

Black Emeralds: African American Women's Political Activism and Leadership in Seattle,
1941-2000

Quin'Nita F. Cobbins

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Reading Committee:

Quintard Taylor, Jr., Chair

Michael K. Honey

Sonnet Retman

Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

Department of History

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Quin’Nita F. Cobbins

University of Washington

Abstract

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Quin'Nita F. Cobbins

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:

Quintard Taylor, Jr.

Department of History

Black women in Seattle have long been major political actors and leaders in their communities although they comprised a very small population. Throughout the 20th century, they engaged in a never-ending struggle for freedom, equality, and visibility to be recognized as first-class citizens and to make the professed liberal ideals of Seattle a more egalitarian place for blacks to live. Black women boldly entered the spaces of social and political justice on their own terms and sought to challenge urban inequality by changing policies, hearts, and minds in a city that refused to acknowledge it ever had a “race” problem. This dissertation explores their political engagement, resistance strategies, and community-building efforts to demonstrate the many different ways African American women exercised power and agency in a city where they never constituted more than five percent of the population. Through organizations, institutions, businesses, social movements, and other sites of contestation, black women collectively

fashioned programs and strategies to manipulate, negotiate, and influence their communities to bring about social change that went beyond electoral participation. This study also extends current scholarship by examining black women's efforts after the 1960s to offer new insights on how their political activism impacted urban western communities in this later period of the 20th century. In the post-Civil Rights era, activist women leaders rose to positions in city and state government through elective and political appointments that provided expanded political and social visibility to the African American community and women. Their leadership and civic work directly created and shaped public policies most critical to women, families, children, and the poor; thus, making significant contributions to Washington State and the Pacific Northwest more broadly.

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Introduction

I lived in this environment [Seattle] of comparative bliss until I graduated from high school...Then my bubble of happiness burst! It was time to awaken from my dream world and face the cruel realities of life as a young black woman.

—Arline Yarbrough, clubwoman and activist
quoted in the *Seattle Times*, Feb. 16, 1992¹

In 1943, Addie Fletcher Booth left Texas with her husband William Booth, a railroad porter, and moved to Seattle. Booth was a graduate of Prairie View A&M College and had taught school in Shreveport, Louisiana before she secured a defense job at Boeing that year. Her employment at Boeing, however, was relatively short-lived. Just a year later, in 1944, she chose to leave the airplane company and work as a full-time domestic for Joseph Gottstein, owner of the Longacres Race Track. It is unknown why Booth decided to leave Boeing and work as a maid. She was, after all, a married woman with a college degree. One can only glean that her decision points to the actual hardened occupational experiences for black women in the city or her strategy to have close access with power and wealth to secure resources for her community. Or it could possibly be that domestic work provided more stable employment for some women, since Seattle Public Schools refused to hire black teachers and defense jobs were temporary.

Confounding as this may seem, what is significant is that the long hours Booth worked as a domestic worker at the racetrack and at her employer's downtown condo did not keep her from participating in community groups, unions, or other organized forms of political activism and protest. Rather, after work and presumably on her days off, she engaged in political and labor activities as a ranking member of the Seattle Ladies' Auxiliary of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and the Seattle Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored

¹ Arline Yarbrough, "Witnesses to Change – 'Far Too Little Black History Has Been Documented,'" *The Seattle Times*, Feb. 16, 1992.

People. Though an exploited worker, Booth's political activities remained hidden from her white employers who ironically, yet affectionately described her as "family." Despite her occupational status, she acquired agency and dignity through service in various leadership capacities within the black labor struggle. She coordinated fundraisers and meetings in support of one of Seattle's only black labor unions, headed the Washington State Council for Fair Employment Practices Commission, and led the Seattle Ladies' Auxiliary to force a fair employment practices law in the 1940s.²

Though Booth may seem an unlikely political actor, her story is not unique but represents the multifaceted experiences of African American women who rearticulated meanings of political expression, leadership, and resistance in a city whose black population never surpassed ten percent. While Western history has undergone immense changes, taking up the examination of the intersectionality of race, class, and gender and discussions of social and economic inequality, popular narratives continue to replicate stories that promote the lore of rugged individualism shaping the frontier. These discourses are monopolized by images of expansionism and white settler encounters and clashes. Historian Darlene Clark Hine noted, "In the mythology of the American mainstream, strength and self-reliance belong to the rugged individualist, the one who stands alone. But among black women, strength comes from being a part of a community, and service to the community is the act not of a do-gooder, but of a leader."³

As Booth's story illustrates, African American women have long been a part of the

² Carole Beer, "People Person—Addie Booth Was a Page Out of History," *The Seattle Times*, Apr. 26, 1996, p. B6; E.I.R., "B.S.C.P. and Aux. Honor National Labor Executives," *The Northwest Enterprise*, Mar. 26, 1947; "Group Here Seeks Fair Practices Act," *The Seattle Times*, May 30, 1947, p. 13; "Fair Employment Council Organized," *The Seattle Times*, June 5, 1947, p. 3; Melinda Chateauvert, *Marching Together: Women of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2008), 172.

³ Darlene Clark Hine and Kathleen Thompson, *A Shining Thread of Hope: The History of Black Women in America* (New York: Broadway Books, 1998), 308.

western experience where they have operated within and survived through community membership – not individualism. In doing so, they contributed to Seattle’s economy and the processes of black community-building through their businesses, organizations, institutions, jobs, social activism, and ideas. The vast majority of African American women have toiled in relative obscurity, however. This study on the local black women’s struggle for freedom attempts to reclaim and reconstruct black women’s lives, knowledge, and experiences in Pacific Northwest history. It illuminates the diversity of their political action, vision, and leadership within the community-building process and deepens our understanding of urban black western communities and U.S. women in the public sphere.

Note on Black Women’s Activism and Leadership

This dissertation specifically examines the lived experiences of African American women in Seattle, Washington and how they developed their political activism and leadership in the 20th century. Activism extends beyond being front and center of a movement or organization. As Patricia Hill Collins’ work suggests, prevalent concepts of political activism focus on women’s visible, official, and formal political activity as individuals or as collective members of an organization. The work of many women, particularly poor and working-class women, are even lesser known because they often do not appear in archival records or took on supportive assignments and roles within organizations. This dissertation expands the notion of political activism by examining how equally important public as well as less visible forms of black women’s authority constitutes ways women engaged in political action. If we fail to expand our conception of political action, we reinforce their marginal status and perpetuate a distorted understanding of black women’s politics. As many historical studies have shown, women

activists were critical to community-building and protest strategies: they fundraised, coordinated community meetings and forums, participated in marches, wrote correspondence, and managed organizational offices for the common good. Collins' finds that women's activism occurred in two dimensions: struggles for group survival and struggles for institutional transformation. The first concept posits that black women created spheres of influence within existing social structures, whereby, they ultimately undermine these structures in their struggle to survive. The other recognizes black women's efforts to change discriminatory policies and procedures and challenge the legal rules of governing their subordination. These particular dimensions of activism are also interdependent. With this in mind, we can see how Seattle's black women pursued efforts to change institutional and structural forms of oppression such as racism, classism, and sexism in their struggle to survive.⁴

This study also rethinks ideas about black women's leadership, where it is found, how it is expressed, and ways that it has been suppressed. The leadership of African American women has gone unnoticed in historical accounts although they have served equally and, often times, carried out the responsibilities and duties associated with leadership. But for much of the 20th century, black women remained excluded from traditional forms of leadership and thus performed roles as wives, mothers, church women, and secretaries that were perceived as subordinate. These roles, on the contrary, fulfilled important functions and required leadership responsibilities that enabled them to make decisions, participate in race-building initiatives, and strengthen and sustain black communities. Women stood at the forefront of social change, took charge, pursued a vision, helped change structures in society, and empowered others to achieve goals. Many women may not have identified themselves as activists or failed to acknowledge

⁴ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment, Second Edition* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 202, 204-206.

their significant leadership contributions. Rather, they saw themselves as ordinary citizens struggling to survive the daily challenges of being black and female. Seattle's former first black mayor Norm Rice, aptly stated in 1985 that "the effectiveness of leadership is not always visible. It's how well you move through the system." Both the visible and less visible forms of black women's leadership deserve attention: they challenge patriarchal perceptions about how we write, think, and teach about African American leadership. Rethinking areas where women have performed traditional roles such as the club movement, in beauty shops, churches, schools, and women's auxiliaries make for more complex and rich discussions on how black women exercise and wield power for social change and economic justice in unlikely places. Addie Fletcher Booth is a model example.⁵

Scope and Significance

Within this framework, I explore the ways in which leadership and political activism changed, transformed, and played out in Seattle's largely black community, the Central Area, and in the city. For much of the last four decades of the 20th century, the continued influx of black women migrants altered the leadership dynamics and activist work of African American women, which had slowly evolved before World War II. Scholars have presumed that in the pre-1940s era Seattle's small traditional male leadership took the helm of the social, political, and economic interests of the fledgling community. A re-reading and expansion of the archive illustrates that black women played more than a supportive role, laying much of the ground work politically, socially, culturally, and economically, although they remained overshadowed by black male figures. In fact, their political mobility and organizing can be traced as far back as

⁵ *Ibid.* Elizabeth Rhodes, "Leading the Way," *The Seattle Times*, Jan. 20, 1985, p. 16.

1906, four years before Washington granted women the right to vote, giving them ten years' worth of political experience and education as legal participants in the democratic electoral process.

As both Shirley Ann Moore Wilson and Gretchen Santangelo-Lemke demonstrate, black women's migration during the Second World War and the immediate postwar period increased the vitality of western black communities and shattered restrictive gender norms. In Seattle, these shifting gender dynamics became central as more migrant women poured into the city, bringing with them new talents, skills, experiences, and leadership styles. Political activist leaders such as E. June Smith, a migrant from Illinois, led school desegregation campaigns in the 1960s as president of the Seattle branch of the NAACP (a post usually held by men in local branches throughout the U.S.) and as the only female member of the Central Area Civil Rights Committee (CACRC). Smith, and many other Seattle women activists, represented the changing gender dynamics and the paths of many who rose to public leadership positions throughout their community, city, and state, serving as elected legislators, directors of anti-poverty programs, school board members, and as the heads of important city and state agencies.⁶

These changing forms of activism and positioning allowed African American women in Seattle to negotiate a new place for themselves in the city. Women individually and collectively used their agency to directly and indirectly shape urban policy and discourses on education, poverty, and employment. This raises a number of important questions concerning the designation of women leaders at various historical moments: how has that leadership impacted the African American community, the citizens of the city, and how was that leadership

⁶ Gretchen Santangelo-Lemke, *Abiding Courage: African American Migrant Women and the East Bay Community* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Shirley Ann Wilson Moore, *To Place Our Deeds: The African American Community in Richmond, California, 1910-1963* (Los Angeles: University of California, 2000).

challenged from both inside and beyond the black community? And, how did women's activist work, visions, and strategies develop differently from men?⁷ I explore these dynamics and the extent to which these women wielded power. I also consider the nature of their dependence on interracial and interethnic ties to further their agenda of race and gender progress in Seattle. As many studies have shown, the prevalence of diverse minority groups in the West gave way to interactions and cultural exchanges with various groups joining together to challenge racial restrictions while at the same time competing with each other for jobs and housing. This dissertation at times explores the extent of these tensions and collaborations between African American, Asian American women (Seattle's two largest non-white racial groups), and Euro-American women.⁸

This dissertation is the first study to examine the political history of African American women in the Pacific Northwest, particularly in the mid-to late twentieth century. It breaks new ground by extending beyond the conventional time frame of analysis of the black experience. Most histories trace urban black experiences during the first half of the 20th century, usually ending their studies after the waning of the Black Power Movement. But the impact of the women's movement, the dissention on race progress, and the economic recession caused by Boeing (the region's largest employer) catalyzed black women's activism and resistance in this period. For the first time, poor black women formed a massive political organization through the

⁷ This question is particularly important because new women's leadership divided the black community politically. For instance in 1975, Dorothy Hollingsworth defeated her rival Eddie Rye, Jr. to become the first African American woman school board member as she joined a board of majority female board members. The election caused rifts in the Central Area concerning who could best represent the concerns of mothers, teachers (mostly female), and students' concerns. Whereas education had historically been relegated to the sphere of women as teachers, men had occupied the administrative positions as principals, superintendents, and school board members. This shift may have well been due to the efforts of black mothers and activists during the 1960s and 1970s desegregation campaigns, formation of parent-teachers associations, and community education councils.

⁸ Studies include Robert O'Brien and Lee M. Brooks, "Race Relations in the Pacific Northwest," *Phylon*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 1946: 21-31; Howard A. Droker, "Seattle Race Relations During the Second World War," *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, Vol. 67, No. 4 (October 1976), 163-174.

welfare rights movement while middle-class women won elective positions in the state legislature and city governing boards and, also, were appointed to positions in state and local agencies. Many of these women gained their political experience in women's organizations, community groups, local precincts, and anti-poverty activism. Additionally, as Seattle developed into a technology and corporate hub in the last two decades of the century, it attracted a migration of professional middle-class women who represented a new political leadership class by their positions in business, education, and government.

This dissertation also reconsiders the black community urban ethos proposed by Quintard Taylor who contended that Seattle's black community was forged through kinship networks, organizations, and institutions in the 20th century. Arguably, this was due, in large part, to women's community-building efforts. Black women from all backgrounds responded to new and often lingering issues throughout the 20th century in addition to the city's shifting demographics and economic growth in the last two decades. I address how the black community transformed in this later period as the complex processes of market forces, gentrification, and displacement pushed the majority of black residents beyond Seattle and south into King County, thereby fragmenting Seattle's core black community by the turn of the 21st century. This shift means we must rethink what is considered the "black community" at this historical juncture, one that began to look sharply different than it had in the early 20th century.⁹

⁹ Quintard Taylor, *Forging of A Black Community: Seattle's Central District from 1870 through the Civil Rights Era* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 6-8. This dissertation is not so much concerned with the questions many scholars ask when writing on Seattle: Was Seattle different? Unique? Or the antiquated notion concerning the extent to which the West offered African Americans freedom. Rather, in the unfolding of the preconceptions, ideas, and activism of a community, it seeks to connect the work of African American women in the broader political battles of local, state, and national levels; how they used their resources, devised plans, and implemented strategies based on spatial and geographical location.

African American Women's History in the West

While the history of African Americans in the West has been chronicled, the scholarship has not sufficiently examined gender in local and regional struggles. Susan Armitage and Deborah Wilbert asserted in their 1988 article that the “black woman is truly the forgotten person in Pacific Northwest history.” Thirty years later, the near silences of black women in the literature obscures and clouds our understanding of significant moments of activism and agency and how women challenged different forms of systemic inequalities in the urban west. My research sits at the nexus of multiple historiographies and conversations on race, gender, region, migration, and activism. Foremost, as a study of African Americans in the western region of the country, it engages prominent western scholarship that continues to etch out a framework that addresses the varied black experiences in the U.S., the development of black communities, and the social, political, economic, and cultural impact they exerted on the region. Scholars such as Taylor and Albert Broussard have shown that the history of African Americans in the West has been, by and large, an urban one, while contemporary studies have examined the particular challenges in African American and Western history that reimagines the Black West. Such works by historians Robert O. Self, Josh Sides, and Herbert G. Ruffin emphasized how the West’s distinctive character is characterized by its multiracialism and development of its cities culturally, economically, and spatially. These analyses challenge the dominant “urban crisis” thesis and complicate the black/white dichotomy that has shaped most of the writing by urban scholars on race relations in cities in the North, South, and Midwest.¹⁰

¹⁰ Susan H. Armitage and Deborah Gallacii Wilbert, “Black Women in the Pacific Northwest: A Survey and Research Prospectus,” in *Women in Pacific Northwest History: An Anthology* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988), 136. These works include but are not limited to Albert Broussard’s study, *Black San Francisco: The Struggle for Racial Equality in the West* (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 1993); *In Search of a Racial Frontier: African American in the American West, 1528-1990* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1998). Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Post-War Oakland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Herbert Ruffin, *Uninvited Neighbors: African Americans in Silicon Valley, 1769-1990* (Lorman: University of

While many scholars writing on black urban experiences have addressed or reflected on women's contribution to the region, but there is still little known of how African American women were able to adapt, resist, and influence the social landscape, the political system, education, and labor.¹¹ In the West, as Kim Warren suggests, women and men developed and expanded new gender norms as a result of imbalanced sex ratios, uncertain economic roles, rapid migration and urbanization, political agency, and the creation of diverse communities. The paucity of numbers always remained a factor and determined the kinds of roles men and women would have to play in order to survive and maintain their communities. But such scholars as Annelise Orleck, Moore, and Santangelo-Lemke have shown that despite the small number of women of color in the region, gender significantly impacted the 20th century urban West through community-building, labor, and political organizing.¹²

While scholars of black western history further dismantle the claim of a white and homogenous West, mainstream western scholarship continues to privilege a masculine narrative. Gender studies have contributed to the rewriting and rethinking of western history by integrating the complexities of women's lives, experiences, and contributions to the development of the urban and rural frontier life. Because gender is inextricably tied up with the complexities of race and class, it is also central to the ordering of western society, the relations of power, and the creation of individual and collective identities as historian Margaret Jacobs suggests. Even as new scholarship reflects the diversity of the West, western women's and gender history has not

Oklahoma Press, 2014); Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African Americans Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present*, (Los Angeles: University of California, 2006).

¹¹ See Darlene Clark Hine, "Black Migration to the Urban Midwest: The Gender Dimension, 1915-1945," in *Hine Sight: Black Women and the Reconstruction of American History* (New York: Carlson Publishing Co., 1994).

¹² Kim Warren, "Gender, Race, Culture, and the Mythic American Frontier," *Journal of Women's History*, Vol. 19, No. 1, (Spring 2007), 234-241. Annelise Orleck, *Storming Caesars Palace: How Black Mothers Fought Their Own War on Poverty* (Boston: Beacon Press), 2005. Moore, *To Place Our Deeds*, 2001. Santangelo-Lemke, *Abiding Courage*, 1996.

yet made a significant impact on traditional scholarship in the field of western history. Jacobs posits that the problem of western histories are historians' reluctance or uneasiness with gender constructs that may not fit neatly with their established narratives. As a result, we continue to produce histories that do not fully represent the past.¹³

Within this paradigm, African American women remain marginalized as an understudied group that further contributes to a fragmented understanding of black women's roles in the American West. Historians Glenda Riley and Lawrence De Graaf stressed in the 1980s that black women would largely remain an invisible population in "western society whose lives and accomplishments would only be known within the confines of their race."¹⁴ This has not come to pass. Much work on black women can be found on California and Texas, both of which had sizeable black populations. In addition, Quintard Taylor and Shirley Ann Wilson Moore's anthology on African American women in the West demonstrates that women were an integral part of the region since the 1500s and contributed to the development of the urban and rural social, cultural, and political landscape through their challenges for racial and gender equality. But part of their frustration remains – the telling of this history has been and still is a slow process. It warrants the question: where do African American women stand in western history today in places where their numbers are few and far between.¹⁵

Seattle is worthy of scholarly attention not just because it constituted the largest African American population in the Pacific Northwest (although very small compared to other urban centers), but how it differed from other cities politically, culturally, and racially. In its earliest

¹³ Margaret Jacobs, "Western History: What Gender Has Got to Do With It?" *Western Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (Autumn 2011), 303.

¹⁴ Lawrence B. De Graaf, "Race, Sex, and Region: Black Women in the American West, 1850-1920," *The Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 49, No. 2 (May 1980), 313; Glenda Riley, "American Daughters: Black Women in the West," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*, Vol. 38, (1988).

¹⁵ Quintard Taylor and Shirley Ann Wilson Moore, *African American Women Confront the West: 1600-2000* (Lorman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 16.

formation, Seattle's blacks were forced to operate within a racially ambiguous environment as the second largest minority group, uncharacteristic of other cities. The city's Asian population comprised the largest non-white racial group until World War II, reclaiming that positioning in the 1980s and 1990s. In addition, Seattle was a place that boasted of its progressiveness by championing early civil rights laws, prohibiting antebellum slavery, and granting women's suffrage a decade before the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment.

This dissertation builds on studies over the past two decades that have given attention to African Americans in Seattle. Taylor's *The Forging of a Black Community* remains the definitive study on the subject, exploring the growth and development of Seattle's black community. Taylor writes that by the 20th century the character of African American communities was largely urban. Yet, the rapid urbanization of the West and pre-war conditions that shaped black urban patterns in the North did not shape Seattle to the same degree due to its relatively small black population. Nevertheless, the migration of black people during and after the Second World War strengthened civil rights organizations, political campaigns, and other institutions that gave African Americans the muscle to advocate for fair housing, schooling, and employment. Jeffery Zane's "America, Only Less So" asserts that Seattle shared some of the same urban ills as other cities but "in a less muted form." Its 1978 adoption of the Seattle Plan, making it the first city to voluntarily adopt mandatory desegregation, and the 1989 election of the city's first black mayor shored up the city's "exceptionalism" and racial progressivism. Yet, he finds that the education and income gap remained significant in terms of racial inequality.¹⁶

¹⁶ Quintard Taylor, *Forging of A Black Community*, 7, 159. Also see Taylor's *In Search of a Racial Frontier*, 1998. Jeffrey Zane, "America, Only Less So: Seattle's Central District," abstract, (Ph.D dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 2000), [no page number given]. Also, the work of Esther Hall Mumford contributed to the early history of African Americans. See Mumford's, *Seven Stars and Orion: Reflections of the Past* (Seattle: Ananse Press, 1986) and *Seattle's Victorians, 1852-1901* (Seattle: Ananse Press, 1980).

Both Taylor and Zane's work provide valuable insights on the development and contributions of a black community in the largest Pacific Northwestern city. My work furthers this body of work by complicating the idea that Seattle was/is an "exceptional" city in terms of race and gender relations where blacks could find a freer society or racial paradise. Rather, in each historical moment, women contested the professed ideals of racial tolerance that the city touted with a profound conviction to end racism and sexism. The paradox of freedom is, therefore, a consistent theme and is productive for distinguishing between the "real" and "perceived" opportunities Seattle offered its black citizens. They struggled to find a place of belonging and identity as women and African Americans in a very white and gendered space. My study explores these dynamics and the transformation of Seattle's black community through women's political engagement, struggles, and resistance.

Organizational Structure and Methodology

This dissertation chronologically explores the political goals, resistance strategies, community-building efforts, and leadership of black women from the late nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth century. However, the focus centers on how black women responded to, and in many ways, engaged in local and national struggles in the second half of the twentieth century that radically transformed the urban black community and contemporary ideas based on race and gender. It demonstrates the many different ways African American women exercised power and agency through organizations, institutions, businesses, social movements, and other sites of contestation within the city and state. Each chapter reveals the intrinsic coalitions and intra-communal conflicts among women and men to comprehend the competing visions and agency of black women's politics.

Chapter One provides a historical reconstruction of African American women's early political experiences and community activism that recaptures their goals, ideas, voices, and coalitions for women's political freedom between 1880 to 1940. While feminist scholars tend to perpetuate the invisibility of African American women in the histories of the suffrage movement and those particularly in the American West, this chapter also examines the role of black women in the state and national suffrage movement. It contends that despite the small black population, black women collectively fashioned programs and strategies to manipulate, negotiate, and influence city and state politics. They formed an important political constituency, often courted by politicians and candidates and participated in elections and campaigns, lobbied for candidates, created partisan organizations and political clubs, served on statewide committees, and served as jurors and precinct committeewomen. Drawing on census data, personal archival records, oral histories, organizational correspondence, and newspaper archives, it demonstrates how black women became empowered and reinvented themselves as political beings in an era where the majority of African American women remain disenfranchised through discriminatory and extralegal means such as poll taxes, literacy tests, and racial violence.¹⁷

The Second World War left the deepest mark on Pacific Coast cities like Seattle as wartime migration quadrupled the African American population. In Chapter Two, I examine black women's migration and labor activism as they entered an expanding yet restrictive workforce in the defense industries and professional occupations during the war and postwar period. Black women workers gravitated to Boeing Airplane Company, the Bremerton shipyard, and auxiliary companies which became major, lucrative operations during the war and the Cold War years, supplying military planes and commercial aircraft. The entry of black women in

¹⁷ Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, "Black Women in the Struggle for the Vote," in *African American Women and the Vote, 1850-1920* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 17.

booming war industries highlighted the ways race complicated the gender glass ceiling in the 1940s and 1950s as employment and unionization did not hold the same weight for them as it did for white women. Hired as temporary guest workers, women had to fight for the right to work and the right to join unions to protect themselves and their jobs as both African Americans and women. This chapter demonstrates that the consequence of war and migration reshaped women's economic roles, allowing for the expansion of professional work as beauticians, teachers, and nurses, which ultimately strengthened civil rights and black women's organizations. This phenomenon produced a new generation of black women leaders who not only laid claims to economic security and autonomy for their families and their futures but helped push one of the first state-wide fair employment practices law in the nation.

Black women's participation and role in local social movements became hotbeds of political ferment between 1961 and 1969. Chapter Three considers how the symbiotic relationship between the Civil Rights, Anti-poverty, and Black Power Movements served as catalysts for fostering a strong grassroots level of black women's leadership and activism which eventually catapulted them into careers in public service and politics in the last three decades of the century. At this historical juncture, the social construction of black women's leadership combined both formal and informal, visible and invisible levels of leadership responsibilities; thereby complicating the mantra coined by Charles Payne that "men led, but women organized." In many instances, women did both. Most women did the work required of leadership but were either excluded from titled leadership positions or preferred to lead behind the scenes as organizational participants and organizers. Like elsewhere in the nation, African American women pushed for economic, political, and educational equality, working alongside the ministerial alliance and also apart from them and other male leaders—forming their own political

agendas and organizing through their homes, churches, schools, and organizations. However, black women represented an array of political ideologies and strategies for social change and ran for political office to assume more power and visible representation in government. Such is the case of Flo Ware, a civil rights and anti-poverty activist, who ran on the Peace and Freedom Party ticket for the U.S. Congress in 1968—the first African American woman in the state to do so. While a full analysis of the 1960s social movements is beyond the scope of this study, this chapter explores black women’s pragmatic roles in these areas with a particular focus on education, an area where the majority of women’s activism can be located.¹⁸

Women of the NAACP, CORE, and the Urban League and those unaffiliated with the major civil rights organizations challenged the city to desegregate Seattle public schools, formed their own community-based schools to train racially and economically-conscious leaders, and established parent-school councils to gain more control of neighborhood schools. Their mobilization and public protest helped influence Seattle’s city officials to adopt a voluntary desegregation plan in the late 1970s, the first city in the United States to do so without a mandated court order. In contrast, black women met opposition from the black male political establishment along with a growing radical young female group who identified with black power politics and disagreed with integration, and poor mothers who sought economic justice. Although fraught with dissention, these political movements served as sites of contestation and collaboration for women to develop skills, leadership abilities, and race consciousness that connected them to oppressed African Americans across the nation and to exert a gendered voice. They made claims to first-class citizenship and racial equality in a city that refused to

¹⁸ Charles Payne, “Men Led, But Women Organized: Movement Participation of Women in the Mississippi Delta,” in *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965*, eds. Vicki L. Crawford, Jacqueline Anne Rouse, and Barbara Woods (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 1.

acknowledge it ever had a “race” problem.

The confluence of social protests, a burgeoning local women’s movement, and racial discord led black women to actively and aggressively seek visible public roles, calling for new political reform strategies and community programs in the post-civil rights era. For the first time, black women, who had gained their political experience in women’s organizations, anti-poverty activism, and civil rights protests, won elective positions in the state legislature and were appointed to city and state government positions. As a small group, they saw the need to work in a larger community of women, across racial and class lines, to address more broadly gender-specific concerns such as job training, daycare, welfare social services, and easier access to public transportation. Chapter Four illustrates how as their public roles and leadership expanded, they made a significant impact on urban policies and state legislation that responded to the needs of the Central Area more than had previously been possible.

Black women, regardless of economic status, continued to face a variety of social ills including high unemployment, poverty, and family disintegration. When Boeing collapsed, it compounded these issues and threw the Puget Sound into a recession where social welfare benefits and public assistance became more common and to some degree temporarily acceptable in the city. This chapter also focuses on poor black women who felt the worst effects of the recession and organized their own movement by launching the Washington State Chapter of the National Welfare Rights Organization. Empowered by their experiences in civil rights and anti-poverty activism, they galvanized hundreds of poor people to demand clothing, food, higher incomes, dignity, and social, political, and economic justice for their families during the economic recession. The organization vented its frustrations and applied pressure to legislators, business leaders, and to middle-class led black organizations to address poor people’s concerns

around unemployment, social services, and public housing. Peggie Joan Maxie, the first African American woman elected to the state legislature, responded to the demands of black women rent strikers when she introduced a bill to protect and ensure tenants' rights. That legislation became the Washington State Landlord-Tenant Act in 1973. Poor black women managed to form a political identity and influence policy while middle-class women rose into formal positions of power, exerting their influence as directors of anti-poverty programs, members of the school board, principals, city officials, state representatives, public servants, and political candidates.

Chapter Five turns to the last two decades of the 20th century that wrought political changes, new migratory shifts, and a geographical reorientation of the black community. No longer could the black male political establishment ignore the demands of women or insist that gender inequality was inconsequential in Seattle's black community. New issues emerged in this period such as gang activity, the introduction of crack cocaine, AIDS crisis, crime, and teenage pregnancy that required new responses and different reform strategies. In this chapter, I illustrate how the expanding Seattle economy attracted a wave of black professional middle-class women who sought changes to the city through their positions in corporate business, education, and government rather than in community based social welfare programs. I focus on one such professional, Constance Rice, a civic activist, educator, and businesswoman, who became the first lady of Seattle when the city elected her husband Norm Rice as its first black mayor in 1989.¹⁹ Rice employed her talents and skills in mobilizing black women politically and professionally and used her political and social positioning to navigate a broader network of political circles in the city to meet the needs and demands of Seattle's historic black community

¹⁹ Constance Rice was also one of the first local African Americans to own a successful public relations and management consulting firm, and she had managed multi-million dollar budgets for various organizations. She also chaired the Ethnic Studies Division at Shoreline Community College.

while fostering the next generation of black women leaders and encouraging their participation in politics.

Other women professionals and activists campaigned for and assumed positions in city and state government by the turn of the century. In 1991, Seattle elected its first African American woman and first openly lesbian councilwoman, Sherry Harris, to the city council. Harris's election was not without controversy when she defeated the long-time incumbent Sam Smith, the first African American councilmember. She did not gain much support from the African American community, especially ministers and their parishioners due to her sexuality and ties to Seattle's LGBT community. At the very moment black women experienced their greatest social, political, and economic mobility in the history of the state, the controversial I-200 initiative which sought to end affirmative action in Washington tested the temperature of race as well as gender relations and challenged the prospects for the continued advancement of African American women. Representative Dawn Mason, the second black woman elected to the state legislature in 1994, helped to block anti-affirmative action measures in the legislature, which ultimately passed statewide on a referendum. The uncertainty of women-owned businesses, equal employment and pay, access to higher education, and the rapidly gentrifying Central Area would cause women to re-strategize and redefine boundaries of community in the 21st century. In this final chapter, I address black suburbanization in the midst of a growing city, resulting in the outmigration of many black residents to the Southeast suburbs.

The promise of this work offers new insights on how black women's activism impacted urban western communities. It is a testament to the many known and unknown African American women activist-leaders who tirelessly labored to build thriving and sustainable communities in spite of their relatively small numbers. They boldly entered the spaces of social

and political justice on their own terms and sought to change policies, hearts, and minds to make the professed ideals of liberalism in Seattle a more equitable place for blacks to live.

Chapter One

Pioneering A Community: The First Generation of African American Women in Seattle, 1880-1940

The women of this state [Washington] possess political rights and privileges accorded no other women of the nation in more liberal quantity: and these political duties as well as privileges should not be overlooked by the women of our race.”

–*The Searchlight*, June 12, 1920¹

And we shall soon know that in Seattle too the race women are awake...

-Mrs. N.T. Fisher, clubwoman, 1919²

The first generation of black women arriving in Seattle during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries came to find a racial paradise that offered the promise of social, political, and economic parity. After all, the Far Northwest was a place considered by African Americans as the last frontier where the experiment of democracy was unencumbered by racial prejudice through its early championing of civil rights laws. Washington State’s ratification of women’s suffrage in 1910, a decade before the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, further signified a progressive political environment that helped catapult black women in a much wider public sphere. Yet black women’s possession of political rights and privileges did not translate into a unitary vision of race and gender advancement shared by both white and black women or even black men due to racial, class, and gender biases. It did, however, create openings for the development of black women’s leadership that impacted the gender dynamics of Seattle’s fledgling black community before World War II. This chapter examines the early development of black women’s leadership and political activism in the region as well as their community-building efforts during the first half of the 20th century.

¹ *The Searchlight*, June 12, 1920.

² Mrs. N.T. Fisher, “What Benefits Can Accrue to Our Seattle People Through the Sojourner Truth Club Movement?,” *The Searchlight*, May 10, 1919.

The Arrival of African American Women (1880-1900)

Early black Seattle consisted of an overwhelmingly male population through the end of the nineteenth century. Many black migrants endured the long journey in search of economic opportunities, while others came to escape the political and economic repression of the post-Civil War South. Seattle's second black resident William Grose, who arrived in 1861 and opened a restaurant, hotel, and barbershop, brought his wife Sarah Grose, their daughter Rebecca, and son. By 1870, Sarah and Rebecca were the only women out of the thirteen black residents. The migrations of the 1880s and 1890s, however, generated small numbers of women and children who often accompanied or joined up with their husbands. In 1889, Lloyd and Emma Ray left Kansas and Isaiah and Mary Allen left Pennsylvania. Susie Revels departed Mississippi to marry Horace Cayton in 1896, while W.L. and Alice Presto arrived from Massachusetts with their young daughter Dorothy in 1899. Other women came in response to recruitment efforts by developing Seattle companies. For example, in 1899, the Rainier Grand Hotel recruited a staff of forty black women and men from Chicago to work as chambermaids, cooks, waiters, and elevator operators. Seattle's black population grew from 19 in 1880 to 406 by the turn of the century. The population of black women increased from 194 in 1900 to 902 by 1910, comprising 0.4 percent of the total population. This small, yet steady migration of women throughout the first four decades of the twentieth century would influence the possibilities for the racial, social, political, spiritual, and organizational development of Seattle's African American community.³

³ Quintard Taylor, *Forging of A Black Community: Seattle's Central District from 1870 through the Civil Rights Era* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 16-20, 25; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistics of Population—Supplement for Washington 1900*. Vol. II, pt. 2, Table 9 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1902), 144; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Composition and Characteristics of the Population, 1910*. Table II (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1913), 602.

The Formation of a Small Community: Organizations, Institutions, and Small Businesses

Historian Quintard Taylor contends that Seattle's African Americans forged a black urban community ethos through kinship networks, organizations, and institutions. This was due, in large part, to women's community-building efforts and leadership during the first four decades of the twentieth century. Nowhere was this concept of an urban community ethos and collective spiritual survival more apparent than in the foundation of Seattle's African American churches. Clara Bonner, who would later become a noted clubwoman and political activist, exclaimed that women "help[ed] the man to lay the foundation of the Church and when they beg[an] to develop and understand how to do some work, they g[ave] their time and money for the support along all lines of uplift work." The founding of First A.M.E. (1890), Mount Zion Baptist (1894), and Grace Presbyterian (1913), formed the nucleus of black women's networking and organizational activities.⁴ Members established women's ministries, auxiliaries, mutual aid and benefit societies, and music programs to support the religious life of the church. They also sponsored social and civic programs such as dances, barbeques, picnics, fundraisers, food drives for the poor, and scholarships for black schoolchildren. Several women of First A.M.E. organized the Ladies Colored Social Circle in December 1889 and held many socials, concerts, and fundraisers that were largely responsible for securing a building just six months after the church's founding. Nettie J. Asberry, who came to Seattle from Kansas in 1890, became the director of music at First A.M.E. before she moved to Tacoma in 1902. At Mt. Zion, LeEtta S. King served as the organist and was often asked to sing at various community events. There is no question that black women's faith and church work informed the very essence of their lives and gave them a sense of communal bonds and kinship. As Sara Oliver Jackson declared, "We always went to

⁴ There also existed other faith-based organizations such the Episcopalians, Catholics, Russellites, Christian Science, Seventh Day Adventists, and Pentecostal.

church. As far as Negro people are concerned, that is the nucleus of our community anywhere you go.” The church would remain a central base for much of black women’s religious, social, and political work throughout the century.⁵

A small number of non-religious institutions and organizations also developed in this period that gave rise to the urban community ethos. On June 24, 1891, the first recorded secular women’s organization, the Queen of Sheba, was founded as a sister organization to the fraternal order, Cornerstone Grand Lodge of the York Masons, for wives, daughters, and female relatives of the Lodge. In 1906, a coalition of reform-oriented elite black women, who modeled the national Progressive movement’s mission to reform society and provide social services to the community, founded the Dorcas Charity Club. Susan R. Cayton, associate editor of the *Seattle Republican* (established by her husband Horace R. Cayton) and daughter of Hiram R. Revels, the first African American U.S. senator and first president of Alcorn College, served as its first president.⁶ Along with prominent black socialites, Leticia A. Graves, Alice S. Presto, and Hester Ray, Cayton formed the club in response to a request by Medical Lake, an institution for the mentally ill, to place abandoned twin baby girls with rickets in a home. When Cayton found the twins a foster home, the club pursued a “racial uplift” philosophy by committing to take care of the sick, destitute, and orphaned children in order to help alleviate the social ills of the city. In one year, the club raised over \$800.00 and, by 1909, boasted a membership of seventy-five women.⁷ While gaining much attention over the next decade, the club continued to support

⁵ Taylor, 6; Clara Bonner, “Birth of the Sojourner Truth Club,” *The Searchlight*, May 10, 1919, p. 1; Turkiya L. Lowe, “The Washington State Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs: Social Activism in Washington State’s African American Women’s Club Movement, 1971 to 1951,” (Ph.D dissertation, University of Washington, 2010), 33-34; “Seattle Colored Citizenry,” *Cayton’s Monthly*, Feb. 1, 1921, p.11; Esther Mumford, *Seven Stars and Orion: Reflections of the Past* (Seattle: Ananse Press, 1986), 70.

⁶ For more on the Cayton family, see the autobiography of Horace Cayton, Jr., *Long Old Road: An Autobiography*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press), 1974 and the Cayton’s biographer, Richard S. Hobbs, *The Cayton Legacy: An African American Family* (Pullman: Washington State University Press), 2002.

⁷ In 1907, the Dorcas Charity Club organized members into circles, each with a superintendent who would serve on

orphaned children, providing them with toys and living expenses until a settlement house could be secured to do this kind of uplift work on a much larger scale.⁸

Seattle presented a “free air” that many black Seattleites found refreshing. This “free air” reflected what Douglas Flamming describes as the “Western Ideal,” a belief adopted by African Americans that the West was exceptional and a land of promised opportunity where one’s skin color did not matter. Unlike western cities elsewhere, Seattle’s larger Asian population bore the brunt end of harsh racism and violence that shielded the smaller black community from white backlash. African Americans found opportunities afforded to them that remained rare in other parts of the country and, in many regards, thought themselves better off than their Eastern counterparts. On a tour of western states in 1913, W.E.B. Du Bois asserted that “the 3,000 [blacks] in Seattle...are educated; not college bred...they are a part of the greater group and they know it.” He went on to say, “They rival Los Angeles as a group.” There was however much fluidity among social and class groups. For example, elite and poor members frequently worshipped at the same churches, sitting next to each other, and joined the same clubs and organizations. Poor blacks could aspire to a middle-class status by engaging in community service, improving their education, and acquiring stable employment or skills.⁹

True to their social class and economic position in Seattle, black women pioneers took advantage of opportunities afforded them. When the common occupation for African American

the executive committee and recruit more women in the city. Club members put on fundraisers to raise money for the needy and sick and gave a donation towards the care of a fifteen-year old girl and a one-year old baby at the County Hospital.

⁸ Lowe, 41-42; Horace Cayton, “Afro-American Charity Organization,” *The Seattle Republican*, Oct. 4, 1907; *The Seattle Republican*, Nov. 8, 1907, p. 8; “African Charity Workers Hold Baby Show,” *The Seattle Daily Times*, May 16, 1908, p. 1.

⁹ Douglas Flamming, *Bound for Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 36; W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Crisis Magazine*, Vol. 6, No.5, 1913, pp. 238-239; Jeffrey Zane, “America, Only Less So: Seattle’s Central District,” (Ph.D dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 2001), 59.

women was domestic servitude, few Seattle women could and did hire domestic workers.

Horace R. Cayton, Jr., son of Susie Cayton, acknowledged that, “what gave us the most prestige and created the greatest envy was the fact that we had a Japanese servant.” Susie Cayton’s family hired a Japanese servant, Nish, while Mary Allen, employed full-time Chinese girls. After the turn of the century, it was common for Japanese and Chinese immigrants who wanted to attend high school or learn English to work as domestic servants.¹⁰

Many of these well-to-do families created private clubs to distinguish their class and social positions. In January of 1907, a group of women met at the residence of Stella Butler Norris, a Memphis native and cousin of Ida B. Wells-Barnett who fled to Seattle in 1901 with her husband Isham F. Norris. Norris had been a former legislator in the Tennessee General Assembly in the 1880s.¹¹ The women established an exclusive club for pioneer families. “The members [older families] feeling the need of a closer affiliation than has hitherto existed...have banded themselves together under the name of the Pioneer Social Club,” wrote one member. The club sought “members among the best families” and held socials, gave receptions to prominent black families visiting the city, and donated goods to the poor. “The pioneers all knew each other. Grandmother [Mary Allen] went to the opera when operas and touring companies first started coming to Seattle. And they had wonderful parties... They had black and white [attire] balls,” recounted Constance Pitter.¹²

¹⁰ Horace Cayton, *Long Old Road*, 7; Constance Pitter Thomas, Interview by Esther Mumford, Seattle, Washington, March 1976, Accession No. 1583-001, [transcript] contained in Constance Pitter Thomas Papers, 1971-1976, University of Washington Special Collections.

¹¹ Mrs. I.F. Norris was elected president. Susie Cayton was chosen as secretary and Cora Oliver, Superintendent.

¹² *Seattle Republican*, Feb. 8, 1907; Ibid, Jan. 25, 1907; Constance Pitter Thomas, Interview by Esther Mumford, March 1976, contained in Constance Pitter Thomas Papers, 1971-1976, University of Washington Special Collections. Organizations created by both men and women, such as the Forum, provided a place for African Americans to discuss the political, social, economic, and civic issues in Seattle and the treatment of blacks in the state. Women often participated by presenting and reading papers to the members on a topic of interest and took on traditional yet important roles as secretaries, fundraisers, caterers, and program coordinators.

These forms of leisure activities and social fraternization alleviated the experiences of isolation and loneliness many women faced being away from family and friends in other regions of the country. To make Seattle home was to create new kinship relations and communal bonds, one that was close-knit and sustained their racial identity and culture; but this type of self-defined community embodied profound class and moral biases that excluded many from becoming members. According to Arline Yarborough's recollection of prewar black society, "Social life in Seattle was refined and dignified." Anyone who did not meet the standards of moral and cultural attainment remained outside of its circle.¹³

Therefore, most black pioneers' perceived ideals of freedom and economic advancement did not relate to the rest of the black population, often single black women and men, living along lower Jackson Street and below Yesler. These sketchy areas for many early black pioneers were referred to as "crosstown," the "Red Light District," or "sporting district." Many poor and working-class women such as prostitutes, who did not adopt genteel and pious standards lived in these areas. Black women residing in the East Madison District subscribed to the idea of respectability politics as they sought to demonstrate to the white community that they possessed the qualities of being respectable female citizens who could contribute their intelligence and moral value to society. Prostitution provided a means for some women who had limited options but presented a dilemma for most morally-conscious reformers. Emma Ray, also known as "Mother Ray," and Mary Allen were known to help young prostitutes get off the street, place them in a home, and care for their children. As a social reformer, Ray, along with fifteen women in the 1890s, organized the Frances Ellen Harper Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) that spent most of its time in the Yesler-Jackson district working with transient

¹³ Arline Yarbrough, "Witness to Change – 'Far Too Little Black History Has Been Documented,'" *The Seattle Times*, Feb. 16, 1992.

prostitutes, criminals, and drug addicts.¹⁴

Aside from racial and social uplift work, Seattle black women found opportunities to engage in early entrepreneurial enterprises. When Horace Cayton, editor of the *Seattle Republican*, ironically called for a thousand black women in the South to flood Seattle in order to fill the city's dire need for maids and domestic servants, a number of recognized women-owned businesses including hotels, rooming houses, restaurants, and beauty salons were operating throughout the city. Jennie Vrooman opened the Vrooman Hotel in 1917 with thirty-four rooms and a pool while Jennie Clark ran a delicatessen. Along 12th and Jackson, Mrs. T.H. Jones ran the Afro-American Hotel, and Mrs. C. Jackson established The Comfort Rooming House and Pool Hall. Mrs. G. B. Miller operated the Ladies' Exchange, a trade business that served "the women folk in her immediate neighborhood" while Mrs. J.C. Cogwell opened a grocery, located "in a strictly [working-class] colored man's community." Though a precarious enterprise, Mary Thompson's Minnehaha Saloon, which included an upstairs brothel, made her a wealthy woman until her death in 1893.¹⁵

Perhaps the most lucrative and stable businesses were the beauty parlors. In 1905, Leticia A. Graves established a successful hair dressing business in the People's Savings Bank Building in downtown. Her financial success and business acumen provided the capital and knowledge to invest in prime real estate in the city. According to *Cayton's Weekly*, Graves purchased a \$3,500 income property in 1919 on 22nd Avenue North, netting her a "realty investment of nearly

¹⁴ Constance Pitter Thomas, interview by Esther Mumford, March 1976; Taylor, 39. For more on Emma Ray see Emma Ray, *Twice Sold, Twice Ransomed: The Autobiography of Mr. and Mrs. L.P. Ray* (Free Methodist Publishing House, 1926); Priscilla Pope-Levison, "Emma Ray in Black and White: The Intersection of Race, Region, and Religion," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, June 2011, Vol.102 (3), 107-116.

¹⁵ Horace Cayton, "Female Help Wanted," *The Seattle Republican*, Oct. 5, 1906; "In the Public Eye," *Cayton's Weekly*, Aug. 18, 1917; "Town Topics," *Cayton's Weekly*, June 15, 1918; H.R. Cayton, "The Passing Throng," *Cayton's Weekly*, Apr. 27, 1918; "Coming Their Way," *Cayton's Weekly*, Dec. 29, 1917; "The Passing Throng," *Cayton's Weekly*, Sept. 15, 1917; Taylor, 30.

\$7,000.” She additionally purchased a \$3,000 residence on 22nd Avenue South. Helen O. Baker, in 1909, came to Seattle as a hair demonstrator at the Yukon Exposition and traveled all over to places like Spokane and Walla Walla to work as a hairdresser. In 1913, Madame Elizabeth DeNeal, opened and operated the DeNeal Hair Store, one of the largest beauty stores in the city and first modern beauty shop, until her retirement in 1937. She served both black and white clientele and was noted as “teaching the young colored girls of the Northwest the art of handling hair.” Many of these early women-owned businesses were short-lived, but they gave women financial independence, assured their social status, and legitimized them as reputable leaders within black circles.¹⁶

However, this presumed social and economic status did not protect African American women from the western brand of racism and sexually discriminatory practices. Racism in Seattle did not mirror the South where racial violence and disenfranchisement was the order of the day. Rather, as Taylor puts it, African Americans faced “a contradictory message of liberalism, paternalism, and race and class bias.” In 1908, an incident at Frederick & Nelson tested the temperature of Seattle’s race relations and black women’s place in the city. When the café inside the department store refused to serve Graves on the account of her race, a committee consisting of both black women and men protested the matter by urging every church to boycott the store. This “little nasty” and hundreds more like it would demonstrate to black women they needed to create more forceful organizations with political objectives that would challenge racial and discriminatory practices in “liberal” Seattle.¹⁷

¹⁶ H.R. Cayton, “The Passing Throng,” *Cayton’s Weekly*, Oct. 18, 1919, p. 1; “Coming Their Way,” *Cayton’s Weekly*, Dec. 29, 1917, p. 1; Arline D. English, “Beauty Shoppe Will Re-Open to New Name,” *The Northwest Enterprise*, June 25, 1937; “Obituary,” *Northwest Enterprise*, Feb. 1945. In 1922, Baker opened “Baker’s Kitchen” which she operated until her death in 1945.

¹⁷ Taylor, 45; Horace Cayton, “The Sunday Forum,” *The Seattle Republican*, June 29, 1906.

Black Women and the Movement for Suffrage

After failed attempts to pass a woman's suffrage bill in the late 19th century Territorial Legislature, in 1906, a renewed and more organized suffrage movement surged under the leadership of Emma Smith DeVoe, a white suffragist from Tacoma and organizer for the National American Woman Suffrage Association, and May Arkwright Hutton of Spokane. These ardent suffragists rallied hundreds of women across the state to solicit the support of voting age men for women's equality. Seattle women, reinvigorated with interest, set out to win the right to vote by declaring: "women without votes were classed by their tyrannical oppressors with idiots, insane persons, and criminals." While Washington State granted women some political rights, though limited, black women took advantage of what they perceived to be privileges denied in other states. For example, in 1908, when prominent suffragettes such as Dr. Fannie Leake Cummings, Katherine D. Stirian, Mrs. Edward C. Fick, Bessie R. Savage, and Edith Del Jarmuth neglected to register to vote in the local school elections out of protest, Susie Cayton was one out of the 468 qualified women who did exercise her right to register and vote.¹⁸

During the 1909-1910 campaign, the suffragists' lobbying efforts influenced a coalition of Progressives in the state legislature to pass a measure that would enable women's suffrage, pending a ratification vote by male voters in the November election of 1910. Suffragists heavily relied on the work of wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters rather than solely on rallies to influence their male counterparts. They widely distributed literature that earned the favor of many organized unions such as the Washington State Grange and the Farmer's Unions. White suffragists also relied on the votes of African Americans. At the 1909 African-Methodist

¹⁸ "Political Rights Women Fail to Register," *The Seattle Daily Times*, Dec. 3, 1908, p. 13. For more on Seattle women in the suffrage movement, see John Putnam, "A 'Test of Chiffon Politics:' Gender Politics in Seattle, 1897-1917.

Conference in Seattle, Elizabeth Baker and DeVoe successfully solicited attendees' support for women's suffrage. When each county voted in favor of the suffrage amendment to the Washington Constitution on November 8, 1910, Washington became the first state in the 20th century and the fifth western state in the country to pass such an amendment. According to Shanna Stevenson, Washington set the stage for the national suffrage amendment in 1920.¹⁹

There are not many available sources to make robust claims that black women had a great impact on the state's early suffrage movement before the 1910s, even though black women in the East worked tirelessly for suffrage while they were virtually ignored in the larger movement. However, it is not unreasonable to conclude that black women participated in and supported Washington suffrage efforts by signing petitions, discussing the issue in their circles, and applying pressure to their husbands and men in the community to support suffrage for women. In a 1908 issue of the *Seattle Republican*, an article appeared, most likely written by Susie Cayton, on the importance of women's suffrage. But what becomes clearly evident after 1910, a watershed moment in black women's history in Washington state, is the widespread political activity and contributions to the national suffrage movement among Seattle's black women that has been unnoticed by historians.²⁰

The passage of woman's suffrage had a profound impact on black women in Washington State and other states in the West. For the first time in the state's history, black women could not

¹⁹ Shanna Stevenson, "The Fight for Washington Women's Suffrage: A Brief History," Washington State Historical Society, accessed May 19, 2016, <http://www.washingtonhistory.org/files/library/TheFightforWashingtonWomensSuffrageABriefHistory.pdf>; Patricia Voeller Horner, "May Arkwright Hutton: Suffragist and Politician," in *Women in Pacific Northwest History* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988); Shanna Stevenson, *Women's Votes*, *Women's Voices: The Campaign for Equal Rights in Washington* (Tacoma: Washington Historical Society, 2009), 51-52. The Amendment only allowed those who could read and speak English the right to vote. Most immigrant Asians and Native Americans, restricted by citizenship laws, were excluded from the franchise. For more on women's suffrage in the American West, see Rebecca J. Mead, *How the Vote Was Won: Woman Suffrage in the Western United States, 1868-1914* (New York: New York University Press, 2004).

²⁰ "Equal Suffrage," *Seattle Republican*, Jan. 22, 1909, p. 5.

only vote and be counted as independent political beings apart from their husbands and fathers, but they exercised a right denied to millions of women in other parts of the country. The conditions in Washington State during this period were therefore ripe for women to take on more public and leadership roles, to make assertive stances on the pervasive racism and discrimination permeating the state and nation, and to openly defend their womanhood. Turkiya Lowe explains that “racial segregation was an informal and persistent reality in Washington State’s social environment” where African Americans “had to be vigilant to defend attempts to institutionalize racism within the state.”²¹

In 1913, for instance, twenty-two black citizens came together to organize the Seattle branch of the National Association for Colored People (NAACP). Much of the initial leadership comprised of fourteen men and eight women including Leticia A. Graves, a Dorcas Charity Club co-founder, beautician, and businesswoman, serving as its first president. Alice S. Presto, a fellow Dorcas member, was elected as the executive corresponding secretary. The early woman-led leadership of the NAACP projected the types of roles women performed, and it provides a glimpse into the gendered interplay of power between male and female leadership within the black community. The success and work of the organization depended heavily on its female membership. Between 1914 and 1921, women helped organize Emancipation Days, staged protest marches, filed lawsuits, and fought an inter-racial marriage bill. By 1918, the membership rose to 166 members.²²

Experiences in the NAACP did not and could not address the gender disparities and discrimination black women faced on a daily basis nor the social ills among the poor. The goals of the NAACP focused mainly on eliminating racial discrimination that often times

²¹ Lowe, 29.

²² Taylor, 88-89; *The Crisis Magazine*, Vol.16 No.4, (Aug. 1918), 173.

overshadowed sex discrimination and women's obligation to care for the poor. Seattle women branched out and banded with women across the state to form a statewide civic and social organization. In 1917, delegates from Seattle, Everett, Spokane, and Tacoma met at in Spokane at Bethel A.M.E. and formed the Washington State Federation of Colored Women. In its preamble, their main objective declared "to bring the women of the state into closer communication and acquaintance, for mutual helpfulness and the promotion of higher social, civic, and moral conditions."²³ Seattle women comprised half of the initial leadership with Bertie Corrine Carter elected as vice-president and Alice S. Presto as second vice-president. With the influence of Seattle women and their affiliated clubs such as the Sojourner Truth Club and the Woman's Political and Civic Alliance, black clubwomen built an organizational structure that supported collective social and political action to articulate and lobby for their community needs.²⁴

Throughout the 1910s and 1920s, women launched impressive campaigns for municipal reform, formed political-civic organizations, served as jurors and precinct judges, and tested the whims of the franchise by running for elected office. For instance, Beatrice Reams Ball became the second black woman to serve as a juror in 1913. African American women pioneers used their social status within the black community and utilized their skills of organizing developed in the last two decades to emerge as political and civic leaders. But just how did a small and almost

²³ For more information on the Washington State Federation of Colored Women's Club, see Turkiya Lowe. Much work has been done on the black women's club on the local, state, and national level that has increased our knowledge regarding black women's history. However, this concentration on clubwomen overshadows the work of countless women who did not affiliate with these middle-class organizations. My purpose here is to situate clubwomen within a larger cohort of women with similar goals and demonstrate how they established intra-racial coalitions among them. Conversely, my goal is to move beyond the club movement, though important, to understand how black women on the local level, particularly in Seattle, contributed to the leadership and political history of the region.

²⁴ "Preamble to WSFCW—Article II," 1917, Box 1, Folder 15, Accession No. 1081-002, Nettie J. Asberry Papers, 1912-1967, University of Washington Special Collections. Poor black women rejected membership in the WSFCW because they had more organizational options such as the Elks and other fraternal lodges and auxiliaries.

invisible population in the far western corner of the nation, isolated from the masses of blacks, wield any political power and influence? All roads lead to Alice S. Presto. Presto represented the genesis of black women's political awakening in Washington and serves as a window into understanding black women's organizing and political mobility in early Seattle.²⁵

Early Political Battles: Alice S. Presto and the Woman's Political and Civic Alliance

In 1899, Presto and her husband Walter Leo Presto, an Afro-Cuban immigrant, came to Seattle after they married on November 27, 1895 in Cambridge, Massachusetts. W.L. worked as a porter, laborer in the ship industry, and lay minister while Alice stayed home with the children. Although there is not much known on Presto's early life, she claimed to have been well-educated and graduated from an Eastern Seminary, while her husband was a graduate of the University of Boston. In 1902, the Prestos built a three-story home at 1818 30th Avenue, increasing the number of black homeowners in the city. She was affiliated with Grace Presbyterian Church while her husband attended First A.M.E. Church²⁶

As a respected member of Seattle's black elite through her service in the Dorcas Charity Club, the Pioneer Social Club, the WSFCW, and the local branch of the NAACP, Presto sought to organize black women across the city to exercise the franchise and participate in the civic affairs of the state. White suffragists had formed dozens of political and civic clubs in the city; many of them finding roots during and immediately after the suffrage campaigns. However,

²⁵ "A Juror," *The Crisis Magazine*, Vo.5, No. 6, (Apr. 1913), 274.

²⁶ "The Negro's Happy New Year," *The Seattle Republican*, Dec. 31, 1909, p. 2; Samuel P. DeBow and Edward A. Pitter, *Who's Who in Religious, Fraternal, Social, Civic, and Commercial Life on the Pacific Coast: State of Washington* (Seattle: The Searchlight Publishing Co., 1927), 53, 176. Walter L Alice S, *U.S. City Directories, 1822-1995*; digital image, [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2011. Accessed Sept. 4, 2015. https://search.ancestrylibrary.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?_phsrc=ljL39&_phstart=successSource&usePUBJs=true&gss=angsg&new=1&rank=1&msT=1&gsfn=walter&gsfn_x=0&gsln=presto&gsln_x=0&msypn__ftp=seattle,%20wa&msbdy=1879&catbucket=rstp&MSAV=0&uidh=763&pcat=ROOT_CATEGORY&h=751546366&dbid=2469&indiv=1&ml_rpos=8.

there had not been much organizing among black women to equip them for their new political right and transition them into full citizenship as there had been for white women.²⁷

In April of 1916, Presto founded the Woman's Civic and Political Alliance (WCPA) and became its first president.²⁸ The goal of the organization was three-fold: to register each black woman of voting age in the city; educate them on all levels of government; and to serve as a voice for black women. Within a month of its inception, the Woman's Alliance boasted a membership of 100 women and by September, they had recruited 143 members. A year later in 1917, membership reportedly increased to 201 members. Despite this growth, members encountered major and unexpected difficulties in registering women to vote. At a public meeting, Clara J. Bonner, wife of Arthur R. Bonner, vice-president of the Profit Sharing Association, reported that she surprisingly "found the colored women indifferent about exercising the right of franchise." While voting was generally new for all women, some black women felt more apprehensive. This apprehension and resistance, as historian Rosalyn Terborg-Penn suggests, stemmed from black women's experiences of "slavery, illiteracy, poverty, and gender proscription [that] provided significant barriers to thwart group political awakening." The Woman's Alliance, in response, launched intensive voter registration drives and meetings to help educate women on government and the importance of voting.²⁹

The Woman's Alliance understood all too well the social, economic, and political disadvantage of belonging to a group with a small population. At the WSFCW first annual

²⁷ Patricia V. Horner, "May Arkwright Hutton," 31.

²⁸ Charter members include: Mrs. N.T. Fisher, Mrs. William Chandler, Mrs. W.M. Casmon, Mrs. R. Booker, and Mrs. W.L. Presto (Alice).

²⁹ "Town Topics," *Cayton's Weekly*, May 11, 1918; *Cayton's Weekly*, Dec. 20, 1919, p. 2; "Women's Alliance Meets," *The Seattle Star*, May 25, 1916, p. 2; "Women Indorse Hughes," *The Seattle Sunday Times*, June 25, 1916, p. 19; "The Passing Throng," *Cayton's Weekly*, Oct. 18, 1919; Minutes of the First Annual Meeting, June 27-28, 1918, "Club Reports," June 25, 1919, Box 1, Folder 9, Accession No. 1081-002, Nettie J. Asberry Papers, 1912-1967, University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections; Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, *African American Women and the Struggle for the Vote, 1850-1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 159.

convention, they reported that the organization was “ever on the alert to note bills and laws unfavorable to our people and at various times have filed letters and petitions to our Congressmen, protesting the same.” In 1917, the Woman’s Political and Civic Alliance in protested the St. Louis lynching, urging their Congressmen Wesley L. Jones to use his influence Congress to end mob law.³⁰

Presto and white Republicans knew that, despite the figures, black women comprised a new voting bloc that could strengthen the already dominant Republican Party. To be sure, the local newspaper reported that “it is an undeniable fact that more candidates sought to speak to the Alliance with the hope of being put in a favorable light before the great mass of colored voters than before any other organization of colored people in the state.” There is little evidence that the group marketed itself as a Republican organization, but its leaders profoundly supported the party and held public meetings each election season, inviting primarily local and state Republican candidates to address the women and explain their platforms. For instance, on May 25, 1916, the women invited the Honorable Frank G. Green to address the group at Mount Zion Baptist Church. Three months later, on August 4, Republican candidates for office, John E. Ballaine (Congress), Robert A. Tripple (county clerk), and M.L. Hamilton (sheriff) spoke at the Woman’s Alliance meeting held at the home of Mrs. James A. Roston. Earlier that year, the Alliance unanimously endorsed the Republican nominee, Charles E. Hughes, for the presidency of the United States. When the Hughes’ Special Campaign Tour, comprised of prominent white Republican women, stopped in Seattle that October, the Woman’s Political Alliance joined together with over a dozen white women to participate in an automobile parade that marshaled

³⁰ Letter to Honorable Wesley L. Jones, Aug. 20, 1917, Box 1, Folder 4, Accession No. 1081-002, Nettie J. Asberry Papers, 1912-1967, University of Washington Special Collections; “Minutes of the First Annual Meeting,” June 25, 1919, Nettie J. Asberry Papers.

the special party from the train station to the Moore Theater.³¹

Members of the Woman's Political Alliance endeavored to create a political identity that would make them visible electors as well as candidates due to Presto's strategic planning. Presto advertised the organization's meetings and activities in the *Seattle Daily Times*, a widely-read publication, and pushed the organization further by developing interracial coalitions. In 1918, *Cayton's Weekly* described the success of the organization under her leadership:

Mrs. Alice Presto...has been doing good work in the interest of the colored folk of this city and county. It [Woman's Political Alliance] took an active part in the 1916 Republican campaign and made many friends. It plans to be heard in the coming campaign and hopes to be able to accomplish even more than it did in the last county campaign.³²

During the next election cycle in 1918, the women did "plan to be heard." The time seemed right and the conditions were favorable for Presto to move the organization in a different direction to thrust black women out of the abyss of obscurity. She had worked for two years to secure "friends" among the state's Republicans and heavily campaigned in the 1916 elections. On August 10, 1918, Presto decided to make her bid for state senate on the Republican ticket from the 37th legislative district, becoming the first African American woman in Washington to run for the state legislature and, according to the *Negro Year Book*, *Chicago Defender*, and *Crisis Magazine*, was believed to be the first black woman to do so in the nation.³³

³¹ "Women's Alliance Meets," *The Seattle Star*, May 25, 1916, p. 2; "Candidates to Speak," *The Seattle Daily Times*, Aug. 4, 1916, p. 9; "Women's Alliance Meets," *The Seattle Star*, May 22, 1916, p. 2; "Women Tell Why They Want Hughes," *The Seattle Daily Times*, Oct. 13, 1916, p. 10; Ed Diaz, ed., *Horace Roscoe Cayton: Selected Writings*-Volume 2, Special Editions 1896, 1917, 1920, 1923, (Seattle: Bridgewater Collins, 2002), 54.

