“Still Here”; The Enduring Legacies Of Dorothy Bolden, Ella Mae Wade Brayboy, And Pearlie Dove’s Community Leadership In Atlanta, 1964-2015

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“STILL HERE”; THE ENDURING LEGACIES OF DOROTHY BOLDEN, ELLA MAE WADE BRAYBOY, AND PEARLIE DOVE’S COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP IN ATLANTA, 1964-2015

by

CHRISTY CAROLINE GARRISON

Under the Direction of Jacqueline A. Rouse, PhD

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the enduring leadership of community activists Dorothy Bolden, Ella Mae Wade Brayboy, and Pearlie Dove from 1964 until 2015. Brayboy was one of the first African-American Deputy Voter Registrars in the state of Georgia, Bolden founded the National Domestic Workers Union and Dove was the first woman to head the department of education at Clark College. This dissertation inserts Dorothy Bolden, Ella Mae Wade Brayboy, and Pearlie Dove into the classic Civil Rights Movement narrative by framing their community advocacy as equal to the efforts of Atlanta’s more well-known African-American leaders.

This dissertation presents Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove as career-oriented professional women who were also politically savvy community activists. These three women acquired a
power base that allowed them to found organizations, create programming, and develop projects dedicated to empowering Atlanta’s black community. These women achieved a level of influence typically associated with the wealthy or the political prominent. Because the three women were grassroots organizers, this study contends that the implications of their activism have been obscured because of gender, race, and class. This study seeks to foreground Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s efforts in Atlanta’s Movement narrative.

In this dissertation, assessments of Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s professional contributions as acts of protest on behalf of the black community are used to undergird a critical intervention; first, their work refutes previous ideology centering the efficacy of Movement leadership (as a social movement) as grounded in mass mobilization. Secondly, their leadership was oppositional to the standard portraiture of Movement leadership as male, ministerial, and middle-class. Finally, the women’s professional and activist emphases on economic uplift, education, and enfranchisement illustrate evidence of how sustained acts of protest, led by local leadership, impacted the community.

Because there is considerably less literature focused on the historical significance of black women acquiring political power outside of elected office, this study seeks to establish the women as politically significant local leadership.

INDEX WORDS: Black Women, Civil Rights Movement, African-Americans, Political Activism, Grassroots, Southern

by

CHRISTY CAROLINE GARRISON

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my late beloved mother, Mrs. Evelyn Marie Francis Garrison and supportive father, Mr. Sidney Charles Garrison, Jr. Mère, I miss you with all of my heart. All that I am is because of you and Daddy. Thank you, my sweet Nya, for being patient with Mommy while I was writing, this is for you. For the best big brother, Craig C. Garrison, thank you for everything this past year. To my patient and supportive family, Demetria and Claude Brumfield, Frankie and Ed Hale, Paul and Katherine Wilson, Michael Thompson and Kayo Matsumoto, and my dear grandmother Mrs. Amanda P. Bowers, thank you for your unconditional love, energy, inspiration, and financial support. To my Ummi and the Chikes, thank you for being my Atlanta family. To Georgianne Thomas and Alvelyn Sanders, this is for you because you told me daily that I was meant to do two things, complete this doctorate and become a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated. You made sure I did both. Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to the memory of Mrs. Dorothy Bolden Thompson, Mrs. Ella Mae Wade Brayboy, and Dr. Pearlie Craft Dove. I am because you were. Thank you God.
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It took a while for my family to believe that I was not returning to New Orleans after graduating from Clark Atlanta University with my bachelor’s degree in history. To give me time to look for a job, my parents promised to pay rent for six months on my downtown studio apartment. By the deadline, I had secured two part-time jobs, one as an associate at a privately owned art gallery, and another as a server at a local restaurant. Both paid minimum wage. My family did not believe that I was willing to work that hard, without creature comforts, just to continue living in Atlanta. I defiantly remained, working both jobs (looking for a third) using public transportation, and working late into the night to make ends meet. After about a year, reality set in for the Garrisons. They began to accept that I would not be coming home. My mother and grandmother asked me to find a “church home,” meaning, they expected me to join a church. Not just any church either, a Methodist church. Not African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.), not Colored Methodist Episcopal (C.M.E.), not Baptist, not Pentecostal, not Presbyterian, not Lutheran, not Church of God in Christ (COGIC), and not Catholic.

Having rejected the practice of regularly attending church immediately upon achieving adulthood, I condescendingly said that I would certainly try to. I sporadically visited churches, synagogues, mosques (both Sunni and Nation of Islam) temples, and Jehovah’s Witness Kingdom Halls to emphasize my independence and free-spirit. Several years later, a personal relationship ended in a painful and abrupt fashion. I accepted my cousin’s invitation to join her for church, and dinner afterward, to help me fathom why it hurt for more than a few weeks. I figured that I would do what old people did, and leave all my troubles “at the altar in prayer.” After service, I left feeling better and reasoned that I did not need to return. I did tell my cousin,
mother, and grandmother that I would visit as my work schedule allowed. I told myself that I would return if I was off on Sunday and bored.

As time passed, I began visiting more frequently. Then one Sunday, while singing the accompanying hymn during the invitation to membership, my heart began beating so loudly and rapidly I became alarmed. I thought people could hear it. I put my hand over my chest and looked around. Nothing appeared amiss. I resumed singing. The pounding in my chest started up again. My throat got tight. A voice in my head said, “Go. Now.” I said, “No.” The voice said, “Go. Now.” I said “No. It’s not time.” The voice said “Yes.” I put the hymnal down and joined the church feeling angry and like a bourgeois conformist. After the service, I was immediately invited to dinner by the couple that coordinated the Young Adult ministry, Eric and Claristine Pinkney. By the end of dinner, Claristine had enlisted my commitment to participate in several outreach efforts; working with the homeless women’s shelter, bible study, and collegiate student outreach. I plunged right in.

Because I was so visibly active, when older members were introduced to me, they assumed that I was an absentee member who had returned to the fold. I would explain that I had grown up as the daughter, granddaughter, and niece of community activists, educators, and members of black Greek letter organizations (BGLOs). I shared an anecdote about how, when I was in high school, my mother single-handedly decided to start feeding hungry people in the neighborhoods adjacent to her uptown New Orleans church. She bought food, gathered volunteers, asked the trustees to open the fellowship hall, and had the youth distribute flyers. My grandmother was a member of several civic organizations dedicated to, among other things, raising money for the Thomy LaFon nursing home and the black orphanage. Service to the community, through church, was as familiar to me as fried fish and potato salad dinners on Friday and red beans on
Monday. My grandmother is currently serving as President and Secretary in two organizations, but has held office in every group she has joined. My aunt and mother were certified Lay Leaders in their respective churches. My aunt has served as vice-president, and has held regional office within Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated. My late beloved mother had no desire for a title and little patience for organizations; where she saw a need, she met it.

A year or so after joining the church, I was approached by several older women who asked me to host a panel discussion featuring several young women between 18-30 and older women over 50. The objective was to engage the two groups in conversation about how to symbiotically work together. The younger generation thought the “old ways were outdated” and the older congregants found the young flighty. I decided to name the panel “Bridging the Gap.” I invited several younger women from the Young Adults, seniors from the United Methodist Women (UMW) and my mother to come up from New Orleans. One of the women representing the UMW was Ella Mae Wade Brayboy. I had no idea of her background, only that around church, she was a woman who got things done and did not “suffer fools gladly.” The panel went well. Church women were pleased with my performance, but not pleased with my “mannish short hair, lack of pantyhose, short skirts and too-high heels.” Yet, they asked me to join several committees, “tsk tsking” all the while. My mother and grandmother felt better about my being single woman in Atlanta because I had a church home, church family, and I was registered to vote. It was 1995.

In 2000, I began conducting research to develop my master’s thesis at Clark Atlanta University. My chair, Vicki Crawford, read over several proposed hypotheses and conveyed surprise that I was not writing about black women, as they had been the focal point in every paper that I had written. She suggested I write about a local subject that I clearly connected with,
and that was black female community activists. She identified ten women, then gave me the assignment of visiting the Auburn Avenue Research Library to conduct a bit of exploratory research on each woman. Crawford later suggested that I schedule a meeting with historian Jacqueline Rouse to sharpen my interviewing techniques as well as discuss how black women are examined in the historiography.

I was startled to see Ella Mae Brayboy’s name on that list. The more I read, the more I encountered Dorothy Bolden’s name. The thesis evolved into Brayboy and Bolden’s unacknowledged leadership in the black community. These were women I recognized. I had grown up under their tutelage, worked with them, and they educated me. These women had lived lives that could have been my grandmother, mother, or aunt had they made one decision differently. I added a third woman, Pearlie Dove, when I began preliminary research for the dissertation. Research questions emerged; if these women were working women, what role did their jobs play in determining their levels of activism? How did the women negotiate with other community leaders? Did the women acquire any levels of power within the community? Were the women able to amass political influence within the community?

I wanted to include an educator as the research revealed two elements for exploration; the multiple roles of education in activism, and the women’s experiences with Atlanta’s politicos. I expounded the scope of the master’s thesis by contextualizing the women as working professionals whose careers provided both venues for leadership, and served as forums for their activism. The workplace was where the women were able to develop the skillset to lead, and was where they began to build relationships with elected officials.

All three women were working professionals with families for whom community advocacy became a calling. When writing my prospectus about why I chose these women, I belatedly
discovered a connection to each woman. It was not just the shared church home with Brayboy (with whom I did not work again until 2001.) Bolden’s home was a mere three miles from mine, Brayboy’s five, Dove’s two—we shared the southwest Atlanta community and its institutions. Brayboy and I were members of the same church. Dove and I were members of the same BGLO. Dove and I shared an alma mater and we both taught there, although we did not formally meet until we were appointed and commissioned by the city to memorialize Brayboy. I had volunteered at Economic Outreach Atlanta sponsored events. Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove were believers but operated outside of the church. These connections and bonds drove me to expand the dissertation beyond identifying black women in leadership to: 1) examining the role of the segregated black community to building the leadership, 2) the impact of attending segregated institutions, and 3) exploring their political relationships and influence to better answer the research questions.
1 INTRODUCTION

By the age of nine, Dorothy Bolden was already employed as a maid. Thirty years later, Bolden decided to create an organization dedicated to increasing the rate of pay for maids and other domestic workers. To ensure pay was commensurate with the members’ skill set, she subsequently founded a training center. Ella Mae Wade Brayboy was a wife and mother who worked part-time as a cook. Brayboy tried very hard to shield her children from segregation’s damaging affects by limiting their interactions with whites. Once her children grew up, they joined the Atlanta Student Movement and pulled her into the Movement as well. She was appointed to serve as one of the first black Deputy Voter Registrars in the State of Georgia.

Pearlie Dove earned a master’s degree, and was an instructor at Clark College when she was prematurely widowed. Dove sought to pursue a terminal degree after losing her husband, but the state of Georgia prohibited her enrollment in any doctoral program at state universities.\(^1\) After earning her doctorate out of state, Dove was promoted to director in the Department of Education at Clark College. She was the first woman to serve in this position.

Born after the nadir of race relations, but before the Great Depression, Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove experienced the wretched indignities of living in the South during possibly the most racially oppressive time period aside from the post-Reconstruction era.\(^2\) Yet, growing up in the vibrant neighborhoods of “Black Atlanta”, the three were nurtured by politically vigilant educators, clergy, businessmen and community women. Groomed by their environments and

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upbringing, they founded organizations, registered voters, established programs, and created educational opportunities for Atlanta’s black residents.

These three women transitioned from heading neighborhood associations, to city, and state organizations. Ultimately, the women’s influence nationally transcended into affecting how domestic workers were paid and perceived, how citizens voted, and how southern black students were taught to be educators. In 1968, Bolden founded the National Domestic Workers’ Union. In 1964, Brayboy was appointed to serve as one of the first Deputy Voter Registrars in the state of Georgia. In 1963, Dove was appointed the first female director of an academic department at Clark College, a historically black college and university (HBCU). In this dissertation, I position Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove, based on their professional experiences and political connections, as qualified Movement leaders.

The original master narrative of the Modern Civil Rights Movement described non-violent social protests led by southern black male ministers. Pressure from the male leadership of interracial and religious organizations prompted the federal government to enact legislation eliminating segregation and enfranchising African-American citizens.\(^3\) Over the past twenty-five years, historians have extended the discourse to include analysis of the efficacy of community leadership. Researching the history of indigenous civil rights movements offers insight into how black communities organized infrastructures to combat racism. Scholarship produced by Aldon Morris, Charles Payne, and John Dittmer addresses the contributions of grassroots leadership and of black women in their works. Morris writes about the limitations of the national civil rights’ movement organizations within the local communities, but ultimately states that indigenous

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movement leadership for the black communities emerged from local branches of national organizations such as the NAACP. However, an area where the scholarship still needs inquiry and critique is the political ramifications of grassroots southern black female leadership. This dissertation argues that Dorothy Bolden, Ella Mae Brayboy and Pearlie Dove’s community activism embodied characteristics associated with the classic Movement leadership model while creating new modes of leadership.

Scholars have presented classic research on black female community leadership that generally ground their activism in church-based organizations. Aldon Morris, Belinda Robnett, Charles Payne, Evelyn Higginbotham, Bettye Collier-Thomas, and Rosetta Ross wrote about black women and their faith-based Movement activism. Yet, in reading the autobiographies of precedent-setting women such as Ida Wells Barnett, Lugenia Burns Hope, Mary McLeod Bethune, Septima Poinsette Clark, Ella Baker, Dorothy Height, Anne Moody, Jo Ann Robinson, and Daisy Bates, each spoke in detail about their important contributions in the workplace as leading to positions of authority. In varying degrees, each of these women worked full time

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jobs, established coalitions, and developed alliances with the wealthy to fund their respective pursuits of social justice. Baker, Clark, Bethune, and Height began working on the local level, later ascending to leading nationally recognized organizations. Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s activism and leadership follow a similar trajectory. It was through both their careers and activism that each became engaged in indigenous activism, as well as interacting with local political leadership.7

Since the three women’s occupations became their vocations, their accomplishments belie three standard black southern Movement tropes: women did not lead, they organized; organizing efforts were mainly through the church; and, female organizers lacked substantial political power. The women in this study co-founded community organizations, commanded staff, and directed projects. They did not galvanize members of the community through church-sponsored organizations, but through their careers. It is important to note that all three openly acknowledged their faith as an essential component of their lives; each were committed and active church members until becoming incapacitated by illness. For the women, the black church and the political process were inextricably linked throughout their lives.

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7 Throughout this dissertation, the term “indigenous” is used to describe “an organic movement organized and led by local people,” as described by Rickey Hill and discussed by Belinda Robnett and Aldon Morris. Rickey Hill, “The Bogalusa Movement: Self-Defense and Black Power in the Civil Rights Struggle,” The Black Scholar, 41, no. 3, (Fall 2011), 43, 46.
1.1 Purpose of the Study

The dissertation establishes these women as members of “Black Atlanta’s” power structure, analyzes the connections between their professional and community work, and explores their local and national endeavors. The intent of this study, while not comprehensive, is to insert the women into the gap in civil rights movement scholarship between studies on black women organizers and black male leadership. These three women were responsible for driving wedges into segregationist practices while maintaining what historian Vicki Crawford described as “the traditional female roles of caretaking and nurturing.” More recently, Tanisha Ford painted the community-oriented women of her research as “waging the battle for liberation through everyday encounters.” Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove are complete representations of Crawford and Ford’s characterizations of activists who were also working-class women. The three women mastered the complex act of juggling full-time employment, community service, church, and childrearing, all while being equally committed to the quest for equality. The women carved out a niche in the black freedom struggle by combining their day jobs with their activism.

Brayboy, Bolden, and Dove also symbolize those whose contributions have been marginalized within the southern Movement and, are almost completely absent from the national Movement narrative. Their absence is conspicuous because all three women were the first in their fields to achieve certain distinctions. Accomplishments aside, these women were unique for a number of reasons; first, the three were career-driven women whose professional successes were in alignment with their community advocacy efforts. Second, their activism led to

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developing an emerging constituency within the black community. Third, this following evolved into a powerbase, which connected the women to a demographic desired by local black politicians running for office. Local candidates and businessmen sought out their endorsements at election time. Yet, wherever the women appear in their infrequent occurrences in the literature, they are not categorized as “career women,” or as Movement leaders, two areas in which all three women excelled.

These women embodied a unique intestinal fortitude that Stephanie Shaw described in her book *What a Woman Ought to Be and to Do; Black Professional Women Workers During The Jim Crow Era*. Shaw theorized that the families of black women born after the Civil War, but before World War II, were inculcated with a “race consciousness” that bound them to the black community.\(^\text{10}\) They were expected to work hard, live scrupulously, and set an example for the community. Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove were born in the era of Jim Crow, had lived through the Great Depression, World War II, the Cold War, Korean War, and the beginning of the Vietnam War. They witnessed the Movement’s legal victories, the successes of the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Brown vs. Board of Education decisions. In a five-year period, the women experienced the deaths of John Kennedy, Medgar Evers, the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombings, Malcolm X, Robert Kennedy, and Martin Luther King, Jr. They each began working as community activists in their late 30s and early 40s. All three attained significant leadership positions in their careers, and within the organizations they served. With possibly the exception of Bolden, there are few studies that assess the women’s contributions as political outliers based on the culminating influences of their leadership, careers, service, and activism.

\(^{10}\)Stephanie Shaw, *What A Woman Ought to Be and to Do: Black Professional Women Workers During the Jim Crow Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), Foreword, 55.
The three women experienced comparably influential elements during their formative years; their secondary educations, their immersion into the black church, and their exposure to professional mentoring from race-based politically-driven forebears. These similarities illuminated patterns indicative of their evolution into women who empowered, enfranchised, and educated. Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove wielded a specific type of power grounded in having earned the community’s esteem, arguably rooted in strict adherence to tenets of the politics of respectability. Although the three women were already exhibiting characteristics of leadership, their acceptance by neighborhood residents was at least partially based upon their reputations. For the era, respectability politics were the milieu in which the women operated.

For black women, practicing “ladylike” behavior was just as important, if not more so, inside of the black community as it was for white women in their communities. Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove did not model behaviors associated with “True Womanhood.” They were not silent or submissive. They held jobs, earned salaries, and wielded authority. Yet, the three women identified themselves as “ladies.” Bolden plainly stated that she had never been promiscuous. Brayboy was only addressed by her title of “Mrs.” Dove was respectable on several levels, she was a widow and had earned a doctorate. Furthermore, Dove held executive office as a member of a Black Greek Letter Organization (BGLO) which prioritized Christianity, virtue, and character as prerequisites for acceptance into membership. More importantly, they were (or in Dove’s case had been) married Christian ladies. Having their names cloaked in respectability, combined with the women’s proven performances, can be perceived as allowing Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove entrée into Atlanta’s male-dominated arenas of leadership: union organizing, leading voter registration drives, and administration (within higher education.)
This dissertation seeks to firmly plant Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove into the overarching narrative of Atlanta’s Civil Rights Movement as politically astute leaders responsible for economically empowering members of the black community. This study hypothesizes as its key intervention that the women acquired an autonomous level of leadership because they were able to create community programming designed specifically to combat social inequality through their careers. The leadership was autonomous in that the women did not fund or channel their activism through the local branches of any major Civil Rights Organizations. That same autonomy allowed the women to develop relationships with politicians and community leadership.

The term “intervention” is most often used in conjunction with government policy, political science, or in relation to military action. The term is also broadly defined as a disruption, hindrance, or to interfere with an outcome, condition or process. In this dissertation, I incorporate the latter definition to assert that Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove interfered in the prevailing segregationist practices by creating venues for residents to disrupt the status quo. In this context, I am utilizing the term to place Bolden, Brayboy and Dove’s advocacy and leadership into several overlapping historiographical narratives; the southern Movement, black leadership in Atlanta, and women’s history.¹¹

Subsequent chapters will discuss consequent interventions: 1) how leadership styles were influenced by environment, 2) when the three left the segregated South, and 3) why the three women should be categorized in the literature as qualified Movement leaders without the constraints typically ascribed to black female leadership. Once the research revealed that the women did not begin their community work through church-based organizations, and all three women served in positions of authority at work, I examined archived interviews to better identify

¹¹Further discussion on intervention is explored in the Methodology section.
the trajectory between their careers and their activism. What was not clear from the interviews and oral histories were whether the women personally preferred to dwell on their personal contributions to the Movement. I drew the conclusion that minimizing the importance of their contributions, but not the importance of the objective, i.e. enfranchisement, education, economic empowerment, during the recorded conversations would have kept the issue of inequality at the forefront of the interview. Further review revealed that the questions the women were asked did not appear to be probative. In the articles, it does not appear as though the interviewers asked for specific details. Bearing in mind newspaper articles are edited for space, comparatively speaking, the results contained the same questions, similar responses, with few variances. Their replies illustrated how the women perceived themselves, their resistance to being labeled “leader,” prioritizing the work over personal details, all of which contributes to the dearth of stringent critique and analyses of their projects.

Attempting to construct the women’s biographies, assessing backgrounds, environments, and life choices prompted a new research question; should the women’s backgrounds factor into the historicization of their activism? The paucity of available background information when compiling the historical movements that formed the nuclei of Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s influence would suggest the answer is “yes,” which altered the direction of the research. In the methodology section, I further explain how the revised research questions formed my approach to assessing the women’s leadership.

When I began comparing the childhood of each woman, the pattern that emerged reflected that each grew up feeling a sense of belonging to the entire community. Because of their interactions with neighbors, small business owners, church members, educators, and librarians who were members of Movement organizations, these women were invested in their
communities. Little analysis exists that amalgamates the impact of biographical information, education, work, community experiences, and mentors upon the women’s lives to study the origins of their activist impulses, or their efficacy as leaders, in and of Atlanta’s black community. In a subsequent chapter, this dissertation introduces their backgrounds specifically in support of the idea that each of the women were shaped by their exposure to politically active family members, teachers, and colleagues, thereby eventually shaping their approaches to their civil rights work.

However, attempting to examine the women’s personal lives as a foundation to ascertain their best leadership practices initially proved to be an obstacle, as literature outside of interviews was limited. Dove offered a relatively substantial trove of recollections about her childhood in comparison to Brayboy who offered nil. Bolden fell in between the two in terms of sharing glimpses into her childhood. In this situation, the women were controlling their narrative by determining the extent of what they shared of their formative years. The women grew up in a time period where black women were being assailed and blamed for all that was wrong with the black community. From black sociologists to political leadership, black women were publicly reprimanded for not being ladies. Racist dogma extolled how black women were incapable of being “ladies.” In this aspect, the women’s reluctance to share personal details may also possibly have functioned as a nod to the three of them being firmly planted in the politics of respectability in which they were reared. Bolden and Dove spoke freely about positive aspects of their childhood, schools, church, and activities. There is almost nothing recorded from Brayboy outside of her Washington High School experiences, and those are limited to the impact that attending such a prestigious school had on her.
Biographically, the women appear diametrically opposed in terms of backgrounds and lifestyles. Further, based on their upbringings, each of the three women chose to direct their attentions to different aspects of inequality, economics, enfranchisement, and education. Yet, specific commonalities that are interwoven through their works include their secondary education, reliance upon their faith, the power of the vote, and the necessity of training and education. Bolden, Brayboy and Dove used their careers, within Black Atlanta, to implement career development, engineer job placement, facilitate social services and to educate citizens.

The black church has been well documented as functioning as the center of black communities.\(^\text{12}\) Historically, the church has operated as a powerful institution in segregated society, the one place free of white dominance. Houses of worship contained the cultural, political, and economic institutions from which they were excluded in larger society: schools, banks, mutual aid societies, performing arts and career centers, and lecture halls. Churches were where one could become literate, secure a loan, learn about job openings or attend political rallies.\(^\text{13}\) Historian Charmayne E. Patterson described the black church as “an agent for change and liberation for African-Americans within segregated American society”.\(^\text{14}\) In studying the political influences of African-Americans, the church and/or clergy are often listed as where most black activists received their first introduction to political rhetoric, dating back to the enslaved preachers delivering messages of both earthly and heavenly freedom to bonded peoples.

\(^{12}\) Many scholars address the symbiotic connections between the black church and community. For this dissertation, the primary text used was C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya’s ten year study, *The Black Church in the African-American Experience*. For this dissertation, I also referenced the seminal works of Aldon Morris, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham and Bettye Collier-Thomas. Bettye Collier-Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice: African-American Women and Religion* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010).


\(^{14}\) Charmayne E. Patterson, "Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread: The African-American Megachurch and Prosperity Theology" (PhD diss., Georgia State University, 2007), 16.
One of the results of such specific exposure would seem to indicate that the institution responsible for religious instruction was also responsible for promoting enfranchisement, and dispensing citizenship training. The church provided spiritual, political, economic, and educational empowerment to its congregants and the immediate communities.

Jack M. Bloom stated that the “political system is so important in setting the framework within which economic struggles are carried out.”\(^{15}\) The church was the institution that disseminated political information and produced strategies to alleviate economic struggles. Therefore, it seemed necessary to include an abbreviated explanation of the roles of the church in the black community, (spiritual component not withstanding). Also included in the discussion is the status of black women in the black church, and the importance of faith to many black female activists who were born during, or immediately after the Progressive Era, or during the Great Depression, to clarify why their Christian faith was an integral part of what they believed their purposes were. It was their faith that allowed them to pursue their professional goals.

Faith based political activism dates back to the nineteenth century. Between 1830 and 1920, black women became more active in the religious and political culture as they exercised their agency by contesting ideas about their abilities and the place of women in public life. Their political and cultural activisms were formalized in a network of secular and religious organizations through which they made substantial financial and material contributions to the black community. Imbued by ideas of freedom, “black women became active participants in the

public discourse about the role and status of women and African-Americans in the United States.”

During the early twentieth century, Social Gospel theology was on the rise. The ideology behind the Social Gospel Movement wedded Christian principles to progressive action to address inequality and injustice in American society. Patterson’s examination of the connections between megachurches and the history of Prosperity Theology within the contemporary black church explains how the black church has “historically tended to support the Social Gospel’s objectives of making the church more accountable for the material and social as well as spiritual needs of its members.” The message was upheld and promoted by most African-Americans denominations. Patterson’s research indicated that the Social Gospel was perceived as being committed to social justice, with an emphasis on activism that addressed racism and poverty. She also contended that the Social Gospel Movement, exhorted black Christians to “move beyond the religious” and become “more involved in and accountable” to the black community.

Motivated by their deep religious convictions in the moral righteousness of their struggle, black women worked long and hard within their organizations and in the interracial church movement to address basic issues of human rights, and to create strategies to improve basic issues of human rights. They sought to improve the economic, social and political status of females, blacks and other minorities. Desegregation and self-determination were cornerstones of

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17Patterson, "Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread,” 167.

18Patterson, “Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread,” 19, 168.
their philosophy. For African-Americans women, these concerns were not only related to civil rights, but were central to the basic tenets of Christianity and self-identity.¹⁹

Faith-based community service is intrinsically connected to servant leadership. Robert Greenleaf first coined the term “servant-leadership” in his book, The Servant as Leader. In Greenleaf’s book, leadership is not just a hierarchal pyramid, faith and belief in a cause automatically lead to service.²⁰ Several well-known examples of servant leaders and organizations that emphasized servant-leadership include, Septima Clark, Ella Baker, Ruby Doris Smith Robinson, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Congress Of Racial Equality (CORE.) Lea Williams interprets Greenleaf’s definition by including the characteristics of “prophetic and visionary”, and uses it to profile several black Civil Rights activists, three of whom were women. Williams extrapolates the criterion of servant-leadership as the selfless desire to be of service to others, committed to a cause or campaign, and not in pursuit of materialistic goals.²¹ Janet Dewart Bell applies Greenleaf’s theory to assess the service of nineteen African-Americans female activists. Servant-leadership has also been associated with those who serve the community without benefit of an official title, but wield influence and believe that it is their moral obligation to serve.²² In each of their studies, both Bell and Williams infer that one mark of servant leadership was “avoiding the limelight”

¹⁹Collier-Thomas, Jesus, Jobs, and Justice, xxxiii.


²²Janet Dewart Bell, “African-American Women Leaders in the Civil Rights Movement: A Narrative Inquiry” (PhD diss., Antioch University, 2015), 19-20. Bell uses the term “servant-leadership” to identify women who “did not have titles which reflected their levels of influence or contributions, but did much of the work and held moral authority.”
and “reluctance to claim the title for themselves”. Bolden did not avoid the “limelight” however she assiduously declared that her faith in God was the foundation of all that she did. Brayboy and Dove were recognized within their professions, but did not bring attention to their faith-based advocacy efforts. In this context, the servant-leader model of activism could arguably fit beneath the respectability umbrella. Laboring in “the vineyard” without recognition would be considered gender-appropriate and Christian.

The United States Constitution mandates the separation of church and state, yet there was little separation within segregated societies. The intertwining relationship of religion and politics in the lives of black women was a cornerstone of their activism. Churches have been fundamental to the political work of African-Americans women since the seventeenth century. Black churchwomen, and their organizations, were potent factors in the social and political reform movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Educator and activist Nannie Helen Burroughs defined the importance of the church to black women in the community by declaring, “The Negro church means the Negro woman.” Their political influence was sometimes limited by lack of access to the franchise, but they found ways to implement their reform agendas and influence public policy issues through use of their associational network, including social, church, club and interracial organizations. Using religious and secular bases of power, women aggressively pursued, organized, and led electoral operations.

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23 Williams, Servants of the People, 143; Bell, “African-American Women Leaders in the Civil Rights Movement,” 18.

24 Matthew 20:1-16 tells the parable of the workers in a vineyard. The moral of the story is that the last will become first, a popular theme in African-American sermons. Another popular chapter was the third chapter of Colossians, which extols working hard for the Lord and not for recognition.

25 Collier-Thomas, Jesus, Jobs, and Justice, xxx.

26 Collier-Thomas, Jesus, Jobs, and Justice, xxxi.
African-Americans women recognized the connection between race and suffrage and realized that without the ballot, their ability to influence government policy would be minimal. The economic and material survival of African-Americans would be placed in jeopardy. As a theoretical concept, it undergirded their resistance to multiple oppressions, including racism, sexism, economic and political exploitation, and lynching. To maintain segregation, not only were laws necessary to govern social and cultural practices, but so was financial deprivation so that the people could not afford to move, or become properly educated. In short, fiscal inequality was necessary to maintain dominion. Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove sought to change the economic and political pieces, deducing that equality would follow. The women undermined the racist political system while seeking to change the oppressive economic system.

During the 1960s and 1970s, black women were developing programs to empower black communities. Crystal Sanders, in *A Chance for Change; Head Start and Mississippi’s Black Freedom Struggle*, wrote about how a group of black women manifested their activism utilizing the Child Development Group of Mississippi’s Head Start program. The women in Sanders’ book created an educational avenue for community empowerment through their jobs. According to Sanders, blacks in Mississippi developed strategies to pursue full freedoms in a state that contained one of the “worst records of black disfranchisement”. In *A Chance for Change*, black Mississippians did not believe that after President Lyndon Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the struggle for civil rights was over. For black Mississippians, “full freedom” meant “enforcement of civil rights legislation, the chance to earn a decent wage, the

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27Collier-Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs, and Justice*, 258.
opportunity to participate in community governance and access to quality education.” One of Sanders’ theories is that “southern black women restructured civic life” and along with the Office of Economic Opportunity, redistributed power and funding while developing a “cadre of independent black leaders,” and “increased the state’s middle-class.” Sanders’ protagonists, who were in charge of the Head Start program, were doing work comparable to that of Bolden, Brayboy and Dove. The three women were presenting residents with means to become educated, enfranchised, and economically stable, which theoretically lead to new black leadership and a larger black middle-class.

The words “community” and “leadership” are used frequently throughout this dissertation. Here, the term “community” is used interchangeably with the phrase “black community.” To be specific, I utilize the word “community” to represent a group of people experiencing similar cultural conditions, not as a set of geographical coordinates or boundaries within the city of Atlanta. In this context, I incorporate Benedict Anderson and Deborah Gray-White’s usage of the term as a descriptor, rather than a location. Anderson’s definition of “community” groups by commonalities of race, political and ideological beliefs, and environment, as opposed to a specific group of neighborhoods. Gray-White defined “community” as relationships among bonded black women as being bound by race, but based upon age, occupation, personal achievements, friendships, and dependency relationships.


30Ibid.

31Sanders, A Chance for Change, 7.

32Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 1991), 4-7. In Imagined Communities, Anderson states that the idea of community lies within nationalism, kinship, religion, ethnicity, cultural ties and ideological beliefs. In this context, community is used to describe “black Atlanta.”

33Deborah Gray White, Ar’n’t I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South (W. W. Norton & Company, 1999), 133.
Thus, the three women sought to improve access to larger society for all black Atlantans, not just the members of their own neighborhoods.

Several definitions of “leader” and “leadership” are presented throughout the chapters. Throughout the dissertation, I introduce additional definitions of leadership found in the scholarship. The additional definitions confirm that the term itself is fluid, based on the author’s research and discipline. Not because the definition changes, but because the women themselves evolved throughout their professional and activist careers. As the women advanced, their responsibilities increased. My early attempts to identify and define specifically what type of leadership these southern black women employed involved attempting to shoehorn Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove into pre-existing profiles created to define Movement men. Research indicated that leadership styles were labeled (based on discipline) by personality, style, gender, or administrative structure: charismatic, gendered, ministerial, hierarchal, grassroots, clinical, dictatorial, top-down, or bottom-up.

If a woman worked in an authoritative capacity, but without formal title, the description becomes quantified, her style may be categorized as Servant-Leader, Bridge, or masculine. In identifying, assessing, and critiquing the leadership of African-American women, defining the style became constrained as the majority of the literature categorized leadership based upon race, class position, and gender. In the classic Movement literature, defining leadership styles could arguably be attributed to scholars offering gendered critiques. The label “leader” is generally applied to anyone who was elected to head up an organization, public office, pioneers in a field,

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34Scholars such as Belinda Robnett have completed important work on qualifying the different avenues where black women exemplified leadership but were unrecognized as such. These works are classic and necessary.
and innovators. However, the term was unilaterally applied to male leaders, regardless of the platform, or the outcome of the leadership.

With women, if the activist did not occupy a formal position, regardless of the achieved results, the term was not applied, unless it was feminized, i.e., Brayboy was identified as “the godmother of voter registration,” Bolden “organized the domestic workers” and Dove, while lauded for her professional accomplishments, has not received a complimentary title. Joan Charles’ dissertation on Ella Baker’s work with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee defined leadership “in terms of traits, behaviors, influence, interaction patterns, role relationships, and positions in occupations. . .and with the vision to lead.” Charles also presents four components of leadership; “(a) leadership is a process; (b) leadership involves influence; (c) leadership occurs within a group context; and, (d) leadership involves goal attainment.”

According to Charles’ amalgamated definition, Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove met all of the criteria for formal leadership.

The three women personified the behaviors, occupied the roles, exhibited influence over groups, and all desired a shared outcome of economic equality and enfranchisement. For the purposes of this study, I am categorizing the women as Movement leadership based upon Charles’ criteria. In this dissertation, I label Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s leadership, “enduring leadership.” I define “enduring leadership” as a specific style that was directly connected to their race, gender, the communities in which they lived, and the era in which they were born. Each of the three women, at various points in their lives, led grassroots-oriented community-conscious

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35Joan Charles, “Ella Baker and the SNCC: Grassroots Leadership and Political Activism in a Nonhierarchical Organization” (PhD diss., University of Oklahoma, 2007), 45. In Charles’ study, she identifies civil rights activist Ella Baker’s leadership using managerial and business models. In this dissertation, this model illustrates Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove as “leaders” in their respective professional settings.
organizations that closely resembled the organizing traditions of Septima Clark, Ella Baker, Ruby Doris Smith Robinson, and Modjeska Simkins. Their goals, as “Race Women” were not to identify individuals to groom for leadership, but to empower members of the black community to uplift others.

Enduring leadership embodies characteristics associated with qualities perceived as “feminine,” nurturing, empowering, and out-of-sight. In assessing the leadership of the three women, in relation to their environment, historian Barbara Ransby’s book on Ella Baker offered a telling anecdote about the roles of black female leaders. Ransby described Ella Baker, in relation to her relationship to socialist anarchist George Schuyler and his family, as “taking on a role she continued to play for much of her political life, that of a behind-the-scenes-organizer who paid attention to the mechanics of movement building in a way that few high-profile charismatic leaders did, or even know how to do.”36 This dissertation is not arguing these women built Atlanta’s Civil Rights Movement, however, these women did build programs that were parallel to the “mechanics of movement building.” Their structures spoke to the immediate needs of the community. As residents, and behind-the-scenes-organizers, these women were able to gauge those needs in a way that an outsider could not. While it can be deduced that the three women must have certainly emitted some charisma, it can also be concluded that the women’s personalities were not the initial reasons people followed them.

This activism, which was addressing the women’s environmental needs, was a visible form of leadership. Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove were conducting what Charles identified as “the preferred form of leadership. . . brought women from diverse backgrounds together”. The women waged door-to-door campaigns, created strategies, formulated tactics, and, mobilized

people and resources to bring social change about in southwest Atlanta.\textsuperscript{37} The women were selected for inclusion in this dissertation because they shared leadership traits, high school experiences, and the desire to economically uplift the members of their community despite having different levels of formal education and having worked in very different occupations.

Since the women in this study carved out their own spaces to confront legalized oppression, the research became equal parts identifying their particular brand of leadership, building a profile by connecting the series of events in each woman’s life —where they respectively took control of a union, an organization, and a department—and recording events that indicated the women maintained some modicum of power. Gender certainly plays an enormous role in this inquiry, selecting women to write about was deliberate. Yet, the limited selection of available material referencing Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s community leadership, or their political activism, confirms the relevance of historicizing the political activism of these three black women.

1.2 Literature Review

When conducting preliminary Civil Rights Movement research, I primarily concentrated on books and journal articles that focused on Atlanta to support one of my key interventions, that the three women’s activism was heavily influenced by growing up in “Black Atlanta.” Several of those works included seminal texts, both classic and newer works, that specifically addressed the issue of race in Atlanta. Ronald Bayor’s \textit{Race and the Shaping of Atlanta}, Alton Hornsby’s \textit{Black Power in Dixie: A Political History of African-Americans in Atlanta}, Karen Ferguson’s \textit{Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta}, Allison Dorsey’s \textit{To Build Our Lives Together: Community Formation in Black Atlanta, 1875-1906}, and Maurice Hobson’s dissertation, “The Dawning of

\textsuperscript{37}Charles, “Ella Baker and the SNCC,” 141.
the Black New South: A Geo-Political, Social, and Cultural History of Black Atlanta, Georgia, 1966-96” provided excellent insight into black Atlanta’s cultural, economic, and political climate during the twentieth century. Although historian and political activist Clarence Bacote wrote “The Negro in Atlanta Politics” in 1955, this article is still cited as it contains comprehensive data pertaining to statistics on blacks and voting. Additional studies contained important statistics on black Atlantans rates of employment, neighborhoods, education, culture, and political practices. Hornsby and Hobson’s work peripherally allude to Brayboy and Bolden’s work within the context of time period or community. Ferguson’s work includes a Pearlie Dove interview. As the women’s programs were not the focal point of the research, there is little critique of the women’s influence upon the community.38

Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s archived interviews are housed in the Special Collections repositories at Emory University, Atlanta University Center’s Robert W. Woodruff Library, Auburn Avenue Research Library on African-Americans Culture and History, the Atlanta History Center, Georgia State University’s Georgia Government Documentation Project, and the University of Georgia. These interviews were integral in the construction of the biographical chapter.

Bolden and her work with the NDWU has received the most scholarly attention. Dorothy Cowser Yancey’s article, “Dorothy Bolden, Organizer of Domestic Workers: She Was Born Poor and She Would Not Bow Down” is one of the earliest scholarly examinations of Bolden. In

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1999, Lars Christiansen completed a dissertation on Bolden and the NDWU; his study was a sociological examination of the NDWU as a union and a social movement. Elizabeth Beck’s “The National Domestic Workers Union and the War on Poverty” juxtaposes Bolden’s work against institutionalized racism and the federal government’s War on Poverty. Kathryn Nasstrom’s “Down to Now: Memory, Narrative, and Women’s Leadership in the Civil Rights Movement in Atlanta, Georgia” study included both Bolden and Brayboy in her theories on women’s contributions to the local Movement. One of the more recent books, published in 2015, is Premilla Nadasen’s study of black domestic workers who organized for higher pay. Nadasen’s work examines a national group of domestic workers and their organizing efforts.39

While Bolden’s founding of the NDWU is central to the text, her biographical information is abbreviated. Nadasen’s characterization of Bolden (and the rest of the workers) as women who were “not a part of the African-Americans elite,” as having little formal education, as speaking in “southern black vernacular which was distinct from the polished vernacular of Martin Luther King” and as “hindered by disability, illiteracy, and limited opportunities” depicts a narrow, if not inaccurate, description of Bolden.40 By presenting Bolden’s childhood, neighborhood, and influences, this dissertation seeks to identify the cultural factors that kept her from being “in many ways ordinary working-class African-Americans women.”41 In grouping Bolden, Brayboy and Dove, this dissertation seeks to introduce the women as “respectable”


40While much of Nadasen’s description accurately describes many domestic workers who were activists, little of it is applicable to Bolden, nor how she would describe herself. Nadasen, Household Workers Unite, 55.

41Nadasen, Household Workers Unite, 55.
grassroots political activists, and as complex women worthy of additional research and critical study.

Marable Manning’s *Black Leadership* was used as the foundational definition to identify a conceptualization of leadership. Evelyn M. Simien’s “Black Leadership and Civil Rights: Transforming the Curriculum, Inspiring Student Activism” was an integral part of constructing leadership profiles for the three women. Elice Rogers’ definitions for politics, the political process and political power were drawn from her study, “Afritics from Margin to Center: Theorizing the Politics of African-Americans Women as Political Leaders”. Anthologies such as *Nobody Speaks for Me! Self-Portraits of American Working Class Women*, Bettye Collier-Thomas and V. P. Franklin’s *Sisters in the Struggle, African-Americans Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement* and Vicki L. Crawford, Jacqueline Anne Rouse and Barbara Woods’, *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers 1941-1965* were excellent resources for providing foundational studies of black women in leadership.  

Atlanta’s black newspapers, the *Atlanta Daily World* and the *Atlanta Inquirer*, and the mainstream publication, the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, became invaluable as each newspaper featured profiles on the women in various stages of their lives in a way that the books do not. The articles also feature the three women speaking about their work. Reviewing Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s interviews, in conjunction with other studies critiquing Movement leadership, led to my formulating the theory that a combination of exposure to psychical

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distance, and the black community, were positive factors that contributed to the women’s ascendance into authoritative positions within their careers.  

Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove shared two common experiences, chaperoned exposure to “white Atlanta,” and being educated at Booker T. Washington High School. I examine these events, experienced at different junctures of their lives, as two of the underlying foundational factors propelling Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s activism: 1) the women were introduced to how blacks navigated the “white world,” and 2) they were taught by “race” men and women who emphasized achievement. The three young women did more than merely venture into white communities then return to black environments. Their movements were transformative. During their adolescent and formative years, they moved from supportive private black spaces into threatening public white spaces. Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove crossed what I describe as segregation’s psychical distances.  

Over the course of this dissertation, the research seeks to present analysis in support of the key critical intervention discussed earlier. The first point of contention positions the women’s leadership as a direct result of living most of their adult lives in the communities in which they grew up. Other shared characteristics include the women being members of the same generation, and their access to the stalwart institutions that anchored the black community. These three black women redefined leadership in Atlanta through their intentional and unintentional political

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43"Psychical distance" is a nineteenth century term that was created to explain how distance is emotionally perceived. In this dissertation, I use the phrase to contextualize the impact of traveling outside of segregated Atlanta upon the three women’s professional and personal choices. I further discuss psychical distance in chapter two.

44Edward Bullough. "Psychical Distance' as a Factor in Art and as an Aesthetic Principle", British Journal of Psychology, 5 (1912): 87. Edward Bullough created the term psychical distance in the discipline of art aesthetics. Bullough introduced the ideas of spatial, perceived, and temporal distance as a methodology for critiquing fine art. He used the concept of psychical distance to illustrate how heavily the role of perception weighs on the viewer’s processing of an artistic piece.
activism. Yet, these three black women have not been typically studied as political leaders in indigenous communities, merely as community organizers.

All activism begins with community, either in response to, or in support of said community. In the lives of Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove, their environs contributed to building women’s character. In critiquing localized Movement leadership, many studies assess motivational impetus for activism as coming from outside connections. Community leaders are occasionally portrayed as having grafted national Movement agendas onto their local strategies, which ignores the community’s agency in protesting injustice.

This dissertation focuses not just on Dorothy Bolden, Ella Mae Brayboy, and Pearlie Dove’s activism, but the political influence the women wielded as a result of the respect they commanded within Atlanta’s black community. Including descriptions of Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s neighborhoods is necessary; the community institutions that they grew up in become the institutions the women served as activists. 45 Studying the early parts of Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s lives and the segregated environment in which they grew up is central to developing my argument that the citizens and institutions located in the historically African-American Vine City and Washington Park neighborhoods played a key role in molding these three women into activists.

