Interracial Cooperation and Southern Education Between the Wars: Robert B. Eleazer and the Conference on Education and Race Relations

Mark Ellis

University of Strathclyde, Glasgow

Robert Burns Eleazer (1877–1973), a liberal white Methodist from Tennessee, served as the educational director and director of publicity of the Atlanta-based Commission on Interracial Cooperation (CIC) from 1922 to 1942. As education director, he developed a strategy for improving race relations which entailed offering prizes to young people in the southern states for essays on racial minorities in American life and culture. The annual "America's Tenth Man" essay prize generated hundreds of entries by white high school and college students, whose teachers were supported by the distribution of thousands of guides on African American history and literary achievements. Eleazer also campaigned for equal funding between the segregated school systems, and convened the Conference on Education and Race Relations, at which black and white professionals could discuss curriculum matters with a degree of freedom.

The objectives and work of the interracial cooperation movement have attracted increased scrutiny in recent years, and judgments that historians largely agreed upon thirty years ago have been questioned. With that interest has come a re-examination of key figures in the

Peer reviewed accepted author manuscript of the following article: Mark Ellis, "Interracial Cooperation and Southern Education Between the Wars: Robert B. Eleazer and the Conference on Education and Race Relations," American Education History Journal, Volume 47. Publication date October 2-3, 2020

movement, but many remain neglected or misunderstood (Ellis 2013; Canady 2016; Brooks 2017). Eleazer's role as the CIC's director of publicity meant constant communication with regional and national journals about lynching and its prevention, poverty, migration, policing, and justice in the courts. He also attempted to radically alter the social studies and civics curriculum in southern education. This article attempts to shed light on the CIC's education work and Eleazer's role and motives in devising and distributing his programs. It also shows how a regional effort to alter the outlook of a new generation concerning respect and human equality predated the intercultural education movement's attempts to do this on a larger scale after 1940 (Halvorsen and Mirel 2013). As such, it offers insights into a possible legacy of the interracial cooperation movement that followed World War I, to the civil rights movement that followed World War II.

ROBERT B. ELEAZER AND INTERRACIAL COOPERATION

In 1929, in a pamphlet entitled *Adventure in Faith*, Eleazer explained that the CIC "believed that white people … could be appealed to successfully on the basis of goodwill, justice, and fair dealing." This broad faith especially drove his educational work during the ensuing decade, as he tried to prise young white southerners away from beliefs that his own generation had been raised with.

Eleazer grew up thirty miles from Nashville, in a rural setting, where he briefly became a schoolteacher and explored the idea of a political career on behalf of the Prohibition party, before turning to journalism with the Tennessee Anti-Saloon League. In 1909, he became the editor of the influential Methodist journal, *Missionary Voice.* Articulate, witty, and dogged,

he had a troubled relationship with the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and his outspoken pacifism attracted unwelcome publicity during World War I. His eventual downfall was caused by his strong support for the Revision movement within Methodism that wanted church policy and the selection of bishops to be democratically decided. He was fired by the Mission Board in 1922, but his Methodist connections and obvious reformist energy willed him to be picked up by the CIC, transferring swiftly from Nashville to Atlanta.

The language and instincts of liberal Methodism continued to drive his work in the CIC. His approach to southern educational work for better race relations, in particular, grew from his wider sense of Christian brotherhood. White southern Methodist opinion in the first quarter of the twentieth century varied widely according to tradition, locality, and class; uncritical defense of white supremacy was common, but so was a growing inner turmoil over the obligations of the "white brother in Christ" toward his "black brother in Christ." Eleazer came to see it as his missionary duty to uplift the weak, heal the wounds of Reconstruction, and combat discrimination and lynching. He showcased a belief that worldwide human interdependence required "our common brotherhood with people of all races, … and appreciation of those of other race and cultures" (Fish 1970; Eleazer 1950, 5–6, 150; Ownby 2013, 34–36).

His fellow radical Methodist, CIC director Will Alexander, who had equally strong Nashville connections through Vanderbilt University, shared Eleazer's faith in the power of goodwill, civility, and respect as forces for change in people's behavior and outlook. For example, toward the end of the 1920s, Alexander told an international audience in Jerusalem about the methods of liberal reform in the American South: "[T]he most important things are not what has actually been done, but the atmosphere that has been created. Race prejudices

are not removed by a frontal attack. Goodwill is a by-product of contact and understanding" (Dobson 1928).

