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The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

Volume 7
Issue 5 *September*

Article 6

September 1980

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Recommended Citation

Blumberg, Rhoda Lois (1980) "Careers of Women Civil Rights Activists," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 7: Iss. 5, Article 6.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15453/0191-5096.1474>

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol7/iss5/6>

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CAREERS OF WOMEN CIVIL RIGHTS ACTIVISTS*

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ABSTRACT

Stages in the civil rights careers of a sample of women active in northern communities were studied. Committed to racial justice, most intensified their participation in the early 1960's. In the second half of the decade, the "Black Power" phase, roles for whites became fewer. Organizations experienced changes in membership and direction; factionalism ensued. Many women welcomed black leadership and played roles in new black-led community agencies. Arrests of blacks allegedly involved in riots elicited support in the formation of defense committees and prison reform organizations. Later, many women entered human service professions; they chose jobs with poor, minority or disadvantaged clientele. Half are still volunteers. Continuity is sought between paid or volunteer work and social concerns. In its absence, a sense of loss or guilt is experienced. Movement commitment tends to be translated into institutional roles, most especially paid careers in the human services.

Although research is accumulating, many questions of theoretical as well as social policy interest remain about the nature of white participation in the civil rights movement of the 1980's. Some suggest that whites, as outsiders, became a hindrance in the later stages of this minority movement (Marx and Useem 1971). Another approach stresses the generally declining function of the membership base in civil rights during the latter half of the 1960's, the "Black Power" phase. It was during this period that government, business, and foundations helped to create paid social movement careers (McCarthy and Zald 1973). Financial resources provided by mainstream white institutions would appear to have

*This is a revised version of a paper presented at the Annual Meetings of the Eastern Sociological Society, March 16, 1977, New York City. Thanks are due to Cheryl Townsend Gilkes for her constructive remarks as discussant, to Richard M. Stephenson for comments on an earlier draft, and to the Rutgers University Research Council for grants which supported the research. Publications of the author prior to 1979 appeared under the name Rhoda Lois Goldstein.

replaced, in effect, the direct action participation of relatively powerless whites. Or did committed whites find new roles to play during the second, less integrationist phase of the movement? If most newly-created paid movement jobs were allocated to blacks and members of other minorities (as a pacification effort, to be sure) what occupational roles were available to the white activists?

Clearly, longitudinal studies are needed to address such issues (Williams 1977). Stages in the growth or decline of white activism, its relationships to changing movement philosophies, organizational contexts and resources -- as well as to individual life history -- are all areas open for exploration.

Most frequently, movement participation is seen as characteristic of college youth, who do not bear responsibility for adult roles and have periods of unscheduled time available (Demerath et al 1971; Fendrich 1977; McCarthy and Zald 1973). Follow-up studies of student activists have been made but little is known of what happened to their adult counterparts (Erlanger 1977; Fendrich 1977.) Yet a 1964 national survey of white civil rights activists found that fifty-two per cent of them were over the age of thirty (Pinkney 1968).

To begin to fill this gap I present data on a sample of white females who range widely in age, most of whom were wives and mothers during the 1960's. Their civil rights participation took place primarily in a relatively neglected context of the movement -- northern communities.(1) In the 1950's and 1960's they joined interracial housing, education, and human rights groups, and branches of national organizations such as NAACP and CORE. Their activities ran a wide gamut: from public speaking and the writing of newsletters and leaflets to organizing, demonstrating, and lobbying. Several travelled to the South to participate in special campaigns.

This paper is concerned with the processes and contexts of their involvement, and the meanings attached to civil rights work. It examines the evolution of movement roles, starting with preconditions to involvement; traces participation through changes that occurred during the Black Power phase; and, finally, looks at the current activities, paid and volunteer of sample members.

The intermeshing of movement careers with family careers has

(1) Reference is made here to the northern activism that paralleled the early thrust of the southern movement.

been dealt with elsewhere (Goldstein 1978; Blumberg 1980). The term "career," as used here, refers to a major involvement over time which helps shape individual identity, and is not limited to paid work (see Becker and Strauss 1970). For those studied, the movement was an intense experience which gave meaning and direction to their lives. As family careers evolved and children grew older, many of the women returned to school or to paid employment. Whether or not these new interests represented "defection" from civil rights commitments is a question that shall be examined.