Prosopography is the methodology supporting this meta narrative of black women leadership’s in Atlanta. In this study, the narrative of Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove, reflects an overarching narrative of Atlanta’s indigenous Movement leadership. This historicization of local women leaders presents their efforts in building organizations dedicated to economic empowerment, enfranchisement, and education, as the “story about the story.” If the Movement

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45 Darlene Clark Hine, “African-American Women and Their Communities in the Twentieth Century,” Black Women, Gender + Families, 1, (Spring 2007): 2. Hine stated that “the primary launching site of every struggle was the community.”
narrative tells the story of local citizenry lobbying for civil rights, my meta narrative presents the people, places, and events that form the basis of that narrative. Movement scholarship contains the histories of black domestic workers who were also activists, but not much about a domestic worker organizing a union of her peers. Brayboy's work as one of the first black female deputy voting registrars has not been historicized; there is little analysis critiquing her efficacy and legacy. There is ample evidence in the canon about the excellent “Negro teachers” who instilled academic excellence in the midst of a bifurcated educational system, but very few narratives exist about those who created professionalized curricula to prepare students for desegregated school systems. A collective assessment of Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s biographies changes the metanarrative about Movement leadership, especially outside of established Movement or church-sponsored organizations. If the narrative of Atlanta’s Movement centers around black male ministers affiliated with organizations that spurred national change, this dissertation presents an overarching story of a continuum of black women serving, empowering, and leading the community that produced them.

These black women were educators, voters, and organizers offering economic opportunities. In the following chapters, stories about the women’s lives illustrate the connection between community and the formation of the women’s characters, demonstrate how they led others to enfranchisement/voting, how they continued the tradition of using education as a tool of activism, and provides anecdotal evidence of their political agency, influence, and enduring legacies throughout Atlanta.

1.3 Methodology

The connections that the women shared, as well as several other factors, led me to select prosopography as a research methodology. Prosopography is the collective study of individual
biographies to determine historical significance of individuals on whom primary sources or data is limited, by grouping them together. This dissertation incorporates prosopography as a research methodology to identify the common characteristics of these three women: environment, locality, social institutions and/or class. In this study Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s lives, as exemplified in their careers and within the community, are used to illustrate their initial forays into activism and the political process. Experiences that Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove shared were, 1) their activism arose out of growing up in segregated Atlanta, 2) their encounters with racism, and 3) their activism began when the women were middle-aged. Moving Bolden, Brayboy and Dove’s stories from the margins of Atlanta’s Civil Rights Movement is one critical aspect of historicizing their activism.

The decision to construct a prosopographical study on Dorothy Bolden, Ella Mae Wade Brayboy and Pearlie Craft Dove’s activism was based upon their organizational histories as presented via their oral histories. Dorothy Bolden organized a domestic workers’ union in Atlanta, Georgia. Ella Mae Brayboy was appointed to serve as one of the first African-American deputy voter registrars in the state of Georgia. Pearlie Dove was promoted by her mentor to serve as the first female chair of the Education Department at Clark College. Using prosopography as the methodological tool, this dissertation introduces the women’s commonalities to first, present a historical narrative of Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s activism, using collective biography, from 1964 to 2004. Second, as an instrument to demonstrate how Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s career activism segued to joining organizations committed to empowering blacks. Building organizations, and coalitions, ultimately led to the women amassing local and national politicized influence. Lastly, this study used comparative analysis of the women’s activism to examine their

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respective efforts. Brayboy, and Dove were pushing back against the political machine of legal
segregation through canvassing for voter registration, creating opportunities for economic
empowerment, and changing their communities through educational uplift.

Because this dissertation is a prosopography, which by definition required a biographical
research base, investigating the women’s lives became even more necessary. The pronounced
lack of inclusion of these women in Movement history revealed that despite the numerous
newspaper articles, the women do not appear in the canon on the Movement focusing on Atlanta.
Yet, these women performed work that had regional, if not national, implications. Secondly, the
reason the dissertation became a prosopographical study was because I identified commonalities
in this disparate group of three southern, black, female, indigenous, community leaders.47

However, despite locating articles, interviews, and speaking with family members, the
background information that I found was woefully incomplete. To be fair, if the women were
deliberate in choosing to withhold personal information, the interviewer has to work with what is
supplied. It is also problematic if the women marginalize their own efforts.

Scholars have charged that biography, as a sole methodology, may lack substantive
evidence of theory. Challenged with presenting a research structure outside of biography, I
sought out how to incorporate the historical and the theoretical as the three women are the
epicenter of the study. Prosopography allowed for the incorporation of non-discipline research
methods, such as case study. Because there was not a large amount of pre-existing background
material on Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove, previously recorded oral interviews provided the
majority of information on the women’s childhoods, adolescence, and young adulthood.

47A prosopography does not demand that all of the subjects be from the same categories, but have
consistent commonalities. Examples of those commonalities include; the three women had widely varying degrees
of formal education, but each considered attending Booker T. Washington their academic and cultural foundation.
All of the women ventured outside of their immediate communities in pursuit of equality, and all of the women lived
in the same part of southwest Atlanta.
The study is centered on Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove, and the narrative begins with introducing the women. However, inserting a brief discussion of the black community’s cultural institutions is critical to illuminating both the factors that spurred the women to excel and the debilitating effects that the women strove to change. The segregated black community in which the three women grew up appeared to be such a powerful and positive influence, that I believed that the analysis would be inconclusive if I did not include a depiction of the institutions and people that the women publicly acknowledged as contributing to their quality of life. Atlanta has been consistently described as being the cradle of the civil rights movement in terms of leadership and Movement organizations. In this dissertation, as the focus is on indigenous leadership, it also on the black neighborhoods, schools, churches, and communities that loved and produced these three women, as well as the economic and political climate of the city at large.

Limited access to primary sources was indeed a double-edged sword. Those limitations validated studying Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove. One of the inherent difficulties in examining a marginalized group of people is that primary sources are often limited to the materials the narrators themselves are willing or able to provide. In this case, available interviews were restricted to archived interviews of the three women, brief interviews I was able to conduct with Brayboy’s daughter, Joyce Jones, and with Dove before she passed away. The lack of ancillary interviewees posed additional research dilemmas; a dearth of available primary sources and inaccessibility to the heirs. Because of the limited access, the interviews functioned as autobiographical reflections in this dissertation.

Using interviews to construct the three women’s biographies was fundamental to building my research methodology. The use of autobiography and biography as history is atypical as the
theoretical credentials may be questioned as less than stringent. Yet, the use of biography is not without precedent. Historians have used their own autobiographies as a vehicle for contributing to the historiography.\textsuperscript{48} Jaume Aurell states that what historians are doing, in using their personal or academic stories, is revealing their epistemological beliefs.\textsuperscript{49} Aurell indicates that the historian’s personal stories become “historical artifacts” positioning the author as both observer and participant in the historical setting. In this dissertation, the women are not historians writing about themselves, but are the historical artifacts. The interviews were the only source where the women’s voices were captured without interpretation. In a historian’s memoir, the author’s activism, research, and career become the intervention in the historical debate. In this case, the women’s interviews encapsulated their contributions in their own words. The three women stated the connections between their personal history and their personal projects.\textsuperscript{50} The women’s careers, political influence, and community advocacy intervene in the masculine-driven narrative of the Atlanta Movement.

Identifying interconnected themes among the three women’s activism was fairly manageable compared to the task of finding primary documentation. While Bolden bequeathed a treasure trove of documentation to several repositories, and Dove has compiled and archived her methodologies, corralling the records of Brayboy’s achievements was an elusive endeavor. As noted earlier, Brayboy preferred to let her actions speak for her. She did not enjoy giving interviews and when she did, she revealed little information outside of emphatic observations.

\textsuperscript{48}As discussed in the introduction, autobiographies and biographies such as JoAnne Robinson, Daisy Bates, Dorothy Height, Ida Barnett Wells, Anne Moody, Ella Baker, and Septima Clark were examined as examples of an author’s personal experiences serving as the historical evidence.


about the importance of voting or community services. One newspaper article quoted Brayboy as pointedly wondering aloud during the interview “why anyone would bother with her.” The consequence of Brayboy remaining steadfast to her personal credo of working “behind the scenes” increases the urgency to capture and historicize her contributions to her community and the city of Atlanta to better study the implications of her work in conjunction with the national Movement. Most of the correspondence that she wrote, and the majority of the projects that she coordinated, do not bear her name. Lyndon Wade stated, “She was a bright woman. She started working with the Community Council and other community groups. She learned how to write grants and plan events. She helped make careers. And all of those guys she worked for never gave her the credit.” However, the resources that do exist on Brayboy offer potent, albeit smaller, glimpses into the woman who is alleged to have registered at least ten thousand people to vote in her lifetime.

This work is not an oral history or case study, yet elements of the prosopography required biographical information and the comparative components of a case study—as the researcher must group the subjects’ similarities to illustrate commonalities. In the case of Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove, this study seeks to demonstrate how the social institutions in black southwest Atlanta contributed to the formation of the three women’s character, and ultimately their leadership skill set. Black women who were not only community activists, but community leaders with political influence. There was a lack of archived materials that contained hard data confirming that the women in this study were the driving forces behind certain accomplishments. However, I


52 Interview by author with Lyndon Wade, June 26, 2015, Atlanta, Georgia. Wade is Brayboy’s younger brother, and former president of the Atlanta Urban League. VEP is the acronym for the Voter Education Project, the citywide voter registration campaign sponsored by the Southern Regional Council.
collected the interviews to use as anecdotal evidence of their leadership. The materials retrieved from the women or from their archived materials provided tenuous evidence of their contributions. The finished Movement projects tended to have the names of the “man in charge”, but the personal records, the church bulletins, minutes from meetings, write-ups in the black newspapers, and accolades from civic organizations tell the women’s story. That resulted in my reliance upon the personal interviews and archived materials. This potential weakness in the research will be strengthened in future studies.

As I delved into the backgrounds of Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove, I studied the economic composition of Atlanta’s black communities, the political environment, and its social institutions. Researching the women, the segregationist culture in which they came of age, and how they joined the Movement exponentially shifted the foundation of this analysis. Reading historians’ interviews on each of the women expanded my theory while narrowing my research focus. This dissertation seeks to prove that a domestic worker, a part-time housewife, and a college professor used their careers as platforms to transform their communities by increasing access to education, enfranchisement, and economic opportunities for Atlanta’s black citizenry. As these three women ascended professionally, their dedication resulted in the acquisition of political acumen, and later, power.

I have been researching the women’s activism for the better part of a decade, from research paper to thesis to dissertation. As the research progressed, the analysis began to exceed the boundaries of the original paper. As the Movement narrative has expanded and unfolded overall, critical studies have widened to include analyses of black women’s contributions. The scholarship has increasingly included bodies of work that insert women into the Movement canon as leaders, galvanizers, and organizers. Frequently, black female activists have been
characterized as politically active “supporters” laboring diligently at the behest of the kings of the Movement. This dissertation purports that Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove were community leaders, political activists, and kingmakers. In seeking to substantiate my preliminary research claim that the women were empowering community activists, examining archival sources revealed that these women were political activists who were community leaders. The original thrust of my dissertation research concentrated on compiling primary sources that proved native Atlantans Dorothy Bolden, Ella Mae Wade Brayboy, and Pearlie Mae Dove, among others, were undeniably community leaders. However, upon reviewing their interviews, oral histories, and articles in the black newspapers, I discovered the simultaneously intriguing and disturbing point of analysis which altered this study’s foci: that these women were politically influential and largely absent from Atlanta’s Movement historiography.

Perusing the biographical information available, the women appeared to have come from strikingly different backgrounds. Discovering that information was almost the singular factor that drew me to deciding to select Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove out of the six to ten other black female activists I identified displaying similar community leadership in Atlanta during the same time period. Analysis revealed that these three women’s lives were, on the surface, vastly different. The fairly standard methodology used to assess the women included grouping by analogous characteristics such as education, income, generation, or organizational membership. For this study, I used the women’s community activism, accumulation of political power and ages as the distinguishing characteristics. Deeper examinations exposed similarities in their spiritual and secular educations as well as their approaches to activism.

Mining the archives caused me to hypothesize that these women’s historical records purposefully only contain what can be linked to public records. This thread of inquiry lead to
developing a discussion about black female leadership, the Movement and the politics of respectability. Defining the politics of respectability for southern black women was directly connected to illustrating how the women adhered to those tenets as a form of protection in public spaces, even as they transcended them. One caveat of respectability politics was that black women in leadership did not often take credit for accomplishments. That lead back to a two-pronged research query, the first being the women may have consciously omitted salient details, possibly to maintain respectability. The women may have refrained from speaking extensively about personal details, based on the era in which they grew up, as a personal response to the very public attacks waged on the character of black women dating back to Reconstruction. The second being the possibility that the interviewers appear not to have asked probing questions about the women’s decisions to pick up the mantle of leadership. Questions that typically get asked of masculine leadership are seemingly missing from the inquiry such as “who were your role models/mentors,” “where do your ideas come from,” “do you have a background in this arena,” “what made you think this particular methodology would be a success,” “what were the failures” and “how did you learn from the failures”.

Examining resources for evidence of their historical contributions to the modern Civil Rights Movement were characteristically outside of primary sources such as autobiography, or secondary sources such as critical studies. As a result, the initial research question focused on identifying black women in leadership who were invisibilized in the literature.53 The inquiry was to be based on the premise that during the modern Movement, southern black female activists were inherent, albeit unacknowledged, leaders. The classic Civil Rights narrative, both long and

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53Kenja Foster-McCray, “Complements to Kazi Leaders: Female Activists in Kawaida-Influenced Cultural Nationalists Organizations, 1966-1987”( PhD diss., Georgia State University, 2017), 10. McCray uses the term “invisibilized” in her research on black female cultural nationalists to describe the erasure of black women’s contributions within Kawaida organizations.
modern, appeared to contain the common denominator that being male was one of the prerequisites for leadership. Women’s roles in the literature were, at best, relegated to that of support staff. At worst, both national and local scholarship completely overlooked black women’s contributions in the recording of Movement histories.

Reviews of pre-existing research appear to focus specifically on the women’s work, or the big event of which they were a part. While this study does not completely answer all of these questions, available interviews led to the development of two theories, 1) the three women constructed professional strategies for career development based upon the guidance that they received, and 2) they incorporated that guidance into developing programs that furthered their activists’ agendas.

Chapter Two offers an overview of life in segregated Atlanta between 1870-1960. The chapter presents the histories of several iconic institutions, examples of black leadership, and important figures that contributed significantly to the formation of Dorothy Bolden, Ella Mae Brayboy, and Pearlie Dove’s character-building childhoods. While community and culture are not the sole reasons the women became activists, those institutions were very influential. The chapter introduces a discussion of the roles of the black church, and the politics of respectability in the black community.

Chapter Three introduces Dorothy Bolden, Ella Mae Wade Brayboy and Pearlie Dove’s biographies. The chapter describes Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove respective childhoods and family life, and their education in Atlanta’s segregated school system. The three women were introduced to the Christian faith, and were active in the church with their families. Additionally, the chapter contains a discussion of how important the church, and respectability practices, were
in their lives. The chapter concludes with presenting key events in their young lives that shaped their forays into activism.

Chapter Four charts the women’s professional and personal paths. The chapter also contains a definition of the phrase segregation’s psychical distance, and explores how leaving the confines of their communities influences the women in their forays into the larger Civil Rights Movement. Bolden and the National Domestic Workers’ Union, Brayboy’s appointment to serve as one of the first Deputy Voter Registrar for the state of Georgia, and Dove’s placement as the first female to head a department at Clark College are examined in detail.

Chapter Five seeks to demonstrate how the women were introduced to the political process. As they progressed in their professional lives, their activism dovetailed the ascension of their careers. As the women accumulated followers, they became valuable to black elected officials. All three achieved some level of national recognition for their professional abilities and their ongoing community advocacy efforts.

Chapter Six concludes the examination of Bolden, Brayboy and Dove’s community activism with a discussion of their impact upon Atlanta’s black community, the community at large, and their legacies.
2  LIFE IN “BLACK ATLANTA,” 1870-1960

Dorothy Bolden, Ella Mae Wade Brayboy, and Pearlie Dove believed that growing up in southwest Atlanta molded their personalities. While reviewing archival interviews, it became evident that all three women felt strong connections to their environs. Each woman attributed their strength of character to the educations they received, the churches they attended, or the neighborhoods in which they lived. They acknowledged teachers, principals, merchants, and church members as playing pivotal roles in their lives. Members of the community exposed the young women to the idea that overcoming segregation was not an insurmountable obstacle for they were still expected to excel.

Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove became “race women,” committed to furthering the ideals of uplifting and empowering the black community. While it can be inferred that they were against racist southern ideologies, research revealed it was not until the women were middle-aged and in supervisory/management positions that their work had dual purposes; to improve the conditions in the communities in which they lived and to be able to safely traverse the white communities. While the three women were preparing all those that they encountered to gain hitherto denied access to the “white world,” they were not preaching the gospel of integration. Rather, they were promoting equality, equal access to jobs, higher education, public transportation, safe neighborhoods, social services, and the constitutional right to vote. It is inherently understood that the women believed that the institution of segregation was oppressive and debilitating. However, the three women did not articulate a desire to leave their community to seek better. They believed that the community where they lived, worked, shopped, and worshipped should have been equivalent to white residential areas.
The women wanted a sustainable quality of life. They believed that their communities were wonderful places to live. However, the women knew that social injustices kept residents underemployed and lacking city services. In an interview conducted a few months before her death, Dove likened growing up in the Washington Park community to growing up in a mythical kingdom. “It was like Camelot,” Dove remembered. “We had everything we needed. Stores. Schools. Banks. A theater and a hospital.” Bolden believed her Vine City childhood was the setting for an idyllic childhood in a neighborhood filled with the kinds of neighbors who fed each other’s children to make sure no one’s child went hungry during the lean periods. Brayboy did not speak directly about the love she had for her neighborhood, but she was fiercely protective of it and lobbied to limit the number of liquor stores allowed to open within a certain radius of the homes.

All of the women belonged to neighborhood associations, Neighborhood Planning Units (as organized by the Atlanta City Council) and organizations dedicated to improving their surroundings. These women were not pushing the city to allow them to integrate white neighborhoods: they were pushing civil servants to provide the same level of service in their neighborhoods, to provide middle schools, bus service, and health care because they paid city taxes. Economic independence, enfranchisement, and education were critical tools necessary to

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54 Gracie Bonds Staples, “A Life Well-Lived,” The Atlanta Journal Constitution, August 11, 2015, http://www.myajc.com/news/lifestyles/a-life-well-lived/nMG3n/ accessed January 8, 2016. Dove could have been referring to either the Fair Haven Hospital, that was owned and operated by Morris Brown College, or the William A. Harris Memorial Hospital founded in approximately 1928 by Sadye Turner Powell and her physician husband, William A. Harris. Fair Haven was housed on the campus of Morris Brown College and Harris Memorial was located on Hunter Street (now Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Dr.) in southwest Atlanta. Sadye Harris Powell family papers, 1910-1991, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library Atlanta, GA 30322, Biographical Scope Note. Herman Mason, Black Atlanta in the Roaring Twenties, (Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 1997), 84.

55 Dorothy Bolden, interviewed by Chris Lutz, Southern Labor Archives, Georgia State University, August 31, 1995.

ensure the black population access to an equally safe and sustainable community as the white middle-class community of Druid Hills.

In studying Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s leadership, this chapter seeks to present an abbreviated examination of what life was like in segregated Atlanta by introducing a few of the prominent cultural institutions and iconic figures who were important to the residents. Role models and mentors were an integral part of the community. This chapter serves to illustrate the bonds the women felt for their neighborhoods. Further, Bolden, Brayboy and Dove’s emulation of their mentors’ activism could be construed as homage to the guidance they received growing up. The women believed they had been more than adequately prepared to succeed because of their respective upbringing. The three became dedicated to continuing work that previous generations of black women had begun by creating opportunities designed to replicate services available to Atlanta’s larger society while pursuing social justice.

In response to the boundaries segregation imposed, the black educational system and church became the institutional bookends of the African-American community. Urban segregation was the impetus leading to the founding of institutions that would become mainstays in the black community. In the South, during the first half of the twentieth century, the black church served the community’s needs, from educational to financial. The majority of the schools, credit associations, businesses, and social outlets that existed within the black community arose out local church members identifying a need and creating a structure to meet that demand. The bifurcated educational system also produced a cadre of fraternal organizations founded to combat social injustices.

2.1 Political Setbacks and Progress

Atlanta’s black community could boast of having a thriving middle-class dating back to the Reconstruction Era. Despite the post-Reconstruction-era’s erosion of civil rights, blacks wielded a small amount of political clout, built profitable businesses and medical practices, and worked in lower-level positions in white corporations. African-Americans were able to become artisans, blacksmiths, tailors, bootmakers, and cabinetmakers. After the Civil War, black men worked for the railroad companies on rebuilding railroad tracks that had been destroyed by Union soldiers.58 Those with the entrepreneurial spirit became peddlers selling produce, dairy products, poultry and baked goods. By 1870, there were five black-owned grocery stores in Atlanta. There were also black-owned barbershops, restaurants, and boardinghouses. For women, the employment opportunities were restricted to domestic work, laundering, cooking and the occasional seamstress. Although segregated, the black community was not only self-sufficient, but seemingly prospering.

The professional class consisted of ministers, educators and medical professionals. By 1881, there were eight black physicians and one dentist in Atlanta. However, medical doctors were often transient due to harassment from the white community, and the population’s low income. The city’s black professionals were poorly paid. The gap between Atlanta’s black middle-class, the working-class and the citizens who were subsisting was vast. Out of the ten thousand African-Americans listed living in Atlanta at the close of Reconstruction, fewer than seven hundred owned property. By 1900, there were thirty-five thousand African-Americans living in Atlanta, yet records indicated that there were fewer than three hundred blacks showing

ownership of property valued at over a thousand dollars. The first decade of the twentieth century witnessed the African-American community lose ground politically and economically. Yet, despite the hardships, blacks were able to build and develop necessary institutions.

In early twentieth century Atlanta, transplant Lugenia Burns Hope was a progressive reformer who challenged the white female leadership of the Young Women’s Christian Association over the group’s policy of selecting white administrators to head the segregated black YWCA branches. In fact, Hope demanded that the women petition for independent branches, which reported only to the National Board. Taking on the YWCA was an unabashedly bold move. Women holding positions of authority in the YWCA were considered safe and respectable. Before moving to Atlanta with her husband, Hope’s professional career included working at the Hull House in Chicago and teaching physical education in Tennessee. Once Hope was established in Atlanta, she joined a group of women who focused on community projects. The members of this group evolved into becoming the founders of the Neighborhood Union, the first female social welfare agency founded by blacks and for blacks. At the turn of the twentieth century, Atlanta’s black citizens were working hard to sustain progressive momentum.

Yet by 1900, lynchings and mob violence against African-Americans had increased. African-Americans were unfairly arrested and detained, the school board refused to build schools


61 Dorsey, To Build Our Lives Together, 142-144. There were several lynchings of African-American men accused of raping of white women (in 1899 Alfred Crawford was killed, Warren Powell was lynched and Sam Hose among others) which was followed by the inevitable white mobs that would gather to roam the black neighborhoods inflicting violence members of the black community to ensure there would be no retaliation for the murders. Upon the hiring of C. C. Penney, an Atlanta University graduate who had passed the civil service exam, to work in the mail department, the white Postmaster General was burned in effigy. Postmaster General John R. Lewis was harassed until he made a public statement supporting white supremacy. Lewis hired another black man, William
for black children, and black political leaders were marginalized and excluded from discussions on race and reform. Race relations, strained at best, had deteriorated to the point where Governor Allen D. Candler’s speech at the Atlanta University Conference for the Study of Negro Problems pointedly emphasized his racist understanding of the status of African-Americans. In Candler’s address to those assembled, he stated that Negroes were only considered equal under the law, and it was an unfortunate situation because Negroes were fully unprepared and while there were many “good ones,” there was a large percentage that had proven to be “bad” and “unsatisfactory citizens.”

The Morehouse, Clark, and Spelman colleges, and Atlanta University, were working on consolidating an effort to corral influence. Organizers, such as National Urban League southern regional secretary Jesse O. Thomas, urged members of the black community to specifically patronize black-owned businesses and to boycott those that refused to hire black employees. Thomas believed that one way to address the ongoing discrimination keeping blacks from acquiring fair housing, jobs, and economic opportunities was to demonstrate through “mass conduct” to white retailers that it mattered how blacks were treated. Thomas believed that there was a connection between “organized buying power” and “employment opportunity.”

The black community contained its own microcosms of business districts. Hunter Street contained small black-owned businesses. The jewel in the crown was “Sweet Auburn” Avenue.

Allen who was a shoemaker and a graduate of Atlanta Baptist Seminary, as a mail clerk in 1891. Allen worked for less than a month before returning to the position of shoemaking.


Auburn Avenue was a lively street filled with an assortment of businesses, funeral homes, insurance companies, eateries, drugstores, shoe repair shops, beauty salons, movie theaters, and doctors’ offices. It was a place where black entrepreneurs were thriving. In the beginning of the twentieth century, Sweet Auburn contained approximately sixty-four black-owned firms and seven professional firms, including the first black-owned bank to join the Federal Reserve, and branches of the Yates and Milton drugstore chain. In 1928, the first black-owned daily newspaper was founded in Atlanta, the Atlanta Daily World. Blacks were proud of their community and took care of it.64

Citizens Trust Bank opened in 1936 and promoted the growth of small businesses that increased the size of Black Atlanta’s middle-class. Atlanta’s black middle-class aspired to create conditions that would assist “Black Atlanta” in becoming solvent. W. E. B. Du Bois, a professor at Atlanta University, promoted building an all-black economy. Economic majors at Morehouse College formed cooperatives that connected rural black farmers with city residents. 65

Although economic growth and development allowed a number of black-owned businesses to flourish, many residents were still forced to patronize white-owned businesses where racial bias was still the norm. However, one neighborhood successfully employed Thomas’ philosophy in response to a racial incident. Westside residents organized a boycott of the neighborhood A&P grocery store after a white clerk beat an unemployed father of three for allegedly stealing a bag of sugar. Black demonstrators formed a picket line around the store and convinced neighborhood residents to stay away from the store. Despite police and Ku Klux Klan presence, black citizens picketed. The boycott gained momentum as students passed out flyers


65Ferguson, Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta, 142.
urging residents to shop elsewhere. To bolster its sales, A&P management insisted that all of the black employees shop at the store. Ultimately, A&P did fire the clerk, but the boycott continued long enough that the store eventually closed in the 1940s. Overall, these efforts reflect an involved community working, lobbying, and petitioning for change, however, the majority of black Atlantans were underemployed.

2.2 Economic Segregation in Atlanta

Journalist Henry Woodfin Grady called for a “New South” in a speech to the New England Society in New York in December of 1886. In this “New South,” Grady declared that the “old South,” which contained slavery, racism, and disfranchised Negroes, was dead. Grady stated the Negro had the full protection of the laws, and that in the South, the hard-working Negro had prospered as a laboring class. Grady implored white southerners to remember the loyalty that Negro slaves had shown to the Confederacy, and what hard workers they were.

In the twenty years following Grady’s series of speeches espousing the benefits of a New South maintained by old South racism, blacks’ civil rights were eroded and their safety was at risk in Atlanta. Atlanta’s conservative white-owned newspapers fanned the embers of hostility percolating in the white community by running cartoons of African-Americans with exaggerated features, mocking their requests, and depicting all African-Americans as potential

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66Ferguson, *Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta*, 143.

67Henry Woodfin Grady, *The Complete Orations and Speeches of Henry W. Grady*, edited by Edwin Du Bois Shurter, (New York: Hinds, Noble, & Eldredge, 1910), 7, 14, 16. Grady’s “New South” speech was not calling for an egalitarian southern society. Grady’s platform was created to beseech the South to consider new ways increase its wealth and rebuild a stable economy outside of, or in addition to, agriculture in partnership with northern industrialists. His editorials and speeches in the local paper, the *Atlanta Constitution*, in which he had partial ownership, were designed to depict a benevolent southern society where blacks were contentedly enjoying the privileges of enfranchisement and liberty. His personal belief was that the “Negro worker” was perfectly suited to working in the fields and deserved only minimal rights. Grady reworked the paternalistic antebellum argument that enslaved blacks were grateful for the protection and guidance of their white superiors, into a clarion call in support of increased southern industrialization and manufacturing of the products grown and harvested by exploited black labor.
predators with limited intelligence. The *Atlanta Constitution* ran a series of degrading cartoons, the *Atlanta News* advocated for white men to organize a citizen’s auxiliary to assist the police force in protecting white women from black men by forming a White Protection League. The *Georgian* fanned the flames of hatred by pushing for stronger laws to control Atlanta’s black population.\(^68\)

Increasing unemployment plagued Black Atlanta. None of the railroad companies, industrial companies, or factories hired black males despite many of the jobs consisting only of harsh manual labor. Black women were automatically excluded, even if it was a company that hired white women. White female workers were adamantly opposed to black women in the work place, as one factory owner soon discovered. Local Republican, and northern transplant, factory owner Hannibal I. Kimball owned both the Atlanta Cotton Factory and the lavish six-story hotel, Kimball House. Although Kimball was a Republican who originally hailed from the state of Maine, he did not allow black women to work in his factory; though he did hire them to work as maids in the hotel. Nor did the owners of the two straw-goods manufacturers hire or allow black women to work the sewing machines.\(^69\) Later, Kimball sold the Atlanta Cotton Factory to Jacob Elsas, a Jewish German immigrant who moved to Atlanta.

White employers who were open to hiring blacks were threatened with the possibility of striking employees. Jacob Elsas learned this firsthand. Elsas employed destitute Confederate widows and children in his factories.\(^70\) By 1897, business had flourished until he needed more employees. He hired black women. White female workers protested by walking off of the job,

\(^{68}\)Dorsey, *To Build Our Lives Together*, 158.

\(^{69}\)Dorsey, *To Build Our Lives Together*, 42.

followed by the white male workers. Elsas fired the black women.\textsuperscript{71} Elsas’ attempt to integrate his factories, the Southern Fulton Bag and Cotton Mill, demonstrated that the average white Atlantan was disturbed by the ideas of blacks in the workplace, in their communities, advancing, and becoming visible in the public sphere.

Although the white female workers were paid less than the white male workers, they chose to unite in opposition to the black female workers. The white female workers perceived the black female workers as a threat to their salaries and the white male workers perceived the black women as a threat to the social order. For the poor uneducated white workers, it became more important to privilege race over class or gender to preserve salary and whatever marginal status they had achieved.

2.3 Atlanta and Jim Crow

Segregation operated as a legalized caste system manipulated by local politicians who worked the system as it benefitted them. “Jim Crow” is the colloquialism used as shorthand for segregation in the southern states. Jim Crow, which primarily existed, but not exclusively operated, in the southern region and the bordering states, from 1877 until the mid-1960s. Historian C. Vann Woodward connected the creation of Jim Crow to the withdrawing of federal troops from the South.\textsuperscript{72} That action signaled to southern states that the federal government, as well as the rest of the country, was leaving the South to handle its black population as southern elected officials deemed necessary. Yet, the social system of segregating the races originated in the northern states, after the abolition of slavery in the South.\textsuperscript{73}

\textsuperscript{71} Kuhn, \textit{Contesting the New South Order}, 24.


\textsuperscript{73} Woodward, \textit{Strange Career}, 17.
Although free northern blacks experienced a higher quality of life than their enslaved brethren in the South, social customs were put into place to ensure that there would be limited interactions between blacks and whites where race-mixing laws were non-existent. In all modes of public transportation, blacks were separated in railcars, omnibuses, stagecoaches, and steamboats. Seating in lecture halls and theaters were divided by race, and the designated seating for blacks was usually in the corner or the balcony of the halls. Blacks were not allowed into privately owned hotels, restaurants, or resorts except as servants. Blacks may have paid local taxes, but separate schools were built for blacks. Prisons, hospitals, morgues, and cemeteries were separated by race. In the mid-west, Indiana, Illinois and Oregon amended their constitutions restricting the admission of blacks into the state. Northern states banned black jurors. The further north or west blacks traveled, the more binding the restrictions on their freedoms. Once slavery ended in the South, white southerners sought to build a system that combined social custom with state laws.\textsuperscript{74}

The ultimate goal of the Jim Crow South was to re-establish, after the Reconstruction era, that the white race was superior and the black race was inferior—from the cradle to the grave. Segregating the races also determined social behavior and customs between the races. Entire pseudo-sciences and schools of thought were developed and devoted to reinforcing white supremacy and privilege, such as craniology, Social Darwinism, and Eugenicism. Academics and politicians waxed eloquent on the limitations of the Negro.\textsuperscript{75}

Anti-black laws were but one cornerstone of segregation in the South. The second cornerstone was public symbols and reminders, the third was disfranchisement, and the final

\textsuperscript{74}Woodward, \textit{Strange Career}, 7, 17-20.

\textsuperscript{75}Woodward, \textit{Strange Career}, 93-95.
cornerstone was economic oppression. The public reminders existed in the forms of blacks’ exclusion from spaces whites dominated or occupied; churches, schools, houses, neighborhoods, jobs, restaurants, all forms of public transportation, sporting events that were not a part of the Negro Leagues, hospitals, orphanages, prisons, asylums, funeral homes, morgues, cemeteries, playgrounds, public parks, and swimming pools.

Blacks in the city of Atlanta were forced to live in sections of the city that were assigned to them. If blacks were arrested for breaking any of the Jim Crow laws, they were at the mercy of a punitive judicial system that did not recognize the civil rights of designated second-class citizens. The Jim Crow system was designed to convey that black life was worthless and unexceptional except in servile or menial capacities, which was reinforced by an economic structure that suppressed blacks’ abilities to gain or sustain employment beyond the prescribed limits. Jim Crow laws supported white employers refusing to hire African-Americans for professional positions. The general belief was that blacks were mentally incapable of intellectual thought, therefore incompetent.76

Out of the four cornerstones, economically repressing blacks was most crucial to ensuring white supremacy. By excluding blacks from earning a living wage, white employers reduced the likelihood that blacks could achieve economic parity. Another advantage of enforcing a segregated workplace meant that poor, working, and even middle-class whites never had to compete with blacks for a job. Without fair wages, blacks were consumed with subsistence rather than pursuing equality.77 The dire threat of long-term unemployment, along with the potential of physical attack, could temper the fanning of activists’ flames in a community hampered by systemically high unemployment. Overall, Atlanta’s black population

76Morris, Origins of the Civil Rights Movement, 2.

77Morris, Origins of the Civil Rights Movement, 3.
was consigned to neighborhoods that were neglected by city services, endured limited access to public schools, were denied access to jobs and careers, and refused service by white-owned establishments.

The legal confines of segregation did not just serve as a way to physically restrict African-Americans. Segregation also constrained African-Americans emotionally, mentally, and culturally within the ascribed borders of the black community. The laws constricted the limits of black movement in the public sphere, access to education, economic opportunities, and advancement. The binding legality of segregation was the structure upon which blacks existed as second-class citizenship status. However, the socialized culture of the Jim Crow South kept blacks “in their places” in the absence of actual laws.

As white supremacy became the prevailing social and cultural practices for limiting or denying housing, economic opportunities, education, and healthcare toward black Atlantans, micro-aggressions escalated. Culminating in a horrific act of violence, the Race Riot of 1906 left hundreds in the black community dead, houses burned, and businesses destroyed. Violent acts against African-Americans continued to escalate over the next several years, even as there continued to be minute signs of progress.

On September 22, 1906, both the *Atlanta Constitution* and the *Atlanta News* featured on their front pages the story of Thomas L. Bryan, a father who was troubled about an alleged attempted sexual assault on his daughter by Luther Frazier, a black man. By 9 p.m. that same night, an angry crowd of whites began chasing random black men through the Old Fourth Ward streets, and beating the men they caught into unconsciousness. The chaos began near Decatur Street in the red-light district. This part of the city contained bars, gambling, and
prostitution, and was frequented by blacks and poor whites. Blacks either lived in or around the area due to the zoning of segregated neighborhoods. The angry and violent mob grew to over one hundred vigilantes who roamed Decatur, Broad, Forsyth, Fair, Marietta, Pryor and parts of Peachtree streets seeking victims to punish. Along the way, the mob sought to vandalize and destroy black-owned businesses. Two barbers were dragged out of Alonzo Herndon’s barbershop and beaten to death. Roaming rioters stopped the trolley cars and attacked the black riders. The attacks on trolley cars continued for several hours until Georgia Power and the transportation company discontinued the services. Some of the rioters broke into a pawn-shop and stole weapons to use while patrolling the streets. Mayor James Woodward ordered fire hoses turned upon the crowd, but to little avail. The sheriff was attacked when he went into the crowd pleading for order.

The angry white rioters were quiet on Sunday. The militia had arrived by then and encouraged white residents to stay home. Any black citizen caught in public was arrested by the militia. However Atlanta’s black citizens had decided to protect themselves. Blacks who lived in Darktown, on the east side, and in the West Fair street communities smuggled guns into the neighborhoods. They doused all of the lights in the neighborhood and waited for intruders. Black college professors and administrators armed themselves. Faculty members patrolled the perimeters of Morehouse and Spelman Colleges to protect the women and children who sought

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79 Rouse, *Lugenia Burns Hope*, 43.


81 Darktown” was a community located on the northeast side of Atlanta, near Auburn Avenue, which is where some of the wealthiest black businesses were located. Hornsby, *Black Power in Dixie*, 28. When the Governor issued a statement that all residents would be protected, Darktown residents sent word to the Governor, “Don’t send the militia, but send the mob.” Rouse, *Lugenia Burns Hope*, 43.
sanctuary on campus. Some men sent their wives and children to hide on the campuses of Clark University and Gammon Theological Seminary while they guarded the black neighborhoods on the southwest side of Atlanta. Black residents were not safe from law enforcement. On the fourth day of the Riot, a police officer caught the president of Gammon Theological Seminary, John Bowen, out in public. The officer hit Bowen in the head with the butt of his gun.

As was the custom, disarming and diffusing black citizens was law enforcement’s chief priority. Despite the violent and criminal acts being enacted upon the black community, officers were dispatched to the Brownsville community to stop a meeting where the black citizens were rumored to be plotting revenge against the white community. White officers went into the neighborhood arresting blacks that were out in public. Black men saw white men approaching. Unable to distinguish the police from the mob, they fired into the crowd. A white officer was killed. The shooters were apprehended and murdered on the way to the police station. In the aftermath of the police shooting, soldiers invaded homes in the black community searching for weapons. More black men were killed. But by Tuesday, it was all over. The militia was sent away.

The Fulton County Grand Jury required the Atlanta press to limit its inflammatory stories, and call instead for the restoration of harmony. Instead of angry rhetoric, the paternalistic white press called for white Atlantans to promote racial mythology by juxtaposing the “good” (hard working) versus the “bad” (idle and drunken) Negroes. Certain black-owned newspapers agreed and reinforced the notions that the black community should promote “sobriety and

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industry” among its own and that blacks should return to work and clean up the community. White businessmen sent “safe” black leaders (ministers, businessmen, and journalists) to urge residents to settle down. These practices served to substantiate the idea that problematic members of the black community were largely to blame for the riot. Despite Bowen’s injury at the hands of white police, he wrote a scathing editorial blaming “black ruffians” for the riot.\(^{85}\) Those who criticized law enforcement, white newspapers, or white politicians faced a backlash.\(^{86}\)

The white businessmen and journalists who were responsible for inciting the riot led the drive to quell the black community in its aftermath by continuing to employ select members of the black middle-class as mediators. Black leaders began propagating the idea that black criminality was not due exclusively to racism but because of the lack of resources in the community. If there were enough resources available, the illegal bars and juke joints would close and alcohol would be eliminated, and black criminal behavior would be reduced.\(^{87}\) These actions not only secured the black elite and the educated black middle-class firmly in-between white Atlanta and the mostly working-class and impoverished black Atlanta, but established a black leadership white Atlanta would accept. This group would take the lead in negotiating concessions of civil rights over the next several decades.

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\(^{86}\) J. Max Barber published critical editorials demanding both black and white politicians address the criminal acts that whites were perpetrating, without punishment, against blacks. After the Riot, Barber wrote an essay about his experiences entitled, *The Atlanta Tragedy*, which was published in *The Voice of the Negro*. Dismayed by the lack of support by the city’s administration and law enforcement, he was later run out of town by white vigilantes. J. Max Barber, “The Atlanta Tragedy,” *Voice of the Negro*, 3, no. 11 (November 1906): 473-479. J. Max Barber, “Why Mr. Barber Left Atlanta,” *Voice of the Negro*, 3, no. 11, (November 1906): 470.

\(^{87}\) Dorsey, *To Build Our Lives Together*, 161,163,165.
In the aftermath of the 1906 Race Riot, many blacks fled the city. Finding reliable labor was difficult and wages rose as a result. Although the city settled down into an uneasy peace between the races, whites continued to exclude blacks whenever possible. Because of the discriminatory practices of governmental agencies and private corporations, the black community was left to become self-sufficient. Self-reliant organizations were established: The West Side Unemployment Relief Committee, The Atlanta Colored Committee on Unemployment Relief, The Neighborhood Union, the Social Improvement Committee, The National Negro Business League and the Atlanta Urban League.

Because blacks were locked out of receiving aid from city, state, and federal agencies, these organizations provided clothing, fuel, and food to over 1684 families, kept children in school, and provided health care services. For example, “the Neighborhood Union was the first female agency in the city to address the educational, social, medical, and recreational needs of black Atlantans.” In 1919, Hope created a social services institute at Morehouse College, which offered certification in social work. The Atlanta Urban League (AUL) facilitated the organization of a workers’ council to aid blacks who wanted to open up a union branch for skilled laborers. Blacks who were involved in these economic-organizing efforts also participated in community campaigns that encouraged blacks to patronize businesses that hired blacks as a way to encourage other businesses to hire blacks.

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91Rouse, *Lugenia Burns Hope*, 82-83.
92Bayor, *Race*, 104.
Yet, by 1960, Jim Crow remained as entrenched in Atlanta as it had been at the turn of the century. Winston Grady-Willis’ *Challenging U. S. Apartheid; Atlanta and Black Struggles For Human Rights, 1960-1977* defines the last two decades of the Jim Crow system as petty apartheid. Grady-Willis’ couches his work in several theoretical frameworks, one of which is that black women were central to every phase of what he terms the human rights struggle. He centers his research on the city of Atlanta, where he states that black women activists fought systemic oppression as grassroots activists, intellectuals, and as nationalists.93 Robert Moses categorizes civil rights activism in two traditions, the community organization tradition and the community mobilizing tradition. Community mobilization consisted of large-scale public events. Community organization, as defined by Moses and Charles Payne, emphasized a “tradition of developing long-term leadership in ordinary men and women.”94 As women who came of age in this system, Brayboy, Bolden, and Dove’s use of their careers and status was a logical conduit for their activist impulses.

Their stories reflect the changes from alienation to resistance from passive anger or fatalism to political action. Brayboy, Bolden and Dove’s interviews connect their work in and out of the community both to Atlanta’s Movement and to the national civil rights movement.95 The protest and push back against segregation that took place in Atlanta was also happening across the South, yet, the some of the tactics employed were unique based on Atlanta’s

93Winston A. Grady-Willis, *Challenging U. S. Apartheid; Atlanta and Black Struggles for Human Rights, 1960-1977* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), xviii. Grady-Willis defines the legal division of the races in the south as petty apartheid, “the provision of separate and unequal facilities according to arbitrarily defined racial classifications.”


demographics, railroad town, large black population, prominent middle-class, and the role of the black vote in deciding elections. Black residents corralled their voting power and political connections to increase public educational options within the two-tiered educational system.

2.4 Employment Outside of the Black Community

While southwest Atlanta contained many small businesses, there were still a significant number of people who had to leave the community to find work. Over the decades, it was very difficult for blacks to get hired through the Georgia State Employment Service, except for in menial positions. The State Service placed blacks in positions that were considered unskilled, such as servants or as industrial workers. Most of the industries in Georgia did not hire blacks in any category but “unskilled.” One race-based method used by the State Service to assist the white corporations was to send skilled service requests to its white divisions. Another racialized method for determining which workers were assigned to which jobs was based on rate of pay. If the job request did not specifically request a white or black man, the determination would be based on how low the pay was; for example, if $1.15 per hour was the listed pay, the agency would send a black man, $1.75 an hour, a white man.⁹⁶

“A Report on the Availability of the Services of the U. S. Employment Service to Negro Applicants in Georgia” demonstrates the bias in hiring blacks; unemployment for whites was at 12% in 1938, for blacks, at 22%. Those who were most often gainfully employed were domestic workers. The companies that were interested in hiring blacks, due to the shortages of white workers who were serving in World War II, claimed to not be able to hire blacks because of the segregationist laws that would have mandated building additional locker rooms,

⁹⁶Bayor, Race, 113,115.
toilets, and employee facilities. More importantly, white workers resented seeing black workers holding positions other than menial in the workplace.\textsuperscript{97}

Because Black Atlanta had several undergraduate colleges, a graduate university, a theological seminary and multiple businesses, white-collar workers and a distinct middle-class, the city was very attractive to transplants. The Urban League and the Atlanta University School of Social Work created campaigns to attract students and interest them in careers in the fields such as law, social work, and engineering.\textsuperscript{98} These graduates could not find work. Companies like AT&T, Southern Bell, and Western Electric ran advertisements in the local papers soliciting applications, and claimed that they did not discriminate on the basis or race or color, yet generally refused to hire blacks for temporary jobs above the menial paygrade. When the temporary assignment was completed, the workers would be fired. By 1950, the percentage of unemployed blacks in Atlanta exceeded the total percentage of blacks who lived in the city.\textsuperscript{99}

Although the political climate was changing and corporations were hiring blacks, albeit in menial positions, new jobs for blacks were not opening up. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference conducted a study that concluded there were “Negro girls with one or more years of college working as domestics and Negro males with college diplomas sorting mail.”\textsuperscript{100}

Over a decade later, blacks comprised 34\% of the workforce and 41\% of the city’s unemployed.\textsuperscript{101} Education and training meant very little for African-Americans seeking work in Atlanta’s private sector. Without external community pressures calling for the hiring of African-

\textsuperscript{97}Bayor, \textit{Race}, 105-106.