³² "Town Topics," *Cayton's Weekly*, May 11, 1918. It should be noted that in 1917 the Woman's Civic and Political Alliance affiliated with the WSFCW.

³³ "First Negro Woman Candidate for a State Legislature," *The Negro Year Book: An Annual Encyclopedia of the Negro*, (Tuskegee Institute, Ala., Negro Year Book Publishing Co., 1918-1919), 56-57; "Woman Makes Fight for Seat in Senate," *The Chicago Defender*, Aug. 1918, p. 1; "Politics," *The Crisis Magazine*, Vol. 17, No.1 (Nov. 1918), 6. During their annual meeting in 1918, Presto stepped down as president to take on a position as assistant secretary possibly in order to cultivate other women leaders and make plans to run for elective office. She, nevertheless, remained a force in the organization. Members elected new officers for the ensuing year: President, Mrs. G.W. DuPee; vice president, Clara Bonner; secretary, Allie DuPee; assistant secretary, Alice S. Presto; and treasurer, Mrs. Frank Harris.

Presto's campaign embodied an anti-racist, class-conscious, and women-centered message, which supported women, children, laborers, minorities, and the expansion of state government. Ahead of her time, Presto advocated for equal pay for women, an increase in widows' pension, an Industrial Insurance Act for workers, reforms to child labor laws, state control of coal mines, and free tuition for children of taxpayers attending state institutions. She vehemently condemned all forms of discrimination and promised to give a "square deal" to the citizens of Washington.³⁴

The Woman's Political and Civic Alliance served as a springboard for her campaign. The group held a meeting at First A.M.E to endorse her candidacy and make the campaign their primary objective until the election in November. *Cayton's Weekly* provided strong support by endorsing her campaign and urging black voters to vote for their "own."³⁵

While black and white women across the nation continued to push for a women's suffrage amendment to the Constitution, Presto ran against three white male Republican candidates, Ed Palmer (a noted politician), George B. Lamping, and Charles S. Tilton; and one male Democrat, Thorwald Slegfried. In August of 1918, she received 460 votes to the winning candidate's 1,205 votes. Given that the approximate black female electorate totaled 942 in addition to the 1,389, eligible black male voters in 1920, it can be suggested that either voter turnout was low or many blacks did not vote for a woman candidate. Presto may have well known that she would not win the election. But the fact that she ran is significant in that she gained the attention of whites in the city, demonstrating that black women could and would exercise their newfound political right to not only vote, but also dare to run for public office.

³⁴ "First Negro Woman Candidate for a State Legislature," *The Negro Year Book: An Annual Encyclopedia of the Negro*, (Tuskegee Institute, Ala., Negro Year Book Publishing Co., 1918-1919), 56-57.

³⁵ "Political Potpourri," *Cayton's Weekly*, Aug. 31, 1918; "Political Potpourri," *Cayton's Weekly*, Aug. 24, 1918.

She taught women how to use the ballot to speak about the issues, provided a platform to give a voice to women, and became an example of how to run for office. Her daring move gave the small community of black women some visibility and challenged male leadership, both black and white, to address issues sensitive to women and laborers.³⁶

Presto's emergence as a race and political leader did not come without conflict among black male leadership. The local branch of the NAACP proves to be the best example of this - racial conflict. The local NAACP comprised a membership of the most successful black leaders and stood as the center of civil rights activities; however, it had been fraught with internal divisions stemming from egos, difficult personalities, and personal rivalries. Horace Cayton, editor of *Cayton's Weekly*, frequently exposed the young organization's many battles and used his paper to attack members with whom he disagreed. At a fiery NAACP mass meeting in 1919, members argued over who would represent the Seattle Branch as a delegate to the national NAACP's ten-year anniversary in Boston. Presto threw her name in the hat, which ignited a firestorm of scathing barrages from Cayton in his newspaper. He referred to Presto and her husband as "Big Wind and Little Wind" stating, "Without a word of warning they were there and many others whom we have not seen before...and for what? to send Mrs. Presto to a gathering of learned men and women among whom she would rattle around like a mustard seed in a tin can." He continued to question her qualifications as a woman in order to build a case for why a male representative was more favorable.³⁷ He argued that the Seattle representative:

Should possess the mental capacity to absorb that from the great leaders...and return home to transmit the same to the Seattle folks...With no selfish motives this paper suggested the name S.H. Stone [president] for the delegate and it did so because Mr.

³⁶ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Population – Washington*, 1920. Table 8 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1922), 086; Hanes Walton, Sherman C. Puckett, Donald R. Deskins, *The African American Electorate: A Statistical History* (London: Sage Publications, 2012), 401.

³⁷ Horace Cayton, "The Passing Throng," *Cayton's Weekly*, May 3, 1919, p. 1.

Stone is a business man among business men of Seattle and the people of the East would see that the Seattle Branch had cut out the tommy rot of sending make shifts to talk business with business men.³⁸

The contentious intra-racial and gendered conflict of the Seattle NAACP reflected a divide among male and female leaders in regard to who was a “legitimate” ambassador or spokesperson for Seattle’s black community. Alice S. Presto struck back in a newly established newspaper, *Searchlight*, founded by her friend Samuel DeBow in 1919. Presto responded to the personal attacks against her and, in doing so, she vehemently spoke out against the defamation of black womanhood. She first condemned Cayton’s malicious attacks, calling his publication “The Profanity Sheet” and deemed him inferior as well as a “leper of degeneracy.” She then went on to emphasize her educational pedigree, stating that, “I am not a back number from the woods of Kansas; but a graduate of an Eastern seminary...” But more tactically, she dismissed his claims by illuminating her competence and leadership abilities in the community.³⁹ She stated:

I am quite able to finance a trip East, I’m not begging to represent the N.A.A.C.P., but the large number who are backing my candidacy[,] both for this and for State Senator, must have thought me capable of representing any body of people. But he that so maliciously [sp] assailed me...if the impression be given that those who take active parts in public affairs, are not representative, then those who are back numbers, and are just being recognized by their own race, must be, comparatively, an eighth of a mustard seed.⁴⁰

This public clash between the community’s most respected leaders led Presto to resign from her post as executive secretary of the NAACP and leave the organization altogether.⁴¹

To sustain the political and civic work among black women in Seattle, Presto organized socials, fundraisers, and entertainments to finance their cause. For the upcoming 1919 election, she planned a grand recital at First A.M.E. for the sole purpose of registering women to vote and

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Alice Presto, *The Searchlight*, May 17, 1919.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ “Editorial Paragraphs,” *Cayton’s Weekly*, Feb. 8, 1919, p. 1.

educating them on political issues. She stated, “Many of the colored women of the city must be educated to use properly the voting privilege granted them. Our organization has absolutely no income. We charge no membership fee. Whenever we need funds to carry on our work in the interest of better citizenship we are compelled to give some sort of an entertainment.”⁴²

Presto continued to remain relevant throughout the 1920s, working with the Woman’s Alliance and the Washington State Federation of Colored Women while building broader coalitions with white women when she joined the King County Republican Women’s Club. She, also, was elected as treasurer of the King County Legislative Federation.⁴³

The Woman’s Political Alliance maintained its powerful presence in the community. The editor of the *Searchlight* acknowledged that it became “sought after for counsel and advice at every city, state organizational election as is no other organization in our midst.” The organization, having earned respect and political favors from city officials, established a Precinct Committee that placed pressure on their endorsed candidates to appoint four women, Alice Presto, Mrs. N.T. Fisher, Mrs. J.H. Winston, and Mrs. Lemuel Jenkins, as Judges of Election. In 1923, the organization made plans to expand its reach outside of Washington state to launch perhaps the largest political education campaign among black women. According to the *Seattle Daily Times*, Presto announced that the group voted to travel to Illinois, California, and Ohio as a part of an “educational campaign to get all women eligible to vote out to the polls.” Scant evidence does not allow us to know the details of the campaign, if it actually occurred, or the correspondence between the organization and women back East and on the West Coast. However, from a 1920 report to the WSFCW mid-winter session, Presto contended that “without proper use of the ballot we will continue to be stigmatized and set aside as a race.” What can be

⁴² “Plan Recital to Help Out Drive,” *The Seattle Daily Times*, Oct. 26, 1919, p. 8.

⁴³ “Stands for Better Citizens,” *The Seattle Daily Times*, Apr. 17, 1923, p. 13.

inferred is that the Woman's Political and Civic Alliance, through the WSFCW, had forged ties with a broader network of prominent black suffragists and civic activists in the NACW, who, new to the franchise, propelled a nationwide civic education movement to politically train and educate women new to the franchise. The women's thirteen years of experience in formal political affairs and familiarity with the election process may have prompted them to lend their assistance to sisters back East. Nonetheless, the vote to proceed with such a campaign revealed the organization's magnitude of power, influence, and the sense of connection with a larger imagined black community of women to participate in and assert themselves in American politics and public life. Presto and the Woman's Alliance continued to work "to bring political justice and true recognition to the Negro" throughout the decade.⁴⁴

World War I and the Rise of a Modern Era

As black women labored to form a political identity in the city, they also participated in the war effort as an extension of this identity in order to prove loyalty and further make claims to citizenship through wartime volunteerism. When the United States entered into World War I in 1917, Congress established Camp Lewis just south of Tacoma, which brought several thousand African American soldiers to the Pacific Northwest including their wives. Immediately the Woman's Political Alliance established a Red Cross Auxiliary, the first black auxiliary of the Red Cross Chapter of Seattle to support the war effort and black troops stationed at Fort Lewis.⁴⁵ Other women's organizations followed suit such as the Dorcas Charity Club that established the

⁴⁴ *The Searchlight*, May 1, 1920; *The Searchlight*, Feb. 21, 1920; "State Federation of Womens Clubs Holds Interesting Meeting," *The Searchlight*, Feb. 14, 1920; "Women Would Awaken Voters in Other States," *The Seattle Daily Times*, Dec. 13, 1923, p. 2; *The Searchlight*, May 1, 1920. For more on the NACW's political education campaign, see Quin'Nita Cobbins, "Making 'Good' Citizens: Education, Citizenship, and the National Association of Colored Women, 1920-1941," (MA Thesis, University of Georgia), 2012.

⁴⁵ The Auxiliary was headed by Mrs. George L. Fields.

Dorcas Red Cross. Members sewed, purchased war bonds, cut bandages, and planned social activities for the soldiers. At the end of the war in 1919, Mrs. George L. Fields, Chairman of the Washington Progressive Club auxiliary to the Red Cross, logged a record of 2,666 working-hours with the Red Cross and received a commendation by the War History of the Red Cross, one of the largest of its kind in the world.”⁴⁶

The war dramatically transformed the state’s economy. An increase in demand for military material and ships made shipbuilding the largest industry in the region. Seattle claimed 41 shipyards as it expanded to meet the rapid need. Boeing, founded in 1916, received its first federal contracts to build military planes and soon became the largest private company in the state by the early 1940s. Due to government spending and a need for replacement labor for white male draftees, black men and women capitalized on the commercial and employment opportunities created by the war. Bertie Corrine Carter persuaded Frederick & Nelson to hire fifteen black women as janitors “to fill the places made vacant by the men employed there going to war.” Carter was vice-president of the WSFCW, the city’s first African American “special” policewoman, and wife of prominent Mount Zion pastor, William D. Carter. She also convinced the company to hire four other women, each receiving fifteen dollars per week. Emma Houston Hancock, for example, was “soon [to] be regularly employed” at the Goldstein Building as an elevator operator while Leticia A. Graves profited from the new migrations in the city and the booming economy by investing in prime real estate.⁴⁷

After the war, Seattle’s black women continued to lobby for community needs and

⁴⁶ Lowe, 45-46; *The Searchlight*, Aug. 2, 1919; *The Searchlight*, Nov. 15, 1919.

⁴⁷ “Purely Personal,” *Cayton’s Weekly*, Jan. 12, 1918; “Women in Early Seattle: Looking and Hoping for Justice,” Seattle Municipal Archives, Accessed June 8, 2016, <https://www.seattle.gov/cityarchives/exhibits-and-education/online-exhibits/women-in-city-government/women-in-early-seattle>. Bertie Corrine Carter was a volunteer for the police department in 1912 and was designated a “special policewoman” in 1914 in order to ease the burden of paying her car far expenses to and from the precinct. She never received payment for her work with the police department helping black children.

engage in civic activities. Lowe writes that women, particularly clubwomen, “used a gendered notion of female leadership to claim a moral authority to pursue their civic activities” without jeopardizing their “representation of female respectability.” Nowhere was this more apparent than through the founding in 1919 of the Sojourner Truth Home, a boardinghouse for black single women, unwed mothers, and young girls affected by the post-World War I economic downturn. Located at 1422 23rd Avenue, the Sojourner Truth Home became the most recognized symbol of women’s social and economic advancement, which allowed them room to carry on racial uplift work. The Home offered a residence for women who had come to the city without kinship networks. Clara Bonner, a noted clubwoman and co-founder of the Home, stated that the women of Seattle can “have a place to have their social amusements from the highest social standpoint and as a place to learn how to do civic and uplift work.”⁴⁸

Clubwomen did often use gendered language to describe their social and civic activities, but a closer reading of clubwomen’s actions show that claims of moral authority was inextricably tied to their goals of claiming citizenship and elevating black womanhood. Mrs. N.T. Fisher, clubwoman, co-founder of the Home, and member of the Woman’s Political and Civic Alliance, announced that the Home provided a great service to the humanitarian needs of the race and would cause “people to become so developed...that in the next decade the ruling factions in the city will ascribe unto us as a race a political status such as we have never possessed in the history of the state.” She also claimed that clubwomen sought to earn recognition and respect for black women and girls while repudiating slanderous reports that “we possess no buildings in which to carry on social service work.” The Home, thus, functioned as a political institution, one that

⁴⁸ Lowe, 49; “The Sojourner Truth Club, Officials and Members,” *Searchlight*, May 10, 1919, p. 1; *Cayton’s Weekly*, Dec. 14, 1918, pp. 1-2. When the Sojourner Truth Club was inducted in the WSFCWC at annual convention, the Sojourner Truth Home became the headquarters of the WSFCWC activities and programs for the next several decades.

offered women a space to strategize, organize, cultivate young leaders, discuss important issues pertaining to women, and defend their womanhood.⁴⁹

If the Sojourner Truth Home provided a space for social, charitable, and political work, the founding of the Wheatley Home in 1919 under the auspices of the 24th Ave YWCA Branch, later known as the East Cherry YWCA, supported moral uplift and thrift. In 1916, Bertie Corrine Carter organized the first “colored” branch of the YWCA due to the exclusion of African Americans from the main organization’s recreational facilities. The Phyllis Wheatley Home provided recreational activities, social services, and a meeting space for the developing black community. It also offered young women classes in sewing, dress-making, swimming, millinery, tailoring, Bible study, knitting, and French. Although the Phyllis Wheatley Branch of the YWCA was always managed and maintained by black women, “the facilities came under the authority of the all-white YWCA executive boards.” Racism limited black women’s participation in the larger, religious organization; however, Carter helped to maneuver through these racial and gender limitations by building an organization, solidly staffed by black women, to foster future leaders, provide social and recreational services, and contribute to the development of an urban black community. Many WSFCW members such as Julia Brown, Jessie L. Shields, Marjorie Pitter, and especially Idell Vertner served as executive assistants, facility managers, and volunteers well into the 1940s.⁵⁰

Because of the class stratification within the black community, the steady flow of migrants as well as the cultural changes of the 1920s influenced many working-class black

⁴⁹ The Searchlight, May 10, 1919.

⁵⁰ Lowe, 58-59, 90. “Y.W.C.A. Has Served Community 22 Years,” *The Northwest Enterprise*, Sept. 15, 1939. In 1933, Idell Vertner, Virginia Clark Gayton, Bertha Pitts Campbell founded the Alpha Omicron Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Inc., the first African American Greek letter organization established in the Pacific Northwest.

women who did not fit the moral standards and socio-economic status of older pioneering families in the 1920s. The rise of jazz and blues singers such as Bessie Smith coupled with the new fashion adorned by “the modern woman” publicized African American women’s sexuality. These influences had a profound impact on Seattle as migrants brought with them these tastes and styles to the music scene found on Jackson Street, known as the “Red Light District” or the “Black Belt of Seattle.” Edythe Turnham, who came to Spokane from Kansas, organized her family into a five-piece band, the Knights of Syncopation. Edythe played the piano while her husband played the drums and their young on the saxophone. Her sister Maggie performed as a dancer and entertainer. As early as 1922, the family performed around 12th and Jackson, known as the hub of the jazz scene, and played all over Seattle, especially in downtown, where it was common for only white musicians to perform. This continued until Local No. 76, an all-white musicians’ union, protested.⁵¹

Clubwomen and members of the Y.W.C.A. saw themselves as the cultured and moral authorities of the race and tried to maintain prohibition in order to protect families, women, and children from the abuses of alcohol. Many black women, however, frequented these nightclubs and engaged in what was considered unfeminine behavior and vice.⁵² Marguerite Carroll remembered that her parents’ friends Papa and Momma Butz “had a cabaret upstairs in a building downtown” where the “music was going.” “Women sat at the tables and drank their beer and whiskey, while the men sat at the bars. But the women didn’t go to the bar, they just sat

⁵¹ Allison Marie O’Connor, “Edythe Turnham Orchestra,” *BlackPast.org*. Accessed Nov. 1, 2016, <http://www.blackpast.org/aah/edythe-turnham-orchestra>>. For more on jazz and blues women, see Paul de Barros, *Jackson Street After Hours: The Roots of Jazz in Seattle*, (Seattle: Sasquatch Books, 1993); Angela Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude “Ma” Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998).

⁵² In 1932, middle-class and pious black women worked to repeal Prohibition after noticing the effects it had caused by producing corruption, violent crime by bootlegging, and underground drinking. Carol “Curfew” Peoples was named to the membership committee of the Women’s Organization for National Prohibition Reform and was appointed state organizer among black women of Washington to initiate a campaign to repeal the Prohibition Act. “Mrs. Peoples Works for Repeal of Prohibition Act,” *The Northwest Enterprise*, July 14, 1932, p. 1.

at the table.” During the 1930s, women would become club owners, singers, and musicians, contributing to the cultural scene of Seattle that would influence a new generation of black musicians and artists in the 1950s and 1960s.⁵³

The advent of a Black Nationalist movement also attracted a number of women who appealed to the message of racial pride, global black political unity, and economic self-sufficiency. Marcus Garvey’s broad appeal reached the Northwestern section when he spoke at the Madison Theater in 1919. Supporters established a local Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) office on 12th and Washington. According to Carroll, the UNIA provided a dance hall there where they had dances. Her grandmother attended many lectures and donated money towards the “Back to Africa” initiative. Women members served as Black Cross nurses and participated in the Black Nurse Class such as Jamaican-born Sarah Lynch while men served as members of the paramilitary African Legion. Juanita Warfield Proctor recalled, “My mother was one of the Black Cross Nurses. There were about fifty to a hundred women that belonged to the Black Cross Nurses. They practiced first aid. I’ll never forget how they used to march in the parades. Like the Memorial Day parade and Fourth of July parade.” When Garvey was indicted on charges of mail fraud and deported to Jamaica, the movement in Seattle quickly disbanded by 1927.⁵⁴

By the end of the 1920s, black women’s population steadily grew from 1,223 to 1,486 in 1930. Black male migration followed a similar pattern, expanding from 1,671 to 1,817. Seattle and the entire Pacific Northwest continued to experience demographic, cultural, and social changes during the post-war years. White migrants from Eastern states as well as those from the South who came to work in the shipyards during the war also made the region their new home.

⁵³ Mumford, *Seven Stars and Orion*, 36.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 36, 44.

These newcomers disrupted the ostensibly amicable race relations between blacks and whites and endangered African Americans political and social rights. Gustave B. Aldrich, an attorney from Tacoma, exclaimed, “The West is changing... Washington Negroes should wake up. The race question is becoming more acute here. Southern hatred is being taught... Southern anti-Negro books placed and the way being paved for your utter downfall and humiliation, right here in Washington.”⁵⁵

Black women, thus, had to remain vigilant in their fight for racial and economic justice, which had dire consequences in the postwar recession. Black women workers, including those comprising of the upper echelon, were particularly vulnerable to postwar conditions. The waitresses’ union barred African American women from membership, “making it difficult to obtain jobs in nonblack restaurants.” Japanese male servants and Swedish female workers presented competition for domestic jobs, positions largely held by black women in the nation’s largest cities. Taylor explains that “these groups never completely replaced black women as domestic servants, but their willingness to take these jobs reminded local African Americans that in Seattle, unlike eastern cities, even menial positions could be contested.” Even Susie Cayton, a reputable civic leader and daughter of a former U.S. senator, could only find work as a domestic laborer when her husband’s newspaper, *Cayton’s Weekly*, folded in 1921. Her daughter, Madge, a University of Washington graduate with a degree in international business, suffered a similar fate when she could only work as a waitress and cashier. LeEtta Saunders King recalled, “It was very difficult for a colored woman to find any kind of work, other than domestic.” To be sure of the restrictions black women faced in terms of occupational mobility, in 1910, 84 percent of black women worked in domestic and private home service; by 1940, 84 percent remained in that

⁵⁵ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Population – Washington*, 1930. Vol. 3. Table 12 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1931), 1222. Gustave B. Aldrich, “The Back Wash of Time,” *The Searchlight*, Nov. 27, 1920.

category. Seattle's core black workers, therefore, remained concentrated in service occupations making a living as maids, railroad porters, hotel waiters, and ship stewards that continued well into the 1930s.⁵⁶

The Great Depression and the Great Political Divide

In autumn of 1929 when the stock market crashed, cities across the U.S. slumped into a severe economic crisis that continued until the outbreak of World War II. The economic downturn adversely affected all groups of Americans, but African Americans bore the worst problems of the Depression. Black women leaders in Seattle as in other cities responded to this crisis by taking advantage of expanded government social service programs and by placing increasing pressure on local and state officials to address the needs of African Americans in the city. At the same time, the Depression caused profound political changes among African Americans as the black electorate shifted to the Democratic Party. Republicans struggled to maintain black voters under the administration of Herbert Hoover. No longer did the Republican Party and its established black female leadership speak for Seattle's black women. New political leadership emerged among women that sought to shape and give a voice to the black female electorate. Political divisions compelled both white male and female Republican leaders to seek African American women's counsel and rely on their activism to retain the control of the black vote. Moreover, the rise of female labor union activism and their political campaign for jobs and fair wages provided a different voice for poor and working-class women. This growth of female labor leadership in this period would eventually help influence Washington legislators to pass a Fair Employment Practices Act in 1949.

⁵⁶ Taylor, 57, 61; Mumford, 8.

By the 1930s, as the continuing Depression made it clear that black women could no longer depend on their meager resources and self-help programs to address community needs, they chose to play a more active role in Seattle's electoral politics. In trying to survive the economic calamity, they found hope in President Franklin D. Roosevelt's creation of New Deal programs in 1933 that expanded the government's role and his establishment of a "Black Cabinet." The integration of black leaders as consultants and heads of programs, though not fully representative of the people, symbolized a government awakening to the plight of African Americans, and it opened a new foray into black political activism for women. Mary McLeod Bethune's founding of the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW) in 1935 and her appointment by Roosevelt as Director of the Division of Negro Affairs of National Youth Administration, for instance, was the closest black women ever came to political power in the nation and signified a new era of black women's political leadership.

A large number of new political organizations in Seattle surfaced throughout the decade that reflected this changing political tide. These groups provided an alternative voice for women, inspired interest among the race to vote, educate voters on the platforms of the candidates, exercise political influence by endorsing nominees, and ran candidates for office. In 1936, a group of civic-minded women formed the City Service League to "secure more adequate representation for Negroes in the municipal administrations" and endorse candidates. Women residing in south Seattle along the Rainier Valley corridor gave support to the newly formed South End Civic and Progressive Club (SECPC). The club offered black Seattleites, frustrated with partisan politics, some variety in their choices for candidates, and its members represented multiple political perspectives. During the 1932 election cycle, the club welcomed both Democratic and Republican representatives from different organizations to speak on behalf of

their choice for president before the group made an endorsement. In the end, the group endorsed overwhelmingly Democratic candidates for positions on city, state, and federal levels.⁵⁷

The King County Colored Democratic Club (KCCDC) and the Democratic Progressive Club (DPC) both formed in this period attracted a large number of men and women to its mass meetings.⁵⁸ After having won Democratic elections during the 1932 election cycle, the club gained traction as a formidable opponent to the long-standing King County Republican Club that traced its roots back to the 1910s. The King County Democratic Club's need for stronger female support led to the creation of the Colored Women's Democratic Club (CWDC). Both of these organizations worked for the betterment of the party by aligning their goals with those of the Democratic Party. The separation of gendered leadership in these organizations, however, illustrates how black men assumed dominance in political affairs although women were members. The women's political groups served as an auxiliary to the KCCDC and assisted the organization in traditional duties such as secretary. Instead, the formation of a separate woman's organization led to an unintended consequence of women taking on more political leadership roles in sustaining both organizations through their organizing, recruiting, and fundraising efforts.⁵⁹

The growing influence of the King County Democratic Club, the Colored Women Democratic Club, and the South End Colored Progressive Club allowed women to secure government jobs, benefit aid, and contracts in the city as New Deal programs expanded. In

⁵⁷ "South End Civic Club Names Political Ticket," *The Northwest Enterprise*, Oct. 27, 1932; Arline D. English, "Social Notes," *The Northwest Enterprise*, Feb. 21, 1936; "Four Colored Democrat Clubs in Seattle," *The Northwest Enterprise*, Feb. 2, 1933.

⁵⁸ These organizations consisted of both male and female members.

⁵⁹ "Social Notes and Church Notes," *The Northwest Enterprise*, Aug. 21, 1936. Other democratic clubs included King County Colored Democratic Inc., and the Young Voter Colored Democratic Club of King County. These organizations formed in response to differences in opinion, leadership styles, and conflicts within black democratic circles.

1933, the new Democratic commissioners, John C. Stevenson and Louis Nash appointed Candace Black as a county social welfare worker based on the recommendation of the SECPC and KCDC. Black was a graduate of the University of Washington and had gained professional experience under Mrs. Gordon Carter, the only black woman social worker in the city. Black declared that without the KCDC and the SECPC's "intelligent and businesslike endeavors...the position would never have been open to any Negro—qualified or unqualified." In the same year, three men and two women, LeEtta S. King, a noted pianist, and Mrs. L.B. Young, were appointed to the new County Welfare Board to take "charge of relief for the unemployed."⁶⁰

Perhaps one of the largest relief efforts came in 1936 when members of the Colored Women Democratic Club secured a Works Progress Administration (WPA) sewing room project located at 1439 22nd Avenue in East Madison. The project employed an initial seventy-five women. Marjorie Pitter worked to obtain approval for the project and reported their activities to the State Consultant on Women. Pitter, an early pioneer and wife of Democratic activist Edward Pitter, headed the organization. Isham F. Norris, secretary of the KCDC, appointed Edith Johnson as manager of the project. The East Madison sewing room received much attention and unanticipated white backlash. Many white residents erroneously claimed that the organization operated a segregationist sewing room with WPA funds. Ironically, similar sewing rooms had been established all over the city in districts such as Ballard, West Seattle, Columbia City, and Rainier Beach that consisted of primarily white residents. This particular sewing room, organized as a community project to benefit unemployed women in East Madison, enabled workers to be

⁶⁰ "Candace Black Appointed County Welfare Worker," *The Northwest Enterprise*, Jan. 12, 1933; Candace Black, "Letter of Appreciation," *The Northwest Enterprise*, Jan. 19, 1933; Sadie McIver, "Five Colored Employed By County Welfare Board," *The Northwest Enterprise*, Feb. 23, 1933. Candace R. Black was born in Seattle and was the daughter of Candace M. Black and Andrew Black, an attorney.

to be near the place of their employment.⁶¹

The singular gains made by black democratic activists weakened the Republican Party, but it incidentally energized new leadership among black Republican women. In 1931, when Mary Brown became the new president of the King County Colored Women's Republican Club (KCCWRC), she represented a new mantle of leadership that would thrust black women into statewide politics. The KCCWRC was formed in the late 1920s under the leadership of Clara Bonner, clubwoman and co-founder of the Sojourner Truth Home, to organize black women to register to vote and support candidates in the Republican Party. Like the Colored Women Democratic Club, the KCCWRC worked jointly with the King County Colored Republican Club (KCCRC), serving as an influential women's political auxiliary.⁶²

Brown and the KCCWRC took collective action to be visible and involved. In 1934, George Flood, Chairman of the King County Central Republican Committee, held a conference with thirteen black Republican representatives. Ophelia Hall, former secretary of the KCCWRC and Carol C. Peoples, a member of the executive committee, were the only women representatives present. Flood urged these black leaders to sway voters back into the Party in order to win the November elections. The Republican Party, according to Flood, "realized it could not be done without the full support of colored voters." Over the next year, the *Northwest Enterprise* reported that African American Republicans including women were invited to participate into party councils and "played an important part in shaping policies and platform planks."⁶³

⁶¹ "Democratic Club Reports W.P.A. Project Opened," *The Northwest Enterprise*, Jan. 3, 1936; "Progressive Demo. Club Clears Up Segregation," *The Northwest Enterprise*, Jan. 10, 1936; "Progressive Democratic Club Clears Up Segregation," *The Northwest Enterprise*, Jan. 10, 1936. The Washington State Colored Democratic Club, the Progressive Colored Democratic Club, and the Colored Women's Club opened a headquarters at 2032 E. Madison St. in August of 1936.

⁶² Arline D. English, "Social Notes," *The Northwest Enterprise*, Jan. 24, 1936.

⁶³ "Colored Republicans Confer With Leaders," *The Northwest Enterprise*, Oct. 4, 1934; "Negroes Are Active In

Black women activists of the KCCWRC capitalized on the vulnerabilities of the Republican Party as well as the opportunities for leadership within political circles. When Democrats won in every county across Washington State in 1934, ousting Republican officeholders, they ended the 38-year Republican control of the King County courthouse. However, Republicans won in precinct districts populated by African Americans in Seattle. Women worked across interracial lines in pursuit of gaining allies and “friends.” For instance, at the 20th anniversary of the Women’s King County Republican Club, Mrs. J.T. Urquhart, national Republican committeewoman, invited Myrtle B. Purnell, a member of the KCCRWC, to speak. Purnell delivered a speech entitled, “On Interests to Look Forward to...of Educated Women from the King County Colored Republican Club.”⁶⁴

During the election cycle of 1936, Mary Brown and the KCCRWC waged an aggressive campaign to win back the support and votes of African Americans and recruit new unregistered voters. Carol C. Peoples and Prentis I. Frazier, president of the KCCRC, directed a massive countywide voter registration campaign to register one hundred percent of every eligible voter and educate them on “the importance of exercising their right of suffrage.” When the Republican State Convention convened in Seattle, Peoples was elected as a delegate to the county convention from Precinct 370 with Mrs. H. Duvall as an alternate. Mary Brown was elected as an alternative delegate from Precinct 351.⁶⁵

In a last attempt to secure the Republican vote and deter those from abandoning the Party of Lincoln, Brown exclaimed:

It is almost unbelievable to us that any Negro[,] who knows the conditions

King County Politics as G.O.P. Convention Opens Here,” *The Northwest Enterprise*, Apr. 24, 1936.

⁶⁴ “GOP Committee Woman Is Honored,” *The Northwest Enterprise*, (May 17, 1939), p. 4; *The Northwest Enterprise*, Apr. 24, 1936; “Call to Colored Voters,” *The Northwest Enterprise*, Feb. 21, 1936.

⁶⁵ “Republicans Sponsor Registration Drive,” *The Northwest Enterprise*, Feb. 28, 1936; *The Northwest Enterprise*, Apr. 24, 1936.

surrounding the Negro of the South, can vote the National Democratic ticket. They must know that those conditions were imposed by the Southern Democratic Party...how in the name of high heaven, in the name of human liberty...in the name of all that is good and righteous can any Negro vote any but the Republican ticket.⁶⁶

At 69, Brown died the following year in 1939, leaving the state Republican Party desperate to galvanize black women political leaders in Seattle into the fold of the party. At the behest of Mrs. J.T. Urquart, twelve black women organized the Women's Republican Study Club, a federated club of the National Federation of Women's Republican Clubs of America, to study politics and economics. As Europe entered a Second World War, members strategized on how to initiate a mass registration campaign to register eligible voters. The group sent letters to Senator Homer T. Bone, urging Congress to remain in session during the European Crisis in Europe and to not vote for the repeal of the Johnson Act. They also invited and interrogated Republican candidates on their sensitivity toward and plan to address African American concerns.⁶⁷ At a regular meeting in September of 1940, the club reported:

A candidate running for United States Representative was the principal speaker. After his talk, he was questioned thoroughly as to his stand on all situations dealing with Negroes, especially regarding the Army, Navy, and Aeronautics. His attention called to the plight of the 25th Infantry, which he agreed was shocking to say the least, but of which he was not aware.⁶⁸

After which, the club donated a generous, yet substantial financial contribution to the Campaign Fund of the King County Republican Club.⁶⁹

The Democratic Party and Republican Party, however, did not fit the bill for many

⁶⁶ E.I. Robinson, "Club Officers Are Sincere in G.O.P. Praise," *The Northwest Enterprise*, Oct. 23, 1936. When Brown died in 1940, twelve black women formed a federated Women's Republican Study Club of the National Federation of Republican Women under the supervision of Florence Parker, president of the Washington Women's Republican Club, to study politics and economics.

⁶⁷ "GOP Study Club Meets," *The Northwest Enterprise*, May 24, 1940; "GOP Study Club Meets," *The Northwest Enterprise*, Jul. 5, 1940; "Women's Rep. S.C. Aids K.C.C.R. Club," *The Northwest Enterprise*, Sept. 13, 1940.

⁶⁸ "Women's Rep. S.C.," *The Northwest Enterprise*, Sept. 13, 1940.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

African Americans. Local Communists appealed especially to blacks “as the most oppressed element of the proletariat and received sympathy and some support in the Central District” for their defense of the Scottsboro Boys. In 1931, nine African American men were wrongly accused, tried, and convicted of raping two white women in Scottsboro, Alabama. The legal involvement of the Communist Party and growing national pressure led to the verdict being overturned in 1934, but the young men were convicted again. An unlikely convert, Susie Cayton, broadened her political views and joined the Communist Party in the 1930s to the chagrin of her loyal Republican husband. She worked alongside her son, Revels Cayton, to fight the Scottsboro case. In 1936, she spoke at the Negro Workers’ Council meeting on the importance of women working in predominantly male occupations and became secretary of the Skid Road Unemployed Council. Cayton understood that only radical political change could address the economic problems of the depression and create a more egalitarian society.⁷⁰

Emerging leftist politics and the organized labor movement appealed to some working-class and middle-class women. By the late 1930s Seattle, black labor union organizing materialized in response to racist attitudes and exclusionary practices of labor unions in the city. The black Seattle porters organized a local division of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP), founded by Asa Phillip Randolph in the 1920s, in the midst of fifteen porters being furloughed due to the economic crisis.⁷¹ Because Randolph foresaw how women could be beneficial in fundraising, boosting morale, recruiting other women, and persuading their husbands and fathers to join the brotherhood, the local Seattle division of BSCP formed the Economic Council, later known as the Seattle Ladies’ Auxiliary of the BSCP. The Economic

⁷⁰ Taylor, 99-100. “Negro Workers’ Council,” *The Northwest Enterprise*, May 15, 1936.

⁷¹ It should be noted that the BSCP excluded female workers from the union such as maids who worked for the Pullman Company.

Council consisted of “lady relatives and friends” who hosted popular card parties to fundraise for the BSCP, campaigned for labor rights, and made arrangements for visiting labor union leaders and members. When C.L. Dellums, the Pacific Zone Supervisor, came to Seattle in 1939, Armeta Hearst, president of the Ladies’ Auxiliary, encouraged the public and labor organizations to come out to what promised to be “a fine program arranged by the ladies.”⁷²

The BSCP also worked closely with the Dining Car Employees’ Union Local 516, which also created a women’s auxiliary, the Puget Sound Ladies’ Auxiliary Local 516. The Ladies’ Auxiliary also held card parties as a major fundraising activity for the union, solicited public support, and recruited more women to join the union to assist in the fight to eradicate racism, classism, and sexism within the company. When the Great Northern Dining and Buffet car employees contemplated joining Local 516, Everett B. Gibson, president of the Ladies’ Auxiliary Local 516, encouraged the women employees to join and met with the national leaders of the Great Northern when they arrived in Seattle. One scholar noted that “racism, male trade union ideology, the notion of domesticity and the family, as well as the need for African American husbands and fathers to assert their masculinity, precluded women’s activities in the BSCP” as well as Local 516. Despite the traditional gender conscriptions assigned to wives and sisters in the union, they assumed public leadership roles in which they organized and educated women on the importance of the union in their lives. As a result, they built and sustained these organizations, which in turn became the first two black trade unions in the city before World War II.⁷³

⁷² “Ladies Auxiliary Entertains Porters,” *The Northwest Enterprise*, Mar. 18, 1938; “Sleeping Car Porters News,” *The Northwest Enterprise*, Mar. 10, 1939; “Railroad Notes,” *The Northwest Enterprise*, Sept. 1, 1939; “Ladies’ Auxiliary Holds Meeting,” *The Northwest Enterprise*, Sept. 1, 1939; “Sleeping Car News,” *The Northwest Enterprise*, Dec. 16, 1938; “Ladies’ Auxiliary, Elects Officers,” *The Northwest Enterprise*, May 1938, p. 4; Paula F. Pfeffer, “The Women Behind the Union: Halena Wilson, Rosina Tucker, and the Ladies’ Auxiliary to the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters,” *Labor History*, (Sept. 1, 1995), 557-558.

⁷³ “Railroad Notes,” *The Northwest Enterprise*, Jul. 7, 1939; “Railroad Topics,” *The Northwest Enterprise*, June 9,

Conclusion

Between 1880 and 1940, a small but active coalition of African American women leaders laid the cultural, social, economic, and political foundation for the black urban community that has been largely unacknowledged by western historians. Armed with the ballot as early as 1910, African American women maneuvered between the Republican, Democratic, and leftist political organizations, using their modicum of influence through lobbying efforts, running for political office, and pressuring legislators to address their issues. In the process, these pioneer women counteracted the negative images of black women and redefined a black womanhood based on piety, moral character, education of government, and participation in the decision-making and political leadership of the community. This long history of resistance and defense of black womanhood was nevertheless shaped by the relatively small size of the prewar black population. In repositioning their status in the local and state polity, they continued to endure hardships and slights to their personhood especially as Seattle's small traditional male leadership fought to take the helm of the social, political, and economic interests of the community. For a city that appeared to offer freedoms unattainable in the South, it would take yet a second world war and a different migration of African American women to alter the leadership dynamics and activist work of these early African American pioneers in efforts to seek racial, gender, and economic equality.

1939, p. 4; James M. Beeby, review of *Marching Together: Women of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters*, by Melinda Chateauvert, *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (Winter 1999): 504, <<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/17658/summary>>. Porter wives were seen as middle-class in African American circles but working-class among whites. For a more comprehensive study on the Ladies' Auxiliary of BSCP, see Melinda Chateauvert, *Marching Together: Women of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters* (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

Chapter Two

To Ho' Westward: War, Migration, and the Politics of Labor, 1941-1961

I still love America, it is the only land I know and I will do everything within my power to help as long as an American boy, white or black must sacrifice his life to the end that Democracy might live. A Democracy however, loudly preached but little practiced as far as Negroes are concerned.”

-Ruby Black, Boeing B17 bomber employee
quoted in *The Northwest Enterprise*, June 2, 1943¹

They didn't open up the town of Seattle until the Second World War. They didn't throw the doors wide open then, but they began to open in the case of employment and purchasing homes.

-Marguerite Carroll, retired Boeing employee
quoted in *Seven Stars and Orion*, 1979²

The death of Susan R. Cayton in 1940 and the United States intervention in World War II a year later both figuratively and literally marked the end of an era of pioneering black women's leadership in Seattle. The Second World War generated the largest migration of African Americans in the history of the Pacific Northwest. In 1940, 3,789 African Americans lived in Seattle with women constituting 43% of its total population; but by 1950, the population skyrocketed to 15,666. The city experienced a 313% increase in its black population both welcoming and, at the same time, rebuffing its recent arrivals.³

Unlike the migrations of the 1880s and 1890s, women left their communities in larger numbers than their male counterparts, mostly coming from rural areas in Texas, Mississippi, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Arkansas in search of social and economic mobility. The migration out of the rural South, acute labor shortages at Boeing and the shipyards, and the prospective enforcement of a presidential executive order (8802) created a conduit for black women—a labor

¹ “Mrs. Ruby Black Sues A.M.U. 751 Charging Race Discrimination,” *The Northwest Enterprise*, June 2, 1943, p. 1.

² Mumford, *Seven Stars and Orion*, 38.

³ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Characteristics of the Population*, 1940. Vol II, pt. 7 (Washington, DC: Washington Printing Press, 1942), 400.

group whose experiences has been marginal if not absent in World War II narratives of the Pacific Northwest—to enter an expanding labor force in Seattle. Their struggle for access and wage labor, workplace resistance, desire for economic independence, and the commitment to community-building and social change challenges the obscurity of African American women’s political agency and wartime contributions. In fact, these “pieces of a southern cultural legacy” as described by historian Gretchen Lemke-Santangelo were used to build on the social and political foundations laid by past pioneer western black women that resisted massive unemployment and chronic housing. This chapter explores the experiences of black women during this period to demonstrate how the consequence of war and migration reshaped women’s economic roles and produced a new leadership base that would become central during the organizing campaigns of the civil rights movement in the 1960s.⁴

The Great Migration to the Pacific Northwest

Nearly forty-five thousand African Americans migrated to the Pacific Northwest by 1945, radically transforming the region’s numerous small black communities and permanently altering its race relations. For the first time in Seattle’s history, the African American population became the largest non-white racial group. Thousands of women journeyed to the Northwest, a place that lacked *de jure* methods of segregation, and brought with them a panoply of traditions and distinctive cultural values. Many came to join their husbands and male relatives stationed at Fort Lawton and Fort Lewis. Defense industry jobs at Boeing Airplane Company and the shipyards in Bremerton particularly attracted black women workers who responded to strident government campaigns and the defense industries’ recruitment efforts to interest women.

⁴ Gretchen-Lemke Santangelo, *Abiding Courage: African American Migrant Women in East Bay Communities* (Charlotte: University of North Carolina, 1996), 3.

Willierean Thomas, for example, moved to Seattle from Texas with her husband in 1943 for the sole purpose to find work in the defense industries. “During that time, you know we were all from the South... We all come out here to work,” she stated.⁵

Southern black migration permeated every aspect of urban life. Kin and extended family eased the transition for most migrants relocating to the city and constituted one of the most central parts of the migration narrative. In a survey conducted by the Seattle Urban League in 1954, it estimated that the “ratio of females to males will increase among the more recent arrivals who will eventually bring along additional members of their families, once they are able to find some measure of security.” The survey projected that black female migrants, in particular, followed a specific pattern intertwined with kinship network, or chain migration. In 1956, Rosielee Johnson and her husband, both Louisiana natives, moved in with her two male cousins who had served in the navy and established themselves in the city. While Johnson described her move as “purely economical,” the desire to start a family, family influences, and hopes to pursue a career in nursing pushed the overall decision to leave. Johnson stated that “the family was a lifeline.” The kinship network held the glue for women coming far out west and comforted their fears of relocation by ensuring stability and support that helped women feel more comfortable in packing up and moving westward.⁶

Women migrants mostly settled in Seattle’s Central Area, the predominantly black area of the city. As Johnson described, her cousins’ houses served as places “where everybody came” because of their social status within the community. One worked as a mechanic and the other worked at the post office. “It was a close knit neighborhood. Everybody knew everybody,” she

⁵ Taylor, 159. Willierean Thomas, interview by author. Personal interview. Seattle, February 4, 2016.

⁶ “A Survey of Housing Patterns,” pp. 8-9, contained in Seattle Urban League Records, Box 15, Folder 10: University of Washington Special Collections; Rosielee Johnson. Interview by author. Seattle, WA, Oct. 30, 2013.

exclaimed. In this way, she felt a sense of personal and communal advancement. The home became an institution of stability, comfort, a spiritual and political safe-haven, where the community met in fellowship to exchange ideas, encourage others, promote spirituality, and ground people in a sense of identity.⁷

Although the Central Area served as the geographical center of the African American community, an amalgam of business interests, such as banks, real estate companies, and neighborhood associations, used redlining practices to concentrate blacks into this section of the city, restricting housing options for both established black residents and migrants. One such report surveying the housing conditions of Seattle revealed that it was “quite difficult for a newcomer to the area, or a young married couple to establish themselves in reasonable standard housing.” Due to entrenched racial discrimination and low incomes, southern migrants remained limited to selecting the “very marginal rental units” which kept them confined within inflexible boundaries.⁸

But housing was a city-wide problem due to the substantial migration of not just black southerners but their white counterparts. The *Seattle Daily Times* described the grim situation: Auto trailer camps, jammed to overflowing and with their ‘no vacancy’ signs; newcomers actually sleeping in automobile garages, not knowing where to look for better shelter; dark, windowless attics of old houses, crammed with ten or twenty defense workers’ cots, or as many as they will hold.⁹

In response to the housing crisis, Mayor Earl Milliken appointed a committee of twenty-

⁷ Johnson interview, Oct. 30, 2013.

⁸ “A Survey of Housing Patterns,” pp. 8-9, contained in Seattle Urban League Records, Box 15, Folder 10: University of Washington Special Collections; Johnson interview, Oct. 30, 2013.

⁹ Richard L. Williams, “City’s Housing Shortages Rapidly Nearing Crises, *The Seattle Sunday Times*, Nov. 30, 1941.

four Seattle citizens to investigate the “difficulties newcomers have in finding houses or apartments to rent.” The magnitude of the problem became so complex that it went beyond the capacities that the municipality could solve on the local level. “It is a hydra-headed problem, and the authorities who should know say it will get worse before it gets better,” proclaimed the daily paper. Agencies such as the King County Housing Authority, the Committee of Nine on Defense Housing, the Fair Rents Committee, the Community Fund, the Defense Chest, and the Seattle Real Estate Board all worked to cope with the problem alongside the Federal Housing Authority and the United States Housing Administration.¹⁰

Lewis G. Watts, secretary of the Seattle Urban League, argued that the “real hardships have been experienced by many recent [black] migrants to the city due to inability to obtain decent housing” because of race. Watts urged city leaders to eliminate the discrimination in housing and allow blacks to buy and rent houses on the open market. Because of segregated housing and restrictive covenants, Seattle consequentially created a concentrated, geographic black community and forced African Americans to forge their own cultural, social, political, and economic fabric of the community with meager resources. Taylor states that Seattle “was inundated with newcomers, placing a tremendous burden on its resources.” The continued population growth placed a strain on the Central Area and further exacerbated housing conditions, causing deterioration in the community by the 1960s.¹¹

The massive wave of black migration was not specific or unique to Seattle only but the entire state of Washington. The concern was so great and the resources in the state so stratified

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Taylor, 105. Lewis G. Watts, “Seattle’s Record in Race Relations,” *The Seattle Times*, Nov. 16, 1958; “There’s Bigger Goal Than Finding Someone to Blame,” *The Seattle Daily Times*, Nov. 26, 1941. The issues with housing thus became a salient feature of the migration experience that would continue to plague African Americans for the next three decades. However, the migration, both black and white, not only placed strains on housing but schools, police departments, public health services, sanitation facilities, and transportation.

that the discourse on public welfare became the focus of the WSFCW's 1944 regional meeting. The clubwomen organized to help distribute aid and marshal resources to thousands of African American migrant women. Eliza P. McCabe, a Texan migrant and president of the Washington Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, invited southern migrant women to join the organization in hopes to use their talents to revive the association from the decline in membership caused by the Great Depression. In doing so, McCabe sought to erase the chasm between long-standing women residents and the newcomers by using mutual cooperation as an opportunity to create more women leaders. Turkiya Lowe observes that these new challenges prompted an organizational change of the WSFCW to meet the rising demands around housing and employment in order to adjust migrants to the Pacific Northwest.¹²

White southern migration and white residents' hostility towards black migration led to intensifying forms of overt discrimination and anti-black attitudes, causing significant alarm to African Americans in the area. In 1944 the National NAACP office issued reports from Pacific Northwest travelers on areas flooded with anti-black signs in restaurants, lunch rooms, bus stations, and sandwich counters on ferry boats. The signs read: "We Do Not Solicit Colored Trade;" "We Serve White Only;" and "We Reserve the Right to Refuse Service to Anyone." A bus terminal in Seattle and a sandwich counter on the ferry boats between Seattle and Bremerton both carried the signs, according to travelers. The NAACP concluded that Seattleites placed the "blame... upon the huge incursion of southern whites and Negroes, both bringing with them their Dixie habits."¹³

In efforts to assuage the mounting racial tensions in the city and across the Pacific

¹² Lowe, 195, 212, 215

¹³ Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters: Fair Employment Practice Commission Files, January-April 1944, Folder 001548-024-0001, March 3, 1944: Holdings of the Chicago Historical Society and the Newberry Library.

Northwest, black clubwomen along with the Council of Churches formed the Christian Friends for Racial Equality (CFRE), which became the largest interracial group in Seattle's history. The CFRE sought to promote racial equality and pressure government action to improve racial conditions and ending segregation in public and private places in the city.¹⁴

Increasing racial discrimination and the outward visibility of a larger black population, conversely, sparked bitter ridicule and chastisement towards newcomers by established black residents. Robert E. Colbert's study, conducted in 1946 on "The Attitude of Older Negro Residents," found that most negative attitudes were predicated on conduct and physical dress.¹⁵

LeEtta Saunders King, a pioneer and clubwoman, confessed but later resented:

I was quite ashamed of them. They looked so bad... I tried not to see them... Women wearing, at that time, jeans. Dungarees weren't worn on the street by women, but these women would be wearing them. Their big shapes—and their heads tied up with a handkerchief. We felt that they don't need to come up here in our wonderful country and spoil things. There was a feeling of the people that were here of resentment against them, the ones that were coming in. Because they were messing things up...¹⁶

King expressed sentiments that were deeply embedded in respectability politics, class bias, and notions of proper female behavior. Class tensions among women and men alike thwarted communal relationships and race-building initiatives to stave off racial discrimination. Many like King blamed the unwelcomed newcomers for the changing neighborhoods and growing discrimination in the city. One woman vehemently described the migrants as "the element that has lately infested our city" whom she believed had come not to seek employment but to rob, beg, and "use vulgar language on the streets, [and] buses." Emphasizing her social distance, she

¹⁴ Lowe, 209-210. One of its members, Bertha Pitts Campbell as well as many other women recognized the need for housing and located lodging for a large number of women migrants. Despite its name, CFRE was an ecumenical group that also included many Jewish members. Two-thirds of its membership and officers were women. CFRE members tended to be of middle age and older and were involved in other civil rights groups.

¹⁵ Robert E. Colbert, "The Attitude of Older Negro Residents Toward Recent Negro Migrants in the Pacific North-West," *The Journal of Negro Education* (Autumn 1946): 698-699.

¹⁶ Mumford, 14-15.

urged that the “better element of colored people and the police department” do something about the “lawless” newcomers.¹⁷

Established black women residents’ fears adhered to dominant social norms and typified white stereotypical perceptions of southern blacks as culturally inferior and unassimilable. These perceptions were undoubtedly rooted in the early formation of Seattle’s black middle-class, which reflected, at the very outset, ambiguous class distinctions that modeled white culture. On the West Coast, Santangelo-Lemke writes that “a small elite, which consisted of doctors, lawyers, ministers, educators, and more prosperous business owners constituted that upper strata of the black middle-class and resembled the white middle class in their occupations, values and lifestyle.” These leading figures of black Seattle attempted to gain acceptance and first-class citizenship through white-defined proper behavior, conduct, dress, speech, thrift, education, and morals. Most of them were southerners themselves. The migrants were reminders of their old way of life in the former slaveholding South, and they subsequently feared white backlash if blacks did not maintain their proper social standing in the city. This fear also rationalized a complete disruption of the decades-long community building process through which settlers established social rules and criteria in order for blacks to become part of the “better element of Negroes” in the state. These social rules were so pronounced that Eliza McCabe, president of the WSFCW, suggested to the clubwomen that they “must interpret the Northwest to the new Comers (sic)...”¹⁸

On the other hand, women migrants, often branded as unwelcomed newcomers, undoubtedly interpreted the Northwest for themselves and observed the African American community in Seattle to be unwelcoming, elitist, and complacent. The social profiles of wartime

¹⁷ S. King, “Lawless Newcomers,” *The Northwest Enterprise*, Jan. 13, 1943.

¹⁸ Santangelo-Lemke, 75; quoted in Lowe, 207.

migrants refuted common stereotypes that branded them as low-class, destitute hirelings.

Dorothy Hollingsworth, a teacher and native of South Carolina who arrived in 1946, expressed her consternation:

...I came here, and then, there wasn't much to do because of the society, black society in Seattle was kind of clannish... You know, who you are, and what are you doing... Well, I really didn't like that, because they were probing, in the first place. But they had a hierarchy. And really, they weren't that professional... And later on, those who came worked at Boeing. That was the height of their ambition... And it really wasn't that open very much.¹⁹

The extent to which migrant women's hopes and ideals were materialized cannot be determined precisely, but as Karen Tucker Anderson observed, "the greatest benefit of the wartime experience for black women workers derived from their movement in large numbers out of the poverty of the rural South to the possibilities provided by an urban, industrialized economy."²⁰

Women in Wartime Defense Industries

The increased role of the federal government in Seattle impacted the Puget Sound's economic and social conditions, making it the epicenter of shipbuilding and aircraft construction. Seattle received nearly \$600,000,000 in federal defense contracts by 1941 and was ranked first among major cities in defense spending. These defense contracts revived the shipbuilding industry, after its post-World War I collapse, that supplied vessels for the Coast Guard, Navy, and Merchant Marine. The eighty-eight shipyards in the Puget Sound area including Seattle's twenty-nine and the Navy's facility at Bremerton employed over 150,000 workers by 1944. The

¹⁹ Interview with Dorothy Hollingsworth by Mildred Andrews on Jan. 31, 2007. Washington State History Museum, Accessed May 24, 2016, <http://www.washingtonhistory.org/files/library/Hollingsworth.pdf>.

²⁰ Karen Tucker Anderson, "Last Hired, First Fired: Black Women Workers During World War II," *Journal of American History*, Vol. 69. No.1 (June 1982), 97.

Boeing Airplane Company, the single largest commercial industry in the region, hired over 4,000 workers in 1939, which increased to over 50,000 employees during its peak war production in 1944. World War II rapidly transformed the Seattle economy from a reliance on trade and service to one primarily dependent on manufacturing and defense spending.²¹

By and large, the significance of World War II is that it enlisted the participation and need for black wage earners and female labor. It became desirable for married and single women alike to enter the labor force as a call to their patriotic duty. Because of the labor shortages, wartime expansion created new job categories, advanced economic mobility, and disrupted the decades-long employment pattern of black women's restriction to domestic work. Anderson explains that, "Between 1940 and 1944, the proportion of employed black women engaged in domestic service declined from 59.9 percent to 44.6." In Seattle, as opposed to other cities like Detroit and Baltimore, the office of the United States Employment Service (USES) discontinued referring black women to domestic service and instead referred them to war industry jobs. The increasing number of black female workers from service employment to industrial labor generated unintended consequences for white women who also desired war jobs. To be sure, the *Seattle Times* published dozens of advertisements revealing the shortage of black domestic labor and the dire need of white women for "colored maids." Nora Eck, an assistant manager at a Seattle employment agency, responded to many requests for domestic workers, advising white women that no black woman was available for work. "Although we have hundreds of requests every week, sometimes frantic, tearful ones, we simply have no one to place," claimed Eck. The unavailability of black female domestic workers greatly impacted the employment decisions of white women. Those who sought work and relied on domestic help

²¹ Taylor, 160-161. Karen Tucker Anderson, "The Impact of World War II in the Puget Sound Area on the Status of Women and the Family" (Ph.D dissertation, University of Washington, 1975), 19-20.

either discontinued looking for work or were particularly inconvenienced by the scarcity of private home workers.²²

During the war period, African American women constituted over half of the one million blacks who joined the paid labor force. Their financial contributions and labor ensured the black community's survival and provided a resource pool to sustain family and community life and struggle through hardships.²³

Similar to many manufacturing companies, Boeing did not welcome women or African Americans into its plant when it was founded in 1916. By the 1940s, the Boeing Airplane Company faced a scarcity of white male labor during a time of increased production and mounting pressure to open its doors to women and nonwhite workers. Polly Reed Myers noted that in 1942 managers realized the company needed to hire a female labor force to “keep up with production and competition with the Puget Sound textile industries.” The implications of the war forced the company's president Phil Johnson, in 1941, to consider the significant changes necessary for the company to hire women—a less traditional source of labor. Dire concerns surfaced around state compliance with laws that granted rest periods for women workers; plants needed to install women's restrooms and personnel services; new infrastructure was required to hire women to work in personnel office to oversee women applicants and employees; and there were additional considerations to pay rates and union policies. These considerations influenced Boeing plant managers to slowly transition white women into a mixed-sex workplace.²⁴

As white women gradually gained entry into Boeing, the company continued to deny

²² Anderson, “Last Hired, First Fired,” 83; *Ibid.*, “The Impact of World War II in the Puget Sound Area,” 19, 34.

²³ Anderson, “Last Hired, First Fired,” 82. Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and Family From Slavery to Present*, (New York: Basic Books), 2010.

²⁴ Polly Reed Myers, *Capitalist Family Values: Gender, Work, and Corporate Culture at Boeing* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2015), 63-67.

access to African Americans. In 1941, labor leader A. Phillip Randolph charged that, “One of the most conspicuous examples in the United States of race discrimination is at Boeing Aircraft Company in Seattle, which from the very beginning of the national-defense emergency has refused to employ Negroes.” This refusal prompted local black political, religious, and fraternal organizations to organize in 1942 the Committee for the Defense of Negro Labor’s Right to Work at Boeing Airplane Company. Even a few local white members of the Aeronautic & Mechanics Local 751 united to encourage the company to hire nonwhite employees and eliminate the union’s membership ban on race, but not without union resistance.²⁵

With Franklin D. Roosevelt’s declaration of Executive Order 8802 in 1941 and the establishment of a Fair Employment Practice Committee (F.E.P.C.), an order that outlawed discrimination based on sex, race, creed, and color, black women seized on the opportunity to enter the paid labor force with the backing of the federal government and abandon domestic servitude. The WSFCW, for instance, urged women to move beyond domestic labor to find jobs in industrial occupations, especially at Boeing. In cooperation with its national NACW Women in Industry Department’s goals to eliminate female employment discrimination, the WSFCW pressed its members “to register with the Department of Labor for possible job opportunities” and report on the political developments concerning employment in the state legislature as civil agents of the Fair Employment Practices Committee.²⁶

The decision to hire African Americans at Boeing came early in 1942. Boeing managers notified Idel Vertner, executive secretary of the Phyllis Wheatley Y.W.C.A., to recruit and recommend six stenographers to arrive at the plant on January 17. Of the six, the company hired Florise DeMirl Spearman who began work on January 25. Spearman was born in Seattle and

²⁵ quoted in Myers, 72-73; Taylor, 163.

²⁶ Lowe, 197-198, 201-202.

attended the University of Washington. She worked as a typist in the King County Juvenile Court, the Federal Housing Administration, and the state welfare office. During her first week at Boeing, Spearman reported that she experienced “courteous and considerate treatment from her present employers and genuine friendship and congeniality from her co-workers.” Surely, Spearman’s integration at Boeing—the hardest company for blacks to secure employment—and her subsequent polite remarks engendered optimism for African American women who may have hoped to obtain a similar treatment. The appeal and prestige of working at a private sector job like Boeing, especially as the only African American employee, led Spearman to decline a civil service job with the government.²⁷ When the King County Colored Republican Club recommended Spearman to work at the State Department of Licenses of Washington, she responded:

I regret to have not written you sooner, but when I was notified the “Boeing Aircraft Company” wanted colored stenographers, I applied and was hired. The excitement and thrill of actually working at ‘Hard-to-get-in’ Boeings, also the unusual hours which I work, (4-12:30), rather upset my equilibrium so that I have neglected to notify you sooner of my regret at having to withdraw my application.²⁸

Still in its initial stages, Boeing gradually hired a small cohort of black women to work as stenographers. But as the war ensued and labor shortages peaked, the number of black female workers in skilled and semi-skilled positions increased. By September of 1942, aircraft industries across the nation increased its hiring of black women production workers. The Consolidated Aircraft Corporation placed 45 women in San Diego, nine of whom were upgraded from custodial work to weld, finish, and salvage while the Ranger Aircraft Corporation in New York and Glen L. Martin Company in Baltimore employed a number of women in production

²⁷ “Miss Florise Spearman Secures Position at the Boeing Aircraft Co.,” *Northwest Enterprise*, Feb. 6, 1942.

²⁸ “Miss F. Spearman Expresses Gratitude to King County Colored Republican Club,” *Northwest Enterprise*, Sept. 14, 1942.

and inspection. Boeing hired its first twenty-two black women in mechanical work. They received training in “riveting, bucking, subassembly, and general sheet-metal work.” Marguerite Carroll left her job as a diet cook at Providence Hospital to work in the mechanic shop on the B-17s and then later in the metal shop to build the B-29s. She paid the \$2.50 permit and received four pairs of overalls and tools. Later in 1942, Boeing hired Dorothy West Williams as a sheet metal worker while Ruby Black, Nancy Grant, and Charlenia Cephas were hired to work on the B-17 bombers. The latter group organized the “B17” as an exclusive social club for fellowship to provide support and camaraderie among this distinct group of women.²⁹ The new club consisted of only ten members, all African-American except two. When Rebecca Maxie moved to Seattle from Texas after her divorce, she immediately found a job at Boeing the very next day. A year later, Boeing managers promoted Margaret Johnson to secretary in the engineering department after a few months of working in Shop 105. According to the *Northwest Enterprise*, Johnson was the only African American to be employed in the Engineering Records Unit out of 2,300 white employees. In 1943, Marie Edwards, who would later establish a beauty school, arrived in Seattle from Topeka, Kansas and worked the swing shift at Boeing. Katie Burks, who migrated from Arkansas, found a position as a mechanic with a starting wage of sixty-two cents an hour. By 1944, African American women comprised 86%, or 285, of Boeing’s 329 black workforce.³⁰

The increasing pool of black women in the defense labor industry and the seeming availability of job opportunities prompted the *Northwest Enterprise* to claim that “5,000,000

²⁹ The racial identity is not recorded of the other two women. The club may have been formed in response to similar clubs established by white women Boeing workers that excluded African American women.

³⁰ “Aircraft Plants Increase Number of Women Workers,” *The Baltimore Afro-American*, Sept. 5, 1942, p.17; Myers, p. 64, 74; Mumford, 38-39; “Margaret Johnson Promoted at Boeing,” *The Northwest Enterprise*, Sept. 15, 1943; Phyllis Fletcher, “Peggy Joan Maxie,” *BlackPast.org*. Accessed June 8, 2017, <http://www.blackpast.org/aaw/maxie-peggy-joan-1936-0>; Lowe, 201.

