A leader of the AME Zion Woman's Home and Foreign Missionary Society, Mamie Donohoo was proud of the multifaceted philanthropic work of her "sister laborers." Black church women, she claimed, constituted "The Relief Corps of Heaven."

For centuries, they worked tirelessly, in a varied array of all-black, interracial, white-led and male-dominated organizations, for civil rights, women's rights, equal employment and educational opportunities. Bettye Collier-Thomas, a professor of history at Temple University, tells their stories.

A valentine to these activists, who "merged their church, club and political work," "Jesus, Jobs, and Justice" is a valuable, exhaustively researched introduction to African-American women whose achievements, resourcefulness, and resilience often have been over-looked.

Among them is Florence Spearing Randolph. A minister, civic reformer, temperance leader and suffragist, Randolph played a key role in persuading legislators in New Jersey to ratify the 19th Amendment to the Constitution, denounced vigilante violence, lynchings and race riots and demanded "no special favors, no Negro rights, but human rights and justice."

All too often, however, "Jesus, Jobs, and Justice" becomes a book of lists (of individuals and organizations), more anecdotal than analytical. Collier-Thomas is not a gifted writer. She does not adequately account for change over time or delineate ideological and tactical debates and divisions within the ranks — between followers of Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois at the turn of the 20th century, for example, or between integrationists and advocates of Black Power in the 1970s.

Nor does she step back often enough to assess failures as well as successes and the overall effect of the efforts of black women on the struggle to achieve "racial and gender freedom."

Nonetheless, the book comes alive when Collier-Thomas turns to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and '60s and demonstrates how the "well-organized web of women's networks" sprang into action. The celebrated successes of the NAACP, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, she writes, owed a great deal to the commitment of well-known black women like Fannie Lou Hamer, Ella Baker and Septima Clark, who were "driven by their faith," and to hundreds of their more anonymous counterparts.

In recent decades, Collier-Thomas points out, more affluent and well-educated African-Americans have been less active in their churches. High profile scandals, including Jesse Jackson's admission that he was having an affair while serving as pastoral adviser to Bill Clinton following his sexual liaison with Monica Lewinsky, have fueled dissatisfaction with the leadership of traditional black denominations. And "the old black women's network" of religious and secular organizations has atrophied.

Millions of black women, however, still worship, teach Sunday school and "undergird the entire operation" of many churches. With the civil rights movement fragmented and leaderless, they are focusing on internal issues in their communities.

But since she believes that past is probably prologue, the ever-optimistic Collier-Thomas finds reason to believe that, sooner or later, they will demand justice and jobs for Americans who have been the victims of sexism and racism.

**Jesus, Jobs, And Justice**
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