\textsuperscript{98}Bayor, \textit{Race}, 106.

\textsuperscript{99}Bayor, \textit{Race}, 108.

\textsuperscript{100}Bayor, \textit{Race}, 113-115

\textsuperscript{101}Bayor, \textit{Race}, 112.
Americans or mandates from the federal government, there were few black employees in Atlanta’s corporations. The few who were hired were pigeonholed into menial positions. Corporations were most likely to diversify their workforce by hiring white women in clerical positions. For working whites, preserving white supremacy trumped intraracial class, salary, and gendered iniquities.

The beginning of the century saw white Atlanta restricting African-Americans’ voting rights, housing, job opportunities, and access to public education. White politicians enforced Jim Crow laws via federal legislation, condensing black businesses and communities into specific parts of the city. Approximately fifty years later, black businesses continued to be almost entirely excluded from servicing the white community, except for in service positions.

2.5 Black Neighborhoods

In the first part of the post-bellum period, many of Atlanta’s blacks continued to live in the servant’s quarters that were adjacent to the white-owned homes. As time progressed, blacks moved to areas throughout the city, creating all-black settlements. These “settlements” were located near railroad tracks or in low-lying areas where the land was cheap and unwanted. By 1883, six areas were predominantly African-Americans. The largest black communities were the “West Side” a black neighborhood that was west of the train station, “Pittsburg,” in the southwest quadrant of the city near a railroad roundhouse, “Summerhill,” which was east and north of Pittsburg and south of downtown, “Tanyard Bottom,” located in a valley in the northern quadrant near a tannery, and the “Butler Street Bottoms,” east of downtown, which ran along Decatur Street.\(^{102}\) Reynoldstown, on the east side of Atlanta, is one of the oldest predominantly African-Americans communities in Atlanta. The neighborhood was named after Madison and

Sarah Reynolds, emancipated slaves who settled the community in the 1860s after the end of the Civil War. By the 1900s, those areas expanded to include Rockdale, Macedonia Park in a corner of Buckhead, Ashby Heights and the Old Fourth Ward. The city annexed Reynoldstown, which was bounded by Moreland Avenue, Pearl Street, and the Southern Railroad, in 1909.

Atlanta enacted its first segregation ordinance in 1913, based upon a similar statute passed in Baltimore, subsequent ordinances or racial zoning legislation were passed in 1916, 1922, 1929, and 1931; these measures used various tactics to keep blacks from moving onto “white blocks” and vice versa. The first laws designated city blocks by race. Four years after Atlanta passed the first ordinance, the United States Supreme Court declared segregation ordinances unconstitutional. The city council responded to the ruling by incorporating citywide comprehensive zoning, which included separation of the races. Racial designations for city areas were no longer blatantly framed as segregation ordinances, but rather in terms of land uses, building types and tenant categories that Atlanta’s white leaders felt could legally bypass the court ruling. A racial zoning designation was regarded as a property usage classification for parts of the city and therefore within the city’s authority. In short, the zoning committees used codified language to delineate dividing the city along racial lines. Atlanta was divided into white and black, single and two family dwellings.

Although racial aspects of zoning were unconstitutional, racial zoning showed up in local legislation. A law passed in 1929 denied individuals the right to move into a building on a street in which “the majority of the residences are occupied by those with who said person is

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103 Mason, Black Atlanta in the Roaring Twenties, 75.
104 Harrison, Our Neighborhoods, 13; Clarke, Lest We Forget.
105 Hornsby, Black Power, 49.
106 Bayor, Race, 54.
forbidden to intermarry.” The national courts struck down all of these laws. Nonetheless, city officials remained cognizant of what sections had been designated as appropriate for black use and continued to think of these areas as the only ones suitable for Atlanta’s black citizens. The Georgia legislature corrected the statutory errors in 1927 and amended the state constitution to permit residential segregation through zoning. Atlanta responded immediately by re-zoning the city and designating certain areas of town as “R” for “colored.”

To demarcate black and white neighborhoods, highways and roads were used as barriers and boundaries to hold the black community in certain areas. The most common indicator signifying a black neighborhood was its undesirability. Blacks were funneled into the parts of the city where whites did not want to live, such as along the railroad tracks. By 1959 the black community which represented 35.7 percent of Atlanta’s black population was confined to 16.4 percent of the land, by 1965, blacks accounted for 43.5% of the city’s population but occupied only 22% of the land. The segregation index in Atlanta increased from 87.4% in 1940 to 93.6 in 1960, third highest in the nation. More black residents were being compressed into smaller communities. Black Atlantans could not live, work, or attend school outside of the zoned black communities.

Invariably, blacks were given less land than whites for residential dwellings and a number of their neighborhoods were classified as industrial. The racial zoning represented an effort to oversee the migration of the black community and to create buffers between white and

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108 Ibid.


110 Bayor, *Race*, 83.
black residential neighborhoods. Black residential sections were placed near the central business district (CBD) near industry and in parts of the west side. The north side was classified as a white area. In addition to being a zoning issue, segregating neighborhoods invariably turned into a city services issue. Black neighborhoods were not serviced. One Summerhill resident recalled that while some houses had bathrooms, many did not. Those without indoor plumbing would urinate or defecate outdoors in a tub, drain the contents into a larger tub, then dispose the refuse adjacent to the neighborhoods. The stench was, at times, overpowering.\textsuperscript{111} Due to restricted voting rights, citizens were also prohibited from voting out racist politicians who endorsed the zoning laws.

2.6 Politics

In 1877, the state adapted a new constitution that limited the black vote. The state of Georgia implemented a cumulative poll tax, stringent residential requirements, and later a white primary.\textsuperscript{112} Georgia later passed legislation which disfranchised blacks except for in “special, general, and open elections.”\textsuperscript{113} In 1907, the state legislature passed a resolution calling for a statewide referendum which would approve a constitutional amendment to disfranchise blacks in Georgia. The disfranchisement measure of 1908 restricted blacks from voting in the white primaries, but not special elections. Black political leaders such as Alonzo Herndon, founder of the Atlanta Life Insurance Company, and black Republican community leader Henry Rucker united to oppose the disfranchisement bill.\textsuperscript{114} These leaders wrote an eleven-page memorial that

\textsuperscript{111}Fleming, Soon We Will Not Cry, 19.


\textsuperscript{113}Hornsby, Black Power in Dixie, 28, Bacote “Negro Politics”, 338.

\textsuperscript{114} According to Allison Dorsey, Henry A. Rucker was a staunch Republican. President William McKinley had appointed Henry Rucker to the position of collector of internal revenue. Jim Crow laws prohibited Rucker from hiring his own staff. Half the whites in the office resigned in protest of his appointment. The local paper, the Atlanta
argued the bill was unconstitutional and undemocratic. They also wrote that the bill would drive black workers out of the state of Georgia, leading to a labor shortage. Herndon, and the others, hoped the bill would serve as an appeal to whites. The legislation was to illustrate how black labor contributed to the state, and remind whites of black Georgians’ political support.115

Two decades later, dramatically declining numbers of voters galvanized citizens into organizing mass action. In 1932, white citizens signed a petition to recall James Key as mayor. Because this was a special election, blacks were eligible to vote. Austin Thomas Walden, president of the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and Charles Lincoln Harper, president of the Atlanta Teacher’s Association, led voter registration drives. Several hundred blacks registered, and defeated the drive to remove Key as mayor.116 That special election motivated black citizens to create their own avenues of negotiating with the majority, rather than depend upon the benevolence of Atlanta’s white leadership. Blacks begin coordinating community-wide efforts focused on solidifying political and economic strength within the community via Citizenship Schools and Civic Leagues.117 Local mass mobilization became a viable option to protest against police brutality, wage inequality, and discrimination being practiced by federal agencies in relation to the New Deal.


Alonzo Herndon was five years old when he became emancipated from slavery. He worked as a sharecropper and performed manual labor until he became a trained barber in his early twenties. Herndon parlayed his barbering skills into a barbershop empire that exclusively serviced white clientele. The barbershops were the foundation of his wealth. Herndon profitably invested in real estate. He founded the Atlanta Life Insurance Company in his mid-forties, securing his position as the wealthiest black Atlantan and one of the wealthiest black families in America. Carole Merritt, The Herndons: An Atlanta Family (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2002), 4-5.

115Hornsby, Black Power in Dixie, 34-35.


African-Americans community activists implemented the relatively new strategy of community organizing. The black community was experiencing growth through expanding population. The borders of the already overcrowded black neighborhoods were being pushed.

2.7 Politics of Respectability

Beginning in the nineteenth century, middle-class white Americans adopted the British code of etiquette rooted in Victorian practices. Achieving “true womanhood” could only be acquired through marriage and motherhood. A lady’s place was in the home, which was her natural sphere. Among whites, gendered roles were built upon a core ideology constructed by evangelical Protestant women who emphasized a value system rooted in home, hearth, religion, and humility. This system was used to measure social status. To be considered a lady, a woman needed to possess the specific attributes of piety, purity, submission, and domesticity.118

“True women” were assumed to be physically, mentally, and emotionally weaker than men, and, white. This false domestic ideal existed well into the twentieth century. The contradiction of True Womanhood ideology was that although all women were expected to attain these virtues, only upper-class women were perceived as having inherently attained them. Working-class and poor women could only be expected to emulate their “betters.” Southern black women were not only excluded from the definition of true womanhood, they were considered the antithesis of the definition. Racialized gendered roles developed into the

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118Gail Bederman, “Civilization,’ the Decline of Middle-Class Manliness, and Ida B. Wells’s (sic) Antilynching Campaign (1892-94),” in “We Specialize in the Wholly Impossible”; A Reader in Black Women’s History,” eds. Darlene Clark Hine, Wilma King, and Linda Reed, (Brooklyn, New York: Carlson Publishing, Inc., 1995), 408, 412. Bederman concludes that during the nineteenth century, womanhood was acquired by excelling in domestic virtues, and manhood was acquired through embodying the characteristics of self-control, strength, and honor. Contrasting civilized whiteness against the inferiority of blackness was necessary to illustrate white supremacy. Paula Giddings cites the example of Harvard professor Edward Clarke’s statement that “a college education could ‘damage a woman’s reproductive organs” as confirmation that a true woman’s place was in the home. Paula Giddings, When and I Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America (New York, New York: Bantam Books, 1984), 80. Hine, Hine Sight: Black Women and The Re-Construction of American History, 42.
cornerstones of the domesticity construct. For African-Americans, the end of the nineteenth century precipitated a return to a violent and racist America. Despite deteriorating conditions, the first generation of African-American women born post-Reconstruction began founding clubs in the late 1890s as one response to the backlash African-American communities experienced.119

Founding members composed mission statements and ideologies that emphasized that their members were cultured and educated. Black clubwomen did not labor under the illusion that their programs were solely to assist the impoverished. The work was public proclamation that the race was advancing. Clubwork represented the advancement of black women.120 As one clubwoman stated, “Among colored women the club is the effort of the few competent in behalf of the many incompetent. . . . Among white women, the club movement is for the already uplifted.”121 The politics of respectability meshed with one of the underlying themes of Christianity; the honorable, poor and oppressed will ultimately triumph over the rich, wicked, and powerful. There was a clear link between the politically active clubwomen and the women who did “church work.” For many women, their activist leanings began with their church work. Many black female leaders received their early training through their affiliation with religious

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120The founding members of the clubs were often already friends and members of similar organizations. Members of the organizations allowed women to connect and support each other’s causes on a national level. The women raised money to aid in the founding of schools, citizenship schools, mutual aid societies, literary and social outlets, and temperance organizations. The women were critical to funding organizations that provided social services to the community.

121Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, 98.
societies. However, “Race Work” was as important as church work, because it was considered a viable recourse that could be used to improve the image of black women.

During the Jim Crow era, popular culture explicitly reinforced negative ideas about African-Americans women. Movies, school textbooks, art, local newspapers, educational curriculum, federal and state laws worked together to construct and propagate the ideology that black women were inherently immoral. In early twentieth-century literature and discourse, blame was squarely placed upon black women for issues within the segregated black schools, the “degeneracy of the black family,” and the widely held perception that black women were unclean. Black women symbolized wanton rampant hypersexualized beings incapable of fidelity, virtue, piety, or loyalty. It was a widely-held belief that it was not possible to rape black women beyond the onset of adolescence because they were presumed to be innately oversexed.

African-Americans connected with the ancient biblical narratives about enslaved and exploited peoples in the Old Testament who were delivered out of oppression by keeping the faith. In embracing modern puritanical values, black women were asserting autonomy over the demeaning iconography created during slavery. In rejecting the racist and sexist demagogy perpetuated in the educational system, the legal system, the political system, and reinforced through popular culture (music, movies, plays, songs, and books) nineteenth century

122Higginbotham, Righteous Discontent, 17.
125Ibid.
Christian black women created a “moral archetype” for the members of the black community with standards by which they, as black women, could be deemed respectable.

Shirley J. Yee wrote that one of the legacies of the Baptist Women’s Convention was that self-esteem and self-determination were independent of race and income. By exhibiting proper behavior in public and embodying the morals of the day, black women were refuting popular Social Darwinist-based notions that African-Americans were biologically inferior. Educated middle-class black women appropriated and emulated the true womanhood behaviors as a defense mechanism both inside and outside of the black community.127 The antebellum racist, sexist, and classist model served as a way for members of the black community to refute racist notions that blacks were incapable of having stable families and communities.128

Black citizens were committed to the pursuit of equality and social justice despite Jim Crow’s stranglehold on the city of Atlanta. As the twentieth century progressed, black women were equally as dedicated to improving the morals of the community as they were to building up its institutions. Black women were doubly tasked, they were charged with uplifting the race, as well as being blamed for its downfall. Families used the church as the rulebook on how a woman, who wanted to be considered a lady, should conduct herself. “The church, like the black community, cannot be viewed solely through the lens of race.”129

127White, Too Heavy a Load, 62-64. Black women were characterized as being morally lax both by whites and by black men in nineteenth century newspapers and speeches.

128Shirley J. Yee, Black Women Abolitionists: A Study in Activism, 1828-1860 (Knoxville, Tennessee: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 4. Yee theorized that black women in the nineteenth century embraced true womanhood because, for the time period, the concept was liberating. The idea that a black woman could be perceived as morally superior, physically weak, submissive, and pious was contradictory to pre-existing racist perceptions of black women as sexually promiscuous and physically strong.

129Higginbotham, Righteous Discontent, 14.
Especially in the roles of missionary and teacher, black church women were conveyers of culture and vital contributors to the fostering of middle-class ideals and aspirations in the black community. Duty-bound to teach the value of religion, education, and hard work, church women adhered to a politics of respectability that equated public behavior with individual self-respect and with the advancement of African-Americans as a group. They felt certain that “respectable” behavior in public would earn their people a measure of esteem from white America, and hence they strove to raise the black lower classes resistance to temperance, industriousness, thrift, refined manners and Victorian sexual morals.\textsuperscript{130}

It is probable that the women Higginbotham wrote about did not consider poor black women’s rejection of white middle-class values as a survival strategy. The zealous efforts of black women’s religious organizations to transform certain behavioral patterns of their people disavowed and opposed the culture of the “folk”—the expressive culture of many poor, uneducated, and “unassimilated” black men and women dispersed throughout the rural South or new migrants to urban centers.\textsuperscript{131} However, the female leaders of the black Baptist church sought to broaden women’s job opportunities and religious responsibilities. Yet, they revealed their conservatism in their unquestioning acceptance of man’s sole right to the clergy.\textsuperscript{132} In fact, broadening women’s job opportunities, came with an even higher expectation of respectability. Parents emphasized to their daughters that if they “maintained a posture of respectability,” they could have “enviable private lives” and successful careers.\textsuperscript{133}

\textsuperscript{130}Ibid
\textsuperscript{131}Higginbotham, \textit{Righteous Discontent}, 15.
\textsuperscript{132}Ibid
\textsuperscript{133}Shaw, \textit{What A Woman Ought to Be}, 38.
2.8 Black Education and Institutions

Booker T. Washington High School was one institution that was the result of pressure applied by Atlanta’s black citizens. Atlanta’s high school for black students opened in September of 1924, almost sixty years after slavery, and fifty-two years after public education began in Georgia. Initially, the members of Atlanta’s Board of Education believed that blacks did not need to be formally educated beyond eighth grade. As a result, the Board refused to commit to building a black public high school. The Board’s members recommended that academic instruction end in the sixth grade. Seventh and Eighth grades were to focus on industrial education. The Board did not consider a high school education necessary for a group of people predestined for careers in menial and domestic labor. When federal monies were allocated to the city of Atlanta to build schools, the white school system would receive a disproportionately large portion for building, renovation, and maintenance of the white schools. If a black student wanted to complete high school, the only choice was to attend black private high schools, for a fee, on the campuses of the historically black colleges.

Black citizens were informed that the school would not be built unless they supported bond referendums to raise the necessary funds to construct a “black” high school. Nor would white citizens support their tax dollars going to the building of schools, or other public facilities, designated strictly for blacks. In exchange for the building of a secondary school, black voters turned out en masse in the election of 1903, and again in 1910, to help pass school bond referendums. The Atlanta Board of Education reneged on its agreement. The NAACP worked with community leaders to register more blacks to vote. When the next school referendum appeared on the ballot in 1919, black voters turned out to defeat that bill. In 1921, another bond referendum appeared on the ballot. The black community was promised funding for schools if

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134 Hornsby, Black Power in Dixie, 42.
this bill was passed with the support of the black community. The bond passed, and the Board of Education pledged over a million dollars to the building of black schools. The land was purchased in 1922. Booker T. Washington opened its doors to admit students in 1924. As the only black high school, by the 1940s, Washington’s attendance had swelled to almost five thousand students before a second high school opened in 1947.\(^{135}\)

One popular educator, who was a highly respected leader in the black community, was Charles Lincoln Harper, principal of Booker T. Washington High School. Harper was a “race man” who dedicated his life to educating the members of the black community and improving the lives of black citizens. He was regarded as a fearless leader who would not back down from whites.\(^{136}\) An 1899 graduate of Morris Brown College, Harper was born on a plantation in Hancock County, Georgia. He attended Bass Academy, before a fire destroyed it. He relocated to Atlanta to complete high school at Morris Brown College’s private high school.\(^{137}\) Harper


\(^{137}\)Kent Anderson Leslie, *Woman of Color, Daughter of Privilege: Amanda America Dickson, 1849-1893* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 82. Bass Academy was an African-American school located in Hancock County, near middle-Georgia. Bass Academy, at its peak, boasted an enrollment of over one hundred students and offered teacher certification. Harper’s father was a farmer and his mother was a nurse and a cook. While Harper worked on his father’s farm as a child, he was fortunate in that his parents were able to make a sufficient living which allowed him to attend school, even travelling to Atlanta to finish high school. Booker T. Washington High School Students, *Neighborhood Portraits: Men and Women Who Built and Inspired Our Community* (Atlanta, Georgia: Helping Our Teens Succeed, Inc., 2000), 19. *Neighborhood Portraits* was a booklet researched and written by Booker T. Washington’s students as a part of project overseen by Principal Shirley Kilgore. The students were responsible for interviewing members of the community that were affiliated with Washington High School, conducting research, and writing a short biography. Brayboy and Dove gave interviews to the students. Dove assisted the students in completing the project. A Hancock County, Georgia American History & Genealogy Project representative indicated that the Bass Academy burned down in January of 1890.
worked as a clerk for the United States Post Office, as an instructor at Morris Brown College, (MBC) as head of MBC’s high school department. Later, Harper was appointed to serve as the first principal of the Young Street Night School, and the first principal of Booker T. Washington High School. At various points in Harper’s career, he founded and served as the President and Executive Secretary, of the Georgia Teachers and Education Association (G.T.E.A.) the professional organization for black educators, State Chapter Vice President and Atlanta Chapter President of the NAACP, and the Sunday School Superintendent at Big Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church. Harper was a very influential man whom many (including Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall) considered fearless. His missions were to improve the black student’s access to education, and to impress upon every black student he encountered the necessity of education.

Outside of the public school system, Atlanta was home to several historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs.) Morris Brown College was founded in 1881 and chartered in 1885 by the historic Big Bethel Church African Methodist Episcopal Church. Morris Brown’s first location was at Boulevard and Houston Streets inside of Big Bethel A. M. E. Big Bethel (known as Old Bethel, Bethel, the African Methodist Episcopal Tabernacle and finally Big Bethel) was the first African-Americans church established in the metropolitan Atlanta area. The railroad city formerly named Marthasville had only been incorporated under the name of Atlanta four years prior. Founded in 1847 by bonded men and women seeking to worship independently of their white masters who were members of Union Methodist Episcopal Church, Big Bethel was developed within the United Methodist Episcopal Church.

138Hornsby, Black Power in Dixie, 44.
The African-Americans congregants worshipped for three years with a white custodian present. After three years, the congregants secured an independent house of worship and its population continued to grow in size and prestige. Several events contributed to establishing Big Bethel as one of the spiritual, political, and educational epicenters of the black Atlanta. By 1900, over 1600 African-Americans worshipped at Big Bethel. The church had hosted the annual North Georgia A. M. E. Conference in 1881, and a U.S. President. During the Atlanta Exposition of 1895, President Grover Cleveland attended services at Big Bethel and spoke to the congregation. It was during the North Georgia Conference that previous Big Bethel pastors, Joseph Wood, Randall Hall, and Wesley J. Gaines led the charge to create an “institution for the higher education of the Negro,” leading to the founding of Morris Brown College. Wood, Hall, and Gaines were appointed to serve on the original board of trustees.140

Clark College and Central United Methodist Church began their institutional lives under the governance of Davis Wesgatt Clark. Clark was elected bishop in the Methodist Episcopal Church during the General Conference of 1864. Once Davis became bishop, he created the Georgia Mission Conference to strengthen the Methodist Episcopal Church’s presence in the South. To aid in increasing the Church’s presence, the bishop realized that providing black ministers with a formal education, training teachers, and constructing primary schools would serve the twofold purpose of the Conference, education and expansion. Clark worked with Richard S. Rust, the Corresponding Secretary of the Freedmen’s Aid Society, to develop schools that furthered the Georgia Mission Conference’s objectives. Central United Methodist Church

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first opened its doors in 1866 as Clark Chapel Methodist Episcopal Church. The church was located on Frasier Street in the Summer Hill neighborhood. Clark College originally opened as a primary school established in 1867 to educate black children in the Summer Hill community.  

The American Missionary Association (AMA) with assistance from the Freedmen’s Bureau founded Atlanta University (AU) in 1865. Prior to the consolidation of Clark College and Atlanta University, AU was the nation's oldest graduate institution serving a predominantly African-American student body. Christians who wanted to assist in solving the “Negro Problem” founded the AMA in 1846. The AMA decided the best way to aid in the newly freed men and women was to develop “the religious element in their character.” The Association decided the most effective way to accomplish that task was to create religious-based educational institutions so that “the element must be cultivated in a school which was under thoroughly religious influence.”

On June 22, 1876, Atlanta University graduated its first class; six young men with Bachelor of Arts’ degrees, four graduates from the Normal Department, and three from the Bible courses for a grand total of thirteen graduates. By the end of the 1870s, Atlanta University had begun offering advanced coursework and granted advanced degrees. The University incrementally incorporated professional programs in social work, library science, and business.

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141 The Freedmen’s Aid Society took over operating the Clark Chapel School and oversaw the purchase of a school building from the American Missionary Association. After several years, the name was changed to the Summer Hill School. By 1869, university-level curriculum had been developed. The administration of the primary school was transferred over the Atlanta School Board. By 1869, The Freedmen’s Aid Society had purchased land, secured departments, and procured instructors in preparation to transition to university status. In honor of the bishop, the board changed the name of the school to Clark University. In 1940, Clark University’s charter was amended to change its name to Clark College in concordance with becoming professionally affiliated with the graduate school Atlanta University, and undergraduate institutions Morehouse College and Spelman College. In 1988, Clark College merged with Atlanta University to become Clark Atlanta University. James P. Brawley, The Clark College Legacy: An Interpretive History of Relevant Education, 1869-1975 (Atlanta, Georgia: Clark College Press, 1977), 6, 7, 11-12, 18, 45, 104, 116, 117, 134.

administration. Graduate Schools of Library Science, Education, and Business Administration were established in 1941, 1944, and 1946 respectively. Atlanta University was chartered by the state of Georgia in 1865, and began its career as a normal school, expanded to university status, then acquired the prestigious addition of a graduate school. The arrival of W.E.B. Du Bois on the Atlanta University faculty in 1896 firmly established the school’s scholarly reputation. In the same 1899 speech where Georgia Governor Allen D. Candler stated that blacks were only equal under the eyes of the law, and that industrial education was the future of black education, he would also declare that "Atlanta University had done more to advance the Negro in Georgia than any other school."143 In 1957, the controlling boards of the six institutions (Atlanta University; Clark, Morehouse, Morris Brown and Spelman Colleges; and Gammon Theological Seminary) ratified new Articles of Affiliation. The new contract established the Atlanta University Center and created the Consortium. In 1988, Clark College and Atlanta University merged to found Clark Atlanta University.

On March 12, 1940, Clark University’s charter was amended to change the name of the institution to Clark College so that the undergraduate colleges clustered the graduate institution, Atlanta University. By 1941, there were five black colleges and the Atlanta University Library located on the west side of Atlanta, Morehouse College, Spelman College, Clark College, Gammon Theological Seminary (which had arisen out of the Clark University Theological School) and Atlanta University. The Atlanta University Center (AUC) was poised to become the premier area for black intellectual development in the nation.

Historically black colleges and universities encouraged academic growth. Campus life provided the fertile ground out of which culturally-themed societies, literary circles, and black

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143Du Bois, The Negro in Business; A Social Study Made Under the Direction of Atlanta University by the Fourth Annual Conference, 53. After the conference Du Bois published the conference papers and Candler’s speech. The papers included reports on employment statistics and the status of black businesses in the community.
Greek letter organizations sprang. One of the black Greek letter organizations founded on a black collegiate campus was Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated (D.S.T.) D.S.T. was founded in 1913 at Howard University by twenty-two young black women who wanted, to promote academic excellence in secondary and higher education, to cultivate African-Americans women in leadership positions within and outside the collegiate community, and to provide services to the black community. The sorority also promoted cultural and artistic expressions. Two of D.S.T.’s foundational cornerstones are based upon a belief in Christianity and unimpeachable moral character, also key components within the politics of respectability. The founders and members were not just committed to the ideology of uplifting the race, but to building character among black women and, enhancing the public standing of black women.

Delta Sigma Theta’s reputation quickly grew, as new chapters were nationally chartered. During the Eighth National Convention, the Grand chapter introduced a regional hierarchy. The Southern Region was founded in 1926. In May of 1931, nine female Clark College students chartered Sigma Chapter dedicated to advancing the Grand Chapter’s ideals of sisterhood, scholarship, and service. Chapter objectives reflected the sorority’s goals of raising money to build scholarships, becoming active in the suffrage movement, heightening women’s participation in politics and grooming them to become leaders. At the local level, branches reflected the national politics. It is no coincidence that the sorority became the gateway through

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144Paula Giddings, *In Search of Sisterhood; Delta Sigma Theta and the Challenge of the Black Sorority Movement* (New York: HarperCollins, 1988), 17, 53, 54, 192. Native Atlantan Mattiwilda Dobbs, daughter of activist John Wesley Dobbs, and member of Delta Sigma Theta, was the one of the first African-Americans to sing at the Metropolitan Opera House.

145Giddings, *In Search of Sisterhood*, 17, 53.

which Dove accessed her first professional experience. D.S.T. and other such organizations proved indispensable to developing black women’s leadership in a segregated society.

Members of the institutions that composed the core of black Atlanta, the churches, schools, neighborhood unions, social and civic clubs, and BGLOs all played important roles in shaping Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s childhoods. The preface of Stephanie Shaw’s *What a Woman Ought to Be* addresses the determination of black women (born one or two generations after slavery) who were raised by not just by their immediate families, but also by the entire community. This generation of black women was not only expected to overcome, but to achieve and excel. Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove, born approximately sixty odd years later, experienced those same expectations, emboldened by the same community-supported cultural training. Shaw theorized that the women she wrote about were keenly aware of their collective history, fully understanding that their forebears lived in legalized states of bondage, poverty, and illiteracy and that it was their duty to prevail over the challenges of living in a segregated society. Their parents and grandparents produced and educated these daughters. They were the empowered. Shaw states that in this way, the daughters could not perceive themselves as powerless, disadvantaged or handicapped. They were enabled and ennobled. They had influence in their communities, and influence beyond their households. Studying these women, understanding the influence of community upon them, contextualizes how Brayboy, Bolden, and Dove could love and embrace their environs, yet be wholly committed to destroying the racist system that created the need for the racial unity.147

“Formal education set women apart, but also made them a part of the community. Community and educational mentors joined to inspire the women to use their education in a

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socially conscious way. Consequently, these women became some of the social and political leaders in the formal and informal movements of the larger group.” While Dove was the only one of the three women to earn an advanced degree, education was a significantly large part of both Brayboy and Bolden’s platforms. Brayboy believed that citizens needed to be thoroughly educated on their rights, citizenship, and understanding the Constitution. Bolden created a training center where domestic workers were taught the rudiments of proper housekeeping, employee etiquette, and required to register to vote.

Despite whites’ resistance to racial progress after the Reconstruction Era, in the early twentieth century, Georgia’s blacks had amassed fourteen million in property holdings, most of which was located in Atlanta. There was a boom in black owned enterprises founded to meet the needs of black Atlantans; Alonzo Herndon’s Atlanta Life Insurance Company, founded in 1905, the Atlanta’s Savings Bank, founded in 1909, and Citizens Trust Company founded in 1921. Black Atlanta contained several black institutions of higher education, including a graduate school, a seminary, banking institutions and insurance companies. Blacks were able to educated their children, attend college, bank their monies, take out loans, bury their dead, shop in markets, and insure themselves without the fear of race-related reprisals that included being cheated or denied. By 1922, city officials built a swimming pool in the Washington Park community for blacks. The Atlanta Daily World was founded in 1928. There were a sufficient number of black-owned businesses so that by 1932, the Atlanta Negro Chamber of Commerce was formed. According to Maurice Hobson, by the 1930s, Atlanta was one of the most successful black

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148 Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to Be and to Do*, 2.
business communities in the nation. This economic power led to the black leadership acquiring considerable political strength in negotiating with Atlanta’s businessmen. In 1965, one year after Brayboy was appointed Deputy Voter Registrar, Q. V. Williamson was elected to the Board of Aldermen, the first black to win this seat since Reconstruction. Since 1944, 25% of Atlanta’s registered voters were African-Americans.

Brayboy, Bolden, and Dove’s love for their community meant a commitment to remaining in the city to initiate necessary changes. This commitment, love, and determination formed the cornerstone of their initial forays into advocacy and agency. Their teachers, community merchants, church members, neighbors, and professional mentors all contributed to their nurturing and grooming. As they progressed both in their careers, and in their service, their activist efforts expanded to include creating opportunities for enfranchisement, higher education, and entrepreneurship for the underserved residents of southwest Atlanta. Chapter Three introduces Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s biographies and, provides evidence of their engagement.

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3  REARED BY FAMILY, RAISED BY COMMUNITY

Researching the backgrounds of the three women led to employing prosopography as the research methodology. At first glance, a high-school drop-out, a former food-service worker who married after her first year in college, and a widowed professor emerita (none of whom worked in the same industry, or within the same organizations) share few similarities. Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove lived very different lives and became activists through divergent circumstances. Yet, in piecing together the early parts of their lives, the three women’s shared experiences revealed commonalities that help us understand their abilities to step into leadership roles.

Building a biographical chapter illuminated just how little archived information exists on southern black female activists outside of their contributions to social change. It was particularly difficult to construct a biography of Brayboy’s early life despite the availability of her daughters, grandchildren, and a few former co-workers. Brayboy’s family has rarely been discussed publicly, records of her life outside of community activism are largely silent. In conducting interviews, very little of her personal life was discussed prior to finding her passion in working for voter registration. Brayboy’s archival records personify what Deborah Gray White describes as “being one’s own best argument for the cause.”

Newspaper interviews covering Brayboy’s life began with her appointment to the position of Deputy Voter Registrar in 1964. Brayboy’s

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153 Growing up in a family of educators, their standard response to those who used the phrase “raising children,” (my mother in particular) would emphatically state that children were reared by people, places raised, i.e. one is reared by parents, and raised in the church.

154 Deborah Gray White, Too Heavy a Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994 (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1999), 88. White states that during the nineteenth century, black clubwomen purposefully kept their private lives out of the public record to combat pre-existing racist perceptions. The clubwomen’s private lives were closed off; their good works are the records that remain for public consumption. Barbara Ransby encountered the same dilemma when writing about Ella Baker. In the introduction to her book, Ransby wrote of her frustration in trying to “follow the trail of a woman who… tried to not leave one.” Barbara Ransby, Ella Baker & the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 7. In Brayboy’s case, there is very little private information available predating her appointment as Deputy Voter Registrar for the State of Georgia.
daughters did not offer personal stories of life with their mother, but reflections of joining her to promote voting registration in the black community. In contrast, Dove’s archived interviews are longer and do contain more personal information. Yet, they are devoid of harsh anecdotes, personal setbacks or negative situations. Brayboy and Dove’s interviews emulate what Darlene Clark Hine describes as “creating an alternative self-image to shield from scrutiny…an empowering definition of self.” In leaving only public memorabilia for scrutiny, Brayboy’s private identity is masked by her civic persona. Dove’s story underscores her career trajectory and community activism. When queried, only Bolden appears to have freely expressed her innermost thoughts and feelings.

Dove offered glimpses of her childhood and young adulthood, yet her recounting provided little insight into the depth of any hardship she encountered, personal or professional. Of the three women, only Bolden’s pre-existing interviews contained a wide range of experiences including being arrested, experiencing loneliness, and enduring ongoing physical pain. All three women developed extensive professional networks, yet for Bolden and Brayboy, there appears to be minimal records of their intrapersonal support systems. Dove was an active member of her sorority; even her social gatherings included service to the community. In the article *Oral History and the History of the Civil Rights Movement*, Kim Lacy Rogers cautions scholars conducting interviews to be aware of narrators conflating their roles during specific

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155 Darlene Clark Hine, *Hine Sight: Black Women and the Re-Construction of American History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 43. Hine argues that black female activists created a secret persona that they used to shield themselves from the public eye. This persona allowed the women to protect their private selves and lives.

156 Dove held several executive offices in the Atlanta Alumnae Chapter (AAC) of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. (DST), including serving as chapter president. As a result, she chaired many committees. Her name appeared frequently in two of Atlanta’s black-owned newspapers, the *Atlanta Daily World* and the *Atlanta Inquirer*, in DST-related stories. The news items were typically in reference to Dove’s chapter hosting meetings, social gatherings that served as fundraisers, community-service events or voter registration drives.
events.\textsuperscript{157} With Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove, the inverse applies, the women were restrained in discussing their work and refrained from mentioning their private lives unless asked specific questions.

By constructing siloed biographical sketches of Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove, then collectively studying their activism, the progression of their leadership efforts can be documented and their politicized influence identified. This dissertation seeks to name the forces that molded, guided, and inspired these women. The biographical information will also distinguish differences and categorize commonalities between the women’s backgrounds, education, influences, lifestyles, beliefs, and/or practices. The narrative of Atlanta’s Civil Rights Movement does include African-Americans women, yet to quote Gore, Theoharis, and Woodard, the “leading-man narrative remains intact.”\textsuperscript{158} While black female activists are viewed as effective organizers, they are not viewed as change-agents. The women are integral in contributing, but do not appear foremost in the research. Black female organizers contributed to change, but were never presented as causal to change. The women are well-known and respected within the city’s political elite, but are not recorded in the archives as being central to the election of the elite. This project serves to challenge that narrative. This chapter serves as an introduction to the early lives of Dorothy Bolden, Ella Mae Wade Brayboy, and Pearlie Dove. Laying out Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s biographies, in conjunction with understanding the communities that produced them, is integral to dissecting the roots of their activism.

Introducing the three women’s narratives presents the opportunity to merge examining their environments alongside their personal experiences. Studying the women comparatively


facilitates theorizing the evolution of their community activism. Describing Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s early years does not comprehensively capture their youth. However, their recollections can be used to construct the paths that led them to becoming activists. In reviewing Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s transcribed interviews, the women do not offer politicized assessments of their works. This dissertation views the three women’s activism through a political lens in order to critique their influence upon Atlanta’s black leadership and community. Exposing selected injustices the women encountered throughout their younger lives juxtaposes their experiences to many other black women of the era. However, their responses to racial inequality differ in how these women created avenues for change. The abbreviated collective biographies present anecdotal evidence of the conditions that propelled these three women into activism, and positions of leadership. Further, the three women were constantly exposed to teachers, clergy, and business owners who were also committed activists preaching the gospel of racial uplift, education, economic empowerment, and voter registration.

This chapter will illustrate that being immersed in a binary educational system filled with teachers insisting upon excellence, crossing psychical distances, and attending churches filled with politically active congregants planted the seeds of leadership within the women. The chapter also includes a discussion of how Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s experiences with black institutions, the schools, the church, and the culture of respectability shaped their respective commitments to their communities. Additional chapters further explore how their shared experiences of living, being educated, and working in “Black Atlanta” are manifested via their leadership. Documenting the women’s shared gendered experiences serves to frame how Bolden,

159 Margo Perkins, Autobiography as Activism: Three Black Women of the Sixties (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), 41. Perkins asserts that studying the autobiographical narrative provides the opportunity to analyze the narrator’s processes of politicization.

160 Perkins, Autobiography as Activism, 43.
Brayboy, and Dove developed their leadership styles, understood race, and their perceptions of class.

3.1 Dorothy Bolden

Dorothy Bolden was born in Atlanta, Georgia circa 1920, to Raymond and Georgia Bolden. The Boldens resided in Vine City, a predominantly African-Americans community located south of downtown Atlanta. According to Bolden, her sister and brother were born at home because their mother did not trust the local hospital to safely deliver her children. Their grandparents adored both her and her brother. Bolden did not mention her sister in interviews. Bolden recalled her grandparents frequently bringing fresh meat and produce from their Covington, Georgia home. She remembered these parcels of food as being essential to surviving the Great Depression. Ultimately, Bolden recollected her childhood as being “sweet” and she clearly felt loved by family members.

Bolden remembered the scarcity of available jobs for members of her family. African-Americans were not able to select the types of jobs they wanted, they took the work that was

161 I did not locate a record of Georgia Bolden giving birth to an additional daughter. According to 1930 United States Census records, Georgia and Raymond Bolden gave birth to one son, Clarence, one daughter, Dorothy, and adopted three other children, Dorothy, Timothy, and Clara Patterson. “United States Census, 1930,” index and images, FamilySearch (https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/3QNZ-S6Z : accessed 08 Nov 2014), Raymond Bolden, Atlanta, Fulton, Georgia, United States; citing enumeration district (ED) 0009, sheet 8B, family 72, NARA microfilm publication T626, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington D.C.; FHL microfilm 2340094. Bolden spoke very candidly about herself in interviews. However, it appears as though she was careful about not giving out identifying information such as the names of family members or any place family frequented, such as church or schools. Bolden believed her mother was afraid of the hospital because “babies had been mixed up” in addition to racist practices. Dorothy Bolden interviewed by Chris Lutz, Special Collections Department, Pullen Library, Georgia State University Southern Labor Archives, August 31, 1995.

162 Dorothy Bolden, interviewed by Chris Lutz, Southern Labor Archives, Georgia State University, August 31, 1995. Bolden Thompson Collection’s biographical statement in the Auburn Avenue Research Library file lists Bolden’s date of birth as October 13, 1923. The Junior League of Atlanta’s Oral History Project transcript lists Bolden’s date of birth as October 13, 1920. In Lars Christiansen’s dissertation, “The Making of a Civil Rights Union: the National Domestic Workers Union of America,” Bolden’s birth date is listed as 1920. Her funeral program lists her date of birth as being four years later on October 13, 1924. Genealogy website www.familysearch.org lists her date of birth as 1925, based on United States Census records that were taken in 1930. Confirmation of her birth is difficult as Bolden was born at home.
available. Yet, various members of her family continued to relocate from rural areas to Atlanta’s black neighborhoods. Although Bolden’s grandfather had been enslaved prior to the end of the Civil War, he managed to become educated. Her parents were not formally educated and did not own businesses in the traditional sense, yet Bolden did not identify her parents as laborers. She described both her parents and grandparents in a professional context. Raymond Bolden was a chauffeur and landscaper. Georgia Bolden was a cook and laundress. Her parents also prepared and sold meals. Bolden’s grandmother peddled flowers to put her grandfather through school. Her grandfather served his community as a teacher, minister, and principal. Bolden appears to have grown up in a loving, entrepreneurial, and self-sufficient family.  

Bolden’s childhood was financially challenging, but in her community, compassionate neighbors took care of each other and everyone was able to survive. Families shared meals and everyone watched the children. Everyone in the neighborhood was acquainted with and trusted each other. In Bolden’s recollection of her Vine City community, most of the adults were hard working and, the children were happy, respectful, and obedient to the neighborhood’s adults. The neighborhood was comprised of hard workers who took pride in their community. Bolden believed that in her community, “everybody loved everybody.” Bolden’s idyllic description of her childhood and her neighborhood contradicts her painful experience of living with a devastating childhood injury.

When Bolden was a toddler, she fell out of bed. The way she landed on the hard floor caused nerve damage to her eyes. At one point, she was completely blind. Because of Bolden’s compromised vision and painful headaches, she did not attend school regularly. A chance meeting between her father and a white woman led to an appointment with a specialist. The

\[163\] Bolden, Lutz interview.

\[164\] Bolden, Lutz interview.
specialist personally treated Bolden from the age of seven to nine years old. After a series of
treatments, her eyesight was restored. Unfortunately, as a result of this injury, Bolden suffered
health issues for the rest of her life. The painful side effects affected her performance in high
school and later, as a young woman, kept her from working certain types of jobs.

Like many families of the era, Bolden’s family experienced financial hardship. Her
mother took in laundry to supplement the household income, but everyone assisted with the
tasks. By the time she was nine, Bolden had already acquired her first paying job. When Bolden
began working for a separate employer, she increased her income from the $.50 per week she
earned helping her mother take in laundry, to $1.50 per week in her new, but dirtier, job of
washing out babies’ diapers. While still a child herself, Bolden collected soiled laundry from
employers in her brother’s wagon, washed garments on a rubbing board, bleached the clothes in
bluing water, dried and ironed them, then returned them to her customers. By the age of ten,
Bolden was consistently working and contributing to the family. When she got to high school,
her impaired vision bothered her to the point that she did not complete high school. She opted to
go to work as a domestic full-time.

Bolden left home at the age of seventeen and traveled between Chicago and Atlanta in
search of career opportunities. While living in Chicago, she worked as a domestic. Later, she
moved to Detroit, where she enjoyed learning how to style dresses. Between 1940 and 1941,

165 Bolden, Lutz interview. Dorothy Bolden, interview by unidentified member of the Junior League Oral
History Committee, Junior League of Atlanta Oral History Project, Special Collections, Auburn Avenue Research
Library, Atlanta, Georgia, December 7, 1978.


167 Bolden, Lutz interview. Because Bolden’s date of birth varies, I am approximating the year she traveled
based on the year of her son’s birth.
Bolden met and married a man named Frank Smith. Bolden and Smith had a son, but divorced soon after his birth.\textsuperscript{168} After only a year, Bolden’s doctor cautioned her against continuing to design and sew dresses due to the strain on her eyes. She then moved to New York. She quickly discovered she did not like the environment, and returned home to Atlanta. Every job that Bolden had outside of domestic work involved manual labor. Bolden worked for a linen service, at a department store, as a waitress, in a factory, and as a freight worker.\textsuperscript{169}

While at the freight company, Bolden met and married her second husband, Abraham Thompson. Thompson was troubled about the physical toll the job was having on her. Bolden once again returned to domestic work. During this time, Bolden and Thompson started their family. Together, they parented seven children, (including a foster daughter.) While the children were young, Bolden stayed home, only working intermittently. Once the youngest were in primary school, Bolden returned to work full-time.\textsuperscript{170}

Throughout Bolden’s adult married life, the Bolden-Thompson family lived in the Vine City community, one of Atlanta’s oldest African-Americans communities. With the exception of the times Bolden lived out of the state, she had spent almost her entire life in this solid and close-knit community consisting of working-class and professional African-Americans. Vine City bordered white neighborhoods, which led to the main thoroughfare, Hunter Street, (now Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive). Bolden loved her neighborhood and was devoted to its residents. As Bolden grew older, she became increasingly committed to seeking ways to improve the community.