Women Needed in War Industries...Cross that Bridge Now.” The metaphoric bridge represented defense training and the leap black women could make in redefining their economic futures and roles in society. Certainly, Geraldine Williams, an employee in Shop 308-66, believed that promoting patriotism and heeding the government’s call to duty to support the war effort could improve her conditions as well as her husband’s. In 1944, she crafted a poem that illustrates her loyalty to the country but also the triple consciousness she felt as a woman, black, and American. She wrote:

It’s grand to work at Boeing Plant Two,
If bucking rivets is all I do
I have bucked hard for over a year;
On the rating list my name isn’t near

I won’t give up for it takes time,
“Stay on the job” is a very good sign
“Back the attack and Buy More Bonds”
It will save the life of mothers’ sons,

I like swing shift, and I like day:
The disadvantage of day I get less pay
But after all I think swing is best;
If you get no pleasure, you do get rest

Now I’ll keep working till they terminate me,
I won’t give up, for my husband is over sea
I’ll buy more bonds, and that’s a fact
Because I really want my husband back³¹

Williams, like thousands of women both black and white, understood that their roles during the war were just as critical as the soldiers fighting fascism. Williams’ poem describing her experiences reveals the overt racialized and gendered politics of Boeing’s workplace culture. She claims to have worked hard for over a year without recognition on the rating list or, in other

³¹ *Northwest Enterprise*, Nov. 2, 1942; Geraldine Williams, “Working at Boeing’s,” *Northwest Enterprise*, Sept. 20, 1944.

words, without earning a higher rank. She was paid much less on the day shift. But more importantly, Williams recognized her position at Boeing was not only precarious but temporary. One scholar suggests that “most employers and public officials believed that married working women were a temporary fixture in the wartime economy,” especially African American working women.³²

The propagandist literature disseminated by the federal government to recruit women for the war effort through the Manpower and Civil Service Commissions did not include black women as a part of the patriotic call to duty. This was publicly conveyed through the creation of the ‘Rosie the Riveter’ image. As Jacqueline Jones writes, “recruitment propaganda was aimed exclusively at white women of both the middle and working classes. When black women were mentioned in connection with the national manpower crisis at all, they were encouraged to enter ‘war service,’ by taking jobs that white women most readily abandoned—laundry, cafeteria, and domestic work” and performed a “behind-the-scenes cadre of support workers for gainfully employed white women.” Therefore, black women workers’ support of the war effort did not help them transcend racial stereotypes or perceived gender roles. Despite the dramatic expansion of jobs for women at Boeing, African American women workers remained at the bottom of the job hierarchy with little to no opportunities for promotions and supervisory positions.³³

Boeing’s decision to hire more white and African American women than black men inevitably established a complex racial and gendered hierarchy of hiring preferences and discrimination. Although more men generally were hired in the defense labor industry, more African American women were hired in aircraft manufacturing than black men since employers considered the women to be temporary workers and “less threatening” to an industry

³² Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*, 208.

³³ *Ibid.*, 200-201, 237.

traditionally defined as both male and white. After hiring a select few black men in 1942, Boeing managers, however, attempted to minimize racial tensions by setting a temporary plan in place to discharge white workers for insubordination if they protested against working with black male workers. But for black women, there was no such plan to address or solve the problems they faced with white male co-workers nor was there a plan to address the issues of white women. The work experiences of Spearman and Williams thus characterize a marginal perspective of black women's amicable relations at Boeing while the vast majority of other women found a quite repressive and exploitative workplace environment.³⁴

The transition to a mixed-sex and mixed-race workplace created uneasiness, sexual tensions, and racial anxieties. Both black and white women suffered from sexual assault, paid extra union fees, and suffered the humiliation of male chauvinism. One white female worker recalled, "Women took an awfully bad beating in Final Assembly. There was harassment and sexism and that kind of thing." Lou Annie Charles, a black female riveter from Muskogee, Oklahoma, recalled her experiences with white male workers, "There's one always put his hands on women. He put his hand on me once...I tried to knock the devil out of him. He didn't touch me no more. He'd always go put his hands on you somewhere he shouldn't." The extent of their experiences, however, differed primarily on race. Black working women faced economic as well as noneconomic discrimination in the hiring process, the shop floor, and within the unions. Segregated facilities such as lunchrooms and restrooms perpetuated white supremacy which established whites as dominant, more skilled, and superior than black workers. The union, in turn, reinforced trade shop agreements that maintained sexual and racial divisions in the workplace thus codifying the exclusion of black workers and women.³⁵

³⁴ Myers, 74, 187.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 64. Lou Annie Charles and Eva Vassar, "Rosie the Riveter, WWII Home Front Oral History Project,"

Boeing managers and supervisors also frequently denied promotion or threatened outspoken workers for protesting unfair and racially biased union policies. Both black men and women paid exorbitantly higher union fees than white women and frequently dealt with the exclusion of their right to join the union and reap the benefits and protections it offered. For example, Ruby Black, a certified trainee of the National Youth Administration (NYA) who installed high quality fuel pumps on the B17 bombers, filed a lawsuit against the Aeronautical Mechanics' Union Local 751 and Boeing, asking the court for an order "to restrain continuation of a practice of prejudice" and for the "union to be restrained from collecting \$3.50 from Negro employees each month." Tucker explains that "because the unions occupied a position of strength," the status of women within the industries depended on their status within the unions. The unions decided questions on pay rates, promotions, and advancement opportunities for female workers. Black argued that she was discharged when she complained about paying the \$3.50 for a work permit required by the union and denied regular union membership while white female workers, also denied entry, only paid \$1.50 a month. She, therefore, lost her job since it was required of all members to be a part of a union.³⁶

It was not until Boeing employed a wartime peak of 1,600 black workers in 1944 in which a black presence was large enough to sway Local 751 leadership and the courts to challenge the ban on minority workers. Thus, Dorothy West Williams was able to join the union as the first African American member. However, AMU union members such as James Duncan, a

conducted by Robin Li in 2012, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2013. Accessed Feb. 20, 2016, http://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/roho/ucb/text/charles_and_vassar_2013.pdf.

³⁶ Jack Johnson, "Prominent Labor Leader Urges Legislation to Invalidate Function of Labor Unions Which Discriminate for Reason of Race and Color," *The Northwest Enterprise*, Nov. 18, 1942; "Mrs. Ruby Black Sues A.M.U. 751 Charging Race Discrimination," *The Northwest Enterprise*, June 2, 1943; Karen Tucker Anderson, *Wartime Women: Sex Roles, Family Relations, and the Status of Women During World War II* (New York: Praeger, 1981), 55.

national union official, did not readily accept black union membership and blamed African Americans for impeding the war effort with their demands by stating, “We rather resent that the war situation has been used to alter an old-established custom, and do not feel it will be helpful to war production.”³⁷

Similar occurrences of racial segregation transpired throughout the city and the Puget Sound area. The Pacific Car and Foundry Company in Renton with an employ of nearly 4,000 workers allowed segregated signs to be placed in its facilities. Marjorie Pitter, a graduate of the University of Washington and former president of the CWD Club, protested the signs and confronted the superintendent of the foundry. Captain Stretcher who was responsible for the oversight at the plant retorted that “if black workers refused to accept the separate [rest]rooms they should resign immediately.” Pitter pushed back and exerted, “We declined to work.” Much to Stretcher’s chagrin, the company sided with the workers and transferred Stretcher to another naval district. This small victory had not, however, tackled the larger issues of race at the foundry nor the racial tensions between white and black workers, male and female.³⁸

Although Boeing and the Pacific Car and Foundry offered employment openings for women migrants, the government rather than the private sector provided many of the wartime opportunities. Bertha Pitts Campbell, a founding member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority and its Northwestern chapter, Alpha Omicron Chapter, did not find manufacturing jobs appealing although she desired to support the war effort. Instead, she applied for a postal clerk position as an indefinite war substitute and worked the night shift. This became a viable option since she was a married woman and cared for her child during the day.³⁹

³⁷ Taylor, 165; cited in Myers, *Capitalist Family Values*, 72-73.

³⁸ Cited in Taylor, *Forging of a Black Community*, 165-166.

³⁹ Pauline Anderson Hill and Sherrilyn Johnson Jordan, *Too Young to Be Old: The Story of Bertha Pitts Campbell, A Founder of Delta Sigma Theta, Incorporated*, (Bloomington: Author House Publishing, 2008), 50-52.

Industrial work in government-owned shipyards provided numerous opportunities but often were “hot, heavy jobs usually reserved for men.” When Willierean Thomas applied to Boeing and was immediately accepted, she turned down the offer after the company denied hiring her husband. She soon went to Bremerton and applied to the Puget Sound Navy shipyard where both her and her husband became employees. Typically, African women and men found less competitive employment in the shipyards, which offered more unskilled positions than Boeing. Each day the couple traveled via ferry to Bremerton from Seattle.⁴⁰

In 1943, the NYA brought to the city a group of black women recruits to not only work at Boeing but as Naval shipyard employees. Eva Vassar, trained by the NYA in Muskogee and Wichita, Oklahoma, relocated to Seattle to work in the shipyards as a welder. She repaired damaged ships and sent them back out to war. Other African American women trained at her high school also came to work as welders. She stated, “I found out after I went to Bremerton, it was other women that were taking welding, because they were over there with me on the ship, welding.” Others worked in menial occupations such as sweepers. Although these opportunities provided skilled trades and experience, local Seattle women found limited gains in these positions.⁴¹ The government as well as private employers offered limited resources to assist black female workers with their dual responsibilities at work and at home. Deborah Hirshfield finds that in the Richmond shipyards black women were the most discriminated group and worked in the “least skilled, dirtiest, and heaviest jobs.” However impressive the gains made during the war, black women largely remained excluded from main sectors of the Seattle

⁴⁰ Anderson, “First Fired, Last Hired,” 90-91; Willierean Thomas, interview by author. Seattle, Feb. 3, 2016.

⁴¹ Hill, et al, *Too Young to Be Old*, 40. Bertha Pitts Campbell status changed from indefinite war substitute to a permanent position in 1950 but she refused in order to devote her energies to volunteer and race work.

economy and held the most tenuous positions within the labor industry.⁴²

From Boeing to Beauty, to Teaching, to Nursing

In 1945 when Germany surrendered defeat, Horace R. Cayton, son of Susie R. Cayton and graduate of the University of Washington, anticipated that the shifting migrant population in Seattle would be permanent after the war.⁴³ Progressive whites predicted also that black war workers would remain in the Pacific Northwest after the war. Rightly so, Washington's black population increased from approximately 7,424 in 1940 to 30,691 by 1950 with African American women constituting 13,274, or 43.25% of the black population in the state. Hugh DeLacy, a state representative, believed black workers had a good chance of remaining employed. "We want to convert vital war facilities into something equally vital for peacetime production," he explained. Speaking at the annual meeting of the Federal Public Housing authority in Portland, Talbot Wegg boldly asserted that the southern migrant in the Pacific Northwest "is here to stay." "Here," he proclaimed, "there is freedom of movement, decent schooling, and hope."⁴⁴ Wegg further expounded that "if the Northwest presents opportunities for white dust bowl farmers, how much more attractive it must appear to the Negro accustomed to all the traditional restraints of the East and South."⁴⁵

⁴² Taylor, 161; Lou Annie Charles and Eva Vassar, "Rosie the Riveter, WWII Home Front Oral History Project," conducted by Robin Li in 2012, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2013. Belle Alexander, Interview by Sara Miner and James Gregory, May 3, 2006. Seattle Civil Rights & Labor History Project. Accessed Oct. 19, 2016, <http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/alexander.htm>; Deborah Hirshfield, "Gender, Generation, and Race in American Shipyards in the Second World War," *The International History Review*, Vol. 19, No. 1, (Feb. 1997): 143; John C. Hughes, Lillian Walker: A Washington State Civil Rights Pioneer (The Legacy Project, June 8, 2009), 29. Lou Annie Charles and her aunt Josie Dunn, trained by the NYA in Oklahoma and came to Seattle to work in the defense industry. Charles immediately found work at Boeing as first a bucker then a riveter while Dunn, trained as a welder for ships, found a land job at Boeing more attractive. The government as well as private employers offered limited resources to assist black female workers with their dual responsibilities at work and at home.

⁴³ Cayton was also a noted sociologist and Communist labor organizer.

⁴⁴ Talbot Wegg was a member and an official of the National Association of Housing.

⁴⁵ Venice T. Spraggs, "Rep. DeLacy Sees Bright Future for Coast Negroes," *Chicago Defender*, Jan. 27, 1945; U.S.

This presumptuous statement by white liberals asks the question: why were black southern workers more appealing than white southern laborers? Historian Quintard Taylor has noted that “many white residents and public officials who neither understood nor were prepared to cope with the growth, or the problems with migrant adjustments resented the increased black presence.” While Wegg and Lacey welcomed more African Americans to the region, their propaganda was rooted in the plan to use black labor to feed the industries and thus augment the economy and wealth of the region. Elsewhere in the nation, major cities such as Detroit, Richmond, and many northern and Midwestern industries experienced a contraction of postwar economic growth leaving thousands of African Americans, especially women, unable to find jobs comparable to their once held industrial occupations. Seattle, however, avoided a postwar decline due to defense spending on airplanes during the Cold War. Both men believed the Pacific Northwest needed a larger black population only for their labor to produce profits and commodities in the postwar industries. African American women’s social reality painted a different picture—a picture that did not ensure job security. The Pacific Northwest, however, offered more than industries and jobs, and their quest for a better living was about more than about labor. It was a place where they could possibly achieve personal autonomy, raise families, pursue professional careers, and gain economic independence. These migrant women would create new women’s organizations while strengthening established ones, form new political coalitions, and assert leadership in areas historically closed to women and African Americans.⁴⁶

In the immediate postwar period, African American migrant women across the country

Census, *Negro Population, by County: 1960 and 1950*, 1966. Supplementary Report PC (S1)-52. Table 1 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1966), 2; “Cayton Lauds Seattle,” *Northwest Enterprise*, Aug. 18, 1943; “Predicts Negro Migrants to Stay in Northwest,” *Chicago Defender*, Jan. 20, 1945.

⁴⁶ Taylor, 187. Donna Murch, *Living for the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 2010.

searched for new jobs, many returning to domestic and laundry service. Historian Shirley Ann Wilson Moore finds that in Richmond, California many women left the kitchen and shipyards “to carve out convention-shattering avenues of economic autonomy in the blues clubs and after hours clubs.” Motivated by wartime conditions, Seattle women followed a similar trajectory of economic independence by establishing beauty salons and a beauty school. When the war quadrupled the number of black women in the city which historically held a very marginal black population, the demands for beauticians and hairstylists inevitably produced a booming black beauty culture enterprise. In 1940, the U.S. census reported only 7 black beauticians and barbers in the city; that number may have possibly been higher. The migration transformed the beauty salon from a place of luxury to a site of necessity and political action and social activism. The *Northwest Enterprise* reported in 1943, “Where there are any appreciable number of women employed, it is incomplete without its beauty salon.”⁴⁷

This claim was also true for white women. In an advertisement posted in the *Seattle Times* by the Carson Beauty School, it claimed that beauty operators were in high demand with business increasing by fifty percent. Mary Stone’s Beauty School urged to train more white beauty operators as well as identifying dozens of shops promising lucrative wages ranging from \$25.00 to \$65.00 a week.⁴⁸

Black beauty shops and beauty schools had proliferated throughout major U.S. cities during the Depression years. In her 1935 ethnographic essay, Myrtle Pollard explained that this increase was a result of beauticians entering into beauty education to supplement their incomes

⁴⁷ Shirley Ann Wilson Moore, *To Place Our Deeds: The African American Community in Richmond, California, 1910-1963* (Berkeley: University of California, 1996), 4; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Labor Force*, 1940, Vol. 3, pt. 5. Table 13 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1942), 856; “Beauty Salons Are A Necessity,” *The Northwest Enterprise*, Sept. 15, 1943.

⁴⁸ *The Seattle Times*, April 12, 1942; *The Seattle Times*, July 20, 1943.

during the economic collapse. In Seattle, however, the numbers remained stagnant until World War II when the black female population mushroomed. LeEtta S. King, a noted pioneer and singer, announced the opening of her beauty salon “Elkay Beauty Booth” on 22nd Ave and East Madison St. in 1941. Edythe Lester opened her business on 23rd and East Madison Street.⁴⁹

More beauty shops opened on the South end—one on Main Street and two on Jackson Street. Ruth’s Beauty Shop, The Swan Beauty Shop, and Ethel’s Beauty Shop were “fill[ing] the need” in the area. These businesses alleviated customers’ frustration of the long appointments that had to be made four weeks in advance due to the lack of parlors in the South End. Ethel Lightfoot, proprietor of Ethel’s Beauty Shop, was delighted to be part of the solution to help ladies who “appreciates artistic hair styles.” She hired two recent arrivals from Fort Worth, Texas who both worked at beauty parlors before relocating. Vessie Jackson, a native of Atlanta, Georgia, found a place in the Modernistic Salon on Jackson Street. Rita Reese, a native of Meridian, Mississippi and graduate of McMurty’s School of Cosmetology, came to Seattle to work as a stenographer for the Treasury Department. In 1944, she purchased the Swan Beauty Salon and changed the name to Modernistic Salon. She employed five women migrants, Vessie Jackson, Addie Lee Houston and Ruth Miller of Houston and Corpus Christi, Texas respectively, and Memphis C. Johnigan, former instructor of Bernice’s Beauty School of Dayton, Ohio and former salon operator at Tuskegee Institute. These experienced beauticians all came to Seattle with licenses from beauty schools in their home states and also favored booth renting because of the flexibility and the freedom it offered.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Cited in Tiffany A. Gill, *Beauty Shop Politics: African American Women’s Activism in the Beauty Industry* (Chicago: University of Illinois, 2010), 64; “LeEtta S. King Announces Opening of New Beauty Shop,” *The Northwest Enterprise*, Oct. 24, 1941; “Mrs. E. Lester Opens New Beauty Shop,” *The Northwest Enterprise*, Apr. 3, 1942, p. 4.

⁵⁰ “Beauty Shops Fill Longing Need,” *The Northwest Enterprise*, Oct. 6, 1943; “Miss Rita Reese New Owner and Operator of Swan Beauty Salon,” *The Northwest Enterprise*, Aug. 9, 1944; “Beauty Salons Are A Necessity,” *The Northwest Enterprise*, Sept. 15, 1943; “Ethel’s Beauty Shoppe Special Announcement,” *The Northwest*

Still, these parlors could not keep up with demand. It was not until 1943 when Ruth G. Whiteside, a migrant from St. Louis and a graduate of Ruth Flowers School of Beauty Culture, claimed a major stake in the beauty business and revolutionized black women's entrepreneurship in Seattle and the Pacific Northwest. Realizing the inability of expert beauticians to meet the increasing demands of a growing clientele and to stabilize their overwhelming appointments due to the limited number of operators prompted Whiteside to establish the Ruth Whiteside School of Beauty Culture located at 614 Jackson Street. In an ad appealing to black women defense workers, Whiteside asked, "Will you be in the same rut after we have defeated the Axis? Did you know that Beauty Culture as a profession offers a lucrative income for a minimum outlay?" Having an acute awareness of the war's impending end and black women's precarious economic positions within the manufacturing sector, Whiteside saw an opportunity to parlay their entry into the beauty world for "post-war security" and economic independence.⁵¹

Whiteside's goal to safeguard women's financial futures ensured employment for dozens of women long after the war ended. She first appointed Janette Coleman, a graduate of Edison School of Beauty in Seattle, as director of the school and then employed experienced teachers, skilled and knowledgeable in the latest styles of "marcelling, fingerwaving, perms, manicuring, and eyebrow arching." Students learned various techniques of hairstyling and haircare but were also required to take courses in the "fine art of makeup, skin analysis, [and] face balancing." Students became eligible for graduation after completion of coursework and passing the state board of examiners. In 1947, when three graduates, Willie Mae Jackson, Ezel E. Rahming, and Dora Ratcliffe passed the state exams with an average of 90%, it attested to the success and

Enterprise, Feb. 16, 1944; Gill, Beauty Shop Politics, 64.
⁵¹ Postwar Security. Advertisement. *The Northwest Enterprise*, Aug. 23, 1944.

educational pedigree of the school and the beauticians it produced.⁵²

Dozens of students enrolled at the Ruth Whiteside School of Beauty Culture and went on to make profitable careers as entrepreneurs after being fired from Boeing and the Naval shipyards. One such student, Willierean Thomas, for example, entered the school in 1946 after being laid off from the Bremerton shipyard and having to find work in domestic labor shortly thereafter. “There were a lot of women doing housework...there were a lot of beauticians around here, but not really professionals,” she stated. Thomas paid the \$50.00 tuition fee and graduated in 1948. She then opened her own beauty salon, Thomas Beauty Shop, and never advertised her business. Perhaps no other student would leave such a deep and lasting imprint on black women’s business and education in the Pacific Northwest and the training of future leaders and political activists than Marie Edwards, a migrant from Topeka, Kansas.⁵³

Working the swing shift at Boeing allowed Edwards to take beauty courses at the Whiteside School of Beauty Culture in the mornings. Edwards remembered, “I felt that black women must have a better opportunity to earn money.” Graduating in 1945, Edwards opened the Glamour Castle Beauty Salon in 1946 and later purchased Whiteside’s school when the founder moved back to St. Louis briefly due to health reasons in the late 1940s. Edwards renamed the school Edwards Beauty School and moved its location from 7th Avenue Jackson Street to the corner of 23rd Avenue and Jackson, an area with a high rate of unemployment and “a pervasive feeling of hopelessness.” The school’s mission furthered the legacy of Whiteside’s goals to offer women new to the trade a marketable skill that would render them an independent, self-

⁵² E.I.R., “Ruth Whiteside School of Beauty Culture Good News for the Well Groomed Women of Community,” *The Northwest Enterprise*, Aug. 16, 1944; “State Board Examination,” *The Northwest Enterprise*, May 14, 1947. Ruth G. Whiteside was born on July 28, 1918 and died on November 30, 1975 in St. Louis.

⁵³ Interview with Willierean Thomas, Feb. 3, 2016.

sustaining worker who owned her own labor.⁵⁴

More significantly, Edwards combined the matrix of beauty, business, and politics to train women to become community activists, leaders, and entrepreneurs while using their skills to beautify the race. According to historian Tiffany A. Gill, “Beauticians were so politically active because they were among the most economically autonomous members of the black community in the twentieth century.” These women were “at the center of perhaps the only lucrative industry in which all aspects were controlled primarily by black women” and insulated from white surveillance. Edwards used the school as an informal support agency for women returning to the workforce, former women prisoners, and young women seeking skills and an opportunity to establish their own business. Students were instructed to visit the youth centers, women’s prison, and nursing homes to provide beauty services to those most vulnerable and living on the margins of society. As noted by one student, they became known as the “beautifiers of Jackson Street.” Edwards also spoke to women as well as her students on the importance of being empowered and learning marketable skills to bring about social change. For instance, in 1947, Edwards persuaded the State Department of Social and Health Services to allow welfare recipients to enroll in the Edwards Beauty School for employment training and help them develop career goals. Edwards also opened two more beauty salons in Seattle and in Bremerton (near the naval shipyard) to place her students once they graduated so they could gain the required one-year professional experience to work in other shops or start their own businesses.⁵⁵

Ruth G. Whiteside and Marie Edwards exemplified the spirit of what Gill describes as the

⁵⁴ Marilyn Kirby, “She Made Beauty Her Business,” *The Seattle Times*, Feb. 27, 1981.

⁵⁵ Gill, *Beauty Shop Politics*, 1-2; Esther Hall Mumford, *Calabash: A Guide to the History, Culture, and Art of African Americans in Seattle and King County, Washington* (Seattle: Ananse Press, 1993), 111; DeCharlene Williams, *History of the Seattle Central Area* (Seattle: Central Area Chamber of Commerce, 1990), 17-19.

survivalist entrepreneur. “Survivalist entrepreneurs,” as she states, “leaned on the beauty trade even during financial uncertainty” in a time where “entrepreneurship was valorized for its ability to help African Americans survive economically.” This also challenged the very idea of entrepreneurship as a means to uplift black manhood or advance the cause of racial uplift and racial pride. Young beauty culturalists, as they were called, received an education that infused practical vocational training with race-conscious, woman-centered, and community-centered pedagogy to train community builders and race leaders. Edwards stated, “In the ‘40s...my school was the only beauty school for blacks north of San Francisco. I guess from 1,200 to 1,500 men and women graduated from it.”⁵⁶

The transformative power of the school and the leaders it produced would impact the Central Area for the next four decades. For example, student DeCharlene Williams would establish DeCharlene’s Beauty Shoppe and Boutique in 1967 and become the founder and president of the Central Area Chamber of Commerce (headquartered in her shop). Odessa Brown would become a community organizer working to open the first health clinic for blacks in the city while studying at the Edwards Beauty School in the late 1960s. Edwards’ beauty skills coupled with her business acumen and activism allowed her to galvanize young beauticians for political community activism and women’s empowerment post-World War II.

Alongside the expanding black beauty culture, other women found professional employment opportunities opening that had systematically denied qualified African Americans and married women entry. One woman explained, “It was the people in between who couldn’t make it because they weren’t allowed to hold jobs—the teachers and nurses.” The Seattle Public Schools (SPS) employed its first black and Asian-American teachers by the end of the 1940s.

⁵⁶ Gill, 66; Marilyn Kirkby, “She Made Beauty Her Business,” *The Seattle Times*, Feb. 27, 1991, p. C1.

The first two instructors, Thelma DeWitty and Marita Johnson, were hired in 1947; followed by six in 1948; and then five in 1949. DeWitty was placed in a classroom at Cooper Elementary School. Juanita Allen taught at Horace Mann Elementary while Edith Johnson took a job at Hawthorne Elementary. SPS placed Gladys Lee Branch at Summit Elementary School and Inez Welch Hall joined the staff at Gatewood Elementary in 1948.⁵⁷

But SPS, like private industries, slowly integrated black women and other women of color into the school system and remained an incubator for preserving white hegemony and control. To be sure, when Dorothy Hollingsworth, a South Carolina teacher who would later become the first African American woman to be elected to the Seattle school board in 1975, applied for a teacher's position in 1949, SPS refused to hire her on the account of her race. She lamented, "I'd had five years of teaching experience...And the personnel director told me Seattle had hired its first Negro teacher but was not overwhelmingly ready to hire Negroes." After Daisy Dawson, a native of Alabama, graduated from the University of Washington in 1948, she accepted a teaching position in South Carolina because "in the state of Washington they were not hiring blacks." When Ora Greene arrived in Seattle from St. Louis seeking a teaching job, local blacks informed her that "they don't hire black teachers here" and "not to bother applying." Fortunately for her, she first found a teaching position in Bremerton and then Seattle but faced the same level of discrimination like all aspiring African American teachers.⁵⁸

Another one of Seattle's earliest teachers was Josephine Stratman Stokes, a native of Selma and graduate of Clark College in Atlanta. After moving to Seattle in 1947, Stokes worked

⁵⁷ "Two Race School Teachers Now Grace Seattle Public Schools," *The Northwest Enterprise*, Sept. 10, 1947; "Gatewood Teacher Wins Favor of Mothers," *Seattle Times*, Nov. 3, 1949; Constance Pitter Thomas, interview by Esther Mumford, March 1976.

⁵⁸ Dorothy Hollingsworth interviewed by Mildred Andrews on Jan. 31, 2007. Washington State Museum. Accessed May 24, 2016, <http://www.washingtonhistory.org/files/library/Hollingsworth.pdf>; Daisy Dawson interviewed by Jonathan Houston on April 27, 2009. Daisy Dawson Family's Private Collection, Seattle, Washington.

as a clerk in the education department of the Veteran's Administration. In 1950, she married Charles M. Stokes, a lawyer and migrant from Kansas who established the only black private law practice in Seattle and who later became the first black state representative from the 37th legislative district in 1963.⁵⁹ Josephine Stokes enrolled at the University of Washington master's teacher certification program in the same year of the groundbreaking decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* that ruled "separate but equal" was unconstitutional. Two years later in 1956, Stokes obtained a teaching position at Horace Mann Elementary School until it closed in 1968. "At first, I was told that I had no experience, but then they said, 'Well, if they never gave me a job, I wouldn't get any experience. So, I was hired,'" recounted Stokes. Because of her husband's political career, Stokes had access to political ties and formed relationships with the state's most powerful Republicans. In certain instances, she would ask her principal to leave her classroom early to attend political events with her husband. The Stokes' became one of the African American community's most politically influential couples during the 1950s and 1960s.⁶⁰

Despite the qualifications and social standing of black women teachers, the transition from an exclusively all white teacher staff to one that was becoming gradually mixed generated opposition at some schools. During Inez Welch Hall's first year of teaching, for instance, white mothers withdrew their children from her classroom. But the next year, Edgar A. Stanton,

⁵⁹ Charles M. Stokes also led the NAACP in lobbying the Washington State Legislature to pass a fair employment practices law in 1949.

⁶⁰ Stephanie Stokes Oliver, *Song for My Father: Memoir of an All-American Family* (New York: Atria Publishing, 2004), 66-68. As a college student, Josephine Stokes worked at Boeing over the summer break. As a college student, Josephine Stokes worked at Boeing over the summer break. Josephine S. Stokes had visited Seattle during the summers of the war starting in 1944 and finally moved after her college graduation in May of 1947. Thelma DeWitty and Josephine Stokes were both members of Mount Zion Baptist Church and the NAACP and remained good friends. Thelma and her husband became Josephine's first-born son's godparents when her husband Howard Wooten, a former Tuskegee Airmen, died from an accidental fall working on a bridge on Dearborn in 1948.

principal at Gatewood Elementary School, reportedly received double requests from other white mothers to transfer their children to Hall's classroom. Stanton stated, "I rarely have seen finer cooperation between parents and a teacher than that accorded Mrs. Hall." One mother considered the presence of a "Negro" teacher on the Gatewood staff as "a most favorable contact for youngsters at an impressionable age" and urged school officials to hire "a few others of different races into the school system." But the request fell on deaf ears only to be reignited during the post-1950s civil rights campaigns.⁶¹

Seattle's first cohort of black teachers broke the seven-decade ban that barred African Americans and married women from teaching in the state. While these teachers entered a predominantly white female domain and endured anti-black attitudes, the racial persecution strengthened their resolve to use their access and platform to address the racial, economic, and educational inequities within their communities and profession. Women education advocates sought to go further and break open the door for African Americans to serve on the school board to effect broader change. For example, Pearl M. White, a 71-year-old widow, clubwoman, and member of the NAACP, announced her candidacy for the school board in 1952, becoming the first African American woman to run for the position.⁶² She sought to establish a Negro History Week, provide free bus fares for Seattle school children, and offer free hot lunches and reduced milk prices for low-income students. "I am a candidate because I'm greatly interested in the welfare of young people," White proclaimed. She charged that "not all Seattle schools are receiving "a fair share" of funds, equipment, and capable teachers." Although she lost the election to incumbent James A. Duncan, she polled a surprising 40,000 votes that attested to the

⁶¹ "Gatewood Teacher Wins Favor of Mothers," *Seattle Times*, Nov. 3, 1949; Mary Elizabeth Cronin, "Visionary Women with Strong Links to the Community," *The Seattle Times*, Oct. 31, 1995.

⁶² Pearl M. White was also past state chaplain of the WSFCW and ran a catering business before retiring several years earlier.

vibrancy of her campaign.⁶³

Over the next decade, the political advocacy of black women teachers, educators, and education activists would manifest in a number of black civil rights and women's organizations. Teachers such as Inez Welch Hall would head the WSFCW and become a founding member of the Seattle Section of the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW) in 1967.⁶⁴ Stokes and Green would become members of the NCNW and NAACP and charter members of the Seattle Links, Inc. Seattle African American women's break into professional and semi-skilled occupations influenced a segment of a growing elite middle-class to organize a Links, Inc. chapter in 1955. The chapter's founding was a direct consequence of postwar opportunities and women's new identity in the Pacific Northwest, informed by their education, economic, and professional gains.⁶⁵

More fortunate women obtained occupations in professional arenas that allowed them to pursue long lasting careers in postwar Seattle. A group of southern women migrants interested in nursing traveled to the Pacific Northwest in search of work in the healthcare industry. Ironically, the belief that Seattle represented a metaphoric utopia for pursue professional opportunities in comparison with the South contrasted with the realities of Juanita Davis and Maxine Pitter, both Seattle natives, who left the city in 1941. They traveled elsewhere to pursue nursing studies in other parts of the country after the University of Washington School of

⁶³ Mrs. Pearl White, "Schools Must Be for All People," *The Northwest Enterprise*, Mar. 7, 1952; "Pearl White Loses Bid for School Bid," *The Northwest Enterprise*, Mar. 14, 1952; "Veteran, Newcomer in School Board Race," *The Seattle Times*, Mar. 9, 1952, p. 15.

⁶⁴ Thelma DeWitty was a member of the NAACP. Josephine Stokes was also a member of Alpha Omicron Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority.

⁶⁵ Charter members of the Seattle Chapter include Beatrice Dotson, Virginia Gayton, Orie Greene, Sarai Greene Haith, Guela Gayton Johnson, Christine Meade, Lillian Mitchell, Melvina Squires, Josephine Stokes, Delores Brooks Williams, and Sylvia Gayton Wesley. The Links, Incorporated was founded in 1946 as a women's service organization to "link" accomplished women to serve their communities' through civic, education, and cultural initiatives. See Turkiya L. Lowe, *The History of the Greater Seattle Chapter of The Links, Incorporated, 1955-2005* (Redmond, Washington: The Greater Seattle Chapter of The Links, Incorporated, 2005).

Nursing refused to admit African Americans in their program. Dean Elizabeth Soule insisted that the women find another career choice since black women nurses in Seattle did not exist. “My father was very angry about that because my mother was born and raised in this city, and my father said he’d paid enough taxes to educate a lot of people forever,” recalled Davis. In 1941, Davis matriculated to Homer G. Phillips Nursing School in St. Louis, a historically black institution, while Pitter enrolled in the Lincoln School of Nursing in the Bronx. Both Davis and Pitter came back to Seattle just before the end of WWII to pursue nursing careers. Davis found a job working with the King County Public Health Department, specializing in venereal diseases, and Pitter was employed at Providence Hospital on Cherry Hill, a place that only hired black women as custodians and cooks.⁶⁶

Given the postwar reputation of Seattle as a gateway to economic freedom, then southern women migrants looking for professional nursing careers sought to lay claim to perceived promises of employment opportunities systematically denied to them in the South. Harborview announced jobs in its catalogue for nursing positions for African American women and a small group of women nurses applied and came to Seattle in 1946. These nurses were considered the first African American registered nurses to work in Seattle although a few may have come prior to World War II but could not find employment. Harborview hired one of Seattle’s first African American nurses in 1943, and by 1950 there were approximately thirteen black women nurses.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Jerry Large, “African American Nurses Organization Has Come a Long Way, *The Seattle Times*, Mar. 30, 2009; Mary T. Henry, “Mary Mahoney Professional Nurses Organization (Seattle),” Feb. 8, 2009,” *HistoryLink*. Accessed Jul. 2, 2016, <http://www.historylink.org/File/8925>. For more on black women registered nurses in Seattle, see Lois Price-Spratlen, *African American Registered Nurses in Seattle: The Struggle for Opportunity and Success* (Seattle: Peanut Butter Publishing, 2001). Their decisions could possibly have been influenced by the shortages of nurses during the war and the federal government’s response to encourage the training of nurses that provided access for black women to enter nursing programs.

⁶⁷ Price-Spratlen, *African American Registered Nurses in Seattle*, 14-16.

Their entry into the nursing profession was not without struggle and tension. In order to create a space of inclusion and a shield from racial and gender discrimination in the hospitals, thirteen nurses formed the Mary Mahoney Nurses' Club in 1949.⁶⁸ Named after the first African American woman nurse in the United States, the founding members organized the club at the home of Ann Baker Roy as a social and political organization. The relative few numbers of blacks in the city and the even smaller number of black professional nurses left many of them feeling isolated in their workplace environments as well as in the city.⁶⁹ "In the early life of the organization, members stressed social and professional development...we shared the challenges, failures, and successes in our work environments," recalled Maxine Pitter. At the hospitals, black nurses experienced hostile racial and gender discrimination by hospital officials. Most patients refused to be attended by a black nurse and many of their co-workers refused to speak to them.⁷⁰

The club sought to promote health in their community, provide support for professional development, sponsor scholarships for young women interested in nursing, and financially contribute to civil rights organization. For instance, the MMNC provided financial assistance to the Seattle-King County Tuberculosis League, the Children's Orthopedic Hospital, the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), the Seattle Urban League (SUL), the Children's Home Society of Washington, the Crisis Clinic, and the NAACP. Helping new and younger women transition into the medical field was a central part of the club's mission as well. Despite the challenges during the war and postwar period, the Mary Mahoney Club represented the small but growing professional class of African American

⁶⁸ In the same year, Lelia Duffel graduated as the first African American nurse at the University of Washington's School of Nursing program.

⁶⁹ These nurses graduated from schools in the South known as the Brewster Hospital and Nurse Training in Jacksonville, Florida, the first nursing school in the country solely for black students. Rachel Pitts came to Seattle in 1946 and was one of the six who graduated from the school.

⁷⁰ Price-Spratlen, 78, 80-81.

women in Seattle, and it would become a pivotal organization for black professional nurses and young women to claim a place in Seattle, however small the impact.⁷¹

The Postwar Struggle for Fair Employment Practices Law in Washington State

By 1950, African American women constituted 48 percent of the black population in Seattle. While places like California, Detroit, and many northern and midwestern industries experienced a bust in war industries after a stint period of production, Seattle became one of few places that did not experience the mass effect of deindustrialization. The Boeing Plant and upcoming new industries continued to thrive due to defense spending on airplanes during the Cold War. Defense workers had acquired savings that could only be spent after war shortages declined. With a new purchasing power, workers kept businesses and retail afloat from decline. However after the end of World War II, most black women were fired as Whiteside had predicted while a select few remained on the employment rolls.⁷²

Therefore, the postwar struggle for fair employment continued to mark the larger quest for equity and justice. If Seattle offered only a few positions for black women to enter in a limited array of professions, then the majority of women remained barred from entry into most occupational and labor fields. Accordingly, migrant black women were the first group to be fired and a few found relatively high paying jobs with the federal government. Many others were forced into low-paying service sector jobs as custodians, cooks, and nurses's aid—the same occupations they left in the South. Rosielee Johnson first found employment in 1956 as a nursing assistant at Harbor View and then as a maid at the Coach House Travelodge where

⁷¹ "Nurses' Club Plans Fund-Raising Party," *The Seattle Times*, Mar. 13, 1968.

⁷² U.S. Bureau of the Census, *General Characteristics of the Population*, 1950. Washington, Vol. II, pt. 47. Table 34 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1952), 47-67; Lowe, 218.

University of Washington students rented and lived. For her, life was about “jobs, not careers.” This attitude reflected the hardships for working-class women to break through racial and gender glass ceilings. Taking care of family became the number one priority for many married women. The prospect of jobs, therefore, did not translate into the opening up of new categories of employment for most black women.⁷³

Women, in response, vented their frustrations wherever they could. In 1952, a Seattle woman wrote to President Harry S. Truman concerning her working conditions:

I went to the 11th grade and my husband has been in service and overseas twice, but I can't understand why there has to be so much discrimination in jobs toward Negro people.⁷⁴

Her plea exhibited the entrenched hardships for employment and widespread discrimination in the city of Seattle. When President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 8802 in 1941, the measure created a Fair Employment Practices Committee to investigate complaints of alleged employment discrimination. Notable black leaders, A. Phillip Randolph, NAACP executive secretary Walter White, and the NYA Minority Affairs Director Mary McLeod Bethune, placed pressure on congressional leaders as well as the president to address the increasing employment discrimination in the defense industries.⁷⁵

The WSFCW also worked diligently to report and pressure government officials to enforce Executive Order 8802. In 1945, the organization sent letters to the Fair Employment Practices Commission requesting funds to continue its monitoring activities of employment discrimination in Washington State. When prominent black women leaders and activists of the NACW descended upon Seattle in 1948 for their national biennial convention, local political

⁷³ Johnson interview, Oct. 30, 2013.

⁷⁴ “A Survey of Housing Patterns,” 1954, p. 8-9, Box 15, Folder 10, Accession No. 0607-001, Seattle Urban League Records, 1930-1997, University of Washington Special Collections.

⁷⁵ Anderson, “Last Hired, First Fired,” 84.

activists such as Mrs. M. Taylor of the local Progressive Party, Mildred Younger, Chairman of the Republican State Speakers Bureau of Washington, Esther Murray of the Democratic Party, and Anne Fisher of the Socialist Party were invited to speak. The four women were part of a non-partisan political forum sponsored by the NACW to speak on their party's position on civil rights and its stance on the FEP in the upcoming election. Progressive Party representative Taylor declared, "The two old parties no longer serve the best interests of most of the people." Fisher assured that the Socialist Party "advocates social equality, the abolition of segregation in the Army," and "seeks Fair Employment Practices." At the convention, women focused their objectives on "constructive legislation" and the "complete integration into civic and economic life of community."⁷⁶

While much of the tension around wage parity in Seattle revolved around closed union membership and shops at Boeing and the Kaiser shipyards that limited the hiring of African Americans during and after the war, the Brotherhood of the Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP) and the Seattle Ladies' Auxiliary of the BSCP launched an impressive political campaign to end employment discrimination in Washington State. The BSCP's political power, derived mainly from the organizing efforts of the women, made the Pullman porters "the aristocrats of black labor in the African American community." Since the late 1930s, the Seattle Ladies' Auxiliary of BSCP played a critical role in the development of black women's leadership, political activism, and trade unionism. The Seattle Ladies' Auxiliary situated themselves as members and supporters of one of two black labor unions in the city and took political action to demand rights as workers, citizens, and consumers. One leader of the national ladies' auxiliary proclaimed,

⁷⁶ Lowe, 223; "NACW Convention Minutes, 1948," July 31-August, 1948, pp. 31-33, Seattle, Washington, Folder, 001554-002-0434, Records of the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs, 1895-1992, Part 1: Minutes of National Conventions, Publications, and President's Office Correspondence. Accessed Aug. 20, 2015. <https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=001554-002-0434>.

“We are all workers and we must consume so we can join together...by organizing and helping to raise the standard of living.” The devoted efforts of the women in the Seattle Ladies’ Auxiliary resulted in a Fair Employment Practices law in the state of Washington in 1949.⁷⁷

During the war in 1944, the Auxiliary’s membership peaked to its highest number of 16 women although they remained a very small group compared to other cities. Letitia Murray, Pacific Coast Zone Supervisor from Los Angeles, reported that the Seattle Ladies’ Auxiliary worked in defense jobs, contrary to the women’s organizational role as housewives. Their decision to enter paid labor was possibly due to the increasing number of furloughed black porters during and immediately after the Depression. In 1948, there were at least twelve furloughed BSCP members in Seattle. Also, the spatial location and the economic and demographic disposition of African Americans may not have generally allowed them to become housewives. This makes an interesting parallel to the rest of the porters’ wives experiences across the country. In 1949, the International Ladies’ Auxiliary of the BSCP president, Halena Wilson wrote to Amanda Riley, president of the Seattle Auxiliary, that the difference between Chicago and Seattle is that “here...too few members in the Auxiliary are actually sold themselves on the roll [sic] that the housewife should play in the labor movement.” In Seattle, black porters’ wives understood better than most members of the international auxiliary the role

⁷⁷ Melinda Chateauvert, *Marching Together: Women of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), xiii; Report of the Proceedings of the Fourth Biennial Convention International Auxiliary Order Ladies Auxiliaries to the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, 1944, p. 37, 63-64. Dellums (Cottrell Laurence) Papers. Oakland Public Library, African American Museum and Library at Oakland. Accessed July 20, 2015, <https://calisphere.org/item/0e3adf43a48a47d10b3fc5d6cc7f7f97/>. This is not to argue that only through the efforts of the Ladies’ Auxiliary did the Fair Employment Practices Law get passed. Many civil rights groups contributed to its passage such as the NAACP, Christian Friends for Racial Equality, and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. Women of the Portland Ladies’ Auxiliary of the BSCP involved themselves in the Council for a Permanent FECPC with English Johnson as Secretary. The Spokane Ladies’ Auxiliary was forced to relinquish its charter in 1944 after failing to conform to the Constitution and General rules of the International Ladies’ Auxiliary due to dissent and internal conflict surrounding one or two members who were unwilling to accept the decisions of the International Ladies.’ It had not functioned since the winter of 1942.

women should play in the movement by their very own participation in the defense industries on behalf of their families, rather than relying on their husbands' salaries and experiences within industry.⁷⁸

In 1946, the Seattle women's auxiliary only consisted of 14 members compared to Portland's thirty-six and struggled to maintain membership throughout its existence. However, the group consistently put on social and benefit affairs for recruitment, raised awareness of the labor movement, and fundraised for the BSCP. Between 1944 and 1946, they financially contributed to and supported the Scholarship Fund of the Red Cross, the local FEPC, the Phyllis Wheatley YWCA, the Seattle branch of the NAACP, and the local Joint Council Dining Car Employees. They sent letters and telegrams to President Truman—nine to state representatives and seventeen to Congressmen—protesting issues affecting African Americans such as lynching, poll taxes, and employment.⁷⁹

When Harry S. Truman and congressional southern aristocrats stalled a bill to fund the FEPC and make it a permanent commission in 1946, Halena Wilson urged delegates at the Fifth Biennial Convention to direct their energies on “the passage of housing and health measures and the enactment of Fair Employment Practices Legislation” both locally and nationally. Wilson claimed that “the proposed federal Fair Employment Practices Commission, which bid fair to be a 20th century Emancipation Proclamation for the underprivileged and minority groups in

⁷⁸ Cited in Chateauvert, *Marching Together*, 200; Report of Proceedings of the Fourth Biennial Convention, 1944, pp. 63-64. Dellums (Cottrell Laurence) Papers, Accessed, July 20, 2016 <<https://calisphere.org/item/0e3adf43a48a47d10b3fc5d6cc7f7f97/>>; Halena Wilson, letter to Amanda Riley, Dec. 16, 1949, Folder 001553-010-0747, Jan 01, 1949 – Dec 31, 1950. Records of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, Series A, Holdings of the Chicago Historical Society, Part 2: Records of the Ladies Auxiliary of the BSCP, 1931-1968. Accessed Jul. 20, 2016. https://hvproquestcom.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/pdfs/001553/001553_010_0747/001553_010_0747_From_1_to_23.pdf.

⁷⁹ Chateauvert, 159; Report of Proceedings of the Fifth Biennial Convention, 1946, pp. 63-64, 90. Records of Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. Dellums (Cottrell Laurence Papers). Accessed, July 20, 2016, <https://calisphere.org/item/ark:/13030/c86w9d6d/>.

America, was permitted to die an ignoble death by the enemies of human progress and by the enemies of human decency.” Although the organization supported equal pay for equal work due to the increased numbers of women in wage labor, the local and national chapter focused their energies on the pressing fight to end employment discrimination.⁸⁰

In 1947, the Seattle Ladies’ Auxiliary made it possible for national black labor leaders, A. Phillip Randolph, president, and C.L. Dellum, fourth vice president of the BSCP, to visit Seattle and speak on the political developments around the F.E.P.C. Randolph urged the BSCP, its ladies’ auxiliary, and the American Federation of Labor to give \$2,500 to assist in the passage of the FEPC. Two months after Randolph’s Seattle visit, a member of the Ladies’ Auxiliary Addie Fletcher Booth and an interracial coalition of labor supporters established the Washington State Council for the National Fair Employment Practices Committee in support of the FEPC bill in Congress and its passage.⁸¹ Booth, born in Texas, attended Prairie View A&M College and taught school in Shreveport, Louisiana before she married William Booth, a railroad porter. The couple moved to Seattle in 1943 where Booth found a manufacturing job at Boeing. She left Boeing in 1944 to work as a cook-housekeeper for one of Seattle’s wealthiest families, Vinson Joseph Gottstein, real estate mogul and owner of the Longacres Racetrack.⁸² As secretary-treasurer of the Ladies’ Auxiliary, Booth served as the first chairwoman of the Washington State

⁸⁰ Report of Proceedings of the Fifth Biennial Convention, 1946, p. 10. Dellums (Cottrell Laurence) Papers. <https://calisphere.org/item/0e3adf43a48a47d10b3fc5d6cc7f7f97/>.

⁸¹ Randolph and members of the March on Washington Movement organized a National Council for a Permanent FEPC in 1941. The nineteen council member group created a strong coalition for civil rights.

⁸² Alhadeff Gottstein, grandson of Joseph, recalled that Addie Fletcher Booth stayed at the cottage behind the track every summer and worked at their downtown condo for the rest of the year. She went to the races everyday and missed church services on Sunday. As a devout member of Mount Zion Baptist Church, when Rev. Samuel McKinney would ask her about her whereabouts, she replied, “At the track. And don’t go giving me a hard time, because I was raising money to build your church!” It is therefore plausible that the types of connections and people Booth interacted with at the races and within the family circles could very well have served her purpose of securing resources for the community especially having the education as well as the skills in fundraising with the Ladies’ Auxiliary. One friend said, “She’d wangle money, goods, or services from her well-heeled friends.” It is also to be noted that she did not just work for any white family in Seattle. Booth very much likely enjoyed the freedom and wages she earned with the Gottstein’s and the connections she made. She continued to work for them

Council for FEPC with R.C. Ridge, president of the BSCP, as vice chairmen.⁸³

The newly organized council planned to raise \$5,000 to help finance its cause of promoting the passage of the F.E.P. bill. Mary Chartveurat writes that these local councils, established by BSCP members, “worked with the national council’s field representatives to build grassroots political support, to send local delegates to lobby Congress, and to raise funds for the national office.” In Seattle, the BSCP and the Ladies’ Auxiliary were the backbone of the F.E.C.P. council with the Seattle Ladies’ Auxiliary leading the way. Booth and the Council spent two years “persuading legislators in Olympia to enact a fair employment statute in Washington State.”⁸⁴

This battle of course was not accomplished alone. Women representing multiple civic and political organizations such as the Christian Friends of Racial Equality, founded in 1943 by black and white clubwomen, the Seattle NAACP, the Seattle Urban League, and the King County Colored Republican Club joined forces with the American Federation of Teachers, the Jewish Anti-Defamation League, the International Longshoreman’s and Warehousemen’s Union, and the Seattle YWCA to lobby for a permanent state employment practices law as well in 1947. With Melvina Squires leading the charge as president of the local NAACP, in 1949, members, Mrs. Derrick, Thelma DeWitty, Arline Yarbrough, clubwoman and member of the CFRE, and Mrs. Freddy Braxton went to Olympia and sat in the Senate chambers to elicit their support of the bill.⁸⁵

for fifty years. See Carole Beer, “People Person Addie Booth Was a Page Out of History,” *The Seattle Times*, Apr. 26, 1996, p. B6.

⁸³ E.I.R., “B.S.C.P. and Aux. Honor National Labor Executives,” *The Northwest Enterprise*, Mar. 26, 1947. Other Council members included Joseph Kane, a young Democratic activist and future lawyer for the Civil Liberties Union and Sidney Gerber, a white philanthropist and civic leader were named co-chairman; Hutchen R. Hutchins, a Communist and civil rights leader was elected treasurer; Alma R. Morgan, secretary.

⁸⁴ “Group Here Seeks Fair Practices Act,” *The Seattle Times*, May 30, 1947, p.13; “Fair Employment Council Organized,” *The Seattle Times*, June 5, 1947, p. 3; Chateauvert, 172.

⁸⁵ Taylor, 171; “Drive for Bill Against Discrimination in Employment,” *The Northwest Enterprise*, Feb. 1949;

The Washington State Committee Against Discrimination in Employment, which met at Josephine Stokes' home, established a temporary auxiliary to set up an intensive fund drive. DeWitty was selected as chairwoman of the new auxiliary to raise funds to facilitate the passage of the bill in the state legislature. After two years of mounting pressure from local labor, civil rights, religious, and women's groups, the state legislature decisively declared discrimination "a matter of state concern," prohibited employment bias "because of race, creed, color, or national origin," and established that the opportunity to obtain employment without discrimination was in fact a civil right. The law also created a state board against discrimination. The confluence of wartime migration and interracial coalition-building between the Ladies' Auxiliary and other civic and labor groups brought about broad-based civil rights and economic reform in Washington State.⁸⁶

Conclusion

With a capital victory in the Washington State legislature, the influence of African American women to force a fair employment practices law marked the first mass action protest for civil rights. Although the FEP law eliminated employment discrimination in the state, it did little to enforce the law until the passage of a federal Civil Rights Act in 1964. The implications of World War II opened new categories for women's work, but the gendered and racial stratification of the defense industries reinforced white male hegemony and thus inhibited black women's opportunities for economic advancement. Progress of black women workers during and immediately after the war were compounded by intrinsic tactical measures of union exclusion,

"N.A.A.C.P. Very Active in F.E.P.C.," *The Northwest Enterprise*, Mar. 23, 1949. Booth was also an active member of the NAACP.

⁸⁶ "Drive for Bill Against Discrimination in Employment," *The Northwest Enterprise*, Feb. 9, 1949, p. 2; Taylor, 171-172. Booth was also an active member of the N.A.A.C.P.

employment discrimination, sexual harassment, and denying job promotions and access to high rank and file positions. Boeing, the Navy shipyard, and the Pacific Car & Foundry certainly guaranteed jobs (only a select number) but not equal treatment in “liberal” Seattle. Black migrant women found that their skill level and training did not net them the benefits of higher paid wages and higher skilled positions. These barriers continued to remain intact forcing women to fight for the right to work and the right to join unions to protect themselves and their jobs.

In the postwar period, many migrant women turned to economic autonomy and pursuing professional careers. Entry into industrial and professional occupations as skilled laborers, beauticians, nurses, and teachers provided black women leadership skills, economic improvements, and strengthened their organizing base. Experiencing discriminatory hiring practices and racist institutional policies around employment, housing, and education in the Emerald City, migrant women turned their consciousness into civil rights activism in solidarity with the plight of their relatives, friends, and communities they left behind in the South, refusing to accept the crumbs given to them by paternalistic whites. The consequence of Seattle’s wartime migration and the development of women’s leadership in this period would set the stage for black women’s political mobility in the 1960s.

Chapter Three

Out of the Shadows: Building Grassroots Movements in Seattle's Central Area, 1961-1969

We as negro women are very much concerned with the problems that headline every news east, every newspapers -whether it be Jackson, Mississippi, Huntsville, Alabama, or here in Seattle, Washington - and we feel more and more that we too...would like to carry our share of this burden - to be a part of the great movement for freedom for all men regardless of race, creed, or color.

–Freddie Mae Gautier, letter to Rev. Dr. Martin L. King, 1963¹

I have been working around in a movement that has been unable to compete on a political basis. There seems to be no end to the violence for people seeking legislation by demonstration and petitions.

–Flo Ware, candidate for the Peace and Freedom Party, 1968²

In 1962, Seattle became the site of the World's Fair, attracting ten million visitors from across the globe to reestablish its position as the “unquestionable gateway to the Orient.” The largest feat to mark the city's spellbinding wonder was the unveiling of the Space Needle, a 605 feet high domed-top tower overlooking the Cascades, Olympic, and Rainier mountains, and making it the tallest structure west of the Mississippi River. At the center of the world stage, city and state officials attempted to conceal the “race problem” fermenting in the city and shield tourists and visitors from unpleasant experiences that might jeopardize the state's reputation. Albert D. Rosellini, governor of Washington, strongly urged Seattle city officers as well as residents to be on their best behavior in anticipation of the event. He stated, “It should be remembered that during the World's Fair our state...will be visited by many non-Caucasians from foreign lands. I urge everyone to take positive steps to prevent discrimination which might involve these visitors from other nations, as well as our own citizens.”³

¹ Freddie Mae Gautier, letter to Martin Luther King, June 19, 1963, The King Center. Accessed Sept. 12, 2017, <http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/letter-mrs-raymond-gautier-and-mrs-robert-joyner-mlk>.

² “Statement by Flo Ware, Peace and Freedom Party Candidate for U.S. Congress-7th District,” 1968, Box 1, Folder 7, Accession No.1438-001, Florestine Ware Papers, 1960-1981, University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections.

³ “World Fair Corporation Fact Sheet No. 1: Why a World Fair?” January 17, 1958. Folder 11, Box 196, Wesley C Uhlman Subject Files, 5287-02. Seattle Municipal Archives. Accessed Jul. 27, 2017, <https://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/CityArchive/DDL/WorldsFair/Jan171958.pdf>; “Rosellini Warns of Racial Bans at

Although not entirely a façade, the city’s liberal image masked growing disparities and deep-seated racial fears to which Freddie Mae Gautier, a long-time resident and community activist, questioned, “Seattle is big enough to have a World’s Fair—where nations from all over the world have been...—yet Seattle is not big enough to realize that they have almost 30,000 citizens, who have hardly been recognized as a part of her greatness.” The city’s increasing racial tensions and the World’s Fair symbol of liberalism and a progressive future presented a paradox that has, in part, shaped the narrative of Seattle as a racially progressive city. African American women contested the perpetuation of this illusive status through the mobilization of three political movements: civil rights, black power, and the War on Poverty.⁴

This chapter explores the gendered dimensions of activism and struggle and how gender shaped black political struggles and ideologies which, at times, were at odds with traditional male leadership. Sociologist Belinda Robnett argues that women, “because of their gender, were often channeled away from formal leadership positions and confined to the informal level of leadership” which helped to “develop a strong grassroots tier of leadership.” By moving beyond a narrow conception of how leadership designated heads of organizations, a conception that has persistently marginalized women who often ascribed to these roles but were repeatedly denied, this chapter contends that women operated in formal and informal leadership roles. Black women used their personal politics and persuasion to mobilize the masses through political elections, school desegregation campaigns, black power activities, and anti-poverty programs. These four areas served as breeding grounds where women developed leadership skills that would strengthen their political acumen and catapult them into careers of activism and public

Fair,” *The Seattle Times*, Feb. 1, 1962.

⁴ Freddie Mae Gautier, “Taxation Without Representation,” *The Facts*, Sept. 14, 1962.

service in the 1970s.⁵

Trouble in the Promised Land

The postwar migration of southern black women and men increased throughout the decade. The black population rose from 26,901 in 1960 to 37,868 a decade later with women constituting half the population. The continued reinforcement of redlining constrained the vast majority of Seattle's blacks in the Central Area with only a handful peppered throughout North and West Seattle. As a result of the hardened residential patterns, schools became rigidly segregated. Despite Washington State's progressive civil rights and fair employment practices laws, housing segregation, employment discrimination, and inadequate schools persisted and remained central to African Americans demands for opportunity and fairness as citizens and taxpayers. Women suffered the most from restricted employment which led to entrenched unemployment rates and severely low incomes. According to the Washington State census, by 1960, only 28 percent of African American women were employed in some occupation, a 104 percent increase from the decade before. The total number of working-women in personal service and private households increased by 31 percent and remained the largest employment sector for black women. In contrast, there existed an increasing but small core group of women who benefited from the limited gains of the postwar economic period. Compared to previous decades, nearly one thousand women found professional positions as physicians, teachers, librarians, nurses, beauticians, accountants, social workers, and secretaries.⁶

⁵ Belinda Robnett, "African American Women in the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1965: Gender Leadership, and Micromobilization," *American Journal of Sociology*, May 1, 1996, Vol. 101 (16), 1667.

⁶ I calculated this by using 1950 and 1960 census data. Seattle. King County. 1950 U.S. Census, population schedule, Iowa. Marion County. 1850 U.S. Census, population schedule. Digital images. Ancestry.com. April 18, 2013. <http://ancestry.com>; U.S. Census of Population, *Race and Class of Worker of Employed Person*, 1950. Washington. Table 83 (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1952), 47-210; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Characteristics of Population*, 1960. Washington, Vol. 1, pt. 49. Table 21 (Washington, DC: Government Print-

While for the first time some black women gained access to positions historically denied to them, the working-class and poor women remain excluded. As a result, the first generation of professional middle-class women, who struggled to balance their class position, political ideologies, and racial identity, came of age, forming the crux of civil rights activism and the fomenting political leadership in the Central Area of the 1960s. The Civil Rights Movement mobilized blacks across class lines. Their assertion of leadership, however, would remain fraught with dissent and sometimes be undermined by young black power advocates as well as poor and working-class women. Often overshadowed by charismatic ministerial leaders, women were vocal and active participants in demanding change and bringing about new visions. Nowhere was this demand for new black leadership more central than their struggle to be a political voice for black Seattle in the state legislature.⁷

A Political Theater: The Staging of Black Women Politicians

Although Alice S. Presto made her unsuccessful bid for the Washington State senate in 1918, up until the 1960s no other black woman in Seattle had run for a state office. Due to the alarming rate of unemployment, the housing crisis, and poor educational facilities in the Central Area, black women entered the formal political arena to contest what they perceived to be ineffective leadership and to make radical changes within city and state government. In 1962, Ruth E. Chiles, a teacher living in the Central Area, filed for candidacy on the Republican ticket as a representative for the 37th legislative district. Chiles was the first African American teacher hired in the Bellevue school system in 1956 where she taught at the elementary, junior, and

ing Office, 1961), 49-44.

⁷ Vivian Caver, interview by Trevor Griffey, Feb. 24, 2005. Seattle Labor & Civil Rights Project. Accessed Mar. 18, 2018, <http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/caver.htm>.

senior high levels. Recognized for her speeches on civil rights and race relations, Chiles campaigned as a “community worker,” “outstanding educator,” and “conscientious citizen” who would implement educational programs to cater to the needs of students and adults. She also sought to improve housing conditions throughout the district by sponsoring an open housing bill and providing stable employment for qualified non-white applicants in government agencies. The young candidate also promised to work for the expansion of social welfare programs for senior citizens and extend the rehabilitation program to train non-disabled citizens.⁸

In a contentious political battle to win both seats in the state legislature from the 37th district, community members united with Chiles and Democratic incumbent Sam Smith, the only African American serving in the legislature, to represent their interests. A group of women strategists formed The Citizens for Ruth Chiles and Sam Smith to seize power from white candidates, Ann T. O’Donnell, a young Democrat incumbent with a strong rapport with black residents, and Republican nominee John M. Clise, an insurance agent.⁹ It was no surprise that since the 37th legislative district comprised over eighty percent black residents, the group sought to promote the only two African American candidates in efforts to gain more political representation in Olympia. The committee chairwoman, Helen Snyder Krisel, and co-chairwomen, Mrs. Otis Law and Dorothy Hollingsworth, an educator and social worker, respectively, urged voters to cross party lines and unify their support to elect the two black representatives. While Chiles’ political views were compatible with the goals of black progress, her support of a Party that had recently and systematically denied political, civil, and economic

⁸ “Vote Nov. 6th: Chiles Outstanding Candidate,” *The Facts*, Nov. 2, 1962, p. 3; “Nominees for State Representatives,” *The Seattle Times*, Nov. 4, 1962; “Introducing Ruth Chiles,” *The Facts*, Aug. 10, 1962; “We Need Ruth Chiles As A Competent Legislator. Advertisement. Aug. 24, 1962, p. 8.

