women Economists in the United States* (London: Routledge, 2002); Barbara Rogers, *Domestication of Women: Discrimination in Developing Societies* (London: Routledge, 1980), 82; Joan Jacobs Brumberg, “We must do everything we can to preserve and organize records and materials from this important female ghetto.” *Cornell University Hearth Archive*, <http://hearth.library.cornell.edu/>.

²⁸ Gloria Steinem, “Women Freeing The Men, Too,” *Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.), June 7, 1970, B1.

women's education and historically black institutions. Once associated with vocational and manual education, Home Economics was seen as an unchanging part of bleak chapters of the past.²⁹ Within the profession, debates over the word home, and concessions over name changes appeared as signs that the field had been internally contradictory and incoherent all along.

In many popular and scholarly pieces, there has been a suggestion—or assumption—that “feminism” caused this downfall.³⁰ Without examinations of shifts in higher education, the rise of “second-wave” feminism has been cited as the reason for a gradual “disappearance” of Home Economics.³¹ One oft-cited anecdote has been especially useful to this interpretation.³² In 1971, feminist activist and scholar Robin Morgan spoke at the annual meeting of the American Home Economics Association on a panel known as the “session on Women's Liberation.” During her allotted time, Morgan famously seized the opportunity to denounce the field, declaring that her audience of home economists were “the enemy” of women for their myopic focus on “marriage, the family, and the issue of consumerism [.]” Though prone to deploying metaphors about the family in works such as *Sisterhood is Powerful* (1970), Morgan told the attendees to quit their jobs and “stand in the way while history rolls over you or...move with it.”³³

By and large, the invitation extended to Morgan has been interpreted as a major blunder. But reactions at the time were far more mixed, with some members expressing resentment about

²⁹ Donald Spivey, *Schooling for the New Slavery* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1978). Frances B. Johnston's photographs of female servants-in-training at Hampton were also circulating through the re-issue of *The Hampton Album* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1966).

³⁰ Brie Dias, “Who Killed Home Ec? Here's The Real Story Behind Its Demise,” *Huffington Post Home Online*, Sep. 29, 2014.; Rebecca Traister, “Feminists Killed Home Ec., Now They Should Bring it Back—for Boys and Girls,” *New Republic* May 28, 2014, <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/117876/feminists-should-embrace-home-economics>; Lynn Peril, *Pink Think: Becoming a Woman in Many Uneasy Lessons* (New York: Norton, 2001), 57.

³¹ A notable exception is Margaret Rossiter, *Women Scientists in America: Before Affirmative Action 1940-1972* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 129-48.

³² See: Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from Open Hearth to Microwave* (New York: Basic Books, 1983); Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English, *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts' Advice to Women* (New York: Anchor Books, 1978); Susan Strasser, *Never Done: A History of American Housework* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982).

³³ “What Robin Morgan Said at Denver,” *Journal of Home Economics* 65, no.1 (1973): 13.

Morgan's accusations and others suggesting that she had made a valuable contribution to the conversation.³⁴ While it may be easy to see the invitation as a recipe for disaster in retrospect, there was every reason to understand Morgan's presence in 1971 as congruous with the rest of the conference program. As historian Gwen Kay suggests, this conference also included resolutions on abortion, public housing policy, and the White House Conference on Aging.³⁵ Still, contemporaries and subsequent scholars have paid a great deal of attention to Morgan's words in isolation, focusing only on her and that moment, despite the fact that she sat on a panel with others as one part of a spectrum of women's activism.



Fig. 1: Trotter, Cooper, Morgan, and Spain – depicted on poster.

Those who spoke along with Morgan on the panel have been mostly ignored in subsequent retellings, but the visual texts of the conference depict a more complicated story. A photograph of the panel (Fig. 1) shows Morgan seated with moderator, Dr. Virginia Trotter, and fellow presenters, Dr. Jean Cooper and Jayne Spain. Each of these co-panelists would have challenged Morgan's ideas about the field. Trotter, a high-profile home economist, was later appointed the Assistant Secretary of Education (1974-1977). Spain, represented in the poster,

³⁴ "Letters to the Editor," *Journal of Home Economics* 65, no.2 (1973): 2.

³⁵ Gwen Kay, "Changing Names, Keeping Identity," in *Remaking Home Economics: Resourcefulness and Innovation in Changing Times*, ed. Sharon Y. Nickols and Gwen Kay (University of Georgia Press, 2105), 218.

was supposed to “present the more traditional view” but was unable to attend because of her appointment as vice chairman of the U.S. Civil Service Commission. As if responding to Morgan’s critique that women were only interested in homemaking, Spain described herself in print as having “three careers—homemaker, top businesswoman, and volunteer on behalf of the handicapped.”³⁶ Though she could not be present to explain her work, Spain loomed large in the oversized print, a symbol of a profession Morgan saw as contrary to women’s development.

The other speaker was Dr. Cooper, an African American Professor of Home Economics at North Carolina Central University who spoke the “liberation movement” in relation to black women.³⁷ In recent years, Cooper had been integral to the AHEA’s workshops with AID. An internationally oriented home economist, Cooper also knew her history. She spoke frankly about the history of black women’s employment as domestics, noting “distressingly low wages” paid by white female employers. Cooper’s speech also noted that unlike “the new feminists,” economic insecurity had largely foreclosed the possibility of “the cozy warmth of home and hearth on a full-time basis” for most minority women. In the end, Cooper also returned to a framework of sisterhood, and put forth her hope for “mutual respect and concern” as well as “equality for all women.”³⁸ Perhaps Morgan’s words made Cooper consider how *all* women’s liberation could be secured. In the past, some women’s freedom—especially those with the privilege of whiteness or economic comfort—had been predicated on the subjugation and domestic drudgery of others, usually African American women. Maybe Cooper feared the kind of future Morgan was seeking to usher in, recalling the contentious debates in the wake of the mid-nineteenth century women’s movement.

³⁶ “Today’s Frontiers: Tomorrow’s Realities,” *Journal of Home Economics* 63, no.6 (1971): 409.

³⁷ “General Session Speakers,” *Journal of Home Economics* 63, no.4 (1971): 237.

³⁸ Jean Cooper, “Women’s Liberation and the Black Woman,” *Journal of Home Economics* 63, no.7 (1971): 521-23.

Few have remembered Cooper or her words, though what she was saying would have unsettled most activist groups at the time. Instead Morgan's speech cast a longer shadow and brought a great deal of unflattering attention to the AHEA. In response, the AHEA formed the Women's Role Committee. The AHEA President, Marjorie East, suggested that Morgan "made us take a second look at what we are doing." Many were struck by Morgan's insistence that they only taught strict homemaking roles. For one woman, this "came as a great shock...because we've been teaching dual roles for women for years." With further reflection, another home economist wondered if "we're portraying something we really aren't."³⁹ Morgan's critique led many to realize that even if they were not as "conservative and hypocritical" as she had suggested, perhaps they had not communicated their work as well as they had imagined.

For much of their careers, the advanced professionals at the AHEA meeting had channeled a concern with domesticity into a range of professional projects. Few had reason to doubt that a similar mode of operation would be successful in serving Great Society projects, the burgeoning field of Urban Extension, or specific initiatives such as Head Start.⁴⁰ However, by the mid-1970s, a woman-driven initiative that seemed so bound to a dated field focused on the family was no longer as popular.⁴¹ The notion that Home Economics was somehow destroyed by the women's movement has been invoked with troubling ease. Yet changes wrought within the field of Home Economics did not happen in isolation or just because of Morgan. Focusing on Morgan's critique has provided a convenient declension point, but this approach places undue

³⁹ "The Women's Role Committee Speaks Out," *Journal of Home Economics* 65, no.1 (1973): 10-12.

⁴⁰ The number of home economists in the Peace Corps was never very high, but there was always talk of a great demand: "Home Economics in the Peace Corps" (Washington, D.C.: Peace Corps, 1967); Box 148, Folder- Outside Organizations- Peace Corps, 1966, AAFCS Papers.

⁴¹ Robert O. Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy Since the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012).

blame on “feminism,” and elides Cooper’s complex, intersectional analysis of the particular relationships between black women, the discipline of Home Economics, and domesticity.

Home Economics cannot be analyzed apart from contemporary social movements or changes occurring within academia. As Morgan, Cooper, and the other attendees at the AHEA meeting were debating the future of the field, many campuses across the country were undergoing student-driven revolutions. Home economists, many of whom worked at land-grant colleges or schools founded in the early years of Reconstruction, looked back over the past century and saw building booms and curriculum expansions. Many students saw only a reconstruction that was both incomplete and undone. Nationally, as students criticized the entire university system, especially the interplays between the military-industrial complex and higher education, home economists who had been keen to work *with* the system found their paths to professional mobility taking on new meaning and garnering criticism from new quarters. In addition to working within a supposedly dated discipline, the notion of working with the state to “help” others throughout the world was now more seriously questioned. At best, this approach was interpreted as a troubling contradiction; at worst, these women appeared complicit with Cold War oppressions and violence abroad. Students demanding a relevant curriculum might have turned to home economists such as Kittrell as allies, but there was a gulf in how each approached personal politics. At Howard and many other institutions, the field withered past the 1970s.

In recent years, when considering the obesity crisis, dearth of knowledge about personal finance, or the ongoing “care deficit” in the country, some cultural critics and journalists have made proposals to “bring back Home Economics.”⁴² Those who make this claim are often as

⁴² Pippa B, “The Feminist Case for Home Economics,” *FBomb*, Aug. 4, 2014, <http://thefbomb.org/2014/08/the-feminist-case-for-home-economics/>; Suzanne Gould, “Have this With Your Cupcake: Betty Crocker Was a Feminist!” *American Association of University Women Blog*, Jun. 12, 2014; Gould, “Feminism and Home Ec: An Unlikely Partnership?” *American Association of University Women Blog*, Jul. 31, 2014; Ruth Graham, “Bring Back

invested in reviving the field as erasing much of its history. In particular, these analyses have a set idea of who studied Home Economics and how the field changed. As Kelly Coyne, author of *Making It* (2011) suggests, “bringing Home Economics back” is about reclaiming the field in “its original, noble form, in which the household is a self-sustaining engine of production.”⁴³ Tom Philpott, writing for *Mother Jones*, likewise suggests a renewed investment in the field, while also noting that he “retained...nothing” from his training in Home Economics.⁴⁴ These essays presume a homogeneous field that was truly only valuable in the beginning; such claims perpetuate the idea that Home Economics was strictly about consumer science past the 1930s, the period that actually opened up a window of opportunity for minority women. Additionally, such pieces elide more recent developments, such as the promotion of a series of African American leaders in Home Economics at major land-grant colleges in the 1980s.⁴⁵

Retelling Kittrell’s story is not about making a case for the return of Home Economics. Rather, investigating her career is a way of determining how she saw her place in the world and what that might mean for how we imagine the contours of education and service. Much of this story can be found by placing Kittrell back in history. A great portion of Kittrell’s career was bound up in *building* and securing a space of her own.⁴⁶ At multiple institutions, Kittrell lobbied for and successfully executed plans for a new Home Economics building, most notably at Howard in 1963. This was as much about creating “model” spaces for students as the desire to

Home Ec! The Case for a Revival of the Most Retro Class in School" *The Boston Globe*, October 13, 2013; Christen McCurdy, "What Happened to Home Economics?--The Rise and Fall of a Contested Discipline" *Bitch* Issue 62, Spring 2014.

⁴³ Kelly Coyne, *Making It: Radical Home Ec for a Post-Consumer World* (Rodale Books, 2011), 2; Shannon Hayes, *Radical Homemakers: Reclaiming Domesticity from a Consumer Culture* (Richmondville Left to Write Press, 2010); Emily Matchar, *Homeward Bound: Why Women are Embracing the New Domesticity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013).

⁴⁴ Tom Philpott, "Why Home Economics Should be Mandatory" *Mother Jones*, Oct.16, 2013.

⁴⁵ Ralston, "'It Was a Special Time:' African American Deans of Home Economics in Predominantly White Universities, 1987-2004," in *Remaking Home Economics*, ed. Sharon Y. Nickols and Gwen Kay (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015), 161-178.

⁴⁶ Anne Enke, *Finding the Movement: Sexuality, Contested Space, and Feminist Activism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

have a structure to cement the field's viability and significance. A return to the details and texture of these spaces provides a very different history of the discipline. To start, the size, prominence, and décor within these buildings defy the notion that the field was a "ghetto" or that Kittrell was a singular figure.⁴⁷ The didactic, "quasi-domestic" structures related to Home Economics at Hampton, Cornell, Bennett, and Howard as well as the national AHEA headquarters point to the ways in which Kittrell and others blurred rather than reified the boundaries between the practical and the liberal, the domestic and the academic.

Starting with the assumption that much can be learned from a single building—and a single life—tools from microhistorical and biographical approaches and feminist biography help to put Kittrell's life and legacy in broader context.⁴⁸ Using Kittrell's story as a lens and guidepost, it is possible to see both the "micro" and the "macro" histories of Home Economics in the twentieth century, to use Linda Gordon's formulation from *Dorothea Lange: A Life Beyond Limits* (2009).⁴⁹ While other scholars have written about Kittrell, mostly in the context of chronicling professional achievements *for* the profession or in collections on notable black educators and scientists, the connections to histories of education, the state, and international affairs have not yet been explored.⁵⁰ Both Timothy Tyson's study of Robert F. Williams and

⁴⁷ Genevieve J. Wheeler Thomas, "Reminiscences" in *Rethinking Home Economics: Women and the History of a Profession*, ed. Sarah Stage and Virginia B. Vicenti (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 230.

⁴⁸ Richard D. Brown, "Microhistory and the Post-Modern Challenge," *Journal of the Early Republic* 23 (Spring 2003): 1-20; Jill Lepore, "Historians Who Love Too Much: Reflections on Microhistory and Biography," *Journal of American History* 88 (Spring 2001): 129-144; Alice Kessler-Harris, "Why Biography?," *American Historical Review* (June 2009): 625-630; David Nasaw, "AHR Roundtable: Historians and Biography Introduction," *American Historical Review* (June 2009): 573-578. Models used for this project include: Alice Kessler-Harris, *A Difficult Woman: The Challenging Life and Times of Lillian Hellman* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012); Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812* (New York: Knopf, 1990). For feminist biography, see: Marilyn Booth and Antoinette Burton, "Critical Feminist Biography II" *Journal of Women's History* 21 (Winter 2009, No.4), 8.

⁴⁹ Linda Gordon, *Dorothea Lange: A Life Beyond Limits* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009), xx.

⁵⁰ May Edwin Mann Burke, "The Contributions of Flemma Pansy Kittrell to Education through her Doctrine of Home Economics" (PhD diss., University of Maryland, 1988); Penny Ralston, "Black Participation in Home Economics: A Partial Account," *Journal of Home Economics* 70, no.5 (1978): 34-37; Ralston, "Distinctive Themes

Martha Hodes's work on Eunice Connolly in *The Sea Captain's Wife* (2006) suggest that there is a possibility for reexamining dominant narratives by carefully probing how social actors understood their worlds through their personal papers.⁵¹ While drawing from Kittrell's own words, a look beyond her writings provides "a significance beyond her own vision" as an historical actor, to use Hodes's formulation.⁵² Compared to other disciplines, Home Economics has more recent roots. After its formal inception in Lake Placid, New York, in 1899, Home Economics was taught by that name at many institutions only through the 1970s. Given this chronology, Kittrell's professional trajectory offers an ideal framework for analysis. Born in 1904, Kittrell worked as a home economist from the late 1920s until 1972, a period that aligns with what some have called the "rise and fall" of the field.⁵³

Though primarily grounded in close readings of Kittrell's many archival papers, this study benefits from the more recent scholarship on Home Economics. In 1991, the College of Human Ecology at Cornell University hosted a conference on "rethinking" the discipline. This meeting has led to various collaborations between home economists and historians, including two edited volumes published in 1997 and 2015, respectively.⁵⁴ Since then, there have been other revisionist histories, including Margaret Rossiter's *Women Scientists in America* (1995), Megan

from Black Home Economists," *Journal of Home Economics* 84, no.2 (1992): 39-44. See also: James Kessler et al, *Distinguished African American Scientists of the 20th Century* (Phoenix: Oryx Press, 1996); Annette Madden, *In Her Footsteps: 101 Remarkable Black Women from the Queen of Sheba to Queen Latifah* (New York: Conari Press, 2001); Penny Ralston, "Flemmie P. Kittrell: Her Views and Practices Regarding Home Economics in Higher Education," in *African American Women: Contributions to the Human Sciences*, ed. Julia R. Miller, Dorothy I. Mitstifer, and Gladys Gary Vaughn (East Lansing: Kappa Omicron Nu Honor Society, 2009); "Flemmie Kittrell" in Wini Warren, *Black Women Scientists in the United States* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1999), 153-174.

⁵¹ Timothy Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 3.

⁵² Martha Hodes, *The Sea Captain's Wife: a True Story of Love, Race, and War in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006), 63.

⁵³ Linda Marie Fritschner, "The Rise and Fall of Home Economics: A Study With Implications for Women, Study, and Change" (PhD diss., University of California Davis, 1973).

⁵⁴ Sarah Stage and Virginia B. Vincenti, *Rethinking Home Economics: Women and the History of a Profession* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Sharon Y. Nickols and Gwen Kay, *Remaking Home Economics: Resourcefulness and Innovation in Changing Times* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015).

Elias's *Stir it Up: Home Economics in American Culture* (2008) , and most recently, Carolyn Goldstein's *Creating Consumers: Home Economists in Twentieth-Century America* (2014).⁵⁵ Each of these studies has done much to challenge the largely derogatory depictions of the field offered in previous decades.⁵⁶

While greatly improving historians' understanding of the field of Home Economics in general, historians Megan Elias and Tracey Deutsch have noted the ongoing inattention to race and issues of international affairs.⁵⁷ Aside from Elisa Miller's 2004 dissertation, "In the Name of the Home," which compared programs at various institutions, most studies have been focused on predominantly white, rural land-grant colleges.⁵⁸ Outside of this literature, most generalized histories of historically black institutions have presented Home Economics as strictly a path to service for minority women.⁵⁹ While there is already a robust literature on the connections between femininity, work, and domestic service from the late-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, little attention has been paid to the later systems put into place to train women—of various backgrounds—as *experts* in domestic matters.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Megan Elias, *Stir it Up: Home Economics in American Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Carolyn Goldstein, *Creating Consumers: Home Economists in Twentieth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Margaret Rossiter, *Women Scientists in America: Struggles and Strategies to 1940* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984).

⁵⁶ Tracey Deutsch, *Building a Housewife's Paradise: Gender, Politics, and American Grocery Stores in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Barbara J. Harris, *Beyond Her Sphere: Women and the Professions in American History* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978); Dolores Hayden, *Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities* (Boston: MIT Press, 1982); Glenna Matthews, "Just a Housewife": *The Rise and Fall of Domesticity in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Laura Shapiro, *Perfection Salad: Women and Cooking at the Turn of the Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

⁵⁷ Megan J. Elias, "No Place Like Home: A Survey of American Home Economics History," *History Compass* 9, no.1 (2011): 897-105; Tracey Deutsch, "Thinking Consumers," *Reviews in American History* 41, no.3 (2013): 489-495.

⁵⁸ Elisa Miller, "In the Name of the Home: Women, Domestic Science, and American Higher Education, 1865-1930" (PhD diss., University of Illinois Champaign-Urbana, 2004).

⁵⁹ Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English, *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts' Advice to Women* (New York: Anchor Books, 1978); Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Forced to Care: Coercion and Caregiving in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

⁶⁰ Eileen Boris, *Home to Work: Motherhood and the Politics of Industrial Homework in the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994); Elizabeth Clark-Lewis, *Living In, Living Out: African American*

Bringing Kittrell's story to the fore is a way of challenging the selective dearth of knowledge about women's education. A cornerstone of both early rural based land-grant programs and mission-based schools, Home Economics was a primary area of study for *most* women in higher education at one time.⁶¹ Yet students and teachers affiliated with this subject area are far overshadowed by women at elite colleges such as the "Seven Sisters."⁶² The inattention to women at land-grants has made their history nearly "invisible."⁶³ Instead of presuming that Home Economics was a static arena for study, a longer look at departmental and institutional changes reveals not only the complexities of a discipline in flux, but larger changes within academia.⁶⁴

Overall, Kittrell's archive—which stretches across a dozen institutions—provides new insights into the experiences of minority students at Cornell and the inner workings of "women's departments" at historically black institutions.⁶⁵ Using Kittrell's trajectory as a guide, a range of documents that have received scant attention come to the fore. This range of documents includes

Domestics and the Great Migration (Washington, D.C: Smithsonian, 2010); Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1985; 2010); David Katzman, *Seven Days a Week: Women and Domestic Service in Industrializing America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Micki McElya, *Clinging to Mammy: The Faithful Slave in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

⁶¹ Fritschner, "The Rise and Fall of Home Economics," 119.

⁶² Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Alma Mater: Design and Experience in the Women's Colleges from their Nineteenth-Century Beginnings to the 1930s* (New York: Knopf, 1984).

⁶³ Alison Cornish Thorne, "Visible and Invisible Women in Land-Grant Colleges, 1890-1940," The 72nd Utah State University Honor Lecture, October 8, 1985.

⁶⁴ Eric Anderson and Alfred A. Moss, Jr., *Dangerous Donations: Northern Philanthropy and Southern Black Education, 1902-1930* (Columbus: University of Missouri, 1999); James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Dwayne Ashley and Juan Williams, *I'll Find a Way or Make One* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999); Henry Allen Bullock, *A History of Negro Education in the South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967); Adam Fairclough, "Being in the Field of Education and also Being a Negro..Seems...Tragic': Black Teachers in the Jim Crow South" *The Journal of American History* 87 (June 2000, No.1): 65-91; Jane E. Simonsen, *Making Home Work: Domesticity and Native American Assimilation in the American West, 1860-1916* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Laura Wexler, *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

⁶⁵ Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Audrey Thomas McCluskey and Elaine M. Smith, *Mary McLeod Bethune: Building a Better World Essays and Selected Documents* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).

yearbooks and work records from Hampton in the 1920s, student work and faculty letters from Cornell in the early 1930s, scrapbooks of the Home Making Institutes held at Bennett in the mid-1930s, private letters and reports drafted from Kittrell's office as Dean of Women at Hampton in the 1940s, and accounts from Howard in the 1950s-1972. Home economists' investment in turning much of the campus into a space for learning means that their records are wide-ranging, stretching beyond the usual confines of a single department. With this unusually broad and sophisticated notion of pedagogy, teachers such as Kittrell kept track of campus calorie counts as well as coursework. Thus, Kittrell's files are revelatory not just for what they show about a single field, but student and faculty experiences more generally.⁶⁶

Outside of these institutions, an analysis of Kittrell's international work adds to an understanding of the complex relationships between educators, philanthropists, and government agents that have enabled or constrained shifts in higher education. Heretofore, changes wrought within Home Economics departments have received little attention due to the assumption that home economists turned increasingly—or exclusively—to work with corporations and in consumer science past the 1920s.⁶⁷ Some home economists did become more involved in consumer work and research. But this focus on work for corporations has obscured the extent to which academics in the field forged strategic alliances with corporate titans.⁶⁸ While it is well known that the Rockefeller Fund sponsored the Extension service, the longer affiliations some scholars forged with this and other funds have not received as much attention. As Kittrell's records show, philanthropic ties were essential to how home economists claimed a greater role in

⁶⁶ Scott Baker, "Pedagogies of Protest: African American Teachers and the History of the Civil Rights Movement, 1940-1963," *Teachers College Record* 113, no.12 (2001), 2777-2803.

⁶⁷ Dolores Hayden, *Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities* (Boston: MIT Press, 1982), 285; Glenna Matthews, *"Just a Housewife": The Rise and Fall of Domesticity in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 170-171.

⁶⁸ General Education Board, *Directory of Fellowship Awards for the Years 1922-1950* (New York: General Education Board, 1952); Alfred Charles True, *A History of Agricultural Extension Work in the United States 1785-1923* (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1928).

global reconstruction. This longer history shows home economists as adept advocates for their field; beyond that, it suggests a more nuanced approach to the ways that philanthropists interacted with figures in education. The few studies that have investigated Home Economics programs or teachers abroad have focused on isolated incidents, but an elongated approach to long-lasting networks suggests more durable and extensive relationships.⁶⁹

Kittrell's use of her training in Home Economics to work with the State Department also complicates histories of "domestic containment" and "colored cosmopolitanism."⁷⁰ Home economists of the 1950s are usually associated with highly conservative courses on homemaking. But there was a much broader range of activity taking place. Instead of being restricted in their work, as the "ambassador-with-cookbook" formulation suggests, home economists found that there was a particular niche for their expertise. While Kittrell's work across various agencies is representative of a broader trend, her particular politics also demand closer scrutiny for what they add to the literature on race and empire.⁷¹ Seen as a highly "effective" cultural ambassador by other agents working for the State Department, Kittrell had a long career largely due to her politics of accommodation and insistence on reform rather than revolution. A pragmatist invested in state institutions, Kittrell chose to work with government agencies to achieve her goals of diminishing malnutrition and advancing women's education.⁷²

⁶⁹ Ellen Flesichmann, "Lost in Translation: Home Economics and the Sidon Girls' School of Lebanon, c.1924-1932," *Social Sciences and Missions* 23 (2010): 32-62; Mire Koikari, "[Cultivating Feminine Affinity: Women, Domesticity, and Cold War Transnationality in the US Military Occupation of Okinawa](#)," *Journal of Women's History* 27, no.4 (2015): 112-136.

⁷⁰ Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992); Ruth Feldstein, *Motherhood in Black and White: Race and Sex in American Liberalism, 1930-1965* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000); Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

⁷¹ Carol Anderson, *Eyes off the Prize: The United Nations and the African-American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944-1955* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Kevin Gaines, "Pauli Murray in Ghana: The Congo Crisis and an African American Woman's Dilemma," in *Race, Nation, and Empire in American History*, ed. Matthew Pratt Guterl and Robert G. Lee (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

⁷² Kevin Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Penny Von Eschen, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism*,

With this approach, Kittrell joined the ranks of other technocrats who believed in “helping others to help themselves.” Though she often traveled with cohorts of white experts, Kittrell was not the only African American woman doing this work. Colleagues Patsy Graves, Allie Holley, Cecile Edwards, Queen Jones, Lydia Rogers, and others all took on government-funded international projects.⁷³ For many of these American experts, the larger goal of these “sharing” projects overseas was to eliminate the need for them to travel abroad. Thus Kittrell worked to train future leaders from the Caribbean, Asia, and Africa from within her own department, often with coordination from the State Department. In the long run, some of Kittrell’s experiments with Home Economics education abroad were not lasting. But in other parts of the world, Home Economics had—and has —great traction among highly educated women.⁷⁴ The existence of groups such as the International Federation for Home Economics (IFHE) and the International Home Economics Service (IHES) are evidence of the field’s ongoing relevance and presence outside of the US.⁷⁵

On one level, Kittrell’s papers are revelatory for what they suggest about these other international figures and the wide range of work happening within the field of Home

1937–1957 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

⁷³ “Mrs. Holley Initiates Home Study in Indian University,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore, MD), Nov.3, 1951, 11; Charlotte Shedd, “Her Indian Student Used a Modern Plane, But...,” *Wilmington Sunday Star* (Wilmington, DL), Jan.31, 1954, 26. Queen Jones was a Fulbright Scholar in Trinidad, BWI: “Dr Queen Jones Dies, Tuskegee Science Dean,” *Washington Afro-American* (Washington, D.C.), Jan. 14, 1969. Edwards, who would eventually replace Kittrell, also worked in India: “Protein Supplementation of Indian Diets: A Review,” *Journal of Nutrition and Diet* 5 (1968), Box 104-14, Folder 23, Kittrell Papers, MSRC; “Home Ec. Specialist Receives Degree from West Virginia State,” *Pittsburgh Courier* (Pittsburgh, PA), Aug. 27 1966, 6; “Patsy Graves Appointed Home Economist with FHA,” *New York Age* (New York, NY), May 3, 1947, 4. See also Box 104-5, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

⁷⁴ Lela O’Toole and the American Home Economics Association, *The International Heritage of Home Economics in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: American Home Economics Association, 1988). Dr. O’Toole’s extensive research files for the book are Box 2, Folders 1-8, Dr. Lela O’Toole Papers, Oklahoma State University Special Collections and University Archives, Stillwater, OK.

⁷⁵ International Federation of Home Economics, *100 Years of the International Federation of Home Economics, 1908-2008* (Bonn: IFHE, 2008); Collection 391 and the Nancy Leidenfrost Papers, National Agricultural Library, Beltsville, MD.

Economics.⁷⁶ While her archival trail is extraordinary in its scope, with regards to some aspects of her life, it is profoundly limited in its depth. There are significant gaps in Kittrell's archive—there is scant mention of her own family at critical points or her decision to remain unmarried as a Home Economics teacher. Kittrell also worked to minimize her relationships to Civil Rights groups; much of the evidence on that work comes from her FBI File, not her own writings. Furthermore, there are jarring silences in relation to some of her work abroad. To take a prominent example, from 1961 to 1965, Kittrell periodically made trips to work on an education program in the Congo. Thus she first arrived in the wake of the assassination of Patrice Lumumba. Though working as a consultant during this period of intense turbulence, Kittrell merely noted that even with “the Congo trouble,” “I saw the possibilities for good and for growth of a real creative nature when I was there [.]”⁷⁷ That a violent and oppressive regime had been propped up during her time there—and by her government—was a fact Kittrell chose to elide.

Similarly, when reflecting upon her time at Cornell—a time when she was one of a small number of minority students—Kittrell argued, “I think I can say that I did not have problems in general because I wouldn't allow myself to have problems.”⁷⁸ This statement tells us far more about Kittrell as a retired faculty member in the 1970s than her earlier life. Kittrell could be verbose and prolific in some areas and deeply private about others. Kittrell adhered to what historian Darlene Clark Hine has called a self-protective and preserving “cult of secrecy, a

⁷⁶ Gladys Gary Vaughn (1973) graduated from Florida A&M University with a BS in Home Economics; she then attended Iowa State University (MS, 1968) and University of Maryland-College Park (Ph.D., 1974) and worked for the USDA in the 4-H and Nutrition Unit in the Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service. Jacqueline W McCray (1974) became an Associate Dean of the School of Agriculture and Home Economics at University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff. Clesteen (Abraham) Clark (1976) attended Iowa State University (MS, 1977). Penny Ralston (1977) graduated from Ball State University and received M.Ed. and Ph.D. degrees at the University of Illinois. Ralston is Professor and Dean Emeritus at Florida State University; she also serves as Director of the Center on Better Health and Life for Underserved Populations at FSU. For more, see “Flemmie P. Kittrell Fellowship for Minorities,” Box 11, American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences records, #6578. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

⁷⁷ Jessie Ash Arndt, “Classroom Beyond Campus,” *Christian Science Monitor*, Oct. 7, 1964.

⁷⁸ Esther Ottley, “Flemmie Pansy Kittrell (1980),” Kittrell Papers, Box 104-1, Folder 9, MSRC.

culture of dissemblance” among African American women. This propensity indelibly shapes what is left in and what has been kept out of her archive.⁷⁹ Rather than dismiss these silences and contradictions, much more can be learned by working through them.

In the end, Kittrell committed herself to imperialist structures *and* peace groups. She was a part of several civil rights groups and yet she did not publicly take a stand on major civil rights issues, such as housing discrimination. Nor did she align with Pan-Africanist groups, despite her long interest in working in and across nation states throughout Africa. Kittrell was a passionate advocate of “the home” and “the family” yet she was scarcely ever at her own residence. Kittrell had decided it was possible to be an exemplar of Home Economics teachings without strictly adhering to gender roles or familial conventions. At any rate, in her scholarship and community action, the private home or individual family was never the true focus of Home Economics. Alas, perhaps it is fitting that much of her interior life remains unknown, hers alone. Though Kittrell left many records behind, she remains a somewhat enigmatic historical subject; this is still a far richer analytical place to be than atop a list of “firsts.”

For a time, Kittrell’s legacy at Bennett College was remembered through a building. Kittrell played an integral role in expanding the Home Economics major there, and when she left to teach at Hampton in 1940, her private residence was turned into the model or “practice home.”⁸⁰ The “practice home” continued to be a part of the major for many years; gradually that component disappeared, and the major was eliminated altogether in 2008. As the program was ending, a book “painstakingly” put together by Home Economics alumnae was presented to the college, to preserve “an illustrious past not to be forgotten.” When Dr. Julianne Malveaux, President Emerita of Bennett College saw this book in the early 2000s, it “plucked at my

⁷⁹ Darlene Clark Hine, “Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West,” *Signs* 14, no.4 (1989): 915.

⁸⁰ Susie Jones, interviewed by Merze Tate, Black Women Oral History Project, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, 1977.

cleaning ambivalence, ambivalence about training women in home economics, not physics, chemistry, or accounting.”⁸¹

Reflecting further, Malveaux thought of a photograph of her ancestor, a maid named Addie Hawkins, whose likeness she kept in her home office. Malveaux could not help but link Bennett’s home economists with a tradition of servitude and subjugation, despite protests that the field was about “lost arts.” As she saw it, African Americans had been overrepresented and overworked as “poorly paid private household workers” and “underrepresented among the icons of gracious living.”⁸² Malveaux simply could not shake the sense that an education in domestic matters was a betrayal of the promise of an institution such as Bennett. Eighty years earlier, the notion that there was both an art and a science to living had propelled Flemma Kittrell to study and teach Home Economics. That her efforts at blending the practical with the liberal and the graceful with the empirical have been so widely forgotten should be a source of ambivalence.

⁸¹ Julianne Malveaux, “Cleaning Ambivalence: A Personal and Political Reflection,” in *Dirt: The Quirks, Habits, and Passions of Keeping House*, ed. Mindy Lewis (Berkeley, CA: Seal Press, 2009), 222-228.

⁸² Malveaux, “Cleaning Ambivalence,” 228.

Chapter One: Education for Life

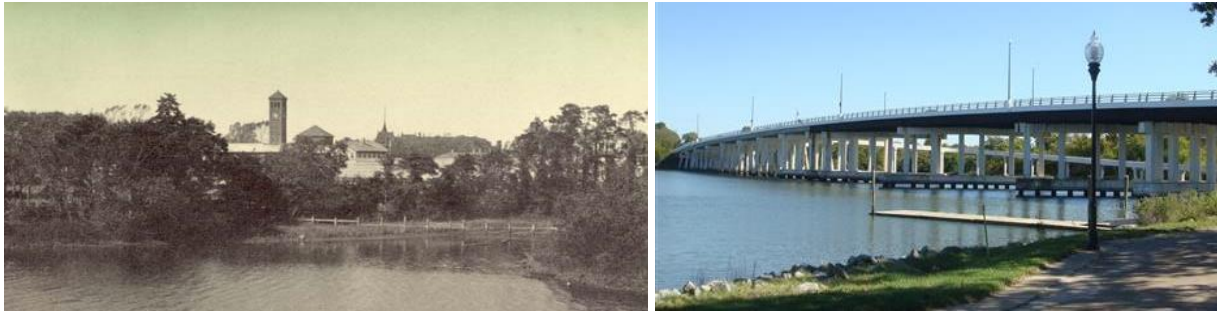


Fig. 1.1: “A partial view of Hampton Institute, Virginia,” (1911).

Fig. 1.2: The View from Hampton University of the Booker T. Washington Bridge.

In Hampton, Virginia, the politics of city planning and the poetics of history converge in the Booker T. Washington Bridge. In practical terms, the Washington Bridge provides a path between Hampton’s commercial downtown and the campus of Hampton University, formerly Hampton Institute. As a memorial, this connector further emphasizes the importance of the man once called a “bridge” between the races. Through this structure, more than a century after his death, Washington continues to introduce visitors to his *alma mater*.¹ Whether traveling by car or foot, Washington’s namesake provides a first view of Hampton, a carefully landscaped campus framed along the shore of the Hampton River. Even as modern architecture encroaches, a Romanesque tower still dominates the historic vista. Completed in 1886, the burnt-orange clock tower of Hampton’s Memorial Chapel is a striking visual marker of the picturesque style.² Positioned at the edge of campus, it is moored, heavy with the weight of history.

Throughout the university grounds, interpretive markers remind contemporary visitors that much of the school, founded three years after the end of the Civil War, was built by its own

¹Louis R. Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); Robert J. Norrell, *Up from History: The Life of Booker T. Washington* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2011); Raymond Smock, *Booker T. Washington in Perspective: Essays of Louis R. Harlan* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1988), 160-179.

² Veronica Alease Davis, *Hampton University* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2014), 38.

students.³ These pupils of the past, including Washington, were encouraged to “learn by doing” and to work on training the “head, hand, and heart” at Hampton.⁴ This history of manual training is perhaps conjured with greatest immediacy near the tower, where museum panels feature photographs of students laying bricks for the building. A piece of coral embedded near the Chapel’s entrance, brought from Hawai’i by one of Hampton’s founders, foregrounds another aspect of the school’s history, however. While the tower is an exemplary work project, it is also a symbol of artistry, religiosity, and missionary zeal. Inside, across the ground level, long, elegantly carved pews line the space, silent witnesses to thousands of services, lectures, and spirituals.⁵ Matching wooden beams extend to the hip roof, with carvings of African American and American Indian figures positioned against the cream colored walls. As a nexus of diasporic and missionary networks, this Chapel exemplifies the Hampton struggle for grace through industry.⁶ Sitting in this space, it is clear that at Hampton, spiritual, manual, and intellectual pursuits were inextricably bound together.⁷

Before this Chapel was constructed, indeed before there *was* a Hampton Institute, there was just Mary Peake. In 1861, when escaped slaves were declared “contraband of war” by Union General Benjamin Butler, the city of Hampton became a strategic location for those seeking liberation and refuge. While battles raged mere miles away, Peake, a seamstress and free woman of color, began offering lessons on the site of the future Institute. Some of Peake’s students

³ The official Hampton University website's About page explains: “Other universities simply teach history. Hampton University puts you right in the middle of it.” See also: National Register of Historic Places, Hampton Institute, Hampton, Virginia, National Register # 69000323.

⁴ Attributed to Hampton founder Samuel Chapman Armstrong, cited in Donald Spivey, *Schooling for the New Slavery* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1978), 3.

⁵ Examples of these spirituals can be found in Mary F. Armstrong and Helen Ludlow, *Hampton and Its Students by Two of Its Teachers* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1874).

⁶ Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, *Twenty-Two Years' Work of the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute at Hampton, Virginia* (Hampton: Normal School Press, 1893), 4.

⁷ Speeches and notes on visitors to the Chapel can be found in Collection 20.17, Hampton University Archives, Hampton, VA, hereafter cited as Hampton Archives. See also Frank Guridy, *Forging Diaspora: Afro-Cubans and African Americans in a World of Empire and Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

would hear the Emancipation Proclamation for the first time underneath an oak tree that still stands today. But Peake did not live to see the end of the war or the formal establishment of Hampton. Instead, the school was officially developed by Samuel Chapman Armstrong. A son of missionaries and a soldier, Armstrong had ties to the American Missionary Association and the Freedmen's Bureau. Both of these connections would prove significant to Hampton's funding and guiding ideology. With backing from the Bureau, Hampton became a missionary project wherein emancipation meant freedom *from* slavery and the "freedom" *to* work, earn a wage, and form a family.⁸ Through building projects and a curricular emphasis on domesticity, Hampton was defined by an ethos of *free* labor.⁹

Given the limited view of social and economic freedom inculcated at Hampton, most historians have criticized the institution's mission and systems of training. Works such as Donald Spivey's *Schooling for the New Slavery* (1978) and James Anderson's *The Education of Blacks in the South* (1988), for instance, interpret this combination of learning and hard labor as a thinly veiled attempt at sustaining black subordination beyond Reconstruction.¹⁰ Laura Wexler's *Tender Violence* (2000) and Evelyn Nakano Glenn's *Forced to Care* (2010) further connect the curriculum at Hampton to longer patterns of coercive and gendered systems of labor.¹¹ To some scholars, the limited education offered at Hampton was directly tied to the Northern industrial

⁸ Mary Farmer-Kaiser, *Freedwomen and the Freedmen's Bureau: Race, Gender, and Public Policy in the age of Emancipation* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010).

⁹ Eric Foner, *Nothing but Freedom: Emancipation and Its Legacy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, reissue, 2007); Francis Greenwood Peabody, *Education for Life: The Story of Hampton Institute Story* (Garden City: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1920); Amy Dru Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage, and the Market in the Era of Slave Emancipation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

¹⁰ James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Dwayne Ashley and Juan Williams, *I'll Find a Way or Make One* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999); Henry Allen Bullock, *A History of Negro Education in the South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967).

¹¹ Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Forced to Care: Coercion and Caregiving in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); Laura Wexler, *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

philanthropists who interfered with the operations and administration of the school.¹² But for those looking more broadly at the enforcement of a “culture of respectability,” Hampton is another example of the restraints put on “race men” and “race women” educated in the wake of Reconstruction.¹³ In general, however, historian Kenneth Bechtel’s blunt conclusion that “vocational training was a failure” most aptly summarizes the literature.¹⁴

One Hampton student’s racial accommodation and political conservatism has had a large role in shaping these interpretations.¹⁵ Just as Booker T. Washington is an inescapable part of the Hampton landscape today, his story is usually positioned at the forefront of histories of the school.¹⁶ While Washington’s tenure and training are important and revelatory, his experiences must not stand in for all Hampton graduates. The system of learning known as an “education for life,” which is mostly associated with Washington, was not static. Over time, the balance between liberal arts based classes cultivating the head, manual training work for the hands, and programs for the spiritual needs of the heart shifted. Some of the most important curricular changes in this evolution came in the wake of World War I, when Hampton was transformed from an industrial institute into a college. Though still primarily focused on training teachers, by the mid-1920s, the work program was eroding and students were earning bachelor’s degrees in the collegiate program.

¹² Eric Anderson and Alfred A. Moss, Jr., *Dangerous Donations: Northern Philanthropy and Southern Black Education, 1902-1930* (Columbus: University of Missouri, 1999).

¹³ Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

¹⁴ Willie Pearson and H. Kenneth Bechtel, *Blacks, Science, and American Education* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 8-9.

¹⁵ For more from Washington, see Booker T. Washington, *My Larger Education: Being Chapters from My Experience* (Garden City: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1911). See also: Houston A. Baker Jr., *Turning South Again: Re-Thinking Modernism/Re-Reading Booker T.* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); Pero Gaglo Dagbovie, “Exploring a Century of Historical Scholarship on Booker T. Washington,” *Journal of African American History* 92, no. 2 (2007): 239-264; Michael Rudolph West, *The Education of Booker T. Washington: American Democracy and the Idea of Race Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

¹⁶ Similarly, Tuskegee has been called “the lengthened shadow of Booker T. Washington.” See Roscoe Conkling Bruce, “Tuskegee Institute” in *From Servitude to Service* (New York: Arno Press: 1905; 1969), 82.

The story of Flemma Kittrell, a graduate of the Academy (1924) and college (1928) programs at Hampton offers vital insights into this period of change. Due to her later prominence as a professional home economist, Kittrell has a large archival base at Hampton. These papers offer an opportunity to explore and evaluate assumptions about Hampton's programs for women, particularly Home Economics. After leaving behind a family largely bound to farm and domestic work in rural North Carolina, Kittrell obtained a high school degree at Hampton then elected to major in Home Economics. As a member of one of the first classes of women to earn a college degree at the school, Kittrell likely chose this major because it was no longer about constraining women to service. In the past, the field of domestic science, a forerunner to Home Economics, had been used to justify systems of women's labor on campus and to train women for domestic work. In the 1920s, that program was upgraded to meet with rising national standards for the professionally-oriented field of Home Economics. This program was not about preparing women for work with individual families or homes but scientifically informed service to communities.¹⁷

Though largely ignored in the literature, at the time, this upgrading to Home Economics was seen as vital to the formation of the new collegiate program at Hampton. This transformation into an academically oriented program was partially due to internal agitation and student demands. Yet it was also connected to national shifts in secondary and higher education related to the passage of the Smith-Lever Act (1914) and Smith-Hughes Act (1917).¹⁸ These acts heightened teaching standards and afforded more funding to Agriculture and Home Economics.¹⁹ Though Home Economics in some form had been taught for many years, it was not until the

¹⁷ For more on this work at Hampton, see Mae Barbee Boone Pleasant, *Hampton University: Our Home by the Sea* (Virginia Beach: The Donning Company, 1992); William Hannibal Robinson, *The History of Hampton Institute: 1898-1949* (Ph.D. Diss, New York University, 1953); James T. Stensvaag, *Hampton: From the Sea to the Stars: 1610-1985* (Hampton: Donning Company Publishers, 1985).

¹⁸ "Hampton's New Courses," *Southern Workman* 51, no.11 (1922): 519.

¹⁹ B.D. Mayberry, *A Century of the 1890 Land-Grant Institutions and Tuskegee University, 1890-1990* (New York: Vantage Press, 1991).

1920s that research in the field was elevated from division to bureau status. This validation of the discipline, along with the imposition of higher standards for teaching tied to Smith-Hughes, served as an impetus to improve college level courses. Since training teachers was always a central aim at Hampton, faculty who sought to strengthen the “women’s program” focused on Home Economics as a viable path to professionalization.

In many histories, the curricular upgrading of programs such as domestic science has been attributed to Washington’s death in 1915. Some have even suggested that change was only possible once “the voice of the ‘Tuskegee Machine’ [was] silenced.”²⁰ While Washington has been endowed with nearly mythical powers, faculty and students in these programs have been given little to no agency. Washington’s legacy, and the tradition of manual labor he represents, is an indelible part of Hampton’s history and built environment. But these aspects of Hampton’s past are only part of the story. In a sense, this is the paradox of the Memorial tower. Built by students to mark the passage of time, it is an object that seems irrevocably rooted in the ways of the past. A more balanced interpretation might portray the tower as a symbol of the Janus-faced nature of Hampton. A work of artistry and an instrument of discipline, the tower is a reminder that an “education for life” was never as stable as Hampton’s architects might have hoped.

During Kittrell’s tenure at Hampton, 1919-1928, the systems for labor and learning that had been in place for several decades underwent a transformation that was both too dramatic for some administrators and too gradual for most students. As the notion that *work* was inherently educational came under greater scrutiny, so did the conceptualization of Hampton as a family. From the beginning, Hampton’s organization was described as familial, with “women’s work” allotted accordingly. In the 1920s, however, students increasingly challenged patriarchal systems of control on campus and relatedly, the division of labor. The development of a Home

²⁰ Williams, *I’ll Find a Way or Make One*, 139.

Economics program in this time might seem to contribute a further entrenchment of “women’s work” into academics. But that was not the student or faculty’s perception at the time. Home Economics faculty used the framework of family in flexible ways. While training students in the “family-like” environments of the practice home and cafeteria, home economists rejected the idea that students were preparing for service. Instead, a student in Home Economics at Hampton was trained to work with “families” on a large scale—across communities, in settlement houses, college campuses, and various workplaces. In their letters, yearbooks, and other campus documents, students echoed this sense that Home Economics represented an important break from earlier forms of training.

In joining this labor to a liberal arts education, faculty insisted that “women’s work” be transformed into rational, scientific processes. In the past, work in the dining halls had also been portrayed as educational. What changed was the professionalization of the discipline and the rise of Euthenics. As a field of inquiry, Euthenics was concerned with the relationships—and potential for improvement—between people and their surroundings. By bringing this approach to bear on the “Hampton way,” faculty rationalized these gendered systems of labor with a new framework. Along the way, these teachers also destabilized the “natural” association between minority women, drudgery, and house work. That these highly educated women focused on family matters yet were not confined to the private sphere—or domestic work—must have been attractive to Kittrell. Seeing opportunity in Home Economics, Kittrell elected to be part of the “Hampton family”—a phrase she herself used—instead of returning “home.”

While Kittrell’s rich archival legacy adds greatly to our understanding of how Hampton operated, her files also point to larger gaps in histories of higher education. Historically, studies of black colleges have focused on the power of Northern philanthropists, male administrators,

and male student/laborers. Women at all levels, but especially female students receive almost no attention; the exceptions are the well educated women or “pioneers,” such as Charlotte Hawkins Brown.²¹ This is not a problem that is unique to histories of co-educational minority institutions. There is also a dearth of knowledge about women students studying outside of elite, single-sex institutions.²² Studies of women at the “Seven Sisters,” for example, far outweigh those of women who studied at public universities or other private colleges.²³ This imbalance has been so great that it has made “women at land-grant institutions... invisible” in some cases.²⁴ Often, assumptions, rather than evidence, about students’ experiences in the classroom and on campus are used to generalize about women’s experiences within these institutions. Kittrell’s papers offer an important starting point for addressing and historicizing these gaps

What Kittrell could not have known from her vantage point is that she was entering Hampton as a much larger cultural shift was underway. For African Americans born around the turn of the century, such as Kittrell, there were increasingly more opportunities for entering institutions of higher education. Between 1914 and 1925, the number of historically black colleges increased 81%. With a 533% rise in students, more black students would graduate from college between 1926 and 1936 than the previous 300 years combined.²⁵ This was not simply because there were new colleges; academic programs at older institutions were also changing.²⁶ Hampton, which had been the epitome of industrial training systems, eliminated the lower-level

²¹ Geraldine Joncich Clifford, *Lone Voyagers: Academic Women in Coeducational Universities, 1870-1937* (New York: Feminist Press at The City University of New York, 1989); Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

²² Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Alma Mater: Design and Experience in the Women's Colleges from Their Nineteenth-century Beginnings to the 1930s* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 1985).

²³ Linda Marie Fritschner, "The Rise and Fall of Home Economics" (Ph.D. Diss., University of California, Davis, 1973), 119.

²⁴ Alison Cornish Thorne, "Visible and Invisible Women in Land-Grant Colleges, 1890-1940," The 72nd Utah State University Honor Lecture, October 8, 1985.

²⁵ Ibram Rogers, *The Black Campus Movement* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 21-22.

²⁶ Louis Menand, *The Marketplace of Ideas: Reform and Resistance in the American University* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2010).

secondary education courses and transformed into a college in this period.²⁷ This was marked explicitly when the words ‘Normal and Agricultural’ were dropped from the school’s full name in 1930.²⁸ As Hampton went, so did Tuskegee, and in 1927, Tuskegee joined the “college ranks.”²⁹ Similar changes took place between 1927-1929 at Southern University and A&M College in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Bethune-Cookman in Daytona Beach, Florida and Bennett College in Greensboro, North Carolina.³⁰

For many principals, presidents, boards of trustees, and mission boards running colleges at this time, training in Industrial Arts belonged to history. Home Economics, on the other hand, was seen as a sensible way to prepare students for the future. While national and institutional standards were rising within higher education, Home Economics did not disappear—it was updated and adapted per student and faculty demand.³¹ This was the trend not only at historically black colleges, but at predominantly-white land-grant universities such as Cornell University and in education programs such as Teachers College. Most surprising, however, was the introduction of Home Economics at Smith College and Vassar College, elite women’s colleges. Given broader cultural anxieties about not only the need to train “race women” but “fit mothers,” there was a stronger, wider arc of growth within the field of Home Economics in the 1920s than has been assumed.

²⁷ Nevedon-Morton, *Afro-American Women of the South*, 17.

²⁸ Cynthia Nevedon-Morton, *Afro-American Women of the South and the Advancement of the Race, 1895-1925* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 22.

²⁹ Albert Scipio, *Pre-War Days at Tuskegee* (Silver Spring: Roman Publications, 1987), 219.

³⁰ Angela V. Proctor, "Emma Nesbit Mayberry" *John Cade Library and HBCU Digital Library*, <http://hbcudigitallibrary.auctr.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/suam/id/1010/rec/3>; Jay S. Stowell, *Methodist Adventures in Negro Education* (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1922); Flemmie Kittrell, "Home Economics at Bennett College," *Southern Workman* 60, no. 8 (1931): 381-4. See Toni Hodge-Wright, *The Handbook of Historically Black Colleges and Universities* (Seattle: Jireh and Associates, 1992).

³¹ Blanche Purcell, "The Home in Home-Economics Education," *Southern Workman* 54 (1925): 157-160; Purcell, "Home Economics at Hampton Institute," *Southern Workman* 55 (1926): 9-15.

Not all of these programs were lasting. A few even failed within a few years due to a range of forms of resistance. This may explain why the history of Home Economics at many of these institutions has become illegible. But “forgetting” or erasing history is a process shaped and informed by competing narratives. These experiments destabilize received knowledge about what students have been trained to do at different types of institutions. Thus this period of expansion in Home Economics also points to an uncomfortable moment in which an “education for life” was in flux throughout the American academy.

Within Hampton’s history specifically, a widely circulated set of images and a contemporary rebellion have proved far more compelling than a close analysis of curricular changes or the “women’s department.” Frances Benjamin Johnston’s photographs of women workers at Hampton in 1899 have often been used to illustrate the history of domestic service and training on campus. While these are significant documents for understanding the social dynamics at Hampton in the late 1800s, comparable images of *later* students have not received nearly as much attention. Additionally, the student strike that took place at Hampton in 1927 is often the only event from that period that receives substantial coverage. This is likely because these images and this event provide a linear narrative from subjection to subversion. What is often lacking, however, is an analysis of students’ work and intellectual lives through their records. Kittrell’s papers present new ways of interpreting not only the Johnston photographs and the strike, but this system of education as a whole.

Kittrell was fifteen when she first arrived at Hampton. From her first work year in 1919 to her final year as a college student in 1928, she would have heard the bells from the clock tower calling her to church, duty assignments, and class. Booming across campus, the bells marked her days, setting the pace for the formative years of her education. For her cohort, the

Chapel might have been a reminder of the hard labor of days now passed. But there were also remnants of that older system that could be acutely felt within that space. Though Hampton now offered college degrees, students were still expected to clean the campus, endure paternalistic social controls, and participate in command performances of spirituals in the Chapel.³² Toward the end of Kittrell's tenure at Hampton, some students could no longer endure the contradiction.³³ In October of 1927, a group of students claimed the Chapel as the space where they would challenge the administration. When prompted to sing for visiting dignitary Gordon Guggisberg, founder of the Achimota School in Ghana, the students refused.³⁴

Hampton's Principal, James Gregg (1918-1930) was apparently stunned by the silence.³⁵ Recitals for visitors were a long tradition at Hampton, and traveling singers had previously worked to "build up" the school. But the students did not stop there. The strike continued, spilling out across campus as students refused to attend classes or comply with other regulations. These acts of rebellion—a response to a continued sense that their increasingly rising expectations were not being met at Hampton—would have been unthinkable in earlier decades. In many cases, this incident has been interpreted as an obvious indictment of all that had *not* changed at Hampton, as if Washington could have stepped in and still been familiar with the mode of operations. It was not so much a lack of change but rather the speed with which these changes occurred that students were protesting. When seen in a broader perspective, the 1927

³² Susan T. Hill, *The Traditionally Black Institutions of Higher Education 1860-1982* (Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics, 1985), xii-xii.

³³ Raymond Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus: Black College Rebellions of the 1920s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).

³⁴ James E. Alford, Jr. "For Alma Mater: Fighting for Change at Historically Black Colleges and Universities" Doctoral Dissertation, Columbia University, 2013. See also "Race Issue in Strike at Hampton Institute," *Daily Press* (Hampton, VA), Oct. 23, 1927; "The Hampton Strike," *Chicago Bee* (Chicago, IL), Oct. 29, 1927; loose clipping: "Punished," Oct. 31, 1927, all held in Strike Box, Hampton Archives.

³⁵ T. David Williams, "Sir Gordon Guggisberg and Educational Reform in the Gold Coast, 1919-1927," *Comparative Education Review* 8, no.3 (1964): 290-306. Future Ghana President Kwame Nkrumah attended the Achimota School.

strike is more of a punctuation point in a longer, uneven, and fraught trend toward heightened and stricter standards for higher education.³⁶

Kittrell was present for—but did not participate in—the strike. She was twenty-three at the time, a veritable Hampton veteran. Instead of rebelling, Kittrell stayed on, earning her bachelor’s degree in Home Economics the following year. We know far less about women such as Kittrell and her cohort than the way that people outside of Hampton commented on the strike. Today, many of these graduates’ stories still remain untold largely because of their compliance during this event.³⁷ This is not because there is a lack of sources; Hampton had prolific outlets for student writing and work. In place of these student-created documents and images, however, one visual history dominates the literature: the photographs of other, ostensibly “well behaved” students staged by Johnston in 1899. These images have come to serve as shorthand for students’ experiences, particularly those that chart “the Hampton way” through “before and after” shots of students.³⁸

These images premiered at the Paris Centennial Exposition in 1900 as a way to support “manual” training. But they returned to wide circulation—during the Civil Rights movement—in the 1960s with the publication of *The Hampton Album*.³⁹ In the preface to the *Album*, Johnston’s photographs are praised for how “her subjects, within her eyes, continual their essential lives[.]”⁴⁰ Though visiting Hampton during a period of growth, Johnston’s images show faces nearly pained with patience and bodies bent in careful study. In configuring her subjects primarily as stoic workers, these images have made it hard to see these students’ histories in

³⁶ Williams, *I’ll Find a Way or Make One*, 103.

³⁷ Laurel T. Ulrich, *Well Behaved Women Seldom Make History* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007).

³⁸ Anderson, *Education*, 48; 56.

³⁹ Brooks Johnson, “Books Noted,” *Black World/Negro Digest* 15, no.10 (1966): 52; 80; Frances B. Johnston and Lincoln Kirstein, *The Hampton Album* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1966).

⁴⁰ Museum of Modern Art, News Release no. 132, December 14, 1965.

anything other than the slightest shades of gray.⁴¹ Johnston did far more than merely “capture” these students in gelatin silver prints. Her work has created a seemingly inalterable set of evidence that Hampton primarily produced laborers.



Fig. 1.3: Frances Benjamin Johnston, "Serving the Dinner"

To take one example, in an image known as “Serving the Dinner,” (Fig. 1.3) a young woman dressed in a formal servant's uniform stands poised in front of a dining room table. From a small but well-placed portrait hanging overhead, George Washington looks on, affixed to the wall and confidently rooted in history. The student/servant stares downward, trapped in the otherwise empty room.⁴² This photograph ultimately fits with a familiar narrative: women training at Hampton were essentially—only—outfitted for service. The details of this woman's experience are lost to history, but we need not rely exclusively on this image. There are rich—and often ignored—visual and print archives for students from subsequent decades.⁴³ Figure 1.4, for example, a photograph from Kittrell's tenure, calls forth a different Hampton. As Home Economics evolved, women were no longer taking the kinds of skills-based courses Johnston observed. With an increased emphasis on living as an *art* as well as a science, students learned not just how to make clothing, but the history of textiles and differences in clothing from around

⁴¹ Laura Wexler, *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

⁴² "Serving the Dinner," *Hampton Album*.

⁴³ Drawn from the archives, B.N. Puryear, *Hampton Institute—A Pictorial Review of Its First Century, 1868-1968* (Hampton: Prestige Press, 1962) is one starting place.

the world. As seen below, in one course from the 1920s, students spent time at the Hampton Museum learning about “Historic Costumes.”⁴⁴



Fig. 1.4: "Study of African Textiles in the Museum" (1921)

By the mid-1920s, students could elect to take Home Economics classes of various kinds as part of the evolving college-level program. This new curriculum was primarily designed to train “young women to be home-makers and teachers of home economics.”⁴⁵ In promotional literature, faculty explicitly differentiated this training from a course of study that would prepare women for domestic work. While paid service was a “betrayal,” the ideal use of a Home Economics degree was in the *community*. This could involve, but was not limited to teaching. The service these professors imagined was closest to what historian Stephanie Shaw describes as “community development,” term that goes beyond the usual distinctions drawn between “domestic work” and “charity work.”⁴⁶ In line with uplift ideologies and trends in liberal-arts

⁴⁴ Carrie Lyford, “Study of African Textiles in the Museum” in *Fifty-Third Annual Catalogue of the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, 1920-1921* (Hampton: Normal and Agricultural Institute, 1921): 86.

⁴⁵ James Gregg, *Principal's Report: 1924* (Hampton: Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, 1924): 14.

⁴⁶ Stephanie Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to Be and Do: Black Professional Women Workers During the Jim Crow Era*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 208.

education, these students were expected to be “race women” who could teach textiles *and* identify the nuances in historic prints and African fabrics.

This was the world of Home Economics Kittrell entered into as a student. Labeled “a true Hamptonian” by her peers, in her later years Kittrell would recall her “former days” at Hampton as “mixed with study, fun, and a fair share of mischief associated with the pranks of youth.” In this and other statements, Kittrell would often strive to present a complicated picture of her *alma mater*. In addition to evoking memories of play, Kittrell would invoke the Hampton motto, “The Standard of Excellence, An Education for Life.”⁴⁷ Kittrell’s investment in particular representations of Hampton was likely shaped by the general backlash against vocational education and the circulation of Johnston’s photographs in the 1960s. Though these images were not of her time, Kittrell would have understood why they were not only pervasive, but seen as “essential” representations of women at Hampton. Overall, these photographs confirmed the assumption that women of color were intimately, inextricably connected to domestic work. But these photographs captured moments from the world Kittrell was born into, not the one she claimed for herself.

Understanding the distance between these worlds requires an examination of the place whence Kittrell came to Hampton. An exploration of Kittrell’s genealogy and childhood in North Carolina is more than mere prologue. Born into the second generation of free people in her family, Kittrell’s lineage reveals the lasting links connecting black women and families to service. Flemma is not and was not a common first name. Yet Kittrell’s surname was undeniably tied to her grandparents’ enslavement in the area where she grew up, also next to a town also named Kittrell. In her own lifetime, many women in Kittrell’s family were listed as

⁴⁷ Kittrell to President Roy Hudson, Hampton, 9 July 1974, Box 104-5, Kittrell Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University Archives.

“keeping house” or working as domestics in census records. But Kittrell worked to complicate such a reduction of her family history. When prompted to describe her upbringing in the 1970s, Kittrell focused on her parents’ “good rearing.” In so doing, Kittrell was presenting her personal trajectory as she saw it—but she was also positioning her family history in opposition to tropes about African American families circulating throughout her lifetime.⁴⁸

Whether following Kittrell’s narration or other parts of her paper trail, the story inexorably begins with her birthplace in Henderson, Vance County, North Carolina. Located in the northern part of the state, Henderson was officially established in 1841. Geographically, it was an important dividing line, as ‘practically no cotton was raised west of Henderson and no tobacco east of it.’⁴⁹ While a natural border seemed fixed in the soil, territorial boundaries were often shifting around Henderson. In Kittrell’s parents’ lifetimes, their home was considered to be part of two different counties; the second was created in 1881 to block recently enfranchised black men from electing Republicans.⁵⁰ The name Vance was chosen to honor of Governor Zebulon Vance, who “showed his humor” by calling his eponymous county “Zeb’s Black Baby.”⁵¹ According to one historian, this reorganization was needed because “Henderson had six churches but what it needed was a jail and a courthouse.”⁵² This latter comment was written in the 1950s, suggesting that in addition to an inauspicious start, Henderson scarcely became a more tolerant or egalitarian place over time.

A mostly rural town, Henderson had a predominantly black population in the years leading up to Kittrell’s birth in 1904. The population of roughly 4,000 residents made a living

⁴⁸ Daniel P. Moynihan, “The Negro Family: The Case for National Action,” Office of Planning and Research, United States Department of Labor (1965).

⁴⁹ Samuel Thomas Peace, *Zeb’s Black Baby* (Durham: Seeman Printery, 1955), 10.

⁵⁰ Laura F. Edwards, *Gendered Strife & Confusion: The Political Culture of Reconstruction* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

⁵¹ Peace, *Zeb’s Black Baby*, 1-2.

⁵² Peace, 293.

from some combination of farming, domestic work, and mill wages. For many, their work was mostly concentrated in the sprawling tobacco fields, even after “cotton mill fever” reached Vance.⁵³ Ambitions to work outside of agriculture had been stalled when a fire broke out downtown. Despite there not being any evidence or proof, many white residents blamed the black population.⁵⁴ At the start of the twentieth century, most blacks in Henderson and Vance were living within a segregated community, disenfranchised through cumbersome voting restrictions and shut out of many chances for upward social mobility.⁵⁵

By the time Kittrell was born, there were still limited opportunities for education. Kittrell College, founded in 1886 as an industrial training school run by the African Methodist Episcopal Church had been joined by just one other institution, Henderson Normal School in 1898. Both offered a promise a brighter future for freedmen—or at least their children. Surrounded by the expansive plantations of the past and the few precarious schools of her present, Kittrell lived in a town divided. But she was also positioned at a crossroad. Living near the major artery US Route 1, Kittrell could imagine a world beyond Henderson. In 1919, she became one of many African Americans leaving this place behind.⁵⁶

This made her rather exceptional in terms of her larger family, and Kittrell did always have a tether to her hometown. Born in a place where genealogy and geography were intertwined, to be a Kittrell from Vance County was practically redundant. Furthermore, as with many communities in the South, racial lines were both arbitrary and absolute in this place. Kittrell’s name came from a slave owner because in her words, “that was the custom in those

⁵³ Demographic information on Henderson can be found in the appendixes to Daniel J. Clark, *Like Night & Day: Unionization in a Southern Mill Town* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Andre Vann, *Vance County, North Carolina* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2000), 6.

⁵⁶ Clark, *Like Night & Day*, 209-210.

days.”⁵⁷ There were so many Kittrells at one time that her ancestors could have been enslaved in one of many areas nearby.⁵⁸ Tracking any family with the name Kittrell in northern North Carolina is no easy proposition. Since the same names are pervasive in both slave schedules and census records, family lines are hard to discern. With only an “N” or “W” to differentiate separate families, it is almost possible to forget the amazing power differences between people living in the same place, sharing a surname and little else.

What can be known is that on her paternal side, Kittrell’s grandfather Essek was born a slave in 1840. In 1861, Essek “was given his freedom” and “a plot of land.”⁵⁹ This made him a minority in this area, as less than 5% of the population was made up of “free colored” persons in this county even in 1860. Shortly thereafter, Essek married Rosa Parham, who “kept house” while he did various forms of farm work. The family’s eldest child, James/Lee Kittrell, was born, in Kittrell’s words, “the year that Lee surrendered in the Civil War.”⁶⁰ By 1880, the family of eight was nearly complete, and Essek was earning wages intermittently. In addition to other farm work, he was chopping wood and clearing fields at a nearby farm.⁶¹ Rosa, who was also essential to the family’s economic survival, “lived to be 115 years old,” well into Kittrell’s life.⁶²

Rosa’s son, Lee Kittrell, who also became a farmer, married Alice Mills in 1888. They raised their family in close proximity to Alice’s residence, which included Kittrell’s maternal grandmother Catherine Mills. Born in 1843 to Jordan Howell and Kizzie Satterwhite Hunt, Catherine was one of fourteen slaves who “belonged to the Howell Satterwhite’s ... in Granville

⁵⁷ Black Women Oral History Project Interviews; Flemma Kittrell, Aug.29, 1977, 1. OH-31, T-32/Kittrell. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

⁵⁸ Kittrell’s ancestors were likely held at the Kittrell properties in the districts of Epping Forest, Fishing Creek, Henderson, Tabb’s Creek, or the Ragland(s). The Parhams were in Tabb’s Creek. See “Townships and Districts of Granville County, North Carolina,” *NC Gen Web*, <http://www.ncgenweb.us/ncgranville/other/gran-landmarks.pdf>

⁵⁹ Tate interview, 1.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Edwards, *Gendered Strife & Confusion*, 85.

⁶² Tate interview, 1.

County.”⁶³ One family historian, Kittrell’s aunt Sarah Mills, succinctly noted that Jordan and Kizzie “were related to the Indians [Cherokees] and both were slaves,” with Jordan coming “from the Tar River Community” in Kittrell. Little is known about Kizzie except Mill’s words; she noted that Kizzie was “very smart” and “did weaving for rich white people.” At some point, her daughter Catherine married William Mills, described as “thin, raw boned, red skin...very kind.” Born to “a white woman” and an “unknown” man, Mills was a “free issue.”⁶⁴ While raising Kittrell’s mother, Catherine did farm work; she later became a domestic in Henderson. Given this chronology, slavery and service were not abstract or distant concepts for Kittrell.

Though the notion of a “color line” dividing the families of Henderson might have seemed like a rich fallacy, Kittrell’s closely linked family lived a world apart from the wealthy whites who controlled the booming tobacco factories downtown. Into the early twentieth century, agricultural and domestic work remained mainstays for the Kittrells and other kin. These families all lived near one another in dense networks. For much of her young life, Kittrell lived next to her maternal grandmother Catherine and reported being “very close” to her paternal grandmother Rosa—her “really true friend” in her young life.⁶⁵ This type of intimacy and proximity across generations is emblematic of a broader trend in which grandmothers had “a protean role” in African American families.⁶⁶ In many cases, grandmothers provided support for—and sometimes did the work of—mothers in these families. As time went on, Kittrell’s mother Alice took on a similar role with her own grandchildren from other siblings.⁶⁷ Late in life, Kittrell

⁶³ “Grandma Catherine Mills’ History as related by Aunt Sara Mills,” Folder 7 – Family Papers –Catherine Mills, Box 104-1. Sara Mills was married to Alice Mills Kittrell’s brother Rueben Mills.

⁶⁴ “Catherine Mills,” Box 104-1, Folder 7, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

⁶⁵ Tate interview, 1-2.

⁶⁶ Jillian Jimenez, “The History of Grandmothers in the African-American Community” *Social Service Review* 76, no. 4 (2002): 525.

⁶⁷ This information drawn from my survey of census data on Kittrell and her family. Alice Kittrell, for instance, was listed in 1930 as living with her daughter, son-in-law (Terrell), four grandchildren (by her daughter), and her

became more interested in her great-grandmother Kizzie's name, partially because it was in Alex Haley's *Roots* (1976) as Kizzy. There was no "connection with *Roots* that we know about, but I'm looking that up," Kittrell noted.⁶⁸ A name of African origin, one translation for Kizzie is "stay put." Through the Great Migration, staying put is, in fact, what most Kittrells did.⁶⁹

While Kittrell would speak of devotion to her grandmother Rosa, many other aspects of her upbringing were only discussed in vague terms. As she told one interviewer, she believed her parents "had a global outlook without knowing it."⁷⁰ Kittrell did not define what she meant by "a global outlook," though she would also insist that her parents' openness to learning was vital to her success. Kittrell argued that it was her mother, for instance, who first showed her that "children were learning, apparently all the time" at home.⁷¹ Kittrell's mother had no formal schooling, but she could read and write—a first for both sides of the family. An emphasis on her mother as a teacher may have been Kittrell's way of showing that her mother valued education.⁷²

Kittrell was also aware that her assessment of the family was influenced by the fact that she was the eighth of nine children. By the time Kittrell was born, she had seven older siblings, with the eldest child Laura being nearly fifteen years her senior. As she saw it, "I had the benefit of many of the privileges that my older brothers and sisters had, without having to work for them, so to speak." For instance, as "a favorite at home" Kittrell "didn't do her fair share of the housework." Claiming that she was "not too alert...on the farm" and "small" for her age, she was

children Rosa and Fred. See: 1930 U.S. Census, Vance County, North Carolina, population schedule, 91-6, 3, p.4201 sheet 11A, 192, Alice Kittrell.

⁶⁸ Tate interview, 1.

⁶⁹ Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 77.

⁷⁰ Tate interview, 1.

⁷¹ Ibid, 2.

⁷² Elizabeth Clark-Lewis, *Living In, Living Out: African American Domesticity and the Great Migration* (New York: Kodansha International, 1996), 27.

asked to do less work than her siblings.⁷³ While joking about favoritism, what she did not say is that only the last three children born to Alice and James/Lee would go to Hampton and have professional careers. Due to the limited opportunities in Henderson, most of the other Kittrell children followed the more common family routes into domestic work and farm labor.

Kittrell positioned herself as relatively privileged, but privilege in Henderson in the early 1900s was relative. Her “fair share” may have still involved heavy work doing the family’s laundry, cooking, or cleaning. Most young African America girls living in the rural south were ‘near trained’ in domestic work “by the age of seven [.]”⁷⁴ Kittrell may have done proportionally less, but her childhood was not one of comfort and leisure. By age 11, Kittrell was working as a nursemaid in the summer, earning \$1.50--\$2.00 per week. She earned considerably more as a cook upon turning thirteen; Kittrell held this position until entering Hampton.⁷⁵ Kittrell usually failed to mention this work. This might be a consequence of Kittrell assuming that such early “training” was obvious or because she deliberately erased and ignored this part of her story.

When read against the well known stories of early Hampton graduates such as Washington and Thomas Calhoun Walker, Kittrell’s *lack* of attention to a development of manual skills marks a very different conception of how to narrate one’s “arrival” at Hampton.⁷⁶ Likewise, Kittrell would suggest later in her life that in contrast to her farm work, when it came to school, “I was always quite willing to get there on time.” This does not mean that Kittrell had an entirely positive experience in the school system in Henderson. In an oft-repeated story about her elementary school teacher, Sally Thomas Eaton, Kittrell told several interviewers that she

⁷³ Tate interview, 2.

⁷⁴ Clark-Lewis, *Living In, Living Out*, 43.

⁷⁵ May Edwin Mann Burke, “The Contributions of Flenmie Pansy Kittrell to Education through her Doctrines on Home Economics,” (Ph.D. Diss, University of Maryland, 1988), 8.

⁷⁶ For more on Washington and his “sweeping test,” see Baker Jr., *Turning South Again: Re-Thinking Modernism/Re-Reading Booker T.*, 47.

“cried because my teacher [Eaton] didn't know enough to teach me the second grade.” Coming to this realization, she supposedly asked her who would teach the third grade.⁷⁷ To Kittrell's surprise, it was the same woman.⁷⁸ In several versions of this story, Eaton is set up as a kind of foil, the rural school teacher bested by the young, sharp student who “never could brook stupidity” even as a young person.⁷⁹ This story of the parochial teacher and her bright student obscures as much as it reveals. A former Hampton student, Eaton actually encouraged Kittrell to continue her studies outside of Henderson.⁸⁰ Still, positively or negatively, Kittrell did not leave Henderson because of one teacher. She left because of the structural limits on the school system. As Kittrell was coming of age, there was still not a high school for black residents in Henderson.⁸¹ At other levels, less than a third of what was spent for white children went to black students in Vance County.⁸²

The Eaton story has been used in many biographical sketches, however, because it enables Kittrell to set up her parents as her best teachers and to avoid the larger problems of discrimination in her local education system. Whatever the exact reasons for leaving, Kittrell was eager and clever enough to hide her true age so she could begin working for her tuition money. When Kittrell first arrived at Hampton in September of 1919 she was only fifteen.⁸³ Some early Hampton records and transcripts list her year of birth as 1903, though it was Christmas day,

⁷⁷ Interview by Kathryn M. Moore with Flemma Kittrell, May 9 1976, Box 1, Folder 7, Interviews by Kathryn M. Moore, #21-32-2360, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

⁷⁸ James Kessler, ed., *Distinguished African American Scientists of the 20th Century* (Phoenix: Oryx Press, 1996).

⁷⁹ Esther Ottley, “Flemma Pansy Kittrell,” (1980) in Kittrell Papers, Box 104-1, Folder 9, MSRC.

⁸⁰ Kittrell to Helen Purves, 16 December 1920, Kittrell Trustee Box, Correspondence folder, Hampton Archives.

⁸¹ Tate interview, 2.

⁸² Andre Vann suggests that there were Rosenwald schools in the area in *Vance County*, 7. There were approximately 800 Rosenwald Schools in the state at the time. Thomas Jesse Jones's *Negro Education: A Study of the Private and Higher Schools for Colored People in the United States* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1916) does not mention a Rosenwald school but provides more concrete population and financial data (439-440).

⁸³ Hampton Institute Girl Student Labor Record, Volume 3, Collection 24.13, Hampton Archives.

1904.⁸⁴ This discrepancy only became an issue in 1941, when an insurance group made an inquiry into her date of birth. A Hampton employee in charge of student records noted that Hampton “did not take women students at that time until they were sixteen.”⁸⁵ But they did take Kittrell. By 1941, Kittrell was one of Hampton’s most prominent female graduates. If anyone felt chagrin about this deception in 1941, it was obviously not recorded.

Though she was young, Kittrell had already worked for close to a third of her life for wages by the time she arrived. Entering Hampton required more of the same. From 1919 to 1920, Kittrell had to do a “work year “to finance her tuition. Day by day, students like Kittrell could chip away at the entrance fees and course costs in one of the school’s work departments. In leather bound volumes, staff and teachers set to marking down the calculus of providing for one’s education. The long lists of names in these volumes show the superstructure required to run a school staffed largely by its own students. The work for the young women was generally divided into tasks across three distinct areas: the Teachers’ Home, the Boarding Department, and the Sewing Room/Laundry. Much of this labor was done in the earliest campus buildings, some of which still make up Hampton’s historic vista along the shore.

Generally, women students such as Kittrell were responsible for cooking, cleaning, and textile care on an institutional scale.⁸⁶ In the laundry, for instance, Hampton women managed 40,000 pieces of clothing and other materials a week.⁸⁷ In a 1917 report, Hampton’s Principal

⁸⁴ Birth certificates in North Carolina were not yet obligatory in 1904. The census records are not entirely reliable either because Flemmie’s ages do not match up more than once in the records of 1910, 1920, and 1930. She is also listed as a male (“Flemy”) at one point.

⁸⁵ Marion Deane to Mr. C.M. Bonner, 14 May 1945: “It is quite possible we made a mistake [at Hampton] in recording the first date of birth when she entered Hampton Institute, [as 1903] or she may have said she was sixteen years old in order to enter the school.” Kittrell Trustee Box, Correspondence folder, Hampton Archives. Neverdon-Morton verifies the age policy, 16.

⁸⁶ Carrie Lyford, *A Book of Recipes for the Cooking School* (Hampton: Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, 1921).

⁸⁷ Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, *The Greater Hampton Movement*, 14, Julius Rosenwald Fund Box, Hampton Archives.

suggested that every effort had been made to ensure that this work was not merely “a tiresome routine” but somehow a “means of mental and moral development.”⁸⁸ Carrie Lyford, who ran many of the women’s courses and their “industries,” noted that students were “neither exploited” in their work “nor...restricted to preparation for a trade” in their training. Lyford even suggested that some labor *cost* the school money because of the level of supervision required.⁸⁹ For Lyford, a labor-intensive work program could be congruous with rising academic standards. Over the course of the 1920s, students would increasingly, vocally disagree, forcing changes in the overall administration of the school.

Kittrell arrived while the work year was still in full swing, but it would be almost completely gone by her graduation. Though she completed most of her campus work in the Teachers Dining Room, Kittrell also did some training in sewing (Summer 1922) as well as in the Boarding and Laundry departments (Fall 1922). In the summer of 1925, Kittrell worked for her first and only time off campus, at a home in Wellesley, Massachusetts.⁹⁰ This would have been a way to supplement her other earnings accrued at Hampton. Only one letter survives from this assignment, and Kittrell does not describe her work. What she does mention is her plan to “see John Alden’s house and Miles Standish’s monument and grave” in nearby Duxbury, Massachusetts. In other words, Kittrell was off to engage in some early colonial revival tourism. As with her reminiscences about her childhood, Kittrell does not mention that this was another time and place where she did domestic work. Kittrell’s archival trail—when woven in and out of her work records—is full of such evasions.

⁸⁸ *Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute Principal's Report 1917*, 4.

⁸⁹ Carrie Lyford, “A Picture of Life at Hampton To-Day” in “The Home Economics School.” 15; Elizabeth Hyde, “Through Two Administrations or Conclusions on the End of an Era, Hampton’s Work System,” Hyde Dean of Women Box, Hampton Archives.

⁹⁰ Kittrell to ‘Miss Emily,’ 1925, Kittrell Trustee Box, Correspondence folder, Hampton Archives.

Another striking detail in these work records is the fact that Flemma was not the only Kittrell from Henderson working at Hampton. Almost all of her work, according to labor records, was performed in the same places, and therefore near her older sister, Rosa Kittrell. Her training, in fact, began almost exactly one year after Rosa began her work year in the fall of 1918. Rosa also studied Home Economics at Hampton, and both came to share a passion for early childhood education.⁹¹ In time, both would use their Home Economics training to create pioneering nursery programs, Rosa in New York and Flemma North Carolina. As a student, Rosa was seen as a creative type. Called “Rose Socialist,” Rosa listed “Building Air Castles” as her “aim in life” and “hobby” in the 1927 yearbook. She also had a flair for writing, contributing a yearbook poem in which praised “dear old Hampton, my kind guardian mother, / I truly do love thee, ‘My home by the sea.’”⁹²

Kittrell followed her sister in many ways, but this fact was not part of the narrative she crafted about herself. She also failed to note that her brother Fred, who attended Hampton for many of the same years, graduated from the college program in 1933.⁹³ Instead of mentioning Rosa and Fred as further evidence of her family’s dedication to improvement, Kittrell seems to have crafted her life story based on tales of singular paths to upward mobility. A proponent of the idea that “the family is central,” *her* family was not central to how she remembered this period, at least publicly. There could be many reasons for this silence. As Rosa’s poem suggests, Hampton was called a “home by the sea.” In various mediums, the language of domesticity was

⁹¹ Rosa Kittrell Barksdale, *The Intuitive Entrepreneur* (Indianapolis: Dog Ear Publishing, 2010), iv. Rosa later worked in mental hygiene and in a kindergarten program. See Gabriel Mendes, *Under the Strain of Color: Harlem's Lafargue Clinic and the Promise of an Antiracist Psychiatry* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015); Michael Pellegrin, “Reception Celebrates Book that Fills Hole in White Plains' Historical Record,” May 18, 2011, *White Plains Patch*, <http://patch.com/new-york/whiteplains/reception-celebrates-book-that-fills-hole-in-white-pl95d3cade2b>.

⁹² Rosa Kittrell, “O Hampton,” *The Hampton Student*, May 1927, 17, Hampton Archives.

⁹³ Information on Fred in Correspondence Folder, Kittrell Trustee Box, Hampton Archives.

deployed to describe the campus as a home for the “Hampton family.”⁹⁴ This idea was reinforced by administrators, particularly those who believed teachers should take on a parental role.⁹⁵ But students also used this language to their own ends. In more private records, like scrapbooks, female students identified with one another as “sisters.” In addition to Rosa’s records, this discourse runs throughout Kittrell’s private records. In addition to relationships with her “sisters,” Kittrell kept a message from a faculty member, likely Martha Doles Hunt (class of 1882) who called her a “dear daughter” and signed off as her “(Practice Home) Mother.”⁹⁶ Perhaps Rosa, Flemmie, and others could accept this “imagined family” because in some ways, it was not so different from the broad and complicated kin networks they grew up with.

This idea of being part of a large family may have also served as a form of solace and protection from trauma that struck the Kittrells in this same period. While Flemmie and Rosa were working to serve meals to their so-called “Hampton family,” their father James died of an inguinal hernia in September 1919. Their older sister Mabel died less than two weeks later of pellagra. At the time, Mabel was only 22, but already married and employed as a domestic worker.⁹⁷ The personal effect or toll that this took not only on Flemmie but also her surviving siblings must have been immense. Kittrell’s early transition to Hampton must have been shaped by this family tragedy. Her work records do not suggest a pause or break, so she may not have even returned to Henderson to mark these deaths.

Contemporary records on student life at Hampton suggest that a highly regimented program would have kept little free time or opportunity for prolonged visits home. From the

⁹⁴ “1923 Home Economics Class,” *Hamptonian: 1923* (Hampton: Hampton Institute Press, 1923).

⁹⁵ “Hampton is the parent” in George T. Scott, “Hampton Institute and Education on the Foreign Field”(no date) Foreign Exchange Box, Hampton Archives.

⁹⁶ Hunt entry, Kittrell Autograph Book, Box 104-2, Folder 6, Kittrell Papers, MSRC. For more on Hunt, see Folder: Martha Hunt, Box 101, Hampton Archives; “Another graduate,” *Southern Workman* 51, no.1 (1922):42.

⁹⁷ Death Certificate for James Lee Kittrell, 24 September 1919, File No. 326, North Carolina State Board of Health; Death Certificate for Mabel Alston (Kittrell), 9 October 1919, File No. 37, North Carolina State Board of Health.

youngest students at the Academy to the advanced college students, all were meant to immerse themselves fully in a new life at Hampton. For faculty and for students, Hampton was not merely a place to work or take classes. Along with her sister, while Kittrell was working and then studying in the Academy, she would have lived in the Virginia-Cleveland building, sometimes referred to as Virginia Hall.⁹⁸ This “imposing four-and-one-half-story red brick structure” is considered “a typical picturesque High Victorian” built on “an almost monumental scale.”⁹⁹ Designed by Richard Morris Hunt, a favored architect among American millionaires, administrators noted that it “was 'sung up' by the Hampton Singers.”¹⁰⁰ With dormitories, a cafeteria, and at one time a chapel, Virginia was one of many spaces where life, work, study, and missionary impulses were constantly reinforced. Though the outside world was not too far from the shore, Hampton was rather like a world onto itself.

A Visitor's Guide from 1926 published on campus provides some insight into the tight timeframes of students' schedules. From 5 a.m. until the early evening, Hampton's students were engaged in some form of work nearly all day across campus. While promising a spectacle of labor, the *Guide* also suggests coming early, during the flurry of activity around the “breakfast hours.” After this period, women could be found gathered in wash dresses for morning recitations. Throughout the rest of the day, young men could then be found in the fields, while one could catch “glimpses of girls in the hallways and bedrooms, in the laundry and dining-rooms.” During her cooking rotations, Kittrell may have been one of the women “serving the wholesome breakfast ... in white caps and aprons;” or one of the students wearing a gingham

⁹⁸ The building was first completed in 1874. Later additions made it the Virginia-Cleveland, with the addition of the Cleveland wing in 1901.

⁹⁹ Hampton Institute, Hampton, Virginia, National Register # 69000323, 2.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 11-12

apron for “heavy cleaning.” Given this in-depth report on how much work to expect, readers can almost forget that this was a school—and growing college.

Other records further emphasize the hum of carefully managed activity that was taking place in the dorms. In each living area, teachers and student leaders supervised “the details of management, order, and minor discipline.”¹⁰¹ Administrative records from these and other areas suggest that every aspect of campus life was seen as a project. In providing an “education for life,” students literally equipped themselves with everything they needed for daily life. Athletic activities, social gatherings, teas and graduations all required separate forms of attire; almost all were made by the Hampton “girls” for themselves and or male students. To instructors, specific lessons on how to make clothing or meals were as much about providing these resources as learning a particular way of dress and comportment. Even graduation day was seen as a time to celebrate the gowns made by Hampton's own in the millinery shops. While faculty insisted that this was a “home-like” environment, it was also an active, industrial-scale operation.¹⁰²

Those most likely to use the rhetoric of domesticity, such as the administrators, were well aware that Hampton was not an informal or private familial unit. Rather, it ran like a large, cooperative industrial project, where many of the “family tables” remained “separate and quite unequal.”¹⁰³ Powerful trustees and administrators knew that no one could eat, bathe, or dress well without the constant work of the female students. Similarly, without the male students and faculty, there would be no bricks to execute the designs of famous architects. But their names were less likely to end up on campus buildings; grants from capitalists and trustees were also

¹⁰¹ Hampton Institute, *1926 Visitors' Guide*, Student Handbooks Box; See also Carrie Lyford, “The Home Economics School” 1921-22, Home Economics Box 3, Hampton Archives.

¹⁰² Carrie Lyford, “The Dormitory as a Home” in *The School Dormitory: Administrative and Educational Problems* (Boston: M. Barrows & Company, 1932). Lyford later became Associate Supervisor of Indian Education for the Department of the Interior, where she published *Quill and Beadwork of the Western Sioux* (1941), *The Crafts of the Ojibwa* (1943) and *Iroquois Crafts* (1945).

¹⁰³ Baker, *Turning South Again: Rethinking Modernism/Re-Reading Booker T.*, 50.

vital to sustaining this system, and they were far more likely to be honored. These were many of the same people, after all, invited to come to Hampton with the *Guide*. The presence of outsiders, and particularly those who could bring money, was not fleeting; their role in sustaining the campus was impressed upon the landscape. Thus, while the work of running the campus was thought to be educational and functional, there was also a performative element when donors were visiting the school.¹⁰⁴

Even in print, students had to find ways of demonstrating their sense of industry and gratitude for the industrialists who sustained the school. One of the handwritten documents penned by Kittrell in this period shows the pressure to achieve this balance. In December of 1920, just before that year's winter recess, Kittrell sent a letter to a Hampton donor identified only as "Mrs. Purves." This was likely Helen Ogden Purves, the president of the Armstrong League at Hampton in 1921. Though the letter appears to have been written by a steady hand, there would have been good reason for her fifteen year old hand to waver. In addition to the events of the past year, there was the added pressure of writing to a distinguished benefactor, a fact likely impressed upon Kittrell. The Purves owned a home situated right on campus, and their comings and goings were often featured in the *Southern Workman*.¹⁰⁵ A prominent philanthropist, Purves came from a dominant Hampton lineage with not one, but two threads of leadership. Her father, Robert Ogden, had once served as a Principal of the school and her husband, Alexander Purves, was the Treasurer.¹⁰⁶

In addition to living in a kind of "model home" on campus, "Mrs. Purves's" family also financially backed the construction of 500 hundred homes in Macon County, Alabama for

¹⁰⁴ The "Hampton Incidents" sections in *Southern Workman* typically provided details on recent visitors. See "Foreign visitors" in the Index to *Southern Workman*.