\textsuperscript{168}Bolden, Lutz interview.

\textsuperscript{169}Bolden, Lutz interview. Lerner, \textit{Black Women in White America}, 235.

\textsuperscript{170}Lerner, \textit{Black Women in White America}, 236.
3.2 Ella Mae Wade Brayboy

Charley Wade was living in Atlanta and looking for work when he met Rosa Lee Jackson. Jackson had moved to Georgia from Alabama upon accepting an offer of employment from a white Atlantan. Wade married Jackson and the couple started a family soon thereafter. Rosa was working as a domestic, but as the children came, she stopped working and stayed home to rear them. Ella Mae Wade, the oldest, was born on October 22, 1918, in Opelika, Alabama. Brayboy was named after her paternal grandmother, Ella Mae Wade. Wade was the first of ten children, only eight of whom survived past infancy. Wade’s parents lived in Atlanta, but when Rosa Wade realized there were no hospitals that admitted blacks nearby, she moved back to her parents’ home in Opelika. Rosa Wade and her daughter returned to Atlanta when baby Ella was two or three months old, where it appears the family lived with Charley Wade’s mother, two maternal aunts and four boarders in Ward One. By 1930, the Wades had moved. Ella spent her youth surrounded by extended family as both Wade’s mother and brother moved with the family.

Joyce Jones, Wade’s oldest daughter, described her family members as close-knit and hardworking. The Wade family eventually settled at 331 Markham Street, SW, near the Atlanta

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171 Joyce Brayboy Jones, interview by author, tape and video recording, Atlanta, Georgia, February 1, 2006 and June 14, 2014.


173 National Archives and Records Administration, 1920 Census, microfilm publication T625. Ward One was a black community that sprang up in the low-lying area west of the Terminal train station (located in downtown Atlanta) between 1865 and 1870. The west side included the Lightning and Vine City communities, which were connected by Lightning Street, Northside Drive, Simpson Street (northern border), Magnolia Street (southern border), and Elliot Streets. Historic Resource Study, Auburn Avenue Community of Atlanta, 1865-1930; Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site and Preservation District, Atlanta, Georgia, (n.p.) prepared by Andy Ambrose, Vincent Fort, Alexa Henderson, Dean Rowley, Carole Stevens, Barbara Taggers for the Martin Luther King, Jr., NHS Library, Atlanta, Georgia, 1982, 2-2.

174 National Archives and Records Administration, 1920 Census, microfilm publication T626.
Terminal, across from the old Railway Express. Jones depicts her grandfather as a consummate professional who took pride in his work. Charley Wade, even as an older man, worked for the Atlanta Terminal, loading and stocking the rail cars with fruit and ice. The family supported each other in times of need. At various points during Wade’s childhood, extended family members resided with the Wades. Joyce Jones recalled her grandmother, Rosa Lee, living with the family and taking care of the children while her parents were at work.

Wade’s interest in community activism was sparked by one of her instructors at Washington High School. At various times throughout the school year, the teacher would take Wade’s class downtown. The class stood outside of the city, state, and federal buildings while the teacher explained how government worked. When Wade was a sophomore in high school, she remembered standing in the rain with the rest of her class watching the inauguration of Georgia Governor Eugene Talmadge, while the white attendees sat beneath a canopy. Wade was subjected to the humiliating experience of having to stand in the rain to watch the racist governor-elect—who won on the platform of enforcing segregation—get sworn into office. Such incidents, juxtaposed against the radical Washington High educators who daily enforced the ideology that the student body was not second-class, must have planted the seeds of resistance.

In 1935, Wade graduated Washington High and enrolled in Spelman College. By 1937, she had married William Anderson Brayboy and given birth to the first of three daughters. After the birth of eldest daughter Joyce, Brayboy withdrew from Spelman to care for her family. Over the course of two years, Brayboy’s life changed from that of a college student living at home

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175 Jones, interview by author.
176 Ibid.
177 Hal Straus, “2 Decades Later, Atlanta Grandma Still Signing Voters” Atlanta Constitution, June 17, 1983, 29(A). Brayboy does not name the teacher who took her class downtown. However, Dove, identified Washington High School Principal Charles Harper as the person who escorted her class downtown. It is highly probable Harper escorted Brayboy’s class downtown as well.
with her family, to wife and mother. Brayboy sought employment when household finances dictated the need. When time permitted, Brayboy worked on church committees at Central United Methodist Church (UMC) and she also volunteered at her children’s schools. 178

When Brayboy worked outside of the home, one of her regular occupations was waitressing in segregated restaurants. On Brayboy’s days off, she took the children with her on the bus to visit downtown Atlanta while running errands or for outings. The girls asked their mother questions that were difficult and humiliating to answer. They wanted to know why, when riding the bus, were the front seats off limits to them. They wanted to know why they were not allowed to join others seated at drugstore lunch counters. The children asked why they could not use public restrooms while they were downtown. Brayboy responded to their queries with hard truths. Brayboy had the unpleasant, yet necessary task of explaining to her children that black people “did not count in the eyes of the law.” 179 Growing up in Atlanta, Brayboy was confronted with segregationist practices at school and in the workforce. As a young woman, her response was to accept the realities of racial injustice. As her children grew older, Brayboy tried to shield her family from racist and harmful practices as much as possible. When Brayboy’s daughters enrolled in college, they sought out ways to protest discriminatory practices. At first, Brayboy feared for her daughters’ safety when they walked the picket lines. As she watched her children continue nurturing their activist impulses, Brayboy began thinking that accepting the status quo was no longer sufficient for herself, her family, or her community. 180

178Jones, interview; “Community Service Around the Way,” Central Fulton Senior Services News, January 1994 2, Number 2; Straus, “2 Decades Later,” 29A.


3.3 Pearlie Dove

In 1921, Dove was born Pearlie May Craft in Atlanta, Georgia to Cecil and Lizzie Dyer Craft. When Pearlie was a toddler, the family lived near the Walden Street School between Fort and Ellis Streets near the original Morris Brown College (MBC) campus. From the age of three, she was affiliated with institutions that figured prominently within the religious, political, and educational culture of black Atlantans. Between the ages of three and six, Craft was exposed to both higher education, and overt racism, when she began kindergarten. Her grandfather, Caleb Dyer, enrolled Pearlie at Morris Brown College because the Boulevard campus contained a kindergarten.\(^{181}\) By the time she was five, the family had moved to the Washington Park community. Pearlie was an alumna of two historically black institutions before completing her primary education. Harper taught her both in primary school and at Sunday School. Even as a young student, Craft considered Harper a creative and innovative principal.\(^{182}\)

Craft’s childhood appeared to be idyllic for the time. Craft’s father returned wounded from World War I. Cecil Craft became a restaurateur. Unfortunately, he soon died, possibly due to war-related injuries.\(^{183}\) Her mother was employed as a bookkeeper at the black-owned Atlanta

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\(^{181}\)Pearlie Dove interviewed by Carole Merritt, Atlanta History Center, January 12, 2006. On Dove’s first day of first grade, the Ashby Street school had been torched by whites who did not approve of the school’s close proximity to the “color-line” of demarcation between Ashby (now Joseph E. Lowery Boulevard) and Simpson (now Joseph Boone) streets. The boundaries of the “black side” of the neighborhood were expanding due to the influx of black students, of all ages, who were enrolling in the historically black colleges, which contained high school departments and religious seminaries. Washington High School’s principal, and legendary community leader Charles Lincoln Harper, petitioned the school board to allow the first grade students to enroll at the high school. Despite its overcrowded status, Harper brought in two teachers and created classroom space to accommodate the students. His actions kept unescorted children safe; they did not have to traverse through hostile white neighborhoods to attend school.

\(^{182}\)Dove, Merritt interview.

\(^{183}\)Pearlie Dove, interviewed by Kathryn Nasstrom, Georgia Government Documentation Project, Georgia State University, April 9, 1992.
Life Insurance Company. \(^\text{184}\) Pearlie Craft stated she enjoyed growing up in a family-oriented community that was clean, well kept, and full of hard-working families. Church and school were the center of the Craft family’s social life. She remembered one of her teachers being related to the founders of Harris Memorial, the black-owned private hospital. \(^\text{185}\) Dove pointed out that her family lived near the famous African-Americans prizefighter Tiger Flowers. \(^\text{186}\) Dove’s description of her middle-class neighborhood, and the diversity of its residents, underscores the impact of segregation on the housing options for Atlanta’s black and middle-class citizens; millionaires were forced to live in close proximity to middle and working class residents.

Craft treasured attending school at Washington High. She spoke of a “cosmopolitan” mixture of students from all over Georgia due to the twelve years of study that was only offered there. Most of the black high schools in Georgia did not exceed the eleventh grade. She attributed much of her academic success to Harper, who refused to allow the student body to perceive itself as second-class. Craft remembered Harper reminding students that neither a segregated educational system nor outdated second-hand textbooks could deter them from achieving excellence. One of the ways Harper set the standard for achievement was by creating an accelerated program for advanced students. The standard high school curriculum was a six-year program. For eligible students who met the rigorous requirements, the program was reduced

\(^{184}\)Karen Ferguson, *Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 28. Herndon was an astute businessman who managed to build several businesses out of his barbering enterprises. He created what became a sizable insurance company out of a mutual-aid society. Craft worked for one of the most prestigious and well-known black-owned businesses in a professional capacity.

\(^{185}\)Sayde Harris Powell, an Atlanta native who trained in nursing at the Provident Hospital and Training Hospital in Chicago, Illinois was a nurse at Fair Haven Hospital at Morris Brown College when she met and married surgeon Charles W. Powell in 1919. Sadye Harris Powell family papers, 1910-1991, Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library Atlanta, GA 30322, Biographical Scope Note.

\(^{186}\)Dove, Merritt interview.
to five years. If the students maintained their grades and kept up with the expedited coursework, Harper also rewarded the students with national tours of college campuses.187

Harper took the students to northern cities so they could see racially integrated classrooms firsthand. Craft and other classmates traveled to New York with Harper in 1935. The group travelled by bus and stopped at historically black schools, such as Howard and Johnson C. Smith Universities, before arriving in New York City. Along the way, Harper led the group of students and faculty on tourist excursions to view the Jefferson and Washington Monuments, Coney Island, Wall Street, and Times Square to see the Rockettes perform. Craft believed these trips with Harper broadened the students’ worldview. Harper introduced them to Washington High alumni who had relocated outside of Jim Crow Georgia and were thriving. The students were given the life-changing experiences of seeing people of color gain opportunities. Harper also took the class on a trip to Illinois where they visited the Art Institute of Chicago, as well as the University of Chicago. During the Midwestern trip, the group visited Mammoth Cave, and stopped to visit the state of Kentucky.188 The trips with her classmates piqued Craft’s interests in traveling. The students were able to see that “the world was bigger than Atlanta.”189

Craft had always planned to attend college. In her family, education was emphasized, and she was expected to pursue higher education. However she had not yet settled on which university. An honors student, she anticipated receiving scholarship offers, which did not materialize. Lizzie Craft, as a widow raising her daughter alone, could not afford to send Pearlie


188 Dove, Nasstrom interview.

189 Dove, Nasstrom interview.
away to school.\footnote{Dove, Nasstrom interview.} When Craft’s French teacher, Susie Cunningham, learned that she had not received notification of awards, she contacted Clark University, now Clark Atlanta University, and secured funding on Craft’s behalf.\footnote{Dove, Merritt interview.} In the fall of 1937, Craft accepted the scholarship and enrolled. Soon after beginning her college career, she decided to major in the field of education.\footnote{Dove, Merritt interview.}

As a young woman preparing to enter college, Craft’s original career aspiration was to become an interior designer. She decided upon the field of education partly because she had relatives who taught, many of her role models worked in Atlanta’s public school system, and because teaching was one of the “better jobs for black women at the time.”\footnote{Dove, Merritt interview.} Craft’s two aunts, who were educators, convinced her that entering the field of interior design was not a realistic career goal for a black woman.\footnote{Dove, Nasstrom interview.} When Craft completed her undergraduate degree in 1941, she had acquired enough course credits for a double major in the fields of Home Economics and Elementary Education. When she graduated from Clark University, she was not yet twenty-one. Because she was under-aged, a family friend encouraged Craft to continue in school. The Red Cross agreed to continue paying the benefits from her father’s death until she came of age, provided Craft remained in school.\footnote{Dove, Nasstrom interview.} After earning her Bachelor of Arts from Clark University, she was accepted into graduate school at Atlanta University (AU).\footnote{Pearlie Craft Dove, interview by author, Atlanta, Georgia, October 25, 2011.} Craft was able to
successfully apply the funding to cover her graduate tuition and fees. After Craft completed her master’s degree at Atlanta University in 1943, she was qualified to teach elementary and secondary level students.\textsuperscript{197}

Craft married Reverend Jackson Benjamin Dove in 1945. He was a Chaplain with the military, so early in the marriage the young couple moved several times, from Georgia to Kentucky to Tennessee.\textsuperscript{198} They also started a family. Dove’s first child died, she later gave birth to a daughter. Eventually, the Dove family relocated to the southwest Atlanta community where Dove grew up. The move was partially nostalgic and partially dictated by segregation. Her husband had been commissioned to serve at Fort McPherson, an Army base located on the edges of southwest Atlanta and the city of East Point. However, as an African-Americans commissioned officer, he was not allowed to live on base. Non-commissioned officers were housed on the campus of Atlanta University. Black commissioned officers were housed at the Phyllis Wheatley YWCA.\textsuperscript{199}

Dove recollected taking pleasure in being a supportive wife and stay-at-home mother. Soon, a teaching offer came from her alma mater. In 1949, Clark College Dean Alphonso A. McPheeters contacted Dove to offer her an Instructor’s position in the Department of Education.\textsuperscript{200} Dove considered McPheeters a great influence on her professional career. He motivated his faculty to establish and maintain high standards in and out of the classroom. She thought of McPheeters as one of her mentors; it was he who suggested that Dove not leave the

\textsuperscript{197}Karen Ferguson, \textit{Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta}, 34.

\textsuperscript{198}Dove, Nasstrom interview. In interviews, Dove referred to her husband by his middle name, Benjamin.

\textsuperscript{199}Dove, Nasstrom interview.

\textsuperscript{200}Dove, Nasstrom interview. Clark College merged with Atlanta University in 1988 to become Clark Atlanta University.
classroom entirely once she moved into administration.201 However, Dove credited her husband with encouraging her to pursue a doctorate. Reverend Dove told her that in order for her to progress from instructor to professor, she would need an advanced degree. Just one month after this conversation with his wife, Reverend Dove was tragically killed in an automobile accident. The Doves had just purchased their home and their daughter was still an infant.202 Dove was now the sole provider for her family. Dove found two graduate programs which readily accepted black women, the University of Colorado and the University of Pittsburgh. She considered the University of Colorado to be a better fit, so she enrolled in the School of Education.203 By 1959, Dove had completed the doctoral program by taking courses during the summer breaks, while continuing to work full-time at Clark College.204

Like Bolden and Brayboy, Dove’s worldview was shaped by similar elements: living in southwest Atlanta, being active in her church, and attending Booker T. Washington High School. As children, and later as young women, all three attended the same high school and lived in the same community. Archival records and interviews do not indicate whether Bolden, Brayboy, or Dove knew each other in high school or as young women. However, records do indicate that all three women attended Booker T. Washington High School for at least a year at the same time under the direction of Principal Harper. The women were all immersed in the school’s rigorous curriculum. There’s a strong possibility that the “teacher” that Brayboy mentions as taking her downtown is the same person that escorted Dove’s class. Both Brayboy and Dove were motivated to attend college after graduating from Washington High School.

201Dove, Nasstrom interview.

202Dove, Nasstrom interview.

203Dove, Merritt interview.

204Dove, interview by author.
Despite each of the women having varying degrees of formal education, all three believed that acquiring knowledge equaled acquiring power. Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove were taught a value system that emphasized a strong work ethos and the pursuit of excellence. Each woman was reared in a household that instilled a belief that Christianity and the black church would become the stronghold and foundation of their lives. The upcoming sections discuss the influence of segregation’s psychical distance, educational activism, the church, and respectability politics in each of the women’s lives.

3.4 Segregation’s Psychical Distance

Scholars have expanded the definition of distance to include both the geographical and the metaphorical. The metaphorical definition can be based upon racial, class, and cultural differences. Further, when distance is being metaphorically measured, the individual is not assessing travel in terms of blocks or miles, but in terms of the mental, emotional, and physical fortitude required to travel the distance. Edward Bullough founded his theory on the precept that individuals feel negative emotions when encountering what is perceived to be a threatening circumstance. One’s reactions to the situation would be based upon either previous experiences, or what the person had been taught to expect. He theorized that the mind extends the actual distance, thereby putting metaphorical space between the body and the place or event. Inserting symbolic distance between the body and the place/event allows the self to disconnect from feelings of terror or fear. Overcoming the negative feelings associated with the image/event only comes from approaching the situation with objectivity and transformation. By venturing into

205 Joshua Lewandowski and Timothy C. Lisk, “Foundations of Distance” in Exploring Distance in Leader-Follower Relationships: When Near is Far and Far is Near, eds. Michelle C. Bligh and Ronald E. Riggio (New York: Routledge, 2012), 14, 20. Lewandowski and Lisk discuss German sociologist Georg Simmel’s concept that distance was less spatial than cultural in that class difference was much more effective in keeping individuals separate than geography. Lewandowski and Lisk use Simmel’s work to identify different leadership styles, which I will utilize to some extent in a later chapter.
“whites only” areas in downtown Atlanta, not only did all three women purposefully cross the short physical distance, but they also surmounted segregation’s much more imposing “psychical” boundaries.

For black women, the larger implications of being impacted by segregation’s psychical distance included having a heightened awareness they were not welcome in white society and the law was not there for their protection. Blacks could not afford to measure distance simply in units, but in terms of proximity to white neighborhoods, communities and businesses or “white spaces.” An African-American crossing Hunter Street (the black side) onto Ashby Street (the white side) was well aware that there was a real risk of being attacked. Segregation’s psychical distance for Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove was both symbolic and actual. Leaving the safer confines of their neighborhoods consisted of more than just the mileage between the black southwestern community and downtown/north Atlanta. It also included the possibility of becoming ensnared in violent situations while traveling to, and through, what Audrey Kobayashi describes as America’s “racialized landscape,” and Patricia Hill Collins identifies as “white spaces.”

Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s breaching the invisible barriers of segregated Atlanta as young adults can be considered a lateral link to the development of the transformative activism that became the basis of their individual leadership styles. The actual distance between Booker T.

206 In what could be considered a postmodern extension of Bullough’s psychical distance theory, scholars have introduced race-based spatial geography, and the concepts of “white” and “black” spaces into the discourse to further critique segregated societies. Michael Keith and Steve Pile discuss the concept that, when discussing race, class, or gender oppression in a city, location is largely metaphorical and connected to the identity of the dominant class or the marginalized. Michael Keith and Steve Pile, “Introduction, Part I; The Politics of Place,” in Place and the Politics of Identity (London, New York: Routledge, 1993), 1-3.

Washington High School and Peachtree Street was (and remains) approximately three miles. Yet those three miles represented the possibility of attack, abuse, persecution, disfranchisement, lack of textbooks, lack of city services, and lack of access to public facilities. Moving through that space, even with adult guardians, took tremendous courage because the laws of segregation did not respect age or gender when being enforced. The politically active educators at Washington High School prepared Brayboy, Bolden, and Dove for the dismantling of Jim Crow, professional positions in integrated settings, and for life outside of Atlanta, Georgia. In traveling between the south side of Atlanta, downtown, and the north side, Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove were able to observe the privileges afforded whites because of segregation. More importantly, crossing into those spaces may have implanted the idea that they, as African-Americans, were entitled to the same lifestyles and rights.

At a very young age, Bolden left her neighborhood in search of a job. At the age of seventeen, she moved even further, leaving the state. She was not yet a legal adult when she left the city of Atlanta, and her family, to move North in search of a higher-paying salary. A white Jewish family in Chicago, Illinois placed an advertisement in an Atlanta newspaper seeking a domestic worker. Bolden responded. The family hired her and required that she relocate to Illinois. Bolden indicated in an interview that while she lived with this particular family, she was treated very well. She attributed her employers’ courteous behavior both to their Jewish faith and to location. Financial need prompted Bolden’s early experiences with bridging psychical distance. This exposure to white employers, both in the South and in the North, introduced her to regional differences in how some whites treated blacks. Bolden believed that the family treated

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her very “lovely” because they were good people, but she also believed that the family treated her well because of how she conducted herself.  

These experiences arguably transformed Bolden over the years, giving her the confidence to approach potential white employers and propose wage increases for the members of what would become the National Domestic Workers Union. Bolden engaged white males and females in dialogue related to increasing the salaries of trained and skilled domestic workers. Those conversations also implied that increased respectfulness toward the workers would be expected as well. Because Bolden had also worked in occupations outside of domestic work, she understood the intrinsic need to train and produce skilled workers in order to better demand higher wages. In turn, she trained the members of the NDWU to meet the standards required to earn the higher salaries by preparing them to meet criteria as set forth by the Career Learning Center. With training, the members of the NDWU gained higher increased salaries, and slightly better treatment from the clientele.

Brayboy’s willingness to bravely breach segregation’s psychical distance by going into the downtown courthouse to complete the application for Deputy Voter Registrar was vastly different from her previous practice of trying to keep her family out of segregated spaces as a form of protection and self-care. Brayboy circulated within the black community conducting voter registration. However, it was in walking her community she began to fully understand that registering African-Americans to vote was only half the battle. Through discussion with neighbors reluctant to register, Brayboy learned that the potential voters were intimidated by the very real threat of being violently harmed. The fear of reprisal was justified because the act of

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209 Seifer, *Nobody Speaks for Me!,* 144.

210 When her children were younger, Brayboy worked when finances dictated a need. “Community Service Around the Way,”. In an interview Brayboy recounted having to explain to her children that they were second class citizens. “I Still Believe in Power of The Ballot,” *Atlanta Constitution,* (Testimonies).
voting was very public. Voters were often watched entering the courthouse. White supremacists employed numerous intimidation tactics to stop blacks from registering. They would take notes or pictures of black voters, report to their employers, follow them home, physically assault them or damage their property. Brayboy’s idea to create spaces other than the courthouse for Atlantans to vote reduced the psychical distance between segregated black communities and exclusionary public white spaces. Although the libraries and schools were near downtown or the courthouse, they were far enough to give black voters the perception that they were not directly in harm’s way. Brayboy did not just register disfranchised African-Americans, she changed the way citizens viewed the voting processes by minimizing the intimidation factors associated with voting.

Dove, just as her mentor Harper had, took her students out of the black community into downtown Atlanta, and out of state by sending students to the American north and Midwest. For black students whose safe existence was determined by geographical determinants, traveling downtown to show students the state capitol was physically just a few miles. But for them, just as it had been for Dove, the psychical distance was much greater. Leaving the enclosed enclave of the black communities, crossing the invisible yet very real demarcated segregation lines was mentally and emotionally daunting. Dove taking these students, first a few miles, on trips to northern schools, and then later out of the country, was presumably just as life altering for the students as they were for her. Having politically active teachers who believed that exposing the student body to exceptionally high standards, and diversity, would suggest that the three women were also observing educational activism.
3.5 Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s Exposure to Educational Activism

Educational activism has been a form of resistance to legal oppression since the Reconstruction Era. At Washington High School, educational activism was the culture of the high school. Educational activism was revealed through the proactive educators who emphasized to the students on a daily basis that they were not receiving a substandard education, that they were not inferior beings, and that the student must meet the school’s academically high standards. The educators at Washington High deliberately violated the legally defined spatial boundaries of segregation, whether it was a few miles or across state lines to show their students that they were not limited by race, but by racism. Race-conscious educators tried to ready their students for immersion into the white world through planting ideas of excellence and the pursuit of higher education. Faculty at the school were responsible for transporting Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove out of “black Atlanta” and into “white Atlanta” thereby reducing segregation’s psychical distance between the two worlds. Between the education and the exposure, the teachers instilled an expectation of excellence that became the foundation for their activism.

That ideal was not just the standard at Washington High School. It was the mantra and belief system for many families, and most black schools, businesses, social, civic, and fraternal organization established under the Jim Crow system. The pursuit of excellence was partially the herculean response African-Americans exercised in attempting to exceed racist perceptions.

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212 Scholar bell hooks writes that being educated in Kentucky’s segregated school system was fundamentally political. In the introduction to Teaching to Transgress; Education as the Practice of Freedom, hooks describes her teachers as “being on a mission” to instill a devotion to learning. hooks believes that the education that she received was revolutionary because it prepared to her to counter colonial hegemony when she began attending integrated schools during the 1960s. hooks summarized her pre-integration education as “nurturing;” that it was clearly conveyed to her that she was expected to excel, become a “thinker,” and use her intellect to uplift the race. bell hooks, Teaching to Transgress; Education as the Practice of Freedom (New York: Routledge, 1994), 3.
It also represented the upwardly mobile aspirations of the black middle-class and its veneer of respectability. The black community was a geographically insular world, filled with the same churches, educational institutions, and social activities—such as debutante balls—that Atlanta’s white society had. Young women were expected to pursue that standard, because each young woman understood that while the internal community may have protected them, the external community devalued them.213

As young women, Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove did not intentionally decide to become activists. The activism sprang from their desire to construct economic avenues of sustainability for themselves, as well as for members of their community. Bolden realized that her “job” of three decades was a career. Brayboy decided to help register neighbors to vote, but she continued working a regular job during the day. That volunteer position led to a life of activism. Dove’s professional advancement was directly connected to her having mentors who pushed her to earn a terminal degree. Once Dove was in a position of leadership, she passed on the expectations of success. All three of these women were skilled professionals who worked outside of Atlanta’s Movement hierarchy but alongside its members. However, the women worked closely with the residents of their neighborhoods to build new structures and were instrumental in creating new institutions.214


214 This was not a new practice or unique to Atlanta. Black business owners served the community they sold to in any number of ways. Jacqueline Jones, Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow; Black Women, Work, and the Family, From Slavery to the Present (New York: First Vintage Books Edition, 1986), 285. In the chapter “The Struggle Confirmed and Transformed, 1955-1980” Jones writes about Mary Davis, who opened her Charleston beauty shop up for classes for illiterate adults, Birdie Keglar, a Mississippi woman who sued the county sheriff when he levied an unfair poll tax and Rosie Steele, a Birmingham resident who offered her home as a respite for marchers on the trek from Selma to Birmingham.
Activism in education is typically studied in relation to the effects of segregation upon the brave students who were the first to integrate the elementary and secondary schools as well as colleges and universities. The examination generally revolves around the historical events of African-Americans students enrolling in the predominantly white educational institutions, and the resulting fallout. Analysis centers on the emotional consequences of the students being thrusted into situations where they endured white peers terrorizing them, teachers who were dismissive of their race and intellect, and little attention or support for the obstacles they encountered during the course of the school day. Or the research focus has been on the sacrifices and challenges faced by the members of the Student Movement. Outside of well-known educators, who were also organizers, such as JoAnne Robinson, Septima Clark, or Daisy Bates, studies have not characteristically focused on the African-Americans educators who prepared the students to go into the trenches to fight the battle of segregation.\(^{215}\)

One example of research which focuses on the role of the educator is Thomas Bynum’s dissertation, "Our Fight is for Right": The NAACP Youth Councils and College Chapters' Crusade for Civil Rights, 1936-1965," which centers on the Youth Councils and their civil rights activism. However, Bynum also presents Juanita Jackson, the National Youth Director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, as the specific catalyst emphasizing the importance of the roles of youth in the freedom struggle. Jackson was committed to purposefully educating and training black youth to both agitate on behalf of the community as well as serve the community.\(^{216}\)

\(^{215}\)Classic Movement narratives that tell the stories of black students who desegregated schools include, Ruby Bridges, the “Little Rock Nine,” Charlayne Hunter Gault, Hamilton Holmes, Atherine Lucy, and Josephine Bradley. The autobiographies and biographies of Anne Moody, Diane Nash, Ruby Doris Smith Robinson, John Lewis, and Lonnie King share the experiences of black students who joined the Movement as college students.

\(^{216}\)Tommy L. Bynum, "Our Fight is for Right": The NAACP Youth Councils and College Chapters' Crusade for Civil Rights, 1936-1965" (PhD diss., Georgia State University, 2007), 19-20. Like Dove, Jackson
for Black Freedom, 1936–1965, he states that Jackson, in developing the youth agenda, planned to implement five objectives, including educating young people about the economic, political, and social problems confronted by blacks.217 Jackson stressed the importance of black youth being exposed to the greatness of their history to prepare them to become future leaders.218 As the director of a national organization, she was able to create national initiatives affecting students and young adults on a national level. Jackson’s initiatives, undertaken in the 1930s, mirrored the educational activism happening at the local level in 1920s Atlanta. Similarly, the faculty at Washington High School, beginning with the appointment of “race-man” Charles Harper, used education as one of the tools to instill pride and ignite activist impulses. As products of Harper’s brand of education, by the end of the 1960s, as adults, Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove were applying their versions of educational activism. Bolden through her Career Learning Center curricula, Brayboy in her coordination of citizenship schools for eligible voters and the exchange program, and Dove through developing a student exchange program for education majors at Clark College.

3.6 Bolden, Brayboy, Dove, and the Church

The black church was the heart of the community. The church, at its core, offered spiritual guidance and religious instruction. It also served as the educational, social, and earned advanced degrees, was a member of a black Greek letter organization and worked with the local black branch of the YWCA. Jackson earned a Bachelor of Science in education, a Master of Arts in sociology, and a law degree from the University of Maryland. Jackson worked with the YWCA and was an active member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated (AKA) As National Youth Director, Jackson believed black youth needed to be informed about the social, economic, and political problems facing the community, support the national office’s objectives, become knowledgeable about blacks’ achievements, and to develop militant youth leadership.


economic hub of black Atlanta. It functioned as the training ground for both male and female leadership as it groomed congregants to chair committees, to coordinate events, to raise and track funds, and to record histories. Within the church’s hierarchy, blacks could earn the titles of “accountant,” “Committee Chair,” or “Director.” By working in these positions within the church, members could achieve professional statuses and respect denied to them outside of the church. The black church was an anomaly; it was the singular institution within the entire black community that operated independently of white control. In addition to providing faith-based services, the church was a place to attend school, take music lessons, learn elocution and other dramatic arts, perform with the choral ensembles, attend political lectures, seek enfranchisement, fundraise, begin a business venture, and collect contributions to assist struggling neighbors. There were few, if any, other places blacks could meet without being surveilled, the church was one such place.²¹⁹

The black church imbued its members with a firm belief system that offered sustenance through the travails of living in the Jim Crow South. The church was far more than a place to worship, it was the foundation of the black community’s culture. Each church contained its own hierarchy and social network. C. Eric Lincoln described the black church as the “cultural womb” of the community; a safe space for its members that served as the birthplace for political activities and operated as an academy for training and educational purposes. The organizational structure of that social and cultural network consisted of pastoral leadership, deacons, lay leaders, trustees, the Mothers Board, Sunday School teachers, and congregants.²²⁰ The body of

²¹⁹Morris, Origins of the Civil Rights Movement, 5. Patricia Hill Collins, in Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice, emphasized that surveillance of the black community was the “strategy of choice” in maintaining the boundaries of segregation. Patricia Hill Collins, Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 20.

²²⁰In some churches Lay Leaders are members of the church laity (members of the congregation that are not clergy) who have been selected to serve in a leadership position. Lay leaders advocate on behalf of the congregation
the black church planted not just the mustard seeds of faith, but also seeds of leadership, achievement, and community consciousness among its members.221

Sociologist John E. Williams’ work examines the black church as a politicized cultural force in the community. Williams builds upon one of Aldon Morris’ theories that social networks are pivotal to social movement organizing. Morris also writes about the modern Civil Rights Movement emerging out of the black church. Two concurrent themes in both C. Eric Lincoln, Morris, and Williams’ works are: (1) the church was a large part the black community’s collective identity aside from the religious aspects, and (2) that identity made the church a natural wellspring for Movement organizing.222 Williams’ work asserts that the black church functions as more than the spiritual and social center of the community, but rather as a cultural belief system. This shared belief system is the core of the black community’s network. The activism that bursts from the church gives members structural opportunities to organize as a cultural and spiritual collective. The importance of the church’s role reflects the black community’s reaction to the shared discourse of segregation. Williams posits that Movement organizing emerges from the culture of the black community, which is rooted in the black church. In the church, congregants dialogue about social injustice and receive guidance to combat it.223 This intersection between religion, politics, culture, and community leads to the

with the pastor, as well serve as the liaison between the congregants and the pastoral leadership. Lay leaders undergo training. On occasion, in some churches, lay leaders stand in for the pastor.


222Aldon Morris’ The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement; Black Communities Organizing for Change and the edited text Frontiers in Social Movement Theory, C. Eric Lincoln’s The Black Church in the African-American Experience, and Williams’ “Linking Beliefs to Collective Action: Politicized Religious Beliefs and the Civil Rights Movement” texts focuses on the significance of the black church as the cultural, in addition to the religious, center of the black community.

church’s influence in allowing the leadership and the membership to use the church as the base from which to organize and mobilize. The church is where organizers meet, strategize, raise funds, and host rallies.

As an institution, the church served Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove in similar capacities. All three women acknowledged that being “raised in the church” did not just speak to their religious training, but also to their exposure to church congregants who were poised for direct social action. The black church was the cultural center of Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s spiritual, social, and political lives. That belief system also became the foundation around which the three women based their family lives and career choices.

Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove alluded to being active church members while growing up, and later as adults. The three women indicated lifelong affiliations with a church “home.” Bolden stated in interviews she had been active in church all of her life. As a young adult, Bolden was a member of Vine City Baptist Church. Brayboy was member of Central UMC until her death. Dove was a member of Big Bethel AME Church from birth to death. Being a member of a church congregation served a dual purpose. Becoming a faithful member of a church congregation was a critical part of their community socialization, and a sure way to engage the complete black community. The black church housed the community’s spiritual, business, civic, and educational leadership. In Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s households, serving the community through their Christianity was an essential part of their lives that contributed to the formation of

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224 Dove, Merritt interview. Obituary for Ella Mae Brayboy, Joyce Jones’ private collection, November 17, 2010. Bolden frequently spoke about the presence of God and her belief in the role of the church, but she very rarely identified her church home. The church listed in her obituary is Friendship Baptist Church. Obituary for Dorothy Bolden, Kay Powell. *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, July 18, 2005. Inventory sheet for the Dorothy Lee Bolden Thompson Collection at the Auburn Avenue Research Library, Atlanta, Georgia.
their leadership skillset, nurtured their abilities to connect with the community outside of their home congregations, and connected the women to networks of influential black Atlantans.225

Bolden grew up in a self-described Christian household. She was baptized between the ages of six and seven.226 Bolden described herself as a respectful child who obeyed her parents and emulated their values. Bolden also developed a work ethic very similar to her parents and grandparents early in her young life. Bolden’s description of her childhood personality was that she was very “slow acting” when it came to socializing or meeting boys. According to Bolden, she did not seek boys out as a teenager. When boys sought her out, Bolden was very particular about the type of boys that she entertained.227

Brayboy’s family became rooted in Atlanta’s black community. The older Ella Mae Wade, Charlie Wade’s mother, was a member of Central United Methodist Episcopal Church. Brayboy was born into membership at Central, followed in her grandmother’s footsteps, and remained a lifelong member. As a devoted member, Brayboy joined community service-oriented groups. She was very project-oriented, nothing reflects this more than her work with Central’s branch of the United Methodist Women.228 As a young married woman, Brayboy’s community service was limited to church-led activities. Brayboy chaired committees, personally hosting

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225 Williams, “Linking Beliefs to Collective Action”, 205.
226 Ibid.
227 Bolden, Lutz interview.
228 The United Methodist Women (UMW) is a female, faith based organization that was founded in 1869 to internationally raise money for girls and women that were living in deplorable conditions. The United Methodist Church’s missionary projects, such as building churches, schools, orphanages, and hospitals, is partially funded by monies raised by individual chapters of the UMW. Each chapter projected an annual dollar amount of funds to raise, and selected an organization to receive the funds. Brayboy, according to her daughter Joyce Jones, enjoyed coordinating the mission drives.
groups in her home. Whenever Central organized projects to serve the community, she would join in or spearhead organizing the project from beginning to end, the majority of which were duties associated with the United Methodist Women.

Dove sang in the church choir for the majority of her life. Her commitment to Big Bethel was the family’s practice. Dove’s grandfather was an active member of Big Bethel, teaching in the Sunday School. Dove’s earliest memories of attending Big Bethel are of her grandfather taking her to church. As a young woman, she worked with the youth board doing local “missionary outreach.” Big Bethel’s members held clothing and food drives during the holiday seasons. Members would visit financially struggling families to share food and gifts. Dove believed her church was where she met her earliest role models outside of the family. Her church family consisted of prominent members of Atlanta’s black community. Charles Lincoln Harper was the Sunday School Superintendent. Marie Finch, the city’s first black truant officer, was a Sunday School teacher, David T. Howell was an undertaker, and the King family were realtors. Dove made a conscious decision to emulate the actions of these leaders and activists.

Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s families instilled in them the importance of faith, a work ethic, and the value of community. The black church was where the women were introduced to their faith. The black school system was where they obtained their education. These community and familial institutions gave the three women the strength to not just survive, but thrive, and lead in the Jim Crow South. These black institutions were also where the women were inculcated with the black community’s doctrine of respectability.

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230 Jones, interview by author.

231 Dove, Merritt interview. In the transcription of the interview, the undertaker is identified as David T. Howell. However, that appears to be erroneous. “Howell” is more than likely the misspelled name of black businessman David T. Howard, who owned a mortuary.
3.7 Bolden, Brayboy, Dove and the Politics of Respectability

Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove were born during the Jim Crow era in Atlanta. So the legally sanctioned second-class conditions under which black Atlantans lived, were educated, and worked created the institutions that developed and nurtured Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove. The churches, organizations, and schools founded to initiate excellence within the prescribed physical boundaries of the black community were fundamental to encouraging young black women. Although African-Americans created these institutions in response to segregation, these women were exposed to the ideas that neither their race nor gender would limit them, which was diametrically opposed to the black community’s version of the true womanhood paradigm. Being a part of these paradoxical educational, spiritual, and fraternal organizations aided in the development of Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s perceptions of character, their understanding of social expectations and, the obligations and expectations of leadership. While differing in structure, all the organizations shared the commonality of imparting a continuous message of racial uplift, morals, and manners.

For Brayboy, Bolden, and Dove, before and during their entrée into activism, they were considered respectable women. One of the ways that Bolden described herself was as having been raised “in the church.” In several interviews, Bolden stressed that she was reared in an environment where she learned how to behave in public. She always identified herself as married. Upon employment, she established that she was not the kind of domestic worker who would accept inappropriate overtures. Brayboy, when canvassing neighborhoods, emphasized that she was addressed as “Mrs. Brayboy,” not Ella Mae. She was called “Mrs. Brayboy” by members of the community, in church, at the workplace, and in newspaper articles. Dove was a widow who had earned a doctorate and taught at the college level. Dove’s respectability, unlike
Bolden and Brayboy, was inferred. Her credentials alone dictated that she be referred to by title.\textsuperscript{232}

It was important to the three women that the public acknowledge them as women of character in a society that mocked, devalued, and labeled black women as servile and promiscuous, aggressive, and emasculating. Although it was common practice for all whites, regardless of gender, age, or class, to call adult African-Americans men and women by their first names, there were few in the black community who showed such disrespect to Bolden, Brayboy, or Dove. Although this respectability was not a protective shield outside the black community, within, the women’s’ reputations allowed them to occupy positions of power and prestige which might otherwise be limited or closed for women.

The respect that members of the community had for the three women allowed them to navigate being in the public sphere performing such forward acts as traveling alone, addressing crowds, knocking on doors to ask the adult occupants if they were registered to vote, approaching strangers on the bus to ask about joining a union, or taking a leadership position in a university department. Bolden purposefully chose to remain a domestic worker as she identified injustices in the community. One of her objectives was to bring respectability to the title of “domestic worker.” Brayboy made the decision to become a deputy voter registrar for the State of Georgia while working for Rich’s department store. Dove traveled out of the South as a widowed single mother to earn her doctorate while teaching at the university level. Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s ability to navigate the public sphere, which was considered masculine domain, and maintain the community’s respect were partially because their character and

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{232}George M. Coleman, “Domestic Work Now a Virtue Because of Dorothy Bolden,” \textit{Atlanta Daily World}, March 23, 1975. In Coleman’s article, he stated Bolden was “proudly called ‘Mrs.’ by college and bank presidents; by the young and the old.” In archived transcripts of interviews, persons who were interviewed about Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove consistently referred to the women using the prefix “Mrs.,” or in Dove’s case, “Doctor.”}
carefully maintained stellar reputations preceded them. Attaining respectability, not only in the “cleanliness, manners, and morals sense,” but also through education, hard work, and enfranchisement while living an honest Christian life were the images Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove presented as professional career women and as activists.

As girls, Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove shared similar experiences such as attending the same high school. As young women, their lives diverged in terms of their pursuit of higher education. All three women married, worked, and had families. Bolden and Dove left the city of Atlanta, yet returned to settle down. All three women were raised with a strong faith in God, and as adults, were committed to a religious life. As the women matured, they became increasingly dissatisfied with the racial conditions under which they were forced to live and work. They began to make changes.

Bolden began thinking about forming an organization which would support, train, and empower domestic workers. Brayboy decided that enfranchisement was the most powerful way to institute change in her immediate community and began emulating the techniques of the activists who trained her to register as many citizens as possible. Dove, after accepting the promotion to Chair of the Education Department, decided to incorporate the invaluable experiences she had with her mentors and instructors at Washington High School, and at Clark College, into the department’s curriculum. Their career paths lead to them leaving the relative safety of their communities to organize, mobilize, educate and agitate for social change. Chapter Four discusses how a significant component of their leadership styles consisted of modeling behaviors they had been taught (such as training and teaching others to go forth) and how their careers became extensions of their community activism.
COMMUNITY ACTIVISM IS CIVIL RIGHTS ACTIVISM

By all accounts, Dorothy Bolden, Ella Mae Brayboy, and Pearlie Dove grew up in a strong and supportive enclave. Residents in southwest Atlanta, in the form of family, educators, merchants, and church members, contributed to building their character. Being surrounded by mentors presented the three, as children, with behavior they would later come to model as adult activists. Their politically active teachers exposed the women to interactive civics lessons on government, the machinations of legal segregation, institutes of higher education, and integrated northern cities.

The culture and climate of 1960s Atlanta was conflicting. There was evidence of incremental racial progress related to housing in the early 1950s. Mayor William B. Hartsfield presided over an interracial committee to navigate peaceful transition in white neighborhoods changing to black as the borders of black neighborhoods continued to expand in 1952. By 1961, Hartsfield was shepherding negotiations between white and black business/community leaders regarding officially desegregating Atlanta’s restaurants and lunch counters after a year of student-led protests orchestrated by Lonnie King and Julian Bond. After twenty-four years in office, Hartsfield’s supporters (white businessmen, blacks, and the wealthy whites that lived on the Northside Drive section of Atlanta) passed their support over to Ivan Allen, Jr.  

Yet, despite what on the surface appeared to be a progressive racial climate for black Atlantans, the inequities per capita income and education remained vast. Between 1960 and 1970, Atlanta experienced exponential economic growth. Between 1961 and 1970, the city gained 160,000 new jobs (a 43% increase.) In 1966, two years before Bolden founded the National Domestic Workers Union, Atlanta could boast, (with an unemployment rate of 1.9%) of

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having the lowest unemployment rate in the United States. In this same time period, four of the nation’s top five largest industrial corporations housed operational facilities in Atlanta. At the end of this decade of phenomenal growth, over 100 delegations from other states visited the city to study its growth.\textsuperscript{234}

Signs of economic growth, change, and prosperity were exploding all over Atlanta, but black Atlantans were not benefitting. It was during this decade Bolden founded the National Domestic Workers Union; Brayboy was appointed Deputy Registrar for the State of Georgia, and Dove became Director of Student Teaching at Clark College. The three women consciously stepped into visible positions of power, strength, and leadership. They were in charge of coordinating staff, planning strategies and desired outcomes, setting goals, and engaging with influential black and white Atlantans.

The changes in their careers elevated the women’s profiles in the community from navigators to negotiators. Studying how the women progressed in their careers provides strong anecdotal evidence that the women were committed to not just educating, enfranchising, and training black residents, but providing a foundation for them to become self-sustaining. Each of the women was ingrained with a value system that emphasized excellence, education, and a solid work ethic. Each of the women believed that she should be dedicated to her community. Those values were reflected in their professional lives and their activism. For Bolden, the National Domestic Workers Union was an umbrella for other activism including women’s rights and rebuilding the Vine City community. For Brayboy, enfranchisement was the way to destroy segregation, which would lead to better jobs, housing, and education. For Dove, building upon the strengths of the

\textsuperscript{234}Hobson, “The Dawning of Black New South,” 34-35.
existing teacher training program was the direct link to Clark College graduates continuing the tradition of excellence and the foundation for her job with the Carter Center.235

One of the commonalities connecting the three women and their career changes lay in the fact that each of them promoted a form of economic empowerment and, they directly connected voting to that empowerment. A second theme emerges in this chapter, and is further discussed in the next, the political influence Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove amassed in the community as the direct result of their career choices. The third theme presents the women in positions of power, and demonstrates how they used that authority to bring opportunities to the residents in their communities. Finally, the chapter, utilizing Joan Charles’ definition, illustrates the women’s 1) leadership process; 2) influence in the community that arose out of their leadership; 3) leadership functioning in a group context; and, 4) leadership leading to goal attainment.