⁹ Ann T. O’Donnell was an active member of the East Madison YWCA, Urban League, the East Madison Commercial Club, the Metropolitan Democratic Women’s Club, and vice president of the Totem Chapter of the Business and Professional Women’s Club. “Ann Teresa O’Donnell,” Obituary, *The Seattle Times*, May 26, 1965, p. 65.

constitutional rights to African Americans in the South and throughout the country presented a conflict with the dominant goals of the burgeoning Civil Rights Movement taking shape in Seattle. In the end, Chiles' political affiliation with the Republican Party took precedence over her race with most residents overwhelmingly voting for incumbent Democrats Smith and O'Donnell.¹⁰

Although African Americans' turn to the Democratic Party had grown since the 1930s Depression, Chiles' campaign demonstrated that they did not necessarily abandon the Republican Party altogether. The 1964 presidential election highlighted the lingering old guard Republican women's interests and presence in political affairs in the city.¹¹ For instance, when the Assistant GOP chairwoman, Clare B. Williams, spoke in Seattle, a small coalition of black Republican women attended the event. At the same time, Freddie Mae Gautier, a matron in the King County Sheriff's office, threw her name in the hat on the Republican ticket to unseat O'Donnell. Just a year before in 1963, Gautier had founded the Benefit Guild, a charitable organization designed to promote unity and improve racial, social, and economic conditions in the community.¹² The Guild sponsored community programs for contributions to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), participated in civil rights activities, and clothed and educated low-income families. In addition, the organization raised money for the families of the

¹⁰ Ruth Chiles and Sam Smith. Advertisement. *The Facts*, Nov. 2, 1962; "King County Legislature, *The Seattle Times*, Nov. 7, 1962. Chiles received 3,850 votes to the incumbent Ann T. O'Donnell's 5,482. African Americans in Seattle like elsewhere in the nation drew a political divide. The Republican Party leaders had overwhelmingly been slow on supporting black political and economic rights. The Democratic leaders also wanted to support but faced the strong Southern Delegation that historically thwarted this effort through political repression, terror methods, and so forth. African Americans divided on their loyalties to parties switched during the 1960s African Americans were unfavorable to the party supported Barry Goldwater and racist policies in the South.

¹¹ Ann Gardenhire, Helen Krisel, Elizabeth Ponder, and Lethia Harvey attended the luncheon meeting sponsored by the Federation of Women's Republican Clubs in Seattle.

¹² Founding members included Esther Chisolm, Lylia Joyner, Dorothy Steele, Hazel Jackson, Alida Washington, Bessie Coleman, Goldie Henry, Mary Neal, Donetta Alexander, and Cassie Ingram.

four girls who died in Birmingham's fatal church bombing. Gautier marched with the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the SCLC in the South and co-founded the local chapter of the SCLC, later becoming the Western Vice President of the regional branch of the organization.¹³ In an earnest letter to King requesting his presence in Seattle, she confessed:

We have all become complacent and satisfied with the course of life here...and you know this area is just as bad as Jackson, Mississippi...where they use the police clubs on you—we have the invisible ones by the governing bodies of the city and state, where you are placed in jail—we also are here in an invisible jail—a ghetto for housing—in other words the Northwest is a silent 'nice nasty.'¹⁴

With a long resume of community welfare activism and ties to powerful politicians, Gautier, like Chiles, understood that black women needed to assume political roles by going beyond electoral participation and running for elective office. Gautier's presence in the race ignited a firestorm by an unlikely group of allies—established black male political leaders. Sam Smith, looking to win his third term, believed that black Republicans were a disgrace and detrimental to the political efficacy of Central Area residents. At a coffee hour hosted by Rovella Tyler, Smith lashed out at his opponents, stating that he felt “insulted that the Republican Party...still wanted us to vote for them.” He declared that he was “angry to the boiling point that some people were out to divide up the votes of his supporters in an effort to weaken the importance of the people of our community.” Gautier, along with Keve Bray, a secretary to the board director of an insurance company and Republican candidate, may have threatened Smith's and the Democrats political stronghold in the district.¹⁵

With four African Americans, two Democrats and two Republicans, vying for two seats

¹³ “Seattle Women Hear GOP Chairmen,” *The Facts*, May 17, 1963; “Benefit Guild Raises \$2000 For SCLC Benefit,” *The Facts*, Nov. 27, 1963.

¹⁴ Freddie Mae Gautier, letter to Martin Luther King, June 19, 1963, The King Center. Accessed Sept. 12, 2017 <http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/letter-mrs-raymond-gautier-and-mrs-robert-joyner-mlk>.

¹⁵ “Lewis Martin, Ann O'Donnell & Sam Smith Present Programs at Coffee Hour,” *The Facts*, Sept. 2, 1964, p. 8; “Bray & Gautier To Face Smith & O'Donnell in Nov. Main Event,” *The Facts*, Sept. 17, 1964.

in the legislature, 1964 was a very polarizing election year. Lewis J. Martin, an inspector at Boeing and Democratic candidate, went as far as to demand that Gautier and Bray withdraw from not only the election but the Republican Party. He stated, "I would ask them to do this out of pride in our race, and think that they would serve the best interests of the Negro people at this time if they took such action." Martin reassured that his plans to run for office did not serve to challenge Smith but incumbent O'Donnell in efforts to obtain black political power in Olympia.¹⁶

The internal conflicts attracted the attention of the *Seattle Times* which profiled Gautier's campaign. Gautier openly retorted to the criticism, "We can't afford a one-party system. The Republican Party traditionally has been the party of the Negro, and I see no reason to leave it." While a forceful presence within black, elite circles and as a well-known fundraiser, Gautier met much opposition during home canvassing visits and spent much of her campaign defending her loyalty to the party of Abraham Lincoln which partly led to her defeat. This may also explain Chiles' choice to represent an unpopular party among Central Area residents. With the visceral assault on Gautier by powerful and established black male leaders, voters yet again elected O'Donnell for a third term.¹⁷

The failure of African American women to win elected seats in a majority black residential area district presents an enigma stemming from several mitigating factors: gender, party affiliation, social-economic status, support from the political establishment, and shortage of campaign contributions. Nonetheless, few women within the Democratic Party worked tirelessly to move up the party's ranks. The best example was Marjorie Pitter King. Daughter of a prominent pioneering family and Democratic stalwarts Edward and Marjorie Pitter, King

¹⁶ "Negro Republican Candidates Ask to Withdraw," *The Facts*, 1964.

¹⁷ Marshall Wilson, "Kin of Ex-Slave Seeks Office," *The Seattle Times*, Aug. 30, 1964, p. 30.

founded M&M Accounting and Tax Service in 1947.¹⁸ She was known in the area as the “Income Tax Lady.” Since the 1940s, King became actively involved in the King County Colored Women’s Progressive Democratic Club and led youth organizing activities. She served as chairwoman of the 37th district Democratic Party, treasurer of the Washington State Federation of Democratic Women, and president of the Metropolitan Democratic Women’s Club Seattle and King County. King became a household name within the Democratic Party for Washington State and reportedly received a letter in 1946 from Eleanor Roosevelt thanking her for organizing a group of young Seattle Democrats.¹⁹

In 1964, O’Donnell, a member of the Rules, Credentials, and Platform Committee of the King County Democratic Party, announced that King would attend the National Democratic Convention as a Washington state representative and its only African American delegate.²⁰ O’Donnell pushed for a resolution requesting that the Washington State Democratic delegation support the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party’s (MFDP) efforts to be recognized as a legitimate party rather than the state’s traditional establishment who barred African Americans from participation in the Democratic Party’s caucuses. King and O’Donnell battled to seat the MFDP delegation at the convention in a televised event seen by Washingtonians across the state. The political acumen of King to extend her fight for racial and political justice on the largest televised political stage as well as her close working relationship with O’Donnell solidified her a place within the state’s political system. This display of daring toughness would be instrumental

¹⁸ Marjorie Pitter King was active on the board of the East Madison YWCA, the Seattle Urban League (elected a board member in 1963), the Cherry Hill Improvement Club, Seattle branch of the NAACP, president of the Alpha Omicron Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta, Inc., and the Totem Chapter of the Washington State Business & Professional Women’s Federated Clubs.

¹⁹ “Rep. Marjorie King Seeks Retainment of Legislative Seat,” *The Facts*, July 14-July 21, 1966; Frank Njubi, “State Legislators in Limelight,” *Seattle Skanner*, Feb. 10, 1993; Carole Beers, “Marjorie Pitter King, Pioneer in Business, State Legislature,” *The Seattle Times*, Feb. 2, 1996, p. B6.

²⁰ She had also been a delegate to the Democratic Convention for the past four terms.

in her rise to one of the highest government positions in the state.²¹

When Ann T. O'Donnell succumb to an untimely death in 1965, it left one legislative seat vacant. In a highly-politicized race to appoint a successor, the 37th District Democratic Club recommended three candidates for consideration to the King County Democratic Central Committee to fill the position. The club chose King, along with David Sprague, a white real estate and insurance broker, and Walter Hubbard, a black civil rights activist, as qualified candidates. King was well-liked in the Democratic Party and received heavy endorsements from influential women's organizations.²² For example, the Totem Chapter of the Washington State Business & Professional Women's Federated Clubs stated:

The membership of the Totem Club acknowledges the close working relationship between Mrs. King and former representative O'Donnell. Mrs. King is thoroughly versed with the planning and policies set forth during the past 6 years, and is imminently qualified to continue the effort for the 37th district.²³

The Central Committee voted overwhelmingly in favor of King, casting 43 out of 68 votes, making her the first African American woman in the state to serve as a legislator. It remains unclear if King was chosen primarily because of her merit or the committee's desire to fill the seat with a woman replacement. What is certain, however, is that she was one of the most qualified candidates to fulfill the role and serve out O'Donnell's term.²⁴

King completed the one-year appointment and ran for the position in 1966 against Democrats Isaiah Edwards, husband of Marie Edwards, Ray Olsen, David Sprague, and the ambitious Republican, Keve Bray. During her campaign, she pledged to address the problems of

²¹ "O'Donnell Pushes Support of the Free Democratic Party," *The Facts*, July 30 – Aug. 5, 1964, p. 5; "Rep. Marjorie King Seeks Retainment of Legislative Seat," *The Facts*, Jul.14-Jul.21, 1966, p. 2.

²² "Local Women's Club Endorses King As 37th District Representative," *The Facts*, June 17-June 24, 1965; "Mrs. King Indorsed as State Solon," *The Seattle Times*, June 11, 1965, p. 37.

²³ Local Women's Club Endorses King," *The Facts*, June 17-June 24, 1965. Both Ann T. O'Donnell and Marjorie Pitter King were members of the Totem Chapter.

²⁴ "Marjorie King Elected to Represent 37th District in Legislature," *The Facts*, 1965.

the Central Area including juvenile and consumer concerns, homeownership, labor, senior citizens, landlord issues, and small businesses. Although the Municipal League rated King as an above-average candidate, Sprague defeated her in the election, possibly due to split African American votes and lack of financial support. King expressed that she had refused money from donors to vote their interest which potentially hurt her campaign. The *Facts* exposed that “the power structure is very unhappy with the courageous stand which Marjorie King has taken and the usual campaign contributions and assistance from which the power structure is being withheld from State Representative Marjorie King.” King and her supporters nonetheless continued to campaign with very little money.²⁵

In the following year, King topped the list of nominees to fill the vacant seat left by Sam Smith who won a position on the Seattle City Council. In a very tight contest with George Fleming, former UW football star who received an endorsement by Smith and Dan O’Donnell (brother of the late Ann T. O’Donnell), former Senator Fred Dore and Representative Ray Olsen endorsed King stating that her “record in the Democratic Party shows she is one of the workingest Democrats around, and her civic record shows that she is dedicated to the betterment of our community and country.” Recognition by the white Democratic establishment was not enough to secure her the position. Despite her impressive record and endorsements, the King County Central Democratic Committee chose another candidate for the position.²⁶

The appointment of King to complete O’Donnell’s term attested to women’s rising influence within the Democratic Party across the nation. As a legislator, King did not introduce bills or legislation due to her short term in office. Her seat was a ceremonial position at best.

²⁵ “Marjorie King Reveals She Wouldn’t Sell Out,” *The Facts*, Sep. 1, 1966; “Rep. Marjorie King Seeks Re-
tirement of Legislative Seat,” *The Facts*, July 14-July 21, 1966, p. 2.

²⁶ “Mrs. King Tops List of Nominees,” *The Seattle Times*, Dec. 13, 1967; “Mrs. King Endorsed for Appointment to
Legislature,” *The Seattle Times*, Dec. 20, 1967, p. 29.

Although she never held political office again, she continued to remain active in local and state politics, championing civil rights causes, and leading political battles. For example, in 1968, King along with Thelma DeWitty attended the National Democratic Convention as delegates from Seattle to support the Democratic presidential nomination of Vice President Hubert Humphrey. While there, King scolded the Washington State Democratic delegation for their part in fighting over southern credential challenges that split the party between pro-Humphrey and anti-Humphrey factions. She told the Washington caucus that they should “forget the petty, party-machine politics and get on the ball. We moderate Negroes are turning into militant blacks. We really can’t wait until 1972 even though you think we can.” The delegation decidedly gave a two thirds majority to support Hubert Humphrey.²⁷

The plunge of African American women into the formal political arena gave way to the burgeoning social and civil unrest taking place in the city and the nation. Chiles, Gautier, and King’s attempt to enter the formal political sphere illustrates women’s willingness and ability to challenge established racial and gendered political hierarchies. As they struggled for representation as black and female legislators in Olympia, women on the grassroots level joined, organized, and led protest campaigns to desegregate Seattle’s public schools.

E. June Smith, the CACRC, and the Campaign for School Desegregation

Housing segregation continued to limit the vast majority of black Seattle residents to the Central District and in the process created a system of *de facto* education. Historically viewed as women’s domain, the issue of black education would become a dominant political battle which drew many women into civil rights activism. Although the local civil rights movement in Seattle

²⁷ “Voter Registration Closes August 17,” *The Seattle Times*, July 24, 1968; “State Negro Delegate Raps Vote,” *The Seattle Times*, Aug. 27, 1968.

took longer to develop than in the South, according to historian Jeff Zane, all three phases of the movement—lobbying, litigation, and protest occurred concurrently in a matter of seven years. A few women staged their own individual battles, but most women leaders worked in organizations to achieve greater results.²⁸

As early as 1961, the Seattle Chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality, the local version of the interracial civil rights group founded by James Farmer, Jr. in Chicago in 1942, attracted a sizeable number of women who often strategized, organized, and led employment and education demonstrations. CORE women, both black and white, created protest strategies and executed direct action campaigns in the form of picketing and shop-ins, targeting grocery store chains, department stores, taxi companies, and labor unions. According to members Bettylou Valentine, an African American woman, Joan Slinger, and Jean “Maid” Adams, women who could not picket, babysat for women who assumed leadership roles. They also cooked meals to “keep the picketers and workers fed.” Valentine, who was responsible for public relations and advertisements, remarked, “I had the support of a large number of people who took part in the physical work using specialized machinery to produce CORE’s meeting minutes, leaflets, investigative reports, and the *Corelator*,” the organization’s national newsletter.²⁹

While no woman ever officially headed the Seattle CORE chapter, they did chair and

²⁸ Zane, 79. Open housing campaigns marked the beginning of a Civil Rights Movement in Seattle. Civil right organizations such as the Urban League and NAACP, churches, fraternal organizations, and black women’s organizations collected donations and raised money for activists in the South. But, very little activity occurred in the city. While the move for open housing is important, my goal here is to examine the issues around education which generated an uptick in women’s activism and leadership given that women had historically held the responsibility of educating the race. For more on black women, education, and civil rights activism, see seminal works by Katherine Mellen Charron, *Freedom’s Teacher: The Life of Septima Clark*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2009. Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democracy Vision*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2003).

²⁹ Joan Slinger, Jean “Maid” Adams, and Bettylou Valentine. Group Interview by Trevor Griffey and James N. Gregory. Oct. 6, 2006. Seattle Civil Rights & Labor History Project. Accessed Mar. 10, 2017. <http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/CORE.htm>; Joan Slinger, et al. *Seattle in Black and White* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011), 31.

operate several committees such as the Housing and Negotiating Committee, the Education Committee, and served in other important but less noticeable positions such as secretary.³⁰ The gender dynamic of the organization reflected the climate of the 1960s where black women usually sacrificed their ambitions to publicly support male leadership “because it was in the best interest of the movement.” “I wanted to run for president of CORE,” Valentine explained, “and this was before the so called ‘women’s movement.’” But she was never encouraged to do so. “There was an attitude that to make it an impressive organization you had to have men in the leadership,” she added. Because of this attitude, like in many other civil rights organizations, women’s exclusion from titled leadership roles within these organizations privileged black masculinity. However this does not mean that women did not provide leadership within the movement. Septima Clark, Ella Baker, Fannie Lou Hamer, and Daisy Bates often assumed the responsibilities without the title or the position.³¹

If Seattle CORE maintained a stratified gender hierarchy, then the Seattle Branch of the NAACP reflected a more fluid gender binary which presented a direct contrast to the lack of visibility of women’s leadership in civil rights organizations. Since its founding in 1913, three women headed the organization including its founding president Leticia A. Graves. In 1963, the local chapter elected its fourth woman, E. June Smith, to head the organization during the most active and critical period of the local movement’s education campaigns.³² A year before, she had served as vice-president of the organization.³³ A native of Cairo, Illinois, Smith came to Seattle

³⁰ In 1968, it is to be noted that Flo Ware claimed to have served as Vice-President of CORE. Daisy Boyetta chaired the Emergency Committee and Negotiating Team; Frances White served on the Education Committee; and Ethel Lightfoot, a beautician, served on the Employment Committee. Other members included Ernestine Rogers who served as secretary, Sarah Lynch who joined CORE at age 66, and Barbara Davis.

³¹ Group Interview by Trevor Griffey and James N. Gregory. Joan Slinger, et al, Oct. 6, 2006.

³² NAACP presidents included Leticia A. Graves (1913), a beautician; Melvina Squires, wife of Urban League director, Bernard Squires (1940s); and Thelma DeWitty (1958), one of the first black teachers.

³³ As vice-president, Smith worked to develop a school desegregation plan and pressed school board members to enact a program of study to assist the NAACP in its efforts. She was also a member of the Self-Improvement

with her husband Roscoe O. Smith, a Seattle native and railroad porter, in 1941 and worked as a real estate agent. In 1948, she co-founded the Beta Kappa Chapter of Iota Phi Lambda sorority, a business and professional organization, and joined the Seattle NAACP in 1956. During her administration, Smith pushed the limits of complacency and made clear of her intentions to absolutely disrupt the racial social order. “In all its beauty,” she declared, “Seattle is a likely battleground for a stirring drama.” She argued that politicians and government officials served as the puppets of powerful corporate organizations and admonished city leaders to work to eliminate racial discrimination. Smith, like Gautier, intended to expose the “hypocrisy existing in Seattle.”³⁴

Intrepid in both leadership ability and strategic planning, Smith soon became a towering figure in the local movement based on her aggressive stance on eradicating school segregation. Education in Seattle marked a contested battleground through which women as mothers, teachers, workers, and professionals collectively debated, organized, strategized, and struggled to provide access to quality education for black children. The majority of the city’s black students attended “crowded and poorly funded Central Area schools, which often provided a dismal education.” “School segregation,” according to historian Quintard Taylor, “was a troubling outgrowth of the rising black population and its concentration in the Central District.” As seen in the 1940s and 1950s, the migration of white and black migrants overpopulated Seattle schools and forced many black families into the Central Area. This process of redlining disproportionately led to an uneven distribution of black students in the neighborhood schools

Club.

³⁴ E. June Smith, “The Seattle Puppet Show,” *NAACP Newsletter*, Oct. 1963, Box 3, Folder 5, Accession no. 0465-001, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Seattle Branch Records, 1950-2003, University of Washington Libraries, Special Collection.

which produced the worst conditions and betrayed greater social ambition.³⁵

When self-appointed male civil rights leaders formed the Central Area Civil Rights Committee (CACRC) in 1961, Smith joined in 1963 as one of very few women members along with Inez Hall, a teacher and secretary of the committee, Robert Byrd Barr, also a teacher, and Dorothy Hollingsworth, an educator and social worker.³⁶ The principal founders, Edwin T. Pratt of the Seattle Urban League, Rev. Samuel B. McKinney, pastor of Mt. Zion Baptist Church, and Rev. John H. Adams, pastor of First African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E) Church, professed to be the pre-eminent and unified voice on civil rights issues.³⁷ As Hollingsworth noted, “The men would meet and they would most often meet with the Rev. Adams and their group. And they would decide the next move...As far as the community, we [women] would decide whether to help them out or not.” These kinds of autonomous decision-making and participation by women reflected the agency and power they exerted in the local movement.³⁸

Nonetheless, the CACRC would determine the shape of the movement for the next five years. This instantaneous mobilization of black leadership, driven by the leaders of church and civil rights organizations, pushed for fair housing, equal employment, and the integration of the public schools. The latter proved to be perhaps its most dramatic campaign when CACRC leaders demanded that African American students be integrated into schools outside of the Central Area through an immediate student transfer program.

Having already worked to develop a school desegregation plan a year prior as vice-president of the NAACP, Smith met with Walter Hundley, Dr. Earl Miller, Dr. Rosalie Miller

³⁵ Zane, 89; Taylor, 209.

³⁶ This broad-based movement encompassed majority white churches, other organizations, and a few Asian sympathizers and activists such as city councilman, Wing Luke.

³⁷ Other members included Walter Hundley and Charles Johnson.

³⁸ Julie Swan, “CACRC,” BlackPast.org. Accessed Jan. 28, 2017, <http://www.blackpast.org/aaw/central-area-civil-rights-committee>; Dorothy Hollingsworth, interview by Trevor Griffey, March 2005, Seattle Civil Rights & Labor History Project, Accessed Mar. 18, 2018. <http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/hollingsworth.htm>.

(only African American woman dentist), and J.R. Henry as part of the Central Coordinating Committee for Civil Rights Legislation to strategize whether the committee should emphasize racial disparities or poor quality of schools as the basis for their argument to transfer students. The committee decided to focus on racial disparities that existed in the public school system and encourage apprehensive parents who questioned the purpose and effectiveness of school transfers. As chairwoman of the committee, Smith worked to allow Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) councils to permit speakers from their committee to connect with the parents throughout the Central Area. The committee reported on September 20, 1963 that each Central Area's elementary school PTA council called for special meetings that allowed the committee to speak about the school transfer plan. Most black parents, however, remained reluctant to embrace the committee's goals of transferring students which continued to pose a significant problem to the committee. Realizing that home canvassing might serve as a better strategy, the committee visited homes to discuss their message of citizenship, housing, schooling, and voting. They also continued its efforts to cooperate with the Urban League, the NAACP, and the CORE Education Committee to push for school transfers in order to resolve racial inequities existing within the school system.³⁹

In order to appease pro- and anti-integration advocates, the Seattle School Board enacted a citywide Voluntary Racial Transfer (VRT) program. The program, however, fell short of expectations from Smith and other civil rights activists since few white students transferred to predominantly black schools and less than 250 of the black students actually took advantage of the program. "I am not happy with the present Transfer Program," Smith publicly lamented. "It

³⁹ "Emergency Student Transfer Committee Report," Sept. 8, 1963, Box 7, Folder 13, Accession no. 0465-002, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Seattle Branch Records, 1950-2003, University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections; "Emergency School Transfer Committee Report," Sept. 20, 1963, NAACP Records.

is the board's job to talk to the parents and students and help make arrangements for transfers. I feel that the parents should receive more help."⁴⁰

The community's views on the school transfer program were starkly divisive. One woman, a housewife, asserted that the program "provides the chance so many of our youth need to advance themselves." Many disagreed, contending that "the student should remain in the present school unless...the parent move to another district" since "it's too hard for the child to readjust to the new environment." Others believed that students rather than parents should decide which school works better. As a vocal supporter of school integration, Ruth Chiles, who had recently ran an unsuccessful campaign for state legislature, admonished those reluctant to join the movement. She naively believed, like many African Americans, that the solution to achieving full acceptance was education. Chiles explained that education was an "important factor in promoting economic and social integration" since incomes "increases proportionally as our knowledge increases." She stated, "We must unite as a race, be realistic in our approach to integration, and knowledgeable regarding the end result."⁴¹

The year 1963 would be a defining mark for black Seattleites. When Seattle held its first Freedom March or Operation I.S. (Integrate Seattle) in June, over 1,000 protesters showed up to support the southern movement and end discrimination and segregation in the city. Under Operation I.S., men demonstrated on Mondays while women protested on Tuesdays and Thursdays. However, civil rights supporters received pushback from many Central Area residents who believed Seattle was unique in terms of race relations and did not require demonstrations but cross-cultural dialogue. But when word reached that white supremacists had

⁴⁰ Taylor, 181; *The Facts*, May 6, 1964.

⁴¹ "Comment," *The Facts*, June 4 to June 10, 1964, p. 11; Ruth Chiles, "Polishing the Brass," *The Facts*, Mar. 22, 1963.

killed four black girls in a bombing at 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham and the assassination of Mississippi NAACP field secretary Medgar Evers, Vivian George, a *Facts* newspaper columnist, put out an urgent call to action.⁴² She exhorted:

The time to protest is NOW. Discrimination, segregation and Jim crow must go. Those who do not raise their voices, those who do not participate in direct action demonstrations, also contribute to the continuation of racism in our country.⁴³

As a result, George too took a strong stance on school integration and the support of the student transfer program. “If education is not equal, we will show up the façade of deception,” she stated.⁴⁴

While over 200 black students took advantage of the VRT, only a handful of white students transferred to schools in the Central Area due to the lack of advertised announcements to white schools and parents. Rev. John H. Adams and E. June Smith quickly set up a meeting with the school board to hold them accountable for failing to instruct the school administration to publicize the school transfers to white schools. They insisted the school board was responsible for arranging transportation for the cross-town transfers, hiring and promoting black employees, and providing an extension for requests to transfer.⁴⁵

Many black parents challenged the VRT by forming their own groups and committees, usually headed by mothers, to voice their consternation with the desegregation campaign in the

⁴² Monica Stills, “Seattleites March for Equality,” *The Facts*, June 21, 1963, p. 1; Vivian George, “News & Views,” *The Facts*, Feb. 15, 1963, p. 3; Vivian George, *The Facts*, May 31, 1963; Vivian George, “News & Views,” *The Facts*, June 21, 1963.

⁴³ Vivian George, *The Facts*, Sept. 27, 1963, p. 6.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* Vivian George used the press to espouse her views in the weekly column “News & Views” in *The Facts* on the importance of supporting the civil rights agendas and political participation. She asked readers to write letters of commendation to legislators and participate in organized trips to Olympia to pass legislation such as an open housing bill. The Women for Peace, the 37th District Democratic Club, and the PTA’s of the 37th and 43rd districts organized trips to the Capital. The Metropolitan Democratic Women’s Club held regular monthly meetings at the homes of members. George urged readers to protest and boycott chain stores and restaurants that deny southern blacks employment and a seat at the lunch counters.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

Central Area rather than allow the CACRC to speak for them. In 1964, a group of concerned parents of Horace Mann Elementary School organized the Better Schools Committee with the goals of improving school conditions in the area instead of transferring black students. Unsatisfied with Horace Mann's old and dilapidated building, the group initiated petitions to demand the school board to build a new school with up-to-date facilities.⁴⁶

Smith, on the other hand, disagreed. To bolster her agenda as well as the CACRC's commitment to full school integration, Smith used the Horace Mann School's run-down buildings as a political tool to push the school board in providing free transportation for students living beyond walking distance and to also take immediate action on the school transfer program. She reminded them that "the NAACP has been asking for the closing of the Horace Mann School, an obsolete building with about 94 percent Negro attendance. It is only one example of how bus transportation would allow these pupils to be sent to a more modern school out of the ghetto area." The fiery NAACP president vehemently opposed the rebuilding of any school in the Central Area, frustrating many black residents. Smith naively believed that the closing of the neighborhood schools would enforce the school transfer program and lead to the full desegregation of the public schools, ushering in a new age of race relations in the city.⁴⁷

The parents of the Better Schools Committee pushed back, calling for a new and improved building located in their neighborhood that would appeal to students.⁴⁸ To be sure of their efforts, the committee along with outspoken community activists such as Isaiah Edwards and Gertrude DuPree presented the school board with a petition signed by 447 Central Area parents in support of neighborhood schools. The acrimonious debate over the fate of Horace

⁴⁶ "Better Schools Committee Formed," *The Facts*, Jan. 2 to 8, 1964, p. 1.

⁴⁷ "Free School Bus Urged as Cure for Segregation," *The Seattle Times*, Nov. 21, 1964.

⁴⁸ Members included Minnie Graham, Alcine Wyatt, Mrs. Arcelious Baily, Jr., and Mr. Shirley Gardenhire.

Mann and the VRT program produced a growing divide among the city's blacks and the civil rights agenda touted by the middle-class leadership of the NAACP, Urban League, and CORE.⁴⁹ Tenacious in her fight to desegregate the Seattle Public Schools, the NAACP re-elected Smith for a second term, defeating the Adams, chairman of the CACRC, in the first contested battle for the position in over ten years. Her victory spoke to her leadership and the strong influence of women members in the organization. Smith was joined by a robust group of women in the NAACP such as Bernice Holland, a school teacher, who served on the executive committee and chaired the membership team. In 1963, Holland grew the membership by an additional 718 new members during the National NAACP membership drive with the help of Florence Harrell, Magnolia Daniels (both executive board members), and Earnestine Williams who led the membership campaign and recruited the most members.⁵⁰

At the start of Smith's second term as head of the Seattle NAACP, she attempted to arouse the consciousness of the city through a direct action civil rights strategy.⁵¹ The women of the NAACP joined forces with the women of CORE to stage an aggressive direct action campaign in Seattle. Since Smith headquartered the NAACP office in the basement of her house on 2310 Pine Street, the two groups met, strategized, and distributed leaflets. Partnering with CORE and CACRC, Smith organized and led a protest march to the King County Courthouse steps that attracted an interracial group of approximately 600 people. Leaders aired the grievances of African Americans living in the Central Area. The marchers appealed to legislators, the white clergy, and others to join in the fight against racial discrimination not only

⁴⁹ Taylor, 12.

⁵⁰ "N.A.A.C.P. Here Elects Officers," *The Seattle Times*, Dec. 31, 1964; "What the Branches Are Doing," *The Crisis* (Oct. 1963), 497.

⁵¹ In 1965, Smith also helped found the NAACP Credit Union, serving as its secretary-treasurer.

in dangerous places like Mississippi and Alabama but in Seattle as well.⁵² They targeted discrimination against African Americans in labor unions and housing, sought relief from police abuse, and urged school officials to desegregate the public schools. The march demonstrated to city leaders, ambivalent blacks, and white employers that the civil rights movement had swept across the country to the Pacific Northwest and was there to stay until their demands had been met. The protest march “renewed confidence” in the minds of the participants, both the leaders and the volunteer activists, that racial discrimination could be erased in Seattle.⁵³

If Smith, representing the middle-class leadership of the movement, helped steer the school desegregation plans, she met swift backlash from poor and working-class women. Civic-minded and educated middle-class blacks supported the NAACP and Urban League, giving, at best, their tacit support to their projects. Many Seattle’s black citizens, however, remained unreceptive of the new civil rights agenda and its efforts to close Central Area schools. The greatest challenge to CACRC was the Save Our Schools Committee (SOS), an interracial group of black and white parents who protested plans to enforce student transfers. Gertrude Dupree, an outspoken activist for neighborhood schools, became the unofficial spokesperson of the Central Area who opposed any efforts to remove students from Central Area Schools. She attacked civil rights leaders and the school district for specifically closing the Summit School.

Dupree organized the S.O.S. meetings, went on speaking engagements, and attended board meetings to express her trepidation. At a meeting called by the S.O.S. in 1966, Dupree charged that “civil rights sometimes can generate civil wrongs.” “People who don’t know the feelings of the Negro community are the ones who have been pushing for ‘integration’ of our

⁵² At the rally, Rev. John H. Adams compared Seattle to Selma and stood in solidarity with those who confronted blatant racism daily while in Seattle they dealt with the covert side of racism.

⁵³ Bob Monahan, “March to Courthouse: Rally Here Notes Selma ‘Spirit,’” *Seattle Times*, Mar. 21, 1965, p. 2.

children,” she stated. Mrs. Waldon Dawson agreed with Dupree stating that “they have no right to speak for all of us...They don’t know how we feel.” Concerned about the personal economic impact of the school transfer, Mrs. Joseph Gordon asked: “What if they miss that school bus in the morning? It’s too far for them to walk, and I don’t have a car to take them to school. They’d just be out of school that day.” Other black mothers felt that children would be unable to participate in extra-curricular activities and miss interacting with neighborhood children due to the long distances to travel to and from school. Support for Dupree and the S.O.S quickly waned when it became obvious that white parents’ motivations were hinged on the fear of white school integration.⁵⁴

On the other hand, many others felt the civil rights leadership brought new and fresh ideas to dismantling segregation in employment, housing, and education. James McIver, an attorney and past president of the Seattle NAACP, commented, “This community didn’t have any leadership until fellows like these arrived.” McIver pointed out that criticism came from those who “didn’t realize what the problems were, couldn’t communicate them if they did, and thought the newcomer was just stirring up unnecessary trouble.” E. June Smith unabashedly dismissed the claims, asserting, “The only people knocking the leaders are Negroes who don’t want to do anything and the white people who don’t want anything done.” The civil rights leadership noticeably could not live up to its claim to represent all African Americans in Seattle. Even Fitzgerald Beaver, editor of the *Facts*, a black-owned newspaper, noted, “[Civil rights] leadership in the Central Area has not gained the respect or the following of the majority of the people.” What is apparent was that a new black leadership class had emerged in the Central Area

⁵⁴ Constantine Angelos, “School Board Majority Favors Voluntary Transfer Program,” *The Seattle Times*, Jul. 1, 1966, p. 19; Marshall Wilson, “Not All Central District Likes School Closing,” *The Seattle Times*, Aug. 29, 1965, p. 10; Doris Pieroth, “Desegregating the Public Schools, Seattle, Washington, 1954-1968,” (Ph.D dissertation, University of Washington, 1979), 236, 303-321.

who saw themselves as representatives of the community and presented a united voice to address the grievances for all African Americans. The inability of the CACRC to mobilize and communicate their plans to the average black resident had dire consequences by the end of the decade.⁵⁵

Despite the community's divided views on school integration, the women of CORE and the NAACP combined their efforts and used numerous tactics to persuade the school board to end segregated schooling. In the summer of 1965, the women distributed 10,000 leaflets to homes in the Central Area that explained the goals of the VRT. They made appeals to elicit the community's support and participation in the program to disprove the school board's arguments that the majority of black parents did not want their children integrated or bussed to school. Next, they turned to home canvassing to educate parents on the importance of school integration, asking them to sign a pledge card in acceptance of their plans. Both groups, collaboratively, focused on community awareness and garnering as much support from black residents to confront the school board, calling it "the school integration crisis."⁵⁶

Once that strategy failed, Smith went on to directly challenge the Seattle School Board through federal action. She issued a statement on May 13, 1965, declaring, "Our position remains unchanged, and we shall continue direct action and other efforts to persuade the school board to desegregate and integrate the schools."⁵⁷ In a letter to U.S. Commissioner of Education, Francis Keppell, Smith cited enrollment statistics that demonstrated that "the majority of Seattle's Negro children attend schools...that are in fact segregated." She requested that the

⁵⁵ Donald K. Smith. "Central Area Committee on Civil Rights Is Leader of the Community," *Seattle Times*, Aug. 19, 1965, p. 3.

⁵⁶ Slinger, et al, *Seattle in Black and White*, 151-152; The school board repeatedly insisted that action had been done to correct the racial imbalances in the schools. Smith charged that they had not done enough.

⁵⁷ E. June Smith, *NAACP Newsletter*, May, 13, 1965, Box 7, Folder 1, Accession no. 0465-002, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Seattle Branch Records, 1950-2003, University of Washington Libraries, Special Collection.

office withhold federal funds from the Seattle School District as a penalty if the school board did not file plans for desegregating schools. Smith additionally charged that “the Seattle School Board has officially adopted the policy of refusing to take any affirmative action to alleviate this condition.” When the letter was released to the press, Phillip Swain, school board president, immediately responded and denied Smith’s accusations, insisting that “the Seattle board continually has sought to provide equal educational opportunities for children of the Central Area.” Two months later, Smith wrote again to Keppell now strongly urging his office to investigate the Seattle School Board for its discriminatory practices in hiring and maintaining a segregated school system. The NAACP president further charged that the school board was noncompliant to the Civil Rights Act and that the organization was more than willing to assist in the investigation.⁵⁸

Smith’s demands did not have much impact. The ultimate test came in 1966 when she, along with CACRC, launched a bold, yet controversial plan to boycott the public schools. CORE, NAACP, and the CACRC called on parents to keep their children out of school on March 31 and April 1 to place attention on the board’s complicit action in maintaining segregated schools. School superintendent Forbes Bottomly responded to the boycott announcement with a press statement that read, “I am sorry to see the children taken out of school and thus used because adults cannot settle their problems. I hope the civil-rights leaders will reconsider this action.” Smith fired back that the boycott would continue unless the board could present a satisfactory policy concerning the racial inequalities in the school system. “We want them to spell out what will be done beyond the voluntary-transfer and compensatory-education

⁵⁸ E. June Smith, letter to Francis Keppell, July 14, 1965, Box 7, Folder 16, NAACP Records; “Swain Replies to N.A.A.C.P. Move on Aid,” *The Seattle Times*, July 15, 1965, p. 3; E. June Smith, letter to Keppell, Oct. 7, 1965, NAACP Records.

programs,” she exclaimed.⁵⁹

On March 26, five days before the boycott, representatives from the local civil rights triumvirate (CORE, CACRC, the NAACP) and several churches met to discuss final arrangements and details of the freedom schools as well as the temporary facilities that would house the students on the day of the protest. Uncertain of how many parents would participate in the boycott, Smith “lined up people to register students as they arrived for [regular] school.” The two-day boycott proceeded as scheduled and demonstrated to the entire city the unity of the black community around the issue of quality education. Nearly 4,000 students participated in the boycott and many participated in the freedom schools set up at the local churches and YWCA. Each freedom school location required one black and one white co-principal who shared responsibilities for the site. Dozens of volunteers, many of them black women, served as teachers and created activities for their assigned age group. At Mount Zion, for example, teachers taught black history, the meaning of the boycott, and conducted music and crafts. E. June Smith reported that “some teachers gave up their two days salary to teach in the Freedom Schools.” At the East Madison Y.W.C.A. School, Roberta Byrd Barr, a teacher and librarian, served as a co-principal and lectured to more than 200 elementary students on black history. Only three certified employees of the district participated in the Freedom Schools, jeopardizing their jobs.⁶⁰

Although deemed by the civil rights establishment as a success, the political unity formed around the boycott did not last. By 1967, young black power advocates who felt ignored by civil

⁵⁹ Herb Robinson, “Seattle Civil-Rights Leaders Set School Boycott,” *Seattle Times*, Feb. 20, 1966.

⁶⁰ Joan Slinger et al, *Seattle in Black and White*, 156-159; Quintard Taylor, “The Civil Rights Movement in the American West: Black Protest in Seattle, 1960-1970,” *The Journal of Negro History* (Winter 1995), 9; Marshall Wilson, “Freedom Schools Have Varied Staff,” *The Seattle Times*, Mar. 31, 1966. p. 1; E. June Smith, letter to Sondra Sellinger, April 6, 1966, Box 7, Folder 17, NAACP Records.

rights leaders and anguished at the slow pace of progress called for a Black-Power forum after hearing Stokely Carmichael's speech at Garfield High School. Carmichael critiqued integration as only "meaningful to a small chosen class" and promoted mass action for blacks to unite "to fight for their liberation by any means necessary." Criticizing the school transfer program, activists explained the degradation and harrassment hurled at black school children at bus stops, their unacceptance at white schools, and the unpopular push to close black schools. Les McIntosh, education chairman of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), warned, "The issue of the school boycott last year was integration, moving Negro children out of the black schools of the Central Area. It's a new ball game now. We are going to take over the schools." Mattie Bundy, a Mississippi native and co-chairmen of SNCC, also expressed her consternation with leaders of the CACRC. "The race problem has been compounded by Negroes who haven't spoken the truth to whites. Negroes have been afraid of hurting the feelings of white people and they have always catered to the white man," she stated.⁶¹

Other black militant groups formed as a response to their dissatisfaction with school integration and the self-professed civil rights leaders. WE, an extension of the Grass Roots Committee, focused on coalition-building with other interest groups except "pressure groups" or "status groups, such as churches" and its leadership embraced the philosophy of black power. Infanta Spence became the spokesperson for the group and met with both Governor Daniel J. Evans and Mayor Braman to offer nine proposals to remedy the conditions of blacks including plans to open a State Service Office in the Central Area and establishing a police review board. After meeting with WE representatives, Evans agreed to open a multiservice office that would include public assistance, health, and employment services. Understanding the hostile and

⁶¹ Lane Smith, "Black Community Power Will End Abuses, Says Carmichael," *The Seattle Times*, Apr. 20, 1967; Ibid, "Black-Power Forum Points to Dissatisfaction with Integration," *The Seattle Times*, May 4, 1967, p. 3.

changing environment brewing in Washington State and the nation at large, he acknowledged that “the militant young adults represented a voice normally not heard in the community.” He added, “It is only one voice to be added to those of recognized civil-rights leaders.” Mayor Braman, in contrast, was more reluctant to hear or work with the young adults stating that the city had made much success “working with the accepted leadership of the Central Area.” The difference in opinions by two high-ranking state and city official indicated the internal conflict between city and state government of how to best handle issues of racial injustice and inequity as to not give rise to the possibility of a race riot that had taken hold in urban areas across the nation. It is also instructive of the CARC’s declining role to maintain the power of determining the black agenda, the strategies, and decision-making in Central Area affairs in the eyes of key city officials.⁶²

Nonetheless, the confluence of Carmichael’s 1967 speech, the assassination of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King in April 1968, and the ardent frustrations of Seattle’s de facto school segregation came to an apex. When Bottomly announced the closure of Horace Mann in 1968, it sent shockwaves into the community. A large number of black parents and community leaders rallied against the mandatory bussing practice, the closing of neighborhood schools, and the burdens carried by black residents in the voluntary transfer program.⁶³ Young black female students also voiced their concerns over the direction of their education. Six grade students Audrey Trice, Carmel Tade, and Denise Rollins opposed the superintendent’s actions and the

⁶² Don Hannula, “Evans to Open State Service Office in Seattle’s Central Area,” *The Seattle Times*, Aug. 11, 1967; Ibid, “5 Negroes Meet with Braman, Call Him ‘Unresponsive,’” *The Seattle Times*, Aug. 15, 1967.

⁶³ Over 500 black students transferred out the Central Area while only a few white students transferred in. On March 18, 1966, Phillip Burton and Charles V. Johnson, NAACP attorneys, filed a suit against the Seattle School Board and Superintendent Forbes Bottomly. The NAACP asked the court to order a district plan as an alternative to the ineffective VRT program. They also requested for the Central Area most segregated schools to be closed including Leschi, T.T. Minor, Harrison, Colman, and Horace Mann elementary schools. In addition, the attorneys asked that minority teachers be promoted to administrative positions such as principals.

idea of bussing. Tade who tried the transfer program to Broadview High School just a year before, stated, “When I was out there at that school last year people used to ignore me. If the teacher wanted volunteers and I raised my hand, the teacher would ignore me. My grades were low there.”⁶⁴

Black mothers described bussing as a physical, psychological, and emotional strain on both parents and children. Jeri Ware, a member of the Madrona P.T.A., claimed the transfer experience was “a catastrophe” for her son. Mrs. George Smith advocated that “a new building would help improve property values in the area” and objected to her tax money being spent in white neighborhoods. Wanda Redmond, president of the Horace Mann P.T.A., expressed her outrage at the school board’s decision. She stated:

We want the school to remain open and we would like to see it rebuilt. We feel our demands are warranted. If Mann is classed as a de facto segregated school, we feel there are other schools in Seattle that have the same problem except that it is in the reverse—white instead of black.⁶⁵

If the civil rights establishment assumed it could claim representation of and set the black agenda for the entire neighborhood, it unexpectedly found considerable opposition. Parent-teacher associations, churches, youth and black power groups, elected officials, civil rights groups, and federal agencies all labored, often in conflict, to develop an agenda for the black community. This internal battle came to a blistering head on May 6, 1968, after the CACRC’s push to close Garfield High School. At the East Madison Y.W.C.A., Rev. John Adams called a meeting to address black separatism in education and rally support for school integration. With a crowd of over 400 community members, he along with a panel of black professional men

⁶⁴ Constantine Angelos, “Close Mann? The Pupils...Their Teachers...And Their Parents,” *The Seattle Times*, Mar. 31, 1968, p. 46.

⁶⁵ “Confrontation in the Schools,” *The Seattle Times*, Oct. 27, 1968, p. 183; *The Seattle Times*, Mar. 31, 1968.

outlined the CACR's Eleven Point Proposal that inflamed a diverse group of dissenters ranging from young, old, to militant who vehemently voiced loud objections to the proposal. According to Roberta Byrd Barr, the crowd "swept him right off the platform," revealing a turning point in black politics in the Central Area and the local movement. Adams and the CACRC soon lost their footing within the civil rights campaign, diminishing their effectiveness and influence as leaders.⁶⁶

In 1969, the school board developed the Central Area School Council as a compromise, consisting of the fourteen schools in the neighborhood. Out of the 65 candidates who filed for the 11 seats on the council, 40 were black women. Jeri Ware, who started the tutoring program at the University of Washington, was chosen as a representative of the council and would later chair the committee. Ware addressed the community's concern on education issues and the right to self-determination and community control. But as community councils formed to gain control of black education in Seattle, one particular group of experts sought to influence the education debates and use their professional experiences and skills to provide alternate forms of educational access in an uncertain climate of community disarray.⁶⁷

Black Women Teachers in the Struggle for Educational Access

At the center of the school integration campaigns stood a vanguard of black women teachers and educators who served as liaisons between the community and the Seattle School Board. These educators, many of whom were migrants from the South working in the Central Area schools, participated in the debates regarding school integration and fought education

⁶⁶ Pieroth, 399-402.

⁶⁷ Constantine Angelos, "16 File for Central Area School Council Positions," *The Seattle Times*, Feb. 18, 1969, p. 7. "Garfield is Called School 'Adrift,'" *The Seattle Times*, Apr. 23, 1969, p. 5; "65 Seek Seats on Central Area School Council," *The Seattle Times*, Mar. 23, 1969, pp. 46, 48.

battles on multiple fronts: as community residents, parents, and as employees of the district. In the middle of the crossfire, black women teachers had to be vigilant about the fate of their jobs during the desegregation process, concerned with the experiences of black students during the transfer, and interpreting the integration process to frustrated parents and obstinate board members.

Two such women educators, Louise McKinney and Dolly J. Adams, wives of the Rev. Dr. John H. Adams of First A.M.E. and Rev. Dr. Samuel B. McKinney of Mount Zion Baptist, all too well understood the racial disparities that existed in Seattle's school system that reluctantly hired black teachers and administrators. Serving dual roles as teachers and the leading women of the two largest black congregations in the Pacific Northwest, McKinney and Adams provide a unique perspective into women's roles during the local movement who wielded much influence among black women by virtue of their positions. As first ladies, McKinney and Adams combined their church work and professional careers to further community-building initiatives. Seen as unlikely political actors in this period, McKinney and Adams went beyond the expectations of lending a supportive role to their husbands' efforts (unlike many ministers' wives involved in civil rights), but also asserted a voice in the school desegregation campaigns while mobilizing church women in providing access to quality educational resources for their community.

When Louise McKinney and her husband arrived in Seattle in 1958 from Providence, Rhode Island with their two small children, she found a job at Georgetown Elementary School before working part-time at T.T. Minor in 1965.⁶⁸ Afterwards, she worked at Horace Mann Elementary until 1968. Using her clout as first lady coupled with her passion for education,

⁶⁸ The McKinneys were first welcomed by Freddie Mae Gautier who became a strong supporter of the new pastor and wife. Louise McKinney joined the Women's Department.

McKinney built community-wide education programs at Mount Zion to improve student learning and to combat the lack of educational opportunities offered by her employer, the Seattle school district. In 1964, McKinney opened a day nursery for 3 to 5 year-olds, becoming its first director. Specializing in primary and elementary education, the young educator, along with her husband, started a pre-reading and corrective reading program, offering classes twice a week to assist students who had difficulties reading. She hoped to, in her words, “give the Negro child a running start.” McKinney incorporated the pre-reading classes in the church’s day nursery and kindergarten program to start the process of the children’s early reading development. Stressing the importance of the church’s educational mission to the community and women’s participation in it, McKinney asserted, “A church should exist to serve its people. These needs go beyond the spiritual, offering help to those who want a better life. . .if he needs to be taught to read, shouldn’t we teach him?”⁶⁹

As a direct result of her husband’s involvement in shaping the local civil rights campaigns, McKinney’s duties extended beyond the church’s classroom which placed her directly into the thick of the movement. When the Central District Youth Club, a group of young civil rights supporters who staged controversial sit-ins unauthorized by the CACRC, requested to use Mount Zion’s facilities for a rally, McKinney refused. She stated the church board decided not to permit use because of “the press of recent situations and the absence of the pastor.” As a teacher at Horace Mann in 1968, McKinney was a proponent of bussing and the mandatory school transfer, but she grew critical of Bottomly’s inaction to solve the racial problem within

⁶⁹ “Church Briefs,” *The Seattle Times*, Jan. 11, 1964, p. 4; Lane Smith, “Church Has Reading Program,” *The Seattle Times*, Aug. 1, 1964, p. 4; Jeffrey Zane and Judson L. Jeffries, “A Panther Sighting in the Pacific Northwest,” in *On the Ground: The Black Panther Part in Communities Across America*, edited by Judson L. Jeffries (Oxford: University of Mississippi Press, 2010), 44. Rev. Dr. Samuel B. McKinney pastored 2,700 parishioners with a 95 percent voting registration rate.

the school system. "I feel the recommendations have assuaged the feelings of many in some way related to the problem, but I feel they have not solved it. I wish he'd been able to integrate every cotton-picking school in the city," she bitterly lamented. Scant evidence does not allow us to know whether McKinney always agreed with CACRC or the direction of the school desegregation plans to close black majority schools, but extant sources do suggest, at least publicly, she sided with the group, addressed issues with the school board, and continued her education work with church women at Mount Zion.⁷⁰

If Louise McKinney sought to take on a quieter role of civil rights activism, then Dolly Adams immersed herself as a public presence in the local movement. It was not long after the Adams's arrived in 1962 from Ohio that Rev. Adams united with Rev. McKinney to disturb the status quo. Dolly Adams taught and worked as an administrative intern at B.F. Day Elementary. Adams, unlike McKinney, found a social community outside the church with the Seattle Chapter of the Links and the East Cherry YWCA. She also became involved with the NAACP under the leadership of E. June Smith and the Seattle Urban League which inevitably thrust her into civil rights activism.⁷¹

As a first lady and educator, Adams used her position in the church to promote activities that provided social services and educational resources to the community. In 1963, she established the Central Area's first day care center and became its first director one year before McKinney founded the day nursery at Mount Zion. The center served working mothers and families with young children, ranging from ages 3 to 6 years old, and fulfilled a need in the

⁷⁰ "Hope for Race Cooperation," *The Seattle Times*, July 27, 1963, p. 2; *The Seattle Times*, Mar. 31, 1968, p. 46.

⁷¹ "A.M.E. Church Plans Center for Day Care," *The Seattle Times*, June 8, 1963; "U.W. Graduate Students in Education Work as Interns," *The Seattle Times*, Oct. 15, 1967; "Membership Drive Slated: Cherry Street YWCA," *The Facts*, Feb. 8, 1963. In 1967, Dolly Adams enrolled in the administration certification program at the University of to become eligible as a principal or superintendent in the state's primary and secondary schools.

community. Church women operated and volunteered their efforts to ensure the daily maintenance of the day care program. In 1965, Adams partnered with Dorothy Hollingsworth, a member of First A.M.E. and first director of the Head Start program, to set up the church as a site for one of the new agency's centers. Adams soon became the home school-coordinator of the Head Start program, encouraging women and men to volunteer their time.⁷²

Both McKinney and Adams became deeply entangled in the controversies around school integration by their mere positions as wives of two civil rights magnates, as church women, and teachers in Central Area schools. As historian Karl Ellis Johnson states, "All the black church's internal programs, as well as its ventures into politics and economic development, depended heavily upon African American women for their promotion and success." During this period, Adams, moreso than McKinney (although she would become more vocal post-1969), became an outspoken advocate and lobbied on behalf of black mothers, teachers, and children during the school desegregation campaigns. Participating in the "Grass Roots Forum," a public talk sponsored by the Urban League to promote cross-cultural dialogue on civil rights issues, Adams joined a panel debating whether children should be used in civil disobedience demonstrations. Speaking in the affirmative, Adams strategically spoke from the vantage point of black motherhood and as an American rather than her positions as a teacher, wife, and a representative of the Urban League and the NAACP.⁷³ While noting that she taught in the Freedom Schools while her children participated in the school boycotts, she stated:

I want my child...[to] realize that there is a brotherhood of man. And that she has to have concern not only for the people who are at the school with her. But the other kids who

⁷² "A.M.E. Church Plans Center for Day Care," *The Seattle Times*, June 8, 1963; "New Hope for Children of Poverty," *The Seattle Times*, Feb. 6, 1967.

⁷³ Karl Ellis Johnson, "Trouble Won't Last": Black Church Activism in Postwar Philadelphia," in *African American American Urban History Since World War II*, eds Kenneth L. Kusmer and Joe W. Trotter (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 252-253; "Children in Civil Disobedience is Y.W.C.A. Topic," *The Seattle Times*, May 8, 1966, p. 81.

can't come to that school, who don't have the money to transfer into a better school....there will be laws and there will be rules and regulations which she will not agree with...she's got to learn...to stand up and buckle. To me, this was her first lesson in bucking an unjust law...As a parent it was my responsibility to see to it that she heard about them [unjust laws]...I am long from the point of view that...all we suppose to do is wait, wait on the Lord and he'll give it to you. I think the Lord helps those who help themselves. And I think where children are concerned, they're going to have to learn this...and I want mine to learn it before they wake up at 21 and say, "Lord I'm in trouble" because that'll be too late!⁷⁴

Adams's views on school integration remained clear as she tried to win over the masses, especially black mothers, through her public participation on panels and active coordination of seminars. To address black parents' apprehension regarding the school district's voluntary racial transfer program, Adams, like many black women educators, switched her role from mother to teacher when discussing how educators should deal with the new transfer arrangements. She first pointed out the persistent racism among white educators and school staff, urging them to examine their own racial prejudices in order to effectively serve black students. Adams advised white educators not to "talk down to [black] parents" but to encourage them to participate in school activities such as the PTA by giving them "a job, a purpose for being there, and by making them feel welcome." As a last caution, she insisted that white administrators refrain from directing corporal punishment onto black transfer pupils since it real would "indicate [that] the teacher has lost control and has not found a creative way of solving the problems."⁷⁵

The inability of white teachers and administrators to teach black children indicated a serious and unintended consequence of the school integration process. To be sure, when SPS

⁷⁴ Dolly Adams, "Should Children be Used in Civil Rights Disobedience?" speech, recorded May 10, 1966, [digital file] Box 87, Accession No. 0607-007, Seattle Urban League Records, 1933-1984, University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections.

⁷⁵ "Negro Parents' Apprehension Over School Transfers Noted," *The Seattle Times*, Aug. 22, 1966. Adams also supervised college students' practice-teaching in Central Area schools. At a Seattle University sponsored event, Adams co-chaired the seminars for the Summer Institute for Integrated Education. Civil rights and education activists served on panels to examine *de facto* segregation in education. Rev. John Adams represented First A.M.E. and the CACRC along with Dolly who represented one out of 90 teachers and 15 principals from schools serving as receiving schools for the voluntary-transfer program.

temporarily relocated Josephine Stokes (a Mount Zion member and teacher at Horace Mann Elementary) to Sand Point Elementary School in order to help white teachers learn how to teach black students, it confounded her. “I used to wonder why it was that black teachers could teach children of all races...and why it was the white teachers who had to have orientation and to be prepared for the minority kids coming out there.” Black women teachers, often times, served as brokers between the community and the Seattle Public School District. They spoke on behalf of the black community as educators, mothers, and activists as well as carried the administrative burden of training their white colleagues on racial sensitivity, identifying their own racial biases, and understanding their new students during the school transfer.⁷⁶

While Louise McKinney and Dolly Adams served to bridge their identities as church women, mothers, and teachers into the fold of the movement, Roberta Byrd Barr sought to connect her civil rights activism and insider positions within the School District to push for community resources and influence education policy. Barr, a Wilberforce University graduate and Tacoma native, worked at Jefferson Elementary School as a music teacher for six years before joining the staff as teacher and librarian at John Muir Elementary School in 1965.⁷⁷ She first made her entre into community activism through her educational television program, “Face to Face,” that “woke the city up to civil rights.”⁷⁸

The program, which debuted in 1965, launched her as a popular figure within the local grassroots movement. The show premiered as one of the first in the nation to consistently speak on black issues in the city. Barr discussed topics and invited guests who explored a range of

⁷⁶ Sherry Stripling, “Making Strides in Seattle with Selma in her Heart,” *The Seattle Times*, Feb. 15, 2005.

⁷⁷ Barr was also a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, the Seattle NAACP and Urban League.

⁷⁸ Mary T. Henry, “Barr, Roberta Byrd (1919-1993),” *HistoryLink*. Accessed Sept. 8, 2016, <http://www.historylink.org/File/306>; Lily Eng, “Educator Roberta Byrd Barr, Dies at 74—TV Host, Principal Had Key Community Role,” *The Seattle Times*, June 25, 1993. In 1961, she launched her TV debut by presenting “Let’s Imagine Bedtime Stories for Young Children.”

social and political issues Central Area residents faced, communicating their problems to interested viewers in the city. The highly provocative program promoted cross-cultural dialogue as a method to end racism by educating people and addressing issues overlooked by the media. During the contentious school boycott, Barr invited an attorney, a minister, and two members of the school board to discuss their perspectives on the school integration program. She was one of many school employees who participated in the school boycott and taught in the YWCA Freedom Schools.⁷⁹

In 1966, school superintendent Forbes Bottomly appointed Barr to be the first African American community-liaison coordinator for the Seattle Public Schools Federal Title I program. In this position, she worked with parents and community groups to strengthen school programs in the Central Area and recruit students for the VRT program. However, Barr grew ambivalent about the outcome of the program and saw it as a “one-sided deal...[where blacks] paid an extremely high price.” As the community-liaison spokeswoman and in high demand as a civil rights speaker, she traveled across the state speaking on behalf of black parents, educators, and women. For instance, in 1966, the Seattle Council of Administrative Women in Education invited Barr to speak on the “Feminine Approach in Administration.” She spoke to Baptist church women on the “Women’s Mission in a Changing World” and at a Seattle Urban League forum on “Women’s Status.” Barr helped coordinate the “Theories of Learning as They Apply to the Urban Child” course and proposed the “Racial Minority in American Culture” curriculum as part of a teacher’s training course to equip teachers to “better understand how to teach those who have been culturally deprived.”⁸⁰

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* “Roberta Byrd: Remarkable People,” *BlackPast.org*, [video]. Accessed Jan. 8, 2016, <http://www.blackpast.org/aaw/barr-roberta-byrd-1919-1993>. The show lasted for seven years.

⁸⁰ Pieroth, 350; Elizabeth Wright Evans, “Teaching Seattle’s Teachers,” *The Seattle Times*, Aug. 13, 1967, p. 120; “Education Women to Meet,” *The Seattle Times*, Oct. 30, 1966, p. 95; “Church Notes,” *The Seattle Times*,

In the same year, Governor Daniel J. Evans appointed her to a five-year term on the Washington State Board Against Discrimination (WSBAD), established in 1949 to ensure employers complied with the Fair Employment Practices Law.⁸¹ As the only woman member of the Board, Barr used her platform to investigate racial biases in state schools and provide a strong political voice on black education. After the start of Tacoma's desegregation plans, for instance, she investigated Tacoma Public Schools to assess whether or not they followed the school system's transfer and enrollment programs to redress racial imbalance and the system's effort to combat segregation. In 1967, Barr, as a WSBAD representative, spoke at the Washington State School Director's Association in Spokane and criticized a member of the Shoreline School Board for raising an obtuse question on why suburban schools should be concerned with urban problems. She charged, "You keep training narrow-minded, chauvinistic children who do not stay in Shoreline. They come to Seattle and then isolated white and isolated Negro meet and have to start adjusting to each other."⁸²

Barr challenged the absurdity of critics' attitudes on the race problem in Washington and their indifference to school desegregation in Seattle by proposing solutions. In efforts to curtail and reverse white flight to the suburbs, Barr proposed the formation of a metropolitan school district that would encompass Shoreline, Highline, Mercer Island, Bellevue, and Seattle, thus making the latter a model for a modern and high achieving school system.⁸³ She stated, "If we can bring students all the way from Germany, all the way from Japan, I think we can bring

May 8, 1965, p. 5; "Forum to View Women's Status," *The Seattle Times*, Feb. 12, 1967, p. 5.

⁸¹ Reports from the 1950s indicate the WBAD remained underfunded.

⁸² "Anti-Bias Post Goes to Seattle Woman," *The Seattle Times*, Jul. 8, 1966, p. 52 "Desegregation Program in Tacoma Schools Hit," *The Seattle Times*, Apr. 21, 1967; Constantine Angelos, "Metropolitan School District Seen," *The Seattle Times*, Dec. 5, 1967, p. 70.

⁸³ The consideration for a metropolitan school district was introduced by the Washington Stated Board Against Discrimination in a report to the State Superintendent of Public Instruction and the State Board of Education on Sept. 29, 1966.

students from one part of the state to another, can we not? Put simply, Barr underscored that blacks and whites had to interact and deal with each other especially in the workforce and they should start early by adjusting to each other during their formative years in school. In this sense, schools would function as racial laboratory experiments in addition to educational learning centers. While calling for mandatory statewide teacher discussions, teacher programs, teacher training, and workshops for Central Area parents, Barr urged school board members to fight for state funds to implement solutions to integrated education. “Lean on the legislature. Money—that’s the name of the game... We have to start sending politicians who are willing to put their money where their mouth is,” she exclaimed. Barr, like so many other black women teachers, engaged in political battles to promote equality education and fairness in the school system.⁸⁴

Although teachers asserted their voices in the matters of education and their profession, some women educators became dissatisfied with the public school system altogether and established their own schools. One example, Hellyne Summerrise, a N.A.A.C.P board member, founded the Central Area’s first Montessori school in 1969 as an alternative to public education and as a method to provide community control and self-determination over children’s learning in the Central Area.⁸⁵ She stated, “We are working for freedom, but through self-discipline. We believe the child has certain capabilities. We provide him with the tools and information and hope he discovers them himself.” Summerrise, a participant in Seattle’s Poor People’s Campaign and volunteer for the nursery in Resurrection City, received training in Montessori education at the Wee Wisdom School in Seattle. The school enrolled a limited number of 21

⁸⁴ “TV Features Tonight,” *The Seattle Times*, Mar. 25, 1966, p. 59; *The Seattle Times*, Dec. 5, 1967. Roberta K. Byrd Barr was the only female member of the Washington State Board Against Education. In 1967, the Seattle Quota honored Barr for her activism in the community and in 1968, she was nominated as Woman of the Year by the B’nai B’rith Women. Roberta Byrd Barr served as an education specialist for Model Cities in 1968.