Eleazer attended the first National Interracial Conference in Cincinnati in 1925, where he advocated tackling racism in American life through education and the provision of increased interracial contacts. The conference exposed the gulf between white liberal participants, such as Alexander, who called for the "patient study" of race problems, and most black delegates, who demanded that "compulsory segregation of Negroes be abolished" with immediate effect. Alexander wanted action, too, but nothing reckless, insisting, "The majority of Americans are capable of tolerance and can be made to believe and support justice. What we need is a method by which this can be done, and there is very much more value in experimenting for the discovery of such methods than in denouncing racial intolerance and injustice." To the African American sociologist E. Franklin Frazier, attending the conference for the Atlanta School of Social Work, this was putting the cart before the horse; he wanted honest condemnation of Jim Crow to be the starting point (National Interracial Conference 1926, 164–68, 178–79). Thus, the CIC approach had its black critics, but Eleazer persevered with Alexander's line of argument in the belief that southern teachers held the key to better race relations if they could be helped to weaken the intergenerational transmission of prejudice.

The CIC, which was staffed almost entirely by white men, generally avoided provoking hostility by overtly criticizing disfranchisement and segregation, and were usually quick to assure white southerners that it was not challenging separation in the field of education. Even still, Eleazer often left room for doubt in his statements, and on several issues he was more radical than the rest of the CIC leadership. (for example, he supported passage of the Dyer

federal antilynching bill, which the CIC opposed). In 1930, when the *Southern Methodist* warned that the CIC was out to destroy segregation and that Eleazer had "Socialistic leanings," he replied, "The Commission is definitely on record as being opposed to the further extension of the principle of segregation and to the stiffening of the segregation laws now prevailing. On the other hand, it has not deemed it wise or desirable to seek the abrogation of these laws at present" (McDonough 1993, 85, 88).

By the end of the 1920s, as large charitable donors such as the Young Men's Christian Association shifted their focus, the number of fully functioning state interracial committees of the CIC dwindled to seven—with strongholds in Georgia, Tennessee, and North Carolina. The campaign against lynching and the commending of sheriffs who stood up to mobs continued to be a central part of Eleazer's role as director of publicity until his retirement. He provided a news service to eleven hundred southern dailies and four hundred national and regional publications, sending out reams of specially prepared releases on racial violence, justice, poverty, and the benefits of interracial cooperation, itself (Eleazer 1920s–1940sa; Eleazer 1922–42). However, his main initiative and the one to which he devoted his creative energy, was the provision of reliable, inspirational material on the African American contribution to American history and life, as well as the ways in which white children in particular could be made to discuss and absorb it for the betterment of society.

In 1890, at the Mohonk Convention in New York, the veteran campaigner against white supremacy, Albion W. Tourgée, declared: "So far as the peaceful Christian solution to the race problem is concerned, indeed, I am inclined to think that the only education required is that of the *white* race." Robert Eleazer would have essentially agreed, but he was a far more diplomatic campaigner (White 1990, 265). Convinced of the urgent need to demonstrate

African American accomplishment and capacity to white people, in the mid-1920s Eleazer launched a series of lectures to be given on all-white college campuses by black academic leaders, such as George Washington Carver of Tuskegee Institute and Isaac Fisher of Fisk University, and reported that these talks had profound effects on young audiences: "The transformation in the viewpoint has been remarkable in many cases. They have been introduced to an entirely new kind of colored people, who give them a new conception of the capabilities of colored people" (National Interracial Conference 1926, 19). At the same time, he was also engaged in trying to convince African American leaders that, despite the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan and the persistence of lynching, not all white southerners were hostile. In 1926, he assured W. E. B. Du Bois, "Bad as conditions are, we feel that colored people are entitled to know that justice is not wholly dead, nor bitterness and hate wholly regnant in the hearts of white people" (Eleazer).

THE *AMERICA'S TENTH MAN* PRIZE

In March 1927, the CIC announced prizes of fifty, thirty, and twenty dollars for the best 1,000-word high school essays on "Negro Progress Since the Civil War" (*Pittsburgh Courier* 1927). The competition was open to black and white children, but the essential objective was to encourage white high schools to allow the discussion and study of race questions. Eleazer's experimental outreach to junior and senior high school principals and state education superintendents had slow start, but by raising the prizes to a hundred, sixty-five, and thirty-five dollars for essays on any aspect of race relations, with a preference for "practical discussions for their improvement," he attracted 269 entries from 139 white schools in 1928 (*New York Age* 1927; CIC 1928). The following year, the competition took on the form it retained for several years—the topic for 2,500-word essays or orations was "Justice in Race Relations" and it became the "America's Tenth Man" prize, with Eleazer

offering his own sixteen-page fact-filled pamphlet of the same title “to encourage as widely as possible the study of the Negro’s part in American history.” The CIC predicted “such a study will be helpful to the children of both races, promoting more intelligent appreciation and sympathy on the one side, and developing a wholesome pride of race on the other” (*Pittsburgh Courier* 1928; *Tennessean* 1928). In 1930, essays were received from five hundred different schools. By 1932, management of the competition was handled by the CIC’s subsidiary, the Conference on Education and Race Relations (CERR), which Eleazer ran, and entries were also sought from four hundred teachers’ colleges and departments of education with a one hundred dollar offer for the best essay and another one hundred dollars for the best use of the project by a class (*Advocate-Messenger* 1932).