¹⁰⁵ Hampton Institute, *Southern Workman* 43, no.1 (1914): 261-262; Puryear, *Hampton Institute*, 58.

¹⁰⁶ "Ogdenism and its Enemies," in *Dangerous Donations*, 38.

African American families in earlier years.¹⁰⁷ Given the Purves family's clear investment in domesticity, it is worth speculating whether Kittrell specifically received funding because of a burgeoning interest in Home Economics. Kittrell does not mention how she came to earn the scholarship, but does insist that her mother "thought that it would be wiser" to come to Hampton than to "be at home" completing her education. Sidestepping the fact that life "at home" would have been increasingly difficult without two key breadwinners, Kittrell adds, "she did not only want me to come but I was so anxious to come myself, especially to take up Home Economic [sic] work." Describing Hampton as "such a nice place for girls," Kittrell concludes, "I thought that I knew very much about Dining Room work...but I was very much mistaken." Talking about the Teachers Home, she adds, "I do not think there is any work at Hampton for girls that I like better." Finally, as if she were copying from the *Visitors' Handbook*, she opines, "I wish that you could be here to see all of the students coming to breakfast at six o'clock in the morning."¹⁰⁸ Given Purves's proximity to campus, it is possible that she did observe Kittrell doing such work at one point.

Beyond discussions of her work, Kittrell also uses this letter to discuss her academic aptitude and enjoyment of a range of classes, including Mathematics and Civics. Kittrell adds that she likely would not "have even stayed in school as long as I have already" if not for Purves's scholarship. The formulaic deference in this letter suggests that at best, it is a limited source for revealing Kittrell's perceptions of Hampton. At the same time, this letter speaks to the capacity of a not-yet-16-year-old girl to not only adapt to Hampton, but to endure a work year in order to obtain an advanced education. For most of her first year at Hampton, Kittrell only took a few classes while working to pay her way alongside Rosa. Then, from 1920-1924, she completed

¹⁰⁷ Thomas J. Edwards, "Classes of Negro Farmers in Macon County, Alabama," *Southern Workman* December 1911 XL, no.12 (1911): 672.

¹⁰⁸ Kittrell to Purves, Hampton Archives.

the Academy program. By completing this high school program, Kittrell was already entering a higher level of education than *most* Americans of the time.¹⁰⁹ Going on to complete her college degree would make her more exceptional. Whatever she thought of the institution in 1920, she would not leave Hampton until nearly eight years after writing that letter.

Kittrell's yearbooks provide more insight into these early years at Hampton. Offering a far more tempered appraisal or perception of her experience in the Academy, Kittrell's classmates write, "We have seen you worry and fret/And your moody ways have been a regret/Yet you are a jolly good companion/A real '24 sport and a true Hamptonian." This contradictory, but perhaps deeply telling characterization of Kittrell as both "moody" and "jolly" points to a kind of emotional darkness not found almost anywhere else in Kittrell's archival papers. Out of her entire graduating class, Kittrell is one of only two students not to receive a nickname. Though seen as a "fair maiden," classmates also chide her somewhat, adding that she is "timid, shy, and bashful." Then, in a puzzling turn in her "history," the yearbook author writes that while she initially "would never smite even an ant," at some point, "there cometh a great change [.]"¹¹⁰ When considering the tenacity Kittrell must have had to build the career that she did after leaving Hampton, perhaps this was an early sign that Kittrell was not just a "fair" student, but a strong woman who would be dismissed by some peers as "difficult."

Kittrell's autograph book is just as polarized. A student named L. Harding writes, "if you should ever feel towards someone else (D) as you do me tell him, there's an ounce bottle of carboic acid on a shelf behind on an empty coffee can. Drink hearty." Yet in the same book, Bee Beaumont writes, "You must always stay the same sweet girl [.]"¹¹¹ These comments, and along

¹⁰⁹ Claudia Goldin and Lawrence F. Katz, "Human Capital and Social Capital: The Rise of Secondary Schooling in America, 1910-1940," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 29, no. 4 (1999): 683-723.

¹¹⁰ Histories in *Hamptonian: 1924* (Hampton: Hampton Institute Press, 1924).

¹¹¹ Kittrell Autograph Book, Box 104-2, Folder 6, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

with the note of being a “true Hamptonian,” are now rather opaque. Kittrell, who could be both sweet and strong willed, might not have been receiving a compliment. By calling her a “true Hamptonian,” more radical students might have been noting Kittrell’s willingness to defer and comply with what they called the “Hampton way.” At the same time, Kittrell must have indeed *also* been seen as a “sport,” as one commentator put it, because she was named the class parodist and asked to write the class will. Showing a flair for the dramatic, Kittrell writes that the body of students “has been in a critical state of health for four years now and is about to pass into another sphere of existence.” Continuing the metaphor, she adds, “her pulse is beating at a most alarming rate; her nerves are all on edge; and her temperature is now one hundred and thirty.” This number refers to the class size. This was much reduced due to attrition, and Kittrell might have derived some pride and pleasure from completing the program. After describing her “crammed brain,” Kittrell also offered a series of bequests, including clown suits, to the class of 1925.¹¹²

Through these brief snapshots, it is almost easy to forget the larger, contentious debates over race, “normalcy” and social progress occurring at the time. But life continued outside of the confines of Hampton, and as Kittrell was working to complete her Academy program, life in Henderson brought other challenges. Though never mentioned in any of her files, public health records reveal that Kittrell’s brother Isaac was murdered in October 1924.¹¹³ Covering the story, the *Henderson Daily Dispatch* carried a sparse headline: “One Negro Killed by Another Negro.”¹¹⁴ The attack appears to have been random, isolated, and senseless. Anyone following the subsequent articles on the man convicted with Isaac’s murder would have noticed an ongoing trend toward both lawlessness and a selective vision of “law and order” in town. Scarcely a day

¹¹² Kittrell, “Class Will,” *Hamptonian: 1924* (Hampton: Hampton Institute Press, 1924).

¹¹³ Death Certificate for Isaac Kittrell, 3 October 1924, File No. 114, North Carolina State Board of Health.

¹¹⁴ *Henderson Daily Dispatch*, Henderson, NC, October 4, 1924.

passed without some mention of Klan activity or of a course of action taken against a black resident in town.¹¹⁵

With these events taking place back home, Kittrell had to weigh her future options. At this time, Kittrell would have been making decisions about her future and whether or not she would continue with her training at Hampton. The most common options for her as a female graduate of the Academy would have been teaching or starting a family; in some communities, both might have been an option. During her academy years, Kittrell entertained at least one suitor. In her autograph book, "Al" noted, "I'm sorry you don't like me as you used to. I'll see if I can reform." Elsewhere, others took note that she might have had "hopes of leaving the house of Kittrell."¹¹⁶ But Kittrell seems to have ultimately taken the advice of her friend Gladys Ferguson, who wrote in her graduation book, a less formal yearbook:

If a young man seeks you / to become his wife/ happiness or
misery will be yours for life/ don't be in a hurry your feelings to
confess/ but think that matter over (sic) before / you say 'yes.'¹¹⁷

Kittrell would quip with one interviewer that she did not marry because she "did not sit still long enough."¹¹⁸ But Kittrell was likely making calculated decisions about her future prospects as well as conferring with friends about "confessions" and feelings. After four years at the Academy, Kittrell decided to stay, a decision as much about education as a prerogative to delay marriage and not return home. That next year, she would not even go to North Carolina in the summer, making the aforementioned trip to Massachusetts instead.

¹¹⁵"Isaac Kittrell..." *Henderson Daily Dispatch* (Henderson, NC), Sep. 24, 1924.

¹¹⁶ The "house of Kittrell" remark is from her yearbook. In her small friends book, Bee Beaumont writes, "You must always stay the same sweet girl and sweeter still to Mr. J." Al, who signs lovingly writes, "I am sorry you don't like me as you used to. I'll see if I can't reform." (1926)

¹¹⁷ Kittrell Autograph Book, Box 104-2, Folder 6, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

¹¹⁸ Ottley, "Flemmie Pansy Kittrell."

Kittrell's decision to stay does not mean that she agreed with all of the operations at Hampton. But she would refer to the "Hampton family" as one that mattered to her for the rest of her life, so she accepted this concept to at least some degree.¹¹⁹ Of course, as she knew well, all were not equal in this family. Patriarchal figures, wealthy male donors, and white matrons held the most power, while black and Indian students were often described in paternalistic terms. Students were rightly critical of the fact that they were sometimes treated as if they were children. Yet this discourse of the school as family also allowed for homosocial living opportunities not available outside of religious spaces and perhaps settlement houses and other reform institutions. In practice, inflexible—or "traditional"—notions of family could not often be upheld at Hampton. Many of the female faculty, such as Kittrell's "(Practice Home) Mother" Martha Hunt, were well educated women who frequently traveled, ran their own departments, and remained unmarried. This must have had some impact, because Kittrell would live as these women did for the rest of her life. By staying to study Home Economics, this was the beginning of Kittrell's investment in domestic ideals fulfilled through academic outlets.

What Kittrell could not have known just from her time at Hampton is that the presence of unmarried, highly ambitious women teaching about the family on college campuses was more common than not. At one of the nation's top Home Economics programs, Professors Martha Van Rensselaer and Flora Rose had a relationship that was academic and romantic; together, they ran a household, practice home, and a College of Home Economics at Cornell.¹²⁰ While they implicitly upheld the idea that the heterosexual, nucleated family was the bedrock of society in their writings, they lived in a way that exposed the plasticity of the underpinnings of family life.

¹¹⁹ "Hampton Institute Dedicates New Home Economics Building," *Journal and Guide* (Norfolk, VA), clipping in Kittrell Hall Box, Hampton Archives. See also: Bob Williams, "Hampton Institute Dedicates New Home Economics Building," *Daily Press* (Hampton, VA), Jan. 30, 1967, second front page.

¹²⁰ Megan J. Elias, "'Model Mamas': The Domestic Partnership of Home Economics Pioneers Flora Rose and Martha Van Rensselaer" *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 15, no. 1 (2006): 65-88.

These women—and others in the discipline—did not see hypocrisy in living a life that was very different from most of the people they encountered and educated. Perhaps this was because their appearance of singleness was in line with what was expected of other professional women working on maternalist issues. As with many of Kittrell's teachers, Home Demonstration agents and high-level federal employees working for the USDA and Bureau of Home Economics usually did not marry or only did so much later in life.¹²¹

There may have been other reasons why Kittrell chose to study the family rather than begin her own. Compared to the difficulty of raising a family in rural North Carolina on a teacher's salary, Kittrell had found a way to secure an extended, relatively unencumbered period to explore her interests. In her college years, Kittrell became involved with various facets of campus life, including the Religious Work Committee and the YWCA. She was also instrumental in the creation of the Calliope Club and Literary Society, a group formed "to foster the habitual use of good English, to encourage self-expression, and to foster an acquaintance with the best books in literature as well as to promote scholarship on campus."¹²² While cultivating these interests, Kittrell ran "a delightful tea room" with fellow Home Economics major Felice Watson, offering "refreshing drinks, ice cream, sandwiches, salads, and cakes" to students, staff, and visitors.¹²³

This enterprise would have been distinct from other forms of campus labor. Though providing an income and involving similar work to what was done in the Teachers Home, for

¹²¹ Virginia Bernhard, ed., *Hidden Histories of Women in the New South* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1994), 138; Linda Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 195; Lu Ann Jones, "Professional Paradoxes" in *Mama Learned Us to Work: Farm Women in the New South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002). For more on single women and professional work, see Susan B. Anthony, "Homes of Single Women" in Katherine Anthony, *Susan B. Anthony: Her Personal Story and Her Era* (New York: Doubleday, 1954), 337.

¹²² Mae Pleasant, *Hampton University: Our Home by the Sea* (Virginia Beach: Donning Company, 1992).

¹²³ "The Willow Tree," *Southern Workman* 57 no.9 (1928). *New York State College of Home Economics Annual Report: 1928*, 28.

example, this project might signal an attempt on Kittrell's part to establish a wider range of expertise. In the mid-1920s, the fields of cafeteria and dormitory management were in high demand. In internal reports at Hampton and Cornell, these were considered quality jobs for educated women.¹²⁴ This was also not the only way that Kittrell expanded her Home Economics training outside the classroom. Perhaps the most significant extracurricular activity Kittrell engaged in was her involvement in the Home Economics Association. This was a student-run group designed to bring students of domestic science and later, students in Home Economics, together with local "workers, housekeepers, and former students" to discuss domestic and teaching problems.¹²⁵

This association's activities exemplified a longer tradition wherein female graduates were expected to "teach the 'Hampton Way' to the rest of her race."¹²⁶ In addition to this Association, students would also undertake seasonal projects such as 'Baby Day.' During this event, "tired mothers" from nearby communities had a period to rest while their children—nearly a thousand in all—would be "carried to the seashore and looked after for the day by volunteer assistants."¹²⁷ On a more frequent basis, students would also work in settlement houses, some of which were run by Hampton alumni.¹²⁸ Projects in these spaces included running night schools and supervising the "club house, play grounds, gardens," and children's clubs.¹²⁹ With these endeavors, Home Economics students were encouraged to take on managerial roles. Students

¹²⁴ *New York State College of Home Economics Annual Report: 1928* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1928): 28.

¹²⁵ Ruby Martin, "The Origin of the Home-Economics Association" *Hampton Student* (1921): 7-8.

¹²⁶ Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, *The Greater Hampton Movement*, 14, Julius Rosenwald Fund Box, Hampton Archives.

¹²⁷ H.B. Frissell, *The Forty-Third Annual Report of the Principal: 1911* (1911): 37.

¹²⁸ William Anthony Avery, "Training Homemakers," 3, n.d., General Folder: Home Economics, Hampton Archives.

¹²⁹ Report of Mrs. Mary E. Burrell, Superintendent of the Domestic Science Department, Read before the National Association of Colored Women, July, 1912, Hampton, VA.; *Hampton Student* records also show many classes making their own mottos, such as 'Not at the top, but climbing,' *The Hampton Student* (1913): 1.

were careful to note that their work was *for* domestics and other laborers in town—they saw an important difference between their work and that of other women linked to domesticity.¹³⁰

After graduation, given this focus on serving entire communities, most former Home Economics students became teachers or worked through Extension networks. Others also likely became homemakers, but those who worked in professions were more often featured in *Southern Workman* reports. One agent who wrote back to her *alma mater*, Lizzie Jenkins, became the District Agent in Charge of Negro Home Demonstration Work for Virginia.¹³¹ Jenkins described her role as “anything and everything possible to help make the county in which she goes to work a better place.”¹³² To a large degree, this meant working to bring her education to larger communities by forming home makers’ and home demonstration clubs.¹³³ Jenkins’s interest in serving her community through modeling and education was scarcely new or unique.¹³⁴ Much of what she was doing, in fact, fit squarely within broader discourses and projects related to uplift. But Jenkins and Kittrell’s cohort, as well as their mentors in Home Economics, configured this work differently, focusing on their connection to state-based networks and scientific approaches.

While working within a community as an educator was not at all new, a job with Home Demonstration was a fairly recent opportunity. For Kittrell’s cohort, women’s community service was more visible as a result of World War I.¹³⁵ It was not so much the death of “the Wizard of Tuskegee” but the increasingly complex needs of a warring state that started to shift the conversation on women’s public education and service.¹³⁶ During the war, in Virginia alone,

¹³⁰ D.C. Jones, ‘Sugar from Sawdust,’ on Agricultural and Domestic-Science Demonstration, *Hampton Student* (1922).

¹³¹ Elizabeth Hendry, “1929-1930 Report on Home Economics,” Home Economics Box 3, Hampton Archives.

¹³² H.B. Frissell, *The Forty-Ninth Annual Report of the Principal: 1917* (1917): 24.

¹³³ Lizzie A. Jenkins, “Training Negro Home Makers,” Anna T. Jeanes Fund Records, Hampton Archives.

¹³⁴ Virginia Church, “Solving the Problem” *Southern Workman* 41, no.7 (1911): 402.

¹³⁵ H.B. Frissell, *The Forty-Fourth Annual Report of the Principal: 1912* (1921): 31.

¹³⁶ Christopher Capozzola, *Uncle Sam Wants You: WWI and the Making of the Modern American Citizen* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

Hampton women were associated with more than 500 clubs, 1,100 gardens, and responsible for “over 50,000 vegetables and 92,777 quarts of fruit canned” during the war.¹³⁷ Generally, this type of work was sponsored and furthered by state-based aid coming from the Smith-Lever Act (1914) and the Smith-Hughes Act (1917).¹³⁸

These acts offered much stronger support for teacher-training and Extension work than what had previously been available.¹³⁹ Financial support was not distributed equally across the 1865 and 1890 land-grant colleges, and Hampton could not expect the same post-war boom as a state school. But the Smith-Hughes Act diverged from many earlier trends in that it dispersed funds that enabled more historically black colleges to adjust their curricula.¹⁴⁰ Within a few years, references to “Smith-Hughes” teachers and training were frequent within the *Southern Workman*. From the vantage point of women such as Jenkins, the promise of a broadened system for professionalism *seemed* to open new opportunities. Yet, it would become increasingly clear that the funding given to black colleges and black agents working in Extension was not only inadequate, but far below the “white” standard. As this separate and unequal system became more entrenched, the wartime legislation passed to control rural agricultural production and educational training would have a great impact on what could be achieved at many educational institutions in the decade to come.¹⁴¹

As plans for “upgrading” programs in “rural fields” were being executed by faculty and Extension staff at other institutions, Home Economics Professor Carrie Lyford saw a need to alter the program at Hampton. Mirroring the rhetoric of Extension boosters, Lyford stressed that

¹³⁷ H.B. Frissell, *The Forty-Ninth Annual Report of the Principal: 1917* (1917): 24.

¹³⁸ “Hampton’s New Courses,” *Southern Workman* 51, no.11 (1922): 519.

¹³⁹ United States Office of Education, *Biennial Survey of Education 1916-18* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1921), 370-375.

¹⁴⁰ Penny Ralston, “Black Participation in Home Economics: A Partial Account,” *Journal of Home Economics* 70, no.5 (1978): 35.

¹⁴¹ Herbert Hoover, “Two Letters,” *Journal of Home Economics* 10, no.3 (1918): 96b.

Home Economics was particularly vital for African American women. As a multi-faceted, community-oriented course of study, Home Economics enabled the "(1) improvement of the girl, (2) improvement of the home, and (3) improvement of the community."¹⁴² In line with the national trend, Lyford sought to create a program equipped "to train teachers of Home Economics, home-demonstration agents, and industrial supervising teachers."¹⁴³ But Lyford was not merely responding to the lofty goals being promoted in education circles. The starker reality was that the teacher training Hampton had been offering was no longer going to suffice. Concurrently, stricter state-based requirements for teacher training were implemented in Virginia; now, students could no longer rely on only earning a degree from the Academy or a two-year post-secondary course.¹⁴⁴ Teaching was central to the Hampton mission, so Hampton would have to change.

In addition to Lyford's advocacy, as historian Elisa Miller argues, outside "[p]ressure from academics such as [Paul] Hanus and students helped to create a more demanding institution."¹⁴⁵ Hanus, a specialist in Vocational Education from Harvard University, audited the domestic science training sites and visited Hampton graduates' homes in 1917.¹⁴⁶ Seeing that students were "not satisfied with mere technical ability," pursuant to Hanus's audit, there was a push for "thorough training in the how and why of cooking, sewing, laundering work, gardening, methods of teaching, and community organizations."¹⁴⁷ While retaining some aspects of the old

¹⁴² "Home Economics for Negro Girls" Carrie Alberta Lyford, Address at the meeting of Southern Home-Economics Conference held at George Peabody College, Nashville, June 1921 Vol. L no. 11 Nov. 1921 p.515

¹⁴³ Robinson, *History of Hampton Institute*, 314.

¹⁴⁴ Robinson, 315.

¹⁴⁵ Elisa Miller, "In the Name of the Home: Women, Domestic Science, and American Higher Education, 1865-1930," (Ph.D. Diss., University of Illinois, 2004), 93.

¹⁴⁶ Paul Hanus, *Report of a Study of Hampton Institute* (1917), Hampton Archives.

¹⁴⁷ Avery, "Training Homemakers," 1

program, this emphasis on “why” would be brought in through liberal arts courses.¹⁴⁸ This new emphasis was in line with what alumni had been advocating, and would continue to advocate for in the next decade.

Increasingly well-educated faculty, particularly those coming from stronger land-grant programs boosted by federal funding, must also be credited with transforming Hanus’s suggestions into practical changes. A significant step toward this stronger academic program was the elimination of the separate funding sources for domestic science and domestic arts.¹⁴⁹ Rather than divide these two areas, faculty members wanted a single Home Economics department. In 1923, students wryly observed in the yearbook that the “revised,” “higher...standards of education” they were promised clearly “could not be done in a day.”¹⁵⁰ While internal reforms *did* come too slowly for many of these students, within a year, faculty announced that they had formed a full collegiate program. Kittrell, who entered the first full class—could now pursue a four-year degree in Home Economics.¹⁵¹

In addition to changes within the course structure, the work system was also eroding. In subsequent years, students would only take on a work morning, a significant departure from the long established ritual of students beginning their training with work. A new department head was also named to replace Lyford, who left Hampton in this period.¹⁵² Lyford, who was one of the earliest women to earn a degree in the discipline, had dedicated her scholarship to Native American crafts and handiwork. Given her experience running women’s “industries” and her

¹⁴⁸ James E. Gregg, “Vocational Home Making” *Southern Workman* 50, no.4 (1921).

¹⁴⁹ Elizabeth Hyde, “Domestic Science and Domestic Art,” Dean of Women Report, 1-2, Hampton Archives.

¹⁵⁰ “1923 Home-Economics Class,” *Hamptonian* 1923.

¹⁵¹ Blanche Purcell, “School of Home Economics,” *Hampton Alumni Journal* (1924): 21-22.

¹⁵² James E. Gregg, *The Fifty-Sixth Annual Report of the Principal: 1924* (1924): 6.

interest in crafts, Lyford likely seemed a less than ideal leader to usher in a new college program.¹⁵³

Students immediately responded to these changes, and requests for study in the four year collegiate program increased sharply each year. By 1925, there were even concerns about *over enrollment* in the four-year Home Economics program, with numbers increasing by 300% in 1925.¹⁵⁴ Students were demanding more courses, in part, because the courses were more demanding.¹⁵⁵ For Kittrell and her peers, earning a Home Economics degree now required a wide range of academic work. Even when Home Economics was a distinct collegiate division, the coursework involved extensive coursework in other branches of the sciences and arts. Students also took a range of electives related to teaching, including “school hygiene, principles of vocational guidance, grade methods, education tests and standards.” These courses were to serve as complements to study in Education, Psychology, Physiology, Textiles, Handicrafts, and Art. Students also took classes in Rural Sociology and methods courses for teaching cooking, sewing, tailoring, and home furnishing.¹⁵⁶ Again, this was the difference between skill and study, knowing how and teaching others.

As Kittrell’s transcript shows, an education in Home Economics was as firmly grounded in Public Speaking, Botany, and Chemistry as Hygiene and House Construction. Her best subjects, in fact, were European History, Literature, Cookery, and the Practice Home.¹⁵⁷ From Historic Costumes to Bacteriology, students in the new collegiate trajectory received an education that was both well-rounded and firmly grounded in the liberal arts and sciences.

¹⁵³ Paulette Fairbanks Molin, “Training the Hand, the Head, and the Heart: Indian Education at Hampton Institute,” *Minnesota History* 51 (1988): 82-98.

¹⁵⁴ Purcell, “Home Economics at Hampton Institute,” 1925, 14

¹⁵⁵ Report of Mrs. R.B. Rollinson, 1926-1927, Home Economics Box 3, Hampton Archives.

¹⁵⁶ Loose sheets on Course of Study 1922-23, 8-9, Home Economics Box 3, Hampton Archives.

¹⁵⁷ Kittrell’s transcript dated April 23, 1929, shows the number of weeks and hours for each content area.

Administrators insisted that this was all part of “a carefully mapped out course—a course designed to make more efficient, stronger women.”¹⁵⁸ This course, while “carefully mapped” also swerved in and out of a variety of disciplines, through laboratories and classrooms all over campus.¹⁵⁹ Given this range of coursework, home economists and their students were comfortable with inhabiting spaces that blurred not only disciplinary lines but also the boundaries between work, home, and school. Put another way, to be a student of Home Economics was not to be isolated or bound to work spaces in the kitchen.

Though they could often be found among students of Agriculture, for instance, home economists also had spaces of their own on campus. Prior to the 1920s, there were frequent complaints about insufficient facilities. With the upgrade to a college-level course, however, new classroom spaces, including new dining rooms, art classrooms, and bulletin centers were added.¹⁶⁰ There were even clothing exhibits, with “colored plates of historical costumes [and] costumes of other countries” to provide greater exposure to art and history.¹⁶¹ This emphasis on cultural training and a major aesthetic makeover can be attributed to the leadership of Blanche Purcell, who became Director of Home Economics in 1923. Trained at the Kansas State Agricultural College and Teachers College, Purcell argued that “Home Economics means the study of the past, present, and future of food, clothing, and shelter, and their application to the betterment of human beings in relation to body, mind, and spirit.”¹⁶² An avid cookbook and historic textiles collector, Purcell brought a new level of rigor and wider set of possibilities to the program.

¹⁵⁸ Loose sheets on Course of Study 1922-23, 10, Home Economics Box 3, Hampton Archives.

¹⁵⁹ See Puryear, *Pictorial Review* for more details on these buildings: 25,28,30,52,55.

¹⁶⁰ Course of Study, 1922-1923, 15.

¹⁶¹ *Visitors' Handbook*, 16-17.

¹⁶² Purcell, “School of Home Economics,” 21.

Along with the Dean of Women, Louise Young, Purcell argued for more work with art and art appreciation in Home Economics. Lyford had already set some precedent for this type of work by taking students to the library and the Hampton Museum for "Historic Costume" courses.¹⁶³ Purcell furthered this tradition by making an extensive study of "painting and sculpture, period furniture, oriental rugs, tapestries, laces, and various textiles" across fourteen American galleries. Just as impressive was her photographic index on nearly 700 exhibits from the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art.¹⁶⁴ The students who would have been among Kittrell's peers reported studying clothing styles as far back as ancient Egypt and "dolls that covered a period of over 1600 years." These same students were also exposed to a special guest lecturer who came "dressed in an old Colonial costume of peach-colored brocaded silk."¹⁶⁵ Purcell pushed for more and more of a focus on this kind of work, stressing that a Hampton woman's education had little to do with vocational training, save for teaching as a vocation.¹⁶⁶

Outside of the classroom, Purcell also urged Gregg to procure and commission new artwork. Lobbying for her cause, she argued that students were "sensitive to beauty" and "dormitory life offers a fertile field for learning to love at least a few great pictures."¹⁶⁷ Such comments must be read in relation to the *Visitors Guide* and other descriptions of life at Hampton. Rather than see Home Economics as linked to *work*, Purcell sought to make this field a viable basis for understanding art and aesthetics. Kittrell, who was to teach "The Art of Living" throughout her career, clearly took something of value from Purcell's worldview.

¹⁶³ Carrie Lyford, "Study of African Textiles in the Museum," *Fifty-Third Annual Catalogue of the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, 1920-1921* (1921): 86.

¹⁶⁴ "Mrs. Blanche W. Purcell," *Southern Workman* 65, no.2 (1936), faculty listing.

¹⁶⁵ "An Illustrated Lecture on Costumes," *Hampton Student* (1921), 5.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ Louise Young, Dean of Women, to Dr. Gregg, 23 April 1924, Dean of Women Box, Hampton Archives.

Kittrell would also be greatly affected by another experience from her time at Hampton: her time in a practice home. According to Purcell and experts in Home Economics at the time, the practice house was an ideal place for refinement. Working with “the wives on campus,” presumably women married to male faculty members, as well as female faculty and administrators, Purcell was insistent on creating a scientific and “beautiful” space for students to “practice” homemaking. While students were theoretically already receiving training in quasi-domestic spaces, such as the Teachers Dining Room, a practice home or cottage was needed to solidify the program's academic standing at that time. A full-scale practice home was built by male Hampton students from the Trade School between 1923 and 1924, in time for Kittrell to spend time there.¹⁶⁸ Designed to accommodate “useful and simple” furniture and decorations, the house included bedrooms, a long sitting room, and a library.¹⁶⁹

As with other parts of campus, students were encouraged to think in family terms in the practice home. One report outlines the surreal setup: “Instead of having one of the girls as hostess we would like to have her as the so called Mother and the other students as her daughters, in order to make it as much like a home as possible.”¹⁷⁰ Notably, there were no men in this scenario. Staff insisted that despite the highly regimented schedule and homosocial division of labor, a student’s time there was like “life itself and life is not formal.” Yet there were actually quite formal ways of regulating time in the home, and Purcell often stressed that students must take a calculated approach to work flow, using tools from scientific management. This contradiction is perhaps most evident in Purcell’s article in the *Southern Workman*. While conceding that it was rather “difficult to estimate the value of the Practice-Home work in

¹⁶⁸ Purcell, “The Home in Home-Economics Education,” 157-161. The benefactor, Hattie Strong, later created her own foundation and scholarships are still given to those seeking teacher training through her bequests.

¹⁶⁹ Purcell, “Home Economics at Hampton Institute,” 11.

¹⁷⁰ Purcell, “Home Economics at Hampton Institute,” 12.

quarter-hours of credit," the quantifiable value was "three quarter-hours." During Kittrell's tenure, this allotment of credits required twelve weeks of training, with eighteen hours of "laboratory" work each week.¹⁷¹ This was not an unsubstantial or casual experiment in living.

Furthermore, in documents written for and about the home, there was an emphasis on separating this space from other systems of domestic work on campus and paid domestic labor off campus. While the focus was on practical experiences with cooking, cleaning, budgeting, entertaining and even landscaping, faculty also argued that it was "an opportunity for artistic expression."¹⁷² To that end, students could entertain and even receive callers, which would have been significant to students who otherwise had few socializing opportunities on campus. Perhaps there was even more freedom in this regimented space when compared with the dormitories. Within a few years, the practice home was in such great demand that "twice as many as can be accommodated are scheduled to take work in the present house."¹⁷³ For her part, Kittrell earned an "excellent" mark for her time in the Practice Home. This course and household management were among her best subjects. Purcell would have been proud to know that later, one of her private residences became the Practice Home and model apartment at Bennett College.

While the practice home model would persist for many decades, it is most often associated with homemaking courses in the 1950s.¹⁷⁴ But these spaces were actually considered far more important in the 1920s, when constructing these homes was seen as a vital part of an

¹⁷¹ Kittrell's time in the Practice Home is documented on her official transcript from Hampton dated April 23, 1929. See also Dedication Box 4, Practice House Folder, Hampton Archives.

¹⁷² Purcell, "Home Economics at Hampton Institute," 9.

¹⁷³ James Gregg, *Sixtieth Annual Report of the Principal of Hampton Institute: 1929* (1929): 15-17.

¹⁷⁴ "The Making of a Home: Cornell Girls Study for their Big Job," *Life Magazine*, Apr. 7, 1952, 121. A renewed interest in Practice Homes emerged with Lisa Grunwald, *The Irresistable Henry House* (New York: Random House, 2010) a work of fiction about a grown practice baby. See "Practice Babies': An Outdated Practice, Rediscovered," *NPR* Jan. 6, 2011; Susan Donaldson James, "Practice Babies': 1 Orphan Raised by 8 Mothers," *ABC News* Jan. 7, 2010.

institution's legitimacy.¹⁷⁵ In connection with President Hoover's Better Homes in America Campaign, high schools and colleges were increasingly adding practice components to domestic science and Home Economics curricula. Hampton was directly in line with these trends, and many faculty members saw this newly regimented home within the context of a Home Economics department as an important change.¹⁷⁶ One divergence was that Hampton students did not care for orphaned children, as they did at Cornell, for instance.¹⁷⁷ Otherwise, this program was seen as a direct offshoot of comparable setups at land-grant college programs.

While Hampton leaders touted the “newness” of the practice space, these declarations obscured the extent to which establishing model spaces at Hampton was not especially new.¹⁷⁸ In the early years, the “civilizing” project of the school had been inextricably bound up in training for “rightful” living at home, a mission promoted by the Freedmen's Bureau.¹⁷⁹ Those with longer memories would know that inspections of homes “bettered” by Hampton graduates were a more than thirty-year-old practice by this time.¹⁸⁰ More broadly, throughout Reconstruction, the notion that free blacks were not entitled to full privacy at home had often been used by white reformers to justify coming into otherwise private domestic spaces. The project of supervising students in the practice home, then, had startling echoes to the “home visits” conducted by “friends of the race” who intruded into freedmen's homes in the 19th century.¹⁸¹ But there were

¹⁷⁵ James Ford and Blanche Halbert, *School Cottages for Training in Home-Making* (Washington: Better Homes in America, 1926); Karen E. Altman, “Consuming Ideology: The Better Homes in America Campaign” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 7 (1990): 286-207; Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994* (New York: Norton, 1999), 131.

¹⁷⁶ R.B. Rollinson, “1926-1927 Home Economics Annual Report,” Dean of Women Box, Hampton Archives.

¹⁷⁷ For more on the program at Cornell, see papers on “Dicky Domecon,” Box 59, Folder 5; Folder 43, Box 20, NYSCHS Papers; “Practice Apartments,” in *What Was Home Economics?*, <http://rmc.library.cornell.edu/homeEc/cases/apartments.html>

¹⁷⁸ Wexler, *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism*, 67.

¹⁷⁹ Mary Farmer-Kaiser, *Freedwomen and the Freedmen's Bureau: Race, Gender, and Public Policy in the age of Emancipation* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010).

¹⁸⁰ See *Hampton Album*; work on remodeling in *Southern Workman* 65, no.2 (1936).

¹⁸¹ Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 160-162.

also connections to another tradition at Hampton. Some veteran teachers might have recalled that early Native American students had been trained in the “arts” of middle class home life. One prominent graduate from this tradition was Anna Dawson Wilde, a Native American student who became a “model” of domesticity at Fort Berthold Indian Reservation, North Dakota.¹⁸² With the recent decision to end the program for Native Americans and Lyford’s departure, by the late 1920s, Wilde and the project of annihilation she represented might have seemed a distant memory.

Significantly, students at Hampton in the 1920s *chose* to see an important ideological break between this work of the past and the new Practice Home. Hampton alumna Rebecca Franklin, '30, wrote to her teachers that after completing her course of study, she was proudly serving as the “model” in her community. But her role was not limited to keeping a neat home, or showing other women how to keep house. For Franklin, the test of her training came with a flood that required her to organize a census, plan menus, and create “crisis” lunch rooms for her community. Reflecting on this episode, Franklin specifically credited her time at the new Practice Home when explaining how she managed the crisis.¹⁸³ As Franklin suggested, “the training contributes much to be carried over into actual life situations to help make better and more cultured homes and communities.”¹⁸⁴

To Franklin and her instructors, there was no doubt as to the value of her training in the quasi-domestic spaces of Hampton to her broader career as a home economist. It is noteworthy that Franklin’s frame of reference for the utility of the “practice” was not running a private home

¹⁸² Jane Simonsen *Making Home Work: Race, Gender, and Native American Assimilation in the American West, 1860-1919* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

¹⁸³ Rebecca Franklin, “Home Economics, A Preparation for Service,” *Southern Workman* 59, no (1930): 365-367.

¹⁸⁴ Franklin, “Home Economics,” 366.

for herself or someone else's home as a domestic.¹⁸⁵ Rather, what Franklin was prepared to do was serve as a community organizer and liaison for all things domestic. Practice Homes were hardly representative of typical family living situations in that they were composed of all women sharing the labor equally and had no men or children. The lack of controversy over the usefulness of this type of training suggests that graduates were exposed to a malleable notion of domesticity.

Outside of this space, when Hampton students were cooking, they were not cooking just for one unit. Hampton students were taught instead to take up their part in "a common responsibility for the maintenance in comfort, health and happiness of a large quasi-family" at Hampton.¹⁸⁶ While rationalizing their part in sustaining a system of "women's work," home economists increasingly sought to apply their training in empirical inquiry and time management to the campus. Those with a land-grant college background especially stressed that their training in food science, management, and other areas should give new meaning to this "common responsibility." Determined to see their obligatory supervisory labor as something more than a tedious responsibility, Home Economics faculty kept careful perhaps even excessively detailed annual records.¹⁸⁷ To emphasize just how much they were supervising, they noted details about every meal (at least 800 breakfasts) and every piece of clothing made for them, down to the number of gymnastic suits (68) and work aprons (106) constructed each year.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ Jennifer Tomas, "'Better Homes, Better Schools, Better Churches, and a Better Country': The International Council of Women of the Darker Races," *Women and Social Movements*, <http://wasi.alexanderstreet.com/>.

¹⁸⁶ Revised Memorandum on the Duties of Women and the Director of the School of Home Economics, February 1927, 1, Dean of Women Papers, Hampton Archives.

¹⁸⁷ Washington's similarly obsessive tracking of campus activity is analyzed in Baker, *Turning South Again*, 97.

¹⁸⁸ Elizabeth Hyde, "Report on Girls' Industries and Dormitories," n.d., Elizabeth Hyde Dean of Women Box, Hampton Archives.

The same level of detail was applied to the kitchens and dining halls, where home economists and a resident physician tracked calorie intakes and levels of food waste.¹⁸⁹ Seeing the dining areas as “one of the best places on the campus to measure the barometer of the school,” these experts took to quantifying each aspect of the work process with great precision, imagining this as an extension of their academic work in Home Economics. For this new cohort of Home Economics faculty, using the campus as a platform to showcase their expertise in clothing production and calorie counting was a means to power. As one professor argued, “the person who directs the nutrition of the campus holds one of the strategic positions in the institution.”¹⁹⁰ Whereas in the past, “connect[ing] the school’s boarding department with the domestic science in such a way that it should be a means of education” was “nearly impossible.” Now, every meal made, consumed, and cleaned up after was part of a larger program in Home Economics.¹⁹¹ *This* was not banal administrative work anymore—it was a way to monitor the *science* of living.

Tracing Kittrell’s various forms of on-campus work and home economists’ reports on their departments’ contributions exposes the ways in which largely invisible, gendered labors were used to run a self-sufficient campus. On a practical level, students, faculty, staff, and even visitors all benefited from the fact that the male students built many of the school’s buildings, including housing for instructors. These are still tangible, and perhaps easier to recognize than the women’s work, which tended to be more fleeting and mundane. Yet the women on campus carefully documented their work and that of the entire “women’s department” as a way of keeping a vital record. While these faculty members did not question that women would be in charge of food preparation, their insistence in seeing it as a scientific endeavor gave them a new

¹⁸⁹ “Diet of Students,” March 22, 1921, Home Economics Box 4, Hampton Archives.

¹⁹⁰ Loose sheet, 6, Home Economics Box, Hampton Archives.

¹⁹¹ H.B. Frissell, *The Forty-Sixth Annual Report of the Principal: 1914* (1914): 26.

framework for traditional labors. To reduce all work systems across Hampton's history to constant drudgery is to miss these changes and the ways that women both accepted *and* adapted the framework of domesticity.¹⁹²

The fact students could be washing tables in the morning and taking advanced bacteriology in the afternoon reveals the extent to which Hampton had become a confusing and contradictory academic institution in the mid-1920s. While work still remained central to the overall operations of the school, for those keen enough to admit it, Hampton was in the throes of a major transition from Reconstruction-era mission program to modern college. Though there were now many paths to a college degree, there were still many trade courses. For many students, it was not so much the course offerings but the strict guidelines regulating socialization that proved troublesome. Particularly for those in the college program, these remnants of the early mission school were intolerable. In some ways, Kittrell's quip about not marrying or "sitting still long enough" obscured the tight restrictions Hampton faculty put on students' social lives. Kittrell may have been fifteen when she arrived, but by the time she left, she was twenty four; had she wanted to pursue another Hampton student, it would have been difficult.

As James Anderson argues, the Hampton model had been "easier to maintain when the institutions were composed of half-grown elementary students [.]"¹⁹³ By 1927, of the approximately 1,000 students enrolled, 417, or nearly half, were in the college division. Within two years, by 1929, high school students were no longer enrolled at Hampton at all. A group of students with heightened expectations, frustrated by the gradual approach taken at Hampton, erupted with frustration during the aforementioned 1927 strike. Their protest emerged partially in response to a new movie policy—specifically, students were outraged that they were refused the

¹⁹² Elizabeth Hyde, "Through Two Administrations or Conclusions on the End of an Era, Hampton's Work System," Hyde Dean of Women Box, Hampton Archives.

¹⁹³ Anderson, *Education of Blacks*, 273.

privilege of a darkened movie theater during the silent film *Chang* (1927). This caused an outburst from the students, who despite attending a college-level program were not allowed basic courting opportunities. There is no way of knowing how much the students saw of the film, purported to be a “vivid and thrilling film conception of man's fight for life in the Northern Siamese jungle,” As the students sat in a fully lit room, scenes with “happy” natives taming elephants, tigers, and leopards flashed across the screen, punctuated with shots of equally content bears, and the “comical” simian Bingo.¹⁹⁴ Given this content, perhaps students were equally outraged by the lights being on as the images of pliant, docile “natives” in front of them.

In the days to come, students refused to sing or to show up for classes. While the strike could be blamed—according to some—on a juvenile response to a new movie policy, Gregg at least knew better. As another contemporary summarized, “the strike had been most carefully and cleverly planned for some time and it was evidently the culmination of grievances, whether real or imaginary, of many years [.]”¹⁹⁵ Once news of the strike spread, W.E.B. Du Bois weighed in on the matter in *The Nation*, highlighting the very real and legitimate grievances students had. Based on insights gleaned from “a loyal Hamptonian,” Du Bois argued that the students were frustrated by Hampton’s “discouraging of college work and the exploitation of certain methods of ‘learning by doing.’”¹⁹⁶ While attempting to elevate the course level, Hampton’s leaders still seem to have fallen short of rising expectations.

Clearly, declaring that Hampton would be a college and actually raising the academic standards across the board to make it one were two different matters. In their list of complaints

¹⁹⁴ Mordaunt Hall, “Chang: A Drama of the Wilderness” *New York Times Review* (New York, NY), Apr. 30, 1927.

¹⁹⁵ “Story of the Strike October 24, 1927” 1-2; Ogretta McNeil, “Strike,” Strike Box, Hampton Archives. See also: Keith Schall, *Stony the Road: Chapters in the History of Hampton Institute* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1977), 154-159.

¹⁹⁶ W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Hampton Strike” *The Nation* (November 2, 1927): 471-72; David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois, 1919-1963: The Fight for Equality and the American Century* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2000).

against the school, the strikers were critical of work “in the academy, the trade school, and the school of agriculture.”¹⁹⁷ They were also frustrated with the food quality and clothing regulations. Interestingly, the student strikers did not mention the attendant labor that went into making the food or clothes. Likewise, Home Economics is also never mentioned as a problematic discipline. Yet women who lived and worked on campus were involved in the strike, and among those named later as participants, a few were Home Economics students. They have left behind no list of grievances, however, and their experiences have often been muted in relation to the words of Du Bois and the informant “Hamptonian.”

Whatever she may have thought of the event, Kittrell did not participate. Even though she has been listed in a few secondary sources as one of a few female students who were suspended, there are no contemporary records from within the Hampton archives to confirm this.¹⁹⁸ Even if Kittrell’s name was removed from internal lists later, the records from Du Bois’s papers also fail to mention Kittrell.¹⁹⁹ With so much of an emphasis on those who rebelled, perhaps it became unthinkable to see a largely successful graduate as compliant. To a degree, there is no way of knowing what Kittrell made of the event. While sitting in the Memorial Chapel, a monument to dated system of work and study, it is possible that she simply did not want to risk her position.

In responding to the strike, Gregg conceded the need for less gradual change.²⁰⁰ In the months to come, Gregg made some alterations, such as shifting the demography of the faculty by hiring more black teachers. Overall, he avoided radical shifts in policy.²⁰¹ Instead, he became

¹⁹⁷ "Reasons Why Hampton Students Struck," Strike Box, Hampton Archives.

¹⁹⁸ Miller Dissertation, 89, footnote 150. I examined multiple versions of the administration's lists on disobedient students. Kittrell is never listed on any of these drafts. The final "Do Not Re-Admit List" from 22 October 1927 does not include her name either.

¹⁹⁹ Robert Coles, List of students expelled, suspended or dismissed from Hampton University, June 8, 1928; Student protest committee roster, 1927, MS 312, W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

²⁰⁰ Gregg, *Fifty-Ninth Annual Report of the Principal: 1927* (1927): 5.

²⁰¹ Pleasant, *Hampton University*, 85.

convinced that he could root out “bad” students. One theory was that most of the young men involved in inciting the strike were from locations that “have a population of over 10,000.”²⁰² Privately, while he considered whether urban-based students were a problem, he publicly encouraged students to think of this as a family affair. He suggested that “as in the life of a large household, there are bound to be some moments of difficulty and disagreement [.]”²⁰³ Local newspapers echoed Gregg’s sentiment, deciding that outsiders were not to blame, as the strike had been “fomented within the household of Hampton Institute.”²⁰⁴

Despite Gregg’s hesitance, incongruities within the system at Hampton were starting to become starker. When Kittrell first arrived, at least 77% of students did a full work year and worked during their school years. Whereas all laundry, for example, was once done by first-year women, by 1930, “outside labor” took care of this work. Over the course of her tenure at Hampton, incidentally, the relationship between work and education at Hampton had irrevocably, if very slowly, changed.²⁰⁵ Within the new, collegiate level courses at Hampton, students and workers were distinct populations. For some, this was an obvious sign of progress, proof that the strike had been necessary and effective.

For others, this change was also a loss, as poorer students could no longer look for the safety net of a full work-year. Kittrell was one of the alumni who remained ambivalent about the change. When reflecting on the matter in 1977, she insisted that the work-year had been “necessary then,” and valuable to her particular situation. She would also clarify that such a program could not stand alone. Students who did work should also be given “a good intellectual education to go along with it.” Combining training in basic skills, however, with such an

²⁰² Miss Drinkwine to Dr. Gregg, 31 October 1927, Strike Box, Hampton Archives.

²⁰³ Gregg, *Annual Report 1927*, 3.

²⁰⁴ “Race Issue in Strike at Hampton Institute,” *Daily Press* (Hampton, VA), Oct. 23, 1927.

²⁰⁵ George Phenix, *Report of the President: 1930*, (1930): 4-5.

“intellectual” backing was not always easy to reconcile, as the strikers would have been quick to point out.

Just as Hampton was adapting to become more like other liberal-arts based institutions in terms of its structure and offerings, the notion of a broader program with an “education for life” was being considered in new places. While Kittrell was finishing her training in Home Economics, several elite women’s colleges instituted experimental Home Economics programs. At Vassar, Home Economics entered the academic program through the Trojan Horse of Ellen S. Richards, an alumna and MIT professor often considered the founder of the field. Here, Kittrell and the trustees of Vassar had something in common. Later in life, Kittrell claimed that a book on Richards’s community-centered approach to science convinced her to forgo political science for Home Economics.²⁰⁶ Richards’s empirically-based practical approach to solving social problems had been attractive to Kittrell. What she likely did not know in 1924 is that some graduates of women’s colleges in her peer group were also finding this idea attractive.

In the 1920s, Vassar Trustee Minnie Blodgett, '81, decided to create a program in honor of her friend and fellow graduate Ellen Richards. Blodgett was interested in Richards’s work in part because of the “near death of her baby, for which she blamed her ignorance about motherhood” and health.²⁰⁷ In proposing anything like Home Economics at Vassar, Blodgett knew that the name of the program mattered. Just as Hampton was abandoning “domestic science,” at Blodgett’s bequest, Vassar trustees would consider the merits of a program in Euthenics, a term invented by Richards.²⁰⁸ The collegiate program and connected short courses would be based in content areas such as “nutrition, heredity, child hygiene, principles of

²⁰⁶ Tate interview, 4.

²⁰⁷ Miller, “In the Name of the Home,” 226.

²⁰⁸ “The Disappointing First Thrust of Euthenics,” in Elizabeth A. Daniels, *Bridges to the World, Henry Noble MacCracken and Vassar College* (Clinton Corners: College Avenue Press, 1994).

education, legal rights of the child [.]"²⁰⁹ Knowing that such a program would be a departure from Vassar's usual collegiate program, Blodgett shrewdly pushed her program ahead by donating half a million dollars for a new building.²¹⁰

Some Vassar alumnae and faculty were quick to support Blodgett's plan. Julia Lathrop, who was heading the Children's Bureau at the time, sparsely and directly declared "that such a school is a legitimate part of the College."²¹¹ Another ally was the suffragist and college president Henry Noble MacCracken, who considered it "remarkable" that in the 1920s, "none of the well known women's colleges of the country is in possession of a single substantial endowment which encourages the study of the family or the child."²¹² The criminologist Katherine Bement-Davis also weighed in, arguing that this program was a way to rectify "the failure to connect the work of the schoolroom with actual life...education is not a thing apart."²¹³ No one dared invoke the phrase "education for life" or call this program Home Economics here, though the boundaries separating such programs from the likes of Vassar were fraying around the edges.

In general, the program was not popular, save for one faculty member who became especially passionate about Euthenics. Annie Louise MacLeod, a woman "educated in the strictest Brahmin tradition" before coming to Vassar to teach chemistry, was a major proponent of the work of Euthenics.²¹⁴ MacLeod became interested in applying her work to campus life when she started an extensive study of the students' diets in the cafeteria, tracking their food

²⁰⁹ Henry Noble MacCracken to Raymond Fosdick, 23 September 1921, 3, Box 47, Folder 483, Appropriations: Child Study and Parent Education, Vassar College, 1921-1928, Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Records, Rockefeller Archive.

²¹⁰ "Ground Staked for New Building," *Vassar Miscellany News* (Oct. 24, 1925).

²¹¹ Julia Lathrop to Mr. (Raymond) Fosdick, 11 October 1921, Box 47, Folder 483, LSRMF Records.

²¹² MacCracken to Mr. Fosdick, 23 September 1921, Box 47, Folder 483, LSRMF Records.

²¹³ Internal Report by Katherine Bement-Davis, 3, Box 47, Folder 438, LSRMF Records.

²¹⁴ Annie Louise MacLeod, "Home Economics: A Liberal Education," *Journal of Home Economics* 37, no.9 (1945): 547.

intake and general levels of waste.²¹⁵ As with the women at Hampton, what started as a curious interest was elevated into a legitimate academic path with the war.²¹⁶ With “temporary” courses in domestic economy now being offered, MacLeod had a base to lodge her passionate defense for Euthenics and translational work. In the same tradition of “making the best better,” the motto of 4-H, MacLeod imagined a program for “college women who will be better citizens, better wives, and better mothers, from a better knowledge of their own lives, [and] the environment in which they are placed [.]”²¹⁷ While destabilizing the idea that women would *naturally* know how to be mothers, this plan emphasized that domestic training should be part of women’s education even at elite academic institutions.

This language can read as both an extension of Progressive ideals and as a form of reactionary rhetoric in light of the Nineteenth Amendment and nativist movements. Just as Kittrell and her peers were encouraged to become “race women,” there was clearly a sense at elite, predominantly-white colleges that more work needed to be done to improve family and community standards for their graduates. Based on Blodgett’s actions, she believed that the best way to solve these questions was to endow a program and a building. Unfortunately, while the building still stands (and is known for an *experimental* program in having students do work for themselves) her vision has not really been enduring. Now, according to a campus historian, “most people who pass through Blodgett do not know what euthenics is, often confusing it with eugenics.”²¹⁸ In retrospect, there were in fact clear areas of overlap with eugenics in euthenics in that students were training to be “better mothers” and taking courses in heredity. But this

²¹⁵ Annie Louise MacLeod and Mary A. Griggs, “Dietary Study at Vassar College,” *Journal of Home Economics* 10 no.3 (1918): 97.

²¹⁶ Miller, “In the Name of the Home,” 248.

²¹⁷ Annie Louise MacLeod, “Euthenics at Vassar,” *Journal of Home Economics* 18 no.3 (1926): 119-122.

²¹⁸ Barbara J. Harris, *Beyond Her Sphere: Women and the Professions in American History* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1978), 135; Vassar Historian, “Ellen Swallow Richards,” *Vassar Encyclopedia Online*, <https://vcencyclopedia.vassar.edu/alumni/ellen-swallow-richards.html>.

conflation of the two fields is revelatory for still other reasons. Like eugenics, the history of Home Economics is often filed away or erased on campuses where it seems incongruent with modern liberal arts studies. The fact that Euthenics was about providing better living environments as a means of social change—a premise that contradicts the field of eugenics—is an aspect of Richards’s legacy that has been forgotten.

Ultimately, MacLeod became so frustrated with trying to teach Euthenics at Vassar that she decided to leave. Taking a position at Syracuse University, MacLeod taught chemistry in Home Economics. Later, MacLeod wrote about what she saw as the “artificial distinction” between vocational and cultural courses. In defense of Home Economics, MacLeod argued, “we need make no apologies...or try to hide under a requirement of 50 per cent of liberal arts like specifications for a blanket 50 per cent wool and 50 per cent cotton.”²¹⁹ These words ring true for at least one other prominent women’s college graduate. While Kittrell was working in Wellesley and hoping to visit Pilgrims’ graves, Smith College alumna Ellen Puffer Howes created the Institute for the Coordination of Women's Interests.²²⁰ After completing a survey of recent graduates from Smith, Howes sought to create a program to “integrate the woman's normal family life with a genuine continuous intellectual interest.”²²¹

To Howes, in a period of changing social roles—for all women—the Institute was a way to achieve balance and fulfillment for women. The Institute would run for six years, from 1925-1931, and would include everything from a nursery school program, to home dinner delivery, and “practical demonstrations” for women in the area. There were also classes on “the nutrition,

²¹⁹ MacLeod, “Home Economics: A Liberal Education,” 547.

²²⁰ Ethel Puffer Howes, “Questionnaire to Alumnae for Program Development,” Institute for the Coordination of Women's Interests Records, Box 1, Folder 8, Smith College Archives.

²²¹ Ethel Puffer Howes, *The Progress of the Institute for the Co-Ordination of Women's Interests, Report at Alumnae Conference* (Northampton: Smith College, 1928), 8, Institute for the Coordination of Women's Interests Records, Box 1, Folder 26, Smith College Archives.

physical and mental development, management, and education of the young child and the principles of parental education."²²² While much of this was exactly like Home Demonstration courses and programs, the Institute was catered to fairly elite women in Northampton. Seeing these developments, many home economists were thrilled that Home Economics, in some form, had come to Smith.

Most faculty members at Smith were not nearly as pleased. For many, these kinds of applied courses focused on the home had no place in an institution dedicated to the liberal arts.²²³ Largely because of their protests, by 1931, the program was done.²²⁴ Historically, it has not fared well either; Howes's life has even been labeled "a capitulation to male prejudice" in one account.²²⁵ An analysis written by Jill Conway, the first female president of Smith, is equally condemnatory. To Conway, the Institute represented a period when "women's intellectual energies were channeled into perpetuating women's service role in society" and their "intellectual enquiry remained unquestionably male controlled."²²⁶ The Institute—conceived, planned, and run by Howes—was not seen as a female-driven solution, but an abject failure established to meet patriarchal desires and demands.

This resistance to Euthenics and general rejection of anything like Home Economics is not entirely surprising within the context of these colleges. From the start, these institutions were designed in opposition to other programs with vocational study. At Vassar and Smith, the early founders and architects had embraced the Collegiate Gothic style to keep them "free of seminary

²²² C. Todd Stephenson, "Integrating the Carol Kennicotts": Ethel Puffer Howes and the Institute for the Coordination of Women's Interests" *Journal of Women's History* 4, no.1 (1992): 92.

²²³ "Smith College Institute for the Coordination of Women's Interests," *Journal of Home Economics* 21, no.5 (1929): 354.

²²⁴ Elizabeth A. Harwick, "In Search of the 'Good Life': Ethel Puffer Howes and the Institute for the Coordination of Women's Interests," and Amelie Russell, "A Matter of Compromise: The Institute for the Coordination of Women's Interests at Smith College, 1925-31," Institute for the Coordination of Women's Interests Records, Box 2, Folder 28, Smith College Archives.

²²⁵ Harris, *Beyond Her Sphere*, 136.

²²⁶ Jill Conway in Harris, *Beyond Her Sphere*, 119.

and domestic associations.”²²⁷ With a very different vision of family, the caliber of the education at the Seven Sisters was explicitly measured against the large industrial schools purporting to be “quasi-domestic.” Still, from within and outside of these colleges’ walls, critics *and* supporters questioned whether a women’s college degree ought to be fundamentally different, and inextricably tied to work with domesticity. As many detractors and a few proponents were keen to point out, most graduates at these predominantly white schools became wives and mothers.²²⁸ What few cared to admit was that the lines between domestic work and the liberal arts were constantly in flux across many types of colleges.

To some degree, the debates within these institutions represented the problems of the privileged: at Hampton, few women could consider that their training *wouldn’t* lead to work. Yet from Vassar to Hampton, all students had some experiences in common. All had watched as the range of coursework offered to them changed with the war. In the years to come, while some courses stayed, such as Nutrition, others were jettisoned due to divergent attitudes among faculty at each institution. These students were also all affected, albeit in very different ways, by the anxieties surrounding eugenics discourses and the need to “better” families. For Kittrell’s cohort, a desire to train scientifically informed “race women” had enabled Hampton’s faculty to create unprecedented opportunities for black women to earn higher degrees. At the same time, debates over how to educate women who were likely to become mothers at both Smith and Vassar led to an untenable gulf between some alumnae and working faculty.

Overall, while it might not have been clear at the time, the 1920s was a period when Home Economics entered new heights in terms of professional ambition and expanse. While the ICWW at Smith and the Euthenics program at Vassar are particularly prominent examples of

²²⁷ Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, p.237.

²²⁸ A newspaper poll of Vassar students in 1923 indicated that 90 percent wanted to marry, while only 11 of 152 preferred a business or professional position to a husband. See Harris, *Beyond Her Sphere*, 134.

experiments with Home Economics, surveys within the United States Office of Education bulletins show that work within this field was diffuse growing across much of the country. At institutions with entire programs in Industrial Arts, Practical Arts, and other seemingly contradictory curricula, courses of study in Domestic Science and Household Economics were growing in size and scope. Instead of disappearing amidst this rise of collegiate programs, there were now more ways than ever to earn a certificate or full bachelor's degree in a field related to Home Economics.²²⁹ From Ohio State University, to Temple University, Simmons College, Tulane University, and the Teachers College at Columbia University, there were a range of laboratory courses taking place in cafeterias and household arts offerings in the classrooms.²³⁰ Summarizing this period, Isabel Bevier, a professor at the University of Illinois, argued that it was "safe to say that in no other five years of its history has the whole subject of home economics been so carefully studied by so many people as in the last five."²³¹

Bevier and other Home Economics educators working at a range of institutions knew that what scandalized the faculty at Smith was at the core of what constituted most women's *only* opportunity to earn a higher education. In this same period, in addition to traditionally recognizable academic programs, there were still other ways to study Home Economics. Even though formal Extension programs were technically government-funded, extension courses by other names were also available at smaller colleges through summer programs, forms of home-study, and classes known as "short courses." While full-time students at Hampton were demanding less work on "technical" skills, these programs were also adapting to meet short term

²²⁹ Most programs offered the B.S. though a few offered the B.Sc. (University of Nebraska). United States Bureau of Education, *Public, Society, and School Libraries Bulletin* no.25 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1915), 113-14.

²³⁰ The range of instructors teaching Household Arts is extensive; some came from land-grant institutions whereas others were trained at Columbia, Wellesley, Wesleyan, etc. See *Teachers College School of Education Announcement 1921-1922* (New York, NY: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1921); United States Office of Education, *Biennial Survey of Education 1916-18* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1921), 378.

²³¹ Isabel Bevier, *Home Economics in Education* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1928), 240.

students' needs and desires. Though not regarded in the same way as a full academic course, even these forms of training would focus as much on the "cultural" as the "vocational" or "practical," to use MacLeod's terms. A *New York Times* article promoting coursework in Feminine Arts at Teachers College provides an illustration. Describing a course "calculated to make a special appeal to women," the columnist explained that this meant learning about "millinery, the study of foods and cookery, costume design, folk dancing, public health, nursing and other [subjects]."²³² Perhaps the most significant aside in this article was the mention of training in Japanese as well as work with Rural Education. Somehow, all of these topics, considered together, made for a coherent women's program. Women taking these courses, like the students at Hampton going to the Museum to study historical textiles from Africa, were presented with a version of women's education in which internationalism, the household, and rural life were somehow all central. While taking her graduate courses at Cornell in the years to come, Kittrell would see this confluence on a much larger scale in both the College of Home Economics and her classes in Rural Education.

Though these various types of programs are not often thought of together, they share a common impulse to connect abstract fields such as art, and the empirical tools of scientific fields such as chemistry, to everyday life. While she was at Hampton, Kittrell's professor Blanche Purcell spoke out against "the tendency of science to concentrate attention on a small portion of life." For Purcell, Home Economics was the best way to not only learn science, but also to receive an "all-round training in general culture."²³³ By the time Kittrell graduated, with Purcell and other faculty members bringing this vision to the program, Home Economics was seen as an avocation, not a part of vocational training. Along these lines, Kittrell left Hampton in 1928 and

²³² "Women to Direct Columbia Courses," *New York Times* (New York, NY), Jun. 20, 1920; See also Series XXII: Women at Columbia, Box 260, Folder 8, Columbia University Archives, NY.

²³³ Purcell, "Home Economics at Hampton," 12.

stated her employment at Bennett College in Greensboro. Soon thereafter, she also furthered her education by earning two degrees at Cornell. Before her departure, Kittrell handed one of her mentors, the botanist Dr. Thomas Wyatt Turner, a graduation portrait. As a student with a firm grounding in art appreciation as well as the natural sciences, Kittrell came to value Turner's teachings and leadership. Later, by following in his path and going to Cornell, Kittrell would stay in touch. But for the time being, she simply inscribed, "To Dr. and Mrs. Turner, Love, Flemmie."



Fig. 1.5: Flemmie Kittrell, Graduation Portrait

Just as Kittrell kept in touch with her teachers, the faculty at Hampton reciprocated that interest, not just in her, but the whole first cohort of bachelor's students.²³⁴ Over the years, various faculty members kept the letters they received from Kittrell and her peers doing graduate work, perhaps sensing that the field was shifting more than they knew. Over time, these papers would accumulate, filling box after box in the archives. Gradually, Kittrell's papers would be folded into the papers of the entire division of Home Economics at Hampton, forming

²³⁴ Home Economics Director's Report, 1930-31, 2, Hampton Archives.

inextricably intertwined histories. Now, these papers are held in the same museum that Kittrell's class once visited to see historic textiles. Just outside, near Kittrell's former dormitory, there is a view of the shoreline with the Chapel tower. And the bells keep ringing, reverberating through the layers of brick that stand tall in the place Kittrell and her classmates called a "home by the sea."

Chapter Two: Not Foreigners, but Friends

Situated between the steep hills and sharp gorges of Ithaca, New York, the Cornell University campus blends gothic and modern styles in a seamless pastoral frame. Established near the end of the Civil War in April 1865, Cornell's first classes began in October 1868 as another set of battles over the future of labor, land, and capital were taking form. Early on, when describing his eponymous university, Ezra Cornell optimistically declared, "I would found an institution where any person can find instruction in any study."¹ Cornell's goal of creating a place for anyone interested in "mastering all the practical questions of life" would be easier to pronounce than to fulfill.² Within a few years, male international students and a white female student enrolled; African American students would not enter Cornell for several more. For decades past the era known as Reconstruction, the challenge of creating a truly open campus would remain ongoing.

This history of striving for inclusiveness is complicated by the fact that Cornell is both a land-grant institution and a highly selective, elite university.³ Cornell therefore has a particular responsibility to train the people of the state of New York and an impetus to bring in other scholars. As part of this dual identity, the founders also had a plan to blend practical and liberal training. This has been evident in the course offerings, but it is also written into the campus architecture. At Cornell, in bold letters etched in stone, the Rockefellers and Gates are honored alongside Liberty Hyde Bailey, a horticulturalist, and Martha Van Rensselaer, a home economist. In this landscape of titans, reformers, intellectuals, and farmers, rigorous academics are cultivated in rural roots. This trend is perhaps most evident in the College of Home Economics,

¹ Malcolm Carron, *The Contract Colleges of Cornell University: A Cooperative Educational Enterprise* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1958); Kermit Carlyle Parsons, *The Cornell Campus: A History of Its Planning and Development* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968).

² Carl L. Becker, *Cornell University: Founders and the Founding* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1943).

³ Becker, *Cornell University*, 111.

where students took academic courses in practical matters. Though the program began small, support from state-based and philanthropic networks enabled home economists to transform their department and eventually, their college into a nexus for wide-ranging networks of educators.

The program in Home Economics was started by Martha Van Rensselaer, who arrived at Cornell around the turn of the century. Before she had her own bachelor's degree, Van Rensselaer started teaching Farmer's Wives Courses from within the College of Agriculture.⁴ With just a room of her own, Van Rensselaer created a small "home in Morrill Hall," an office from which she would eventually create her own college.⁵ This was an appropriate place for an origins story; Vermont Senator Justin Morrill's eponymous Land-Grant Act of 1862 partially funded the university. As the developing program in what came to be known as Home Economics outgrew Morrill and then a second shared building with the College of Agriculture, Van Rensselaer pushed for a separate space.⁶ Three decades after Van Rensselaer arrived to teach short courses, a \$1 million building—the largest at Cornell to date—was erected in her honor between 1931 and 1933.⁷

A Georgian structure, Martha Van Rensselaer Hall was designed to look like an oversized house. On the outside, evenly placed windows punctuate long rows of buff bricks, and a large front door is capped by a cream pediment. Inside, some aspects were considered traditionally academic, but other spaces, such as the tea rooms, cafeterias, *practice homemaking rooms*, and

⁴ Martha Van Rensselaer, *Saving Steps: Cornell Reading-Course for Farmers' Wives no. 1* (Ithaca: New York State College of Agriculture, 1902).

⁵ Morris Bishop, *A History of Cornell* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962), 379.

⁶ Flora Rose and Esther Stocks, *A Growing College: Home Economics at Cornell University* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969), 519. Van Rensselaer's small office can be seen in the photograph "Various views of the basement room in Morrill Hall" in Human Ecology Historical Photographs, Item BE-M-03, Collection #23-2-749, Division Rare & Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

⁷ New York State College of Home Economics at Cornell University, Eighth Annual Report (Ithaca, 1933), 9; "Dedication to Honor Miss Van Rensselaer," *Advance News* (Ogdensburgh, NY), Dec. 16, 1933; Office of the Dean of the University Faculty, Cornell University, "Memorial Statement: Van Rensselaer, Martha," <http://hdl.handle.net/1813/18429>. See also "Martha Van Rensselaer," *Journal of Home Economics* 29, no.9 (1932): 761-773.

*nursery areas made this building functional and didactic.*⁸ *Blurring the lines between work, study, and home life, MVR Hall was declared a vital “place in which staff and students and the people of the State may come together and together learn to live.”*⁹ *This was not empty rhetoric; New York residents came out in droves to celebrate the new building during Farm and Home Week in 1934. These locals were joined by “Agricultural Celebrities” and First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, who declared the College “the most important part of the university, for it concerns the homes of the people of this country.”*¹⁰ Upon further reflection, Roosevelt suggested, “the whole country is one big family...we go up together or down together.”¹¹ For the years preceding this construction and dedication of this building, the country had been largely going down, and not together. MVR Hall could have been criticized as an extravagant expense, yet finding a suitable “home” for this discipline was seen as vital.

To Van Rensselaer and her supporters, private homes and colleges of Home Economics were not spaces for women to retreat from politics.¹² Instead, these spaces were erected as venues for politicizing, publicizing, and hopefully solving domestic issues. According to Van Rensselaer’s partner Flora Rose, who later became the head of the College, the building would be a constant reminder of “the obligations it imposes... to carry on the services to civilization

⁸ “Doors of Van Rensselaer Hall to Open For 1st Time Tomorrow,” *Cornell Daily Sun*, Sep. 27, 1933.

⁹ Ruth Van Deman, “Martha Van Rensselaer Hall,” *Journal of Home Economics* 26, no.5 (1934):289; Building Plans – Martha Van Rensselaer Hall and Nursery School, Box 1, Folder 5, Ethel B. Waring Papers, #23/13/550. Department of Manuscripts and University Archives, Cornell University Libraries.

¹⁰ “Agricultural Celebrities to Come Here,” *Cornell Daily Sun*, Feb. 9, 1934.

¹¹ “Mrs. Roosevelt Says All Must Go Up or Down in New Deal,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (Chicago, IL), Feb. 16, 1934, 6; Elanie Engst and Blaine Fiedlander, “Cornell Rewind: The Influence of Eleanor Roosevelt,” *Cornell Chronicle*, Dec. 11, 2014, <http://news.cornell.edu/stories/2014/12/cornell-rewind-influence-eleanor-roosevelt>

¹² In an early alumni book, agriculturalist Liberty Hyde Bailey writes, “The Department of Home Economics... is a necessity as a means of developing society. It stands for the evolution of women’s work and place.” See Bailey, “The Department of Home Economics,” 1911-1912-1913 Volume, Box 1, College of Home Economics alumni records, #23-11-2357. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

which the achievement of this building in the name of home economics implies.”¹³ Over time, Rose would suggest that this “obligation” went far beyond local or state borders, stretching to the entire world. For Rose, expanding the reach of the profession was only logical; as she argued, “in whatever country people live, the fundamental problem of people is the kind of homes and the kind of family life that have been established.”¹⁴ For these leaders, occupying a prominent building and a large position on the Agricultural Quad was not just about status, but claiming space and legitimacy for their profession, on this campus and in the world.

The construction of this space was of great interest to many students and faculty for much of Flemma Kittrell’s time at Cornell. Starting with a summer course in 1929, Kittrell spent portions of the next six years traveling to and from Ithaca to take graduate courses. After earning her master’s degree and taking a short leave, Kittrell returned to Cornell. In 1936, she completed her Ph.D. in Home Economics, which has earned her the distinction of being “a first.” For this achievement, Kittrell has often been configured as an outlier—not only within the College but in the history of her discipline. Her achievement was individual, but focusing too much on her “firstness” can erase other contingencies. A closer look at Kittrell’s tenure at Cornell reveals that she was both exceptional *and* part of a broader trend. Kittrell’s tenure as a graduate student overlaps with a more general period of growth wherein the College sought to invest in training minority “leaders” from the South and from abroad. Kittrell’s ambitions intersected with these heightened efforts to expand the scope and political utility of the discipline.

¹³ *New York State College of Home Economics at Cornell University, Seventh Annual Report* (Ithaca, 1932), 13-14. See also: Megan J. Elias, “‘Model Mamas’: The Domestic Partnership of Home Economics Pioneers Flora Rose and Martha Van Rensselaer” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 15, no. 1 (2006): 65-88.

¹⁴ Flora Rose, “Report – Conference on Education for Home and Family Life, 1938,” Box 12, Folder 21, New York State College of Home Economics records, #23-2-749. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library. Hereafter cited as NYSCHE records.

While Kittrell was at Cornell, a surprising number of teachers *from* historically black institutions were trained for administration and leadership *at* these institutions. There was also an emphasis on training minority experts for public service, including work with the segregated Extension service.¹⁵ This was part of a more general upswing in advanced degrees among minority students. Prior to 1920, only twenty-one black students had earned PhDs; over the next decade, thirty more minority students completed doctoral degrees, then 189 between 1930 and 1939.¹⁶ But Cornell had a disproportionate role in this boom in select disciplines. Four college presidents, several directors of Agriculture and graduate study, and many more professors in these fields and Home Economics all earned master's degrees or PhDs at Cornell. In addition to Kittrell's peers who taught in Home Economics, a short list of other notable leaders includes Simon Haley, Frederick Patterson, and Jerome Holland. An emphasis on configuring Kittrell as "a first" has obscured this cohort of fellow leaders, some of whom Kittrell associated with for the rest of her career, such as Jerome Holland, a future president of Hampton Institute.

How Kittrell and these colleagues found funding for their studies is integral to understanding this period of relative opportunity. During the Depression, not all disciplines were affected evenly. Experts working in practical or outreach fields who could scientifically confirm and manage the depths of the Depression found more options than those in traditional academic arenas. Through institutional support and federal Purnell funds, from the early 1920s until 1944, Cornell's College of Home Economics granted 207 degrees in advanced courses of study, of which 23 (roughly 11%) were doctorates.¹⁷ In an affiliated field known as Rural Studies, 40

¹⁵ Office of Research, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Cornell University, *One Hundred Years of Agricultural Research at Cornell University: A Celebration of the Centennial of the Hatch Act, 1887-1987* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1987), 93-94.

¹⁶ Harry W. Greene, *Holders of Doctorates Among American Negroes: an educational and social study of Negroes who have earned doctoral degrees in course, 1876-1943* (Boston: Meador Publishing, 1946), Table 1.

¹⁷ Stocks, *A Growing College*, 156.

graduate students earned doctoral degrees in Rural Sociology and many more earned master's degrees. Many of these alumnae went on to hold "responsible positions" with land-grant colleges, the USDA, local experiment stations, or colleges abroad.¹⁸ For Kittrell, such "responsible positions" would include work with the Office of Price Administration and serving as Dean of Women at Hampton in the 1940s. Though not often considered in histories of higher education, these "rural" fields opened paths to institutional power and work with the state, particularly for minority men and women at Cornell.

This increased attention to cultivating leaders within historically black colleges was contemporaneous with an investment in international education. During World War I, Van Rensselaer and Rose provided educational outreach and nutrition data for Herbert Hoover's United States Food Administration.¹⁹ This service, in turn, opened opportunities for them to work as consultants for both the League of Nations and the Commission for Belgian Relief. With this service, Van Rensselaer and Rose pursued the idea that Home Economics was an ideal field for women to "encircle the world" with through exchange and study.²⁰ Determined to see their rational, scientific approach to homemaking and "domestic" issues spread, they not only worked abroad, but also lobbied for international scholarships. In addition to training women such as Kittrell, these leaders saw great potential in forming exchanges with women overseas. Both demographics—minority women of the South and women from abroad—represented a kind of foreignness to the predominantly white College.

This confluence of interests defies most representations of the field. One reason these interwoven histories of minority training in "rural work" and internationalism have not been

¹⁸ Cornell University, Office of the Dean of the University Faculty, "Dwight Sanderson Memorial Statement," *ECommons@Cornell*, <http://hdl.handle.net/1813/17942>.

¹⁹ Melissa Walker and Rebecca Sharpless. *Work, Family, and Faith: Rural Southern Women in the Twentieth Century*. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 147-149.

²⁰ Martha Van Rensselaer, Presidential AHEA Address, *Journal of Home Economics* 7, no.9 (1915): 461.

explored is the assumption that home economists were almost solely focused on consumption and corporate work past the 1920s. In the same year that Kittrell arrived at Cornell, Christine Frederick published *Selling Mrs. Consumer* (1929). In multiple histories, this book represents a pivotal moment in the discipline; as Dolores Hayden argues, Frederick's book was "the final corruption of home economics."²¹ Glenna Matthews's history of homemakers also suggests that this is when home economists were "bought" by corporations, "not because home economists were weak women...but because the field had been misconceived in the first place."²² More recently, Carolyn Goldstein's work on consumer science has greatly challenged this view.²³ Overall, however, the extent to which all persons in the field of Home Economics were invested in consumer affairs has been overinflated. This is a particularly rich obfuscation when considering that Frederick was not even a home economist.²⁴

This emphasis on consumerism has overshadowed a far more complex set of relationships with corporate America. Though some home economists did work for companies such as Corning Glass, within academia, others forged strategic alliances with corporate philanthropy. Ties with the philanthropic boards of Julius Rosenwald and John D. Rockefeller are in fact what enabled faculty to create and secure scholarships for students from black colleges and foreign institutions. This combination of interests was not coincidental. These concurrent developments echoed the connections between philanthropists funding work in "Southern education" through the General Education Board (GEB) and scientific inquiry and

²¹Dolores Hayden, *Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities* (Boston: MIT Press, 1982), 285.

²² Glenna Matthews, *"Just a Housewife": The Rise and Fall of Domesticity in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 170-171.

²³ Carolyn M. Goldstein, "Part of the Package: Home Economists in the Consumer Product Industries, 1920-1940," in *Rethinking Home Economics*, 275.

²⁴ Frederick presented herself as a home economist. But this was not her training or academic background; this did not go unnoticed by home economists at the time. Christine Frederick, *Selling Mrs. Consumer* (New York: Business Bourse, 1929).

education abroad through the International Education Board (IEB).²⁵ Though focused on different terrains, both programs funded the training of rural experts under the umbrella of the Rockefeller Fund. Through *Alabama in Africa* (2010), Andrew Zimmerman argues that Urban Sociology was developed not only in Chicago, but through international networks of “civilizing missions” tied to Europe and Africa. Connections wrought at Cornell in the 1930s further suggest that *Rural* Sociology was a critical international nexus in the mission of remaking the South and the world in the interwar period.²⁶

In coming to Cornell with funds from both the Rosenwald Fund and Rockefeller’s GEB, Kittrell was part of this global network. Rather than see herself as the *subject* of a “civilizing mission,” however, Kittrell was trained to be a leader and exemplar among “her people.” Despite her exceptional status as a minority on campus, what she shared with the increasingly diverse cohort of women coming to study Home Economics was the potential to become a rural expert.²⁷ Kittrell also found a similar dynamic at Columbia University, when she took summer courses in between earning her master’s degree in 1931 and a doctorate at Cornell in 1936. At both of these institutions, faculty in rural fields shared an investment in casting an increasingly wider net for their expertise. Yet neither was a multicultural utopia; both institutions by and large maintained a gradualist approach to race relations. While opening their College to the world, the home economists at Cornell and faculty in Rural Education at Columbia, such as Mabel Carney, were not ardent integrationists. Both programs taught students that there were certain commonalities

²⁵Stocks, *A Growing College*, 517; “General Education Board: Purpose and Program,” Family Records, Rockefeller Boards, General Education Board, Box 15, Folder 145, Rockefeller Archive Center.

²⁶ Andrew Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

²⁷ Letter to Martha Van Rensselaer from the International Congress of Farm Women, Box 12, Folder 23, NYSCHE records.

across all rural societies—yet Kittrell and her “foreign” peers also learned that the particulars of regional rural life must be carefully studied and each student must return “home.”

While Kittrell had been at Hampton, she would have spent a great deal of time listening to visiting missionaries and dignitaries in the Memorial Chapel. This space was likely the most evident marker of how wide-ranging networks came to converge in Hampton. At Cornell, Kittrell would have watched as MVR Hall—which hosted local “rural” events such as Farm and Home Week—became a site for international exchange. In the words of Esther Stocks, the College’s Placement Secretary, the building became known “a show place,” not only for women from the United States, but also the “large numbers... [of] visitors from other lands.”²⁸ As a magnet for those who came to study rural, isolated communities, this program would open up unprecedented routes for travel; it was as much a place for understanding and leaving behind rural life.²⁹ Tracking the women from around the country and eventually, world who used this space to teach, learn, and spark dialogues adds up to more than institutional history.³⁰ Mirroring the myth of American isolationism in the 1930s, the field of Home Economics has been seen as detached from other areas of study and parochial in nature. Kittrell’s story demands a new interpretation of the ways that women in the field attempted—and sometimes failed—to create exchanges of ideas across disciplinary and racial lines.

In interdepartmental documents, faculty from the 1930s often wrote about Kittrell’s promising career as a researcher and the fact that her work in Home Economics was not merely

²⁸ Stocks, *A Growing College*, 119.

²⁹ Omicron Nu International Fellowship records to 1948; 1949-1950 Foreign student census; AHEA International Scholarship Students Addresses, 1969, Box 235, College Club International Committee Folder, American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences records, #6578. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library. Hereafter cited as AAFCS Papers.

³⁰ Lists of visitors can be found in Box 14, Folders 18-19, NYSCHE records.

for herself, but “her people.”³¹ This same language was also used for women from other countries, and even American Indian students, such as Henrietta Guilfoyle (Hoag).³² In a sense, Cornell’s status as a “centrally isolated” campus presents a fitting metaphor for these minorities working within the College. While at Cornell, Kittrell and her peers from historically black colleges of the South, including Hampton, as well as those from former mission schools or foreign countries were not fully integrated. Sometimes, these students could only find a “place” on campus in groups such as the Booker T. Washington Club or the Cosmopolitan Club, a group designed for international students. Though admitted into their respective colleges and the university as a whole, these students were still expected to align most closely with—and find acceptance among—“their people.”

During Kittrell’s tenure at Cornell and Columbia, some minority students faced serious obstacles in terms of on-campus segregation and discrimination. Kittrell’s records do not directly speak to these moments of discrimination or conflict. Instead, Kittrell’s professors complimented her on being “less race conscious”—a way of suggesting that unlike students who had “problems,” Kittrell mostly deferred to the status quo at Cornell.³³ Yet other forms of evidence, including interviews from her FBI file, suggest that in her scholarship and in her work in downtown Ithaca, Kittrell was working on race issues. Due to Kittrell’s reluctance to reveal certain aspects of this work and discrimination she might have faced, it is impossible to fully understand many aspects of her career in this period or other students’ lives.³⁴ Yet there is still

³¹ In this period, 74.5% of graduates from the South resided there for life. Charles S. Johnson, *The Negro College Graduate* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1938), 41.

³² Mrs. Daniel Edward Guilfoyle (Henrietta Hoag), Box 337, Cornell University Alumni Records, 1869-2006, #41-2-877. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library. Hereafter cited as Cornell University Alumni Records.

³³ Hazel Hauck, “Notes on Course FN 224, Kittrell Deceased Alumni File, Box 315, Folder 2, Cornell University Alumni Records.

³⁴ Darlene Clark Hine, “Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West,” *Signs* 14, no.4 (1989): 912-920.

much to learn from her records and the ways that others outwardly worked to negotiate this contested terrain. Overall, the makeup of colleges may have been shifting, but Kittrell and other students would still feel—as W.E.B. Du Bois famously put it, “in,” “but not of” an institution.³⁵

Placing these experiences in a broader context, Kittrell’s time at Cornell also complicates our understanding of women’s politics more generally during this interwar period of economic decline. The Depression was devastating for many families, and particularly for African American women, 90% of whom continued to work in domestic service or agriculture.³⁶ Seeing a need to meet familial crises with structural solutions and in-depth research, home economists clamored to expand their profession and solve social problems. And for some women, this crisis did provide a small window of opportunity for advanced education and by extension, the means to make claims to particular forms of knowledge about family problems. But this desire to do more within Home Economics was not only about forging a “female dominion” or furthering academic ambitions, though that was certainly one motivation.³⁷

Research projects such as Kittrell’s, which focused on meeting the nutritional needs of black women in North Carolina, were about bridging the practical and the liberal. These projects also spoke to a larger mission for Home Economics beyond working within individual families or even communities. Kittrell and other experts imagined clear links between hunger and political instability. Therefore their work on food supplies, for instance, which could be used to end inhumane suffering, could also contribute to national and global understanding. Through a seemingly conservative framework, home economists in this period found a way to give new life

³⁵ W.E.B. Du Bois, “A Negro Student at Harvard at the End of the Nineteenth Century” in David L. Lewis, ed., *W.E.B. Du Bois: A Reader* (New York: Holt and Company, 1995), 274.

³⁶ Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1985; 2010), 167-171.

³⁷ Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform 1890-1935* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

to municipal housekeeping. This time, however, a wider range of women were working as agents and researchers.³⁸

What's more, Kittrell's mentors saw little reason to limit this work to domestic borders. While at Cornell, Kittrell and her cohort were exposed to the idea that rural people shared certain traits all over the world—and that this notion gave women political power.³⁹ Throughout the 1930s, home economists were actively working to fulfill the ideals of Wilsonian internationalism. This was manifested through work in exchanges and in groups such as the Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW). Toward the end of Kittrell's time at Cornell, members of ACWW who gathered from all over the world on the Ithaca campus argued that women were “realizing now, as never before, how bound up we all are with one another.”⁴⁰ Another member of ACWW described “the thrill” of finding “that there were other people, who, though they spoke other languages and possibly wore other kinds of clothes, still were battling with much the same problems and were interested in the same ideas.”⁴¹ This belief in exchange and internationalism was so strong that some experts thought it might even prevent war. As one rural woman put it, it was as if these women were no longer “foreigners, but friends and neighbors.”

These plans to solve domestic and international problems through a “global sisterhood” were seriously challenged by World War II. Even before the war, the fact that undergraduates of color were denied housing right on the Cornell campus could have suggested that this was

³⁸ Section 1: More than Glorified Housekeeping in Sarah Stage and Virginia Vincenti, eds., *Rethinking Home Economics: Women and the History of a Profession* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Ian Tyrrell, *Reforming the World: The Creation of America's Moral Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

³⁹ Courses detailed in “Summer Session 1929” “Summer Session 1930” “Summer Session 1935,” Box 20, Folders 1-10, NYSCHS records.

⁴⁰ Dame Edith Lyttleton, “The World Crisis-Why?,” in Sholto Watt, ed., *What the Countrywomen of the World are Doing* (London: Chapman and Hall Ltd., 1932), 119. See Box 1, Anna Vertrees Love Ackerly papers, #3847. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

⁴¹ Elsie M. Zimmern, “The Discovery of Internationalism,” *What the Countrywomen of the World are Doing*, 131.

already a failed endeavor. Yet this period of exchange and the educational opportunities created during it should not be so easily dismissed. Some of these connections reemerged after 1945, and prominent leaders trained during this time, including Kittrell, chose to embrace this framework and apply it to the growing military-industrial complex. The zeal for internationalism and extending the field of Home Economics at Cornell clearly left a lasting mark on Kittrell. For the rest of her career, she would find and create ways to work with state politics and on global missions, just as her mentors had. Kittrell could not exactly replicate the career of Flora Rose or any of her other professors. But the politics of pragmatism bound up in encouraging Kittrell to do “race work” but not be “race conscious” left an indelible mark on her approach to administration and international development. Kittrell did not reject, but she did reinvent the tradition of “encircling the world” she found at Cornell.

Before they knew they were living an interwar period, for *some* Americans, the years just preceding the Depression were nearly humming with what seemed to be an endless string of technological advances and quietly negotiated truces. Amidst this optimism and quest for “normalcy,” Kittrell was in her first teaching job at Bennett College in Greensboro, North Carolina. Just one year into her position, in the summer of 1929, she started working toward a graduate degree. Heading to the North to take her first graduate courses on Rural Life, she left the bustle of urban life in downtown Greensboro. With the recent additions of the luxury King Cotton Hotel and the Jefferson Standard Building, the largest skyscraper in the South outside of Atlanta, Greensboro was a city on the rise.⁴² By comparison, Ithaca was a small, relatively isolated college town. Surrounded by the Cayuga lake, Ithaca’s landscape was dotted with

⁴² Gayle Hicks Fripp, *Greensboro* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 1997), 49-50.

academic buildings and small-scale manufacturing factories.⁴³ With famously pleasant summers, Ithaca offered a milder climate, a chance to escape the oppressive heat of a summer in the South.

As agricultural experts carefully tracked the weather that year, they observed warm temperatures. Temporary droughts troubled the faculty at the College of Agriculture, but relief came soon enough that August in the form of “liberal rains.”⁴⁴ As Kittrell was preparing for her trip, one of the most popular songs to pervade the airwaves was jazz singer Ethel Waters’s “Am I Blue?”⁴⁵ The Cotton Club performer’s deeply felt longing and despair seemed, to some, at odds with the mood of the summer of 1929. Just two months later, farmers and businessmen alike watched as the American stock market crashed. This was a painful punctuation point few had wanted to see coming. Yet many farmers, and particularly African American farmers in the South, had not been able to hide behind the luxury of ignoring inequality and poverty.

Kittrell, who later wrote about the desperate poverty in North Carolina in 1933-1934, might not have foreseen the worst of it either that July from her position at Bennett. Initially, Kittrell did not make any set plans for continuing her education at Cornell beyond the 1929 courses. Especially as conditions worsened, Kittrell could have been compelled to abandon her graduate work. Instead, she spent the better part of seven years shuttling back and forth between North Carolina and New York. In various interviews and reflections, Kittrell would provide many explanations as to why she pursued an advanced degree. Whether talking about her desire to serve others, the ease with which she was given money, or the push from her mentor, Dr. Thomas W. Turner at Hampton, Kittrell was careful to not to put herself at the center of the story. Her ambivalence about discussing the hard work and difficult circumstances she

⁴³ Carol Kammen, *Ithaca: A Brief History* (Charleston: History Press, 2008).

⁴⁴ Based on weather reports from July 9, 1929; July 23, 1929; August 13, 1929 in USDA Weather Bureau, *Weekly Weather and Crop Bulletin* (Washington, D.C.: USDA, 1929).

⁴⁵ Ethel Waters, “Am I Blue?,” <https://archive.org/details/EthelWaters-01-10>

encountered has had significant consequences. Since Kittrell has been assumed to be an outlier, the broader networks of support and challenges she encountered have both dropped from the narrative, along with the people who came to Cornell alongside her. A closer examination of her reasons—even if briefly stated—for going to Cornell reveal a more complex story and a shrewd student.