⁸⁵ In the same year, her husband Bob Summerrise, a disc jockey, opened the Humanities School that concentrated on teaching self-awareness. They created Operation Education as a funding source for both schools.

students between 2.5 to 4 years old and welcomed pupils from all racial and socio-economic backgrounds but gave preference to black children living in the Central Area. Located at 1623 South King Street, the Children's House was purchased from famed educator Orre Nobles' estate and charged \$400 tuition per child. Summerrise, however, struggled with funding and persuading parents in the Central Area of the benefits through this form of pedagogy for their children, although most parents with enrolled children were satisfied with the school. In 1970, the Children's House Montessori School closed.⁸⁶

In spite of Summerrise and many others losing confidence in the public school system, black women began to receive nominal promotions and titled leadership positions from the school board. After a year of strong criticism from civil rights groups advocating for the promotion of black school administrators, in 1968 the board named Dolly Adams to be vice principal of B.F. Day School, becoming the first black woman to be appointed to the administrative position. Adams declined the post after her husband accepted a transfer to a church in Los Angeles, presumably because of his waning power on the CACRC. Bottomly then appointed Roberta Byrd Barr, a logical choice, as vice-principal of general operations at Franklin High School after 150 students held a sit-in in March to protest the expulsion of black female students who wore their natural hair. Barr became the first African American woman vice-principal in the state. A year later, the school board promoted her as the first woman principal in the city when she took charge of Lincoln High School, a position that was almost compromised because of her involvement in the 1966 school boycott. In the same year,

⁸⁶ Patricia Fisher, "New School to Stress Needs of Pupils," *The Seattle Times*, Jul. 16, 1969. p. 49; "In a Mini-Mansion, A Montessori School," *The Seattle Times*, Dec. 7, 1969, p. 4; "School Seeks Donations," *The Seattle Times*, Feb. 15, 1970, p. 15; "2 Private Schools Issue Coupon Book," *The Seattle Times*, Jul. 4, 1970, p. 4; Hellyne Summerise, "Obituary," *Seattle Times*, Feb. 6, 2003. Accessed Oct. 3, 2016, <http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/seattletimes/obituary.aspx?n=hellyne-l-summerrise&pid=774817>.

Louise McKinney became principal of Harrison Elementary School.⁸⁷

‘Who Speaks for the Poor:’ Black Power Politics and the Movement to End Poverty

While black educators played a significant role in shaping the educational debates and advocating for school desegregation, by 1967, Seattle’s civil rights campaign had been overwhelmed by the more radicalized black power movement taking form in the Central Area. The issue of school integration devolved into factions, the largest one being “primarily young radicals who identified with ‘black power.’” The internal divisions within the African American community became so pronounced that it increasingly stymied the activities of the CACRC. The latent school campaign illustrated the growing appeal of black power and the push for decentralization and community control as an alternative to integration. Young black dissenters believed that integration did not provide the answer to abolishing racial and economic oppression among African Americans. Instead, they vehemently criticized civil rights leaders for their ineffectiveness, charging that whites shaped the destiny of the organizations they represented. CORE, unable to compete with the message of black power, disbanded in 1968 as did the CACRC. Many of its members found a home in the anti-poverty programs while others gravitated towards black power activities. Although the NAACP remained intact, members did not re-elect E. June Smith as president.⁸⁸

The formation of the Seattle Chapter of the Black Panther Party (BPP) in 1968, the first

⁸⁷ “Seminar to Probe De Facto Bias,” *The Seattle Times*, Mar. 27, 1968; “2 Negro Principals to Be Named,” *The Seattle Times*, June 18, 1968; Herb Robinson, “Negroes Move Up in Schools,” *The Seattle Times*, Jul. 26, 1968. Nora Adams became principal of T.T. Minor in the early 1970s. The Seattle School Board also appointed its first black secondary school principal, Dr. Roland M. Patterson, and two of its first black elementary principals, Clinton Richardson and Robert A. Bass in 1968. Other administrative appointments were Mildred German as Assistant Supervisor of the district’s Guidance Office.

⁸⁸ Taylor, 213-215; Zane, 131-132. Smith continued to serve as the treasurer-secretary of the NAACP Credit Union during its first ten years of its existence and remained active in community politics.

BPP chapter to be established outside of California, represented the apex of this transition. The BPP's founder, a young 19-year-old Aaron Dixon, called for the implementation of new tactics to achieve full employment, education, decent housing, military exemption, and education for African Americans. The BPP especially appealed to younger working and middle-class black women between the ages of 19 and 25 who were disillusioned with the slow results of the civil rights movement and its call for racial integration. The Party's message of black equality and pride inspired many women to challenge older leaders, provide an alternative voice of black Seattle, and organize the community's latent political and economic power.

Like elsewhere in the country, the growing black power movement sent waves of excitement and fear. Despite its masculinized message of black nationalism, the Black Panther Party was supported and sustained by women and, on the national level, occasionally led by young black women.⁸⁹ For one, women began wearing their hair in natural styles and sported African print dresses and scarves to celebrate their blackness. Aaron Dixon's sister Joann (Dixon) Harris, Maude Helen Allen, who served as captain of women, Kathleen M. Halley, the deputy minister of finance and treasurer, and Alice Spencer, communications secretary, represented the many women who joined the local chapter of the BPP and ran the "nuts and bolts" of the organization. New female recruits underwent a six-week training period like most new members. After the training period, new recruits, under the command of Allen, devoted much of their time to fundraising and office work that included answering phones, responding to correspondence, and setting up meetings. They also organized the breakfast programs and contributed to the newsletters. When Gayle "Asali" Dickson, an artist from Oakland, moved with her husband Melvin in 1969 to work with the Seattle Chapter of the BPP, she took on the

⁸⁹ Elaine Brown was the only black woman to lead the Black Panther Party from 1974-1977.

administrative work, painted the signs for the Sydney Miller Free Medical Clinic (now the Carolyn Downs Clinic), and facilitated the art projects. A new recruit, Vanetta Molson, who would later become a nurse and member of the Mary Mahoney Professional Nurses' Organization, assisted in the preparation of the Party's Summer Liberation School by "procuring food donations in advance and planning classes."⁹⁰

As one panther woman stated in Oakland, "The sisters have to pick up guns just like the brothers." Women like Joanne Ellis, a member of the party's female corps, admitted that she did not own a gun, but "when the revolution comes, I'll want to have a gun. How can you fight in a revolution if you don't have a gun?" She believed that peace could only be achieved through war. Michael Dixon, the younger brother of Aaron Dixon, proclaimed, "We trained our women to be soldiers...but women had to earn medals, and part of the medals was fighting the male chauvinism in the party." Although male chauvinism existed, many Seattle women held different views and experiences. Molson remembered that her concentration was not on the gendered dynamics of leadership but working as a collective for the common good. "We all sold newspapers, helped with the breakfast programs...also trying to figure out our lives and careers as young activists." Similar to CORE, the men subscribed to traditional gender roles where women rarely held positions of leadership within the party's ranks although many assumed the responsibilities of titled positions.⁹¹

Established black middle-class women's organizations often remained ambivalent about

⁹⁰ Aaron Dixon, *My People Are Rising: Memoir of a Black Panther Captain* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012), 179-180; Patrick Douglas, "Black Panthers on the Prowl," *The Seattle Magazine* (October 1968), 46.

⁹¹ Michael Dixon. Interview by Janet Jones. June 27 and Aug. 10, 2005. Seattle Civil Rights & Labor History Project at the University of Washington, accessed May 4, 2017. http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/michael_dixon.htm; Douglas, "Black Panthers on the Prowl," 43-44; Vanetta Molston, Interview by author, Feb. 21, 2017. Other members identified or associated with the party were Lynn L. Greely, Martha Jane Richard, Kathy Jones, Irma Dean Neal, Teola Hunter, Sandra Kay Randolph, Vanetta L. Molson, Gwendolyn D. Dixon, Sylvia Yvonne Curtiss, Betty Ellis, Joyce Ann Bruce, Joyce Sims, Gayle 'Asali' Dixon, Kathy Halley, Rosita Hollins.

black power and groups like the Black Panther Party who claimed to represent the masses of poor and working-black Americans. Some attempted to bridge the huge chasm between the two classes of women. Jeanne L. Noble, a native of Seattle, a professor of education at New York University, and past president of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc., spoke to the upper echelon of women on their place in the ‘black revolution’ during her 1968 visit to the city. Noting the stark class divisions, Noble attempted to shed light on the importance of understanding the agitation of “militant blacks” whom she identified as “disenfranchised males, the youth, and poor black women.” Noble explained that well-to-do Seattle women “cannot continue to play ‘broker’ between white society and Negro society.” “I, as a member of the middle class,” she explained, “can play an interpretative role.”⁹² Explaining the dilemma the black middle-class faced in a time of unparalleled civil unrest within their communities, she added:

Some white people say we should be telling the blacks not to riot. The ghetto dweller is more against the ‘sell-out’ black, which they would consider us if we brought that message than against the white man.⁹³

Noble spoke to a growing concern in the late 1960s. Many affluent black women appeared reluctant to revise their old strategies of social justice activism and join the new black power movement in challenging the white power structure. Their unwillingness reflected their views on education and their almost universal abhorance of violence to promote a political agenda. These women also recognized that as an educated elite, they were best positioned to take advantage of and benefit from the new economic opportunities opened by the civil rights movement of the decade.

Yet their socially conservative views, detached from the political upheavals in the city

⁹² Sally Gene Mahoney, “Negro Women Hear Truths on Their Place in ‘Revolution,’ *Seattle Times*, June 26, 1968, p. 21.

⁹³ Ibid.

were met with criticisms by younger groups including their own children, younger siblings, and students. For instance, when Roberta Byrd Barr accepted the position as vice principal at Franklin High School in 1968, she noticed her young black students keen attention to black power politics. Attempting to communicate the feelings between older community members and students, Barr noted that “the new racial awareness among young members of minority groups amount to nothing less than them standing up to the white majority: ‘I am no longer invisible. I am no longer afraid. And I am no longer going to try to make a carbon copy of you.’” Barr’s understanding and sympathies toward the political ideologies of her students won her favor and trust among young adults and helped quell school disruptions.⁹⁴

Young women warned members of established black, mostly middle-class, women’s organizations to either “join the revolution or be cast aside.” Such strong reproaches certainly created a greater rift between women activists of the civil rights movement and the rising black power movement. After a group of civic and politically-minded women established the Seattle Section of the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW) in 1967, a national black women’s political group, they invited young adult women to attend the NCNW Western Region Meeting to voice their concerns.⁹⁵ During the “Youth Speaks” segment, young women warned delegates that the outlook seemed “pessimistic for bridging the generation gap between Negro youth and the older Negro middle class.” One youth participant noted that the “adults and the youger generation are thinking on different levels...adults always want to lead because they feel they have had the experience.” In a separeare but concurrent meeting in the city, women of the Far

⁹⁴ Mike Parks, “Woman Accepts Challenge of Franklin,” *The Seattle Times*, Jul. 11, 1968, p.16.

⁹⁵ The NCNW was founded by Mary McLeod Bethune in 1935 to serve as an umbrella for the numerous black women’s organizations and a political voice for African American women throughout the nation. Founding members of the NCNW were Inez Hall, Annie Hall, Virgie Harris Haley, founding president and educator, Josephine Stokes.

West Region of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority heard similar concerns about the generation gap. The meeting of these organizations further reflected the growing division of women over class and age. Young people no longer had the patience to automatically defer to older black women's leadership regarding black community affairs.⁹⁶

Nor did the working poor. The National War on Poverty movement reached over the Cascade Mountains to Seattle and exposed the conditions of poor people living in a prosperous city. When Lyndon B. Johnson launched his Great Society Program in 1965, it galvanized a generation of black women. Historian Annelise Orleck stated that “poor women and men registered to vote, ran for office, and demanded a voice in shaping policies on public housing, schools, and welfare.” Through anti-poverty education programs, women in Seattle organized, gained empowerment, trained for jobs, and participated in community affairs that favored community-control of their neighborhood rather than integration. Although these voices varied on the new direction of the Central Area, they represented a direct challenge to established middle-class organizations and made clear that they did not, in fact, speak for them.⁹⁷

A year after President Lyndon B. Johnson signed into law the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, the mayor established the Seattle-King County Economic Opportunity Board (EOB), the administrative and coordinating agency for the anti-poverty and community action programs in the city. The EOB operated and funded the federal programs with a board that consisted of 24 members. Seventeen of the board members comprised of men and women from various economic and racial backgrounds. The War on Poverty movement in Seattle provided massive opportunities for women to further develop and grow their leadership skills, both formally and

⁹⁶ Sally Gene Mahoney, “Join the Revolution or Be Cast Aside, Middle Class Negro Women Told,” *Seattle Times*, July 1, 1968, p. 25.

⁹⁷ Annelise Orleck, *Storming Caesars Palace: How Black Mothers Fought Their Own War on Poverty* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005), 4.

informally. HeadStart and the Central Area Motivation Program (CAMP) were two such programs where women found a space to continue their social and political activities.

CAMP was conceived in 1964 before Congress passed the Economic Opportunity Act. A group of Central Area residents developed a comprehensive anti-poverty proposal that was met by some skepticism from civil rights leaders who distrusted government funding for social change. According to Ivan King, director of CAMP's Action Education Centers (AEC), CAMP became "the first totally new, community-inspired program in the country to receive funding" although most Economic Opportunity dollars in 1965 expanded established agencies. In 1967, CAMP enlisted over 300 employees in the summer of 1967 which also consisted of volunteers.⁹⁸ Walt Hundley, former president of CORE, served as CAMP's first director.⁹⁹

With twenty-five community-based programs, CAMP's major area of service was education. The AEC program operated as its most wide-reaching and innovative program that included a challenging African American History project. In its first year, some 7,000 children, youth, and adults participated in a series devoted to the study of African American history and culture that focused on community action, self-worth, and self-determination. Though King served as the first director of the AEC, women populated the teaching and tutorial staff such as Infanta Spence and Annie L. Williams. Barbara Laners, a University of Washington law student and staff member, supervised the after-school study centers that provided tutoring services for more than 3,000 children in ten schools. In doing so, Laners helped create the educational curriculum for the education programs.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ In the earlier years, those programs included Community Organization, Creative Arts, Employment, Family Support Services.

⁹⁹ W. Ivan King, *The Central Area Motivation Program, a Brief History of a Community in Action* (Seattle: CAMP, 1990), 6-7.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 7. Charles T. Michener, "How Goes the War on Poverty," *Seattle Magazine*, (May 1966), 18. CAMP laid the groundwork for what Hundley called "creative conflict." Its mission for self-determination threatened established political hierarchies such as school officials, public housing authorities, and the police due to its black

Gertrude Du Pree along with Nora Bear and Keve Bray believed CAMP was too closely connected to the CACRC and its civil rights agenda. To provide an alternative anti-poverty program to the CACRC, they formed the Central Area Action Committee (CAAC).¹⁰¹ As president of the organization, Du Pree focused, although unsuccessfully, on securing anti-poverty funds from the Seattle-King Economic Opportunity Board in order to reach the masses of the poor. Bray stated, “CAMP’s project just reaches the lower middle-class, not the poor people that our group represents.” However earnest the CAAC attempted to speak for the poor, CAMP prevailed as the primary social agency for the war on poverty and was directly funded by the EOB in 1965.¹⁰²

Despite much pushback from political anti-poverty groups claiming to represent the poor, Daisy Boyetta was perhaps the most visible face of the War on Poverty movement and CAMP. In a 1968 article, the *Seattle Magazine* asked, ‘Who Speaks for the Poor?’ Out of the ten delegates appointed to the Economic Opportunity Board, Boyetta, a teacher’s aide at CAMP’S after-school study program and a black nationalist, was regarded as “unusually effective” and a representative of the poor. “She comes on like gangbusters,” said a city official. Boyetta attended community meetings, city planning forums, and jobs training initiatives and influenced the decision-making among her contemporaries. “I just tell ‘em like it is,” Boyetta exclaimed.¹⁰³

Long before poor welfare mothers in Nevada amassed the largest collection of African and African American books in the state, Boyetta opened the only black bookstore in

organizing power. The program began using “block volunteers” to organize residents into neighborhood councils that focused on helping the poor in the Central Area to develop a voice of their own—and a taste for “middle-class politics.” This system of block volunteering strove to give agency to residents by empowering them with tools to no longer be the “invisible poor.” Rather, they encouraged the development of leaders who would want to run for office and establish their own businesses.

¹⁰¹ The Central Area Action Committee claimed to have had upward to 500 members in 1965.

¹⁰² “Antipoverty Group Buys Headquarters,” *The Seattle Times*, Dec. 15, 1965.

¹⁰³ Michener, “How Goes the War on Poverty,” 19.

Washington. Named after the black nationalist Marcus Garvey, the Garvey Bookstore specialized in black literary works. With over 500 book titles, Boyetta hoped to develop the store into a distribution location to supply black literature to schools, libraries, businesses, and organizations who ordered large quantities. Women-owned businesses, she believed, were one viable route out of poverty.¹⁰⁴

Espousing black power discourse of community self-determination, black self love, and education for empowerment, Boyetta became a mainstay in the community and a friend of the Black Panther Party, often encouraging the young radicals. Aaron Dixon, who often visited the bookstore, observed:

Boyetta was like an old griot, sitting in her little bookshop surrounded by pictures of Marcus Garvey and other Black leaders. She could sense that something was coming, that Blacks were getting ready for the next big push for social justice...through these conversations with us young people, she could reinvigorate herself, discussing the injustices committed by the white man and suggesting ideas to counter these injustices.¹⁰⁵

In addition to CAMP education programs, women could also be found working in early childhood education. Head Start was an outgrowth of the efforts of black women in Mississippi such as Fannie Lou Hamer who developed programs to address the needs of poor families and children. The appeal of the program traveled to the Pacific Northwest and became one of the government's most successful anti-poverty programs. In 1965, the Seattle-King County EOB appointed Dorothy L. Hollingsworth, an educator and social worker, to be the first director of the Head Start program. The program served low-income children from ages 3 to 6 years old. The need for child day care centers in the Central Area had existed for a long time, leaving

¹⁰⁴ Orleck, *Storming Caesars Palace*, 222; Don D. Wright, "Black, Beautiful, Read All Over," *The Seattle Times*, Nov. 10, 1968, p.118; *Ibid*, "Back in Business: Book Store Specializes in Black Literature," *The Seattle Times*, Dec. 7, 1969, p. 45. Daisy Boyetta participated in the Universal Negro Improvement Association when she was young and remained a follower of Garvey's black nationalist message.

¹⁰⁵ Dixon, *My People Are Rising*, 65.

church women, strained for resources, to fill the need. The free education program included hot lunches and snacks as well as medical and dental services for young children, promising to give them a “head start.” Many churches and neighborhood schools served as site for the centers. Hollingsworth supervised over 435 children in over twelve centers, with a staff of teachers, teachers aide, and adult volunteers, positions usually held by black women. Hollingsworth was instrumental in getting black women hired to work as teachers for the program. For instance, Inez Hall and Daisy Tibbs Dawson assisted in the programs as teachers and as teachers aides while Dolly Adams served as home-school coordinator and supervisor over the demonstration center at Trinity Episcopal Church. Black women continued to lead and operate the Seattle city anti-poverty program well into the 1980s.¹⁰⁶

The pressure to eradicate poverty nonetheless came from below. When five women appealed to the Washington State Board Against Discrimination, Marion Bryant, Florence Fox, Bobby Campbell, Gertrude Dupree, and Ethel Lightfoot charged that middle-class Seattle blacks routinely discriminated against poor people. Gertrude Dupree leveled the most devastating accusation: that black male-led anti-poverty programs in the city designed to help the poorest of the poor in fact discriminated against poor black women. She claimed that the anti-poverty program administrators routinely hired their wives, paying them \$10,000 a year to work in agencies that did not meet the needs of the working poor. Roberta Byrd Barr asked Dupree and the women to substantiate their claims. But Bobby Campbell demanded that the board get “a factory or something in our neighborhood to give us jobs, instead of spending all that money for

¹⁰⁶ Constantine Angelos, “In-Depth Project Included as Head Start Program Begins, *The Seattle Times*, June 27, 1966; Interview with Dorothy Hollingsworth by Mildred Andrews on Jan. 31, 2007. Washington State History Museum. Accessed May 24, 2016, <http://www.washingtonhistory.org/files/library/Hollingsworth.pdf>. Daisy Tibbs Dawson and Virgie Harris Haley served as directors respectively. Dorothy Hollingsworth also served on the Seattle Human Rights and was appointed by Mayor Brahman to the Police Liaison Committee in 1968.

schools and training.”¹⁰⁷

The frank exchange revealed the radically different worldviews of the black elite and the diverse voices among the working poor. While most middle-class and poor women emphasized education, many poor women agitated for jobs and economic stability. Campbell challenged the emphasis almost entirely on education or job training for the poor when she said, “Negroes could not get jobs after completing training.” She and the other women believed the anti-poverty money could be best spent securing jobs in the area so they could have a stable income rather than education.¹⁰⁸

While Daisy Boyetta, Gertrude DuPree, and a number of activist women advocated for access to social services and a right to be heard, Florestine “Flo” Ware presented the most looming political voice on poverty, the elderly, and education issues in the Central Area since the 1950s. Ware, a native of Fort Worth, Texas, became involved with numerous SPS committees, wrote community proposals for school funding, participated in the Head Start program, and was a founding member of the Central Area School Committee.¹⁰⁹ As a community leader, Ware spoke to hundreds of organizations and meetings on issues ranging from healthcare, education, fostercare, and politics. Although a sought after speaker, she refused to charge for her speaking engagements. On numerous occasions, she would wear a dress made out of bath towels to some of her meetings when she could not afford clothing. She exclaimed, “How do you think I run around and speak to all these schools and nobody gives me a dime. They don’t pay me nothing.” Ware made the best of what she had to continue raising concerns about the issues so vital to poor

¹⁰⁷ “Five Central-Area Women Complain to Anti-Bias Board,” *Seattle Times*, Aug. 18, 1967, p. 9.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Flo Ware owned a sandwich shop on Jackson Street during the 1950s. She was also the President of Foster care, an affiliate of CORE.

black people.¹¹⁰

Nowhere was this more pronounced than the Poor People's March on Washington. When national civil rights organizers launched the March and Resurrection City to continue King's message of economic justice and bring attention to the plight of poor people from all racial backgrounds, Ware answered the call to action. In 1968, she led two busloads of Seattle's poor, black, white, Native American, and Asian American citizens to participate in the Poor People's Campaign. Although disheartened with the outcome of the campaign she described as being "badly organized," Ware along with fellow activists Hellyne Summerrise, a member of the Seattle NAACP, and Gladys Givens, a CORE member, visited Capitol Hill twice to encourage Washington State Representative Brock Adams to hear the demands of Washington's poor and tour Resurrection City. Adams agreed, but another representative refused to meet with them.¹¹¹ Ware's disillusionment with liberalism and a political system that showed little regard for the poor and black communities convinced her to channel her energies towards abandoning the two-party system. Soon after leading the Poor People's Campaign March, Ware felt that a new political force, a third party, should be created. In 1968, she joined Seattle's Peace and Freedom Party, a left-wing socialist political group first organized in California as an electoral coalition intended to protect the Black Panthers. A year prior, Jeri Ware (no relation), a community

¹¹⁰ Flo Ware, [interviewer unknown], ca. 1980, Oral history. Accession No. 1439-003 T3 [digital file], Florestine Ware Papers, 1960-1981, University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections. In 1969, the SPS selected Ware to be a consultant in the public schools for the six week summer institute. In this role, she instructed teachers on the values of school desegregation, how to meet the challenges of understanding different cultures and racial background they were unaccustomed to, and placed emphasis on the alarming differences in the performance between poor and middle-class pupils at Bailey Gatzert Elementary School. Her classes also stressed the track system and alerted them on the economic conditions that denied certain children a quality education. Ware also opposed bussing, attacked special education classes, contending that it was another form of segregation, and resented "special" classes for gifted children since most of the children, she believed, came from middle-class homes.

¹¹¹ William W. Prochnau, "25 From Seattle Area Join March," *The Seattle Times*, June 19, 1968; *Ibid.*, "Seattle Woman, State Indian Among Throng At 'Poor' Rally," *The Seattle Times*, June 20, 1968, p. 25.

organizer and tutoring coordinator at UW, had joined the party serving as its vice president. This is significant to note as it revealed the progressive social and political environment in the city and black women's role in the production of these political ideologies. It further complicates our views and understandings of black women's politics in this period. It was just as much varied and complex at the beginning of the decade as it was towards the end.

For Flo Ware, at least, understanding politics had become simple. She cogently argued that her decades long broad-based community activism allowed her to see "the need for an independent mass political organization of the people that can compete with the major parties." The PFP condemned the Vietnam War and the Democrats failure to support the Civil Rights Movement. Party activists routinely disrupted rallies of political foes and became subjects of state sanctioned violence. When Democratic Nominee Vice President Hubert Humphrey held a rally in Seattle, PFP candidates showed up to demonstrate and petition for social change.¹¹² Violence inevitably broke out at the rallies, usually directed at the protesters who were perceived as militant political threats and outliers who allegedly instigated violence.¹¹³

Ware, the civil rights trailblazer, spoke out against the violence at these rallies and, at age 53, ran for the U.S. Congress 7th legislative district on the PFP ticket. In a statement released to the public, her platform reflected the growing influences of black power, the peace movements, women's liberation, and black disillusionment with the white establishment. Ware charged that "the Republican-Democratic party strangles the movements for liberation and peace, and we are smothered in racism, militarism, and hopelessness." The crux of her campaign platform

¹¹² Marjorie Pitter King and Thelma DeWitty supported Hubert Humphrey at the 1968 Democratic Convention while also criticizing Democrats for their lackluster support of civil rights.

¹¹³ "President Urged to Pull Out of Vietnam," *The Seattle Times*, May 11, 1967, p. 22; "Statement by Flo Ware, Peace and Freedom Party Candidate for U.S. Congress-7th District," 1968, Box 1 Folder 7, Accession No. 1438-001, Florestine Ware Papers, 1960-1981, University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections.

envisioned a free and equal society and heavily criticized representatives of the Democratic and Republican Party whom she identified as her capitalist opponents. Ware supported the socialist agenda to end the Cold War and the War in Vietnam; to eliminate the capitalist class in government that oppressed its citizens; and to end the exploitation of workers and colonial interference in foreign governments. She encouraged a redistribution of wealth and resources and championed women's equality. In short, she ran on the issues of "poverty, hunger, and the reorganization of the federal government." Despite her long record of community organizing, Ware received 709 votes compared to the winning candidate, Brock Adams, a Democrat, who received 106,628 votes. Ware's candidacy as well as the PFP's political efforts generally did not hold the expectations of tallying the most votes in the elections; rather they sought to use "electoral politics to organize the people into a permanent, radical force" in efforts to create change in the country. Ware's campaign intended to grow the PFP's membership and political sophistication so that by 1972 the party would become a real political force.¹¹⁴

The growing racial polarization in urban cities around the country placed city officials on high alert. Contemplating the possibility of a race riot occurring in Seattle similar to other major urban areas, city leaders rejected the public presence of the new socialist party and its alliance with the Black Panther Party. In fact, Mayor James Braham charged that the Freedom and Peace Party along with the Black Panther Party and the Students for a Democratic Society were "part of a conspiracy to promote racial unrest and guerilla warfare" in Seattle. In a press conference, Ware and her allies dismissed the claims as false and accused the city and the police of

¹¹⁴ "Candidate in Congressional Races Comment," *The Seattle Times*, Nov. 3, 1968, p. 99; Andrea Vogel, "Disturbing the Peace Isn't Violence, Say 5 Candidates," *The Seattle Times*, Oct. 1, 1968, p. 6; "Statement by Flo Ware, Peace and Freedom Party Candidate for U.S. Congress-7th District, 1968," Flo Ware Papers, University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections; "How State Voted for President, House, Senate," *The Seattle Times*, Nov. 6, 1968, p. 9; Marty Loken, "Radical Party Starts Taking Its Issues to People," *The Seattle Times*, Nov. 4, 1968, p. 24; Walt Crowley, *Rites of Passage: A Memoir of the Sixties in Seattle* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995), 130-131; "Flo Ware," *Helix Magazine* (October 1968), 9.

“conspiring to incite racial conflict and quash political dissent.” After losing the campaign, Flo Ware continued her community and political and social justice activism. In the 1970s, she would continue to run for numerous political positions as a change agent and the leader that she believed the Central Area desperately needed.¹¹⁵

Conclusion

As the postwar migration exposed the fragility of race relations in Seattle and the intra-racial class biases, the political struggles of the 1960s made African Americans aware of their tenuous status in the Pacific Northwest. The symbolism of the World’s Fair was a distant memory by the end of the decade and would remain the greatest paradox of the century. In this moment, black women devised a politics that enabled them to work politically in three successive social movements and assert power in American public life. For the first time since 1918, black women campaigned and ran for legislative office, flexing a political muscle that lay dormant for over four decades. Unable to secure a seat in Olympia, they debated, strategized, and organized around education and developed leadership skills on the grassroots level during one of the most tumultuous times in Seattle’s history.

During this period of uncertainty, several competing voices emerged. There were women who worked through and ascended to the top of the NAACP. Many chaired CORE committees while others formed their own community-based organizations. Although overlooked, wives of civil rights leaders, teachers, and poor mothers illustrated the agency and significance of this grassroots mobilization through their lobbying efforts to demand quality education from the city while at the same time utilizing their resources to provide their own educational programs. Due

¹¹⁵ Don Hannula, “Three Groups Brand Mayor’s Guerilla Statement as Lie,” *The Seattle Times*, Oct. 22, 1968, p. 2.

to the deep fissures caused by the school desegregation campaigns, the growing appeal of black power challenged the integrationist objective and provided a gendered space for dissenting young women and poor women to become civically engaged and vocal on the direction of the black community. They turned away from integration and, instead, promoted community empowerment and self-determination over neighborhood schools.

While the Civil Rights, Black Power, and War on Poverty movements opened the window for black women's leadership to evolve, the inability of African Americans to obtain jobs and higher wages proved intractable. Demolishing racial barriers did not translate into opportunity and equality as they had hoped, especially for African American women. Instead, rising criminal activity, police brutality, drug abuse, and single-parent homes headed by women exacerbated conditions and tested the legacy of these social movements. Nonetheless black women, who represented an array of political ideologies, worked to eliminate some of the most egregious forms of discrimination and achieved success in strengthening political coalitions. Yet their status as mothers, professionals, and citizens rested on them shaping a new, political identity in the 1970s—one that claimed public visibility and confronted the realities of racism and the issue of gender more urgently.

Chapter Four

Unaccustomed Frontiers: Black Women's Politics in a New Age, 1970-1979

I believe it is high time that Black Women became visibly represented in the State Capitol. No Black Woman has ever been elected to the House of Representatives.”

-Marion King Smith, candidate for 37th district state legislature
quoted in *The Facts*, March 5, 1970¹

I had been engaged in the civil-rights movement and found that to get equality under the law, you have to get in there and make the laws.

-Barbara Laners, former CAMP supervisor and UW law graduate
quoted in *The Seattle Times*, March 5, 1970²

During Mayor Wes Uhlman's 1970 town hall meeting at Garfield High School, one black woman confronted city leaders and asked, “Why are there less women in government?” As the *Seattle Times* reported, the city representatives laughed and moved on to “more serious matters.” The officials' dismissive response disregarded the woman who raised an important democratic question and revealed the attitudes towards black women as lawmakers. Despite women's involvement in civic affairs and early electoral participation since the dawn of the 20th century, the town hall meeting clearly proved the national dilemma black women faced as African Americans and as women in Washington State.³

The 1970s signified a watershed moment in Seattle's history and women's political history in the Pacific Northwest. The dissention on school integration, the growing women's rights movement, and the recession caused by the Boeing Bust called for a reorientation of black leadership. Black women challenged state and city officials to address the problems of the black

¹ “Mrs. Smith May Be Candidate for Legislature in 37th District,” *The Facts*, Mar. 5, 1970.

² Constantine Angelos, “Civil Rights Child,” *The Seattle Times*, Mar. 5, 1970, p. B1.

³ “Tielsch in 1st Central Area Public Meeting,” *The Seattle Times*, Sept. 29, 1970, p. 19. City leaders on the panel included Councilman Sam Smith, Mayor Wes Uhlman, Fire Chief Gordon Vickery, and Police Chief George Tielsch. This also partly explains the failure of black female representation in city and state government over the last seventy years and, particularly, in the previous decade when African Americans held the majority in Seattle's 37th legislative district.

urban community by daring to prime their own candidates for public office. For the first time in the state's history, black women would win elective positions in the state legislature and city governing boards and, also, be appointed to positions in state and local agencies. Most gained their political experience in women's organizations, community groups, local precincts, and anti-poverty activism. These spaces functioned as key sites for black political engagement where women activists cultivated their leadership and reshaped conceptions of black womanhood.

While fighting for their place in a city undergoing an economic crisis, black women set in motion a blueprint for growing a political base that catapulted them into careers of activism and public service. The primary concerns of middle-class black women and black women's groups focused on the intersection of racial and gendered issues such as education, employment, child care, reproductive decisions, and affirmative action regression. Working poor women, who did not typically identify with white, middle-class feminists and were consequentially left out of the women's agenda, directed their activism to politicized class struggles for welfare rights and access to affordable housing and healthcare. Their collective action shined a beaming light on urban inequality in postwar Seattle.

This chapter explores how race, gender, and class shaped women's struggles for political power and awakened the state to the possibilities of black women's leadership during one of the region's most distressing economic downturns. Through an interlocking web of community organizing, anti-poverty activism, and political coalition-building, black women were able to directly influence public policy and shape legislation, thereby challenging urban inequality and giving a voice to a small and underrepresented population in Washington state.

“Will the Last Person Leaving Seattle—Turn off the Lights:” Boeing and the Economic Crisis

The year 1970 was fraught with economic uncertainty: the *Seattle Times* predicted “a cloudy future for the local area.” Miner Baker, vice president and economist of the Seattle-First National Bank, vowed that 1970 would be “a painful year of readjustment...lower profits, high-cost money...and a higher unemployment rate.” These predictions spoke to the recent economic slumps at the Boeing Airplane Company. For the past thirty years, the health of the Puget Sound economy depended on the giant airplane manufacturer. Boeing accounted for three fifths of the industrial base and maintained its position as the Puget Sound’s largest employer. In 1969, however, Boeing’s workforce had declined from more than 100,000 to 80,000 workers. The sales of the new 747 jetliner turned out to be extremely unprofitable. No commercial airline made a single purchase in 1970 due to the excess in capacity. Exacerbating its woes in 1971, Boeing lost its contract with the federal government to continue funding its supersonic transport (SST), B-1 and C5-A; while at the same, the country endured an energy crisis that increased the cost of commercial flying. The billboard: “Will the Last Person Leaving Seattle—Turn off the Lights—sprang up near the Sea-Tac airport when Boeing announced it would lay off 60,000 more workers. The billboard exposed a city in turmoil due to massive unemployment and considerable financial losses. By the end of 1971, Boeing’s workforce dropped to 32,500, plunging the region into “the longest and deepest recession since the Great Depression.”⁴

Misfortunes at Boeing and President Richard Nixon’s onerous struggles to fund social programs while paying for a costly war in Vietnam took a massive toll on the city. But Seattle, on the surface, did not look like a city in a depression; rather it appeared to be thriving and

⁴ Miner H. Baker, “Economics Alone Won’t Solve Woes of 1970s,” *The Seattle Times*, Jan. 1, 1970, p. 51; Sharon Boswell and Lorraine McConaghy, “Lights Out, Seattle,” *The Seattle Times*, Nov. 3, 1996.

prosperous with the construction of new high-rises, busy streets, and bustling downtown businesses. The city even won praise and was awarded a reputation as “America’s most livable city” by *Harper’s Magazine* in 1975. Beneath the thin veil of prosperity existed a rising class of what the *Ramparts Magazine* described as the “new poor.” The term “new poor” differed from the “old poor” in that the former were unemployed white middle-class workers who managed assets such as vacation homes, boats, and cars that disqualified many from receiving public assistance. Many sold or pawned their luxury assets to meet mortgage payments. Nearly 36 percent of Seattle’s unemployed workforce did not qualify for state and federal food benefits, whereas, over 40 percent of unemployed workers statewide exhausted unemployment benefits by the end of 1971. Nonetheless, most of the 67,000 terminated Boeing workers, comprised of highly skilled, educated, and middle-income whites, did rely on welfare assistance such as food stamps and unemployment benefits in addition to community food banks.⁵

If the white middle-class felt the shock of urban poverty and massive unemployment, then African Americans, considered the “old poor,” suffered the worst blow. The *Seattle Medium* estimated that Boeing employed over one third of the black community’s labor force. The Central Area took the hardest hit when losses at the airplane manufacturer stimulated an outflow of the population and decreased real estate activity and residential values. Each year, increasing numbers of residents were displaced throughout the city with 20 percent of all households relocating, largely due to increased rents. Displacement occurred throughout the city rather than in just one or two neighborhoods, but the North End, the Central Area, and Queen Anne neighborhoods comprised higher percentages of displacement. Major shifts in the demand and supply of housing caused inflationary pressure on the housing market, thus reducing the

⁵ Arthur M. Louis, “The Worst American City,” *Harper’s Magazine* (January 1975), 67-71; Jon Stewart, “Seattle: The New Poor Face The New Depression,” *Ramparts* (May 1972), 51-52.

availability of lower cost housing, especially single-family units. The Central Area underwent the greatest upsurge in housing costs that adversely affected low-income families, mostly headed by single black mothers, the elderly, and renters. The area also witnessed the spread of deteriorating and dilapidated housing. According to a city report in 1974, Seattle ranked second to Detroit in Housing and Urban Development (HUD) repossessed houses.⁶

Although Seattle, for the first time, experienced a decline in its total population, the non-white population continued to increase dramatically. By 1970, the black population had increased to 37,636 with 95% of the population living within the Central Area. Only 4.2% lived in places outside of the district. Many white residents left the Central Area at an alarming rate while blacks did not move out as quickly. In fact, black residents who did relocate tended to move to the South End along the Rainier Valley corridor and Rainier Beach while white residents moved north. Issues of displacement would continue to burden Central Area residents and resolutions remained elusive for the next forty years.⁷

During the Boeing Bust, the years between 1973 and 1976 marked unprecedented high levels of unemployment especially among African Americans. While the unemployment figures ranged from 12 to 17 percent for Seattle, those numbers nearly doubled for residents living in the Central Area. Black women, especially, endured unmitigated hardships. According to the 1970 census, of 8,933 black families, 27 percent of households were headed by black women with 44 percent living below poverty level. Eighteen percent of black families received some form of public assistance. Compared to the 118,057 total white families, only 12 percent were headed by

⁶ Kenneth Long, "Boeing to Drop 1800 in First Quarter," *The Seattle Medium*, Jan. 21, 1970, p. 2; "Seattle Displacement Study," Office of Policy Planning, 1979, pp. ii-iii, 2, 7.

⁷ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Characteristics of the Population*, 1970. Vol. 1, pt. 49. Washington, Table 91. (Washington, DC: Government of the Printing Office, 1971), 49-214; "Separation is Trend of Seattle's Racial Gap," *The Seattle Medium*, Jan. 21, 1970, p. 2.

women with 29 percent living below the poverty level. Black women, constituting less than 4 percent of the population, disproportionately lived in poverty at higher rates than white women. The Boeing Bust compounded their poverty status. Though the extent to which the old and new poor benefited from and experienced the welfare system in varying ways speak to the institutionalized racial structure of the city and state agencies. But one thing was for certain: thousands in the Queen City were starving!⁸

“Welfare is A Woman’s Issue:” The Feminization of Poverty and the Campaign for Welfare Rights

Black women’s response to their impoverishment, the Boeing Bust, the women’s movement, and urban inequality shaped their political identities in a city structured by racial discrimination and economic disparities. Between 1969 and 1973, President Richard Nixon vehemently worked to dismantle the Johnson administration’s Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) programs that he determined was the primary failure of the War on Poverty. Nixon transferred many of the OEO’s programs to other “old-line” federal departments such as Labor and Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW). In the process, he defunded the Community Action Agencies (CAA), abandoning the idea of poor people’s participation in creating and sustaining programs that served them. While state and federal budgets became strained due to military spending, rising inflation, and Nixon’s opposition to OEO, poor and middle-class women continued to work in and around anti-poverty agencies such as CAMP and a newly established

⁸ I calculated this by using 1970 census data. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Poverty Status in 1969 of Negro Families and Persons for Areas and Places, or Characteristics of the Population*, 1970. Vol. 1, pt. 49, Washington, Table 95 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1971), 49-228; “Population of Seattle, WA,” Population.us <<http://population.us/wa/seattle/>>; Mike Wyne, “35% Unemployed in Central Area, New Study Finds,” *The Seattle Times*, Nov. 24, 1976; “City Council Candidates Response on Hunger,” *The Facts*, Aug. 19, 1971;

program, Model Cities.⁹

During the peak of Nixon's OEO budget cuts, leadership at CAMP turned in a new direction. In 1967, Walter Hundley resigned from CAMP to assume the directorship of Seattle's new Model Cities program, leaving the organization in need of a visionary leader with experiences in management and skills in community organizing. In June of 1971, the Central Area Citizens' Committee, including Bob Flowers, Hundley, and Judge Charles Johnson, announced the appointment of Rossalind Y. Woodhouse as CAMP's first woman executive director and the first African American woman to head a social agency of its size and budget in the city and possibly the state. Woodhouse, who came to Seattle in 1962, worked as a social worker for the State Department of Public Assistance and held positions as a guidance counselor for the Seattle New Careers Project and as the Community Organization Specialist for the Seattle Housing Authority.¹⁰

At CAMP, Woodhouse worked to improve the programs in place while managing a reported fiscal budget of 1.6 million dollars. She remained close with Hundley and met with him regularly to get oriented to the new job. He first advised her to "always have the person in charge of the money report directly to you." Woodhouse led the organization under the surveillance of Nixon who jeopardized the fate of CAMP. In the early 1970s, Nixon sent federal auditors to different cities across the country to audit OEO programs without notice and then shut them down. Woodhouse's political ties in Washington D.C. alerted her to the fact that "Seattle and CAMP was on the list." For nearly six months, the new director and Hundley covertly strategized on how to place CAMP in a firm position to pass the audit. For instance, Woodhouse

⁹ Williams S. Clayson, *Freedom is Not Enough: The War on Poverty and the Civil Rights Movement in Texas* (Austin: University of Texas, 2010), 137.

¹⁰ "Mrs. Rossalind Woodhouse Appointed Executive Director of the Central Area Motivation Program," *The Facts*, Jul. 15, 1971, p. 1.

spawned the Central Area Credit Union into its own independent agency to prevent it from being subject to the audit. When the review came, she explained, “It was three guys from D.C. who wanted to see the books, but we were ready. They spent a better part of a week going over stuff and asking questions...but they did not shut anything down!” Woodhouse had helped to prevent a government shut-down of CAMP earlier on and continued to save and revive CAMP programs such as Educational Talent Search, Minority Home Repair Service, Energy Assistance, and Employment Training.¹¹

The gendered leadership dynamics in CAMP had unilaterally favored men while women ran the daily operations of the program, Woodhouse’s leadership thus presented internal challenges to the organization. Many community members responded negatively to her stance as a self-proclaimed feminist and her choice for administrative assistant. She caused an uproar when she hired a male executive administrative assistant whom many saw as a secretarial position usually performed by women. Inversely, they believed her position should be performed by a man. Woodhouse eschewed her critics by stating that “sex seems to present as greater problems to men than it does to me. Since its their problem they’ll have to struggle with it. Meanwhile there’s a lot of work to be done here at CAMP and we’re going to do it together.”¹²

Although Woodhouse and CAMP strove to ameliorate poverty through programs and serve as a responsive resource agency to the needs of the poor, the introduction of the Model Cities program in 1967 served as the primary vehicle for anti-poverty programs and focusing on combatting urban issues of race and poverty and the social, economic, and physical conditions of neighborhoods. Seattle proved to be the perfect experiment for this new program. Unlike

¹¹ Rossalind Woodhouse. Interview by author, Seattle, Washington, Aug. 23, 2017.

¹² “Mrs. Rossalind Woodhouse Appointed Executive Director of the Central Area Motivation Program,” *The Facts*, Jul. 15, 1971, p. 1; Rossalind Woodhouse, interview by author, Aug. 23, 2017.

Detroit, Chicago, and other cities undergoing urban decline, Seattle remained only “in the initial stages of decay” and the opportunity for city officials to reverse the problem was possible.¹³

The Model Cities Neighborhood consisted of the Central Area, the International District, and Pioneer Square. It included an Advisory Council, Steering Committee, staff, and task forces which planned projects in conjunction with community activists. These projects focused on areas of education, employment, health, housing, and law and justice. Like CAMP, black women worked alongside Hundley by their involvement on the staff, committees, task forces, and advisory councils. Flo Ware, for instance, served on the Health Advisory Board and presented free lectures on “Poverty in the Central Area.” Roberta Byrd Barr served as an education specialist. There existed much overlap and collaboration between the two organizations in which W. Ivan King called “a fortuitous interweaving of CAMP and Model City personnel and sentiments” where most activists and community members shared dual roles in each agency. It is therefore through the anti-poverty programs developed under CAMP and Model Cities that welfare rights activists emerged and launched a state-wide political movement led by poor black Seattle women.¹⁴

As the nation’s unemployment surged and welfare rolls swelled, Washington State proved no different. CAMP and the Model Cities program alone could not cope with the increasing rise of families sinking into poverty and growing welfare issues during the city’s economic retrenchment. Nor did city and state welfare agencies, fueled by federal disinvestment, provide appropriate funding for welfare and public assistance programs.

¹³ Cited in “Historical Note,” Seattle Model Cities Program Records, 1967-1975, University of Washington Libraries, Special Collection <<http://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/ark:/80444/xv22921>>

¹⁴ “Flo Ware Lecture Set on Poverty,” *The Seattle Medium*, Mar. 25, 1971; W. Ivan King, *The Central Area Motivation Program*, p. 9. Other members on the Health Advisory Board included Elizabeth Caldwell, Ida Foster, Julie Bassett, Rita Fields, and Johnnie Mae Davis. In the late 1960s, Flo Ware was very critical of Model Cities claiming that the federal government’s program was a failure that expanded welfare rather than eliminate poverty.

According to the *Seattle Medium*, sixty-five percent of welfare recipients, mostly women, had moved into the Model City Neighborhood since 1968, causing the welfare caseloads in the Central Area to increase by 250 percent with 20 percent of the residents receiving some form of aid.¹⁵

The need was so great, and the problem was so massive that a coalition of poor black women mobilized to seize control of their own destinies. Mary Louise Williams, Director of Extended Service for Red Cross and a veteran organizer of welfare recipients, organized a Washington state chapter of the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO) in 1970.¹⁶ According to Guida West, “Although NWRO was defined as a movement of poor people by its organizers and leader, in reality, it attracted largely a black constituency.” For fifteen years, Williams relied on public assistance when her husband deserted the family, leaving her to raise the children as a single mother. She became employed as a block worker for CAMP, helping to organize neighborhood blocks around single issues such as welfare rights. Under the auspices of CAMP’s block program, in 1966, she founded Aid to Dependent Children Motivated Mothers (ADC), one of the first grassroots welfare mothers’ organization in Seattle, at Woodland Park Zoo. The ADC Motivated Mothers first investigated and evaluated the effectiveness of agencies that provided services for poor people, probing the breakdown between the agencies and the recipients. CAMP provided the organization with access to resources that would have otherwise been impossible to obtain.¹⁷ Williams revealed that:

Social workers belonged to CAMP...some of the social workers were really in our corner and they began to get the rules and regulations...they would slip the rules and regulations

¹⁵ “Central Area Near Depression,” *The Seattle Medium*, May 13, 1971.

¹⁶ The NWRO was founded in 1966 by George Wiley, an African American chemist and former member of CORE.

¹⁷ Guida West, *National Welfare Rights Movement: Social Protest of Poor Women* (London: Churchill Livingstone Publishing), 1981, p. 211. Mary Lou Williams, group interview with Guida West, Apr. 9, 1984, [digital recording] wes_180, Seattle, Washington in Guida West Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

to us from their office...they'd make a copy of them and give them to us.¹⁸

Williams studied the laws surrounding welfare and citizenship rights and taught other mothers. She later served as chairwoman of the Welfare Task Force of the Model Cities Program. As a welfare recipient and member of multiple organizational boards, she used her position at Red Cross and Model Cities to further the goals of the welfare rights struggle. For instance, she successfully established a Red Cross office in the Central Area and opened the first food bank, along with the help of two nurses, out of the building. The emergency food bank continued to expand and served hundreds of people daily including those ineligible for welfare assistance or waiting on welfare grants.¹⁹ The office was also used for ADC Motivated Mothers and welfare rights meetings and became a hub for welfare recipients to receive help.²⁰

The ADC Motivated Mothers comprised the core organizing base of the NWRO nationally as well as in Seattle where they urged the federal government to increase AFDC and food-stamp benefits and to remove restrictive regulations.²¹ The organization of 550 members galvanized hundreds of poor people to demand clothing, food, higher incomes, dignity, and social, political, and economic justice for their families. Leola Woffort, a grandmother, joined the ADC Motivated Mothers after her husband, a Pacific Railway worker, fell ill. She confessed, "I found out we was living a middle-class life, and I didn't know it." When Woffort was selected president of the organization in 1969, Williams and activists in CAMP, such as Odessa

¹⁸ Mary Lou Williams, group interview with Guida West, Apr. 9, 1984, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College.

¹⁹ Under the current law, those ineligible for welfare assistance constituted single men and women or a childless couple under 50 years old who were physically able to work regardless of availability of jobs.

²⁰ "Food Bank Opens in Central Area," *The Seattle Medium*, Jul. 16, 1970, p. 5; "Donations Asked for Emergency Food Bank," *Seattle Times*, Jul. 29, 1970; "Neighbors in Need" Food Program Help Feed Hungry Families," *The Seattle Medium*, Dec. 23, 1970, p. 2; Mary Lou Williams, group interview with Guida West, Apr. 9, 1984, Sophia Smith Collection. Two locations existed at the Francis House and the Red Cross Branch on E. Yesler Way. Church groups also followed suit and organized food banks to help address the endemic crisis such as Ebenezer Zion AME called the Neighbors in Need Food Program.

²¹ ADC morphed into AFDC (Aid to Families and Dependent Children) in 1962.

Brown and Ida Foster, encouraged her to join the NWRO. Woffort then became a National Coordinating Committee (NCC) representative—the formal decision-making apparatus of the NWRO. Harriet “Joyce” Greenwood, a disabled worker, served as president of the North End Chapter of the NWRO and as a member of the King County North End Welfare Advisory Committee.²²

The Washington State NWRO included a membership of poor white women and men, but its leadership stratum overwhelmingly reflected the national organization. Elizabeth Caldwell and her niece Bernadine Garrett, also recruited by Williams, constituted the central leaders of the state welfare rights movement. Born in Arkansas, Caldwell came to Seattle in 1966 after leaving Tulsa, Oklahoma and retiring from her café business due to a heart attack. Moving costs and chronic health problems prevented her from re-establishing her business in the Pacific Northwest. Relying on welfare assistance for survival, she became active in the Model Cities Program and the welfare rights movement, serving as president of the Washington State chapter of the NWRO and as a member of the organization’s national board. Garrett, on the other hand, moved to the city with her husband, a Longshoreman from Oklahoma and immersed herself in voluntary civic and church work such as the East Cherry YWCA, Red Cross, and the Model Cities Program.²³ The dissolution of her marriage in 1969 immediately altered her middle-class lifestyle and changed her status to a poor, single mother entirely dependent on welfare assistance. Garrett soon became absorbed into welfare rights activism serving as a spokesperson and state

²² Leola Woffort, group interview with Guida West, Apr. 9, 1984, [digital recording], wes_122a, Seattle, Washington in Guida West Papers, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Mass; Ray Ruppert, “Coalition Here Raps Tightened Public-Assistance Regulations,” *The Seattle Times*, Sept. 20, 1971, p. A11; Marjorie Jones, “Welfare-Rights Leaders Press for ‘Decent’ Income,” *The Seattle Times*, Oct. 11, 1970, p. B6.

²³ Bernadine Garrett was also a board member of the Seattle Legal Services, the Seattle Mental Health Institute, and advisory board member of the Model Cities Program.

organizer for the Washington NWRO.²⁴

These leaders supported the initiatives of the NWRO and aligned their politics with its new national executive director. Rhonda Y. Williams writes that “some poor black women... accepted the awesome and, for them, enthralling responsibility of local and national leadership, which afforded them an opportunity to broker and channel discontent into group outrage, alliances, and campaigns.” When Johnnie Tillmon of California assumed the reigns over the NWRO in 1972, she feminized the national movement by articulating strong gender politics and redefining welfare and poverty as a “woman’s issue.” In her call to de-stigmatize welfare, she argued that welfare was a right and necessity for women and that only poor welfare women could “really liberate women in this country.” “The ladies of N.W.R.O. are the front-line troops of women’s freedom,” she contended. She also emphasized women’s right to an adequate income and living wage especially housewives. The welfare rights movement thus helped advance the women’s rights struggles, refashioned black womanhood among poor women, and created, for the first time, a distinct political identity.²⁵

Seattle welfare mothers-turned-activists articulated their poverty as part of larger structural forces that discriminated against poor people and low-income families. The state NWRO sought leverage for tangible improvements in the welfare system that dehumanized and denied them access while challenging the stigma often accompanied with welfare. Welfare

²⁴ “Elizabeth Caldwell, Dies at 61,” *The Seattle Times*, Sept. 2, 1976; Marjorie Jones, “Welfare-Rights Leaders Press for ‘Decent’ Income,” *The Seattle Times*, Oct. 11, 1970.

²⁵ Rhonda Y. Williams, “Something’s Wrong Down Here”: Poor Black Women and Urban Struggles for Democracy,” in *African American Urban History Since World War II* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 318-319. For more on the National Welfare Rights Organization, see Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Poor People’s Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976); Johnnie Tillmon, “Welfare is a Woman’s Issue,” *Ms. Magazine*, 1972. In 1973, Harriet Greenwood sat on the Seattle King County Economic Opportunity Board. Mark Toney, “Revisiting the National Welfare Rights Organization,” *Colorlines*, Nov. 29, 2000. Accessed Apr. 4, 2017, <https://www.colorlines.com/articles/revisiting-national-welfare-rights-organization>>

advocated women's economic independence through paid work as a solution to state welfare dependency and demanded that the state guarantee them jobs and livable income to make them less economically dependent on men. Nevertheless, they also understood that welfare benefits and public assistance provided a safety net for many black women escaping volatile domestic relationships as well as for those divorced mothers who now headed single-parent homes. It also helped women whose husbands could no longer work, women who had become disabled, or those who were laid off or tended to the care of their own ill health and that of family members. Rhonda Y. Williams states that "many women in cities across the nation found themselves in similar harrowing situations that thrust them into not only poverty, but also social positions of disrepute and disgust, particularly because they proactively turned to social-welfare programs to abate their and their families' suffering." The Washington NWRO leaders fought against the scrutiny from government authorities, the harassment by caseworkers who intruded into their homes searching for evidence of male partners and extra financial support, and the boorish attitudes encountered by welfare employees.²⁶

Instituting the national organization's model of protest, Caldwell and Garrett used direct action and confrontational techniques, boycotts, sit-ins, marches, lobbying, and legal recourse to protect and advance welfare recipients' rights. At a meeting between King County welfare administrators and representatives of several welfare protest groups in 1970, Garrett (accompanied by Caldwell) led the groups to confront city administrators, demanding

²⁶ Rhonda Y. Williams, *The Politics of Public Housing: Black Women's Struggles Against Urban Inequality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 4-5. Williams, "Something's Wrong Down Here," 319. For more on public housing and black women's welfare rights activism, see Lisa Levenstein, "Gendering Postwar Urban History: African American Women, Welfare, and Poverty in Philadelphia," in *African American Urban History Since World War II* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 2009; Allison Puglisi, "Identity, Power, and the California Welfare-Rights Struggle, 1963-1975," *MPDI Humanities*, Apr. 2, 2016. Historians Sherna Gluck, Felicia Kornbluh, Premilla Nadasen, and Annelise Orleck are known for their work on the welfare-rights movement.

representation for welfare recipients on the King Central Advisory Board. She also vehemently argued for a welfare rights information center to be placed in the welfare offices so that recipients could be informed of their rights. Protesters demanded clean restrooms, ash trays in the waiting room, free milk and coffee, and a daycare center in the welfare offices. They also called for the removal of security guards at the offices, available aid to elderly men, and the hiring of unemployed persons as social work aides.²⁷

Ralph Dunbar, administrator of the King-Snohomish District, assured protesters that welfare recipients would be placed on all the districts advisory boards. Weeks later, after protesters recognized the broken promises of Dunbar in appeasing their demands, Garrett and a dozen of welfare rights and civil rights groups descended upon the Central Welfare office. In a direct action political strategy, Garrett set up a table in the lobby to disseminate welfare rights literature to recipients and established a nursery near the food benefits office where mothers could leave their children. In a display of considerable discontent, Garrett rebuffed, “They can be done. We just did them.” The demonstration gained much attention and prompted Dunbar to fully address the group and report on the demands made by the protesters.²⁸ Reminiscing on the welfare rights advocates, Rossalind Y. Woodhouse, CAMP director, noted that:

There would be community gatherings and meetings...and they would travel together. There would be about six or eight of them. They would wear Afro-centric clothes and some were other size...when they came in, you knew they were in the house. Some people were a little afraid of them because a lot of ways they've learned to get attention was to be angry.²⁹

²⁷ “Welfare Recipients’ Demands to Be Heard,” *The Seattle Times*, Sept. 19, 1970; “Welfare Changes Demand For Central Area,” *The Facts*, Sept. 24, 1970, p. 1; Marjorie Jones, “Groups in Protest at Welfare Office,” *The Seattle Times*, Oct. 2, 1970.

²⁸ “Welfare Recipients’ Demands to Be Heard,” *The Seattle Times*, Sept. 19, 1970; “Welfare Changes Demand For Central Area,” *The Facts*, Sept. 24, 1970, p. 1; Jones, *The Seattle Times*, Oct. 2, 1970. Protest groups included the Washington Welfare Rights Organization, Seattle Liberation front, Stone Way Welfare Rights Group, Central Area Mothers for Peace and Improvement, Georgetown Free Store, A.D.C. Mothers Council, Seattle Union of Unemployed, Model Cities Parent Program, Park Lake Parents Group, Georgetown Welfare Rights Group, Council for Advancement of Human Welfare, Renton Union of CAMP, and Legal Services.

²⁹ Rossalind Woodhouse, interview by author, Aug. 23, 2017.

Dissatisfied, nonetheless, with the slow action of the city and county welfare offices, both Caldwell and Garrett planned a march on Olympia to garner support from legislators and to protest President Nixon's Family Assistance Plan (FAP) bill introduced in 1971. The FAP proposal sought to reduce grants for welfare recipients. The bill threatened to eliminate Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) and replace it with a program that guaranteed \$1600 for a family of four and \$1900 for a family of five. Outraged, the state NWRO contended that a family of four needed \$5500 a year to survive. In Olympia, Garrett expressed to lawmakers, "Most people on welfare aren't lazy, nasty, or dirty. Most would rather work and be independent, but for many reasons can't. We feel these people have a right to be heard, and we intend to be heard."³⁰

The movement for welfare rights did not only build indignation and militancy among the poor but it also evolved into an important political education campaign. Just as they had fought for welfare rights' literature in the local offices to inform poor women, activists also reiterated the need for the education of welfare laws and citizenship rights to arm poor women with the tools to fight more effectively. After encounters with state lawmakers in 1971, Caldwell and Garrett accelerated their critiques on the welfare system by planning the Western Regional Conference of the NWRO with the help of white welfare activists, Eliza McLean, vice-president, and Wayne Nelson, secretary. A central belief among the state NWRO leaders contended that case workers infringed upon poor people's rights because they misinterpreted welfare standards and regulations. The goals of the conference sought to devise a new plan of action to educate welfare recipients on their rights as citizens under the law. Furthermore, the state NWRO in

³⁰ Kora Vann, "Welfare Organization to March on Olympia," *The Seattle Medium*, Oct. 15, 1970; "Central Area Near Depression," *The Seattle Medium*, May 13, 1971, p. 1; "How Nixon Plan Hurts Welfare Recipients," *The Seattle Medium*, Oct. 15, 1970, p. 5. The FAP bill proposed \$1600 for a family of four and \$1900 for a family of five. The NWRO contended a family of four needed \$5500 a year to survive.

partnership with the Seattle Urban League and Seattle Legal Services published a “Fair Hearing” booklet to inform welfare recipients, who had been denied public assistance or whose grants had been reduced or terminated, on how to appeal their applications. “Welfare recipients are able to fight for their rights under law only if they know those rights and the Fair Booklet is going to help them do that,” claimed Garrett.³¹

Both Garrett’s and Mary Louise Williams’ keen study and understanding of welfare laws and regulations empowered them to challenge social welfare workers and hold them accountable for violating policies. Garrett was described by the *Seattle Times* as “a thorn to many welfare administrators and workers.” To quell the pressures and persistent mandates made by Garrett, administrators offered her several jobs at the Division of Public Assistance, attempted to buy her off, and allegedly harassed her. Williams noted, “We learned many, many things during the time that the door was open to us to be able to deal with the man on his level...that was the reason he closed so many doors because we were learning too fast.”³²

The potential alliance between established black women’s groups and the NWRO never materialized on the local and national level. George Wiley, former executive director of NWRO, reported that there existed an “anti-welfare ethic” that was “afflicting the middle-class blacks.” Guida West observed that black women’s organizations did not view the NWRO as a black or women’s movement and therefore abstained from participation in the welfare rights struggle. Historically, black women’s organizations such as the WFCWC and the East Cherry Branch of the Y.W.C.A. took up the cause for poor women in efforts to “lift as we climb” and provided social services for their downtrodden sisters. Yet, they also advocated for jobs and income rather

³¹ Ray Ruppert, “Welfare Recipient Attacks the ‘System,’” *The Seattle Times*, Apr. 25, 1971; “Fair Hearing” Booklet for Welfare Recipients,” *The Seattle Medium*, Oct. 14, 1971, p. 1.

³² Ruppert, *The Seattle Times*, Apr. 25, 1971. Mary Lou Williams, group interview with Guida West, Apr. 9, 1984, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College.

than what they perceived to be welfare dependency.³³ Bernadine Garrett confessed:

You can work for people, but when you become poor yourself, when the man comes and cut off your lights, your gas off, then you get a totally different attitude. I'd work for poor people and then I became poor, and it makes you feel different...People who sit behind the desk and say I know how you feel have never been there. They don't know because I used to think that.³⁴

Garrett's recollection of welfare and the shame attached to it exposes the prevailing attitudes of many middle-class black women and black civil rights organizations in Seattle who conceivably remained ambivalent concerning welfare and gave tacit support at best in the economic recession. The *Facts* and *Seattle Medium* newspapers chronicled welfare rights activities and reported on welfare reforms and issues affecting poor people in the city and state, providing an avenue to promote the cause of welfare recipients. To show their support and appreciation, the *Seattle Medium* honored three "unsung heroines" Flo Ware, Harriet Greenwood, and Mary Lou Williams with the first Dr. Martin Luther King Humanitarian Award and the Mahalia Jackson Spiritual Awards respectively for their work in the community with low-income families and political work.³⁵

Although Leola Woffort and Garrett acknowledged that black churches and the community provided support for welfare rights, it seemed that few took the risk of being involved "with a movement of militant poor women." The emphasis on welfare reform and the stigmatization alone was antithetical to black women's organizations focus on self-reliance and independence. White women's groups also displayed the demeaning attitudes toward welfare, associating it with African American dependency and laziness although more white people

³³ West, *The National Welfare Rights Movement*, 233-240; "Nixon Assistance Plan Termed Worse Than Present Plan," *The Seattle Times*, Sept. 18, 1971, p. B15.

³⁴ Bernadine Saulsberry, interview with Guida West, Apr. 9, 1984, Sophia Smith Collection.