Seventy thousand copies of *America’s Tenth Man: A Brief Survey of the Negro’s Part in American History* had been distributed by 1933, and new editions appeared until 1941. His other widely distributed works, addressed to both teachers and students, included *Thy Neighbor as Thyself* (1933), *School Books and Racial Antagonism* (1935), and *Singers in the Dawn* (1936). In *America’s Tenth Man*, Eleazer set out to challenge history books that “show us the Negro only as a semi-savage slave, or as an illiterate, dangerous freedman—in either case a liability rather than an asset.” He stressed the acquisition of mechanical skills by slaves and their “fund of folklore and a distinct gift for music,” the religious devotion in black communities, the importance of the labor of African Americans to the US economy, their wartime service, their clubs and charities, and successes since Reconstruction in business, science, medicine, the arts and sport. It was a detailed, succinct rebuttal of polemicists, such as Thomas Nelson Page and R. W. Shufeldt, who relentlessly denigrated black people, and historians who merely ignored them. (Eleazer 1932). In February 1934, Eleazer led

celebrations in Atlanta of Negro History Week, first devised by Carter G. Woodson in 1926 (*Jackson State Tribune* 1934).

At the height of his educational program in 1938, Eleazer was mailing material prepared by himself and professors associated with the CERR to 2,300 high school principals. Two hundred and seventy-two schools and sixty-two colleges were now running courses using his material across twenty-three states, including some northern and western states. Their students responded with completed questionnaires and work on history, sociology, music, business studies, and English – especially poetry; Eleazer read it all, detecting in young people a general decline in ignorance, an abiding belief in the importance of fairness and justice, and a degree of empathy that gave him hope. For example, prize-winner Virginia Davidson of Fayetteville, Arkansas, wrote in 1932 that black people should be entitled to jury service, the vote, and "room in any hotel. … The era of prejudice is passing. Both races are on the threshold, half inside a fuller, freer, happier life, a friendly co-existence in which a free expression of the best that is in them is possible." Eleazer told James Boykin of the Associated Negro Press, "I have filed away here some thousands of papers, written by white people for no purpose except that I hate to throw them away." Many of these essays remain in the files of the CIC in Atlanta and Eleazer's personal papers in Nashville, and have provided historians with insights into the attitudes of young white people in the interwar period (*Pittsburgh Courier* 1938; Woyshner 2018, 195–96; Davidson 1932; CIC 1919–1944b; Lipson 2013).

The annual conferences of the CERR at George Peabody College in Nashville or at Eleazer's close friend W. D. Weatherford's Blue Ridge Assembly near Asheville, NC, drew representation from black and white teachers' colleges and state departments of education

from across the South, and heard teachers' own experiences of trying to prepare young people for citizenship in the South. Most of the participants were white liberals who shared the CIC's vision of gradual progress through the "adjustment" of southern mores and practices concerning race. Despite this, Weatherford's anxiety about harmful publicity arising from any departure from segregated arrangements for delegates' accommodation, bathing, or dining tended to set the tone for conferences at Blue Ridge. The CERR's 1933 resolutions upheld the interracial cooperationist goal of improving race relations through practical steps, and said nothing that implied any fundamental challenge to Jim Crow. The published statement could not have been more anodyne: "There should be taught in both white and colored schools those things that will build up in the lives of the people of both races such knowledge of the factors involved in a bi-racial civilization and such mutual understanding as will promote goodwill, fair play, and a spirit of cooperation that will enable us to work for more fruitful civilization." (*New York Age* 1933b; Canady 2016, 100–107). That safe tone characterised the dull reports put out by the CERR during the 1930s, but a letter to Eleazer a few days after the 1933 conference from the black historian, Merl R. Eppse of Tennessee Agricultural and Industrial State College in Nashville (later, Tennessee State University), suggests that, in person, the CIC leaders could speak out with sincerity and passion: "I have never heard white men of the South quite so brave and frank in all my life. … Thank you again for the unusual interests which you and Dr. Alexander have manifested in the betterment of the 'forgotten man'" (Eppse 1933). Later in 1933, this willingness to rock the boat emerged in Eleazer's strongly worded pamphlet, *Thy Neighbor as Thyself*, in which he condemned the pitiful share of state educational funding given to African American schools. This publication was referred to approvingly by W. E. B. Du Bois, during his testimony to the Committee on Education of the U.S. House of Representatives on the worsening state of black education provision in Georgia (Committee on Education 1937).