The upcoming sections follow Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s arcs of employment, the coalescence between their career choices, ascension into positions of leadership, and personal activism. Weaving the three women into the historiography of the modern Civil Rights Movement by inserting their pioneering accomplishments into Atlanta’s narrative is critically important. What is just as deserving of analysis is the environment that fostered, or drove, these three women to make the bold personal choice to create, seek, or accept authoritative positions in the racially segregated and sexist South.

4.1 Bolden and the NDWU

Bolden began working as a domestic before she was in middle school.236 As a child, she was savvy enough to find employers willing to hire her apart from working with her mother, and pay

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235A year after Dove retired from Clark Atlanta University, she was offered a position with former President Jimmy Carter’s non-profit organization The Atlanta Project, further discussion later in the chapter.
her separately. For the majority of the next three decades, Bolden was employed as a domestic worker. However, when she was a young woman, she looked for jobs in several other industries. Bolden stated she “did a little bit of everything, just to experience something else.”237 One job required cleaning Greyhound buses. At the retail store Sears and Roebuck, Bolden was the first “chute girl,” the person who kept products moving from the mailroom to the associates on the floor.238 Another position she accepted outside of service was working at the National Linen Service Company. Bolden was initially hired to work for three dollars a day. The white employees at the linen company formed a union, thereby exposing Bolden to organizing. Once the union was established, all of the employees’ (black and white) benefitted from salary increases. Bolden’s rate of pay skyrocketed to twenty-three dollars a day. This increase also included eligibility for benefits.239 In this instance, she was both a witness and a recipient of the advantages of organizing. Bolden worked in a company that unionized, on jobs that involved manual labor, and consistently interacted with white employers and supervisors. Those factors, along with Bolden’s abilities to secure employment outside of domestic work and her interpersonal skill set, all appear to have contributed to preparing Bolden for her future activism on a professional level.

On a personal level, an unfortunate, potentially dangerous situation occurred when Bolden was in her twenties. She was arrested and jailed for almost a week because she “talked

236 Dorothy Bolden, interview by unidentified member of the Junior League Oral History Committee, Junior League of Atlanta Oral History Project, Special Collections, Auburn Avenue Research Library, Atlanta, Georgia, December 7, 1978.

237 Seifer, Nobody Speaks for Me!, 142.

238 Seifer, Nobody Speaks for Me!, 141-142.

back” to her white employer. The “lady of the house” was an ill-tempered alcoholic who spoke to Bolden in what she described as a “very nasty tone.” Bolden stated in an interview with Nancy Seifer that although she had been working as a maid for over a decade by that time, not one employer had ever spoken to her as rudely as this woman. Bolden indicated that she “dressed” and left the household. The woman was so outraged by Bolden’s refusal to carry out her orders, as well as the impudence displayed by Bolden’s departure, that she called the police. The officers picked Bolden up as she walked toward the main thoroughfare, which was Peachtree Street, to find public transportation to get home. Bolden was first taken home, then to the county jail. She was charged with being mentally ill for speaking angrily to a white woman. She spent five days in a filthy cell. She found the food inedible, the beds dirty, and the rooms were cold. During daily visits, her family brought her food and cigarettes. If it were not for Bolden’s uncle hiring the services of two psychiatrists to testify regarding Bolden’s mental capacity, and the intervention of Geneva Haugabrooks, a prominent business owner in Atlanta’s black community, Bolden could have been convicted, sentenced, and incarcerated. While she had endured unfair practices by employers, this was Bolden’s first experience with a white person’s capricious attempt to take and destroy her freedom simply because she had exerted her rights. It also opened her eyes to just how arbitrary racist discrimination was in the city of Atlanta. Bolden describes her situation as emblematic of why many blacks had prison records. The fact that you could be jailed and declared mentally unfit for “sassin” a white woman was proof of a racially biased legal system.

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240 Bolden stating she “got dressed” most likely means that she changed from a uniform of sorts into different clothing to travel in public.

241 Seifer, Nobody Speaks for Me!, 142.

242 George M. Coleman, “Domestic Work Now a Virtue Because of Dorothy Bolden,” Atlanta Daily World, March 23, 1975, National Domestic Worker’s Union, Newspaper Clippings, Box 1633, Folder 182, Special
Although Bolden did not start organizing black domestic workers immediately after her arrest, she had a different sort of epiphany about some of the domestics she encountered on a daily basis in the neighborhood that she deemed unrelated to social justice. Bolden stated she had seen black maids performing substandard jobs, and were so unprofessional in their demeanor that they were incapable of earning higher pay. Over the years she had seen women—who looked as if they were lounging at home—ride public transportation with rollers in their hair and wearing print shifts instead of uniforms en route to work. Bolden believed that all domestic workers lost respect because of the imagery unkempt and unprofessional workers presented. As time passed, Bolden formed ideas about ways to address the concerns of domestics, what changes needed to be made in how employers hired and paid maids. Conversely, Bolden also began contemplating how increasing the workers’ skillsets could possibly connect to increased levels of respect for the workers, ways to improve employers’ perceptions of domestic workers, and what the workers themselves could do to modify the public’s opinions.

Bolden used public transportation to get back and forth to her employers’ homes. The majority of domestic workers rode the buses to the north side of Atlanta from the south side in the early hours of the morning, because they were expected to be in place by, or before, sunrise to prepare breakfast for the household. Across the first half of the twentieth century, conditions for Atlanta’s black domestic workers were not that much different than the conditions Jacqueline

Collections and Archives, Georgia State University Library, Atlanta. Declaring African-Americans mentally unfit is a practice that dates back to the antebellum period. Mental health professionals diagnosed re-captured fugitive slaves with “dраОетомания,” or “flight from home mania.” Compliant blacks were considered mentally healthy. Paul B. Pederson, et al., *Counseling Across Cultures* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2016), 150. Most of the literature that chronicles the use of mental health diagnoses as a mode of oppression, or to justify incarceration, have been published within the discipline of psychiatry, psychology, and criminal justice.

243 Ibid.

244 Tina McElroy, “Domestic Workers: Changing Image,” National Domestic Worker’s Union, Newspaper Clippings, Box 1633, Folder 182, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University Library, Atlanta. n.d.
Jones describes domestic workers enduring in *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*. Maids and nannies were expected to report at dawn, and the workday did not end until the dishes were cleaned up after dinner.245 Across the South, maids were paid fifty cents a day to approximately one dollar and a half per week. The conditions in Atlanta for black domestic workers were not any more favorable. In 1930, twenty-one thousand black women were recorded as being employed as domestic workers.246 In the 1930s, the Phyllis Wheatley YWCA conducted a limited survey of domestic workers, and concluded that the average hourly rate was twelve cents.247

Alice Adams started her domestic career when she was fourteen, and remained with the same family for forty years. As a teenager, the average workday for Adams consisted of cooking breakfast, “midday dinner,” “six o’clock dinner,” washing the dishes, light cleaning such as dusting, changing and making the beds, and straightening out the closets.248 Adams recalled leaving her home very early in the morning because she was expected at work by seven. She generally left work around seven in the evening, unless there was a dinner party. Adams stated that she did not get extra pay for working dinner parties; she was just required to stay at work for a longer period of time and serve more people. Every day she left in the dark, and returned home in the dark. Adams worked seven days a week, with a half-day on Thursday and a half day on

245 Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*, 172-173. Jones indicates that the average weekly wage for domestic workers in many southern states was a dollar and fifty cents per week.

246 Clifford Kuhn, Harlon E. Joye, and E. Bernard West, *Living Atlanta; an Oral History of the City, 1914-1948* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1990), 111. One of the interviewees for *Living Atlanta* recalled that even though he came from a family of seven, his family always had a servant. According to the subject, there was always “some black woman who’d come in and work for a dollar and a half a week, fifty cents a day, maybe at the most.” Kuhn, *Living Atlanta*, 113.


248 Kuhn, *Living Atlanta*, 113.
Sunday. Half days consisted of getting off of work at 1:00 p.m., until she asked for Sundays off to attend church. Adams’ employers eventually acquiesced, but were initially unwilling to give her a whole day off.\(^{249}\)

It was a bit different for laundresses. They walked to employers because they were bringing the laundry with them in baskets or wagons. “Washer women” as they were known, picked up parcels of soiled clothing, linen, napkins, tablecloths, shirts, and sheets from each white family being serviced. The chore of washing clothes involved using a big black metal pot to initially boil the clothes. Then the clothes were transferred to smaller tubs, and rubbing boards were used to generate friction to clean tough stains by hand. Bolden, who began helping her mother “take in” laundry for white employers around the age of nine, recalled helping her mother wash bundles of laundry for $1.75–$2.00 each.\(^{250}\) The clothes were hung up on a clothes line, outside to dry, ironed and returned to each family. Domestic workers were overworked and underpaid by even the most benevolent of employers.

Exploitation of domestic workers ran the gamut from economic to sexual. Bolden remembered work days that did not end until eight o’clock at night, which meant she would not arrive home until close to ten p.m. She recollected employers believing that giving her pans of food to take to her family, so that she would not have to cook again when she got home, was sufficient compensation for working an additional two hours, without an increase in pay, based upon the family’s presumed needs. Yet, there were many nights when the food did not make it to her family because white teenagers taunted her when she was on the way home by knocking the

\(^{249}\)Kuhn, *Living Atlanta*, 118-120. Her request was not denied because the family needed caregiving. Adams’ employers told her they would not be able to manage without her for an entire day. Adams not being granted the whole day to spend it with her own family, but to attend morning church services speaks to the absolute inconsideration employers demonstrated toward their servants in respect to their personal lives—even for longtime employees. Adams worked for one family for several decades.

\(^{250}\)Kuhn, *Living Atlanta*, 111.
pan out of her hand. Bolden remembered taking the bus on routes that traveled near Emory University and Georgia Institute of Technology campuses. Some of the students would stand over the domestic workers and make a game out of hitting the women on their heads before requiring them to move out of their seats. While waiting on Peachtree Street to transfer to buses that would take Bolden and others to the southwest section of town, young men would jump out of cars and urinate against the wall where the women stood.251 Workers often had to navigate getting home safely from the white communities without evoking predatory attention from white males (regardless of their ages).

Unfortunately, white males preying upon black females was not a practice confined to the public spaces, such as random women being attacked by strange men. Rape, as a form of intimidation and control, confronted African women during the Middle Passage. The concept of “owning” black women’s bodies through sexual coercion was fundamentally practiced throughout the TransAtlantic slave trade. Scholar/Activist Angela Yvonne Davis’ categorization of the rapacious behavior as “one of racism’s salient historical features has always been the assumption that white men—especially those who wield economic power—possess an incontestable right of access to black women’s bodies” encapsulates the behaviors that the majority of domestic workers expected to encounter.252 The private-home-as-workplace was the perfect arena to manifest that concept through sexualized power plays. The stereotypical assumption that black women were inherently immoral allowed white males to attempt the seduction, coercion of, or violent attack on any black female working in their home with relative impunity. Black domestic workers ran the risk of being assaulted at work, being kidnapped and

251Bolden, Lutz interview.

assaulted on the way to and from work, raped as a form of retribution for being too “uppity,” and also as an intimidation tactic to women suspected of Movement organizing. Domestic workers witnessed and endured these, and a host of other debilitating and patronizing behaviors, due to their race, gender, and class.

By 1960, the median income for African-Americans families was approximately three thousand dollars, which was less than half of the median income for white families. For a two-income household, that annual gross reflected working fifty-two weeks of the year, five to six days a week. The daily rate of pay averages out to between three to four dollars a day per parent for a family comprised of domestic workers and manual laborers. According to Maurice Hobson, over half of all African-Americans males were manual laborers and three quarters of all African-Americans female workers were domestic workers. Bolden was living this reality. By the mid-1960s, Bolden decided that the domestic workers should collectively unite and work together to seek higher wages. One year prior to Bolden began officially recruiting, the daily rate for domestic workers had risen, but only to about seven dollars a day. Bolden believed that domestics should be perceived as skilled workers and maids should be treated as professionals. Bolden declared, “It takes magnificence to be able to run two households. . .but white folks treat

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you like you’re stupid.” Her intent was not to lead an entire organization, but to actively recruit participants while she sought out civil rights’ organizations to spearhead the effort.

Recruiting domestic workers was an immense ongoing task. There were several reasons why it was difficult to organize the maids; the twelve to fourteen-hour work-day, six to seven day work week, employment was often not stabilized, and ultimately, the fear of retribution from potential employers. Theorists who have studied social movements indicate that it was problematic for domestic workers to organize. The nature of the employment practices meant that domestics worked in isolated settings and often worked for several employers. Additionally, domestic work was never considered within the “purview of wage, hour, and safety regulations.” There were not any standards set in terms of workday, tasks, salary, or expectations. When the Social Security Act was passed, domestic work was purposefully excluded from coverage for two reasons; the field was one that African-Americans dominated and not providing protection for African-Americans service workers placated Southern Democrats and segregation’s status quo.

Domestic work was an exercise in isolation. The majority of the women worked as the sole employee within the homes. Consequently, it was challenging for workers to build solidarity with each other or unite to seek redress against abusive employers. There was also the fear of retribution from employers. Domestic workers were more than justified in their concerns.

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257 Dorothy Bolden, unidentified interviewer, General Mills-Kroger oral history collection for the Friends of the Auburn Avenue Research Library, Archives Division, Auburn Avenue Research Library on African-American Culture and History, Atlanta-Fulton Public Library System, Tape 27.


259 Beck, “National Domestic Workers Union,” 199; Ferguson, Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta, 122.

Bolden encountered resistance from employers directly to her face. She stated that employers would call and tell her, “The bitch wasn’t worth that type of salary.” Bolden was also threatened by Ku Klux Klansmen when she was in the early stages of recruiting future members. However, it was much more frightening when white men would call her home and anonymously threaten to harm her. She did not tell any of the potential members about the harassing phone calls because she did not want them to be afraid. She also did not discuss those particular threats in interviews prior to speaking with Lars Christiansen. In Lutz’ interview, Bolden stated whites would telephone her home, call NDWU members “bitches” and “whores”, and tell her that no one was going to pay the amount of money she was asking employers to pay for maids. She said when the men would call and “cuss” her out, she would curse them right back. If the caller would threaten to kill her, Bolden would invite him to come try. Bolden was emphatic in stating that she would not be deterred in her organizing efforts.

These factors, made it difficult for union organizers to pursue potential members. However, there were several components in place which enabled Bolden to overcome the daunting obstacle of recruitment: first, Bolden had been a domestic worker for most of her life, so she was credible when she told the workers she understood their problems and posed possible solutions through organizing. Second, she met the women on their turf. She rode public transportation in the early mornings and late in the evenings so she could speak to the workers on domestic workers was considered notoriously difficult because of the nature of the work. Christiansen, “The Making of a Civil Rights Union: The National Domestic Worker’s Union of America,” 53-54.

261 Seifer, Nobody Speaks for Me!, 163.


263 Bolden, Lutz interview.
the long bus rides to and from work.264 During the morning commute, Bolden was able to speak to a captive audience about the organization she hoped to found.265 The lengthy routes from southwest Atlanta to the wealthy white neighborhoods located throughout the city allowed Bolden to spread her message and build her platform of raising the pay for domestic workers. Bolden’s outreach via public transit breached segregation’s physical and psychical distance, and soon she was enlisting other workers to do the same. She ventured into the masculine purview of organizing, and she did it while in white neighborhoods.

Initially Bolden approached several community leaders and groups about organizing the domestic workers, including Martin Luther King, Jr. She had several informal conversations with him about collectively organizing Atlanta’s large population of domestic workers. Early one particular morning, Bolden recollected seeing King on Sunset Avenue near his home while she waited for the bus. Bolden told King that she wanted him to “organize the maids.” Bolden stated his response was “you need to organize the maids.”266 Later, Bolden visited the Atlanta Urban League’s (AUL) offices because she had heard they were attempting to organize domestic workers.

In Christiansen’s dissertation, he attributed much of Bolden’s start up to assistance from the AUL. He depicted the relationship between Bolden’s preliminary meetings and the AUL as a partnership of sorts. Bolden acknowledged the AUL as laying the foundation for the National Domestic Workers Union (NDWU) and the role of the Community Services Director, Charles

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265 Dorothy Bolden, interview by Duane Stewart, 15 July 1990, Atlanta, Georgia.

Stinson. However, Christiansen connected the United States’ government’s “War on Poverty” and what he described as a “third wave” of domestic worker activism as being a direct link to the AUL’s efforts to organize domestic workers, which he deemed “integral” to the founding of the NDWU. In contrast, my analysis of the archival documentation interprets the AUL as lending very critical support in terms of procedural, administrative, and technological assistance by: providing meeting space, promoting the meetings and assisting the domestic workers in clarifying their most urgent issues. However, I argue that the AUL did not give Bolden, and other founding members, exigent agency to organize and move forward. Bolden had already undertaken efforts to recruit and meet with women to launch her vision of organizing them. She had gathered feedback from other workers on what their pressing issues were, and was working toward creating a structured group to address how to petition employers to meet these requests.

Conversely, Stinson’s decision to meet with domestic workers did not come from dialoguing directly with them prior to the first meeting. According to Stinson, the idea of reaching out to black domestics came from four white women contacting his office to lodge a complaint about their observations of exploitative employment practices. The white women were members of a group Stinson identified as a Jewish humanitarian organization, the American Friends Society. The members believed they had witnessed domestic workers being taken advantage of, and they wanted to work with the AUL on organizing the black women. Stinson agreed that action should be taken on behalf of the domestic workers and followed up with the AUL. Both Stinson, and Christiansen, categorize the first meeting, held May 8, 1968, as a way to

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267 Christiansen, “Making of a Civil Rights Union,” 131, 138-139, 170. Christiansen also attributes the location of Women’s Bureau and U. S. Department of Labor documents amidst the archived papers of the NDWU as a form of confirmation of the link between national domestic worker activism, the AUL, and the founding of the NDWU.

268 Christiansen, “Making of a Civil Rights Union,” 132.
identify and “help define the issues of domestic workers.” Members of the organization posted flyers and made announcements. At the second meeting, Stinson explained to the group assembled that the AUL did not intend to maintain direct control over organizing the domestic workers. Rather, the AUL was going to serve as a resource and asked for volunteers to serve on the executive board. Seven women agreed to serve, along with Martha Parker, who agreed to serve as president. 269

During this second meeting, according to Stinson, Bolden raised her hand during the meeting and began asking questions that she thought were not being answered during the general discussion. Stinson indicated that Martha Parker had agreed to serve as the first president of the National Domestic Workers Union of America. However, after Bolden moved from the back of the room to the podium, by the time she had finished speaking, she had assumed the position of president. Stinson recalled Bolden asking questions of the group while walking to the front of the room. Stinson stated, “the other lady who was President, when Dorothy starts talking she just sat down…she was a classic maid, very timid. I shouldn't stereotype, take what you consider the average mentality of the maid…it’s kind of subservient, it’s not aggressive. But Dorothy was very aggressive.” Stinson said the group did not take a vote, however once Bolden assumed the podium, she assumed the presidency. 270 Stinson’s comments are telling about the relationship that existed between the Community Director of the Atlanta Urban League and low-income domestic workers: 1) For Stinson, reaching out to Atlanta’s domestic workers demographic was not an agency agenda item; 2) Stinson invoked the perception of a black domestic worker’s

269 Christiansen, Making of a Civil Rights Union, 170-171, 173. Christiansen interviewed Charles Stinson regarding his role, and the AUL’s contributions to the founding of the NDWU. It is not clear from the interview whether Stinson is conflating a Jewish humanitarian organization with the Quaker’s Society.

270 Christiansen, “Makings of a Civil Rights Union,” 174-175.
persona that is typically ascribed, and required, by white employers; and 3) he described Bolden as aggressive, and equated that characteristic with leadership.

The second meeting was scheduled for May 16, 1968 at 1:30 p.m. in the AUL’s office, at 239 Auburn Avenue. Bolden claimed, in an interview with Christiansen, that the AUL knew she was “trying to do something” prior to the first meeting. Bolden and two other domestic workers appeared on the black-owned radio station, WIGO, one month prior to the meeting the AUL-hosted meeting, to announce the formation of the National Domestic Workers Union of America, and invited any interested workers to contact her. Bolden also placed advertisements in local black-owned newspaper, the Atlanta Daily World. Stinson stated “we pulled away after about six or seven months…they just took it and ran with it…we were there at the embryonic stage…more so than a continuous part.” Stinson acknowledged that the NDWU “had something, Dorothy had something” before the AUL got involved.

Stinson suggested that the AUL’s administrative assistance was very important, but was neither the catalyst nor the impetus for the launching of the NDWU.

In addition to the Atlanta Urban League, Bolden received valuable support from another agency. Members of the fledgling organization were allowed to use space within the Georgia Council on Human Relations offices for their June meeting. After that meeting, Bolden and the other members appeared to have impressed the executive officers enough for them to pay Mary

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271 Handwritten meeting announcement, n.d., no author, Box 202, Folder 18, Atlanta Urban League, Robert Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center, Special Collections.

272 National Domestic Workers Union, Southern Labor Archive, Special Collections Department, Georgia State University, Atlanta, Georgia, 1633/182.


274 Lyndon Wade indicated that he was speaking with Stinson about the AUL working with domestic workers. Wade stated “Charlie Stinson said to me ‘We were working with the domestic workers, but she [Bolden] took it and ran with it.’” Wade, interview by author, February 11, 2016, Atlanta, Georgia.
Delk’s salary, but donate her services to Bolden’s group and offer the use of an office, which included also paying for a telephone.275 As the group expanded, Bolden moved the meeting place several times, ultimately landing at the Wheat Street Baptist Church.276 Bolden and the other members decided that membership should cost applicants one dollar and they should be in possession of a voter registration card. 277

By September of 1968, the NDWU was incorporated under the name, “National Domestics Union of America, Inc,” in Fulton County. However, the group underwent several title changes with “National Domestic Workers Union” being one of them.278 Bolden intuitively understood how naming the fledgling organization would impact the group’s recruitment efforts. She wanted the name to reflect that its members were united trained professionals. Founding members did not want the term “union” used. Bolden believed the word “union” would convey solidarity, and that would be a draw for the working-class members seeking job stability.279 Bolden possibly thought the word “union” could be parlayed into political strength, which could be used to negotiate demands with employers. However, members were concerned that calling the organization a “union” would frighten away potential recruits who were afraid of retaliation from potential employers. Bolden stated that she initially did not understand how much the word “union” scared maids from joining. Ultimately, “union” was dropped from the title.280


276 Ibid.


278 In this dissertation, I refer to the organization as the National Domestic Workers Union.

279 Yancy, “Dorothy Bolden Organizer of Domestic Workers,” 54.

280 Tyson, “Dorothy Bolden Speaks for Herself, Others,” (14)G.
Bolden did not want “national” inserted into the NDWU’s name, as taking the NDWU nationwide was not what she envisioned. However, members were strongly in favor of adding the term, so she consented. As of 1976, Bolden stated the NDWU was a nonprofit organization and the official name was the National Domestic Workers, Inc.\(^\text{281}\) The charter was granted to the NDWU for thirty-five years starting September 30, 1968. The charter lists Dorothy Bolden, Martha Barker, [sic], Sarah White, Louise Scott, Gwendolyn Hudson, Eloise Fitch, Carrie Brown, and Mary Cornelius as being the petitioners requesting incorporation, with the option to renew after the time period had expired. The charter stated that the corporation was being chartered for the purpose of enhancing, protecting, and promoting the economic, social and education welfare of its members in Atlanta, Georgia, its environs and in the American nation as a whole. The primary objective of this corporation shall be benefit to the community as measured by increased wages, better working conditions, and more benefits to its members as reflected by improved living standards rather than monetary profits to its members.\(^\text{282}\)

The charter gave the NDWU the authority to “enter into and perform contracts,” borrow or raise money for any purpose without any limit on the amount,” to “draw, make, accept, endorse, execute and issue promissory notes, drafts, bills of exchange, warrants, bonds, debentures…” to open a credit union, to have more than one office, and to “buy, sell, convey real and personal property.”\(^\text{283}\) Incorporating the NDWU was a significant step in the formation of the organization for two reasons. First, chartering the union gave its members the legitimized ability to build an institution with the inherent potential for financial expansion through

\(^{281}\) Seifer, *Nobody Speaks for Me!*, 162.


\(^{283}\)Ibid.
establishing a credit union, the purchase or sale of property, and exchange of promissory notes.

Second, inculcated in the language of the petition is a domestic workers bill of rights which listed the organizational objectives as improving for its members: wages, working conditions and standards of living. This language demonstrates Bolden’s, and the other founding members’ desire to offer NDWU members better wages and economic empowerment.

Bolden was determined, passionate, and professional about the organization’s purpose. She coordinated the construction of training manuals, which contained codes of conduct, ethics, expectations, and rules. Later, she oversaw the NDWU’s petitions for grants to subsidize the creation of the NDWU’s Career Learning Center (CLC.) Bolden was a visionary, yet she was also cognizant of her organizational weaknesses. She actively solicited assistance to complement her strengths. Louise Bradley, one of the founding members of the NDWU, described Bolden as having tremendous drive and a lot of personal contacts. She stated that Bolden “always needed lots of help…she had all of the drive but she didn’t have all of the skills. . .she couldn’t always articulate it…a lot of people helped because of her drive.”

Bolden may not have had “all of the skills,” but what she did have were overlapping visions of training the domestic workers in her community, upgrading their images, increasing their wages, and honoring their contributions to the community. Bolden’s strategy of implementing standardized best work practices, educating her workers, and requiring them to behave in a conservative manner gave potential employers the understanding that NDWU’s maids were polished professionals. What is also significant about Bolden’s establishment of a training center was that once employers, specifically white housewives, understood they were hiring skilled employees—rather than confidants, armchair therapists, sounding boards, and scapegoats—personal boundaries became clearly delineated.

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Defined job descriptions were also utilized to teach workers how to refute maternalist behavior by creating work environments with employers who were task-specific, not relationship-driven.

Maternalism operates similarly to paternalism in that oppression is cloaked in false generosity and racial inequality. Mothering the employee allows the female employer to disregard the female employee’s adulthood and to disrespect her contributions. The act of mothering transformed business relationships into personal relationships, thereby allowing the white socially superior female employer to demand attention, conversation, and a mock friendship from the inferior black female employee as a part of the actual job. Maternalism, like paternalism, has the “dual purpose of protecting and nurturing as well as degrading and insulting.”

Maternalism had long been an insidious practice necessary to objectify domestic workers and validate substandard living wages. The livelihoods of low income/undereducated nonwhite women depended on caretaking/serving middle-class white women whose respectability was dependent upon having servants. Within the maid-is-really-apart-of-the-family paradigm, employers could financially exploit domestic workers because the family could perpetuate the notion that they were taking care of the women in other ways. Bolden’s Career Learning Center (CLC) was uniquely positioned to work toward eliminating the veneer of faux benevolent hiring practices and put forth a business model of employers paying for a skilled worker just as in any other career.

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286 In Living Atlanta, white employers and black employees discuss how little the domestic workers were paid. One worker talks about being paid fifty cents a week to “wash, iron, and clean up” for a white family who lived in Techwood Homes (an Atlanta public housing development.) Several of the families interviewed spoke about how the domestics were “a part of the family” and were given food, clothes, tuition, or set up in business. However, in Bolden’s interview, she stated “You were a part of the family till somebody gets there. . . attitude would change and her conversation was ‘niggers.’ Kuhn, Living Atlanta, 113-115. Jacqueline Jones cites interviews describing seventy-seven year old widow and laundress Mandy Leslie as a “pillar of strength and comfort to several white households because she did their washing and ironing every week.” Jones, Labor of Love, 208.
The NDWU, and its Career Learning Center became an organization that trained women to become professional employees, gave women jobs with health benefits. The CLC was the manifestation of Bolden’s belief that the best way to elevate the workers’ wages was through the professionalization of domestic work. By the time the training center opened, the NDWU had been successfully operating for several years under Bolden’s leadership. Bolden and a cadre of grant writers were able to secure federal funding from the Office of Economic Opportunity, through the local Community Action Agency, (Community Services Administration) and was locally fiscally overseen by Economic Opportunity Atlanta, Incorporated. The NDWU began receiving grants of between twenty and thirty thousand dollars annually between 1969 through 1978.

The Career Learning Center was the first of its kind in Atlanta. By 1977, the NDWU was able to open its own training facility. The first group to attend consisted of prospective domestics, aged 20-50 years old. The program was expected to take five months to complete and required 150 hours of attendance and participation. The program was conducted by James DeBerry, a social services consultant. The members were required to enroll in the training program, which included taking classes in the domestic arts, cooking, laundering, housekeeping, child care, and sewing. The twelve-week Training Program Calendar included sessions on work ethics, voter registration, obtaining social security and identification cards, and “sensitization training” that focused on cultural differences between black housekeepers and white employers. The program consisted of field trips, role playing, weekly reading assignments, learning how to


set and keep appointments, sessions on math, writing, and early childhood education, monetary budgeting, food preparation, First Aid training, general household duties and seminars on “family life,” including setting goals and family planning. Members also received a Job Search Kit. Members who had dropped out of high school could work towards earning their general equivalency diplomas (GEDs). Bolden took enfranchisement so seriously that membership in the NDWU was contingent upon being registered to vote. Women who joined the NDWU gained access to educational opportunities, increased skill sets, and lectures on the importance of voting. The Center offered NDWU members several ways to change or enhance the quality of their lives.

The CLC’s program packet emphasized what was important to Bolden, love for the community, family, a work ethic, and self-respect. In Bolden’s “Homemaking Training Skills Program,” packet, a “self-evaluation” checklist was included. Participants were required to write down their personal and professional goals, followed by identifying their training needs. At the bottom of the checklist, the statement “Identify the problem within ourself [sic] so that each person within (his or her) self can and will identify the problem.”

One of the most progressive aspects of the CLC was Bolden’s, and the CLC staff’s efforts to address the effects of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, and financial exploitation upon the mental health of domestic workers. There were the covert issues of isolation, loneliness,

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and sadness that domestic workers experienced. The women were away from their families for twelve-fourteen hours a day for six days a week. In many households, workers were constantly monitored and/or accused of being thieves, predators, liars, and inherently criminal. The women were spoken to in condescending tones and treated as being of marginal intelligence. Bolden and her team identified the effects that working in such environments had on the domestic workers, and created outlets to aid in their emotional and mental well-being.

The packet also listed “family counseling, health and child care and training and employment opportunities” as components of the program. One of the program’s benefits were the counseling services. Workers who were not doing well were offered services that would assist them in determining the roots of their problems.” Counseling was also promoted as a way for workers to gain relief from “inner pressure” and make “positive strides toward self-sufficiency.” Bolden understood the emotionally painful side effects that low-paying harsh work wrought upon the domestic workers’ psyche. Bolden also included a section entitled “Institution of Love.” In this area, the program stated that the worker is an “institution,” a “love in an instrument,” and “understanding is the key to life.” This section reflects Bolden’s goal to “promote understanding between families.” The booklet states that a “sweet attitude will make this program a success on all levels.” One of the pamphlets for the training program emphasized maids taking pride in their appearance and maintaining a professional demeanor by watching

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292 Caroline Sweetman, ed. *Gender and Migration* (Oxford: Oxfam Publishing, 1998), 10. Sweetman’s book studies Asian, Indian, and Pakistani domestic workers who travel abroad in search of work. However, these workers experience similar working conditions such as racially based financial exploitation, abuse, and marginalization.

their language with employers. The CLC offered a comprehensive and holistic program by providing its members with access to an education, training, wellness, support, and the franchise.

Bolden’s leadership of the NDWU forced the “union” to function beyond being an organization for potential domestic workers to seeking jobs. The NDWU and the CLC offered a version of the training program that was specifically designed to target unemployed and undereducated mothers living in public housing by offering parenting, nutrition, housekeeping, sewing, budgeting, and education classes. Over the course of five years, Bolden and the executive board of the NDWU secured federal funding, operated training programs, performed job placements, offered job referrals, and presented the NDWU-trained maid as a skilled, courteous, respected and professional employee.

By the 1970s, Bolden had joined an organization focused on cleaning up her beloved Vine City, had joined a council to bring jobs to the area, and had been appointed to the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. Bolden worked with Mayor Maynard Jackson on bringing attention to the needs of Vine City and sat on the Board of the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) to ensure consistent service in black neighborhoods. Bolden’s political clout grew as the Union grew. She transferred that clout into becoming appointed to boards, Mayor’s councils, and a federal appointment.

4.2 Brayboy Registers Members of the Community to Vote

By the early 1960s, Brayboy was becoming increasingly disenchanted with living in racially segregated Atlanta. As she thought about ways to get involved, her family members

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295 Beck, National Domestic Workers Union and the War on Poverty, 204.
were already actively seeking change. There were many opportunities to get politically active and become a part of the vanguard fighting racism. In 1960, Brayboy’s college-aged children were demonstrating outside of retail stores to protest discriminatory policies. Her brother, Lyndon Wade, had returned to Atlanta in 1963 after first completing a master’s degree in social work, then serving five years as an officer in the United States Army. Wade began working at Emory University as the first black social worker hired by the medical school in the field of psychiatry. She saw members of her family taking the risks of plunging into the white world.296 Brayboy’s path to becoming Deputy Voter Registrar started when she joined community organizations that were founded to enfranchise African-Americans.

In 1962, Brayboy began working with the All Citizens Registration Committee (ACRC) a group that had organized in 1946 after two federal landmark decisions had been handed down from southern supreme courts.297 These two cases, Smith vs Allwright in Texas and King vs. Chapman in Georgia, ruled that all white democratic primaries were illegal.298 From 1946 until when Brayboy joined in 1962, the All Citizens Registration Committee worked continuously to

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296“I Still Believe in Power of the Ballot,” Atlanta Constitution, February 7, 1993 (Testimonies). Wade, interview by author. “Negro Firster” was the term used to describe the first black person to desegregate an organization, or the first black person to hold a position such as Colin Powell or Jackie Robinson.

297In 1946, four members of black Atlanta’s middle-class came together to form the All Citizens Registration Committee (ACRC) in response to both the Smith v. Allwright and the King vs. Chapman cases. Atlanta University historian Clarence Bacote and Grace Towns Hamilton were members of the executive committee. The group started small, but many became involved. The group made tremendous strides in the numbers of people they registered. The ACRC planned a massive voter registration drive. In just seven weeks, the ACRC registered approximately 17,000 voters, increasing the number of African-American voters by over two hundred percent. Nasstrom, “Down to Now,” 117. Lorraine Nelson Spritzer and Jean B. Bergmark, Grace Towns Hamilton and the Politics of Southern Change; an African-American Woman’s Struggle for Racial Equality (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1997), 113.

298In 1944, in Smith v. Allwright, the Supreme Court overturned Texas’ state law, which allowed the Democratic Party to follow its own rules by legally enforcing all white primaries. The Court decided that all white primaries were unconstitutional. Georgia’s political parties resisted adhering to the ruling because the ruling took place in Texas courts. Primus King, a black businessman from Columbus, Georgia took this to court. After a two-year battle, on April 1, 1946, Georgia’s Supreme Court ruled that blacks could vote in Georgia’s democratic primaries. Spritzer, Grace Towns Hamilton, 110.
get Atlanta’s black population registered to vote. For the ACRC’s first voter registration drive, Executive Secretary David Watson procured United States Census tracts to identify all 1,162 city blocks where Atlanta’s blacks were consigned to live. Almost nine hundred ACRC volunteers canvassed each block and contacted every household twice. The ACRC coordinated mass meetings, distributed literature, and gave out stickers that proclaimed “We are registered voters.” Pastors spoke about the ACRC in sermons and a speaker’s bureau was created to provide speakers to churches, social functions and public dances. Car pools were coordinated to take interested citizens to the courthouse to register and volunteers were asked to stand at the Courthouse to direct applicants to the Registration Office. The *Atlanta Daily World* published editorials emphasizing the importance of registering, black businesses held registration drives among their employees and fraternal organizations used the registration drive as service projects.  

The ACRC’s drive was hugely successful in terms of voter registration and turnout. The drive happened when Brayboy was probably 28 years old. As an adult, Brayboy more than likely encountered members of the ACRC distributing handbills, canvassing neighborhoods, or saw speakers at church and/or community events. Whether she encountered members of the ACRC as a young woman during the 1946 drive, or when she joined the organization, working with this particular group was fortuitous in that it she learned how to recruit volunteers, assign tasks, plan and coordinate events. Brayboy’s foray into enfranchising members of her community included 1) working with an organization whose activist origins were rooted in going to black neighborhoods and knocking on every door, every day, and 2) working with a large volunteer force that required an aptitude for organization, administration, and strategizing. As she

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developed her political skills and discovered innate administrative talents, Brayboy observed and absorbed what the people around her were doing.

Two of the immediate benefits of joining the ACRC were that Brayboy was able to work for the first time in a supervisory capacity while observing African-Americans women in leadership, like Grace Towns Hamilton. At the time, Hamilton served as the Executive Director of the Atlanta Urban League. One of the projects that Hamilton oversaw with the All Citizens Registration Committee was coordinating the logistics of the voter registration drive. Hamilton had been partially tasked with creating a city-wide movement to register voters. Brayboy volunteered to become a part of this historical movement. Working with the Committee introduced Brayboy to the efficacy of door-to-door canvassing. Leadership positions within the Committee included block workers, precinct organizers and ward leaders. Working in this exciting hive of activity, Brayboy was able to, in an environment outside of church or school, become immersed in a professional environment where black people were promoted, took ownership of their ideas, exhibited leadership, created assignments, and set goals and tasks that benefitted her people. She ultimately worked her way up to precinct organizer within the ACRC.

During this same time period, Brayboy began working with the Georgia branch of the Voter Education Project (VEP) and sponsored by the Southern Regional Council (SRC.) The Southern Regional Council was organized in February, 1944 in Atlanta, Georgia as the offspring of two parent organizations, the Commission on Interracial Cooperation and the Durham-Atlanta-Richmond series of conferences (which included a conference organized by Durham’s black leadership.) The SRC was constructed to build programs which would aid in the economic, educational, civic, and social development of the South. The group hoped to stimulate the growth of additional interracial committees across the South. One of the functions of the SRC was to organize “constructive action at every point…on the racial problems of the South.” The Southern Regional Council: Its Origin and Purpose (Atlanta, Georgia: Southern Regional Council, Inc., June, 1944), 3-4. Funding for the VEP was provided by grants from the Taconic Foundation, the Field Foundation, and the Stern Family Fund. Wiley Branton was an African-American attorney from Arkansas who worked on civil rights cases.

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300 Pomerantz, Where Peachtree Meets Sweet Auburn, 151.

301 Nasstrom, Down to Now, 119.

302 The Southern Regional Council was organized in February, 1944 in Atlanta, Georgia as the offspring of two parent organizations, the Commission on Interracial Cooperation and the Durham-Atlanta-Richmond series of conferences (which included a conference organized by Durham’s black leadership.) The SRC was constructed to build programs which would aid in the economic, educational, civic, and social development of the South. The group hoped to stimulate the growth of additional interracial committees across the South. One of the functions of the SRC was to organize “constructive action at every point…on the racial problems of the South.” The Southern Regional Council: Its Origin and Purpose (Atlanta, Georgia: Southern Regional Council, Inc., June, 1944), 3-4. Funding for the VEP was provided by grants from the Taconic Foundation, the Field Foundation, and the Stern Family Fund. Wiley Branton was an African-American attorney from Arkansas who worked on civil rights cases.
VEP, under the direction of Wiley Branton, was created in 1961 by the Department of Justice after angry white southerners inflicted extreme violence upon Freedom Riders. Attorney General Robert Kennedy charged the Justice Department with creating a solidly funded tax-exempt organization specifically to register black voters in the South. The VEP awarded the ACRC a grant to conduct registration campaign. By 1963, the ACRC had received over eleven thousand dollars in grants to fund their own non-partisan voter registration drives. Working between the two organizations may have been where Brayboy first encountered Branton. Ultimately, she ended up working for, and with, him on the VEP. Brayboy became responsible for co-directing the VEP’s first voter registration drive.

In the space of two years, Brayboy moved from deciding to join an organization committed to enfranchising black Atlantans, to managing a voting precinct with the ACRC, to co-directing a voter registration campaign funded with federal dollars. Each subsequent position


303 Kennedy had not spoken publicly on the violent attacks the Freedom Riders had experienced in Mississippi. The Attorney General was quoted in the *Washington Post* as stating that the Department of Justice could not take the side of one group against another when the dispute involved constitutional rights. However Kennedy was already angry at the Riders for several reasons. The foremost reason being that the rides were taking place while he was planning summit talks with Kruschev in Vienna and delivering speeches to Congress about his commitment to promote his “freedom doctrine” across the “whole southern half of the globe—Asia, Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East...”. Blacks seeking full citizenship in the United States at the time when Kennedy was taking a strong stance on human rights with the Soviet Union was considered a potential political embarrassment. Subsequent reasons included Kennedy’s feelings of betrayal at multiple caravans of Riders (he believed that there would only be one group of Riders making one trip that he had consented to protect with federal marshals.) One of the main objectives behind the formation of the VEP was Kennedy’s hope that the VEP would take the lead in getting blacks registered to vote in the South, and defuse what he felt were the confrontational stances that members of student-centered activists’ groups such as SNCC and CORE were moving toward embracing. In a meeting with members of SNCC leadership, Kennedy pressed the point that it would better serve southern blacks to become educated about their constitutional rights and registered to vote than to instigate public stances of protest. In that vein, Kennedy believed, blacks could slowly change the politics of the South, and with greater impact. Once formed, the VEP would be sponsored and housed within Atlanta’s Southern Regional Council. Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-1963* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 469,471,472,474,476, 479-480.


required complex levels of accountability and organization. While these positions were not salaried positions, she was not promoted simply based upon her availability as a volunteer. She advanced through the ranks based upon her organizing skills, her knowledge of the community, her ability to implement community outreach strategies, her work ethic, and her integrity.

As a representative of the All Citizens committee, Brayboy employed the techniques that had proven phenomenally successful during the first ACRC campaign in 1946. She walked through neighborhoods, knocked on each door, explained eligibility requirements for voting, distributed information and helped applicants complete the registration form. After starting as block worker, Brayboy’s levels of responsibilities increased. By 1964, Brayboy had risen through the ranks to serve on the ACRC’s Executive Committee as Secretary. The on-the-job training she received at the ACRC made Brayboy a valuable asset to the VEP. While still new to the organization, she was assigned to work on one of their first massive campaigns to register blacks to vote.

There was a difference between the VEP and the enfranchisement campaign waged by the All Citizens Committee. The VEP was not established to register individuals to vote. Its primary objective was to award small grants to organizations to fund their non-partisan respective registration drives. Brayboy’s hard work paid off in several ways. The first was in the number of blacks she registered to vote. The second was Brayboy’s appointment to serve as Deputy Voter Registrar for the State of Georgia. She was one of the first African-Americans selected for this honor. Brayboy’s appointment was the second major effort to push back

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306 *Atlanta Daily World,* photo standalone of Brayboy and Fred C. Bennette, Jr., Executive Vice-President of the All Citizens Registration Committee receiving a check from James Gause, President of the Laundry Cleaning and Linen Workers Union Local 218, May 3, 1964, A2.

307 According to Ralph Jones, Registration Manager for Fulton County, Georgia, the process of becoming a Deputy Voter Registrar involves the citizen completing and submitting an application. Once the application has been approved, the applicant is deputized. The Deputy is responsible for registering a certain number of persons to vote
against segregation’s political machine and reflected a series of accomplishments. Her courageous actions defiantly contradicted the explanations she was forced to give to her children.\footnote{When her children were younger, Brayboy worked when finances dictated a need. “Community Service Around The Way,” \textit{Central Fulton Senior Services News}. In an interview, Brayboy recounted having to explain to her children as they grew older that “in the eyes of the law, they did not count.” “I Still Believe in Power of the Ballot,” \textit{Atlanta Constitution}, February 7, 1993 (Testimonies).} To volunteer for Deputy Voter Registrar, Brayboy had to go to the Fulton County Courthouse to complete and submit her application, which was no simple feat. The County Courthouse was a place where blacks who wanted to register were watched, stalked, and harassed. Brayboy’s decisions to breach segregation’s psychical distance by registering to vote, followed by applying to serve as a Deputy Voter Registrar, were momentous.