Sample and Methods

Use of a reputational method solved the problem of locating former activists. My first-hand acquaintance with their everyday world, a world I had shared, included many contacts. Through these I derived a snowball sample of white females, well-known for civil rights activities in their own communities in the State of New Jersey. (2) The respondents' networks led to seven centers of interracial movement activity, although this by no means exhausted such centers in the state. Length of participation varied, but each individual was included only if she considered racial justice to be an important personal value. Forty-one women met this criteria.

In-depth interviews focussed on the dynamics of voluntary association and social movement participation as related to stages in the individual's life course.(3) A brief follow-up contact by mail and telephone in December 1976 brought information up to date.

To provide a clearer image of the respondents, some background characteristics are presented. Their median year of birth is 1927, with a range of from 1898 to 1945. Two of the younger women have never been married. Of the ever-married, one-half are married to first husbands, a little over 15% to second husbands; a little over one-quarter are divorced, and slightly over 10% are widowed. More than two-thirds possess a bachelor's or higher degree, but their educational status was

(2) The suggestions of as many different respondents as possible were utilized; where feasible at least two were chosen from each community represented.

(3) Most subjects were highly verbal and talked freely; the open-ended nature of the interview favored the exposure of serendipitous data.

lower at the time of their activism. Religious backgrounds are varied and will be discussed later. Many women recall the effect of the Depression on their families, with more than a third saying they were poor or very poor during childhood. A few of the families were relatively well-to-do.

Typing the White Civil Rights Activists

Categorizations of white civil rights workers have sometimes differentiated between political "liberals" or "reformists" and political "radicals," corresponding to the individual's degree of alienation from the social structure (Demerath et al 1971:171; Marden and Meyer 1977:200). But an individual's strong commitment to racial equality need not be tied to over-all political radicalism (Meier 1970). Pinkney has used the terms "civil rights liberals" and "civil rights radicals" to indicate degree of commitment to the cause rather than to signify a general political stance (1968). This recognition that individuals vary in the extent of their willingness to serve a particular cause is implicit in such distinctions as those made between "core" and "peripheral" members.

Another concept, "white positivism" has been said to characterize:

that small number of white Americans who not only think that blacks should gain complete equality for their own sake, but believe that it is essential for liberating whites, morally and ethically (Marden and Meyer 1977:200).

Members of the sample take varying positions about the viability of the present social system. Of the need for racial justice, however, they have no doubt. They cite practical as well as moral reasons for believing that this goal serves their own self-interests. A quest for interracial experiences for their children propelled many of them into civil rights activities. Equality for black people is frequently now encompassed within broader ideals, such as economic equality or "equality for all peoples." Said one respondent, as a typical example:

Maybe it's enlightened self-interest, this feeling that as long as there are large segments of the American population that are second class, that don't have their rights, that this inevitably threatens me as well.

(Interview 108)

These women, then, most closely fit Marden and Meyer's concept of "white positivists" or Pinkney's concept of "civil rights radicals."

Differences between white male and female activists have not been analyzed in depth, although hypotheses have been advanced. Follow-up interviews of a sub-sample of young white volunteers in a 1965 summer voting project ("SCOPE") found that women were more likely to become "reformists," "disengaged," or "drop-outs" than "radicals." The authors then generalized that, "women may not be good bets for sustained activism of any sort." (Demerath et al 1971:180.) Their female volunteers appeared to be more oriented to marriage than were males. Obviously, intensity of involvement in a social movement needs to be weighed against the pull of other commitments or other careers. In the case of this sample, marriage and motherhood were highly valued; however, the women generally found the combination of motherhood and activism compatible (Blumberg 1980). In some cases, husbands were partners in social movement activity, while others placed some restraints on their wives (Goldstein, 1978).

The data presented may be compared to studies of voluntary association participation which assume life careers based on male models. Women's career combinations are changing, but paid employment was deferred by most members of the sample in favor of family careers. With a few exceptions, they worked sporadically or part-time while their children were young. As suggested elsewhere, changing patterns of female labor force participation may have significant impact on voluntarism (Kreps and Clark, 1975). In contrast to the reported male tendency to join organizations connected with paid employment (Wilensky 1961), the women activists' eventual choice of full-time employment appeared to be influenced by prior movement "work." As will be seen, those with options tended to choose careers in the human service field and to work with minorities or other disadvantaged clientele.