Eleazer realized that the kind of social studies for black and white southern students fostered by self-styled experts such as the sociologist, Thomas Jesse Jones, of the Phelps-Stokes Fund (and formerly Hampton Institute) were not contributing to the improvement of race relations. Despite the efforts of teachers, the approved curriculum and the available materials did little to instil race pride in African American pupils and left white pupils to base their opinions about black people on the surrounding racist culture. None of this was new to black scholars like Carter G. Woodson and Du Bois, who Eleazer respected (James-Galway 2020; Dilworth 2004). Three years into the CERR program, Eleazer produced *School Books and Racial Antagonism: A Study of Omissions and Inclusions that Make for Misunderstanding*, a ten-page pamphlet prompted by surveys of history, civics and literature textbooks undertaken by a white graduate student at George Peabody College and an African American graduate student at Fisk University, who both concluded that pupils were being denied information about black contributions to American life. They empirically demonstrated the logic of the CIC's educational program as a force for interracial respect. Eleazer now examined for himself fifty books used across the South and found negligible references to African American participation in America's wars, distorted views of Reconstruction and black progress since Emancipation, complacency about black poverty and disfranchisement, unyielding assumptions about the permanence of white supremacy, and either a neglect of black cultural sensibility and achievement or an emphasis on "our Negro problem." Overt malice in textbooks was rare, but he found the experience of black people was essentially ignored or skated over (Eleazer 1935).

In 1938, the CERR conference called on the states to examine their textbooks themselves, for "such eliminations and additions as may be needed for the building of intelligent, fair

minded attitudes on the part of teachers and pupils." The Mississippi Education Association took up the challenge and found with dismay that in the state's schoolbooks "the Negro is simply ignored, or treated only in terms of the white man's advantage." The association concluded: "Though only the truth may be told, the limited portion of the truth told results in a picture decidedly warped. The graduate of the Mississippi high school who has mastered his textbooks will have small understanding of and less liking for his neighbor, the Negro. There is scarcely a mention of the contributions of Negroes to American life … scarcely a hint of progress … Negro leadership [is] pictured at its worst" (*Asheville-Citizen Times* 1937; Eleazer 1942, 897).

It was not enough for Eleazer's material to be mailed by the CIC to selected southern white high schools; for it to have any impact required imaginative committed teachers with a clear sense of how and why they were opening their students' eyes to lives and experiences far removed from their own. Eleazer may have cared less about the intrinsic educational value of his material than its eventual moral and political outcomes, but some teachers clearly saw a useful pedagogic purpose in his program. One of the most effective and exemplary teachers with whom Eleazer worked was J. Pope Dyer of Central High School in Chattanooga, TN, who was determined to "modernize" his sociology course by centering it around student reports on social problems—"lives persons, live things, live issues." He believed learning was a product of "meaningful" and "functional" teaching, describing himself as an "alert teacher [with] an irrepressible ambition to grow and see that his pupils grow." His adoption of CIC courses in 1937 saw interested students hosting African American speakers, giving radio broadcasts, joining discussion panels at the city's largest black high school, and writing "[n]umerous essays and articles on better racial understanding." Eleazer's program had suggested the way forward, although Dyer and other

"alert" teachers clearly found their own ways of enhancing the CERR's materials. Dyer considered field trips "gave the students a first hand picture of the way the unfortunates of our country are treated." Eleazer's papers resound with the enthusiastic responses of white teachers like Dyer, who believed their pupils' attitudes on race had been permanently altered; one responded to a CIC questionnaire that students who had taken the course "assure me that their attitudes changed greatly. They favor programs and policies required to do justice to Negroes." Unsurprisingly, the files are largely silent on the reactions of white teachers who chose not to touch the CERR material because they feared negative reactions of school boards and parents, or because the teachers, themselves, found the material controversial and offensive, or were convinced that existing textbooks were adequate (Eleazer 1920s–1940sc; Eleazer 1939, 5–7; Dyer 1938, 19–20; DeCesare 2007, 36, 39; Woyshner 2012).

THE END OF THE CIC EDUCATION CAMPAIGN

Recognising the region's sensitivity to outside criticism, Eleazer emphasized his own roots in Tennessee and tried to address his fellow southerners as members of a family, and encouraged educators to think in analogous terms. In 1941, in *Twelve Million Negro Americans*, after a decade of intensive CIC-led educational missionary work, Eleazer wrote, "It is hard enough for people to get along together when they belong to the same family. Those of different families find it more difficult, and when there is a difference of nationality or race, it is more difficult still. This difficulty, it seems, is due to the fact that people do not so readily understand those who are different from them, that they tend to be suspicious or fearful of those they do not understand, and finally that they foolishly assume that those who are different from them must necessarily be inferior. … Only an intelligent, right-minded citizenship can meet this challenge. It seems highly important, therefore, that students preparing for citizenship give serious attention to this question, so that in the future it may be

handled more wisely than in the past" (Eleazer 1941, 3). These ideas acquired particular resonance as the United States was drawn into preparedness for war and then war, itself.