The second achievement centered on orchestrating, as co-director, a major voter registration drive that took place in 1964. Brayboy recalled that she, and other organizers, registered five hundred voters the very first night of the drive.\footnote{Hal Straus, “2 Decades Later, “Atlanta Grandma Still Signing Voters” \textit{Atlanta Constitution}, June 17, 1983, 29(A).} At the VEP, Brayboy entered into what became a professional career of serving the community in leadership positions. The work she began with the ACRC was now continuing with the VEP. As a deputized registrar, her official duties included answering questions about eligibility requirements, distributing applications, assisting applicants who needed help with completing the form, and accepting their completed forms. Kathryn Nasstrom described the relationship between the individual and the community in “the act of registering to vote” as dynamic in her critique of the ACRC’s voter and he/she is required to participate in at least five drives per year. If the Deputy falls short of the requirements, he/she must reapply for certification again the next calendar year. Jones was unsure of the minimum number of citizens required to maintain certification during the 1960s, but he indicated that the current number required is twenty. Jones indicated that he would not be able to confirm the date of Brayboy’s application due the fact that Fulton County does not keep its records of deputized registrars over two years, and records dating back to the 1960s are nonexistent. The application process has not changed much, aside from becoming electronic, but consists of being an English-speaking citizen, over the age of 18 who has not been arrested. Telephone interview by author with Ralph Jones, July 15, 2015, Atlanta, Georgia.
registration drive in 1946. She listed three key components that contributed to the success of this particular drive. Brayboy’s organizational approach to rallying the community involved all of these elements. The first point was that people who normally did not interact were in extended contact with each other for several hours when they were waiting to register to vote.\(^{310}\) While Brayboy was not able to spend several hours at each home while canvassing, knocking on every door allowed her to become acquainted, and eventually familiar, with a cross-section of citizens from various walks of life.

The second point Nasstrom’s article makes is that the successful voter registration drive emphasized “relationships and process”.\(^{311}\) As Deputy Voter Registrar, Brayboy continued to practice all of the grassroots’ organizing methodologies that she was taught while working with the ACRC and the VEP. After working her day job, she visited the segregated southwestern Atlanta communities where African-Americans lived. Talking to the members of the communities provided Brayboy with crucial information that would serve her well in her future careers with the Atlanta Public Library and the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change. She met with disfranchised citizens to hear their concerns first-hand. She was also able to see up close the disparate and unequal conditions where working-class and working-poor of the community lived. Each face-to-face meeting gave Brayboy a substantial platform for her theory that the voting process equaled change. Brayboy becoming a Deputy Voter Registrar was the personification of her message about the importance of being franchised.

Early on in her activist career, Brayboy was able to “show and prove” that voting was a direct path to acquiring the power to affect change. Her newfound ability to consistently get people registered placed her in a position to educate those she met about citizenship and their

\(^{310}\) Nasstrom, “Down to Now,” 120.

\(^{311}\) Ibid.
rights. For Brayboy, it was important that residents of the community understood the connection between being responsible for electing leadership that was theoretically interested in their needs versus having leadership selected by outsiders who were interested in maintaining the status quo of oppressive segregation. Hence, she was the link uniting the community and connecting it to the radical act of registering to vote. As a Deputy Voter Registrar who lived in, or near the communities she visited, Brayboy built relationships and followed the systemic process that had been developed to allow for an effective mass registration. Nasstrom’s third point in the article highlighted that one of the ACRC’s key strategies for saturating the black community by constantly reinforcing a single act—registering an individual to vote—thousands of times would contribute to increased voter registration rolls. Brayboy was a part of two major drives over a two-year period resulting in the registration of approximately ten thousand voters. These three criteria, based upon Nasstrom’s overall assessment of what made the ACRC drive of 1946 historical, suggests that Brayboy was well on her way to becoming a one-woman voter registration drive who was giving voice to the voiceless, as she became an indomitable force in the community.

The subsequent large-scale operation that Brayboy became involved in was the VEP’s decentralization project. After evaluating both the mechanics and the logistics of voting in Georgia, the organization decided the process was not just racist, and exclusionary, it was outdated. The group looked for ways to remove the act of voting from the county courthouse, and place it in the community. Soon after Brayboy began working with the VEP, the

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312 Nasstrom, “Down to Now,” 118-120.
organization launched an initiative designed to remove voting from the exclusive purview of the courthouse as a way to decrease assaults on black voters. In addition to voting being a precarious and intimidating function, the actual process was purposefully a lengthy paper-work filled process. The process was very similar to that of post-Reconstruction era politics calculated to overwhelm prospective black voters. The set-up was designed to allow whites access to the courthouse to note any black attempting to vote. After undertaking a survey of the electoral process in Georgia, the VEP became dedicated to finding a way to move voting booths closer to black communities. Feasible locations were scouted to serve as temporary voting centers were shopping centers, grocery stores, and banks. Here again is an example of Brayboy working with a small organization that eventually became responsible for making enormous inroads into Atlanta’s predominantly white male power infrastructure. She was now learning how to attack the political machine by dismantling the pre-existing post-Reconstruction-era system that was installed to support segregation. Brayboy continued to emphasize voting as a way for individuals to change their own communities. She often stated that voting was power, and Brayboy wanted everyone to have access. To do that, she felt that she needed to be close to the people.

Brayboy’s commitment to voter registration did not change, but professionally, her priorities shifted. In 1965, Brayboy’s next career move was employment with the City of Atlanta. Brayboy joined the Community Council of Atlanta, where she served as a

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315 Voter Registration System ‘Unworkable, Antiquated’, *The Atlanta Inquirer*, August 26, 1972, VEP Newspapers File, Voter Education Project, Archives, Atlanta University Center Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta, Georgia.

316 Nasstrom, “Down to Now,” 132.

317 MOVERS AND SHAKERS: Ivan Allen Jr.’, *Atlanta Constitution*, Feb 16, 1984, 5E.
Neighborhood Analyst for seven years. As an analyst, Brayboy was assigned specific communities for which she was responsible for compiling and organizing statistical data for city records. As was now her custom, Brayboy visited her assigned areas, and knocked on the door of each inhabited home. She interviewed residents about their concerns, and what was lacking in their communities. Just as when working with the ACRC and the VEP, Brayboy became familiar with the residents of her assigned neighborhoods. The competence that Brayboy displayed led to her being contracted to work as a consultant with the Atlanta Housing Authority. Brayboy was hired on a temporary basis to lecture the agency’s Family Service Aides to offer suggestions that would support the employees in their interactions with low-income families.

Working with the Community Council did not interfere with Brayboy’s work with the VEP. After initial programs had been launched the focus of the VEP changed, therefore Brayboy responsibilities were altered. In the latter half of the 1960s, the VEP revamped its organizational outreach. In the early stages, the push was to get disfranchised African-Americans registered. Later the group began focusing on the obstacles that people experienced in getting to the polling centers. She never wavered in her personal emphasis on registration. However, as a VEP representative, she devised a multifaceted methodology to incorporate both enfranchising and transporting citizens. Brayboy began to incorporate what can be described as a research design similar to that of a sociologist or trained social worker. First she compiled data about the needs of the people. She met with residents to identify exactly what problems were keeping them from

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318 Biographical Scope Note, Brayboy Collection.

319 Letter to Brayboy from Mamie Gill, June 9, 1970 thanking her in advance for the talk she was scheduled to present, June 15, 1970, General Correspondence File, Ella Mae Wade Brayboy Collection, Special Collections, Auburn Avenue Research Library on African-American Culture and History, Atlanta, Georgia.

320 Chester J. Fuller, “Voter Education Project”, VEP Newspapers File, Voter Education Project, Archives, Atlanta University Center Robert W. Woodruff Library.
the polls. She ascertained if the obstacle was an emotional response such as fear, or logistical, like not having access to an automobile. Brayboy’s next step was to develop a plan based on being able to offer solutions designed to meet the transportational needs of the citizens. The final level was to coordinate Election Day events where she put solutions into place based upon the anticipated needs of the people. Brayboy firmly believed that proper planning, management, and execution of “Election Day facilitated voting” within the community. 321

After her stint with the Community Council, Brayboy’s next career move took her to working in the city’s library system.322 However, bringing the people closer to the vote was always on her agenda. By the 1970s, she was working at the Atlanta Public Library where she was a critical part of developing a pioneer program to install voting machines in the libraries. For the second time in her career, Brayboy was a part of leading reform in the ways that the city of Atlanta conducted its voting. She was also fortunate to be working with another African-Americans woman in a management position. Brayboy reported to Ella Gaines Yates, one of the Atlanta Public Library’s first black Assistant Directors.323

In the early to mid-1970s, Brayboy’s responsibilities with the Atlanta Public Library had evolved into working on a federally funded special project. Atlanta was identified as host city to design a prototype for an outreach program.324 Brayboy was assigned to assist in supervising and developing programs for three neighborhood information centers. Brayboy, under Yates’ supervision, drafted a proposal, which she submitted to the State of Georgia, then later to the

321Murphy, “In Praise of Consistent Purpose,” 18.

322Document on Ella Mae Brayboy from the private collection of Joyce Brayboy Jones, Brayboy Collection.

323“Obituary for Ella Gaines Yates,” July 1, 2006, private collection of Stephanie McIver.

federal government to aid in the installation of multiple voting booths, in the libraries, on
election days.\textsuperscript{325} Once the project gained momentum, the Fulton County Registrar’s Office
worked in tandem with Brayboy and the Atlanta Public Library to decentralize voting.\textsuperscript{326} The
Registrar’s Office provided twenty-eight units and offered the use of two hundred staff persons
who would be trained to serve as deputy voter registrars within the county libraries. In
correspondence between the Director of the Library and the County Registrar, a proposal was
submitted highlighting one key justification for opening the library for voting, the library was
funded by taxes, so it should be more available to taxpayers.\textsuperscript{327}

Prior to the beginning of the program, Brayboy taught the library staff how to conduct
voter registration. By the end of the pilot program, the Atlanta Public Library was the first in the
nation to institute voter registration in the public library.\textsuperscript{328} Brayboy’s work was so outstanding,
Yates promoted Brayboy to Director of Neighborhood Information. The title and responsibilities
had been designed just to suit Brayboy’s strengths and her passion for constructing
organizational schemas to enfranchise citizens.\textsuperscript{329}

\textsuperscript{325}Document at Woodruff Archives in Atlanta Urban League Papers, 1920 -1990 Executive Director’s
Files, Wade, Correspondence, 1967-1990. Box 117, Folder 61, Letter to Lyndon A. Wade, Director of the Atlanta
Urban League from Brayboy dated April 10, 1973, notes that the Honstein outline of how the Atlanta Public Library
is “willing to assist the Registration department in decentralizing registration. The proposal has been approved by
the state office and is now awaiting approval in Washington” which she estimated would take about 60 days.
Brayboy signed the letter (Mrs.) Ella Mae Brayboy, Consultant. The Atlanta Public Library Neighborhood
Information Center Project.

\textsuperscript{326}Document at Woodruff Archives in Atlanta Urban League Papers, 1920 -1990 Executive Director’s
Honstein at the Fulton County Registrar’s Office from Carlton C. Rochell, Director of the Atlanta Public Library.
Brayboy was copied on the letter, listed as a consultant. In the letter, Rochell submits an outline of how the Atlanta
Public Library “is willing to assist the Registration department in decentralizing registration which will result in
going more Fulton County citizens registered to vote.”

\textsuperscript{327}Letter to Lyndon A. Wade, Director of the Atlanta Urban League from Brayboy.

\textsuperscript{328}Yates, “Making Her Mark,” A10.

\textsuperscript{329}Joyce Brayboy Jones, interview by author, Atlanta, Georgia, February 20, 2006.
By 1984, Brayboy was being touted as a powerful woman who could make things happen in Atlanta. Brayboy was identified as such in an article in the white-owned newspaper, the *Atlanta Constitution*, alongside three wealthy and influential white males, the former mayor of Atlanta, Ivan Allen, Jr.; multimillionaire property developer, Al Barr, Jr.; and Bennett A. Brown, the chief executive officer for The Citizens and Southern National Bank. Brayboy was quietly acknowledged as being an important part of Atlanta’s political process. Not “black” Atlanta, but Atlanta as a whole.

4.3 Dove’s Educational Activism

Dove’s first experience with crossing a segregated psychical distance was facilitated by Harper, Dove’s high school principal. Dove was also able to witness the transformative effects of breaching segregation’s psychical distance on her classmate. Dove believed it was the tour of colleges that Harper took the students on that introduced one of the students to Hampton University. The classmate later enrolled and graduated from Hampton. Later, as a working mother, and widow, Dove left the South to pursue a terminal degree from predominantly white institutions of higher learning. Georgia’s version of “separate but equal” allowed southern schools to deny black students access to local institutions, but provide access to higher education by offering tuition and travel grants to eligible students to pursue advanced degrees at schools that did accept blacks. It was under this program that Dove began working on her doctoral degree, only during summer semesters, at the University of Colorado in 1954.

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330 MOVERS AND SHAKERS: Ivan Allen Jr.”, *Atlanta Constitution*, February 16, 1984, 5E. Bolden and Brayboy were both featured in this article, Bolden was also cited as a “mover and shaker” as a woman who “leads 10,000 maids” and “is often in demand for political support and can give or deny to a political candidate.

331 Interview with Pearlie Craft Dove, by author, Atlanta, Georgia, October 2011.

332 Dove interview, Nasstrom.

333 Ibid.
Dove began teaching at Clark College in 1949. By 1953 she had been promoted from Instructor to Director of Student Teaching. Dove was contemplating earning a doctorate in the field of education to further her career. Her husband, Benjamin Dove, was preparing to apply to Union Theological Seminary. About a year after her husband’s death, Dove began researching doctoral programs and discovered two institutions that had what she considered to be premier programs in the field of education. One was the University of Pittsburgh, the other was the University of Colorado. Dove applied to the University of Colorado because the school in Pittsburgh did not have graduate dormitories. Dove’s selected the school that offered housing and de facto protection. As a single black woman, even though she carried the respected title of “widow,” living on campus meant she would not have to seek housing in a new city that was predominantly white before learning the city’s racial and social climate. Once she was accepted and enrolled, she realized that Harl R. Douglass was the Director of the School of Education. During the 1950s, Douglass was considered one of the leading professors in the field of education and that the University of Colorado’s educational departments was highly rated.

Dove learned that the University of Colorado was initiating a program that allowed students to enroll without having to attend class in the traditional manner. She would be allowed to complete coursework over several summers, and at least one semester via correspondence. Before being fully admitted into the program, the department required Dove to take two prerequisite courses and pass an entrance exam. Once the chairperson determined that Dove was prepared to handle the rigors of the program despite living out-of-state, the department head

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334 Ibid.

devised a program of study. It took Dove a total of five summers to complete the departmental requirements, which included the semester she received her assignments by corresponding with faculty and completing her thesis, and graduate. Dove earned her doctorate in 1959. In 1963, Dove was again promoted to chair of the department.

As Chair of the department, Dove was tasked with finding ways to restructure the curriculum to prepare the education majors for integrated classrooms. Dove believed that learning about the “Sibley Hearings” and following the proceedings in 1960 influenced how she perceived preparing students to become educators in integrated settings. One of the results of the Sibley Commission hearings was that Dove had the responsibility of placing the Clark College’s black student teachers in predominantly white classroom settings. She recollected that some of the other professors were not enthusiastic about taking on the immense project of ensuring that some of the black student teachers were placed into white schools, and all of the challenges that would go with such an undertaking. The first obstacle was in finding students who were eager to participate, or who had experiences with whites.

How Dove began to coordinate student placement was based on her supposition that the Hearings were mostly created for white Georgians to vocalize how they felt about desegregating the school systems, but there were not any similar forums being conducted for institutions in

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336 Dove interview, Nasstrom.

337 Dove interview, Nasstrom. The Sibley Commission was named for wealthy white Atlanta businessman John Sibley, a pro-segregationist. However, he understood that ultimately, resistance to segregation would eventually become a futile endeavor post Calhoun versus Latimer decision. That ruling stated Georgia’s twelve year plan to desegregate violated Brown v Board of Education’s standards of compliance. Sibley established the Commission as a forum to allow citizens to articulate their support or dissent at proposed public school desegregation plans. Traveling from county to county, the Sibley Commission held town hall meetings that mostly served to allow white coalitions to voice their outrage (which included lobbying to close public schools altogether rather than integrate) and black organizations to voice support. Kevin Kruse, White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007), 136-137, 141.

338 Dove interview, Nasstrom.
higher education. However, the Sibley Hearings allowed Dove to clearly understand just how negatively Georgians were receiving the ideas of desegregated schools. These hearings cemented Dove’s desire to expose her student teachers on both a personal and professional level to what working with white teachers, students, and communities would be like.339

One of Dove’s goals was to expand how the department prepared its students to enter the job market. A secondary goal was to engage students in positive ways to express their discontent with racism by encouraging them to write their concerns down and get them published in two mainstream Atlanta papers, the Atlanta Constitution, and the Atlanta Journal. These two goals soon intertwined as the students who were moving into predominantly white classrooms were expecting to encounter blatant racism. Dove began to work on building a program that would prepare Clark College’s education majors to teach in integrated and multicultural environments.340 The second was to coordinate an exchange program between Clark College and two colleges in the state of New York.

Dove was an innovative and hard-working educator dedicated to intellectually preparing student teachers to educate, instead of simply “training” them to teach. Dove believed that she had been taught by some of the very best educators, and she acknowledged them as having provided her with an excellent foundation on which she based many of the programs she coordinated. Dove said of Harper, “We were very fortunate to have a very interesting principal, whom I think was a person who offered programs that we are now re-inventing.” Dove credited Alphonso McPheeters, who was responsible for hiring her at Clark College, with insisting she move into administration. McPheeters also professionally counseled Dove to teach at least one

339Dove interview, Nasstrom.

340Dove interview, Nasstrom.
class a year to continue professional development. McPheeters also believed that the best way to assess the relevance of various pedagogies was by engaging them herself in the classroom.\(^3\)

Professionally and personally, Dove considered Harper one of her mentors. Dove attributed her success in working with black students and placing them in white schools to the experience she had in working at the YMCA and the influence of her mentors.\(^4\) Dove believed that from her mentors, she learned to extrapolate problems that her students would encounter related to racism from characteristics related to what she called “the human condition” and to deal with each accordingly.\(^5\) She worked with Harl Douglass, who was considered a leader in his field, while completing her terminal degree. All of this professional guidance played an important role in how Dove developed programs and wrote curriculum for Clark College.

Dove considered that during this time period, the activism that she, members of the department, and her students engaged in was “quiet.” Both educators and students were preparing to enforce the federal decisions to desegregate the school system as student teachers and future employees. Dove argued that such as a strategy was as radical as the students who were facing shouting bigots and angry police on the picket lines. As department head, Dove wanted to ensure that the education department’s curriculum was current and competitive so that the matriculating students would be prepared for the workforce, despite limited funding and

\(^3\)Dove, interview Nasstrom.

\(^4\)Dove had completed her graduate coursework and was awaiting thesis approval when she found a job with the Young Women’s Christian Association. Rather, the job found Dove. Irene Harris, a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated and her sorority sister, invited Dove to offer the greeting at an annual event at Ebenezer Baptist Church. Dove’s poise during the presentation impressed Harris. Harris invited Dove to come work with her at the black branch of the Young Women Christian Association, (YWCA) the Phyllis Wheatley branch. The Phyllis Wheatley YWCA was located on Boulevard, not far from the original site of Morris Brown College. Harris believed Dove would be an excellent fit for the program because the program was, by design, educational. Dove worked with Harris until Dove resigned to get married. Dove interview, Merritt.

\(^5\)Dove interview, Nasstrom.
resources.\textsuperscript{344} Two documented examples of Dove implementing programs to elevate the standards of Clark College’s education department are 1) Dove developed an exchange program to send students to a northern school to student teach, and 2) Dove’s plan to ensure that the department was accredited by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education.\textsuperscript{345}

One of the methods Dove adapted was to take the students to visit other institutions outside of Georgia, thereby leading them across segregation’s psychical distance, like her mentor Harper had done for her.\textsuperscript{346} Once Dove was appointed chair, she and the department worked together to build a program which prepares students to study or teach in integrated classrooms. In 1971 the Southern Student Teachers Program was launched in conjunction with the Monroe County Human Relations Commission, the University of Rochester, Nazareth College (in Rochester, New York) and United Negro College Fund Institutions. In suburban New York, a coalition was organized to recruit southern black college students to student teach in predominantly white classrooms, participate in the “social and cultural life of a predominantly suburban white middle class,” and to earn scholarships to attend graduate school in the New York area. The curriculum really functioned as an exchange program. The northern school districts raised money to cover the black students’ plane fare. Once they arrived, families in the Monroe County community housed the students.\textsuperscript{347}

The Monroe County Human Relations Commission sought two outcomes. The Commission hoped that a significant number of students in the “exchange program” would 1) become gainfully employed and, 2) remain in the area. Dove’s desired outcome was that the

\textsuperscript{344}Dove interview, Merritt.

\textsuperscript{345}Dove interview, Nasstrom.

\textsuperscript{346}Dove interview, Merritt; Dove interview, Nasstrom.

\textsuperscript{347}Dove interview, Nasstrom.
teaching experience would expose the students to new methodologies and pedagogies in an integrated setting. There would also be the opportunity to apply to specific universities in New York as a part of the partnership, such as the University of Buffalo. Dove estimated that approximately one-fourth of the students remained in the area to attend graduate school. At least half of the students returned home to Atlanta (or the South) to seek employment.\textsuperscript{348} Dove was invited on several occasions to speak to educators at symposia regarding the landmark program. Almost two decades later, Dove and another faculty member, Isabella Jenkins, presented an entire thematic session focused on the successes and failures of the program at the Association of Teacher Educators’ annual conference, designed to assist other institutions with the implementation of similar programs. The presentation, which was delivered to an integrated audience composed of educators from all over the United States, included listing the desired outcomes and illustrating the shortcomings of the program.\textsuperscript{349}

Concurrently, Dove strengthened the department by developing programming designed to help the students raise their standardized testing scores. Students were required to take the National Teachers in Education Examination before being certified to teach. If the students were unable to pass, their job prospects were severely limited. The organization that administered the exam was called the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). As chair, Dove oversaw coordinating the department acquisition of the necessary credentials to become accredited. Clark College received accreditation by the NCATE in 1975, becoming the first black private college to earn this distinction. Upon receiving this accreditation, graduates of

\textsuperscript{348}Dove interview, Nasstrom.

\textsuperscript{349}“ATE Sixty-Third Annual Conference Program, February 1983,” Pearlie Craft Dove Papers, Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia. The conference theme was “Excellence in Diversity.”
the program would then have reciprocity, meaning they could relocate to any one of thirty states and apply for work without having to become certified in that state. Dove first learned of the NCATE from one of her instructors at the University of Colorado who was one of the organization’s co-founders. Dove’s form of educational activism linked the methodologies of her mentors with the pedagogy of the day. She sought to instill excellence as a credo, breach psychical distance, and prepare students for a world without segregation.

Once formerly all-white professional associations began accepting black members after the Brown decision, Dove made it a professional priority to join as many organizations as possible to continue gaining access to divergent methodologies which she could bring back to the department. As she joined these organizations, she began pushing for the students to charter branches of national student teaching and academic organizations. Dove believed that the student teachers should become immersed in student organizations to become exposed to professionalized standards and best teaching practices outside of the classroom lecture. One of the first organizations she coordinated along with the education majors was the Student National Education Association, which was chartered in 1964. The second organization was the Phi Delta Kappa Honorary Education Society founded in 1982, which was based upon academic excellence. Throughout the late 60s and 70s, Dove became a sought after workshop facilitator and moderator where she led workshops on building a strong department of education. She led workshops at Morris Brown College that were open to all faculty in the Atlanta University Center. She worked in partnership with Morris Brown College and Georgia State University to

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350Dove interview, Nasstrom.
351Ibid.
recruit students to become teachers’ aides through by following a non-traditional curriculum. The course of study was geared to students who were already working, had earned a general equivalency diploma (GED) and were considered low-income. Some of the students recruited had withdrawn from college and now wished to return after several years in the workforce. The students actually enrolled in the professional courses prior to the core curriculum so the students would become qualified for the Teachers’ Aides’ positions faster. If the student decided to matriculate towards a bachelor’s degree, the schools offered evening classes for that purpose. The participating schools received a federal grant to cover a large portion of students’ tuition, which allowed the schools to offer the program to eligible students at significantly reduced fees. Out of the hundred and fifty students who started the program, Dove approximated that about sixty-five had finished the program, several of whom decided to pursue advanced degrees.352

After working for almost four decades with Clark College, Dove was awarded Distinguished Professor of Education prior to her retirement from Clark College (two years prior to the merger between Clark College and Atlanta University) in 1986. She was later granted the honor of Professor Emerita in 1993. She retired from teaching and preparing students to venture forward into work with the community. Upon ending one career in higher education, she began a second career grounded in activism. Dove began working with local agencies dedicated to improving Atlanta’s black communities. She simultaneously committed to the local neighborhood movement which was dedicated to getting the Washington Park neighborhood recognized by the National Historic Registry.

The three women had a sense of self-worth rooted in being grounded in three areas, home life, church life, and career life. These women were not, as the working class is typically portrayed, phoenixes rising from the ashes of oppression but women borne, nurtured, and molded

352Dove interview, Nasstrom.
in their homogenous community, and who sprang forth to lead it. The culture and residents of the black community had as much influence upon the women as their immediate families.

While there were many negatives associated with living in the segregated South, many black Atlantans were still able to make comfortable lives within the black communities. Dorothy Bolden, Ella Mae Brayboy, and Pearlie Dove grew up surrounded by enterprising entrepreneurial African-Americans who were leaders in the community. The three women were taught and mentored by educators who not only insisted on academic excellence, but who were also activists fighting for civil rights. It could be argued the grounding and education that these three women received within their respective neighborhoods were integral propellants which allowed them to cross Atlanta’s segregated psychical distances, or even state lines, to look for work or complete their education.

The same community that “raised up” Brayboy, Bolden, and Dove instilled in the women the fortitude to leave home, build careers, pursue a terminal degree, found a union, and become a voter registrar in middle-age. When Brayboy, Bolden, and Dove were younger women, they were able to find jobs, continue their education (to varying degrees) raise their families, and have active religious and social lives. Bolden and Dove, as single women, left the state—Bolden in search of better job prospects and Dove in search of a terminal degree—in efforts to improve their careers. While it was not unusual for African-Americans men to leave home looking for new opportunities in the North or Mid-West, the practice was not as customary among black women. However, Bolden and Dove returned home to the city of their birth, and applied the practical and experiential theories they had learned while traveling. A combination of factors

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353 Stephanie Shaw, in What a Woman Ought to Be and to Do: Black Professional Women Workers During the Jim Crow Era, writes that in the communities where professional black were reared, they were exposed to a “process” created by persons who also encouraged the women to take responsibility for their respective futures. That process instigated the women to become agents of social change. Stephanie Shaw, What a Woman Ought to Be and
led to these three women becoming agents for social change, their childhoods, education at Booker T. Washington High School, work experiences, traveling outside of the South, and the influence of community mentors. As change-agents, the women were able to balance their private lives, navigate the black community, and negotiate with the white community. The programs that Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove created, and led, resulted in the city as a whole being impacted as the recipients of their training, efforts to enfranchise and educational methodologies were able to vote, get better jobs, or become educators in their own right.

In Brayboy, Bolden, and Dove’s work lives, they built networks, which provided access for neighborhood residents, women seeking work, and college students to move into integrated spaces. Their personal experiences led to them forging careers in increasing black citizens’ access to the community-at-large. The women did not combat racism in the form of sidewalk picketing or passing legislation. Rather, Brayboy, Bolden, and Dove’s community activism trained, educated and politically armed individual members of Atlanta’s black community to challenge Atlanta’s segregationist politics. In doing so, the women were preparing the next generation to move into leadership. The three women’s efforts to improve conditions under which they worked, lived, and taught in the community, on the individual level, contributed to the sustenance of the collective Movement.354 The women segued from taking care of their families, to taking care of the community that so substantially contributed to the formation of

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354 Kim Lacy Rogers, “Oral History and the History of the Civil Rights Movement,” The Journal of American History, no. 2 (September 1988): 568. According to Rogers, “The process of growth gives activists an enhanced sense of political efficacy as they critique the culture that has oppressed them and challenge it politically. Such personal and political developments generate and sustain mass movement at local and national levels.” Although Rogers was referring to the pertinence of oral history to the national Civil Rights Movement, the assessment is equally applicable to Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s activism.
their individual identities. The transformative style of leadership evolved into the three women developing political influence among both black and white citizens of Atlanta.

5 POLITICS AS USUAL

By the 1970s Dorothy Bolden, Ella Mae Brayboy, and Pearlie Dove had developed thriving professional careers in fields that were directly connected to their personal belief systems. Bolden remained the president of the National Domestic Worker’s Union, Brayboy had worked with the All Citizens Registration Committee, the Voter Education Project, and the Atlanta Public Library, and Dove continued to head Clark College’s Department of Education. As time progressed, the three women acquired political acumen, and more importantly, political influence. The women’s advocacy on behalf of the black community and their burgeoning reputations as authorities in their respective careers were intertwined. Members of the community perceived Bolden as a defender of the poor and champion for women’s rights, Brayboy as a benefactor, and Dove as a consummate educator.

The women’s abilities to build alliances with Atlanta’s black middle-class leadership, as well as negotiate with white businessmen, had placed them in the positions of interfacing with elected officials, business leaders, and clergy. In available literature, Brayboy is explicitly acknowledged as having an integral role in local elections, and Bolden is described as being clearly influential. Dove’s connections are indirect in that she trained her students to participate in the electoral process via voting, writing, and volunteering. I argue that as their leadership roles became overtly politicized, the women increased the possibilities for dismantling the negative effects of segregation in the community. This chapter theorizes that as Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s credibility grew outside of their immediate organizations, their efficacy as
community leaders led to them gaining influence as Movement outliers, which afforded the women leverage with elected officials.  

Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove were middle-aged when they stepped into organizational positions of leadership and moved forward in their careers. The workplace served as a forum where the three women were able to conduct outreach and provide resources. In professionalizing domestic workers, registering citizens to vote, and developing programs to sustain new and returning college students, these women acquired a cadre of supporters; some were former mentees of their programs. The women could be considered political outliers because they were not a part of Atlanta’s formal black political leadership, yet their contributions garnered them significant influence. Using Elice E. Rogers’ broad definition of the term “politics” as “a power relationship that involves the ability to influence the behavior of others,” this chapter argues that Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove amassed political influence in Atlanta. Members of the community, their organizations, staff, and students respected Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s leadership enough to seek their advice prior to endorsing political candidates. The accumulation of supporters can be assessed as an informally constructed bloc of prospective voters. These blocs translated into a base of supporters, thereby giving the women a base of power. Earning the endorsement of any of the three women, especially Bolden and Brayboy, became a stamp of approval sought out by candidates at election time. This acknowledgement by

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355 The broad definition of an outlier is someone who stands apart from others in their group, or a person whose abilities lie outside of statistical probability. Malcolm Gladwell, a “cultural economist,” defines outliers as people who are “the beneficiaries of . . . extraordinary opportunities and cultural legacies that allow them to . . . work hard . . . in ways that others cannot.” Additionally, he states that those cultural legacies shape one’s pattern of achievement. Malcolm Gladwell, *Outliers: the Story of Success* (New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 2008), 19. Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove were political outliers because they were not descended from Black Atlanta’s political or business elite, they were not wealthy or male.

Atlanta’s black and white leadership of the women’s influence was also actualized via their appointments to various boards, committees, and councils.

This chapter will explore the three women’s activism through a revised version of Rogers’ definition, “politics is a process of deciding who gets what, when, and how and that this decision-making process is typically made by political elites who exercise the most power and control.” This definition expands beyond the organized structure of “protest politics” or “electoral politics” to allow for an assessment of the three women’s personal power. Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove were not political elites in the traditional sense, their leadership influenced elected officials’ decision-making processes. The women’s careers remained synchronized with their community activism over the next thirty years, and their access to political leadership enabled them to develop their programs.

The next three decades— from the 1970s to the 1990s—were busy for the women. In addition to the NDWU, Bolden served as an active member of Economic Opportunity Atlanta, Vice-President of Vine City Housing, Vice-President of Black Women's Coalition of Atlanta, member of the Governor of Georgia Commission on the Status of Women, and as a member of the Advisory Committee in the United States Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) under Secretary Elliot L. Richardson. Brayboy worked as a Neighborhood Analyst and with the Voter Education Project. In 1972, she began assisting Andrew Young on his congressional campaign. Dove was conducting training workshops and sending students to northern universities to study. Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove had fashioned careers, lives, and goals based upon a culture of resistance and community development through service. In building up schools and pursuing reform, the women’s service to the community reflected continuity in the historiography of black female activism, and was inherently politicized.

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357 Rogers, “Afritics from Margin to Center,” 702.
Bolden and Brayboy learned to negotiate on behalf of their constituency from working directly with elected officials on assorted projects. Those skills were of great assistance to the two women when they were seeking funding. Both volunteered to work with African-Americans seeking public office for the first time. Those opportunities allowed them to 1) hone their strategic planning abilities to oversee a project from beginning to end, and 2) establish relationships with (both black and white) influential citizens. Bolden joined Grace Towns Hamilton and Julian Bond’s congressional campaigns. Bolden’s lobbying on behalf of domestic workers led to Commission appointments. Brayboy joined Young’s campaign, which led to a paid position as a staff member after he was elected. Dove’s personal and organizational papers do not indicate whether she joined any potential candidates’ campaigns. However, Dove offered extra credit to students who volunteered to work on Clark College alumnus Marvin Arrington’s campaign for a seat on the Atlanta Board of Aldermen (which later evolved into the City Council). 358

Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s efforts to empower Atlanta’s black citizens, beginning in the 1960s, are a part of the twentieth century linear trajectory of Black women’s leadership, community advocacy, and dedication to racial uplift. The three women’s activism can be traced back to those nineteenth century era black women abolitionists. More recently, their work can be considered an extension of the activism of southern black women during the Progressive Era. Glenda Gilmore, in writing about black women navigating early twentieth century segregationist politics in North Carolina, assesses their work as “embracing southern white progressivism, reshaping it, and sending back a new model that included black power brokers and grass roots

358Pearlie Dove, interviewed by Kathryn Nasstrom, Georgia Government Documentation Project, Georgia State University, April 9, 1992.
activists.” Glmore studied black female North Carolinians engaged in progressive race work that was seldom publicly documented, not found in public laws or electoral politics, and is absent from the southern progressive reform discourse. Yet these black women initiated reform without financial resources, without the civic protection of their husbands, and without publicity.360

Forty years later, in another southern city, Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove engaged in similar acts of reform, with limited financial resources, without the civic protection of their husbands, and in public spaces. Bolden actively pursued publicity for the NDWU, the Vine City Community, and women’s rights. In her professional life, Brayboy shunned publicity, but decided to lay aside her reservations about being in the spotlight to run for public office in order to better serve her community. Dove was a sought after facilitator within the Atlanta University Center consortium (and from other schools) to speak about the methodology and pedagogies she incorporated into the Department of Education. All three women became involved in some aspect of local, state, and national politics based upon the documented successes they achieved in the workplace—a direct outcome of their activism. However, the women’s exposure to activities associated with governance did not begin with their entree into the workplace. It began with growing up active in the black church. For the three women, political activism complemented their programmatic thrusts and was an extension of their faith.

5.1 Politics and Religion

For Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove, their introduction to the southern political process did not begin with enfranchisement or meeting elected officials. While the women were growing up, they observed spiritually-guided politically active congregants. Bettye Collier-Thomas’ research


360 Ibid.
indicated that early twentieth-century black female leadership did not “generally view religion as a barrier to political involvement.” Collier-Thomas stated that black female Christian leaders believed “it was their duty to see that justice was done, and there was no better way to do that than to become involved in politics.”\textsuperscript{361} Political action in black churches involved more than the exercise of power on behalf of the congregants. It included negotiation on behalf of the community with the white power structure, exhorting the community to vote, choosing candidates to support, and pleading for financial contributions. It also included clergy, laity, and members using their skills and talents to develop community building activities for residents. When discussing the foundation of the black community’s resistance to white domination, the roots of political activism and the role of the black church are inextricably linked.\textsuperscript{362}

Within their respective churches, Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove witnessed black men and women taking charge of their communities, making decisions, promoting enfranchisement and fostering entrepreneurship as a way of serving God. Bolden has often been quoted as saying in regards to the members of the NDWU, “We weren’t Aunt Jemima women, and I sure to God don’t want people to think we are. We are politically strong and independent.” Yet, Bolden firmly believed that God was the driving and sustaining force behind all that she had accomplished. Bolden stated “…I started this with no money and you see how far He has gotten me…”\textsuperscript{363} The year prior to becoming Deputy Voter Registrar, Brayboy served as Chairwoman of Sunday School, and coordinated church forums on race relations featuring noted black


\textsuperscript{363}Gayle White, “Profile on Peachtree,” \textit{Atlanta Journal Constitution}, November 1, 1987; G. Bolden, Lutz interview.
women. Dove attended church with members, and mentors, who were publicly active with the NAACP. For the women, faith, community leadership, activism, and race work interconnected.

5.2 Political Exposure

As incremental progress occurred across Atlanta’s segregated landscape, Brayboy, Bolden, and Dove’s activism can be viewed as a response to looming political issues posed by the onset of racial integration in a socially and economically unequal society. Atlantans witnessed the election of Andrew Young to Congress in 1972 and Maynard Jackson’s successful mayoral campaign in 1973. However, the black working-class and working-poor were not necessarily benefitting from these changes. SNCC activist Robert Moses posed questions about inclusive change: “as society changes, will all of the black citizens have access, new skills, or will some be left behind/denied participation in the emerging society?” As the 1970s progressed, the women sought to answer such questions for their communities through creating holistic opportunities that went beyond singular acts such as joining a union, becoming enfranchised, or majoring in education at a historically black college. Instead, their designed acts

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365 Dove, Nasstrom interview. Dove attended the same church as her high school principal C. Lincoln Harper, who was known as a “race man.” John Calhoun, a one-time president of the local NAACP branch, was also a member, as was Sam Davis. Calhoun went to jail rather than turn over a list of teachers who were members of the NAACP to the Atlanta Public School Board. Davis helped lead the black teachers’ strike for teacher salary equalization.

366 Robert Moses, Mieko Kamii, Susan McAllister Swap, Jeffrey Howard, “The Algebra Project: Organizing in the Spirit of Ella,” Harvard Educational Review, 59, no. 4 (November 1989): 423. In this article, the authors state that Ella Baker represented the black community’s ability to produce “leaders from the ranks of their own people,” and she displayed “perseverance when confronting overwhelming obstacles.” The article examined civil rights activist and educator Moses’ development of a community-oriented mathematic curriculum that was based upon Movement organizing. Moses asked these questions in conjunction with revising how black children were being taught math. He created a communally holistic approach to teaching and learning by enjoining extended family and community members to assist in educating the students. The programs that Brayboy, Bolden, and Dove developed to empower black Atlantans reflected similar characteristics.
became first steps toward economic empowerment and independence. Residuals from this community activism were the political connections Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove forged. Interestingly enough, all three women were able to meet the politician James Earl “Jimmy” Carter at various stages of his career in public service.

Both Brayboy and Bolden were invited to the White House when former Governor Carter was elected to the presidency. Bolden was asked to attend a reception celebrating his election and Brayboy was invited to President Jimmy Carter’s inauguration through her work with Andrew Young.367 Dove actually met Carter before he was president. When Carter was running for governor of Georgia, Dove’s church member requested he visit and speak to the congregation.368 These encounters led to Bolden and Dove developing significant relationships with two influential women in the Carter family. According to Bolden, she became close friends with Lillian Carter, Jimmy Carter’s mother.369 Lillian was a friend, supporter, and benefactor to Bolden, particularly through her contributions to the Maid’s Honor Day events. When Bolden believed that she was being unjustly targeted for investigation, Lillian Carter pledged to monitor the proceedings to ensure Bolden was being treated fairly.370 In Dove’s case, she met Carter and his wife Rosalyn again after joining the staff of Jimmy Carter’s social justice program, The Atlanta Project (TAP). Dove’s work with the TAP, and at Clark Atlanta University, was brought

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368 Dove interview, Nasstrom.

369 Bolden interview, Lutz.

370 Bolden interview, Lutz.
to Rosalynn Carter’s attention, which led to Dove being chosen a Rosalynn Carter Honorary Fellow of Emory’s Institute for Women's Studies.  

The three women were being sought out for their expertise in their fields, and for finding solutions to reduce the economic and educational disparities between black and white communities. Bolden was appointed to serve on national committees and invited to speak at national conferences. Brayboy was consulted in conjunction with political analysts and scientists to give her observations on upcoming local elections. After retiring from Clark College, Dove was appointed coordinator of The Atlanta Project’s Washington Cluster. As coordinator, Dove was responsible for implementing initiatives in health, education, and economic development for residents in the neighborhoods she served. Emory University was Dove’s cluster partner; the partnership was responsible for working with the appointed members of Atlanta’s Empowerment Zone Community Board Members to “execute proposals for funding” to revitalize the assigned communities. The following sections examine the accumulation of their political influence.

5.3 Bolden and the Political Elite

Prior to the launching of the NDWU, Bolden’s first political battle was with the Atlanta Public School Board. Bolden took on the system and won. Atlanta School Board Superintendent John Walter Letson decided to remove the seventh and eighth grades from Booker T. Washington High School to create a middle school. The black junior high was

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371 Atlanta City Hall Proclamation of “Pearlie Dove Day,” June 17, 2013.


originally scheduled to open in an abandoned building in 1964. More importantly, the proposed site was on the other side of Peachtree Street. Bolden and other parents were outraged for several reasons; Bolden was concerned about the safety of the children once they left the confines of the Vine City and Summerhill communities, the financial cost, and the safety of the children once they actually arrived at school—the “approved” facility was condemned. Round-trip bus fare was twenty cents a day and the school lunch was priced at forty-five cents a day. The new school was projected to cost parents approximately sixty-five cents per day before school supplies, school clothes or any additional expenses.

This expense was of monumental concern to Bolden, and other domestic workers, who averaged a salary of three to five dollars a day. She was concerned about how other domestic workers, especially the single mothers, would be able to afford to send their children to the site of the new school. The family was barely making ends meet although both Bolden and her husband worked. Bolden’s mother assisted the family whenever possible by feeding the children and providing them with treats. Bolden’s second and third issues concerned the children’s physical safety. Black children were forced to cross Peachtree Street to get to a building previously determined unfit for white adult occupation. The Board of Education merely opened the building, the members did not offer to repair or renovate the facility. Parents were rightfully worried about their children’s safety traveling to and from school. Members of the black community feared the children would become victims of racial violence without the option of being able to flee to adjacent black neighborhoods. Bolden had witnessed firsthand the


devastating sight of black children stopping to browse in white-owned drugstores, then being arrested and charged with theft because they handled the merchandise.\(^{377}\)

Bolden approached Letson about building a new school in the Vine City community. Bolden stated the superintendent was “surprised to see low-income people were concerned about quality education.”\(^{378}\) Letson informed Bolden that if she would increase community support for an upcoming bond issue, he would back getting a middle school constructed within the community. Bolden upheld her end of the deal, but after the bond passed, he did not move forward with construction. Bolden’s children were forced to attend school in the condemned structure.\(^{379}\) Over the next several years, it became apparent that Letson was not going to build a new school. Bolden withdrew her bond endorsement.\(^{380}\) While Bolden could not have known the impact of removing her support for the bond, it can be surmised that she understood doing so in a public manner would continue to draw attention to Letson’s refusal to follow through on his promise.

Bolden decided to publicly protest Letson’s reneging on his commitment to build a middle-school for black students within the southwest community. During this same time period, Bolden enlisted the support of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee’s (SNCC) student members to lead a boycott on the Atlanta School Board and Letson’s office.\(^{381}\) Bolden believed that Martin Luther King, Jr. sent SNCC members to lend support for picketing the School Board

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\(^{377}\) Dorothy Bolden, interviewed by Chris Lutz, Southern Labor Archives, Georgia State University, August 31, 1995. Tyson, “Dorothy Bolden Speaks for Herself,” 14-G.


\(^{379}\) Ibid.

\(^{380}\) Atlanta Interfaith Broadcasting’s African-American Video Oral History Project.

\(^{381}\) Bolden interview, Lutz.
Bolden contacted federal agencies and filed claims requesting an investigation of the Atlanta School Board. After maintaining an active campaign protesting the School Board’s closing of the middle school in Vine Community, construction began on John Kennedy Middle School on Baldwin Drive in 1970.

After the school was built Letson congratulated Bolden, through one of his assistants, on her commitment to seeing the project through. Letson’s decision to honor his pledge to the black community resulted in the white residents of southwest Atlanta scrutinizing his moderate political stances with aversion. White citizens were alarmed at the Atlanta Board of Education’s decision to use “white dollars” to build a “black school”. Black citizens were buoyed by the Vine City victory and began pressing for other educational reforms, including a better plan for desegregating Atlanta’s schools. Letson, who served as Superintendent of Atlanta schools from 1960-1973, ended up taking an early retirement as part of a desegregation plan compromise, which included naming an African-Americans successor.

Bolden was dismayed by members of the black community who initially cautioned her to scale back her demonstrations against the school board, and told her that pushing for a black representative was too much. Bolden’s response to local critics was to tell them, “They got something new. We want something new. And I got Kennedy school.”