Preconditions to Entering the Movement

A strong emotional reaction to injustice, sometimes but not always focussed on race, was the personal precondition expressed clearly by the women. More than half recalled having had such a feeling in childhood, and described specific incidents. Others shared the sense of outrage against injustice, but attributed it to parental socialization and parental modelling.(4) Over 70% report having been socialized to a humanistic, religious, or political ethic stressing justice and equality.

(4) Civil rights activists in a national study report having had a similar general humanitarian feeling long before they became specifically involved in civil rights (Pinkney 1968).

The sense of injustice was sometimes attributed to personal experience of poverty or marginality, as in the following two cases:

When I was in private conversation with people who were bigoted and prejudiced, I was too unsure of myself to speak up. I would just sort of get sick inside. When they were talking about Jews -- and my maiden name was Reilly, and I didn't look Jewish, so nobody knew I was half Jewish -- and when they'd talk about the "niggers" and the Jews, I'd get sick inside but I wouldn't say anything. It wasn't until I was married and had children that I finally got to the point where I could talk up.

(Interview 006)

My feeling of commitment (to racial justice) goes back to the earliest time that you can think of. I've always felt like this. I was a very poor little girl, who had stigma placed upon her because of poverty ... It is related to problems based upon racial or religious or ethnic discrimination and deprivation.

(Interview 125)

Although questions about anti-Semitism were not asked, both Jews and non-Jews introduced the topic frequently. Abhorrence of racial discrimination was linked with similar feelings about Nazi anti-Semitism. The generalized concern with injustice became focussed on race early in life for many of the women. Almost half recalled having had a significant personal relationship with a black individual before graduating from high school. By the time of young adulthood, more than three-quarters had had such experiences.(5)

Entry into the Movement

Most sample members report that they did not translate their first internally-felt reaction against racial injustice into overt action. The personal pain was tolerated because of shyness,

(5) Surace and Seeman note that one of the correlates of civil rights activism for whites is equal status interracial contact (1967). I was, at first, puzzled by the long-lasting effect on some of the women of early contacts with black servants. As children, a low status group within the majority group, they were allowed much freer and more personal contact with these servants than their parents experienced. However one may react to this, the white children and black employees shared an equally low status.

uncertainty, or a sense of powerlessness, as in one interview quoted. However, a little more than a third do recall taking some public stance. Such individual behavior typifies the early stages of an incipient movement, when people grope for solutions independently.

The respondents' entry into group activity focussed on racial injustice has been classified into five time periods (see table 1): before 1950, from 1950-59, from 1960-64, from 1965-69, and from 1970 on. The early sixties were obviously the main period for entry, with almost 40% joining organizations at that time. However, an even larger percentage were involved in group activity prior to 1960.

Table 1: Beginning of Civil Rights Activism

	No.	Percent
Before 1950	7	17.0
Between 1950-59	11	26.8
Between 1960-64	16	39.0
Between 1965-69	6	14.6
From 1970 on	1	2.4

Although CORE groups operated as early as 1942, the proliferation of direct action organizations occurred after 1955 (Marden and Meyer 1978). Some date the nonviolent action period of the modern civil rights movement by the action period of Mrs. Rosa Parks on Dec. 1 of that year when she refused to surrender her seat to a white man on an Alabama bus. The historic Montgomery bus boycott, in which Martin Luther King, Jr. rose to prominence, followed (Abernathy, 1971). Others see Feb. 1, 1960 as the beginning phase of southern activism -- the day four black students sat in at a Greensboro, North Carolina lunch counter (Demerath et al 1971).

Respondents report taking part in early efforts to desegregate public facilities such as swimming pools, hotels and restaurants, which were undertaken by small groups of friends or NAACP chapters. Left-oriented organizations were also in the forefront in trying to obtain justice for imprisoned blacks, and in waging campaigns against lynching. A little more than a quarter of the women came from homes with radical or labor backgrounds or else joined left-oriented groups, both Socialist and Communist, while still single. Such women were prepared from childhood to take part in social change efforts, and sought out civil rights organizations. Note the following case:

My parents were left activists in civil rights... before I was born. ... I worked for a union for about one and a half

years, and it was during that time that I wound up in New York and eventually in North City. At some point along the way I had written national CORE. I had been getting their calendar and newsletter for a few years. I had asked them where a local chapter was in New York or New Jersey, and before I got an answer I ran into somebody from Brooklyn CORE and started getting involved with Brooklyn CORE... And (then) I started getting involved in North City CORE.

