**Creating Empathic Connections across Cultural and Racial Barriers in Mid-century America**

Susan Lanzoni, Ph.D.

March 29, 2021

The Quaker social activist and educator Rachel Davis DuBois explained in 1965 that even as political and economic strategies had been implemented to combat racism, “we’ve long known that prejudices are the result of our emotions and not our logical thinking.” She concluded, “it seems time that we arrange situations in which our emotions can catch up with our logical thinking.”[[1]](%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftn1)

Dubois had for many years pioneered programs to educate participants about different cultural traditions and to foster emotional connection. She formed the Intercultural Education Workshop in 1941, which later became the Workshop for Cultural Democracy. She developed the innovative interpersonal programs of “Group Conversation” and the “Unity Home Festival” to foster empathy and create connections between people of different ethnic, racial and religious backgrounds. These events established connections through emotional bonding, sharing of childhood memories, singing and conversation. In the 1960s, Dubois carried out Group Conversation in the Ten Cities Project to improve race relations under the auspices of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Along with educators such as Dubois, psychologists in the Jewish Congress in the post war years developed methods of socio-drama, psychological inquiry and role-playing to engender what they called “forced empathy” for those in disadvantaged or prejudiced groups. This paper examines techniques to enhance empathy and emotional connection developed by educators and psychologists in mid-century America to reduce racism and to facilitate a greater understanding of immigrant groups, Black Americans, and Jewish citizens.

[[1]](%22%20%5Cl%20%22_ftnref1) Rachel Davis Dubois, “Ten Cities, Birmingham,” 1965, p. 4 Rachel Davis Dubois papers. University of Minnesota, U.S.