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382 Bolden, interview, Lutz. Bolden stated she had “marched with Dr. King every time he came to town [from Alabama].” Bolden’s inference appears to be that King referred the SNCC worker’s to Bolden’s protest because he knew and respected her.


384 Atlanta History Center, Atlanta History Center Photograph Collection, catalog number VIS 170.1064.001. Letson landed on his feet; he finished his career as the Dean of the School of Education at Valdosta State College (now Valdosta State University.)

385 Dorothy Bolden, interviewed by Duane Stewart, June 29, 1990 and July 15, 1990, Aisle 106, Drawer E-1, National Domestic Workers Union, Southern Labor Archives, Special Collections Department, Georgia State University, Atlanta, Georgia. When Bolden says “they,” she is referring to white Atlantans. Bolden believed that too
proud to have been a part of the entire process, from getting a school built to the negotiations ensuring black representation on the school board. Yet once the school was built, Bolden stated that Reverend William Borders, pastor of Wheat Street Baptist Church and community activist, did not want her to get credit for her enormous role in bringing the project to completion.386

Bolden had decided that she wanted to improve the community in which she lived, not move to another one. As a result, she was selective about lending her endorsement to candidates who pledged to protect the community as a part of their platform. Bolden did not believe that an elected official deserved her vote just because he or she was black. Yet, she did not fully trust many of the white politicians she came in contact with. She declared that Mayor William Hartsfield “had two faces.”387 Prior to Bolden’s NDWU organizing, she had volunteered as a community advisor to the Director of Economic Opportunity Atlanta, which she co-founded, an organization created to train and provide opportunities to small businesses owners and organizations working on the implementation of an anti-poverty program in the Vine City.388

Reviewing the available literature revealed that as early as 1960—eight years prior to launching the NDWU—Bolden publicly espoused her belief that more women needed to be in leadership positions, registered to vote, and involved in the political process. Subsequently, Bolden joined with political campaigns, demanded accountability from black elected officials, and required that active members of the NDWU become registered to vote.

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386Ibid. Bolden believed Borders did not accept that she was capable of being the driving force behind getting the middle school built.

387Bolden interview, Stewart.

388 “Dorothy Bolden’s Resume,” Dorothy Bolden, Biography, Resume, 1977-1978, National Domestic Workers Union, Southern Labor Archive, Special Collections Department, Georgia State University, Atlanta, Georgia; Christiansen, “The Making of a Civil Rights Union,” 154.
Bolden’s decision to work with Grace Towns Hamilton was not surprising in light of Hamilton’s experience in working to improve the conditions of domestic workers. Hamilton had previously sought to raise the pay and change their work conditions. During Hamilton’s tenure as Executive Secretary with the Atlanta Urban League, she published an article entitled “What Can Be Done About Domestic Employment?” The article called for an overhaul in terms of standardizing service industry, training workers, and job placement. According to Bolden, she made speeches on behalf of Hamilton when she was a director at the Atlanta Urban League. Bolden stated she wanted to work with Grace Towns Hamilton for she could “show you what she’s produced.” By joining Hamilton’s campaign, Bolden was able to work closely with an influential African-Americans woman who won an election.

In Nasstrom’s article, “Women and Community Organizing,” members of the Vine City community described Bolden as a woman “who could get things done.” When interviewed in 1990, Bolden assesses her position in the community as being someone that both blacks and whites could come to for sound counsel. She fully believed that the work she did was empowering. More importantly, Bolden understood that both entrenched and aspiring leadership perceived that she was influential. With that understanding, Bolden was fully aware of the leverage she had when negotiating on behalf of the Vine City community, the NDWU, or Economic Opportunity Atlanta. Bolden definitively stated that she “picked out politicians.” She also said that the politicians would call her at the office to request she travel to their offices for


390Dorothy Bolden interviewed by Duane Stewart, recording, Special Collections Department, Pullen Library, Georgia State University Southern Labor Archives, June 29, 1990.

391Kathryn L. Nasstrom, “This Joint Effort; Women and Community Organizing in Vine City in the 1960s,” Atlanta History, 48, no. 1, (Spring 2006): 34.

392Bolden, Stewart interview.
meetings. Bolden would refuse so that she could control setting the time, date, and place because she was neither leaving work nor bringing her children to the meetings. Bolden’s reputation labeled her as plainspoken and even blunt. Her refusal to accommodate the black male community leaders speaks to her clarity of the intrinsic value she had to offer the politicians, via members of the NDWU, and to the citizens of Vine City. Although she may have aggrandized the events via memory, Bolden’s observation of her reputation among Atlanta’s black power brokers is both self-aware and insightful.

An early indicator of Bolden’s prowess in mixing Black Atlanta’s elite, white politicos, and businesspeople from both sectors was her Maid’s Honor Day program. This event was connected to Bolden’s quest to dignify the image of Atlanta’s domestics. The celebratory program recognized the hard work of local maids and raised their morale. Employers submitted their employee’s name, along with a brief description of why she should win, and the entrants were voted on. Lyndon Wade and Grace Towns Hamilton were judges. The affair consisted of a nice luncheon with respected politicians and businessmen such as Andrew Young, then Governor Jimmy Carter, and Sam Massell, in attendance. Tickets to the event were four dollars. In addition to selling tickets for the luncheon, the planning committee drafted advertising contracts to sell to neighborhood businesses and politicians for placement in the commemorative printed programs.

The luncheon served as an opportunity to laude the maids who were finalists in the contest, proclaim the winner of “Maid’s Honor Day” and take pictures for submission to local

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393 Bolden, Lutz interview.

394 Maid’s Honor Day Program Participants Program, Correspondence, NDWU Maids Honor Day Miscellaneous 1970-197, Box 1628/99, Georgia State University Pullen Library. Maid’s Honor Day Correspondence, 1970-1972, Bolden opened her letter to Shirley Chisolm by asking if she would be the keynote speaker for the 1972 banquet with acknowledging Massell’s proclamation. Box 1627/76. Lyndon Wade was Executive Director of the Atlanta Urban League, and was Brayboy’s younger brother.
newspapers. Bolden was able to convince the mayor, Sam Massell, to issue a proclamation declaring July 15, 1970 “Maid’s Honor Day” in conjunction with the event. The first banquet was held in the summer of 1970 and featured African-Americans leadership. Emma Darnell was slated to present the keynote speech, Billye Williams was the mistress of ceremony, Bunny Jackson delivered the welcome address, William Holmes Borders delivered the invocation and the benediction, Xernona Clayton delivered the introduction to the speaker, and Charles Stinson and John L. McCown were scheduled to deliver remarks. In creating Maid’s Honor Day, Bolden produced an elegant event hosted in a hotel ballroom, where domestic workers were celebrated by the community and honored by the leadership. Creating this contest and declaring domestics as worthy of public respect was a significant component of one of Bolden’s key objectives, to change the public’s perception of service workers. Judges, elected officials, and business-owners were contributors to the program, which confirmed that by 1970, Bolden had worked with a number of Atlanta’s black and white power brokers. More importantly, this event can arguably be assessed as both a savvy vehicle used to cement the loyalties of her working-class union members, and as a tangible demonstration of her growing power base.

Just as Bolden made her presence felt on the local level, she did not hesitate to contact national and federal organizations to see redress on behalf of her community. One example of Bolden’s ability to open the lines of communication with the heads of various organizations is

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395 Maid’s Honor Day Program Participants Program, Correspondence, NDWU Maids Honor Day Miscellaneous 1970-1971, Box 1628/99, Georgia State University Pullen Library July 9, 1970.

396 Maid’s Honor Day Program Participants Program, Correspondence, NDWU Maids Honor Day Miscellaneous 1970-1971, Box 1628/99, Georgia State University, Pullen Library July 9, 1970. The speaker was Emma Darnell, the first black woman to head a department in Atlanta city government, Billye Williams, a WSB television personality who would go on to marry Hank Aaron, Burnell (Bunny) Jackson, Vice-Mayor Maynard Jackson’s first wife and Director of Economic Opportunity Atlanta, civil rights activist and Baptist Pastor William Holmes Borders. Stinson was the Director of Community Services for the Atlanta Urban League, McCown was the Executive Director of the Georgia Council on Human Relations, and Clayton was the first southern black woman to host a television talk show.
demonstrated in how Bolden initiated contact with Elizabeth Duncan Koontz, Director of the Women’s Bureau of the United States Department of Labor. On February 5 1971, Bolden sent a telegram to Koontz to request entry into an upcoming meeting scheduled for February 16th. Bolden believed she was denied admission to the meeting because of her race and low-income status. It is not readily apparent from the available information how the February 16th meeting issue was resolved.

In August of 1972, Bolden wrote to Koontz again proposing the Women’s Bureau and the members of HEW combine resources to complete a study on domestic workers. She suggested the development of a Minority Women’s Guidance Association to train domestic workers for other careers. In the letter, Bolden pointedly stated, “the main stream of our working life is dark. No job, no money, no schooling, no nothing, so where do we go now?” She concluded the letter by acknowledging that Koontz was a “very busy lady,” but that she knew “Koontz has the best interests of minority women at heart.”

Bolden and Koontz ultimately appeared to come together as evidenced by a photograph of the two that accompanied a newspaper article in the *Atlanta Daily World* entitled “Women’s Bureau Holds Negro Women’s Confab.”

As a result of Bolden’s stance on feminism, and her work with the NDWU, she was appointed to serve on committees dedicated to resolving economic issues related to gender, race, and class. In 1972, she was appointed to an eighteen-member panel created to examine topics

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397 Correspondence, Undated: United States: Department of Labor, Women's Bureau, 1971-1972, Southern Labor Archives, Box 1630/137, Georgia State University Library, Pullen Library. National Domestic Workers Union, 1965-1979, Southern Labor Archives, Georgia State University Library, Atlanta, GA.

affecting women, such as disparity in pay. In 1973, Elliot L. Richardson, National Health Education and Welfare Secretary chose Bolden to serve a three-year term on the Advisory Committee on the Rights and Responsibilities of Women. The Committee was created to make recommendations to the secretary regarding policies and programs affecting women. By 1976, Bolden was a member of the Governor’s Commission on the Status of Women and on the Board of Directors for the Legal Aid Society. Bolden worked as a consultant with the WIN Program, which was funded by the State of Georgia’s Labor Department, all while maintaining the executive offices of Vice-President of the Vine City Neighborhood Development Project (NDP) and Vice-President of the Black Women’s Coalition of Atlanta, an Advisory Board member with Citizens Trust Bank, the NAACP and on the Board of Directors for WIGO radio station. Within all of these groups, Bolden’s commitment was to remain a spokesperson for the working-class, the working poor, and Vine City.

As the size of the NDWU grew, so did Bolden’s public profile. She was appointed to serve on the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) Citizen’s Transportation Advisory Committee. Bolden believed that she represented the opinions of the working poor and was obligated to speak on behalf of the underrepresented citizens. She argued in favor of MARTA adding, and improving, bus routes to low income black communities such as Perry

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400 “NDWU Head Named to HEW Advisory Post” *Atlanta Inquirer*, July 15, 1972, 2.

401 Tyson, “Dorothy Bolden Speaks for Herself,”14G.

402 “Dorothy Bolden’s Resume,” Dorothy Bolden, Biography, Resume, 1977-1978, National Domestic Workers Union, Southern Labor Archive, Special Collections Department, Georgia State University, Atlanta, Georgia.
Homes, a public housing complex, and Dixie Hills. During the course of one board meeting, Bolden found it problematic that neither the black or white members of the committee were automatically in favor of creating nor increasing bus routes that would go into the working class black neighborhoods. Bolden stood up in the meeting and declared that all of the maids, butlers, and nannies came from these communities. Those without automobiles needed affordable ways to get to work.

During the 1970s, Bolden campaigned on behalf of mayoral candidates Maynard Jackson and Andrew Young, congressional candidate Julian Bond, and presidential candidate Jimmy Carter. Her connections to each candidate were personal. Jimmy Carter’s mother, Lillian Carter sat on the board of Bolden’s organization. Bolden greatly respected Lillian Carter, referring to Carter as a “great ambassador for women.” Bolden was so dedicated to supporting Carter, she left her position with the HEW to campaign for him. Bolden publicly endorsed Maynard Jackson’s campaign for mayor. When Julian Bond won his seat, the Georgia State Legislature refused to seat him. Bolden confronted Bond and told him she would beat him with a baseball bat if he stepped down. She considered his responsibility to the people greater than his personal feelings.

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403 George M. Coleman, “Domestic Work Now a Virtue Because of Dorothy Bolden,” Atlanta Daily World, March 23, 1975, National Domestic Worker’s Union, Newspaper Clippings, Box 1633, Folder 102, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University Library, Atlanta.

404 Ibid.

405 Bolden, Lutz interview.

406 Jean Tyson, “Dorothy Bolden Speaks for Herself, Others,” Atlanta Journal and Constitution, November 21, 1976, (14G). For two years after winning the election, Julian Bond was denied his seat in the Georgia State Legislature after publicly stating that he endorsed citizens who burned their draft cards. According to Bolden, in a private conversation Bond intimated that he felt like giving up. Bolden soundly rejected the idea.
Bolden visited the White House several times during Carter’s administration, for both celebratory and advocacy reasons. Bolden petitioned Congress on behalf of Bill 49, giving domestic workers a minimum wage. Bolden perceived her interventions as critical to the bill’s passing both houses of Congress. Maynard Jackson stated, “it’s against the law to not know who Dorothy Bolden is, and if you didn’t…she’d make sure you never forgot.” As a measure of Jackson’s respect for Bolden, he made sure she was the first woman appointed to the Leadership Atlanta Commission.

By the early 2000s, Bolden dealt with increasingly fragile health. This caused her to scale back on her public service and her activism. However, prior to the onset of medical issues that led to confinement to her home, Bolden had successfully translated her political acumen into political power. Bolden developed successful professional relationships with three of Atlanta’s mayors, Sam Massell, Maynard Jackson, and Andrew Young. She had met President Jimmy Carter and worked with his wife Lillian Carter. Bolden worked with Grace Towns Hamilton, the first African-Americans woman to be elected to the Georgia General Assembly and was the Executive Director of the Atlanta Urban League. Bolden had also campaigned for Horace Julian Bond in his successful bid for the Georgia Legislature. Bolden’s political connections allowed her access to city council and executive board meetings to articulate the plight of the working poor. Bolden continued to agitate on behalf of the Vine City community until illness confined her.

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408 Bolden, Lutz interview.
409 Christiansen, “Making of a Civil Rights Union”, 268-269. Jackson created “Leadership Atlanta” as a way to offer opportunities to blacks, women, and young adults by providing access to training.
5.4 Brayboy and Elected Officials

Brayboy’s foray into politics began when she was hired to work as staffer in Andrew Young’s office. By that time, she was quite experienced in navigating City Hall. She had spent a decade working for, and with, lawyers and politicians since joining the All Citizens Registration Committee. She understood the art of negotiating on behalf of constituents. Her responsibilities in Young’s office included monitoring social issues affecting Fulton County, a task that Brayboy was already performing as a part of her civic service to her community.410

As early as 1971, Brayboy was maximizing her connections on behalf of southwest Atlanta. As a part of the Community Council, Brayboy collaborated with the Vine City Medical Clinic and the Neighborhood Union Health Center to offer services in spite of declining funding. The two medical facilities merged to continue offering health care to the Vine City. With the merger, the Neighborhood Union proposed to start offering treatment in addition to preventative medicine as a part of a pilot project. The clinic would be open Tuesdays and Thursdays and staffed by volunteer nurses and a private physician. Upon completion of the project, the black press acknowledged Brayboy’s work as instrumental to the clinic’s opening and funding of the project. Helen Howard, director of the Vine City Foundation, Inc., singled Brayboy out to thank her for her support of the clinic.411

After completing a stint with Andrew Young’s office, Brayboy was appointed by the Fulton County Commissioners to a seat on the Fulton County Department of Family and Children’s Services Board for a five-year term.412 Brayboy established a work history that led to

411“Two Local Clinics to Merge,” Atlanta Daily World, July 9, 1971, 3
her being hired, nominated, or appointed to serve in positions related to community and social services. Near the end of the 1980s, Brayboy was a part of talks between developers, the City Council and residents organized to discuss the revitalization of Auburn Avenue. One of the revenue-generating events was the Sweet Auburn Festival. A key meeting was held at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center under her purview. The City Council hoped to capitalize on the hundreds of thousands of tourists who came to the area to visit the King Center and King’s birth home. In 1990, she was elected to serve as the corporate secretary on the Auburn Avenue Revitalization Committee. Being a part of these discussions gave Brayboy firsthand access to the political machinations that could economically stimulate a community or leave it to wither.

After leaving her position with the Fulton County Public Libraries, Brayboy began working at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change. She served as the Community Outreach Coordinator and the Director of Community Affairs. She also worked without title in a third capacity. Because of Brayboy’s commitment to meeting the needs of the neighborhoods surrounding the King Center, she was considered a “defacto social worker” for the King Center. Councilman and Movement activist C. T. Vivian, in reflecting on her advocacy, stated, “Don’t forget Mrs. Brayboy was a social worker, she was a real social worker. When I taught at Clark College, I would invite her to come and teach a class to the students.” In each of her roles, Brayboy continued to preach the gospel of enfranchisement. She also sought

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415Untitled, undated excerpt of article on Ella Mae Brayboy from the private collection of Joyce Jones, “Ella Mae Brayboy”, Brayboy Collection.
416C. T. Vivian, recorded speech, the “Ella Mae Wade Brayboy Memorial Park Unveiling of Plans,” May 24, 2017, author’s possession.
to use the King Center as a vehicle for improving social service processes such as aiding hungry families and supporting senior citizens.

Brayboy offered local residents referrals for city social services, resources to secure income-based housing, food, and jobs, and voter education. Because she kept a close watch on Fulton and DeKalb County election supervisors, she also charged citizens to go beyond being active voters, and extend their civic obligations to become deputy voter registrars as well. Brayboy, like Bolden and Dove, served in a leadership position with at least one group dedicated to addressing her community’s specific needs. Brayboy chaired Neighborhood Planning Unit-K, which prioritized residents concern and brought them to the attention of the City Council.  

During her tenure at the King Center, Brayboy was selected to serve as the Program Director of the City Wide Coalition, a group organized to boost voter registration throughout Atlanta’s black communities. Brayboy orchestrated a citywide rollout for the “Get Out The Vote” campaign. The plan involved centering information checkpoints within designated neighborhoods. At each information center, a dispatcher was assigned to manage voter registration. Brayboy oversaw the staffing of the stations, and ensured that the stations were advertised as safe places for residents to register to vote.

As the driving force behind the City Wide Coalition, Ella Mae Brayboy raised money to underwrite the “Get Out The Vote” campaign. She mandated that all volunteers be properly

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417 Murphy “Community Service Around Town,” 18.
418 Ella Mae Brayboy, Brayboy Collection.
419 Murphy “Community Service Around Town,” 18.
420 Joyce Brayboy Jones, interview by author, Atlanta, Georgia, 20 February 2006.
educated and trained so that no laws were accidentally broken. Brayboy had more than enough experience to adequately prepare for election-day. Due to her extensive prior knowledge, and the training she received from local Movement organizations, she had an innate grasp of what would be needed to assist transporting citizens to the polls based upon the knowledge she acquired from walking the neighborhoods. Brayboy figured specific budgets; line items listed a proposed dollar amount necessary to purchase gasoline for the volunteer drivers responsible for picking up the elderly and disabled, salary for temporary staff, and the costs of printing flyers and posters. After election-day, Brayboy was responsible for compiling the statistics and documenting the election’s outcome and voter turnout.

After being a part of several political campaigns and working with elected officials to improve the community, Brayboy decided to serve her community a different way. She joined the number of candidates running for a seat on the city council. Brayboy solicited endorsements from various councils. She met, along with eleven other potential candidates, with the Third District Voters Council. The members voted in a secret ballot to identify their “preferred candidates” in an effort to eliminate a costly run-off for a special election that was to be held in March of 1987. John Lewis, Sr., was voted to be the “preferred” candidate for the council, and two potential candidates were eliminated from running in the special election. However, Brayboy was not to be deterred.

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421 Operation Big Vote Progress Report, 1992, Get Out the Vote Project 1992 File, Ella Mae Wade Brayboy Collection, Special Collections, Auburn Avenue Research Library on African-American Culture and History, Atlanta, Georgia.

422 National Coalition on Black Voter Participation, Inc. Operation Big Vote Fiscal Report, dated March 9, 1993, Get Out The Vote Project File, Ella Mae Wade Brayboy Collection, Special Collections, Auburn Avenue Research Library on African-American Culture and History, Atlanta, Georgia.


Ultimately, Brayboy was declared ineligible to participate in the run-off by two votes. The final candidates were Jabari Simama and John Lewis, Sr. The Fulton County Board of Elections certified the results after a recount. Larry Dingle, Clerk of the Atlanta City Council, and Election Supervisor Tom Malone conducted a re-count days after the March 3rd special election. Brayboy decided to take the Council to court because she believed the special election results should have been disallowed. Brayboy alleged that there were irregularities regarding the counting of the absentee ballots and she filed an appeal to stop the continuation of the election. Brayboy also contended that ninety percent of fifteen thousand registered voters did not show up to the polls. Brayboy did not earn enough votes to qualify for the March 24th run-off. She did not attempt to run for public office again.

Brayboy worked with the City-Wide Coalition for ten years, from 1985 until her retirement from the King Center in 1995. During this active period, Brayboy’s leadership, organizational skills, and political savvy guided all of her special projects. In her new position, and as a member of the Atlanta Consortium, she supported and lobbied for the implementation of a sample ballot to assist newly registered African-American voters in making their voting selections. The Consortium maintained a provisional ballot was necessary for several reasons; many of the registered voters were new, many voters had been purged, polling places and voting procedures had changed within the community. Thus, newer registrants would be

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428 “I Still Believe,” Testimonies, Atlanta Constitution.
better equipped to make an informed choice with a sample ballot.\textsuperscript{429} From 1985 until 1991, Brayboy served as a member of the Martin Luther King, Jr. State Holiday Commission.\textsuperscript{430}

Brayboy’s political clout and powerful connections allowed her to negotiate on behalf of a number of issues that affected her immediate neighborhood. Brayboy’s demand for better services manifested itself through a number of venues. She was appointed chair of Resource Development for the Fulton County Council on Aging. While serving in that capacity she earned a number of victories, including lobbying Atlanta’s City Council to allow senior citizens to pay half-priced taxi fares.\textsuperscript{431} Working with MARTA as a consultant, she was a part of the committee organized to deliberate which neighborhoods transit would service. Using her political connections, Brayboy assisted residents in the Pittsburgh community with securing indoor plumbing, electricity and natural gas service.”\textsuperscript{432}

In the latter years of her activism, Brayboy’s foci were split between continuing to advocate for blacks to become enfranchised, and addressing the needs of senior citizens. Brayboy believed the senior population was underserved. She considered the city lagging in providing adequate social services, medical care, and amenities to its aging working-poor population. Brayboy petitioned for the establishment of a geriatric clinic at Grady Memorial Hospital. She also requested an increased number of county caseworkers be assigned to Atlanta’s senior population. In seeking to protect and care for the elderly, she sought to have a centralized

\textsuperscript{429}Letter to The Honorable Max Cleland, Secretary of State, from John Cox, co-convener of the Atlanta Consortium with a carbon copy to Ella Mae Brayboy, April 18, 1986, Get Out to Vote Correspondence File, Ella Mae Wade Brayboy Collection, Special Collections, Auburn Avenue Research Library on African-American Culture and History, Atlanta, Georgia.

\textsuperscript{430}Biographical Scope Note, Brayboy Collection, Auburn Avenue Research Library, Atlanta, Georgia.

\textsuperscript{431}“A Lifelong Volunteer Honored to Serve: Ella Mae Brayboy Has Always Fought for Racial Justice and Other Precious Rights” Andrea Jones, \textit{Atlanta Journal Atlanta Constitution}, February 10, 2000, XJD, 11.

\textsuperscript{432} “Atlantan was ‘Godmother of Voter Registration’: Woman was Aide to Andrew Young, Helped Seniors,” Rick Badie, \textit{Atlanta Journal Constitution}, November 5, 2010, B6.
facility built that was devoted strictly to serving the elderly. When the City Council contemplated reducing the programs offered to support senior citizens, Brayboy testified at the public hearing that federal reductions would diminish the quality of assistance provided to seniors such as homemaker services, home-delivered meals, transportation, and case management. Brayboy was appalled that eight case managers were expected to serve Fulton County’s 58,000 senior citizens. District Five Commissioner Emma I. Darnell endorsed Brayboy’s efforts to bring attention to the plight of the elderly.433

In her capacity as spokesperson for The Council on Aging, she worked with the City Council to ensure the councilmembers adhered to the plan of constructing the multi-purpose senior center. Forsyth Street was the site of the original location. However, Brayboy later learned that the Atlanta City Council members voted to move the Greyhound bus station to Brotherton Street, next door to the Garnett Street MARTA station. Brayboy and the director, Diane Williamson, were frustrated at the city’s delays in funding the building, which was projected to offer recreation, financial assistance, meals, social programs and senior daycare. Brayboy, along with Williamson and members of the advocacy group, believed that the transient population associated with a bus terminal would put seniors at risk as potential criminals’ targets. They also believed seniors would hesitate to patronize the facility if it was built in that location. Brayboy, Williamson, and others scheduled numerous meetings with then Mayor Bill Campbell to discuss resolution.434

Throughout the 1990s Brayboy continued to galvanize and mobilize her neighbors. Brayboy coordinated organizing senior citizens in her Washington Park community to protest the

433“Seniors Want County to Replace Funds from Aging Programs,” Atlanta Daily World, May 9, 1996.

434Charmagne Helton, “Community Plan To Move Bus Station Prompts Call To Find New Site For Senior Center,” Atlanta Constitution, Gwinnett Extra, October 26, 1995, D3.
proliferation of alcohol-selling package stores. She estimated that over twenty liquor stores were currently operating in a two-mile radius of Simpson Street (now Joseph E. Boone Boulevard) and Ashby Street (now Joseph E. Lowery Boulevard.) The overage of liquor stores versus the singular existence of one major grocery store was of paramount concern to Brayboy and other community activists. Brayboy understood that her section of Atlanta was a “food desert” long before the phrase was coined. Speaking in her blunt fashion, Brayboy was quoted as saying that the number of liquor stores in her community, and the type of individuals associated with the stores, “make it [the neighborhood] a hellhole.”

Brayboy, along with a coalition of activists representing Washington Park, Hunter Hills, Simpson Road, and Dixie Hills, brought district three’s issues to then council member J. Michael Bond. According to Bond, she was very “deliberate that he should do something.” As someone who had grown up in the community where she lived, and now represented it, he readily agreed. Brayboy worked closely with him to draft legislation curbing the number of permits being granted to merchants seeking to open liquor stores in black neighborhoods, especially along Simpson Road. After the proposed bill lay dormant for three months, Brayboy asked Bond to revisit the issue with the city council. He brought it up again on the council floor. Eventually the bill passed, until the state legislature overturned the bill. Bond stated that the bill was copied across the country. He unequivocally gives credit to Brayboy as being the “thought behind the bill”. He labeled Brayboy a visionary who helped draft one of the most effective bills toward cleaning up communities that he had ever seen.

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436 Ibid.

437 Interview with Julian Michael Bond, by Christy Garrison-Harrison, May 31, 2017, Atlanta, Georgia. Bond, the son of Movement activist and congressman Horace Julian Bond, uses his middle name in public life.
Brayboy has been characterized as a woman who could get someone elected. Michael Bond describes her as a person who had a great amount of political skill and ability. During his interview, he emphasized that Brayboy was particularly skilled in the arenas of voter registration and turnout. Bond’s perception of Brayboy was that through her work with Young, Fulton County, and the King Center, “she was exposed to, and others were exposed to her in a political realm.” He considered her to be “methodical, patient, and deliberate in her work and extremely thoughtful in her agendas.” Bond believes that Brayboy was attuned to the needs of the community and let the residents inform her of what ought to be done. She would then bring their concerns to him. He experienced Brayboy’s devotion to her community before he was elected. During his second attempt to run for office, he observed “how good Brayboy was at putting her finger on the pulse of what was going on and what the community desired.”

She entered the new millennium having negotiated for improved community services with four of Atlanta’s mayors, Sam Massell, Maynard Jackson, Andrew Young, and Bill Campbell, met President Jimmy Carter, and had been employed by Young when he won the congressional seat. She was an integral part of decentralizing voting in Atlanta, deemed single-handedly responsible for registering thousands of citizens to vote in her lifetime, of bringing attention to the dire needs of Atlanta’s growing aging population, ensuring affordable transit service, and working to keep liquor stores out of poor communities. Brayboy’s community activism can be assessed as politicized leadership due to several factors, 1) she produced hundreds of voters annually, 2) she was the liaison between members of the community and elected officials, and 3) many of the projects on which she worked required the support of elected officials. She continued her service until deteriorating health affected her mobility.

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438Bond, interview by author.
5.5 Dove Works With The Atlanta Project

I identify Dove’s political connection as a bit more indirect than Bolden’s (she received a federal appointment) or Brayboy’s (who worked for a congressman and later ran for public office.) Dove’s “quiet” educational activism was reflected more so in how she developed curriculum and trained students while a professor at Clark College. Dove’s radical teaching methodologies were grounded both in the traditional training that she received and her cutting edge innovations. Her forays into dealing with the political process arose from her work with students, then later through her affiliation with the Carter Center after her retirement from academia. Dove encouraged her students to become politically active in a variety of ways, such as volunteering to work on the campaigns of Clark College alumni running for office. Two examples of Dove’s students following her lead are Carolyn Long Banks and Lydia Tucker Brown Douglas, both of whom used political action as a venue for change.439

Dove retired from Clark College in 1991. In 1992, she was recruited to return to work, but in a different capacity. Dove was hired by the Carter Center to work as one of the Cluster Coordinators with The Atlanta Project (TAP); however, she was classified as an Emory University employee.440 The Cluster Coordinator position called for Dove to develop, among other projects, an educational curriculum. In this capacity, Dove was responsible for directing a

439 Carolyn Long Banks was the first African-American buyer employed for the locally owned Rich’s Department store. Banks went on to serve as (out of two black females in the League’s history) president for the National League of Cities. Banks was the first African-American city councilwoman elected in Atlanta. Lydia Tucker Brown Douglas joined the Atlanta Student Movement to protest the segregated practices of locally owned retail stores. Douglas, and other picketers, were arrested for demonstrating outside of Rich’s Department store. Douglas remained active with the Student Movement, but also finished school and earned an advanced degree from the Interdenominational Theological Seminary. Dove, Pearls of Wisdom, 5. Elizabeth Montgomery, “City Council Honors First African-American Council Member,” November 6, 2014, www.AJC.com, accessed January 5, 2016. Lydia Tucker Brown Douglas, Voices Across the Color Line, Oral History Project, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center, January 5, 2006.

440 Correspondence to Dove from The Atlanta Project offering her the position of Cluster Coordinator, September 2, 1992, Pearlie Craft Dove Collection, MSS 8641 Dove, Pearlie Craft Correspondence 1987-1996 Box 1 FF6, Emory University’s Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Books Library, Atlanta, Georgia.
staff, coordinating large-scale projects, serving as the liaison between the community and the approved corporate vendors, creating strategies to maximize resources and assessing efficacy. At some point during her tenure with TAP, Dove also initiated researching the lengthy application process to get Washington Park placed on the National Historic Registry.

President Jimmy Carter conceived The Atlanta Project in 1991. He spent several months conceptualizing his ideas, followed by meeting with those potentially able to provide an abundance of resources such as Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of corporations, administration from academia and organizations that could serve as service providers. A short time after that, Carter invited residents from the community to attend the meetings. One of Carter’s objectives was to form a diverse collective of individuals, representing a variety of disciplines, to find ways to spark urban revitalization while reducing poverty. The project was intended to serve a large geographic area with a population of approximately a half-million residents. The cities of Atlanta, Decatur, Forest Park, College Park, East Point—which were housed within Clayton, Fulton, and DeKalb Counties—were to be the assigned territories. A key component which distinguished TAP from other community-oriented programs was the level of input that the citizens had in determining what services would be provided to the neighborhoods. In Carter’s vision of a bottom-driven-service-providing-organization, the people who were from the area would identify the needs of the area.  

Ultimately, TAP’s goal was to listen to the residents of the communities, pinpoint the needs that service providers could assist with; then work together with the residents and the vendors to identify the best solutions to the problems. Within the metropolitan area, TAP formed twenty-one clusters, and the headquarters was named The Carter Collaboration Center. Each

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cluster had an office located within the heart of the community it served. TAP’s preference was that the Cluster Coordinator meet specific criteria; 1) the final candidate for the position be well-known within the community, and 2) the person have a civic history of working with the community. It was important that the coordinator understand the community as an inhabitant, not as an observer. Coordinators were assigned an assistant, clerical support staff, student interns, and a full-time corporate partner. Based up the criteria, and the preliminary goals of TAP, Dove was identified as an ideal fit for the position of Cluster Coordinator.

As Coordinator, Dove’s assignments involved visiting predominantly African-Americans working and low-income neighborhoods to attempt implementation of the social service programs created to improve neighborhood conditions. TAP was focused was on upgrading housing, offering economic opportunities and improving educational access. Dove’s office was located inside of her beloved Booker T. Washington High School. TAP was, according to Dove, invented to “bridge the gap” between the “haves-and-have nots” by offering training and empowerment programs.

Approximately twenty neighborhoods were identified and targeted for installation of the program and monitoring, Dove was assigned the boundaries of her cluster. Her territory was expansive, she (and her staff) were expected to cover from Northside Drive to West End to the West Lake community. The Carter Center oversaw funding TAP. Eventually, corporations began subsidizing the program, moving TAP from a private to a corporate model. Despite having such a large cluster, Dove believed her placement to be fortunate for several reasons. Dove’s corporate partner was Emory University, her home base was Washington High School, and her

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443 Dove interview, Merritt.
section included the Atlanta University Center; she had deeply rooted connections to each of the entities.444

Each cluster was given lofty goals. They were expected to form committees composed of local residents to first identify the needs of the community, then the appropriate resources to address the concerns. Eight areas that were emphasized were economic development, housing, education, children and youth, health, arts, and public safety.445 Dove had extensive experience in four areas, education, children and youth, and the arts. One example of Dove’s educational endeavors was her effort to bring the diverse inhabitants of her section together to work on artistically-driven and historically based projects. Dove brought residents of the Herndon Homes public housing development and students from Spelman College together to develop a booklet that would creatively share the community’s unique history.

The Washington Cluster’s booklet *Neighborhood Portraits*, evolved from a compilation of biographical essays that were written by Washington High School students. The booklet was designed to be reflective of the project’s historical and educational components. It contained research conducted by the students about historical figures relevant to the school, the community and the cluster.446 The students were paid for their research efforts, primarily funded by a private donor and a non-profit organization that contacted Dove offering to finance the project. *Portraits* was co-sponsored by an organization, Helping Teens Succeed, Inc., and a private donor, Deborah

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444Dove interview, Merritt.


446 *Neighborhood Portraits*, from the personal collection of Karcheik Sims Alvarado, however a copy is also archived with the Pearlie Craft Dove Collection, MSS 8641 Booker T. Washington Cluster Box 1 FF 3, Emory University’s Stuart A. Rose Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, Georgia.
Insell. It highlighted local luminaries such as businessman Heman Perry; the first black librarian, Annie McPheeters; and a co-founder of the Georgia Voters’ League, Ruby Blackburn.

One of Dove’s artistic projects involved introducing students to the African-Americans artist Hale Woodruff, educating them on his importance as an American artist, his contributions to Clark Atlanta University and the community. Dove worked with the students and residents of TAP’s Booker T. Washington cluster to produce another booklet entitled “A GOLD MINE OF ART ON THE WESTSIDE: Resources in The Booker T. Washington Cluster.” Dove researched a number of African-Americans cultural landmarks, historic venues, and notable residents located on the west side of Atlanta and artist Rupert Rukuumba A. Nedd drafted the document. The list also contained churches, specialty shops and galleries. The objective was to highlight and celebrate the west side of Black Atlanta’s artistic culture.

As Cluster Coordinator, Dove’s efforts to find solutions to decaying neighborhoods sought to improve neighborhoods on several levels; 1) Renovating homes would increase the value of the home, 2) homeowners would not be living in potentially dangerous domiciles, and 3) it would keep citizens from losing their homes to the city and/or predatory buyers. One example was Dove’s efforts to educate citizens on how violating codes allowed the city to legally destroy older homes that were of importance to the community. Dove contributed to the Washington Cluster’s Strategic Plan during the last year that she worked with TAP. She was

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447 Correspondence to Pearlie Dove from Deborah Insel, Pearlie Craft Dove Collection, MSS 8641 Dove, Pearlie Craft Correspondence 1987-1996 Box 1 FF6, May 30, 1996, Emory University’s Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, Georgia.

448 Dove, Merritt interview.

449 Pearlie Dove gifted me with a copy of “A GOLD MINE OF ART ON THE WESTSIDE: Resources in the Booker T. Washington Cluster,” however a copy is also archived in Pearlie Craft Dove collection, MSS 8641 Booker T. Washington Cluster Box 1 folder 3, Summer 1996 and 1997, Emory University’s Stuart A. Rose Library Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, Georgia.

450 Dove, Merritt interview.
intentional in ensuring that homeowners understood the city’s housing codes, and where financially feasible, homeowners were assisted with repairs. An example of TAP’s economic assistance was in providing temporary employment for young people when Atlanta hosted the Olympic Games. Dove connected young adults with various companies who needed valet drivers for the events.\footnote{Dove, Merritt interview.} Dove’s hard work with TAP resulted in former First Lady Rosalynn Carter appointing Dove to the Rosalynn Carter Honorary Fellows Program, in conjunction with Emory University’s Rosalynn Carter Programs in Public Policy Institute. The award was given to women based upon exemplary service to the nation, state, or community.\footnote{Correspondence from Rosalynn Carter to Pearlie Dove, Pearlie Craft Dove Collection, MSS 8641 Dove, Pearlie Craft Correspondence 1987-1996 Box 1 FF6, September 3, 1993, Emory University’s Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, Georgia.}

As Cluster Coordinator, Dove was responsible for drafting the Unit I report, the “Neighborhood Economic Development Task Force Report and Recommendations.” This report stated concerns from the residents, offered recommendations to correct shortcomings in the city’s responses to problems, and proposed legislation—which the Cluster believed would enhance the economic development within the community.\footnote{City of Atlanta Neighborhood Economic Development Task Force Report and Recommendations, Pearlie Craft Dove Collection, MSS 8641 Dove, Box 1 FF5, November 9, 1992, p1, Emory University’s Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Atlanta, Georgia.} The report was an expansive document that addressed many concerns, from the lack of courteous customer service displayed by City Hall employees to the lack of training exhibited by the police serving the Washington Park and Vine City communities. One issue that was of paramount concern to the committee was legislation before the City Council that could potentially remove decision-making autonomy from the NPUs and give that responsibility to a different committee. The report requested increased funding and staffing, and stated that the NPUs (based upon the various committee
findings) were the best chance for each community to engage and promote economic development from within.454

The report highlighted the shortage of safe and affordable housing. In accordance with the Cluster Report’s emphasis on the residents being able to develop opportunities for themselves, the report called for the installation of a department created solely and specifically to address exploitative and predatory lending practices by financial institutions.455 As she had throughout her career, Dove worked closely with community activists who would go on to win seats on Atlanta’s City Council, such as Gloria Tinubu, Cleta Winslow, Vincent Fort, and Mary Norwood. 456 Although the report reflected the hard work and research of many committee members, Dove’s name, as Cluster Coordinator, is the only name featured. As coordinator, Dove cited the City Council’s shortcomings in protecting its low-income citizens and lack of economic development. Yet, because of the dissolution of TAP, there was no way to implement or enforce the recommendations.

Dove retired from The Atlanta Project in 1996, choosing to work with neighborhood organizations, and to serve as an active member of the Neighborhood Planning Unit K, which

454 Emory University’s Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Pearlie Craft Dove Collection, MSS 8641 Dove, City of Atlanta Neighborhood Economic Development Task Force Report and Recommendations, Box 1 FF5, November 9, 1992, 2, 6-7, 9, 10-12.

455 Emory University’s Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Pearlie Craft Dove Collection, MSS 8641 Dove, City of Atlanta Neighborhood Economic Development Task Force Report and Recommendations, Box 1 FF5, November 9, 1992, 12-13.

456 Emory University’s Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Pearlie Craft Dove Collection, MSS 8641 Dove, City of Atlanta Neighborhood Economic Development Task Force Report and Recommendations, Box 1 FF5, November 9, 1992, p.13. Tinubu was a full professor of economics at Spelman College who had served on the city council and later ran for mayor. Fort was a professor at Morehouse College who successfully ran for the state senate in 1996. Cleta Winslow was a social worker who had worked with the black children’s home and the Urban League. In 1993, Winslow won a seat on the City Council representing District 4. In 2001, Norwood won the Post 2 At-Large seat on the City Council.
included the Washington Park neighborhood.\textsuperscript{457} Dove attended cluster meetings, city hall council sessions, and organized community meetings to seek better city services. Dove worked closely with Christi Jackson, Chair of Neighborhood Planning Unit (NPU) K. One of Jackson and Dove’s projects was their dedication to saving black millionaire Heman Perry’s home from demolition. One of their biggest triumphs was being awarded a Washington Park Livable Centers Initiative grant while working with the Conservancy at Historic Washington Park on applying for a historic designation for their unit.\textsuperscript{458} Throughout the 2000s, Dove still actively met with many of the organizations that she had served until her health began to rapidly decline.

5.6 Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s Political Efficacy

Martin Kilson defined the political system as “the process through which services and benefits are allocated among competing sectors in society.” Kilson described segregationist politics as a combination of “coercive regulatory agencies” and “party and machine organizations” designed to exclude urban black denizens from the political process.\textsuperscript{459} Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s efforts to protect and empower the members of their communities were carefully orchestrated to attack those coercive agencies. Each sought to include all eligible

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{457}In 1974, during his first year in office as the first African-American mayor of Atlanta, Maynard Jackson created the Neighborhood Planning Unit system to harness the “growing strength” of neighborhoods and their associations. Jackson’s system divided the city into a cluster of twenty-four units, led by a Chair and populated with residents and neighborhood associations. One of the NPUs objectives was to increase citizens’ participation on the city charter, connect residents with their elected officials, and maximize feedback on the city’s Comprehensive Development plan. Amy Melissa Widestrom, “Impoverished Democracy: Economic Inequality, Residential Segregation, and the Decline of Political Participation” (PhD diss., Syracuse University, 2008), 214-215. Dove was a longtime member of NPU-K. Dove and NPU-K Chair Jackson worked on several community initiatives together.


\textsuperscript{459}Martin Kilson, “Black Politics: A New Power” 18, no. 2, Dissent, (August 1971): 334. Kilson’s study concentrated on the city of Chicago, Illinois, but his assessment of the urban political process at the beginning of the 1970s is broad enough to be applicable to any city that practiced Jim Crow politics. Kilson earned a doctoral degree from Harvard University, later earning the distinction of becoming the first African-American to earn a full professorship at Harvard. His research focused on race, class, political leadership and government.
\end{footnotesize}
citizens in the political process so that they could advocate for services from the elected officials. Their leadership ensured that citizens had access to the franchise, employment, education, city services and benefits that Kilson described.

The three women’s alliances with business leaders and politicos to better promote and develop Atlanta’s predominantly black neighborhoods allowed for a cross pollination of political contacts, resources, and vendors within City Hall. By the 1990s, each of the women had become involved, on some level, in a political process. Bolden viewed herself as a powerful woman. Brayboy was cited as powerful.” Dove’s work in education was honored by a national organization, and she was sought out to direct important projects, including one pioneered by a former president of the United States.

Bolden’s work with HEW and Economic Opportunity Atlanta; Brayboy’s contributions to de-centralizing the voting process, lobbying for senior citizens, and running for office; and Dove’s work as a coordinator with The Atlanta Project, and her efforts to have the Washington Park Community recognized by the National Historic Registry are the women’s major contributions to the community. I argue that these women were: 1) community leaders conducting political activism, 2) they maximized their political relationships to benefit the community, and 3) their ability to negotiate with Atlanta’s white elite was the result of their growing up in southwest Atlanta. Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove crossed segregations psychical distance, were taught by politically conscious educators, and were mentored by Atlanta’s black

460 Bolden interview, Lutz.


462 Letter from David G. Imig, Executive Director of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education congratulating Dove on her retirement from Clark College. Pearlie Craft Dove Collection, MSS 8641 Dove, Correspondence 1987-1996, Box 1 FF6, Emory University’s Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library Atlanta, Georgia. In his letter Imig called Dove “an articulate spokeswoman for black concerns but an exceptional advocate for quality teacher education. . .”
elite. While differing in personality, each required those under their tutelage to commit to the community, just as they had been taught.

In founding the NDWU, Bolden was responsible for completely re-organizing the payment structure for Atlanta’s black domestics, which led to co-founding an organization committed to developing businesses and training citizens for better jobs. She worked on political campaigns and on legislation bringing attention to the plight of domestics, and working women. The second half of Brayboy’s life was committed to enfranchisement, making her community safe, and spearheading the drive to create resources for Atlanta’s growing elderly population. After losing her election bid, Brayboy worked with city council members to eliminate blight in her neighborhood.