(Interview 106)

Several women became active organizationally while in college and one while a college teacher. More typically, the first mode of entry into the movement came through membership in traditional organizations, such as YWCA's, PTA's, church social action groups, Leagues of Women Voters, and political parties. Many of the future activists had moved to new communities with their husbands and children; they entered public life by way of the existing and available organizations. Children were placed in socially-oriented Sunday schools and parent-cooperative nursery schools. The women tried to create interracial settings for their children in both pre-school and public school. In two cases of late entry into the movement, younger women who were welfare mothers became allied with blacks through poverty programs. Atypically, an older woman became active after her husband's retirement. In a somewhat peripheral case, the latest entry, also the youngest respondent and unmarried, joined a core of older activists in a local organization after 1970.

The Growth of Involvement

Unlike those with socialist or communist backgrounds, most women grew in awareness and radicalism through their community experiences. Voluntarism in traditional organizations affected them in three ways. First, they developed knowledge about racial inequities in the local community. Secondly, when some of their churches or other organizations became slightly involved in the civil rights movement, respondents pushed for greater commitment. If unsuccessful, they consciously moved on to more focussed civil rights organizations. The following case is lengthy, but illustrates both of these experiences:

When my oldest was in kindergarten I did all the proper things. I became a room mother and joined the PTA. It gave me something to do. And the PTA drove me up the wall, absolutely up the wall. I tried to do something to stir up the women there. And then I started discovering things in the school district. The only Black kids came from Robbsville,

and they all went to that one little elementary school. The kids there were in real poverty.

...Along with this activity, at the same time, I was going to the local Lutheran Church. And they invited three people to come to talk about this new group that was forming, this Human Rights Council. What they were doing was drumming up interest and hoping that other people would join. Well, everyone sat there and smiled and said it was marvelous, and they waved good-bye to them, and that was the end of it... The church didn't join the Human Relations Council, but I did.

(Interview 101)

Another woman describes her entry into the NAACP in this way:

What happened was -- we left Pittsburgh and went to New Jersey, and the local church was not as socially oriented as the other church (in Pittsburgh). It's an old conservative church, with very conservative Republican members. They were the ruling element ... and they said, "We don't want any of that stuff going on in our church." So I picked myself up and went and got involved in the civil rights movement. ...Along about that time, through the League of Women Voters, I had acquired a friend who was black, and she took me to my first NAACP meeting.

(Interview 103)

A third reoccurring element is touched on here -- the ease with which respondents developed contacts with black people and acquired black friends. The presence of even one black in a predominantly white organization could be instrumental in facilitating the transition to movement groups.⁽⁶⁾ On occasion, more traditional community organizations -- such as the YWCA -- proved a satisfactory avenue for civil rights work and membership was continued. The League of Women Voters was credited by some as an important educational source.

The Meaning of Civil Rights Work

The activists tended to switch out of membership groups in which they felt uncomfortable or dissatisfied. Some had questioned teachings of their churches even in childhood. Over 60% eventually

⁽⁶⁾ As a social policy implication, it should be noted that the black integrator of a predominantly white group can serve as an important catalyst.

changed religious affiliations -- either moving from one Protestant denomination to another or, more frequently becoming Unitarians, Quakers, or persons without religious affiliation.(7) (See table 2.)

Table 2: Religious Identification

	I.D. in Childhood		I.D. Now	
	No.	Percent	No.	Percent
Protestant	19	46.3	10	24.4
Protestant and Jewish	1	2.4	0	0.0
Protestant and Quaker	1	2.4	0	0.0
Jewish	15	36.6	8	19.5
Catholic	3	7.3	1	2.4
Unitarian	0	0.0	8	19.5
Quaker	1	2.4	3	7.3
No religious I.D.	1	2.4	11	26.8

Passing through various membership groups is part of the process by which new reference groups become adopted. There is a "continued and cumulative interplay between the deterioration of social relations within the membership group and positive attitudes toward the norms of a non-membership group" (Merton 1968:323-324). This is what happened for those who withdrew from traditional organizations. When the disillusioned would-be activists left these groups and joined ones dedicated to civil rights, their moods changed. The groups felt "right"; finally the women were in the company of equally concerned peers. The interracial social action organization was the membership group most closely approximating the positive reference group of an integrated, non-discriminating society.