To the faculty with whom she worked, Kittrell framed her graduate work as a means to promote uplift. Dr. Ethel Waring, Kittrell's primary doctoral advisor, wrote in an evaluation that "she very frankly speaks of the negro people and plans her study and research towards service 'for my people.'"⁴⁶ Kittrell was not alone in making this argument, or in having her ambition framed in terms of "service."⁴⁷ At Hampton, Kittrell's teachers had used this language, stressing service not in terms of paid domestic labor, but as social work in the community. While this language had particular meaning for African American women, the idea of Home Economics as a path to service was also found among white women working in Extension. As Lu Ann Jones argues in her history of home demonstration agents, many presented a "public image of selfless 'missionaries' motivated primarily by service." This provided women with a justification for working in public for wages and with a deferential language to "influence public policy and win

⁴⁶ Ethel Waring, "Instructor's Personnel Report: Family Life 101," Kittrell Deceased Alumni File, Box 315, Folder 2, Cornell University Alumni Records.

⁴⁷ Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: the Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: Morrow, 1984); Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Michelle Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Cynthia Neverdon-Morton, *Afro-American Women of the South and the Advancement of the Race, 1895-1925* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1989); Stephanie Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to be and do: Black Professional Women Workers During the Jim Crow Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994*. (New York: Norton, 1999).

social recognition.”⁴⁸ A bold act of obtaining a higher degree could therefore be explained through the language of uplift and “mission-like” service.⁴⁹

Later, when Kittrell was directly asked to explain her pursuit of higher education, she also dismissed the idea that it unusual. As she put it, “I found...that the people want to know why I came—and I said, to learn, and I just ended it like that. Sometimes I make my answer very short and to the point.”⁵⁰ Here, Kittrell does not address the larger question being posed by the interviewer as to why or how she was able to obtain such a high level of education given her race and background. This seemingly straightforward answer also sidesteps the long history of gradual integration at Cornell. Ezra Cornell had imagined a place where *anyone* could come and take courses, but only 200 non-white students studied at Cornell in its first fifty years. This number does not suggest complete openness; as historian Carol Kammen explains, Cornell’s “founding principle” in many circumstances “proved to be too high a standard [.]”⁵¹ And, as Kittrell would learn, admission was not the same as acceptance.

There were likely other reasons for Kittrell’s insistence that she was there to learn. This was a way of reinforcing that she was at Cornell for advanced training for rural leaders and teachers, not as the first step toward a radical upheaval of the social order. When asked to elaborate on her graduate training, Kittrell would usually say that she was simply fortunate that she did not encounter “problems.” As she put it, “I think I can say that I did not have problems in general because I wouldn’t allow myself to have problems.” Based on this assessment, when compared to the general campus climate of many schools in both the 1920s and 1960s, Cornell in

⁴⁸ Lu Ann Jones, *Mama Learned Us to Work: Farm Women in the New South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 108.

⁴⁹ Alfred Charles True, *A History of Agricultural Extension Work in the United States 1785-1923* (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1928).

⁵⁰ Interview by Kathryn M. Moore with Flemmie Kittrell, May 9 1976, Box 1, Folder 7, Interviews by Kathryn M. Moore, #21-32-2360, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

⁵¹ Carol Kammen, *Part and Apart: The Black Experience at Cornell, 1865-1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 118.

the 1930s appears to be a comfortable place for minorities. Such a conclusion comes from the fact that figures such as Kittrell worked hard to cultivate and sustain that image. Even though she “always had to look for money” she would also say that she “didn’t have any financial difficulties really in going through Cornell.”⁵² Though she did, in fact, experience some financial and bureaucratic difficulties, Kittrell chose not to elaborate on them for others.

In framing her own success story in calculated ways, Kittrell implicitly supported the idea that there were some personal difficulties not meant to be shared. Many of Kittrell’s reflections on her time at Cornell come from later interviews, including one conducted *at* Cornell in the 1970s. The notion of her not having “problems” says as much about the racial climate of the 1960s and 1970s as the period when she first arrived. Thus these words can be interpreted as an attempt to forget a difficult time, or as a particular response to the racial fractures of recent years on college campuses. However we read these words, Kittrell’s statements largely elide the labor that she put into securing her own education. This presentation of easy progress, as with Kittrell’s minimization of work in her childhood, stands in contrast to the narratives of drudgery and difficulty posed by leaders such as Booker T. Washington.

At the same time, Kittrell’s statement that “*I did not have problems*” also plays into a sense that she was an “only” as well as a “first.” Instead, the patchwork of funding that enabled her education were part of broader trends in philanthropic giving. Kittrell really did have fewer “financial difficulties” than one might imagine in financing six years of graduate study during the worst economic crisis in US history. Kittrell received fellowships at various points from the General Education Board, the Rosenwald Fund, Methodist organizations, and direct assistance from the College of Home Economics. Kittrell was not unusual in obtaining funds from a variety of groups dedicated to “scientific philanthropy.” After years of supporting black students

⁵² Moore interview with Kittrell, 7.

through college, the GEB turned, in 1924, to advanced degrees, offering “fellowships to promising black instructors in Southern colleges and universities.”⁵³ In turn, the Rosenwald Fund also started to focus more on financing advanced degrees.⁵⁴

When examined in a broader perspective, Kittrell’s timeline in education provides a striking metric for how philanthropy changed in the first half of the twentieth century. Kittrell was born in 1904, a decade before the first rural Rosenwald School was built to provide elementary education. As the Rosenwald Fund was sponsoring elementary education, Kittrell was struggling with the limits of her hometown training. Yet she would come of age just in time to benefit from the shift within the Rosenwald and GEB’s agendas toward funding secondary schools and college programs. Kittrell also completed her studies at Hampton in time to apply for new funding sources related to advanced higher education.⁵⁵ After earning her bachelor’s degree, where she was part of one of the first Hampton classes in the full collegiate program, Kittrell was one of 25 minority women to receive a post-graduate Rosenwald grant for Home Economics between 1929 and 1931.⁵⁶ Through her first 30 years, Kittrell’s trajectory happened to align with this change in priorities. But this was not merely coincidence. Kittrell’s decision to focus on Home Economics and Rural Education reveals a keen sense of how the landscape of funding as far as where money was being directed and for whom.⁵⁷

Thousands of others also benefitted from these grants, including some of the preeminent black intellectuals and artists of the 20th century. A very short list includes singer Marian

⁵³ Andrea Walton, *Women and Philanthropy in Education* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 284.

⁵⁴ Raymond B. Fosdick, *Adventure in Giving: The Story of the General Education Board* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962); Edwin R. Embree and Julia Waxman, *Investment in People: The Story of the Julius Rosenwald Fund* (New York: Harper, 1949).

⁵⁵ Mary S. Hoffschwelle, *The Rosenwald Schools of the American South* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2006), 125.

⁵⁶ Flemmie Kittrell Fellowship Application, Fellowships Granted, Box 427, Folder 4, Julius Rosenwald Fund Papers, Fisk Archives. The files are arranged alphabetically, so a full list of names can be provided in an appendix.

⁵⁷ General Education Board, *Directory of Fellowship Awards for the Years 1922-1950* (New York: General Education Board, 1952), 108.

Anderson, sociologist E. Franklin Frazier, poet Langston Hughes, author Zora Neale Hurston, and Dorothy Porter Wesley, Howard University's archivist. Notably, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), which includes a humiliating "battle royal" in which black men must scramble for scholarship money, was written while Ellison was a Rosenwald Fellow.⁵⁸ Of course, far more is known about these figures' accomplishments because their works have remained more legible to the public. Kittrell was also a cultural contributor and just as adept in the way that she financed her goals. While still working on her own degree, for instance, Kittrell contacted the GEB to finance a nursery school at Bennett that she would supervise for several years. Kittrell also later contacted the Rockefeller Fund to support her international work. Kittrell did not present herself as a savvy student of these networks. Maybe she did not see herself this way—or she assumed that these networks were so well known that she did not need to elaborate.⁵⁹

In addition to the fact that "problems" related to money seemed to simply elude Kittrell, she was always careful to point out that other people wanted her to do the work. In addition to a call to service, Kittrell credited her mentor, Dr. Thomas Turner, (Ph.D., Cornell, 1921) with her choice. Turner knew the challenges of being "a first"—he was the first African American man to earn a Ph.D. in Botany. While Kittrell was still at Hampton, she later recalled that he told her to "think about...getting yourself a degree and become a teacher of college students."⁶⁰ Turner was influential, but there is more to this story. In the past, a bachelor's degree sufficed at many small colleges, including Bennett, where Kittrell was first hired. Even Van Rensselaer had started teaching at Cornell without a full degree. With the explosion of new programs in the 1920s, however, the standards for college-level teaching were now much higher. In particular, Bennett's

⁵⁸ Peter Ascioli, *Julius Rosenwald: The Man Who Built Sears, Roebuck and Advanced the Cause of Black Education in the American South* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2006), 399.

⁵⁹ Moore interview with Kittrell, 2.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 3.

new President, David D. Jones, aspired for more. In 1928, he all but promised the *New York Age* that within a year most of his faculty would be working on “the securing of the master’s degree at least.”⁶¹ His boosterism proved correct, and in a time when the hiring, achievements, and firing of professors at black colleges were newsworthy in predominantly black papers, Kittrell saw her name in print again soon. While Jones was known to be ambitious, without the support of the GEB and other alliances, this kind of advancement would have been harder to achieve.

At the same time, large research universities, such as Cornell and Columbia, were also catering to the needs of educators and working people by creating a wide spectrum of courses. As with many other faculty members at Bennett, Kittrell could not afford to quit her job. But extension, distance, summer, winter, and short courses ensured that teachers at many institutions could continue their own studies while working for much of the academic year. Similar academic programs, such as “short courses,” date back to the early years of the land-grant university. Though largely understudied when compared to “traditional” courses of study, these programs were central to the early development of Home Economics at various institutions, including Cornell.⁶² This range of course offerings was especially vital for those who lacked the privilege of family money to support continued education.

There were clearly many push and pull factors that led to Kittrell’s decision to come to Cornell. Yet her *doubts* and reservations about such a path are perhaps just as revealing. She told one interviewer that she felt anxious, thinking, “I don’t know anybody up there (up North)!”⁶³ While Kittrell does not invoke her race at first, she then explains that “there were just three

⁶¹ “Bennett College Has Strong Faculty of 19,” *New York Age* (New York, NY), Sep. 22, 1928, 9.

⁶² Julia Hurd, “Short Courses in Home Economics,” in Walton C. John, *Land-Grant College Education 1910-1920* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1925).

⁶³ It is not clear if Kittrell said “up North” or if this was added by Esther Ottley. See Esther Ottley, “Flemmie Pansy Kittrell,” (1980) in Kittrell Papers, Box 104-1, Folder 9, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University Archives.

minority people when I came to Cornell. Three women.”⁶⁴ Margaret Morgan Lawrence, an African American woman who enrolled at Cornell in 1932, mentioned similarly low numbers, adding that she was “resentful” that “everybody here thought that the two black women should be friends.”⁶⁵ Yet there is another layer to Kittrell’s story: she actually earned her master’s among a small cohort of women from Hampton, including Felice Watson Holmes. The point is not that Kittrell erases these women from her own personal story, as is her prerogative, but the ease with which these dense educational networks can be dropped from the narrative.⁶⁶

Kittrell’s comments about going “up there” points to another aspect of the educational culture at Cornell and other land-grant institutions. The way that she stresses place is significant. The lists of candidates for summer courses, and in fact many graduate file folders, provide sparse comment on race. Some only mention ethnicity, or do not acknowledge metrics of difference at all. But the student’s educational history and hometown were always carefully noted because these colleges had to train a certain percentage of students from within the state. In the summer sessions, however, there seems to have been a greater geographic range. In 1929, for instance, students from New York and various other states, North and South, were joined by a woman from “Greenville, Eng.,” (England) and in 1930 Kittrell’s name appears next to a student from Poland.⁶⁷ While many aspects of life in Ithaca may have seemed foreign to Kittrell, the presence of international students was not. Her own graduating class of 1928 came “forth from twenty

⁶⁴ Moore interview with Kittrell, 7.

⁶⁵ “Margaret Morgan Lawrence,” in Winni Warren, *Black Women Scientists in the United States* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1999), 175; Kammen, *Part and Apart*, 93-94; Carol Kammen, “Part and Apart: The Black Experience at Cornell 1865-1945” Africana Studies Lecture at Cornell University, posted online 16 October 2009, <http://www.cornell.edu/video/part-and-apart-the-black-experience-at-cornell-1865-to-1945>.

⁶⁶ Other contemporaneous minority women listed in an index and throughout Kammen’s *Part and Apart* include: Marion Elizabeth Gandy, BS 1928; Miriam Sophrinia Gould (Mrs. Myron B. Towns), MS 1929; Grace Hicks Peterson, AB 1930; Martha Jane Robertson, Ag. ’30; Bernice May Ware, Grad 1930; Felice Watson Holmes, Grad 1930; Alice Curtis (Cabell), AM 1931; Pauline Alexandra Davis AM 1931; Ruth Louise Peyton AM 1931; Mayme Lillie Powell MS 1931; Beatrice Olivia Roberts AB 1931; Gertrude Burroughs Rivers AM Ed 1932; Ovetta Brown (Jewell) Grad 1934; Lucille Wells Grad 1935; Margaret Morgan (Lawrence), BS 1936; Amanda Elizabeth McKee Grad, HE 1936; Mrs. Kelso B. Morris, AM 1937; Sarah Ethel Thomas, AB 1937; Nellie Francis Tidline, MS 1937.

⁶⁷ “Summer Registration in 1930 Summer Session,” Box 20, Folder 4, NYSCHS records.

States in the United States, the far-away continent of Africa, Porto Rico, and the Virgin Islands.”⁶⁸ Though there were not many of these students, still, for Kittrell Cornell would have presented a familiar confluence of global networks brought together for the pursuit of knowledge about “rural life.”

While these records may have seemingly only stressed *place*, this should not suggest that race was inconsequential to the larger bureaucracy at work at Cornell. The College of Home Economics was part of a larger university, and within that framework, record keepers “began noting race on some alumni cards” as early as the 1890s.⁶⁹ Such notations were irregular, but visual texts also became part of this process, and photographs eventually became mandatory with the university application.⁷⁰ Later, in the wake of the GI Bill, one admissions officer explicitly denied that photographs had anything to do with “discriminatory practices.”⁷¹ Others disagreed, and between 1948 and 1950, pressure from a Teachers’ Union within Cornell and the local chapter of the NAACP forced the issue, and for a time, the policy was abandoned.⁷² While there are some records from the 1920s and 1930s with photographs and blanks asking for “ethnicity,” not all include them. Other records do show that at least one record-keeper thought it necessary to add the words “Black” or “colored” on certain files.

⁶⁸ “Hamptonian Histories,” *Hamptonian* 1924, Hampton University Archives.

⁶⁹ Kammen, *Part and Apart*, 34; In Kammen’s “Black Experience at Cornell” lecture she states that an archivist in the 1980s started keeping a list as part of a “recovery” project.

⁷⁰ Mary Lou Griswold to Kittrell, 29 June 1943, Dean of Women Files, Correspondence folder, Hampton University Archives.

⁷¹ Glenn C. Altschuler and Isaac Kramnick, *Cornell: A History, 1940–2015* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014).

⁷² “Teachers’ Union Investigates Need For Application Form Photographs,” *Cornell Daily Sun*, Dec. 1948, 2; “Admissions Office Restates Photo Requirement Wording,” *Cornell Daily Sun*, Sep. 1950, 21; “Local NAACP Favors Move Against Left Wing Elements,” *Cornell Daily Sun*, Oct. 12, 1950, 2; “Human Relations Report Excerpts As Presented to Student Council,” *Cornell Daily Sun*, Apr. 16, 1952, Editorials Page.

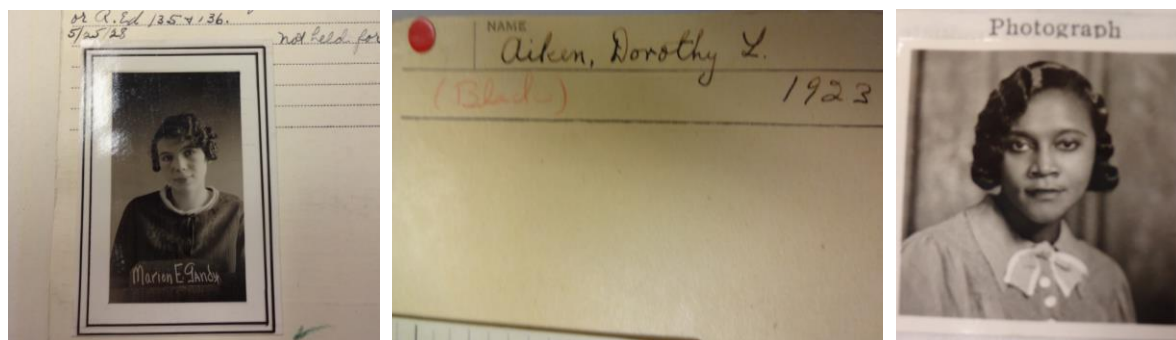


Fig. 2.1: Marion E. Gandy, BS 1928 (College of Agriculture) – listed as “American.”

Fig. 2.2: Dorothy Aiken, BS 1923 (College of Agriculture)

Fig. 2.3: Bennie Mae Ware, Hampton '30, MEd '39

Before the photograph policy, a young woman from Henderson, North Carolina who came to Cornell via Hampton may not have stated her race. That did not make it irrelevant, just as the phrasing of working for “her people” was inextricably about race and place. Beyond these admissions records and lists, housing forms were another medium in which race was documented or at least considered.⁷³ Unlike an undergraduate student, Kittrell would only come to Cornell intermittently, and she always lived *off* campus in various boarding houses.⁷⁴ Kittrell also lived with Reverend (George) Eugene Durham and his wife, Mary Durham.⁷⁵ Kittrell’s decision to live with the Durhams suggests that there were sometimes other networks at play. Reverend Durham, who graduated from the College of Agriculture in 1920, was the Methodist pastor at Cornell and the minister at the first Methodist Episcopal Church in Ithaca.⁷⁶ Kittrell was a life-long churchgoer, and Bennett was a well-connected Methodist college. She would later argue that she was “interested in the church all my life” – “not from the emotional side” but as a means

⁷³ Carol Kammen, *Cornell: Glorious to View* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

⁷⁴ “In the university records, Kittrell was listed as living in a boarding house on Edgemore Place and later in the Belle Sherman area.” See Kammen, *Part and Apart*, 153. See also 205 College Ave., Ithaca NY - Mrs. Annie Hofer in *Manning’s Ithaca Directory* (Schenectady: Manning Co., 1929).

⁷⁵ The Durhams lived at 101 Brandon Place, Ithaca, NY according to *Manning’s Ithaca Directory* (1936), 134.

⁷⁶ More on Eugene Durham: “Ithaca Girl is Bride of Norman Dounce,” *Elmira Star-Gazette* (Elmira, NY), Jan. 10, 1939, 4. Durham is listed as a “new member” of the First Methodist Episcopal Church of Ithaca in *Church Helper* 29, no.5 (1918).

of finding structure and order.⁷⁷ It is possible that someone from within Bennett or her own Methodist network made this arrangement. In addition to providing “order,” the Church could also a way that she found a broader network to connect with in Ithaca.⁷⁸

This particular connection complicates our understanding of how minority students found or made networks for themselves while obtaining an education well into the twentieth century. Kittrell does not seem to have made much contact with St. James African Methodist Episcopal Church.⁷⁹ This religious institution was at the center of civic life for most African Americans in Ithaca. As the oldest church in town, it was considered a vital social and religious resource. Sometimes called “the ‘colored church,’ on North Albany Street,” it was a stop on the Underground Railroad. Then, at the turn of the century, it served as a different kind of “sanctuary” for black men at Cornell, who gathered there to start the first African-American fraternity, Alpha Phi Alpha.⁸⁰ But for Kittrell, an affiliation with the Methodist Episcopal Church, and networks from Bennett gave her a kind of “sanctuary”—or at least a place to stay.

Though Kittrell did not attend St. James, she was not disconnected from the African American community in Ithaca. When interviewed by the FBI in the 1940s, Kittrell’s doctoral advisor, Ethel Waring, mentioned that she “lived and worked with the people in the very lowly negro community in Ithaca [.]” Waring further added that Kittrell “never publicized her efforts and activities on behalf of the poor.”⁸¹ Understandably, Waring minimizes Kittrell’s social work and anything resembling “activism” in this interview. While other evidence as to Kittrell’s

⁷⁷Black Women Oral History Project Interviews; Flemma Kittrell, Aug.29, 1977, 26. OH-31, T-32/Kittrell. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

⁷⁸ “We have been richly blessed with friendships all over the world and it gives us joy and delight to think of each of you as we address the letters [.]” Eugene and Mary Durham to Kittrell, Christmas Letter, 1962, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

⁷⁹This is in line with what Kammen found among the earliest students at Cornell in the 19th century but is not what has been generally reported about African Americans in Ithaca in the 20th century: *Part and Apart*, 16.

⁸⁰ Kammen, *Ithaca: A Brief History* (Charleston: History Press, 2008).

⁸¹ Comments of Ethel B. Waring in U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, File on Flemma P. Kittrell, 2, report 1209642-0, HQ 4486.

relationship with the “negro community” does not survive, Kittrell was most likely connected to the Frances Harper Women’s Club in Ithaca. Kittrell might have found a good fit with this group given her interest in poetry and their mission of honoring Harper through “community mothering.”⁸²

If Kittrell had become involved with this type of club work, she would have been a minority there as well. At a time when one of the leaders in the club worked as a domestic for the head of the Graduate School at Cornell, Kittrell had a very different relationship to the graduate school and domesticity while working for her master’s degree.⁸³ In this sense, the title of historian Carol Kammen’s study of minorities at Cornell, *Part and Apart* (2009) is especially apt. For some students, Ithaca may have been a refuge, but for others, it may have been another place to experience alienation. Some African American students were even called “prof” outside of the campus. Kammen argues this done with “some deference,” though this also reinforced the student’s class or educational difference.⁸⁴ Tantalizing references to other connections, such as the ones in Waring’s comments in Kittrell’s FBI file, reveal that there were reasons for keeping certain associations silent—now, much of that history has been lost.

Another way of accessing the history of inclusion and exclusion is through an examination of other students’ experiences with residency. In the history of integration in higher education, the dormitory is usually as significant as the classroom. At Cornell, while there was “little expectation” that the school provide housing for young men, women were a different matter. The issue of *white* women’s respectability was more or less settled with a plan for

⁸² Diedre Hill Butler, “The South Side Community Center of Ithaca, New York: Built Through ‘Community Mothering,’ 1938” *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* (2008)
<http://www.thefreelibrary.com/The+South+Side+Community+Center+of+Ithaca%2c+New+York%3a+built+throug+h...-a0173646759>

⁸³ Diedre Hill Butler, “The South Side Community Center of Ithaca, New York,” 12.

⁸⁴ Kammen, *Apart*, 15

separate women's housing in the 1870s. But minority women's access to campus facilities was contested for many decades. This matter was far from resolved as the fall semester of 1929 approached. Just as Kittrell and her cohort had finished taking "refresher courses," two black undergraduates, Pauline Davis '31 and Ruth Peyton '31, were denied housing at Sage College, the women's dormitory. As their fates were being decided, a small "quake" hit Ithaca. While some slept, missing it entirely, others rushed to the nearest telephone as "tremors shook houses, awakened sleepers, and provided food for thought and conversation [.]"⁸⁵ For those who were awake enough to catch it, the ground was shifting beneath their feet.

Davis and Peyton's exclusion from Cornell housing matters, in part, because several sources have confused *their* story with Kittrell's.⁸⁶ By the time the term started, Kittrell was back at Bennett. Much like the Hampton strike of 1927, it has been simpler to collapse these incidents into one person's story. But by placing Peyton and Davis back in their own narrative, it is easier to see why Kittrell insisted she did not have "problems." In some ways, Kittrell was minimizing a long tradition of conflict related to housing within the theoretically open campus. Sixty years earlier, the first female student to fully enroll in the university, Jennie Spencer, withdrew because she was "defeated by the lack of adequate housing for women" back in 1870.⁸⁷ Living off-campus was not easy, for in the mile between the downtown area and the college, there is a significant elevation change. Some women, therefore, experienced "hazardous travel uphill and down," replete with "undignified tumbles" during the commute.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ "Quake Hits Ithaca" *Cornell Alumni News* 31, no.40 (1929).

⁸⁶ Esther Ottley makes this claim, and notes that "President Fearon" excluded Kittrell. This story was also repeated in Annette Madden, *In Her Footsteps: 101 Remarkable Black Women from the Queen of Sheba to Queen Latifah* (New York: Conari Press, 2001), 118-120; James Kessler et al., eds., *Distinguished African American Scientists of the 20th Century* (Phoenix: Oryx Press, 1996), 209.

⁸⁷ Charlotte Williams Conable, *Women at Cornell: The Myth of Equal Education* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 66; Jennifer Cleland and Robert P. Stundtner, *Sage Hall: Experiments in Coeducation and Preservation at Cornell University* (Ithaca, NY: PhG Publishing, 2011).

⁸⁸ Conable, *Women at Cornell*, 63.

The construction of Sage College, sponsored by a local industrialist, was a deliberate action to show that the institution was committed to bringing and welcoming women students to campus.⁸⁹ Once completed in 1875, Sage was the home to many successful students, including Florence Kelley, who imaginatively tackled other housing issues in her own career. But the same issue that early white female students confronted—theoretical openness paired with *de facto* exclusion—also caused complications for minority women. Sage was integrated in 1886, without apparent incident. This pattern of integration continued until two new African American residents asked to reside there in 1911. In response, over two hundred students, essentially the entire residential population of women, signed a petition in opposition.⁹⁰ Cornell President Jacob Gould Schurman (1892-1920) refused to accept it, and reminded students that “the last colored woman student who resided [in Sage felt] politely and considerately treated [.]” He further urged the students to “make the lives of the two incoming colored students equally happy and memorable.”⁹¹ Under Schurman, resentment and resistance among students were not tolerated.

In 1929, in a striking echo of 1911, Peyton and Davis also faced discrimination, but from different sources. They were not up against fellow students, but Dean of Women Louise Fitch.⁹² Fitch was responsible for women’s orientation to campus; she also frequently gave lectures, invited women into her home for tea, and decided matters related to housing.⁹³ In Peyton’s case, she was denied the “blanks” needed for a spot on campus. Forced to find a room in a local boarding house, Peyton faced an inconvenient commute. In response, Ruth’s mother R.C. Peyton wrote directly to President Livingston Farrand (1921-1927), noting that “the Dormitories were

⁸⁹ Prudence Risley Hall was added 1912-1913. “Work on Prudence Risley Hall is Being Rushed,” *Cornell Daily Sun*, Oct. 3, 1912; Cornell University, *Guide to the Campus*, Cornell University (Ithaca, NY: 1920).

⁹⁰ “Co-Eds in Bitter Race War,” *Cornell Daily Sun*, Mar. 29, 1911, front page.

⁹¹ “The University’s Attitude Toward Colored Students,” *Cornell Alumni News* 13, no.27 (1911): 314.

⁹² “Miss R.L. Fitch to Take Office,” *Cornell Daily Sun*, Sep. 21, 1926, front page.

⁹³ “Mortarboard Activities Start With Dean’s Aid,” *Cornell Daily Sun*, Oct. 5, 1927, 7.

veritable melting pots for foreign nations, [with] many much blacker than either of the girls in question.”⁹⁴ Peyton was not hesitant to link position and phenotype, adding, “the best white people of the town are so proud of Ruth [.]” Perhaps most striking was Peyton’s clarification as to Ruth’s aims. Her daughter was “reaching for more knowledge—not social equality [.]”⁹⁵ Unfortunately, Fitch disagreed, and saw a place in the university housing as precisely that: a chance at equality.

Compared to Schurman, President Farrand was not so idealistic about the mission of Cornell. He fell back on the matter of jurisdiction, essentially arguing that Fitch was allowed to deny Peyton housing and that he was powerless to stop her. From his position of privilege, the imposition of walking to campus from a distance of a few miles uphill seemed a fair compromise. He also urged Peyton to see that living in Sage “inevitably caused more embarrassment than satisfaction [.]”⁹⁶ With Farrand’s support, Fitch had effectively turned transformed integrated housing into a closed system. That Farrand acquiesced to a Dean of Women is particularly significant, as Kittrell would hold this position at Bennett and Hampton. Clearly, this position could vary greatly in power and duties depending on the institutional leadership. Given her own work and interest in academic and domestic spaces, it is possible Kittrell followed this story. Controversies at Cornell were “nationally observed,” even if the college was “isolated.”⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Listing: “John W. (Betty L.), chef, h 304 Cascadilla” from the *Ithaca Directory 1929*, 216. John and Betty Jackson lived a little more than a hundred feet from their neighbor, Simon Haley. A graduate student at Cornell working on an MS in Agriculture, Simon was the father of Alex Haley, author of *Roots*. See “Alex Haley Birthplace” in Nancy C. Curtis, *Black Heritage Sites: An African American Odyssey and Finder’s Guide* (Chicago: American Library Association), 338.

⁹⁵ R.C. Peyton to Livingston Farrand, FF 54, Box 27, Livingston Farrand papers, #3-5-7. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

⁹⁶ Livingston Farrand to R.C. Peyton, 22 July 1929, Box 6, FF 23; Box 11, FF 5, Livingston Farrand papers, #3-5-7.

⁹⁷ Kammen, *Part and Apart*, 67.

Peyton, Davis, and Kittrell were all at Cornell at a time when the number of minority graduate students was rising. It was perhaps not so much their singularity as what they really represented—the beginning of an increasing window of opportunity—that startled students inclined toward racial exclusion. A few months after this incident, *The Cornell Sun* ran a “special interview” with W.E.B. Du Bois. How much he knew about individual students’ experiences is unclear. Still, his assessment that minority students remained “segregated from the rest of the student body in fact if not in theory” would have certainly rang true for Peyton. Kittrell might have especially related to his suggestion that ‘It takes determination for a Negro to go to a Northern college.’⁹⁸

The complexities of being both “part and apart” are further evident in the career of Nellie Frances Tidline Adams Brodis, a contemporary graduate student in Home Economics. Brodis, who was originally from Virginia, is featured in Fig. 2.5 serving tea for Robert E. Lee Day at Willard Straight Hall, a student center. At the time, Brodis was only months from completing her master’s degree. She was also writing a thesis: “A Study of the Participation In Household Tasks by Ten Negro Girls In Ithaca, New York.”⁹⁹ A charter member of Alpha Kappa Alpha, Brodis went on to have a long career teaching and she even returned to Cornell for a Ph.D. in Home Economics in 1969.¹⁰⁰ Did she, like Morgan and Kittrell, decide to remember this period as one without problems? While she attempted to distance herself from domestic work through the

⁹⁸ “College Atmosphere Should Foster Better Race Relations Says Du Bois,” *Cornell Daily Sun*, Dec.12, 1929.

⁹⁹ Nellie Tidline, “A Study of the Participation In Household Tasks by Ten Negro Girls In Ithaca, New York,” (master’s thesis, Cornell University, 1937).

¹⁰⁰ Nellie Frances Tidline Adams Brodis, “Parent-Child Relationship and Self-Concept as Related to Differential Academic Achievement of Adolescent Siblings in Father-Absent Families,” (PhD diss., Cornell University, 1969); Brodis with College of Human Ecology at Cornell, “Interdisciplinary Research Group on Poverty: IRGOP Reports,” 1 (1970); *Unsung Sorors: Nellie Soror Frances Tidline Davis Adams Brodis*, *UnSung Sorors AKA*, <http://unsungsorors.aka1908.com/index.php/32-hall-of-fame/301-soror-nellie-soror-frances-tidline-davis-adams-brodis>

position of a scholar, for student activities, Brodis was nonetheless positioned here as a representative of a world of coercive domesticity that had supposedly passed.



Fig 2.5: Robert E. Lee Day, 1937

Thirty two years after this photograph was taken, black student protesters would emerge from this same building holding rifles as part of a Parents' Weekend takeover.¹⁰¹ This, to a large degree, is the history of racial conflict that is best known at Cornell. The 1930s, however, had a distinct form of internal race politics. Before segregated housing became a known part of the Civil Rights movement in the 1950s, students were undertaking the battle in smaller steps on college campuses. Davis, who certainly had "determination," tried once again to get housing, now for her graduate study. This time, Fitch claimed it was not her racial identity but other mitigating factors. As if forming a defense, Fitch would claim that she had allowed other women with "colored blood" to live on campus because they were 'unobtrusive' and 'had no dates...either with white or negro (sic) men.' In addition to being 'aggressive,' Davis, on the other hand, was 'very dark in color, quite aggressive in her attitude' and 'dates frequently with negro men, of whom there are...a number here at Cornell.'¹⁰² Fitch, who named herself the judge of women's race and character, configured herself as a *champion* for "respectable," meaning white, students.

¹⁰¹ Donald A. Downs, *Cornell '69: Liberalism and the Crisis of the American University* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).

¹⁰² Kammen, *Apart*, 90.

These stories add greater depth to Kittrell's dismissal that she "did not have problems" and context for her related claims that she did not marry or date because she was 'too busy' or 'just never had the time.'¹⁰³ Kittrell understood that academic opportunities could be challenged by intrusive administrators who chose to police black women's sexuality. Fellow student Margaret Lawrence would also claim that she, too, was simply 'too busy to be lonely, afraid, angry' at Cornell.¹⁰⁴ Like Kittrell, Lawrence was committed to particular narratives about how she had navigated the racial politics of the 1930s. These women also shared more than similar attitudes. Both were members of the Booker T. Washington Club on campus.¹⁰⁵ Within this group, African American students discussed literature as well as social justice issues, including cases of lynching and the Scottsboro trial. That minority students would gather under "the Wizard's" name to discuss painful, divisive issues illustrates greater contradictions of the period.

In later years, Lawrence's daughter published a biography detailing her mother's "unhappy situation" at Cornell—namely, her alienation, a need to work, and later, her rejection from Cornell Medical School. Yet Lawrence challenged many of her daughter's interpretations, and returned to Cornell to clarify the work in *Balm in Gilead* (1995).¹⁰⁶ Lawrence instead stressed her relative privilege for the period and her sense of opportunity.¹⁰⁷ In the long run, the tensions between mother and biographer are about more than family difficulties. These discrepancies reveal the differences between those trained in the codes of silence and uplift movements and those who came a generation later to upturn these stoic paths of progress.

¹⁰³ Ottley, "Kittrell," 2-3.

¹⁰⁴ Kammen, *Apart*, 93-94.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 125.

¹⁰⁶ Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, *Balm in Gilead: Journey of a Healer* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995).

¹⁰⁷ Carol Kammen, "Part and Apart: The Black Experience at Cornell 1865-1945" Africana Studies Lecture at Cornell University, posted online 16 October 2009, <http://www.cornell.edu/video/part-and-apart-the-black-experience-at-cornell-1865-to-1945>.

While Brodis, Lawrence, and Kittrell were at Cornell, discussions of race were largely limited to “understanding” and the promotion of exemplars. This is most evident in the annual Negro Education Week, started in 1928 “to cultivate understanding between the races.” This week of lectures was billed as particularly important for the white college students who might only know “waiters or domestics, people whom he can hardly admire.” While giving students permission to ignore *most* African American people, this series shifted the focus to the “young Negroes” at Cornell who would “someday become leaders of their people.”¹⁰⁸ Yet these categories were not mutually exclusive. Historically, some black male students studying at Cornell had boarded “in exchange for maintaining the furnace and boiler.” Many female students, too—of various backgrounds—had also worked downtown cleaning houses to pay for their lodgings.¹⁰⁹ This newspaper writer was probably unaware of that type of arrangement, further evidence of the need for “understanding.”

For Kittrell, challenging the conflation of black women’s work with domestic service would have been a lifelong challenge. Perhaps this is why the work that Waring alluded to was scarcely mentioned in her records, and Kittrell focused on her desire “just” to learn. This type of comment might also reinforce the fact that in her courses in Home Economics and Rural Education, Kittrell encountered faculty who unabashedly saw the improvement of rural life as an *academic* challenge. Plotting her path at Cornell, Kittrell elected to make Rural Education her major subject and Foods and Nutrition her minor subject. In addition to courses in Home Economics, including Nutrition and Dietetics, Kittrell therefore also took teaching classes within Rural Education (S235 and S248).¹¹⁰ These types of teaching courses for home economists were

¹⁰⁸ “Negro Education Week,” *Cornell Daily Sun*, Feb. 22, 1932.

¹⁰⁹ Kammen, 47.

¹¹⁰ Certified Letter dated 2 July 1934; Flemma Kittrell transcript, Cornell University Graduate School Records, #12/5/636. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

then conducted under the auspices of Rural Education, a pattern that persisted for the next decade until 1947.¹¹¹ In these Rural Education courses, students were taught methods on matters such as “how a one-room school may be conducted on a modern basis;” in other words, ways to improve teaching in rural areas.¹¹²

Through these relatively short, intensive courses, summer students at Cornell were expected to go back to being teachers and faculty by fall to translate this course material into action. Enrollment figures show a great demand for this type of continuing education: in 1929 alone, 782 students journeyed back to twenty different states and six foreign nations for these classes at Cornell.¹¹³ For these students, aligning with Rural Education was a shrewd decision. Rural Education had started small at Cornell, with only a few professors and strong contacts with Extension. Though not a well-seasoned department, it was well funded—and in demand. In addition to money from the Smith-Lever, Smith-Hughes, and Purnell Funds, state funds poured into some institutions to fund studies on how to manage smaller school systems.¹¹⁴ Cornell’s Janus-faced status made it especially privileged in these kinds of areas. Faculty doing this work could rely on land-grant state and federal funding *and* the philanthropic largesse more often associated with elite institutions. Well-connected affiliated faculty from Agriculture, including the Dean Albert R. Mann and Professor Dwight Sanderson, were especially adept at finding money from philanthropists to top state grants.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Stocks, *A Growing College*, 349; “Home Economics New York State Summer Session at Cornell University, July 6-August 16,” Box 20, Folder 3, NYSCHE records.

¹¹² “College of Agriculture Plans Summer Session,” *Cornell Daily Sun* XLIX no.162, 7 May 1929.

¹¹³ New York State College of Agriculture, *Annual Report College of Agriculture 1929-30* (Ithaca: 1930), 28; 92. See also “Graduate Students Major in Home Economics, in Residence, 1934-1935,” and “Purnell Res. Appoint.,” Box 51, Folder 3, NYSCHE records.

¹¹⁴ “The Purnell Act of 1925 authorized ‘economic and sociological investigations of the rural home and rural life’ and provided some funding for home economics research.” See Alison Cornish Thorne, “Visible and Invisible Women in Land-Grant Colleges, 1890-1940,” 12.

¹¹⁵ Cornell University - Rural Sociology Fellowships, 1927, Box 31, Folder 334; 1925 Appropriations, Box 39, Folder 407, Series 3, Subseries 3.05, Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Records, Rockefeller Archive Center.

For graduate students, sources of funding such as Purnell grants were particularly important, as they provided resources for research-based fellowships.¹¹⁶ The matter of *how* Kittrell—and other students—paid for their summer courses is perhaps just as important as what they learned in them. Unlike the program at Hampton, where students had work options to pay off part or all of a tuition bill, training in predominantly white colleges or graduate schools required other means. Usually that funding came through large “scientific philanthropy” boards linked to a larger agenda. After the wide-ranging student protests of the 1920s at historically black institutions, including Hampton, training teachers and experts in Agriculture and Home Economics was not a luxury, but a fairly conservative means of adaptation.¹¹⁷ By coming to Cornell, Kittrell entered a much larger financial web of dense, interconnected networks of administrators, philanthropists, and academics invested in training particular types of leaders for black higher education.

By focusing on rural affairs and black education, Kittrell’s work would have been particularly attractive to the agents at the Rosenwald Fund, which had started looking for candidates “of unusual promise who desire to study at Northern colleges or abroad.”¹¹⁸ Over time, Kittrell would be involved in both types of work, particularly in the postwar period after 1945. But this phrasing also points to a much larger pattern. Through the Depression, programs for preparing leaders at black colleges were inseparable from contemporaneous efforts among American academics to further develop rural and agricultural programs overseas. Many of the same individuals who “toured” the South for the GEB, supporting and inspecting black

¹¹⁶ New York State College of Home Economics, “Guidance Material for High School Students and Others Interested in Graduate Study, Graduate and Research Work,” 1928. Box 20, Folder 77, NYSCHE records.

¹¹⁷ Ascoli, *Julius Rosenwald*, 303-304.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, 311.

institutions, also worked with philanthropists to build international agricultural programs in what some saw as a “postwar” period in the 1920s.

To take one prominent example, Dean Mann, Dean of Cornell’s College of Agriculture from 1917-1931, was involved with philanthropic funds for black education and international programs in China. Mann is a quintessential Rockefeller-funded success story. A graduate of the College of Agriculture at Cornell, Mann went on to study Sociology at the University of Chicago, which had been initially funded by Rockefeller. When he returned from Chicago, he developed the program in Rural Sociology and taught rural social organization at Cornell.¹¹⁹ This academic area was vital for Extension work, which had also been funded, early on, by Rockefeller.¹²⁰ Later, in addition to teaching at Cornell, Mann took a position with the Rockefeller Fund’s International Education Board, becoming Director of Agriculture in the 1920s. As part of these duties, he spent two years touring Europe between 1924 and 1926. Working with the IEB, Mann was tasked with studying the possibilities for postwar education re-development on the continent; he then spent time at the University of Nanking in China.¹²¹ Upon returning to the United States, Mann worked to bring funding back to his own institution, pushing for scholarships and graduate fellowships at Cornell.¹²² Finally, in 1937, a year after Kittrell completed her degree, Mann left Cornell to become vice president of the GEB.

Even in his own lifetime, Mann’s career was used as a way to understand the connections between the GEB and IEB, and the broader links between rural Southern education and global reform. Discussing Mann’s work, an alumni newsletter from Cornell explains that the goals of

¹¹⁹ “Dr. Mann Tenders Resignation as Cornell University Provost,” *Cornell Daily Sun*, May 3, 1937, front page.

¹²⁰ True, *A History of Agricultural Extension Work in the United States*, 69.

¹²¹ “Improvement In Chinese Crops Seen Despite Political Disturbances- University of Nanking, the International Education Board, and Cornell University,” *Cornell Daily Sun*, Nov. 27, 1929.

¹²² Institute of International Education, *Fellowships and Scholarships Open to Foreign Students for Study in the United States* (New York: Institute of International Education, 1929), 27.

the GEB and IEB are “similar” in that both “advance the basic interests of the nations” involved “by means of interchange of experience and knowledge in two primary fields, general science...and agriculture.”¹²³ This notion of “interchange” was particularly important to Mann, as he did not believe in merely exporting models from Cornell to other places. He would insist that programs in Agriculture and related fields “must be indigenous and arise out of native abilities, native plants and animal stocks, and the cultural characteristics of the people.”¹²⁴ Using metaphors appropriate to his field, Mann was expressing the need for translational work and broad, wide-reaching extension programs.

Looking only at Mann’s career, it would seem that philanthropic organizations and rural education programs were exclusively male arenas. But these intra-national and international networks were sustained by and connected to women’s work through Home Economics. Van Rensselaer, in particular, saw great, even global potential for the field early on. In 1915, she addressed the American Home Economics Association and declared the home “the nucleus of all social life [.]” In line with the ideology of “social housekeeping,” Van Rensselaer did not see a focus on the home as a constraining; rather, she was crafting a renewed invitation to “domesticate” politics. Paula Baker has argued that following the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, women “surrendered to government functions that had belonged to the women’s sphere.”¹²⁵ Professional women working in Home Economics complicate this trajectory, and Baker’s notion that women “rejected the form and substance of nineteenth-century womanhood in the 1920s.”¹²⁶ Van Rensselaer, while rejecting some of the forms, would continue speaking

¹²³ “Mann ‘04 Gets Important Post,” *Cornell Alumni News* 26, no 39, 494.

¹²⁴ Amanda Carroll Waterhouse for The Rockefeller Fund, *Food & Prosperity: Balancing Technology and Community in Agriculture* (New York: The Rockefeller Fund, 2013), 105.

¹²⁵ Paula Baker, “The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920,” *American Historical Review* 89, no. 3 (1984): 644.

¹²⁶ Baker, *ibid.*

with much of the same substance—for her, studying the family was a vital path to civic service tied to state and federal projects.

Van Rensselaer also saw Home Economics providing a path into international understanding. At this same 1915 lecture, she stated that “there is no more fitting subject to encircle the world than Home Economics.”¹²⁷ This idea would take on new meaning with the Great War for both Van Rensselaer and her colleague/partner, Rose. During the war, both were content to serve the warring state. While Van Rensselaer relocated to Washington to direct the Home Economics Division of the United States Food Administration, Rose stayed behind and became deputy director of the New York office. As a result, each saw how massive campaigns for changing Americans’ food habits could be implemented at the federal and state level, respectively.¹²⁸ This kind of service also had a professional benefit. With the war, Home economists were declared “an extremely valuable ally” to the government, and within a few years, the Division of Home Economics was elevated to a Bureau at the federal level.¹²⁹ These women discovered that they could maintain their “municipal housekeeping” rhetoric—and, in some cases, lay claim to government functions. In other words, they became some of the governmental experts to whom Baker refers.

In the same year that the Bureau of Home Economics was created, the global implications of the field came even more sharply into view. After the war, like Mann, who was asked to tour agricultural colleges in Europe, Van Rensselaer and Rose were called upon to assist with the Commission for Relief in Belgium. While traveling throughout the war-torn country, they gathered nutritional data on some 5,000 children. Their findings were grim, as they

¹²⁷ Martha Van Rensselaer, Presidential AHEA Address, *Journal of Home Economics* 7, no.9 (1915): 461.

¹²⁸ Stocks, *A Growing College*, 61.

¹²⁹ Louise Stanley, “Chart of Functions,” *Bureau of Home Economics Scrapbook*, Collection 334, National Agricultural Library, Beltsville, MD.

discovered high levels of malnutrition and starvation. As they assessed the nutritional needs of the Belgians, Van Rensselaer and Rose also spoke to teachers, measuring the demand and potential for Home Economics in Belgium. They found that teachers there were “ravenous for information,” and “hungry in a way that we cannot understand with our rich, rich nutrition literature.” Without a system of land-grant colleges or Extension service, teachers there lacked the kind of support and education that Van Rensselaer and Rose had watched develop in their own lifetimes in the U.S.¹³⁰ In the midst of great suffering, they were convinced that the systems of knowledge developed in Reconstruction in the US could heal war-torn Europe.

Van Rensselaer and Rose understood the significance of their trip and had all of the letters they sent “home” to the faculty and staff at the College saved for posterity. In one of these letters, Rose urged her colleagues to “take stock of our democracy and begin to make conscious effort not to lose it.” Rose did not shy away from exceptionalism; she also declared that the United States was “in a big way the sunshine or the Vitamine [sic] D of the world.”¹³¹ Rose was not interested in merely bringing American models to the Belgians, though. Instead, seeing Belgians’ “hunger” for Home Economics, she envisioned exchange programs: “I’d like to select a dozen of these fine Belgian girls and take them home... They have the real spirit of freedom[.]” At that time, such an undertaking was deemed impossible. Gradually, however, this kind of experience would lend itself to elaborate exchange, research, and development programs. Rose, a figure described as “very eager to work with young people of all nationalities, would try

¹³⁰ “I am so glad that efforts are being made to get Belgian women started on the way toward some real educational opportunities. It looks though it might be a very steep road ahead of them. But one can never tell. I remember so well the women of my youth describing the heroic struggles they had when they went to college in the 70s. As one looks at history, that is only a short distance away!” Lou Henry Hoover to Van Rensselaer, 26 March 1924, Box 26, Folder 8, NYSCHE records.

¹³¹ Van Rensselaer and Rose, Letter 2249, “Better Homes,” 6 September 1923, *Letters from Belgium*, Box 47, NYSCHE records.

to “encircle the world.”¹³² For these women, this type of endeavor was about creating a more stable world—and forging “understanding”—yet working with the US government, an imperial power, was not a contradiction that troubled them.

While Home Economics research was becoming a recognizable tool for governmental use within the Bureau and the Commission, Van Rensselaer and Rose also pushed for greater prestige within the university. After years of gradual growth from a room to a department, in 1925, their efforts to push for a separate College finally came into fruition. With an enlarged scale for their operations, contemporaneously, these leaders also worked to reinforce the importance of their work to the people of New York, writing that “from the broad view of statecraft, the State will find in education in home economics a tool of the utmost importance.” Frustrated that the home “had been beclouded with false sentiment,” they declared that their work countered the notion of “the inviolability of the privacy of the home.”¹³³ One of the ways that Rose and Van Rensselaer worked to live up to their “substantial purpose” was through a plan for more staff, data, and a graduate program for Home Economics.¹³⁴ This plan was largely carried out by Rose and her successors. In the first twenty years of the graduate program, through 1944, 207 graduate degrees were awarded. In addition to the master’s degrees, starting in 1930, when the first doctorate was awarded to Helen Canon, the College would confer at least one degree of this kind almost every year from 1930-1944.¹³⁵ Of the 24 early doctorates conferred by the College, eleven were granted in Foods and Nutrition, including Kittrell’s.¹³⁶

¹³² Catherine J. Personius Interview conducted February 17 1964, 81, Box 5, New York State College of Home Economics Project oral histories, #47-2-O.H.. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

¹³³ *New York State College of Home Economics Third Annual Report* (1928): 7, 15.

¹³⁴ “Request for Permission to Give Graduate Work in the College of Home Economics,” Box 19, Folder 52, NYSCHS records.

¹³⁵ “Graduate student lists,” Box 51, Folder 2, NYSCHS records.

¹³⁶ The numbers in some of these charts vary. General statistics on registration can be found here: “Registration Statistics – 1932-1962,” Box 3, Folder 1, New York State College of Human Ecology Admissions Office records,

This buildup of graduate work was partially about prestige, but it was also about demonstrating skill with scientific methods and meeting the needs of various populations of rural people. Within one year of its creation, the Bureau of Home Economics had received “more than 5,000 letters...from homemakers, teachers, and other professional workers” seeking information on everything from budgeting to laundering. In the past, Bureau experts declared, Home Economics had “lacked a sufficient background of fundamental information developed by scientific research.”¹³⁷ Now, with a full Bureau staff and an expansive network of departments in land-grant colleges, home economists could take on new projects. Likewise, the records from Cornell show that this push for research was not merely self-serving; faculty in Agriculture and Home Economics were frequently asked about “best methods” or time-saving techniques from farmers and housewives.¹³⁸ Through direct letters, home economists learned what they needed to investigate further to meet their state’s needs; subsequently, this research was sent out through bulletins and “friendly” guides.¹³⁹ While the College always had an obligation to serve the people of New York, outside grants to fund graduate students from beyond this state’s borders enabled women within the College to have a more expansive mission.

Kittrell arrived at Cornell in time to become part of this upswing in research and graduate education in Home Economics. After taking her short courses, Kittrell undertook a research project. While all projects within Home Economics and Rural Education focused on a group of subjects and an issue within a rural community, many did not mention race or ethnicity. Kittrell’s thesis, “A Study of Home Economics Education in Negro High Schools and Colleges of North Carolina,” is atypical in relation to earlier projects in that race is explicitly identified and the

#23/11/2928. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

¹³⁷ “Report Dated 30 June 1924,” Subject Correspondence Office, Chief Bureau, Home Economics, Predecessors, 1924-29 Annual Reports Box 596, RG 176, National Archives and Records Administration, Kansas City, MO.

¹³⁸ Letters sent to Flora Rose from homemakers can be found in Box 34, Folder 33, NYSCHE records.

¹³⁹ Ella Cushman, *Letters from a Homemaker to Her Friend on House Cleaning*, Box 98, NYSCHE records.

subjects are from the South. At the same time, Kittrell's work connects with the larger upswing in graduate research related to rural life. The list of faculty with whom Kittrell worked, including Cora Binzel and J.E. (Julian Edward) Butterworth, connects Kittrell to the boom in spending to fund Rural Education. Professor Binzel, who specialized in Home Economics education, received her salary, initially, through Smith-Lever funds allotted to the university.¹⁴⁰ Butterworth also fit with this push for "teacher training" from the federal government. He focused on rural surveys, and his book, *The Modern Rural School*, is considered a landmark in the field.¹⁴¹

While drawing on some of her mentors' models, Kittrell focused on the particular educational components of what she called "Negro schools" located in North Carolina. In examining the "uses and applications of Home Economics," Kittrell conducted surveys with principals, teachers, and students to get at perceptions of the field. Out of 76 accredited black high schools in the state, 53 had Home Economics programs. In her study of 40 of these programs, she tracked an upward trend in high school Home Economics programs in black communities. This was related to the fact that the three historically black colleges offering Home Economics in the state had all added a four-year degree option since 1924. Concurrently, the number of students attending college had gone up 500% between 1923 and 1930.¹⁴² With 50% more teachers now holding a bachelor's degree, many of them in Home Economics, Kittrell was observing trends in line with her own experience at Hampton in the preceding years.¹⁴³

In addition to compiling quantitative data, Kittrell also examined "various conceptions of the term 'Home Economics'" and discovered that among most principals, the "old" emphasis on

¹⁴⁰ More on Cora Binzel in Box 4, Folder 33, NYSCHE records.

¹⁴¹ J.E. Butterworth, *Rural School Survey of New York State: School Buildings and Grounds* (Philadelphia: Fell Company Printers, 1922).

¹⁴² Kittrell, "A Study of Home Economics Education in Negro High Schools and Colleges of North Carolina," (master's thesis, Cornell University, 1932), 1. Some of this data was also drawn from "A Study of Home Economics Education in Teacher Training Institutions for Negroes," *Home Economics Series* 28, no.7, 28; "Trends in Home Economics Education," *Department of the Interior Bulletin*, no. 25 (1929).

¹⁴³ Kittrell, "A Study of Home Economics Education," 31.

‘cooking and sewing’ was “diminishing very rapidly.” Even the notion of training “future home-makers” was “supplemented by the idea that home economics should also make for finer living in the present life of boys and girls.”¹⁴⁴ Most principals surveyed considered training in foods and nutrition most important, but subjects such as clothing and childcare were also given high priority. Overall, most educators in her survey suggested that courses in Home Economics made contributions in many areas, including civic education, ethics, and “worthy home ownership,” in line with the contemporaneous focus on “better homes.”¹⁴⁵

In Kittrell’s descriptions of the discipline, there is scarcely even a hint that Home Economics had an historical—and contemporary—relationship to domestic service for some black men and women. Despite her glowing descriptions of the academic work, the place of Home Economics in many of these schools belied the notion that it was truly held in such high esteem. Echoing the early Home Economics program at Cornell, many of the schools she surveyed also put their programs in the basement. Kittrell further observed that many high schools were underutilizing spaces such as cafeterias that could be turned into “laboratories.” But Kittrell marked this as an issue for “older” school systems. Based on her assessments, newer high schools more often had “well planned” departments with “adequate provisions” on higher floors.¹⁴⁶ In her final assessment of the high schools, Kittrell also suggested that all could benefit from practice space, a sign that she held these programs to a high standard as many colleges had only recently added that element of instruction.

To Kittrell, these spaces and geographies mattered because they reflected the status of the field. Given her high opinion of the discipline, Home Economics had no place in a basement, connected to drudgery. Once committed to Home Economics, Kittrell insisted that it be held in

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 11.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 17.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 40; 59.

high regard—and if it was not already, she would change that. After spending quite a bit of time in basements, Kittrell was more impressed with the “negro colleges,” where she found that students had practice environments and better facilities.¹⁴⁷ This evaluation may reflect the fact that Kittrell was teaching at a college profiled in her thesis, Bennett. But at all institutions, Kittrell noted the need for improvement. She was concerned that the college students were not getting *off* campus enough—they needed to do “more extension work” and see Home Economics as a vehicle for community engagement.¹⁴⁸

Additionally, Kittrell stressed that teachers should spend time encouraging discussion on why one should study Home Economics. Partially, this was an echo of the transition from skills-based training to more of a liberal arts focus at Hampton in the preceding years. Kittrell was not encouraging teachers to jettison all training related to practical matters, such as how to make hats, or preserve food. Yet she was insisting that more abstract concepts, including how to appear “becomingly and neatly dressed” or how to “spend the 24 hours of the day in order to gain the most” also be incorporated into teaching plans.¹⁴⁹ For Kittrell, Home Economics students should learn practical and abstract thinking skills. These lessons were not merely for themselves, but in her terms, for learning how to support the “home community.” This careful phrasing suggested a purposefully imprecise line between home and community, and a mission to train students for work and “service” beyond individual units.

In this thesis, Kittrell’s descriptions of an ideal program in Home Economics are significant, for she did not always document how she viewed the field. This research also had immediate implications for her work as an instructor at Bennett, so this was not merely abstract planning. In listing her priorities, Kittrell was also outlining the obligatory Art of Living course

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 54.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 59.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 90.

she taught at Bennett right around this same time. Furthermore, this sense of applicability was in line with what other graduate students from black colleges, many of whom continued to teach, were doing with their research.¹⁵⁰ One of Kittrell's colleague's careers is particularly striking in its similarity. In addition to Kittrell, Felice Watson Holmes, Hampton '29 completed her MS at Cornell in 1934. Holmes was also teaching at Bennett in between her coursework and she used her own students as her survey population. For her thesis, Holmes surveyed students' perceptions of dress at Bennett, identifying how "a preference for a color and consideration of complexion" impacted students' dress habits.¹⁵¹

Holmes was not the only graduate student at Cornell studying college students' dress choices. Another graduate student at Cornell, Natalie Dunn, was also researching college wardrobes, but at Cornell.¹⁵² Her study did not signal an interest in race—because it did not have to. But Holmes, like Kittrell, was seen as working on a "special field of interest." This was another way of saying work for "her people," and a way of not saying "negro" or any other racial descriptor.¹⁵³ While this work was convenient for Holmes considering her preexisting relationship to the student population at Bennett, there were likely other factors. Contemporary letters sent to the Bureau demonstrate a strong interest in research specifically for African American women. As one woman wrote,

I am deeply interested in the problem of correct dress for Negro women. I wish to state that I (1) am colored and I am trying to prepare myself for a life of

¹⁵⁰ Letter to Miss Stella M. Wiley, Institutions: Hampton Institute, Cornell University Graduate School Records, #12/5/636. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

¹⁵¹ Felice W. Holmes, "A Study of Some Important Practices and Reactions of a Selected Group of College Freshman Girls in Relation to Textiles and Clothing," (master's thesis, Cornell University, 1934), 20-21.

¹⁵² There were only two graduate students in textiles at that time. See *New York State College of Home Economics Ninth Annual Report*, 1934; Natalie Dunn, "An exploratory study of the relationship between a Cornell freshman's wardrobe and her orientation to college life," (master's thesis, Cornell University, 1934).

¹⁵³ Watson's major area was Textiles and Clothing, and her minor was Household Arts. The "special interest" appears in Morin's review, "Felice Lucile Watson Holmes," Box 83, Cornell University Graduate School Records, #12/5/636. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

usefulness. I want to be a real help to my people and I believe that an understanding of the subject of correct dress is greatly needed.¹⁵⁴

Students such as Holmes were doing more than advancing their careers—they were seen as working to meet the need expressed in this letter to the Bureau. While Dunn worked for her “people” at Cornell, Holmes was seen as having another mission.

In addition to Kittrell and Holmes, Lucy Clay Barrow, Hampton ’29 received funding through a Rosenwald fellowship to complete her MEd at Cornell in 1932.¹⁵⁵ Barrow studied Jeanes Supervisors, educators working for the Jeanes Fund who assisted with teacher training in rural schools in the South.¹⁵⁶ Barrow shared many academic interests with Holmes and Kittrell, but she was only admitted provisionally.¹⁵⁷ One of the obstacles she faced was her command of French. Though her qualifications to study Education or Home Economics went unchallenged, this was an area where faculty found a basis for exclusion. Similarly, Howard archivist Dorothy Porter Wesley was challenged on her ability to speak French elsewhere, and later, Kittrell *also* almost did not complete her degree due to an issue with her French translation exam. In each of these cases, there was an element of racial discrimination. Wesley, for instance, was told her “lips were too thick...to speak French well [.]”¹⁵⁸ While Wesley, Kittrell, and Barrow could succeed in many arenas in spite of academic constraints, this highly subjective field of evaluating translations and speech patterns proved ripe for racial exclusion.

¹⁵⁴ Ella Mae Washington to Ruth O’Brien, 2 November 1928, Folder: Extension Service 1929, RG 33, National Archives Kansas City.

¹⁵⁵ Lucy C. Barrow, “A Course of Study in Home Economics Planned for a Teacher Training Class,” (master’s thesis, Cornell University, 1932). Barrow’s first job at Philander Smith College and her graduate work at Cornell were funded by Rosenwald.

¹⁵⁶ Lance Jones, *The Jeanes Teacher in the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1937).

¹⁵⁷ J.E. Butterworth to Dean Richtmyer, 10 May 1932, “Lucy C. Barrow,” Issue C.1, Box 66, Cornell University Graduate School Records, #12/5/636. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

¹⁵⁸ Janet Sims-Wood, *Dorothy Porter Wesley at Howard University: Building a Legacy of Black History* (Charleston: History Press, 2014), 23.

Though Barrow initially faced a “problem,” to use Kittrell’s phrasing, she did finish her degree and even went on to advanced study at Columbia. This was partly due to the fact that she had an ally behind the scenes. Professor Binzel, Kittrell’s advisor, also supported Barrow, ensuring that she would maintain her place in the College.¹⁵⁹ Binzel is actually a common denominator in many records of African American women studying rural life at that time. In addition to Barrow and Kittrell, she worked with Mayme L. Powell, Hampton ’29, MS ’31. With a Rosenwald Fellowship, Powell studied clothing problems at Langston University. After her time at Cornell, Poweell had a long career teaching at various historically black colleges, including Prairie View State College, Hampton, and Bennett.¹⁶⁰ Through her support of students from throughout black colleges in the South, it is evident that Binzel took the mission of finding ways of “understanding” among all rural women seriously.

In addition to these Hampton graduates there was also Bennie (Maye) Ware Rankin, Hampton ’30, who completed her MS in Education through the assistance of a GEB fellowship in 1939.¹⁶¹ Upon first glance, Ware’s time at Cornell resembles that of her fellow students. She took many of the same classes and her research concerned black colleges and secondary schools. Yet Ware’s work is exceptional in that she offers a broad and sharp political critique. While Kittrell and others spoke vaguely of civics training, Ware is less equivocal:

Growing up in a country where actual participation in a democracy has been more discouraged than encouraged has caused Negro home economics teachers to close their eyes to some of the social and political ills.

¹⁵⁹ Cora Binzel re: Barrow, 1931-19932, Issue C.1, Box 66, Cornell University Graduate School Records, #12/5/636. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

¹⁶⁰ “Mayme Lillie Powell,” Box 97, Cornell University Graduate School Records, #12/5/636. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

¹⁶¹ Bennie M. Ware, “Ways of Helping Home Economics Teachers in Service Through Supervision,” (master’s thesis, Cornell University, 1939).

Ware's goal with her thesis was to address the teachers who "want to help but do not know how to begin."¹⁶² Her study is as much about teaching techniques as a meditation on why education matters. Throughout her work, Ware urges teachers to find the concepts "that hinder the task of adjusting our democracy to the conditions of the industrial age."¹⁶³ Ware became a professor for many years at Tuskegee Institute, but what kind of teacher she became is difficult to determine. No personal or professional papers were kept on her behalf.

There are still other silences with regards to this cohort. While there are many institutional connections among the women briefly chronicled here, the extent to which they crossed paths or formed shared bonds is difficult to determine. Holmes's connection to Kittrell is particularly elusive; both went to Hampton and taught at Bennett yet they did not maintain—or preserve—any lengthy correspondence. Unlike undergraduates, these women also did not create yearbooks or other forms of social media to collect memories. But the faculty teaching Home Economics and Rural Education at Cornell did have places to reflect upon and write about these students collectively. In one pointed letter, Kittrell, Holmes, Barrow, and Powell are compared for their "background in design and clothing"—which was found to be universally lacking.¹⁶⁴ In another side-by-side review, Barrow, who had been admitted "provisionally," was later declared to be "above the average among colored students" in the program.¹⁶⁵ Generally, however, the short comments written by faculty emphasized what all of the women shared: a perceive desire to work for "their people."

¹⁶² Ware, "Ways of Helping," 43.

¹⁶³ Ware, 29.

¹⁶⁴ Letter to Miss Hazel A. Ellenwood, Secretary to the Dean of the Graduate School, 27 January 1939, Kittrell Deceased Alumni File, Box 315, Folder 2, Deceased Alumni files, #41-2-877. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library. Ellenwood had just graduated a few years earlier in 1934, so it is striking that she was suddenly privy to this information about graduate students in her new secretarial role.

¹⁶⁵ Cora Binzel re: Barrow, 1.

Due to her later prominence and longer tenure at Cornell, more files survive on Kittrell's time and work as a graduate student. But even early on there seemed to be a sense among some researchers that Kittrell "had a real contribution to make to the field of home economics," in the words of Rose.¹⁶⁶ It was clear that some saw Kittrell as the superior student, and she may have been chosen, in a sense, to receive encouragement to continue beyond the others from Hampton. Furthermore, outside of Cornell, Kittrell was seen as having potential in other venues. In 1931, Kittrell was named a "contributor" in *The Pittsburgh Courier*.¹⁶⁷ Hundreds of miles away from Bennett and Cornell, Kittrell's work was news. In this same paper, another teacher is labeled "educator"—but Kittrell was seen as having a distinct skillset. A "contributor," Kittrell was a leader and a builder—a teacher of Home Economics, but also something more.



Fig. 2.4: "Contributor: Miss Flemmie Kittrell" *Pittsburgh Courier*, 24 October 24, 1931, 6.

This same snippet also references Kittrell's recent *Southern Workman* article about the program in Home Economics at Bennett.¹⁶⁸ More than an accumulation of skills, *her* Home Economics

¹⁶⁶ Flora Rose to Kittrell, 1 November 1935, Box 315, Folder 2, Kittrell Deceased Alumni File.

¹⁶⁷ "Contributor: Miss Flemmie Kittrell" *Pittsburgh Courier*, 24 October 24, 1931, 6.

¹⁶⁸ Kittrell, "Home Economics at Bennett College," *Southern Workman* 60, no. 8 (1931): 381-4.

program was a way “to help students find and solve their own problems.” Beyond this practical application, this degree would also “give students a broad outlook and cultural background of the family and its position in the history of civilization.”¹⁶⁹ Kittrell had done more than fulfill Jones’s promise for a better educated faculty. She was now making a name for herself by claiming a strong role in the collegiate program. If Kittrell had learned anything at Cornell, it was how to enhance one’s department and position.

When she returned to Bennett full-time after completing her master’s degree, Kittrell also likely recognized that money was being put into Bennett at a surprisingly high rate. A major reason to stay in Greensboro, for a time at least, was the recent donation of \$250,000 to Bennett from the GEB. This gift was matched by other donors and within a few years more than \$500,000 was put into the campus—during the Depression.¹⁷⁰ From these grants and GEB funding, Bennett would become one of only three black colleges to have a lab-based nursery program; the others were Spelman College and Hampton. These programs shared financial and personal connections. Bennett’s program, which was run by Kittrell, was modeled on Cornell’s Department of Family Life and Nursery School. This latter program, run by Kittrell’s advisor, had been funded through the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Foundation Memorial (LSRM) fund in 1925.¹⁷¹

Just as Rockefeller names and networks circulated through all of these spaces, Kittrell had knowledge of most of them as she moved between Hampton, Greensboro, and Ithaca.

¹⁶⁹ Kittrell, “Home Economics at Bennett College,” 381.

¹⁷⁰ James Stewart, “Bennett College for Women: A Brief History to 1945,” *Textiles, Teachers, and Troops*, <http://libcdm1.uncg.edu/cdm/ref/collection/ttt/id/37431>

¹⁷¹ Family Life Department Historical Material, Box 1, Ethel B. Waring Papers #23/13/550.

Based on her knowledge of these connections, Kittrell may have observed that philanthropic investments in nursery schools were going overseas.¹⁷² For instance, the LSRM, also partially endowed the American College for Girls (ACG), a missionary project with a Home Economics program in Constantinople.¹⁷³ As with projects at Cornell, in this “international investment in good will,” space and place mattered. The ACG was built in “beautiful grey stone” and was positioned so that it could “be seen from every vessel passing up and down the strait” in Istanbul. What’s more, even this project had “dreams” for a “practice house, built in Turkish fashion [.]” With each of these projects, the idea was not to replicate or export a single model, as these educators “have not believed in forcing upon them American methods that might not fit their needs [.]”¹⁷⁴ Instead, the idea was to develop particular solutions for each “people.” At the same time, funding was power; whether a student was in Istanbul or from Tuskegee, the money all tended to flow from one of a few funds.¹⁷⁵

By following the money moving in and out of these programs, it is clear that select international networks were constantly colliding and intertwining in Ithaca. Kittrell is sometimes isolated as an exceptional figure for teaching Home Economics abroad later in her career. This is clearly something she learned, at least in part, at Cornell. But even if she saw Cornell as a nexus for these growing networks, she did not immediately return for doctoral work. Instead, she chose a more cosmopolitan and diverse urban campus, enrolling in three summer courses at Teachers College in 1932 with previously unused Rosenwald grant money.¹⁷⁶ New York might seem like a questionable location for rural studies, but it was actually flourishing at Columbia, which had

¹⁷² Ellen Fleischmann, “Lost in Translation: Home Economics and the Sidon Girls’ School of Lebanon, 1924-1932,” *Social Sciences and Missions* 23 (2010): 32-62.

¹⁷³ “Gift of John D. Rockefeller, through his agent: \$150,000 in 1912.” See American College for Girls Records, 1880s-1979, Series I: Records of the Trustees, ACG 3-7, Columbia University Archives, New York.

¹⁷⁴ Letter from Chairman of the International Committee to Members of Home Economics Clubs, February 1926, International Activities – College Club International Committee, 1926-1949, Box 235, AAFCS Papers.

¹⁷⁵ “International Activities, College Club International Committee, 1926-1949,” Box 235, AAFCS Papers.

¹⁷⁶ Application for Fellowship, Box 427, Folder 4, Julius Rosenwald Fund Papers.

endowed an Institute for Rural Affairs for \$2 million.¹⁷⁷ Demography may have also trumped geography, as this was the period when ‘Black Manhattan’ was developing uptown.

In addition to the lure of Harlem, in recent years, increasing numbers of minority students had been enrolling at Teachers College. Contemporaneously, Teachers College faculty had been hosting Rosenwald lectures featuring prominent philanthropists and black intellectuals.¹⁷⁸

This emphasis on African American education was in large part due to Professor Mabel Carney, who was head of the Department of Rural Education (1918-1941) at Teachers College. Carney played an instrumental role in securing funding opportunities for African American and foreign students, including “government officials from ...developing nations” to continue in higher education. In addition to a strong relationship to the Rosenwald Fund, like Mann, Carney was active in the American Country Life Association and she made tours of the black institutions in the South under the auspices of the GEB.¹⁷⁹ Pursuant to one of these tours, Carney commented that she had seen “conditions of every type in both schools and rural life, many of which I scarcely thought possible for this day in American society.”¹⁸⁰ What Carney had witnessed in passing was the substance of Kittrell’s life.

Reversing Carney’s trajectory, Kittrell was traveling to New York City for the first time. While acclimating, she may have taken advantage of planned “excursions” tailored to summer students, or walked only a few blocks east to hear the jazz beats of Duke Ellington booming from the Apollo.¹⁸¹ Or perhaps she spent at least some of her time considering the heavy constraints placed upon black domestics, particularly those who stood in line along the Bronx “slave

¹⁷⁷ “Columbia University plans,” *New York Times* (New York, NY): May 16, 1927.

¹⁷⁸ Kathleen Weiler, “Mabel Carney at Teachers College: From Home Missionary to White Ally” *Teachers College Record* 107, no. 12 (2005): 2599–2633.

¹⁷⁹ Mabel Carney Faculty File, RG 17, PocketKnowledge, Courtesy of The Gottesman Libraries at Teachers College, Columbia University. .

¹⁸⁰ Weiler, “Mabel Carney,” 2616.

¹⁸¹ “Students to See Sights of City,” *Columbia Daily Spectator*, May 31, 1932.

market” waiting for work.¹⁸² Maybe she even crossed paths with Langston Hughes, one of her favorite poets who spent time at the Rosenwald YMCA¹⁸³ While all of these encounters are speculative, Kittrell was certainly affected in some way by the buzzing of diasporic networks in the city. After spending nearly a decade at Hampton, Kittrell must have felt a thrill stepping into an entirely new domain of black cosmopolitanism.

In coming to Columbia, Kittrell was also entering a prestigious academic network and taking her place among the 11,559 students enrolled in summer courses. For her part, Kittrell elected to study educational guidance, social hygiene/sex education, and the psychology of personality. These choices were likely related to her recent appointment as Dean of Students/Women at Bennett. Even though these courses were compressed, they were quite rigorous. In a matter of only two months, there were dozens of lectures and exercises, up to 30, for each class.¹⁸⁴ More broadly, the range of courses “offered to men and women on equal terms” at Columbia was stunning. From Americanization to Zoology, the variety in this single listing is typical of the larger catalogue: “nutrition, Old Testament, painting, parent education [.]”¹⁸⁵ As this list suggests, rigid lines between practical/technical study and academic pursuits could not have been easily upheld in general at Columbia during the 1920s and 1930s. More specifically, Teachers College also had a complex if not contradictory academic program. Here, faculty offered “professional training, both theoretical and practical” along with courses in the Practical Arts.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸² “Harlem During the 1930s” in Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); “Ella Baker and Marvel Cooke, The Slave Market,” *The Crisis* 42 (1935): 330- 331.

¹⁸³ In a Head Start meeting, Kittrell would recite Langston Hughes’s “Mother to Son” from memory (Chapter 5).

¹⁸⁴ Columbia University, *Columbia University Bulletin of Information* 33, no.53 (1933).

¹⁸⁵ Columbia University, *Columbia University Bulletin of Information* 31, no.52 (1931): 214.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

There were still other signs of fluidity and systems in flux. Kittrell's arrival coincided with the addition of the New College at Columbia.¹⁸⁷ The New College was a particular kind of immersive, professional training program with 'a volunteeristic mission' and a focus on 'contact with life.'¹⁸⁸ Students in the New College spent time in Canton, North Carolina studying Home Economics; they also completed farm activities, fieldwork in Harlem, a period of study abroad, and a stint in industry.¹⁸⁹ This wide range of activities led to "burnout" and New College did not last. But some students were deeply moved by this range of work, and in their last year, they created their own yearbook, *We Asked the Mole*.¹⁹⁰ The students writing the yearbook identified themselves as those "who do not wish to too much isolate the real world from preparation for the real world" in their studies.¹⁹¹ As these students realized that their education would be framed as fitting between "a past war and perhaps a coming war," they wondered if there was a future for the concept of education for life.¹⁹²

When seen in relation to contemporary missions at Cornell, the combination of international studies, work in Harlem, and training in the South for the New College is especially striking. While this was an extraordinary curriculum, this confluence of interests was clearly not entirely unusual for the period. There was even precedent within Columbia, particularly with the formation of The International Institute. Founded in 1923 with funding from Rockefeller's International Education Board, the International Institute was designed to focus on international

¹⁸⁷ Goodwin Watson, "Utopia and Rebellion: The New College Experiment," in Matthew Miles, *Innovation in Education* (New York: Columbia University Teachers College, 1964).

¹⁸⁸ Sonia E. Murrow, "'Preparing Teachers to Remake Society': New College at Teachers College, Columbia University, 1932-1939," *Critical Questions in Education* 1, 59.

¹⁸⁹ Murrow, "Preparing Teachers to Remake Society," 55; "The Challenge of Teaching in 1932," PocketKnowledge.

¹⁹⁰ The title is a reference to William Blake, *The Book of Thel* (1789): "Does the Eagle know what is in the pit? /Or wilt thou go ask the Mole: /Can Wisdom be put in a silver rod? /Or Love in a golden bowl?" The idea is that these students "asked the mole."

¹⁹¹ Columbia University New College, *We Asked the Mole: New College Yearbook*, 1939, PocketKnowledge.

¹⁹² New College, *We Asked the Mole*, 4.

study *and* black institutions in the US.¹⁹³ To meld these interests, students from the Institute, many of whom were foreigners, actually went *on tour* to the South. As part of these trips, they visited Hampton. During the 1927 tour, Kittrell was still a student, and by that time, was running her own tea house. It is highly likely that she saw the Institute's parade of 80 international students who came with Columbia faculty to see the Practice Home, dormitories, the museum, and the School of Home Economics.¹⁹⁴ Hampton records note that the students were served tea. It is worth wondering—by whom? The Institute tours promised meaningful exchange, but perhaps it was more like the spectacle of work promised in the *Visitor's Guide*, a text presented to potential donors. However Kittrell interpreted these tours, she would later replicate these kinds of teas with her own international students at Howard; more immediately, Kittrell also clearly chose to *go* to Columbia, perhaps to see whence these students came for herself.

Kittrell's perception of these types of programs, and her own navigations of these networks, can be hard to access. In lieu of primary source material from Kittrell, Carney's work with the GEB and African American students at Teachers College provide a window into the race politics of Columbia in this period. In many ways, Carney serves as model of the pragmatic race politics deployed by many administrators in the Depression. As historian Richard Glotzer explains, Carney was against segregation, but she was not a radical. Instead, Carney took a gradualist approach, seeing "racial progress in the context of an evolving cultural pluralism permitting points of contact between the races, especially between better educated

¹⁹³ See *Announcements of Teachers College 1935*, 178-179; "International Institute of Teachers College," Folder 7, Box 33, Series I: Academics and Research, 1750s-2000, Columbia University Archives. More information is available in "Ten News Clippings, 1923-1931, Teachers College International Institute;" "Petition Addressed to the General Education Board Regarding the Establishment of a Training Center for Foreign Students at Teachers College, Columbia University," 1923; "Report on the International Institute of Teachers College to the Rockefeller Foundation" January 1939, Pocket Knowledge.

¹⁹⁴ Loose sheets on "International Institute: 1924," Folder: Foreign Exchange, Hampton University Archives.

individuals.”¹⁹⁵ Carney advocated for many minority students seeking graduate fellowships and separately, undertook investigations of segregated school systems. While working to secure routes for advancement for some, she still did not push for total integration or equality.

Around the time Kittrell was at Columbia, Carney worked extensively with Edna Meade Colson, an African American graduate student seeking a GEB fellowship. Colson subsequently asked for Carney’s assistance with housing in the women’s graduate dormitory, a space predominantly occupied by white women. As with Cornell, Columbia and Teachers College were only open to a degree, as Colson soon learned. In response, Carney urged Colson to stay in ‘the apartment reserved for colored girls’ or the International House. Carney justified the segregated options this way: with the International House, Colson could ‘demonstrate the new relationships and attitudes’ in America to foreign students. But this “new” attitude was actually quite old. Colson could get scholarships, but she could not have access to an equal place.

Though Carney and Cornell’s Dean of Women Louise Fitch do not appear to be similar at first glance, both deployed similar logic in some situations. Like Fitch, Carney framed her assessment of Colson with colorism. In one document, Carney noted that Colson was “very light” and had “much refinement and exceptional ability.”¹⁹⁶ According to Carney’s logic, a student of such “refinement” should see the international dormitory a good compromise. But this particular suggestion is also quite telling. As historian Kathleen Weiler has argued, it was as if Colson—and other minority students—were “foreigners in their own country.”¹⁹⁷ This same pattern was also evident at Cornell, where co-eds such as Grace Hicks Peterson, ’30, an African American student from Alabama, were also in the Cosmopolitan Club.

¹⁹⁵ Richard Glotzer, “The Career of Mabel Carney: The Study of Race and Rural Development in the United States and South Africa,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 29, no. 2 (1996): 311.

¹⁹⁶ Weiler, 2614.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, 2611.

A longer look at Carney's career reveals that her opinions on race and the "place" of black students at Teachers College did not remain static. Like Kittrell, Carney was highly attuned to fellowship funds and education options. Later on in the 1930s, Carney created assignments at Teachers College that encouraged students to critique racism within segregated school systems. As a consequence, the Rosenwald Fund stopped funding applicants for Teachers College.¹⁹⁸ The connection between this assignment and this foreclosure of options was explicit, not just assumed by Carney and others. The boards' officers apparently drew a firm line between opportunity and equality.

The need to please those holding the philanthropic purse strings also affected students at Cornell. In 1930, a student named Inez Blackchief, an American Indian from the Tonawanda Reservation in Akron, New York was given a DAR fellowship to study Home Economics. The fellowship was initiated by Dr. Erl Bates, a Quaker physician known as "a friend" to Indians in New York. While attending a DAR meeting, Bates put forth the idea that "the daughters" should sponsor a 'Human gateway,' a scholarship student, rather than another marble structure.¹⁹⁹ This proposal was one of Bates's many efforts to bring former Carlisle Indian School students to Cornell. But Blackchief, who also joined the Cosmopolitan Club, was never really given an opportunity to succeed or to be a peer in the College. The DAR imposed overly cumbersome work requirements and Blackchief eventually left Cornell.²⁰⁰ Thus Colson and Blackchief remained relative outsiders, or "foreign," in some way at their respective institutions. Though

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, 2621.

¹⁹⁹ "Indian Student Scholarships," Box 1, Erl Bates papers, #21-24-790. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

²⁰⁰ Inez Blackchief, special student, *The Cornellian* 62 (1930): 625; Inez Blackchief Registration Card, 1929, Cornell Graduate Files; more on the plans for the educational program in Box 1, Folder 20, Erl Bates papers; "Indian Reservation Aided by the College," *Cornell Countryman* 2, no.1.

Bates saw this scholarship as an opportunity to further and update former mission efforts, in the work requirements, there were more lingering traces of the Carlisle system than Bates would have cared to admit.

Despite the constraints imposed on these and other students, after another year of teaching, Kittrell returned to Cornell, this time as a doctoral student. Kittrell knew how to excel in this system now and therefore claimed that she had more to do for “her people.” To start, she worked with her connections within the GEB to obtain more scholarship money. In 1933, she wrote that the recent Rosenwald grant had “encouraged me to go on even after receiving the master's degree.”²⁰¹ Scholars who applied to both funds were often doubly rewarded, a fact that was well known by both officers and applicants.²⁰² In response to this message, Kittrell got the GEB grant and also received funding from the National Board of Education of the Methodist Church. After that, she was also afforded support through the Anna Cora Smith Fellowship, a grant awarded by the College of Home Economics at Cornell.²⁰³

These grants and scholarships enabled Kittrell to take courses during the summer of 1934 and then again in the spring and summer of 1935. By the time she finished her degree, the nation was deep in the throes of the Depression. While her studies continued, other summer programs and the Law School stopped offering courses. Even earlier, by July 1933, the number of students coming for summer sessions had dropped considerably. One *Alumni News* columnist declared, “The ‘Depression,’ as some die-hards persist in calling it, is supposed to be the cause.” Chiding the “real workers,” the “spectacled, serious...graduate students” who still continued to come, this

²⁰¹ Jayne Beilke, “Deserving to Go Further: Philanthropic Fellowships, African American Women, and the Development of Higher Educational Leadership in the South, 1930-1954,” Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, April 1999.

²⁰² Jayne R. Beilke, “The Changing Emphasis of the Rosenwald Fellowship Program 1928-1948,” *Journal of Negro Education* 66 (1997): 3-15.

²⁰³ Flemma Kittrell, “A Study of Negro Infant Feeding Practices in a Selected Community of North Carolina” (doctoral thesis, Cornell University, 1935).

reporter snidely noted that they came after much “scraping, and saving, and self-abnegation... during the school year”²⁰⁴ As one of these “real workers,” Kittrell likely did have to scrape and save, and when she returned for doctoral work, her time was fairly compressed. But Kittrell was also a shrewd student; she was entering a high-demand field at the right time. Despite the national downturn, some programs at Cornell continued to thrive.²⁰⁵ While other programs were struggling to maintain students, professors in the College of Home Economics were celebrating the unveiling of a new building and moving into new territory.

This sense of relative stability within the College was partially due to the practical application of Home Economics. During this bleak period, the College was able to generate vital research on issues such as budgeting, nutrition, and meal planning. Rose, who now led the College, worked closely with the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), forging yet another bond between the work of the College and the government.²⁰⁶ While familial issues related to poverty were often high on the agenda, Rose also had other plans. In addition to working with FERA, Rose served as an expert with the League of Nations. She was not alone in this work, either. For some experts, there was a sense that home economists could “supply attitudes of international understanding and scientific facts for rational international trade, which will shortly substitute common sense and world organization for hate and war.”²⁰⁷ Though “hate and war” were scarcely “outside” problems, this idea actually had a popular base. By 1934, there were over 1,000 youth Home Economics clubs where women discussed consumer problems and

²⁰⁴ “The depression,” *Cornell Alumni News* 35, no. 34 (1933): 435.

²⁰⁵ “Bankhead-Jones Act,” *Cornell Alumni News* 38, no.11 (1935): 169.

²⁰⁶ Megan J. Elias, *Stir it Up: Home Economics in American Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), 90-91.

²⁰⁷ “Home Economics World Bond; Montana Woman Heads Group,” n.d., *Christian Science Monitor*, Ethel B. Waring Papers.

collected funds for foreign students to come to study Home Economics at American colleges.²⁰⁸

Students in these clubs were encouraged to see that “the problems of the home are similar in every land” and to learn about other cultures.²⁰⁹

In this same period, Kittrell was also broadening her horizons and showing more of a marked interest in connecting Home Economics to internationalism. Throughout the 1930s, Kittrell continued to work with the YWCA, which promoted “widening the circle of friendship” and a vague “Association spirit” through work abroad.²¹⁰ More importantly, Kittrell joined the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, an association that historically had not been open to many minority women.²¹¹ Though Kittrell was not well known in this period, she was not entirely obscure; her academic achievements were celebrated in nationally distributed black papers.²¹² In the next decade, with her academic credentials firmly established, Kittrell would move into higher positions of power within both organizations. Then, issues first raised in the WILPF agenda in the 1930s, such as the sovereignty of Liberia, would become matters on which Kittrell was consulted.²¹³

²⁰⁸ “Student Home Economics Clubs,” and “International Scholarships and Student Clubs,” *Journal of Home Economics* 26, no.9 (1934): 551; 571.

²⁰⁹Chairman of the International Committee Edna Lord Demarest to the Advisers of Home Economics Clubs, n.d., possibly 1928-1929, “the problems of the home are similar in every land;” International Activities – College Club International Committee, 1926-1949, Box 235, AAFCS Papers.

²¹⁰ See “Bessie Boies Cotton” in Amy Hague and Tricia Brooks, “‘An Ever-Widening Circle of Friendship’: YWCA Overseas Secretaries from China to Liberia,” Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, <https://www.smith.edu/library/libs/ssc/ywca-os/ywca-intro.html>. This source draws information on Cotton from Elizabeth Leighton, “A Woman’s Mission to Revolutionary Russia: Bessie Boies Cotton and the Young Women Christian Association” (honors thesis, Mount Holyoke College, 1983).

²¹¹ Joyce Blackwell, *No Peace Without Freedom: Race and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, 1915-1975* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004), 92.

²¹² “Have Their Masters” *Chicago Defender* (Chicago, IL), Apr. 21, 1934, Kittrell Trustee Box, Hampton University Archives; “Bennett College Will Open with Increased Faculty,” *New York Age* (New York, NY), Sep. 5, 1936, 3.

²¹³ Melinda Plastas, *A Band of Noble Women: Racial Politics in the Women’s Peace Movement* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011), 212-213; Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 225; Michelle Rief, “Thinking Locally, Acting Globally: The International Agenda of African American Clubwomen, 1880-1940,” *Journal of African American History* 89, no.3 (2004): 203-222.

As a student at Hampton, Kittrell had chosen Home Economics *over* Political Science as her major area of study. Seeing the work of nutrition and family experts such as Rose, Kittrell may have decided that she did not really forsake Political Science after all—she merely blended it with Home Economics. Indeed, as Kittrell was moving into the more advanced ranks of higher education, she did not move away from, but rather deeper into, Home Economics. When Kittrell first came to Cornell, she had focused on Rural Education. But for her Ph.D., Kittrell prioritized Nutrition and Child Development, fields squarely associated with Home Economics. During her years as a doctoral student, Kittrell also forged stronger relationships with Helen Monsch (Nutrition) and Ethel Waring (Child Development).

While much has been made of Kittrell as a first, what is not mentioned is how this achievement positioned her in relation to other faculty at Cornell. Many other leaders, such as Rose, the head of the College, did not even have this degree. As Professor Catherine Personius later observed, “your pioneers in the field may not have the formal degrees themselves” even though “they...created the kind of training needed by other people.”²¹⁴ Since the field was still relatively new in some collegiate programs, there had been a substantial move toward credential upgrading in the years preceding Kittrell’s arrival. Still, by completing her doctoral studies, Kittrell was actually exceeding some of the professors who taught her.²¹⁵ Yet Waring, who had only completed her Ph.D. at Columbia a few years earlier, and Monsch, who had earned her MS at Teachers College in 1916, seemed pleased to be working with women obtaining degrees at the highest levels.²¹⁶ Perhaps they were simply keen to see the field expand in size and prestige.