³⁵ "Unsung Hero' Hears Praise from Friends," *The Seattle Times*, Feb. 4, 1973. Other nominees were: Rev. Samuel B. and Louise McKinney, Dorothy Hollingsworth, R.Y. Woodhouse, Carver Gayton, Alvirita Little, Freddie Mae Gautier, Gertrude DuPree, and Isaiah Edwards to name a few.

benefited from the welfare state. Some white women groups in the Peace Movement and protestant denominations provided resources, but their involvement had little impact on the national and local movement.³⁶

Seattle's black middle-class women and welfare rights activists, however, worked closely through anti-poverty agencies and with civil rights groups such as the Urban League to eradicate poverty, garnering resources for families, and lobbying in Olympia. These same individual middle-class leaders were also members of established women's groups such as the NCNW and sororities that re-shifted their focus in the 1970s on political and social action around changing women's roles in society, education, and employment, unlike welfare rights reformers who rallied around a single issue. Both groups attended community forums, conferences, and meetings that allowed them to speak on the state of women's roles and pertinent issues on rising poverty and welfare concerns affecting the Central Area. This ebb and flow of cooperation and exchange of ideas was evident but had little impact on the welfare rights movement and failed to truly form a collective, black women's grassroots political movement consisting of diverse economic backgrounds in Seattle. Class differences among black women, therefore, dictated their strategies, motives, and issues for racial and gender advancement and continued to do so throughout the decade.

Militant action taken by Seattle's poor black women, their negotiations with local welfare directors, and confrontations with lawmakers nevertheless provided a political awareness and training that cultivated candidates for public office. In 1971, at age 37, Garrett announced her candidacy for the Seattle City Council Position 4—the first black woman to ever do so—claiming that the council had been “turning a deaf ear to poor people.” As a lobbyist for poor

³⁶ West, 233-248; Bernadine Saulsberry, interview with Guida West, Apr. 9, 1984, Sophia Smith Collection.

people in Olympia and working to meet the emergency needs of black citizens, Garrett herself could not afford the \$201.72 filing fee needed to qualify as a candidate. Discovering flaws embedded in the city charter, she sued the city clerk, claiming that her name would not appear on the ballot because she was too poor to pay the fee. Garrett asserted that city statutes requiring a fee to file for candidacy were “unconstitutional in that they violate[d] the Equal Protection clause and the due process clause.” “Such a fee,” her attorneys argued, “denies the right to vote for a candidate of one’s choice and denies Garrett the right of free speech, press, assembly, and petition of the first Amendment.” The Seattle Legal Services attorneys, with whom she was a former board member moved for a preliminary injunction to allow her to file without paying the fee. The request was granted.³⁷

Garrett’s political dexterity running as a poor woman and welfare mother stunned the city and revealed the volatile political climate amid an economic recession. Garrett ran a distinctive campaign that radically argued for change by proposing a restructuring of the city government to better serve its citizens. For instance, she called for the city of Seattle to be declared a disaster area “as a symbolic act that would put the city on record recognizing that we are truly facing the worst crisis in our history.” In this way, recognized disaster areas would allow the federal government to discharge more food to supplement the food stamp program. Garrett also proposed plans to legalize bingo and slot machines and place them under city control. She also recommended a 20 percent reduction in city employees’ salaries who made over \$15,000 a year and opportunities for hiring people of color and women for city jobs.³⁸

³⁷ “Bernadine Garrett Files Lawsuit Against City Clerk,” *The Seattle Medium*, Jul. 22, 1971, p. 4.

³⁸ “Woman on Welfare to Run for Council,” *The Seattle Times*, Jul. 14, 1971; “Bernadine Garrett to Run for City Council,” *The Seattle Medium*, Jul. 15, 1971, p.10. How the mainstream media framed her announcement is telling. *The Seattle Times* reported that “A Woman on Welfare to Run for Council” whereas the *Seattle Medium* ran the news story as “Bernadine Garrett to Run for City Council.” Conversely, the two media outlets highlight how the *Times* engaged in the stigmatization of a black woman candidate and blatantly disregarded the humanity of welfare recipients by only referring to her as a welfare recipient, rather than her name. The Washington State

Garrett's campaign platform undeniably embraced the women's rights struggle as the NWRO sought to obtain support and solidarity from feminist organizations. At a press conference following the Women's National Abortion Conference, Garrett publicly solicited support for the repeal of abortions laws and called for an end to sterilization. "I understand all too well that abortion laws, even so-called liberalized abortion laws, discriminate against the poor and minority women like myself...these repressive laws also result in many of us being forced to undergo sterilization," she conveyed. She went on to express that "it is in this area of contraception that we have our greatest fight ahead...it is past time for women to gain control over their own bodies."³⁹ Historian Rebecca Kluchin notes that although most forced sterilizations occurred in the South, places like Washington also "exploited existing eugenics laws" and "embraced the association between illegitimacy, mental incompetence, and poverty among black women." In one instance, for example, the state ordered a tubal ligation for a young black teen after her first pregnancy at age fifteen. After she became pregnant a second time, the state required her to abort the pregnancy and undergo a forced hysterectomy. She was therefore involuntarily sterilized twice. By 1973, *Ebony Magazine* had declared sterilization the "newest threat to the poor" particularly among blacks.⁴⁰

Garrett's tough stance on the city's poverty increase, high unemployment rate, healthcare, and its disproportionate effects on women attracted an array of endorsements from community, labor, and leftist political leaders. Radical Women, a socialist feminist group, called upon all local women's organizations to lend their support to Garrett:

Senate passed the Economic Disaster Relief Act of 1971 and urged the passage in the House.

³⁹ In 1909, Washington became the second state to enact a sterilization law and an early practitioner of eugenics that included mentally ill, criminals, rapists, and those deemed illegitimate.

⁴⁰ "What is WNAAC?" *WNAAC National Newsletter*, Sept. 16, 1971, p. 10; Rebecca M. Kluchin, *Fit to Be Tied: Sterilization and Reproductive Rights in America, 1950-1980* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University, 2011), 92; Jack Slater, "Sterilization: Newest Threat to the Poor," *Ebony Magazine* (Oct. 1973), 151-156.

Ms. Garrett espouses a truly radical program. . .she is a consistent exponent of women's emancipation on the job front, in law, in educational and political opportunity, in the birth control area, and in the important field of civil liberties for welfare mothers.⁴¹

When George Wiley visited Seattle for a "Survival Fair," he spoke at a luncheon in honor of Garrett stating, "Bernadine Garrett is one of the few people in the city speaking to the issue of hunger and malnutrition. Her campaign should be a symbol to indicate the city needs to make basic changes. It should also be an indication a black woman can be a political figure in Seattle." After one of her many opponents, John Lynch, withdrew from the race, he threw his support behind Garrett stating that she "is a black woman who has worked tirelessly as a poor person to solve the problems of all poor people."⁴²

Although the office for city council remained nonpartisan, Republican and Democrat city council candidates received unwavering support from their traditional partisan groups. However, Garrett's political loyalties, like Flo Ware's, sided with the poor and leftist organizations rather than an established partisan political group even though she identified as a Democrat. Many black community members labeled Garrett a communist due to her ties with the Communist Party, one of the first supporters of the welfare rights movement. The welfare rights leader frequently attended Communist and socialist events because of their support for women's rights, welfare, and black freedom. When the Seattle Branch of the Young Workers Liberation League, a communist organization, hosted their annual People's Picnic, Garrett addressed members and assured activists that the welfare rights movement supported the People's World Party (PPW). In turn, the spokesperson of the PPW backed her campaign for city council.⁴³

⁴¹ "Radical Women Endorse Bernadine Garrett's Candidacy," *The Seattle Medium*, Sept. 2, 1971, p. 5.

⁴² "Nixon Assistance Plan Termed Worse than Present Plan," *The Seattle Times*, Sept. 18, 1971; "City Council Candidate Withdraws," *The Seattle Times*, Sept. 9, 1971.

⁴³ Letter from Mike Kelly to Jack Barnes, Jul. 13, 1971, Marxists Internet Archives. Accessed Nov. 11, 2016, <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/document/swp-us/idb/swp-pc-min/jun-jul1971/44%20Liberation%20league%20Seattle%20jul%2029%201971.pdf>; Bernadine Saulsbury, interview with Guida West, Apr. 9, 1984, Sophia Smith Collection. Garrett operated her headquarters in the same building as the PPW's office.

Garrett faced white backlash for her nebulous ties with communists and socialists. To be sure, the Seattle Police Officers Guild and the Seattle Firefighters Union targeted Garrett by asking her to complete a questionnaire concerning her connections to organizations they deemed ‘radical.’ Garrett refused to fill out the questionnaire and reported the story to *The Seattle Medium* newspaper, stating it “reads like a cross between one of the Police Departments booking sheets and an FBI clearance application form.” Questions asked about her arrest records and possible memberships in organizations such as the Elks, the Ripon Society, and the Communist Party. She retorted, “I am not a member of any of those organizations (and as a black woman, membership in the Elks seems fairly remote), but your not-so-clever red-baiting is certainly not going to give you the information you seem to want.” The city council campaign required that she win over non-black voters and to persuade them of her qualifications as a candidate. As in the case of Flo Ware, voters were skeptical of her because of her race, gender, poverty status, and connections with leftist organizations.⁴⁴

Although an African American, Sam Smith, had been represented on the city council since 1965, Garrett’s election increased the possibility of more black and female representation on the council. However, in a terse political primary on September 21, Garrett expectedly lost the primary election.⁴⁵ Spending only \$700 on the campaign, she polled a surprising 4,218 votes to the winning candidates’ 16,318. The impressive loss did not deter her from politics, rather it mobilized an ostracized and neglected political base. The goal was not to win the election but use the campaign platform to talk about poverty, race, and welfare concerns. Garrett re-energized her commitment to changing laws that adversely affected women and poor people. In 1971, the city of Seattle changed its policy for elections where they could not deny citizens the

⁴⁴ “Bernadine Garrett Questions Questionnaire,” *The Seattle Medium*, Sept. 16, 1971, p. 6.

⁴⁵ She lost to the candidate James I. Kimbrough.

right to run for office due to the filing fee stipulation. Garrett, Caldwell, Williams, and other welfare activists continued their fight in the NWRO and organized welfare recipients across Washington state into welfare rights groups and community action programs until it disbanded in 1975.⁴⁶

Finding a Sense of Place: Black Women in Government

While the grassroots struggles by poor black women carved out a public space for black women's political mobility, middle-class women strove to find a place in public leadership positions and assert a political identity of their own as they sought to transform city and state government. When approximately 200 Seattle women attended a city council hearing on April 23, 1970 sponsored by Councilwoman Jeanette Williams to establish a City Commission on the Status of Women, it marked a turning point in the history of Seattle women. The women in attendance called for direct action to wholly abolish sex discrimination. Dorothy Hollingsworth, Freddie Mae Gautier, and Barbara Laners were among the few black women who testified at the hearing. "Women," Hollingsworth expressed, "are on the move with or without your help." In a collective multi-racial and multi-ethnic alliance, the women reached across race and class divides in support of a new women's commission. They represented groups such as the United Indians of All Tribes, Central Area Mothers for Peace and Improvement, CAMP, and Radical Women. There were several individual women in attendance who did not affiliate with any organization, but they all agreed to "end sex discrimination in employment, education, and political appointments." Pat Emerson, president of the Seattle League of Women Voters claimed that "we

⁴⁶ Bernadine Saulsberry, interview with Guida West, Apr. 9, 1984, Sophia Smith Collection; "Primary Results," *The Seattle Times*, Sept. 22, 1971. Elizabeth Caldwell died in 1976. Bernadine Garrett continued to organize welfare recipients and educate them on welfare policies and laws. She ran Operation Emergency Food Bank, the largest food bank in the state for nearly two decades.

[women] are human beings” and advocated for women’s concerns and interests to be handled by the Department of Human Rights (DHR) in Seattle. The DHR in response created a women’s division within its existing body.⁴⁷

Not all black women were entirely on board with the agenda of the women’s movement—locally or nationally. In fact, many grew skeptical of their motives while others condemned the movement all together. To express such contempt, a group of fifty Seattle black women held a workshop and press conference expressing their disdain for what they saw as a movement for white women’s liberation without consideration to women of color. One organizer of the workshop aired in a released statement: “We are not a part of the White Women’s Liberation Movement, although we support that movement’s demand of equal pay for equal work. We will not permit white women to speak for us. We refute their statement and intimations that a great many Black woman have joined their movement.” Psychologist Jane W. Torrey noted in 1979 that “black women, especially those identified with the black rights movement, fear[ed] that feminism will split their ranks and divert public attention.” Literary scholar Toni Morrison bluntly stated that the movement was “white, [and] therefore suspect” to black women who “look at white women and see them as the enemy.”⁴⁸

These assertions certainly did not deter some black feminists from joining the ranks of white women to abolish sex oppression. Rosalind Y. Woodhouse, an avowed feminist, tried to work diplomatically with white women’s groups to forcefully address the issues of race and class within the movement. When the city council formed the Seattle Women’s Commission in 1971,

⁴⁷ Shelby Gilje and Joan Wolverson, “Women Are Tired of Studies They Want Action-Now,” *Seattle Times*, Apr. 24, 1970. Caver became assistant director of DHR in 1970 and vowed to work for racial and gender advancement in the city.

⁴⁸ “Black Women Hold Workshop,” *The Facts*, Apr. 30, 1970, p. 1; Jane W. Torrey, “Racism and Feminism: Is Women’s Liberation for Whites Only?” *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, (Winter 1979), 281–293; Toni Morrison, “What the Black Woman Thinks About Women’s Lib,” *The New York Times*, Aug. 22, 1971.

Mayor Wes Uhlman appointed 15 unsalaried commissioners, consisting of 13 women and 2 men from diverse sections of the city to act as an advisory body for the concerns of women in the city. The committee held powers to recommend women for appointment to city boards and commissions and, according to its members, was the only city agency of its kind in the nation with “enforcement and quasi-judicial powers.” Members of the Women’s Commission elected Woodhouse as the founding president which made her also the first African American president.⁴⁹ Under Woodhouse’s leadership, the Commission removed gender-segregated ads in the newspapers; recommended women to be police officers and firewomen; and sent an ordinance to the mayor prohibiting “discriminatory practices based on race, color, sex, age, creed, religion, ancestry, or national origin with respect to employment.”⁵⁰

The presumed unity of the commission, however, hid significant tensions and was relatively short-lived. The combined aspiration of the commissioners did not necessarily know how to resolve the many issues addressed by women. Members presented different views on the Equal Rights Amendment, rape victims, and wage discrimination to name a few areas of disagreement. Some commissioners exhibited more militant behavior than others while the majority did not consider race important to women’s issues that led a high-ranking city official to express, “The Women’s Commission fought among itself for over a year.” In 1972, for example, Woodhouse, Barbara Laners, Carver Gayton, and one Japanese American commissioner June Shimokawa publicly condemned the organization in a letter for its “insensitivity to the concerns

⁴⁹ Rossalind Y. Woodhouse served as director of CAMP, former president of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, and the city’s only social worker with the Seattle Housing Authority. She served a second term on the Commission from 1974-1975.

⁵⁰ R. Y. Woodhouse, letter to Representative Barbara Jordan, Mar. 26, 1975, Box 5, Folder 6, Accession No. 5721-001, R. Y. Woodhouse Papers, 1970-1998, University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections; Joan Wolverton and Sally Gene Mahoney, “Women’s Commission: Who Are They,” *The Seattle Times*, Apr. 4, 1971, p. G4; “Ordinance Prohibiting Discrimination Sent to Mayor,” *The Seattle Medium*, Nov. 18, 1971. Mary Louise Williams also served on the Seattle Women’s Commission between 1974-1975.

of minority and low-income women” and threatened to resign from the council.⁵¹ Laners conveyed to the public the economic concerns of domestic workers and women who were forced to have hysterectomies and abortions that disproportionately affected black women. Woodhouse agreed stating that “this is where I feel the Commission has failed.” She criticized the commissioners for not considering the Central Area as one of the six meeting spots for the Women’s Commission even though she offered a building.⁵²

Members responded angrily at the public letter, calling it a “misunderstanding on the part of minority women.” One commissioner dismissively expressed, “There are an awful lot of housewives who are being screwed out in the suburbs; a lot of people don’t have anyone speaking for them.” The discord within the Seattle Women’s Commission represented a huge failure on the part of the women’s movement in Seattle to coalesce into a broad-based inter-racial coalition of women but this was certainly reflective of the larger national movement and its inability to deal with racial issues.⁵³

Black women turned inward to their own community to promote and advocate for women’s rights and empowerment. For the first time, black women explicitly called for a women’s rights agenda, emphasized the importance of black women’s new role in public affairs, and awakened women to the new possibilities of government leadership. Central Area women hosted their first conference, ‘Sister-Nar,’ sponsored by CAMP and the Central Area Citizen’s Committee, to discuss and debate the “Black Woman’s Role in Today’s World.” In 1972, an

⁵¹ Barbara Laners worked for CAMP’s Education Action programs and as a volunteer for the Model Cities Program. The disgruntled commissioners requested that the Seattle Women’s Commission to make public their intent on addressing racial and class problems; undergo a self-evaluative process; and get help from the Department of Human Rights to engage in an extensive diversity cross-training process.

⁵² Sally Gene Mahoney, “4 Commissioners Speak Out,” *The Seattle Times*, May 10, 1972. Erin Van Bronkhorst, “Commission Leaves Questions Unanswered,” *Pandora*, June 13, 1972, p. 2 contained in R.Y. Woodhouse Papers, Box 1, University of Washington Libraries.

⁵³ Bronkhorst, “Commission Leaves Questions Unanswered,” June 13, 1972, contained in R.Y. Woodhouse Papers.

opinion poll showed that 62 percent of black women supported women's liberation as well as the idea of strengthening or changing women's status compared to 45 percent of white women; however it did not result in common organizing goals. Panelists stressed family obligations while contradictorily pushing women to train for careers. Louise McKinney acknowledged the superwoman role black women played and encouraged self-care and fulfillment. Laners urged for new media roles to defy stereotypes of black women.⁵⁴

While most panelists noted the generational barriers that separated them, poor women recognized the inherent class disparities that caused deep fissures in the Central Area. Representatives of low-income families and poor welfare mothers rebuked what they perceived to be middle-class complacency and asked the conference attendees to show concern for black women who did not share their political views or social class status. Leola Woffort, ADC Motivated Mothers president, conveyed to the group that she had been a "black middle-class wife and mother" and now became what Nixon deemed a "low-income individual" because of her husband's illness. "I only hope for good rapport between us; we are only separated by luck. You can never go so high you can't fall...I think the Boeing layoff has shown many people what it is like to fall," she cautioned. Woffort revealed the lack of racial and gender solidarity between middle-class women and welfare mothers that found its roots in class biases. Welfare activists like Woffort attended and were invited to these conferences and meetings to speak as representatives of welfare rights and incorporate their voices on the new black woman's political agenda for the city.⁵⁵

Nonetheless, within this new wave of women's empowerment and provision, middle-

⁵⁴ Sharon Smith, *Women and Socialism: Class, Race, and Capital* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2015), 65; "CAMP-CACC "Sister-Nar" to Highlight "Black Women Week," *The Seattle Medium*, Mar. 5, 1970; Joan Wolverton, "Black Women View Role Today," *The Seattle Times*, Mar. 12, 1970.

⁵⁵ Wolverton, *The Seattle Times*, Mar. 12, 1970.

class black women took advantage of the gains that had been made in the previous decade and obtained appointments to varied public service positions. For example, Mayor Wes Uhlman appointed Vivian Caver, as assistant director of the Department of Human Rights in 1970 after she helped organize human-rights councils throughout the city in 1968 and 1969. This ultimately led to the creation of the Human Rights Department. Five years later, the mayor named Caver as director of the department—a post she held until 1981. Several black women also received promotions as principals in SPS such as Mona Humphries Bailey, Louise McKinney, and Roberta Byrd Barr.⁵⁶

Black women also saw the need for women to run for political office to change leadership in the Central Area and to participate in the decision-making process of local and state governments. Marion King Smith expressed these sentiments when she announced her candidacy for 37th legislative district representative, position one. She stated:

There is a great need for women to join hands with our men in meeting the challenges of our changing conditions...women must be brought into full partnership and responsibility in all walks of life and granted every opportunity for development of leadership that is available to anyone. Perhaps we will be able to bring some of the pressing problems under control before we are destroyed by them.⁵⁷

Smith typified the cohort of middle-class African American women activists who participated in the Civil Rights Movement and sought political clout and expanded opportunities. She campaigned on women-specific issues that remained absent from the local civil rights agenda, articulating the necessity for black women legislators in Washington state by focusing on classic feminist views on society, family, and women's public roles. Smith was no exception

⁵⁶ "Vivian Caver," Washington State Historical Society, <http://www.washingtonhistory.org/research/whc/WA_Women/bios/AfricanAmericans/caver/>; "Mrs. Mona Bailey Appointed as Associate Principal of Meany Middle School," *The Facts*, Aug. 20-Aug. 26, p. 8. Baily also would go on to serve as Assistant and Deputy Superintendent of Seattle Public Schools, and as Assistant State Superintendent in the Washington State Office of Public Instruction. From 1979 to 1983, she presided as the 17th National President of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.

⁵⁷ "Mrs. Marion King Smith Confirms She is in Race for Legislative Position," *The Medium*, May 28, 1970, p. 8.

to the many women who strategized, fundraised, and organized for candidates, both male and female, black and white. Her depth of political knowledge stemmed from her background as a precinct committeewoman and campaign manager for her husband's successful bids for state legislator and then city council. She also served as a former campaign manager for George Fleming whom she helped win the election for state representative after her husband Sam Smith vacated the position to run for city council. When Fleming took his chances on running for a state senate seat, Smith decided to run for the vacated position, also her husband's former seat. At the same time, Peggy Joan Maxie, a social worker, surfaced as a candidate for position 2 after her brother Fred Maxie dropped out of the race and convinced her to run. This was an unprecedented election in that it was the first time that two black women had run for office and the first time the Central Area could have possibly elected two black women representatives to Olympia in the state's history.⁵⁸

This possibility remained an uphill battle. Smith's political savviness and social status compared with her Republican opponent Michael K. Ross's reputation as a union leader and supporter of the UW Black Student Union split the voters' choice in the primaries. Smith presumably had an advantage when her friend Fleming invited her to speak at his dinner party. While there, she took the opportunity to appeal to welfare mothers and low-income women, vowing to continue support of day care centers and welfare benefits. "When the man of the household is out of work, the woman is hit just as hard because of her responsibility to keep the family budget in line," she added. Smith promised to advocate for more black jurors to serve in courts, asserted her stance against the construction of freeways in the community, and criticized high interest rates and public assistance cuts. Freddie Mae Gautier, former candidate for state

⁵⁸ Ibid.

representative in 1964, and Olive Hunter, a Boeing worker, lent support to Smith by placing monthly ads in the newspaper paid for by the Active Women's Club, a newly formed political group.⁵⁹

During the primaries, both Fleming's and Smith's camps synchronized to run as a team to build tremendous support and to elect three black candidates of their choice for both state senate and the house of representatives. As Fleming's former campaign manager, Smith rode the coattails of his success and benefited from her husband's achievements. The dynamic duo added Democratic candidate Lewis J. Martin, who ran for position 2 and a long-time supporter of Sam Smith, to their team rather than Peggy Joan Maxie. This underlines the complexity of black women's politics and political thought. While Smith campaigned strongly on the importance of black women in government and emphasized their new role in society, she did not publicly support a black woman candidate. Her loyalties remained with her husband and male friends and dashed an opportunity for black women candidates' political power to be realized. She chose to create a family political dynasty. "I am sure that some people don't like developing a Black Family that is active in politics, but you don't have to look far on the White side to find this," she claimed. As one resident expressed, "If Fleming, Smith, and Miller got into office there'd only be four Sam Smith's. I hope others win." Welfare rights activist Elizabeth Caldwell stated that "Mrs. Smith is one issue—and I think we need more than that."⁶⁰

Conversely, Maxie was not a member of Seattle's black establishment. Born in Amarillo,

⁵⁹ "Mrs. Smith Calls for More Black Jurors on Cases Involving Blacks," *The Seattle Medium*, Jul. 9, 1970, p. 1; "Three Candidates Speak at Fleming Dinner," *The Facts*, June 25, 1970, p. 1; Vote Mrs. Marion King Smith. Advertisement. *The Facts*, Sept. 3, 1970, p. 1. Freddie Mae Gautier and Olive Hunter were chairwoman and co-chairwoman of the Active Women's Club.

⁶⁰ Ross Burks, "George Fleming Endorses Lewis Martin and Mrs. Smith," *The Facts*, Sept. 3, 1970, p. 1; "Mrs. Smith Gets Nasty Letters About Campaign," *The Facts*, May 9, 1970, p. 1; "The Medium Wants to Know," *The Seattle Medium*, Oct. 29, 1970, p. 4. According to the *Medium's* poll, 75% of voters who favored Smith tended to be middle-aged women (many of them church women) or white. Those who opposed Smith did so because of their disdain for her husband. Many young black voters directed their opposition mostly against Smith than any

Texas, Maxie moved with her mother and siblings to Seattle in 1942. Although a newcomer to politics, Maxie had some experience in public service, working as a legal secretary in the State Attorney General's Office for seven years. As a social worker, she also worked in the new careers Research and Evaluation Project and had experience as a student and family counselor. Having lived and worked in the 37th district for 27 years placed her in the middle of the issues that affected residents the most. She campaigned on employment, welfare reform, better police recruitment and protection, and quality educational opportunities for youth and adults. Rather than focusing on women's rights issues during an economic crisis, she made unemployment the number one issue and offered tangible solutions such as: proposing tax incentives to bring new industries to Seattle; requiring foreign imports such as cars to be assembled in the port of Seattle; declaring the 37th district as a Disaster Area in order to become eligible for federal and state grants; lowering interest loans to help small businesses; reinvesting the state's tax dollar; extending technical and industrial programs for young and unemployed persons; and bringing new industry into the 37th district. On September 15, 1970, the Central Area voted in the primaries for its first black women Democratic nominees to represent the 37th legislative district, for Position 1 and Position 2.⁶¹

Going into the general election, both Smith and Maxie ran two different campaigns. Smith spent a great deal of time fighting with the white establishment, labor supporters, and her former Democratic contender, Cordell Garrett, a UW student who leveled a barrage of attacks against Smith during the primaries and accused her of being part of the "corrupt Sam Smith political machine" that was "responsible for the low economic, political, and social condition of

other candidate. Just years prior, Smith's husband had publicly scorned black Republicans that potentially hurt Freddie Mae Gautier's chances of winning.

⁶¹ "Peggy Maxie Speaks to the Voters of the 37th District," *The Facts*, Sept. 10, 1970, p. 1, 4.

the district.” The *Seattle Medium* also publicly criticized Smith and her husband Sam for demanding guaranteed front page coverage, stating that “if we can’t be on the front page, then I don’t want to be in it at all.”⁶² Maxie, on the other hand, used a grassroots approach by focusing on the issues instead of attacks. After two months of a bitter election campaign in a “starving” city, on November 3, 1970, the Central Area elected more than one black legislator for the first time in the state’s history—including the first black woman. Maxie seized the win in a surprising turn of events, becoming the first African American woman elected to the state House of Representatives while Smith lost to Republican Michael Ross. Jeffery Zane noted, the election “served as reminders of the diversity of leadership and opinion that thrived in the Central Area” and revealed a politically moderate electorate. It also signified the changing political climate in the state and the first time that blacks had representation in both the House and the Senate for an opportunity to directly influence legislation on a grander scale.⁶³

In 1971, Maxie joined a freshman class of eight elected women legislators, the largest number in the state’s history despite the fact they represented less than ten percent of the state’s total representatives. By 1974, black women gained more visibility in electoral politics across the country with four representatives in the U.S. House of Representatives and twenty-six in state legislatures—more than doubling their numbers in 1969. With Maxie in office, black women achieved a political platform to make legislative policies and decisions. During her first term,

⁶² “Mrs. Smith Gets Nasty Letters About Campaign,” *The Facts*, May 9, 1970, p. 1; “Cordell Garrett Announces His Candidacy for 37th District Rep,” *The Seattle Medium*, June 18, 1970; “Fleming, Maxie, and Ross Predicted As 37th District Winners,” *The Seattle Medium*, Oct. 29, 1970, p. 2. In a poll conducted by the *Seattle Medium*, middle-aged women and whites were more likely to vote for Smith. Fifty percent of those who opposed Smith noted their disdain with her husband, Councilman Sam Smith, and his influence in the campaign. They feared a rise in the Smith political dynasty.

⁶³ “Thoughts from the Publisher-Will Our Representatives Continue to be Silent Once They Are in Olympia,” *The Seattle Medium*, Oct. 22, 1970; Zane, p. 137, 139. According to the *Seattle Times*, when white incumbents David G. Sprague decided not to run and Fred Dore moved to the 45th district, it opened the path for more black representation in Olympia.

Maxie co-sponsored legislation and submitted bills that directly impacted Seattle's only black community although it had not devolved into a ghetto per se, unlike most cities. Announcing to her constituents, "Most of the bills, resolutions, and speeches I made and supported, thus far, [have] dealt with helping the people in the ghetto, particularly the young." For example, she sponsored bills requiring bacon to be packaged so that the consumer could discern the amount of lean meat on the strip; providing three days to cancel retail installment contracts; extending unemployment benefits from 39 to 52 weeks; regulating and reporting campaign contributions; and establishing an election commissioner to restore trust among younger voters. She also fought to preserve the 37th district from a redistricting plan devised by legislators to divide up the district for political interests. Maxie filed an affidavit, arguing that the Central Area had been under-counted, and in 1972, a federal court order mandated the state of Washington to redistrict based on a non-political map drawn by a UW geography professor.⁶⁴

Maxie's background as a social worker shaped her tenure as a state representative where she dedicated her time to legislation that would "ensure and maintain the integrity of family, ethnic, and cultural life." She regularly communicated with her constituents through the city's black newspapers such as *The Facts* and *Seattle Medium*. Most notably, she addressed the concerns for the working poor and was an increasingly vocal supporter for welfare mothers who comprised a significant part of the district she represented.⁶⁵

When the NWRO and welfare rights groups stormed the state capitol rotunda in Olympia, Maxie spoke to them and pledged her support for their proposals and demands. From the

⁶⁴ Sally Gene Mahoney, "Women Gain in Statehouse," *The Seattle Times*, Nov. 6, 1974, p. D2; Luci Horton, "The Distaff Side of Politics," *Ebony* (December 1973), 48-52; Peggy Joan Maxie, "What's Happening in the Legislature: Reflection, Projection, and Action," *The Seattle Medium*, Jan. 21, 1971, p. 2. Although black women's officeholders increased by 160 percent, they remained under-represented in elective positions, only 12 percent of the 2,629 black officials in the nation compared to ten percent in 1969.

⁶⁵ Mahoney, "Women Gain in Statehouse," *The Seattle Times*, Nov. 6, 1974.

protests, Maxie learned that many welfare recipients had difficulty cashing their welfare checks since most did not have a form of identification. The humiliation of attempting to cash checks, according to community members, was the direct result of Liberty Bank's (the first black-owned bank in the city) harsh policies towards welfare recipients. Because of the high unemployment rate in the Central Area and the concentration of black welfare mothers in the area, Liberty Bank served as the only convenient financial institution to cash checks for African Americans. The bank, however, lost money due to stolen or forged welfare checks as well as bad checks cashed by many black welfare recipients. To ensure the survival of the business, the bank instituted a strict check-cashing policy which limited the face amount of checks it would accept and refused to cash checks from recipients who did not have an appropriate form of identification. The restriction severely hurt poor women and led to several public protests of the bank's policies. With an acute understanding of the multidimensional problems of poverty, Maxie intervened, proposing a bill that provided identification cards for welfare recipients and arranged transportation for them to travel to the Department of Motor Vehicle offices that issued the cards. She further raised donations in the form of gift certificates to reduce or eliminate the \$1.50 cost of getting an I.D. card. "It is my strategic plan to do bigger and better things for welfare recipients with the help of the community," she promised. Poor black mothers in the Central Area found an advocate in Maxie as they applied pressure from below to elicit a response from their representatives.⁶⁶

This victory cemented Maxie's public persona as a champion of poor women and revealed her practical legislative politics, especially concerning landlord-tenant disputes.

⁶⁶ Sarah Janet Ervin, "Welfare Recipients to Get I.D. Cards," *The Medium*, Aug. 12, 1971; Kora Vann, "Welfare Check Cashing Problem Still Unsolved," *The Seattle Medium*, Jan. 28, 1971; "Fleming Sponsors Welfare Check Bill," *The Medium*, March 4, 1971, p. 2; "Thanks Community from Peggy Joan Maxie 37th District Representative," *The Facts*, May 27, 1971.

Throughout the 1970s, impoverished poor tenants of the Central Area staged a series of rent strikes and other protests, mostly led by black women, to counteract unfair treatment and low standards of living imposed by landlords. The largest of these strikes culminated in 1971 by residents of the Flintstones Buildings owned by Coultan Realty. Angered tenants directed their frustration at what they considered to be unfair rent increases and punitive evictions. A complaint by an unidentified young woman who paid \$157 a month for a one-bedroom apartment sparked the strike organized by the Central Area Tenants Association. The rent strikers conducted their own investigation and discovered that tenants paid different prices for the same type of unit. Strikers demanded lower rents, the return of security deposits, removal of parking fees, and routine building maintenance.⁶⁷

Days later, twelve women tenants at Bay View Apartments staged a second-rent strike led by Barbara Chambers, a King County Hospital worker. She and others were evicted because of their dissatisfaction with the apartments due to deplorable conditions that included a leaky roof, a roach infestation, poor maintenance, unsafe buildings, filthy appliances, and excessively high rent. They refused to leave and pay rent. She exclaimed, “The owner is paying Western Van Lines to move my things out but couldn’t afford to have the curtains cleaned and the outside premises kept up.” Tenants’ activism “forced government officials to reckon with the disparate treatment of low-income black women.”⁶⁸

As a consequence of these growing protests and strikes to settle disputes, in 1973, Maxie sponsored a major bill, House Bill 217, along with co-sponsors Michael K. Ross and Albert

⁶⁷ “Renters Strike Against High Rent,” *The Seattle Medium*, Jul. 2, 1971, p. 5.

⁶⁸ Christ Bennett, “Bad Conditions and High Rent Force Second-Rent Strike,” *The Seattle Medium*, Jul. 22, 1971, p. 1; Larry Williams, “Rent Striker Evicted,” *The Seattle Medium*, Jul. 29, 1971; Williams, “Something’s Wrong Down Here,” 319. Tenants of Valley View Apartments and Chateau Apartments also participated in rent strikes in 1971. The strikes continued, in a muted form, well into the 1970s.

Shinpock, that became the Residential Landlord-Tenant Act of Washington State. “Present law favors the landlord. We want to provide methods of recourse for residents with maintenance complaints especially,” Maxie stated. The law established clear guidelines and responsibilities for both landlord and tenant by setting standards for rental housing such as notification before entry into a tenant’s unit. The law passed and required that landlords routinely ensure maintenance responsibilities and give notification before entry into a tenant’s unit as well as correct the inequities embedded between the landlord and tenant’s relationship.⁶⁹

Another major bill sponsored by Maxie was the No Fault Divorce Law. When she campaigned for re-election in 1971, she obtained special permission from the Dean of Social Work at the University of Washington to enter the master’s program while serving as a legislator. In 1972, she wrote her thesis on the controversial no-fault divorce law. The no-fault divorce laws had been enacted in states like California and Iowa and was promoted by pro-ERA groups. It granted either spouse the right to manage community property such as wills, gifts, and the sale of property; whereas under the existing law, only the husband could legally make such decisions.⁷⁰

Opponents criticizing the law argued that it would “speed the breakup of families” and that the state was “taking marriage lightly.” Maxie contended that the law would “restore stability to the family and create equality in the home.” The no-fault divorce law in a sense re-codified present laws by eliminating the common grounds for divorce—adultery, desertion, and cruelty. It also lessened the acrimonious actions in divorce proceedings by allowing divorce for

⁶⁹ “Bill to Establish Specific Landlord-Tenant Guidelines Supported,” *The Seattle Medium*, Feb. 25, 1971, p. 3; “Need for Tenant Bill is Cited,” *The Seattle Times*, Jan. 21, 1972; Peggy Joan Maxie, “Landlord-Tenant Issue Test Effectiveness of Government,” *The Seattle Medium*, Jan. 27, 1972, p. 1, 5.

⁷⁰ Phyllis Fletcher, “Peggy Joan Maxie,” *BlackPast.org*. Accessed June 8, 2017, <http://www.blackpast.org/aaw/maxie-peggy-joan-1936-0>.

one reason: irreconcilable differences. It eliminated alimony payments, except in the case to support the woman temporarily while she prepared to make adjustments in earning a sustainable income and maintain child support. Despite strong pushback, the legislature passed the No-Fault Divorce Law a year later—a stunning victory for women.⁷¹

For the next several years, Maxie served on several committees including the Appropriations, Insurance, and Judiciary Committee. She twice chaired the Higher Education Committee and sponsored several education bills, including one that funded a new building for the University of Washington School of Social Work. With a profound passion for education, Maxie fought for the affordability and accessibility of higher education by opposing tuition increases. She also co-sponsored legislation on childcare, education, public welfare, and consumer protection. Her strong record as a first term legislator and her “quiet” yet practical style of politics won her much support from the welfare rights leaders, beauticians, former governor Albert Rossellini, and a host of state political representatives just as much as it frustrated her opponents. She was elected for five more terms and served in the state legislature for twelve years until she was defeated by Gary Locke, a future Washington governor, in 1982. Her position in the state legislature and creation of public policies proved significant in providing practical and immediate solutions to African American and women’s concerns in the state.⁷²

The expansion of women’s roles in the public sector became a symbol of the advances of the civil rights movement and the women’s rights struggle in the city that led a group of civic-minded and established black women leaders to form a new women’s political group in 1973.

⁷¹ “Women’s Rights Bill Wins House Approval,” *The Daily Chronicle*, Feb. 2, 1972, p. 19; “Senate Narrowly Defeats No-Fault Divorce Bill,” *The Seattle Times*, Apr. 8, 1973, p. 20; “Senate Reverses Itself, Passes ‘No-Fault’ Divorce,” *The Seattle Times*, Apr. 10, 1973, p. 6.

⁷² *Seattle Times*, Nov. 6, 1974; Sally Gene Mahoney, “Priority-Selection Time,” *The Seattle Times*, Nov. 20, 1974. In 1974, women’s electoral presence in the state government rose from four in the state senate to thirteen in the state house of representatives. A minimum of seventeen women served in the legislature.

Dorothy Hollingsworth, Vivian Caver, Jeri Ware, Peggy Joan Maxie, Barbara Pool (founding president), Freddie Mae Gautier, Rossalind Y. Woodhouse, and Elizabeth Ponder founded Women in Unity to encourage African American women to run for and be appointed to a political office, lobby for legislation that affected black women, and cultivate women's leadership in politics while influencing local public policy. Woodhouse stated, "We saw ourselves as a version of the League of Women Voters."⁷³

Members represented multiple political perspectives and acknowledged that they did not necessarily know how to strategically groom and develop their own candidates since there had not existed any previous examples of black women elected officials before them. The organization instead kept abreast of the issues and informed the black public, held workshops on voter education, conducted interviews and evaluated candidates, rated candidates, hosted political rallies, and worked with other women's organizations with similar goals and interests. In 1977, for instance, the group held a town hall and invited representatives from the National Organization of Women (NOW), Black Social Workers, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, the League of Women Voters, and the Seattle Section of the NCNW to discuss and rate mayoral candidates for the upcoming election. They published their rankings one week prior to the primaries and general elections in the community newspapers and church bulletins. Women in Unity and the influence of its members serving in the state and city since government became one of the most powerful black women's political organizations in the state the height of the Woman's Political and Civic Alliance in the early 20th century.⁷⁴

⁷³ Rossalind Woodhouse, interview by author, Aug. 23, 2017. Barbara Pool served as a comptroller for CAMP; Jeri Ware later served in Congressman Mike Lowry's Office; and Elizabeth Ponder who became the only black delegate to the Republican National Convention in 1984. The group consisted of both Republican and Democratic women.

⁷⁴ R.Y. Woodhouse Interview, Aug. 23, 2017; Scott Holter, "Facing the Main Issues: National Black Women's Congress Comes to Northwest," *The Skanner*, June 14, 1995; "A Town Hall to Question, Rate Mayor Candidates," *The Seattle Times*, Aug. 10, 1977.

Political scientists have suggested that civic activity and activity in women's organizations translated into a significant political base for women officeholders in the 1970s. This held true for Women in Unity members. Perhaps no other woman exemplified the archetype exponent of black women's organizational activity, education, and politics than Dorothy Hollingsworth. Hollingsworth cemented her leadership credentials on the city level and had been active as a political strategist, social worker, educator, and an administrator of the Great Society Programs. After serving as the first director of the Head Start Program, from 1969 to 1971, she worked for the City of Seattle as Deputy Director of the Model Cities Program. She became Associate Director of Project Planning in 1972, and according to the *Seattle Times*, the highest paid female employee, netting \$18,768 a year. As a divorcee and single mother, Hollingsworth used her position and economic independence to combat sexism in an office filled with men. She boasted, "I have fun with men. When I offer to pay for their lunch, I tell them it's because I want something, not because I'm in women's lib. If they still offer to pay, I say, 'No, I need the tax deduction.'"⁷⁵

As part of the Model Cities Program, Hollingsworth oversaw over forty-six separate projects in education, arts and culture, economic development, job training, health, welfare, and legal services. The position required her to unite city officials, planners, developers, and neighborhood residents to cooperate in implementing the programs and distributing funding aligned with the goals of the Model Cities experiment.⁷⁶

The programs administered Model Cities served four neighborhoods in the East, Southeast, Southwest, and Northern sections of Seattle. Two of the neighborhoods were white, one mostly black, and the last a mixture of blacks, whites, Chicanos, and Filipinos. When asked

⁷⁵ Joan Wolverton, "A Woman With A Mission," *Seattle Times*. Feb. 13, 1972.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

what residents wanted, who primarily consisted of poor and working-class women and men wanted, she replied, “child-care services, health services, employment, and job training.” She observed, “In a way that’s what Model Cities is all about. It’s to establish a way that poor people can see that the system can be responsive; and when it’s not, enable them to see ways to make changes within the system.”⁷⁷

Hollingsworth by the mid-1970s was the most recognized black woman in Seattle city government.⁷⁸ At 55, she used that prominence to launch a successful campaign to become the first black woman elected to the Seattle School Board in its 93-year history with the support of Women in Unity and her church family at First A.M.E. When she held a press conference at First AME to officially announce her candidacy, Rev. Cecil Murray assured the audience, “For the most part Dorothy Hollingsworth will emerge as the people’s choice,” even though she could not obtain the support from the Central Area School Council or retiring board member Carver Gayton who both lent their support to her opponent Eddie Rye, Jr., the spritely Executive Director of CAMP. Hollingsworth’s platform vowed to address the educational needs of children and exercise good money management. She committed herself to advancing desegregation efforts and reworking policy to reduce teacher layoffs.⁷⁹

While approval from the Central Area School Council proved gravely important since the organization represented the voice of the community, she received support from top political figures, women’s organizations, and prominent persons in higher education that crushed her competition. Along with Mayor Wes Uhlman, four city council members, one county council

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Hollingsworth was elected to a three-year term on the national YWCA board in 1970. She held memberships in the Seattle Chapter of the National Council of Negro Women, Delta Sigma Theta, Inc., the National Association of Social Workers, and board member of Neighbors in Need.

⁷⁹ Mr. Charlie, “Hollingsworth Announces Candidacy for School Board,” *The Seattle Medium*, Jul. 23, 1975, p. 3; “Rival Enters Central Area School Race,” *The Seattle Times*, Jul. 17, 1975.

member, and four state representatives including Peggy Joan Maxie and George Fleming, pledged their support.⁸⁰ The Municipal League ranked Hollingsworth as the top candidate for position 5, and she garnered the largest campaign contributions than any other candidate. Although Hollingsworth became embroiled in a heated campaign with Rye, she won a landslide victory with 71 percent of the vote in the primaries to go on and win the general election. In 1975, she joined the first female majority on the school board and faced the challenge of continuing the desegregation process while restoring the board's credibility after a tumultuous decade of bitter attacks, parent dissention, and racial upheavals. Hollingsworth acknowledged that the traditional black leadership recognized her as the premier voice of the black community on the school board and expected her to push for a desegregation plan.⁸¹

In the early 1970s, the Seattle school district faced looming threats of legal action from integrationist advocates. It began its initial steps toward mandatory busing by transferring 2,000 middle school students. The plan was halted for two years due to a lawsuit filed by Citizens Against Mandatory Busing. Continued threats of legal action by civil rights and pro-integration advocates forced the board to implement a more effective integration program. The election of Hollingsworth helped position her to oversee a desegregation program in the school district and represent the interests of civil rights, women's, and community groups.⁸²

⁸⁰ Dorothy Hollingsworth had the support and backing of some of the most prominent individuals in higher education as well as community groups. She received endorsements from Samuel E. Kelly, director of the UW Office of Minority Affairs and Diversity; Robert J. Flennaugh, president of the UW Board of Regents; Consuelo Shaw, an assistant to the superintendent of Seattle Public Schools; Charles Z. Smith, a former judge and UW law dean; the 36th District Democratic Club, Alpha Omicron Chapter of DST, Ann B. O'Donnell Metropolitan Democratic Club, Women in Unity, the Association of Black Ministers, and South Realty.

⁸¹ "Mrs. Hollingsworth Tops School Candidates in Donations," *The Seattle Times*, Oct. 16, 1975, p. C3; "Reception for School-board Candidate Set," *The Seattle Times*, Aug. 22, 1975, p. C9; "Municipal League Gives Hollingsworth Top Rating," *The Seattle Medium*, Aug. 27, 1975. New challenges included levies on taxes, teacher evaluations, and possible school closures. For more on the voluntary Seattle Plan see Michael J. Dumas, "Sitting Next to White Children: School Desegregation in the Black Educational Imagination," (Ph.D. dissertation New York: The City University of New York, 2007), 97.

⁸² Cassandra Tate, "Busing in Seattle: A Well-Intentioned Failure," *Historylink*, Sept. 7, 2002. Accessed Dec. 1, 2016, <http://www.historylink.org/File/3939>.

Of the seven board members, Cheryl Bleakney, Suzanne Hittman, and Hollingsworth took the reins of leadership during the desegregation process. Although Hollingsworth refused to lead the desegregation committee, stating that it was a “white problem,” she remained an ardent supporter and followed through to see that a plan would be in place. In the face of an imminent court order and legal action, civic groups such as the NAACP, ACLU, and CASC and three board members Bleakney, Hittman, and Hollingsworth demanded that the board act swiftly in clearly creating a definition of racial imbalance and a timetable for reversing the process of de facto segregation.⁸³

The board members certainly did not agree on the strategies towards desegregation but continued to etch out a plan that would best serve Seattle’s school children through an extensive community involvement process. Hollingsworth alongside two other members and Superintendent David Moberly strongly favored an unpopular mandatory student fixed-assignment-first plan rather than a voluntary-first plan to ensure schools would be desegregated quickly. Because the divisive plan did not provide school choice options, it received less support from other board members to pass. In an attempt to achieve greater equality in the city, the Seattle School Board enacted the Seattle Plan on December 14, 1977 to expand the voluntary transfer program to include all schools in the district. When Hollingsworth made the motion to adopt the Seattle Plan, the board voted to 6 to 1, making Seattle “the largest city in the United States to voluntarily undertake district-wide desegregation through mandatory busing.” According to Ann Siqueland, “the plan received support from a wide range of community leaders, including the city’s black and Asian leaders, an outgoing and newly elected mayor, the

⁸³ Ann Siqueland, *Without A Court Order: The Desegregation of Seattle Schools* (Seattle: Madrona Publishers, 1981), 188; Jennifer Hehnke, “The Politics of Racial Integration in the Seattle Public Schools: Discourse, Policy, and Political Change, 1954-1991,” (Ph.D diss, University of Oregon, 2009), 140.

local Chamber of Commerce, religious leaders, the League of Women Voters, the Municipal League, teachers' association, and others."⁸⁴ Moberly stated:

Most large cities have gone the court route. They have thrown that very tough decision to a federal court and let a judge make the decision and then lost the local control. About a year ago we saw a tremendous resentment on the part of the community asking that we not allow this issue to go to the court. They said, "Let Seattle be the first city in the nation to face this very sticky, very emotional issue, and let's do it with local control...The decision was made by the Board [...] to do it ourselves with citizen input..."⁸⁵

The historic yet controversial plan, however, produced an outward number of critics although violence did not erupt as seen in other cities across the nation. The lone dissenter on the board, Ellen Roe, opposed the plan, blaming white liberals in the Central Area for not wanting only their children to be subjected to attending school with black children. Two months later, challengers of the Seattle Plan sponsored an anti-busing initiative that passed with the approval of 61 percent of the city's voters. However, in 1982, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled the initiative unconstitutional. The Seattle Plan remained an uphill battle for the next two decades as legal battles and struggles ensued.⁸⁶

As a leading advocate of bussing, Hollingsworth spent her tenure on the board directing the implementation of the desegregation plan as well as instituting policies. For instance, in 1976, Hollingsworth proposed a district-wide policy that required principals and program managers to report physical assaults and threats of violence on children to the superintendent within 24 hours. This came as a result of racial threats and violence inflicted on Anita Whitfield, a 14-year-old black female student body president at Addams Junior High School, by a young

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 4, 111; Hehnke, "The Politics of Racial Integration," 140; Tate, "Busing in Seattle" *Historylink*, Sept. 7, 2002, <http://www.historylink.org/File/3939>.

⁸⁵ Cited in Hehnke, 178.

⁸⁶ Fred Barbash, "Balancing Act," *The Washington Post*, Mar. 22, 1982. Hollingsworth served one term on the Seattle School Board from 1976 to 1981.

white male. She also testified to members of the House Social and Health Services Committee, supporting a bill to establish a pilot program of day care centers in vacant elementary school classrooms.⁸⁷

Along with fellow Women in Unity members Maxie and Hollingsworth, Rossalind Y. Woodhouse emerged as one of the most visible and politically influential black women in the state. When Washington elected Dixy Lee Ray, its first woman governor in 1977, Woodhouse's proven leadership in CAMP, as a social worker, and as president of the Seattle Women's Commission manifested in an appointed cabinet position in Ray's administration. Some Republican senators who believed Woodhouse did not possess the experience or training for such a position, spoke of halting the confirmation. Despite the rumor of a senate floor fight to block the nomination, the state senate unanimously confirmed the appointment, making Woodhouse the first African American and first woman Chief Motor Vehicle Administrator in the nation as well as the first woman to be appointed to a cabinet-level position in the state.⁸⁸

As director, Woodhouse managed a fiscal budget of \$1.6 billion and oversaw the licensing and regulation of all motor vehicles in addition to the licensing of thirty-three professions and occupations. Because of the varied roles of the department, Woodhouse's first task was to change the name from Department of Motor Vehicles to the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs (DOL). She contended that the current name misled the role of the department since it also oversaw the "licensing of all professions, policies securities and real

⁸⁷ Constantine Angelos, "School Policy Asked on Reporting Assaults," *The Seattle Times*, Jul.1, 1976; "Day-care-center Bill Sparks Spirited Debate," *The Seattle Times*, Mar. 25, 1977.

⁸⁸ "Black Woman Confirmed," *The Daily News*, Mar. 4, 1977, p. 5. Woodhouse, because of her unique role and status, would become the firsts of many. She was the first African American and female Chair of the State Real Estate Commission and the State Highway Transportation Commission. She also served on the National Consumer Safety Commission and the National Department of Agriculture Advisory Council. When elected as President of the Western Region, she became the first female executive officer of the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators (AAMVA). Her initial presentation, "A Consumerism Approach to Motor Vehicle Administration," drew ire by the all-male members.

estate sales, and provide[d] staff for the state Gambling Commission.” She also ordered new replacement documents to reflect her name rather than the former director which drew critics such as *The Daily News* in Port Angeles. When an article alluded to claims of “wastefulness with taxpayer’s money,” she responded that “the citizens of the state have a right to know who their officials are. It’s good management.”⁸⁹

During her tenure, Woodhouse deliberately leveraged her new position of power to increase opportunities for African American men and women. For example, she hired the first African American Deputy Director of the State Department of Licensing, Saul Arrington, a retired military police officer, and placed the first African Americans on the Washington State Real Estate Commission, Cosmetology Board, Barber Board, Nursing Regulatory staff, and Public Affairs staff to provide representation and jobs for black women who did not have equal access to such roles in the public and private sector.⁹⁰

In addition to expanding roles for women and blacks, Woodhouse used her position to promote the first midwifery school in the state of Washington. She was instrumental in helping with the development of a licensed lay midwifery practice and updating an antiquated 1917 law that required midwives to obtain two years of midwifery education in order to be eligible for licensure. Up until the 1970s, there had not existed a licensed midwife in the state of Washington or a school to meet the education requirement. Four determined apprentice-trained and self-educated midwives lobbied for a school to comply with the law and to receive licensure. With the support of Woodhouse who received advice from her sister Victoria Fletcher, a certified nurse midwife, the women were called into her office and they began discussions on establishing

⁸⁹ “Minorities Are Among Major Appointments,” *The Daily News* (Port Angeles, Washington), Jan. 28, 1977, p. 5; Woodhouse, interview by author, Mar. 23, 2016.

⁹⁰ Woodhouse, interview by author, Mar. 23, 2016.

a school. In May of 1978, the Seattle Midwifery School was founded, the first in the state. Because of her involvement, Woodhouse is known as “the Mother of Midwifery” in Washington State and helped to expand midwifery practice in the region.⁹¹

Maxie’s, Hollingsworth’s, and Woodhouse’s political pathways broke the decades-long restriction of black women’s access to public office. It is no coincidence that these women each had a background in social work. Social workers, a predominantly female profession, had historically been one of the most politically active groups. Their jobs required them to interact with the state and serve as mediators between the people and the state by testifying in court and testifying on the senate and house floors on behalf of their clients. Even moreso, black women have always engaged in social work through private avenues such as churches, schools, women’s groups, voluntary and civil rights associations, and it was one of very few professions open to black women.⁹² Other black women, on the grassroots level, continued to discuss and devise plans of actions to develop new leadership within the Central Area and gain political power. In 1975, black women gathered to hold another conference, this time sponsored by the Seattle Section of the NCNW. The conference was organized around topics concerning self-help and community empowerment and designed for community women to interact with black women experts and those in positions of resource “to share knowledge and common concerns.” Leaders such as Barbara Laners, Marjorie Pitter King, Maxine Mimms, Jeri Ware, and Peggy Joan Maxie

⁹¹ *Ibid*; Helen Verney Burst and Joyce E. Thompson, *A History of Midwifery in the United States: The Midwife Said Fear Not* (New York: Springer Publishing, 2016), 142-143. Also, the growing presence of African Americans in government by the late 1970s led a group of public service workers to form the Northwest Conference of Black Elected Officials. However, the name changed to the Northwest Conference of Black Public Officials (NCBPO) to include those working for city and state government who had not been elected. The organization served as a clearinghouse to foster communication between all black public officials on the state and local levels in Oregon and Washington state; build unity, political power, and set a political agenda for African Americans in the region given their relatively small population. From 1979 to 1981, Woodhouse served as president.

⁹² For more information on social workers in the 20th century, see Daniel J. Walkowitz, *Working With Class: Social Workers and the Politics of Middle-Class Identity*, (Charlotte: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

led individual workshops on self-help and community betterment.⁹³

The most important gathering of women in the state up to that point, however, occurred in Ellensburg on July 8, 1977. The Washington State International Women's Year Conference (IWY) sought to confront and address the issues of all women in Washington, specific to their historical backgrounds and race.⁹⁴ Black women served on the planning committee such as Dorothy Hollingsworth, executive chair and delegate to the Houston Conference of the IWY. Hollingsworth, as chair of the coordinating committee, gathered black, Latina, and Native women to become involved in the planning process as a way to make the conference more inclusive. Out of the Seattle meetings to get black women involved was born the Black Women's Caucus. Tacoma's Thelma A. Jackson, a Republican and coordinator of the Black Women's Caucus, took the helm in organizing the caucuses across the state and also served on the IWY planning committee. The Black Women's Caucus worked to raise the consciousness of black women about the conference, issues affecting their communities, and to encourage their presence at the event in order to have a stronger voice. Woodhouse, representing the Seattle Women's Commission and Director of the Department of Vehicles and Licensing, was also present.⁹⁵

While the conference was meant to unify women, it was a site of great contestation. The conference quickly devolved into factions of pro-ERA and anti-ERA, spurring conflict and

⁹³ "Black Women's Conference Set," *The Seattle Times*, Oct. 29, 1975.

⁹⁴ For more on the IWY conference see Cassandra Tate, "Washington State Conference for Women Opens in Ellensburg on July 8, 1977," *Historylink*, Dec. 28, 2012. Accessed Oct 2, 2017, <http://www.historylink.org/File/10259>.

⁹⁵ Interview with Dorothy Hollingsworth by Mildred Andrews on Jan. 31, 2007. Seattle, Washington. Washington State History Museum. Accessed May 24, 2016, <http://www.washingtonhistory.org/files/library/Hollingsworth.pdf>; Interview with Thelma A. Jackson by Mildred Andrews on Jan. 30, 2007. Lacey, Washington. Washington State History Museum. Accessed May 24, 2016, <http://www.washingtonhistory.org/files/library/Jackson.pdf>. Hollingsworth and Jackson both influenced and encouraged other women of color to form caucuses and be counted at the conference.

dissent. Most women sided with passing an equal rights amendment except conservative women who argued against Roe versus Wade.⁹⁶ While a hot button issue, black women fell into pro-choice camps. “We definitely believe in pro-choice...But that didn’t mean that you were pro-abortion, or anti-family, or that kind of thing,” stated Jackson. Most black women’s position understandably was ‘choice’ given their historical experiences of being denied basic rights, humanity, and a voice.⁹⁷

While navigating through the personal and political differences that divided women, black women focused on more immediate issues to address such as access to jobs, housing, childcare, and adequate education. These participants set the political agenda for African American women in the state and presented on the status of black women with recommendations. The report indicated that black women were becoming a “newly organized political force.” While they saw education as the primary pathway to upward mobility and job opportunities, educational institutions did not respond to the needs of black students. They therefore demanded more control over school curricula, teacher training, and staff development to dispel gender and race bias as well as encourage racial pride. They also recommended the establishment of community-based and black-run reproductive counseling centers and sex education classes. Because of the increase in teenage pregnancy and the widespread sterilization abuse on African American and poor women, they concluded that “in order to effect those changes, black women must become politically aware and active so that they can begin to fill elected and appointed positions at all levels of government and influence those persons already holding these positions.” As a result, Thelma Jackson continued to lead the black women

⁹⁶ In 1973, the Supreme Court ruled on the constitutional right for women to make personal medical and health Decisions, including abortion.

⁹⁷ Thelma Jackson, Interview with Mildred Andrews, Jan. 30, 2007. Lacey, Washington. Washington State History Museum, <http://www.washingtonhistory.org/files/library/Jackson.pdf>.

caucuses across the state for six to seven years after the conference to realize these goals. This political agenda would outline the urban conditions for the next two decades and make a case for the urgent need of black women in politics to reduce and eliminate the social ills of western black communities.⁹⁸

Regeneration of the Central Area

While women living in the Central Area pushed for more political and economic power for themselves, they witnessed their community rapidly changing around them. The passage of a city and federal open housing ordinance of 1968 coupled with local pressure and federal regulations forced an amalgam of business interests like real estate agents, lending institutions, and neighborhood associations to improve their service to Central Area residents, thereby weakening redlining practices. These changes heavily impacted the area by lifting barriers that dictated where African Americans could live and where children could attend school. It, nevertheless, produced unintended consequences, what Jeffery Zane describes as “a renewed and more expensive housing market in the neighborhood.” The dismantling of a system of discriminatory practices did not produce immediate results. Boeing’s resurgence by 1978, the persistent traffic jams outside the city, and its central location made the Central Area a desirable place for a “new type of urban dweller” aside from the high crime, dilapidated housing, and

⁹⁸ Washington State IWY Coordinating Committee, “Recommendations of the Washington State International Women’s Year Conference (1978). *Washington State Conference for Women, 1977*, pp. 17-18. Accessed May 3, 2016, https://digitalcommons.cwu.edu/wa_state_womens_conference/17; “Status of Black Women,” Report from the International Women’s Year Conference, 1977, pp. 48-49. Washington State Historical Society. Accessed May 3, 2016, <http://digitum.washingtonhistory.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/digipubs/id/542/rec/1>; Doreen J. Mattingly and Jessica L. Nare, “A Rainbow of Women:” Diversity and Unity at the 1977 U.S. International Women’s Year Conference,” *Journal of Women’s History*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (2014): 88-112; Alexandra Minna Stern, “Sterilized in the Name of Public Health: Race, Immigration, and Reproductive Control in Modern California,” *American Journal of Public Health* (July 2005), 1128-1138. Thelma A. Jackson was coordinator for the YWCA Work Options for Women and a member of the North Thurston County School Board.

congested streets. With the help of the anti-redlining campaigns that obtained funds to help improve properties, it attracted the new urban elite who held the key to economic revival and reshaping the physical landscape of the neighborhood.⁹⁹

There was also considerable movement from the suburbs to the city. About 8 percent of households left suburbia for the city when disillusioned Boeing workers exited the city altogether. The energy crisis played a role in the renewed interest of white suburbanites to the city as the cost of gasoline skyrocketed. The convenience of the location near the city center and mass transit attracted others. The city also offered affordable housing to these young urban elites.¹⁰⁰

This steady movement of whites back to the city targeted mostly the Central Area due to its proximity to downtown and the relatively inexpensive housing costs.¹⁰¹ Real estate developers demolished old worn-down homes and renovated standard living homes. Many black residents took advantage of the seller's market by accepting developers' lucrative offers to sell and sometimes even selling their own homes to strangers knocking on their door looking to purchase. Black leaders claimed that the rekindled interest in the city and the Central Area, in particular, resulted in reverse block busting which further dislocated black residents. For instance, Rev. Samuel Berry McKinney noted these changes and forewarned others that, "The city's becoming desirable for middle-class whites, and what were old, ramshackle ghetto-slum dwellings are converted into palatial residences for the comfortable." The steady transformation of the Central Area was particularly felt in Southeast Seattle as it gained a 15 percent increase of

⁹⁹ Zane, 226-232.

¹⁰⁰ "Seattle Displacement Study," Office of Policy Planning, 1979, p. 118.

¹⁰¹ The continuation of African Americans relocation to Southeast Seattle in the 1970s was also due to its closer proximity to the Central Business District; access to better transportation services; cheaper rents; zoning; and a desire to live among other blacks.

black residents by 1978 and set in motion the early stages of gentrification and displacement that would impact the area for decades.¹⁰²

Conclusion

The dissention on race progress, integration, the growing women's rights movement, and the effects of the Boeing Bust left Seattle's black community disintegrated, allowing for black women's activism and leadership in politics to manifest through public office and service. The informal and formal networks created during the 1960s buttressed their resumes, placing them in higher positions in the emerging anti-poverty programs and agencies of the 1970s and 1980s. The confluence of the anti-poverty programs, welfare rights activism, and the Boeing Bust exposed the ways that race, class, and gender shaped public discourses, public assistance programs, and poor people's lives in Seattle than any other previous period.

Poor and low-income black women exposed various levels of urban inequality and the social, political, and economic forces that shaped it through the welfare state. They fought for the right of economic security, challenged the popular assumption that families headed by black women were dysfunctional, and identified their movement as part of the larger struggle for black freedom. As a result, black welfare recipients and poor women formed a political identity while reshaping their own destiny and recasting the stigma of welfare with dignity.