Here two respondents describe their sense of belonging and identification with movement organizations:

After I had lived here a short time, one of the friends I made told me about the Human Relations Council. It really enriched my life. I felt it was for me. The right thing...

(7) A similar tendency to switch to more liberal religious preferences or to no religion was found in a study of peace activists (Bolton 1972). Bolton's control group of non-activists not only changed religions much less frequently, but such changes were randomly distributed among various churches.

I was active in PTA for just a while... The Human Relations Council was my main activity.

(Interview 135)

The second, who became highly politicized in the movement, was more analytical:

I began to realize that you just can't spread yourself out so thin, and be a dabbler in everything. And I began to see myself as developing an "umbrella" in terms of what types of political activities I would be involved in, and what types I wouldn't be involved in. And I would not, for example, be involved in PTA at a school, and I recognized very clearly that those kinds of things are just not relevant to the kind of person I am, and I began to think through very carefully, before I get involved in any project, just what they were about, and how they hooked into the political person that I see myself as.

(Interview 004)

Identifying with civil rights groups, the activists report little concern about criticism directed toward them by other whites. Some were relatively impervious to physical danger. Said one:

I know there were times when we were involved in kinds of demonstrations... where I felt a physical danger, and it's an uncomfortable feeling... but it's too much a part of me not to be doing these things. The kind of people who didn't respect me or feel that I was doing the right thing are really not people who are of personal or intellectual interest.

(Interview 106)

Another, when asked how her parents felt about her being arrested, stated,

Well, I think they were duly horrified, but by that point I don't think it was terribly significant to me... They had been horrified so many times before that it didn't particularly matter.

(Interview 120)

And a woman who travelled South to participate in restaurant sit-ins in the early sixties, describes the experience: "We submitted to stares and nasty looks. It was a lovely experience, really beautiful." (Interview 121)

The Changing Movement

In the second half of the sixties, the movement evolved into its Black Power phase (Pinkney 1968; Yinger 1973). Black leadership became viewed as essential and integration goals downgraded by formerly integrated organizations such as CORE and SNCC (Killian 1975). Black nationalist positions stressed self-determination and community control (West 1979). A series of urban riots brought home the fact of black discontent. Two cities in which sample members lived experienced such riots. The black movement erupted on campuses throughout the nation.

The federal government met the threat of black insurgency with repression. Black leaders were killed or imprisoned; organizations were infiltrated by government agents (Killian 1975; Pinkney 1976). At the same time, programs which resulted from the movement, such as school desegregation, poverty programs, and affirmative action were put into motion.

An important change occurred in the resources available during this period. Government and foundation support of movement organizations increased dramatically. Industry too, became heavily involved in social action programs (McCarthy and Zald 1973). The connection between increased black militancy and the financing of organizations by mainstream institutions is a question which cannot be dealt with here. However, some of the effects are relevant. The phase has been described as one in which "professionalization of social movement careers" took place (McCarthy and Zald 1973). Given the nationalist mood, and the need to placate angry blacks, much of the "poverty money" went to black agencies and the jobs to black people. Universities developed special programs for "minorities" and "the poor," many of which were geared to blacks.

The Reaction of the White Activists

What happened to this group of white female activists after the mid-sixties? Their experiences varied, and were tied to their own changing family careers. However, examining the duration of their involvement in the movement, three women were active only in the period of 1960-64, four more confined their activity to the period between 1965 and 1969 and seven others were active only between 1960 and 1969. Thus, not only were most women active in the second half of the sixties, but almost two-thirds participated before and after the civil rights decade.

Duration of involvement is one key to variations in commitment, but other factors are also present. Personal and family health,

and the need to find full-time employment turned out to be important variables.(8) Among those whose group activity occurred only in the 1960's and who might, therefore, be considered less seriously committed, are four women whose families became interracial through marriage or adoption. The problems of black people would necessarily continue to be of vital concern to them.