²¹⁴ Catherine J. Personius Interview conducted February 17 1964, Box 5, New York State College of Home Economics Project oral histories, #47-2-O.H.. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

²¹⁵ Linda Marie Fritschner, “The Rise and Fall of Home Economics” (PhD Diss, University of California, Davis, 1973), 104; 109-111.

²¹⁶ “Her high standards, her practicality, her dedication to nutrition education, her eagerness to learn from other cultures (foreign students and missionaries were usually enrolled in her classes), made her a unique member of the

Kittrell's primary advisor, Waring, also took a particular interest in her career. In Waring's words, Kittrell "needs only guidance—her own plans are thoughtfully made and she carries them along resourcefully."²¹⁷ Kittrell would later call Waring a "beloved professor...the most humane person I've ever known." She believed that Waring had shown her how "to observe objectively and not be prejudicial, because prejudice means having your thoughts get right too soon."²¹⁸ Kittrell made this comment in relation to Waring's courses on child observation. What Waring taught, and how she treated Kittrell, had a major impact on her life. In her courses, Waring argued that people did not naturally know how to "think, feel and act for the good"—this had to be taught by families, the "simple and almost universal laboratory for developing social attitude and social interaction [.]"²¹⁹ Under Waring's guidance, Family Studies was not about skills per se, but using the family as an agency for change. Kittrell would later argue that Waring influenced her thinking on how to train children in a way that would avoid the formation of prejudice.²²⁰ They maintained a correspondence for the rest of Waring's life.

Though they were very close, Waring's comments on Kittrell were not exceptional in their positivity. Many professors were deeply impressed by Kittrell, who was herself already a college professor elsewhere. As Helen Monsch observed, Kittrell was "one of the few graduate students who comes very definitely knowing that she has a definite piece of work ahead of her that she is anxious to get to in order to equip her to go back to improve the condition of her own race." Waring had also recognized this clarity of vision and dedication, noting that Kittrell "very frankly speaks of the negro (sic) people" a fact "respected highly by her classmates and they

Cornell faculty. She loved life," 2. Recollection from Elizabeth Selke Hensley on Helen Monsch, 30 March 1989, Helen Monsch Faculty File, Box 6, Folder 5, NYSCHE records.

²¹⁷ Waring, 9 February 1934, F.L. 101 Evaluation, Box 315, Folder 2, Kittrell Deceased Alumni File.

²¹⁸ Tate interview, 17.

²¹⁹ "Family Life Course Description," Box 20, NYSCHE records.

²²⁰ Kittrell, "Interrelated Services," 10.

include her without question in their social affairs.” Binzel, who had known Kittrell for nearly five years, had similar praise: “Miss Kittrell is an untiring worker, thoroughly dependable... [her] professional interest is sincere and deep.” In another revealing comment, she describes Kittrell as a “woman of very real charm”—“forceful without being insistent.”²²¹ Kittrell, in other words, was not to be confused with Peyton, the “aggressive” minority student mentioned earlier.

Other faculty comments written about Kittrell’s academic progress are equally, if not more, revealing. The idea of Kittrell “fitting in” with the other students was apparently important to the faculty because Nutrition Professor Hazel Hauck also wrote about this issue. In her course notes, Hauck observed that Kittrell was “very well accepted by the students in this class, and by the subjects with whom she has worked in the laboratory.” As Hauck explained further, Kittrell “has learned to accept quite naturally the friendship of white people where she finds it, and yet not to assert herself where that is not desired.” Hauck attributed this to the fact that “she is less race conscious than other negro students” even though she “shows a tremendous interest in the particular nutritional problems of her race.”²²² What Hauck meant in this candid analysis is that Kittrell had learned how to see where *she* was “not desired.” More than any other comment, these two sentences summarize the careful line that Kittrell, Holmes, Colson, and their peers had to walk. They had to be invested in “their people,” yet not too vocal about race consciousness.

The extent to which Kittrell had simply learned to please these professors is difficult to determine. Aside from her relationship with Waring—which went beyond the classroom—Kittrell did not stay as close with other members of the faculty, but she did return to Cornell many times over the years. There is also evidence that while some professors were not so supportive of Kittrell, others were. In 1935, when a representative of the graduate school

²²¹ Professor Cora Binzel to Dean F.K. Richtmyer, 15 March 1934.

²²² Hazel Hauck, “Notes on Course FN 224, Kittrell Deceased Alumni File, Box 315, Folder 2, Cornell University Alumni Records.

questioned Kittrell's schedule and short residency periods, noting "irregularities," Monsch fired back as to why her student was still teaching.²²³ Monsch had encouraged Kittrell to continue the pattern of intermittent residency she had developed as a master's student. She explained that Kittrell was not just "a very good student"—she was also an invaluable teacher. As she reported, the staff at Bennett "had never found anyone who could quite take her place with the students [.]"²²⁴ Kittrell, who later said she "didn't want to have any special favors, I worked hard and I just got results"—may not have even known about the behind-the-scenes politicking.²²⁵

A controversy Kittrell was well aware of had to do with her language proficiency requirement. That same year, Kittrell had difficulty with a French exam. This time Monsch *and* Binzel came to her defense, writing letters on her behalf and questioning the process.²²⁶ At first, Kittrell was unable to complete her French translation exam to the satisfaction of her proctor, Theodore Eaton.²²⁷ In later years, she claimed that the professor simply refused to let her pass.²²⁸ Kittrell would not suggest racism directly, but she did imply it. This rare recognition of outright conflict over race is striking, in part, because Kittrell told this story to several interviewers. At the same time, Kittrell could name Eaton in a way that she could not have named other potential adversaries. After all, Eaton was not in the College of Home Economics. In the end, Kittrell would also get more use out of her training in French than she—or her examining professor—would have imagined in 1935.

²²³ F.K. Richtmyer Letter to Monsch

²²⁴ Monsch to Dean Richtmyer, 12 October 1935,

²²⁵ Moore interview, 7.

²²⁶ Kittrell's Graduate File shows a fairly substantial amount of correspondence regarding this issue. Kittrell took her first French exam in March 1935 with Eaton; her thesis was approved in May and her examination was passed in August of that year. For more on Eaton, and his connection to Rural Education, see his Necrology: https://ecommons.cornell.edu/bitstream/handle/1813/18598/Eaton_Theodore_Hildreth_1961.pdf?sequence=1

²²⁷ This was similar to Ware's issue years earlier and this was an issue even earlier in the Agriculture College. See Box 4, Cornell University Graduate School Records, #12-1-1776. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

²²⁸ Ottley, "Kittrell," 2.

To ensure that Kittrell could meet a shorter completion time, the faculty also worked with her to adjust her topic. Initially, she had planned a local nutrition study in Ithaca; now, she would do a study of feeding habits among African Americans in North Carolina. By staying at Bennett, Monsch noted, “this meant money to her,” and “it was a decided advantage...to her college.” Perhaps most importantly, Monsch wrote, since “she was to go back to that institution later to work with the colored people in Greensboro, I suggested that she take the term off and pick up the statistics for her thesis among [them].”²²⁹ It was not just the money, as the same logic of working for “her people” also emerges here. Kittrell apparently took this advice, and finished “A Study of Negro Infant Feeding Practices in a Selected Community of North Carolina” in 1935.

With this thesis, Kittrell had surpassed her Hampton cohort, and was, in fact, the only minority woman working toward this degree at Cornell. But this project placed her squarely within the broader trends and debates in the field. In addition to the recent buildup of parent education and children’s health studies funded by the LSRM at Cornell, the White House Conference on Child Health of 1930 had also put a sharper spotlight on children. Home economists, most prominently Van Rensselaer and Louise Stanley, head of the Bureau of Home Economics, made sure that they had an important role in this conversation.²³⁰ One of the outcomes of this conference was a heightened emphasis on children as “the citizens of tomorrow.” Children were no longer to be seen as “an economic asset” but more as “a grave responsibility” with “new significance in the minds of the people.”²³¹

While this was a relatively privileged statement, the Conference was not all about vague rhetoric. A general report noted that “maternal deaths in the United States are in excess of those

²²⁹ Monsch to Dean Richtmyer, 12 October 1935, Kittrell Graduate File.

²³⁰ Letter from to Miss (Margaret) Justin, 15 August 1929; Justin to Van Rensselaer, 12 September 1929, Box 56, Folder 1, NYSCHE records.

²³¹ “The White House Conference Calls to Action by Mrs. R.D. Rood,” 1929, Box 56, Folder 11, NYSCHE records.

of the 25 largest nations of the world.”²³² From within this conference, Van Rensselaer also expressed the dearth of care for the “negro child,” who at present, had fewer means “to develop into a healthy citizen [.]”²³³ The data produced by researchers at the Conference added to the moral imperative to continue work with child care and parent education. By coming back to Cornell to study nutrition and child care, Kittrell put herself at the center of this discourse.

Van Rensselaer, Rose, and Waring were all valuable role models to Kittrell in various ways, though Professors Monsch and Hauck were integral to her final research project. In recent years, both professors had become increasingly concerned with children’s health and the application of nutrition science to family needs. But Monsch was a particularly important exemplar for Kittrell.²³⁴ Monsch’s concerns were, at once, local and global. In addition to meeting with mothers in Ithaca about childcare, she also took to returning inquiries from women around the world.²³⁵ Her other graduate students’ contemporaneous projects on the nutritional status of babies in New York and foodstuffs in North India, respectively, demonstrate the breadth of her interests.²³⁶ Monsch’s methodology was also critical to Kittrell’s own work. In the past, many research studies had focused on children in institutions *or* children living “at home.” Monsch encouraged students to be more flexible; she also led by example, working with local mothers and obtaining data from the children at the nursery school and practice home.²³⁷

²³² Ibid, 4.

²³³ Martha Van Rensselaer, “The White House Conference,” Box 56, Folder 13, NYSCHE records.

²³⁴ In this standard form, Monsch explains her “experiences contributing to your effectiveness” such as traveling abroad, traveling to Land Grant colleges throughout the US, and that she has “had from time to time, children of relatives and friends in my own home for 24 hours out of the 24...from three weeks to twenty years.” Helen Monsch B1378 Form in Home Economics, Box 6, Folder 5, NYSCHE records.

²³⁵ Monsch was known for working closely with mothers. See *Farm and Home Week of the New York State Colleges of Agriculture and Home Economics and the Veterinary College at Cornell University*, Volumes 22-35, 24.

²³⁶ Rachel Bizal, “A Study of Infant Feeding Practices as Found by a Survey of 702 New York State babies,” (master’s thesis, Cornell University, 1933); Charlotte Viall Wiser, “The Foods of a Hindu Village of North India,” (master’s thesis, Cornell University, 1933).

²³⁷ “For Health and Happiness,” 2, Box 6, Folder 5, NYSCHE records.

Kittrell would model this kind of wide-ranging approach in her thesis and later, with her work on international feeding habits.²³⁸ While building on the tools and methods used by her mentors, Kittrell's thesis, "A Study of Negro Infant Feeding Practices in a Selected Community of North Carolina" was also poised to make a distinct contribution given her focus on African American families. Though many knew of the specter of suffering and poverty among these families in the South, Kittrell was seeking to provide clinical data and work that could later be translated for social change. To get a range of responses, Kittrell drew upon records from the L. Richardson Hospital, "a Negro hospital," co-founded by Dr. Charlotte Hawkins Brown. She also conducted interviews with midwives, doctors, and mothers (280 cases in all) throughout Guilford County, North Carolina.²³⁹

Prior to 1935, Kittrell's relatively protected position as a professor may have seemed to isolate her from the Depression. This study plunged her into some of its worst depths of suffering, as death seemed to linger throughout this study of childhood and birth. While Kittrell did pore over clinical records as part of her work, she also went directly into many families' homes. As she traveled and gathered data throughout Guilford County, Kittrell discovered extreme, widespread malnutrition. In Greensboro, most families averaged three children; of these, "the average number of children dead in these families was two."²⁴⁰ Nearly all of Kittrell's general statistics showed even bleaker rates for "negro families." While about half of those families "were on the relief books," very few (10%) had any kind of prenatal care.²⁴¹ In a state with one of the highest infant mortality rates overall, Kittrell showed that the death rate among

²³⁸ Hauck would also become interested in international work; she would later conduct a nutritional survey in Thailand. See Hazel Hauck and Kathryn E. Walker, "Women's Work in Changing Villages" *Journal of Home Economics* 56, no. 4 (1964): 233-238.

²³⁹ Wilson Elkins, "The History of L. Richardson Memorial Hospital, Greensboro, North Carolina," *Journal of the National Medical Association* 61, no.3 (1969): 205-212.

²⁴⁰ Flemma Kittrell, "A Study of Negro Infant Feeding Practices in a Selected Community of North Carolina," 57.

²⁴¹ Kittrell, "A Study of Negro Infant Feeding Practices in a Selected Community of North Carolina," 2; 8.

Negro families was *double* that of white families. Here, the rhetoric of “better homes” would have come up against a stark reality—without economic power or stability, there was little art in living.



Fig. 2.5: “Negro sharecropper house on dirt. Dorothea Lange, North Carolina, 1939.”

Fig. 2.6: “Wife and child of young sharecropper in cornfield beside house. Dorothea Lange, North Carolina, 1939.”

Three years later, Dorothea Lange’s photography commission with the Farm Security Administration brought her to rural North Carolina. In capturing rural families’ living conditions, Lange was exposing an underside to free markets and systems of free labor. Just as significantly, Lange was creating a record of black life in the interwar period.²⁴² Lange’s snapshots of rural life and Kittrell’s Home Economics research reached different audiences and of course, had different purposes. Yet both provide indictments of inequality in the way that they claim humanity often denied to those living in rural poverty. Likewise, these records are reminders that in spite of buoyant claims about the commitment to children and family in the US, most forms of social service were failing both. For poor families living off farming and sharecropping, the downturn had exacerbated existing problems, and the little relief that was available was far from

²⁴² Linda Gordon, *Dorothea Lange: A Life Beyond Limits* (New York: Norton, 2010).

sufficient.²⁴³ In some ways, “the experience of postwar gains and the hopes and heightened expectations of improvement” made the Depression harder to bear for some families.²⁴⁴

At the White House Conference, it was one thing to declare children were not “economic assets,” but among sharecroppers or even urban families, this was a luxury out of reach. What was particularly frustrating for Kittrell and other researchers in child nutrition was the fact that such high mortality rates were avoidable. As Kittrell noted, life-saving supplements had been found, and had been proven to work. Drawing upon Monsch’s scholarship on babies in the practice home, Kittrell reinforced the fact that “high death rates among artificially fed infants do not need to exist today.”²⁴⁵ Previously, the idea that babies and children could be kept alive while being “artificially fed” had been contested. But Kittrell’s mentors determined right on campus that the staple of milk, which could be in short supply, need only be supplemented. In the end, she concluded that “Adequate standards for nutrition of Negro infants have not been developed in the United States.”²⁴⁶ The notion that Kittrell wanted to do this work “for her people” had not been an empty promise.

This was scarcely an ending. This comment was more a prelude to her life’s work. As one of Kittrell’s colleagues would later argue, this training was truly “the turning point in her life’s work, for it provided the preparation and skills for what she was to accomplish.” Perhaps most important, during her doctoral training, Kittrell learned that a “home economics program had its own integrity.”²⁴⁷ In addition to lessons in institution-building, Kittrell and her cohort also received an education in pragmatism, accommodation, and exchange. From within the

²⁴³ Ibid, 55-61.

²⁴⁴ Darlene Clark Hine, *Hine Sight: Black Women and The Re-Construction of American History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 129.

²⁴⁵ Kittrell, “A Study,” 54; 72. This was proved in Monsch’s research and work in the practice home in 1934.

²⁴⁶ Ibid, 82.

²⁴⁷ Dean Cecile H. Edwards Tribute, Box 315, Folder 2, Kittrell Deceased Alumni File.

College of Home Economics, some experts believed that in networks of rural education, women could find paths to solve family problems, and by extension, global crises. The language of diversity and multiculturalism was not in their repertoire. Instead, they far preferred to think in terms of friends, families, and neighbors. This is clearest in their involvement with the Associated Country Women of the World, which held its annual meeting in Washington D.C and took a trip to Cornell the same year Kittrell's Ph.D. was conferred. At this meeting, one American Home Demonstration agent was deeply moved by "the eagerness for friendly and neighborly living" shared by women from various nations.²⁴⁸ Though minority students had been denied housing throughout the previous decade, many were thrilled that these global delegates, upon coming to Cornell, would be staying within the faculty's homes.

Many professors even made careful notes as to what their new "friends" from ACWW were curious about, such as screens ("little wires), national shrines, and grocery stores. These home economists considered it "thrilling to listen" to women from around the world, including a tea grower in India whose "difficulties...sound so extremely familiar to many of us in rural New York [.]". Another letter, this one from a conference participant about hosting a woman from Germany, noted the similarities and differences in running a farm when compared to the US. War was apparently not mentioned during this visit, since the focus was on "domestic" concerns. Likewise, Monsch, who hosted women from Latvia, "immediately" took to an atlas and started researching the country once she heard her guests would be coming. When they arrived, one of the women "put on her Latvian costume and then they repeated the story at my request which they had previously told me about the peasant celebration [of farmers' wives] of June 23."²⁴⁹

²⁴⁸ Estelle Jones to Rose, 7 July 1936, Box 12, Folder 18, NYSCHE papers.

²⁴⁹ Beatrice Fehr to Rose, 15 July 1936; Monsch to Rose, 10 July 1936, Box 12, Folder 18, NYSCHE papers.

Much like the “International” tours to Hampton a decade earlier, the line between sharing and spectacle was not always clear.

These women did not have a concept of multiculturalism—but they were grasping for something like it. Faculty such as Monsch did not take such interactions lightly; they earnestly believed that they were forging life-saving connections through a shared experience in rural life. At the end of the ACWW events, some women felt real excitement that they could, as a delegation, “organize the women of the world together and be strong enough to say to the world, we won’t have war! And we will be heard.”²⁵⁰ Another representative concurred, adding, “It is countrywomen who are showing that world friendship and good will need not wait upon political or national development.”²⁵¹ If food science could *win* a war from within rural communities, perhaps women could also *end* war using their new-found power. This optimism was not considered strange even as the world inched toward war.

Outside of the ACWW meeting, other faculty members were also sharing this optimism in the mid-1930s. In 1936, Cornell Nutrition professor Marion Pfund and her research partner, textiles professor Beulah Blackmore, embarked on a six-month trip “Around the World”—as if it was not teetering on the edge of economic and military disaster.²⁵² While on tour, Pfund and Blackmore were especially pleased to find a Cornell Home Economics graduate working as a missionary in the Philippines. This placement, which could be seen as merely a “friendly” encounter, was actually part of a longer tradition. Since 1929, Home Economics faculty had been contributing to short courses for missionaries working there and in other parts of the world. More

²⁵⁰ Estelle Jones to Rose, 7 July 1936; ACWW in Box 12, Folders 16-19, NYSCHE papers.

²⁵¹ Sholto Watts, quoted in “Peace Bridge Ceremony of Farewell to Overseas Delegates to Conference of Associated Country Women of the World,” June 16, 1936, Box 12, Folder 16, NYSCHE records.

²⁵² Blackmore’s file includes her list of “Hobbies: collecting interesting fabrics; making collection of historic costumes for College- dresses used by persons at courts of the world, wedding dresses, garments illustrating the fashions of all periods in American History, belonging to the wives of the Pres. Of Cornell University; Foreign costumes—collecting for college.” See Blackmore and Pfund Faculty Files, NYSCHE records.

broadly, too, there was also a concept of needing a “missionary spirit” to work within Home Economics.²⁵³ This same spirit had been identified among the “H E’s,” the top Home Economics students at Hampton.²⁵⁴ For experts in this field, a missionary-like zeal for improvement, and a desire to grasp for some sense of sameness among women throughout the world was not incongruous with a rich research program.

Had they been looking for it, Pfund and Blackmore could have questioned the meaning of bringing “domestic politics” into foreign domains—or, in the case of the Philippines, contested territories. They could have traced a longer history of struggles for sovereignty in relation to their pursuits, pointing to the arrival of the “Thomasites” in the Philippines in 1901.²⁵⁵ At Hampton, too, the “spirited,” would-be missionaries could be connected to a larger network built up with philanthropy and imperial pursuits. But Pfund and Blackmore were imagining a different narrative. Their plan was to encourage dialogue and exposure through exchange, primarily by curating “a permanent exhibit” on native foods, costumes, and handicrafts at Cornell.²⁵⁶ Pfund had also been studying “native foods and nutrition problems,” the beginning of a growing investment in studying family problems overseas. In entering women’s homes and bringing back objects to curate for their students, home economists believed they were part of a global shift in prioritizing and improving rural life. Then, the notion of inviting the world into the College came to a head in 1939. As war loomed closer in Europe, the ACWW Headquarters was relocated

²⁵³ List of missionaries attending for a one-year course in College of Agriculture, Box 12, Folder 20; “Report on Conference on Education for Home and Family Life, 1938,” Box 12, Folder 21, NYSCHE records. See also: Anna Schatz, “Fixing Family Problems Around the World: Home Economics at the Cornell School for Missionaries,” 2 October 2013, Cornell University Dean’s Fellowship in Home Economics Lecture, <http://www.cornell.edu/video/history-of-cornell-school-for-missionaries>.

²⁵⁴ Melissa Stokes, *Hampton Student* (1921): 9, Hampton University Archives.

²⁵⁵ Paul Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, & the Philippines* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 202.

²⁵⁶ “Blackmore,” *Cornell Alumni News* 38, no.16 (1936): 262; Marion Pfund and Beulah Blackmore, *Trip Around the World*, Box 47, NYSCHE records.

from London to Ithaca.²⁵⁷ Soon, home economists would not be waging peace with ACWW or the League of Nations, but serving the warring state—again.

To Rose and others, taking on a mantle of leadership for rural women worldwide had been a logical development. Some of this optimism, especially in the late 1930s, may seem naïve. But these experts had a better understanding than most academics in the period as to the depths of human suffering. The Cornell mission to "discover, preserve, and disseminate knowledge" was acutely felt, and it buoyed them to continue. With letters pouring in from women "facing privation and want" specialists in nutrition, family life, and textiles were determined to correct the fact "that this modern civilization has concerned itself far more with mechanical inventions and machines than with man and his welfare."²⁵⁸ From Ithaca to Greensboro, home economists knew from correspondence with Extension agents and their own research that struggling families, mothers in particular, were looking for answers in order to survive. In 1936, as Eleanor Roosevelt received similar letters at the White House from wives and mothers looking for answers, she started to think again about the work of "Miss Rose" and others at Cornell. She concluded that the College was "really giving an education in democracy."²⁵⁹

If the College of Home Economics was indeed a place to get "an education in democracy," that phrasing also points to the tensions and shortcomings of democracy in the 1930s. In some ways, Kittrell remained confident in the possibilities that could be wrought from Home Economics education. After leaving Cornell, she wrote to Rose asking for more detailed plans of Van Rensselaer Hall, adding that she was "anxious to have the best thinking to present

²⁵⁷ Linda Ambrose, *A Great Rural Sisterhood: Madge Robertson Wyatt and the ACWW* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 185-190; Associated Country Women of the World, *Proceedings of the Third Triennial Conference, 1936* (Washington: U.S. Govt. Printing Office, 1937).

²⁵⁸ *New York State College of Home Economics Sixth Annual Report* (1931): 15.

²⁵⁹ Eleanor Roosevelt, *My Day: May 26, 1936*, Ithaca, NY.

to my President.”²⁶⁰ Kittrell had learned that having a large, proper place for Home Economics mattered. She had also seen that in lieu of comforting platitudes about the home, experts at Cornell sought to provide data and to use state power as an instrument for their own ambitions. A College of Home Economics was not supposed to be an isolated, apolitical enclave for women. Rather, it was a place to meet the needs of a changing nation—and, possibly even “encircle the world.” Yet while she spent time in this College, Kittrell also would have observed that many of her mentors seemed more comfortable making an “international investment” in women’s education than forging meaningful relationships with black college students in the US. Perhaps a more distant “foreignness” was easier to understand and to embrace, particularly if only for a conference.

Though exceptional women could obtain new levels of higher education “for their people,” in the 1930s at Cornell, Kittrell’s story should not suggest a radically transformed university. Rather, this framework often only further reinforced markers of difference, making the College largely inhospitable to plans for furthering equality. Additionally, in line with broader social trends, these educational opportunities were further constrained and tied to the power of philanthropic boards, the fruits of tycoons. Though Kittrell’s connection to Cornell is oft-cited, this more complex history of financial entanglements and strivings for cultural contact has been lost. Rather than think of her as “a first,” it is perhaps more useful to frame her within a contested window of opportunity.

A mural added to the College in 1937, entitled “Home Economics,” captures some of the larger hopes and tensions from this period. Painted by recent graduate Virginia True, the mural was a kind of internal WPA project.²⁶¹ In addition to a “primitive woman,” a symbol of

²⁶⁰ Kittrell to Rose, 26 October 1936, Box 315, Folder 2, Kittrell Deceased Alumni File.

²⁶¹ Robin West, “Virginia True,” 2001, *Resource Library Magazine*, <http://www.tfaoi.com/aa/3aa/3aa435.htm>

“elemental needs and urges,” True painted Van Rensselaer and Rose, professional “pioneers.” Her goal was to show “the fullness of life richly lived.” When the mural was revealed, most seemed focused on True’s addition of “a Negro woman” on the mural.²⁶² True was soon asked to “cut down on her racial characteristics.” True resented the criticisms of her figure and the supposition that “a less racial-looking Negro, whatever that means, would arouse less feeling.”²⁶³ True saw these criticisms as evidence that her peers did not understand art. If living was an art, as home economists taught their students, then these critiques pointed to a much greater struggle. Throughout the College, bringing diverse populations into a single frame or building was not as easy as it seemed—or as Ezra Cornell first pronounced three quarters of a century earlier. To True’s great frustration, a curtain was put over the mural to defuse the situation—a way to “avoid problems,” in Kittrell’s words. Yet so many visitors asked to see the mural over the years that eventually, the curtains were taken down, exposing the Depression-era art for all to see, to interpret.



Fig. 2.7: “Home Economics” by Virginia True.

²⁶² Virginia True Interview, 80, New York State College of Home Economics Project oral histories, #47-2-O.H.. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

²⁶³ True Interview, 21; 81.

Chapter Three: “Cease to be a Drudge, Seek to be an Artist”

On the campus of Bennett College in Greensboro, North Carolina, a bronze bell is preserved for posterity in the center of a white neo-classical pavilion.¹ Designed to honor eponymous donor Lyman Bennett, this “temple-like” structure pays homage to the religious network that brought the school into being in 1873.² Inside the bell, an inscription from the Book of Isaiah invokes Bennett’s Reconstruction Era origins: “To proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound” (Isaiah 61:1).³ With a charge to connect freedom and education, Bennett was established in the final, fading capital of the Confederacy. In the early years, the bell was used as a practical timepiece, but it would eventually become decorative—a symbol to remind students that religiosity and order were mutually reinforced with rigor.⁴ While the school began as a co-educational Methodist seminary, over its first fifty years in operation, Bennett evolved into a premier women’s college in the 1920s.⁵ With a mission of “Learning by Doing,” Bennett came to be known as a “Beacon for Womanhood.”

Bennett is one of only two women’s college dedicated exclusively to the education of African-American women in the United States; the other is Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia. Both institutions were founded for the purpose of spreading religious training in the nineteenth century; now, both are liberal arts colleges. At the onset, however, Bennett more closely

¹ “Just Scenes,” *Bennett Belle 1962* (Greensboro: Bennett College, 1962), 108.

² Jay S. Stowell, *Methodist Adventures in Negro Education* (New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1922), 155-160. Lyman Bennett was a contributor to the Methodist Freedmen’s Aid Society and early benefactor of what became Bennett Seminary. Marla Jabbour, “Who Was Lyman Bennett?” *Collar City Mysteries*, <http://marlajabbour.com/who-was-lyman-bennett.html>.

³ “Bennet College Bell” in National Register of Historic Places, Bennett College Historic District, Greensboro, North Carolina, Register #92000179.

⁴ Juanita Patience Moss, *Tell Me Why Dear Bennett: Memoirs of Bennett College Belles, Class of 1924-2012* (Berwyn Heights: Heritage Books, 2010); Moss, *Tell Me Why Dear Bennett: Memoirs of Bennett College Belles Volume II* (Berwyn Heights: Heritage Books, 2012).

⁵ Sarah Cardwell, “‘I, Too, Am America:’ The Founding of Bennett College for Women and the Implications of a Progressive Education for Black Women” (master’s thesis, Sarah Lawrence College, 2008); Alicia Collins, “Socialization at Two Black Women’s Colleges: Bennett College and Spelman College” (EdD thesis, University of Pittsburgh, 2001); Nadine Sherri Lockwood, “Bennett College for Women, 1926-1966” (PhD diss., State University of New York, Buffalo, 2004).

resembled Hampton Institute. In the 1870s, the 30-acre co-educational campus was sparse, with “four buildings and about 35 acres of campus planted in corn and turnips.”⁶ What students had, they built themselves, often with minimal outside support. Administrators struggled for many years to maintain the school, and by the early 1920s, according to one chronicler, “there were ten students and no money.”⁷ To revive Bennett, the Methodist Church provided increased funds, paving the way for new course offerings and higher enrollment numbers.⁸ With a new sense of vigor, administrators expanded the school in size and narrowed the educational focus to female students. The culmination of these changes came in 1926 when Bennett was declared a women’s college. The Methodist mission remained, but there would now be loftier goals than “the opening of the prison” to those once held in bondage.

Much of the subsequent growth that took place at Bennett can be credited, at least in part, to David D. Jones. Appointed President of Bennett in 1926, Jones led the college and lived on campus for thirty years, through his death in 1956. As with Hampton Institute, declaring that a school would be a college and making it one were two separate matters. Yet unlike Hampton’s leaders, Jones encouraged the development of a well-educated, predominantly African American faculty. Flemmie Kittrell, who taught at Bennett from 1928 to 1940, was among this cohort. While Kittrell’s tenure at Bennett was concurrent with a longer arch of growth, she also played a particular role in furthering the curriculum. As a professor and later, as Dean of Students, Kittrell worked to build an increasingly expansive and influential Home Economics program. In addition to creating a path-breaking laboratory nursery school for local children, Kittrell’s Home

⁶ “Bennett Undergoes a Change,” *Bennett Belle 1973* (Greensboro: Bennett College, 1973), 144. Hosted by Digital NC, <http://library.digitalnc.org/cdm/ref/collection/yearbooks/id/2953>

⁷ “Dr. David D. Jones,” *Baltimore Afro American* (Baltimore, MD), Jan. 26, 1956, 2.

⁸ Material on Bennett College for Women, 1926-1934, Records of the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, United Methodist Church Archives - GCAH, Madison, New Jersey. Hereafter cited as Methodist Archives.

Economics orientation course, “The Art of Living,” was mandatory for all students by 1931.⁹ At Bennett, a confluence of two highly ambitious academics, Jones and Kittrell, meant that Home Economics would become more, not less, important to the women’s college. Later, when reflecting on Kittrell’s time at Bennett, David’s wife Susie Jones argued that it was as if she was a “dream walking” for young black women on campus.¹⁰

While Kittrell and other members of the faculty represented a “dream” of achievement and advanced education, there were also more tangible markers signaling a changed Bennett. In addition to a radical revision of the curriculum, Jones was responsible for creating an almost entirely new campus landscape. Jones’s boosterism about the promise of the faculty, such as Kittrell, brought large bequests to the school. In particular, donations from Methodist philanthropists Annie and Henry Pfeiffer swelled the campus coffers in the 1930s.¹¹ The college that had evolved slowly over many decades suddenly exploded all at once. Now, instead of student works projects, new buildings with “Pfeiffer” inscribed on the front or side dotted the campus, framed by rows of magnolia and oak trees. One of these new buildings, perhaps predictably, was a modern space for the study of Home Economics.

In describing this evolving campus, Jones stressed that Bennett was a “carefully planned” place, with an “appropriately landscaped, simply but beautifully furnished” environment.¹² Jones’s reference to beauty here was not incidental. The students who walked along this new campus landscape were known as “Bennett Belles”—a clever—and racially charged signifier for

⁹ The phrasing “art of living” was used earlier by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Home: Its Work and Influence* (London: William Heinemann, 1904), 66. This phrasing also appears in the 1920s as a concept for Household Design or Household Arts classes.

¹⁰ Susie Jones, interviewed by Merze Tate, Black Women Oral History Project, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, 1977.

¹¹ “David Dallas Jones,” *Journal of Negro History* 41 no.2 (1956), 179-181.

¹² David D. Jones, Report to the Board of Trustees of Bennett College, 1926-1927, “Bennett College Campus Heritage Plan Made for the Getty Foundation,” (August 2005), 19.

the school's Southern identity and strivings for beauty.¹³ As this label suggests, in addition to integrity and academic excellence, *beauty* was highly valued at Bennett. To train the "Belles," Jones had even developed a system known as "beauty work." The requirements of "beauty work" training included on-campus cleaning and maintenance. There was also quite a bit of "beauty work" built into the curriculum, as students were required to comply with strict dress codes. In addition to making their own clothes in class, Belles were receiving an education in how to "dress the part" of a college student.

The bell that signaled the schedule throughout the day and imposed time discipline was vital to this system of living. Students even competed to ring it, and set tasks, such as cleaning a particular area, served as the basis for the competition. Many aspects of this system, including the Bennett motto of "Learning by Doing," are in line with the traditions at other historically black institutions with manual training components. But Jones insisted that "beauty work" was distinct from older learning/labor systems. As he saw it, "beauty work" was not about drudgery, but a desire to cultivate a wholly immersive, aesthetically pleasing, and planned academic environment. Jones was careful to suggest that unlike other institutions with intrusive donors, "our buildings are kept clean, not for the inspection of visitors, but for our own self-respect."¹⁴ In oral histories, contemporary students echoed this sentiment, arguing that this system was about respectability, not flattery; dressing "the part" was a way to "get respect" in town.¹⁵

The idea of respectability was clearly important to Jones and the "Belles." To further organize this system, Jones often relied on the rhetoric of domesticity. In his words, Bennett's

¹³ Linda Beatrice Brown, *Belles of Liberty: Gender, Bennett College, and the Civil Rights Movement in Greensboro, NC* (Greensboro: Women and Wisdom Press, 2013).

¹⁴ "Girls of Bennett Say Life Can Be Beautiful If," *Pittsburgh Courier* (Pittsburgh, PA), May 29, 1948, 15.

¹⁵ Rita Liberti, "We Were Ladies, We Just Played Like Boys," *Sport and the Color Line: Black Athletes and Race Relations in Twentieth-Century America*, eds. Patrick B. Miller and David K. Wiggins (New York: Routledge, 2004), 86.

campus was a “wholesome family atmosphere... where personal development of young women is expected.”¹⁶ According to Jones’s promised ideal, by living, worshipping, and learning together, the students and administration would create a beautifully formed “family” of high achievement and faith. Jones considered the family and the home ideal models for the school, as “the home is the greatest socializing unit in our civilization [.]”¹⁷ More than any bell or marker, these words reveal the school’s Reconstruction roots and Jones’s connections to the “civilizing” rhetoric of the past.¹⁸ The long shadow of the Freedmen’s Bureau, and linked associations between freedom and marriage seem inescapable on this carefully maintained campus.¹⁹

But the record of women’s achievements from Bennett—in education, public service, and activism—belies the notion that “Belles” were being inculcated in an older model of manual training. This is due, in part, to the fact that Jones’s concept of family was not as static as the promotional literature or news coverage of the college might suggest. Jones was not interested in running a school like the one he inherited. He *was* interested in creating an innovative program that would appeal to donors and support his students’ ambitions. A rigorous major in Home Economics resolved these contradictory impulses. Through the development of a strong program in Home Economics, Jones was able to reconcile the perceived need to keep “the home” at the fore of women’s training while also expanding work in the sciences and research.²⁰ With little resemblance to earlier training programs, by the 1930s, Home Economics at Bennett was

¹⁶ Bennett College, *Way of Life at Bennett College, Bennett Bulletin* 13, no.1 (Greensboro: Bennett College, 1939), Thomas F. Holgate Library, Bennett College, Greensboro, NC.

¹⁷ “Bennett College is Serving Effectively,” *Bennett College Scrapbook Circa 1930s*, Bennett College Scrapbook Collection, Thomas F. Holgate Library, Bennett College, Greensboro, NC.

¹⁸ Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Michele Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Laura Wexler, *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

¹⁹ Clinton B. Fisk, *Plain Counsels for Freedmen: In Sixteen Brief Lectures* (Boston: American Tract Society, 1866); Mary Farmer-Kaiser, *Freedwomen and the Freedmen’s Bureau: Race, Gender, and Public Policy in the age of Emancipation* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010).

²⁰ *Way of Life at Bennett College*, 8.

grounded in liberal arts and sciences courses. Rather than curtail black women's strivings for professional work, Home Economics was seen as a way to provide new options.²¹

Given her own successes in academia thus far and her emphasis on studying the family, Kittrell was seen as a preeminent role model on this campus. Looking back, after spending close to twelve years at Bennett, Kittrell would call her time there the "most satisfying job" she had in her career. On the one hand, working at Bennett was a great opportunity for Kittrell to grow her own academic program in Home Economics. Yet this was not just about prestige on campus; Kittrell was also deeply impressed by the culture of leadership at the college and Jones's dedication to "service."²² When promoting the school, Jones urged philanthropists to see that Bennett's institutional advancement was for the betterment of students, who in turned would serve their "home communities." Though suggesting that they were preparing students to "serve," the Joneses and Kittrell did not have paid domestic work in mind. Instead, they envisioned women doing "beauty work" in their communities, applying an interest in home and family life to a much larger canvas. In addition to "training for a given profession," Kittrell's Home Economics courses encouraged students "to go and contribute."²³

This desire to extend the classroom and have students work with local communities was most clearly manifested in the creation of the annual Home Making Institute in the early 1930s. A forum similar to Farm and Home Week programs at land-grant colleges, this Institute brought the people of Greensboro into the Home Economics department at Bennett. Lectures and programming at the Institute further reinforced a symbiotic relationship between the college and

²¹ "Bennett College History" materials, Box 239, Folder: Bennett College History, American Association of Family and Consumer Science records, #6578. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library. Hereafter cited as AAFCS records.

²² Black Women Oral History Project Interviews; OH-31, T-32/Flemmie P. Kittrell, 1977, 7-8, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

²³ Rita Liberti, "We Were Ladies, We Just Played Like Boys," 86.

community by encouraging students to leave campus and work with the black community in Greensboro. Over time, these students came to see activist work as essential to their development in the field of Home Economics. Under the mantles of “beauty work” and service, the Belles of the 1930s became “Belles of Liberty,” taking part in housing advocacy, public health campaigns, and even voter registration. From within the frame of “learning by doing”—a concept usually connected to manual labors—students at Bennett saw an impetus to take part in social work and civil rights demonstrations as early as the mid-1930s. After all, even the finest bell is designed to ring.

When put in broader perspective, the Belles’ interwar activism suggests a more nuanced trajectory, and greater continuity, between uplift efforts and legal declarations of civil rights. Repositioning the history of Home Economics at historically black institutions from margin to center also further complicates narratives on “women’s work” and service from the Depression to World War II. As Kittrell’s papers attest, the meanings and options for community—and state—service changed most markedly with the entrance of the US into World War II. After nearly two decades of involvement with peace work and community service through groups such as the YWCA and the Home Making Institute, Kittrell was called to do her part for the war effort. In 1940, Kittrell had accepted a teaching position at Hampton; she arrived at her *alma mater* while the school was being transformed into a place where an “education for life” meant gearing up for war.²⁴ Soon, Kittrell was using her training in Home Economics and her skills in reaching the community in entirely different ways. In her teaching, extension work, and publishing, Kittrell did not reflect on whether this was a “Good War,” despite her affiliations to

²⁴ Ibram Rogers, *The Black Campus Movement: Black Students and the Racial Reconstruction of Higher Education 1965-1972* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 57.

peace groups. Instead, she served as a stable contact for two servicemen in her family, including a war baby born in 1918.²⁵ Kittrell was often an idealist, but she did not live in an abstract world.

For the most part, Kittrell's teaching years at Bennett and her return to Hampton have been minimized, caught between her time at Cornell University and her work at Howard University. It is not surprising that this work has been underexplored, as the investment in state-based programs and forms of activism Kittrell undertook have become less recognizable over time. Kittrell did not present herself as an activist, and much of her work was vaguely focused on 'the family,' community service, and youth leadership. Through the Home Making Institute, projects related to "youth leadership" such as the Southern Negro Youth Congress, and extensive service for the government during the war, Kittrell did more than apply her qualitative skillsets and educational tools. She pushed the boundaries of what a home economist ought to be and do, and sometimes met resistance. While historians have not taken note of these activities, other sources document them quite well: Kittrell's FBI files.

Before the war, Kittrell's involvement with peace groups such as WILPF and citizenship development programs run through the Southern Negro Youth Congress were apparently unremarkable. Once Hampton became a primary training site for black soldiers, Kittrell's loyalty was questioned, and her "peace activities" were reported to the FBI. Though Kittrell often deflected the political dimensions of her own work, clearly others did not see them as innocuous. What further complicates Kittrell's story is the fact that she was hardly rebelling against the state once the war machine was in full motion. From 1940-1944, Kittrell chose to heighten her involvement with government projects at Hampton, particularly those related to nutrition. A

²⁵ World War II Draft Card for Galwin Alexander Alston (nephew), Serial Number 3777, Box 6; World War II Draft Card for Richard Austin Terrell (nephew), Serial Number 247, Box 364, *Records of the Selective Service System, 1926-1975, North Carolina World War II Draft Registration Cards*, RG 147, Class RG 147, National Archives Southeast Region; Atlanta, GA.

savvy woman with her connections was certainly aware that the meaning of peace activism and “service” had changed. Within the constraints of her position, Kittrell decided to more closely align with, rather than rebel against, the state.

While other histories of World War II have chronicled the contributions of land-grant colleges and exceptional African American servicemen, such as the Tuskegee Airmen, far less is known about women at black colleges in this time. But African American women, and particularly home economists who could translate the latest nutrition research for the “Agricultural Front,” also felt compelled to serve in order to reap the fruits of a “double victory.” Kittrell’s papers from Hampton in the 1940s reveal this pressure through her complex negotiations of personal politics and professional ambition. They also provide insights into her time as Dean of Women, a historically understudied role, and the inner workings of “women’s departments” at black colleges during the war. Hampton had a long tradition of extending the knowledge of the campus to the community, and the need to do this work was acutely felt by Kittrell and others on the “Agricultural Front” when the war hit “home.”

While Kittrell was researching and teaching courses related to the war effort at Hampton, government photographer Gordon Parks was tasked with documenting this type of work at black colleges. During one trip, Parks photographed women learning to make a “Victory Dinner” in a Home Economics class at Bethune-Cookman College in Daytona Beach, Florida (Fig. 3.1).²⁶ In Parks’s photograph, the Home Economics students dressed in neatly pressed uniforms are gathered in a semi-circle, ostensibly listening to their instructor. While her lesson is now long forgotten, the words of Mary McLeod Bethune, hanging behind them on a poster, reach out

²⁶ Audrey Thomas McCluskey and Elaine M. Smith, *Mary McLeod Bethune: Building a Better World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999); Ashley Robertson, *Mary McLeod Bethune in Florida* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2015).

across the divide of space and time: “Cease to be a Drudge, Seek to Be an Artist.”²⁷ This photograph is part of one of the most significant visual histories collected in US history, the Farm Security Administration (FSA) collection. While it is hardly obscure, the meaning of Bethune’s words—and a longer history of the ways that art, science, and service circulated through Home Economics has become less visible over time.



Fig. 3.1: Daytona Beach, Florida: Students in the Home Economics Class, 1943.

Around the same time that this photograph was taken, Bethune-Cookman’s James A. Bond boasted about the school’s legacy of “service.” Like the students at Bennett, co-eds at Bethune-Cookman were urged to “serve” the community, but Bond did not mean drudgery or paid domestic work.²⁸ Instead, this service was tied to activism; as Bond declared, “in no other southern city does the Negro use the ballot so effectively as he does in Daytona Beach.”²⁹ This particular example is suggestive, and not just for its connection to activism. From voting to wartime ration education, students at Bethune-Cookman were consistently encouraged to work

²⁷ “Ella Watson, U.S. Government Charwoman,” in Carl Fleischhauer and Beverly Brannan, eds., *Documenting America, 1935-1943* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); “Government Work (FSA/OWI), 1942-44,” *Gordon Parks Foundation*, <http://www.gordonparksfoundation.org/archive/government-work-fsa-owi-1942-44#3>.

²⁸ “Bennett College is Serving Effectively,” *Daily News* (Greensboro, NC), Apr. 20, 1936, 12.

²⁹ James A. Bond, “Bethune-Cookman College: Community Service Station,” *The Crisis* 48, no.3 (1941), 81. Rosabelle Bond, James’s wife, taught Home Economics at Bethune-Cookman.

with, rather than against, state systems. While one type of activity might be praised as “early” Civil Rights work, the other can be read as a form of complicity with the warring state. Overall, this range of civic activities tied to Home Economics suggests that women at historically black colleges in the 1930s and 1940s participated in forms of social protest *and* strategic patriotism.

Yet these nuances have often been lost, and the activism of the 1950s and 1960s is still often seen as a sudden eruption of social frustration. Yet, as one social scientist would observe in the 1970s, the very people associated with social conservatism, the “counselors” and “country demonstration agents in domestic economy” from the 1940s, had taught many of the radicals coming of age in that time. Curiously, then, these “traditional” teachers had been “responsible for releasing blacks from their narrow traditional roles.”³⁰ How this happened, particularly at black colleges, is worth closer inquiry. Since these words were written half a century ago, few have connected individuals working in Home Economics to longer histories of politics. Again, this has less to do with data from within these colleges and more to do with assumptions about the “drudgery” women were thought to be trained for in the discipline. Through Bethune’s invocation for artistry and the codes of “beauty work,” however, home economists before and during the war taught more than homemaking skills or how to make Victory Dinners. In the long run, the activities that emerged from within Home Making Institutes and wartime service programs suggest an important challenge to the accepted forms and means of raising political consciousness.

In ways that mirror the broader historiographical inattention to Bennett, Kittrell’s tenure as a teacher there is often minimized in chronicles of her life. Yet her time spent at Bennett was vital not only to her professional development and her politics, but to her continued cultivation of

³⁰ Linda Marie Fritschner, “The Rise and Fall of Home Economics: A Study With Implications for Women, Study, and Change,” (PhD diss., University of California Davis, 1973), 96.

philanthropic and religious networks. Bennett would also be the first place where Kittrell had the chance to build a strong Home Economics program. Of course, that did not all happen right away. When Kittrell first came to Bennett in 1928, she was a twenty-four year old teacher who had just completed her own college degree. By leaving Hampton and moving to Greensboro, Kittrell was reversing the trajectory of many African Americans at the time. In addition to returning to her home state, Kittrell was heading south to relocate to a city.

Though much about Greensboro would have been new to Kittrell, at the onset, some aspects of the Bennett culture might have felt familiar. After more than a decade at Hampton, Kittrell was accustomed to being at an institution described as a “home-like,” and among a religious “family” dedicated to work and advancement. But there were also major differences between the two, such as the strong African American leadership and the fact that Bennett was a single sex college. Perhaps most significant divergence, however, was the fact that Bennett would fare much better in the Depression than Hampton. While Bennett was experiencing a building surge, Kittrell saw room for a distinct opportunity.

In her early years of teaching, Kittrell was also enrolled as a graduate student at Cornell University. During that time, Kittrell studied the buildings used for Home Economics training at black colleges and secondary schools throughout the state of North Carolina.³¹ In locating these programs, Kittrell found that place and space mattered with regards to perceptions of prestige. Returning to Bennett, it was not long before Kittrell was suggesting that the facilities for Home Economics there were insufficient in size and scope. This ambition to have a new building occurred during a period of large donations, particularly from the aforementioned Pfeiffers. As

³¹ Kittrell, “A Study of Home Economics Education in Negro High Schools and Colleges of North Carolina” (master’s thesis, Cornell University, 1932).

they continued to make selective grants to the school, Kittrell seized upon the chance to be part of the plans for Pfeiffer Science Hall.

When this new academic building was completed in 1937, it was nearly the largest structure at Bennett, rivaled only by the primary women's dormitory. With echoes of the classical and the colonial in its contours and details, Pfeiffer Science Hall was placed at "the heart" of the academic center of campus. Even as it blended with the other Georgian Revival structures made of bond red bricks, Pfeiffer Hall overshadowed the rest.³² Considered practical and beautiful, Pfeiffer represented what mattered to the Bennett "family." It was also the "home" to the newly revised program in Home Economics, run by Kittrell. That connection is vital to understanding why this building so closely resembles the structure known as Martha Van Rensselaer Hall, the building that housed the College of Home Economics at Cornell.

A few months after completing her degree, Kittrell wrote to the head of the College, Flora Rose, for details on the design of MVR Hall.³³ While one structure is made of buff brick, and the other a bold red, these buildings have much in common. Outside, both share a Georgian design. More important, however, is the shared emphasis on blending academic and domestic spaces in highly controlled ways. The labyrinth of classrooms, laboratories, and meeting spaces in Pfeiffer is strikingly similar to MVR Hall. Taken altogether, these small details are evidence of the ways in which Kittrell transplanted certain ideas from Cornell. More than just her department building, Pfeiffer was a symbol of the ways Kittrell spanned the two worlds of Cornell and Bennett between 1929 and 1936 (Fig. 3.2 and Fig. 3.3).

³² National Register of Historic Places, Bennett College Historic District, Greensboro, North Carolina, Register #92000179.

³³ Kittrell to Flora Rose, 26 October 1936, Box 315, Folder 2, Kittrell Deceased Alumni File, Cornell University Alumni Records, 1869-2006, #41-2-877. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.



Fig. 3.2, Fig. 3.3: Pfeiffer Science Building and Martha Van Rensselaer Hall³⁴

Kittrell also stayed involved with her former teachers and the community at Hampton. In 1931, Kittrell published an article on Home Economics in Hampton's *Southern Workman*, an on-campus organ read by current students and alumni. Writing to the Hampton community, she noted that she had already created a course of her own design at Bennett known as the "Art of Living." Kittrell also emphasized that Home Economics in some form had been vital to Bennett since the beginning, but now it was part of the move toward "progressive education" at the college. As she saw it, the long tradition of Home Economics at Bennett "has had a very satisfying influence on its continued growth." Kittrell was clear that the program had little to do with crafts, "manipulative skill," or static concepts.³⁵ Instead, Kittrell insisted that a Home Economics program ought to be "a moving picture in a fluid state," a field prone to adaptation.³⁶ Just three years after completing her own degree at Hampton, Kittrell had found a niche at Bennett to remake Home Economics as she saw fit.

In this same article, Kittrell also wrote that her goal was to teach her students "to apply science and art to the betterment of living." Such an ambitious, if vague, objective often required that Kittrell and her students go beyond the scope of the classroom. As Kittrell imagined her

³⁴"Pfeiffer Science Building" hosted on Textiles, Teachers, and Troops, Digital Greensboro, <http://libcdm1.uncg.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/ttt/id/37398/>. Martha Van Rensselaer Hall image from Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Martha_Van_Rensselaer_Hall,_Cornell_Univ_Ithaca_NY_USA.jpg.

³⁵ Kittrell, "Home Economics at Bennett College," *Southern Workman* 60, no. 8 (1931): 381-4.

³⁶ Kittrell, "Home Economics at Bennett College," 383.

curriculum, coursework was only one component; activities that took place outside the classroom were also essential.³⁷ Where “outside” activities did not exist, Kittrell invented them. In addition to reforming the students’ coursework, Kittrell found “an old home” for her students to “fix.”³⁸ Far from being an artificial exercise, a practice home was an ideal way to see how “science and art are being applied to everyday living.” Kittrell further suggested that within the practice home, “home personalities are being developed, and ‘spiritual satisfaction’ is being acquired.”³⁹ The practice home was a heightened experience for students in many ways. Yet beyond its four walls, the whole campus was really a “practice” space to apply the Art of Living to their “beauty work,” to life.

In *The Way of Life at Bennett College* (1939), a promotional publication, it is clear just how pervasive the discourse surrounding the art and science of living became during Kittrell’s tenure. While this highly illustrated booklet tells a visual story about the quality of education at Bennett, the captions reinforce the interconnectedness of science, art, and domesticity. As one suggests, at Bennett, “science is studied...in the service of the Christian home and of the community.”⁴⁰ This phrasing is similar to what could be found in earlier publications at mission or manual training schools. Yet this same publication also shows the students’ strong base of academic work with science and their opportunities for expression through art.

These areas of study were considered synergistic. While stressing that Bennett was an aesthetically pleasing place for study, all work, including tests with laboratory rats, reads like poetry. Under the supervision of faculty who work “to enrich daily living and to express the

³⁷ Scott Baker, “Pedagogies of Protest: African American Teachers and the History of the Civil Rights Movement, 1940-1963,” *Teachers College Record* 113, no.12 (2001), 2777-2803

³⁸ Louise Guenveur Streat, “Home Management,” in *Time for Design: Vignettes of Life as a Clothing Major* (Greensboro: Bennett College Home Economics Department, 1974).

³⁹ “Home Economics at Bennett College,” 384.

⁴⁰ *Way of Life*, 8.

aspirations of the human spirit,” whether in the art room or laboratory, the “impulses from generations of artistic forebears flow through the fingers of Bennett girls.”⁴¹ While art could be seen as “release, freedom for the spirit”—the Art of Living required that students also take on a taxing, broad curriculum. Outside the pages of *Way of Life*, cultivating a campus “abounding in good will, radiant with beauty and reverent to God” required great effort.⁴²

If living was an art as well as a science, the *Bennett College Blue Book* was the textbook for both. Designed to translate the college’s promotional promises and lofty ideals into action, the *Blue Book* served as an orientation manual on “rightful living,” further distilling the lessons from Art of Living. Primarily, the *Blue Book* reminded students to be neat, as “neatness is the basis of all beauty: being neat suggests cleanliness, simplicity, orderliness, and refinement in every phase of our daily life.”⁴³ Students were also encouraged to take care of their personal hygiene and to “be appreciative of your dormitory home” by keeping it clean. These rules were further reinforced through the “Bennett Bs.” The “Bs,” including “Be Kind, Be Honest, Be Forgiving, Be Loyal” were shorthand for what was valued at Bennett.⁴⁴ Through the *Blue Book*, “Bs,” and the system of “beauty work,” Bennett had an alliterative culture filled with rituals designed to maintain the desired “beautiful” order.

While some of these rituals were particular to Bennett, Spelman also had a book on “decorum” that was given to women students in this period.⁴⁵ Likewise, MaryRose Reeves Allen, a Professor of Physical Education at Howard (1925-1967) also trained female students in

⁴¹ Ibid, 9.

⁴² David D. Jones, quoted in “Bennett College Campus Heritage Plan Made for the Getty Foundation,” (August 2005), 2.

⁴³ Cardwell, “I, Too, Am America,” 52-55.

⁴⁴ As seen in *Bennett College Scrapbook 1930s* and *Bennett College Scrapbook 1939-1940*.

⁴⁵ Collins, “Socialization at Two Black Women’s Colleges,” 99.

aesthetics and hygiene “to ‘develop in women the qualities of poise, beauty, and femininity [.]’”⁴⁶ There were clear precedents for such training. Decades earlier, Nannie Burroughs’s National Training School had been established with a motto of “three Bs”—“Bible, Bath, and Broom.”⁴⁷ Unlike Burroughs’s school, honing housekeeping skills was no longer the focus of women’s training at Spelman, Howard, or Bennett. But there was still a similar emphasis on ‘race advancement’ through care of the heart, head, and hands. What had lasted beyond Burroughs’s time was the idea that black female students should receive training in femininity and academics.

For administrators, such as Jones and Kittrell, this training was convenient for many reasons. The students, not outside workers, were held responsible for the care of the campus. Likewise, the strong liberal arts program hardly merited comment because many aspects of Bennett still seemed to run like an older training school. Thus for students, this last aspect of “beauty work”—the manual labor—may have been less than appealing. There is little consensus on what made for a “typical” Belle in this period, though most were likely from North Carolina.⁴⁸ Considering that many students might have been local, and from lower-income and/or working class backgrounds, “beauty work” may have made women feel that they had been brought into higher education only to receive work in domestic service.⁴⁹ On the other side

⁴⁶ Pamela Grundy, “From Amazons to Glamazons: The Rise and Fall of North Carolina Women’s Basketball, 1920-1960,” *Journal of American History* 87, no.1 (2000): 124; Rayford Logan, *Howard University: The First Hundred Years* (New York: New York University Press, 1969), 503.

⁴⁷ Victoria Wolcott, “‘Bible, Bath, and Broom’: Nannie Helen Burrough’s National Training School and African-American Racial Uplift,” *Journal of Women’s History* 9 no.1 (1997): 88-110. Holmes’s master’s work on Bennett also examined women’s bathing practices: Felice Watson Holmes, “A Study of Some Important Practices and Reactions of a Selected Group of Freshman Girls in Relation to Textiles and Clothing” (master’s thesis, Cornell University, 1934), 34-35.

⁴⁸ Lockwood, “Bennett College for Women,” 46. The Bennett College scrapbooks occasionally feature articles on women from other states, such as South Carolina or Ohio: “‘Ohio Club’ At Bennett College,” 1939-41, 36. The geographic distribution of students and occupations of their parents can be found in Willa B. Player, “Improving College Education for Women at Bennett College” (PhD diss., Teachers College, Columbia University, 1948), 7. Of the 487 students, 220 were from North Carolina; 65 students’ parents were farmers, 169 skilled workers, and many more in professions (1947-1948).

⁴⁹ Cardell, “‘I, Too, Am America,’” 67.

of the Magnolia frame surrounding the campus, nearly all African American women who were employed in Greensboro worked in domestic service.⁵⁰

Precisely because of this proximity to service, Dr. Louise G. Streat, a black professor who taught Home Economics at Bennett for four decades, saw this work as vital to the education program. Many women “were not only first generation college students, but many times they were the first generation education period coming out the family.” To Streat, “beauty work” was not a contradiction of terms. As Streat argued, “beauty work” was designed so that if students “did move into another category of life because of a degree...they would be prepared for it.” To her mind, this work provided a necessary entrée into higher education, particularly for those students who were “rural, from farms.”⁵¹

It is not surprising that Streat was a home economist because this thinking is in line with the Art of Living; in her textiles courses and in Kittrell’s general class, students were trained to fit within their new surroundings. Similarly, home economist Felice Watson Holmes spent time researching how students at Bennett became “clothes conscious,” linking their attire to opportunities for “social intercourse.”⁵² At Bennett, the cards were not stacked against non-elite students as they developed this consciousness; instead, their courses and “beauty work” equipped them for it. As Alicia Collins has argued, precisely because “Jones equated simplicity and cleanliness with refinement,” he provided a way of “divorcing the seemingly inextricable link between money and refinement” for poorer students.⁵³ Thus the high standards of beauty and

⁵⁰ Lockwood, “Bennett College for Women,” 100.

⁵¹ Interview with Louise Guenveur Streat in Lockwood, “Bennett College for Women 1926-1966,” 194-195.

⁵² Holmes, “A Study of Some Important Practices and Reactions,” 18.

⁵³ Collins, “Socialization,” 49-52.

performance of womanhood expected at Bennett—replete with hats and gloves—may have been an opportunity to imagine and even practice for a life of upward mobility.⁵⁴

Wherever women came from, at Bennett they had an opportunity to be respectable—and to do work, as Jones had said, not for others, but for their own “self-respect.” To some degree, this rhetoric was defensive and cautious. It was also a reflection of the ongoing power of the discourse of uplift, and perceived need to reinforce “bourgeois values” through education.⁵⁵ To a degree, Jones had found a way to reconcile offering a rigorous bachelor’s degree program with a work system that had been eroding at other institutions. At the same time, talk of going into “another category” was not merely idle—most students would go on to graduate school or would take professional jobs in social work or education.⁵⁶ In other words, this was an education for *professional* life.

In various oral histories, many of these students of this period and the 1940s would claim that they “recognized the practical importance of their exposure to homemaking skills and responsibilities” while at Bennett.⁵⁷ Some would stress that during these ‘good old days’ they learned “discipline and hard work” through this system.⁵⁸ For some particularly invested alumnae, such as poet Dr. Linda Brown, the work around campus was “a way for us to be disciplined and a way for us to take ownership of our environment, which is why I think it was not a bad thing.”⁵⁹ In some cases, distance and time likely bred nostalgia, particularly after the 1960s and 1970s, when “beauty work” was seen differently. A yearbook from the 1970s would

⁵⁴ “They Have the Distinctive Stamp of Bennett College,” *Bennett College Scrapbook 1939-1941*, 23-24.

⁵⁵ Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

⁵⁶ “1938 Educational and Financial Goals,” Bennett College Annual Reports to Trustees, Methodist Archives.

⁵⁷ Rita Liberti, “We Were Ladies, We Just Played Like Boys,” 86.

⁵⁸ Julianne Malveaux, “Cleaning Ambivalence: A Personal and Political Reflection,” in *Dirt: The Quirks, Habits, and Passions of Keeping House*, ed. Mindy Lewis (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2009), 228.

⁵⁹ Lockwood, “Bennett College for Women,” 262.

declare that the Belles of the past ‘did the work of maids’ and “resented” it.⁶⁰ It is worth noting that the Belles would have no major rebellions against the administration. Instead, through demonstrations and community outreach, they projected their frustration with inequality outward.

As with Kittrell’s experiences at Cornell, if students’ resentment was registered anywhere, it has scarcely survived. Some sources also suggest that it was not so much students, as parents, who rebelled against this system. One history—written by a Bennett president—argues that “beauty work...was abolished sometime in the sixties, as parents complained that they did not pay competitive tuitions for their daughters to do cleaning.”⁶¹ Perhaps parents who had been raised in the Depression saw this work as far too close to service for their own daughters. Likewise, the strict social controls on campus would also be loosened by the administration as “beauty work” disappeared. Over time, they came to be seen as incongruous with a liberal arts education in the years after Jones’s passing in 1956. Yet for the students of the 1930s, “beauty work” was vital, an almost unquestioned part of the curriculum. It was also part of an interlocking system; the ritualized repetition of the “Bs” served as a reminder that students were to be “ladylike” exemplars at all times or, as they were told, “32 trains left Greensboro every day.”⁶²

These students who were told to be a “Beacon for Womanhood,” might have bought into this system because of who was running it. This “Beacon” rhetoric would not have seemed empty at Bennett due to the composition of the faculty and staff. Unlike other black colleges that continued to struggle with the promotion of black faculty and administrators, Bennett was led by a black president and a well-educated black teaching force. Professors “trained in the universities

⁶⁰ “Work of maids,” *Bennett Belle 1973* (Greensboro: Bennett College, 1973).

⁶¹ Malveaux, “Cleaning Ambivalence,” 228.

⁶² Cynthia McCottry-Smith, ’45 in *Tell Me Dear Bennett*, 57.

of the land and in the school of life,” were seen as vital assets and role models to be followed closely.⁶³ Jones explicitly encouraged students to follow the example set by the strong female leadership on campus, and kept to his own ideals by making Kittrell Dean of Students (Women).⁶⁴ In *Way of Life*, Kittrell was featured prominently for this role. Positioned with a telephone eagerly poised at her ear, Kittrell was portrayed as an “accessible” and “friendly” Dean, responding to students’ needs.

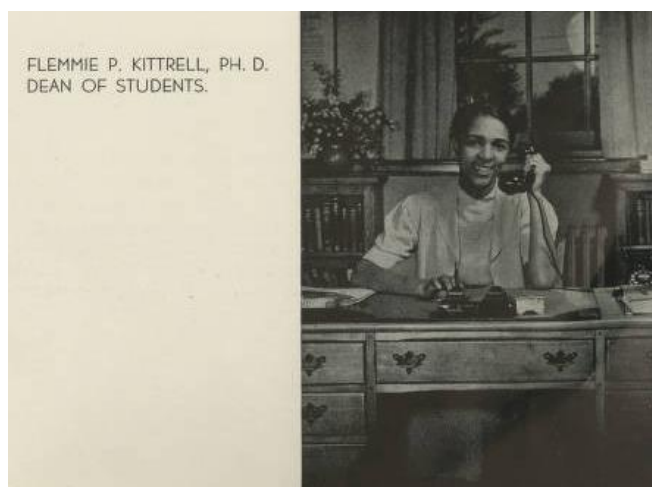


Fig. 3.4: Kittrell in *Way of Life* at Bennett College (1939), 5.

Kittrell was likely promoted into this role because she had obtained such a high level of education. But at Bennett in the 1930s, she was not anomalous; other exemplars at Bennett include her colleague Felice Holmes and Dr. Willa B. Player, Director of Admissions.⁶⁵ Fulfilling Jones’s promises in an earlier promotional column in the *New York Age*, nearly three-fourths of the faculty had advanced graduate degrees by 1935.⁶⁶ Many of these faculty members went to the same institutions, primarily Teachers College or Cornell. For instance, Dean of Instruction, Frank Marcellus Staley, earned his MS in Agriculture at Cornell in 1928—just prior

⁶³ *Way of Life*, 5.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ “Make Faculty Changes at Bennett,” *Bennett Scrapbook 1939-41*, 7.

⁶⁶ “Have Their Masters,” *Chicago Defender* (Chicago, IL), Apr. 21 1934; *New York Age* (New York, NY), Aug. 19 1939, 8.

to Kittrell's and Holmes's arrival at Bennett.⁶⁷ These networks spanning Greensboro and Ithaca continued to be vital in years to come. For example, Kittrell's replacement when she left Bennett was Marian Gandy Wyatt, who earned her MS at Cornell.⁶⁸ For students in the 1930s, Kittrell was part of a highly visible (if now largely forgotten) network of African American faculty.

As an eager administrator, Jones emphasized advanced education—as something achieved by his faculty, and emulated by the students—as a way of presenting a solid image to the outside world. This initiative cannot be reduced to an issue of status, however, because much of this graduate study had immediate utility for Bennett. Like Holmes and Kittrell, Dr. Player, who later succeeded Jones as president of the college, studied Bennett's curriculum as part of her graduate studies. Graduate work took these faculty members away from campus, but much of it was also done in the service of the institution. In addition to studying Home Economics in North Carolina, Kittrell's doctoral work also had a symbiotic relationship and immediate impact on her academic work at Bennett. In 1934, for instance, a college article declared that upon "Dean Kittrell's return, several new courses will be offered." This included 'Problems in Consumer Buying,' a course "designed to help develop an understanding of the problem faced by individuals and families who must buy efficiently and economically."⁶⁹ As the Depression worsened, Kittrell had started this concentration at Cornell toward the end of her graduate studies.⁷⁰ Once she returned to Greensboro, she was fulfilling the promise of working for "her people" with efficiency.

⁶⁷ Frank M. Staley, "Suggestions for Curriculum-Making in Agriculture for the Negro Agricultural and Technical College of North Carolina, Based Upon a Study of Agriculture in North Carolina and the Experience of Teachers of Agriculture" (master's thesis, Cornell University, 1928).

⁶⁸ "New Director: Mrs. Marian Gandy Wyatt," *Bennett Scrapbook 1939-41*, 34.

⁶⁹ "Dean Kittrell Again at Bennett College" *Bennett Scrapbook 1930s*, 4.

⁷⁰ "Home Economics at Bennett College," *Bulletin of Bennett College* 12, no.2 (1937), Thomas F. Holgate Library, Bennett College, <http://libcdm1.uncg.edu/cdm/ref/collection/ttt/id/7222>.

Incidentally, shortly after Kittrell's degree was officially conferred at Cornell in February 1936, a tornado hit downtown Greensboro. The economic downturn was now compounded by natural disaster. To date, this is still considered one of the worst storms in Greensboro history, with 14 fatalities.⁷¹ The shell of the new science building, Pfeiffer, would weather the storm due to sturdy construction. But the campus sustained other costly damages, and a local paper declared the "PRACTICE HOME WRECKED."⁷² The home, "fronted on Macon Street" and adjacent to the campus quadrangle, was under Kittrell's supervision.⁷³ No one was hurt on campus, but the "recently renovated and furnished" home would have to be rebuilt.⁷⁴ In effect, nearly all of what Kittrell had worked to build in the previous five years was nearly completely destroyed. If anyone considered this turn of events inauspicious, no one said so, least of all Kittrell.

Undeterred by the tornado, a ceremony was held just a few weeks later to celebrate the new construction projects on campus. This was another opportunity to present the college as forward-looking, and Annie Nathan Meyer, a founder of Barnard College, was invited to speak about "The Problem before Women." Meyer was a controversial choice; she had recently published an anti-lynching play in 1932, *Black Souls*.⁷⁵ In spite of her recent indictment of Southern racism, Meyer was not a radical. During her talk, Meyer expressed her deep ambivalence over what education ought to be for African American women. Despite being a

⁷¹ "List of Dead in Tornado-Ravaged Greensboro Swells to 12," *Daily Times News* (Burlington, NC), Apr. 3 1936; "When the Great Tornado of '36 Came Through," *Daily Times News* (Burlington, NC), Jul. 26 2014.

⁷² "\$25,000 Storm Damage on Campus at Bennett," *Bennett Scrapbook 1930s*.

⁷³ Louise G. Streat, "The Role of Management in Home Economics: A Historical Perspective," AAFCS records. It is not clear if Kittrell lived in the practice home. Her address is H531 Macon in 1936. This address puts Kittrell at the intersection of Macon and Gorrell and she was a householder. Previously, in 1929, she was listed as a resident at 922 E Washington, a general address for Bennett. In 1933, 1935, 1939 she was also listed as living at Bennett. In 1937, she was listed at H535 Macon. See *Hill's Greensboro Directory* (Richmond: Hill's Co., 1937).

⁷⁴ "Local College Badly Damaged," Apr. 11, 1936, no paper listed, *Bennett College Scrapbook, 1930s*.

⁷⁵ "Annie Nathan Meyer," in Kathy A. Perkins and Judith Louise Stephens, eds., *Strange Fruit: Plays on Lynching by American Women* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1998), 133-138.

fervent proponent of the liberal arts at Barnard, Meyer was critical of the nationwide trend toward a “determination to prove that women could do the things that men could do.” Meyer linked this to a “tendency to belittle the work of the home.”⁷⁶ Like the reformers at Vassar and Smith a few years earlier, Meyer looked at the sweep of changes in her lifetime but could not see a line of advancement; instead, she was unsure as to what women’s education should accomplish.

In analyzing the changes in higher education since the Civil War, Meyer considered “the emancipation of the negro and the emancipation of women” analogous, as ‘women, upon receiving increased freedom...exhibited a disdain for their work of the past.’ That the majority of the women in attendance occupied both of these categories did not garner comment from Meyer. To this audience, however, and especially Kittrell, making the distinction between their academic ambitions and the ‘work of the past,’ particularly low-paying, coercive domestic work was imperative. Many forms of higher education for women, broadly defined, remained controversial, and the particular legacy of domestic work attached to African American women added another challenge. Thus Meyer’s comments, while not explicitly addressing the double burden faced by African American women in higher education, point to the multiple terrains African American students and teachers had to navigate. While listening to Meyer, Kittrell likely imagined that her Home Economics program reconciled some of the tensions between the desire for professional work and the perceived need for educated women to still be invested in “the family.”⁷⁷

Kittrell was not alone in thinking this way. Dr. Player, who would run the nursery program and later, become president of Bennett, also criticized the “tendency to imitate

⁷⁶ “Ground is Broken for Science Building at Bennett College,” *North Carolina Daily News* (Jacksonville, NC), Apr. 20, 1936.

⁷⁷ Ibid. See also *Bennett College Scrapbook, 1930s*: many interior photographs were removed “by F.P. Kittrell.”

programs of study designed for men.” As she saw it, “the needs of women are, in many respects, different.” At Bennett, Player believed that administrators had avoided such an error by working to understand “those problems of Negro women which have an important bearing on the type of collegiate education they should receive.”⁷⁸ In her analysis, the Art of Living course was an ideal way to bring such “problems” into the curriculum. While the administration was proud that many Bennett women went “on to the graduate schools of America,” or into “the service of public education” they also boasted that they trained “home-makers and the mothers of the citizens of tomorrow.”⁷⁹ Many members of the faculty were not willing to dismiss homemaking as a valued path, but they were careful not to suggest that it was the only one, either. While Home Economics was a way of furthering women’s intellectual capabilities, it was also a means of maintaining many gender norms.

At the same time, to simply accept the promotion of homemaking in Home Economics is to miss the broader connections faculty and students forged within the local community. In addition to serving undergraduates, this new science building with Home Economics was also seen as having utility outside of the confines of the school. As Player’s comments suggest, these educators were interested in thinking broadly about the needs and problems faced by African American women. To that end, Kittrell’s reports drafted for the Board of Trustees stressed the need for a parent and child center as well as more practice space. These components of the program were described in vague terms as areas to “provide opportunities for securing knowledge and experience in the art and science of homemaking.”⁸⁰ But the proposed parent and child development center, focused on the familial needs of African American families, was a

⁷⁸ Player, “Improving College Education for Women at Bennett College,” 3; 22-23.

⁷⁹ *Way of Life*, 16.

⁸⁰ “1938 Educational and Financial Goals,” 3-7, Bennett College Annual Reports to Trustees, Methodist Archives. .

major intervention in child studies and the first of its kind in the area.⁸¹ Kittrell's doctoral research had shown that in the Greensboro area, there was a dire need to address the nutritional problems faced by African American families. Child development studies and parent education programs were a way to grapple with, and possibly even solve such problems.

Still, the proposed child study program was not designed to be charitable. Parents would have to pay \$20/semester to enroll their children. Touted as a "scientific" endeavor, the Nursery program was more of a laboratory for analysis and future action than a daycare.⁸² This was an important distinction that set this program apart from earlier efforts in providing childcare at manual training schools. At Hampton and Tuskegee, the earliest care centers for children with working parents were often places where "the ethics of hard work and toil" were stressed far more than development.⁸³ The new Bennett program, however, would be a space to "enrich rather than merely maintain children."⁸⁴ It was also a "scientific," didactic space for students. To prepare for their future roles as leaders, teachers, or mothers, students would have an opportunity to "observe the maximum amount of learning on the part of the little children under the best environment."⁸⁵ More than just a place to leave children, Kittrell believed this "laboratory" system would benefit the students, the children, and their families.

Kittrell tried to further the mission of the nursery program by reaching out to the General Education Board (GEB) for funding.⁸⁶ In her proposal to the GEB, Kittrell presented even more ambitious plans, suggesting the addition of a Parent Institute and a Consumer Center to the

⁸¹ Kittrell to Lorenzo C. White, 3 October 1938, Kittrell Trustee Box, Correspondence folder, Hampton Archives, Hampton, VA. Hereafter cited as Hampton Archives.

⁸² "Home Economics at Bennett College," Box 239, Folder: Bennett College History, AAFCS Papers; "Bennett," *Carolina Times* (Durham, NC), Oct. 1, 1938.

⁸³ James Anderson, *Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 76.

⁸⁴ Emily Cahan, *Past Caring: A History of U.S. Preschool Care and Education for the Poor, 1820-1965* (New York: National Center for Children in Poverty, Columbia University, 1989), 32.

⁸⁵ Kittrell to Lorenzo C. White, 3 October 1938, Hampton Archives.

⁸⁶ "Bennett to Have Nursery School New Project Gift of General Education Bd.," *Bennett College Scrapbook 1930s*.

nursery laboratory. Considering that Kittrell planned to build these programs within a small liberal arts college, this would have made Bennett's program in Home Economics extraordinary in its scope and in the extent of its outreach programs. Only the Nursery School came into fruition, though Kittrell did make this a "Nursery-Parent" center. This addition of "parent" stressed the importance of offering care and spreading knowledge to local families, an echo of "community mothering" in uplift efforts.⁸⁷ Some aspects of this training also mirrored the land-grant college nursery system found at Cornell. When Dr. Ethel Waring, Kittrell's advisor, paid a visit in 1938, she would have recognized this idea immediately.⁸⁸

To Kittrell, the greater social significance of this work was readily apparent. In describing this Center she argued, "[t]o enrich the life of people...we naturally focus our attention on the home... [and] the first six years of life."⁸⁹ Kittrell's controlled research, early intervention, and close contact with parents in Greensboro soon attracted national attention due to the implications for juvenile delinquency. In a 1938 *New York Times* article, Kittrell explained that the child's early years and home environment were crucial; this timeframe was when 'the development of the child is largely determined.' Kittrell also argued that 'crime and delinquency' were 'associated with homes that are poorly managed.'⁹⁰ This rhetoric about delinquency put Kittrell squarely within the key debates of the period about children and families.⁹¹ Emphasizing that criminality was not innate, but learned and unlearned, Kittrell saw her own work as a solution. Rather than impose systems of punishment, centers for educating parents could provide a social cure for the problem of delinquency. Kittrell does not signal race explicitly; clearly,

⁸⁷ Diedre Hill Butler, "The South Side Community Center of Ithaca, New York: Built Through 'Community Mothering,' 1938" *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* (2008).

⁸⁸ "Teachers of Nursery School Confer Here," *Bennett Banner* (Greensboro, NC), Dec. 1939, 1.

⁸⁹ "Nursery School at Bennett," *North Carolina Daily News* (Jacksonville, NC), Apr. 28, 1940.

⁹⁰ "Negro Child Gets Pre-School Study," *New York Times* (New York, NY), Dec. 18, 1938, 10D; *Bennett College Scrapbook 1939-41*, 39.

⁹¹ Linda Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 63; 135.

however, she was pushing back against narratives that racialized crime. Notably, this emphasis on working *with* rather than assigning blame to parents, particularly black mothers, was thirty years before Project Head Start.

While this work reflected broader social concerns, this focus on delinquency and deviance had particular resonance in the 1930s at Bennett. At an institution where anxieties about respectability were acute, even the parade of children going to and from the nursery program was seen as significant. A Durham paper, *The Carolina Times*, reported that the opening of the school was “a gala day at Bennett College;” the reporter went on to describe the mothers who brought their children to the program for the first time. While the children made their way into the school, the “tots...donned their best bibs and tuckers [.]”⁹² This care center, in other words, was not to be confused with those at training schools where children were photographed working in fields or holding brooms.⁹³ With the college serving as a space for upward mobility, everyone, including the very small “tots,” was expected to meet high standards.

Beyond the nursery program, during Kittrell’s tenure, many records from Bennett, and particularly those related to Home Economics, stress the importance of presentation. It was not just the tots who seemed to be on parade. One alumna specifically recalled that “‘Flemmie P.’ emphasized proper behavior and attire at all times.” For example, slacks were “improper for anything but active sports.”⁹⁴ Another student remembered that in line with their training, “hats and gloves were always worn when off campus.” Students were always told: “‘carry yourselves’ since you will always be recognized as a ‘Bennett Girl.’”⁹⁵ Recognized they were, as local papers occasionally printed large photographs of co-eds with the line: “They Have the

⁹² “Director of Home Economics,” *Carolina Times* (Durham, NC), May 7, 1938, 2.

⁹³ Anderson, *Education of Blacks in the South*, 76.

⁹⁴ “Valena Minor Williams, ’43,” *Tell Me Dear Bennett*, 49.

⁹⁵ “Annie Green Ponds, ’42,” *Tell Me Dear Bennett*, 41.

Distinctive Stamp of Bennett College.”⁹⁶ In their textiles courses, students were trained to make all the components necessary for this look, yet uniformity was discouraged because an outfit “expresses the underlying values of personality.”⁹⁷ While bibs and dresses might be an outlet for “personality,” all still had to fit within the confines of respectability. To do so, they had to always attention to their comportment and dress. Ultimately, “beauty work” was just that—work.

The implications of “beauty work,” in the long run, would add up to more than superficial examinations of women’s dress. Promoting “better homes” and “neat” appearances was political. As Sarah Cardwell argues, “outward appearance...mattered greatly to a race that experienced constant degradation from white southerners.”⁹⁸ While the notion of beauty as empowerment is most often connected with the afro and natural hair movement of subsequent decades, Bennett students in the 1930s learned about civic power from “beauty work.” From within the well-kept confines of the campus, Bennett seemed “to be the exact opposite of political activism and radicalism.”⁹⁹ Yet precisely within this frame, the “emphasis on Belle responsibility for uplift of the community” led women outside of the magnolia quadrangle, taking “beauty work” into the community.¹⁰⁰

One way that students engaged with the community was through the annual Home Making Institute, run by Kittrell. Each Institute focused on a particular problem depending on the broader needs faced by the people of Greensboro in that year. In 1936, for example, the theme was consumer and economic issues. Visitors in that year were provided with information on “Misleading Advertisements,” and Kittrell gave several lectures on strategies for smart

⁹⁶ “They Have the Distinctive Stamp of Bennett College,” *Bennett Scrapbook 1939-41*, 34.

⁹⁷ *Way of Life*, 11; this phrasing is almost identical to Holmes’s argument that students should be taught to see “clothing as an expression of beauty and personality.” See Holmes, “A Study of Some Important Practices and Reactions,” 23, 39.

⁹⁸ Sarah Cardwell, “‘I, too, am America’: The Founding of Bennett College for Women,” *Journal About Women in Higher Education* 3, no.1 (2010), 124.

⁹⁹ Linda Beatrice Brown, *Belles of Liberty*, 1.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, iii.

consumption habits. In training people in the local black community to be shrewd consumers, Kittrell also encouraged her students to see that their purpose was to become “young women who can meet and solve complex problems of home and community life in a modern world.”¹⁰¹ Home economists’ interest in consumption has often been oversimplified. With this Institute, Kittrell’s work shows that for some educators, Home Economics continued to be a form of political advocacy.¹⁰²

This forum was also not just about Home Economics. As a coordinator and lecturer at the Institute, Kittrell placed herself in good company, inviting prominent speakers on social justice issues, including Benjamin Mays of Morehouse College. Over time, the Home Making Institute provided women with tools particular to their training in Home Economics *and* paths for advocacy and leadership. While the Institute was only one week out of the year, it was part of a system meant to instill within students a sense that their education required engagement with the outside community. Through this local effort, Kittrell urged the Belles to think big, and to see “that we are no longer living in an isolated society, but in a world that is interrelated.”¹⁰³ After hearing from great leaders, students did more than think about becoming “Beacons”—they acted.

In response to the racist policies of local theatre in Greensboro, Bennett students lodged a protest in 1937. The Belles involved were specifically tackling the fact that the theaters cut “scenes that portrayed African-American characters on ‘an equal basis’ with white characters.” Through training in Home Economics, students had learned that they possessed economic power, derived from their roles as consumers. Additionally, from the concept of “beauty work,” these students had a framework to protest inaccurate or degrading representations of African

¹⁰¹ *Way of Life*, 8-9.

¹⁰² Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers’ Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003).

¹⁰³ “Dr. Kittrell Heard At Home Institute,” *Bennett College Scrapbook 1930s*.

Americans. Within a few months, the women “succeeded in crippling box office sales.”¹⁰⁴ President Jones’s daughter, Frances, who was also a student at Bennett, was part of the protest. All picketers received the administration’s support.¹⁰⁵ Jones, who believed that the “only justification” for the college was in how it worked for the community, did not condemn, but rather encouraged the protest. Put into broader context, this was more than two decades before the Woolworths sit-ins in the same city.¹⁰⁶

This protest was not an isolated incident. Rather, it was part of a tradition, as two Bennett historians argued, of “advocating civic involvement and responsibility,” values they explicitly connected to the Institutes.¹⁰⁷ In subsequent years, students would take on other projects, such as referendums on public housing and education efforts related to public health issues. These projects bore some relation to older uplift projects, as students went out into the community, educating local families door-to-door. Over time, these students also linked the quest for respectability, so central to their campus, with a vigorous push for civil rights in the community. In 1942, Bennett students went out into the community to poll voters to see whether a new housing project could be approved. As a result, they saw that “many people in Greensboro are ignorant of the power they possess in the ballot to decide important issues.”¹⁰⁸ With sustained advocacy, the women worked to turn the tide, which had been against public housing, and eventually the measure was passed. Home Economics, for them, was not just about private homes, but also about housing policy.

¹⁰⁴ Millicent E. Brown and Lea E. Williams, eds., *A Celebration of 60 Years of Student Activism in Pursuit of Social Justice at Bennett College 1937-1997* 1 (1988).

¹⁰⁵ Jones’s daughter, Frances (Jones) Bonner, was “the first physician to graduate from Bennett, 1939” in “Graduates Urged to Give Back,” *Times-News* (Burlington, NC), May 10, 1933, 5.

¹⁰⁶ Emily Herring Wilson, *Hope and Dignity: Older Black Women of the South* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983), 57-65.

¹⁰⁷ Brown and Williams, *A Celebration of 60 Years of Student Activism*, 4.

¹⁰⁸ Lockwood, 221-224.

Emboldened by this work, other Bennett students then took on the challenge of voter registration through the campaign known as “Operation Doorknock.” This initiative, which was one of the largest and most successful voter registration efforts undertaken in the area, started as part of the 1951 Home Making Institute. It is with this project that political significance of the Institutes is most clear. Historian Sarah Cardwell has argued that projects such as “Operation Doorknock” presented an “apparent incongruity” as “the purpose of a Homemaking Institute was to teach proper home and family management, not encourage political activity.”¹⁰⁹ This perception of incongruity is precisely why the Institutes were a successful platform for organizing political work. At Bennett, constructions of citizenship were not separable from notions of domesticity, and politics and home management were not mutually exclusive. Through Home Economics, the Belles would take part in civil rights projects, disrupting preconceived notions of how and why women engage in politics, and what service could mean at women’s black colleges in this period.

Kittrell would be the first to suggest that her work at the Homemaking Institutes and her Art of Living courses were meant to inspire more than lessons in dining room arrangements. Yet, it is crucial not to see the emphasis on “the home” as deceptive rhetoric. While students were expected *not* to work in other people’s homes upon their graduation, Home Economics training was grounded in a belief that one’s private home was tremendously significant. In her own words, Kittrell’s mandatory course, the Art of Living was designed to do the following:

develop integrated personalities, capable of meeting and solving in an adequate way various complex problems of the student as an individual, and as a member of a family group, and as a member of society.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Cardwell, 132.

¹¹⁰ “Home is Emphasized at Bennett College,” *Greensboro Daily News* (Greensboro, NC), Apr. 21, 1940, 9. This same phrasing is also in “Home Economics at Bennett College,” 1937, 2.

The family and the home mattered, in part, because it was through the family that one learned how to be a citizen. While Kittrell did not believe in focusing on manual skills, she was still devoted to the idea of “better homes” as a way to “better” individual people. Kittrell never explicitly connected this only to women, but she did suggest that women had a particular responsibility.

This line of thinking was not just shared by home economists at Bennett. Historian Merze Tate, who taught at Bennett and also knew the challenges of being “a first” (as a student at Western Michigan Teachers College, then at University of Oxford, England, and in earning a Ph.D. in government at Radcliffe College) agreed with this sentiment. Echoing Player’s analysis of the college, Tate believed that the home must still be a part of women’s college experiences. To colleagues in the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs, Tate argued:

Between the ultra-feminism of women’s rights forever, and the ultra-feminists in the idea of women always to serve the men, to produce the race, and to keep the home, is the stimulating vision of women making their fullest contribution to life, whether in the home, in other service, or in both fields of activity.¹¹¹

Tate was confident that there was a place for women in public service. She also maintained that women should be able to find fulfillment through work related, but not bound to “the home.” Perhaps her tenure at Bennett convinced her that these need not be separate endeavors.

Without apparent contradiction, even President Jones, who was deeply devoted to a concept of normative domesticity, supported campus activism. In a “This I Believe” testimony, Jones proclaimed the centrality of his family to his life’s work. He declared that “from the outset” of his marriage, he and his wife Susie “had the feeling that no matter what else we did in life, we had to devote our best thinking and our best living to our children.” He said this in

¹¹¹ Merze Tate, “The Justification of a Women’s College,” *Bennett College Bulletin* 12 (1937): 15.

contrast to those who—to his mind—privileged public affairs over family.¹¹² Susie Jones also recorded her own reflections on domesticity and public work for “This I Believe.” These remarks are particularly compelling in light of her involvement with what she called “the first sit-ins” and “all of the activities that were a part of this movement in Greensboro.”¹¹³ Susie, who called herself a “housewife, educator, and church leader,” further explained, there was “nothing small in doing the little things of life.” Articulating a concept of “civic chores,” Jones collapsed tasks such as “making a bed” into the same category as “canvassing the neighborhood to encourage registration for voting [.]” If done with purpose, “chores” could be a means of fulfillment.¹¹⁴

Within the confines of Bennett, pulling all of these activities together may not have seemed so unusual. But Susie Jones likely knew that she was somewhat exceptional in seeing political activities such as canvassing as part of her “routines of daily life [.]” As with the tasks of “beauty work,” civic chores were also still work. At times, Jones would have been stretched thin, between her mission efforts, political organizing, campus employment as a registrar, and the upkeep of her home. Yet her notion of “civic chores” is significant, for it is an articulation of a deeply politicized personal life that is distinct from later movements. Jones found a way to blend uplift rhetoric about family with nonviolent sit-ins. Jones did not question that “beauty work” was her burden. Nor did she push back against the idea of gendered labor divisions in the home. This approach to politics was entirely secular. For Jones, a firm belief in faith-driven purpose made the difference between drudgery and meaningful service. Thus her role as a member of the Methodist church, as much as other markers, provided the guiding principles for everything from voting canvassing to a woman’s chore list.