Like all organizations that depended on philanthropic donations, CIC struggled to raise funds in the context of the depression, which itself had exposed a range of regional social and economic problems far wider than race. Notable social scientists and professional social workers took the lead, and at the end of 1942 Eleazer retired unwillingly, edged out by Howard Odum of the University of North Carolina, after a stringent review of the CIC's strategies and relevance by University of Tennessee sociologist William E. Cole (Odum 1942; Cole 1942). The Board of Education of the Methodist Episcopalian Church, South, found Eleazer a short-term advisory role in Nashville, which he hung onto for five years, before retiring properly and returning to his lifelong interest in lobbying politicians and government officials about the dangers of militarism and irresponsible press coverage of crime.

Despite the demise of the CIC and the consequent discontinuation of the CERR, the interracial cooperation movement's connections in Washington, D.C., lived on. During the New Deal, these connections and the widened reach of an activist civil service had encouraged federal officials to take a greater interest in the quality and scope of black education in the South. The Department of the Interior had maintained only a statistical tally before the New Deal, but the Democratic administration's recruitment of southern liberals like CIC veterans Will Alexander and T. J. (Jack) Woofter into key agencies (i.e., the Resettlement Administration, the WPA, and the Farm Security Agency), produced a new awareness at the federal level. After 1941, Woofter became a major figure in the new Federal Security Agency, to which the Office of Education was transferred, and as the agency's

powerful director of research he oversaw the production of a series of new reports on the strengthening of African American education, signalling the wartime and post-war administration's growing commitment to progress in civil rights. (Blose 1928, 1930; Caliver, 1940, 1945; U.S. Office of Education, 1935, 1937, 1940, 1944).

Eleazer, however, foresaw a long struggle. In 1942, he despaired: "The Negro child finds in his school history little to encourage him, to inspire pride of race, little incentive to patriotism and to a new sense of national unity. The white child finds little or nothing to afford understanding and apprehension of the Negro or to prepare him to deal intelligently and fairly with the problems incident to the biracial situation" (Eleazer 1942, 897). He admitted that he had failed to get the states themselves to withdraw inadequate or harmful material and commission something better, and yet he was certain that his efforts to provide receptive schools and colleges with current information on race and ways of opening up discussions had made a difference. Shortly before he died in 1973, he told the southern journalist and historian, John Egerton, that of all the pamphlets and books he had written on black life and culture, he was most proud of *Singers in the Dawn*, a twenty-page annotated compilation of poetry, prose, and songs celebrating forty-two creative souls, from Phyllis Wheatley to Langston Hughes. This example of Eleazer's best educational work was an ardent expression of his belief in love and Christian brotherhood as a source of racial harmony and understanding, a force that he lived to see help inspire and sustain the civil rights movement (Eleazer 1936; Eleazer 1973; Ownby 2018, 57-106).

REFLECTIONS

Just as the interracial cooperation movement as a whole continues to be thoroughly re-examined, Eleazer's interracial education initiatives have been critiqued latterly by historians.

Diana Selig, in her ground-breaking work on the “cultural gifts” movement, gives a detailed reading of the records of the CERR and argues that the CIC’s “failure to confront racial segregation or socioeconomic inequality limited both the conceptual reach and the political effectiveness of educational work. Indeed, the focus on cultural appreciation, on individual change and psychological attitudes, allowed educators to preach change without defying the institutional foundations of white supremacy or demanding that participants alter their political or social relationships around race.” She argues that this “could provide a distraction that subverted the work of civil rights.” However, CIC staff members who had faced intimidation by the Klan and charges of left-wing radicalism and disloyalty to their race and region did not see it as realistic or productive in the interwar period for an Atlanta-based organization to openly “confront racial segregation” or set about “defying the institutional foundations of white supremacy” (Selig 2007, 182). Selig downplays the significance of the necessarily understated, gradual attempt to disrupt southern racial certainties to be found in the educational materials created by Eleazer and his collaborators in the CERR.

Jennifer Ritterhouse’s verdict, in *Growing Up Jim Crow*, is that the CIC’s exercise in “antiprejudice education” was a “limited success at best” (Ritterhouse 2006, 215). This is hard to dispute, in the sense that Eleazer secured no fundamental curriculum change in the South and his materials were used by only a minority of teachers, but he was attempting something unique in the interwar period and the letters he received from educators working in southern colleges and schools indicated considerable appreciation of his efforts and approach in the deeply racist climate. As the CIC as an organization began to wind itself up before being subsumed into the Southern Regional Council in 1944, Eleazer was swamped with commendations for his work in schools by black and white teachers, as well as specialists. In the view of Atlanta University President Rufus E. Clement, for all that the CIC