Dove’s work with TAP led to her being awarded the Lillian Carter fellowship, and involved her working with politicos, corporate vendors, and private donors. A neighborhood acquiring the status of being placed on the Registry afforded protection from predatory business practices by private citizens (such as an overabundance of liquor and convenience stores), the possibility of federal financial support, and cooperation from local governments. While all of her hard work was for, with, and in her community, the case could arguably be made that the external support that she received was because: 1) Dove was a respected and admired leader, 2) she lived in the community she represented, and 3) her formal education and title were considered assets. Because of numbers two and three, she could be considered “for the people” but not “of the people” which was a plus in class-conscious Atlanta.

Black women have been documented as intervening in the political process dating back to the nineteenth century abolitionist’s movement. Black women working in authoritative positions within Movement organizations is not a new concept in the literature. Yet, in the
academy, examining black women’s leadership was, up until the past three decades, considered atypical and relegated (for the most part) to the niche of black women historians writing about black women. Constructing a research paradigm identifying black women’s leadership as political activism outside of elected office and critiquing their efforts is blanketed under “Civil Rights” and housed in the “Community Activism” corner. The studies historically have been categorized by class, occupation, education, or generation. Further, examinations of black women’s leadership as a contiguous effort are usually also grouped by class.\textsuperscript{463}

While newer literature addresses the role of class in Movement organizing, it did not play a role in my decision to group Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove for analysis because of their more relevant shared characteristics; community, gender, and age. The discourse centered on class is nuanced and closely tied to the laws of segregation in the black community. This examination determined that the levels of political clout that the women shared were not directly connected to levels of education or marital status. Although the women’s professional endeavors may not have been connected by education or income, their dedication to mutual goals of economic development and enfranchisement were just two of the ties that bound all who came together to pursue equality. As a part of collective leadership, and with their political influence, the women were responsible for targeting areas in need of improvement within the community, public transportation, police protection, accessible schooling, non-traditional programs in higher education, and the construction of senior community centers. The women were also responsible for boosting morale, building self-esteem, drafting legislation for safer communities, and demanding that the city recognize the value and worth of their communities via historic preservation, funding job training and economic development. Their work led them to forging

\textsuperscript{463}During the nineteenth century, Charlotte Forten Grimké and Sojourner Truth were black female abolitionist crusaders who were considered social reformers. It is difficult to locate scholarly studies grouping their activist efforts together.
relationships with Atlanta’s black elected officials, as well as with both black and white elites. These relationships forged opportunities for the women to nurture and empower working-class and working-poor residents to become the next generation of elected officials and community business owners. These relationships presumably afforded the women clout and funding as each developed their respective projects.

6 CONCLUSION: STILL HERE

This dissertation embeds Dorothy Bolden, Ella Mae Wade Brayboy, and Pearlie Dove within the classic Civil Rights Movement narrative by positioning their community advocacy as equal to the efforts of Atlanta’s more well-known African-Americans leaders. This dissertation politicizes Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s activism, illustrates their acquisitions of power, and seeks to move them to the forefront of Atlanta’s Movement. Researching these three southern black female servant-leaders, whose faith-based Movement work aligned with their professional careers, revealed the significance of this dissertation project and confirmed the historical relevance of these particular three women. Further, this examination of the women’s efforts led to creating a framework which encompassed identifying their leadership style as “enduring,” assessing the influence of growing up in Black Atlanta, constructing the events that led to their promotions at work, and the roles that both faith and respectability played in the women’s lives.

Assessment of Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s professional contributions as acts of protest on behalf of the black community is a critical intervention based on several factors; first, their work refutes previous ideology centering the efficacy of Movement leadership (as a social

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464 Dirk van Dierendonck and Kathleen Patterson expound upon Robert Greenleaf’s “servant-leader” theory as being necessary to building a more caring society. Both definitions are based on the principles of service, stewardship, ethical behavior and collaboration through connecting with other people as being a foundational philosophical part of leadership. Dirk van Dierondonck and Kathleen Patterson, eds., Servant Leadership: Developments in Theory and Research (London: Palgrave McMillan, 2010), 3.
movement) as grounded in mass mobilization. Secondly, their leadership was oppositional to the standard portraiture of Movement leadership as male, ministerial, and middle-class. Finally, the women’s professional and activist emphases on economic uplift, education, and enfranchisement illustrate evidence of how sustained acts of protest, led by local leadership, impacted the community.

Growing up in a supportive and familial black community contributed to the women’s characters. Their personalities were formed through interactions with family, friends, educators, and Sunday school staff. As the young women matured, they experienced increased interaction with whites. Growing up in tightly knit and supportive environments gave the women the strength of character necessary to endure the inevitable indignities that accompanied those interactions. This strength allowed them to devise strategies that nurtured and empowered their communities just as they had been. They systematically sought to break the strangleholds of economic oppression and disfranchisement while empowering residents to do the same.\textsuperscript{465}

The three women helped wage the battle for liberation from white supremacy in their “everyday encounters” with friends, neighbors, employers, students, and local merchants. Brayboy, Bolden and Dove’s “organizing” paralleled a tenet of the Mississippi Movement tradition. They made sure to address the everyday issues of inequality, segregation, and exclusion in education, work, business, services, and government. In the tradition of “casting their buckets down where they were,” Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove began with changing their personal environments first, followed by their neighborhoods, and workplaces.\textsuperscript{466}


\textsuperscript{466}Robert Moses, Mieko Kamii, Susan McAllister Swap, Jeffrey Howard, “The Algebra Project: Organizing in the Spirit of Ella” \textit{Harvard Educational Review}, 59 no. 4 (November 1989): 428. Robert “Bob” Moses, an educator activist, was a part of The Algebra Project. The Algebra Project was created to teach algebra to middle-school students. Moses’ teaching philosophy consisted of introducing advanced mathematical concepts into black communities, not just as “technical instruction.” He also believed that the entire curriculum was in need of revision,
Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove consciously fashioned their public identities both inside and outside of the black community. Their everyday encounters were not restricted to crossing segregation’s psychical distances from the black community into white spaces. The women also had to navigate unfamiliar black neighborhoods and public spaces that did not necessarily welcome confident black females. Upon reviewing the oral interviews and newspaper articles, I drew the conclusion that the women’s reputations often preceded them. In turn, being “known” afforded them a point of entrée to broach discussions with residents about joining the NDWU, becoming enfranchised, or promoting the economic revitalization of a neighborhood. While their work may have theoretically “spoken for itself”, this study contends that the women’s images, both inside and outside of the black community, contributed to their agency and the growth of the community’s support. Because the three women’s full personal identities were private, and their constructed public personas were socially respectable, the women fluidly moved between communities, negotiating on behalf of the people they represented. Available primary sources suggest that despite gender, they faced few challenges to their leadership status.

The painstaking care that the women took in deflecting personal discussions, in lieu of work projects, allowed their legacies to remain unblemished. Yet, the lack of information restricted my access to their achievements, biographies, or failures. The women were each interviewed several times by historians, sociologists, news reporters, students, and colleagues. However, I have only been able to locate a few cases where the interviewer appears to have been able to penetrate the public persona to engage the three women in conversations beyond their professional endeavors. The second challenge came in interviewing family and co-workers.

in addition to the local communities and school cultures. Moses used the phrase “cast down your buckets where you are” as a reference to both Booker T. Washington’s use of the phrase in 1895 at an address he delivered during the Atlanta Cotton Exposition Address and to his own work in Cambridge with The Algebra Project. Moses, “The Algebra Project,” 424-426.
Family members’ current recollections seemed to neatly coincide with what has already been preserved in the public record. The final issue appeared to be that, with a few exceptions, interviewers did not appear to press the women to respond to stringent and incisive questioning on par with the type of inquiry that male community activists received. The women’s interviews were especially lacking in two areas, 1) accountability, and 2) the strengths or weaknesses of their projects.

Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s activism were evident in reactions to issues in their neighborhoods, workplaces, and schools. Growing up in the Vine City and Washington Park neighborhoods, they witnessed community activists knocking on doors, visiting churches and neighborhood businesses, promoting enfranchisement to black patrons in beauty, shoe repair, tailor and seamstress shops, as well as the black-owned corner markets. It is highly probable that the young women observed practices associated with grassroots activism and sought to replicate what they perceived as successful approaches to conducting outreach. This study posits the three women’s activism as proactive responses to inequality as opposed to viewing their work through a reactive lens of oppressed victimhood. As residents of the community where they worked, Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s cultural, social, and professional practices became the foundation of their political practices. Representing black Atlanta’s southwestern community, the women forged political networks throughout the city.467

In context, Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s use of their black female physical bodies to cross segregation’s psychical distances to secure higher wages, to promote suffrage, and to place black college students in the white public sphere could be interpreted as transgressive acts. For the majority of the twentieth century, leadership space was generally masculine space. These

467Ford, “Soul Generation,” x.
women were unprotected, exposed, and vulnerable when going into white neighborhoods, white private homes and white public spaces. Whether it was Bolden moving North in search of employment as a teenager; Brayboy’s trip to the Midwest as a young girl; or Dove’s visit to northern colleges as a high school student, the women were introduced to a world outside of their segregated enclaves. Both Bolden and Dove had the opportunity, the exposure, and the means to leave not just their neighborhoods, but the South. The exposure contributed to the formation of their activist identities. Upon returning, they used what they had learned to teach others. Over the years, the women built up a loyal constituency whom they helped cross similar boundaries to confront comparable injustices.

In reading classic Movement literature, the works reveal that indigenous movements produced community-oriented leadership that was more concerned with pressing issues such as increasing prospects for employment to reduce economic disparities. For local leadership, securing national legislation was less of a priority than acquiring political power. Martin Luther King, Jr. has the distinction of being considered a national leader as well as one of Atlanta’s own. Aside from King, there were several groups committed to developing protest strategies outside of the national Movement’s framework. Thirty years ago, Clayborne Carson theorized that historians appraised the southern black freedom struggle as a larger part of the national civil rights reform effort as opposed to a locally-based social movement. In his essay “Civil Rights Reform and the Black Freedom Struggle,” Carson stated “local black movements produced their

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468 Ella Mae Brayboy, interviewed by Melissa Fay Greene, Spring 1993, Box 29, Folder 15, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Special Collections, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia. The interview is misidentified as “Interview with Mrs. Bratberg.”
distinctive ideas and indigenous leadership rather than from the initiatives of national leaders.”

Movement scholarship has progressed to include varied studies highlighting local leadership. However, there is still considerably less literature focused on the historical significance of black women acquiring political power. This study does not measure the breadth or scope of Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s political influence. The analysis presented is concentrating on establishing the women as politically significant local leadership. Carson critiqued how sociologists and historians of the era were recording the Movement’s “heroes.” These women embodied what Carson suggested was lacking in the literature. They were “decisive shapers of reform” who were more interested in “building enduring local institutions than staging marches.” The women did not instigate reform by transmitting a mass ideology, but by being and empowering individuals to attack systemic injustice.


471 Carson, “Civil Rights Reform and the Black Freedom Struggle,” 19-20. Carson wrote that Movement activists are often portrayed as “important forces on behalf of reform, but not the decisive shapers of reforms themselves.”
Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s politicized community advocacy contradicts classic Movement critiques, which assessed the efficacy of indigenous leadership. Presenting analysis on the political demographics of the national Movement, David Levering Lewis cites Martin Kilson’s 1971 article *Origins and Causes of the Movement*, “civil rights politics largely a middle class affair and the Negro lower strata had little political relationship to civil rights politics” in partial agreement with Lewis’ assessment. Lewis’ study incorporated the importance of increased access to the political process, a surging economy, higher education, and the use of litigation to increase the importance of the black vote. Carson, here again critiquing how little attention scholars paid to the contributions of local leadership in relation to the national Movement, differentiated between local and national black leadership. Kilson went a step further by pointedly discussing the failings of black leadership. However, his criteria for what constituted leadership were acutely specific. He limited his examinations to elite members of the black bourgeoisie or militant lower-class community organizers.

In that same book, David Garrow supplied commentary to Nancy J. Weiss’ essay, “Creative Tensions in the Leadership of the Civil Rights Movement.” Garrow’s response validated Carson’s article “Civil Rights Reform and the Black Freedom Struggle,” by concurring there was not enough scholarship concentrating on southern leadership. Garrow concluded that the existing definitions of leadership were “overly narrow” and did not allow for a “more meaningful understanding of leadership.” He cited six examples of southern leadership, three of

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472 Brayboy interview, Greene.
whom were women, Diane Nash, Fannie Lou Hamer, and Ameila Boynton. Garrow identified black women, who were omitted from Weiss’ essay, as evidence that more historical credence should be placed on the leadership of local activists. However, Garrow stopped short of describing the women as politically influential. Also, the women he listed were described as performing the bulk of their work with the local branch of national Movement organizations. While Carson and Kilson’s theories defining archetypes of black leadership have evolved in the decades since their articles were published, during the time periods in which they were writing, (the 1970s-1980s) Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove were firmly entrenched in leadership positions. Yet their presence, or similar examples, are largely absent from the literature published in the decades following the peak of the modern Movement.

Moreover, the women’s very presence counteracts the claims of what leadership was and its political efficacy (or lack thereof.) The women’s work was not recognized in Movement scholarship, nor did it fit in the narrow definition of black leadership. Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s jobs and activism personified Garrow, Lewis, and Carson’s analysis while contradicting Kilson’s. The women personify the indigenous leadership that Lewis wrote about and they were uniting residents across the class strata, which Kilson did not believe the black middle-class leadership or working-class were capable of performing. Garrow addressed the idea of powerful women within the political process, but he did not label them political activists.

Examinations of black women working in authoritative positions within the Movement were published in the 1990s. It was not until 1993 that *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965* edited by Vicki L. Crawford, Jacqueline Anne Rouse,

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and Barbara Woods. *Women in the Civil Rights Movement* appeared. This volume clearly concentrating on black female activism across the civil rights, political, labor, and community spectrum. The next book, Bettye Collier-Thomas and V. P. Franklin’s *Sisters in the Struggle: African-Americans Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement* was published in 2001. An edited volume containing diverse essays from Barbara Ransby, Vicki Crawford, Jacqueline A. Rouse, Sharon Harley, Genna Rae McNeil, and Linda Faye Williams on Gloria Richardson, Septima Clark, Mary McLeod Bethune, Joan Little, and Fannie Lou Hamer examining the political power and leadership of black women in leadership, and included a study of black female elected officials. *Sisters in the Struggle* specifically stated one of its main purposes was to “present sociopolitical analyses of African-Americans women” in response to other volumes that lacked emphases on their “shifts in political consciousness” or their political contributions to social protest movements.475

The scholarship on black women’s political activism has exponentially expanded since these earlier ones were published, but analyses emphasizing the grassroots leadership of non-politician black women has not kept up in volume.476 One anthology, *Southern Black Women in the Civil Rights Movement*, edited by Bruce A. Glasrud and Merline Pitre, identifies relatively unknown black female leadership in various southern cities from Texas to Florida to Virginia. This compilation groups Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove with other black female Georgians who were activists. While the book’s contributors firmly place their women in authoritative positions, and as politically active, the women are primarily positioned as promoting enfranchisement as


476Clarissa Myrick Harris, “Call the Women; the Tradition of African-American Female Activism in Georgia During the Civil Rights Movement,” in *Southern Black Women In The Civil Rights Movement*, ed. Bruce A. Glasrud and Merline Pitre (College Station: Texas: Texas A&M Press, 2013), 97-98, 107-110.
opposed to being politically activists. In *Southern Black Women*, Bolden is briefly described as a
domestic worker who organized domestic workers, with support from the Urban League and the
Georgia Council on Human Relations. Brayboy is listed twice, on page 107 where she is
described as an “effective community organizer” who worked with the VEP, and on page 108,
where she is described as a “community organizer who implemented effective programs.” Dove
is cited once as an educator who “raised the political awareness” of those she taught. The chapter
offers an engaging discussion about the contributions of Georgia’s black female activists.
However, because it is a compilation, the chapter does not assess the outcomes of the women’s
work.

The authors of *Want to Start a Revolution: Radical Women in the Black Freedom
Struggle* state that in “standard understandings of the struggle” there has been no place for a
“convergence” in the literature studying the leadership of black female radical activists alongside
their black female civil rights counterparts.\(^477\) The essayists establish their protagonists as
politically transformed activists responsible for creating strategies to attack social injustices
across movement lines of civil rights, Black Power, and labor. Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove are
emblematic of Goré, Theoharis, and Woodard’s key intervention; the editors describe the women
in their book as being “long-distance runners” who “employed multiple strategies” in the
“struggle for social, economic, and political change” by investing in coalition building.\(^478\)
Brayboy, Bolden, and Dove did not self-identify as radicals, leftists, or as black feminists. They
were, however, long-distance runners. As the head of organizations or divisions responsible for

\(^{477}\)In *Want to Start a Revolution?*, the authors write about black female activists who decided to affiliate
with Communist, Socialist, Leftist, or Labor movements. Later, these radical activists collaborated with Civil Rights
Movement activists, (such as when black Communist labor leader Vicki Garvin worked with Rosa Parks on a
project). Dayo F. Goré, Jeanne Theoharis, and Komozi Woodard, *Want to Start a Revolution?: Radical Women in

developing and implementing policy and programming, they successfully employed multiple strategies.

Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s accomplishments are included in Atlanta’s “black community” narrative. Local churches and the “black press” have recognized their hard work. Going forward in the research, this dissertation on black southern female leaders counters the standard narrative by including Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove into what Margo Perkins describes as the “hegemonic ways of knowing” southern history by examining their professional accomplishments as overt political acts designed to enfranchise, empower, and educate. Bolden created a professional identity for the domestic worker, offered job training to adult residents of the Vine City Community, and nationally represented the interests of working class women. Brayboy registered potential voters and educated them on their rights and responsibilities as citizens, while working on behalf of low-income residents and Atlanta’s neglected senior population. Dove personified the connection between scholarship and activism.

The importance of black intellectual work on college campuses as activism is often contextualized amidst studies centered on youth and young adults mobilizing within the Student Movement. Dove’s training, teaching, and mentoring students was a part of the educational curriculum. Winston A. Grady-Willis recorded Joyce Ladnor’s personal revelation that “scholarship was inextricably bound to the black freedom movement.” For a scholar such as

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479 Atlanta’s black newspapers, the Atlanta Inquirer and Atlanta Daily World, chronicled Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s achievements. They received recognition for local organizations and many women’s groups.

Ladnor, scholarship and activism were intertwined. For Dove, the activism was in the educating. For Brayboy, the activism was in the voting and for Bolden, the activism was in the training.  

These three women were key actors in Atlanta’s vital and dynamic civil rights movement, not supportive players. As activists, their decisions to organize did not spontaneously appear out of a singular cataclysmic episode of frustration with the “system.” Rather, their behaviors reflected what Doug McAdam describes as “organized groups of people who consciously strategized to build networks and resources to assist with sustained activity.” Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s leadership arose as a result of what McAdam categorizes as “ongoing interactions with their environment.” It is probable that the women did not have an epiphany, but experienced a series of seismic events leading them to formulate organized responses to the injustices they consistently encountered. There is a clear link between the programs the three women developed and events from their pasts. As a domestic worker, Bolden was jailed for asserting her womanhood. Brayboy watched her children protest her employer’s discriminatory policies. Dove was forced to cross state lines to legally pursue a terminal degree at a desegregated university.

As the women’s careers advanced, they assumed positions of authority that directly addressed the existing socio-politico-economic inequities within their communities. The three women were preparing the residents of segregated communities for integrated workplaces, neighborhoods, and schools, or at the very least, desegregation. The women were able to identify the needs of the community because they were life-long residents of said neighborhoods. The


483 Ibid.
working class and low-income residents of Atlanta’s Southside believed that the Civil Rights Movement was passing them by and the “Negro” politicians elected to serve the community were in fact, self-serving. The working-poor residents believed that while the old guard black leadership claimed they spoke for the masses, their middle-class concerns reflected the wants of a few, not the needs of many.\footnote{David Andrew Harmon, \textit{Beneath the Image of The Civil Rights Movement and Race Relations, Atlanta, Georgia, 1946-1981} (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), 184. Hornsby, \textit{Black Power in Dixie}, 114.}

The historiography’s classical phase typically limits the roles of the indigenous leaders, and all but omits the black female indigenous leadership, which undermines their gravitas. One of the residual effects of mapping the national Movement over local leadership was that this omission narrowed the scope of the most remarkable mass movement in American history. This study seeks to widen the scope, and add a layer of depth through this gendered exploration of politically savvy and strategically powerful community advocates in leadership. Further, examining black leadership emphasizes the role of economic apartheid in enforcing oppression, and increases emphasis on the importance of the black community’s acquisition of economic empowerment. As discussed in an earlier chapter, Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s efforts were reminiscent of the Progressive Era when women created their own vehicles to drive their own ideas to fruition.

In the Movement discourse, black women’s leadership has generally been quantified as “community” or “civil rights” activism, which restricts the critique of the extent of influence wielded that was not rooted in church-based organizing. Doug McAdam writes about creating an “amended understanding of the civil rights movement,” by synthesizing “structuralist, culturalist,
and rationalist approaches” to the study of collective action.\textsuperscript{485} McAdam, a sociologist, built his theory on the foundation that one of the roots of the black protest movement was the importance of the African-Americans “institution”. Specifically, there were three institutions he acknowledged as the mainstays of the activist community: the black church, black colleges, and the southern chapters of the NAACP. McAdam credited these cultural stalwarts, and their memberships, as vital. These organizations housed Movement activity and the wellspring of leadership. In the most simplistic terms, the term “leader” denoted an influential individual whom others look to for guidance. Dorothy Bolden, Ella Mae Brayboy, and Pearlie Craft Dove meet McAdam’s criteria to be quantified as leadership. The women were community-based Christian leaders who attended, or worked for Atlanta University Center schools, were members of the NAACP, and who acquired a constituency.

In conducting research on Bolden, Brayboy and Dove, it is evident that the women’s activism has been sparingly introduced into Atlanta’s Civil Rights Movement historiography, though they have been recognized by churches, universities, and corporate sponsors as dedicated community activists. Cursory examinations of archival sources substantiate my thesis that the women should be identified as enduring leadership reflecting the continuity of black female activism. Their leadership was responsible for creating projects that promoted economic opportunities within the black community, and their abilities to navigate Atlanta’s power structure resulted in political influence within those same communities. Residual programs suggest that their activism influenced Black Atlanta, and resulted in national outreach. Due to Bolden and Dove’s appointments to national organizations, their methodologies were introduced

\textsuperscript{485} Doug McAdam, \textit{Political Process and Development of Black Insurgency}, viii. McAdam elaborated upon Aldon Morris’ text which outlined the relevance of the black institution to both the community and to Movement organizing.
to a wider audience. Brayboy pioneered the federally funded voting pilot program, which became the test model for other cities.

In the field of Movement scholarship, this dissertation establishes that the nature of the three women’s activism was political, intentional, and the result of crossing psychical distances. These three women ventured outside of the relative safety of their environments to challenge authority and the racial status quo. In challenging the white masculine power structure, (possibly the black power structure) and achieving positive outcomes, the women attained a base of support within the black community. Yet, with the exception of Brayboy’s singular attempt to run for a seat on the City Council, none of the women publicly flexed their political muscles. Their actions can cautiously be described as covert, because the women did not bring attention to themselves, but to their causes. Despite the women stepping into the public arena, this dissertation assesses their political power as covert partially due to their generationally-influenced adherence to the ideology of respectability, and because neither of the women were ever elected to public office. Conversely, they flouted convention by assuming authoritative positions. Based upon the sources available, the women did not appear to wield their power to trade favors, but to open doors on behalf of their communities that would have otherwise remained closed.

These three women did not establish groups to pursue integration. Yet they created means to economically empower Atlanta’s black residents. They did not wish to leave their homes in search of better communities, their belief was that their neighborhood was good, but would become better with equitable city services, schools, and amenities. The pursuit of civil rights was a by-product of their foremost efforts to improve the standard of life by economic development, enfranchisement, and ongoing efforts to increase access to educational opportunities. Although
the contributions of the women have been marginally recognized, there is a distinct lack of available studies critiquing their methodologies, and the implications of their work upon the national Movement landscape.

In selecting black women as research subjects, this dissertation is a continuum of the classic scholarship of Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham and Shirley J. Yee, and newer studies by Tera Hunter, Jessica Marie Johnson that focused on black female activists during the nineteenth century. Historians Jacqueline Anne Rouse, Glenda Gilmore, and Jacqueline Jones explore black women’s community activism during the first half of the twentieth century. Darlene Clark Hine, Belinda Robnett, Danielle McGuire, and Vicki Crawford define and reconstruct the parameters of black female leadership during the latter half of the twentieth century. This study documents Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s activism, and incorporates their contributions into the discourse on Atlanta’s indigenous leadership. This examination differs from previous explorations of Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s activism in that while the women should rightfully be identified as activists and leaders, they should also be credited with accruing enough power to disrupt the political machinations of segregation in Atlanta. This dissertation contends that the women were political forces that directly influenced the evolution of the voting process, and improved the educational opportunities, city services, and job options available to the Black Atlanta.

Another key intervention that arose out my research is based upon the variants in the three women’s lifestyles. The differences led to my identifying prosopography as the most effective framework with which to evaluate the women’s community advocacy. Because of their levels of education, backgrounds, and career choices, these three African-Americans women are accurate representations of indigenous black female leadership. As noted in above, Bolden was
unable or unwilling to complete high school due to her medical condition, Brayboy became engaged, and Dove obtained a terminal degree in another state. Bolden was a maid, Brayboy alternated between being a “stay-at-home-Mom,” and working various jobs, and Dove was a widowed college professor and a mother when their lives changed and they stepped into leadership roles. While they differed in careers, education, and income, certain characteristics connect the women. All developed or implemented programs designed to improve conditions in southwest Atlanta. Each emphasized voter registration within their respective organizations. All worked with political candidates and elected officials in varying capacities. All were responsible for continuing the tradition of resistance carried out by Maria W. Stewart, Sarah Mapp Douglass, Septima Clark, Fannie Lou Hamer, and Shirley Chisolm. Each believed that service to the community was her Christian duty. The idea of duty was planted by political active clergy and church members, and reinforced by the NAACP meetings that were held at the churches.

While the church may not have been their base of operations, the women believed that faith sustained them through all. Bolden moved away from Vine City several times between the ages of seventeen and twenty-three. After each sojourn, she returned home to Atlanta within three months because she was homesick for her family, her church, and her community. Bolden continually opted to return and remain and improve the city of her birth. Bolden believed that all of her life’s experiences were God “molding her” and preparing her for the founding of the NDWU. Even as a child, Bolden was faithful. When she was younger, she wanted to be a missionary. Brayboy served the church her entire adult life, in a number of laity roles until she

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487 Seifer, Nobody Speaks for Me!, 142.

488 Jean Tyson, “Dorothy Bolden Speaks for Herself, Others” Atlanta Journal and Constitution, November 21, 1976, 14-G.
became incapacitated by illness. Dove’s faith was reinforced by the grandfather who took her to church and school throughout her childhood. Dove often quoted one of her grandfather’s favorite sayings, “With God as our guide and family support, the world would make a beaten path to your door.”

The three women were devout Christians who were empowered by their belief systems when they stepped into the public arena of leadership.

When I began researching southern African-Americans women who served in leadership positions, a profile began to emerge that allowed me to pare down the much larger pool of subjects to Brayboy, Bolden, and Dove. The women I selected were from and lived in the segregated southwest Atlanta community they served, had careers, and ultimately, acquired political influence. Other commonalities eventually appeared; all three practiced a grassroots-style outreach, remained in the community where they grew up, and relied upon faith to guide their activism.

The shared commonalities were connected to community, both geographical and cultural, and the institutions therein. Constructing a prosopography, by connecting the women to study as a group, became a necessary methodology as biographical information on all three women was almost exclusively limited to the few existing oral interviews that seemed to emphasize vast dissimilarities. Additionally the dearth of available interviews and records limited my opportunities to fully extend the dissertation’s discussion of their differences. In-depth interviews were scarce. Those that do exist are perceptibly hampered by the women’s reluctance to extensively speak about their personal lives or offer expansive critique of black leadership and organizations. Interviews published by the mainstream newspaper or the black-owned media outlets were excellent sources of information, but were insufficient in terms of offering public

criticism. That lack speaks to the perception that the women, while being perceived as strong community advocates, were not seen as leaders. As I delved deeper into their backgrounds, I initially intended to incorporate a discussion of class into the study to support my analysis of their differences.

Initially, I reviewed studies that addressed the role of class. Many of the classic studies focused on differences between the legal, social, and economic privilege afforded to white Americans versus blacks’ second-class status as citizens. During the early 1990s, the discussion broadened to include intersectionality as defined by scholar Kimberle Crenshaw, as historically and foundationally relevant when producing contemporary Movement analysis. Intertwining race, gender, class, and other identities, evolved into a consistently theoretically sound approach to examining black women’s leadership; especially when dissecting the multiple oppressions black women faced during their quests for equality.490

Early drafts of the chapters broached the roles of class and intersectionality in studying the three women’s titles and roles within the NDWU, the VEP, and Clark College. However, research indicated that the women’s job titles did not correlate with their levels of responsibilities. Additionally, their levels of education did not inhibit their access to engage the support of Atlanta’s powerful elite. Interviews with the women indicate that each perceived herself as a Christian dedicated to serving the community while maintaining a career. Based on their backgrounds, it is seemingly obvious that Dove would self-identify as middle-class.

However, a close reading of Bolden and Brayboy’s interviews reveal that the two women also

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490 Kimberle Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color,” *Stanford Law Review*, 43, no. 6 (July 1991): 1241-1242. Crenshaw did not pioneer the intersectional framework, Claudia Jones, Angela Davis, Evelyn Higginbotham, and Cherrie Moraga are among those who wrote about multiple oppressions and dual identities. However Crenshaw’s study, grounded in identity politics, examined the race and gendered dimensions of structural racism on black women as a politicized systemic form of domination into the discourse. However, there have been subsequent studies that refute Crenshaw’s model as definitive.
perceived themselves as middle-class. Both Bolden and Brayboy referenced a few fairly standard markers of middle-class status; two-parent homes, mothers who were occasionally not compelled by economic circumstances to seek employment outside of the home, and home-ownership. On a professional level, each woman transitioned into authoritative positions, which could also arguably be used to assess class status.

The discussion of intraracial class conflict is typically included in studies which dissect the historical roles of class, gender and intraracial conflict within Movement organizing and leadership. Intersectionality speaks to the idea of “difference” versus inclusion and commonality among groups and/or organizations. In the literature, identifying leadership within Movement organizations has occasionally been based upon gender or class. In this study, identifying the three women’s activism to promote their political agenda of equality was based upon their aforementioned commonalities of race, gender, age, and community. Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove certainly encountered many obstacles in their pursuit of civil rights. However, in this study, class, gender, and intraracial differences were not categorized as points of division within their organizations or careers.⁴⁹¹ As a result, I did not emphasize intraracial differences or class status as focal points of interventions in critiquing the women’s contributions and leadership of the communities they served. However, class status is contextualized from the standpoint of the politics of respectability in specific examples, i.e. Dove’s personal revelation about how she realized she had become class conscious or Bolden’s declaration that she did not have trouble with men because she made it clear she was not “fast.”

⁴⁹¹There are also scholars who caution against interjecting intersectionality into the literature wherever the study includes black women. Jennifer Nash wrote that intersectionality has “demonstrated the ways in which difference can fracture seemingly unitary political movements, it has left activists struggling with balancing the efficiency of working ‘as women’ or ‘as blacks’ with the necessary attention to variation and diversity within ‘women’ and ‘blacks’.” Jennifer Nash, “re-thinking intersectionality,” Feminist Review, 89 (2008): 4.
In constructing the theoretical framework in which to critique the three women’s activism, I consulted sociological models. In the discipline of sociology, the theory of social mobilization in relation to status inconsistency is secondary to the idea of mass organization resulting from individuals reacting to the strain of being marginalized. The foundation of that theory implies that African-Americans leaders of social movements were pre-disposed toward joining Movement organizations because they were “aggrieved” members of the population, as opposed to, or in addition to, having “rising expectations” about their places in society or the desire for “occupational mobility”.

Historical documentation disproves the idea that mass mobilization activism was: 1) spur-of-the-moment, primarily emotionally-driven response to random acts of inequality, and 2) the singular most influential strategy toward affecting change on the local community level. As individuals, each woman’s activism was not a reaction to one particular injustice, but their life’s experiences. Bolden responded to institutional racism over two decades. Brayboy (over a two-year period) increased her activism before moving to making community advocacy a full-time occupation, in addition to working another full-time job. For Dove’s entire career as an educator, she prepared students to teach in an integrated society. These efforts bear the imprint of community development via long-term economic empowerment and self-sufficiency rather than the pursuit of self-improved lifestyles and follow the traditions of Lugenia Burns Hope, Mary McLeod Bethune, and Ida Barnett Wells.

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492 While Brown vs. Board of Education illustrated the psychological damages that segregation wrought upon the African-American population, McAdam indicates that the classic Movement narrative emphasizing the necessity of integration, while an acute factor, was not the sole factor. As early as 1966, scholar Joseph W. Scott published an article that noted as one of its conclusions that the “Movement was not simply a spontaneous response to the moving oratory of contemporary Negro leaders. Aspirations for power, dignity, and opportunity were planted years ago” based on the premise that the “near middle-class Negro” had been educated, was acculturated and was primed for success and only segregation was keeping him/her from it. Joseph W. Scott, “Social Class Factors Underlying the Civil Rights Movement”, Phylon, 27, no. 2 (1966): 144; Doug McAdam, Political Process and Development of Black, 12, 14-15.
Despite their very full lives, the three middle-aged women did not have the irrepressible energy of the student organizers or the cautious pragmatism of senior clergy in leadership but a combination of the two. The women possessed a stalwart determination to attack institutional racism by dismantling the very institutions that enforced legal segregation. Seeking better opportunities in their respective careers led to organic transitions into positions of authority. Because the institution of segregation was responsible for the marginalization, working to remove the benchmarks was the priority. By professionalizing and upgrading the perceptions of a disparaged industry, enfranchising, and educating, the women were an integral part of changing the status quo. Based upon reviewed archival sources, Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s activism does not appear to be perceived as closely connected with the local chapters of the national civil rights’ organizations, as a result, the residual effects upon the national Movement have yet to be fully studied academically. The research and anecdotal evidence suggests the women were not only key actors in the collective and sustained activities of the local Atlanta Movement, but were able to present their methodologies for promoting economic empowerment, political autonomy, and educational equality to national audiences.

Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove’s efforts were not individual acts. Their work reflects the spectrum of women’s activism across the social strata in Atlanta’s black community. The three women also reflected the mentoring to which they were exposed. Bolden worked with Grace Towns Hamilton, a member of black Atlanta’s elite, on her political campaign. Dove was influenced by Ruby Blackburn’s ideologies. Blackburn was a former domestic worker who became a beautician and later founded an African-Americans women’s voter’s league. Dove was aware that Blackburn joined forces with a white woman from the Druid Hills community to plant dogwood trees in both of their communities. Dove appeared to view those actions as a political
statement, and as equally as important Blackburn being the first black woman to run for a seat on
the Democratic Executive Committee in 1958. Dove recollected Blackburn sharing her ideas
while the beautician styled her hair. In an interview, Dove spoke about Bolden’s organizing the
maids as a political act.

Previous scholarship on the three women does not include intensive exploration of their
coping mechanisms, failures or long-range plans. Lars Christiansen’s dissertation presents
analysis of why the NDWU eventually closed its doors including Bolden’s poor health, domestic
workers’ increased ability to find work in an integrated Atlanta, and Bolden’s desire for the
organization demise to coincide with her own. Other works examine the NDWU’s relevance as
an organization, not Bolden’s relevancy as a leader. Research has not revealed any critique of
Brayboy aside from her failed bid for the City Council, which could be arguably construed as the
community’s lack of confidence in her ability to hold public office. There are several studies that
address the failures of The Atlanta Project, but no documentation suggests failure or lack of
effort on Dove’s behalf. The absence of critiques reflect another critical component missing from
the Movement narrative. The limited existing analyses indicate that the field is in dire need of
inclusive Movement scholarship studying the historical component of women’s leadership in
politics outside of elected office, as well as their influence on the city’s political climate.

In researching the three women’s lives, a different type of political influence appears, the
politics of respectability. The women carefully maintained their respective “irreproachable

493 Blackburn lost the election. Blackburn was denied admission to the Atlanta League of Women because
she was black. However, she negotiated with a few League members to assist her in founding the Georgia League of
Negro Women. The ultimate goal of the League was that every woman be enfranchised. The League offered
educational sessions on prospective candidates’ platforms, civil services, neighborhood conditions such as sewer
conditions and slum clearances. Blackburn, like Bolden, also worked on an educational campaign with the Atlanta
School Board to open an elementary school in the Dixie Hills community when the School Board had planned to
close it after whites moved from the area. Blackburn opened the Atlanta Cultural League Training Center on
Auburn Avenue as an educational center which emphasized professionalizing and enhancing the skills of those in
the service industries. Dove interview, Nasstrom. Herman Mason, Jr., Politics, Civil Rights, & Law in Black
public personas”. The importance of character and virtue in a black woman’s public life were readily apparent during the three women’s political phases. Typically, Brayboy and Dove’s personal beliefs were not publically discussed.

Seemingly, Bolden was more willing to discuss her views on topical matters. Bolden believed that she did not experience discrimination as a woman in a leadership position because she “went in as a well-mannered woman who commanded respect and was not flirty.”494 She proclaimed that through being poor and a domestic worker, she was still a woman, “I am still a woman. I hold up my womanhood…”495 Respectability and the woman’s place in society appear to have been important enough to Bolden that she indirectly acknowledged its relevance in several interviews. She stated that she believed that women had roles, and it was not the woman’s place to take over for men. Bolden believed that “women haven’t been denied their God-given rights” because she had the “freedom to do what she wanted.”496 In Sociologist Elizabeth Beck’s article, *The National Domestic Workers Union and the War on Poverty*, described Bolden as a “third generation domestic worker.”497 However, Bolden did not describe herself as such. In Bolden’s self-assessment, she as well as the other women in her family, were respectable entrepreneurs and professionals. Bolden identified as a feminist in her support of equal pay and collective organizing. Yet she also declared there was much she disliked about the

494 Bolden, Stewart interview.

495 Tyson, “Dorothy Bolden Speaks for Herself, (14G).


497 Beck, National Domestic Workers Union, 201.
Women’s Movement. Bolden disagreed with the feminist movement’s stances on abortion, and her perception was that the Women’s Movement “disdained” marriage and motherhood.\textsuperscript{498}

In direct contrast, Brayboy did not speak out publicly on feminism or respectability. Based on archival sources, she did not address whether she experienced sexism. As noted in previous chapters, not only did Brayboy refrain from discussing her personal beliefs, she resisted being interviewed. When she did speak publicly, the content was restricted to the cause she was promoting. When I attempted to interview Brayboy in 2001, I asked her if she was a feminist, and if she considered her work feminism. She simply said, “no” without expounding.\textsuperscript{499} Here again, Brayboy’s reticence to divulge personal details limit academic exploration of her beliefs.

Dove shared an experience where her personal politics interfered with her public interactions. During Dove’s first opportunity working with low-income children, she described herself as openly judgmental of the needs of the children she was hired to teach. The number of unwashed students that she encountered, whom she also described as having “emotional hang-ups”, overwhelmed her.\textsuperscript{500} Dove characterized herself as “saturated with middle-class values,” so much so that she went into “cultural shock” and “recoiled…from the door-key children whose parents had gone to work early to take care of other people’s kids.”\textsuperscript{501} Dove believed that although she said the right things to them, her posture and tone reflected her distaste.

\textsuperscript{498}Dorothy Bolden, “You Can’t Talk About Women’s Rights Until We Include All Women,” 302.

\textsuperscript{499}I met with Brayboy in 2001 to interview her at her home. She did not answer any of my questions but directed me to previously printed interviews. She would not discuss personal questions. She stated “she did not have anything to talk about.”

\textsuperscript{500}Dove interview, Nasstrom.

As a result, Dove did not connect with the children, which caused her to submit a letter of resignation. Irene Harris, Dove’s mentor, refused to accept her resignation and insisted that Dove work harder to gain trust and build credibility with the students.\footnote{Dove interview, Nasstrom. Harris was the branch’s Executive Director and Dove’s sorority sister. Harris mentored and hired Dove. Harris had experienced crossing psychical distance as she completed her work at the Ohio School of Social Work.} Dove stayed at the YWCA and worked to build a sustainable program. Once Dove realized that she was resigning because she did not want to fail, she was able to look beyond the “odors” and disagreeable personalities. She ascertained that many of the children did not have adults at home to enforce the practices of personal cleanliness, so Dove decided to approach teaching the children as if they were young adults. Dove also decided she needed help. Dove contacted a public health nurse to teach about personal hygiene. Dove taught the students how to make inexpensive egg dishes.\footnote{Dove interview, Nasstrom.} Through her experience with working at the YWCA, she began to understand the importance of developing instructional programming that was tailored to speak to the needs of a wider audience. She also realized her personal bias was inhibiting her professionalism. Her idea of respectability was hindering how she educated the “great unwashed.” Four decades later, Dove returned to serving the working-class and working-poor as a coordinator with The Atlanta Project.

The women’s activist interests occasionally intersected. In 1971, the National Office of the Women’s Bureau (U.S. Department of Labor) formed Black Women’s Consultation Steering Committees in thirteen cities across the United States. The steering committees were charged with identifying and recommending actions that would alleviate economic, political and social barriers affecting the achievements of Black Women. The group formed in Atlanta remained intact after the completion of the national projects and in 1973, was incorporated as the Black...
Women’s Coalition of Atlanta, Inc. (BWCA). As members of the Black Women’s Coalition of Atlanta, the women’s paths crossed.  

Brayboy and Bolden worked together, and held office with the organization, Black Women’s Coalition of Atlanta. In 1973, two of the three women served as executive officers, Bolden was the second Vice President and Brayboy was the Recording Secretary. The organization invited all of the mayoral candidates for that year to come speak at a forum addressing critical issues pertinent to all women. Members of the Coalition scheduled consciousness-raising sessions, trained executive officers, offered leadership training, and requested political candidates to come directly into the community they purported serving. Four years prior to her death, Dove was a member of the Atlanta City Council Commission Commemorating Ella Mae Wade Brayboy. The group was dedicated to commemorating Brayboy’s activism by naming a park after her.

These women loved their communities. Dove called southwest Atlanta, her Camelot. Bolden publicly declared that “everyone did not want to leave” [the community]. As long as Brayboy was physically able, she worked to improve her neighborhood. Hobson’s dissertation argues that Atlanta was home to a “particular strand” of Black Nationalism. This Nationalism emerged as white business-run Atlanta transitioned into becoming a competing player in international business/politics, and the majority of black Atlanta remained disfranchised. Yet, the


506The City of Atlanta approved Resolution 13-R-0642, creating a commission to honor and memorialize Brayboy.

507Ibid.
community became increasingly divided between the black have and have-nots.\textsuperscript{508} Hobson’s work specifically addresses the marginalization that Atlanta’s black working-class felt as the city became a global economic player. I am not labeling Bolden, Brayboy, and Dove as black nationalists, but their particular style of leadership emphasizing community-oriented consciousness speaks to residents engaged in Hobson’s “particular strand” of uplift, the disfranchised working-class who sought to remain in their own communities.

6.1 Legacies of Enduring Leadership

In later years, Bolden acknowledged that she never envisioned NDWU operating as a traditional union or adopting methods such as striking as a negotiating tactic. Bolden’s purpose was to train, provide social services, advocate, and increase wages.\textsuperscript{509} In summary, Bolden sought to professionalize the field in Atlanta, and to change the domestic worker’s image from that of unskilled worker to trained professional. Bolden did not intend for the Union to live on after her death. She believed that the Union was her calling and not an entity to exist into perpetuity.\textsuperscript{510}

All three women remained residents of southwest Atlanta until the end of their lives, the community bears the imprint of their activism. Bolden’s legacy is somewhat less tangible than Brayboy’s or Dove’s. In 2005, Bolden’s lost her life in a house fire. Her community imprint is reflected in the domestic workers who were able to command a fair wage even after the Union’s numbers dwindled and the NDWU closed. Brayboy worked until illness stopped her, she died in 2010. Although neither the buildings nor the programs are named after Brayboy, her legacy


\textsuperscript{509}Beck, “National Domestic Workers Union,” 203.

\textsuperscript{510}Bolden, Lutz interview.
literally stands by the way of the geriatric unit at Grady, the retirement center, the lifetime of registering over ten thousand voters, and a public park named in her honor. Dove was a member of the City Council Commission, her neighborhood watch, the Neighborhood Planning Unit and the Washington Park Conservancy effort until congenital heart failure ended her life in 2015. Dove’s legacy is the number of educators she taught and trained, the curriculum she developed and the gift of philanthropy. The proceeds from the sales of her book *Pearls of Wisdom*, undergird the Dr. Pearlie Dove Community Council Scholarship Award.  

Above all else, it is evident the women found their true purposes, to change lives by challenging the institution of segregation, offering economic uplift, educating, training, enfranchising, providing aid and loving the residents of their beloved southwest Atlanta community. Their legacies are still standing.

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