¹¹² Jones, “Fixing Up the Run-Down Places,” *This I Believe Broadcast*, <https://thisibelieve.org/essay/16688>.

¹¹³ Susie Jones, interviewed by Merze Tate, Black Women Oral History Project, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, 1977.

¹¹⁴ Mrs. David D. Jones, “Doing the Simple Tasks,” *This I Believe Broadcast*, <http://thisibelieve.org/essay/16689/>.

While generally understudied in histories of higher education, religion and religiosity were integral to the academic and social culture at Bennett. Kittrell, who was active in Methodist networks her entire adult life, saw Susie and David Jones as remarkable leaders partially because of this attachment to the church.¹¹⁵ Kittrell also seems to have agreed with their linkages between women's work and politics. But there were many ways in which Kittrell did not fit with their vision of black women's roles. For many others, Susie and her husband served as a highly visible as model of respectable heterosexuality—an ideal “race marriage.” Literally “The Joneses,” they raised their family onsite while teaching and running the campus. Aside from their family, many other exemplars on campus were unmarried, highly educated women. Kittrell admired Susie, but she did not emulate her life choices. Given this range of models, students might have questioned if there were not contradictory ideals put forth by the faculty. Kittrell, the lead teacher on home life, not only owned her own home but lived in it alone. In later years, students and critics would directly tackle these apparent contradictions. But to this administration, it was not unusual to stress the value of family and to lavish praise on women who chose to pursue careers at Bennett.

In one interview where Susie Jones discussed her time on campus, she invoked an *Afro-American* piece that asked: ‘Did you ever see a dream walking?’¹¹⁶ For Jones, the presence of faculty who had earned advanced degrees such as Kittrell, Dr. Cotton (Psychology and Education), Dr. Player (Psychology), and Dr. Tate (History) meant that Bennett students “had these dreams in reality on the campus, constantly stimulating them, encouraging them and urging them forward.”¹¹⁷ Though marriage was theoretically encouraged for aspiring Belles, Kittrell was still considered a ‘dream’ to look up to. In still other ways, marriage was selectively

¹¹⁵ Kittrell, Tate interview, 7.

¹¹⁶ Jones discusses this article in her interview with Tate for the BWOHP. This question comes from a Bing Crosby song. It was used in many housing ads and articles in the 1930s about FDR's brain trust: “Two Strikes Eliminate Washington ‘Dream Walkers,’” *The Milwaukee Sentinel* (Milwaukee, WI), May 22, 1934.

¹¹⁷ Jones, Tate interview, 17.

discouraged. While still students at Bennett, the Belles were often told they were “too young to specialize” when it came to men.¹¹⁸ In addition to raising a “model” family on campus, Jones encouraged students to think of the school as a family, and to settle for the “family-like” environment of the school rather than leaving to start their own.

In some oral histories of the period collected by Juanita Moss, students spoke at length about how they admired Jones and his work on campus. Though many affectionately called him “Prexy,” others, finding him to be a “stickler,” saw him as overly involved in this campus “family.” Early in his tenure as president, a student from the class of 1930 even led a small rebellion against him, spurred into action by bad breakfast grits. This seemingly minor issue was also a source of contention at Hampton in 1927, where students proclaimed the food to be of substandard quality. By protesting for better breakfast food, this Bennett student exposed the gap between the proclamations of a beautiful, abundant campus and the sometimes less pleasant reality. Apparently, Jones responded by telling the student he would work to ‘do better’—and he later offered her a job at a kindergarten upon graduation. For this alumna, this incident represented “Prexy’s” “compassionate” response to student complaints.¹¹⁹

Jones clearly earned a reputation for his imposition of high standards and intense involvement with student life. But the person most often associated with the school’s rigorous ideals in contemporary student works was Kittrell. She may have been a “dream walking,” but she was not a distant figure. As a professor, dean, and administrator of the practice home, Kittrell was privy to many academic and social activities. Due to this presence, Kittrell’s name appears with some frequency in the campus paper, *The Bennett Banner*. Even—or perhaps especially—as a dean, Kittrell was not immune to criticism in the *Banner*. In “A Light History of the Class of

¹¹⁸ Moss, *Tell Me Why*, 41.

¹¹⁹ Dorothy Ann Strothers Kennedy, ’30, *Tell Me Why*, 22.

'39," students recalled that many of their "troubles" came from their first Home Economics course: "the course itself wasn't hard; but oh how neatly one must go dressed for that class." To them, "it seemed that only Dorothy Moore [Most Sophisticated, '39] ever met Dr. Kittrell's approval, but finally we 'wisened up' [sic] and kept one dress containing the correct number of snaps in preparation for that class."¹²⁰ Others from around that same time remembered how some "trait[s] of good grooming" were "pounded into our Freshman skulls...by Miss Flemma P. Kittrell."¹²¹ Even the class of 1943 would echo this characterization: "I am sure everyone remembers...when we spent two hours dressing before going to Home Economics class (Art of Living) where we were daily checked on grooming, clothing, colors, hair style, ad infinitum."¹²² Here, "beauty work" seems simply exhausting, and Kittrell nearly impossible to please.

This same graduating class would also fondly remember that "Miss Kittrell" comforted them, as "nothing tragic would happen to her 'little dears.'" This seems to have been written with affection, but it could just as easily signal condescension. The college students of the early 1930s would not have been much younger than Kittrell. But with so much responsibility, despite being comparatively young, she was not youthful. She was also unmarried and exceptionally well educated, even for women at Bennett. It might be for this reason that instead of referring to her as Dr., Professor, or Dean, as was common, most of these short articles call her "Miss Kittrell." Other long-serving professors, such as Streat, would be alternatively referred to as Dr. *or* Mrs., but here Kittrell does not have either prefix. This effectively levels her accomplishments and restores her to the students' level, at least in marital terms.

In another type of source featured in *The Bennett Banner*, invented dialogues, students imagine the following conversation or "conference," which plays on Kittrell's nutrition

¹²⁰ "A Light History of the Class of '39," *Bennett Banner*, May 1939, 3.

¹²¹ "The Woes of a Practice Teacher," *Bennett Banner*, Dec. 1942, 4.

¹²² "I am sure everyone remembers," *Bennett Banner*, Jan. 1943, 3.

background: “Miss Kittrell, I want to reduce.” “Miss K.: “Take a basal.”¹²³ As a nutrition teacher, Kittrell may not have wanted to be associated with students’ dieting measures.¹²⁴ Additionally, while a basal metabolic rate is a scientific measure of caloric needs, the way this is framed, the other definition of “basal,” as in bottom, seems to suggest a quick enema. A few years later in 1937, students were even less subtle—or perhaps just less kind. In a “Famous Sayings of Faculty Members,” article, “Miss Kittrell” is quoted as saying, ‘Everybody is stupid but me.’¹²⁵ But there were still other jabs. A “Class Will” from 1939 left “Miss Kittrell” “Ella Fitzgerald’s ability to sing swing tunes (any kind of tunes, in fact).”¹²⁶ Other faculty members were not spared from this kind of treatment or teasing. One brief mention of Tate notes, ‘I bet if Hitler, Mussolini, and the rest of those fellows had to take Miss Tate’s Current Affairs’ Test, they would stay at home and stop making current history any more complicated.’¹²⁷ At the same time, Kittrell had a broad range of responsibilities, so there was simply more for students to target. In her own recollections, Kittrell pointed to her age and relative vulnerability when she started teaching. In an interview *with* Tate, Kittrell mentioned a student—whom she names—giving her a difficult time with chewing gum on her very first day of teaching. After telling the student to discard her gum unless she could share with all, the student gave everyone a piece. In the end, though, Kittrell remembered this class on “art appreciation” fondly. Instead of taking the gum, all of the students backed her, which gave her “a lift” and boost of confidence.¹²⁸

Whatever the students really thought of these course and standards, Home Economics remained an important part of the college for decades to come, and it was a subject

¹²³ “Miss Kittrell, I want to,” *Bennett Banner*, May 1934, 8.

¹²⁴ A “basal metabolism machine” is shown in “Home Economics at Bennett College,” 6.

¹²⁵ “Famous Sayings of Faculty Members,” *Bennett Banner*, October 1937.

¹²⁶ “The Class Will,” *Bennett Banner*, May 1939, 3.

¹²⁷ “Student’s Comment,” *Bennett Banner*, May 1934, 2.

¹²⁸ Kittrell, Tate interview, 7.

that many (at times, most) elected to study as a major.¹²⁹ By the mid-1970s, 15% of all graduates at Bennett since the first class in 1931 had majored in Home Economics.¹³⁰ While some of this teasing likely revealed deeper tensions, there is considerable evidence that Kittrell impacted many young women's career paths. Outside of the pages of the *Banner*, some gave the greatest compliment by emulating her career path. Perhaps the best example of this trend is Hattie Green Holmes, a Bennett alumna from Henderson, Kittrell's hometown, who later earned a master's in Home Economics at Howard in the 1940s. After working as a Home Demonstration agent stateside, Holmes lived abroad for many years, teaching extension work in Liberia.¹³¹ Holmes was not alone in continuing her career in Home Economics. Another Bennett graduate, Marie Clapp Moffitt would also pursue graduate work, completing her thesis on cooperative vocational work in North Carolina while studying Home Economics at Cornell in 1941.¹³²

By the time Moffitt went to Cornell, she had married. This fact was featured prominently when the *Afro-American* publicized the conferral of a degree on "Mrs. Moffitt."¹³³ The article detailing Moffitt's accomplishments was further juxtaposed with a piece on recent women graduates entitled: "Not Wedding Veils, June Sheepskins for Them." As war loomed, the future of the married, professional African American leader was clearly still uncertain. Yet Moffitt was not alone in trying to have a marriage and a career in Home Economics. Lydia Jetton Rogers, Bennett '32, president of her class, went on to earn her MS at the University of Wisconsin. For Rogers, a degree in Home Economics "provided purpose for the direction of my

¹²⁹ In 1947, Sociology was the most popular major, Home Economics the second most popular. Player, "Improving College Education for Women at Bennett College," 8-9.

¹³⁰ Streat, "Home Economics in the 21st Century," in *Time for Design: Vignettes of Life as a Clothing Major*.

¹³¹ Hattie Green Holmes, *Tell Me Why*, 63-65.

¹³² Marie Clapp Moffitt, "A Study of Cooperative Projects In Vocational Home Economics and Agriculture Among Certain Rural Negro Families Durham County, North Carolina" (master's thesis, Cornell University, 1941).

¹³³ "Mrs. Moffitt Wins Degree from Cornell," *Afro American* (Baltimore, MD), Jun. 21, 1941, 16.

life, which focused upon the solution of problems of families in our society.”¹³⁴ Like Kittrell, she did doctoral work at Columbia University; unlike Kittrell, she got married before teaching others about homemaking.

In addition to working on Home Economics programs in Nigeria, Rogers would later become one of Kittrell’s colleagues at Howard. She was not alone in this trajectory. Anna Camp, a graduate of the 1930s, and Carolyn Robinson Payton, Ph.D, a graduate from the 1940s, both later taught at Howard after completing their graduate studies; Payton also became Director of the Peace Corps in 1977. Meanwhile, Queen Hester Bell, another student from the 1930s, stayed and taught at Bennett. Other students from the 1930s and 1940s also went on to hold prominent positions, including: Minnie Miller Brown, North Carolina State University; M. Yvonne Peeler, principal, Cleveland, OH; Miriam McTeer Abernathy, Ph.D., North Carolina State College; Mollye Hugher Briley, Extension Agent, NC; Audrose Mackel Banks, Extension Agent, NY.¹³⁵ In 1980, an accounting of the first fifty years of Home Economics graduates reported that over 21% of alumnae had earned a graduate degree, including the doctoral degree.¹³⁶ These students must have found something meaningful in the concept of an Art of Living—and the examples set forth by Holmes, Kittrell, Streat, and others. In the end, those who followed in Kittrell’s paths may have been especially keen to remember her as exacting.¹³⁷

For these students who attended Bennett in the 1930s, there would be other aspects of this period worth remembering. Many of these alumnae rightfully thought of their college years as exceptional times, a notion reinforced by the idea of the “Greatest Generation.” Much of this period was marked by the crisis of the Depression, and many Bennett students felt privileged to

¹³⁴ “Celebrating 50 Years of Home Economics at Bennett College,” AAFCS Papers.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ “Home Economics Celebrates 50 Years,” *Bennett Banner*, Oct. 24, 1980, 1.

¹³⁷ Incidentally, Kittrell’s death was reported in the same edition as the 50th anniversary of Home Economics. L “Kittrell, Great Humanitarian, Passes” *Bennett Banner*, Oct. 24, 1980, 3.

be continuing their education. At the same time, there were new issues coming to the fore. By the end of the 1930s, students were increasingly told about other battles raging in Europe through campus talks. In one discussion on “Italy and Ethiopia,” Kittrell told students they were ‘living through one of those rare moments in history: we are witnessing a fundamental change in our social thinking.’ Looking globally at so many regime changes, another faculty member reminded Belles they were reformers, not radicals, arguing, ‘we are trying in America to adjust our government to existing conditions rather than make fundamental changes in form as has been done in Russia, Italy and Germany.’¹³⁸ At an earlier Home Making Institute, Kittrell had urged students to see the world as interconnected—now there was no choice.

Throughout the 1930s, Bennett historians had saved clippings on local peace rallies. But with war looming, Jones shifted his rhetoric. Perhaps he feared that the gains of the last decade would be lost, or that a wartime boom would not benefit a women’s college in the same way it would a large land-grant university or co-educational college. Referring to Bennett as “An Arsenal for Democracy” in a college pamphlet, Jones compared the “bottlenecks choking production of machines for horrid war” to those inhibiting “the battle for a better way of life.” Pleading for more institutional support, Jones declared war on undereducated women and asked donors to see that “Bennett College is fighting, heart and soul, to smash this bottleneck which is choking democracy.”¹³⁹ This pamphlet, published five years before President Roosevelt’s address to the nation using the same phrasing, put forth a striking claim for the education of a group that historically, had earned little by way of rights or advancement in wartime.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ “Italy and Ethiopia Mentioned in Talk...Kittrell, dean of students at the college, presided,” *Bennett College Scrapbook 1930s*.

¹³⁹ David D. Jones “An Arsenal for Democracy” Pamphlet, 1935 Available through Textiles, Teachers, and Troops, <http://libcdm1.uncg.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/ttt/id/7967/rec/12>.

¹⁴⁰ Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Fireside Chat: December 29, 1940,” *American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=15917>.

Kittrell, for her part, also believed that education, especially about the home, was central to fighting any war. But she would not fight these battles at Bennett. It is not entirely clear why she decided to quit her position in 1940—in her words, “it was sad to leave Bennett; in fact, I wept.”¹⁴¹ After working for more than a decade to establish herself on and off campus, Kittrell would have watched as her private residence at 900 East Lee Street was transformed into a practice home.¹⁴² At an institution that valued “integrated personalities” and immersive experiences, this was perhaps a final validation of Kittrell’s work. Her desire to leave may have been less about Bennett, and more about a pull toward Hampton. The consistency of Kittrell’s correspondence with her first *alma mater* suggests a strong sense of loyalty and interest in the institution. After building up a program of her own at Bennett, Kittrell may have simply wanted a new challenge—that is certainly what she got upon her return.

Kittrell would later describe her years spent as a faculty member and Dean of Women at Hampton as “a very unusual experience” because of the war.¹⁴³ It was also extremely trying: Kittrell was put in the spotlight more often for her administrative role, and pre-existing tensions from within Hampton did not simply disappear. When Kittrell arrived, “the morale of both students and faculty was low.” While Bennett had been in a period of relative prosperity, the enrollment rates had been steadily dropping at Hampton. The school further suffered from “instability” due to a constantly changing faculty roster. In response, many parents were “sending their daughters to colleges that seemed to offer better education and guidance.”¹⁴⁴ With echoes of the problems of 1927, there had been another major strike on campus in 1939. Students

¹⁴¹ Kittrell, Tate interview, 8.

¹⁴² “Home Economics at Bennett College,” AAFCS Papers.

¹⁴³ Kittrell, Tate interview, 8.

¹⁴⁴ Kittrell, “A Summary of the Dean of Women’s Work at Hampton Institute 1940-1944,” Dean of Women Folder, Hampton Archives. For more on this role, see Richard Herdlein, Christine Frezza Cali and Joanne Dina, “Deans of Women at Historically Black Colleges and Universities: A Story Left Untold,” *Journal of Negro Education* 77, no.4 (2008): 291-305.

were frustrated, again, by the caliber and unbalanced racial makeup of the staff, and what they perceived as censorship on campus.

If Kittrell had been reading a range of newspapers at Bennett, she was likely aware that her appointment coincided with an intense firestorm of criticism against the school. Through the 1930s and early 1940s, Hampton administrators, who had been out of step with those at other black colleges, “did not ‘feel the time was ripe’ for a Negro president.”¹⁴⁵ The outgoing president, Arthur Howe, Sr. (1931-1940) whose wife was the daughter of Samuel Armstrong, the founder of Hampton, was seen as out of step with the institution. In response to the unrest of 1939 and charges of “Jim Crowism,” Howe was even described as “visibly nervous” at his last commencement exercises.¹⁴⁶ Reporters at the *Afro-American*, who followed Howe’s tenure closely, declared that “Hampton alumni forced out Dr. Arthur Howe because he was conservative and too closely allied with the town’s lily-white Rotary clubs.”¹⁴⁷

In addition to these criticisms of Howe, students decried the fact that there had not yet been a “Negro dean of women.” The protestors believed that “Numerous difficulties between the dean of women’s office and the women of the Institute are thought by many to be due to a lack of understanding on the part of the dean of women.” More to the point, they argued that “a qualified Negro dean can more effectively deal with the problems of Negro students.”¹⁴⁸ In light of these events from the previous fall, Kittrell’s return to Hampton was highly publicized in

¹⁴⁵ “The Point is This,” *Afro American* (Baltimore, MD), Aug. 8, 1942, 35.

¹⁴⁶ “President-Elect Given an Ovation at Hampton,” *Afro American* (Baltimore, MD), Jun. 1, 1940, 5.

¹⁴⁷ “Advice to Hampton,” *Afro American* (Baltimore, MD), Feb. 13, 1943, 4.

¹⁴⁸ “The Committee: Aug. 4 1939,” Box: Student Strike, Hampton Archives. See also: “Hampton Students Ask for a Colored Dean of Women,” *Afro American* (Baltimore, MD), Apr. 11, 1936, 6. In place of DOW Dorothy Hobson, students suggested E. Estelle Thomas. She would not be appointed until 1939, replacing Dr. Beulah Van Wagenen, “White Hampton Dean of Women Replaced,” *Afro American* (Baltimore, MD), Nov. 11, 1939.

African American newspapers through the summer of 1940.¹⁴⁹ Whereas at Bennett, Kittrell was one of quite a few African American women of advanced achievement, Hampton could not boast a strong faculty. Thus her appointment may have been an attempt to assuage parents' fears and correct the perception of "instability"—while also providing "good press" for Hampton.

Kittrell's appointment was complicated by the fact that Howe's successor, another white president, Malcolm S. MacLean (1940-43) was by and large, another polarizing figure. While he only kept the position for a few years, some of his administrative choices, such as making Kittrell Dean of Women, and electing P.B. Young, a prominent local black editor, to the Board, seemed to present a shift in leadership. Thus, for some, particularly reporters at the *Afro American*, MacLean was "a jewel." Yet he was also seen as unfortunately miscast, "too streamlined, energetic, democratic and devastatingly frank for Hampton."¹⁵⁰ While some saw him actively working to ensure "that the Negro will be given a larger share in the affairs of the institution," to others, MacLean made conciliatory moves.¹⁵¹ Though both MacLean and Kittrell had a short tenure at Hampton, it was an incredibly charged period. The two would not get along, and their debates over minor matters reveal far greater tensions as to black women's roles in a militarized campus. In the end, the criticism and internal troubles were too much for MacLean, who resigned to take a Navy commission—an honorable form of retreat.¹⁵²

For the nearly four years they spent on campus together, many questions over the future of race relations and education in America were brought into sharp focus by the war. As Dean of Women, Kittrell needed to think about not only her teaching, but covering deficits, recuperating

¹⁴⁹ "Goes to Hampton," *Journal and Guide* (Norfolk, VA), Apr. 20, 1940; "Miss F. Kittrell is New Dean of Hampton Inst.," *Afro American* (Baltimore, MD), Apr. 27, 1940, 1-2.; "Hampton's New President," *New York Age* (New York, NY), May 18, 1940; See also: *Bennett College Scrapbook 1939-41*, 17-18.

¹⁵⁰ "In Defense of Hampton's President," *Afro American* (Baltimore, MD), July 4, 1942, 4.

¹⁵¹ "Hampton's New President," *New York Age* (New York, NY), May 18, 1940.

¹⁵² "Advice to Hampton," *Afro American* (Baltimore, MD), Feb. 13, 1943, 4; "Afro Scoops the Nation on Hampton Prexy," *Afro American* (Baltimore, MD), Apr. 30, 1940, 11.

diminishing enrollment numbers, and the gender imbalance in some departments wrought by war. In spite of these challenges, most others at Hampton eagerly embraced the war, seeing the addition of military training programs as a “much-needed financial lifeline.” Unlike Bennett, Hampton and Tuskegee had greatly suffered from the Depression.¹⁵³ While Tuskegee would lead in aeronautics, Hampton was seen as significant because of its proximity to the Hampton Roads Channel. By 1941, the surrounding areas of Fort Monroe and Hampton Roads became training sites for more than a dozen military support training programs.¹⁵⁴ Given this strategic naval location, according to Kittrell, Hampton Institute was “changed almost overnight into a training program for the men.”¹⁵⁵

On campus, there were Navy Training Schools in a variety of subjects, from electrical training and basic engineering to work as carpenter’s mates.¹⁵⁶ MacLean also made a quick declaration of Hampton’s loyalty by offering Shellbanks farm to the War Department in 1941. This sale (priced well below the value of the land) allowed for the further expansion of Langley Field, which would become one of the largest bases in the US. The way Kittrell remembered it, “the men who came there for training were outstanding.” Over time, these students “made up the mechanics and leadership positions in the army posts abroad” and she “had a very high regard for the armed forces” she interacted with at Hampton.¹⁵⁷ What Kittrell did not say in her reminiscences about the 1940s is that Hampton was an important site for segregated training.

¹⁵³ Juan Williams, *I’ll Find a Way or Make One: A Tribute to Historically Black Colleges and Universities* (New York: Harper Collins, 2004), 216.

¹⁵⁴ Jonathan Sutherland, *African Americans at War: An Encyclopedia, Volume I* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2004), 458.

¹⁵⁵ Kittrell, Tate interview, 8.

¹⁵⁶ “US Naval Activities, by State: Virginia,” *Ibiblio*, <http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USN/ref/USN-Act/VA.html>.

¹⁵⁷ Kittrell, Tate interview, 8.

African American men might excel at Hampton, but they were still not as likely to obtain promotions as their white counterparts.¹⁵⁸

African American women at Hampton were also seen as having a large role to play in the war, not in spite of, but partially due to this explosion in men's training facilities. Amidst this boom in training and building, there were still many women taking courses; in some years, the numbers actually increased due to the demand for nurses.¹⁵⁹ These women, while receiving "a smaller share of the limelight than the male population" had many added duties. As Kittrell reported, 'without neglecting their studies,' students tried to 'make life pleasanter for the enlisted men.' This often entailed supervised, segregated evenings chaperoned and sponsored by the USO, described as "the cleanest, most wholesome places of recreation for Black servicemen."¹⁶⁰ Especially patriotic women could even earn "credits for dancing" by attending two events each month.¹⁶¹ In addition to this type of "service," other administrators, including Mary McLeod Bethune, worked directly with the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, where "black women were among the first to volunteer."¹⁶² Though women at Hampton were not active in these kinds of service in the same numbers, the pressure to show loyalty was no less serious.

To President MacLean, the significance of the war was "obvious." As he saw it, "if we lose the war, if the Axis powers gather might and strike Russia down, then England, then us, there will be no higher education for Negroes."¹⁶³ Thus MacLean openly courted state

¹⁵⁸ Shaneka Oliver, "Black Student Protests in World War II, and the Historically Black Colleges and Universities in Virginia" *Virginia Center for Digital History*, <http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/civilrightstv/essays/oliver.pdf>.

¹⁵⁹ Jesse J. Johnson, *Black Women in the Armed Forces 1942-1974* (Hampton: Hampton Institute, 1974), 46-54; 87. The author (a Hampton graduate) was married to Elizabeth C. Johnson, Hampton Dean of Women at time of publication, 79.

¹⁶⁰ "Women Students of Hampton," *New York Age* (New York, NY), Oct. 3, 1942; Johnson, *Black Women in the Armed Forces 1942-1974*, 100.

¹⁶¹ "Hampton Institute Has Only Two War Weddings," *Afro American* (Baltimore, MD), Apr. 29, 1944, 11.

¹⁶² Johnson, *Black Women in the Armed Forces 1942-1974*, 5.

¹⁶³ Malcolm S. Mac Lean, "The Impact of World War II Upon Institutions of Higher Education for the Negro," *Journal of Negro Education* 11 (1942): 338-345.

intervention and worked to aggressively militarize the campus. But he also hoped to maintain the regular academic programs and to even speed up the curriculum, shortening completion times for most degrees.¹⁶⁴ In the *Journal of Negro Education*, MacLean urged other educators to do the same. He also suggested that other leaders remember that “We cannot, even though we be [sic] located in the South, continue to fight the Civil War in the middle of World War II.”¹⁶⁵ Yet even he framed the terms of the war in relation to the Civil War, presenting the possibility of a “Post-War Reconstruction” at the end of the world war. To him, this promise would be a credit and reward for those who had been dedicated to “all-out cooperation.”

But the ongoing civil war was inextricable from such hopes for a postwar restructuring. As Dr. Charles H. Thompson editorialized in the same journal, “Negro higher education is forced to fight on two fronts—at home and abroad [.]”¹⁶⁶ Both aspects of this fight were represented in a propaganda video produced by the Office of War Information, *Negro Colleges in Wartime* (1943). In this film, Hampton is described as training “practically on a 24 hour basis.” Scores of “physically and mentally” fit men are seen in the film marching through the archway of the college’s chapel and around the President’s residence—duly noted as “an old plantation house.”¹⁶⁷ With the “Little Scotland” mansion in the shot, the camera pans to students learning war trades in the industrial buildings and out on the air fields. The Civil War was clearly more a part of the foreground than MacLean preferred to admit.

As with all other wars, this was not merely a men’s battle, as even the Office of War Information acknowledged. Partway through the film, the narrator adds that in addition to

¹⁶⁴ “Hampton Cancels Exams to Train for Defense Jobs,” *Afro American* (Baltimore, MD), Dec.27, 1941, 5; Malcolm S. MacLean, “War Effort Hopeless with Minorities Barred,” *Afro American* (Baltimore, MD), Mar. 8, 1942, 2.

¹⁶⁵ MacLean, “The Impact of World War II,” 342.

¹⁶⁶ Charles H. Thompson, Editorial Note, *Journal of Negro Education* 11, no.3 (1942): 244.

¹⁶⁷ *Negro Colleges in Wartime*. RG 208, Office of War Information, National Archives and Records Administration, 1943.

military training, “one of the most significant fields of the war program is the study in the field of nutrition.” During this time, from within the Home Economics laboratories at Hampton, students explored projects such as how to use soy beans as food substitutes. For the homefront, they also produced translational pamphlets on issues such as “Ways to Improve Diets” and short lessons for radio programs to be heard by “thousands of families.” All of these types of activities would have been under Kittrell’s supervision as Head of Home Economics on campus. The pressure to encourage research, manage the women’s education, and oversee the department was enormous.



Fig. 3.5-3.8: Stills from *Negro Colleges in Wartime* showing women at work in Nutrition courses, testing soybeans, and preparing for radio programs.

This range of work was similar to contemporaneous research and education efforts at the Bureau of Home Economics. At the Bureau, researchers set an example, taking a “responsibility

for defense in the homes of the nation.”¹⁶⁸ While claiming the home as the basis for “morale” and “stamina,” Bureau-based home economists eerily parroted much of the propaganda printed more than two decades ago. This is not entirely surprising, as women such as Louise Stanley, long-time chief of the Bureau, had been integral to food programs run under Hoover in 1917 during World War I. Now, Stanley continued working for the USDA through the second global war in her lifetime. This explains why researchers at the Bureau as well as many extension offices also literally reused slogans from World War I, including “Victory Begins in the Home” and “Food Will Win the War.”¹⁶⁹

Ruth Van Deman, who also worked for the Bureau, expounded on these connections, noting that World War I “called attention to the value of home economics and the need for further research in this field as no situation had ever done.” After the buildup of funding that came from the war, Van Deman suggested that the Depression, a domestic crisis, had created a renewed impetus for spreading their research.¹⁷⁰ By writing cookbooks and hosting a radio show, Van Deman suggested that she and her colleagues were determined that their work not be “locked up in the archives” but translated and “popularized.” As she saw it, the “practical application” of their work needed to be “pointed out in every possible way to the general public so that homes may be made more comfortable, attractive, and healthful.”¹⁷¹ The use of words

¹⁶⁸ Letter to Eloise Davison, *Herald Tribune*, 21 October 1940, Box 461, Folder: New York A-R, RG 176, General Correspondence of the Bureau and its Predecessors, National Archives at Kansas City, Kansas City, MO.

¹⁶⁹ George W. Carver, “Food, What Is It? How Can It Win the War?” *Service Magazine* (March 1942), 11.

¹⁷⁰ “Aunt Sammy” a.k.a. Ruth Van Deman, *Aunt Sammy’s Radio Recipes: The Great Depression Cookbook* (New York: Universe Books, 1975).

¹⁷¹ Ruth Van Deman, “The Relation Between Home Economics and Scientific Research in the United States,” Box 4, Folder: International Congress of Home Economics, Rome, Italy 1927, RG 310, National Archives and Research Administration, College Park, MD.

such as “attractive” should not take away from the fact that this research, which impacted quotas and plans for social programs, could mean health or malnutrition for many families.¹⁷²

During the war, at Hampton and the Bureau, nutrition research continued to be an especially vital aspect of wartime Home Economics study. Scientists in this field worked to create “diet plans” and dehydrated foods recipes; their research was also used to determine calculations for the Surplus Marketing Administration, the American Red Cross, and shipments to the United Nations and for refugees.¹⁷³ In response to requests for this type of work, there seems to have been widespread compliance among home economists. At national meetings, women rallied to find ways for women to be “mobilized on the home front.”¹⁷⁴ As part of the “national campaign,” home economists within the Bureau, state Extension Offices, and colleges were expected to translate their research for other agencies and the public. These efforts were not really limited to publicly funded institutions, however. For administrators at black colleges such as Kittrell, the professional duty to take part and “mobilize” was compounded by financial need, loyalty, and hope for a “double victory.”

In histories of wartime contributions at black colleges, the work of soldiers and airmen is far better known. Yet from within these institutions, departmental and administrative records show a far greater emphasis on what was known as the “Agricultural Front.” With the idea that food could win wars—as it had before—the need to mobilize farmers and their families was acutely felt. Even children living near black college networks were encouraged to do their part through 4-H. During the war, enrollments increased significantly, with over 650,000 new

¹⁷² More on Ruth Van Deman and the “Farm and Home Hour,” Box 14, Folder 12, Series IV, Atwater Family Papers, Collection 2008-36, Special Collections & Archives, Olin Library, Wesleyan University, Middletown CT.

¹⁷³ Ruth Van Deman, “Bureau of Home Economics Victory High Lights” *Bulletin of the American Home Economics Association* 24, no.3 (1942), 9.

¹⁷⁴ “Our Wartime Convention,” *Bulletin of the American Home Economics Association* 24, no.2 (November 1941/February 1942), 1.

members joining by 1942, making for 1.5 million members total.¹⁷⁵ Records from Tuskegee show that these statistics included an “all-time record of nearly 280,000 colored farm boys and girls.”¹⁷⁶ Some black children might have been attracted by the promise of “Citizenship Training for Democracy,” or the mission of ‘serving as citizens in maintaining world peace.’¹⁷⁷ In this group, even children were led to see that victory was inextricably linked with state-based rights.¹⁷⁸

For her part, Kittrell actively promoted 4-H and also worked to rally young people by giving “Mother-Daughter Talks” in nearby Norfolk. Continuing her investment in the community, Kittrell lectured on topics from “social disease” to “home beautification” and family relationships.¹⁷⁹ Few records from these talks survive, though this strategic military location suggests that Kittrell was tasked with addressing the women and children on the home front. Kittrell loosely described this work as part of the “extension division of Hampton.” While not tasked with formally serving as an Extension agent, Kittrell was often performing many of the same kinds of tasks in terms of outreach and education. In addition to the talks, Kittrell was involved with the Statewide Program of Wartime Nutritional Planning, which held meetings at Hampton. Presented in conjunction with the FSA, these sessions included exhibits on food and wartime products and how to make “dietary budgets.” As with earlier projects, the confluence of

¹⁷⁵ Wayne Rasmussen, *Taking the University to the People: Seventy-five Years of Cooperative Extension* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1989), 114.

¹⁷⁶ “On the Agricultural Front,” *Service Magazine* (April 1946), 24.

¹⁷⁷ Quoted in “4-H International Programs” ECOP 4-H Subcommittee Meeting June, 1982,” Box 1, Folder: 4-H International Work, Policies and Reports Relating to 4-H Intl Programs Policies and Reports to Correspondence, RG 33, NARA, College Park, MD.

¹⁷⁸ Gabriel Rosenberg, *The 4-H Harvest: Sexuality and the State in Rural America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 19; 180.

¹⁷⁹ “Mother-Daughter Talks at Norfolk,” *Afro American* (Baltimore, MD), Feb. 26, 1944, 11.

federal and philanthropic funds can be seen here; fellowships from the General Education Board funded visiting educators.¹⁸⁰

These efforts were not altogether separate from the work of the Bureau or other USDA agents. These translational projects had a symbiotic relationship with contemporaneous research efforts, some of which were carried out by those following in Kittrell's footsteps. During the war, Barbara Bond, the daughter of the aforementioned Dean at Bethune-Cookman, undertook graduate work at Cornell with Kittrell's recommendation. Whereas Kittrell's ticket to higher education had been the crisis of the Depression, Bond conducted research on yeast studies "to banish fatigue" among war workers.¹⁸¹ This type of research had obvious and immediate utility, and it granted Bond a chance at academic advancement.

Some of Bond's other colleagues at Cornell also worked on research projects related to textiles, family life, or nutrition, often as a way to serve the War Department of the Extension Service.¹⁸² At the land-grant colleges, there was a clear obligation to produce research and distribute wartime bulletins.¹⁸³ Even without the same imperative, leaders at Hampton and Tuskegee also disseminated their work and that of the Bureau through outlets such as *The Tuskegee News and Service*.¹⁸⁴ Leaders at these institutions also courted philanthropic funds during the war. During the early 1940s, Kittrell's various teaching and research projects blurred the lines between private, state, federal, and philanthropic initiatives. This is not surprising in

¹⁸⁰ "Statewide Program of Wartime Nutritional Planning at Conference," *New York Age* (New York, NY), May 16, 1942.

¹⁸¹ "Barbara Bond Studies Menus Using Fatigue-Banishing Yeast," *Afro American* (Baltimore, MD), Dec. 19, 1942, 17; "Women Invade A 'Man's World,'" *Service Magazine* (September 1945), 17.

¹⁸² Marie Belle Fowler to Women's Division of the State Council of Defense, 11 June 1941, Box 18, New York State College of Home Economics records, #23-2-749. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

¹⁸³ "Meals for Many," (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, February 1942); "War Emergency Bulletin: How to Prepare for Blackouts," (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, May 1942); "War Emergency Bulletin: Eat Less Sugar for Country and Health," (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, June 1942); "Keeping Clothes Wearable," (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, October 1942).

¹⁸⁴ "The Market Basket" is an example of a US Bureau of Home Economics Bulletin featured in *Service Magazine* (January 1941).

light of her longer trajectory. Her attempts to seek a range of alliances also has particular resonance, however, in relation to the development of contemporaneous military programs at black colleges. Early in the war, when the Tuskegee campus was militarized, it was through private funding—the Rosenwald Fund provided a grant for “training facilities and dormitories.” Some of this funding also went to Moton field, where the Tuskegee Airmen would train.¹⁸⁵ This influx of money for development was largely regarded as an opportunity for growth. The fact that the war had made these schools more deeply intertwined with the state and to private philanthropic funds was not usually mentioned.

As with the leaders at Tuskegee, MacLean was eager to seize these types of government and private funding opportunities for Hampton. MacLean also strongly argued that the former distinctions among educational institutions were becoming increasingly blurry with the war. MacLean even declared an armistice between “academic” and “vocational” schools. Referencing recent fronts of the war, he argued, “We have gossiped about one another and elaborated and romanticized about one another's mistakes... We have had in college education, therefore, our little betrayals and treacheries, our Pearl Harbors and Corregidors and Bataans.”¹⁸⁶ MacLean wanted to put the problems of the previous years behind Hampton and to push for a stronger future. Like the home economists who liberally borrowed rhetoric from World War I, MacLean placed his hopes in a postwar boom that would reward “loyal” colleges.

MacLean also sought to change Hampton’s image by changing the Board of Trustees. Early on, MacLean reached out to P.B. Young, the editor of the *Journal and Guide (J&G)* in Norfolk, to be on the Board. This decision proved useful for Kittrell, who was hired to write short articles related to Home Economics in the paper shortly thereafter. With high circulation

¹⁸⁵ Williams, *I'll Find a Way or Make One*, 217.

¹⁸⁶ MacLean, 343.

rates (100,000) the *J&G* was an important source for news written by and for African Americans in the South.¹⁸⁷ It was also the only African American paper in the South to have a national edition. Young, who was appointed to Roosevelt's Black Cabinet, was a well known figure and "race man."¹⁸⁸ During the war, Young served the local Civilian Defense Council. Perhaps this work put Young in touch with Kittrell, who was working on local food campaigns at the time.

Over several years, Kittrell would write about a range of issues for Young's paper, from children's safety to nutrition. In tackling these subjects, Kittrell usually focused on the connections between the home and civic life. In "Guidance Need of Adolescent Youth," for example, Kittrell describes parents' roles in training their children to maintain safety in the streets and in vehicles. She then stresses the need to "educate our young people so that they can stand firm under the pressure of life[.]"¹⁸⁹ In another article, "The Coming Generation" Kittrell focuses on the relationship between parenting and citizenship. Here, Kittrell argues that "surrounding children with an enslaving and selfish love make it extremely difficult for them to grow up emotionally. It is found that mothers are more guilty of this trait than fathers."¹⁹⁰ In comparison to her earlier work at the Bennett nursery program, these articles present a sharper view of Kittrell's perception of mothers. Here, Kittrell explicitly explained that they could be blamed or praised for a child's adjustment into adulthood and citizenship.¹⁹¹

Kittrell further elaborated her thinking on this issue in a series of articles on "The Home and National Defense" in the *J&G*. In these pieces, Kittrell was once again concerned with

¹⁸⁷ Jessie Carney Smith, *Encyclopedia of African American Business I* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2006), 85-86.

¹⁸⁸ Earl Lewis, *In Their Own Interests: Race, Class, and Power in Twentieth-Century Norfolk, Virginia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 188; Henry Lewis Suggs, "P. B. Young of The Norfolk Journal and Guide: A Booker T. Washington Militant, 1904-1928," *Journal of Negro History* 64, no.4 (1979): 365-376.

¹⁸⁹ Kittrell, "Guidance Need of Adolescent Youth," *Journal and Guide* (Norfolk, VA), Feb. 12, 1938.

¹⁹⁰ Kittrell, "The Coming Generation," *Journal and Guide* (Norfolk, VA), Kittrell Trustee Box, Hampton Archives.

¹⁹¹ Ruth Feldstein, *Motherhood in Black and White: Race and Sex in American Liberalism, 1930-1965* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).

questions such as “How Well Are Our Children Standing up Under War Tensions?”¹⁹²

Throughout these writings, Kittrell encouraged readers to think of the family as a “democratic unit,” in line with the Bureau’s push for democracy and “defense at home.”¹⁹³ As she saw it, even toy selection was highly significant, and as “necessary to...all-round development as are food and sleep and shelter.”¹⁹⁴ With these articles, Kittrell used her expertise to contribute to the changing discourse on family. As her comment about “enslaving and selfish love” suggests, Kittrell was deeply invested in New Deal liberalism and notions of respectability. While some of her wartime writing was similar to extension bulletins, these articles were a space where Kittrell put forth her own highly political vision of what African American families needed to do to win the war and reap the fruits of victory.

In addition to this commentary, Kittrell used her relationship with the papers to change the public perception of Hampton. Presenting a counter-narrative to the articles from preceding years on racial tensions at the college, Kittrell wrote in glowing terms about the students, who had “high scholastic achievements and maturity adequate for these times [.]” To her mind, Hampton was the ideal site to help a student “serve the present day well and to be prepared for the big job ahead on to-morrow when the guns have ceased firing around the world.”¹⁹⁵ Kittrell was also keen to promote the Nursing program. In addition to being a stable wartime profession,

¹⁹² Kittrell, “How Well Are Our Children Standing Up to War Tensions?” *Journal and Guide* (Norfolk, VA) Apr. 4, 1942.

¹⁹³ Katherine F. Lenroot, “Children in Wartime,” *Bulletin of the American Home Economics Association* 24, no.2 (November 1941/February 1942), 11; United States Department of Labor, Children’s Bureau, *Children Bear the Promise of a Better World: Through Play They Learn What Freedom Means*, Defense of Children Series, no.8, 1942.

¹⁹⁴ Kittrell, “Durability, Ease of Cleaning, Simplicity Chief Points in Selection of Xmas Toys,” *Journal and Guide* (Norfolk, VA), n.d., Kittrell Trustee Box, Hampton Archives.

¹⁹⁵ “Where shall I send my daughter to college in wartime?” in “The Hampton Woman Today,” special to the *Journal and Guide* (Norfolk, VA), 1943, Kittrell Trustee Box, Hampton Archives.

Kittrell noted that “if the nursing arts are given sufficient help in times of peace, we could do away with war to a large extent.”¹⁹⁶

Overall, signs of outright peace activism are still noticeably absent in these articles. This may reflect the publishing choices of the time. In papers such as the *J&G*, the war was often framed as a testing ground. Surrounding the articles on blacks’ contributions to the war were notes on rations, constant war wedding announcements, and work notices promoting involvement in industry for African American men and women. As if this were not clear enough, many editions of *The Afro American* had this tagline: “Colored America’s Share in the War Effort Will Determine Its Share in the Peace That Follows.” In one of many editions with this line, Kittrell was asked to offer “New Year’s Greetings” with Charlotte Hawkins Brown. For her part, Kittrell told readers, “some of the greatest and most artistic work of man have been made possible because of trouble and discord.” Here, Kittrell cited the examples of Queen Esther, Madam Curie, Jane Addams, and Sojourner Truth.¹⁹⁷ Instead of promoting peace, Kittrell seems to have been accepted the possibility of some good coming from war.

In this list of female role models, the invocation of Addams is particularly significant given Kittrell’s connection to WILPF. Addams, who had been one of the nation’s most prominent Progressive reformers and a founder of WILPF, was heavily criticized for protesting World War I. With that knowledge and the heavy weight of nationalism bearing down on her, Kittrell may have made concessions to her values. She may have also imagined that war was better with home economists—who could provide life-saving data on food supplies—than

¹⁹⁶ “Women and the Nursing Profession—A Great Challenge Today” *Journal and Guide* (Norfolk, VA), Oct. 16, 1943; “Forty-Eight Deans Meet, Discuss College Girls, War-Time Problems,” *Pittsburgh Courier* (Pittsburgh, PA), Apr. 18, 1942.

¹⁹⁷ “New Year’s Greetings,” *Afro American* (Baltimore, MD), Jan. 3, 1942, 17.

without them. But perhaps she also believed it was a kind of “test,” one that she would have to “win” through her work at Hampton.

Outside of these articles, Kittrell’s intensified commitment to her work and a notion of duty is perhaps most evident in her role as Dean of Women. Given the illustrious history of prominent women who had filled this role elsewhere, including Margaret Murray Washington and Lucy Diggs Slowe, Kittrell would have seen it as more than an administrative post.¹⁹⁸ As the “first” African American Dean of Women at Hampton, Kittrell declared that her goal was to make all female Hamptonians excel “in areas of their social, economic, homemaking, spiritual, health, and civic life.”¹⁹⁹ With a brighter spotlight on the campus due to the war, this was more important than ever.

With her training in Home Economics, Kittrell was determined to “think in terms of the whole college environment.” To that end, over her four years as Dean of Women, she oversaw everything from female students’ physical examinations to dietary regulations in the student dining halls. Food, not surprisingly, proved to be a particular area of interest for Kittrell, who urged the school to develop a “diet table” for those with special restrictions, such as allergies. Kittrell considered students eating too many meals in the cafeteria to also be an issue, for it was difficult to “develop poise and grace and good manners with the exclusive use of the cafeteria.”²⁰⁰ Overall, Kittrell considered herself responsible for maintaining the standard wherein “life at Hampton stresses the art of living graciously.”²⁰¹ Emerging from the Bennett

¹⁹⁸ Margaret Murray Washington and Jennie Moton are two examples. Both served as “president’s wives” and ran “women’s industries” on campus. Washington’s “Log Book” in the Tuskegee University Archives shows an overwhelming record of uplift work, campus supervision, and other forms of community service, including prison reform. See Margaret Murray Washington Notebook, Box 511.011, Tuskegee University Archives.

¹⁹⁹ Kittrell, “A Summary of the Dean of Women’s Work at Hampton Institute 1940-1944,” 2.

²⁰⁰ Kittrell, *Ibid.*, 8-11.

²⁰¹ “The Hampton Woman Today,” special to the *Journal and Guide* (Norfolk, VA), Summer 1943. This idea was also promoted in “Appropriate Standards for Institutional Residence Halls and Dining Rooms,” *Proceedings of the*

culture of “beauty work,” Kittrell was clearly still invested in students’ deportment and presentation; now, she was also counting their calories.

In some ways, Kittrell worked to empower, as well as supervise, the female co-eds. One of Kittrell’s reforms was an attempt to bring more power to students—within a controlled, highly regulated way. Under her tenure as Dean of Women, she assisted to create a student-run organization for the government “of feminine residential life” in 1942.²⁰² She also insisted on teaching while she was Dean of Women as a way to stay in touch with the students on a more familiar level. This arrangement, and scope of responsibilities, did not please other administrators. By 1942, some of her surviving letters, especially to MacLean, become increasingly terse. In confirming that she will be teaching two courses, Kittrell mentions that she is still up to doing the work of a Dean while also heading her department. Others on campus did not agree. Eventually, she was forced to choose, and she left her post as head of the division of Home Economics.²⁰³

Even with this friction, Kittrell was deeply invested in “the Hampton way.” In a sense, Kittrell’s intense desire for regulation of all areas of student life is the best evidence of her commitment to—and general acceptance of—Hampton’s mores. Still, not all students wanted “in” with this culture, even with small overtures to sharing power. Annabelle Baker, a Hampton student during the 1940s, published an account that illuminates some of these power dynamics. As a wartime student, Baker “hated what we called ‘meatless Thursdays’!” but was generally “so happy” at Hampton and “so alive and hungry to learn.” This changed in 1943 when Baker’s training in art lead her to reconsider how she had been wearing her hair. After deciding to wear

First or Organization Meeting of the Association of Business Officers in Schools for Negroes, April 13-16, 1939, Kittrell Trustee Box, Hampton Archives.

²⁰² “Girls Govern Hampton Dorms,” *Afro American* (Baltimore, MD), Sep. 26, 1942, 16.

²⁰³ “Hampton Cuts Budget, Drops 7 Staff Members,” *Afro American* (Baltimore, MD), Mar. 28, 1942, 8.

her hair “naturally,” Baker found that she had alienated her among many of her peers—leading to “an excruciatingly painful period [.]”²⁰⁴ In addition to trouble with peers, Baker came into direct conflict with Kittrell when she asked permission to attend a conference at Wellesley College, likely a meeting of the YWCA. Baker wanted to present her “natural” hair at the conference. According to Baker, Kittrell “was furious” because she was “unsuitable to represent the college.” Kittrell is also said to have cited rules against “un-chaperoned student travel” to prevent her trip north.

In her telling, Baker presents Kittrell as a kind of impressive foe, adding that her “influence had grown from one small office to almost half of the main floor of the administrative building [.]” Though she concedes that Kittrell was “an impressive role model...under a lot of pressure,” Baker resented how she “redoubled her efforts” against her.²⁰⁵ What is perhaps most striking is that Baker cited her work as an art student as an inspiration for her choice. Kittrell, who had taught art appreciation and supervised “beauty work,” did not anticipate this type of activism.²⁰⁶ This act of resistance was decades before “black is beautiful” became a catchphrase at Howard and other institutions.

Baker’s story is illuminating for other reasons; as she mentioned, Kittrell truly had made an impressive niche for herself at Hampton. While expanding her own power on campus, she also came to be considered an exemplar outside the college. By 1942, one did not even have to be a Bennett or Hampton student to receive advice from Kittrell on how to manage personal affairs. In addition to her work for the *J&G*, the *Afro American* also published short pieces by

²⁰⁴ Maxine Leads Craig, *Ain’t I a Beauty Queen: Black Women, Beauty, and the Politics of Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 81-83.

²⁰⁵ Annabelle Baker, “Severed,” in *Tenderheaded: A Comb-Bending Collection of Hair Stories*, eds. Pamela Johnson and Juliette Harris (New York: Pocket Books, 2001), 15-19.

²⁰⁶ For more on the changing politics of beauty, see Tiffany M. Gill, *Beauty Shop Politics: African American Women’s Activism in the Beauty Industry* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010).

Kittrell on “College Essentials.” In these articles, Kittrell stressed the need for rest, grooming tips, and how to have a “planned social life” at college. Kittrell also urged students to cultivate “a tolerant recognition of difference” (though not of “natural” hair) and “an active spirit of co-operation in dormitory life.”²⁰⁷ While making a name for herself through her publications, Kittrell was elected head of the National Association of Deans of Women and Advisors to Girls in Negro Schools.²⁰⁸ In promoting her election, the *Afro American* featured Kittrell dispensing advice among a row of powerful women leaders from other institutions. Clearly, Kittrell’s chosen profession did not put her on the margins of academia within black colleges.²⁰⁹

At the same time, this new visibility did not make Kittrell immune to criticism—quite the opposite. While being praised for her leadership capacities, Kittrell was literally labeled a “problem” on the same page of one newspaper. As early as 1942, “inside sources” from Hampton claimed that Kittrell was having difficulties with MacLean.²¹⁰ Kittrell would later be dubbed “MacLean’s thorn,” at least in part because of her aforementioned desire to be Dean of Women and head of her department.²¹¹ This was not the only issue, however. An article defending MacLean noted that “both Dr. and Mrs. MacLean join in the campus social activities [and] dance not only with each other but with faculty members and students.” MacLean also loosened social regulations, which meant “fewer violations of sex rules.”²¹² In the papers, this was presented as a problem for “white oldsters”—condescending patriarchs. This was not the

²⁰⁷ “Dean Lists 8 College Essentials,” *Afro American* (Baltimore, MD), Oct. 3, 1942; Dec. 19, 1942, 17.

²⁰⁸ This group was founded by Lucy Diggs Slowe in response to racism from the National Association of Deans of Women. See Carroll L.L. Miller and Anne S. Pruitt-Logan, *Faithful to the Task at Hand: The Life of Lucy Diggs Slowe* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), 264-270.

²⁰⁹ “Dr. Kittrell Heads Deans’ Association,” *Afro American* (Baltimore, MD), Apr. 11, 1942, 17; “Dean of Women Flies to Pacific Coast—National Association of Deans of Women meeting in San Francisco,” *Afro American* (Baltimore, MD), Feb. 28, 1942.

²¹⁰ “Dr. Kittrell—Problem,” *Afro American* (Baltimore, MD), Apr. 11, 1942, 4.

²¹¹ “MacLean’s Thorn,” *Afro American* (Baltimore, MD), July 11, 1942, 1.

²¹² “In Defense of Hampton’s President,” *Afro American* (Baltimore, MD), July 4, 1942, 4.

whole story—it was also an issue for Kittrell, who watched as servicemen increasingly socialized in an unrestricted way on Hampton campus.²¹³

A central component of Kittrell's strict policies as Dean of Women was her concern that the women on campus were vulnerable with so many men in training or stationed nearby.²¹⁴ This meant that she came into conflict not just with MacLean, but also with Dean of Instruction Ralphiel Lanier. They also exchanged tense letters over the way that Navy officers regulated, or did not regulate, the behavior of their men. As Kittrell saw it, Hampton needed "strict" policies that would "protect the school and no foolishness about it. I am willing to do anything that I can."²¹⁵ With an unusually candid statement on race, Kittrell would also write to Lanier:

The physical, social and spiritual protection of our women is a job in which the whole staff must participate in precept, example and effective classroom teaching. This is particularly true at this time when it is so easy to lose even what little ground we have gained in poise and essential requirements for decent living. Negro women represent a minority group who get the least respect and protection of all women. Our standards for them at Hampton should be the best we can provide...I want to make it clear that if I am to be held responsible for the general welfare of women students—and this responsibility I should have—then it is absolutely essential that I be in on initial planning in those areas that are vital to women.²¹⁶

To Kittrell, privileging the rights of "visitors"—even Navy men—over the needs of Hampton women struck her as an abdication of responsibility.²¹⁷ In the end, some of Kittrell's best allies came from the population of male civilians on campus, those who "were so anxious over the results of the incoming service men that they insisted upon exceptionally strict regulations."

²¹³ Kittrell, "A Summary of the Dean of Women's Work at Hampton Institute 1940-1944," 6; Kittrell to Malcolm MacLean, 20 October 1942, Kittrell Trustee Box, Correspondence folder, Hampton Archives.

²¹⁴ Kittrell, by telephone to Lanier RE: Personnel & guidance report to Curriculum Committee; Hampton and the Navy, 19 March, 1943, Kittrell Trustee Box, Correspondence folder, Hampton Archives.

²¹⁵ Ibid, 2.

²¹⁶ Kittrell to Dean Lanier, 16 October 1942, Kittrell Trustee Box, Correspondence folder, Hampton Archives.

²¹⁷ Kittrell to Dean Lanier, Confidential Note, 14 October 1942, Kittrell Trustee Box, Correspondence folder, Hampton Archives.

Jealousy proved productive—these same restrictions were then applied to the civilians, to which Kittrell purportedly noted, “helps all around.”²¹⁸

Kittrell’s investment in the women’s safety also intersected with a range of bureaucratic duties, including her obligation to post the names of married men on campus. Kittrell also had to oversee the process of obtaining marriage licenses for “war weddings.” In the end, only two Hampton women married during the war. While some glorified the speedy war marriage, during a program organized by Kittrell known as Women’s Day, other administrators denounced them. As they saw it, single women were no less patriotic, and ‘one may have a very full and satisfying life without marriage.’ Others urged that young women resist these “bunk” unions because many “returned fighters will be psycho-neurotics.”²¹⁹ For some women, the war had opened up previously unthinkable possibilities in industry.²²⁰ Thus, for a time, Kittrell protested the “hasty” war wedding. Yet by 1943, she was also part of a “Back to Home Movement,” likely a play on “Back to Africa Movement.”²²¹ Together with Charlotte Hawkins Brown, Kittrell urged women to see that there was a great need for “intelligent mothers...building for their race the homes which make up the basic unit of civilization and racial progress.”²²² With this rhetoric, the constraining echoes of Reconstruction were as deafening as ever.

Kittrell would not stay to see the end of the war at Hampton.²²³ Instead, in 1944, Kittrell was enticed by Howard President Mordecai Johnson to leave Virginia and to move to the capital. In departing, she would accept a post as a Hampton trustee, which was another first for black women at Hampton. By that time, MacLean was a world away fighting in the Pacific. Years

²¹⁸ “Hampton Institute Has Only Two War Weddings,” *Afro American* (Baltimore, MD), Apr. 29, 1944, 11.

²¹⁹ “Marriage Expert Warns College Girls Against ‘Patriotic’ War Weddings,” *Afro American* (Baltimore, MD), Apr. 29, 1944, 11.

²²⁰ “Negro Women in Skilled Defense Jobs,” *Service Magazine* (April 1943), 23.

²²¹ “Back to Home Movement,” *Afro American* (Baltimore, MD), Oct. 2, 1943, 12.

²²² “Dr. Brown Urges Girls to Plan Towards Return to Home Making,” *Afro American* (Baltimore, MD), Oct. 2, 1943, 12.

²²³ James E.C. Norris, *Fight On, My Soul: A Biography* (Pella: The Write Place, 2009), 228.

earlier, MacLean had described the battles in this theater as abstractions; now he was fighting them. From his position at Hampton, MacLean had also urged other educators to “ride out the storm” and to take whatever comes, standing up and fighting together.”²²⁴ The notion of fighting together and obtaining the greatest “gain” proved more elusive than he could have anticipated.

While the archives have well preserved many of the letters written between Kittrell and other Hamptonians, including MacLean, another aspect of her correspondence from this period is of great significance. Starting in 1941, someone was watching Kittrell’s mail. That year, a tip was sent to the FBI that “Kittrell received a large amount of literature from the American Emergency Peace Mobilization Group and was active in the American Youth Congress.”²²⁵ Given that Kittrell’s residence was *on* the Hampton campus, it is probable that someone she knew made this report.²²⁶ As her FBI file denotes, just prior to starting her post at Hampton, Kittrell had spent her Labor Day weekend in Chicago, attending the Emergency Peace Mobilization. This Peace Mobilization group had ties to labor unions, civil rights organizations, and some connections to Communist groups. This work still raised an alarm with someone.

In previous years, Kittrell’s service to both the YWCA and WILPF—groups that encouraged cooperation, dialogue, and scarcely uttered the word “race” were seen as safe, even patriotic outlets for activism. In the early 1940s, however, Kittrell was generally less involved with these groups and more invested with citizenship efforts and the Peace Mobilization. In particular, Kittrell had an increased involvement with the American Youth Congress and the Southern Negro Youth Congress. This person who was invested enough in her career to report to the FBI that Kittrell had received mailings about peace also knew that she had traveled several

²²⁴ MacLean, “The Impact of World War II,” 345.

²²⁵ U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, File on Flemma P. Kittrell, report 1209642-0, HQ 4486.

²²⁶ Kittrell’s listing in 1943 directory: “Kittrell Flemma P (C) dean of women Hampton Institute r do,” [r- resides or rooms, do-ditto] in *Hill’s Newport News City Directory* XXXVI (Richmond: Hill’s Directory Co., 1943), 620.

times to Atlanta for her work with SNYC.²²⁷ Upon further investigation, Kittrell's name was also linked to a conference on Current Problems in America for Negro Youth, held at Hampton in conjunction with the NAACP in 1941.²²⁸ This work put her in contact with figures such as Ella Baker, Charles H Thompson, and Thurgood Marshall. After years of working with youth groups and running programs such as the Home Making Institute, now a lecture on "Education for Democracy" was seen as subversive. There was even discussion that she was possibly "communistically inclined."²²⁹

Kittrell was not a communist and had, in fact, "severely disciplined students who displayed such tendencies."²³⁰ Nonetheless, investigations into Kittrell's loyalty lasted for more than two decades as various persons were interviewed and re-interviewed. Perhaps to help her case, some professionals affiliated with Kittrell, including Dr. Willa B. Player at Bennett, would deny that she had connections to "any Peace group" whatsoever. Jones, likewise, added that Kittrell was "entirely loyal" and had no links to Communism. However, Jones noted that he "could very easily believe that Miss Kittrell might have allowed her name to be used as a sponsor for some so-called Peace movement since she was very religious and sincerely interested in the cause of peace." Jones and Player seem to have drawn a distinction between certain types of politicized peace work, possibly as a way to protect their former colleague.

²²⁷ See loose contents in Flemma Kittrell Papers, Box 2604, SNYC Folder, Flemma Kittrell Files, RG 39-School of Human Ecology Records, Howard University Archives.

²²⁸ Ruth Taylor, "NAACP Issues Call to Third Annual Student Meet to be Held at Hampton Institute," *Carolina Times* (Durham, NC), Oct. 4, 1941; "Youth Council News," *The Crisis* (October 1941), 328; "Youth Council News," *The Crisis* (October 1943), 311.

²²⁹ Lanier was also investigated in 1943 because his name "appeared on a list of 1,250 persons who were stated by the 'Daily Worker' [an East Coast communist newspaper] to be signers of a petition." This assessment of Kittrell from 1941 was referred to in a letter written by J. Edgar Hoover to Samuel D. Boykin, Security and Consular Affairs, 29 December 1952, in U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, File on Flemma P. Kittrell, report 1209462 HQ 4226.

²³⁰ Report of Fred Coots in Norfolk, VA, 6 February 1953, 2 File on Kittrell, 1209462 HQ 4486.

In these records, Kittrell's friends and colleagues are mostly close lipped. Yet these records also reveal the most information about Kittrell's tangential involvement with more subversive forms of peace activism, youth groups, and other civil rights efforts. Her own files contain few letters or references to such work. While both SNYC and 4-H groups were dedicated to cultivating leadership skills, only one group pointed to the underlying contradictions within society. The other, 4-H, sought to train young people to work with, and around the pitfalls of segregation. Given Kittrell's silences about her broader range of activism, her FBI file is a surprisingly useful document set for recovering and reconnecting the threads of political work that some worked so hard to conceal. This file is suggestive of more than understudied aspects of Kittrell's career, for the figures interviewed within it hardly seem like the kind of educators who would cultivate a culture ripe for sit-ins and protests. But that is exactly what happened.

Often, Martin Luther King, Jr., is touted as *the* "example of how black colleges not only survived" through the Depression but also "produced graduates who became the generation of leaders in the 1950s[.]"²³¹ Likewise, the contributions of soldiers and airmen at black colleges are often given far more weight than what was happening on the "Agricultural Front." Kittrell's papers suggest a far more nuanced vision of how programs in "graceful living" and systems of "beauty work" allowed for more than mere "survival." At Bennett and at Hampton, in a program often linked with drudgery, black women were learning strategic forms of patriotism and how to exercise claims to citizenship. By protesting segregated theaters and taking positions working in wartime research, students did not see Home Economics as delimiting; rather, it became a way to reinvent their position on campus and in relation to the state.²³²

²³¹ Williams, *I'll Find a Way or Make One*, 223.

²³² Jones, "An Open Letter to Negro Girlhood," *Bennett College Scrapbook 1939-41*, 26.

Kittrell's Methodist colleague Mary McLeod Bethune also saw that these colleges provided a vital education for a life of leadership. During a SNYC meeting held in 1944, Kittrell and Bethune rallied students and discussed the future of democracy. During her lecture, Bethune gave an impassioned plea to young people to 'get ready in heart, in head and in hand, for the new world which is coming.'²³³ Calling upon the motto of 4-H and Hampton, Bethune suggested that a new world order could emerge from the same kind of progressive idealism that made "the best better." To her, these were part of a straight line, not incongruous traditions. In the long run, however, Bethune's invocation, the notion of "beauty work," and the ideal of an "art of living," would comprise a forgotten legacy of leadership.

The careful negotiations of femininity, beauty politics, and civil rights rhetoric that made these projects largely uncontroversial at the time would also render them less legible in relation to other activisms. The idea that Home Economics could be an outlet for artistry, and a path to citizenship, would also be lost.²³⁴ Operation Doorknock, for instance, would be seen simply as "quiet activism" done under a "misleading" mantle tied to homemaking.²³⁵ But this work was not quiet or misleading. Rather, it is emblematic of another way of conceptualizing the links between domesticity and citizenship. The politics of administrators such as Kittrell defy easy explanation, but one thing is clear: the exuberant plea for freedom inscribed in Bennett's memorial bell was not a set of dead letters. To these leaders, the future belonged to those who claimed their freedom through an art and science of living. Perhaps there was a kind of beauty in that, too.

²³³ Rogers, *Black Campus Movement*, 52.

²³⁴ Brown, *Belles of Liberty*, 25.

²³⁵ Beth McMurtrie, "Bennett Activism a Tradition," *News and Record* (Greensboro, NC), Oct. 10, 1998.

Chapter Four: Something like Internationalism

In March of 1867, a group of educators and missionaries in Washington, D.C. founded Howard University. Named in honor of Oliver Otis Howard, the Commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau, this university was formed in the midst of an exodus of freedmen fleeing the South.¹ In addition to finding teachers, the founders began their mission by purchasing land from a reluctant former slave-owner. From this spot called "The Hill," early leaders at Howard could take in sweeping views of the capital city, from the Washington Monument, to the White House, and across miles of the Potomac River.² On this "hallowed" hilltop, Howard would evolve into an institution with a prominent place in histories of uplift and higher education. In emphasizing the university's geographic and academic position, Howard is often presented—in the tradition of American exceptionalism—as if it were a campus on a hill.

As with many institutions founded in the wake of the Civil War, at first, the "so-called University" had just a few buildings. One institutional historian surmised that initially, Howard "was not a collection of colleges but a combination of the home, the church and the elementary school."³ With time, Howard grew in size and offerings, becoming a striking part of the landscape in Washington D.C. and a top research institution. As the school's ever-growing faculty and staff worked to heighten the university's standards for professional development, the administration secured funds to treble the facilities and quadruple the library's holdings. In the long arc of Howard's history, this development was gradual, though many changes were concentrated in the years between the 1920s and 1940s.

¹ Rayford W. Logan, *Howard University: The First Hundred Years* (New York: New York University Press, 1968); National Register of Historic Places, Greater U Street Historic District, District of Columbia, Washington, National Register #98001557, 27-28.

² Walter Dyson, *Howard University: The Capstone of Negro Education, a History 1867-1940* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Graduate School, 1941), 107.

³ Dyson, *The Founding of Howard University* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1921), 8-13.

One institutional project from this period related to both metrics of growth—the number of books and buildings—is Founders’ Library, an iconic Georgian structure completed in 1939. Designed by famed architect Albert Cassell, Founders pays tribute to Howard’s early leaders and Independence Hall in Philadelphia. As Cassell argued, “since it was dedicated to liberty we felt we could do no better.”⁴ While paying homage to various architects of freedom from earlier decades, Founders also featured a call to students. From within the library, an inscription over a reading room arch reads: “Ye shall know the Truth and the Truth Shall Make You Free.” On this hilltop, a commitment to freedom was embedded not only in the intellectual fabric, but the very architecture of the university.

Howard’s development into a primary site of social and economic advancement for African Americans occurred mostly under President Mordecai W. Johnson (1926-1960). Partway through Johnson’s tenure, reporters from *Life* magazine came to Howard to document changes wrought on campus. This visit came one year after the end of World War II, and Johnson had much to report as to the state of the university. In addition to the physical expansion of the school, there were now co-eds representing more than a dozen different nations and 39 different states.⁵ Some of these students, including two couples who posed in the shadow of Founders Library on the main quadrangle, were featured in one of *Life*’s classic photo essays. According to this piece, the students and faculty—“among the best in the nation”—made Howard “America’s Center of Negro Learning.”⁶

⁴ National Register of Historic Places, Andrew Rankin Memorial Chapel, Frederick Douglass Memorial Hall, Founders Library, District of Columbia, Washington, National Register #01000070.

⁵ Mordecai Johnson, “Howard University,” Entry #A1, 50 Records Relating to the Annual Survey of Howard University, 1941-1979, Container 3, Folder: Howard University 1943, RG 12, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD. Hereafter cited as NACP.

⁶ “Howard University: America’s Center of Negro Learning,” *Life Magazine*, Nov. 18, 1946.



Fig. 4.1, Fig 4.2: *Life* November 18, 1946, 109; 112.

One of the individual professors photographed for this piece was Flemmie Kittrell. In her featured photograph, from within a “bare, utilitarian” classroom, Kittrell faces a cluster of student desks, teaching a course in Home Economics. When this shoot was underway, Kittrell had only been at Howard for two years. But this would be her longest lasting job, spanning more than two decades and the better part of her career. From 1944 to 1972, Kittrell taught courses in Nutrition, conducted laboratory research, and ran the department of Home Economics. She also lobbied for a new building for the discipline at Howard. Two decades after her arrival, Kittrell and visiting dignitaries finally dedicated the building in 1963. This space was a manifestation and symbol of many of her ambitions and projects. While Kittrell wrote frequently of her desire to have strong roots at Howard, she spent nearly as much of this part of her career *away* from campus as on the “hilltop.” In the end, Kittrell’s time at Howard would be more remarkable for the time she spent abroad, forging a political strategy she called “something like internationalism.”⁷

⁷Black Women Oral History Project Interviews; Flemmie Kittrell, Aug.29, 1977. OH-31, T-32/Kittrell. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. Hereafter cited as Tate interview.

Kittrell's previous post at Hampton Institute had been irrevocably shaped by the crisis of World War II. As the war ended and the hopes for a "Double Victory" went unfulfilled, Kittrell and her new colleagues at Howard started fighting other battles. Despite claims that Reconstruction was a process happening outside of the nation's borders through aid packages such as the Marshall Plan, US-based racial tensions continued to intensify. As the primary training site for African American lawyers, Howard was a nexus for contemporaneous legal struggles related to Civil Rights "at home." Yet Howard's proximity to the capital and strong tradition of international leadership also meant that there were longstanding ties to the Department of State. Thus, some members of the faculty at Howard *also* became integral to research and public relations tours tied to Cold War projects overseas. In the beginning, a small group of reformers had founded Howard to reconcile social issues left unresolved by the Civil War. Now, another set of "postwar" faculty were at a pivot point, this time at an intersection of Cold War politics and Civil Rights activism.⁸

Kittrell was influenced by—and embedded in—the networks of "domestic" and international activists circulating through Howard.⁹ Starting with a contract to study nutrition and health education in Liberia in 1946, Kittrell worked as a traveling expert for the government and various mission and peace groups for the rest of her life. Through connections at the USDA and Department of State, some of which were directly tied to Howard, Kittrell subsequently had contracts or grants through Point Four, Fulbright, the United States Information Service (USIS) and the Agency for International Development (AID). In addition to data collection and offering

⁸ Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

⁹ Paul Kramer, "Is the World Our Campus? International Students and U.S. Global Power in the Long Twentieth Century" *Diplomatic History* 33, no.5 (2009): 775-806.

lectures, Kittrell worked in technical assistance, furthering or starting programs in Home Economics in India, the territory of Hawai'i, Japan, Ghana, and Uganda. While Howard's prestige and proximity to state agencies brought Kittrell new opportunities, she also continued to work within the philanthropic world. For instance, on her first trip to Liberia in 1946, Kittrell sought funding from the General Education Board on top of her government contract.¹⁰ In earlier decades, Kittrell had negotiated with these various constituencies to fund her graduate research and initiatives such as the childcare program at Bennett College. Now, Kittrell's reach was international, and she spread her expertise further by continuing her ties to former associations and by making new inroads into the Foreign Service.

While many other black scholars' opportunities for travel were constrained or restricted by government agents due to Cold War race politics, Kittrell was almost constantly in motion through the early 1970s. In addition to government-sponsored tours, Kittrell was invited to travel as an official delegate or representative to international meetings of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), the American Home Economics Association (AHEA), the International Missionary Council in Willingen, and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Stateside, Kittrell was also a prolific lecturer and visiting academic. On top of her teaching at Howard, Kittrell visited groups throughout the South to discuss her time abroad and her studies in Home Economics. Contemporary black papers, such as the *Afro-American*, rarely missed an opportunity to note that when Kittrell gave these talks, she was prone to wearing saris, tokens from time spent in India.¹¹

¹⁰ In 1945 Kittrell attended a meeting including General Education Board members, "colored Extension workers," and mission workers headed to West Africa, see: "Dr. Jackson Davis and Claude Barnett Address Dinner Meet," *New York Age* (New York, NY), Jul. 21, 1945, 4.

¹¹ "Dr. Kittrell Heard," *Baltimore Afro-American* (Baltimore, MD), Apr. 12, 1952.

By coming to Howard, Kittrell took a new position and a new role in the world of “colored cosmopolitanism.”¹² For this wide range of activity, Howard students recognized Kittrell in the 1956 yearbook; this was also the year that the yearbook editors declared Howard to be “A Center of International Education.” Dedicating this volume to Kittrell, the editors noted that they chose her not just for her service to Howard, “but to humanity” and the cause of “international peace and freedom.”¹³ This dedication points to Kittrell’s prominence on campus and her way of engaging with politics. A consistent advocate of peace, education, and leadership initiatives, Kittrell promoted non-violence tactics and programs grounded in friendship and understanding. Kittrell did speak explicitly about racial injustice in some contexts, but usually only in private and with fellow peace advocates. With this overarching focus on peace and state-based solutions, Kittrell worked *with* rather than in opposition to government agencies. This meant that Kittrell largely avoided, or did not align with movements of anti-colonialism and Pan Africanism.

The fact that other employees of the federal government—particularly those working with the FBI—were tracking Kittrell’s movements was not likely lost on her as she traveled.¹⁴ In various ways, Kittrell was a complex academic with high ideals for peace and to her mind, pragmatic plans for accommodating a growing, imperialist state. Yet her complex negotiations of “domestic politics” and foreign affairs have not received much attention from historians. Indeed, with few exceptions, African American women more broadly have not been considered in histories of foreign policy. Kittrell’s international work in Home Economics is an important challenge not only to that blind spot, but to constructions of global black activism in the

¹² Nico Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism: The Shared Struggle for Freedom in the United States and India* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

¹³ Howard University, *The Bison: 1956* (Washington, D.C.: Graduating Class of 1956, 1956), Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University Archives. Hereafter cited as MSRC.

¹⁴ U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, File on Flemma P. Kittrell, report 1209462 HQ 4226.

“postwar” period more generally.¹⁵ As Robert Vitalis argues in *White World Order, Black Power Politics* (2015) scholars at historically black institutions, and especially Howard, were integral to the development of International Relations.¹⁶ In largely reconceptualizing this academic field of study, Vitalis stresses the intellectual contributions of figures such as Alain Locke and Ralph Bunche; he also reclaims the work of historian Merze Tate, but Kittrell’s work receives no attention. In the early 1950s, Kittrell and Tate were both working in India on Fulbright grants. In fact, these two women shared many of the same itineraries. Yet Kittrell’s extensive tours, research projects, and education programs remain understudied because the field of Home Economics is no longer legible as a politically oriented discipline. The notion that training in Home Economics, as much as History or Political Science, could be a source of power for international relations, has not been fully considered.



Fig. 4.3: “Howard University Faculty, 1950” MSRC.

A well-known image entitled “Howard University Faculty, 1950,” captures the narrow view of academic politics that has made Kittrell and her colleagues’ work in the discipline less visible. This photograph (Fig 4.3) features future Howard President James Nabrit along with Professors Charles Drew, Sterling Brown, E. Franklin Frazier, Rayford Logan, and Alain Locke.

¹⁵ Penny Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

¹⁶ Robert Vitalis, *White World Order, Black Power Politics: The Birth of American International Relations* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015).

Standing together at the edge of the university gates, these men are within and *of* the university. As the Founders tower looms behind them, they look beyond the institution with confidence.¹⁷ Significant as these figures are, the history of this period must not be limited to them. Just beyond where these men stood at the gates, a short walk uphill leads to the site of what was once Kittrell's Home Economics building. With Kittrell's guidance, this space was a nexus for dense US-based and international networks in Home Economics. Though these constituencies are not often thought of together, they were neighbors in life.¹⁸

Positioned next to Founders, Kittrell's Home Economics building once held an important place on Howard's political landscape. When it was first completed, many people on and off campus saw this large, modernist structure as a personal triumph for Kittrell, who lobbied for the funding for it for nearly two decades.¹⁹ Anthropologist Margaret Mead, who attended the dedication, declared it a "dream come true" for her friend.²⁰ But it was not merely a personal achievement. As the home economist Dr. Cecile H. Edwards argued, it this space was a "link between...[Kittrell's] outreach to help third world countries, on one hand, and her dedication, on the other, to make home economics a discipline which was research-oriented, with nutrition, textiles, and family components."²¹ To her peers and contemporaries, this space represented the synthesis Kittrell was striving to create between work "at home" and abroad.

¹⁷ Jonathan Holloway, *Confronting the Veil: Abram Harris Jr., E. Franklin Frazier, and Ralph Bunche, 1919-1941* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Zachery R. Williams, *In Search of the Talented Tenth: Howard University Public Intellectuals and the Dilemma of Race, 1926-1970* (Columbus: University of Missouri Press, 2009).

¹⁸ For example, the Rayford Logan Lecture, included in "Africa and the Afro-American Experience," was hosted in the Home Economics Building in 1970 (Washington, D.C.: Department of History, Howard University, 1971).

¹⁹ Elinor Lee, "A New Outlook on Home Economics on Howard Campus," *Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.), Jan. 31, 1963; "This...is the Science of Home Economics" and "Around the World with Howard University's Home Economics Department," *Washington Afro American* (Washington, D.C.), Feb. 2, 1963, 3-4; 9-10.

²⁰ Margaret Mead, "Address: February 1963," Box 104-2, Folder 2, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

²¹ "Dean Cecile H. Edwards's Tribute," Box 315, Folder 2, Flemma Kittrell Deceased Alumni Folder, Deceased Alumni files, #41-2-877. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

With Kittrell carefully supervising each detail, the building was intended to both reflect and further the networks Kittrell had been part of over the previous two decades. The “home-like” décor was therefore infused with “African, Indian, Japanese, and American” design.²² One particularly prominent living area designed to evoke “an African house” even had a large fireplace where a roaring fire could illuminate a mosaic chimney of “black, turquoise, and gold” tiles. To provide students and visitors with “pride in their cultural heritage,” Kittrell also installed carvings and “mementos” from her travels in Asia and Africa.²³ To reporters, Kittrell explained that this building was “a blending of the physical and social sciences and the humanities for universal family development.”²⁴ One visitor further reflected that this space served as “a tangible link with widening horizons” for Howard students. With co-eds from all over the diaspora gradually coming to study Home Economics, this space welcomed students from the Western Caribbean islands, India, and several newly independent West African countries.²⁵ As these students gathered together, Kittrell provided a warm hearth to fight the Cold War.



Fig. 4.4: *The Bison*, 1963, 62.

²² Howard University, *The Bison: 1963* (Washington, D.C.: Graduating Class of 1963, 1963), 62, MSRC.

²³ Howard University, *The Bison: 1970* (Washington, D.C.: Graduating Class of 1970, 1970), 76, MSRC.

²⁴ An *Afro American* news supplement was also published on the building, featuring a large spread of photographs: Feb. 1, 1963, Box 2604, Flemmie Kittrell Files, RG 39-School of Human Ecology Records, Howard University Archives. Hereafter cited as Kittrell Files, HUA.

²⁵ Jessie Ash Arndt, “Classroom Beyond Campus,” *Christian Science Monitor*, Oct. 7, 1964.

Of course, the complexities of Home Economics work in the “postwar” period cannot be confined to a single building. As a space where Kittrell took command of growing international networks, this building nonetheless defies the notion that home economists were concerned with narrow or apolitical projects after the war. The discussions that took place here about international work also challenge the perception that the field of Home Economics in the 1950s was primarily focused on training white future housewives.²⁶ While surviving mental hygiene films and many secondary materials *do* focus on homemaking and postwar adjustment, this is not the whole story.²⁷ For the students who came around the country and eventually, the world, to study Home Economics at Howard, this discipline would not have seemed so narrow.

The presence of this structure also begs a closer inspection of Kittrell’s connections to the Howard community. Located in a prominent area of campus, this department was not an isolated enclave. This project was seen as important enough to warrant the hiring of Hilyard Robinson, a world renowned Howard architecture professor. In earlier years, Robinson had been commissioned for private projects including Ralph Bunche’s house, educational work such as the Tuskegee Airfield, and global commissions such as the Centennial Exposition in Liberia.²⁸ Robinson had also designed dormitories at Hampton and WPA housing.²⁹ Though not normally linked with Home Economics, Robinson’s argument that there was a need for “housing that

²⁶ “These days, the term “home economics” doesn’t conjure very much, except among baby boomers who remember junior-high cooking classes mysteriously focused on baking-powder biscuits.” See Laura Shapiro, “The First Kitchen: Eleanor Roosevelt’s Austerity Drive,” *New Yorker*, Nov. 22, 2010; Julia Kirk Blackwelder, *Now Hiring: The Feminization of Work in the United States, 1900-1995* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1997).

²⁷ “Home Economics Story,” (1951); University of Kansas, “Why Study Home Economics?” (1955), Box 108, New York State College of Home Economics Records, #23-2-749, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library. See also: Ken Smith, *Mental Hygiene: Classroom Films 1945-1970* (New York: Blast Books, 1999).

²⁸ “Proposed Howard Building Stirs Storm,” *Jet*, Dec. 29, 1960, 24. Robinson defended his large modern design against complaints from the National Capital Planning Commission.

²⁹ Kelly Ann Quinn, “Making Modern Homes: A History of Langston Terrace Dwellings, a New Deal Housing Program in Washington, D.C.” (PhD Diss., University of Maryland, 2007).

would uplift the spirits of its residents” would easily fit into Kittrell’s curriculum.³⁰ More than a builder or designer, Robinson put forth the notion of being a “race architect,” a fitting concept for Kittrell’s ambition not just to have a building, but a place that was both deeply rooted and connected to the world.³¹ By filling this building with laboratories, classroom, as well as cases for art pieces and clothing from her travels, Kittrell was forging a link between the intimate family lives of people of various Diasporas and all of the students at Howard.

In addition to her ambitious trips abroad and plans for a new building, Kittrell continued to focus on empirical work, tackling issues such as the nutritional value of margarine. Kittrell also furthered her research on children while working as a consultant for the Midcentury Conference on Children and Youth. At first glance, Kittrell’s travel itineraries, building plans, and ongoing research do not form a coherent professional agenda. There was a consistent thread in the focus on the family and “helping people to help themselves [.]” For Kittrell, the tradition of translational research was “one of the finest undertakings of our great country.”³² To Kittrell, families were not private, nuclear units that existed outside of politics. Rather, the family was an ideal unit with which experts (such as herself) could enable people to “help themselves” in life.

Kittrell’s papers—and passport—reveal that working as home economist was something that propelled, rather than constrained, the projects she sought to work on in the US and abroad. Much like her work with the Home Making Institutes, Kittrell was not insincere about her investment in “the home.” Yet, Kittrell was not “homeward bound” in the sense that she scarcely showed any interest in forming a family of her own or in training her students how to do the same. Instead, Kittrell was working more tenaciously than ever to entrench the professional

³⁰ Max Bond, “Still Here,” *Harvard Design Magazine* no.2 (1997); Dreck Spurlock Wilson, ed., *African American Architects: A Biographical Dictionary, 1865-1945* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

³¹ Hil[y]ard Robinson, “Something is Missing,” *Howard University Record* 19 (1925): 407.

³² Kittrell, “International Sharing of Home Economics,” AHEA Introductory Remarks, n.d., likely 1956, Box 2604, Kittrell Files, HUA. Profiles on the foreign students: *Journal of Home Economics* 48, no.7 (1956): 494.

discipline of Home Economics at Howard and in institutions across the world.³³ As with the technical experts Nick Cullather examines in *The Hungry World* (2010), Kittrell deployed her skills in nutritional research to maneuver into larger ideological battles.³⁴ As food became a weapon and having a family was configured as a human right, Kittrell used her background in Home Economics as a tool and entrée into global plans for development.³⁵

Though trained to perform technical research, Kittrell also saw great value in promoting the commonalities among all people. Thus, in addition to working directly as a nutritionist and observer for UNESCO, Kittrell also took part in a project known as the *United Nations Cookbook*.³⁶ While Kittrell's work with government and international agencies was usually focused on global food supplies and national levels of malnutrition, the *UN Cookbook* promised better foreign relations through recipe exchanges. Similarly, Kittrell's work was also tied to the National Council of Negro Women's *Historical Cookbook of the American Negro*. In this text, which directly cited Kittrell's development projects in India, the international "quest for friendship" was seen as a legitimate entrée into global affairs.³⁷

While cookbooks are normally linked only with conservative gender ideology, these texts put forth alternative histories of women's relationships with internationalism.³⁸ In line with more recent scholarship on domesticity, food, and politics, these texts are reminders that "the home should be viewed not as a sealed private space but as a portal to the public where social

³³ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988); Ruth Schwartz Cowan, "The Postwar Years" in *More Work For Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

³⁴ Nick Cullather, *The Hungry World: America's Cold War Battle against Poverty in Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

³⁵ Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

³⁶ American Home Economics Association, *Favorite Recipes from the United Nations: 170 Authentic Dishes from all Countries of the United Nations* (Washington, D.C.: United States Committee for the United Nations, 1950).

³⁷ Sue Bailey Thurman for the National Council of Negro Women, *Historical Cookbook of the American Negro* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958; 2000), 33.

³⁸ Jessamyn Neuhaus, *Manly Meals and Mom's Home Cooking: Cookbooks and Gender in Modern America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

connections and political consciousness may be fostered.”³⁹ Through both of these cookbooks, women were doing more than sharing “national dishes.” To Kittrell and her peers, encouraging women to “foster the habit of thinking internationally at the dinner table” was a way to bring politics home. These texts also reflect Kittrell’s investment in friendship and nationalist missions tied to global organizations such as the UN. Though deeply interested in the needs of people in Ghana, for instance, Kittrell did not identify as an American African when she was there. Instead, much like the civil rights lawyer Pauli Murray, who was at Howard when Kittrell arrived and traveled many of the same trajectories, Kittrell possessed a “faith in American constitutionalism.”⁴⁰ Overall, Kittrell put forth a steady confidence in the theoretical workings of democracy and in the practices of nonviolent strategy.⁴¹

Often, Kittrell chose to frame her work as focused on building infrastructure—schools and extension networks—over ideology. The two are inseparable, as Kittrell well knew based on her own ambitions for a Home Economics building. In the broader context, working on a rural education project in Hawai’i in the mid-1950s, for instance, was clearly part of a larger US-based imperial project. Kittrell’s deflections of her cooperation with state agencies and larger structures of power were therefore part of a strategy that enabled her to justify involvement in projects she considered significant. Many government agents also saw an advantage to hiring Kittrell and furthering her plans for Home Economics. In funding Kittrell, agencies such as the United States Information Service (USIS) fulfilled another purpose. Among State Department officials, Kittrell was reported to be a reliable and “effective” speaker for many years. Though ostensibly paid to

³⁹ Stephen Vider, “‘Oh Hell, May, Why Don’t You People Have a Cookbook?’: Camp Humor and Gay Domesticity,” *American Quarterly* 65, no.4 (2013), 881. See also: Tracey Deutsch, *Building a Housewife’s Paradise: Gender, Politics, and American Grocery Stores in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

⁴⁰ Kevin Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 114-115.

⁴¹ Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism*, 228.

go to Ghana in 1958 to discuss Home Economics, for instance, Kittrell was also expected to talk about racial tensions “at home.” While some activists felt pressured into taking their “eyes off the prize of human rights,” for civil rights “at home,” Kittrell chose to speak in vague terms about liberty and the “family of man.”⁴² Instead of drawing on the discourses of civil or human rights, Kittrell configured the world as a family, a political strategy with a niche specific to her expertise.

Ultimately, when later asked about this range of work, Kittrell would surmise that she had been part of “something like internationalism.” An expert at deflecting her own political work, with this phrasing Kittrell did more than elide her own careful navigations of funding networks and bureaucratic policies with Cold War agencies. With this aside, Kittrell also sidestepped her complicated relationship to the ever-increasing state and rising military-industrial complex. When Kittrell testified in front of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee about the need for more US-based aid projects, she invoked what she saw as the “moral imperative” for the US to act abroad.⁴³ Kittrell also used similar language in her Christmas letters and even in a private diary, kept in India in the early 1950s. This infusion of morality into Cold War projects allowed Kittrell to reconcile the tension between her cooperation with the state and her continued involvement in peace work.

These deflections and uneasy engagements with state politics partially explain Kittrell’s subsequent erasure from histories of international work. The obscurity of Kittrell’s international work today is not because of a dearth of sources, but because of a change in perception of who

⁴² Carol Anderson, *Eyes off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944-1955* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁴³ Kittrell, “Testimony Before Senate Foreign Relations Committee in Relation to S2996 - Foreign Assistance Act April 18, 1962,” 1962, Box 104-13, Folder 34, Flemma P. Kittrell Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University Archives. Hereafter cited as Kittrell Papers, MSRC. N.B.: Kittrell has papers in the Manuscript Division and in the University Archives.

was involved in this work. Kittrell *was* part of a significant, if largely forgotten tradition of internationalism in Home Economics. That this work had begun as part of 19th century missionary and imperialist efforts did not trouble Kittrell, who saw no contradiction in working for the US and in speaking out against war with WILPF. A reexamination of Kittrell's travels, research, and investment in various civic and religious groups during this time adds up to more than fascinating postwar biography. Heretofore, Kittrell has been configured as exceptional for her work abroad. A new look at her own words and works shows how she was connected to other experts, traveling not so much as an outlier, but as a proponent of American exceptionalism. This range of activity seriously challenges perceptions not just of Home Economics, but conceptions of which academics seized upon notions of exceptionalism to participate in international power plays in the twentieth century.