At the same time, the 1970s augmented black women's political representation as they assumed more public leadership roles in education, government, and politics. Garrett, Caver, Woodhouse, Maxie, and Hollingsworth represented the few who gave voice to a previously

¹⁰² "Seattle Displacement Study," Office of Policy Planning, 1979, p. 72; Zane, 232; *The Seattle Medium*, Sept. 23, 1983, p. 1.

ignored community and even more silenced group within the community. These often unnoticed change agents comprised a small cluster but made profound institutional changes and impacted public policy. They helped to rebuild the faith of a fragmented and disheartened community while forging new pathways for the succeeding generation of women. By the end of the decade, black women had far surpassed their foremothers a generation earlier who strove to make Seattle a more equitable place for them and their families. Washington State had established a State Women's Council, ratified the ERA to the federal constitution, added an Equal Rights Amendment to the state constitution, equalized divorce, elected its first female governor as well as its first African American woman legislator, Licensing Director, and school board member. Yet, the feminization of poverty became more entrenched especially among black women while the Central Area began to experience radical transformations and demographic shifts due to the renewed interest in the city. The next two decades would bring about new issues during the turn to conservatism and attract a younger business and professional class that did not necessarily live in the Central Area but struggled to become the new faces of an aging black leadership and disintegrating community.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Tate, *Historylink*, Dec. 28, 2012, <http://www.historylink.org/File/10259>.

Chapter Five

Forging Hope in a Changing Community, 1980-2000

I want to see new centers of influence and authority created.

–Constance Rice, First Lady of Seattle
quoted in *The Seattle Times*, July 12, 1992¹

Being black and female, my realization of the concepts of prejudice, discrimination and injustice came early. My involvement in lesbian-gay issues was a natural extension of my activism in African-American and women's issues.

–Sherry Harris, Seattle City Councilwoman
quoted in *The Seattle Times*, Aug. 1, 1993²

Daily, there are comments made on this campus [State Capitol] that never let me or my assistant forget we're black.

–Dawn Mason, 37th Legislative District Representative
quoted in *The News Tribune*, Feb. 21, 1995³

In 1983, the *Black Enterprise* baptized Seattle as one of the most livable cities for African Americans. Featuring ten major cities in its special issue, the magazine calculated blacks' overall quality of life based on income, education, cost of living, employment, and housing. Although the Emerald City ranked the smallest out of the cities, it was identified as a "center of success and opportunity for black professionals." This national recognition, in part, highlights the successful gains of the post-Civil Rights era and the beneficiaries of those achievements who migrated to the city. Yet, the article's assessment was far from accurate. The reliance on data inadvertently perpetuated the lore of Seattle's exceptionalism in terms of race relations and neglected other salient factors that also influenced the daily lived experiences of African Americans such as cultural heritage, unemployment, access to quality education, institutions,

¹ Marla Williams, "Constance Pursues Her Own Agenda – Reaching for Possibilities," *The Seattle Times*, Jul. 12, 1992, p. 8.

² "Who's Who Among Power Gay Leaders," *The Seattle Times*, Aug. 1, 1993, p. A13.

³ Bruce Rushton, "Legislature '95: Lawmaker Feels Insulted on Day of Civil Rights Rally," *The News Tribune*, Feb. 21, 1995, p. B3.

dating prospects, morale, and feelings of belonging and self-worth. It also did not take into consideration the subsequent conservative backlash shaping much of the decade.⁴

The 1980s and 1990s can, therefore, be characterized as a combination of economic prosperity and individual achievement for some and immense poverty for the rest. The resurgence of Boeing and the growth of industries such as Pacific Bell (US West), Microsoft, Starbucks, and Amazon transformed the city's economy and moved it decisively from an economic history dominated by aircraft manufacturing and its local suppliers. Many African American women gravitated to and were recruited by these companies, becoming the first to assume mid-level management positions in these businesses and administrative positions in other lines of white-collar work.

The revival of the urban economy and the dismantling of redlining policies continued to displace blacks from the Central Area while giving others the freedom to live elsewhere such as in the suburbs. At the same time, the conservative push against liberal policies severely curtailed social welfare programs designed to promote equity and fairness in education, health, and employment while compounding issues of crime, drugs, teenage pregnancy, AIDS, and unemployment placed new burdens on a community undergoing rapid economic and demographic transformations.

This moment called for a political realignment and a renegotiation of visible black leadership to confront these challenges. This chapter examines the shift of black political leadership from the reins of the old guard who found their roots in civil rights and anti-poverty activism to a new generation of black women who located their politics in professional networks and community-based activism. Yet at the pinnacle of their economic and political mobility,

⁴ R.G. Collazo, "Ten Cities That Work for Blacks," *The Black Enterprise* (July 1983), 42.

they fought to protect their hard-won achievements against one of the largest conservative attacks to eliminate affirmative action in the state by the turn of the century.

A Community in Transition Crisis: The Central Area in the Conservative Era

The election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 sent shockwaves throughout Black America. Seattle, like most places, experienced a strong white conservative backlash to civil rights legislation. Opposition to school integration, affirmative action programs, and welfare reform translated into votes for Ronald Reagan in King County, who spoke to the thousands of whites who felt that too much had been given to blacks. The new conservative administration moved quickly to reinstate traditional values, retrench liberal policies, and reduce federal government spending on social services, urban development, and the welfare state.⁵

During the first year of Reagan's term, the median income of black families fell by 5.2 percent. Poverty increased for over two million Americans as the administration cut billions from the federal food stamps program, child nutrition programs, and subsidized housing programs, policies that acutely affected poor black women relying on Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). Congress drastically restricted spending on federal assistance programs by 20 percent and also eliminated the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act program. To the further detriment of black women, Reagan popularized and racialized the discourse of the "Welfare Queen" that not only inaccurately depicted public aid recipients as defrauders but stereotyped black women as fur-wearing thieves living off of hard-working

⁵ David Wilma, "Ronald Reagan and Republicans Win Elections on November 4, 1980," *Historylink*, Oct. 3, 2003. Accessed Jan. 2, 2018, <http://historylink.org/File/5591>; "1980 Presidential General Election Data Graphs – Washington." Accessed Jan. 3, 2018, <https://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/datagraph.php?year=1980&fips=53&f=0&off=0&elect=0>. Ronald Reagan won 49.66% of the vote in Washington including every county except Grays Harbor and Pacific counties.

Americans.⁶

The economy in Seattle flourished while at the same time the nation including the Pacific Northwest region entered into an economic slump. The expansion of air travel led to the profitable recovery of Boeing, feeding the nation's demands for Boeing's 757 and 767. Boeing added nearly 50,000 workers and offered lucrative wages that were ranked among the highest in U.S. manufacturing. Seattle diversified its industrial portfolio by attracting more technology companies to relocate to the Northwest. These industries grew beyond expectations throughout the 1980s and 1990s while the country experienced a slowdown in manufacturing. In 1987, Microsoft typified this changing market and the dawn of a high-tech boom. In addition, Lockheed Shipbuilding received a \$304 million defense contract from the U.S. Navy. In 1995, internet company Amazon made its debut as well as the giant coffee company, Starbucks. Seattle continued to remain the powerhouse of the region in terms of economic development and growth. By 1989, according to the *New York Times*, the Emerald City led the nation in job growth; ironically, just two decades prior, it ranked as having the highest unemployment rate.⁷

This economic opulence contributed to a profound increase in class stratification among Seattle's black population. African Americans with upward mobility relocated to Seattle.⁸ The black population grew from 37,868 in 1970 to 46,565 in 1980 with women constituting 50 percent of the total black population but only 4.7 percent of the city's overall population. This migration included, for the first time, a significant professional middle-class which was most

⁶ Manning Marable and Leith Mullings, *Let Nobody Turn Us Around: An African American Anthology* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 491-492; Robert Pear, "Reagan's Social Impact; News Analysis," *The New York Times*, Aug. 25, 1982.

⁷ Timothy Egan, "Economic Pulse: The Pacific Northwest – A Special Report; Northwest's Fortunes, Once Grim, Thrive Despite National Recession," *The New York Times*, Mar. 14, 1991; Collazo, "Ten Cities That Work for Blacks," 42.

⁸ The unintended consequence of a growing economy also led to a migration of California residents. The rapid growth increased traffic flows and raised housing prices.

evident in the rise of a black suburban population.⁹

The growth also came as the first significant numbers of black students graduated from the University of Washington and other institutions of higher education in the early 1970s and 1980s, finding jobs in industry, government, and other educational institutions. They were joined by other college graduates from all across the nation, recruited by private firms and governmental agencies. This new migration, unlike earlier migrations, was mostly economically motivated and tended to be single, educated women who did not originate from the South. Before 1980, the professional class of black Seattle women usually included a small group of registered nurses, school teachers, beauticians, social workers, and wives of prominent men in the community. By the 1980s, however, professional women were much more numerous in the city and they worked in a much broader array of occupations that included the legal field, medicine, media, education, and finance. African Americans held 7,139 professional, executive, and managerial positions in 1980 that increased by 34 percent in 1990. This followed a similar pattern in the city that saw its highest percentage increases in professional and related service industries including executive, managerial, administrative, and professional specialty occupations.¹⁰

With the Open Housing Ordinance of 1968, a few black migrant women found

⁹ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Characteristics of the Population*, 1970, Vol.1, pt. 49, Washington, Table 91. (Washington, DC: Government of the Printing Office, 1971), 49-214; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Population and Housing, Census Tracts, Seattle-Everett, Wash.*, 1980. Table P-3 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1983), P-65; "Population of Seattle, WA," Population.us. Accessed Apr. 5, 2018, <http://population.us/wa/seattle/>; "Historical Population of Washington State for period 1850-2015," Population.us. Accessed Apr. 5, 2018, <http://population.us/wa/>.

¹⁰ Taylor, 235-237; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Characteristics of the Population*, Washington, 1980, Vol. 1, pt. 49, ch. C. Table 135 (Washington, DC: Government of the Printing Office, 1983), 49-193; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Social and Economic Characteristics of the Population*, Washington, 1990, Vol. 49, pt. 2, Sec. 2. Table 185 (Washington, DC: Government of the Printing Office, 1993), 629; "Census, Seattle 1990: Who We Are, Current Planning Research Bulletin," No. 52, Seattle Planning Department, (Dec. 1, 1992), 15; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Population and Housing Characteristics for Census Tracts and Block Numbering Areas, Seattle-Tacoma, WA*, Sec. 2., 1990. Table 23 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1993), 768.

reasonable housing in affluent neighborhoods although these areas remained inaccessible to the majority of black families. The *Black Enterprise* noted that for black professionals, living in the Pacific Northwest was “surprisingly affordable.” The median value of a home capped at \$70,600 with black households attaining a median income of \$17,737 that rose to an average household income of \$26,436 in 1990. According to a survey, 40.9 percent of black families were considered “middle-class.” Thus, by many standard markers of success, African Americans seemed to be thriving. Even Carver Gayton, son of Virginia Cayton, observed that “Seattle was a very integrated city—blacks are spread all over the city and it would be difficult to identify a ‘ghetto or highly concentrated black neighborhood.” This was certainly true but misleading. By 1990, the Central Area lost 11.6 percent of its black population while the overall population continued to increase by 3.5 percent. Although there were increases in other places such as Ballard, Downtown, Queen Anne, and Lake Union, the massive concentration of African Americans settled in Southeast Seattle which included the neighborhoods of Beacon Hill and Rainier Beach. In fact, one historian noted that “instead of a reconstruction of the Central Area’s black community, Southeast Seattle had become the city’s most perfectly integrated, with equal number of Asians, African Americans, and white residents.” The influx of Asian refugees assembled along the Rainier Valley Corridor, however, made the almost even ratio somewhat fragile. Southeast Asian immigration, including refugees from Vietnam, Korea, and other nations coupled with the surge of Pacific Islanders, surpassed African Americans as the largest non-white racial group and competed for political representation.¹¹

The notion of Seattle as a racially integrated or diverse city, promoted by many African

¹¹ Collazo, 42; Zane, 269; 1990 U.S. Census Bureau, Population and Housing Census; “1990 Census,” Population Changes in Seattle, City of Seattle–Office for Long Range Planning, 1980-1990, Apr. 1, 1992; “Seattle Segregation Maps 1920-2010,” Seattle Civil Rights & Labor History Project. Accessed Jan. 6, 2018, http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/segregation_maps.htm.

Americans like Gayton and key city officials, pointed to the city's lower crime rates, employment patterns, and the fragmentation of an identifiable black community compared to other major cities. While on the surface Seattle appeared to be a Shangri-La for black families, the figures obscured the rapid rate of displacement, increasing housing and rent prices, and the vulnerability of the poor and working class African Americans in the new economy. As the demands for housing grew, black residents continued the shift southward to find more available and affordable housing. Black homeownership fell sixteen percent in the city while white homeownership increased nineteen percent. African Americans either were forced out or sold off prime real estate, wealth, and a cultural, social, and economic milieu to eager urban developers and young, white urban elites. A 1988 survey conducted by the University of Chicago found that Seattle constituted one of the most segregated cities for African Americans in the U.S., refuting the *Black Enterprise's* claims just a few years earlier. Although redlining and discriminatory housing practices rigidly defined the black community spatially, ending housing segregation brought unintended consequences that slowly disintegrated a black community in the midst of rapid growth in the city.¹²

In 1981, frustrated long-time black residents and activists met with Mayor Charles Royer at the Central Area Housing Committee to discuss the issue of displacement and limited housing options in the Central Area. The committee sought to “preserve the existing democratic characteristics of the community” and create a Central Area Public Housing Development Authority to provide housing for low-income families. The profound social and economic stratification created two different Seattles for African Americans—one that seemed diverse and

¹² Collazo, 42; Zane, 266; Kerry Godes, “Segregation in Seattle: A Jolting New Study,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencier*, Nov. 23, 1988.

integrated and the other that was polarizing and fragmented.¹³

The local expanding economy under a conservative administration had not been favorable to the masses of African Americans. It set in motion what sociologist William Julius Wilson described as a permanent “underclass.” From the late 1970s to the early 1980s, unemployment in Seattle mushroomed to 9.4 percent among whites and reached 16.7 percent among blacks. Those living in poverty accounted for 9.4 percent whites and 22.5 percent black. Despite Boeing’s recovery, manufacturing declined steadily, losing about 12,000 jobs a year and disproportionately affected the South End and Central Area where no related industry existed to employ those workers. By 1989, just over 25 percent of African Americans lived below the poverty line. To lower unemployment in the city, Representative Peggy Joan Maxie introduced a key element of the House Democratic Caucus Jobs Program known as the Washington State Comprehensive Jobs Package. The bill proposed to create 27,000 new jobs within the state without government investment by cooperating with both the business and private sector. Disillusioned with conservative cutbacks, Maxie asserted, “President Reagan’s programs have failed largely because they count on the giant corporations to stimulate growth... Small business is responsible for creating the majority of new jobs in today’s economy.” Community protesters rallied downtown for “Peace, Jobs, and Justice” in a move that was symbolic at best.¹⁴

Politically, African Americans faced intractable problems. In 1981, conservatives pushed a redistricting plan, opposed by Maxie a few years earlier, to ensure each district represented an equal number of voters based on the 1980 census. The plan created dire consequences for the 37th legislative district and to black voters. At least for the last three decades, the 37th district

¹³ Alberta Garvin, “Central Area Residents Hear Recommendations,” *The Seattle Medium*, Apr. 22, 1981. The suburbs, on the other hand, were fairly well integrated among all races, the study claimed.

¹⁴ William Julius Wilson, “The Black Underclass,” *The Wilson Quarterly*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (Spring 1984), 88. Zane, 287, 290; “Rep. Maxie Proposes Lasting Job Program,” *The Seattle Medium*, Feb. 10, 1982.

served as the hotbed of black political power and inspiration. The gerrymandering plan divided the black vote between two districts, 18% in the 37th district and 22% in the 43rd district. This was most noticeable during the 1982 primary election when a young Asian American lawyer, Gary Locke, defeated Maxie, a 12-year incumbent, while John Eng, also an Asian American, defeated Republican Michael Ross. George Fleming held on to his senate seat as the only African American in Olympia. Black voters, nonetheless, lost two critical voices in the state legislature.¹⁵

It became clear in the 1980s that the African American community needed vigorous leaders with fresh ideas to contest ineffective and harmful policies and to protect their interests against societal ills. In 1981, in her discussion on “Leadership in the Eighties” to members of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Rossalind Y. Woodhouse warned that the decade signaled “perilous times” for blacks and that the majority of the decade would have to be devoted to protecting legislation.¹⁶

Women in Unity also responded to these swift assaults. In 1982, the group launched a major voter registration drive to register as many eligible voters to turn the tide of harsh, conservative legislation emanating from all levels of government. Members expressed their anger with the local and national budget, rising unemployment, cuts in Medicare, the increasing black prison population, nuclear weapons, and high interest rates. As a part of their continuing voter education program, the group sponsored two political seminars on the Democratic and

¹⁵ Doug Underwood, “Errors Threaten G.O.P. Redistricting Plan,” *The Seattle Times*, May 14, 1981; Bill Dietrich, “Redistricting Adds Questions, Competition to Election,” *The Seattle Times*, Aug. 18, 1982, p. B2; “Incumbent Legislators Hold Their Ground; Peggy Maxie Falls,” *The Seattle Times*, Sept. 15, 1982, p. B3; Chris Bennett, “Redistricting and Politics,” *The Seattle Medium*, Jan. 15, 1992.

¹⁶ “Sorority Discusses Leadership in the 80’s,” *The Seattle Medium*, Feb. 25, 1981, p. 7. Participants, all having earned doctorates in their fields, discussed the psychological aspects of surviving as one of only few black women in their professional arenas, the role of black leadership in education, and the importance of black women in politics and government. One participant encouraged women to “become more mobile and more willing to seek opportunities for career advancement” rather than stay close to home.

Republican caucus to better inform voters to participate in political affairs. Jeri Ware, a longtime community activist and a district community representative in Congressman Mike Lowry's office, moderated the events.¹⁷ Panelists included Constance W. Rice, Linda Holiday, Virginia Taylor, and Nat Turner, all representing Democratic and Republican positions. Realizing the need to have a more forceful influence on their representatives, Women in Unity sent their very first lobbyist, Barbara Poole, to Olympia in 1983. As a political lobbyist, Poole advocated for the interests of the group on behalf of the community. Professional and political women, especially, understood the importance of raising the consciousness of other women to mobilize their efforts against conservative attacks.¹⁸

But by the late 1980s, unemployment and poverty fostered a new form of social inequality: the trafficking of illegal drugs. An emerging, highly addictive product "crack," a rock-type of cocaine, was introduced in the Central Area. The *Seattle Medium* also reported the flow of drugs in South East Seattle and along the Rainier Valley Corridor where many blacks relocated. Crack was less expensive and more readily available than powdered cocaine, a preference of choice for wealthy users. Nationwide, thousands of African Americans were soon addicted to crack cocaine, and its widespread use and accessibility turned the War on Poverty into the War on Drugs by the Reagan administration in 1984.¹⁹

¹⁷ "Jeri Ware Appointed Congressional District Community Rep," *The Seattle Medium*, Apr. 22, 1981, p. 13. Mike Lowry appointed Jeri Ware to this position in 1981. Ware served as director of community involvement for the Center for Urban Studies and had been involved in CAMP, the Seattle Urban Academy, the Central Area School Council, and the Madrona Community Council to name a few. Lowry stated that, "In this time of important change, I am honored to have a person of Jeri's experience and background represent me in the Central Seattle community."

¹⁸ "Women in Unity Urges Citizens to Get Out and Vote," *The Seattle Medium*, Aug. 25, 1982; "Women in Unity to Present 2 Political Seminars," *The Seattle Medium*, Feb. 3, 1982; "Women in Unity Say Blacks Must Turn Out and Be Counted," *The Seattle Medium*, Aug. 4, 1982; "Women's Group Gets Lobbyist," *The Seattle Medium*, May 1983. In 1990, Women in Unity merged with a newly organized national organization for politically savvy black women leaders to become the Puget Sound Chapter of the National Political Congress of Black Women.

¹⁹ Carlton Smith, "Crack-Cheap Form of Cocaine Spreading Across Nation, Into Seattle Area," *The Seattle Times*, May 28, 1986; "Social and Economic Issues of the 1980s and 1990s," Amistad Digital Resource. Accessed Jan. 9, 2018, http://www.amistadresource.org/the_future_in_the_present/social_and_economic_issues.html; Chris Ben-

With the decline in employment and lack of educational opportunities, many youths saw selling drugs as an immediate path to generating an income and relieving their poverty. Although more blacks than ever were attending college, Seattle's black student population saw a growing dropout rate. As southern California gang members moved north to the Pacific Northwest, gang activity rose and became increasingly violent in Seattle, Portland, and Tacoma as gang members sought to control new drug markets. The federal and state governments responded to inner-city crime by establishing stricter penalties for drug sale and possession, eliminating parole, and building new prisons, which devastated urban black communities and criminalized black families across the nation. With the aid of the federal government, the city of Seattle closed "rock houses" and arrested crack cocaine drug dealers in hopes of securing safer streets. Police arrests disproportionately targeted African Americans while austere, punitive measures that complicated solutions to drug and gang violence. In 1986, the federal Anti-Drug Abuse Act, imposed mandatory-minimum sentences that embodied a far harsher punishment on users of crack cocaine than on those found with the drug in powdered form, mostly used by white abusers.²⁰

City and community leaders held meetings and events to address the drug problem in their neighborhoods. The increase in crime forced city officials to propose a curfew for children 14 and under from midnight to 5 a.m. Many community members found themselves caught in an entangled web of lobbying for police protection while denouncing police harassment. On one hand, they sought to rid their neighborhood of drugs and violence with police assistance. On the other, most remained distrustful of the police's use of excessive force towards black individuals. In 1988, after 15 raids on a single house, Representatives Jesse Wineberry and Seth Armstrong

ett, "Political Potpourri," *The Seattle Medium*, Jan. 6, 1988.

²⁰ Smith, "Crack-Cheap Form of Cocaine," *The Seattle Times*, May 28, 1986; Connie Bennett Cameron, "Blacks Gather in Record Numbers for Solutions to Community's Biggest Problem—Crack," *The Seattle Medium*, Apr. 19, 1989; "Social and Economic Issues of the 1980s and 1990s," Amistad Digital Resource; Zane, 290.

along with Police Chief Patrick Fitzsimons proposed controversial anti-drug trafficking initiatives to allow police the freedom to quickly close down homes where they suspected drug sales while holding home owners and landlords accountable for drug trafficking. Concerned residents and community leaders continued to remain ambivalent about the increased police presence and debated solutions to resolve gang activity and drug trafficking.²¹

If the crack cocaine epidemic stimulated government intervention that adversely affected Seattle's African Americans, so did a health crisis. By the late 1980s, black women launched robust campaigns to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS by reaching out to and educating those most vulnerable to the disease: prostitutes, sexually active youth, and drug users. In 1982, Washington State reported its first AIDS case in King County and a second case involving a man returning to Seattle after a diagnosis in Hawaii. Public health agencies advertised the virus as a white, male gay problem. The following year, hundreds of gay activists and allies marched on city hall, demanding that the Seattle City Council take immediate action on the AIDS crisis. As a result, the city council declared AIDS a health emergency and dispersed \$40,000 to the Public Health Department while the King County Council allocated an additional \$40,000 to address the health crisis.²²

Increasing reports throughout the decade showed that Hispanic and African Americans were at higher risks. However, education awareness programs as well as public health agencies only targeted white males and neglected to craft their messaging towards communities of color.

²¹ Bennett, "Political Potpourri," *The Seattle Medium*, Jan. 6, 1988; Shirley Blash, "Legislators Announce Special Hearing in Seattle to Crackdown on Drug Problem," *The Seattle Medium*, Jan. 6, 1988; "Survey Finds White Youths Use Drugs More than Blacks," *The Seattle Post-Intelligencier*, Dec. 19, 1989. Although crack cocaine posed a serious problem for black communities, studies showed that whites were more apt to abusing drugs contrary to popular inventions by the media and government to portray the problem as a black-inner city problem.

²² Tim Burak, "The HIV/AIDS Epidemic in King County: A Timeline of Significant Events," HIV/AIDS Program of Public Health – Seattle & King County in King County Archives. Accessed Feb. 10, 2018. <https://kingcountyarchives.files.wordpress.com/2016/06/hivtimeline2010.pdf>.

Historian Kevin McKenna argues that “liberal gay politics were safer for city officials to embrace than racial or economic justice, which would have required sustained commitment of public resources and/or a fundamental restructuring of society and the political economy.” In 1988, blacks constituted 25 percent of all people with AIDS while Hispanics comprised 14 percent of the total cases nationally. Black and Hispanic children represented 80 percent of children with AIDS while black and Hispanic women constituted more than 70 percent of all women with the disease. By 1987, King County reported 500 cases of which 92% involved men who had sex with men. Just 23 cases were among blacks, but the disease was spreading.²³

These alarming statistics did not ignite a mass mobilization of black activism but led a few determined African American women to confront the realities of the disease. In July of 1987, P. Catlin Fullwood, a bi-racial woman minister, established the People of Color Against AIDS Network (POCAAN). The organization included a diverse member of 40 African Americans, Hispanics, American Indians, and Asian and Pacific Islanders who planned community forums and distributed brochures to minority groups. POCAAN became the only organization in Seattle “organized by people of color, with people of color, and for people of color around the issue of AIDS.” Fullwood expressed, “We believe that it is crucial that we empower ourselves and our communities to stand up in the face of this disease with dignity, integrity, and a true sense of self-determination.” Although Seattle had the “most well-funded and coordinated response to the AIDS epidemic of any municipal public health department in the 1980s,” the campaign faced problems in reaching non-white populations due to the persistent

²³ *Ibid.* Kevin McKenna, “Safer Sex: Gay Politics and the Remaking of Liberalism in Seattle, 1966-1995,” (Ph.D dissertation, University of Washington, 2017), iii; Charles E. Brown and Janice Haynes, “Deadly Denial – Long Reluctant to Discuss It, Seattle Black Community is Now Facing A Virulent Killer, AIDS,” *The Seattle Times*, Feb. 21, 1988, p. L1; Rita Hibbard, “Frightening Trend for Minorities,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencier*, Oct. 13, 1987, p. A1.

denial of AIDS as also a black and Latino/a problem. In her analysis on black politics surrounding AIDS, political scientist Cathy J. Cohen posits that discussing the disease in black communities is “to discuss a multiplicity of identities, definitions of membership, locations of power, and strategies for the political, social, and economic survival of the community.” Most African American leaders were not prepared to openly deal with or discuss the complexities surrounding the disease. POCAAN, therefore, urgently worked to correct misinformation about AIDS and provide critical evidence that the virus could be transmitted through hetero- and homosexual encounters as well as through intravenous drug use. They wanted to change people’s views by having open and honest dialogue on homosexuality in order to gain access to community support and resources and save lives.²⁴

The black church wrestled with its socially conservative teachings on homosexuality and remained silent on the AIDS crisis even though the disease posed a potentially fatal threat to its congregation. Rev. Patrinn Wright, director of the Total Experience Gospel Choir, was one of few individual women and ministers to publicly advocate for community action towards AIDS when she heard of a few choir members afflicted with the disease. In 1988, she coordinated a community fund-raising program at the Langston Hughes Cultural Arts Center with the support of POCAAN. With a crowd of 350 people, she observed that only a handful of audience members were black due to the lack of support from the clergy.²⁵ She stressed:

Those of us who have tried to educate the black community about AIDS get shot down. I know I got shot down by members of the clergy. Some of them said I was not qualified, that I was not a leader, and that whatever’s done should be done by leadership. They were telling me that as a Christian, AIDS was sent from God to chastise homosexuals and

²⁴ Cited in McKenna, “Safer Sex,” 9, 162; Hibbard, “Frightening Trend for Minorities,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencier*, Oct. 13, 1987, p. A1; John Marshall, “Blunt Approach the Latest Salvo in War on AIDS,” *The Seattle Post-Intelligencier*, Aug. 2, 1988, p. B1; Cathy J. Cohen, *The Boundaries of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of Black Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 8.

²⁵ *Seattle Post-Intelligencier*, Oct. 13, 1987; Brown and Haynes, “Deadly Denial,” *The Seattle Times*, Feb. 21, 1998.

those who are committing sin.²⁶

The threat to respectability and the strong adherence to a strict moral code of what black leaders thought to be legitimate attributes of the community impeded many from tackling AIDS as a health crisis among African Americans. To accept AIDS meant that they would also have to accept what they believed were deviant sexual behaviors. The Chairman of the NAACP's Labor and Industry Committee, Oscar Eason stated that, "Civil rights is one thing, but homosexuality and AIDS is a very difficult thing for the community to handle." This response mirrored the national response by civil rights organizations that denied AIDS to be a political issue for black communities or relevant to their work. Seattle's oldest civil rights organization found it more productive to address drug abuse since it was viewed as a public, rather than a private, concern. While not a priority, the local chapter did make plans to sponsor one community forum on AIDS and considered forming a special task force to study the AIDS problem in order to develop outreach programs.²⁷

The Seattle Urban League (UL), headed by its first woman president, Rossalind Y. Woodhouse, broke away from traditional mores about homosexuality and took up the issue of AIDS. Woodhouse urged that "our political system can only deal with one issue at a time and now is the time for AIDS." The Urban League partnered with POCAAN in 1988 to implement an outreach project and develop an AIDS prevention program funded by the Center for Disease Control and the Department of Social and Health Services. The two organizations revised their message by promoting a "Famous Last Words" campaign that lasted from 1988 to 1990. The campaign worked to eliminate the misconception about HIV/AIDS as being only a gay, white

²⁶ The Seattle Times, Feb. 21, 1988.

²⁷ *Ibid.*; Cohen, *The Boundaries of Blackness*, 259.

disease and also created comic books as a tactical way to reach the youth and teenagers.²⁸

Black Seattle remained frayed throughout the decade with scattered leadership, high unemployment, crime, displacement, and a health and drug crisis. A prospering black female professional class fashioned a renewed sense of community-activism and political organizing through their professional networks. They provided fresh leadership, ideas, and resources and had access to political connections and corporate ties in the city. As political scientist Nadia E. Brown notes, “it was middle-class Blacks who were best positioned to take advantage of affirmative action policies and electoral politics.” No one embodied this new leadership style and political agency than Constance W. Rice.²⁹

“Constance, the builder of bridges, the maker of Friends:” The Making of Seattle’s First Lady

Late 20th century migrant women found difficulties connecting with a black community. Unlike in previous decades where kinship networks and families helped ease the transition to the Pacific Northwest, these new, mostly single, professional women arrived in response to often affirmative action-inspired corporate recruitment or to specific white-collar employment opportunities. Ironically, because of the decline in residential segregation, many of them never lived in the Central Area and thus were often both spatially and psychologically isolated from the core of the black community. When Lisa Jones, recruited by Rainier Bank, moved to Seattle in 1980, she became the vice-president of the bank ten years later. Jones expressed, “In my job there was no [black] organization within the bank to network with. There was nothing for

²⁸ *Seattle Post-Intelligencier*, Oct. 13, 1987; Maryviolet C. Burns, “Seattle Urban League Head Talks Candidly About AIDS and the Black Community,” *The Seattle Medium*, Jan. 26, 1989.

²⁹ Nadia E. Brown, *Sisters in the Statehouse: Black Women and Legislative Decision-Making* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 3.

professional blacks, especially women.”³⁰

Even black women who were native to Seattle experienced similar isolation when they accepted managerial or administrative positions. A manager at the Boeing Company and a Seattleite, Linda Martin asserted, “I felt the absence of a place minority women could go and meet. There were unique issues dealing with women of color that weren’t being met.” This was particularly telling. By 1989, the company had employed fewer blacks, Hispanics, and women as professional and managers than any other U.S. aerospace industry in the nation.³¹

Some women found refuge in established, yet exclusive organizations such as the sororities, Jack and Jill, and the Links rather than in old civil rights and social service organizations such as the NCNW, the colored women’s clubs, and the East Cherry YWCA. They usually focused their energies on community social service activities through youth, education, and professional development/career services programs.

Despite their growth in numbers, professional black women encountered occasional overt and far more frequently subtle racial discrimination that limited upward social mobility. They were often times denied promotions on their jobs, paid higher interests rates on home and car loans, and encountered informal policies of residential discrimination by lending institutions and white real estate firms. Sociologist Larry Bobo has described this limitation of group advancement as “laissez faire racism.” Like their predecessors, black women challenged that discrimination, where they were often the only African Americans in their occupations, and offered mutual psychological, moral, and professional support.³²

³⁰ Susan Gilmore, “Group Helps Black Women in Careers-Social Organization Grew Quickly at Its Start, Now Has Many Roles,” *Seattle Times*, May 31, 1990, p. F2.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Larry Bobo, James R. Kluegel, and Ruan A. Smith, “Laissez Faire Racism: The Crystallization of a ‘Kinder, Gentler; Anti-Black Ideology,” in *Racial Attitudes in the 1990s: Continuity and Change*, edited by Steven A. Tuch and Jack K. Martin (Westport, CT.: Praeger), 1996; “Social and Economic Issues of the 1980s and 1990s,” Amistad Digital Resource. http://www.amistadresource.org/the_future_in_the_present/social_and_economic_issue

If the earlier organizations had been a conglomeration of women's clubs, then the new groups were often called women's networks. These networks attracted an array of professional women into one setting to address the gender and racial disparities within the workplace. In 1981, for instance, a group of educated women inspired by the work of the Seattle Section of the NCNW, held a meeting to form the Black Women's Network (BWN). The BWN focused on personal growth, employment, education, social services, and political awareness. Mary Madison, a manager at KING Broadcasting and one of the founders of BWN, stressed that "we're interested in some of the same things as other networks—to be a support system and provide reinforcement," but added, "we also felt a need to address additional kinds of stress that come with being black."³³

The Black Women's Network promoted the advancement of the black career women and black women's new status in society without having to choose between their gender and race. They exposed other black women to new opportunities and information traditionally held from them such as sponsoring seminars focused on comparable worth and securing non-traditional jobs. These workshops served to encourage women to participate in historically non-traditional forms of work and to eradicate myths that tended to be obstacles from pursuing such paths. In addition to seminars, the group hosted a black women's employment workshop centered on job skills, interviewing, and career decisions while addressing factors that affected women's ability to secure better jobs and higher salaries. BWN also focused on developing a communication system among black women to publicize community outreach programs since many of them lived in different neighborhoods throughout King County.³⁴

s.html.

³³ P.J. Radar, "Join Groups That Can Provide Information You Can Use," *Seattle Times*, Jun. 3, 1982, p. 4.

³⁴ "Black Women's Network Seminar Slated," *The Seattle Medium*, Mar. 25, 1981; "Black Women's Network To Host Job Workshop," *The Seattle Medium*, June 22, 1981.

Other professional networks emerged. In December of 1983, a group of women founded Catalyst III “to speak to the professional and economic needs of black women in the Pacific Northwest.” The Black Women’s Gathering formed to promote the professional development of Seattle’s African-American women. In 1983, Constance Rice and three other women established the largest network, 101 Black Women, after one woman complained of the difficulty to connect with black women in Seattle. When Rice sent over 600 letters, approximately 180 women showed up at the first meeting, birthing a new network, 101 Black Women.³⁵ Modeling after the concept of the exclusive group of 100 Black Women in Chicago and New York, Rice stated that “101 means we’re distinctive, but not snooty, and there’s always room for one more.” The organization became a vehicle for a diverse group of black women in the Puget Sound area whose mission was “to network and support the black community through dedication to excellence in career, community, and self.”³⁶

More than a social organization, 101 Black Women provided a space for women to develop friendships in Seattle, find job opportunities, give advice on how to navigate car dealerships, and plug newcomers into the city. Meeting on the second Thursdays of each month at the downtown Nordstrom’s, Rice invited speakers that presented on a range of topics such as tax reform, mixed-race relationships from the perspectives of men, public speaking, financial planning, computer trends, blacks in Corporate America, and art expression. The group also focused on young women’s mentorship and humanitarian and political causes. They sponsored

³⁵ Early co-founding members included Constance Rice, Janet White, Ida Hawkins, Lisa Jones, and Linda Martin. Margaret Spearman was recruited from the University of Washington School of Social Work.

³⁶ “Sorority Founder, Activist Used Gentle Persuasion to Counteract Prejudice,” *The Seattle Times*, June 5, 1984, p. F1; Constantine Angelos, “Honors and Inspiration – 5 African-American Women Cited,” *The Seattle Times*, Oct. 20, 1992, p. C3; Susan Gilmore, “Group Helps Black Women in Careers-Social Organization Grew Quickly At Its Start, Now Has Many Roles,” *Seattle Times*, May 31, 1990, p. F2; Susan Phinney, “Constance Rice’s Agenda Executive Power is Not New for Mayor’s Wife,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencier*, Jan. 19, 1990, p. C1; “101 Black Women,” *The Rose Newsletter*, Seattle, Washington, Vivian Phillips Private Collection.

programs on AIDS awareness and supported the United Negro College Fund, the Black Child Development Institute, the Central Area Senior Center, and the Seattle Urban League. *The Rose*, the official newsletter of 101 Black Women, connected and informed women on the latest happenings with the organization and with black women around the Puget Sound area.³⁷

Rice's community record and exemplary leadership in education and business placed her in the ideal position to unite women and develop their skill sets, talents, and influences. Arriving in Seattle in 1967 from Bedford-Stuyvesant, the predominately black section of Brooklyn, New York, Rice lived in the Central Area and immediately took an active role in community civic affairs. Her work as an administrative assistant in the National Urban League Office in New York provided the experience in working with community issues central to African Americans that carried over to Seattle. She first found employment at CAMP and helped edit the neighborhood's newsletter. In 1974, she became the first African American woman to obtain a doctorate in education administration at the University of Washington. With her expertise, she chaired the Ethnic Studies Division at Shoreline Community College and helped develop the Women Studies Department in the 1980s. By diversifying her skill set and knowledge, she also became one of the first local black entrepreneurs to own a successful public relations and management consulting firm (which included companies such as AT&T and the Seattle Art Museum) and manage multi-million dollar budgets for various organizations.³⁸

³⁷ Janice Hayes, "Social Struggle—For Black Women, Price of Success is Loneliness," *The Seattle Times*, May 13, 1989; "101 Black Women," *The Rose Newsletter*, Vivian Phillips Private Collection; "Meeting to Discuss Black Role Models," *The Seattle Times*, Aug. 7, 1990, p. E3. The organization could not and did not become a dating service to help those black women looking for partners. Black professional women, for the most part, also felt alone and isolated in their personal lives where they felt torn between professional advancement and personal fulfillment. Seattle provided economic opportunities but fewer dating prospects due to increasing number of black women in white-collar jobs compared to black men. Also, the high unemployment rate among black men and the disproportionate number of men in prison compounded the shortage of upwardly, mobile black men.

³⁸ Phinney, "Constance Rice's Agenda Executive Power," *Seattle Post-Intelligencier*, Jan. 19, 1990; Constance Rice, Interview by author. Seattle, Washington, Apr. 27, 2016. Rice later became the first African American woman to join the downtown Rotary Club and had been

Politically, Rice was a well-known civic leader and had become connected to the city and state's Democratic circles. In 1983, she served as co-chairwoman of Congressman Mike Lowry's first unsuccessful Senate campaign and spoke at the Northwest Conference of Black Public Officials. She retained special bonds with a veteran generation of black women strategists and political activists who served as her mentors. "Our political foremothers were Vivian Caver, Barbara Poole...Freddie Mae Gautier, and Lila Joyner. These are the women that took me under their wing," she expressed. Although a young member of the Benefit Guild (founded by Gautier) and closely associated with Women in Unity, Rice formed personal and professional relationships with these women whom she described as political bosses, asserting that candidates "had to kiss their rings in order to get the endorsement." This was especially true of Gautier, who ran unsuccessfully for the 37th district legislative position in 1964. As a masterful community organizer and fundraiser, Gautier was noted as a "shrewd and astute political adviser" and "one of the most sought-after endorser for political candidates" in Washington State over the last three decades. In fact, Rice credited Gautier for "tactfully bestow[ing] upon me the secrets of working well with folks in Seattle."³⁹

Rice's skills as a businesswoman, education administrator, and speaker coupled with her ability to galvanize black women across the Puget Sound, regardless of socioeconomic status, proved indispensable in her husband's 1989 bid for mayor. Serving as co-campaign manager of Seattle Councilman Norm Rice's campaign, Constance was also president of one of the most exclusive African American women's organizations in the city, the Seattle Chapter of the Links,

a manager of the communications division at Metro for five years. She served on numerous boards including the Fred Hutchinson Foundation Board and was a charter member of the City Club.

³⁹ Rebecca Boren, "Rice Backs Lowry For Governor – Candidate Addresses Democratic Concerns at Annual Fund-Raiser," *The Seattle Post-Intelligencier*, Jul. 27, 1992, p. B1; "Black Public Officials Hold Super Conference in Portland," *The Seattle Medium*, 1983; "Freddie Mae Gautier," *Obituary*, Accessed Feb. 6, 2018. <http://www.washelli.com/obituary/160477/Freddie-Gautier/>; Constance Rice interview, Apr. 27, 2016.

Inc. The Links became greatly involved in the mayoral election and strategically campaigned for Norm Rice as individuals rather than as an organization in order to protect their 503-non-profit status. According to Rice, individual members “had their rolodex [and] they had the contacts. They were women who were with their own prestige.” Many members organized coffee hours and teas and donated money to the campaign. Since the Office of Mayor was a citywide election, members broadened their reach outside of the Central Area and into neighborhoods where they lived. They used their influence and spatial location to sway neighbors and co-workers.⁴⁰

101 Black Women also assisted with campaign efforts. Vice president Vivian Phillips-Scott remembered that the group licked envelopes and answered the phones. In one instance during the campaign, she recalled “walking into a back room and finding it filled with 101 members.” “It really hit me how powerful that group of women is,” she noted. On November 7, 1989, Seattle elected Norm Rice as the city’s first black mayor, winning a citywide election with the majority of white votes. One political scientist concluded that Rice’s success demonstrated that “African American candidates can win an election in a city where whites are an overwhelming majority of the registered voters.” This is significant in that anecdotal evidence, including Constance Rice’s role as a campaign adviser, suggests that the political activity of African American women contributed to the election of Seattle’s first black mayor. Constance Rice acknowledged, “Their influence really helped propel my husband to become mayor.”⁴¹

Rice’s new position as first lady-elect also propelled her into the 1990s as arguably the most influential and politically powerful black woman in the city, if not the state. Norm Rice’s historic victory made the couple a namesake in the city. He appointed black and Asian women

⁴⁰ Rice interview, Apr. 27, 2016.

⁴¹ Gilmore, “Group Helps Black Women,” *The Seattle Times*, May 31, 1990; *The Seattle Post-Intelligencier*, Jan. 19, 1990; Mylon Winn, “The Election of Norman Rice as Mayor,” *Political Science and Politics* (June 1990), 58-159; Rice interview, Apr. 27, 2016.

to serve on his staff and cabinet. For example, in 1991, he appointed Germaine Covington as Deputy Chief of Staff for Housing and Human Services. Pointing to her years of city government experiences, he stated, “She will be a key member of my policy team working on some of the highest priority issues of my administration.” Rice also appointed Frances Carr, a Link member, as executive assistant to the mayor.⁴²

After Rice was sworn in, African American women consisted of 0.5 percent of the state population and nearly 5 percent of the city’s population. No black woman at the time served in key policy making positions on the state or local level until a few months later when Tacoma voters elected Rosa Franklin as a state representative and Seattle residents chose Sherry Harris as Seattle councilwoman. Rice closed down her business, C.W.R. Communications, that she had operated since 1983 to prevent any conflict of interests and refocus her energies. In her new public role as first lady, she envisioned herself as a “civic volunteer.”⁴³

In an attempt to not overshadow her husband, she concentrated on issues around hunger in the city and established the Health and Nutrition Project. Gaining access into the elementary schools through her political connections, the program served dinners for students and their families under the guise of health and nutrition. She raised money and hired Fare Start, a newly established social service catering enterprise committed to addressing poverty, homelessness, and hunger, that delivered hot meals to the schools. The program coordinators conducted workshops in conjunction with Washington State University on nutrition and money

⁴² Immediate Press Release, “Mayor Rice Appoints Germaine Covington Deputy Chief of Staff,” Jul. 12, 1991, Box 65, Folder 3, Series 3600-02 contained in African American Young Women Brain Trust, Seattle, Washington, Seattle Municipal Archives.

⁴³ U.S. Census of the Bureau, *General Characteristics of Black Persons*, 1990. Census of Population and Housing, Characteristics of for Census Tracts and Numbering Blocks, Seattle-Tacoma, WA, Sec. 1. Table 3 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1993), 125; “Population of Seattle, WA,” Population.us. Accessed Apr. 5, 2018, <http://population.us/wa/seattle/>; Marla Williams, “Constance Pursues Her Own Agenda – Reaching for Possibilities,” *The Seattle Times*, Jul. 12, 1992, p. 8.

management. Parents and students gained insights into reading strategies, shopping at Costco for five dollars, and anger management. The program lasted for a decade and served nearly 1,300 African immigrant, African American, and Latin American students at T.T. Minor, B.F. Day, High Point, and Baily Gazert. According to the *Seattle Times*, the project was hailed as “a model for the nation by ranking Bush administration officials.”⁴⁴

Apart from nutrition and health advocacy, Rice radically used her platform to foster the next generation of black women’s leadership – complicating her public supportive role as just a civic volunteer. Only two decades before, the vast majority of black women’s leaders emanated from grassroots social and anti-poverty activism. In the 1990s, however, historian Jeffery Zane contended that “the community’s symbolic activism had failed to ignite a new generation of leaders.” Although grassroots activism in the Central Area had not produced a bastion of black leaders as it had done in the past, the assertion ignores the professional black women who did not live in the neighborhood but felt symbolically connected to it. These women forged ties to the Central Area through a shared sense of history and culture, church memberships, and community events and were involved enough to be significant stakeholders. Their connections to the local or imagined larger black community also came, to a certain extent, through their employment at large corporations, nonprofit agencies, government, and service on civic and national boards such as the YWCA, Urban League, and Langston Hughes Cultural Arts Center. These institutions provided donations, funds, volunteer efforts, and publicity for civic activism.⁴⁵

Therefore, the involvement of non-Central Area, middle-class residents demonstrated

⁴⁴ Rice interview, Apr. 27, 2016; *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, Jan. 19, 1990, p. C1; Marla Williams, “Constance Pursues Her Own Agenda,” *The Seattle Times*, Jul. 12, 1992, p. 8.

⁴⁵ Zane, 303; Eric. S. Brown, “The Black Professional Middle Class and the Black Community: Racialized Class Formation in Oakland and the East Bay,” in *African American Urban History Since World War II*, edited by Kenneth L. Kusmer and Joe W. Trotter (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 296-297.

their support of African Americans living in that area. For instance, after having successfully bought, sold, and managed hundreds of millions of dollars of securities throughout the 1980s, Mary E. Pugh, at age 29, became the youngest person to be named senior vice president at Washington Mutual Savings Bank, which would eventually be the largest savings and loans association in the nation. In 1991, Pugh stepped down from her position and founded her own institutional investment firm, Pugh Capital Management, where she invented a mock investment game to help black students learn how to manage portfolios. She used her business acumen and experience to promote financial literacy in the black community.⁴⁶

Professional women also strove to create more diverse and inclusive environments at their companies while providing access and resources to community youth. Trish Dziko, a wealthy hardware program manager in 1988, became a founding member of Blacks at Microsoft (BAM), a resource group that addressed the interests of those that self-identified as black, West Indian, or African American in the company. Carissa M. Smith, also joined BAM as a project manager at the company and worked to expose young black students to technology and computers at Garfield High School. The tech group held “Minority Day” once a year that brought children from the Central Area to Microsoft, gave them a tour, and introduced them to technology. As the Senior Diversity Administrator at Microsoft, Dziko noticed the small number of employees of color and women within the tech industry. “Microsoft was trying to hire people,” Dziko acknowledged, “but they weren’t able to get the diversity because we as a society

⁴⁶ Richard Buck, “Investment Manager’s Views Are Worth A Listen,” *Seattle Times*. Feb. 27, 1995; Buck, “Secret of My Success-From the Fast Track to Her Own Track,” *Seattle Times*, May 13, 1991. A native of Seattle, when Pugh arrived there eight years prior as a 21-year old investment analyst, Pugh reported, “Washington Mutual was very much in crisis mode with interest rates requiring the bank to pay twice as much interest on deposits as it was earning on its long-term mortgages.” Washington Mutual became her first client where she managed five million dollars of assets for their employee-pension fund. In 1995, Pugh managed \$75 million for ten clients that now included along with Washington Mutual, the University of Washington, the Young Women’s Christian Association (YMCA), and the *Seattle Times*. She was also a member of the Links, Inc.

were not preparing our students of color nor our young girls.” Because of the lack of African Americans and women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) fields, she retired from Microsoft in 1996 and co-founded the Technology Access Foundation (TAF), a local organization geared toward providing technology training to students of color. Dziko also encouraged other Microsoft alumni to impart their knowledge to the black community to ensure the future generation will “take care of their own community and be good leaders.”⁴⁷

In 1994 when Starbucks Coffee Company hired Sharon Elliott, a former corporate executive at Allied Signal, to serve as its Senior Vice President of Human Resources, only eight white men and two white women had served on the senior management team at the company. Elliott, in turn, recruited Wanda Herndon, a Detroit native and former public relations manager at DuPont and Dow Chemical, to become the new Vice President of Communications and Public Affairs in 1995. The following year, the company promoted Herndon to Senior Vice President of the company’s global communications division. She persuaded company CEO Howard Schultz to add “inclusion and diversity” to the company’s five core values. Both Herndon and Elliott encouraged a broader definition of diversity beyond race and gender by considering age, learning styles, and capabilities in its hiring process and consumer base.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Videorecording of Trish Millines Dziko. Microsoft Alumni Foundation Integral Fellow Finalist, 2009. Accessed Mar. 1, 2016, <https://www.microsoftalumni.com/s/1769/index.aspx?pgid=493&gid=2> John; John Iwasaki, “Minorities Urged to Count Math as An Option,” *The Seattle Post-Intelligencier*, Jan. 16, 1995, p. A1; Trish Millines-Dziko. Interview by Jessah Foulk, Aug. 8, 2002, [transcript], Museum of History & Industry, Seattle, WA, p. 30. Accessed Mar. 1, 2016. <http://digitalcollections.lib.washington.edu/cdm/ref/collection/imls/mohai/id/8444>. Even though women’s employment statuses and visibility in the city had increased substantially, white males still earned the highest median pay, about a tenth higher than that of minorities and women. Towards the end of the century, a slew of discrimination lawsuits were filed with Boeing, Microsoft, and Starbucks on the discrimination of African Americans and women. Plaintiffs reported a pattern of paying smaller salaries, bonuses and stock options to black and female workers than to white males doing the same work. In one case, a plaintiff alleged that Microsoft promoted white men rather than better-qualified blacks and women. The only named plaintiff in the suit was Monique Donaldson, a black Washington resident who worked for Microsoft in an unspecified capacity between 1992 and 1996.

⁴⁸ Howard Schultz and Dori Jones Yang, *Pour Your Heart Into It: How Starbucks Built A Company One Cup At A Time* (New York: Hachette Books, 1997), 283-285; Patti Payne, “Executive Wanda Herndon Crafted Starbucks’ Message,” *Puget Sound Business Journal*, Mar. 12, 2006. Accessed Feb. 27, 2017, <https://www.bizjournals.com/>

During this moment of unprecedented advancement, Constance Rice worked to capitalize on the expanding professional class of women leaders to apply their networks, skills, resources, and leadership for social change in the workplace, schools, boards, foundations, and in political office. In 1992, she established the African American Young Women Brain Trust (AAYWB). Targeting and mentoring a small group of professional women under the age of 35, she hoped to increase the number of black women serving on boards of foundations, in management positions, and running for political office. Sociologist Eric S. Brown contends that it is improbable for black middle-class professionals to “maintain political and cross-generational relevance to the black community unless they work to promote strategies to reproduce black access to important mainstream opportunity structures, including higher education, political office holding, and professional and managerial jobs.” Particularly for Seattle’s black professional middle-class women, they sought ways to advance women’s interests and promote policies that would support mobility and solidarity for poor blacks with middle-class aspirations.⁴⁹

The newly formed political group consisted of fifteen well-established black women in the fields of business, education, and media. Such members included Mary E. Pugh, founder of Pugh Capital Management; Shelia Edwards, Executive Assistant to the President of Western Washington University; Carissa M. Smith, project manager at Microsoft; and Linda A. Holliday, U.S. West Manager to name a few.⁵⁰ These women were already involved in community and civic-based organizations and identified themselves as black leaders with a focus on acquiring

seattle/stories/2006/03/13/newscolumn2.html. Both Elliott and Herndon were the first black women work at Starbucks in senior level management board. Herndon was one of few corporate executives who oversaw the company growth from 12,000 employees in approximately 500 stores in North America in 1995 to over 100,000 employees and over 11,000 stores in 37 countries in 2006 when she retired. She was also a member of the Links.

⁴⁹ *The Seattle Times*, Jul. 12, 1992; Brown, “The Black Professional Middle Class,” 288.

⁵⁰ Members included Debra M. Bird, H. Randi DeWitty, Sheila Edwards (Executive Assistant to the President of Western Washington University), Carmen W. Gayton, Sonja J. Griffin, Linda A. Holliday, Danielle Johnson, Theresa Hazzard, Gayle A. Johnson, Venerria L. Knox, Mary E. Pugh, Kimberly Reason, Carissa M. Smith, Kikora Dorsey, and Michelle Terry (doctor).

political access and social services to African American women and children. They also shared similar concerns with networking, increasing African American's mobility in management positions, mentorship for young girls to help decrease teenage pregnancy, and, more importantly, developing a political agenda for African American women.⁵¹

Through monthly coordinated meetings at her home, Rice recruited speakers to prepare the women for leadership roles in the city and on corporate boards. For example, invited guest Gary D. Gayton, former Assistant U.S. Attorney and member of President-elect Bill Clinton's transition team, spoke to women about fundraising and campaigning. When May's List, a bipartisan organization dedicated to electing women leaders for political office, found difficulty recruiting women of color for the current election cycle, the AAYWB moved forward to identify African American women who might be interested in running for office. Shelia Edwards served on the board of May's List and became a liaison between the two groups. Mary Pugh, Vivian Caver, Devora Butler, Lou Rochelle Brim-Donahue, Germaine Covington, and Judith Hightower, Seattle Municipal Court Judge, all expressed interest. Although the AAYWB was relatively short-lived, lasting for three years, it provided the support, network, encouragement, and resources for black women who would later run for public office and become board members, college administrators, judges, and businesswomen.⁵²

The First Lady of Seattle envisioned innovative ways to influence the political structure through black women's empowerment. But her vision of leadership extended beyond the boundaries of the city to women's global leadership. In 1994, she visited Japan at the behest of

⁵¹ These women's profiles are contained in African American Young Women Brain Trust Files, Box 65, Folder 3, Series 3600-02, Seattle, Washington, Seattle Municipal Archives.

⁵² "May's List Pamphlet," "Summary of Gary Gayton Presentation, Jan. 30, 1993," "Summary of Meeting," Oct. 10, 1992 contained in African American Women Brain Trust Files, Box 63, Folder 3, Seattle Municipal Archives.

her husband as part of the country's "opinion leader." As the first foreign woman to address the Japanese Keidranen, an economic business federation, Rice immediately recognized the absence of women and met with four friends in Seattle to discuss an international conference on women's global leadership. The group narrowly defined women's leadership as: "recognizing that people are the most important factor in any issue; championing the win-win model of living; emphasizing individual rights and responsibility to one's community are equally important; investing in the next generation by using a long-range perspective; [and] valuing the relationship of mind, body, and spirit." Serving as conference chairwoman, Rice linked the conference with the fourth United Nations Conference on Women in order to "enhance Seattle's reputation as a 'Geneva of the world' and 'a focal place for international dialogue.'" She noted, "If we really want to eliminate the barrier of color, we have to spread our hands and reach to all women. Bring them into the circle." In 1999, Rice became the National Founding Executive Director of the Desmond Tutu Peace Foundation.⁵³

Throughout the decade, both local and national leaders recognized Rice's public service initiatives and contributions to Washington State. In 1993, the Seattle-King County Association of Realtors awarded her the First Citizen Award. As a close associate of both President Bill and Hillary Rodham Clinton, they congratulated Rice on the honor, stating, "I commend you on the work to improve the lives of women and children in Washington State." Governor Mike Lowry, whom the Rices endorsed a year earlier for governor, added his laudatory remarks for "the wonderful things Dr. Rice has done." Many times, Rice had been coaxed to run for the U.S. Senate and was promised support, but she never ran for a public office due to the 'abuse' experienced by her husband during his tenure as mayor. Nevertheless, her visibility and

⁵³ Carey Gelernter, "Taking the Lead – From A Sailing Trip Came the Impetus for A Forum Where Women Share Ideas for Empowerment," *The Seattle Times*, Jan. 31, 1995, p. E1.

coalitional building among many different racial and political groups enabled her to assert power and agency in the Pacific Northwest region.⁵⁴

Shifting the Political Paradigm or Defining the Political Landscape: Black Women Political Outsiders

When Constance Rice became the first lady of Seattle in 1990, a fundamental shift was occurring in black politics in the Pacific Northwest and came in unexpected forms. African Americans ran for elective office and gained more public services positions across the region than ever before. This included an increasing number of black women who found their niche in politics. Debra Wilson Mobley, a Seattle City Council clerk, ran for the 43rd Legislative District City Council seat, proclaiming, “I patterned my life to pursue a career in the field of government.” In 1993, De Charlene Williams, a long-time community activist and beautician, ventured to challenge Mayor Norm Rice, becoming possibly the first African American woman to run for mayor. Williams had founded the Central Area Chamber of Commerce in 1983 with the assistance of Mayor Charles Royer and was an outspoken critic of Rice’s leadership on crime and city spending.⁵⁵ Vivian Caver, a veteran civil rights leader and former director of the Seattle Human Rights Commission, was appointed as the 37th District State Representative after Representative Gary Locke’s was elected King County Executive in 1993. Caver became the third African American women to serve in the state legislature and ran unsuccessfully for the position a year later.⁵⁶ Dawn Mason, an education activist, unsuccessfully challenged a

⁵⁴ Rice interview, Apr. 27, 2016; Gil Bailey, “Constance Rice Honored As ‘King County First Citizen,’” *The Seattle Post-Intelligencier*, May 13, 1993, p. B2; *The Seattle Times*, July 12, 1992. Rice has served on numerous boards such as U.S. West Corporation and Evergreen State College.

⁵⁵ DeCharlene Williams was also a graduate of the Mary Edwards Beauty School and opened her own salon and boutique in 1968. In 1987, she trademarked Juneteenth in Washington State and put on celebrations every year. The trademark of a holiday became very controversial in the late 1990s when other groups tried to put on celebrations but could not without her permission. After 1997, the trademark was never renewed. In 1997, she ran unsuccessfully for the city council.

⁵⁶ Caver ran for the seat in 1994 and was defeated.

Democratic incumbent of 52 years for a seat in the state legislature in 1992. Tacoma native Rosa Franklin won a seat in the Washington State Senate, becoming the first black woman to do so. By 1997, three black women from Portland, Margaret Carter and JoAnn Bowman, served in the Oregon State Legislature, while Avel Gordly served in the State Senate.⁵⁷

The regional political pursuits among black women followed a national trend in politics. In fact, political observers considered the 1992 election cycle as the “Year of the Woman.” Thousands of women ran for public office on the local, state, and federal level for the first time in United States history. A new cohort of black women entered Congress, including Eddie Bernice Johnson of Texas; Cynthia McKinney of Georgia; Corrine Brown of Florida; and Eva Clayton of North Carolina. The most significant victory was that of Illinois’s Carol Moseley-Braun who became the first African American woman to serve in the U.S. Senate and the first African American elected to the Senate in nearly two decades. In the same year, black women demonstrated their voting power by providing Bill Clinton 86 percent of their vote compared to 44 percent of white women and 77 percent of black male voters. Women’s claims to public visibility and representation would shape the rest of the decade.⁵⁸

In Seattle, there existed a new politics in town where the region’s many newcomers had eroded old alliances. Many black male leaders acknowledged that the Central Area lacked a centralized black leadership in the city where no one could claim to be the definitive leader. This became most evident when a 35-year old engineer, Sherry Harris, directly challenged longtime

⁵⁷ Elizabeth J. Mann, “Candidates in 43rd District Long on Diversity – Seven Running in Traditionally Democratic Area,” *The Seattle Times*, Aug. 21, 1990, p. C3; Daryl Strickland, “Civic Activist Chosen for House Seat – Nominee to Serve Gary Locke’s Term,” *The Seattle Times*, Dec. 28, 1993, p. B1; Linda Lawson, “Butler Jumps Into Politics at Young Age,” *The Seattle Skanner*, Mar. 18, 1992; Nathaniel Scott, “Black Women Making Political Gains in the Pacific Northwest,” *Michigan Citizen*, Apr. 5, 1997.

⁵⁸ Manning Marable, *Black Liberation in Conservative America* (Boston: South End Press, 1997), p. 58; Luchina Fisher, “Black Women Play Decisive Role,” *Alternet*, Apr. 5, 2004. Accessed Apr. 3, 2018, https://www.alternet.org/story/18317/black_women_play_decisive_role.

incumbent Sam Smith who was elected to the Seattle city council some 24 years earlier. Born in Newark, New Jersey, Harris came to Seattle in 1978 as an engineering recruit for Boeing and later worked for the Pacific Northwest Bell Telephone Company (US West). She lived in the North End community of Maple Leaf and had been active during the 1980s, serving on numerous city boards, commissions, and community councils. She also served as a former president of the Seattle Women's Commission. The newcomer's first foray into public politics in the city, however, came when she applied for the city council seat vacated by Mayor Norm Rice in 1989 but did not receive the council's votes for the appointment.⁵⁹

In one of the most hotly contested political battles of the decade, Harris's profession as an engineer, her activism in Maple Leaf, and her sexual orientation clouded her candidacy when African Americans, especially those living in the Central Area and Rainier Valley, questioned her ability to serve their interests.⁶⁰ In other words, she caused concern by running as an outside neighborhood activist and as an openly gay candidate. In the past, enthusiastic black candidates, either out of respect or for political expediency, dared not to run against Sam Smith. In an attempt to mock his opponent, Smith remarked, "We've got an expert engineer. Good, we'll put her in charge of fixin' the streets...I'm the expert in legislation." His comments hinted at Harris's political and legislative inexperience and, according to political observers, she "lacked the broad political base considered essential to take on an incumbent."⁶¹

⁵⁹ Steven Goldsmith, "Black Politics Take a New Turn in Seattle—Traditional Paths to Power Being Ignored," *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, Nov. 6, 1995, p. A1; Angelo Bruscas, "Crowd is Vying for Rice's Seat on City Council," *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, Dec. 13, 1989, p. C1. Out of 26 applicants, four were black women: Sherry Harris, Barbara Laners, Phyllis Beaumonte, a teacher and member of the Municipal League's 1989 evaluation committee, and Linda Holliday, a US West communication technician and Municipal League member. Holliday would also join the African American Young Women Brain Trust group.

⁶⁰ The campaign was financed in part by Victory Funds, an organization dedicated to electing openly gay and lesbian candidates for public office. Harris received endorsements by both the *Seattle Times* and *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*.