sponsored research established local interracial committees, and accelerated the reduction of lynching, it was the education work that was seen as the greatest contribution (Clement 1944). Joseph W. Holley, founder-president of the Georgia Normal and Agricultural College at Albany (later, Albany State University), told Eleazer, “You are the second white man I have met who believes that the Negro thinks, and that you would really like to know what he is thinking” (Holley 1939). When Eleazer finally left the CIC, the tireless Nannie H. Burroughs of the National Trade and Professional School for Girls, told him, “We need people like you today more than we have ever needed them before in the history of our country. You have made a tremendous investment” (Burroughs 1943). Sociologist Charles S. Johnson of Fisk University, with whom Eleazer had planned a “Source Book on the Negro,” told him, “We all know very well that progress and development in any field are slow unless accompanied or preceded by a campaign of education which puts people in the frame of mind and spirit to accept change” (Johnson 1942). Ambrose Caliver, the senior specialist on African American education in the U.S. Office of Education, considered Eleazer “among the very few to become interested in this whole question of better race relations from the standpoint of applying scientific research to the subject,” and told him in 1953 that he “should take just pride in the advancements that have been made in race relations in this country. The groundwork that you laid a generation ago, is now bearing fruit” (Caliver 1943; Caliver 1953). Walter C. Jackson, president of the University of North Carolina’s Woman’s College at Greensboro, told Eleazer that, although his own feelings about the CIC were “rather mixed[,] … you are one of my real friends. … You have done a job that will have everlasting consequences, and you have done it brilliantly” (Jackson 1942). Eleazer’s papers are filled with such tributes. Gunnar Myrdal, in his monumental mid-century survey of race in the United States, *An American Dilemma*, credited Eleazer and the CIC with beginning to change attitudes through education, in ways that allowed “rational discussions of race

relations and of Negro capacity and achievement." Myrdal believed the education efforts of interracial cooperationists would prove effective, "even if they are slow to develop liberal political power which can force great reforms" (Myrdal 1944, 846, 848). Thus, the assessment of people with intimate and deep knowledge of southern racial problems was that Robert Eleazer was a rare and essential pioneer in the practicalities of harnessing education as a vehicle for social justice.

For all that, the CIC's impact on the southern curriculum and the racial climate should not be exaggerated. The testimony of white students' surviving papers notwithstanding, the omission or misconstruction of black history in the curriculum and textbooks was impacted only in small ways by Eleazer's work—for the number of black and white high school students that he and his collaborators reached and let alone inspired was undoubtedly a small, and probably non-representative proportion of the southern school-age population of both races. Eleazer and his collaborators did oblige some white children in the South to think seriously about race, the problems it caused, and how they might be addressed. Perhaps they did also chip away at the monolith of white supremacy and at least help to prepare the ground locally for a civil rights movement, but education historian Christine Woyshner's critique of the history curriculum Eleazer helped to promote is insightful and compelling. She acknowledges the CIC's motives and the advancement in terms of debate about the curriculum and teaching methods that the CERR represented, but her analysis of white students' actual responses shows that the program, the materials it distributed, and the field trips it encouraged often reinforced stereotypes as much as they challenged them. This suggests that even those white children who were apparently intent on engaging fully with this voluntary initiative could still react viscerally and negatively to the black presence. Their upbringing left them able to visualize positive changes in the circumstances of the black

community only in terms of the apparent implications of those changes for white people like themselves. That would remain just as true in 1960 as it had been in 1930 (Woyshner 2018). (Today, the visibility, perspectives and modes of delivery of black history and culture within the curriculum remain problematic in the United States (and the United Kingdom), despite continued growth in awareness, resources, and the number of trained professionals, as the essays in the recent volume edited by LaGarrett J. King make clear (King 2020).)

The work of Robert Burns Eleazer eighty years ago kept a vital conversation going. It comprised part of what Ronald C. White called a "missionary education bridge" between, on the one hand, the era before World War I, when reformers such as Washington Gladden of the American Missionary Association, J. L. M. Curry, and Edgar Gardner Murphy secured massive charitable donations for the Tuskegee-ite southern education movement, and, on the other hand, the education policies that saw an expansion of American intercultural education during and after World War II (White 1990, 263; Cole 1941; Vickery and Cole 1943). Eleazer's work does appear to have bestowed some sort of intergenerational legacy of rationality and awareness towards questions of civil rights, as his friends assured him it would when he retired. Ten years after the defeat of Fascism, as the civil rights movement blossomed, the executive director of the Southern Regional Council, George S. Mitchell, wrote repeatedly to tell Eleazer about being approached by middle class white southerners who recalled hearing Eleazer speak, "so wisely and persuasively," during their student days in the 1930s and how it had made them permanently interested in improving race relations. Mitchell called it "this tiny tangible evidence of the spread-out of what you worked at so well," maintaining that, "always as I move about[,] I meet that same small bit of history" (Mitchell 1955a; Mitchell 1955b).

REFERENCES

Advocate-Messenger (Danville, KY), Jan. 9, 1932, 4.

Asheville Citizen-Times (Ashville, NC), July 31, 1937, 14.

Blose, David T. 1928. *Statistics of Education of the Negro Race, 1925–1926.* Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Education.
———.1930. *Statistics of the Negro Race, 1927–28*. Washington, D.C.: Office of Education.