Before Kittrell could imagine a postwar order, she was bogged down with difficult circumstances in 1944 on the "Agricultural Front." While still at Hampton, Kittrell had to oversee the Home Economics program amidst an "unusually destructive" spring and summer in terms of weather and morale. Though much of the east coast was plagued by "Hurricanes, tornadoes, straight-line winds, hail and floods," Norfolk, Virginia faced "the most severe drought" ever seen in the area.⁴⁴ During this period of chaos, as Kittrell made plans to leave this area and the Hampton campus for the second time in her life, she was toasted by the Navy men on campus, who made her guest of honor at a dinner dance.⁴⁵ With any memories of suppressing wartime marriages seemingly forgotten, the sailors read a poem to the departing Dean:

Miss Kittrell, you have played a part
In filling many a sailor's heart

⁴⁴ J.L. Baldwin, "Monthly Weather Review of the Weather of 1944 in the United States" (Washington, D.C.: Weather Bureau, 1945): 1.

⁴⁵ "Hampton's Dean of Women Honored by Navy School," *Pittsburgh Courier* (Pittsburgh, PA), Aug. 26, 1944, 10; "Dean Kittrell Leaves Hampton for Howard Post," *Afro American* (Baltimore, MD), Aug. 26, 1944, 13.

With homespun happiness.
 So while you sail the seas of life
 We hope for you there'll be no strife
 Just peace and real success.⁴⁶

While peace may have seemed far away in August 1944, success may have felt closer at hand. Leaving the instability of Hampton, Kittrell was moving to an institution more in line with her first teaching job. President Mordecai Johnson, who urged Kittrell to come to Howard, actually had much in common with President David D. Jones of Bennett. In addition to serving their respective institutions for nearly identical terms, both were highly energetic administrators who devoted themselves to expanding the curriculum and aggressively seeking new routes for funding. At Hampton, Kittrell's ambitions had been frustrated—but with Johnson's and Jones's leadership styles, she would be able to expand her work both on and off campus.

Johnson was nearly twenty years into his tenure as president of Howard when Kittrell arrived in 1944. Though sometimes credited with ushering in a "Golden Age" at Howard, it was far from inevitable that Johnson would lead a top-tier university in the nation's capital. Born to a preacher and a domestic worker in 1890, Johnson was the first member of his family to be born into freedom.⁴⁷ While growing up in Henry County, Tennessee, an area named for Patrick Henry, it is perhaps little surprise that Johnson yearned for people and places far away from his home in a rural town. Johnson found ways to make his world more expansive and interconnected through Baptist networks and the YMCA. After attending Harvard Divinity School and the University of Chicago, Johnson came to be known as an oratorical genius with a "calling" for leadership. As

⁴⁶ W.B. Presley, "To Dean Flemma P. Kittrell Our Shipmate," August 17, 1944, Flemma Kittrell Dean of Women Box, Hampton University Archives, Hampton, VA.

⁴⁷ "Dedication: Mordecai Wyatt Johnson 1890-1976," *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no.5 (1994), 1.

he cultivated the persona of an enigmatic, well-connected leader, Johnson courted the federal government, General Education Board and the Rosenwald Fund to bolster and sustain Howard.⁴⁸

To some Howard intellectuals, the bounty Johnson provided came with a cost. Johnson had a reputation for possessing a “messianic complex” and an “ecclesiastical posture.”⁴⁹ Still, even those who derided him by calling him “the messiah” could appreciate the changes wrought under his tenure. When Johnson first arrived, the university was lacked many vital resources, but within a few decades, it would be known as the ‘West Point of Negro Leadership.’⁵⁰ Indeed by 1946, half of all African American doctors, surgeons, and dentists—and 80% of lawyers—had all gone to Howard. Amidst this period of growth, Kittrell later recalled being asked to attend a meeting with Johnson, who said with a “commanding” voice, ‘we would like to have you because we think home economics is a most important field.’⁵¹ Kittrell’s cursory examination of the campus seemed to contradict that statement, but she left Hampton anyway.

According to Kittrell, Johnson insisted that she come to Howard, imploring: ‘Daughter, if you come to Howard University, you will get your building.’⁵² Kittrell also credited Dean Charles H. Thompson, founder of the *Journal of Negro Education* with convincing her that she would be “sophisticated enough” for life at Howard.⁵³ Kittrell had a history with Thompson, one that likely began during her graduate training, when both she and Charles’s wife Mae were earning master’s degrees at Cornell University.⁵⁴ More recently, Kittrell and Thompson had also

⁴⁸ Richard I. McKinney, “Mordecai Johnson: An Early Pillar of African-American Higher Education,” *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 27 (2000), 100.

⁴⁹ McKinney, “Mordecai Johnson,” 104.

⁵⁰ Ponchita Pierce, “The Solicitor General,” *Ebony Magazine*, November 1965, 69.

⁵¹ Tate interview, 8.

⁵² Esther Ottley, “Flemmie Pansy Kittrell,” Kittrell Papers, Box 104-1, Folder 9, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

⁵³ “The *Journal*...was his baby.” See Faustine Jones, “Editorial Comment: In Memoriam: Dean Charles H. Thompson (1896-1980),” *Journal of Negro Education* 76, no.3 (2007): 490-491.

⁵⁴ Mae Stewart Thompson, “The Determination of the Extent and Character of the Preparation of the Underdepartmentalized Teacher of Physical Education and Health in Elementary School” (master’s thesis, Cornell University, 1931); Tate interview, p.8.

both spoken at the Annual Student Conference, a civil rights meeting at Hampton.⁵⁵ Thompson had not been shy about his criticisms of Hampton during the war, deriding what he saw as a “‘Gone-with-the-wind’ philosophy of race relations.”⁵⁶ Perhaps Thompson thought it time for Kittrell to be part of a more “sophisticated” institution. But these recollections are also part of a longer pattern. As with her decision to study at Cornell, Kittrell chose to cite the ambitions that other people—particularly prominent people—had for her.

In retrospect, it is clear that Kittrell was also becoming a high-profile academic at this time. Through her work in the *Journal and Guide* (Norfolk, VA) and the publicity she garnered as Dean of Women, Kittrell’s work became known to a wider academic base. Kittrell was also given a commendation for her work for the Office of Price Administration, most likely on ration regulations.⁵⁷ This service to OPA strengthened her ties to government agencies and opened potential lines of connection to figures such as OPA administrator—and future ambassador to India—Chester Bowles.⁵⁸ With this evidence, it is clear that from a position of increasing clout, Kittrell made a calculated choice to go to Howard and to benefit from the school’s federal subsidies and ties to the State Department. This was also an opportunity to move closer to figures at the center of national power, from the Bureau of Home Economics to the National Council of Negro Women in DuPont Circle.

In coming to Howard, Kittrell’s *first* leadership responsibility was serving as a Department Head in a growing department. In line with national trends, Kittrell’s first year at

⁵⁵ “Youth Council News,” *The Crisis*, (October, 1941), 328.

⁵⁶ Charles H. Thompson, “Educational and Administrative Reorganization of Hampton Institute,” *Journal of Negro Education* 9, no.2 (1940): 141.

⁵⁷ According to archivist Randy Sowell, Official File 357-H at the Truman Presidential Library indicates that such awards “were presented to persons who contributed to the price control and food rationing programs during the war.” Randy Sowell, message to author, April 13, 2015.

⁵⁸ *Volunteers in Nutrition/US Office of Civilian Defense* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Civilian Defense, 1942); “Chester Bowles” in Benjamin Shearer, *Home Front Heroes: A Biographical Dictionary of Americans During Wartime* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2007).

Howard was marked by a surge in enrollments among undergraduate and graduate students.⁵⁹ In significant ways, however, Howard's history of Home Economics diverged from other land-grant institutions and private historically black colleges. There had not been an early "women's program" in homemaking at Howard.⁶⁰ Similarly, in preceding decades, there had been an "Agricultural department" at the university "in name only." Both the Board and early administrators had refused proposals to make "a *real* agricultural department" at Howard through the acquisition of practice farmland.⁶¹ Howard, in other words, did not start with a functional crafts-based program in domestic science that grew into a collegiate-level department.

The financially beneficial relationship Howard had to the warring state was similar to other institutions, however. The genesis for the Home Economics department began in 1917 during World War I, when the Industrial Department first began offering classes. As with the program at Bennett, Home Economics grew to be more expansive in the 1920s. Gradually, as faculty with more advanced degrees came in, the program was declared to be "on a collegiate level" in official reports. Furthermore, amidst a more general reorganization of the university structure in 1934, Home Economics was moved to the College of Liberal Arts. Despite these changes, J. St. Clair Price, the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences still linked Home Economics with "Voc. Subjects" in 1946. Calling these subjects the "step children" of the College, Price only begrudgingly acknowledged that the "situation in H.ec. [was] changing because of new leadership."⁶²

⁵⁹ "Home Economics Annual Report 1945-46," Box 2610, Annual Reports Folder, Kittrell Files, HUA; Lisa Marie Fritschner, "The Rise and Fall of Home Economics" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California Davis 1973), 124.

⁶⁰ Logan, *Howard University*, 153-54.

⁶¹ Dyson, 116-117.

⁶² Ray L. Hamon, "Report and Recommendations on the Physical Plant of Howard University," Aug. 2, 1946, 2: "This arrangement is very awkward for the Home Economics department. The building is badly in need of major renovation."

Price might have been alluding to Kittrell's recent appointment, though other staff members had also earned advanced degrees, primarily from Teachers College, and/or Cornell University.⁶³ Significantly, these faculty members had created their own graduate program a few years prior to Kittrell's arrival. The first graduate students who enrolled (during the war) had studied a range of topics, from the eating habits of war workers to childcare and nursery designs—but all focused on black communities.⁶⁴ Bringing in Kittrell was likely a way of continuing this process of upgrading, and Kittrell's annual report applauded this graduate work. Kittrell was also deeply concerned with undergraduate education, particularly the need to keep Nutrition courses accredited by the American Dietetic Association. Dietetics was a solid career path for African American women, and Kittrell's students had the advantage of training at Howard University Hospital.

Early on, however, Kittrell found the budget to be stretched too thin. Seeing this accreditation at risk, she wrote, "It would be tragic for us not to measure up with minimum standards in so important a field as human nutrition."⁶⁵ Kittrell had other concerns, too, such as the need for a new building to properly teach "the meaning of home economics for satisfactory personal and family living." Dean Price echoed this concern, for he saw that the "arrangement is very awkward for the Home Economics department."⁶⁶ Though Kittrell was initially quite

⁶³ Ibid, 113. Faculty from the early 1940s: Susie Amelia Elliot, AM, Teachers College, Columbia University; Madeline Wand Kirkland, Ed.D., Columbia University, also a graduate of Howard and Pratt Institute; Frances McShann, S.M. from Kansas State Teachers College, also a graduate of Howard; Louise Thompson Sewell, A.M., Columbia University, also a graduate of Pratt Institute and Simmons College (Ky.); Ethel Roberson Stephens, A.M., Columbia University, graduate of Ohio State University.

⁶⁴ Dorothy B. Porter, *Howard University Masters' Theses Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Master's Degree at Howard University, 1918-1945* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Graduate School, 1946), 23. Of particular note is Guthrie, "A proposed plan for establishing day nursery centers for children of working Negro mothers in Washington, D.C."

⁶⁵ "Home Economics Annual Report 1945-46," 2, Annual Reports Folder, Box 2610, Kittrell Files, HUA.

⁶⁶ Hamon, "Report and Recommendations on the Physical Plant of Howard University," 2; Logan, xxv; 207.

invested in working closely with the staff on this program and in lobbying for a separate training space, soon other opportunities beckoned, pulling her focus away from campus.

By the time the next departmental report was due in 1947, Kittrell was out of the country. Lydia Jetton Rogers, Bennett '36, became Acting Head in her place.⁶⁷ As part of a larger project linking Howard faculty to the State Department, Kittrell had been offered an opportunity to conduct a nutritional survey of Liberia starting in December 1946.⁶⁸ In the preceding years, Howard intellectuals such as Ralph Bunche and Rayford Logan had taken a keen interest in Liberia, and especially the politico-economic situation. Johnson had also joined the Council on African Affairs (CAA), an elite group of educators dedicated to anti-colonialism. Most recently, in 1943, Edwin Barclay, the President of Liberia, had visited Howard during a trip to the US.

There were also much older ties between Howard and Liberia, indeed, between the US and this nation sometimes called “Another America” given its roots as a colonial project. One of the early Law School graduates and members of the Board of Trustees at Howard was John Henry Smyth, Minister to Liberia. Likewise, Alexander Crummell, and educator and Pan-Africanist who resided in Liberia from 1853-1872 later taught at Howard.⁶⁹ Kittrell would have also been aware of Liberia’s intertwined history with Hampton.⁷⁰ Though Booker T. Washington’s work in Africa had been in Togo, the system of education he represented had a

⁶⁷ Alice Allison Dunnigan, *The Fascinating Story of Black Kentuckians: Their Heritage and Traditions* (Huntington: Associated Publishers, 1982), 233; Lydia Jetton Rogers, “Home Economics Annual Report 1946-47,” Box 2610, Kittrell Files, HUA. List of faculty: Mrs. Artie G. Bell (fashion and textiles), Mrs. Rebecca T. Davis, Miss Helen Farmer, Mrs. Emma Marks, Mrs. Letitia Randall, Mrs. Louise Sewell (dietetics), Mrs. Myrtle S. Thompson (nursery school), Mrs. Mary Rajan (nutrition, child development), Ethna Beulah Winston, Rogers (education).

⁶⁸ “Dr. F.P. Kittrell Goes to Liberia,” *New York Age* (New York, NY), Dec. 28, 1946, 4.

⁶⁹ Logan, 539.

⁷⁰ James Ciment, *Another America: The Story of Liberia and the Former Slaves Who Ruled It* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2013).

clear impact on Liberia, where a school bore his name.⁷¹ An interest in Washington's mode of training also spurred early twentieth century leaders working in Liberia to come and see his *alma mater*. While at Hampton, Kittrell undoubtedly would have seen the "stream of foreign visitors" coming to campus as part of this tradition.⁷² This "back and forth" was also encouraged by the GEB, which paid for leaders such as R.L. Embree, a missionary and advisor to the Liberian Government, to spend time at Hampton.⁷³ In 1946, this dynamic shifted as one of Kittrell's former colleagues, Raphael Lanier, was appointed the US Ambassador to Liberia in July 1946.⁷⁴

Now, this tradition would continue to evolve with Kittrell, whose primary objectives in Liberia were set not by a mission board but by the State Department.⁷⁵ According to documents sent between Washington, D.C., and Monrovia, Kittrell's foremost duty was to gather information on Liberians' feeding habits.⁷⁶ Additionally, the trip was also meant to be a foundational step in building educational networks. Kittrell was asked "to demonstrate methods and give concrete recommendations to coast and interior schools" for "improving teaching of dietetics and on food use." The "Dept." saw this "as [a] necessary first step in sound program of teacher and advanced student exchange in this field between US and Liberian schools."⁷⁷ Though the U.S. Public Health Service had already been in the country working on preliminary research

⁷¹ Andrew Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010). See also Donald Spivey, *The Politics of Miseducation: The Booker Washington Institute of Liberia, 1929-1984* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1986).

⁷² The *Southern Workman* was "sent regularly to 70 individuals, libraries, or societies in foreign countries. Twenty-two copies go to Africa." See James E. Gregg, *Hampton Institute Principal's Report: 1924* (Hampton, VA: Hampton Institute, 1924), 25. "Foreign Visitors" lists also regularly appeared in *Southern Workman*.

⁷³ "Visit from Liberian Official," *Southern Workman* 65, no.11 (1936): 357.

⁷⁴ Later, when Lanier left the post in 1948, a former Howard student and lawyer with the NAACP, Edward Dudley, was appointed. Michael L. Krenn, *Black Diplomacy: African Americans and the State Department: 1945-1969* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1999), 47-48.

⁷⁵ "Dr. Kittrell to Make Study of Liberia's Diet Problem," *Journal and Guide* (Norfolk, VA), Dec. 21, 1946; "Now In Liberia," *Afro American* (Baltimore, MD), Feb. 8, 1947; "News of Women in Our Own and Other Countries," *Milwaukee Journal and Sentinel* (Milwaukee, WI), Feb. 16, 1947, 10.

⁷⁶ T.E. Bracken to Mr. Russell, Letter, June 27, 1946, file 811.42782/6-346, 1945-49 Central Decimal File, RG 59, NACP.

⁷⁷ Department of State to U.S. Embassy Monrovia, Liberia, Telegram, 10 May 1946, file 882.12A/5-1046, 1945-49 CDF, RG 59, USNA.

for years, this was to be the first survey of its kind; it was also a foray into broader exchange programs.⁷⁸

Outside of these official documents, Kittrell was making her own plans to extend her trip by several weeks, determined to make the most of this initial survey. Writing to Francis J. Colligan at the Department of State, she suggested, "I am sure the General Education Board would be willing to finance this if the request came officially from the State Department."⁷⁹ In the end, Kittrell got her way. After a trip to New York and a "journey by air" that lasted some "thirty hours" Kittrell began what she described as a "mission to Africa." With relative freedom of movement, throughout her six-month stay in Africa she was often out among "natives in the hinterland." Taking full advantage of her first overseas trip, Kittrell noted that she "traveled by foot, hammock, native dug-out boats, motor boats, canoes, and plane." She had gone over such "a wide range of territory" in fact that she "was rather surprised myself when the total mileage was added up."⁸⁰

After completing her "mission," Kittrell drafted an official report with her observations on Liberian families. She also created summaries of quantitative data she had compiled on over 4,000 Liberians' feeding habits. In documenting the nutritional problems faced by Liberians, Kittrell reviewed food inventories and medical records from the Firestone Hospitals, the Moore Maternity Clinic (Kakota) and the Ganta Health Mission (Ganta). This was similar to her approach in her doctoral thesis, where she collected data from institutional sources and looked broadly at food availability and eating patterns.⁸¹ Kittrell found some promising results, such as

⁷⁸ John Dunaway, "Republic of Liberia First Periodic Report to Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations," September 12, 1946, Box 104-14, Folder 21, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

⁷⁹ Kittrell to Francis J. Colligan, Letter, November 14, 1946, file 882.12/11-1446, 1945-49 CDF, RG 59, USNA.

⁸⁰ Kittrell, 1947 Christmas Letter, Kittrell Trustee Box, Correspondence Folder, Hampton University Archives.

⁸¹ Kittrell, "A Preliminary Food and Nutrition Survey of Liberia, West Africa, December 1946 - June, 1947" (Washington, DC: Howard University):1, Box 104-13, Folder 11, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

an apparent lack of teeth density problems. Outside of a few positive remarks, in most of the report, Kittrell highlights the more-or-less constant instances of vitamin deficiencies found in clinic records, noting especially the low levels of iron, calcium, and Vitamin A. With the Firestone Hospital records, Kittrell also points to “a growing record of tuberculosis and respiratory disease among the workers on the rubber plantations.” In the end, Kittrell concluded that matters of health were “the overall concern of the government.”⁸² That the government might not have sufficient power to regulate the likes of the Firestone Corporation is not a matter Kittrell delves into with any great depth.

Kittrell did use her final report as an opportunity to further highlight a domestic problem. Noting that many Americans “hear and read about...hunger every day particularly in Europe and Asia,” Kittrell saw that many “are moved to correct this problem.” Yet as she knew well from earlier research, “millions and millions...including people in our own country... suffer from hidden hunger.”⁸³ After traveling thousands of miles, Kittrell had not forgotten the problems she observed closer to home. In years to come, Kittrell would continue to advocate for research on “hidden hunger.” While Kittrell is often credited with coining this phrase *in* Liberia, it is perhaps more significant that it appeared earlier in National Conference for Defense documents.⁸⁴ For Kittrell, hunger had implications for defense and cultural perception. Not only was this kind of malnutrition largely invisible, it could be misinterpreted as “laziness by those who do not understand the science of nutrition.”⁸⁵ Though unwilling to directly critique corporations such as

⁸² Kittrell, “A Preliminary Food and Nutrition Survey,” 6-7.

⁸³ Kittrell, “A Preliminary Food and Nutrition Survey,” 1.

⁸⁴ “Food for a Stronger America- National Conference for Defense launches the drive against Hollow Hunger and Hidden Hunger,” *Survey Graphic* (1941) in Press Releases, Institute of Home Economics, General Records Concerning the History and Philosophy of Home Economics and Nutrition Research, 1932-1970, HM 1991, Box 4, RG 310, NACP.

⁸⁵ In 1944, Kittrell showed a film entitled “Hidden Hunger” at a Tuskegee workshop. See Kittrell, “A Nutrition Workshop,” *Journal of Negro Education* 13, no.4 (Autumn 1944): 554-557. See also: Kittrell, “Family Needs I’ve Seen Around the World,” *Methodist Woman* (June 1963).

Firestone, Kittrell nonetheless used her work to challenge how Africans struggling with food shortages might be misinterpreted by outsiders. Ultimately, for Kittrell, food sustained life on a basic physiological level; it was also the key to peace and political stability; as she declared in 1951, “if we could ever have enough food and if people are properly fed we can prevent wars.”⁸⁶

Kittrell’s contemporaries also saw a greater significance to her work, and understood that her trip was about more than assessing basal metabolic rates. For her contributions, Kittrell received a Liberian Centennial Award in 1948 and a special citation from the National Council of Negro Women.⁸⁷ Kittrell also started to garner more public attention outside of the capital. Through lectures, professional articles, and newspaper interviews, Kittrell obliged those who turned to her as an expert on Liberian culture, offering insights into what she saw as ‘a new day in Liberia.’ To broad audiences, Kittrell stressed ‘the friendly aid of the United States’ and ‘the progressive administration of President Tubman of Liberia.’⁸⁸ In an article for Thompson’s *Journal of Negro Education*, Kittrell was more cautious about the history of foreign intrusion in Liberia. Though some outsiders (such as herself) could offer much with “the science of living,” Kittrell suggested that the West Africans she met already demonstrated “the fine art of peaceful and good neighborly living.”⁸⁹

In this essay and later, in her reflections on India, Kittrell argued that the “world we want and need” would be forged out of “these two arts.”⁹⁰ While acknowledging that Liberians had some forms of knowledge missing in “the West,” this language nonetheless allowed Kittrell to

⁸⁶ Kittrell in Asian Diary, 31 January 1951, Box 104-1, Folder 17, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

⁸⁷ “Women Leaders Honored,” *Pittsburgh Courier* (Pittsburgh, PA), Jun. 26, 1948, 6; Ida Jones, *Mary McLeod Bethune in Washington, D.C.: Activism and Education in Logan Circle* (Charleston: The History Press, 2013), 108-111.

⁸⁸ “Race Week Sponsored by Hood Town Hall,” *The News* (Frederick, MD), Mar. 14, 1948, 3; “Liberia Headed for ‘New Day’ Speaker Says,” July 22, 1947, Hampton University Archives.

⁸⁹ Kittrell, “Some Observations on Life and Education in West Africa,” *Journal of Negro Education* 17, no. 2 (1948): 192-194.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

sidestep contemporary discourses of Pan Africanism. At the same time, such wording also obscured her role as an agent of the US government, configuring her as something other than an intruder. Instead of being radicalized by this experience, or finding a transnational source of connection, Kittrell seems to have reveled in receiving a post with the State Department. At a School of Missions meeting at a Methodist church in Towson, MD, in 1948, Kittrell was asked to address Liberia's role "as a leader for Africa." Kittrell spoke about missionaries, but she also used this opportunity to speak about American politics. According to one participant's notes, she "praised our constitution as the model for most of the new government there" noting that the "only problem is living up to our own constitution." The fact that the general failure to live up to and enforce the Constitution was a crisis plaguing many of her colleagues was something Kittrell chose to omit.

Far more than her distinction of being "a first," Kittrell's work in Liberia shifted her profile within the national leadership of Home Economics.⁹¹ Upon her return, Kittrell was invited to lecture to the AHEA and to publish her findings on Liberia in the *Journal of Home Economics*. For *Journal* readers, Kittrell worked to familiarize Liberia, noting that it was "approximately the size of the state of Ohio" and "situated on the bulge of that large continent."⁹² Kittrell also provided political context for the *Journal's* readership, noting that Liberia was a nation of "freedmen and ex-slaves from the United States" celebrating a centennial "after much difficulty with an exacting climate, tropical diseases, fevers, and unfriendly neighbors [.]". It is striking that Kittrell thought it necessary to foreground her essay with this history. Kittrell claimed much of her knowledge about Liberia and the "congenial people" living derived from her time spent in individual homes. Clearly, however, she also wanted the

⁹¹ "Flemmie Kittrell reported on the work she did in Liberia," *Journal of Home Economics* 40, no.4 (1948): 209.

⁹² Kittrell, "Child-Adult Relationships of Native Africans," *Journal of Home Economics* 40, no.5 (1948): 243-244.

Journal's readers to know that she had a firm backing in the nation's socio-political origins; she also likely saw this as an opportunity to further educate the predominantly white profession.

Kittrell's subsequent analysis of life in Liberia reads much like an anthropological study. Kittrell argues that based on her time in the villages, Liberian children were "completely integrated into the social life of the family and the tribe." Raised with a "sense of calmness" and "soft and gentle tones," children did not experience corporal punishment but "mutual interest and protection." These descriptions were in sharp contrast to what Kittrell had seen at the schools, where physical punishment was common.⁹³ But the most significant aspect of her essay might be her description of polygamy as a social norm. Kittrell notes that "Family life is polygamous" in Liberia then offers no further elaboration. Kittrell's *lack* of comment on what might have surprised her is perhaps most striking. There is no indication whatsoever that this may have been shocking in 1948 as most Americans celebrated private, nuclear families.

While Kittrell presented a breezy acceptance of Liberian practices, that feeling was not always reciprocated. At one point during Kittrell's trip, a Liberian "Chief took a strong dislike for her." Apparently, he was displeased that she was wearing pants and "bossing the men around" to make food purchases. When told she was a 'bad woman' Kittrell later recalled telling the Chief, 'I am not! I am a Missionary Ma!'⁹⁴ Kittrell seems to have assumed that being a missionary was more acceptable than presenting herself as an academic or nutritionist. In her words, her research was about "working for the general good or looking for humanity"—she clarified further, noting, "Not that I wasn't a scholar, but my objective was a little different."⁹⁵ Her objectives aside, while going into homes and clinics dressed in pressed pants

⁹³ Kittrell, "Some Observations," 193.

⁹⁴ Ottley, "Flemmie Pansy Kittrell," 10-11.

⁹⁵ Tate Interview, 2.

and a safari hat, Kittrell was likely aware that she made for an extraordinary sight in isolated communities.

Through traveling under the auspices of the US government, Kittrell insisted that she entered private homes in Liberia simply to observe, learn, and understand. When she returned to the US, Kittrell started receiving mail about a stateside program of domestic immersion with similar aims. Primarily, the purpose of the Workshop for Cultural Democracy, as it was known, was to create understanding through experiences in private homes. Overall, as Quaker educator Rachel D. DuBois explained to Kittrell, this initiative encouraged women to solve racism by starting in their neighborhoods.⁹⁶ DuBois must have suspected that Kittrell would be keen to the group's mission of encouraging dialogue through "homey get-togethers" and "home festivals." A report on these gatherings noted that while "hate makes headline...Americans of varying races, colors and creeds getting together with quiet determination to rub out the pattern of hate in American life." By socializing in one another's living rooms, one woman argued, 'We learned that people are not very different and that what differences there are, are nice.'⁹⁷ As the thinking went, simply bringing people together might be the best way to build respect and understanding.

In a YWCA report from a few years later, General Secretary Grace Loucks Elliot similarly argued, 'We know how to get unity if we *eliminate* difference, but we must create one world *through* difference.'⁹⁸ Kittrell had started with the YWCA as a young woman at Hampton, and by this time she had become an Executive Member. While the YWCA continued to invest in international work, there was also a focus on solving "domestic" crises including segregation.

⁹⁶ Bruce Lambert, "Rachel D. DuBois, 101, Educator Who Promoted Value of Diversity," *New York Times* (New York), Apr. 1, 1993, Obituaries; Rachel D. DuBois to Flemma Kittrell, 28 October 1948, Box 104-4, Folder 2, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

⁹⁷ "Do You Know Your Neighbor?" *Woman's Home Companion*, February 1948.

⁹⁸ Grace Loucks Elliot, *YWCA Annual Report, 1952*, 7-8, Box 8, Folder 2, Series 1, RG 1, YWCA of the U.S.A. Records, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, MA.

Efforts to “eliminate difference” had resulted in war, ethnic cleansing, and other twentieth century atrocities. But what would it mean to accept, or even promote constructions of difference—and would it be another way of justifying inequality? After all, a central premise of contemporaneous Civil Rights struggles was the notion that separate was not equal.

The question of how to deal with categories of difference—and the line between separatism as strategy and segregation—were pressing matters for educators in Kittrell’s network. Privately, M.S. Davage, secretary of Higher Education of the Methodist Board of Education, noted to Bennett’s President Jones that “questions are being asked as to the advisability of the Church continuing its support of our Negro colleges.” Some donors even worried that the Church was “placing its stamp of approval on segregation.” In response, Jones argued that leaders of black colleges were “working in every way to do away with segregation” but that “in the meantime we will make these colleges just as good as we can make them.”⁹⁹ Both agreed that outright integration—particularly in the South—seemed unlikely and that their work must continue in the interim.

Privately, Kittrell also suggested to a Methodist colleague that there was still “much to be done in the matter of togetherness by lines of Jurisdiction and of Race.”¹⁰⁰ Yet to her and many of the reformers in her networks, bold action was unthinkable or at least unadvisable. For them, the most effective strategy was to combine peaceful action with top-down protections for Civil Rights. In Kittrell’s case, in lieu of an overt alignment with a transnational movement for solidarity, she chose to work more closely with the US government. This decision may have

⁹⁹ M.S. Davage to Jones, 26 November 1948; Jones to M.S. Davage, 30 November 1948, Bennett College Folder 2: 1948-1949, Records of the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, United Methodist Church Archives - GCAH, Madison, NJ.

¹⁰⁰ Kittrell describes her transition from Asbury to Douglas Memorial Church. Asbury UMC is significant in Methodist history, as it was “the oldest black Methodist church in Washington, D.C.” National Register of Historic Places, Asbury United Methodist Church, District of Columbia, Washington, National Register #86003029. See also: Kittrell to Bishop Love, 1 April 1959, Box 2600, Kittrell Files, HUA.

been influenced by the confluence of family-focused programs and Civil Rights initiatives launched by President Truman. Along with the “Special Message to the Congress on Civil Rights,” Truman’s administration formalized the School Lunch Program (1946) to ameliorate hunger in the US while also creating a “Salute to Youth” stamp (1948) to combat the specter of juvenile delinquency.¹⁰¹ Kittrell was connected to School Lunch through her colleagues in Home Economics, and she was specifically asked to attend a reception for “Salute to Youth” stamp along with members of the Children’s Bureau and Women’s Bureau. In earlier decades, Kittrell had worked on these issues from within her own institution. In the case of delinquency, Kittrell had been particularly invested in “solving” this social problem through her newspaper articles and in the nursery program at Bennett. Perhaps she saw promise in these plans for desegregation and large social programs targeted at children.

The year after the stamp dedication, Kittrell was given an opportunity to work even more closely with government agencies. In 1949, she asked to serve as a consultant to the Midcentury Conference on Children and Youth (1949).¹⁰² After the horror of World War II, the perceived need to invest in children—“the future destiny of this country”—seemed especially acute.¹⁰³ In the four years preceding the Midcentury Conference, soaring marital rates and an attendant “baby boom” had made the country increasingly more youthful. In 1948 alone, there were “nearly 4,000,000 infants born in the United States...the largest crop in the history of the

¹⁰¹ Harry S. Truman, “Special Message to the Congress on Civil Rights,” February 2, 1948, *American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=13006>. See also: The President’s Day: Wednesday, August 11, 1948,” *Harry S. Truman Presidential Library Online*.

<http://www.trumanlibrary.org/calendar/main.php?currYear=1948&currMonth=8&currDay=11>

¹⁰² Letter from President Truman, 6 October 1949, Official File 1502, Truman Library.

¹⁰³ Harry Schlacht, “March of Youth,” *Milwaukee Sentinel* (Milwaukee, WI), Sep. 9, 1949; Steven J. Rod, “Salute to Youth Issue,” *Arago: People, Postage & the Post*, <http://arago.si.edu/flash/?s1=5|sq=youth%20month|sf=0>

country.”¹⁰⁴ Rather than glorify the “baby boom,” however, the authors of the Midcentury Conference report stressed how exceptional these changes were.

The authors, including Kittrell, also forecasted dire shortages in school systems and other institutions to note how unsustainable this level of population growth had become within a short period of time. Instead of trite expressions or truisms about the strength of the family, the report stressed that legislators and educators had to take these coming constraints seriously. This document also contained nearly constant references to discrepancies among conditions for “negro” and “non-white” children. In many rural areas, at least 15% of “negro and other children” were not going to school, more than double the rate among white children. For those who *were* getting an education, an astonishing number of children in rural areas were still in one-room schoolhouses.¹⁰⁵ Though Kittrell’s direct role in authoring the report is unclear, Kittrell reported to the Home Economics Honors Society Omicron Nu that she “did considerable travelling and speaking to local and state groups” as part of her work on the Conference.¹⁰⁶

In addition to the report, some of this work may have entered into Kittrell’s contemporaneous article in the *Journal of Negro Education*, “The Negro Family as a Health Agency.” Though prone to vaguely discussing the family as a “cornerstone” or “bedrock” of society, here Kittrell provided concrete conclusions and a longer historical sketch of problems faced by black families. From the onset, Kittrell traces the lineage of contemporary problems, arguing that “during ante-bellum days Negroes were not encouraged to develop good patterns of family living.” Strong black families had been “a threat to the system of slavery;” in more recent decades, “segregation and discrimination” caused “many attending evils.” Kittrell does not

¹⁰⁴ *Children and Youth at the Midcentury: A Chart Book* (Washington, D.C., 1950): 13.

¹⁰⁵ “One Room Schools Still Abound”—“41% of all schools are 1-room buildings.” See Chart 72 in *Children and Youth*, 153-156.

¹⁰⁶ “Dear Omicron Nu Members,” *Omicron Nu Magazine* 27, no.3 (1951): 16-17.

elaborate on these “evils” because “we are all aware” of what they entail. What she does suggest is that this historical-political context was essential to understanding how families could be empowered to do their “big job” of serving as a socializing and health agency.¹⁰⁷ Rather than place blame on individual family units or race groups, Kittrell proposed “legislation which will build up rather than break down family life.”¹⁰⁸ While Kittrell and other social scientists were highlighting the *particular* problems of black children and minorities, a shift toward international relief would mute these voices in favor of fighting for democracy elsewhere.

The same year that this article was published, Truman proposed a new foreign policy initiative known as the Point Four. With a sense that US programs such as Extension and School Lunch could be exported, Truman would encourage experts to “help others to help themselves” *outside* of the US even as many social projects “at home” remained far from complete. In an increasingly interconnected world, this project was not the sole purview of adults. As the Midcentury Report suggested, “children of the United States are [now] children of the World.”¹⁰⁹ Though children within the US were clearly subjects of concern to a degree, there was a sense among some leaders that children could also be used as foreign relations assets. The idea that children were both deeply vulnerable and generally optimistic led to programs such as the International Farm Youth Exchange, an offshoot of 4-H. With IFYE, rural youth were sent out “to see and experience the life and cultural of rural people in Europe and other countries”—and to speak positively about life in the US.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Kittrell, “The Negro Family as a Health Agency,” *Journal of Negro Education* 18, no.3 (1949): 422-428.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 428.

¹⁰⁹ *Children and Youth*, 161.

¹¹⁰ Frederick Simpich, “4-H Boys and Girls Grow More Food,” *National Geographic*, November 1948; *Celebrating 50 Years of IFYE: Report of the 7th World IFYE Conference* (Washington, DC: International Four-H Youth Exchange Association of the USA, 1999).

In using 4-H club members as cultural ambassadors, leaders within IFYE encouraged the students to have an ‘experiment in living’ and to focus on “home and community experiences.”¹¹¹ While many entered the program with a background or interest in Home Economics, one of the more general requirements was “a missionary zeal for understanding other people... [and their] problems rather than enforce own thoughts and impressions.”¹¹² Through family-based encounters, the idea was that young people could tackle the growing tensions of the Cold War. Rural youth are not often associated with internationalism, in part because rural society is usually defined by the perceived absence of state intrusion. Thus these IFYE club members point to a complex and largely unacknowledged relationship between the mission of nurturing the “head, hands, heart, and health,” the growth of the state, and foreign affairs.¹¹³

This was a connection that Kittrell understood well, and used for her own purpose. This effort also represents an attempt to sidestep contemporary racial discourses and to seek “world understanding” instead. Still, even Kittrell told 4-Hers—in a segregated group—that it was a way to “embrace the world.” Eliding the issue of integration altogether, Kittrell also told these black club members she had “been associated with [4-H] practically all my life,” having developed a “special affection” for the group.¹¹⁴ At a large 4-H event sponsored by the *Chicago Defender* at Tuskegee Institute a few years later, Kittrell and others honored and “praised Booker T. Washington, George W. Carver, and Mrs. Mary McLeod Bethune as the kinds of Americans who

¹¹¹ E.W. Alton, “Tentative Outline for International Farm Youth Exchange Project,” Box 2, Folder: 1947, Records of the 4-H International Farm Youth Exchange, RG 33, USNA; Quote from Diana Hebrink: “Truly, this has been an experiment in living. I’ve learned things about people, a country I hardly realized existed, my own country, and myself.” RG 33, Folder: Quotes 1948-1955, Records of the 4-H International Farm Youth Exchange, USNA.

¹¹² “Roster of First IFYE Delegates 1948,” Box 2, Folder: Roster of First Delegates, Records of the 4-H International Farm Youth Exchange, RG 33, USNA.

¹¹³ Gabriel Rosenberg, *The 4-H Harvest: Sexuality and the State in Rural America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

¹¹⁴ Kittrell, “American Goals and How Others See Us,” Box 104-12, Folder 12, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

exemplify the principles of 4-H.”¹¹⁵ In such presentations on models of race pragmatism and accommodation, Kittrell configured 4-H as an entrée into state based politics for *all*, though many opportunities were in fact far more circumscribed.¹¹⁶

Kittrell could speak to the benefits of working on rural or agricultural issues in part because *she* continued to have political success in these arenas. Though few departmental records survive from the early 1950s, newspapers such as the *Afro-American* covered and promoted what Kittrell did at her “regular job” at Howard.¹¹⁷ In addition to researching tips, shortcuts, and recipes for the kitchen, Kittrell also tackled the so-called “margarine issue,” more specifically the risks of the dyes used to make margarine yellow.¹¹⁸ Based on her work with “youngsters” at the Howard nursery program, Kittrell found that margarine was suited to “children and aged persons suffering with ailing joints.” These results were not merely helpful tips but arguments within a national debate over anti-margarine laws.¹¹⁹ Through dairy lobbying, purchasing margarine had become illegal in some states or otherwise taxed to excess.¹²⁰ Kittrell’s research was seen as an important boost to “consumers and farmers in their determine fight or repeal of anti-margarine laws.”¹²¹

¹¹⁵ “Only Trained and Equipped Farm Operators Likely to Survive,” *Carolina Times* (Durham, NC), Jul. 12, 1952.

¹¹⁶ Later, one of Kittrell’s students from Baroda University in India took part in a 4-H exchange to Massachusetts. See Box 104-4, Folder 21, Kittrell Papers. MSRC.

¹¹⁷ “Dear Omicron Nu Members,” *Omicron Nu Magazine* 27, no.3 (1951): 16-17; “Meatless Days No Bar to Good Meals Says Expert,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore, MD), Nov.22, 1947, 9; “Tips on Low-Cost Thanksgiving Menu,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore, MD), Nov.27, 1948, 11.

¹¹⁸ “What’s Happened to Margarine,” *Prescott Evening Courier* (Prescott, AZ), Oct. 20, 1949; Rebecca Rupp, “The Butter Wars: When Margarine Was Pink,” *The Plate*, <http://theplate.nationalgeographic.com/2014/08/13/the-butter-wars-when-margarine-was-pink/>.

¹¹⁹ “Is Margarine a Better Spread?” *New York Amsterdam News* (New York, NY), Mar. 26, 1949; “Nutritionist Says Margarine Shows Superiority to Butter,” *California Eagle* (Los Angeles, CA), Mar. 31, 1949. Reports on this story circulated through the Associated Negro Press (ANP); “Dairy state senators are against regimentation—except for housewives mixing margarine,” *Pittsburgh Press* (Pittsburgh, PA), Apr.29, 1949.

¹²⁰ “1948-49 Report of Activities,” *Journal of Home Economics*, 41, no.7 (1949): 374.

¹²¹ “Food Research at Howard U,” *Indianapolis Recorder* (Indianapolis, IN), Mar. 26, 1949, 9.

Earlier, the notion that margarine was a contentious, political consumer issue had been publicized in the *Journal of Home Economics*¹²² Likewise, other food scientists, such as the home economists employed to work on School Lunch programs, were aware that their work had social political implications.¹²³ At national meetings held under the umbrella of the USDA, Kittrell's colleagues made bold claims as to the utility of Nutrition studies, especially with regards to the significance of standardized terms.¹²⁴ Important as this work was to national conversations, Kittrell's research reached a distinct, often underserved population. Not only was her research described in vivid detail in nationally distributed African American newspapers, from Watts to Pittsburgh, a photograph of Kittrell working in her lab coat (Fig 4.5) was also circulated by the Associated Negro Press.¹²⁵ Kittrell might have presented herself as an exemplar to the 4-H youth because of precisely this kind of validation.



Fig. 4.5: "Dr. Flemmie P. Kittrell"

After dedicating considerable time to this "margarine issue," Kittrell moved seamlessly back into international politics. In August 1949, Kittrell flew to Copenhagen, Denmark to attend

¹²² Clive McCay, "What the Consumer Should Know about Bread," *Journal of Home Economics* 41, no.4 (1949): 179.

¹²³ Susan Levine, *School Lunch Politics: The Surprising History of America's Favorite Welfare Program* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 95-96.

¹²⁴ Robert Williams, "Nutritional Consequences of Food Laws," in Hazel Stiebling, ed., *Proceedings of National Food and Nutrition Institute* (Washington, DC: United States Department of Agriculture, 1952).

¹²⁵ "Dr. Flemmie P. Kittrell," *California Eagle Watts Section* (Los Angeles, CA), Mar. 24, 1949.

the international WILPF meeting. Amidst Europe's Reconstruction, WILPF was growing strong again, and even Germany reentered "the world body after an absence of seventeen years."¹²⁶ Reflecting broader international anxieties, WILPF members made declarations on women's work with the UN, statelessness, disarmament, and the Children's Emergency Fund.¹²⁷ While Kittrell had been a member of WILPF for more than a decade at this point, she became increasingly valued by WILPF leaders for her expertise on Africa.¹²⁸ Asked to give a paper on the status of the continent, Kittrell argued that "the whole problem of colonialism...as deplorable as ever." Thus, "Africa, perhaps, is our greatest threat to peace."¹²⁹ At a time when there were still very few minority women in high ranking positions in WILPF, Kittrell positioned herself as an invaluable expert and offered a bold stance against colonialism. This type of talk was emblematic of a broader pattern in her career: when surrounded by fellow peace advocates or women's groups, Kittrell was more inclined to frank talk about race and imperialism.

During this same trip, Kittrell also attended the International Congress of Home Economics meeting in Stockholm with her colleague (and former student) Lydia Jetton Rogers. As with the WILPF meeting, many commentators from this delegation stressed the need to foster stable relationships among the 700 delegates from 25 nations.¹³⁰ Kittrell found many delegates and people in Europe far more interested in the US's *domestic* race relations than international

¹²⁶ Lawrence S. Wittner, *The Struggle Against the Bomb: One World or None: A History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement, 1* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995): 155-56.

¹²⁷ Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, "WILPF Resolutions: 11th Congress, Copenhagen," August 15-19, 1949.

¹²⁸ Flemmie Kittrell "The Challenge of Africa in Building for World Peace" (on record) Recorded in Washington, D.C., Nov. 17, 1949, for WILPF, in Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) Records (DG 043), Swarthmore College Peace Collection. This record can no longer be played but based on Kittrell's papers, this is likely similar to Kittrell's writings in "Progress Report," Box 2607, Folder: WILPF 1948-51 (2), Kittrell Files, HUA..

¹²⁹ "Dr. Flemmie P. Kittrell," *Omicron Nu Magazine* 28, no. 2 (1952): 6; "Kittrell Gives Progress Report on Africa 1950," Box 2607, Folder: WILPF 1948-51 (1), Kittrell Files, HUA; Flemmie Kittrell Bio Folder, Box 4A, Part III, Series A1, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) Records (DG 043), Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

¹³⁰ Marjorie M Heseltine, "The Stockholm Congress," *Journal of Home Economics* 41, no.10 (1949): 581-582.

affairs per se. A report of Kittrell's lecture to the Philomathians, an African American women's group in Baltimore, stressed that Europeans were "constantly besieging her with questions about Americans of color and their fight for equal rights."¹³¹ According to the *Afro-American*, Kittrell was up to this challenge; a "dignified, soft-spoken," professor, Kittrell was "as much at home discussing the problems of Europeans...as she is discussing the perplexing situations which arise in this democracy in which we live." Kittrell also told this group it was—in her words—'better to have little, live simply and have your self-respect, than to have luxury and jim crow [sic].' Concluding her talk, she urged the Philomathians to 'fight for equality and against segregation and discrimination.'¹³² With this lecture, Kittrell was ostensibly invited to talk about her work overseas, but such a discussion was inseparable from conversations about racism within the US.

Many Howard scholars, including Johnson, saw the hope for improved race relations in the US as inextricably linked to global affairs. Kittrell's proximity to these figures certainly had an influence on her desire for broadening horizons and the way that she approached talks such as the one for the Philomathians. Kittrell's "successful," long-term navigation of various Cold War agencies and philanthropic networks was *also* indelibly shaped by her connections within her profession. In recent years, national Home Economics leaders had been closely tracking the development of the Fulbright Act, which allotted grants for research, travel, and study abroad.¹³³ Facing what they saw as an "inescapable responsibility" to serve the world, home economists writing for the *Journal* urged a "speedy implementation." Echoing the broader cultural rhetoric on the importance of children, they also argued that "if the youth in devastated areas remain uneducated...they may become the soldiers our children must face on the battlefield

¹³¹ Description of Philomathians in "From Baltimore," *Jet*, July 10, 1975.

¹³² B.M. Phillips, "If You Ask Me," *Baltimore Afro-American* (Baltimore, MD), Oct. 22, 1949.

¹³³ "Washington News," *Journal of Home Economics* 38, no.8 (1946): 492; "Status of the Fulbright Act," *Journal of Home Economics* 39, no.4 (1947): 233; "Comment: 'Let Us Move Forward,'" *Journal of Home Economics* 39, no.9 (1947): 589.

tomorrow.”¹³⁴ As subsequent *Journal* articles would reveal, Home economists were right to keep tabs on the development of Fulbright. By the end of 1949, there were several Fulbright scholars teaching Home Economics overseas; as with the earliest mission efforts in domestic science, the first experts went to the Philippines.¹³⁵

In addition to sending US scholars overseas, home economists were increasingly investing in exchange programs and international scholarships.¹³⁶ In later years, and particularly after a fellowship was created in her name for “minorities in the United States and the developing countries” in the 1970s, Kittrell would be regarded as *a* pioneer or in some cases *the* pioneer among home economists for her international work in Liberia.¹³⁷ A broader look at professional journals and department records reveals that Kittrell was part of a rising tide *and* a longer tradition. In perusing her own profession’s journal, Kittrell would have seen that by April 1947, more than 174 home economists had secured work abroad.¹³⁸ In addition to chronicles on these trips, Kittrell could have also read listings of “Scholarships for International Friendliness” and profiles on individual students.¹³⁹ In one typical report, readers were told about Korean students Chinsook Kwan and Chungil Choo, who were seen as “adopted daughters” by Home Economics faculty and staff in Georgia.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁴ “Comment: Inescapable Responsibility,” *Journal of Home Economics* 39, no.2 (1947): 104.

¹³⁵ “U.S. Trained Home Economists in Other Lands,” *Journal of Home Economics* 39, no.2 (1947): 216-219; Elvessa Ann Stewart, “Home Economics in the Philippines,” *Journal of Home Economics* 39, no.4 (1947): 216-211; “News Notes,” *Journal of Home Economics* 41, no.10 (1949): 599; “News Notes,” *Journal of Home Economics* 41, no.9 (1949): 541.

¹³⁶ “Greek Student Arrives,” *Journal of Home Economics* 40, no.5 (1948): 244.

¹³⁷ Alice M. Stewart, “The Flemma P. Kittrell Fellowship for Minorities,” *Journal of Home Economics* 65, no.5 (1973): 30-31. The fellowship has since been changed to the AAFCS-Kittrell International Graduate Fellowship.

¹³⁸ “US Trained Home Economists in Other Lands,” *Journal of Home Economics* 39, no. 4 (1947): 216-219. This issue also features reports on women working throughout Africa, the “Near East,” China, Mexico, and the Philippines. A foreign scholar profiled this year, Kathleen Rhodes, would earn her Ph.D. at Cornell; she would later serve as a leader in the Cornell-in-Ghana Program in the 1960s.

¹³⁹ Ava M. Clark, “Report from the Orient,” and Marion Steele, “Scholarships Foster International Friendliness,” *Journal of Home Economics* 41, no.2 (1949): 65-70. See also Ava Clark, *Adventures of a Home Economist* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 1969).

¹⁴⁰ “Chinsook and Chungil Study Home Economics,” *Journal of Home Economics* 41, no.5 (1949): 237-38.

Three decades earlier, Cornell Professors Martha Van Rensselaer and Flora Rose had traveled to Belgium to assist with Belgian relief and humanitarian aid. Now, home economists had an opportunity to engage with large scale overseas projects that in some ways carried on what Rose and Van Rensselaer had started. This was an opportunity that professors such as Dr. Katherine Holtzclaw, who conducted early postwar reconstruction surveys in Germany, did not pass up.¹⁴¹ Likewise, Dr. Edna Noble White, a child studies expert, left her position at the Merrill-Palmer School (a post she had held since 1920) to go to “the Home Front in Greece” from 1947-1948.¹⁴² Though her work with the American Mission for Aid to Greece diverged in significant ways from her career as an educator in Detroit, by the time she went to Greece, White had spent nearly forty years blending Home Economics work with internationalism. In the 1920s, with funding from the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Fund, White had created programming at the Merrill-Palmer wherein “women from various nationalities [would] meet for a series of 6-8 lessons at the school for interchange of ideas on foreign and American dishes.”¹⁴³ In some Home Economics networks, Fulbright grants and foreign commissions enabled women to travel parts of the world they had only imagined in earlier decades.

Kittrell’s next opportunity to go abroad came in 1949. With a budget shortfall forecasted by the administration, Kittrell asked to take a leave so that others would not “be denied continuance.” Around this time, Kittrell received “a long-distance call from Cornell University asking me would I be interested in a post in India [.]” This call was from Hansa Mehta, an Indian reformer and delegate to the UN Human Rights Commission. Mehta was active with the All

¹⁴¹ Dr. Katherine Holtzclaw went to Germany in 1946 as part of a USDA-run reconstruction project. “To Aid Home Economics Teachers in Germany,” *Journal of Home Economics* 39, no.10 (1947): 625; Elise F. Hawtin, “Home Economics for Farm Women,” *Military Government Information Bulletin*, January 25, 1949.

¹⁴² Edna Noble White, “A Program for the Home Front in Greece,” *Journal of Home Economics*, 41, no.5 (1949): 235-36.

¹⁴³ See “Programs on Foreign and American Dishes at the Merrill-Palmer,” Series 3, Subseries 3.05, Box 33, Folder 349, Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Records, Rockefeller Archive Center.

India Women's Conference, an uplift organization, and The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, where she was Vice-Chancellor. Described in the *Cornell Sun* as "charming and gracious, yet firm in her belief in freedom and the rights of women," Mehta had recently visited Cornell to lecture and to visit her children, who were both students there.¹⁴⁴ At that time, Mehta's daughter was studying as a Home Economics major, and through contacts at Cornell, Mehta was introduced to Kittrell. During the aforementioned phone call, Mehta offered to fly to Washington to discuss the possibility of working with Kittrell on building a Home Economics program at Baroda.¹⁴⁵

Kittrell was immediately interested: the timing was right and Mehta promised ample funding. The college had been doing well financially because of earlier bequests from Sayajirao Gaekward III, Maharaja of Baroda State, and his successor Pratap Singh Gaekwad, the last Maharaja of Baroda. In Kittrell's words, some of the faculty members were even staying "places where some of the people of royalty had been living." Though Mehta had secured support for this project from the Women's Educational Trust Fund in India, Kittrell suggested that the project have US funding on top of everything else. In her words, "I inquired downtown if the Fulbright people would accept an application for home economists to go to India [.]". In her story, "the Fulbright people" received approval for India that same day, so she became the first home economist to work in Asia with a Fulbright.¹⁴⁶ For Kittrell, this was likely a way to add prestige to the project and to show a continued interest in working with US agencies while abroad.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ "Mehta Stresses Indian Freedom at Celebration," *Cornell Daily Sun*, Jan. 28, 1947; "Mehta, UN Representative, Censures Discrimination, Indian Caste System," *Cornell Daily Sun*, Jan. 29, 1947; "Indian Women Wear Sadis (sic) As Usual Campus Costume," *Cornell Daily Sun*, Oct. 22, 1946.

¹⁴⁵ Tate interview, 6.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 6.

¹⁴⁷ Kittrell, "A Home Economist's 'Enriching Experience' in India," and Dr. Horace Poleman, "U.S. and India Exchange Educators," *American Reporter* (New Delhi, India), Jan. 31, 1951, 12.

Kittrell arrived in India in its first year as a republic, a time when the country had “secured its independence at a cost and by a method that gained the respect and admiration of suffering people everywhere.” In early reports, Kittrell argued that a Home Economics program was central to furthering this new freedom because “[t]he people of India, like people almost everywhere, believe that the home is the source of the nation's strength.”¹⁴⁸ Partially as a result of her efforts, the College of Home Science at Baroda—initially the only one of its kind in India—was officially opened in July of 1950, with “eager young women from all parts of India ready to enter the first class.”¹⁴⁹ For Mehta this was a pivotal moment—in her words, “the future of our nation depends on the kind of homes we wish to make.”¹⁵⁰ With these declarations, Mehta and Kittrell suggested that through Home Economics, they had an important role to play in national development.

The core curriculum Kittrell developed had many echoes of her earlier work at Bennett and Hampton. The most clear connection was in the emphasis on striving “to give students a broad and cultural background in the art and science of living” and a way to find “a useful purpose throughout life.” Practically, this meant taking courses in a variety of liberal arts fields and training in a nursery school program. After the second year of training, students could then select a more specialized program, choosing between: “child development and family life, foods and nutrition, household management, and home economics teaching.”¹⁵¹ Kittrell also suggested that there would need to be a new building with cafeterias, laboratories, an auditorium, nursery school, and home management wing. Not surprisingly, all of these plans were remarkably similar to the “Family Life” structures at Bennett, Hampton, and Cornell.

¹⁴⁸ Kittrell, “The Faculty of Home Science at Baroda University,” Box 104-15, Folder 11, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

¹⁴⁹ Kittrell, “University of Baroda Establishes Home Economics in Higher Education,” *Journal of Home Economics* 44, no.2 (1952): 97-100.

¹⁵⁰ Kittrell, “University of Baroda,” *JHE*, 98-99.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

Though Kittrell had made little progress with designing her own space at Howard thus far, the administration at Baroda quickly approved her building plans. By August 1951, the cornerstone for the building was set down, a process overseen by the minister of health for the Indian government. The ceremony for this event also coincided with the First All India Conference on Home Economics and Home Science. The stated purpose of the Conference was to plan a path forward for Home Economics at Baroda and other institutions. This meeting was also a way to bring together some of the best educated women in the region. Several Indian participants at the conference had earned advanced degrees in America, including Rajammal Devadas, who earned a Ph.D. at Ohio State University.¹⁵² Here, Home Economics would not have been thought of as a parochial or limiting field; rather, these women were shrewd about shaping their role as experts in women and children's health.

Upon her return to the US at the end of her contract, Kittrell eagerly promoted her role in developing Home Economics in the *Journal of Home Economics* and the *American Reporter*, an organ of the United States Information Service (USIS). She also wrote to friends about this time abroad. All of these sources are remarkably similar in tone and content, but Kittrell also kept a private log, which she called her "Asian Diary," starting in January of 1951. In her controlled, cursive script, Kittrell records her visits with missionaries, observations on home life in India, and general comments about the students and faculty at Baroda in this notebook. This is an unparalleled document in her archive. With most projects, Kittrell only maintained official reports or letters that read like official reports. Kittrell's diary offers a less public record that illuminates other dimensions of her work; it is an important break in her archival materials.

¹⁵² Kittrell mentions these credentials in her *JHE* article: "Surjeet Chopra, Dr. Rajammal P. Devadas, Mrs. Sucy Koshy, and Mrs. Kumudini (Pandit) Karandikar, all of whom studied at Ohio State University, as well as Angani Mehta, Hazel Man-oranjan Sadoc, and Theodora E. Bryce of Cornell University and Florence Theopilus of the department of physiology at Vassar College."

In many entries, Kittrell writes about the positive aspects of her trip in India. For example, she thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to travel and collect “trinkets,” not only in India but throughout Ceylon, Pakistan, and Kashmir. Her time in India was not entirely positive, though. Kittrell also found that she slept for long periods of time and felt isolated from others. Singing Methodist hymns in her room seemed to provide some comfort, but she was deeply frustrated by many aspects of teaching at Baroda. Students were often tardy to her classes or did not come at all—a fact that “disturbs me greatly.” At one point, the flexibility demanded of her by students and staff made her “hit the ceiling!” Kittrell was also annoyed by “Sucche, the boy who helps clean” who went missing for weeks at a time. Kittrell’s colleague Merze Tate, who was now also teaching at Howard and working in India on a Fulbright at this time, later noted that she “lived in India like a princess.”¹⁵³ Kittrell *would* concede that she did not face many blackouts and had the luxury of enjoying “screens... [and] nets for sleeping...a refrigerator, and some air conditioning.” While she had “imported some of the West to the East,” Kittrell did not feel like a “princess,” even in royal quarters.

There were still other aspects of life that did not thrill Kittrell. In one of her first entries, she mentions meeting a family where a young woman is marrying her cousin: “It does not seem right to me.”¹⁵⁴ This comment is in sharp contrast to Kittrell’s neutral evaluations of polygamy, for instance, just a few years earlier. Other minor annoyances, such as an extended entry about a toddler crying at supper, also made Kittrell feel “low” or “depressed.” In general, the particular events that bothered her were all related to home and family life, especially when Kittrell vented about the campus. As she saw it, “The ultimate test of our program...lies in the action that it inspires in our students in their houses and communities.” During one house visit, she was

¹⁵³ Joseph E. Harris, “Professor Merze Tate (1906-): A Profile,” Box 219-1, Folder 16, Merze Tate Papers Collection 219, MSRC.

¹⁵⁴ Kittrell in Asian Diary, 1951, Box 104-1, Folder 17, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

appalled by a student's "very cluttered and dirty" living quarters—which indicated to her that the student did not "seem to understand how College education goes along with physical surroundings!" At Bennett, Kittrell had the administrative and cultural power to make these connections explicit—now, thousands of miles away, she felt deeply frustrated by the students' unwillingness to embrace a broad academic program.

Kittrell also reflected on the pressures of being a cultural ambassador in this medium. In one particularly illuminating entry, she records her thoughts on a visit to Women's Christian College in Chennai. First, Kittrell notes that there were "many question[s] on race asked" during her visit. In response, "I said that we still have many problems, but over all [sic] picture's wholesome and democracy is seen working more and more in all [areas] of life." Given the sometimes snide, or even rude comments about colleagues elsewhere in the diary, it is striking that Kittrell continued to express her opinions about American politics in this way. This was clearly at least a semi-private medium, but Kittrell did not write frankly about contemporary struggles over racism or inequality. While many other "colored cosmopolitans" found inspiration in the shared struggles of people of color around the world, in India, Kittrell seems to have become *more* devoted to American exceptionalism. These comments foreshadow the approach Kittrell took for much of the next two decades with other projects.

This approach set Kittrell apart from many intellectuals of the period and particularly her colleague, Tate. To the readership of the *Afro-American*, Kittrell and Tate were portrayed as friends sharing newspapers and meeting up abroad.¹⁵⁵ Privately, Tate's approach to foreign work bothered Kittrell immensely. Tate thoroughly enjoyed her "Fulbright Years" and later called her time in India "the most exciting, inspiring and meaningful experience in my life [.]” As

¹⁵⁵ "Dr. Merze Tate," *Afro American* (Baltimore, MD), Jun. 23, 1951, 4. Tate also secured a press card from the *Afro-American* to get better access to social and political events in India. Harris, "Professor Merze Tate (1906-): A Profile," 7.

compared to Kittrell, however, Tate was more inclined to talk about racial tensions and Cold War politicking, as “good intentions are too often nullified by cries of imperialism and the atomic bomb.”¹⁵⁶ This divergence came to a head when Tate visited Baroda while Kittrell was teaching there. Kittrell was greatly annoyed by Tate’s “boastful” talk and a comment that “her principal told her not to stay at YWCA nor with Anglo- [families?].” This was “not a smart thing to repeat, especially since we are here to build up good will.” To Kittrell, a talk at Baroda was not the time or place for such critique.

Kittrell was not the only one to have noticed that Tate was comparatively less reserved. In 1950, Tate was labeled a possible “public relations liability” in a State Department Telegraph out of New Delhi. Tate, who had “expressed dismay and resentment” about her Fulbright grant, came in with different expectations of the “terms of award and expected stipend payments from USEFI.”¹⁵⁷ Around this time, reports as to Tate’s “character” were collected by FBI agents back in the US. Reported to be “a woman of great nervous energy, who has tremendous ‘drive’ and ability,” Tate was ultimately seen as loyal because she “mixed with only the better people.”¹⁵⁸ By this time, Tate had attended several elite institutions, including Oxford University and Radcliffe, though these credentials were apparently not enough. Staff at the US Embassy fired off a memo declaring that Tate was “publicly stating she received second rate Fulbright grantee because she is Negro.” Complicating matters further, Tate had suggested that “Kittrell, Fulbright candidate now at Baroda, being delayed because she is Negro.” Tate, the “public relations liability” was interfering with a figure noted as an “excellent public relations asset.”¹⁵⁹ This sheds new light on Tate’s notion that Kittrell was treated like a “princess” in India.

¹⁵⁶ Tate, “Fulbright Years,” 84-87, Box 219-10, Folder 15, Tate Papers, MSRC.

¹⁵⁷ New Delhi to Secretary of State, Confidential Telegraph, 11/7/1950.

¹⁵⁸ Merze Tate FBI File, Nov. 9, 1950, 2, Folder 4, Tate Papers, MSRC.

¹⁵⁹ New Delhi to Secretary of State, Confidential Telegraph 14 December 1950, 511.913/12-1450, RG 59.

Though Kittrell took a more conservative approach to her grant period as a Fulbright scholar, both she and Tate had the funding to take an extended journey back to the US. With nearly identical itineraries listed in their respective files, it is likely they were even sharing space on the same Pan-American ship. Before returning to the US, both spent time going through Burma, Thailand, Hong Kong, Tokyo and Honolulu. Kittrell kept scant records on this trip but for Tate, it was highly significant. In Hawai'i, Tate became fascinated with the connections between Samuel Chapman Armstrong, whose parents had been missionaries there in the 19th century, and the history of education in the US, including Hampton, which Armstrong founded.

¹⁶⁰ Placing Armstrong in a lineage of US imperialism, Tate later explicitly argued that the “Sandwich Islands missionaries” were “the first Point Four agents.”¹⁶¹ As a historian of foreign relations, Tate saw Armstrong and by extension, Booker T. Washington within a web of US imperialism. These connections would have seemed especially fraught to Tate in light of the contemporary debates over Hawai'ian statehood.

Oliver J. Caldwell, a representative of the International Cooperation Agency (ICA), was also struck by the fact that technical experts were literally retracing missionaries' paths. While missionaries had been “the first to use the personnel, techniques, and institutions of American education to help underdeveloped peoples,” now, experts focused on “sharing the skills we have achieved” rather than “trying to force our way of life on reluctant peoples.”¹⁶² For Tate and Kittrell, there were other important differences, particularly as ideas about nonviolence

¹⁶⁰ Barbara D. Savage, “Professor Merze Tate: Diplomatic Historian, Cosmopolitan Woman,” in *Toward an Intellectual History of Black Women*, ed. Mia Bay, Farah J. Griffin, Martha S. Jones, and Barbara D. Savage (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

¹⁶¹ Tate interview, 3; Merze Tate, “Sandwich Island Missionaries: The First American Point Four Agents,” *Seventh Annual Report of the Hawai'ian Historical Society for the Year 1961* (Honolulu: Advertiser Publishing, 1962): 7-23.

¹⁶² Oliver J. Caldwell, “Education and International Relations,” and “Report on Trip for the ICA to Certain Countries in Asia,” Container #14, Folder: ICA Regional Education Conference, Manila, January, 1956, Dept. of Health, Edu, and Welfare. Office of Edu. Bureau of International Records Relating to International Organizations, 1952-1965, RG 12, NACP.

circulated through these networks. Earlier, Gandhi had taken a keen interest in Booker T. Washington; according to her diary, Kittrell had taken an interest in Gandhi. Decades after she first sat in the Hampton Chapel with Hawai'i coral brought by the Armstrongs embedded inside, Kittrell likely saw herself within this genealogy of missionary and nationalist work in a new way. Tate and Kittrell were not *subjects* in these efforts; now, they were empowered to work as agents. Regardless, Tate remained highly critical of “problems” linked to the government—but for Kittrell, direct technical action abroad and nonviolence within the US suited her larger goals.

Upon their return, Tate and Kittrell both had a role in the formation of the Asian Studies program at Howard, a group “interested in the international good-will and understanding of peoples.” In addition to the academic component of Asian Studies, as a kind of forum, it “serve[d] a great cultural purpose and at the same time strengthen the bonds of friendship and cooperation.”¹⁶³ Similar language about friendship and cooperation appeared in Kittrell’s holiday letter in 1951. This was as much a friendly greeting as an educational document for self-promotion. Praising the “keen, alert, and world-minded” students and educators she encountered in India, Kittrell noted that their “freedom comes at a time when the world is most unsettled and when we are engaged in a Cold War.” As with her observations about Liberia, Kittrell argued that India could gain much through “material good,” but the “West” had much to learn “in terms of spiritual light.” Though generous in her appraisal of “Christian Missions, private foundations, and the Point Four Program,” Kittrell still saw these efforts as insufficient to truly bring these nations “together.”¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ Papers on the Institute of Asian Studies, Howard University, Box 2600, Kittrell Files, HUA..

¹⁶⁴ Kittrell, 1951 Christmas Letter, Kittrell Trustee Box, Correspondence Folder, Hampton University Archives.

At closing, Kittrell added that she hoped she would be given Point Four funds to return soon, since she “missed the way of life that I shared with the Indian people [.]”¹⁶⁵ Kittrell would be negotiating a return to India within a year. In the meantime, national leaders in Home Economics declared that “the opportunities to develop home economics in foreign countries are limitless.”¹⁶⁶ While awaiting her next opportunity, Kittrell took to spreading this message at Howard, to co-eds at other historically black institutions, and within “domestic” civic work. First, she became involved with the American Committee for the United Nations and the *United Nations Cookbook*, which incorporated recipes from all member states, including India.¹⁶⁷ A year after this text was published, one of Kittrell’s Home Economics students presented a birthday cake with “six candles for the United Nations’ six years” to President Truman in 1951.¹⁶⁸ Thereafter, Kittrell further promoted her government work and the UN at Hampton, where she spoke at a program known as Woman’s Day in 1952. Wearing “a dress of Indian silk,” she described her time as a Fulbright scholar.¹⁶⁹ After the event, Dean of Women Estelle Thomas wrote to Kittrell, gushing, “having you on campus meant a great deal to the entire Hampton family.”¹⁷⁰ The establishment of a Flemma Kittrell Homemaking Club, which hosted international dress exhibits, fashion shows, and UN celebrations, hints at the impact her talk may have had on her audience at Hampton.

Kittrell must have also made an impact on the Philomathians, the black women’s organization based out of Baltimore. In 1952, she was invited back to lecture on “Building Today For a Better World Tomorrow.” According to a report, “Kittrell, who talked on

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Mary Rokahr, “Home Economists the World Around,” *Journal of Home Economics*, 43, no.2 (1951): 94.

¹⁶⁷ American Home Economics Association, *Favorite Recipes from the United Nations: 170 Authentic Dishes from all Countries of the United Nations* (Washington, D.C.: United States Committee for the United Nations, 1950).

¹⁶⁸ Photograph of Truman and Miss Mildred Montgomery, Box 104-18, Folder 3, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

¹⁶⁹ “Dr. Kittrell Woman’s Day Speaker at Hampton,” *Journal and Guide* (Norfolk, VA), May 31, 1952. .

¹⁷⁰ Estelle Thomas, Hampton’s Dean of Women, to Kittrell, 12 May 1952, Box 2600, Kittrell Files, HUA..

India...was nice to look at, too, in a colorful sari,” dressed just as she had been for her talk at Hampton.¹⁷¹ Kittrell’s tour continued the next month when she lectured to the Spruce Street Baptist Church for Woman’s Day on “Women at Home and Abroad in Religion and Education.”¹⁷² In addition to this range of speaking engagements, Kittrell was also becoming better known within her Methodist network. In the summer of 1952, Kittrell was nominated to serve as a delegate to the International Missionary Council in Willingen, Germany. Kittrell arrived in Willingen in time for a prolonged heat wave, a serious drought, and incidentally, an unfortunate misunderstanding about the availability of baths.¹⁷³ As a lifelong Methodist, Kittrell was clearly connected to this conference through her faith background. Professionally, she was not alone either; Kittrell was joined by Irma Highbaugh, a Cornell Ph.D., home economist, and Methodist missionary with extensive experience working abroad.¹⁷⁴

During the meeting at Willingen, Kittrell gave a paper entitled “Man Shall Not Live by Bread Alone” (Matthew 4:4). On the one hand, this lecture referred to a biblical mission outlined in the book of Matthew. It also suggested links to Cold War discourses on poverty and plenty, and Kittrell’s own experience as a nutritionist with an investment in promoting international relations. This meeting is often seen as a turning in 20th century missionary work. Given the expulsion of missionaries from China the preceding year, this was a moment of reckoning for those gathered at Willingen. As the origin of a new plan linked to *missio dei*, or mission of God, some credit the Willingen delegates with the new vision for modern evangelicalism.¹⁷⁵ Much like the shift toward “social gospel” in the 1920s, these delegates stressed the need to offer practical

¹⁷¹ “Dr. Kittrell Heard,” *Baltimore Afro-American* (Baltimore, MD), Apr. 12, 1952.

¹⁷² “Woman’s Day Program: Spruce Street Baptist Church, May 18, 1952,” Box 104-2, Folder 2, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

¹⁷³ Nicolah Aupt and Christoph Seitz, “Where is Willingen?” *International Review of Missions* 92, no.367 (2003).

¹⁷⁴ Highbaugh “worked in the Philippines, Japan, Korea, Burma, Malaya, Thailand, Indonesia and Ceylon, in the training of church leaders.” See “Cottey Alumna Award to A Methodist Missionary,” *Nevada Daily Mail* (Nevada, MO), May 8, 1959, 1.

¹⁷⁵ “Guest Editorial: Willingen 1952-Willingen 2002,” *International Review of Missions* 92, no.367 (2003).

aid and spiritual guidance. Kittrell's emergence within higher-level meetings at this time suggests another layer to this shift. Much like the agents at the State Department who sought to use "effective" "race women" as ambassadors, the Methodist Board of Missions was now at least partially inclined to promote experts who brought greater diversity.¹⁷⁶

This range of activity was part of a longer pattern in Kittrell's life. Across her career, religious work, civic activism, and state-funded projects were never that far apart. Thus, in addition to positioning herself as a future administrator for a missions project, throughout the 1950s Kittrell worked to further her relationships with the State Department. This meant not only cultivating her own opportunities but forging paths for foreign exchange students. Over time, Kittrell built an especially strong relationship with the Africa Desk, partially through her efforts to bring women from throughout the African diaspora to Howard. Kittrell was also invested in other arenas, particularly Asia. In 1953, for instance, home economist Sultana Ibrahlim of Karachi, Pakistan, was invited to Howard to discuss her experience with the State Department's exchange program at a tea.¹⁷⁷

Around the time of Ibrahlim's visit, Kittrell was headed to or already in India, having secured a contract through Point Four and the Technical Cooperation Administration (TCA).¹⁷⁸ Upon her return in the fall of 1953, Kittrell found the picture of Home Economics in India much changed. Since the first All India Home Science Association gathering a few years prior, many more leaders from India had trained as professional home economists. There were also more constituencies from outside of India merging at this meeting. Another notable American home economist in India this time was Professor Jessie Harris of the University of Tennessee-

¹⁷⁶ "News in the World of Religion," *Somerset Daily American* (Somerset, PA), Sep. 29, 1952.

¹⁷⁷ "Tea at Howard," *Afro American* (Baltimore, MD), Aug. 1, 1953, 12.

¹⁷⁸ George Dolgin, India Branch of TCA, to Kittrell, 21 October 1952, Box 104-4, Folder 8. Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

Knoxville. While working with the Technical Cooperation Mission (TCM), Harris received funding to build a program in Home Economics at Lady Irwin College.

Prior to securing this contract, Harris worked with the Tennessee Valley Authority and trained women for jobs in Home Demonstration. During World War II, Harris then worked for the USDA's Food Distribution Administration. Early in the postwar period, Harris was part of the State Department Cultural Exchange program in Germany; by 1953, she was a veteran traveler and part-time federal employee.¹⁷⁹ Given this background, Harris was an ideal candidate to build a program between Tennessee and Lady Irwin. The stated mission was "Growth Through Sharing," and it is not coincidental that this motto sounds like an Extension truism.¹⁸⁰ Kittrell and Harris were sent to India to develop academic programs; they were also there to create an infrastructure similar to that of the land-grant college system in the US. In government documents written about this kind of technical assistance, Rural Education and Extension networks were seen as ways "to initiate and process a transformation of the social and economic life of the villages."¹⁸¹

Thus, in addition to teaching in Baroda, Kittrell was tasked with leading a 7-month trip for future Extension teachers from India.¹⁸² As with Kittrell's earlier navigations of Rural Education networks, this was only partially government-financed; other backing came from the

¹⁷⁹ Francille M. Firebaugh and Lois E. Dickey, "Jessie Harris: An Accomplished Leader in Home Economics," *Kappa Omicron Nu Forum*, 17, no.1 (2007):25-32.

¹⁸⁰ "Home Science Program, University of Tennessee and India," Box 15, American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences records, #6578. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library. See also Lela O'Toole, *The International Heritage of Home Economics in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: AHEA, 1988).

¹⁸¹ Dr. Rajammal P. Devadas, "Home Science Extension in India," *Journal of Home Economics* 48, no.1 (1956):8; Devadas, "Agricultural Production Geared to Meet Nutrition Requirements of Our Nation," Box 104-14, Folder 19, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

¹⁸² Kittrell/Chief Home Economist, "General Report - Training Program in Allahabad, Hawai'i, Japan, Baroda," November 19, 1954 - May 27, 1955, Box 104-14, Folder 15, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

Ford Foundation, which had funded a similar program in Allahabad in 1952.¹⁸³ Along with Ellen Moline, a consultant in Extension at Washington State, Kittrell took Extension trainees from India to the territory of Hawai'i, and Japan.¹⁸⁴ By way of conclusion, the women returned to Baroda to finalize their findings.¹⁸⁵ For much of this trip, Kittrell told the trainees to focus on "meeting people, seeing homes and demonstrations," and making "observations of nursery school[s]."¹⁸⁶ At the onset, in Hawai'i, the women paid a visit to the Extension program at the University of Hawai'i.¹⁸⁷ Then, after moving through a dizzying array of small Hawai'ian villages, the group slowed their pace somewhat, traveling between Tokyo and Kyoto and visiting a few prefectures in Japan. Most of the Indian students were surprised to learn that Japan had already appointed more than 12,000 Extension workers.¹⁸⁸ Though the US occupation was scarcely mentioned, perhaps their sense of wonder had more to do with the extent to which the US had imposed its system of Rural Education so rapidly.

In the official reports on the trip, the imperial reach of the U.S. in Hawai'i, the ravages of a recent world war throughout the Pacific, and the ashes still smoldering throughout Japan receive scant comment. This is because Kittrell wrote all of the surviving records, and they bear her consistent emphasis on cooperation and mutual development. As she saw it, by focusing on family life, even foreign places felt familiar to this diverse group. In her analysis, the Indian women observed that in Japan and Hawai'i, "the family pattern was similar in many ways" to

¹⁸³ Douglas Ensminger, Report: 1725, Grant #: 52-61; 52-76; 52-104; 52-55; 52-186, "Ford Foundation Program Letter for India and Pakistan: Report no. 11." Ford Foundation Records, RAC. Ensminger describes a program for men: a "10-week study of Agricultural Extension organization and methods in the United States and Japan, [which] the Foundation is sponsoring."

¹⁸⁴ "Miss Moline to Fly on March 5," *Deer Park Union* (Deer Park, WA), Feb. 21, 1952, 1; "Overseas Opportunities for Home Economists in Programs of Non-governmental Agencies," *Journal of Home Economics*, 47, no.6 (1955): 391.

¹⁸⁵ J.M. Stodman's circular (1934) mentions Extension in India, Japan, and the Soviet Union. See "Cooperative Extension Publications," Box 1, Collection 34: Early Extension Service Miscellaneous Materials, National Agricultural Library, Beltsville, MD.

¹⁸⁶ Kittrell, "Training Program," 10.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 4.

¹⁸⁸ "What about Japan?" *Journal of Home Economics* 39, no.4 (1947): 218; 232.

their own. Furthermore, Kittrell suggested that this delegation “made an excellent pattern of how various cultures and backgrounds can be coordinated and integrated for the over-all good of the country.” The most critical comments she offers are that some found the schedule too full, and others had ‘cultural shock’ along the way.¹⁸⁹ Ultimately, Kittrell stresses the women’s range of new experience and their shared consensus that they were eager to return to India. All agreed that they shared a “need to know their own villages better.”¹⁹⁰

Like Kittrell’s mentors who wrote about *her* progress at Cornell twenty years earlier, Kittrell was confident that this experience made the women better suited to go home to work for “their people.” Another echo of the past was Kittrell’s insistence that she was most proud of the “feeling of friendship” developed among the women.¹⁹¹ Rather than dwell on geopolitical struggle—or promote transnational movements—Kittrell suggested this framework for understanding the trip. Perhaps this is why Kittrell was subsequently proclaimed “an ambassador of good will...and a modest carrier of American know how to a people eager to learn” in an *Afro-American* special feature.¹⁹² As one of an increasing number of “brown faces in nearly every embassy, Point Four mission and U.S. Information Service Office,” Kittrell might have been “a long way, both geographically and culturally, from the hilltop at Howard University,” but she “effectively bridged the gap between the two worlds.”¹⁹³ After all, these women were not foreigners—now, they were friends.

This notion of “bridging” was more than a turn of phrase. Pursuant to this trip to India, representatives from the ICA wrote directly to Johnson at Howard. Based on Kittrell’s performance as an educator and ambassador abroad, there was an interest in providing

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 14.

¹⁹⁰ Kittrell, “Training Program,” 12.

¹⁹¹ Ibid, 15.

¹⁹² “Summary Report of Work Faculty of Home Science (Baroda),” Box 104-13, Folder 32, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

¹⁹³ William Worthy, “Diplomatic Service in the Far East,” *Afro Magazine Section*, July 2, 1955, 7.

“additional assistance in the development of home economics programs.”¹⁹⁴ Kittrell shared this ambition for furthering Home Economics abroad and for building a stronger network of study abroad programs.¹⁹⁵ In addition to working on direct forms of assistance for foreign students, Kittrell also served as a kind of bridge from Howard into the larger professional circles of Home Economics. After this trip to India, Kittrell introduced the visiting students from Sweden, South Africa, and Korea at an annual meeting of the American Home Economics Association. In this talk, Kittrell argued, “I think the most outstanding achievement of our present era will be that of our cooperation and understanding between nations.”¹⁹⁶ Comparing the present moment to the Renaissance, Kittrell avoided any mention of the fact that the Korean War had ended just a few years prior.

Kittrell also did not mention that continued *lack* of diversity within the AHEA. Only privately, in a contemporary letter to Esther Stocks, Placement Secretary at the College of Home Economics at Cornell, would Kittrell argue: “we have a long way to go in the U.S.A. when it comes to job opportunities for all the people.” Though requests came across her desk at Howard for her graduates to do work “in India, Burma, South America, the Philippines, and West Africa” Kittrell did not see as many placements as she would have liked. To Stocks, she acknowledged that while some black home economists were “serving all around the world,” they were “not yet [hired] in large numbers – because many barriers are still in the way.”¹⁹⁷ Among the women to whom Kittrell referred was Allie Holley, an African American home economist who taught at

¹⁹⁴ Logan, 551.

¹⁹⁵ Kittrell to “Merze + Members of the Round Table,” 31 December 1953; Kittrell, 1954 Christmas Letter from Baroda, India, Box 219-4, Tate Papers, MSRC.

¹⁹⁶ Kittrell, “International Sharing of Home Economics,” AHEA Introductory Remarks, n.d., likely 1956, Box 2604, Kittrell Files, HUA. Profiles on the foreign students: *Journal of Home Economics* 48, no.7 (1956): 494.

¹⁹⁷ Kittrell to Esther Stocks, 29 May 1952, Box 69, Folder 1, NYSCHE Papers.

Baroda in the 1950s.¹⁹⁸ Lydia Rogers, Kittrell's Howard colleague, and Queen Jones, Kittrell's former classmate and a professor at Tuskegee, were also contemporaneously completing similar work in Asia and the Caribbean, respectively. Other African American home economists in Kittrell's network, including Cecile Hoover Edwards and Patsy Graves, a fellow D.C. resident, were incredibly active in securing funds for work overseas.¹⁹⁹ Yet little has been written about any of these home economists. While Kittrell often used her platforms for speaking to promote the wide range of women "sharing" across the world, their work has been overshadowed, in many cases, by her very prominence.

In retrospect, Graves's absence in the historical record is particularly striking. Graves, who began her career with the Urban League, was a prominent member of the NCNW and employee of the USDA before going abroad. Her first international assignment was in India, when she was hired by the State Department in 1954 to work in New Delhi.²⁰⁰ Like Kittrell, some of this work was also financed through Point Four.²⁰¹ Graves also traveled extensively, but eventually settled for a few months in Calcutta. At one point, while stationed at the site of an old army camp, Graves wondered "if someone I knew laid out the walks and built the Quonset huts where we hold classes."²⁰² For Graves, war was not so distant and peace did not feel so imminent. Nonetheless, by tapping into the generative relationship between Home Economics

¹⁹⁸ Allie Holley is mentioned alongside Kittrell in *Historical Cookbook of the American Negro*, 33. For more on Holley, see: "Mrs. Holley Initiates Home Study in Indian University," *Afro-American* (Baltimore, MD), Nov. 3, 1951, 11; Charlotte Shedd, "Her Indian Student Used a Modern Plane, But..." *Wilmington Sunday Star* (Wilmington, DL), Jan. 31, 1954, 26.

¹⁹⁹ Queen Jones was a Fulbright Scholar in Trinidad, BWI: "Dr Queen Jones Dies, Tuskegee Science Dean," *Washington Afro-American* (Washington, D.C.), Jan. 14, 1969. Edwards, who would eventually replace Kittrell, also worked in India: "Protein Supplementation of Indian Diets: A Review," *Journal of Nutrition and Diet* 5 (1968), Box 104-14, Folder 23.

²⁰⁰ "Home Ec. Specialist Receives Degree from West Virginia State," *Pittsburgh Courier* (Pittsburgh, PA), Aug. 27 1966, 6; "Patsy Graves Appointed Home Economist with FHA," *New York Age* (New York, NY), May 3, 1947, 4. There is also information about Graves in Box 104-5, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

²⁰¹ "Alumni Honors Patsy Graves," *Afro-American* (Baltimore, MD), Nov. 27, 1954, 11.

²⁰² "Patsy Graves Says," *Pittsburgh Courier* (Pittsburgh, PA), Apr. 7, 1956, 19.

and the warring state, Graves worked extensively for decades through various government programs.

Graves and Kittrell certainly knew each other; in addition to their crisscrossing paths in India, they also worked together in the capital. In 1957, both women gave lectures at the 4-H Club Camp hosted at Howard.²⁰³ Kittrell presented information on eggs while Graves was seen “modeling” a sari for a group of young 4-H clubwomen.²⁰⁴ Each of these scenes was captured for posterity by the *Afro-American*, and both women were presented as exemplars. Eager young students might have wondered if it would really be possible to replicate their careers, however. Graves and Kittrell had used a career in Home Economics to see the world, but 4-H continued to have a *de facto* policy of segregation.²⁰⁵ Young black club members were encouraged to *read* about IFYE, learn about India, and watch these models pose in saris—yet their requests to be *part* of IFYE were consistently denied. What’s more, while white 4-H club members were sent to the U.S.S.R, they were unwilling or unable to see beyond racial lines in the US to attend 4-H camp at Howard. Though keen on teaching internationalism, 4-H leaders did not encourage social justice work or racial equality in their own systems.

In recent years, *all* club members were required to take a newly expanded pledge, “for my club, my community, my country, and my world.”²⁰⁶ As part of national efforts to teach a global outlook, the Extension Service had even created a “home-grown” UN flag program.²⁰⁷

²⁰³ “Gain Knowledge, Youngsters Told,” *Pittsburgh Courier* (Pittsburgh, PA), Sep. 14, 1957.

²⁰⁴ “Sari is Center of Interest,” “Food Value of Eggs,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore, MD), Aug. 27, 1957, 8.

²⁰⁵ Tyler Archer, “The History of National 4-H Camp,” *4-H Preservation*, http://4h-historypreservation.com/History/4-H_Camp/.

²⁰⁶ Gabriel Rosenberg, *The 4-H Harvest: Sexuality and the State in Rural America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), 189.

²⁰⁷ Local sources present Charlotte Jackson’s (Ingram) story, and her Native American (Delaware) and African American ancestry: “Charlotte D. Jackson,” *Native Americans of Delaware*, http://nativeamericansofdelawarestate.com/Obituaries/Charlotte_D._Jackson_Funeral_program%20page2.pdf

Within a few months, 35,000 citizens had submitted orders for flag kits.²⁰⁸ These flags were sewn in segregated circles, but leaders in 4-H continued to promote select presentations of interracial work. Thus an interracial delegation was sent to the White House to present the first American homemade UN flag to Truman and Eleanor Roosevelt. Standing at the nation's preeminent domestic space, African American club member Charlotte Delores Ingram made a pledge "to the United Nations, the one great hope for a peaceful world with freedom and safety for all."²⁰⁹ To some reporters, this demonstration highlighted the fact that while "white and Negro 4-Hers take the same pledge, have the same creed and supposedly are working for the same thing—good citizenship" all club members were not yet equal.²¹⁰ While focusing on building "better" citizens and providing leadership skills, bureaucrats within 4-H had done little to address issues of inequality, pivoting to vague issues of internationalism instead.

While many 4-H leaders worked hard to ignore such incongruities, increasingly, civil rights injustices were making national and international headlines. A few weeks after Kittrell's 4-H talk, the "Little Rock Nine" were met with violence and vitriol as they attempted to walk to school, the first step in desegregation in Arkansas. Halfway across the world, upon hearing about this incident, another "good-will ambassador" touring for the State Department refused to suppress his outrage. Famously, upon hearing about Little Rock, Louis Armstrong declared, 'the government can go to hell,' refusing to continue his travels on behalf of the US, or a "two-faced" president.²¹¹ Kittrell evaluated this situation differently. Despite her earlier work with SNYC and youth groups, she doubled down on the notion of "sharing" and frameworks which did not demand integration or use the term equality. As she continued to serve on the board of the

²⁰⁸ Collection 34, Special Collections, National Agricultural Library.

²⁰⁹ "United Nations Flag Folder," Box 77, Folder 59, NYSCHE Records.

²¹⁰ "Nat'l 4-H Clubs Reek With Bias," *Pittsburgh Courier* (Pittsburgh, PA), Dec. 15, 1951.

²¹¹ Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World*, 63.