⁶¹ Mike Merrit, "Smith Returns for Council Race Homestretch," *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, Nov. 1, 1991, p. E1; Robert T. Nelson, "Last Hurrah? Play it Again, Sam," *The Seattle Times*, Aug. 30, 1991, p. C1; Scott Maier,

To Harris's favor, Smith suffered many setbacks that allowed her to capitalize on an aging leadership. At 69, health issues restricted Smith from campaigning at rallies and raising campaign donations. He made public appearances and speeches, often times, from his wheelchair, thus concerning his base and political supporters. This became most apparent when the King County Labor Council and the 43rd District Democrats did not endorse his re-election. The most looming detriment to his campaign occurred when his wife Marion died on Aug. 1, 1991, just a month before the primaries. Marion, who ran for office in 1970, served as his chief adviser and campaign organizer since his first venture into politics in 1958. She also scheduled his appearances. The death of his wife of 46 years took a toll on Smith and his political career. His grief reportedly triggered a diabetic shock that hospitalized him for days on the campaign trail. He acknowledged, "I've always thrown my body into raising money and campaigning, sending surrogates to fill in his place. Despite his failing health and unstructured campaign, the black clergy and most of the city's and state's black officeholders threw their support behind him."⁶²

During the primary election, the results were clear. Harris captured 45 percent of the vote to Smith's 38 percent in a four-way race. Even more surprising for Smith's campaign was that he polled an average of 47 percent of the vote in 10 precincts with predominantly black voter population while Harris polled 40 percent in those same areas.⁶³

"Smith Ready for Fight – 'I Can Go Only One Way-Upward,' Says Council Incumbent," *The Seattle Post-Intelligencier*, Sept. 19, 1991, p. A1.

⁶² Nelson, "Last Hurrah?" *The Seattle Times*, Aug. 30, 1991; Neil Modie, "Soul Not In Campaign," *The Seattle Post-Intelligencier*, Aug. 28, 1991, p. B1; Mike Merritt, "Harris Receives Labor Council Endorsement – Move Deals Blow to Smith in City Council Race," *The Seattle Post-Intelligencier*, Oct. 3, 1991, p. B1. Such leaders include Rev. Dr. Samuel Berry McKinney, King County Councilman Ron Sims, state representative Jesse Wineberry, and city Comptroller Norward Brooks.

⁶³ Maier, "Smith Ready for Fight," *The Seattle Post-Intelligencier*, Sept. 19, 1991; Neil Modie, "Rice Neutral in Smith-Harris Race – Stance Seen as Outgrowth of Gay Issue," *The Seattle Post-Intelligencier*, Oct. 2, 1991, p. B1.

Despite her political inexperience, Harris proved to be a formidable campaigner and fundraiser, raising over \$40,000 for the primary election compared to Smith's \$27,000. By hiring Cathy Allen, she also ran a well-managed campaign focusing on transportation, economic development, and public safety. An enthusiast of transportation and land use, she vowed to expand the use of Metro mini-buses, design joint programs between Seattle public schools and the city library system, and conserve water by replacing the city's shrubbery with more water-efficient native plants. Though a Democrat, Smith ran on fiscally conservative policies with a long history of opposing tax increases and utility-rate increases. He was also a proponent of a strong police force. While he rested on his laurels of the past, Harris ran a campaign on how she represented the future. "I hope to bring new ideas, new energy and fresh perspective to that position," she stated. Rather than attacking him out right, she painted the incumbent as ineffective and lacking energy.⁶⁴

The general election campaign gained more momentum as black leaders and the downtown business community came to the aid and rescue of Smith's flailing re-election campaign. Shocked by Harris's large margin victory, they sought to increase fundraising and organizational support, usually a position done by his late wife Marion. Ideological problems, however, compounded the campaign as the issue of homosexuality became a salient factor in the race. A year before, Smith opposed a domestic-partner benefits measure, which passed by the council, approving funds for health benefits for partners of unmarried city employees. He cited his Christian beliefs and the "idea of the sanctity of marriage" for his opposition which ultimately alienated the gay community.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ *The Seattle Post-Intelligencier*, Sept. 19, 1981; *Ibid*, Aug. 28, 1991, p. B1; Neil Modie, "Smith Absent Once Again as His Supporters Quietly Fade Away," *The Seattle Post-Intelligencier*, Nov. 6, 1991, p. A10.

⁶⁵ Neil Modie, "Support Pours in For Smith After Poor Primary Showing," *The Seattle Post-Intelligencier*, Sept. 24, 1991, p. B1; Robert T. Nelson, "Backers Regroup for Sam Smith's Uphill Campaign," *The Seattle Times*, p. B2;

Smith's re-election against a gay politician agitated fresh wounds that severed any remaining ties with the gay community. For instance, when the Municipal League rated Smith as an "adequate" candidate, he became irate, blaming the gay community for the low rating and alleging they had conspired against him. Many gay activists hastily refuted the attacks including Harris, stating, "There is not an organized effort by the gay community to get him off the council...I do believe the Municipal League rating reflects Sam Smith is out of touch with the community at large, and that it's time for him to let go." Smith's conservative, traditional views on homosexuality and his accusations were viewed by many as homophobic and anti-gay, further unraveling his re-election campaign. His public feud against the gay community created difficulty for long-time friends and elected black political supporters to endorse his campaign including Mayor Norm Rice who, for the first time, remained neutral. The final blow came when King County Labor Council voted to endorse Harris.⁶⁶

After months of an intense election cycle, on November 5, 1991, Harris became the first black woman on the City Council and part of the first majority female city council in the city's history. The election signified more than a "transition from a traditional black politician, conservative on 'moral' issues and backed by most of the black community's traditional leadership, to a black woman who becomes the first acknowledged lesbian to hold elective office" anywhere in the nation, but the changing of the old guard to a new, younger black leadership. Some political observers attributed Harris's surprising victory to the response of women throughout the nation to the treatment of Anita Hill by the U.S. Senate during the Hill-Clarence Thomas controversy. Others saw Smith's failing health and the assistance she received

Debera Carlton Harrell, "'Adequate' Rating Angers Sam Smith," *The Seattle Post-Intelligencier*, Aug. 31, 1991, p. B1.

⁶⁶ Harrell, 'Adequate' Rating Angers Sam Smith," *The Seattle Post-Intelligencier*, Aug. 31, 1991.

from his political foes as the key to her election. Representative Cal Anderson, the first gay legislator in Washington state, attributed the loss to Smith's anti-gay attitudes.⁶⁷

Black sexual politics had long been a taboo in many respectable circles and remained so during the peak of the AIDS crisis in the 1990s. Harris's win generated resentment and eventually resistance from Seattle's black male political establishment. Seattle School Board President Michael Preston, who later ran unsuccessfully for the City Council in 2001, remarked:

The traditional black leadership views this as a loss...Her primary identification is in the North End, as a lesbian and a member of Vision Seattle. I don't see that as being something most African Americans will identify with.⁶⁸

Preston's disavowal of Harris as a legitimate voice for black Seattleites was rooted in many blacks' uneasiness with homosexuality, the growing gay rights movement in the city, and the fear of HIV/AIDS. Her multiple identities did not fit the paradigm of politics that they had been accustomed to and certainly did not make them feel she could represent their interests only. In her victory speech, she proclaimed, "A torch is being passed to a new generation of black leadership that considers its seniors as important as its juniors, where women are as important as men, where sexual orientation is not a barrier, and where all people are given an opportunity to serve." Whatever the concerns, Harris unseated "one of the most dominant political figures in Seattle's history" and changed the face of an aging leadership that had "no plans of retiring."⁶⁹

During her four-year term on the council, Harris's political positions were not without controversy as she faced overwhelming expectations to represent the interests of gays, blacks, and women. In 1992, when the city council planned to renew the controversial Drug Traffic

⁶⁷ Modie, "Smith Absent Once Again," *Seattle Times*, Nov. 6, 1991; Mark Matassa, "A Statewide Revolution? Women See '92 As Ripe for Plunge into Politics," *Seattle Times*, Nov. 25, 1991; *The Seattle Times*, Aug. 30, 1991. In 1993, Anita Hill, an African American woman and law professor at the University of Oklahoma, accused Clarence Thomas of sexual harassment that resulted in a nationwide debate.

⁶⁸ Robert T. Nelson, "Changing of The Guard - Smith-Harris Race Was More Than Just A Battle Over Votes," *The Seattle Times*, Nov. 13, 1991. p. A1

⁶⁹ *Ibid*; *The Seattle Times*, Nov. 6, 1991.

Loitering Ordinance that allowed police officers to arrest citizens for stopping or engaging passersby in conversation, she cast the swing vote against the wishes of the city's African American activists. Critics of the law Arnette Holloway, president of the Central Area Neighborhood District, and Lacy Steele, president of the NAACP, argued that the ordinance gave "police a tool to harass African Americans unfairly," especially given that more people of color had been targeted and arrested since its passage. Harris voted in support of the bill with the condition that her amendments be added such as creating a 13-member task force; mandating law enforcement reports submitted to the council detailing the arrests and demographics; forming a police-community reconciliation forum to improve communication; and requiring specialized training before the officer can enforce the Drug Traffic Loitering Ordinance. In addition, she pushed for council members to become a part of a joint selection process with Mayor Norm Rice to hire the next police chief after Police Chief Patrick Fitzsimons had been criticized for the mistreatment of minorities by police, the responsiveness to minority communities, and the lack of leadership in combating Asian American gangs.⁷⁰

In 1992, Harris won some praise by community members when she cast the lone vote against the mayor's controversial Weed and Seed program, a federal grant proposed by the Bush administration to reduce violent crime, drug abuse, and gang activity. It attempted to insert more police officers and social workers and then renew the neighborhood through economic and social revitalization. At a town hall meeting, a group of angry Central District residents blasted the mayor and city council members who endorsed police powers to target black children and

⁷⁰ Mi Young Pae, "Council Has Votes to Renew Drug Loitering Law-Harris To Seek Citizen-Task-Force, Amendments to Clarify Ambiguities," *The Seattle Times*, Aug. 15, 1992, p. A1; Dick Lilly, "Loitering Law to Hang Around-Harris Casts Swing Vote on Council," *The Seattle Times*, Aug. 18, 1992, B1; Constantine Angelos, "Harris Urges City Council to Push for Joint Process to Select New Police Chief," *The Seattle Times*, Jul. 19, 1993, p. B3.

heavily surveillance the Central Area. Led by Mothers Against Police Harassment president Harriet Walden, who was also the chairwoman of the Puget Sound Coalition for Police Accountability, the women called the plan “unacceptable and hurtful to the Black community.” Other members expressed the serious problem with police brutality and mistreatment of black youth. Walden believed the Weed and Seed plan aided in the process of gentrification by claiming that the \$1 million in federal funds would drive the gang and drug activity further south. Listening to the input of concerned community members, Harris wanted to demonstrate symbolically that she cared about the community’s concerns of over-policing.⁷¹

But this was not enough to satisfy her main supporters. In December of 1993, city council members proposed to introduce a program called the domestic partnership registration that would grant legal recognition to unmarried couples, including gay partners. Although supported by Mayor Rice and the city council, the legislation stalled due to deep divisions among the city’s gay community leaders over political strategy. Supporters saw it as a great civil rights achievement that should be voted on immediately, while others believed the bill to be a symbolic gesture and should focus their energies on passage of a gay rights bill in the legislature. Harris, the only openly gay member, suggested a compromise plan of action to wait after July 8, 1994 at the end of the legislative session. The wait would make it too late for opponents to place a local anti-gay initiative on the ballot. Her decision fueled activists on both sides. After the provision went into effect a year later, Harris and her partner, Judith Scalise, surprisingly refused to take advantage of the measure allowed unmarried gay couples official, if not symbolic, recognition of

⁷¹ David Bash, “Operation Weed and Seed: Controversial Justice Dept. Plan Sparks Community Outrage,” *The Seattle Medium*, Mar. 25, 1992; Mike Merritt, “Squabble Over Police Task Force,” *The Seattle Times*, Jan. 11, 1993, p. B1; Paulette Payne, “Sherry Harris: She Will Step Up for Equity,” *Sistah 2 Sistah* (March 1995), Series 4633-02, Item 14/6, Sherry Harris Subject Files, 1973-1995, Seattle, Washington, Seattle Municipal Archives; Steven Goldsmith And Mark Higgins, “Public Safety at Issue in Race – Manning Takes on Harris for City Council,” *The Seattle Post-Intelligencier*, Oct. 13, 1995, p. B1.

their union. “After 14 years in a relationship, acquiring a certificate that states you’re in a relationship would not be significant to us as a couple,” the councilwoman indicated. This personal stance angered many within the gay community and they also questioned her commitment to AIDS housing.⁷²

Battling through the many obstacles as the first black councilwoman, Harris claimed some political victories on the council. For instance, as Chair of the Housing, Community Development, and Urban Environment Committee, she fought for fifty additional low-income housing units in the Sand Point neighborhood, despite the opposition of a powerful, white upper middle-class neighborhood association. She also served on the Utilities and Environmental Management Committee as vice chair, the Planning and Regional Affairs Committee, and the Transportation and Economic Development Committee. In 1994, she teamed up with fellow councilwoman Jane Noland to amend the Women and Minority Business Enterprise (WMBE) ordinance to ensure women and people of color gained a percentage of city contracts while encouraging the city to employ their businesses. She also proposed a resolution to ban city-sponsored travel to Colorado when lawmakers amended the state’s constitution to deny equal rights protection to LGBTQ citizens. The council followed suit and passed the measure. Additionally, she helped to get the phrase “sexual orientation” incorporated into city policies and created a dispute mediation board to handle city workers’ complaints of discrimination.⁷³

⁷² Michael Paulson, “Vote on Recognizing Gay Couples Delayed—A Strategy Rift Over City Registration Plan,” *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, Dec. 8, 1993, p. A1; Susan Paynter, “Partner Law Divides Gay Community,” *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, Sept. 7, 1994, p. B1. This is not to say that Harris was not active in the gay community. She helped found Hands Off Washington, a gay and lesbian political organization and pushed for more gay African Americans to join or organize around gay civil rights issues.

⁷³ Mike Merritt, “Council Bans Official Trips to Most Of Colo,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, Dec. 15, 1992; Paulette Payne, “Sherry Harris: She Will Step Up for Equity,” *Sistah 2 Sistah* (March 1995), Sherry Harris Subject Files, Seattle Municipal Archives; Cynthia Laird, “Elect One of Our Own in Oakland?,” *EastBay OutNow*, Aug. 8-21, 1995, pp. 3-4, in Sherry Harris Subject Files, Seattle Municipal Archives. The ban also included Springfield, Oregon, and Concord, California, two cities that exempted gay citizens from housing and employment discrimination protection. She received support from the mayor Norm Rice and the board.

At the end of her term, Harris's leadership style doomed her re-election bid in 1995. As she noted, her multiple identities (black, female, and gay), which initially helped her gain office, had nothing to do with her interests as a politician. "I had greater expectation put on me," she confessed, "yet who I am as a minority has nothing to do as to why I want to be on the council." The councilwoman admitted that she preferred to deal with traffic patterns and public policy instead of discrimination issues. Cathy Allen, Harris's political consultant, stressed, "She's an engineer at heart. She saw the town as an engineer's grid map. She was a system fixer without dealing with the people who use that system." Harris explained that her passion for environmental concerns, city utilities, water resource development, and street and road provisions were important issues.⁷⁴

The '91 election complicated the notion of what constituted a 'black leader,' his or her responsibility to the community, and who could claim legitimacy. Identity politics proved essential to voting behavior and Harris was an aberration that black voters could not relate to. As a result, voters elected John Manning, an African American police sergeant, who charged Harris for her "lack of visibility in the community." Representative Dawn Mason, the second black woman to be elected to the state legislature, rebuffed the claim, stating that Harris was "the most visible" councilmember. "They [city officials] handle issues as they relate to their committees though Sherry is committed and concerned with issues that don't relate to her committee," she claimed. Harris attempted to make a political comeback in 1997 but was defeated.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Robert T. Nelson, "Sherry Harris: Out, But Never Quite In," *The Seattle Times*, Oct. 20, 1997, p. B1.

⁷⁵ *Lesbian News* (July 1995), 63, 80, contained in Sherry Harris Files, Seattle Municipal Archives; Imani Villavaso, "Election Draws Near for City Council Candidates," *Apogee*, Sept. 1995, p. 3, Sherry Harris Files, Seattle Municipal Archives; Payne, "Sherry Harris She Will Step Up for Equity," Seattle Municipal Archives. Harris explained that representing African American issues were challenging because in the past black community had unified vision of what it needed. She states, "if you ask 10 different people in the African American community what is the most important thing for us as a group of people right now, you get 10 different answers."

While many assumed Harris represented black leadership, she by her own admission, had never intended to be a spokeswoman of the black or the gay community. Her tenure as councilwoman was more symbolic than practical. Nonetheless, her presence and fame grew national attention, and she became an inspiration to gay activists seeking office across the country.

Many of the political newcomers like Harris took untraditional paths to office without the provision of the black traditional leadership. Such leaders as Sam Smith, Rev. Dr. Samuel Berry McKinney, and George Fleming all influenced the Northwest Black Elected Officials and the local NAACP. Larry Gossett, a black power activist and freshman member of the King County Council, acknowledged, “If Sam Smith or George Fleming got behind someone, they could push him into office.” Ruth E. Chiles, who ran an unsuccessful 1962 bid for legislator opined in the early 1990s, “Rev. McKinney does not speak for me.” McKinney also admitted that the black leaders of his generation no longer drew the line at priming potential candidates for office. “Some of those old lines are no longer in place,” he revealed. “I suppose there’s still the power to bless, but not to coerce.” As a political strategy, these leaders discouraged two or more black candidates from running for the same position. *The Seattle Medium* also took this same position, proclaiming: “In order to win in the new 37th District...the community must support *one* candidate for Position #1, and *one* candidate for Position #2.”⁷⁶

In 1994, Dawn Mason, a parent education activist and a relative newcomer to Seattle in the 1980s, further broke the gendered constraints of the black political elite who handpicked their candidates, usually male, for public office. When seeking to run for the 37th legislative district

⁷⁶ Goldsmith, “Black Politics Take a New Turn,” *The Seattle Post-Intelligencier*, Nov. 6, 1995; Ruth Chiles. Interview by Gary Greaves, ca. 1990, Gary Greaves Collection, Oral History, Accession No. 5815-001 [digital], University of Washington, Special Collections; Chris Bennett, “Redistricting and Politics,” *The Seattle Medium*, Jan. 15, 1982.

Position 1 seat against Jesse Wineberry, the black establishment asked Mason to step aside to avoid dividing the black community's vote and guaranteeing incumbent John O'Brien's re-election. She refused. "Once I didn't drop out...I was an enemy. And the old guard went with Jesse. He was a political boss all over," Mason explained." Dee Anderson explained a similar experience when civil rights veteran Walter Hubbard decided to run against her for George Fleming's vacant senate seat in 1990. "That leadership, all men, totally tried to isolate me and freeze me out. It said, 'Wait your turn.' Every time a younger progressive-thinking black steps forward, the old leadership mounts a campaign against it," she lamented.⁷⁷

As a political outsider, Mason made her entry into politics specifically to address education and children. She had been an education activist in the Central Area and Rainier Valley since the 1980s and founded Parents for Student Success.⁷⁸ In 1991, she became a founding board member of Powerful Schools, created to empower students academically from schools that lacked resources. Rather than compete for a position on the school board, she felt that she needed to be in Olympia to make education policies and be a voice for working-class and impoverished black women who, in many cases, experienced domestic violence and drug misuse that steered them into a lifetime of abuse and poverty. She ran on a platform that emphasized strong and effective Central Area schools, family-wage jobs within the district, and solutions to the causes of violence and family dysfunction. After a successful campaign, Mason became the third African American woman to serve in the Washington State legislature after Vivian Caver, who lost the Position 2 seat to Kip Tokuda, an Asian American, in 1993.⁷⁹

The election victory came at an opportune time when one of the largest gatherings of

⁷⁷ Mason, Dawn. Interview by author, June 30, 2016, Seattle, Washington; *The Seattle Times*, Nov. 13, 1991, p. A1.

⁷⁸ Mason also served on the Seattle Human Rights Commission, Democratic precinct committee officer,

⁷⁹ Jen Ellison, "Activist Running Campaign on Behalf of Children," *The Skanner*, Sept. 14, 1994, p. 1; "Two Democrats Seek Seat in 37th District," *The Seattle Times*, Apr. 28, 1994, p. B2.

prominent and forceful black women planned to descend upon the region. During Mason's first year as a lawmaker in 1995, the National Political Congress of Black Women (NPCBW), a nonpartisan political organization of black women, held their annual conference in Seattle to create a comprehensive plan and national agenda for solving the pressing issues in the African American community. The NPCBW was founded in 1984 by nationally prominent black women such as Shirley Chisolm, Maxine Waters, and Rev. Willie Barrow to provide women candidates training, fund-raising support, and campaign assistance. With a total membership of 35, the Puget Sound Chapter of NPCBW, formerly known as Women in Unity, affiliated with the organization in 1990 and focused on "bringing African American women to leadership in politics and affecting the legislation surrounding local politics." The Seattle and Portland chapters joined together to host the delegation after Caver lobbied for four years to bring the conference to the Pacific Northwest in hopes of gaining national exposure.⁸⁰

The conference lasted five days and brought together over 150 chapters with over 500 women leaders in government, education, business, and entertainment. Speakers included Myrlie Evers-Williams, the newly elected president of the NAACP, Betty Shabazz, and U.S. Surgeon General Jocelyn Elders. Local women including R.Y. Woodhouse and Representative Dawn Mason spoke and shared a panel with Evers, C. Delores Tucker, Representative Cynthia McKinney, and Dionne Warwick among others. Panelists discussed the role of African American women in their communities and ways to advance women's position in society. Workshops addressed the conservative attacks on affirmative action, abortion, and social service programs. They also focused on economic development, healthcare, and youth violence. More emphatically, the national president C. Delores Tucker and the NCPBW launched an anti-rap

⁸⁰ Scott Holter, "Facing the Main Issues: National Black Women's Congress Comes to Northwest," *The Skanner*, Jun. 14, 1995; Lisa Ely, "NPCBW: Strong Women Building Strong Bridges," *Hyde Park Citizen*, Jul. 20, 1995.

campaign in defense of black womanhood that condemned ‘gangsta’ rap music and the music industry for perpetuating derogatory images of black women in the media and propagating violence.⁸¹

After the conference, Mason went back to work, empowered by the messages of the importance of women’s leadership and responsibilities to uplift black communities and children. During her first term in the legislature, Mason proposed two bills that aimed to benefit working-class families and women. One bill provided a tax exemption for diapers, and the second bill provided tax exemptions to women who bought feminine hygiene products and over-the-counter contraceptives. Mason argued that these two bills would assist poor and working-class black families. She insisted that most tax breaks went to businesses and that “it was now time for some breaks to go to working-class individuals.” A Republican-controlled legislature, however, blocked the bills.⁸²

As the assistant minority whip and ranking chair on the House Higher Education Committee, Mason also witnessed the defunding of higher education in the state due to budget cuts and increases in undergraduate and graduate tuition. After alleging that the GOP “rob[bed] kids of a future,” she sponsored an education bill provided state funds to recruit faculty and students of color to attend state colleges and universities. The bill miraculously passed through the House Committee on Higher Education but failed in the Appropriations Committee. In addition, Mason proposed a bill that would have provided state funds to state colleges and universities to recruit students and faculty of color, but the bill also died in the Appropriations

⁸¹ Eric Houston and Tina Kelley, “Black Women’s Group Convenes – 500 Leaders in Town for National Meeting,” *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, Jul. 5, 1995, p. B1; “African American Women’s Status,” *C-Span*, [video], Jul. 6, 1995. Accessed Jan. 30, 2018, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?66034-1/african-american-womens-status>.

⁸² Tom Bates, “Black Women Seek Influence—And Solutions,” *The Oregonian*, Jul. 9, 1995, p. C1; Martha Anderson, “Unsung Legislative Bills Whistled in A Minor Key,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, Feb. 21, 1995, p. P1.

Committee.⁸³

Mason continued to encounter barriers passing laws and bills in a Republican-controlled legislature in Olympia and became a direct target for Asian American contenders. In her re-election campaign in 1996, challenger Camille Monzon, a Fillipina and Native-American executive director of the Seattle Indian Center, charged Mason as “an ineffective lawmaker.” However, this did not go over well with the African American community. When Monzon brought her African American son-in-law to carry her prop on black churches at a campaign forum held at First AME, Christ Bennett, editor of the *Seattle Medium*, raised immediate concerns in his newspaper. “At the political caucus the other day, one non-black candidate made it a point to show off a black-in-law,” he wrote. In addition, Mae Scott, an African American woman and retired social worker, challenged to unseat Kip Tokuda, one of two Asian Americans in the state legislature.⁸⁴ Blacks were critical of Tokuda, partly because he defeated Vivian Caver two years earlier after she had been appointed to fill the seat of Gary Locke. Bennet elevated both Mason and Scott’s races in his columns declaring, “Thus far, Asian male politicians in the 37th and 43rd Districts have walked on the backs of black folk in their quest for political power. We view the challenge to one such Asian politician as healthy.” Although each candidate tried to steer clear of highlighting race as a factor in their campaigns, it remained an effective tool of division and amplified tensions between the two groups as each competed for political representation.⁸⁵

The 1996 re-election campaign between African Americans and Asian Americans

⁸³ Dawn Mason, “House GOP Robs Kids of a Future,” *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, Mar. 30, 1995, p. A17; Ellis E. Conklin, “Close Battle for 37th District – Mason, Monzon in Grudging Rematch,” *The Seattle Post Intelligencer*, Aug. 23, 1996, p. C1.

⁸⁴ Mae Scott was a former counselor and former administrator at the University of Washington and the state Department of Social and Health Services.

⁸⁵ Kery Murakami, “Racial, Ethnic Rivalry Shapes Legislative Contest – Asians Compete with African Americans in 37th District,” *The Seattle Times*, Sept. 11, 1996, p. B5.

signified, on one hand, the changing demographics in the 37th and 43rd legislative districts and, on the other, a growing rivalry between two non-white majority groups for political control of the districts. The 37th legislative district encompassed 38 percent whites, 36 percent blacks, and 22 percent Asians. This multiracial composition of the district produced an array of impassioned political views, approaches, and leadership styles. While Mae Scott lost Position 2, Mason overwhelmingly won 94 percent of the vote and worked alongside Kip Tokuda for the improvement of the district. As show of solidarity, they sponsored the Youth in Government Program at the East Madison YMCA to involve more youth in the affairs of government and policy making.⁸⁶

In 1998, Mason sponsored two unsuccessful bills that aimed to benefit parents who home schooled. The first bill gave a tax rebate on home school equipment and supplies while the other provided a stipend equal to 5 percent state spending on public school students to home school families. Mason, like many black women disillusioned with the state of public education, pursued alternatives to the public school system to provide better and quality education to black children—however controversial. Many Democrats including African Americans condemned Mason on her stance which likely placed her on the side of conservatives. “Home schooling is a legal and legitimate choice, and I want to support parents who make that choice. It doesn’t matter to me whether Republicans support the same idea,” she asserted. Whatever her position on education, the fight for minority and women’s access to higher education and employment would be tested as she led the battle to preserve affirmative action programs in the state.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ *Ibid*; Esther Dove John, “Youth Gain Experience in Government,” *The Northwest Asian Weekly*, Mar. 8, 1996.

⁸⁷ Heath Foster, “Mason-Kline Race in 37th District is Making Waves,” *The Seattle Post-Intelligencier*, Sept. 23, 1998, p. B1; Dawn Mason interview, June 30, 2016.

Initiative I-200 and the Decline of a Spatial Black Community

In the mid-to late 1990s, a burgeoning national movement to end affirmative action sprouted all across the nation. Conservative proponents believed that affirmative action programs produced reverse discrimination in college admissions and employment while others argued that enough had been done for blacks. Washington State was not exempt. Conservative factions statewide couched their support in terms of colorblindness where discrimination should not exist in any form.

The first attempt came in 1995 when Republican Representative Scott Smith introduced House Bill 1999, an anti-affirmative action bill, in the legislature. He stated, “When we go to giving preferential treatment to a certain group it holds against another group [of] white males.” Both Senator Rosa Franklin and Mason attacked the bill, stating that the claims were unfounded. Franklin vowed to “oppose anything that tries to gut affirmative action” in the senate. Mason, on the other hand, went further by vehemently opposing the measure and leading a counterattack. She spoke at local churches and rallies in protest of the bill and educating her constituents. Because of such efforts, she galvanized several hundred people, mostly black men and women, to testify at the hearing held in Olympia on February 28. While energizing her base, she strategically implored the assistance of political heavyweights for back up. At her request, Arthur Fletcher, the first African American to run for lieutenant governor of the state of Washington and the architect who wrote the affirmative action laws during the Nixon administration, came to help her fight the bill.⁸⁸ Fletcher spoke to community groups, churches, as well as legislators at the hearing.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Fletcher was also a former city council member of Pasco, Washington and appointed by Richard M. Nixon as an assistant secretary of labor. He was also an adviser to Presidents Gerald R. Ford and Ronald Reagan. In 1990, he was selected as head of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights by George H.W. Bush.

⁸⁹ “House Measure Would Ban Affirmative Action,” *The Seattle Times*, Feb. 20, 1995, p. B2; Chris Nishiwaki,

The well-publicized hearing garnered much attention and developed into it a confrontational shouting match between lawmakers. According to the *Olympian*, Mason scolded Smith by stating, “I don’t think you knew what you were doing, and you’ve been used,” before her microphone was cut off three times by the Law and Justice Committee Chairman Mike Padden. The chairman accused Mason of waging attacks against legislators who supported House Bill 1999 to which she hastily replied, “Mr. Chairmen, I am not your worst nightmare. Bills like this are.” Arguing successfully against the passage of the bill, it was killed in committee, suffering a fate similar to those of several other legislative attempts across the nation to repeal such policies.⁹⁰ Mason explained:

I was a minority in a minority...when you’re in the minority, you’re not passing the laws, you’re stopping bad legislation. You played defense. I organized the largest committee meeting to stop affirmative action laws.⁹¹

Although a major victory for Mason and supporters of affirmative action programs, many worried if Washington State would follow California’s Proposition 209 that allowed voters to decide by placing the measure on a referendum. The California model did, in fact, devolve into a wave of contestations to affirmative action policies including Washington State. In March of 1997, the conservative push to place Initiative 200, or I-200, on the ballot came on the heels of Proposition 209. Scott Smith and conservatives urged Washington voters to contribute to what they deemed as an “American experiment.” These anti-affirmative action enthusiasts formed the Washington State Civil Rights Initiative to lobby for the referendum and gather the required signatures by the 1998 election cycle. The American Civil Liberties Union slightly delayed the

“Opponents Fight Elimination of Affirmative Action,” *The Lewiston Tribune*, Feb. 22, 1995; “Hiring Debate Emotional,” *The Olympian*, Mar. 1, 1996.

⁹⁰ *The Olympian*, Mar. 1, 1996; “Affirmative-Action Repeal Dies,” *The Olympian*, Mar. 2, 1995; “Lawmaker Leads Counterattack,” *The Olympian*, Mar. 4, 1995; Susan Gilmore, “A Presidential Campaign Like No Other,” *The Baltimore Sun*, May 14, 1995.

⁹¹ Dawn Mason. Interview by author. June 2013, Seattle, Washington.

process by filing suit (a legal challenge on the wording) in Superior Court, arguing that the ballot title and summary should state that I-200 would prohibit the state from granting “affirmative action” instead of “preferential treatment.”⁹²

The use of language was key to the success of passing the measure. To indicate “preferential treatment” rather than “affirmative action” invoked feelings among voters that people of color were given opportunities who were not qualified. The same phrasing of “preferential treatment” followed the California model which extracted excerpts from the 1964 civil rights act that stated: “the state shall not discriminate against, or grant preferential treatment to, any individual group on the basis of race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin in the operation of public employment, public education or public contracting.” Therefore, “civil conservative backers strategically emphasized race-neutral language of “colorblindness” and rights” as a tactic to argue for equal treatment regardless of race.⁹³

Critics pushed back and formed the NO!200 campaign. The coalition contended that although the initiative, on the surface, promoted equality, it would produce adverse effects. Since the 1960s, affirmative action programs helped shape state hiring goals and provided opportunities for women and minority owned businesses to receive local and state contracts. It also buttressed outreach for middle to high school students to participate in math and science and training programs for those traditionally excluded from skilled trades. The struggle for women of color to achieve equal pay in Washington State was also on the line. According to one study

⁹² Marsha King, “State, Local Preferential–Treatment Programs Targeted – Initiative 200 Campaign Travels Far and Wide for Signature, Cash,” *The Seattle Times*, Aug. 4, 1997, p. A1; “Black Opposing Affirmative Action Focus of Controversy,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencier*, Aug. 5, 1997, p. B2; Paul Guppy, “A Citizen’s Guide to Initiative 200: The Washington State Civil Rights Initiative,” Washington Policy Center, Sept. 1, 1998. Accessed Jan. 6, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpolicy.org/publications/detail/a-citizens-guide-to-initiative-200-the-washington-state-civil-rights-initiative>.

⁹³ “Washington State Initiative 200,” *BlackPast.org*. Accessed Jan. 10, 2018, <http://www.blackpast.org/primarywest/1998-washington-state-initiative-200>; Guppy, “A Citizen’s Guide to Initiative 200,” Washington Policy Center, Sept. 1, 1998.

conducted by Catalyst, a research group geared towards women's advancement in the workplace, women of color earned 57 cents for every dollar earned by their male counterparts and comprised 10 percent of the work force with only 5 percent holding management level jobs. If passed, people of color and women would suffer most from the elimination of affirmative action policies, particularly black women.⁹⁴

After the Washington State Civil Rights group obtained the required 180,000 signatures, the bill went to Olympia. The Washington State Legislature, including Mason, voted against the bill, but it was placed on the November ballot as a referendum. Initiators of the referendum did not provide evidence of widespread discrimination, except anecdotal cases such as Katuria Smith's lawsuit against the University of Washington Law School. Smith alleged the school used racial quotas in its admissions review that denied her acceptance. That lawsuit became the ammunition and rallying cry for whites, claiming "reverse discrimination."⁹⁵

In efforts to persuade voters of the harmful nature of the bill, an amalgam of Pacific Northwest businesses, state, and local activists pushed an anti-I-200 campaign. Governor Dan Evans voiced his disdain by asserting, "Education is the great equalizer...this plan could end targeted educational opportunities, like tutoring, that can give children a helping hand." Senator Rosa Franklin, the lone black woman in the state senate, maintained, "I don't want to be a fatalist. But if we as a country wanted to do the right thing by minorities, we wouldn't have had to have affirmative action in the first place." Corporate giants such as Microsoft, Boeing, US Bank, Starbucks, Costco, Eddie Bauer, Kaiser, and Weyerhaeuser opposed the referendum. *The*

⁹⁴ "Initiative 200 Discrimination/Preferential Treatment," Smart Voter League of Women Voters. Accessed Mar. 9, 2018, <http://www.smartvoter.org/1998nov/wa/state/meas/i200/>; Maggie Jackson, "Minority Women Lagging in Management," *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, Oct. 23, 1997, p. B1. In the same study, it found that Asian women managers earned 67 cents for every dollar earned by a white male manager, eight cents higher than white women managers, possibly due to higher levels of education and the tendency to live in the Pacific Northwest where the cost of living is much higher.

⁹⁵ King, "State, Local Preferential," *The Seattle Times*, Aug. 4, 1997.

Seattle Times newspaper publisher donated \$215,000 for anti-I200 full page ads that ran for two months.⁹⁶

Despite the political rivalry, some Asian American leaders lent their support to African Americans in efforts to stop passage of the bill. The political interests of African Americans were matched by the actions of a few Asian American supporters who saw their struggle tied up with blacks. For instance, the Filipino American Political Action Group of Washington and the Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance enlisted volunteers to send out 15,000 mailings to the Filipino community. The Asian Pacific American Coalition for Equality home-canvassed in the 37th district. City Council member Martha Chloe led a “No!200” fundraising event in Chinatown/International District to educate voters on the perils of the I-200 bill and to enlist their support for African Americans. Chow warned that supporters of the bill implemented divisive tactics to pit Asian Americans against African Americans. “The ploy of those for I-200 is to use against blacks and other minorities,” she cautioned.⁹⁷

National representatives such as Daphne Kwok, the executive director of the national Organization of Chinese Americans, and Herbert Yamamishi, national executive director of the Japanese American Citizen’s League, joined with Chow to urge their communities to stand with other communities of color. Kwok firmly acknowledged, “We cannot allow ourselves to be used as a wedge. We need to educate people that we are where we are because of the African American community, and that we stand together.” They also indicated that many Asian Americans in California voted for Proposition 209 without fully understanding what the

⁹⁶ “Initiative 200 Discrimination/Preferential Treatment,” Smart Voter League of Women Voters; *Seattle Post-Intelligencier*, Aug. 5, 1997, p. B2; *The Seattle Times*, Aug. 4, 1997; “Background on I-200,” American Civil Rights Institute. Accessed Feb. 24, 2018, <http://acri.org/background-on-i-200/>; Lynne K. Varner, “Blacks Feeling Uneasy About I-200 – More than Race Involved as African Americans Wrestle with Feelings About Affirmative Action Law,” *The Seattle Times*, Oct. 23, 1998, p. A1.

⁹⁷ Deidre Silva, “Chloe Leads the Fight: National Representatives Join I-200 Opposition,” *The Northwest Asian Weekly*, Oct. 30, 1998.

referendum entailed and advised that it should not happen in Washington. In his work on Japanese and black relations in Los Angeles, Scott Kurasige notes that whites pitted both groups against each other to “solidify white hegemony.”⁹⁸

Although there is little evidence of any organizational links or much cooperation between African American and Asian American women, both groups did organize across the state. For example, in Bellevue, women organized the Sisters on the Eastside and the Eastside Asian Pacific Islanders in opposition to I-200. Despite such concerted efforts, on November 3, 1998, Washington voters overwhelmingly approved I-200, enshrining it into law and ending affirmative action statewide. On the same day, African Americans, black women in particular suffered yet another blow. Mason lost the senate election to incumbent Adam Kline and thereby forfeited her seat in the House of Representatives, leaving no black representative from the city of Seattle. Armed with the political motivations to make changes through public policy, Mason unsuccessfully ran a year later for the Seattle City Council against veteran Asian American officeholder Cheryl Chow. She continued to run for positions in local and state government and advocate for resources in Seattle’s diminishing black community.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Lisa Charlie Ritts, “Your Vote Could Make the Difference: National Asian American Leaders Urge Washington APAs to Vote Against I-200,” *International Examiner*, Nov. 4, 1998, p. 6; Deidre Silva, “Chloe Leads the Fight: National Representatives Join I-200 Opposition,” *The Northwest Asian Weekly*, Oct. 30, 1998; Scott Kurasige, *The Shifting Grounds of Race: Black and Japanese Americans in the Making of a Multiethnic Los Angeles* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 4. For more on affirmative action in Washington state, see Anthony J. Colello, “Affirmative Action Bans and Minority Employment: Washington State’s Initiative 200,” (MA thesis, Georgetown University, 2011); Susan K. Brown and Charles Hirschman, “The End of Affirmative Action in Washington State and Its Impact on the Transition from High School to College,” *Sociology of Education* (April 2006), 106-130; Mark Trahan, “Initiative 200 Misread the Future,” *The Seattle P-I*, Nov. 4, 2006.

⁹⁹ John Iwasaki, “Fertilizing Grass Roots in Bellevue – Workshop Aims to Get Residents Involved in Their Community,” *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, Feb. 27, 2003, p. B3; Al Sanders, “Mason Running for City Council,” *The Skanner*, Mar. 17, 1999; Heath Foster, “Mason-Kline Race in 37th District is Making Waves,” *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, Sept. 3, 1998, p. B1; Steven Goldsmith, “Chow, Mason Run for Open City Council Seat,” Mar. 8, 1999, p. B2. While fighting against affirmative action earlier that year, Mason made headlines when she decided, against the wishes of the Democratic establishment, to challenge Kline for the Senate seat. Many blacks, especially, admonished her for giving up her seat in the House when she remained the only black representative. Dawn Mason unsuccessfully ran again for the senate in 2002.

By 2000, the tech and industrial shift fundamentally altered the Puget Sound, and the changes profoundly impacted the black population. A third migration of African Americans moved further south and resettled into the suburbs during this period of rapid urban and high-tech industrial development. The 1983 claim of Seattle's livability for blacks was far long a forgotten memory as the city struggled with the challenges that growth and change brought forth over the last two decades. For the first time, Seattle African Americans declined in numbers and percentage of population. The suburbs represented the new frontier for African Americans. Kent witnessed the most dramatic change with a 115% increase in its black population since 1990. Others such as Tukwila experienced a 100% increase; Sea-Tac 104%; Federal Way 98%; Des Moines 89%; and Renton, just 28%.¹⁰⁰

Although the suburbs have represented a middle-class lifestyle, an opportunity for a better life, higher incomes, and access to better education, in King County, the numbers painted a different reality for most. South King County suburbs contained significant levels of poverty almost similar to those found in urban centers. For instance, Kent comprised almost identical levels of poverty as Seattle with 22% of black residents living below the poverty line while Sea-Tac was significantly higher with 30%. The other cities were above 10%.¹⁰¹

Portland also experienced similar changes. In 1990, 60% of African American home-

¹⁰⁰ I calculated this by using 1990 and 2000 census data. Social Explorer, U.S. Census Bureau; Census of Population and Housing, 1990: Table 12, "Race," Summary Tape File 1 on CD-ROM [machine-readable data files] / prepared by the Bureau of the Census. Washington: The Bureau [producer and distributor], 1991. Accessed Mar. 3, 2018, <https://www.socialexplorer.com/tables/C1990/R11653266>; Social Explorer, U.S. Census Bureau; 2000 Census of Population and Housing. Table 14, "Race," Summary File 1: Technical Documentation, 2001. Accessed on Mar. 3, 2018, <https://www.socialexplorer.com/tables/C2000/R11653318>.

¹⁰¹ Social Explorer, U.S. Census Bureau; Census of Population and Housing, 1990: Table 101, Poverty Status in 1989, Summary Tape File 1 on CD-ROM [machine-readable data files] / prepared by the Bureau of the Census. Washington. (Black Population), 1991. Accessed Mar. 3, 2018, <https://www.socialexplorer.com/tables/C1990/R11653266>; Social Explorer, U.S. Census Bureau; 2000 Census of Population and Housing. Table 187, "Poverty Status in 1999 (Black or African American). Summary File 1: Technical Documentation, 2000. Accessed Mar. 3, 2018, <https://www.socialexplorer.com/tables/C2000/R11653318>.

owners lived in North and Northeast Portland and by 2000, over 52% of black homeowners lived outside of the area. These regional shifts were all byproducts of a complex web of market forces, real estate speculation, and gentrification that led to the displacement and relocation of the cities' African Americans and low-income residents. It also reflected a national trend in many places like Washington, D.C., San Francisco, and Harlem. For those who found themselves in the suburbs, Herbert G. Ruffin posits that the social isolation that blacks felt "was rooted not in just being around a lot white people much of the time, but in their having to learn new ethnic cultures and in having a hard time identifying defineable ethnic markers such as churches, soul-food restaurants, and stores that said to new migrants 'this is the black community.'" Indeed, structural forces caused people to leave the neighborhood, either by force or choice, leaving behind those who had to pick up the pieces of a "traditional" community built on businesses, institutions, leadership, talents, and organizational memberships. Despite the less visible characteristics that once identified a black community, African Americans continued to reshape, rebuild, and expand the sense of community in the 21st century.¹⁰²

Conclusion

As African American women improved their social positioning and economic status in the Pacific Northwest, I-200 further exposed the tenuousness of Seattle's promise of racial liberalism and gender equality. New sources of conflict and oppression had emerged near the end of the century, calling for a reorientation of black women's leadership. The conservative tide of the 1980s followed by the moderately conservative policies during the 1990s exacerbated conditions rather than alleviate them. Redistricting, welfare reform, punitive drug sentencing,

¹⁰² "Gentrification in Portland, Ore in the 1990s" (documentary), *Priced Out: Tales of Gentrification*, June. 5, 2017. Accessed Mar. 30, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o5rjbPUNaVQ>; Herbert Ruffin, *Uninvited Neighbor: African Americans in Silicon Valley, 1769-1990* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 2014), 204, 209.

AIDS, unemployment, and the elimination of affirmative action programs tested the social and political agility of a professional middle-class to address these changes that threatened the quality of life for all African Americans.

Black women turned to new strategies of organizing, particularly through professional women's networks and community-based activism. These networks served as training grounds for fostering black women's leadership, career advancement, and political education and provided agency to black women. Striving for increased visibility in this moment was a critical juncture in redefining themselves as political actors in the public sphere. They assumed formal leadership roles not just in government but also in the private sector such as serving on boards and foundations. In these spaces, women influenced policies and changes to better serve urban black communities and advance the interests of women and the poor.

At the very peak of Seattle's African American women's social, economic, and political acumen, they encountered intra-and inter-racial conflict with traditional black male figures over power and control of leadership and ideology as well as the black community's political agenda and to which issues to give urgency. As Asian Americans vastly became the largest non-white racial group, they competed with African American women over resources and leadership positions on the local and state level.

By the end of the 20th century, the Central Area looked markedly different than it had in the mid-century due to complex causes of relocation, gentrification, and displacement. If black women had been the culture bearers and sustainers of black communities that helped defined the black urban ethos a century earlier, then they would be tasked with maintaining community ties in the 21st century to preserve their institutions, organizations, and cultural legacies while redefining new ones in the suburbs.

Conclusion

As we move into the 21st century...African Americans have to recognize that we must utilize and develop all of the potential within our ranks if we are to survive. Gender, cannot and should not be the prevailing variable anymore.

–Rosalind Y. Woodhouse, president of Seattle Urban League
quoted in *USA Today*, Feb. 25, 1992¹

“Reclaiming my time, reclaiming my time, reclaiming my time,” the powerful response by Congresswoman Maxine Waters on July 27, 2017 during a congressional hearing with Steve Mnuchin, the Secretary of Treasury. Instead of directly answering her queries, he attempted to dodge her questions by showering Waters with compliments and then rambling in order to run out the clock. “Reclaiming my time” was more than just a catchphrase, it represented larger political meanings around black womanhood and how black women, even when in positions of power and leadership, have been silenced, disrespected, spoken over, underrepresented, or have had their time wasted. The model of integrity, fierceness, and passion set by Waters resonated with and empowered many black women to reclaim their time and take back their power.²

Just a few months later on November 12, 2017, as the nation nervously watched the Alabama election results between an extremely right-wing conservative and accused pedophile, Roy Moore, and Democrat challenger Doug Jones, 98 percent of black women voted against Moore, giving Jones the votes needed to win the election by a slim 1.4% margin. In contrast, sixty four percent of white women voters favored Moore.³ According to the 2017 exit polls,

¹ Janice Hayes, “Women Holding Rights Movement, Community Together,” *USA Today*, Feb. 25, 1992.

² “Reclaiming My Time’: Maxine Waters Interrupts Mnuchin’s Roundabout Answer,” *The Washington Post*, Aug. 1, 2017. Accessed Mar. 4, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/video/national/maxine-waters-reclaiming-my-time/2017/08/01/30fae7f4-76d4-11e7-8c17-533c52b2f014_video.html?utm_term=.db7b3363368f.

³ In this election, the soul of the nation was at stake. The country had elected an immoral and politically inexperienced reality star into the White House just a year before. The election also came on the heels of the rising #metoo movement that empowered women to expose the culture of sexual violence and misconduct in the workplace.

black women were also the frontrunners in turning Virginia from red to blue in the gubernatorial races. In a recent report on the Status of Black Women, it discovered that black women vote at comparatively high rates and constituted a higher voting rate than all other groups of men and women during the last two presidential elections. For example, in 2016, they voted 94 percent in support of Hillary Clinton, the first woman contender for president; whereas, white women voted 53 percent for an accused sexual predator and racist bigot. What is telling in these cases is not just the voting behavior of many white women and how they too benefit from white supremacy and perpetuate patriarchy even at the expense of their own interests as women, but the political efficacy of black women to carry the load in challenging systemic oppression and other forms of discrimination for the common good. They demanded to be heard at the ballot box by supporting progressive candidates and running for elective office themselves at an historic rate.⁴

This phenomenon is not surprising but follows a historical trend; that is, black women play a decisive role in politics. Historically, black women have always been political actors in their communities and exercised agency in moments of restricted legal rights, protections, and freedoms. Elsa Barkley Brown writes that as early as the late nineteenth century, African American women shaped the community's vote and political decisions even while they remained excluded from legal enfranchisement. Black women's ideas and understandings of freedom, citizenship, and politics, therefore, have extended beyond electoral participation, committed to universal freedom for all rather than the idealism of rugged individualism. This dissertation demonstrates this long history of black women's political efficacy and attests to their

⁴ Marcie Bianco, "Roy Moore's White Female Voters Are Part of a Long History of Internalized Misogyny," *NBCNews*, Dec. 11, 2017; Melanie L. Campbell, "Follow Black Women to Victory in 2018," *The Seattle Medium*, Dec. 27, 2017. Asha DuMonthier, Chandra Childers, Jessica Milli, "The Status of Black Women in the United States," Institute for Women's Policy Research, June 7, 2017, Accessed Aug. 4, 2017 <<https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/The-Status-of-Black-Women-6.26.17.pdf>>, 1.

perseverance to make real their citizenship, liberation, and survival in a region that was, on one hand, very remote with a small African American population and, on the other, held promises of a better life.⁵

This study also challenges the notion of a singular African American and gendered western urban experience. Black women were complex, multi-dimensional beings who consistently negotiated between their overlapping identities such as class status, sexuality, age, religion, political affiliations, parentage, and region of birth that informed their political ideologies, survival skills, leadership styles, and tactical methods to end oppression. Tensions between lower income and middle-class women as well as those who subscribed to different political philosophies were pronounced throughout the 20th century, particularly during the 1960s and 1970s social upheavals that determined the trajectory of the black community.

Yet, Seattle's black women exercised an influence, as did all women in Washington State, that provided early access to the vote. This development occurred years before the majority of American women were granted suffrage and several decades before black women in the Jim Crow South could vote. Armed with the ballot, they played a critical role within the traditional political sphere and enacted their democratic understandings of political discourse through initiating voter registration campaigns, creating political clubs, hosting rallies, participating in political parties, attending meetings, educating eligible women voters on the importance of government, becoming precinct committeewomen, and running for political office.

This political participation continued throughout the twentieth century. Although a small group, they held the belief that as a new political constituency they could affect social change by

⁵ Elsa Barkley Brown, "Negotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere: African American Political Life in the Transition from Slavery to Freedom," *Public Culture*, Vol 7, No. 1994, p. 122.

using the franchise intelligently to advance African American and women interests. The Woman's Political and Civic Alliance and the King County Women's Republican Club embraced local officials who visited club meetings and rallies to solicit political support. Such visits by elected officials and candidates were more uncommon on the local level in the earlier part of the century although such political leaders commonly attended and sent greetings to the state and national club organization of the NACW. Organizations formed in the latter part of the century such as Women in Unity expected these visits to be the norm and ranked each candidate for the public's review. Early women's auxiliaries were intended to be appendages to the men's political clubs and organizations in support of their efforts. Within these partisan and gendered political clubs, however, African American decided on how they would support the men's clubs and found the freedom to make their own decisions on the community's urgent needs such as the case during the civil rights campaigns of the 1960s. The presence of black women's political organizations and the actions of elected officials and hopeful candidates courting black women's votes underlines their political influence in the city and access to power. This discovery of black women's political activity during this early period of community-building and urban development should be further studied in other western places such as Tacoma, Cheyenne, Salt Lake City, Tucson, and Denver just to name a few to understand how their lived experiences and contributions to pioneer communities and early urban black settlements in underpopulated environments helped shape the city.

Beyond the ballot, African American women participated in numerous political struggles and efforts to end employment discrimination. For instance, as the global war for democracy waged on, their roles and contributions to the war effort as well as to improving conditions in the workplace shaped local battles for equal wages, employment, and housing. They looked for

recourse by suing unions and companies for racial discrimination and organizing around job parity. The Seattle Ladies' Auxiliary of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters financed, lobbied, and fought for the rights of the union to secure better wages and working conditions while the WSFCW clubs monitored activities on employment discrimination and pressured government officials to enforce Executive Order 8802. NAACP women members went to Olympia to elicit support for a fair employment bill. In so doing, women helped to force a fair employment practices law for all and sought to secure a place for black women in the region.

Throughout the 20th century, black women engaged in a never-ending struggle for freedom, equality, and visibility through their participation in local and national political movements. Particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, black Seattle women developed a strong sense of racial solidarity and gender consciousness that closely aligned with a black political identity across the nation. They saw their struggle albeit in a progressive place like Seattle connected with those East of the Mississippi River. The relationships between the Civil Rights, Black Power, and Welfare Rights Movements relied on the organizing skills and foresight of black women. These sites of political engagement produced itinerant women leaders and social activists from different generational, religious, political, and socio-economic backgrounds working collectively through and, sometimes, apart from the NAACP, CORE, CAMP, Model Cities, the Black Panther Party, and NWRO to end systemic oppression.

The diversity of experiences and political coalition building did not negate the profound tensions among African Americans and debates on the best strategies for racial progress within each movement. The school desegregation campaigns and welfare rights movement provide two of many examples. Nonetheless, their participation enabled them to assert a form of authority in American public life where their skills provided avenues for positions in city government,

advisory boards, administrative positions often appointed by city officials in an effort to, at best, provide tacit support in ameliorating the issues of African Americans. The widespread success and failures of these political movements demonstrated women's ability to not only organize and advocate for quality education, employment, housing, and welfare but to also lead African Americans through a tumultuous, unparalleled period of change and resistance in the city.

The most profound political legacies of African American women are their contributions to creating and shaping Washington's legislation and policies. Through political appointments and electoral politics, a handful of women assumed public office and directly impacted public policy. The belief that only men should make policy decisions was shattered by the dynamic examples of black women who were consistently at the forefront of political and social reforms.⁶ Such elected officeholders like Peggy Joan Maxie established the Washington State Landlord-Tenant Act and No-Fault Divorce Law while Dorothy Hollingsworth created education policies on the school board and oversaw the school desegregation process. Rossalind Y. Woodhouse changed the name of the Department of Motor Vehicles to the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs and oversaw the licensing of thirty-three professions and occupations in addition to developing the first licensed lay midwifery practice in the state. As city councilwoman, Sherry Harris provided fifty additional low-income housing units in the Sand Point neighborhood and amended an ordinance that called for police accountability while Dawn Mason blocked anti-affirmative action laws from passing in the state legislature. Taken together, their leadership and civic work provided expanded political and social visibility to the African American community and created policies most critical to women, families, children, and the

⁶ "Black Feminism," Amistad Digital Resource. Assessed Mar. 30, 2018, http://www.amistadresource.org/the_future_in_the_present/black_feminism.html.

poor.

As the city's economic and demographic character changed in the last two decades of the 20th century, it brought about immense changes. Civil rights legislation, affirmative action programs, and a lift on housing restrictions created pathways for a growing professional middle-class of African Americans who took advantage of these opportunities. These professional women gained access to greater financial, political, and social networks that provided an entry into influencing both the private and public sector by increasing black women's representation in Corporate America and business, on community boards and foundations, and in politics to serve the interests of the community and provide resources. Although they attained much success and social capital, they were not the end result but part of a much larger story of black women's struggle for freedom and visibility in a region undergoing rapid transformations.

African American women in Seattle continue to assume leadership roles and sustain the community although finding a way to hold on to the Central Area remains elusive. Gentrification and displacement coupled with increasing rent and property taxes are shaping the future of the city's most storied historic African American community, now called the Central District. Today, whites comprise nearly 60 percent of Central District residents while blacks constitute less than one fifth of its population. In 2006, a *Washington Post* news article claimed Seattle to be the "nation's second-whitest major city" just behind Portland. "An invasion of young, well-educated and mostly white newcomers is buying up and remaking Seattle's Central District... What had been the largest black-majority community in the Pacific Northwest has become majority white," it observed. By 2010, new census demographic information showed that Seattle fell to the fifth spot on the nation's whitest cities list, although in 2015, King County

ranked number one as the “whitest big county in the U.S.”⁷

Like elsewhere in predominantly black populated urban communities and neighborhoods across the nation, these new residents attract new businesses like coffee shops, vegan restaurants, and yoga studios. Where 23rd and Union was once the center of black cultural life, now stands a cannabis dispensary and newly constructed commercial and apartment buildings. In a recent study conducted by King County researchers, about 60 percent of families in homeless shelters and 40 percent of individuals living on the street are black. In addition, one sociologist finds that Seattle is experiencing not only a migration of race but also a migration of poverty as many black lower-income families move out of the city.⁸

While the concrete struggles, organizations, and social movements I have detailed in these pages have come and mostly gone, the African American cultural legacy is still being preserved by those black residents who struggle to maintain their homes and businesses. For instance, in 2015, Vivian Phillips, former member of 101 Black Women and chair of the Seattle Arts Commission, led a successful campaign to designate the Central District as a historic arts and cultural zone. African Americans gather at community events like the Juneteenth Celebration, sponsored by DeCharlene Williams and the Central Area Chamber of Commerce, the ROOTS picnic, the MLK Day of Service at Garfield, and a host of other cultural festivals.

⁷ Blaine Harden, “In Parts of U.S. Northwest, A Changing Face,” *The Washington Post*, June 19, 2006. Accessed Mar. 25, 2018, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/06/18/AR2006061800605.html>; Gene Balk, “Seattle is Getting Whiter,” *The Seattle Times*, Oct. 27, 2014. Accessed Apr. 5, 2018, <http://blogs.seattletimes.com/fyi-guy/2014/10/27/seattle-is-getting-whiter-census-finds/>; Balk, “Whitest Big County in U.S.? It’s Us,” *The Seattle Times*, Jul. 3, 2015. Accessed Apr. 5, 2018, <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/data/whitest-big-county-in-the-us-its-us/>.

⁸ Ted Land, “Seattle Central Area Property Tax Hikes May Force Out Longtime Residents,” *K5News*, Mar. 20, 2018. Accessed Mar. 20, 2018, <http://www.king5.com/article/news/local/seattle/seattle-central-area-property-tax-hikes-may-force-out-longtime-residents/281-530467923>; Tyrone Beason, “Seattle’s Vanishing Black Community,” *The Seattle Times*, May 26, 2016, <https://www.seattletimes.com/pacific-nw-magazine/seattles-vanishing-black-community/>. See also Henry McGee, “Seattle’s Central District, 1990-2006: Integration or Displacement?” *The Urban Lawyer* (Spring 2007), 167-256.

Although many of the participants are reflecting more of the demographic changes in the neighborhood, proponents of Africatown and other neighborhood groups act as liaisons between urban developers, the city, and the African immigrant and African American communities to preserve the historic character of the neighborhood. In 2017, the group secured funds to build 115 affordable housing units and commercial space to assuage the effects of displacement and promote black entrepreneurship by honoring the legacy of Liberty Bank, the first black owned bank in Seattle.⁹

New social movements, however, are engaging and connecting a new generation of young black women activists. The Seattle Chapter of the Black Lives Matter movement, co-founded by Marissa Johnson and Mara Jacqueline Willaford, have organized protests around police violence against African Americans and continue to address the racial and economic disparities in the justice system. The November 2016 shooting death of Charleena Lyle, a pregnant black woman, by police officers generated outrage by African American women who led rallies, protests, and marches in downtown against state sanctioned violence towards women of color.¹⁰

Nikita Oliver, a bi-racial, queer woman and political outsider, galvanized progressive politics in her mayoral bid in 2017, providing hope for a new generation of women displeased with an unresponsive political system to champion the causes of income inequality, displacement, and homelessness. Jacquie Jones-Walsh, a long-time labor leader and political strategist, serves as president of the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW) and chairs the

⁹ Tyrone Beason, "Central District's Shrinking Black Community Wonders What's Next," *The Seattle Times*, May 28, 2016; "Murray Announces New Cultural District in the Central Area," Office of the Mayor, Nov. 15, 2015. Accessed Mar. 15, 2018, <http://murray.seattle.gov/murray-announces-new-cultural-district-in-the-central-area/>; Africatown, website. Accessed Mar. 15, 2018, <https://africatown.wordpress.com/>.

¹⁰ Daudi Abe, "Black Lives Matter, Seattle Chapter," Blackpast.org. Accessed Mar. 8, 2018, <http://www.blackpast.org/aaw/black-lives-matter-seattle-chapter-2014>.

Legislative and Political Action Committee of Local 843, Washington Federation of State Employees (WFSE). In January of 2018, she along with black members of WFSE/AFSCME went to Olympia urging legislators to pass a House Bill that would repeal I-200 and “restore the fair treatment of underserved groups in public employment, education and contracting.” The bill is currently being debated.¹¹

Black women today continue to remain a politically active group and at the forefront of social change, but they remain underrepresented at every level of federal and state political office. No black woman from Seattle, since the end of Dawn Mason’s term in 1999, has been elected to a city or state office. This phenomenon can be attributed to a combination of issues around gentrification, displacement, redistricting, and economic pressures that have hindered, if not diminished, black women’s political representation and clout in the city and state government. However, these conditions have not destroyed their political consciousness and activist work.¹²

Redefining boundaries of community, notwithstanding, continue to give rise to a range of political possibilities in the 21st century for African Americans’ survival. Although younger African American women reimagine the very concept of the black community through social media, pop up events, mixers, blog posts, podcasts, apps, and social women’s networks, a number of black communities can now also be found in South Seattle and in the Southeast suburbs of SeaTac, Kent, Renton, Tukwila, and Federal Way. These suburbs collectively have more black residents than remain in the city of Seattle. These suburban newcomers were either

¹¹ Jacquie Jones-Walsh also served as president of Blacks in Government and is a member of the Puget Sound Chapter of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists (CBTU) and the Women’s Committee of the Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO. Tim Welch, “Restore Affirmative Action,” WFSE, website. Accessed May 6, 2018, <https://wfse.org/news/restore-affirmative-action>.

¹² Rosa Franklin of Tacoma remained the first and only black woman senator in the state until her retirement in 2011.

driven out of the city by rising housing prices and rents that accompanied gentrification or they were attracted to these communities by the affordability of homes. Looking beyond the city limits of Seattle can provide new perspectives on migration and black suburbanization. These areas, containing higher percentages of African Americans than Seattle's 7.9 percent, are ripe with potentialities for rebuilding a solid black political bloc in King County and regaining black women's visibility in politics by rebranding, reorganizing, and cultivating young black women leaders. With an increasing concentration of immigrants and people of color, political organizing and coalition-building with African immigrants and other communities of color can bring about broad-base social and economic changes and consolidate political power. These alliances represent the possibility of making a political and cultural rebirth that is multi-ethnic and inclusive of women.¹³

In closing, this dissertation proposes that black women's political participation, their presence in political office, and their involvement in positions of power is profoundly needed and helps to remedy a range of issues affecting women, children, families, and communities of color in the Pacific Northwest. For them, political and social engagement symbolized a place of immense transformation that had the potential of opening new forays into a life of freedom—whether expanded or limited. While this study offers new insights on how black female activism influenced urban western communities, I hope that it sparks interest for further study and provides perspective toward the creation of a general framework for studying the mosaic of

¹³ Carolyn Adolph, "Black Life is Draining Out of Seattle, Census Shows," *KUOW*, May 13, 2017; *The Seattle Times*, May 26, 2016, Accessed June 7, 2017 <<https://www.seattletimes.com/pacific-nw-magazine/seattles-vanishing-black-community/>>. More and more institutions are beginning to accept this reality of change in order to remain relevant. For instance, the foundational institutions of black life, the church, suffer from social and economic pressures as they experience a steep decline in membership. In order to survive, First AME added a South Campus location to cater to the needs of members who relocated to the suburbs. Mount Zion which long held the distinction of having the largest black congregation in the Pacific Northwest, has now been supplanted by New Beginnings in Renton. Numerous storefront churches are found. African Americans host their own Juneteenth celebrations, festivals, and black history programs where Kent has been hailed as the new "CD."

African American women experiences within these communities. Only then can we paint a more accurate and inclusive history of the American West and enrich our historical understanding of black women, their contributions to the political process, and its implications today as they reclaim their time.”

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