How did the women react to the black separatist phase? Working closely with blacks, they had observed the reality of black-white cultural differences, and shared disappointments at the pace of success. Despite their own integrationist ideals, many were acutely aware of the need for black leadership and came to see separatism as a necessary stage in strengthening the black community. Appointed to the board of a new community action agency, one respondent made strenuous and successful efforts to have a radical black appointed as its director. Another left the movement before the mid-sixties, over the issue of black leadership. She explains:

I dropped out shortly after that (issue) because I didn't like the leadership being so predominantly white... If I had a role I would be glad to play it, but not as anybody who was going to be an organizer. This was something that I felt... the NAACP and the other black people in town were trying to do. And I didn't see a damned bit of reason why a bunch of middle-class white people should be organizing or taking it over.

(Interview 104)

Respondents agreed with the black mood in broadening their concerns to include economic issues, and began to see links between poverty-related organizations and civil rights.(9) Here one indicates how she made the connection:

I remember thinking at that time that race and welfare were two different issues... I was sort of pushed into it, and was asked to come down and work ...as it turned out, I realized that I was working in the racial area on a different economic level. Where previously I was working with middle class

(8) Critiquing an article on voluntary participation, Blenker noted the omission of considerations of physical vigor and functional capacity as affecting participation (Margaret Blenker 1961).

(9) A similar focus on economic issues was found in a follow-up study of student civil rights activists (Demerath et al 1971).

blacks in a housing area, now I had moved to a lower economic and welfare area, and it was still the race issue...

(Interview 005)

The changes in the direction of the movement created repercussions that came to affect the availability of movement roles for whites. All communities did not experience these changes in the same way, nor did all of the respondents. Some representative cases follow.

One fair housing council in Scenic City operated successfully into the late 1960's. It had received funds to hire an executive director and a community organizer. A former member explains its success:

We were one of the few that kept active... I think the reason we did is because we shifted gears. The old concept of placing one black family in a white neighborhood just wasn't valid anymore, because economics had entered the picture. If there's no housing in the price range that people can afford, why talk about placing a black family? You've got to tackle it at its source, which is zoning.

(Interview 127)

The very changes that kept this organization alive led to its eventual decline. Factionalism developed over the new programs. As the council turned to economic issues and sought housing for poor blacks, its membership and corporate support dwindled. The factionalism reported here, as in a number of other cases, tended to occur over issues and directions rather than by racial lines. But the result was frequently the loss of some white members.

In another location, North City, a formerly well-integrated organization decided to focus on the recruitment of lower-income blacks. One respondent removed herself from a leadership position at this point. She states:

There was a real effort to involve more people from the particular area around where our office was. The composition of the chapter changed considerably. There really was no point, I thought then, either for college-educated people who stood out, or whites, to be in leadership positions. So there was a change at that point and I supported the change and decided to leave the board.

(Interview 116)

Finding it difficult to be less active, she took the advice of a black organizational leader and returned to graduate school, to specialize in community organization.

Some respondents were appointed to official citizen advisory boards, such as those of Community Action projects, Legal Services, and community funding agencies, based upon their civil rights credentials or the support of black leaders. The black activists frequently moved into paid careers with these agencies; the white women tended to enter by way of voluntarism, although some were later hired. In Pleasant County, a black agency utilized several respondents in community action and pre-school projects. Their skills in education, writing and administration were recognized and tapped. Later the agency recruited blacks from other communities, factionalism developed, and three of the more active white women were caught in the cross-fire of internecine disputes.

Central City, another important locale for activists, experienced a major disturbance in which many blacks were arrested. Rather than alienating the white activists, the riot created new avenues for their support. They helped to form a defense committee for the accused persons, which drew upon the pool of white civil rights workers in surrounding communities. Increasingly skeptical of official justice, members of the committee raised funds and attended the numerous trials that ensued. Related activities developed -- the transportation of and visitations to black prisoners, as well as general concern with the prison and justice systems. Prison reform organizations gained the activists' attention.