YWCA, for example, “racial inclusiveness” was put on the top of the agenda—a way of promoting “understanding” without demanding structural change.²¹²

Many other home economists took a similar position. The following year, Kittrell was part of the lead organizing committee for the meeting of the International Federation for Home Economics (IFHE). A global organization, this IFHE meeting brought women from 60 nations “round the world” to Maryland. The event was seen as a great success, with each foreign visitor staying with an American family as part of the experience. Reflecting on this experience, one woman surmised, “everywhere in the world there are hands weaving on the same piece of cloth... the owners of these hands are so near that we can consult with each other almost at will.”²¹³ Somehow, with a renewed hope at understanding, these women almost exactly echoed the letters from the interwar Associated Country Women of the World meeting decades earlier.

Another echo of the past was the IFHE’s tour of Cornell, a part of a meeting of the Institute on International Education. In the final report from this gathering, written by Kittrell and others, experts declared that “Home Economics rests on the assumption that there are universal elements in the nature of man.” These delegates insisted that the basic *needs* of the family, the “primary biological and social unit in any culture” were the same around the world. With this logic, family matters anywhere became the concern of home economists everywhere. Thus, seemingly distant issues were “the concern of home economists in all parts of the world.”²¹⁴ By embracing multiculturalism, “something like internationalism,” and a shared professional identity, these experts found a way to elide or possibly ignore the contentious race politics of the day.

²¹² “1958 YWCA Board Meeting,” Box 2605, File on YWCA, Kittrell Files, HUA.

²¹³ Mary Hawkins, “This is Our World,” *Journal of Home Economics* 50, no.8 (1958): 611.

²¹⁴ Alfred L. Baldwin, “Final Report: Institute on International Education in Home Economics,” Box 15, Folder 15-19, NYSCHE Records.

Shortly after these meetings, in the fall of 1958 Kittrell went back out into the world, traveling this time to Ghana under the auspices of the United States Information Service (USIS).²¹⁵ As part of this trip, Kittrell spent her time “interview[ing] outstanding leaders, especially important Ghanaian women” and offering lectures to “social welfare workers” in various cities.²¹⁶ In addition to performing a service for local health agencies, the USIS envisioned Kittrell’s performing as an exemplary ambassador who was keen to talk about racial “progress.” According to one document, Kittrell was “led to believe that she would spend the major portion of her time while in Ghana consulting with women leaders.” The actual itinerary was more of “a lecture tour.” Official State Department records note that aside from “housekeeping matters”—Kittrell was unhappy she could not have a 35 mm camera—she was “most cooperative, followed her schedule religiously and was an extremely effective grantee.” Like the piano prodigy Philippa Schuyler, who was also part of this coordinated exchange to Ghana, poise and presence were critical for the USIS mission.²¹⁷

For the most part, Kittrell’s status as an “effective” cultural and educational ambassador derived from how she responded in question-and-answer sessions. Repeatedly, files written about Kittrell by embassy officials stress that her audiences valued her for what they saw as warmth and expertise. Most importantly, she was “equally effective” when dealing with questions about race. Women at the IFHE may not have wanted to talk about segregation, but audience members at Kittrell’s talks in Ghana did. In one part of her lecture tour, an audience

²¹⁵ “Race Relations in the United States and American Cultural and Informational Programs in Ghana, 1957-1966, Part 2,” *Prologue Magazine* 31, no.4 (1999).

²¹⁶ USIS Activities Report, August 31-September 6, 1958; “USIS Activities Report, September 7-13, 1958,” General USIS Records 1951-1958 - USIS Records from 1951-1956, Educational Exchange 1957, Box 1, Folder B, RG 84, NACP.

²¹⁷ Edith Kermit Roosevelt, “Negro Success Story,” *Spokesman-Review* (Spokane, WA), Nov. 27, 1960, 4.

member “took her to task over the Jimmie Wilson and Little Rock incidents.”²¹⁸ Ghanaians were familiar with Wilson, the African American man sentenced to death for stealing \$1.95 the year before.²¹⁹ According to one State Department Despatch, an audience member’s “attack was rather sharp and persistent” when Kittrell seemed to be avoiding his subject. Kittrell gave an answer that “obviously impressed” her American hosts. With “a very calm voice that could be clearly heard throughout the hushed room,” Kittrell traced “the Negro’s progress from the time of slavery,” concluding that ‘any objective-minded person will have to concede that these are exceptional cases [.]’ That such a case could be extreme *and* revelatory was not something she would entertain in these forums.

In this and other speeches on tour, Kittrell was clear about her belief that ‘the inexorable trend is one of progress in this area of race relations in the United States of America.’ Indeed, her answers to questions about Wilson were in line with how she dealt with similar incidents when she was pushed beyond platitudes. While on the same tour, Kittrell was asked about Little Rock and desegregation at a meeting of the Association of University Women of Uganda. In her words, she recalled that she was asked “of course to tell about Little Rock.” In response, Kittrell discussed “our Heritage in Democracy from Thomas Jefferson” and “how the Democratic procedure in Government would handle the situation.” Kittrell understood that in addition to talking to women about nutrition and childcare, agents expected her to describe these situations “objectively.”²²⁰

As these comments suggest, for the most part Kittrell chose to work within the parameters set by others working within the State Department. In reports she authored, Kittrell

²¹⁸ American Embassy Accra to Department of State, 9 October 1958, Despatch 225, Records of the United States Embassy at Accra, Ghana, General Records of the United States Information Service, “Dr. Flemmie P. Kittrell,” RG 84, NACP.

²¹⁹ Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights*, 4.

²²⁰ Kittrell, “Summary Report-Uganda” to Mr. Howard Russell, USIS, Uganda, RG 84.

put forth some explanations for why she took these highly constrained trips. Partially, Kittrell saw these tours as opportunities to learn about and assess the condition of women's lives abroad. As part of this same tour, during her time in Uganda, Kittrell stayed at the YWCA, which in her words fostered "an atmosphere of relaxation and good will." In this place "for gracious and happy living," Kittrell was moved by the African women she met there who "were hostesses to women of the world." Kittrell also could not praise the design—or the function—of the YWCA building enough. Given her lifelong interest in quasi-domestic spaces, Kittrell saw this as a vital meeting place for women all over the world. Kittrell also credited the women of this YWCA as providing her with a home base from which she could gain access to other public buildings and private homes nearby. This nexus had enabled her to investigate "the aspirations of the African people" and to see whether these were "nurtured or frustrated by Foreign Powers [.]” By meeting people “up close,” she intended to work on ways to grow “the bonds of friendship between the American and African women.”²²¹

In this and other documents, Kittrell insisted that by focusing on building friendships, she had a particularly important perspective on social conditions in Africa. As opposed to those who wrote about the continent with an “‘As I see it from where I sit’ attitude” or “insufficient knowledge,” Kittrell could draw upon first-hand experiences and visits with women and families. While other scholars in the US had already written about the geopolitical history of West Africa, according to Kittrell, they knew far less about “the family life patterns and the overall culture of the people.”²²² Kittrell saw herself as investigating within that niche, and unlike others, her work did not rely on “stereotypes and cliché that have been handed down by oppressors for hundreds

²²¹ Kittrell, “Y.W.C.A. Frontiers in Uganda, East Africa,” n.d. 104-14, Folder 7, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

²²² Kittrell, “Some Observations on Life and Education in West Africa,” 192.

of years.”²²³ These assertions of disciplinary-specific expert knowledge are striking in light of the fact that Kittrell has been entirely forgotten in histories of international relations at Howard.

After spending time at the YWCA in Uganda, Kittrell continued her work with this organization stateside as well as her role as an expert on Africa for WILPF. In 1958, WILPF leaders drafted a fresh set of principles prioritizing non-violence tactics, with the related goals of peace, freedom, and justice.²²⁴ Confidentially, some women within the organization, such as Civil Rights lawyer Virginia Durr, were concerned over the lack of concentrated action for justice within the US.²²⁵ From her vantage point in Alabama, Durr knew that the “face” of WILPF was too often a white woman. Writing to WILPF leader Mildred Olmstead, Durr thought it important that the next visiting delegation to Alabama present “a Negro and White woman...together.”²²⁶ Soon thereafter, Kittrell was elected to fill this role, so she set out to Montgomery to speak to a thousand students at the Alabama State University. Following up, Olmstead soon wrote to Kittrell, admitting that she was “so anxious to hear how you made out,” and asking if she faced “any antagonism” and whether she was “able to enlist any new members...?”²²⁷ Kittrell responded promptly that she presented a lecture on “the seeking of freedom through methods of non-violence in Africa,” then “turned to questions which of course, included the Montgomery picture.” While in Africa, Kittrell was asked about the South—“of course.” Then, while in the South, when Kittrell was sent to talk about Africa, many of the questions were still the same.

²²³ Kittrell, “Y.W.C.A. Frontiers in Uganda, East Africa,” n.d. 104-14, Folder 7, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

²²⁴ WILPF US Section, “Principles and Policies 1958-1960,” supplement to *Four Lights* (1958), Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

²²⁵ “Dr. King’s Knifer Sent to Bellevue,” *New York Times* (New York, NY), Sep. 22, 1958.

²²⁶ Letter sent to Kittrell “For Your Information,” Virginia Durr to Mildred [Horton], 20 October 1958, Box 104-6, Folder 1, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

²²⁷ Mildred Olmsted to Kittrell, 26 November 1958, Box 2600, Folder: WILPF 1958, Kittrell Files, HUA..

In this letter, Kittrell continued, as if it were an afterthought, “I got this feeling from Dr. Martin Luther King when I met with him and his wife in their home earlier in the evening.”²²⁸ After this brief reference, Kittrell does not elaborate, possibly because she assumed that Olmstead already knew about her connections to King. That the only mention to this meeting occurs in a letter to a fellow peace activist is unsurprising in the context of Kittrell’s archive. Continuing her work overseas clearly necessitated a kind of discretion—or complicity with racist systems—that creates silences and obfuscations in her papers. Still, this is clear evidence that Kittrell still maintained a relationship to Civil Rights activists and particularly to nonviolent movements. Earlier, through her work with SNYC at Hampton, such alliances were overt. Nonetheless, it is striking to place Kittrell at ASU in 1958, in proximity to the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church parsonage, the Kings’ small white bungalow, and the first Confederate White House. While spending time in the Kings’ home, past, present, and future struggles for freedom would have collided in their discussions of civil disobedience. Kittrell was likely aware that shortly before her visit, efforts to confront the bussing issue in Birmingham had begun. Writing back to Olmstead, Kittrell could only privately acknowledge that “the picture not only in the South but in various parts of the country is a frustrated one.”²²⁹

Ultimately, Kittrell held firm to the belief that “in spite of what looks to be rather dark now some specific head-way is made, although it may be at times hard to discern.”²³⁰ Within a few years, this position frustrated some within WILPF circles, including Ava Hunt Pauling. Writing to Durr in 1962, privately Pauling suggested that WILPF’s “good Negro friends are not yet willing to speak out of turn...sometimes I think the WIL puts them on the Board just in order to have people that they can influence [.]” She noted that at one meeting, along with other

²²⁸ Kittrell to Mildred Horton, 26 November 1958, Box 104-6, Folder 1, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

African American members, “Kittrell was there, too, but she, too, did not say anything—at least not in the plenary session.” After calling Olmstead “naïve,” Pauling attacked WILPF’s domestic and international agendas, dismissing the talk about “how much had been accomplished by the non-violent methods in the South.” Rhetorically, she asked, “Can you really believe that things have been non-violent in the South?”²³¹

Aside from these letters, WILPF members did not push back against Kittrell, though reporters sometimes did. When asked about the state of struggling African republics, Kittrell would often barely acknowledge that there were problems related to imperialism. In one unusually candid interview, Kittrell noted that after an extended tour, she had decided that Kenya was “the most depressing” and Sudan was “the most conservative [.]” The reporter from the *Pittsburgh Courier* noted that when urged to say more about exploitation in Liberia, “Dr. Kittrell said she would not say it was non-existent, but she would say she saw nothing in Liberia which she did not see in this country.”²³² This is the closest Kittrell comes in this period to criticizing either, at least publicly. But this comment was so opaque that without knowledge of her earlier indictments over “hidden hunger” in the US *and* in Liberia, it is hardly a pointed critique. Indeed, in this and other interviews, Kittrell focused on the positive aspects of life in nations such as Nigeria and Ghana, which she lauded for “international flavor” and “good economic condition[s],” respectively. Most of all, Kittrell praised Ghana because of its history of “getting its independence through peace and nonviolence.” To friends and colleagues, Kittrell further emphasized the need for education, noting that university students in Liberia, Nigeria, Uganda, and the Sudan were “alert, and wide awake in regards to the political and economic situation in

²³¹ Letter from Ava Hunt Pauling to Virginia Durr, 18 July 1962, Box 4.003, Folder 3.1, Oregon State University Archives and Special Collections, <http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/coll/pauling/calendar/1962/07/>

²³² “Dr. Flenmie Kittrell Sums Up African Tour,” *Pittsburgh Courier* (Pittsburgh, PA), Dec. 6, 1958, 16.

their country, and the world picture at large.”²³³ Despite violent battles in her own country over desegregation in the schools, Kittrell still focused on nonviolence and education as important advocacy tools.

Amidst all of this work and travel abroad, the Home Economics department at Howard was largely run by faculty members other than Kittrell. Though she insisted to friends in 1959 that she remained “busy with a full schedule” at Howard, she was gone most of the time.²³⁴ Soon, even Kittrell’s frequent replacement, Lydia Rogers, had started working overseas, establishing a Home Economics program at Osmund College, Nigeria in 1953.²³⁵ With these exemplars leading the way, internationalism became a central focus for the department.²³⁶ For those on campus, even laboratory classes in food science were “adapted to the practice of some of the international methods of understanding other peoples.” One year, the “climax” of the class was preparing a French dinner for the department’s seniors and Madame Henri Bonnet, wife of the French ambassador.²³⁷ In addition to these exercises and presentations such as the UN cake, there were forums and teas where foreign students within the department discussed cultural customs, clothing, and childcare from around the world.²³⁸ When available, Kittrell ran these events and served as an advisor to the International Club. Like the Flemma Kittrell Club at Hampton, this group took part in International Week by hosting a “Nations Potpurri” supper and

²³³ Kittrell, 1958 Christmas Letter, Kittrell Bio Folder, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

²³⁴ American Home Economics Association, *Home Economics, New Directions: A Statement of Philosophy and Objectives* (Washington, D.C.: American Home Economics Association, 1959); Kittrell, 1959 Christmas Letter, Box 104-12, Folder 10, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

²³⁵ “Lydia Rogers Dies; Professor at Howard U,” *Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.), Oct. 10, 1998, B6.

²³⁶ See Box 2600, Kittrell Files, HUA.

²³⁷ Rogers, “Howard University Department of Home Economics, Annual Report 1950-51,” Box 2610, Kittrell Files, HUA.

²³⁸ This might have been modeled on similar, earlier events at Cornell. See: “Visitors from Other Countries,” Box 77, Folder 35, NYSCHE Papers; Helen K. Stephens, “Implementing Family Centered Teaching,” *Journal of Home Economics* 47, no.6 (1955): 394.

providing “music and dances representative of various cultures.”²³⁹ At all of these events, students were urged, “Wear Your Native Costume!”²⁴⁰

Another venue for Kittrell to highlight the international dimensions of the program was the final supper of the year. Dinner programs from the department files reveal that by the late 1950s, the department regularly had a fair number of students, many of whom were doing graduate work, from all over the Caribbean, Asia, East and West Africa.²⁴¹ During their final dinner together, these women would enjoy a meal of their own creation along with administrators or visiting cultural ambassadors, such as the attaché to India. After eating, they would all stand and recite the New Homemakers’ Creed: “If there is harmony and love in the home, there will be justice in the Nation. If there is justice in the Nation, There will be peace in the world.”²⁴² As a home economist and peace advocate, Kittrell was immensely proud of these kinds of events and kept careful records of each one.



Fig.4.6: Homecoming Float

²³⁹ Kittrell’s papers on International Club, Box 2600, Kittrell Files, HUA.

²⁴⁰ Jerry Landauer, “Ceylonese Coed at Howard Studies To Reform Wives in Her Native Land,” *Washington Post and Times Herald* (Washington, D.C.), Jun.5, 1959, Box 2605, Kittrell Files, HUA. See also: Izabel Zakko, Box 2607, Kittrell Files, HUA.

²⁴¹ Graduate Programs, Box 104-2, Folder 2–Programs, 1952-67; Folder 3–Programs, 1968-77, Kittrell Files, HUA..

²⁴² Through the late 1960s and into the 1970s, students came from Aruba, Barbados, Bermuda, British Guiana, Ceylon, Germany, Grenada, India, Iraq, Jamaica, Japan, Kenya, Korea, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, St. Thomas, “West Indies.”

Later, during her oral history with Tate in 1977, Kittrell referenced these rituals and presented a prized photograph of a Home Economics Homecoming float. Pointing to the women from India, Bermuda, and Africa on the float, she added that the woman sitting prominently in a sari “represents scholarship as well as internationalism.”²⁴³ Over time, this association of internationalism with Home Economics at Howard would be forgotten—but to Kittrell, it was inescapable.

As a model for how to live an engaged life with women throughout the world, Kittrell rarely stayed at Howard for very long. In the summer of 1959, Kittrell went overseas again, this time to Geneva for UNESCO meetings and to Stockholm for a WILPF meeting with Anna Johnson, wife of the Howard president.²⁴⁴ As with earlier WILPF meetings, Kittrell gave a paper on the future of Africa, arguing “for mutual understanding [.]” In spite of important differences between each “people,” Kittrell suggested that all cultures shared a need for food, the commonality she deemed “the most significant.” While some home economists were optimistic that food could bring people together through recipes, for example, Kittrell argued that hunger could be the undoing of humanity, as “many of our major wars have been entered around the scarcity of food or the fear of hunger.”²⁴⁵ In presenting this paper, Kittrell was largely dismissive of cultural differences, insisting instead that her work on food and nutrition exposed the vital, shared aspects of the human experience.

²⁴³ Tate interview, 31.

²⁴⁴ Kittrell to Anna Johnson, 6 April 1959, Box 104-6, Folder 1, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

²⁴⁵ Kittrell, “Economic Influences on Cultural Developments with Special References to Africa,” Box 2600, Folder: WILPF 1957, Kittrell Files, HUA..

As part of this same trip, Kittrell also went to Moscow for the American National Exhibition, the setting of the famous “Kitchen Debate.”²⁴⁶ The particulars of the visit are unclear, though studying the school systems and conditions for women and children was on at least one agenda.²⁴⁷ In general, Kittrell was impressed with “the alertness of the people and the cleanliness of the streets and yards” and the fact that women were heavily involved in building projects.²⁴⁸ The ease with which Kittrell seems to have traveled in this period is scarcely noted in her own documents. In her telling, there is nothing extraordinary about a Home Economics professor from Howard traveling around the University of Moscow in 1959. Perhaps for this reason she had the privilege of declaring, “While we are living in an age of tension, we are at the same time living in an age of sharing – a two way process of giving and receiving.”²⁴⁹ In her time abroad, Kittrell chose to see more sharing than tension; she also chose to hope for peace while working on what some might call imperialist intrusions.

Kittrell’s experiences as an African American educator, ambassador, and traveler set her apart from most other women of her time. Yet to overemphasize the ways in which she was distinctive is to miss how she drew support from—and worked within—a wider network of like-minded women. A circular newsletter from Kittrell’s Cornell advisor Ethel Waring in 1963 proves the point.²⁵⁰ As if breathlessly sharing news with a friend, Waring mentions her students’ contributions throughout the world with state-funded projects, missionary groups, the YWCA, UNESCO, FAO, and other NGOs. Kittrell is not seen as exceptional among these people, those

²⁴⁶ “Facts About the American National Exhibition in Moscow, July 25-September 4, 1959,” Box 2600, Kittrell Files, HUA.; “Women’s Peace Conference Closes in Stockholm, Sweden” *Memphis World* (Memphis, TN), Aug. 2 1959, 4; “Mrs. Stewart, Dr. Kittrell Fly to Russia,” *Afro American* (Baltimore, MD), Aug. 15, 1959, 12.

²⁴⁷ Howard University Press Release, June 24, 1959, Box 104-1, Folder 9, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

²⁴⁸ Kittrell, 1959 Christmas Letter, Box 104-12, Folder 10, Kittrell Papers, MSRC. See also: Anna Anrold Hedgeman, “How Russia Treats JD,” *New York Age* (New York, NY), Nov. 11, 1959, 7. This article mentions insights from “a friend” on children and strategies on combating juvenile delinquency in the U.S.S.R.

²⁴⁹ Kittrell, “International Sharing of Home Economics,” AHEA Introductory Remarks, n.d., likely 1956, Box 2604, Kittrell Files, HUA.

²⁵⁰ Ethel Waring, 1963 Newsletter, Box 21, Folder 31, NYSCHE Papers.

who traveled from Greece to Pakistan, Egypt, or Yugoslavia as part of their professional course. As with earlier files, Kittrell's race goes without mention. What these women focused on instead was a shared desire to be "at home in the world." This phrasing was not a particularly useful tool for fighting integration; it *was* a way of guiding global service and academic work with state and international institutions.

While this newsletter was primarily sent to keep alumnae in touch with one another and to highlight impressive travel records, it also reveals strong relationships to "home" institutions and a shared *alma mater*. Most of these women worked abroad *in addition* to their teaching and research at colleges and universities in the US. In Kittrell's case, despite all that she had accomplished outside of the US, she persisted in seeing a new Home Economics building as vital to her work and legacy. In 1961, an allotment was finally set aside for a new building. To start this new chapter, Miner Hall, one of the few original buildings left from the founders' period, was leveled. Named in honor of abolitionist Myrtilla Miner, this early residence hall which evoked "a Christian home under the guidance of maternal care, sympathy and love" was now an expendable relic.²⁵¹ By eliminating this remnant of the Reconstruction Era, Howard's faculty and staff further reinforced that they were now in command of their civil rights and roles in global reconstruction projects. Though Home Economics would not last at Howard, it is striking that in 1961, a piece of history was removed to make a prominent place for its future on campus.

Two years later, when the building was completed, it was formally "dedicated to the family of man." The main theme of this ceremony was the importance of family, with Kittrell writing, "In an age of rapid change the family remains as always central, the cornerstone for human development."²⁵² Dr. Edna Amidon, Director of the Home Economics Education Branch

²⁵¹ Logan, 101.

²⁵² Program for Home Economics Building Dedication, Box 104-2, Folder 2, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

of the Office of Education, declared that the program housed within the building was “internationally famed.”²⁵³ Kittrell had long deplored the fact that she lacked the proper facilities “to set the tone and social philosophy” of Home Economics.²⁵⁴ Now, there would be ample space not just for courses and research, but for showing the decorative art and heritage pieces she brought from around the world.²⁵⁵ With all this considered, Kittrell took great pride in the fact with her building, “the art and the science of living is reflected in its structure [.]”²⁵⁶ In the end, Kittrell saw this artistic, internationally oriented, scientifically equipped space as ideal for studying the family and the home.

Of Kittrell’s students from the 1950s and early 1960s, a remarkable nine earned doctoral degrees in Home Economics. Many more also earned master’s degrees and had long careers in the field. Thus for some alumnae, this Home Economics building would be remembered as a vital academic resource and as a critical nexus for women who echoed the faculty’s own travel itineraries. Yet this same space would only house Home Economics—by that name—for the next decade. In 1963, Kittrell felt confident that Home Economics could continue to be a vital, densely connected discipline that met the needs of local people and global populations. But Home Economics did not last at Howard, and many of Kittrell’s political projects were gradually forgotten.

Just five years after the dedication, as long-simmering tensions boiled over, students stormed buildings throughout the Howard campus. As the campus erupted and students occupied the Home Economics building, questioning the university’s entire structure, Kittrell “watched

²⁵³ Dr. Edna P. Amidon, “Home Economics at Howard University,” Box 104-2, Folder 2, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

²⁵⁴ Kittrell to Dean Snowden, 18 December 1957, Box 2607, Folder: Program for Home Economics Building, November 1957, Kittrell Files, HUA.

²⁵⁵ Howard University, *The Bison: 1963* (Washington, D.C.: Graduating Class of 1963, 1963): 61-65.

²⁵⁶ Tate interview, 10.

her dream almost fall to pieces.”²⁵⁷ While Kittrell’s work abroad heightened the profile of her career and the department in which she worked, the climate of “international good-will” she sought to cultivate would not survive. Striving for “something like internationalism” would not satisfy students who demanded a far more explicit, direct engagement with global issues such as Pan-Africanism and so-called domestic issues such as “personal politics.” At the zenith of her career, Kittrell had to wonder as to the real meaning of sitting atop this campus on a hill. For all of her efforts to change and control the landscape, the ground had been shifting underneath her feet all along.

²⁵⁷ Cecile Edwards, “Dean Cecile H. Edwards’s Tribute,” 5, Box 315, Flemma Kittrell Deceased Alumni Folder, Cornell University Alumni Records, #41/2/877, Cornell University Archives.

Chapter Five: Home Institutions

On Massachusetts Avenue in Washington D.C., commercial buildings, embassies, and historic mansions share the real estate, forming a diagonal line emanating from Dupont Circle.¹ Amidst this mixture of private and governmental dwellings, the leaders of the American Home Economics Association set their sights on a location for a new headquarters building in 1969. Soon, leaders settled on the property surrounding Litchfield House, a historic home located at 2010 Massachusetts Avenue. After deciding that Litchfield was “humorless,” the AHEA had it torn down, and a new structure was put in its place by 1971. By then, all that remained of Litchfield was some wrought iron, though the AHEA’s architects insisted that the new building was “historical continuity made contemporary.”² The leadership of the AHEA suggested that this headquarters would blend seamlessly with the neighborhood, serving as model of “efficiency, economy, mobility, and beauty.”³ In addition to providing more space, this move was an attempt to establish the AHEA’s position in relation to national and foreign politics.



Fig. 5.1, 5.2: American Home Economics Association Headquarters in 1971.

¹ National Register of Historic Places, Massachusetts Avenue Historic District, District of Columbia, Washington, National Register #74002166.

² “New Headquarters,” *Journal of Home Economics* 63, no.5 (1971): 338-339.

³ “Welcome to Your New AHEA Headquarters,” *Journal of Home Economics* 63, no.1 (1971): 7.

During the grand opening of the new headquarters, light rains fell on the capital. Undeterred, representatives from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Department of Labor, and the Future Homemakers of America came out to the dedication.⁴ A list of attendees—over five hundred in all—and a large photographic spread of the building soon filled that month’s *Journal of Home Economics*. What the AHEA’s leadership seemed most proud of in the coverage was *how* the building was funded. Two years earlier, the AHEA had launched a “Building for the Future” campaign to mark the organization’s 60th year.⁵ With all-time-high membership rates, a member-funded headquarters was seen as a way to express “the sense of vigor within the Association in laying plans for a future[.]” The building itself was not so much a priority; rather, it was “the realization of a goal not to get, but to serve, and by serving to become.” Without apparent contradiction, some members of the AHEA felt optimistic that this space would be “the ‘bricks and mortar’ symbol of an organization firmly on the move.”⁶ As a manifestation of a larger professional commitment to relevance, this building was designed to give members “a sense of place.”⁷



Fig. 5.3: AHEA “Building for the Future” Campaign (1967-1969)

For Flemmie Kittrell, “building for the future” was also more than an abstract concept. Throughout her career, Kittrell pushed for various building projects, from a nursery center at Bennett College in the 1930s, to a new Home Economics building at Baroda University in the

⁴“AHEA’s New Headquarters: Grand Opening,” *Journal of Home Economics* 63, no.6 (1971): 400.

⁵ “‘Building for the Future’ AHEA Sixtieth Anniversary Campaign Report,” *Journal of Home Economics* 61, no.1 (1969): 12.

⁶ “The Sixtieth Anniversary,” *Journal of Home Economics* 61, no.1 (1969): 12.

⁷ “Progress Toward a New Headquarters Building,” *Journal of Home Economics* 60, no.8 (1968): 617.

1940s, to the more recent structure dedicated in 1963 at Howard University. For Kittrell and many of her colleagues involved with the AHEA campaign, finding a place in academia and politics often involved constructing one of their own. Not all of these attempts at securing a means of permanence would be lasting. Within a few decades, nearly all of Kittrell's spaces for teaching Home Economics would be transformed for other purposes; this headquarters would not be a lasting "home" for the AHEA, either. By the AHEA's 80th anniversary, this new structure was on the real estate market.⁸ This was not an outcome that home economists anticipated.

The field of Home Economics came under significant attack in the 1970s. Criticisms from outside the academy and tensions within the modern university system fed a perception that the discipline was a "ghetto" for women.⁹ Yet as recently as the mid-1960s, many within the profession saw the field expanding, not diminishing. In 1965, one expert went so far as to suggest, "when we are judged by history we shall have written in bold hand a record of important contributions to education...and important contributions to knowledge produced by research."¹⁰ This optimistic forecast was related to the emergence of Great Society programs, the Peace Corps, and Urban Extension, all of which home economists saw as outlets for their expertise.¹¹ On top of these initiatives, the Vocational Act of 1963 was a "windfall," with "substantially more funds" coming to Home Economics.¹² In 1968, a letter to the editor of the *Journal of Home Economics* argued, "instead of outgrowing home economics...contemporary society requires more from this field, although there will have to be some reordering of objectives and the means

⁸ Sheron Sumner, "AHEA's 80th Anniversary," *Journal of Home Economics* 81, no.1 (1989): 3.

⁹ Susan Strasser, *Never Done: A History of American Housework* (New York: Pantheon, 1982); Laura Shapiro, *Perfection Salad: Women and Cooking at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux 1986); Glenna Matthews, *"Just a Housewife": The Rise and Fall of Domesticity in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

¹⁰ Victor A. Christopherson, "Women in Modern Society," *Journal of Home Economics* 57, no.2 (1965): 99-100.

¹¹ Annabelle S. Sherman, "War on Poverty: A Challenge to Home Economics," 57, no.6 (1965): 436.

¹² Margaret Rossiter, *Women Scientists in America: Before Affirmative Action, 1940-1972, Volume II* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 166; 176.

of achieving them.”¹³ In this context, a new headquarters in the capital was a sensible place to start “reordering” and furthering the reach of the discipline. Few professionals within the field saw themselves at the edge of a tipping point; that would only be apparent in retrospect.

Significantly, this AHEA building was not an aberration within the profession. Instead of seeing this building as a final effort to revitalize the field, home economists such as Kittrell likely placed it within a recent upswing in construction. One hundred years after the first Morrill Land Grant Act, institutions founded during or soon after the end of the Civil War were all reaching their centennial marks in the mid-to-late-1960s. With important anniversaries approaching, many administrators pushed for opportunistic building projects. Along with a continued interest in internationalism, Kittrell and other home economists took advantage of these moments to cement their legacies at their “home institutions.” Contemporary records reveal that these building projects were about commemorating the past and putting forth a desire to be part of future plans.

During what has since been interpreted as the twilight of Home Economics, the following buildings were all constructed and highly celebrated at Howard University, Hampton Institute, Cornell University, and Bennett College.¹⁴ At Howard, the 1967 centennial was marked with a series of events on “The University in a Changing Society.” During these commemorations, the recently completed Home Economics Building was held up as an example of Howard’s history of adaptation and continued relevance.¹⁵ The department of Home Economics was also part of contemporary celebrations at Hampton. During the Founder’s Day ceremony of 1967, a newly constructed Home Economics department building was unveiled as part of a longer campaign set

¹³ David D. Henry, “Letter to the Editor,” *Journal of Home Economics* 60, no.6 (1968): 408.

¹⁴ There was a similar trend at the University of Nevada: “New Building, New Program, New Directions” in Marilyn J. Horn, *The History of Home Economics in Nevada* (Reno: Nevada Home Economics Association, 1991).

¹⁵ Rayford W. Logan, *Howard University: The First Hundred Years* (New York: New York University Press, 1968), 278; viii.

to climax in time for the 1968 centennial. At the time, this new building—Flemmie Kittrell Hall—was seen as a marker of all that had changed since the early programs in domestic science. This dedication trend continued at Cornell, where a large wing was added to Martha Van Rensselaer Hall in 1968, a century after classes first began at the university. Finally, at Bennett, a new Clothing Laboratory, Home Economics Reading Room, and Home/Family Life Center were added between 1965 and 1975.¹⁶

In light of the discourses surrounding the “new” crisis of the family and the “war” on poverty, home economists saw these buildings as innovative venues for researching vital social needs.¹⁷ A document guiding some of these contemporary efforts at maintaining relevance was the landmark “McGrath Report” of 1968. This study authored by education expert Earl McGrath set a new course for the profession. Primarily, McGrath suggested a heightened focus on efforts related to “internationalism, urbanism, and expanded social welfare.”¹⁸ As a result of McGrath’s report and internal changes, at many institutions, students were encouraged to act locally through Extension and to think globally from within Home Economics buildings.¹⁹ Still, these efforts at adapting and securing the legacy of Home Economics did not prove to be as successful or lasting as their architects hoped.

McGrath’s report set out an ambitious and wide-ranging set of responsibilities for Home Economics educators. While attempting to broaden the possibilities for the profession, some

¹⁶ “Bennett College History” materials, Box 239, Folder: Bennett College History, American Association of Family and Consumer Science records, #6578. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library. Hereafter cited as AAFCS records. See also: Louise Guenveur Streat, *Time for Design: Vignettes of Life as a Clothing Major* (Greensboro: Bennett College Home Economics Department, 1974).

¹⁷ Natasha Zaretsky, *No Direction Home: The American Family and the Fear of National Decline, 1968-1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

¹⁸ Earl McGrath, “The Changing Mission of Home Economics,” *Journal of Home Economics* 60, no.2, 1968, 88-93. McGrath was also the author of *The Predominantly Negro Colleges and Universities in Transition* (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1965).

¹⁹ Reports on Inner City Fellowships, Box 133, AAFCS records. See also: “Professor Studies Home Ec in the Ghetto,” *Milwaukee Journal*, October 20, 1968; Ruthanna Russel, “Deepening our Commitment,” *Journal of Home Economics* 61, no.5 (1969): 334; “Inner City Experiences,” *Journal of Home Economics* 61, Number 5 (1969): 337.

administrators developed or further expanded sub-disciplines within the field. By the late 1960s, some departments, programs, and colleges incorporated as many as twelve specializations under Home Economics. This led to criticisms that Home Economics was too compartmentalized and hyper-specialized. At the same time, other programs were seen as too vague or narrow, focused only on “homemaking.” Thus two paradoxical assumptions could coexist about the field: that it cast too wide a net, on the one hand, and focused on too small or dated an arena, on the other. In previous decades, home economists often used their flexible and plastic definitions of the field to their advantage. Now, they were targeted for lacking cohesion and disciplinary logic.

With this apparent problem of incoherence, some administrators opted to jettison the term “home” in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Soon, many prominent programs, including the ones at Cornell and Howard, no longer bore the same name. This trend only compounded identity issues. Overall, the shift from Home Economics to Human Ecology or Family and Consumer Science was not as abrupt as has been imagined. The fact that even 25% of degree-granting institutions underwent a name change by 1989 nonetheless exposes substantial intra-professional conflict.²⁰ For some home economists, a willingness to change the name revealed a lack of a “consensus of mission.”²¹ These struggles over identity did not happen in isolation or simply because of outside criticism. Instead, they occurred in the wake of a decrease in the conferral of doctoral degrees, a rise in male faculty taking over administrative positions, and new regulations regarding mandatory retirement.²² While some problems within Home Economics were experienced nationally, they were confronted locally along departmental and institutional bureaucratic lines.²³

²⁰ Horn, “College Programs Affect all AHEA Members,” 2.

²¹ Marilyn J. Horn, “College Programs Affect all AHEA Members,” *Journal of Home Economics* 83, no.3 (1989): 2.

²² For quantitative data, see: Earl McGrath, *The Changing Mission of Home Economics: A Report on Home Economics in the Land-Grant Colleges and State Universities* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1968), 104-117.

²³ Gwen Kay, “‘If it did not exist, it would have to be invented’: Home Economics in Transition at Iowa’s Regents Institutions,” *Annals of Iowa* 70 (2011): 132-160.

As Margaret Rossiter has shown, within some institutions a professional crisis was compounded by animosity from “a new breed of ambitious university presidents who wanted to get rid of home economics, whatever it was [.]” Rossiter’s analysis of various departments and colleges shows that many administrators were stuck in a pattern of working “repeatedly and futilely to define the field and improve and expand their programs with little outside support[.]”²⁴ This was not necessarily because these colleges or programs were underfunded. At the University of California, Berkeley, for example, the exact opposite was the case. As Maresi Nerad’s research reveals, “[o]nce money was to be gotten, men moved into the field.”²⁵ The strong program in Nutrition at Berkeley had long brought money to Home Economics, but a successful Nutrition program did not fit with many administrators’ assumptions about the discipline. Instead of reevaluating the field, Nutrition was taken into another department; thereafter, Home Economics was eliminated. Clearly, it was not abject failure or even a lack of money that changed how some valued Home Economics.

Though Kittrell and others were working as hard as ever to stake bold claims to space, they were losing ground. Almost immediately after Kittrell’s retirement, which came amidst a large number of institutional departures and national retirements in the field, Kittrell’s program was changed to Human Ecology. This fairly rapid loss of institutional knowledge was one issue; there was also the matter of how home economists would continue to engage with bureaus and federal agencies. As one male leader in the field observed, quoting the late President Kennedy, ‘one of the ironies of history is that war has brought American women their greatest economic

²⁴ Margaret Rossiter, “The Men Move In,” in *Rethinking Home Economics: Women and the History of a Profession*, ed. Sarah Stage and Virginia Vincenti (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 115.

²⁵ Maresi Nerad, *The Academic Kitchen: A Social History of Gender Stratification at the University of California, Berkeley* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987; 1999), 131-137.

opportunities.’ Looking ahead into the 1970s, this same Child Studies expert wondered if “home economics can sustain and swell the crest of opportunity that our wars have set in motion.”²⁶

Starting with World War I, many home economists had developed a generative relationship with the warring state that continued through the Depression, World War II, and many battles of the Cold War. For some home economists who had served the state through previous world wars and Cold War battles, it would be possible to continue finding work. Past the 1970s, the perception and availability of that type of work would radically change.

Kittrell’s papers reveal a dense network of professionals working across federal agencies to find and make opportunities for research and teaching abroad. Contributors and editors writing within the *Journal of Home Economics* also frequently trumpeted the fact that there were many overseas positions through the 1970s. Many of the women who seemed to be most successful in obtaining such contracts were not just colleagues, but peers. These women of a certain age—Kittrell’s age—had benefitted from the postwar boom of World War I, the temporary surge in graduate work in the Depression, and most recently, the push for federal service with World War II. While “veteran” home economists who had already undertaken service projects tended to be highly successful at claiming *more* work, changes within the overarching structure of federal work had a long term impact on the field.

During a more general reorganization in 1953, the work of the Bureau of Home Economics was folded into the Agricultural Research Service.²⁷ This change, along with a shift in focus toward agribusiness, meant that research in nutrition and family welfare started to receive less funding. Two years later, in 1955, home economists began drafting a proposal to create an agency or foundation of their own, something comparable to the National Science

²⁶ Christopherson, “Women in Modern Society,” 100.

²⁷ Susan Levine, *School Lunch Politics: The Surprising History of America’s Favorite Welfare Program* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 95-96.

Foundation. For nearly seven years, ambitious leaders “made the rounds of government officials” but “they were told repeatedly that other projects—military preparedness, ICBM missiles, and a balanced economy—held higher priority in the federal budget.”²⁸ While investigating problems outside of the U.S. was big business for some home economists, the possibilities for domestic reform were declining in some arenas. With these changes, the opportunities for rising professionals were also shrinking. While some established home economists—like Kittrell—moved with ease between contacts at various bureaus and agencies, it would soon become apparent that there was not another generation who could or wanted to continue that work.

This shift away from state-funded international work in Home Economics was not just about connections. Throughout the late 1960s, student demonstrators challenged the longstanding associations between many modern universities and the military-industrial complex. Particularly in the preceding decade, defense contracts had been financially beneficial to many institutions. In addition to challenging the Vietnam War, many students decried these linkages as contrary to the mission of the institution where they studied. As protestors criticized campus military training and entanglements with “defense” projects, Kittrell’s connections to the State Department and Agency for International Development (AID) took on new meaning. In this context, her expansive, globally-connected building might have been a sign of just how embedded she and her colleagues were in the modern university and imperial networks.

Likewise, Kittrell’s emphasis on “the family” and “humanity” put her out of step with students’ mission of remaking Howard into a “Black University.” Kittrell had completed her own college degree in the 1920s amidst one set of student revolutions—now, she would live to see another, though she would leave Howard in 1972 to quietly retire.

²⁸ Rossiter, *Women Scientists in America*, 175.

Heretofore, transformations in governmental structures, changes in students' expectations of higher education, and shifts in racial discourse toward identity politics have not been considered in relation to Home Economics. These factors and contingencies are essential to understanding why this discipline came to be seen as incongruous with many institutions of higher education. Often, these subtle shifts and social revolutions have been disregarded in favor of an oft-cited anecdote related to feminism. In many histories, Robin Morgan's speech at the 1970 AHEA meeting in Denver, Colorado has been given undue emphasis.²⁹ This moment has provided a clear entry point for arguing that feminist challenges to Home Economics eroded the discipline and profession. However, this argument does not completely explain how and why the discipline changed, and it fails to account for what Kittrell and her peers taught and practiced through the 1960s.

In retrospect, home economists' work from this time *could* have overlapped with many activist agendas. While many feminists, broadly defined, demanded greater access to child care, Home Economics departments continued to offer that service and to train day care workers.³⁰ Furthermore, as groups from the Young Lords to the Black Panthers decried the deficiencies in children's health, particularly within urban areas, a growing number of home economists were researching food crises and attempting to take a stronger role working in cities.³¹ By and large, home economists were not seen as potential allies for these groups or the National Organization for Women (NOW). Clearly, these experts in extension and translation were no longer extending or translating their work as widely as they imagined. After working for decades to become part

²⁹ "What Robin Morgan Said at Denver," *Journal of Home Economics* 65, no.1 (1973): 13.

³⁰ Benita Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

³¹ Rhonda Y. Williams, "Black Women, Urban Politics, and Engendering Black Power," in *The Black Power Movement: rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era*, ed. Peniel Joseph (New York: Routledge, 2006).

of “the establishment,” in order to secure grants and high paying jobs, perhaps the most ambitious home economists simply seemed like part of the problem.

As Megan Elias argues in *Stir it Up* (2008), Casey King’s question of “Who cleans the freedom house?” and the 1968 Miss America Protest reveal a surprising connection between home economists and “new feminists.” Both groups would have agreed that “women must seize control of all forces and elements having to do with domestic space and activities.”³² Beyond that, however, many home economists *were* ambivalent as to the prospects of the women’s movement. Calls for Women’s Studies within the academy even surprised some senior home economists. These women could remember (or were at least aware that there was a time) when their field had begun in a single “Women’s Building.” To one leader, aligning with Women’s Studies might suggest a too narrow frame, as if home economists were “concerned only about women and not about people.” Though this educator followed up by suggesting that home economists should study “the roles of both sexes,” Home Economics was usually associated with just women.³³ This was not a source of connection between home economists and many feminists. Home economists’ focus on serving humanity and the family largely meant that they were out of step with the discourses surrounding both feminism and identity politics.

Home economists clearly did not always explain or promote the full range of their work. Therefore a very limited perception of what home economists were doing—rather than evidence of what they were involved with—informed commentaries on the field. Kittrell’s career from the mid-1960s until her retirement in 1972 is particularly illustrative. In the early 1960s, Kittrell was involved with several studies on black children’s health, a pilot for Head Start, and training for Urban Extension. Kittrell was also involved with the formation of a college in the Congo from

³² Megan J. Elias, *Stir it Up: Home Economics in American Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 143-148.

³³ Marjorie East in “What Robin Morgan Said at Denver,” *Journal of Home Economics* 65, no. 1 (1972): 15.

1961-1965 and a peaceful demonstration in South Africa in 1967. At the height of her career, Kittrell testified as to the value of the Foreign Assistance Act and experienced the joy of forming her own academic space at Howard. Not long after these events, Kittrell was refused service at a small diner in Maryland because of her race. In response, she sat in silent protest with her white colleagues, who all donated money to a civil rights group in kind.³⁴ Upon her death, a friend would suggest that Kittrell was not one to talk explicitly about race relations—but she was always “doing something about them [.]”³⁵ Over time, this emphasis Kittrell placed on *doing* work related to race relations, rather than protesting or discussing discrimination outright, made her range of political activity less visible. In 1977, three years before her death, Kittrell even had to defensively reiterate, “I’m political too.”³⁶

In the wake of the Moynihan Report (1965), Kittrell’s community-based work with black families and her planning for Head Start could not have been apolitical. By the same token, her interest in black Africans’ nutrition in South Africa or women’s education in the Congo could hardly be divorced from foreign policy. Kittrell’s assertion reveals how these complex projects could *still* be minimized given her chosen discipline. That Kittrell had been focused on the family while doing highly public, political work was not a contradiction to her—it was strategy. Nonetheless, as students questioned the entire structure of the university and politicized domestic relations in new ways, Home Economics came to be seen as a troubling remnant of dated gender ideals. The fact that Kittrell had used this field to surprising ends would gradually be forgotten.

Though Kittrell spent much of the 1950s away from Howard, in the early 1960s, she shifted some of her attention from battles overseas to the War on Poverty in the US. Earlier,

³⁴ Kittrell, “Testimony Before Senate Foreign Relations Committee in Relation to S2996 - Foreign Assistance Act April 18, 1962, ” 1962, Box 104-13, Folder 34, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

³⁵ Rev. Kathryn Moore, “In Memoriam 1980,” Box 104-1, Folder 13, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

³⁶ Tate interview, 33.

Kittrell had published her findings on “The Negro Family as a Health Agency” and worked on national initiatives related to children’s health.³⁷ Kittrell returned to this work with a series of federally-funded projects on black children’s health and black family dynamics in the early 1960s. In a 1966 article written for the *American Association of University Women Journal*, “The Family is Central,” Kittrell described some of her most recent quantitative and longitudinal work on campus. She also positively noted that as of late, more home economists and other experts had been “pooling their knowledge and their findings toward the ultimate well-being of youth.”³⁸ Confident about the future of her discipline and child studies in particular, Kittrell continued, “I welcome this constellation of varied experts and practitioners.”³⁹

Of all her work with children, Kittrell’s involvement with Project Head Start, which coincided with this article, is most notable.⁴⁰ At the onset, Head Start was lauded as an especially important intervention in early education. This perception owed much to the idea that this was a wholly innovative program conceived by two “fathers:” Yale psychologist Edward Zigler and Sargent Shriver.⁴¹ This honorific label and sense of newness would minimize the extent to which women’s labors and earlier contributions set a foundation for the work.⁴² As Head Start leader Polly Greenburg argues, many architects of the program “neglected to notice the relevant

³⁷ Kittrell, “The Negro Family as a Health Agency,” *Journal of Negro Education* 18, no.3 (1949): 422-428.

³⁸ Suzanne Gould, “Feminism and Home Ec: An Unlikely Partnership?” *American Association of University Women Blog*, July 28, 2014, <http://www.aauw.org/2014/07/31/feminism-and-home-ec>. This article fails to mention the complex history between AAUW and Home Economics. See Mary Henry to Olive Homan, 12 December 1940, Box 14, Folder 14-43, New York State College of Home Economics records, #23-2-749. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library. Hereafter cited as NYSCHE records.

³⁹ Kittrell, “The Family is Central: Cornerstone for Human Development,” Box 104-12, Folders 33-34, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

⁴⁰ Sally Lubeck, *Sandbox Society: Early Education in Black and White America* (Philadelphia: Falmer Press, 1985); Sonya Michel, *Children’s Interests/Mothers’ Rights: The Shaping of America’s Child Care Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); Maris A. Vinovskis, *The Birth of Head Start: Preschool Education Policies in the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

⁴¹ Edward Zigler and Sally J. Styfco, *The Hidden History of Head Start* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁴² Urie Bronfenbrenner, “Head Start Reminiscences,” Box 1, Folder 80, Urie Bronfenbrenner papers, #23-13-954. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

pioneering work...women had been thoughtfully engaged in...for several generations.”⁴³ The large federal investment, infrastructure, and increased attention to the “crisis of caring” due to rising rates of working married mothers was new to a degree, though the notion that systems of childcare could be used for democratizing society was not.⁴⁴

As Greenberg’s work suggests, there had been experimental childcare systems and child study laboratories on campuses for decades up to that point. In this regard, Kittrell’s education and career is illustrative. From the beginning, child care facilities—and training for work in them—had been part of the program at Hampton and therefore part of Kittrell’s experience. At Cornell, the Child Study program funded through the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Fund created ample opportunities for observation and research just prior to Kittrell’s arrival.⁴⁵ After seeing what the LSRMF could accomplish at Cornell, Kittrell asked for General Education Board funds to create her own laboratory nursery school at Bennett. Later, at Howard, Kittrell continued this type of work with the pre-school and kindergarten on campus.⁴⁶ Significantly, in Kittrell’s pre-Head Start work at Howard, she considered both children and parents subjects and participants in her research. While many saw this approach as new to Head Start, Kittrell knew it was an echo of Children’s Bureau and the Parent Education initiatives of the 1920s.⁴⁷

⁴³ Polly Greenberg, “The Origins of Head Start and the Two Versions of Parent Involvement: How Much Parent Participation in Early Childhood Programs and Services for Poor Children?” in *Critical Perspectives on Project Head Start: Revisioning the Hope and Challenge*, ed. Jeanne Ellsworth and Lynda J. Ames (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 63. See also Megan McDonough, “Polly H. Greenberg,” *Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.), Jan. 16, 2014.

⁴⁴ “A Group Day-Care for Culturally Deprived Children and Parents,” March 1, 1965, Box 104-12, Folder 39, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

⁴⁵ Emily Cahan, *Past Caring: A History of U.S. Preschool Care and Education for the Poor, 1820-1965* (New York: National Center for Children in Poverty, Columbia University, 1989), 28.

⁴⁶ “Growing up is a complicated task at best but HU’s nursery school helps point the way,” *Washington Afro-American* (Washington, D.C.), Feb. 2, 1963, Kittrell Trustee Box, Hampton University Archives. Hereafter cited as Hampton Archives.

⁴⁷ “A Parent’s Creed,” and The National Congress of Parents and Teachers, *Its History, Organization and Program of Service* (Washington, DC: National Office, 1928), File 907, Folder: Parent-Teacher, Home & School, Records of the Office of the Commissioner Historical File, 1870-1950, RG 12, National Archives College Park, College Park, MD.

In the years just preceding Head Start, child care studies had moved from the margin to the center of Kittrell's career. From 1959-1964, Kittrell worked with Sociologist Hylan Lewis on a program funded by the National Institute of Mental Health entitled "Enrichment Programs for Culturally Deprived Children."⁴⁸ Thereafter, Kittrell supervised a Children's Bureau research program on children as they matured from age three to age five.⁴⁹ Through these grants, Kittrell was able to generate nutrition research and in turn, create systems of support for local families. Kittrell also used her care and research sites as a means of training Home Economics students (Fig.5.5) and as a platform for working with faculty in Social Work such as Ira Gibbons.⁵⁰



Fig. 5.4: *The Bison*, 1966, 48-49.

By the time Head Start launched, Kittrell had been studying family dynamics and childcare for the better part of four decades, though she also saw the potential for innovation. Kittrell envisioned Head Start as a way to build on her earlier research and to create an expert-

⁴⁸ Kittrell, "A Nursery School Program Within Day Care Hours for Culturally Deprived Children and Parents," September 1966, Box 104-13, Folder 2; "A Nursery School Program Within Day Care Hours for Culturally Deprived Children and Parents," December, 1966, Box 104-13, Folders 3-4, Kittrell Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University Archives. Hereafter cited as Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

⁴⁹ Kittrell, "Enriching the Preschool Experience of Children from Age 3: The Program," *Children* 15, no. 4 (1968): 139, Box 104-12, Folder 30, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

⁵⁰ "First Day with the Nursery School Children: Observation Notes," October 1, 1964, Box 104-12, Folder 37, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

driven, parentally informed system of care tailored to each community.⁵¹ Due to her extensive experience, Kittrell was invited to the early organizational meetings for the project. She was soon struck by the “confusion among many of the participants as to how to get started on a program designed for the poor.” Citing her “early upbringing” and Depression-era research, Kittrell did not see this as an obstacle for herself. Intervening in these conversations, Kittrell raised her hand and recited the Langston Hughes poem “Mother to Son” from memory.⁵² “Life for me ain’t been no crystal stair,” a mother in the poem relates, telling her son about hardship through a domestic metaphor.⁵³ Kittrell thought the message of the poem about resilience and “climbin’” fitting, for it spoke to “how parents and children learn how to cooperate and learn from each other and the resources of the community.”⁵⁴ In a room filled with experts, Kittrell claimed her expertise through a Harlem renaissance poet, her way of communicating a history of resilience at a time when “the black family” was a target of criticism.

Kittrell’s choice to speak through Hughes also reveals her comparative comfort with discourses of uplift. Likely because of this affinity, Kittrell’s work with poorer communities was not as immune to criticism as she suggested. Just a few years earlier, there had been “mistrust and hostility” among some parents participating in a childcare program at Howard. A major source of contention was the “home visit,” an investigation usually conducted by comparatively privileged Howard students studying Home Economics. Over time, parents and the staff worked to set clearer boundaries; students were also given training to respect the “pride” and

⁵¹ Kittrell, “The Contribution of Research to the Field of Child Development and Family Relations,” n.d., Box 104-12, Folder 28, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

⁵² “Parents and Children Learning Together in the Home—in the School—in the Community,” presentation for Sigma Delta Epsilon, Graduate Women in Science, Cornell University, April 1976. Folder: Head Start, Flemma Kittrell Files, RG 39-School of Human Ecology Records, Howard University Archives. Hereafter cited as Kittrell Files, HUA.

⁵³ Langston Hughes, “Mother to Son,” in *The Weary Blues* (New York: Knopf, 1926).

⁵⁴ “Parents and Children Learning Together in the Home—in the School—in the Community,” presentation for Sigma Delta Epsilon, Graduate Women in Science, Cornell University, April 1976. Box 2603, Folder: Head Start, Kittrell Files, HUA.

“aspirations” of parents willing to put children in the program. Then, a local news story described participants in the study as ‘culturally deprived children of a poverty area.’ In Kittrell’s words, some parents understandably “expressed resentment.”⁵⁵

Reflecting on this episode, Kittrell advocated that colleagues choose their language more carefully. In subsequent years, this language would become more, not less entrenched in national discourses on the war on poverty. For the Head Start pilot at Howard, the targeted group was “alienated, culturally deprived, and culturally impoverished children.”⁵⁶ While work with the “culturally deprived” could be big business for some research universities, Kittrell was well aware that this possibility for institutional advancement had to be balanced with community buy-in.⁵⁷ Kittrell’s longitudinal data showed that it was ultimately the work with *parents* that led to more successful Head Start alumni.⁵⁸ Thus Kittrell urged other care providers to watch their phrasing and strive to be “gifted in the art of being finely in tune with people in need.”⁵⁹ Gibbons similarly urged his Social Work students to focus on people, not services, and to ‘help people to be their own advocates.’⁶⁰ Their shared goal with Head Start was to enable parents to be stakeholders in community development.

Kittrell and her colleagues’ discussions of parents, social services, and deprivation must be read in relation to Daniel P. Moynihan’s *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (1965). In much of her work, Kittrell stressed the “aspirations” single African American mothers

⁵⁵ Kittrell, “Enriching the Preschool Experience,” 139.

⁵⁶ Logan, *Howard University*, 566; Charles G. Hurst, Jr. and Wallace L. Jones, “Generating Spontaneous Speech in the Underprivileged Child,” *Journal of Negro Education* 36, no.4 (1967): 362-367; Robert S. Allen and Paul Scott, “Shriver Agency Tries to Find Answers,” *Lewiston Daily Sun* (Lewiston, ME), Mar. 9, 1967, 4.

⁵⁷ “Getting Over the Hump Becomes Realistic for Mississippi Kids,” *Jet* Aug. 27, 1970, 20-21.

⁵⁸ Kittrell, “Findings,” n.d., p.31.

⁵⁹ Kittrell, “The Family is Central: Cornerstone for Human Development,” Box 104-12, Folders 33-34, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

⁶⁰ “Pull Up Poor By What Bootstraps?” *St. Petersburg Times* (St. Petersburg, FL), Aug. 21, 1969, 11B; Ira Gibbons, “HU Trains Social Workers to Cope With Environment,” *Baltimore Afro-American* (Baltimore, MD), Apr. 21, 1970, 109; Gibbons, “Character Building Agencies and the Needs of Negro Children and Youth,” *Journal of Negro Education* 19, no.3 (1950): 363-71.

had for their children. Her invocation of Hughes came at a time when black mothers were seen not so much as role models, but matriarchs creating a “tangle of pathology,” to cite Moynihan.⁶¹ In contrast to Kittrell’s and Gibbon’s reports on engaging parents at a local level, Moynihan’s sweeping study emphasized what he perceived as the failures of black parents nationwide.⁶² While Moynihan and Kittrell drew from longer histories of the black family in their work, they came to very different conclusions.⁶³ Kittrell ultimately saw far more hope and frankly, dignity, among black families in her work.⁶⁴

By placing Kittrell in conversation with other contemporary experts, a shared emphasis on the family as the principal organizing unit in society emerges. Even President Johnson argued that “[t]he family is the cornerstone of our society” at the Howard commencement address of 1965.⁶⁵ Kittrell might have been particularly pleased to hear this statement on her campus from a sitting president. At the same time, an overemphasis on what “the family” could be expected to provide for individuals often led to a politics of blame. Post-Moynihan, the “black family” and attendant notions of “pathology” were frequently invoked as catchalls for larger social problems. Kittrell, who had spent the better part of the past three decades working directly with black families, insisted on putting them in context.⁶⁶

Kittrell’s race politics in relation to Head Start are significant because she reached a wide audience that stretched beyond her campus. In addition to running a pilot site, Kittrell trained an estimated 2,000 Head Start workers across the country. At one of her sessions in Dallas, Texas, a

⁶¹ Eric Pace, “Hylan G. Lewis, 88, Student of the Urban Poor,” *New York Times* (New York, NY), Mar. 16, 2000.

⁶² Daniel P. Moynihan, “The Negro Family: The Case for National Action,” Office of Planning and Research, United States Department of Labor (1965).

⁶³ E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939).

⁶⁴ Kittrell, “The Negro Family as a Health Agency,” *Journal of Negro Education* 18, no.3 (1949): 422-428.

⁶⁵ Lyndon B. Johnson, “To Fulfill These Rights,” *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1965 II* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1966), 635-640.

⁶⁶ Kittrell, “Understanding Black Children Within the Context of the Black Community,” Box 104-14, Folder 2; Kittrell, “The Care of Young Children,” 5 December 1970, Box 104-12, Folder 23, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

reporter noted that “Dr. Kittrell always welcomes the opportunity to emphasize that Home Economics is more than cooking and sewing; that it is actually the study of the science of living.”⁶⁷ This phrasing is nearly identical to coverage of the Bennett nursery school thirty years earlier.⁶⁸ Clearly, this message was still not reaching a wider audience, but Kittrell saw this as a moment for future recruitment. This notion was shared by Kittrell’s former classmate Queen (Shootes) Jones. In this same period, Jones also offered educational sessions based in Home Economics and Sociology on the “disadvantaged child” at Tuskegee Institute.⁶⁹

These recruiting and educational programs shift our focus away from national “czars” while also complicating the binaries separating white policymakers and black participants.⁷⁰ Kittrell and Jones were not the only black home economists weighing in on these issues through training and research. Nellie Brodis, a fellow Cornell alumna, took a similar approach in her scholarship on single-parent households in a predominantly black community Detroit. In her research, Brodis resisted drawing easy conclusions about race and poverty. After working with more than 225 single mothers, she argued that ‘studies reporting racial differences are likely to be reporting class differences.’ Furthermore, Brodis argued that racism was *learned* during the “very early years.” For Brodis, this knowledge presented a special challenge to Home Economics teachers dealing with the gradual transition toward integration.⁷¹ She recommended that Home Economics teachers see “a mandate to become agents of change” through their work with young children in the classroom and in their service to local communities.⁷²

⁶⁷ “Dr. Kittrell Visits Dallas for Head Start Orientation,” *Post Tribune* (Dallas, TX), June 19, 1965.

⁶⁸ “Negro Child Gets Pre-School Study,” *New York Times* (New York, NY), Dec. 18, 1938, 10D.

⁶⁹ Head Start Teacher Training Program Files, VF.C2, Tuskegee University Archives.

⁷⁰ For an in-depth look at one particular program, see Sunflower County Progress, Inc., Box 32, Folder 24, Fannie Lou Hamer Papers, Amistad Research Center, New Orleans, LA.

⁷¹ Nellie Brodis, “Is School Desegregation Still a Good Idea?” *The School Review* 84, no.3 (1976): 507-511.

⁷² Nellie Frances Tidline Adams Brodis, “Parent-Child Relationship and Self-Concept as Related to Differential Academic Achievement of Adolescent Siblings in Father-Absent Families,” (PhD diss., Cornell University, 1969), 6; 22; 131.

Brodis's vision for Home Economics teachers echoed proposals put forth just a few years earlier by one of Kittrell's colleagues. Dr. Ruth Jefferson Bryant, a professor of Home Economics at Howard, argued that "interracial understanding" could be most readily fostered through "home and family life education."⁷³ For both of these women, racism began "at home," which meant that anti-racist teachings were the purview of Home Economics teachers. Over the course of the next decade, critics of Home Economics would often focus on the field as a form of sex segregation. This focus has obscured the extent to which some home economists imagined their discipline as a means of dealing with racial segregation.

With regards to Head Start, for Kittrell and other black home economists, working within a government-funded initiative of this scale meant the difference between being a subject or an agent. Well-versed in uplift rhetoric and bureaucratic systems, Kittrell chose to see governmental programs as more useful than not. In part, Kittrell's commitment to civic reform seems to have been buoyed by the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Writing directly to President Johnson that year, Kittrell commended him for ushering in legislation "second only to the signing of the emancipation proclamation" and "on par with the Land Grant Act of 1893." Pledging "to provide goodwill and understanding among all Americans, *regardless* of race or creed or color," Kittrell drew upon the language of programs such as Point Four to outline "domestic" plans.⁷⁴

This letter takes on new meaning when considering Kittrell's contemporaneous research abroad. From 1961-1965, Kittrell worked in the Congo as a part-time consultant to the Woman's Division of the Methodist Church and the Agricultural Technical Assistance Foundation

⁷³ Ruth Bryant Jefferson, "Interracial Understanding: A Challenge to Home and Family Life Education," *Journal of Home Economics* 51, no.2 (1959): 87-93.

⁷⁴ Kittrell to Lyndon B. Johnson, 4 July, 1964, Box 104-6, Folder 10, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

(ATAF).⁷⁵ Charged with developing a Home Economics program at the Congo Polytechnic Institute (CPI) in Stanleyville, Kittrell was in the Congo during many periods of turmoil. Kittrell maintained extensive records on curriculum development in the Congo and workshops she hosted for Howard and Drew University students desiring to work there. Even with this dense record, the subjects Kittrell chose not to document are far more significant.⁷⁶

A few months before Kittrell's earliest trip to the Congo, Patrice Lumumba, the first democratically elected Prime Minister of the Congo, came to speak at Howard. During his talk, Lumumba called Howard 'the pride of the black race.' He further expressed a hope that Congolese students would come to Howard and that in return, Howard students would work 'on the land of their ancestors.' Lumumba's trip incited intense excitement among many students; with this young leader at the head of a democratic nation, the future of African independence seemed brighter.⁷⁷ Despite the great impact Lumumba had on campus, Kittrell's files do not mention this visit. Regardless, it is likely that the students who soon signed up to teach Home Economics in the Congo with Kittrell were inspired by Lumumba.

Kittrell's other files on the Congo also contain no references or even allusions to the series of events that happened after Lumumba's visit to campus. As part of this same trip, Lumumba sought to lobby support from the United Nations to avoid a civil war in the Congo. A few months later, Lumumba was murdered on January 17, 1961 in an assassination coordinated

⁷⁵ Flemmie P. Kittrell Mission Biographical Reference File, Microfilm Edition of the Mission Biographical Reference files, 1880s-1969, United Methodist Church Archives - GCAH, Madison, New Jersey. Hereafter cited as Methodist Archives.

⁷⁶ "Crash Program for Congo Missions," *Christian Advocate* V, no.2 (1961): 9-11; Eugene L. Smith, "The African: What He Wants, What He Needs, What We Are Doing" *Christian Advocate* V, no.22 (1961).

⁷⁷ "Lumumba Visits Historic Places," *Reading Eagle* (Reading, PA), July 28, 1960, 11; Robin McKown, *Lumumba: A Biography* (New York: Doubleday, 1969).

by the Central Intelligence Agency.⁷⁸ The Belgian inspector of police, Frans Verscheure, happened to notice that it was 9:43 P.M. when the orders were given “to muscle Patrice Lumumba’s body into a shallow trench.”⁷⁹ Lumumba, an inspiring leader who had just started traveling the world the previous year, was put in an unmarked grave. This was not the first or last time that acts of international violence in the Congo were deliberately hidden from history. Decades earlier, King Leopold II had the imperial archives from his torturous rule burned, declaring, ‘I will give them my Congo...but they have no right to know what I did there.’⁸⁰ As Adam Hochschild suggests, “history lies heavy in Africa.”⁸¹

The full extent of the Belgians’ and Americans’ complicity in Lumumba’s murder would not be widely known for years. Nonetheless, Lumumba’s death was a huge international news story. As the situation in the Congo worsened, activists within and outside of Africa grappled with the individual loss and the larger defeat Lumumba’s murder signified. For many students at Howard—perhaps some of Kittrell’s own students—this was a serious blow.⁸² As Peniel Joseph has suggested, “for a generation of African Americans, the murdered nationalist leader provided a face for both anti-imperialism and the consequences associated with such political audacity.”⁸³ Kittrell could not have avoided the extensive coverage of this act of terror; still, there is no mention of this incident in any of her Congo papers currently available for research.⁸⁴

⁷⁸ Komozi Woodward, “Amiri Baraka, the Congress of African People, and Black Power Politics from the 1961 United Nations Protest to the 1972 Gary Convention,” in *The Black Power Movement: rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era*, ed. Peniel Joseph (New York: Routledge, 2006), 55-77.

⁷⁹ Emmanuel Gerard and Bruce Kucklick, *Death in the Congo: Murdering Patrice Lumumba* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 5.

⁸⁰ Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), 294.

⁸¹ Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost*, 301.

⁸² “Congo Faces War,” *Baltimore Afro-American* (Baltimore, MD), Feb. 14, 1961, front page.

⁸³ Peniel Joseph “Black Studies, Student Activism, and the Black Power Movement,” in *The Black Power Movement: rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era*, ed. Peniel Joseph (New York: Routledge, 2006), 256.

⁸⁴ In the National Archives, many papers related to AID and “the Congo” or “Zaire” are still restricted. Similarly, some papers from the 1960s are not yet accessible at university archives.

In contrast to reports written about political situation in the Congo at the time, an entirely different, if myopic, picture of the Congo emerges from Kittrell's personal files and other mission documents. The American missionary Billy Starnes promoted the Congo Polytechnic Institute by arguing that the Congo would not be able to "rise to its highest level of living if the home and welfare of the family lag behind."⁸⁵ For Starnes and Kittrell, what the Congo needed most was stronger families. Therefore, Kittrell's role was to create a strong Home Economics program at CPI. Though Starnes and other stakeholders insisted that their work was invested in women's futures, Home Economics was hardly new to the Congo.⁸⁶ As with other nations formerly occupied by colonizing powers, a range of missionary groups had established domestic science programs decades earlier.⁸⁷

One of these programs was the Home Economics School in Lodja, an institution run by the Woman's Division of the Methodist Church.⁸⁸ According to Methodist missionary Sally Reinecke, this program "was not too well accepted" at first. Many parents assumed that the female students "would only learn to cook and sew." In response, Reinecke focused her efforts on making a practice home and developing recipes with "local ingredients" with the students. As she saw it, "this prejudice has gradually been broken down."⁸⁹ During her time in the Congo, Kittrell observed a different form of "prejudice" against Home Economics.⁹⁰ Kittrell would

⁸⁵ "Report on the Home Economics and Family Life Program of the Congo Polytechnic Institute," Mission Geographical Reference Files, Methodist Archives.

⁸⁶ Nancy Rose Hunt, "Domesticity and Colonialism in Belgian Africa: Usumbura's Foyer Social, 1946-1960," *Signs* 15, no.3 (Spring 1990): 447-474; Barbara A. Yates, "Church, State and Education in Belgian Africa: Implications for Contemporary Third World Women," in *Women's Education in the Third World: Comparative Perspective*, ed. Gail P. Kelly and Carolyn M. Elliott (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982).

⁸⁷ Lorena Kelly, "Christian Home Makers," *World Outlook* (1958): 39-40, Home Economics Schools, Lodja, Congo, Mission Geographical Reference Files, Methodist Archives.

⁸⁸ Sally Reinecke, *Voices from Africa* (Westminster: privately printed, 1990).

⁸⁹ Sally Reinecke, Report of the Home Economics School (Ecole Menagere) Lodja, June 19, 1957, Mission Geographical Reference Files, Methodist Archives.

⁹⁰ Lorena Kelly to Dr. Omar Lee Hartzler, Director, CPI, 1 July 1961. Kelly and Reinecke were among the first to assess Kittrell's plans and among the first to see them as overly ambitious. Kittrell's correspondence with Harzler can be found in Box 104-5, Folder 15, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

argue that new approaches in Home Economics faced “stiff resistance” in part because they did *not* resemble the colonial forms of domestic science training.⁹¹ Similarly, Queen Jones found hostility among Jamaican women accustomed to English education practices in the late 1950s.⁹² What neither academic said was that their Jamaican and Congolese students may have interpreted these “new” Home Economics programs as another imperial intrusion.

For her part, Kittrell saw the new program at CPI as wholly distinct from other antecedents, in a positive way. Her earliest proposals stressed that the new courses would be “for those young women with superior secondary (high school) *training, leading to a bachelor’s degree.*”⁹³ Graduates would then be “teaching, directing extension programs, [and] conducting research in family life and nutrition, social welfare and public health.”⁹⁴ Speaking to a group of professional home economists, Kittrell further clarified that this work in higher education at CPI was grounded in the “conviction that leadership in the country would have to stem from liberal education.”⁹⁵ As Kittrell initially understood it, the program would be developed to nurture a cohort of female leaders capable of advancement in the newly independent Congo. Kittrell explained this mission during a preliminary lecture tour in 1961. Traveling around Elisabethville, Kittrell insisted that Home Economics classes were for “smart girls” who “may work in government and even in the United Nations.”⁹⁶ Those aware of the international machinations of the previous year might not have been so sure this was a hopeful premise.

⁹¹ Kittrell, “Home Economics in African Countries,” in *International Home Economics* (Ames: Center for Agricultural and Economic Development, Iowa State University, 1965).

⁹² Queen Shootes (Jones) to Kittrell, 30 December 1958, Box 104-10, Folder 8, Kittrell Papers, MSRC. See also Research Committee, Caribbean Association of Home Economists,” *Caribbean Association of Home Economists Inc.*, <http://www.caribbeanhomeeconomist.org/>.

⁹³ “Congo Polytechnic Institute Program for Home Economics Education 1961-1962,” Box 104-12, Folder 26, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁹⁵ Tate interview, 12.

⁹⁶ Kittrell, “Consultation on Home Economics,” Box 104-12, Folder 27, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

If there was pushback, it was not written down. Internal mission documents from this talk on locals' reactions only include banal statements such as: "the explanations given by Dr. Kittrell make us very happy."⁹⁷ Shortly after this trip, once back in the US, Kittrell was asked about "the Little Rock question." This issue had interested her audiences in Ghana; most likely, the groups she met with in the Congo also had questions with regards to this topic. Kittrell's answers remained the same. To a fellow home economist working as a journalist at the *Washington Post*, Kittrell suggested, 'I say we have a free press and we are glad to let the world know what goes on in our country.' Reflecting on what she described as the "Communist propaganda" circulating in the Congo, Kittrell continued, 'I tell them whatever our difficulties are, we work at the problem in a peaceful way and that we are all working for full democracy.'⁹⁸ Kittrell's long-held commitment to notions of progress did not waver in this period.

To other home economists, Kittrell would describe her work in the Congo as a way to meet the "thirst for education [that] is so particularly great in those countries which have recently received their independence."⁹⁹ Kittrell's educational and technical assistance projects abroad had never been apolitical or neutral, but now the stakes might have seemed especially high. This time abroad in the Congo—as with everywhere else—was not merely about teaching women life skills or homemaking methods through Home Economics. During Kittrell's tenure, CPI received grants from the mission board, the non-profit ATAF, UNESCO and finally AID, ostensibly for

⁹⁷ Kittrell, "Reports of Discussion Groups: Home Economics Consultation, Elisabethville, Katanga," Box 104-13, Folder 33, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

⁹⁸ Elinor Lee, "She's Off to the Congo to Organize a College," *Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.) July 30, 1962, B6.

⁹⁹ Kittrell, "International Education with Special Reference to Home Economics," May 4, 1962, Cornell University Home Economics Advisory Council Meeting, Series IV, Box 1, Folder 12, New York State College of Home Economics Advisory council records, #23-21-2794. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

books and structural development.¹⁰⁰ The extent to which Kittrell was working for other agencies, especially AID, on top of her contract with the Methodist Church remains unclear. Kittrell simply does not engage the broader political context of changes within the Congo in nearly any document, which in itself is suggestive of larger gaps in her archive.

Only a few letters allude to the internal and geopolitical turmoil in the Congo. By 1964, there were increasingly intense and sustained movements against white missionaries. In earlier years, the CPI had been run by white missionaries and a few local elites; the “lines of authority” were often “ill-defined,” according to Kittrell.¹⁰¹ This leadership issue reached a critical climax in the months leading up to the creation of the People’s Republic of the Congo.¹⁰² Writing to ATAF, Kittrell pushed for a consolidated power structure for CPI, “OTHERWISE IMMEDIATE CHAOS STOP.”¹⁰³ Kittrell and her colleague Thomas Howett, an ATAF representative, also expressed fears about the Home and Family Life Centers, satellite training sites set up by CPI throughout rural areas.¹⁰⁴ According to some records, as foreign outposts, these sites were frequently under attack.¹⁰⁵ One of Howett’s letters complicates this claim. Boasting to Kittrell, Howett argued, “it was our school and the Americans there in Vanga which prevented the

¹⁰⁰ Kittrell to Laskey, 12 December 1965, Virginia Laskey, Congo Correspondence and Reports, Women’s Division of the General Board of Global Ministries, Methodist Archives.

¹⁰¹ Kittrell, “Third Report on Education of Women in the Congo,” 8 May 1964, Box 104-14, Folder 1, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

¹⁰² Dan L. Thrapp, “Missionaries in Africa to Stay, Bishop Says,” *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA), Mar. 8, 1964, N5; “Johnson Halts U.N. Rescue Of Missionary in Congo,” *New York Times* (New York, NY), Mar. 18, 1964, 33.

¹⁰³ Kittrell to AGRITAF, 14 March 1964, Box 104-2, Folder 7 – Correspondence, Kittrell files, HUA.

¹⁰⁴ Nona Nelson, “Home and Family Life Centers Congo Polytechnic Institute” March 1965, Congo Correspondence and Reports, Women’s Division of the General Board of Global Ministries, Methodist Archives.

¹⁰⁵ “The Family Life Centers: Supplement to Fourth Report (October 1965) on Education of Women in the Congo” 1966, Congo Correspondence and Reports, Women’s Division of the General Board of Global Ministries, Methodist Archives.

spreading of the communist revolt in Kwilu.”¹⁰⁶ These documents hint that Kittrell’s role in CPI was as much about her Methodist networks as other Cold War projects.¹⁰⁷

In 1964, Kittrell would report to *The Christian Science Monitor* that even “in the midst of the Congo trouble, I saw the possibilities for good and for growth of a real creative nature when I was there two years ago.”¹⁰⁸ Kittrell resisted describing her time in the Congo with any negative terms, and her reluctance to speak to the violence and imperial intrusions in the area is especially striking given the links between Howard and the Congo. Kittrell seems to have been frank *only* with regards to the plan of study for Home Economics. Upon seeing an early curriculum plan, she dashed off a letter, noting, “I do not approve of the way Home Economics is organized, nor does it represent any of the modern ideas that have developed over the past few years in regards to home and family life.”¹⁰⁹ Kittrell insisted that the program needed “supporting” core courses in “bacteriology, physiology, chemistry, education, sociology/extension methods.”¹¹⁰ If Kittrell was asked to promise “modern ideas,” she wanted to see that reflected in the curriculum. Kittrell also wanted to build an efficiency garden, a kindergarten, and a series of multipurpose teaching sites with “a physical emphasis on African culture” and “science integrated into the total program.”¹¹¹

Billy Starnes, who invited Kittrell onto the project, privately suggested to a colleague that she “has a mind of her own, has very definite ideas about Home Economics and is capable of

¹⁰⁶ Thomas Howett to Kittrell, 19 April 1964, Box 2610, Congo 1964, Kittrell files, HUA.

¹⁰⁷ Howett to Kittrell, 1 September 1964, Box 2610, Congo 1964, Kittrell files, HUA.

¹⁰⁸ Jessie Ash Arndt, “Classroom Beyond Campus,” *Christian Science Monitor*, Oct. 7, 1964.

¹⁰⁹ Kittrell to Ruth Lawrence, 13 January 1961, Box 2609, Folder: Congo, 1960-61, Kittrell Files, HUA.

¹¹⁰ “Report on Higher Education of Women in the Congo August 1962,” Box 104-13, Folder 21, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

¹¹¹ “Congo Polytechnic Institute Program for Home Economics Education 1961-1962,” Box 104-12, Folder 26, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

expressing her view.”¹¹² That “view” often did not win out, partially because there were not very many women eligible to enroll in the program Kittrell envisioned. Long-serving missionary and teacher Lorena Kelly observed that while she could “appreciate Dr. Kittrell’s earnest desire that Congolese girls be given higher education in home economics training, even on a university level” there was a need to “reach a larger group of girls than are, at the moment, prepared to take on this higher training.”¹¹³ Kittrell imagined that she could do more than was really possible.¹¹⁴ In the end, she conceded that there was a much greater need for a strong *lycee*, which some considered “the important place of the whole enterprise.”¹¹⁵

After four years of intense civil battles, the development of a strong secondary school for young women was still an accomplishment.¹¹⁶ Nonetheless, Kittrell still hoped to have a role in the “unfinished” work of building a college program.¹¹⁷ She saw an opportunity when the Methodist church asked for “resource people” to attend the World Understanding Workshop in Zambia in 1966. Kittrell volunteered, and had her application seconded by Eunice Kasonga, a woman from the Congo studying at Howard.¹¹⁸ Methodist missionary Margaret Bender was unimpressed with this request. She quickly wrote to Kittrell and suggested that the Board could not pay to send her.¹¹⁹ Privately, Bender wrote to another missionary, “even if we had the

¹¹² Alva C. Kirkland, Jr. and Billy Starnes to Thomas Howett, 27 February 1964, Box 104-6, Folder 6; See also Box 104-6, Folder 26, Kittrell Files, HUA.

¹¹³ Lorena Kelly to Dr. Omar Lee Hartzler, Director, CPI, 1 July 1961.

¹¹⁴ Kittrell, “Home Economics in African Countries,” 145; Kittrell, “Third Report on Education of Women in the Congo,” Box 104-14, Folder 1, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.; Tate interview, 12.

¹¹⁵ Virginia Laskey to Florence Little, 17 December 1965, Virginia Laskey-Congo Correspondence and Reports, Women’s Division of the General Board of Global Ministries, Methodist Archives.

¹¹⁶ Keith Smith, “A Report to the Woman’s Division of the Board of Missions of the Methodist Church from the Agricultural and Technical Assistance Foundation (ATAF) and the Congo Polytechnic Institute (CPI).” January 1965, Records of the Women’s Division of the General Board of Global Ministries, Methodist Archives.

¹¹⁷ Florence Little to Dr. Melvin Blake, July 1966, Congo Correspondence and Reports, Women’s Division of the General Board of Global Ministries, Methodist Archives.

¹¹⁸ “Eunice Kasonga,” *Rome News-Tribune* (Rome, GA), Jun. 9, 1967, 2.

¹¹⁹ Margaret Bender to Kittrell, 1 August 1966, Congo Correspondence and Reports, Women’s Division of the General Board of Global Ministries, Methodist Archives.

money, I would not want to bring Dr. Kittrell to the workshop.”¹²⁰ After pushing for higher and higher standards, Kittrell was no longer welcome as a consultant.

Though Kittrell could not and did not build a full college program, she did train college women from the US specifically for work in the Congo. In the end, Kittrell was far more successful in running the Congo Teachers Summer Orientation Program at Howard.¹²¹ These sessions, which Kittrell described as enabling “people through their own efforts to become more competent human beings” attracted teachers “from many parts of the world” including India, Iraq, Jamaica, “and six African countries.” Some students were explicitly interested in mission work in the Congo while others were funded by the State Department for different projects.¹²² As with her earlier international work in training Extension leaders, Kittrell reflected that these “workshops are unique in that they can serve effectively, in one course, a variety of people with different education, cultural, and economic backgrounds.” Among all people and interests, there was “a common denominator in the word, home” and therefore an easy way to connect with this diverse group of educators.

Back on her own campus, Kittrell had relative autonomy, so she created a dense curriculum. With these workshops, students were supposed to learn how to translate the “science” and “basic rules” of Home Economics while also gaining a greater understanding of cultural context through courses in African Studies, Anthropology, and French.¹²³ For these latter courses, Kittrell called upon a range of Howard faculty members and guest speakers such as the anthropologist Priscilla C. Reining. Experts from the FDA, USDA, and Red Cross also

¹²⁰ Margaret Bender to Eugene Stockwell, 8 July 1966, Congo Correspondence and Reports, Women’s Division of the General Board of Global Ministries, Methodist Archives.

¹²¹ Kittrell to Thomas Howett, 15 March 1964, Box 104-6, Folder 6, Kittrell Papers, MSRC; Summer Orientation Program Bound Volume, Box 2602, Folder - Congo Teachers Summer Orientation Program, 1962 (2), Kittrell Files, HUA.

¹²² Letter on Congo Teachers Summer Orientation program, 17 July 1962, Box 2602, Folder: Congo Teachers Summer Orientation Program, 1962 (1), Kittrell Files, HUA.

¹²³ Kittrell to Ernest Goodman, 17 July 1962, Box 2602, HUA.

periodically provided lectures. A review of the workshop curriculum reveals that connecting students to persons working in the federal government and private agencies was clearly important to Kittrell. Students seemed to spend a great deal of time *away* from Howard in these workshops, touring sites such as the Botanic Garden, White House, and National Gallery of Art in D.C. While these sessions were ostensibly to prepare women for work in the Congo and other missions, they also served to highlight the expansiveness of the federal government in D.C.

Considering the travel limits often imposed on minorities at the time, for Kittrell, these itineraries were as much about exposure as making claims to spaces of national significance. By leading African American women and foreign educators around D.C., Kittrell was reinforcing the strength of her connections to positions of power and cultural sites in the capital. These side tours and lessons in navigating public space as a woman of color may have been considered especially important for the workshop class of 1962. That year, in addition to students from Howard preparing to go to the Congo, there were international students from Uganda, Nigeria, Liberia, and Sierra Leone who were set to enroll in courses at Bennett, Spelman, and the University of Vermont, respectively, that year.¹²⁴ Given this range of visiting students, Kittrell saw this work as a way of training others on “overcoming the many prejudices which hinder all peoples.”¹²⁵ Reporter Elinor Lee, a home economist herself, noted that while “nothing sounds farther from world politics than teaching home economics” Kittrell’s workshops might be “the United States’ best plan for cementing international friendships [.]”¹²⁶

Some of the students in these workshops who went to work in the Congo, possibly the same students who heard Lumumba speak in 1960, did not find much “friendship,” except with one another. In 1962 and 1963, tensions erupted between Howard students sent to teach at CPI

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Elinor Lee, “She’s Off to the Congo to Organize a College,” B6.

¹²⁶ Kittrell to Ernest Goodman, 17 July 1962, Box 2602, Kittrell files, HUA.

and Principal Emile A. Disengomoka. Disappointed with teachers' performance, Disengomoka intimated to visiting Home Economics professor Dr. Bessie McNiel that the underperforming educators were "American Negroes who, one would think, should be able to understand our needs particularly well."¹²⁷ Disengomoka saw these women as unfocused, and further suggested that there was a need "to keep them busy so that they have no longer the time to dream and roam about."¹²⁸ With this comment, Disengomoka reveals a deeper anxiety about the potential for radical African American students to cause problems on his campus. Instead of seeing "friends" and highly educated teachers, Disengomoka saw American students fraternizing where they should not and misunderstanding what they should be able to grasp about his mission.

Disengomoka's comments were not meant to be secretive; each offending student was given a carbon copy of the letter. In response, the students reached out to Kittrell, explaining that Disengomoka "charged us with ineptness and inefficiency in our roles as teachers...without a fair trial." They immediately pointed out the racial dimension, adding that they would "welcome any word of advice which you may give us at this point for this matter is definitely beyond our reasoning capacities, if discrimination is ruled out."¹²⁹ While "100 percent of the failures are Negroes," the white teachers sent from Drew University worked to Disengomoka's satisfaction. Within a few weeks, Kittrell responded by writing a letter to *all* of the students trained in her course. After expressing her "complete confidence" in her former students, Kittrell added, "I know from your records...that your academic performances and character records are of very high quality." With a note of encouragement, she concluded, "I hope you will keep your

¹²⁷ Marie Parsons, "'Primitive Congo' has Lighted Streets: Former Alabamian Walked Them," *Tuscaloosa News* (Tuscaloosa, AL), Mar. 14, 1965, 26.

¹²⁸ E.A. Disengomoka to Dr. Bessie McNiel, 2 August 1963, Box 104-4, Folder 7, Kittrell files, HUA.

¹²⁹ Claudette Barrington, Adessa Wagoner, Gladys Lowe, and Anita Jacobs to Kittrell, 5 August 1963, Box 2602, Kittrell files, HUA.

Christian faith high and thereby develop additional strength under difficulties.”¹³⁰ Kittrell did not tackle the charge of discrimination here, but she did not entirely ignore it.

Upon making her annual visit to the Congo, Kittrell countered both McNiel and Disengomoka’s assessment of the teachers. She also questioned McNiel’s promotion as Dean, which had been a “surprise” to her.¹³¹ Overall, Kittrell seems to have been most offended by McNiel and Disengomoka’s plan to send the Howard women to “the bush” and the “rural centers” as a punishment. As Kittrell saw it, these students had been “especially prepared” for such work and were actually “frustrated” and “anxious” to have been kept from it. Kittrell posited that in the future, “a common thread of understanding and mutual cooperation would have made our operation and work together easier.”¹³² These interactions, which Kittrell described as “somewhat awkward,” expose some of deeper tensions among international missionaries, local experts, and traveling students working within this program.

In her institutional records, Kittrell chose to ignore much of the contemporary violence and social upheaval in the Congo from 1961-1965. In these letters, by encouraging the women to think broadly about their responsibilities as Christians and educators, Kittrell was keen to take race and racial discrimination out of the conversation. That did not mean that Kittrell was immune from the kind of prejudice these young women were describing. The previous year, Kittrell had been refused service at a diner in Laurel, Maryland. This experience was linked to her service to the Congo; at the time, she was traveling with an interracial delegation of Methodist missionaries. Despite having been “assured by telephone that a racially integrated

¹³⁰ Kittrell to CPI students, 20 August 1963, Box 2602, Kittrell files, HUA.

¹³¹ Kittrell, “Second Report on Higher Education of Women in the Congo,” 11 September, 1963, Box 104-13, Folder 26, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

¹³² Ibid.

group would be served,” the group was seated, but not allowed to order.¹³³ As a result, they sat in place “for the time it would have taken to eat a meal, gave what they would have paid for it to the Congress of Racial Equality, and went back to their meeting hungry.”¹³⁴ To a passerby, Laurel was a sleepy suburban town between Baltimore and D.C. with a motto of “Progress through People.” It was also a place where a group of residents attempted to torch a row of homes in a segregated area in the name of the KKK a few years later.¹³⁵

This racially charged incident obviously garnered more attention. That a well-known professor who had spent time at embassies could be refused a meal at a diner did not go without notice, either. The locals’ refusal to serve Kittrell was also covered in at least one local paper, prompting some residents to write in, suggesting a boycott. The *Christian Advocate*, a Methodist news outlet, also carried the story.¹³⁶ At least one letter—from someone with whom she had no other affiliation—was written directly to Kittrell to express outrage.¹³⁷ Around this time, Flemma’s nephew Billy Kittrell also wrote to inform her about his work with the NAACP. He added, “You, and the example you have set, has made me what I am.”¹³⁸ These positive and affirming letters are among the few traces of civil rights work that Kittrell chose to maintain. Focusing on the support she received—rather than hatred she observed and encountered—had become her strategy abroad and apparently, just a few miles from home.