Boutte, Gloria. 2020. “The Right Kind of Education.” In *Perspectives of Black Histories in Schools*, edited by LaGarrett J. King. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

Brooks, Clayton McL. 2017. *The Uplift Generation: Cooperation Across the Color Line in Early Twentieth-Century Virginia*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press.

Burroughs, Nannie. H. 1943. Burroughs to Eleazer, Jan. 6., folder 2, box 1, Robert Burns Eleazer Papers, Special Collections, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN.

Caliver, Ambrose. 1940. *Supervision of the Education of Negroes as a Function of State Departments of Education*. Washington, D.C.: Office of Education.
———. 1943. Caliver to Eleazer, Dec. 31, folder 3, box 1, Robert Burns Eleazer Papers, Special Collections, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN.
———. 1945. *Postwar Education of Negroes.* Washington, D.C.: Office of Education.
———. 1953. Caliver to Eleazer, Feb. 13, folder 3, box 1, Robert Burns Eleazer Papers, Special Collections, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN.

Canady, Andrew McN. 2016. *Willis Duke Weatherford: Race, Religion, and Reform in the American South.* Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.

Clement, Rufus E. 1944. “Educational Programs for the Improvement of Race Relations: Interracial Committees.” *Journal of Negro Education* 13 (3): 316–328.

Commission on Interracial Cooperation (CIC). 1928. “Brief Statement of Work for 1927 and Brief Suggestions for 1928,” folder 4, box 27, Phelps-Stokes Papers, Schomburg Branch, New York Public Library.
———.1919–1944a. News releases, 1922–1942, reels 26, 27, CIC Papers, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center.
———.1919–1944b. Conference on Education and Race Relations, reels 33, 38, CIC Papers, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center.

Cole, Stewart G. 1941. “Intercultural Education.” *Religious Education* 36: 131.

Cole, William E. 1942. Cole to CIC Board of Directors, Oct. 15, folder 6, box 4, Robert Burns Eleazer Papers, Special Collections, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN.

Committee on Education. 1937. “Federal Aid to the States for the Support of Public Schools.” HR 5962, 75th Cong., 1st sess., March-April: 285, 286.

Davidson, Virginia. 1932. "America's Tenth Man," folder 12, box 4, Robert Burns Eleazer Papers, Special Collections, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN.

DeCesare, Michael. 2007. *A Discipline Divided: Sociology in American High Schools*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Dilworth, P. P. 2004. "Competing Conceptions of Citizenship Education: Thomas Jesse Jones and Carter G. Woodson." *International Journal of Social Education* 18 (2): 1–10.

Dobson, James O. 1928. "Account of the Discussion." In *The Christian Mission in the Light of Race Conflict*, 4: 229–31.

Dyer, J. Pope. 1938. "Vitalizing Sociology Instruction." *The Social Studies*, 24: 19–20.

Eleazer, Robert B. 1920s–1940sa. News releases, c1922–1928, folders 1, 2, box 3, Robert Burns Eleazer Papers, Special Collections, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN.

———.1920s–1940sb. Student Papers, folders 10, 12, box 4, Robert Burns Eleazer Papers, Special Collections, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN.

———.1920s–1940sc. High school reports on projects, folder 11, box 4, Robert Burns Eleazer Papers, Special Collections, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN.

———.1926. Eleazer to Du Bois, Feb. 23. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers, University of Massachusetts Library, Amherst.

———.1929. *An Adventure in Faith: A Brief Story of the Interracial Movement in the South*. Atlanta: Commission on Interracial Cooperation.

———.1931. "The Quest for Understanding: Education in the Art of Getting Along Together," in *Education and Racial Adjustment: Report of the Peabody Conference on Dual Education in the South*. Atlanta: Executive Committee of the Conference: 17–23.

———.1932. *America's Tenth Man* (1st pub. 1928). Atlanta: Conference on Education and Race Relations.

———.1933. *Thy Neighbor as Thyself: How the Golden Rule Works Out in Negro Education.* Atlanta: Conference on Education and Race Relations.

———.1935. *School Books and Racial Antagonism: A study of Omissions and Inclusions That Make for Misunderstanding*. Atlanta: Conference on Education and Race Relations.

———.1936. *Singers in the Dawn: A Brief Anthology of American Negro Poetry*. Atlanta: Conference on Education and Race Relations.

———.1939. *College Courses in Race Relations: An Effort to Meet the Challenge of the Southern Situation*. Atlanta: Conference on Education and Race Relations.

———.1941. *Twelve Million Negro Americans: Their Background, Progress and Present-Day Problems*. Atlanta: Conference on Education and Race Relations.

———.1942. Review of Mary E. Carpenter, *Treatment of the Negro in American History School Textbooks*. In *American Historical Review* 47(4): 896–97.