Colleges and universities provided a context where involved faculty members found roles to play. They helped to create recruitment and support programs for minority students and pushed for the hiring of black faculty (Alman 1971). One younger respondent became allied with blacks through special minority programs at a community college. Only one of the women joined what have been called "twin-track" organizations -- organizations of white "friends" (such as Friends of Welfare Rights) which supported parallel black groups (West 1979).

A small number of women who had been extremely active into the late 1960's experienced personal challenges leading to temporary withdrawal or lessened roles, either being openly criticized or involved in the black factionalism described above. Another was a target of some (but not extensive) criticism from blacks for adopting an interracial child -- and was little daunted. She reasoned:

At the time we adopted him it was really the height of black separatism and there was an awful lot of discussion among blacks about whether it was right to place them in white families. It became very clear to us that if there were sufficient black families to adopt black children, that was fine, but that we knew definitely we were preferable to a succession of foster homes.

(Interview 120)

The women had to disassociate anti-white rhetoric from their own experiences and were usually able to do this; they themselves had fought racist whites. Many were seen as trusted supporters by blacks who knew them and who continued to draw upon their skills and resources. In a few cases, their organizational base disappeared, and they moved on to unrelated activities.

For persons more peripherally involved than these core activists, the Black Power phase provided a justifiable end to participation. But most of the respondents sought ways to continue their involvement.

Was this group of activists unique in seeking new roles to play during the Black Power phase? My hypothesis is that they were not, and that similar networks of core white activists -- "white positivists" or "civil rights radicals" can be found. Further studies are needed to isolate the multiple variables involved in persistence, and to analyze more systematically the changing contexts described above.

Current Roles: Occupational and Volunteer

Close to 90 per cent of the women are now holding paid jobs, the vast majority full-time. About half do not now participate in volunteer activity: of these, almost all are working full-time, in school, or both (See table 3).

The most frequently mentioned voluntary activities are related to the criminal justice system, such as work on defense committees and with prisoners. Church-related social action groups and service on boards of community agencies are next in times cited. Women who entered civil rights with a left political orientation are still committed to socialism of various sorts, and some are involved in associated political or cultural organizations. Only a few respondents appear to confine their voluntarism to fund-raising for traditional charities. (10)

(10) The volunteer efforts described probably understate organization participation, as respondents tended to mention only what they considered their most significant affiliations. Occasionally they would suddenly recall other related memberships.

Table 3: Current Activities:
Work, Educational and Voluntary Roles

	Participates in Volunteer Activity		Does not Participate in Volunteer Activity	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Works Full-time	11	26.8	18	43.9
Attends Graduate School or College	1	2.4	3	7.3
Does not Attend Graduate School or College	10	24.4	15	36.6
Works Part-time	7	17.1	0	0
Attends Graduate School or College	1	2.4	0	0
Does not Attend Graduate School or College	6	14.6	0	0
Does not Work	3	7.3	2	4.9
Attends Graduate School or College	0	0	1	2.4
Does not Attend Graduate School or College	<u>3</u>	<u>7.3</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2.4</u>
Total	21	51.1	20	48.7

Efforts to find appropriate careers were frequently sparked by changes in marital status -- divorce or widowhood -- and changed economic circumstances. Money was needed to help put children through college or to supplement the retirement income of husbands.

Other movements gained ascendancy in the late 1960's and early seventies. The women's movement drew fewer active participants from this sample than did the peace movement. However, its indirect affect was clearly acknowledged. The trend for adult women to enter or re-enter paid employment is well-established, but their widespread return to colleges and universities is more recent. Sensitive to societal currents, many respondents grasped

the educational opportunities newly available to mature women. Full-time employment, age or illness prevented others from doing so.

Work Roles and Their Meaning

The current occupations of sample members provide a partial indication of their work roles (See table 4).

Table 4: Present Occupation (December 1976)

<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Administration	9	22.0
Teacher or School Director	8	19.5
Social Worker	8	19.5
Social Worker	8	19.5
Office or White Collar	5	12.2
Lawyer	2	4.9
Home Business	2	4.9
Writer	1	2.4
Waitress	1	2.4
Student, Not Working	1	2.4
Not Working nor in School	4	9.8

Two characteristics of the roles, when known in more detail, stand out. First -- with one exception, those who returned to school prepared themselves for careers in the human service professions, such as teaching, social work and law. That exception is a woman who acquired a business degree related to her full-time job, but who plays an important role in civil-rights related legal work. Incidentally, the organizational skills acquired in voluntarism may help explain why many of the women quickly rose to administrative positions.