With colleagues, Kittrell also held back on many of the details about the challenges with the CPI program. The year her contract ended, Kittrell’s disappointment seemed most evident

¹³³ Montgomery J. Shroyer to Kittrell, 25 May 1961, Box 104-10, Folder 1, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

¹³⁴ “Go Away Hungry,” *Christian Advocate* V, no.13 (1961): 24.

¹³⁵ Baker E. Morten, “There’s No Sense in Talking Up More Trouble,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore, MD), July 29, 1967, 14.

¹³⁶ Francis C. Murphy and Elizabeth W. Murphy to Gertrude Poe, n.d., Box 104-8, Folder 1, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

¹³⁷ Review.

¹³⁸ Billy Kittrell to Flemma Kittrell, 2 December 1959, Box 104-6, Folder 27, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

and explicit when speaking at a large professional meeting in Iowa in 1965.¹³⁹ After suggesting that too few people had been “hospitable” to her plans, Kittrell drew a distinction between the climate in the Congo and developments in Home Economics elsewhere in Africa. Overall, Kittrell was most optimistic about Cornell’s satellite programs in Ghana and Liberia and developments in Nigeria, where Patsy Graves had been working with AID.¹⁴⁰ According to Graves’s own report, she was training home economists (American and Nigerian) to create “a hard core of broadly educated men and women whose minds have been quickened, awakened and stretched.” In enabling women to manage a “cross cultural tightrope between the old and the new,” Graves sought “to preserve the best” in African “culture while infusing and adapting improvement and change.” In Nigeria, where there were polygamous families, Graves was unequivocal: the “expatriate home economist” could not have “rigid, intolerant ideas.” This vision for Home Economics mirrored Kittrell’s; both thought it possible to bring in American “tools” and keep local cultural mores largely intact.¹⁴¹

This focus on training women how—not what—to think was not so different from Kittrell’s vision for the department of Home Economics at Howard. In addition to her work overseas and government childcare projects, Kittrell continued to work on updating the liberal arts core. In 1963, she reminded Howard administrators of the value of Home Economics. Writing to the Acting Dean of the College of Liberal Arts, Carroll Miller, she explained, “at this stage in history the discipline...faces a crisis in many universities.” Unlike traditional fields of study, “Home Economics is a difficult and complex one that needs careful interpretation to

¹³⁹ Kittrell, “Home Economics in African Countries,” in *International Home Economics*, 145.

¹⁴⁰ Kittrell, “The Challenge of Home Economics in Research and Service,” presented to the Omicron Nu Conclave, State University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA, Box 2603, Kittrell files, HUA.

¹⁴¹ Patsy Graves, “Cross-Cultural Understanding,” in *International Home Economics* (Ames: Center for Agricultural and Economic Development, Iowa State University, 1965).

colleagues from time to time.”¹⁴² Kittrell was troubled that Home Economics was not considered part of the required core of general requirements in the College of Liberal Arts. She observed that these standards had not changed in decades, even though “our political and economic world has changed in profound ways.”¹⁴³ As she saw it, Home Economics was essential to preparing students to face the world.

In trying to show the comparative strength of the Home Economics department, Kittrell pointed to several developments. In 1963, Howard students became eligible for initiation into Omicron Nu, the national honors society for Home Economics.¹⁴⁴ This was a significant achievement; Omicron Nu had traditionally only been at larger (predominantly white) land-grant institutions. Other colleagues, including Lydia Rogers, were now also going overseas and foreign faculty, such as Justina Singh of Baroda University, were at Howard as visiting lecturers.¹⁴⁵ Kittrell, describing these exchanges as part of the “international flavor of our work,” also mentioned the growing student exchange program bringing co-eds from India and a number of African countries.¹⁴⁶ Drawing upon these “visitors” as cultural assets, Kittrell boasted of the international fashion shows, forums, and teas on world events broadening students’ horizons. Due to its location and proximity to federal funding sources, Howard’s department had the “added assets of the Department of Agriculture and its research facilities, the Library of

¹⁴² Kittrell to Dr. Carroll L. Miller, 9 August 1963, Box 2610, Kittrell files, HUA.

¹⁴³ Kittrell, “A Re-evaluation of Our Academic Program,” 3 February 1964, Box 104-13, Folder 18, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

¹⁴⁴ “By-Laws of Alpha Pi Chapter of Omicron Nu,” 22 March 1963, Box 104-15, Folder 17, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

¹⁴⁵ Kittrell to Dr. Carroll L. Miller, 9 August 1963, Box 2610, Kittrell files, HUA.

¹⁴⁶ “Dr. Flemmie Kittrell: US Nutritionist with a Keen Interest in Africa” *Africa Feature*, 1963, Box 104-1, Folder 3, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

Congress, the Office of Education, etc.” For Kittrell, Howard’s lines of access bolstered a program already offering the best of a liberal arts education.¹⁴⁷

To Kittrell, all of these aspects of her department’s work were evidence of vitality. Some administrators started to ask questions about this wide range of programming and course content. Comparatively, this department had a “high monetary cost,” in the words of Dean Charles H. Thompson. Two decades earlier, Thompson had urged Kittrell to come to Howard. Now, he was asking for a full accounting of her program’s structure and details on student outcomes.¹⁴⁸ Thompson seemed to see the program as both stretched too wide and bound too narrowly to separate tracks for study. Citing “extreme specialization,” Thompson was critical of the fact that there were four distinct major areas offered under Home Economics.¹⁴⁹ Nationally, this program was not comparatively large, or “excessive,” to use his term, though it had more content areas than most other private institutions. What confused Thompson was the fact that Home Economics had many of its own course components *and* an emphasis on interdisciplinarity. Where others saw inconsistency, Kittrell saw a synthetic program designed around knowledge of “the basic natural sciences” *and* “knowing what to do about science.” As she explained, without the “liberal tradition” one “became a slave rather than a free person.”¹⁵⁰ Home Economics, which provided training in “what to do” with scientific research, was practical *and* essential to freedom.

¹⁴⁷ Howard University, *The Bison: 1966* (Washington, D.C.: Graduating Class of 1966, 1966), 48, MSRC. Areas of specialization are mentioned here: “General Home Economics; Home Economics Education: Foods and Nutrition; Clothing and Textiles; Child Development and Family Relationships; Urban Extension.”

¹⁴⁸ Kittrell, “A Re-evaluation of Our Academic Program,” 3 February 1964, Box 104-13, Folder 18, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

¹⁴⁹ Kittrell, “Response to Dr. Charles H. Thompson’s Inquiries Concerning Home Economics at Howard University,” 28 September 1964, Box #2610, HUA.

¹⁵⁰ Kittrell, “To the Committee on General Education,” Box 2605, Folder: College of Liberal Arts 1963, Kittrell files, HUA.

Departmental files with student examinations support Kittrell's assertion that Home Economics at Howard was a humanistic field with a solid footing in scientific disciplines. In one exam, in addition to mastery of basic facts, students were reminded to "wrestle with 'big ideas'" and "keep open to a new truth."¹⁵¹ The concept of Euthenics was even re-introduced to Howard coursework as a way to emphasize broad thinking about people and environments. This complex constellation of skills and disciplinary knowledge was often lost on those outside the field. Kittrell grew especially frustrated when women who lacked a strong secondary education were sent to Howard for Home Economics through mission networks. In a letter to the Women's Africa Committee in 1964, Kittrell clarified that *all* students had to prepare for "work at a high academic level, yet always with the idea of application to personal and family living here and now; and with special reference to various areas of the world." For those interested in crafts, she clarified, "cooking and sewing is not worthy of consideration in a university program[.]"¹⁵²

Though Kittrell often stressed the "applicability" of her teachings, she resisted the notion that Home Economics was vocational, focusing on the field as pre-professional instead.¹⁵³ Alumnae data affirmed this assertion. In a survey from the mid-1960s, Kittrell noted that most Home Economics graduates were able to find "work of their choice in their chosen field." Out of 250 recent graduates, 102 were teaching at the secondary and college level, 60 worked in nutrition or public health, 25 worked for the cooperative extension service in the Department of Agriculture, 58 were involved with international work in Africa or Asia, and ten fell into a

¹⁵¹ Examinations can be found in Box 2611, Folder: Exams in Home Economics Department – Euthenics, Kittrell files, HUA.

¹⁵² Kittrell to Zelia F. Ruebhausen, 27 August 1964, Box 2600, Woman's Africa Committee, 1964 Summer Institute (2), Kittrell files, HUA.

¹⁵³ In McGrath's survey of 22 HBCUs, he found the following numbers for master's programs: 5 Home Economics, 4 Agricultural Education, 2 Home Economics Education, 1 Extension Education, 1 Foods Administration, 1 Foods and Nutrition. This was out of 89 "Professional and Educational Programs" in total. By contrast, in many fields, there was only one program (Art, German, Philosophy, Drama, Political Science, American History, Botany, etc.) See McGrath, *The Predominantly Negro Colleges and Universities in Transition*, 183.

“miscellaneous” category. There were also women who had earned the master’s degree at Howard earning doctorates elsewhere, and many more women asking for advanced graduate degrees at Howard.¹⁵⁴ This data showed Home Economics to be a means of opening career paths in many areas. The idea of using Home Economics as an entrée into domestic service or motherhood alone is not even mentioned, a fact that would have surprised the field’s critics.

There was a similar emphasis on professional development at Cornell, where there were *eight* possibilities for specialization in the College of Home Economics. Kittrell could speak to this range of work because she served on the Advisory Council for the College in the early 1960s. This was a forum for experts in the field to share their ideas on the profession and Cornell’s particular curriculum. Likely because of her work abroad, Kittrell was brought onto the Council during a time of expanding international programs.¹⁵⁵ At many of these meetings, the utility of a Home Economics degree and the potential for work abroad were seen as nearly inseparable issues.¹⁵⁶ As the College’s Dean Helen Canoyer observed, even with high employment rates among alumnae, there were “six times as many requests as there are graduates available for work here [in the U.S.] and overseas.”¹⁵⁷

While the notion of expanding the field remained thrilling to many leaders, an increasingly pressing issue received far less attention. In 1966, Canoyer acknowledged that the College should work on finding “opportunities for women to perform the dual role” as this was

¹⁵⁴ Protégées include: Violet Currie, Ph.D., Jane Enty, Ph.D., Norge Jerome, Ph.D., Lorine Knight, Ph.D., Margaret Green LeBat, Ph.D., Arvinda Jaituni, Ph.D., Mona Williams, Ph.D., Marianna Sewell, Ph.D., Gwendoline Mitchell, Ph.D. See: Esther Ottley, “Flemmie Pansy Kittrell,” Box 104-1, Folder 9, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

¹⁵⁵ Kittrell to Forrest F. Hill of the Ford Foundation, 7 May 1962, Box 1, Folder 2, New York State College of Human Ecology Ghana Project records, #23-2-2703. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

¹⁵⁶ Kittrell was a member “at large,” see Advisory Council Biographical Information, Box 1, Folder 31; See also: Mrs. Joseph Burke, “Families in an Interdependent World,” Box 1, Folder 10, Minutes of the Council, New York State College of Home Economics Advisory council records, #23-21-2794.

¹⁵⁷ Helen Canoyer “Careers – Home Economists Here and Abroad: January 1962,” Box 15, American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences Records #6578, Cornell University Archives.

seen as the key to women's "fulfillment."¹⁵⁸ This broad, perplexing issue never really moved to the center of their discussions with regularity. Overall, for much of Kittrell's time on the Council, there was a far greater emphasis on "intercultural exchange" and professional pathways. As the Women's Committee of the AHEA would concede a few years later, some women in the field could easily be seen as "portraying something we really aren't."¹⁵⁹ For many leading international experts in Home Economics, including Kittrell, work with initiatives such as Cornell-in-Ghana and Cornell-in-Liberia had been a primary focus of their lives.¹⁶⁰ In some ways, they lacked personal experience with managing a family and a career, a fact that again, would have surprised detractors who envisioned a narrow field focused on homemaking.

In earlier decades, women working outside the home in Extension or in teaching Home Economics justified this work as a form of selfless service. Now, some Cornell faculty saw international work as an adaptation of the land-grant college's mission. As nutrition expert Dr. Catherine Personius argued, in an interconnected world, "state colleges, in fulfilling their responsibilities to the people of New York State, find themselves concerned, therefore, for people around the world."¹⁶¹ For those in high positions, the College seemed to be "on the threshold of an awesome opportunity-that is, to speak to problems of our society and the world." This drive for interconnectedness and satellite programs could stretch a department's capacity.¹⁶² Faculty could not always be looking outward; as Canoyer noted, "pressures emanate from 'great society legislation'" to work on national social initiatives. At these meetings, many experts

¹⁵⁸ Helen Canoyer, "Budget Request Justification," 25 May 1966, Box 1, Folder 18, New York State College of Human Ecology Advisory Council Records.

¹⁵⁹ "The Women's Role Committee Speaks Out," *Journal of Home Economics* 65, no.1 (1973): 10-12.

¹⁶⁰ Minutes of the Council, 1-2 October 1964, Box 1, Folder 16, New York State College of Human Ecology Advisory Council Records.

¹⁶¹ Dr. Catherine Personius, "Families in an Interdependent World," 35, 1961, Alumni Institute, Folder 14, Box 76, NYSCE records.

¹⁶² See also: Doretta S. Hoffman, "Guidelines for International Programs in Home Economics," *Journal of Home Economics* 60, no.4 (1968): 255.

reveled in the sheer number of professional outlets open to them. By the late 1960s, others rightfully feared that potential budget cuts would mean doing more than ever with less.¹⁶³

By comparison, Kittrell found a much more troubling picture at Hampton. After her departure in 1944, Kittrell served on the Board of Trustees and maintained a close relationship with the faculty. Her counsel was requested most frequently during the tenure of Lorine Knight, a Howard graduate who served as head of Home Economics in the 1950s.¹⁶⁴ After high enrollments in the 1940s, only seventeen students were in the Home Economics program in 1957, a drop of nearly 90% in a decade. The number of staff plummeted from ten to four, the graduate program was eliminated, and Home Economics lost its division status.¹⁶⁵ In 1957, Hampton President Alonzo Moron (1948-1959) was prompted to investigate the department further when an inquiry came from Scott Paper Company. In recent years, Scott had been offering scholarships to Home Economics students at Hampton.¹⁶⁶ In spite of the “generous scholarships” in place, Moron noted a steady decrease in enrollments. That winter, Moron put the program on hold, fueling rumors it would be cut entirely.¹⁶⁷

In Board meetings from 1957, Home Economics was listed among several programs, including machine shop and driver education, to be “phased out as soon as possible.” Two years prior, Agriculture, once the mainstay of a man’s education at Hampton, had been eliminated.¹⁶⁸ In addition to this precedent, those inclined to drop Home Economics could point neutrally to the

¹⁶³ “Effect of President Johnson’s Proposed 1967 Federal Budget Slashes of New York’s Land-Grant University,” Box 1, Folder 18, New York State College of Human Ecology Advisory Council Records.

¹⁶⁴ Lorine Knight to Kittrell, 4 October 1956, Home Economics Box 3, Hampton Archives.

¹⁶⁵ For a longer history, see: “The History of the Home Economics Division at Hampton Institute,” March Conference 1946, Hampton Archives.

¹⁶⁶ Scott Paper Company also visited Howard University in April 1963 and gave a speech “on 100 years of great black women since the Emancipation Proclamation.” Loose sheet, April 1963, Box 2604. Speeches Folder, Kittrell files, HUA.

¹⁶⁷ Alonzo G. Moron to Barbara Harris, re: Scott Paper Company Scholarship Program for Home Economics, 16 November 1957, Home Economics Box 3, Hampton University Archives.

¹⁶⁸ Hoda M. Zaki, *Civil Rights and Politics at Hampton Institute: The Legacy of Alonzo G. Moron* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 98.

low enrollments. For Moron, who was less diplomatic on the matter, Home Economics simply no longer had a place at Hampton due to its “non-collegiate character.”¹⁶⁹ Kittrell refuted this characterization. Mobilizing her power as a trustee, she presented statistics on Hampton graduates’ careers. Even with this data, Moron grew frustrated, arguing that Kittrell and other alumni trustees merely argued for their “favorite” programs.¹⁷⁰ In 1959, citing difficulties with the head of the Board, other trustees, and alumni, Moron resigned.¹⁷¹

Moron’s departure proved consequential. After his resignation, Home Economics was not eliminated, but reinvigorated under President Jerome Holland (1960-1970). Holland, a Cornell graduate of the 1930s, was a close friend of Kittrell’s. Early into his career at Hampton, Kittrell laid out for him “the place of Home Economics today in liberal and general education.”¹⁷² Holland agreed to a reorganization of the program, and Professor Lenora Williams upgraded the curriculum with Kittrell’s assistance. Williams also promoted the program by visiting high schools; soon, enrollments went up by 600%.¹⁷³ Over time, courses in early childhood education returned, and by 1966, there were plans for a new Early Childhood Education Laboratory Building and programs for Head Start teachers.¹⁷⁴ While much has been made of the demise of Home Economics throughout the country, this incident shows the disproportionate power that some professors and trustees were able to wield with cooperation from the administration.

Kittrell did not hesitate to use her power when it came to defending Home Economics. at some point, she must have paused to reflect on the distance between her status in the sixties and

¹⁶⁹ “Recommendations on Hampton’s Instructional Program of the Next Decade,” 10. Box E69, Folder 1, Margaret Mead Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁷⁰ Alonzo Moron to Margaret Mead, 9 January 1959, Home Economics Box, Hampton Archives.

¹⁷¹ “Hampton Alumni Urge Dr. Moron Resignation,” *Jet* June 25, 1959, 20.

¹⁷² Kittrell to Jerome Holland, 7 February 1961, Box E69, Folder 6, Margaret Mead Papers, LOC.

¹⁷³ Lenora P. Williams, “Enrichment of the Home Economics Program at Hampton Institute: Proposal,” 30, Holland Box, Hampton Archives.

¹⁷⁴ Jerome Holland re: A Statement to the Architect Regarding the Early Childhood Education Laboratory, 28 July 1966, 2.10.1 Jerome Holland Papers, Hampton Archives.

when she first arrived at Hampton forty years earlier. In 1919, Kittrell was penniless, embarking on a work-year. Now, she had more influence than ever at Hampton, and full access to the spaces in which she once worked. The brick colonial “Trustee House” built during her Academy years, for example, was now the place where she stayed for meetings with fellow board member Margaret Mead. Kittrell now also dined freely at the Holly Tree Inn, the campus restaurant where she had once cleaned tables.¹⁷⁵ During one of her meals there, Kittrell might have been surprised to find Rosa Parks posted as the Inn’s hostess. While Hampton trumpeted Parks as part of the “Hampton family,” it was far from an ideal situation. Parks had been in great need of steady work, having paid a high cost for her activism.¹⁷⁶ While Parks would later be mythologized in print and throughout historic landscapes, Kittrell would often be relegated to the footnotes, her methods of activism too equivocal to be remembered.¹⁷⁷ In some ways, both women’s stories would be flattened and simplified with the passage of time.

Whence she sat in the 1960s, this was not an outcome that Kittrell would have forecasted, particularly as her legacy seemed increasingly secure at Hampton. As the administration prepared for the centennial, Holland agreed to fund a new Home Economics building.¹⁷⁸ This was part of Holland’s larger infrastructure plans, which included a multi-million dollar campaign for a quadrangle of new academic buildings. Most were named posthumously to honor former instructors. Two new buildings departed from that tradition: Martin Luther King, Jr Hall and Flemma Kittrell Hall.¹⁷⁹ Chosen by the alumnae, Kittrell Hall was so named because of how she

¹⁷⁵ Loose sheet, Trustee House Folder, Home Economics Box 4, Hampton Archives.

¹⁷⁶ “The faculty and staff at Hampton were pleased that Rosa Parks was a member of their family” in Joyce Hanson, *Rosa Parks: A Biography* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2011), 117-118.

¹⁷⁷ Renee Romano and Leigh Raiford, *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory* (Rome: University of Georgia Press, 2006).

¹⁷⁸ Williams, “Enrichment of the Home Economics Program,” 18.

¹⁷⁹ Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Board at Trustees September 1963-June 1964, Holland Box, Hampton Archives.

“diligently defended Home Economics at Hampton Institute.”¹⁸⁰ Kittrell’s donation of \$10,000 in 1964 to the Centennial Campaign also likely kept her in the “Hampton family’s” good graces.

Less than a decade after the program was nearly eliminated, on Founder’s Day, June 29, 1967, Kittrell Hall was officially dedicated with Holland, Kittrell, and other graduates present for a large ceremony.¹⁸¹ The timing was freighted with meaning. Historically, this day was set aside to honor Samuel Chapman Armstrong, Hampton’s founder. Kittrell used the opportunity to offer a speech honoring her instructors, telling her audience, ‘my teachers at Hampton Institute are a part of me and I would like to share this honor with them.’¹⁸² Like the building at Howard, Kittrell Hall was trumpeted as having fully modern academic spaces and “living centers...designed to encompass the multiple areas included in Home Economics and to facilitate the quality education we endeavor to provide.” For the second time in less than five years, Kittrell was positioned at the center of a major ribbon cutting.¹⁸³ As a younger person, Kittrell had little power over her discipline. In the 1960s, as an esteemed expert and alumna, when the program did not adapt fast enough, she changed it to fit her own designs. In subsequent decades, the program in Home Economics would wither at Hampton—but not in Kittrell’s lifetime.

Kittrell knew how to wield her influence at Hampton. Other events from later that year exposed the contingencies of her power. In 1967, the USIS coordinated a trip for Kittrell to South Africa to visit the home of the American Ambassador William Rountree, Jr. In reference to the apartheid, Rountree reportedly told Kittrell, ‘we are breaking the ice by having you here as

¹⁸⁰ Juanita Strawn Memo on Home Economics, 1965, Holland Box.

¹⁸¹ “Founder’s Day to Feature Kittrell Hall Dedication,” *Alumni Record*, January, 1967, Kittrell Hall Folder, Hampton Archives.

¹⁸² Bob Williams, “Hampton Institute Dedicates New Home Economics Building,” *Daily Press* (Norfolk, VA), Jan. 30, 1967, second front page.

¹⁸³ Sara Slack, “Reading Writing & Arithmetic: Honors for Dr. Kittrell,” *New York Amsterdam News* (New York, NY), Feb. 11, 1967, 27.

our guest!’¹⁸⁴ This light tone belied the serious violence and high stakes geopolitical maneuvers in South Africa at the time. Kittrell may have been brought in to start a conversation, but she was treated by the embassy staff as a second-glass guest. With every move, she was shadowed by Afrikaans escorts; onlookers would often stop to stare as she rode by in embassy Jeeps. The embassy staff also tried to hide her, shuttling her through hidden routes in the building and back doors. Kittrell confronted the staff carefully, telling them “I don’t think I need to use the back door.”¹⁸⁵ A supposedly privileged guest, Kittrell was still not free or accepted.

In spite of the harsh constraints imposed on black people in South Africa, Kittrell made an unofficial visit to a local mine near the embassy. As she approached the mine, her presence caused a stir—the workers “hadn’t seen any woman of color in so long, looking dignified, so they all just applauded and they made so much noise [.]” Upon hearing their clapping and shouting, Kittrell put her hand in the air to ask for quiet, and addressed her “fellow citizens of the world.” After making what she called “a political speech” she promised to “tell my people about this when I return [.]”¹⁸⁶ Kittrell did not explicitly discuss Apartheid politics, though she considered her visit and promise for an exchange of information political. Relating this story, Kittrell was taken aback when her colleague Merze Tate called this encounter “innocuous.” Further clarifying her political work in South Africa, Kittrell noted that she confronted her Afrikaans escorts, who believed she had enjoyed her time at the embassy. She recalled telling them, “I have never been so unhappy as I am now, to think that you think I enjoyed my stay.” Looking back, “I just couldn’t whitewash that.”¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴ Esther Ottley, “Flemmie Pansy Kittrell,” 15.

¹⁸⁵ Tate interview, 44.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, 39.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, 40.

In retrospect, Kittrell further suggested that she was “very fortunate not to have gotten into more trouble” during her trip given the intense racial tension. Citing her skill with human relations, she added that she “had read the history of the country and knew exactly what to expect.” What Kittrell did not mention in her late-in-life interviews was another political act that took place on this trip. Early on the morning of December 6, 1967, Kittrell boarded a chopper in Lusaka on a mission for the American Committee on Africa. Wearing a tailored suit and flowery blouse, Kittrell was joined by a small cohort of men in neatly pressed attire. This group included George Houser, the leader of ACOA and CORE.¹⁸⁸ All of the participants had dressed the part, ready for publicity. The plan was for the group to fly into the contested territory of South West Africa to test recent UN resolutions terminating the South Africa mandate.¹⁸⁹ In the larger context, this effort was a way of testing “nonviolent direct action techniques in international affairs, either by nations or individuals”—a “rare” tactic at the time.¹⁹⁰

Once in the air, as the group faced death threats and imprisonment, they lingered long enough to also face the threat of a fuel shortage. Fearing for their lives, the pilots operating the chartered choppers turned around. In one sense, the operation failed: the team could not enter South West Africa. The team was also unable to make the research trips they had planned. Kittrell, for instance, was expected to conduct family life surveys throughout the territory upon a successful landing. This failure to land was not really surprising to the researchers. The team “never had the naïve impression that this project was basically going to change the situation” but

¹⁸⁸ The other participants were Samuel F. Ashelman, John L.S. Holloman, Lyle Tatum, and George Houser. Box 94, Folder 16, American Committee on Africa Records, Amistad Research Center, New Orleans, LA. Hereafter cited as ACOA Records.

¹⁸⁹ “Because we do not recognize the authority of South Africa we have not sought visas from that Government. But we will enter South West Africa with only our American passports. If the United Nations Council offered visas, we would have applied for them, but we understand that provisions requiring visas have not been established by the United Nations Council.” Letter to The United Nations Council on South West Africa, The United Nations, 28 November 1967, Box 94, Folder 16, ACOA Records.

¹⁹⁰ Lyle Tatum, “A Case Study of Nonviolent Direct Action in International Relations by Private Citizens,” 22 January 1968, Box 94, Folder 17, ACOA Records.

“all five participants felt the project was successful.” The project generated considerable press, and was especially celebrated in the *Times of Zambia*: ‘these citizens...demonstrated...the difference between paying lip-service to the ideals of African nationalism and actually doing something about it.’¹⁹¹ For some, including Houser, this type of work in Africa was ‘an extension of the battle on the home front’—a logical outgrowth of earlier activism.¹⁹²

In some ways, this trip was an aberration in Kittrell’s career, for it lacked official US-sponsorship. This expedition was clearly an extension of other networks circulating through Kittrell’s life. Houser, a child of Methodist missionaries, was integral to both the ACOA and CORE, the organization Kittrell’s delegation donated their diner money to a few years earlier. The full extent of Kittrell’s relationship to ACOA, CORE, or other groups cannot be fully known. In organizing her papers, Kittrell made choices to minimize trips such as this one and to focus instead on her official work for the State Department. It is worth wondering how much her contemporaries at Howard knew about this activism. Tate clearly was not altogether impressed by Kittrell’s speech or comment to the embassy staff. Did politically inclined students at Howard see Kittrell as an exemplar—or as an academic who mostly worked in tandem with the government? While it is impossible to know, the broader history of changes within Howard and other institutions suggests that Kittrell may have become at best, a complicated role model.

For much of her career, Kittrell had enjoyed positive press for her on-campus work, and she had chosen to speak positively about her Foreign Service. From 1967-1970, press members increasingly pointed their cameras at students, documenting campuses in turmoil. By the late 1960s, social struggles throughout the world and on the ‘home front’ were not only linked, but increasingly, inseparable. Near the end of her career, acts of violence, resistance, and occupation

¹⁹¹ Mary-Louise Hooper, *Southern Africa Bulletin*, Box 94, Folder 16, ACOA Records.

¹⁹² George Houser, “The Struggle Never Ends,” Comments on the 50th Anniversary of ACOA, Washington, D.C., October 3, 2003, <http://www.sahistory.org.za/sites/default/files/GeorgeHouserand%20ACOA.pdf>.

increasingly became a part of Kittrell's experience at "home institutions" as "students increasingly directed [attacks] at the university itself."¹⁹³ In this context, strategies that Kittrell and her colleagues had used to their advantage—such as a command of the relationships between money, space, and power—were deployed by students. In their takeovers of arenas for knowledge production, students challenged not only their educators' teachings, but their spaces for legacy-building. Those who had been told—by teachers and parents—that the future belonged to them had believed it.

At Howard, campus tensions came into sharper view in 1967. Shortly after the 100th Charter Day Celebration, a day when President James Nabrit, Jr. (1960-1969) declared that the university was "at its highest peak in 100 years," students disrupted a presentation from General Lewis Hershey on selective service.¹⁹⁴ Hershey "was shouted off the stage" as students retaliated against the ROTC program at Howard and the war in Vietnam.¹⁹⁵ The administration, particularly Nabrit, tried to suppress these first signs of rebellion, and "disruptive" students were expelled. One reporter surmised that "repression is rarely the remedy for discontent."¹⁹⁶ She was right: during the next major Howard anniversary, students occupied the Administration Building from March 19-23.¹⁹⁷ Rejecting the traditions of their "reform-minded professors," students pushed for a greater emphasis on courses dealing specifically with African American history and culture. As the school year was winding down, King was shot at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee. At the start of the decade, Lumumba had been murdered thousands of miles away;

¹⁹³ Noliwe M. Rooks, *White Money, Black Power: The Surprising History of African American Studies and the Crisis of Race in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), 18.

¹⁹⁴ Don Robinson, "Howard President Plans Next Century," *Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.), Mar. 2, 1967, A4; Leon Dash and Don Robinson, "Activism Emerges on Howard Campus: Hershey Talk Disrupted," *Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.), Mar. 23, 1967, D1.

¹⁹⁵ Susan Jacoby, "History of Howard U. Protests," *Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.), May 8, 1969, A9.

¹⁹⁶ "Letter of Demands," 8 May 1967, Box 104-5, Folder 12, Kittrell Papers, MSRC; "Trouble at Howard," *Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.), July 29, 1967, A10.

¹⁹⁷ "University Compromise Ends Student Sit-In," *Boston Globe* (Boston, MA), Mar. 24, 1968.

this assassination was even closer to home. A fissure that had long been eroding seemed to break; in grief, anger, and despair, people took to the streets and cities were torn apart in the summer heat.

That summer, some home economists sought to solve the “urban crisis” through Inner City Fellowships. So many professors had been eager to participate that the number of applicants outpaced the positions 10 to 1. To those involved, the stakes were high: it was an opportunity to “determine the profession’s relevance... [and] the future existence of the field of home economics.”¹⁹⁸ In the weeks before the start of the program, one home economist reflected on “these last riot-crazed weeks” and called for “swift and positive action” from the discipline. While some experts already working in cities were well aware of the depth of America’s social problems, one home economist acknowledged, “most of us have been able to move along in comfortable grooves scarcely aware of the rock-bottom misery of the ‘other Americans.’”¹⁹⁹ Believing that home economists had much to learn, the editors of the *Journal of Home Economics* continually urged awareness-raising articles and plans for action.

For some land-grant college faculty accustomed to life in rural areas, moving to a city would have been adjustment enough. The timing of this work with “the urban condition” between 1968 and 1970 could not have been more politically charged or fraught. As one professor from Iowa reported, walking into the heat and tension of the summer months in D.C., “one saw and felt fear, distrust and disdain in the eyes of others on the street.”²⁰⁰ Some were more clearly rattled by the experience, declaring, “I can’t help but have a bit of concern about us...[w]e need to take a hard look at ourselves and decide, are we capable of functioning in the

¹⁹⁸ Thomas M. Brooks, “An Inner-City Experience,” 12.

¹⁹⁹ “Change! Action! Results!,” *Journal of Home Economics* 60, no.5 (1968): 332.

²⁰⁰ “Home Economics in the Inner City,” *Current in Home Economics from Iowa State University* 1, no.2 (1968), Box 133, AAFCS records.

capacity that has been described here today [.]”²⁰¹ Many of the participants—who were white—were especially struck by the racial divides and the extremity of the poverty in the cities. These experiences exposed a lack of coordination in the profession. By the late 1960s, Kittrell had already made Urban Extension a core part of the program at Howard. In lieu of working with existing institutions and stakeholders, some Home Economics programs simply sent unexperienced students from rural colleges into the city. When white students from the University of Wisconsin-Madison came to do Urban Extension work in a “ghetto” in Chicago, for instance, they were surprised to see black home economists working there already.²⁰²

That other activists in Chicago may have wanted to conduct similar programs, on their own terms, was not something even considered. As with earlier initiative, forging friendships and “mutual understanding” with women halfway around the world could sometimes seem easier than interracial dialogue in American cities. The Inner City Fellowships were not declared a rousing success, but they were not discontinued, either. Many home economists, Kittrell included, would continue to stress the need to reorient the profession toward the urban environment. Kittrell even worked as a kind of bridge within the profession, offering lectures on urban work to student groups in rural communities. During a gathering at the University of Vermont, Kittrell urged emerging professionals to “go out into the community and find out in what way we keep the poor people poor.”²⁰³ Kittrell also emphasized, in light of recent events, the need to work with the very young in society. After “many years...working with groups of people in areas which involve an attempt to change attitudes and resolve feelings” she had decided that “it is almost impossible to change attitudes. We start too late.” Though frustrated by

²⁰¹ “Annual Meeting Association of Administrators of Home Economics in State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, Panel Discussion, Second General Session,” 33, 10 October 1968, Monteleone Hotel, New Orleans, LA, Reports and Correspondence, Box 133, AAFCS records.

²⁰² “Professor Studies Home Ec in the Ghetto,” *Milwaukee Journal* (Milwaukee, WI), Oct. 29, 1968, 6.

²⁰³ Kittrell, “Interrelated Services for the Planned Community,” Box 104-12, Folder 48, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

these efforts, Kittrell saw that children *could* be taught about prejudice in their “first school,” the home. Kittrell continued to credit her mentor, Dr. Waring, with this idea, and for providing her with a “simple formula” involving “a love for people” and a deep sense of respect for others. In a summer marked by racial turmoil, Kittrell chose to focus on the needs of “humanity,” eliding the increasingly urgent discourses of identity politics.

In this same speech, Kittrell stressed that she “could have been a great many things” but *chose* to be a home economist.²⁰⁴ Though expressing some doubts about whether racism could really be eliminated through education, Kittrell was doubling down when it came to her profession. Her comments about her profession and Waring might reflect the fact that she had recently visited Cornell. In the summer of 1968, Kittrell was honored during the dedication of a new wing added to Martha Van Rensselaer Hall. As with Kittrell’s Howard building, the new wing was declared “a dream come true” and “a symbol of new and forward-reaching forces arising to meet complicated and tumultuous problems of today’s society.”²⁰⁵ The dedication afforded an opportunity to celebrate distinguished alumnae. Women were selected for distinction in industry (Lucy Maltby, Corning Glass Works and Ellen Ann Dunham, former VP of General Mills), academia (Kittrell, Dr. Helen LeBaron, Iowa State, and Dr. Virginia Cutler, BYU), and civil service (Dr. Margaret Hockin Harrington, FAO, UN, and Helen Bull Vandervort, NY State Fair).

²⁰⁴ Kittrell, “Interrelated Services,” 10.

²⁰⁵ New York State College of Home Economics, *Forty-Third Annual Report of the New York State College of Home Economics, A Statutory College of the State University, Cornell University* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1968), 12.



Fig.5.6, 5.7: Kittrell gathered with distinguished alumnae and colleagues at Cornell, 1968

For her achievements—and for being a first among her race—Kittrell remained an exceptional figure at Cornell. To many at the College, she was also a *representative* graduate whose trajectory illustrated broader trends in the College’s history. As part of the celebration of the new wing, a large map was put on display, with strings stretched “to and from Cornell.” For one of the promotional photographs for the College, Kittrell was asked to pose in the center and point to Ithaca. In retrospect, this map was not so much a template for future action as a snapshot of a dynamic already fading. In celebrating their decades of accomplishments, the veteran crowd assembled for many of these events may have seemed out of touch. Shortly after this event, the idea of a name change was put to a vote. Soon, the College of Home Economics, as such, was no more.

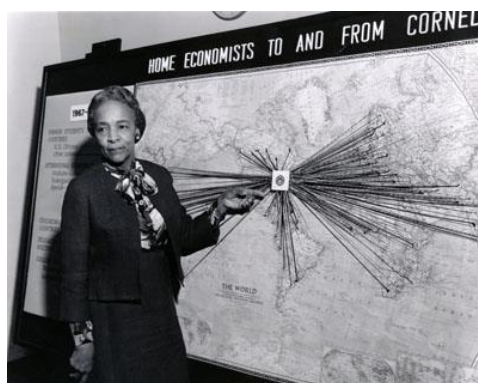


Fig 5.8: “Home Economists to and From Cornell” (1968)

This desire to celebrate the past while great needs went unmet in the present was not a problem unique to the College at Cornell. At Howard, attempts to commemorate the history of the institution had also become forums on student discontent. When Kittrell returned for the new school year at Howard in the fall of 1968, a student leader charged the faculty with being “brainwashed” for wearing academic regalia.²⁰⁶ Many students at Howard rejected the emphasis on strict civil disobedience and middle-class respectability promoted by the faculty, and demanded more critical talk about race. One student interviewed in the fall of 1968 put it this way: “a lot of teachers here at Howard say that they are men and women and not Negroes; they are concerned with the problems of humanity.” Those unwilling to discuss the “particular problems” of Negroes were “shirking the issues.”²⁰⁷ Others decried the lack of “relevance” in the curriculum and the need for engagement with life outside of the Howard campus.²⁰⁸

By the spring of 1969, tensions between students and the administration had worsened. During the week of May 5th, students occupied various parts of the campus again.²⁰⁹ In making their claims to space, the students stressed their desire for a “Black University”—not just in terms of demography, but content.²¹⁰ The occupiers demanded a revitalized curriculum; they were particularly critical of Sociology and History and the “professional” schools of Social Work, Medicine, and Law.²¹¹ The administration had no desire to discuss curriculum content amidst an occupation. On Friday, May 9, local guards were sent in to disperse the crowds of students. As a light drizzle started to fall, “bottles, bricks, and lengths of wood” flew through the

²⁰⁶ Susan Jacoby, “Changed Howard: Students Speak Up,” *Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.), Sep. 24, 1968, A1.

²⁰⁷ Oral History Interview with Adrienne Manns by Harold Lewis, 9 August 1968, Howard University Civil Rights Documentation Project, #267, Ralph Bunche Oral History Collection, MSRC.

²⁰⁸ Oral History Interview with Ewart Brown by Robert Martin, 14 September 1968, Howard University Civil Rights Documentation Project, #354, Ralph Bunche Oral History Collection, MSRC.

²⁰⁹ Vincent Paka, “Students Take Howard U. Buildings,” *Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.), May 7, 1969, A1.

²¹⁰ Tom Myles, *Centennial Plus One: A Photographic and Narrative Account of the Black Student Revolution, Howard University 1965-1968* (Washington, D.C.: Black-Light Graphics, 1969).

²¹¹ Martha Biondi, *The Black Revolution on Campus* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 149-150.

air. Through the opaque mists, debris collided with tear gas grenades tossed into the air by police.²¹² After a protracted struggle, the students were evacuated, and the 800 members of the National Guard and 400 additional policemen kept on watch were called off. The rebellion was quieted through blunt force. While commemorative years brought opportunities for ribbon cuttings, conflicts over an incomplete reconstruction also came to the fore.

During this 1969 occupation, students were not indiscriminate when it came to the building takeovers. In past campus occupations, protesters had only taken over the Administration Building. Now, students concentrated on covering more of the main quadrangle.²¹³ One reporter noted that “looting and vandalism were extensive in some buildings, minor or absent in others.”²¹⁴ Years later, one of Kittrell’s colleagues, Dr. Cecile Edwards, mentioned that during the “student disorder” on campus, “the home economics building was taken over.” Edwards would have heard about this incident secondhand, but she was one of Kittrell’s frequent correspondents. She stressed that Kittrell “impressed those who knew her in the way she watched her dream almost fall to pieces ...yet went on.”²¹⁵ In terms of location, this building was directly within range of where students were concentrating their efforts.

Aside from Edwards’s comment, there is no other mention of Home Economics in records of protest.²¹⁶ In Kittrell’s files, there are some general essays about the takeover but no record of major damages. This silence does not mean that students were uncritical of Home Economics or that these conflicts over the meaning of higher education can be ignored when

²¹² “Howard U. Campus Cleared,” *Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.) 10 May 1969, A1.

²¹³ Buildings still occupied on May 8th: Douglass, Locke, Social Work, Fine Arts, Home Economics. See “Howard U. Closed, Ultimatum Issued,” *Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.), May 8, 1969, A8.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

²¹⁵ Cecile Edwards, “Dean Cecile H. Edwards’s Tribute,” 5, Box 315, Flemmie Kittrell Deceased Alumni Folder, Cornell University Alumni Records, #41/2/877, Cornell University Archives. Edwards was teaching in North Carolina at the time. See Wini Warren, *Black Women Scientists in the United States*, 89.

²¹⁶ Buildings still occupied on May 8th: Douglass, Locke, Social Work, Fine Arts, Home Economics. See “Howard U. Closed, Ultimatum Issued,” *Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.), May 8, 1969, A8.

evaluating the field. The evidence we *do* have suggests that many students might have been ambivalent about the space. Students decrying the lack of attention to African history may have paused in front of the collection of African textiles brought back by Kittrell. They may have also been cautious with the areas connected to Head Start given their stated goal of connecting with the local community.²¹⁷ Kittrell's records do not show any direct conflict, but this may be more a reflection of her prerogative than students' opinions. What we can know is that the School of Social Work came under substantial criticism, and Ira Gibbons, Kittrell's collaborator, went on leave in 1969 to work with the OEO.²¹⁸ Whatever he made of the charges for more "community" involvement on campus, he decided to do this work elsewhere.²¹⁹

In April of 1969, there was a similar occupation at Cornell.²²⁰ As Donald Downs has shown, this takeover revealed the extent to which universities had become "split and variable;" by 1969, Cornell was less a *university* than a "multiversity" with "multiple functions, interests and connections to society."²²¹ The students' push for a more relevant curriculum at Cornell was grounded in recent, localized frustrations, though their critiques were neither new or unique. In fact, there was a similar dynamic at Hampton at this same time, where new students faced old problems. As co-eds criticized the course offerings and faculty turnover rates, the echoes of 1920s protests were not lost on veteran administrators.²²² Trustee Margaret Mead made this connection explicit, reading this contemporary struggle through the prism of the 1927 student strikes. Perhaps thinking of Kittrell, Mead noted that on campus, there was a history of protest

²¹⁷ "Howard U. Campus Cleared," *Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.), May 10, 1969, A1.

²¹⁸ Hazel Geissler, "To Help a Child: Get a Head Start in Involvement," *Evening Independent* (St. Petersburg, FL), Aug. 20, 1969, 2B.

²¹⁹ Gibbons, "Head Start Observations for Teacher Education," *Afro-American* (Baltimore, MD), Jan. 31, 1970, 22.

²²⁰ John Kifner, "Afro-American Hopes Find Frustration at Cornell," *St. Petersburg Times* (St. Petersburg, FL), Apr. 24, 1969, 15A.

²²¹ Donald A. Downs, *Cornell '69: Liberalism and the Crisis of the American University* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 25-27.

²²² Jerome Holland, "Memorandum to Students of Hampton Institute and their Parents," 1965; Madeline Kay Coles, "Booker T. Rides Again," May 16, 1969, Strike Box, Hampton Archives.

“embodied in the living people who remembered.” Writing for the *American Scholar*, Mead wondered if he “Hampton of the present had learned from Hampton in the past.”²²³ What Mead did not mention was just how many of these leaders had likely been passive in the earlier strikes.

Though Mead and others mobilized this history to their own ends, it did not belong exclusively to trustees or aging alumni. It was also at the disposal of Hampton’s students, who felt empowered to invoke this history. Deliberately playing on the idea of an “Education for Life,” students demanded an “Insurrection for Life” in 1969. They were especially critical of Holland’s attempts to rebuild the campus, arguing:

Students are supposed to be fooled when they see new buildings going up... to feel as though Hampton is changing, and that things are progressing when this is not at all the case—at best Hampton has spiritually stood still, at worst, it has retrogressed.

Instead of seeing an administration building for the future, students contended that this new layout impeded “free mental movement.”²²⁴ There were a few notable exceptions mentioned by the student protestors, including the Home Economics complex. Some saw this new space as evidence of a rather thin commitment to excellence, however. They quipped that “Dr. Flemmie Kittrell of Howard University would have been demoted...and fired five years ago if *he* (sic) had been at Hampton Institute.”²²⁵ If asked, Kittrell, who “embodied” Hampton’s history, might have argued that administrators had only learned the art of consistency.

Another Hampton alumna, Lucy C. Barrow, may have also been struck by the echoes of history. Thirty years after her graduation from Cornell, in 1969, Barrow was asked to take part in an Intersession Program on Women at the College of Human Ecology, as it was now known. Much like the conversations surrounding the student protests of the day, this conference

²²³ Edward K. Graham, “The Hampton Student Strike of 1927: A Case Study in Student Protest,” and Margaret Mead, “Postscript: The 1969 Demonstration,” *The American Scholar* 38, no.4 (1969): 668-683.

²²⁴ DeForest Raphael, “Insurrection for Life,” April 1969, Strike Box, Hampton Archives.

²²⁵ “Hampton’s Watergate,” Strike Box, Hampton Archives.

was framed through historical references. The program organizers declared that this “possibly historic” forum on women was a continuation of the work at Seneca Falls. If it were to succeed, one commentator wrote, “there would be an interesting continuity in presenting the new feminism within distance of recall.”²²⁶ Under the umbrella of Human Ecology, the Intersession forum brought together representatives from NOW, including Kate Millett, W.I.T.C.H, and the Black Panther Party to discuss issues from child care to sex discrimination.

The Intersession meetings quickly became contentious, with the same issues plaguing the rest of the university coming to the fore. As one activist charged, “black women were conspicuous in their absence both from the panels and from the audience.”²²⁷ A representative from the Black Panthers was more pointed, dismissing the “white feminist movement” altogether.²²⁸ As predicted, there were indeed echoes of Seneca Falls and late 19th century social movements. While some participants continued to speak about the shared struggles of all women, others rejected this focus on consensus and pointed to racial differences. According to written records, Barrow did not speak at the intersession, though she could have testified as to the “double burden” of being black and female at Cornell. As with the protests of 1927 at Hampton, Barrow slips from the historical record, though her silence speaks volumes. Barrow likely did not see herself as aligning with either the “new feminists” or the Panthers.

This Intersession is indicative of broader debates and tensions of the time. None of these were resolved at the Intersession, though it is striking that women within Home Economics/Human Ecology saw their field as hospitable to fostering such conversations. Indeed,

²²⁶ “Memos to Participants and Organizers,” Box 1, Folder 1, Intersession Program on Women records, #23-2-1238. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

²²⁷ Sheila Tobias, ed., “The Black Woman in America,” Box 1, Folder 10, Intersession Program on Women records.

²²⁸ Ellen Scott, “Feminists Angered by Sex Discrimination,” and Natalie Miller, “Conference is Eye-Opener,” Box 1, Folder 2, Intersession Program on Women records.

the first Women's Studies class at Cornell actually grew out of the Intersession.²²⁹ This forum suggests that some home economists still thought that the field had relevance for women's issues, broadly defined. Some experts even argued that Home Economics was the ideal "frame of reference" for expanding women's equal opportunities in employment.²³⁰ There were even some attempts to align with Women's Studies programs, though this impulse was far from universal.²³¹ In 1972, Sheila Tobias argued for such alliances, as working with these academic programs would enable home economists to:

move into areas that represent very pressing national needs: institutional child care, support for welfare families, contraception and abortion legislation, architectural innovations to provide for more efficient, more androgynous, and, possibly, more communal living arrangements. In the next few years federal, state, and local governments will be looking for programmatic recommendations that will meet the needs of the poor and of women. If colleges of home economics are not working on these issues, they may not receive the students or funding that they have enjoyed in the past.²³²

As Tobias rightly surmised, relevance and financial stability were inextricably linked for home economists. Home economists *had* been working on some of these issues, but their attempts to have a larger role in policy were no longer as effective.²³³

At the same time, while many university structures were coming under siege, women who had earned positions of power and prestige were likely to be seen as part of the problem rather than agents of change. In this way, the words of prominent international educator

²²⁹ Anne Ju, "Women's Studies at Cornell Evolves over 40-Year History to Include Sexual Minorities," *Cornell Chronicle*, Nov. 4, 2009.

²³⁰ Victor A. Christopherson, "Women in Modern Society," *Journal of Home Economics* 57, no.2 (1965): 99-100.

²³¹ Helen LeBaron, "Now That Women are Liberated," *Journal of Home Economics* 64, no.4 (1972), 3-4.

²³² Sheila Tobias, "For College Students: A Study of Women, Their Roles and Stereotypes," *Journal of Home Economics* 64, no.4 (1972): 21. See also: "Sheila Tobias" on *Veteran Feminists of America*: <http://www.vfa.us/SheilaTobias.htm>. Tobias: "I never write about my childhood, or my family. As far as I am concerned nothing significant happened to a well-adjusted and school-successful little girl until I went to college with two exceptions but they were only important in retrospect."

²³³ Dolores Hayden, *Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities* (Boston: MIT Press, 1982).

Lela O'Toole are especially instructive. As she saw it, "students should be educated to be a person, a family member and parent, a citizen and a worker."²³⁴ While Home Economics experts had gone far with this kind of rhetoric before, this language failed to grapple with changing discourses. Debates over how to discuss and navigate the differences among women based on race, class, status, and age were now discussed in far more explicit terms than before. Home economists, on the other hand, were still insisting on an overarching emphasis on humanity and domesticity—often, they were often speaking a different language from their students. There was also the matter of the focus on "the home." As Robin Morgan's speech revealed, few people "knew the depth of the instruction in most universities." The continued existence of even a few courses in table setting meant that home economists "presented a highly confusing facade of programs to the public."²³⁵

In other contexts, strategies that had suited home economists for years now also seemed to be failing them. In the early 1960s, the American Home Economics Association arranged for "Family Life Abroad" tours for women in the field. In 1965, one of the twenty delegates who toured the U.S.S.R., Dr. Ruth C. Hall, returned to the US outraged. When "compared to the last visit," Hall argued, "this one did not go as well." Hall stressed that her "main interest concerns kitchens, sinks, the homefront and all else connected with the family." Her purpose in the U.S.S.R. was obviously 'to observe the same.' Hall was therefore shocked when Russian women would not accept that her group "believe[s] in peace and friendship." In particular, she felt 'berated over Viet Nam.' Caught in this "peculiar spot," Hall was displeased to hear 'that there is only one system in the world, one right system, we could surmise what was meant.' Hall thought

²³⁴ Lela O'Toole cited in Summer Orientation Program Bound Volume, Folder - Congo Teachers Summer Orientation Program, 1962 (2), Kittrell Files, HUA.

²³⁵ Ruth Bonde, "A Time of Growth, A Time of Decisions," *Journal of Home Economics* 68, no.1 (1976): 29-33.

earlier tours to be more pleasant because ‘there was no discussion of anything political then.’²³⁶ In this same period, Hall published an article on home economists’ various contributions to government projects over the preceding decades.²³⁷ Ignoring the growth of the military-industrial complex and her profession’s role in it, Hall remained convinced that in some circles, women such as herself could travel the world in pursuit of friendship, overlooking the US’s imperial interests and intrusions. Hall’s difficulty with acknowledging the field’s political orientation was not unique, and to a large degree, that was part of the discipline’s public relations problem.

For her part, Kittrell kept up with developments such as the Committee on the Status of Women; she also tracked women’s emerging roles in government in the US and throughout the world. Within the academy, Kittrell did *not* align with the feminist movement or make any pointed stances for cultural or area studies. Some colleagues ardently believed that she had been working to fight prejudice her whole career.²³⁸ Ultimately, Kittrell seems to have been ambivalent about calls to create women’s programs and programs in Black/Africana Studies. Given her attempts to make Home Economics *central* to the liberal arts core, perhaps it was unclear to her whether these fields represented new opportunities or further marginalization. Privately, Dr. Waring asked Kittrell as to her “reasoning on the relationship between the prospects for integration and the demands of the black power folks for their independence.” She continued, “Personally the integration is so much more rewarding in the long run that I dread this opposition to it, even temporarily.” Possibly imagining their interracial friendship as a model, Waring asked Kittrell for a “straight-forward presentation on this.”²³⁹ Unfortunately, there is no

²³⁶ “Family Life Abroad Evaluations,” Box 15, AAFCS Papers.

²³⁷ Ruth C. Hall, “The 65th Anniversary of the First Lake Placid Conference,” *Journal of Home Economics* 57, no.1 (1965): 21.

²³⁸ “The Changing Role of Women,” n.d., Box 104-12, Folder 12, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

²³⁹ Ethel Waring to Flemma Kittrell, n.d., Box 104-1, Folder 15, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

surviving letter that provides such as “straight-forward presentation” or any other document setting out Kittrell’s thoughts on these matters in the 1970s.

In some instances, other home economists confronted the issue of racism and “dissent” directly, with figures such as Patsy Graves writing about the “Negro revolt in America” in the context of a global revolution. Graves struck on a much larger cultural issue when she declared, “we are in the midst of a revolution, and it is amazing to observe how many people are completely unaware of what is taking place.”²⁴⁰ Graves had returned to teaching in the US after spending thirteen years out of the country. She was stunned by all that was taking place. Pleading with her colleagues to adapt, she found most other home economists still forming seminars on “intercultural understanding.” This work, much like earlier efforts, tried to promote interracial, international dialogue through personal relationships. This was another attempt to make that which was different familiar, with speakers such as Gwen Newkirk, a black home economist, presenting on “Values in Family Living in West Africa and Black America.”²⁴¹ Beyond these attempts, there was *not* a radical shift in language; the focus on “the family” remained while various social groups decried the lack of attention to socially disenfranchised units.

These nuanced, if limited, attempts to grasp contemporary politics were not what people associated with the discipline. What’s more, the complicated ways that home economists had tried to navigate educational networks throughout the world were not well known. Particularly in the 1970s, much of the reputation of the field was based on what people know of it from the secondary level.²⁴² Therefore many of the contributions Home Economics experts had made,

²⁴⁰ Patsy Graves in “Values in Ferment,” *Journal of Home Economics* 61, no.8 (1969):602.

²⁴¹ Gertrude Esteros, “Developing Intercultural Understandings: I. Minnesota/Intercultural-International Focus on Home Economics,” *Journal of Home Economics* 61, no.4 (1969): 259.

²⁴² “Do you know that the field of Home Economics offers you, a prospective student, a greater variety of occupations from which to select than any other profession for women? You can’t lose if you choose Home Economics for your career.” See: “Home Economics Careers for Young Women,” Home Economics Box, Hampton Archives.

particularly in childcare, were not translating.²⁴³ Most people would not know that from with the small circles of a “Family Life” course, students at Bennett had debates over child care, divorce, abuse, and premarital sex.²⁴⁴ Or, that the *Journal of Home Economics* ran articles from self-identified feminists, long histories of women’s rights, or advertisements for teaching films “from a feminist point of view.” One of these films, “Together Sweetly,” showed “what can happen in a marriage when a wife gives up her identity to please and serve her husband.”²⁴⁵ Most activists assumed that home economists taught the opposite, and some of them likely did. Above all else, outsiders saw the word “home” as incongruous with “liberated” women’s ambitions.

An article from the *Los Angeles Times* on Alicia Hernandez, a NOW activist and Howard graduate, is particularly revealing. A proponent of daycare and international activism, Hernandez recounted that she “ran for the first time into prejudice against women” when a faculty member in Political Science “advised her to take home economics instead.”²⁴⁶ Hernandez interpreted this as an insult. This would have surprised Kittrell’s peers—and Kittrell especially—for she had decided to forgo a career in Political Science for Home Economics. This piece is significant for the way that it points to just how readily the complex histories of internationalism, child care, and social work taking place within Home Economics department at Howard could be ignored. Even those who knew of the “African-like” living room in the department may not have been aware of the complex, global politics attached to it.

²⁴³ Muriel Morisey, “Women in the Universities,” *The Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.), Sep. 28, 1970, C2. See also: Isabel V. Sawhill, “Homemakers: An Endangered Species?” *Journal of Home Economics* 69, no. 5 (1977): 19. In addition to a discussion of childcare policy, this article suggests, “feminist thinking has something to offer homemakers...It is feminist scholars and activists who have sensed the homemakers’ plight and have tried to do something about it.”

²⁴⁴ Streat, “Family Life 124 Comments,” *Time for Design: Vignettes of Life as a Clothing Major*, no page numbers.

²⁴⁵ “New Programs and Visuals,” *Journal of Home Economics* 66, no.6 (1974):68. See also: “No Hiding Place” on “the tensions that divide the Negro and white communities in an American suburban town.” 61, no.6 (1969):468.

²⁴⁶ Maggie Savoy, “NOW Leader Too Busy to Be Angry: Feminist Wants Alternatives,” *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA), June 3, 1970, F1.

A few years earlier, Kittrell had told a reporter, “I’m trying to divorce cooking from the concept of home economics.” While cooking and eating were obviously necessary, “this can be picked up by anyone who can read a recipe.” With greater technological advances, Kittrell hoped that women could “have more time to enjoy the arts and make a contribution to the community.” Kittrell also wanted “to see more women get into the legislative branch of the government; this is what women of the new countries are doing.”²⁴⁷ Still, the idea that Home Economics was about “stitching and stirring”—skills, not advancement, persisted. The bad press continued when Gloria Steinem referred to Home Economics as a “cultural ghetto [.]”²⁴⁸ Steinem saw Women’s Studies and women’s history as proper outlets for women’s homosocial growth. Home Economics, on the other hand, was delimiting, linked to racialized denigration.

This framing of Home Economics as a “ghetto” came at a strange time. Into the 1970s, there was a national surge in male leadership in the field.²⁴⁹ In previous decades, men had been minorities in the field, and occasionally, curiosities.²⁵⁰ What men had lacked in quantity they had overcome through perceptions of prestige. As Rossiter’s wide-ranging research shows, men with doctorates became particularly successful in advancing higher and faster in the field, especially in the sub-disciplines of child development and family studies.²⁵¹ Curiously, this heightened focus on children and family dynamics led some to believe the field was narrower than it was in reality. Likewise, prominent (male) voices pushing for name changes suggested a greater sense of incoherence.

²⁴⁷ Kittrell in “Classroom Beyond Campus,” *Christian Science Monitor*.

²⁴⁸ Gloria Steinem, “Women Freeing The Men, Too,” *Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.), June 7, 1970, B1.

²⁴⁹ Margaret Rossiter, “The Men Move In: Home Economics in Higher Education, 1950-1970,” 96-117.

²⁵⁰ Luther G. Baker, “The Enigma of Men in Home Economics,” *Journal of Home Economics* 61, no.5 (1969): 337.

²⁵¹ Royston Lawson, “Men in Home Economics, 1900-1975,” *Journal of Home Economics* 85, no.1 (1993): 50; Mary Ruth Swope, “Is There a Teacher Shortage in Our Colleges?” *Journal of Home Economics* 64, no.9 (1972): 10.

There is yet another factor that must also be considered in looking at Home Economics in the late 1960s: age. Here, Kittrell provides a particularly rich case study. Throughout her life, Kittrell was reluctant to accept—or publicly acknowledge—societal limits. As a young person, even age had not held her back. According to most records, Kittrell altered her birthdate to enter Hampton’s secondary school early. This trend ended in 1970. That year, at the age of 66, Kittrell’s application for a UNESCO post was denied due to age.²⁵² The following year, a group of Howard alumni presented a portrait of Kittrell to the Home Economics department. Hundreds of guests turned out to see her receive 27 roses, each one marking a year of service.²⁵³ This was a celebration, but it was also the first step toward a mandatory retirement set for the next year.²⁵⁴

Kittrell’s retirement is significant because it was one of many taking place at the same time in Home Economics departments across the country.²⁵⁵ While much has been made of generational divides during this period, the loss of a large population of workers in their 60s and 70s due to new regulations on forced retirement has received less attention. Within a decade, so many women who had been active in the AHEA had retired that the *Journal* took an extensive survey. Compared to the rest of the AHEA membership, the retirees surveyed in 1980 were disproportionately unmarried and had obtained much higher levels of education. In the retired group, women who were mostly trained during the 1930s, 64% held master’s degrees and 12% held doctoral degrees. Even when accounting for age differences, these numbers were much higher than those for the rest of the AHEA (33% and 5% respectively).²⁵⁶

²⁵² Kittrell UNESCO Application, Box 104-3, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

²⁵³ Margaret Tillett, “Dr. Kittrell Honored,” *Omicron Nu* 38, no.2 (1972): 14.

²⁵⁴ Logan, *Howard University*, 575.

²⁵⁵ New York State College of Home Economics, *Forty-Third Annual Report of the New York State College of Home Economics*, 7.

²⁵⁶ Helen LeBaron Hilton, “Membership Profile: AHEA Retirees,” *Journal of Home Economics* 72, no.4 (1980): 45.

Thus Kittrell's retirement was emblematic of a much broader trend. The older model of the unmarried, highly educated home economist would not continue into the future. For these women, it had been possible to take an interest in domesticity and engage with home and family life issues throughout the world. In so doing, they were not seen as taking a strong lead on matters of "domestic" discontent. After all, these women *had not* come out in strong support of women working, nor had they focused on work-life balance to any large extent. With so many retirements happening at once, the exemplars of that earlier tradition would be far less visible, along with the programs they built in Home Economics.

Within a year of Kittrell's departure, the name of her program at Howard was changed to Human Ecology.²⁵⁷ The focus on "teaching, research, [and] service" remained, along with an even stronger emphasis on "international studies" in the program.²⁵⁸ Kittrell was still not pleased. As she saw it, "human ecology can be broken into so many different areas, and people are apt to not see it as a whole." In her frame of reference, "home economics really had a broader base."²⁵⁹ As someone who had done quite well with a career grounded in the home, Kittrell was not apt to drop it. Now, the loss of the label "Home Economics" separated her legacy from the program.

In some ways, Kittrell's departure was an important break in her life. This retirement marked the end of her teaching career. At the same time, Kittrell had never been hemmed in by the academic calendar. Now, she had even more time for travel, and by the summer of 1972, she was on an extensive trip abroad. With a grant from AID, Kittrell took part in an "Airlift of Understanding" to Bangladesh.²⁶⁰ She then returned to the Congo, now known as Zaire. There, Kittrell reconnected with Eunice Kasongo, her former student, to collaborate on a long-term

²⁵⁷ Wini Warren, *Black Women Scientists in the United States*, 91.

²⁵⁸ "School of Human Ecology International Studies in Human Ecology," Box 2602, Kittrell files, HUA.

²⁵⁹ Tate interview, 28.

²⁶⁰ "Emergency Relief Fund, 1971," Box 104-15, Folder 6, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

family studies project. Behind the scenes, AID representative Patricia Connor Ayers urged her colleagues to support Kittrell's research, arguing that Kittrell "is a highly intelligent woman and besides doing good things for Zaire and American education, I am sure she will make good copy."²⁶¹ Names may change, and regimes might be overturned, but as long as the family remained central, a veteran home economist would still be "good copy" for the government. Rounding out the year, Kittrell also traveled to India, where she was set to give the keynote address at the 11th biennial meeting of the All India Home Science Association.

To fund her travels, Kittrell wrote of her plans to synthesize what she had learned from her many trips throughout the world into a single study.²⁶² For the most part, her research had been published in bits and pieces, and this would provide an opportunity to write a synthetic analysis of her life's work. Kittrell would never produce that monograph. Instead, she led a fairly unencumbered, peripatetic life, moving from continent to continent. She also returned to Ithaca, serving as a visiting fellow at Cornell between 1974 and 1976. As yet another marker of how little had changed, Kittrell insisted that her trip to Cornell came at the urging of others. Kittrell considered this time at Cornell to be one of the most fruitful of her life; she had few direct obligations, yet enjoyed the privilege of being in an academic setting.²⁶³ Free to travel and lecture, Kittrell largely sidestepped fights over her discipline and the future of education.

After her time at Cornell, Kittrell took another extensive tour, adding stamps from Alaska, New Zealand, and Australia to her passport. Even with a dizzying travel record, Kittrell was insistent that it was the similarities between people that mattered most. As she told Merze Tate, "I have enjoyed knowing that human beings respond predominately the same ways...to the

²⁶¹ Patricia Connor Ayers to James C. McIntosh, Box 104-2, Folder 7, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

²⁶² "Family Ecology in Zaire - What Modern Technology Can Offer," Box 104-12, Folder 32, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

²⁶³ Rev. Kathryn Moore, "In Memoriam 1980," Box 104-1, Folder 13, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

problems they meet, all over the world.”²⁶⁴ The words were spoken during what would be known as the “age of fracture,” so it would be easy to dismiss this as a bland assessment. Kittrell was not an uncritical observer, however. In this same conversation, Kittrell held her own with Tate as they drifted from assessments of Australian aborigines to the history of the Sandwich Islands Missionaries. Kittrell was also aware of just how exceptional she was for having traveled so far from the crossroads of Henderson, North Carolina. To a large degree, she chalked this up to her profession, claiming that “a university professor is a very fortunate person to be, because the university professor is free.”²⁶⁵ As she knew well, it was not just her position, but the way that she positioned herself in relation to politics that had made the difference.

After this interview, Kittrell traveled to China and the Philippines. She also purchased airfare for India, but never made the trip. On Friday, October 3, 1980, Kittrell was visiting Howard when she suffered a heart attack. She passed away later that day at Howard University Hospital. In the weeks to come, administrators at Baroda University, Bennett, Cornell, Hampton, and Howard all marked the passing. In various outlets, Kittrell would be praised as “a pioneer” and “great humanitarian.”²⁶⁶ A fellowship was even named in her honor at Cornell to remember her life.²⁶⁷ Meanwhile, at her other *alma mater*, President William Harvey paid tribute to Kittrell from within the Hampton Memorial Chapel.²⁶⁸ Half a century after her graduation, a large group gathered to honor her, including students “draped in black,” a tribute to “a sister” of the Calliope Literary Society. Though he had since moved on, Jerome Holland offered remarks, describing

²⁶⁴ Tate interview, 16.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 42.

²⁶⁶ “Kittrell, Great Humanitarian, Passes,” *Bennett Banner* (Greensboro, NC), Oct. 24, 1980, 3.

²⁶⁷ Faculty of Home Science at Baroda University, “Memorial to Dr. Flemmie P. Kittrell,” Box 133, Flemmie Kittrell Fellowship File, AAFCS records.

²⁶⁸ “Letting their Lives Do the Singing: A Citizen of the World...and the Lady Next Door,” Box 315, Flemmie Kittrell Deceased Alumni Folder, Cornell University Alumni Records.

how Kittrell “gave of herself unstintedly” to Hampton. Holland also expressed his pride in the “living memorial to her on campus”—the Home Economics building.²⁶⁹

There was also a service held at the Andrew Rankin Chapel at Howard. This memorial brought home economists, including Helen Strow, Patsy Graves, and Kittrell’s protégée Dr. Marianna Sewell, together with consumer and labor advocate Esther Peterson and classics scholar Dr. Frank Snowden into the same room.²⁷⁰ Several speakers sought to capture Kittrell’s life as one of constant motion—“a moving picture in a fluid state,” as she might say.²⁷¹ Some privileged her professional contributions, others her human touch.²⁷² Gwen Newkirk, a friend from Cornell and the first black president of the AHEA, noted that Kittrell ‘reached out to all corners of the world to improve the quality of home and family life of many peoples.’²⁷³ Kittrell, who was “omnipresent, much-traveled and oft-referred to,” was seen as both deeply grounded in—and constantly moving between—the institutions that mattered to her. Here, too, mourners pointed to a building, invoking the structure “named Flemma P. Kittrell Hall by the home economics faculty,” located just up the hill.²⁷⁴

Celebratory by convention, these memorials capture only part of the story. In the end, Kittrell’s minister, Rev. Kathryn Moore, conveyed a sharper sense of her humanity. Standing beneath the large, exposed beams of the Rankin Chapel, Moore confessed, “it is hard to remember her also without smiling, and even then to eventually break out laughing.” At her church, Kittrell “used to fall asleep” but would still be keen on offering congratulations or notes for improvement. Declaring Kittrell “feisty,” in the sense of being “full of life,” Moore recalled,

²⁶⁹ Jerome Holland to Dorothy Spencer, 3 May 1982, Box 315, Flemma Kittrell Deceased Alumni Folder, Cornell University Alumni Records.

²⁷⁰ Evans E. Crawford, “In Memoriam: Dr. Flemma P. Kittrell,” *Journal of Home Economics* 73, no.1 (1981): 12.

²⁷¹ Kittrell, “Home Economics at Bennett College,” *Southern Workman* 60, no. 8 (1931): 381-4.

²⁷² “Flemma Kittrell, noted home economist, dies,” *AHEA Action*, 1980, Kittrell Trustee Box, Hampton Archives.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁴ Rev. Kathryn Moore, “In Memoriam, 1980.”

“I never knew her to talk about race relations, but her whole life was a constant flow of doing something about them—and not just one variety of people but for all people all over the world.”²⁷⁵ A life built on complex notions of service, deeply complicated and perhaps even evasive race politics, and “something like internationalism,” could not be summarized more succinctly.

After nearly eight decades of building a life dedicated to the family, the *Washington Post* obituary concluded thus: “Dr. Kittrell, who lived in Gloucester, Va., left no immediate survivors.”²⁷⁶ Per Kittrell’s final wishes, her various real estate holdings were to be sold and the proceeds divided between Hampton and Howard for Home Economics education. Furthermore, Cornell would receive some portion of her stocks, while her personal papers, writings, and “art items from Africa and India” would go to Howard. Other professional texts were deeded to the Home Economics department at Hampton. As Kittrell’s material legacy was scattered, those who wanted to pay tribute would have no grave to visit. The woman once called “the buildingest person alive” asked to leave no lasting marker.²⁷⁷ Friends and colleagues were urged instead to send donations to the headquarters of the American Home Economics Association at 2010 Massachusetts Avenue. A few years later, with little fanfare, the AHEA Headquarters was relocated to a rental space in Virginia, marking the end of a hope for permanence and a lasting sense of place.

²⁷⁵ Rev. Kathryn Moore, “In Memoriam, 1980.”

²⁷⁶ “Flemmie Kittrell Dies, Professor at Howard U.,” *Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.), Oct. 5, 1980.

²⁷⁷ Mary Francis Reed to Kittrell, 1974, Box 104-9, Folder 18; Kittrell’s Last Will and Testament, Box 104-1, Folder 12, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

Conclusion: A Model Home of One's Own

In the mid-1970s, Flemma Kittrell started devoting more time to thinking about African American history and her place within it. Swept up in bicentennial fervor and the interest generated by Alex Haley's *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* (1976), Kittrell observed that the history of the black family was becoming more recognizable within national historical narratives. With this upswing in interest, in addition to researching her own genealogy, Kittrell started to explore how and where noted black educators were being commemorated. Kittrell saw particularly rich possibilities for historic preservation in Gloucester, Virginia, so she started to make plans for building a home of "her own design" there. Since her arrival at Hampton Institute in 1919, this would be the first time Kittrell lived apart from an academic campus in more than half a century. Gloucester was not an incidental choice—this area had connections to histories of enslavement, rebellion, and the fight for black home ownership. Gloucester was also the site of the Moton Center, a home connected to a "Black Think Tank." Continuing her life-long interest in quasi-domestic, didactic spaces, Kittrell went to Gloucester to make a model home of her own and to forge a monument reflective of her commitment to black family life.¹

After her retirement from Howard University in 1972, Kittrell was ready to make a change. Though many of her civic activities would still necessitate trips to the capital, Kittrell decided to leave her townhouse on Warder Avenue in D.C. and to move a few hours south to Gloucester.² In choosing a location that was "not so distant from the main thoroughfare," Kittrell was also looking to put just enough distance between her new home and former life.³ Kittrell was also placing herself in an area where she would be among a dense network of prominent African

¹ Esther Ottley, "Flemma Pansy Kittrell (1980)," 18, Kittrell Papers, Box 104-1, Folder 9, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University Archives.

² Black Women Oral History Project Interviews; Flemma Kittrell, Aug. 29, 1977, 37. OH-31, T-32/Kittrell. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

³ Susan Friend, "Flemma Kittrell Has Life of Firsts," *Daily Press* (Newport News, VA), Mar. 25, 1979.

American homeowners and intellectuals.⁴ In particular, Kittrell's new address put her in close proximity to Holly Knoll, Dr. Robert Russa Moton's retirement home. Moton, who first taught at Hampton Institute, later succeeded Booker T. Washington as president of Tuskegee Institute. After overseeing the transition toward full collegiate programs in the 1920s, Moton left Tuskegee in 1935 to return to Virginia. Once there, Moton maintained his relationships with the philanthropic world by hosting informal meetings at Holly Knoll, his private residence.⁵ After Moton's death in 1940, *his* Tuskegee successor, Dr. Frederick Patterson, a fellow Cornell University graduate, turned Holly Knoll into a professional venue known as the Moton Center. From within this space, prominent leaders in African American education launched the United Negro College Fund and the Moton Center for Independent Studies. Known as the "Ebony Tower" or "Black Think Tank," Moton attracted a wide array of scholars, including Kittrell, who served as a fellow after her retirement.⁶

Kittrell had other reasons for settling in Gloucester. While still living in D.C., Kittrell wrote to Grace Walker, a Gloucester resident, about plans to preserve the legacy of her father, the late Thomas Calhoun Walker.⁷ Born in the same year that the Emancipation Proclamation was issued, Walker studied at Hampton and later became one of the first African American lawyers in the state of Virginia. After starting a business that enabled local black families to buy land and build homes on their own terms, Walker held a series of local governmental positions. One of his most prominent roles was with the Virginia Emergency Relief Administration;

⁴ Harriet Cowen and Gloucester County 350th Anniversary Committee, "African American Heritage Trails Tour," <http://www.gloucester-va.info/Portals/0/tourism/documents/africanamericanheritagetrailstour.pdf>

⁵ "Robert Russa Moton," *Journal of Negro History* 25, no.3 (Jul., 1940), 404-406.

⁶ Easy Klein, "The Ebony Tower," *Change* 7, no.5 (1975): 19-20.

⁷ Flemmie Kittrell to Grace Walker, 6 August 1974, Box 104-11, Folder 5, Kittrell Papers, Moorland-Springarn Research Center, Howard University Archives; "Her Father was State's First Black Attorney," *Free Lance Star* (Fredericksburg, VA), Feb. 26, 1977, 4; George C. Grant, "The Negro in Dramatic Art," *Journal of Negro History* 17, no.1 (1932): 27.

relatedly, Calhoun supervised the collection of slave narratives for the Virginia Writers' Project.⁸ Dedicated to home ownership, education, and civic work, Walker saw inextricable links between history, land, and freedom. Late in life, Walker summarized his life-long mission by suggesting that "Negroes...could never really be free until they owned their own homes."⁹ Kittrell saw a similar link between homeownership and freedom.

To memorialize Walker's work and mission, Kittrell took an active role in preserving his home. At the time, Walker's daughter Grace, a once "internationally known monodramatist," still lived in the family's Greek revival home. Undeterred, Kittrell wrote to Grace in 1974 about her desire to purchase the Walker family's property.¹⁰ Kittrell had designs to make the home and "land surrounding it" into "a historic landmark which will hold...[Walker's] personal belongings, books by and about him, and your favorite portrait of him." Kittrell also sketched out plans for "a small, attractive brick structure as a memorial."¹¹ Land cards offer the rest of the story. By 1977, Kittrell secured the land she asked for and her home was constructed where she had wanted—near Walker's.¹² Kittrell's tenure in Gloucester was cut short by her death in 1980 and a memorial for Walker was not constructed for many years. Under the supervision of Kittrell's executor Claudine Mitchell, a fellow home economist from Howard, a plan was put into place to eventually transfer ownership of the structure to Kittrell's "home by the sea," Hampton. The same fate befell Walker's home upon Grace's death.¹³

⁸ Charles Perdue and Writers Program, *The Negro in Virginia* (New York: 1940).

⁹ Thomas Calhoun Walker, *The Honey-Pod Tree: The Life Story of Thomas Calhoun Walker* (New York: 1958).

¹⁰ "Ethiopia Will be Theme of Sketch," *New York Amsterdam News* (New York, NY), Apr. 13, 1940, 3.

¹¹ Kittrell to Grace Walker, 6 August 1974, MSRC.

¹² Land Card for Flemma Kittrell, Tax Map 32A2 (11)-18, Property Records Database Gloucester, VA. Transfer of land: <http://prd.gloucesterva.info/images/cards/9765/00018642.PDF>

¹³ The executor was a Claudine Mitchell, a former Howard student. "Mrs. Claudine L. Mitchell," *Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.), Jan. 18, 1982; Land Card for Flemma Kittrell, Tax Map 32A2 (11)-18, Property Records Database Gloucester, VA. Transfer of land: <http://prd.gloucesterva.info/images/cards/9765/0001E67D.PDF>.

Kittrell's plans were not entirely successful, though it is significant that she sought to save Walker's house amidst the national surge in bicentennial-related history projects. While others were saving colonial homesteads and spinning wheels, Kittrell saw value in saving and marking Walker's property.¹⁴ In proposing a landmark, Kittrell revealed a remarkably keen sense—for someone who was not trained as a historian, architect, or landscaper—of how the history of the built environment would be memorialized for the future. At the time, the National Historic Landmark Program was less than a decade old. City planners and preservationists often take for granted the idea that the home of a notable figure reveals something about his or her legacy. As a home economist, Kittrell shared this vision and applied what she had learned in collegiate institution-building to make a place for Walker's story.

Kittrell imagined more than a well-placed retirement home when she wrote to Grace. She saw an opportunity to denote the importance of Walker's legacy of promoting homeownership through his own property holdings. This plan mirrors larger concerns circulating throughout Kittrell's career. Kittrell did not conceive of private homes as insular, private spaces closed off from the world. Her interest in saving Walker's home was about preserving a single family's private life to a degree. This plan was really about linking black history and domesticity to American history. This effort was likely influenced by recent changes in her discipline. If Kittrell was frustrated by the lack of focus on the "home" in many (former) Home Economics departments, perhaps she imagined that the domestic space of an exemplar from the past could be instructive. She may have also considered her own *home* as a kind of learning space. As a potential companion to Walker's memorial, perhaps she saw her model home as a site where travelers could visit to revel in the history of Home Economics.

¹⁴ Natasha Zaretsky, *No Direction Home: The American Family and the Fear of National Decline, 1968-1988* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

Though her plans were not entirely successful, Kittrell could imagine a receptive audience for a Walker site because of the contemporaneous interest in black family history inspired by Haley's *Roots*. Personally, Kittrell was fascinated with the *Roots* phenomenon. She told her friend and colleague, historian Merze Tate, that *Roots* even inspired her to trace her genealogy. In so doing, Kittrell had been struck by the fact that she, like Haley, had an ancestor named Kizzie/Kizzy. Still, Kittrell was not exclusively interested in her own family, or she would not have reached out to Grace Walker. The Walker memorial effort points to a conception of African American family history that went beyond a single genealogical chart. This work repositions Kittrell from a subject of history to an agent working to secure and carefully manage her place within it.

Kittrell's foresight is most striking when considering that it took another 35 years for a local historian to list the home on the National Register of Historic Places. While protected to some degree today, the home is not open to the public and there is not a prominent memorial of the kind Kittrell imagined. Elsewhere in town, Walker's legacy remains fraught for other reasons. A local school in Gloucester that bore his name for many decades was closed in 2012. Among some members of the local community, this decision was seen as a serious affront. As one critic argued, "the change is racially motivated, aimed at erasing the legacy of one of the commonwealth's major black civil rights figures and a favorite son of Gloucester County."¹⁵ On top of the Walker controversy, there is scarcely a trace of Kittrell's life in Gloucester. Her home remains private, an echo of the notion that Home Economics was delimited to "private" interests and an insular notion of domesticity.

¹⁵ Thomas M. Boyd, "Restoring the T.C. Walker Name and Legacy to Gloucester," *Richmond Times-Dispatch* (Richmond, VA), Apr. 13, 2012. The school closed that May.

Outside of Gloucester, there is scarcely any evidence of Kittrell's Home Economics department at Howard. The building Kittrell's colleagues referred to as "Flemmie Kittrell Hall" is now used to house a STEM-focused charter school, MS².¹⁶ Across her career, Kittrell would contend that there was a science and an art to living. She also insisted that her students—anywhere in the world—learn about the natural sciences and "what to do about science" through their training in Home Economics.¹⁷ With both her department and the Walker school, a combination of bureaucratic factors and ideological considerations converged to render some histories less visible, less worthy of saving. The fates of these academic structures and private homes point to the tenuousness of all legacy-building efforts.

There *are* other ways of finding Walker and Kittrell's longer histories—if not in brick and in stone, then through paper. Kittrell suggested that a portrait of Walker be put on display near his home in the early 1970s. While this plan never came to fruition, the portrait Kittrell likely intended is among her papers at the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center at Howard University. This puts the Walker portrait in good company. The Moorland-Spingarn contains materials on black history from across the past four centuries, providing a paper trail from slavery, to freedom, to liberation and beyond. Today, it is one of the most significant collections of materials related to African American and diasporic history in the world.

For this distinction, the Moorland-Spingarn is deeply indebted to one of Kittrell's contemporaries, the archivist Dorothy Porter Wesley.¹⁸ Wesley is especially important for her service to the archive, though her career also points to a larger pattern. Wesley retired at the same time as Kittrell, Ira Gibbons, Tate, and more than thirty others on the faculty at Howard.

¹⁶ Rev. Kathryn Moore, "In Memoriam 1980," Box 104-1, Folder 13, Kittrell Papers, MSRC.

¹⁷ Kittrell, "To the Committee on General Education," Box 2605, Folder: College of Liberal Arts 1963, Kittrell files, Howard University Archives.

¹⁸ Janet Sims-Wood, *Dorothy Porter Wesley at Howard University: Building a Legacy of Black History* (Charleston: History Press, 2014).

Altogether, these figures had a combined 1,223 years of service.¹⁹ When Kittrell, Wesley and their peers left Howard, an unfathomable amount of institutional and worldly knowledge left with them. Wesley's work in securing a strong archive has meant that these individuals' stories and their efforts at making a lasting legacy have not entirely disappeared. Though Kittrell's work in Home Economics has *become* relatively obscure, the existence of two archival collections related to her time at Howard belie the notion that she was an insignificant figure. These files tell us quite a bit about Kittrell; they also open important avenues for research about other home economists. Kittrell's insistence on documenting what was possible with a career in Home Economics is itself a political act worth remembering.

Outside of the archives, over the past several decades, it has become harder to see what home economists built across academic landscapes throughout the US.²⁰ Traces of their work remain in child laboratories, day care centers, and cafeterias but many campus buildings named in honor of or constructed for home economists are no longer explicitly connected to the field. Yet, it would be a mistake to overstate this pattern of erasure. Home Economics structures were always meant to be dynamic spaces of change and action; they did not represent the totality of what home economists were striving for or the range of their labors and research. As venues to work with students and communities, these spaces allowed women such as Kittrell to do the now largely forgotten, or unrecognizable work of the discipline. Whether that labor involved teaching mothers from Greensboro about nutrition in 1934 or providing breakfast for young D.C. residents through Head Start in 1964, most of the work home economists did was dispersed, scattered. Looking back over these decades of working "with the daily, mundane, practical needs of families," home economist Marilyn J. Horn noted, "It would be foolish to speak of 'a glorious

¹⁹ Ethel Payne, "So this is Washington—Assorted Items," *Pittsburgh Courier* (Pittsburgh, PA), May 26, 1973, 6.

²⁰ Virginia Moxley, "Building a Legacy in Stone," in *Remaking Home Economics: Resourcefulness and Innovation in Changing Times*, ed. Sharon Y. Nickols and Gwen Kay (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2015).

past” for Home Economics. At the same time, Horn insisted, the field “has never been trivial.” As she saw it, Home Economics “was important in the way that it addressed the critical problems of the day, and also in terms of the way it sought to achieve respect for ‘women’s work.’”²¹ Without a recognizable space, or an emphasis on foregrounding home economists’ labor within institutional histories, these academic and social contributions went the way of many forms of “women’s work”—quietly deemphasized, forgotten, or elided.

Over time, the field of Home Economics came to be seen as simply too incongruous with modern higher education. Now it is no longer taught at Howard, Hampton University, or Bennett College. At these and other institutions, where some versions of Home Economics do still exist, the courses are usually taught under the umbrellas of Human Development and Family Studies. Notably, these fields focus far less on the home as a space of work despite the persistence of social problems related to the “double day.” Elsewhere, at programs such as the College of Human Ecology at Cornell University, the word “home” has also been dropped. Now, it has been gone for nearly as long as it lasted. Even the American Home Economics Association became the American Association of Family & Consumer Sciences (AAFCS) in 1994.

To only focus on this pattern of declension and the “domestic” angle would be to miss the longer connections between stateside programs and international networks. Outside of the US, most leaders in the discipline have not pushed to eliminate the word home. Groups such as the International Federation for Home Economics (IFHE), for instance, have not gone the way of the AHEA. Another international alliance that persists into the present—and was founded by a cohort of leaders including Kittrell—is the International Home Economics Services (IHES).²²

²¹ Marilyn J. Horn, *The History of Home Economics in Nevada* (Reno: Nevada Home Economics Association, 1991), 201.

²² Ruth E. Norman, “A History of International Home Economics Services,” hosted on *International Federation for Home Economics-United States*, <http://www.ifhe-us.org/iheshistory.pdf>.

Kittrell was part of the formation of the IHES during the same period that she was working on the Walker transaction. First organized by colleagues Patsy Graves and Helen Strow, this interracial delegation was incorporated with Kittrell and three other experts: Kathleen Flom, Margaret Morris, and William Morris.²³ The group had several key objectives, including:

Strengthen or develop formal and non-formal home economics programs in less developed countries; Utilize the expertise of U.S. home economists to assist colleagues; Enable women to fully participate in the development process of their countries and their professional associations; Cooperate with other groups including the International Division of AAFCS.

The IHES was not intended to be a top-down charitable organization. While some projects were extensive and long term, IHES members from around the world also supported individual scholarships. To date, IHES officers and members still marshal support for income generation projects and community workshops.

In line with the longer history of international Home Economics, the projects of the IHES is not divorced from geopolitics. While much of Kittrell's international work was shaped by World War II and the Cold War, more recently, the terrorist attacks of 9/11 inspired some members of IHES in Atlanta, Georgia, to start a new campaign. While watching the local news one night, a leader from IHES was stunned by the new security measures in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. She was particularly disturbed by the number of scissors that might go to waste once they had been confiscated from passengers' bags. After calling a security representative from the Atlanta airport, she was encouraged by the idea that she could collect these scissors for Extension workers teaching sewing or other skills. For many months, a small team of home

²³ Ron Drum, "Watch the Children and the Elderly," in *4-H Stories from the Heart*, ed. Dan Tabler (Bloomington: I Universe, 2011); Helen Strow and Margaret Morris, "Africa Tour," *Journal of Home Economics* 66, no.5 (1974): 6-10; "Margaret Morris, Former USDA Official, Dies," *Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.), Sep. 17, 1989. Kathleen Solveig Flom was Assistant Leader for 4-H International Programs and National 4-H Foundation. Flom also coordinated an International Extension 4-H Travel Seminar to Botswana, Kenya and Swaziland. Margaret Marco Morris worked for the USDA as chief nutritionist in its national school lunch program, as a consultant for the National Youth Administration, the President's Committee on Consumer Interests, and President Kennedy's Commission on the Status of Women. In "Europe and the Philippines," Morris taught Nutrition.

economists worked with the airport and sent thousands of pairs of scissors abroad to home economists and homemakers' clubs. Though most were sent to women in Liberia, where the IHES had a strong network in place, hundreds of sets were sent to women in a dozen other nations. For some figures, this discipline continues to serve as a meaningful gateway into engaging with the state and global education networks.

Indeed, along with IHES, there are other national groups of home economists in various parts of the world. The long reach of Home Economics past the 1970s can be seen in meetings such as the First All Africa Home Economics Conference, held at the Kwame Nkrumah Conference Centre in Ghana in 1987, or the conference on “Reflecting on the Past, Creating the Future” organized in Switzerland in 2008. At the former meeting, attendees discussed contemporary issues and visited coastal forts used for the Atlantic slave trade.²⁴ At the latter, one delegate from a historically black college in North Carolina argued that home economists “should promote understanding and mutual respect” while striving to “be more responsive given current global trends to help rural and urban people to create more sustainable livelihoods [.]”²⁵ For these women living across diasporic communities, Home Economics is not merely a part of the past. In addition to Flemmie Kittrell Hall at Hampton and MS² at Howard, the groups and the professionals who occupy them are undoubtedly part of Kittrell’s legacy. Throughout her career, Kittrell worked to link matters related to the home to national concerns and international relations. Perhaps it is fitting that Kittrell’s story cannot be confined to a single house, academic building, or archive. A career stretched across so many different locales and institutions demands a broader view.

²⁴ Papers of the International Federation for Home Economics, Box 5, Folder 14, Collection 391, National Agricultural Library, Beltsville, MD.

²⁵ International Federation for Home Economics, *100 Years of the International Federation of Home Economics, 1908-2008* (Bonn, Germany: IFHE, 2008).

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