———.1950. *Reason, Religion, and Race*. New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury

———.1973. Transcript of interview with John Egerton, April 8, folder 29, box 1, Robert Burns Eleazer Papers, Special Collections, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN.

Ellis, Mark. 2013. *Race Harmony and Black Progress: Jack Woofter and the Interracial Cooperation Movement*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Eppse, Merl R. 1933. Eppse to Eleazer, Aug. 7, folder 5, box 1, Robert Burns Eleazer Papers, Special Collections, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN.

Fish, John O. 1970. "Southern Methodism and Accommodation of the Negro," *Journal of Negro History* 55: 200–214.

Halvorsen, Anne-Lise, and Jeffrey E. Mirel. 2013. "Intercultural Education in Detroit, 1943–1954," *Paedagogica Historica* 49: 361–381.

Holley, Joseph W. 1939. Holley to Eleazer, July 6, folder 7, box 1, Robert Burns Eleazer Papers, Special Collections, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN.

Jackson State Tribune (Jackson, MS), Feb. 19, 1934, 7.

Jackson, Walter C. 1942. Jackson to Eleazer, Dec. 22, folder 8, box 1, Robert Burns Eleazer Papers, Special Collections, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN.

James-Galway, ArCasia D. 2020. "Problems and Alternatives: A Historiographical Review of Primary and Secondary Black History Curriculum, 1900–1950." In *Perspectives of Black Histories in Schools*, edited by LaGarrett J. King. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

Johnson, Charles S. 1942. Johnson to Eleazer, Dec. 23, folder 8, box 1, Robert Burns Eleazer Papers, Special Collections, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN.

King, LaGarrett J., ed. 2020. *Perspectives of Black Histories in Schools*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

Lipson, Steven J. 2013. "A Better Understanding Between the Races": Southern Educational Initiatives to Improve Race Relations Between World War I and World War II." [MA thesis.] Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN.

McDonough, Julia A. 1993. "Men and Women of Goodwill: A History of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation and the Southern Regional Council, 1919–1954." PhD diss., University of Virginia.

Mitchell, George S. 1955a. Mitchell to Eleazer, Feb. 25, folder 11, box 1, Robert Burns Eleazer Papers, Special Collections, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN.
———.1955b. Mitchell to Eleazer, Dec. 2, folder 11, box 1, Robert Burns Eleazer Papers, Special Collections, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN.

Myrdal, Gunnar. 1944. *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*. New York: Harper and Brothers.

National Interracial Conference. 1926. *Toward Interracial Cooperation*. New York: Federal Council of Churches.

New York Age (New York City, NY), Dec. 24, 1927, 3.
———.1933. Feb. 25, 5.
———.1933b. Aug. 26, 5

Odum, Howard W. 1943. Odum to Eleazer, Dec. 10, folder 12, box 1, Robert Burns Eleazer Papers, Special Collections, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN.

Ownby, Ted. 2013. "Brotherhood and Its Limits." In *Mobilizing for the Common Good: The Lived Theology of John M. Perkins*, edited by Peter Slade et al., 32–59. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.

Ownby, Ted. 2018. *Hurtin' Words: Debating Family Problems in the Twentieth Century*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Pittsburgh Courier (Pittsburgh, PA), March 19, 1927, 15.
———.1928. Oct. 5, 13.
———.1938. Oct. 8, 12.

Ritterhouse, Jennifer. 2006. *Growing Up Jim Crow: How Black and White Southern Children Learned Race.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Selig, Diana. 2007. *Americans All: The Cultural Gifts Movement*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Tennessean (Nashville, TN), Dec. 23, 1928, 9.

U.S. Office of Education. 1935. *Fundamentals in the Education of Negroes*. Washington, D.C.: Office of Education.
———.1937a. *Education of Negroes: A Five-Year Bibliography, 1931–1935*. Washington, D.C.: Office of Education.
———.1937b. *Vocational Education and Guidance of Negroes*. Washington, D.C.: Office of Education.
———.1940. *Negro High-School Graduates and Non-Graduates*. Washington, D.C.: Office of Education.
———.1944. *Education of Teachers for Improving Majority-Minority Relationships*. Washington, D.C.: Office of Education.

Vickery, William E., and Stewart G. Cole. 1943. *Intercultural Education in American Schools.* New York: Harper & Bros.

Ward, Jason M. *Defending White Democracy: The Making of a Segregationist Movement and the Remaking of Racial Politics, 1936–1965*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

White, Ronald C. 1990. *Liberty and Justice for All: Racial Reform and the Social Gospel (1877–1925)*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.

Woyshner, Christine. 2012. "'No Unfavorable Comments from Any Quarter': Teaching Black History to White Students in the American South, 1928–1943." *Teachers College Record* 114 (10): 1–23.
———.2018. "'I feel I am really pleading the cause of my own people': US Southern White Students' Study of African-American History and Culture in the 1930s Through Art and the Senses," *History of Education* 47 (2): 190–208.