Secondly, within their paid careers, the clients or target groups of the women are most frequently poor, minority, elderly or handicapped people. Non-mainstream teaching contexts are numerous -- cooperative nursery schools, day care programs, alternate schools, special education programs, and social action-oriented religious schools. The carry-over from civil rights appears in varied ways: a city planner is developing low and moderate income housing; a woman whose new business involves home demonstrations immediately brought in and trained several black associates.

The changing life careers of these women attest that, at

least in the United States, the openness of work careers in the modern world now extends to women (Berger, Berger and Kellner 1974). Most respondents could not have foreseen their future occupations when they were deeply immersed both in the movement and in the daily details of child-rearing. It is clear, though, that they now search for consistency in meaning between the different stages of their lives, in line with the observation that, "As the individual reflects about the successive moments of his experience, he tries to fit their meanings into a consistent biographical framework." (Berger and Luckmann 1967:64)

In claiming this continuity, most of the women say they consider their occupational roles compatible with movement interests. For example, a social worker who counsels low income, unmarried mothers credits her rapport with clients to earlier sensitization to the problems of race and poverty. A full-time peace worker considers civil rights and peace to be "twin movements," parallel, compatible, and mutually reinforcing. Respondents indicate that, within their paid careers, they make judgments in terms of, and are guided by, their basic commitment to racial and human justice. As administrators, many have opportunities for such judgments in decision-making and hiring. Some of those who did not return to school are continuing their civil rights related volunteer activities.

A small number of women feel that they no longer contribute to the movement in any way. They express a sense of guilt, emptiness, or puzzlement over the discontinuity. One of them, who resigned from a prisoner's defense committee during the 1970's because of ill-health, cannot accept her inaction. Her tale sounds somewhat like the protrait of battle fatigue that characterized field workers at the height of the Mississippi campaigns -- she describes nightmares, tension and misunderstanding with fellow workers, adding:

Yes, I feel guilty about it... I don't want to give up on the people. After all, they're still in prison. We still have injustice.

(Interview 115)

Conclusion

This paper has traced the careers of a sample of white females who were highly involved in the civil rights movement. Their precondition to activism was a strong sense of injustice; many were forerunners in the movement, active before the 1960's. The majority of them persisted in the movement through its Black

Power phase. In the late 1960's, when many black activists found paid careers in government, business, and foundation-sponsored minority programs, volunteer roles for still-committed whites changed and became fewer in number. Some respondents were brought on to the citizen advisory boards of community agencies; others went into prisoner defense and related legal work. Some continue to take part in social action committees of religious or political groups.

Later stages of the women's lives were influenced by marital, health, and financial contingencies and by the growing women's movement. New opportunities for higher education were successfully utilized in many cases. Close to 90 per cent of the former activists are now in paid work, mainly in human service professions. They tend to serve non-traditional clientele, especially the poor and minorities. About half still participate in voluntary activities. Those who cannot find a connection between their present lives and their former intensive involvement express a sense of guilt, loss or discontinuity.

These data suggest additional elements which need to be considered in assessing the decline of social movement participation. As is true of former student activists, the adult women experienced changes in their personal lives which required entrance into paid careers. At the same time, movement roles for whites changed.

The movement functioned in many ways for its participants: the women found contexts of action for deeply-felt concerns. They enlarged their sensitivities about human inequality and acquaintance with political processes. They gained skills in such areas as administration, writing and public speaking.

The findings of this research are congruent with those of a recent follow-up study of former Legal Services lawyers (Erlanger 1977). Rather than lamenting the turnover of lawyers in this agency that serves the poor, conclusions emphasized the long-term effects of agency experience. The former Legal Services lawyers tend to serve more moderate income and minority people, and to do more pro bono work, than their matched non-Legal Services-trained peers.

A large proportion of the women civil rights activists also direct their paid career efforts toward minorities, the poor and the disadvantaged. The civil rights movement furthered the development of humanistic citizens who now bring their values and skills to positions in the institutional system, and who may have impact thereupon.

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