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A study of Black female political participation in Atlanta, Georgia

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ABSTRACT

AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDIES

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A STUDY OF BLACK FEMALE POLITICAL
PARTICIPATION IN ATLANTA, GEORGIA

Advisor: Dr. William Boone
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Dr. David Dorsey

Thesis dated May 1998

This thesis will examine historical and contemporary forms of black women's political participation in America. This research will also examine a 1997 survey of black women's political participation in Atlanta, Georgia to argue that contemporary black women's activism has encompassed both electoral and non-electoral activism and is not atypical. Most of the existing research on women, however, posits black women's activism to be an anomaly. However, black women have participated in both traditional and non-traditional forms of political activity. It is argued that black women's level and style of political activism has been influenced by race, gender, and economic factors.
A STUDY OF BLACK FEMALE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION
IN ATLANTA, GEORGIA

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
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THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF AFRICAN AND AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDIES

BY
CARMEN V. WALKER

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS** ........................................... ii

Chapter

1. **INTRODUCTION** ................................. 1

   Black women's political participation 1519-1870

   Black women's political participation
   Reconstruction-World War II

   Black women's political participation
   World War II-Present

2. **BLACK WOMEN AND THE STUDY OF BLACK**
   POLITICAL PARTICIPATION .............................. 23

3. **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK** .......................... 42

4. **POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: AN OVERVIEW** ........ 51

5. **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR**
   BLACK WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION ........ 60

   Black Women's Political Culture

6. **BLACK WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN ATLANTA** 72

7. **SURVEY OF BLACK WOMEN IN ATLANTA** ............ 80

8. **CONCLUSION** ............................................. 88

**APPENDIX**

   Black Women's Political Participation
   in Atlanta Survey ........................................ 93

   GLOSSARY .................................................... 100

   BIBLIOGRAPHY ................................................ 102

    iii
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Black political participation is not a new topic. Uncovering Black women's political contributions is perhaps a more challenging inquiry. This is due to the parameters outlined for examining political participation in general, black political participation and women's political participation in particular.

Since our struggles against slavery, black men and women have worked both outside and inside the American political system in efforts to influence government and public polices. Consequently black political participation has taken both conventional and nonconventional forms. However, because of traditional assumptions about the meaning of democracy and emphasis on winning democratic elections, attention has focused primarily on electoral participation. Studies, therefore, on political participation have generally highlighted voting, political party behavior, monetary contributions to parties or candidates, and overall political socialization. Examining the history of blacks in the American political system, however, leads one to conclude that a study limited to electoral politics will not give a complete picture of black
men's and women's political behavior. As helpful as these studies are, Hanes Walton found that behavioral studies on traditional forms of political behavior failed to demystify the entire political body. Instead of exposing the obstacles that have both hindered and encouraged ingenious forms of political behavior, the behavioral revolution, which paved the way in the analysis of political behavior, "objectively" found new methods of supporting existing discriminatory structures by focusing on the social and economic "problems" of individuals instead of racist, sexist, and classist institutions and structures. For example, Walton's study found that political behavioralists studying black political behavior argued that alienation, apathy, low income and education were primary determinants of political voting behavior. Needless to say, Walton concluded that these studies have left a need for analysis of the more invisible forms of political participation and factors contributing to this behavior.

When studying black political participation, multidimensional analysis has uncovered many obstacles to full political participation. Walton found that black political behavior could not be completely explained by socio-economic factors and other psycho-social variables. Defining black political behavior in Invisible Politics, Walton argued that black political behavior was,

a function of individual and systemic forces, of "inner" and "outer" forces, of intrapsychic and
societal realities, of things seen and unseen, of sociopsychological and material forces, of micro and macro influences.¹

In contrast to Walton's definition, other political behavioralists studying black political behavior argued that the best explanations or definitions could be found by examining several indexes - socioeconomic status, fear and apathy, and group consciousness. Matthew and Prothro argued that higher socioeconomic status positively influenced political participation. Lester Salamon put forth a second, more controversial, explanation that that fear and apathy determined the different levels of participation. Lastly, Sidney Verba and Norman Nie argued that black political behavior could be explained by analyzing levels of group consciousness. Their studies concluded that blacks have the lowest socio-economics status and the highest levels of alienation and apathy. When self-awareness and group consciousness were measured (controlling other variables like socio-economics and other psychological factors) blacks had higher participation rates than whites. While these conclusions were disheartening, studies like Verba and Nie's were more encouraging. Still they nevertheless sought to explain political behavior without the examination of laws, institutions and practices which also influenced black political behavior. Walton's work was influential in

revealing weaknesses such as these. By examining only individual or group behavior and not the existing laws and political structures, Walton showed how these studies were produced to influence future public policies and programs not aimed toward benefitting blacks but rather toward continuously reminding blacks why and how our economic, political and social positions in America were, in the end, a result of our own behavior and not racist, sexist, and classist laws, structures, and practices.

Although Walton's work led the way toward a new analysis of black political behavior, a second look at his work revealed that the "political man" was highlighted at the expense of the "political woman." Throughout Invisible Politics, black political life was presented as a giant monolith. While Walton's book looked at several dimensions of political activity, no attention was paid to the additional differences sexism and classism have created in the types and levels of black female political behavior. For example, when studying black voting behavior, his analysis began with the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment. This Civil War Amendment enfranchised black men, not black women. Quickly, after the discussion of the Fifteenth Amendment, the 1965 Voting Rights Act is highlighted. However, between 1870 and 1965 black women's political activism and achievements were most notable. In fact, black women's marginalized political behavior was so
influential white politicians like Ben "Pitchfork" Tillman remarked, "Experience has taught us that Negro women are much more aggressive in asserting the 'rights of the race' than the Negro men are." In addition to Tillman, a Mississippi Senator by the name of J.K. Vardaman added, "The Negro woman will be more offensive, more difficult to handle at the polls than Negro men."²

Black Women's Political Participation 1519-1870

Between 1519 and 1870 black women's political participation covered various community concerns and issues. In "In Quest of African American Political Woman," Jewell Prestage argued that black women have always engaged in both traditional and non-traditional political activities.³ Prestage argued that while public policies precluded black male and female traditional political participation, both enslaved and free black women engaged in non-traditional political participation aimed at changing public policies. For example, enslaved women organized both collectively and individually to fight slavery. These forms of political activity ranged from slave revolts, the practice of infanticide, mothering, and running away.⁴ Historical


⁴Ibid., 91.
accounts have been written which document the efforts of Harriet Tubman and her Underground Railroad operation. In There Is A River, Vincent Harding argued that black women were "regular participants in the struggle for freedom."

During the slave trade, Harding contended that black women were given greater freedom aboard slave ships because they were considered to be passive and weak. However, in 1721 on the English ship, Robert, this freedom allowed them to inform their male counterparts of the best time to attack.

Toni Morrison's novel, Beloved, told a fictional account of Margaret Garner, who ran away from a Kentucky slave master in 1856. After running away to Cincinnati she killed her daughter rather than give her up to the slave master. Free black women also fought against the public policy of slavery. Forming some of the first abolitionist organizations like the Massachusetts Female Anti-Slavery Society and the Afric--American Female Intelligence Society, these women published articles and pamphlets which argued against slavery. Individually black women purchased slaves in order to grant them freedom. Suzanne Lebstock's, work, The Free Women of Petersburg: Status & Culture In A Southern Town - 1784-1860, gave examples of black women who purchased

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family members and others in the slave community.\textsuperscript{6} Black women also worked within other abolitionist organizations. Maria Stewart and Sojourner Truth were two such women. In 1832, Stewart became the first woman to speak publicly against slavery to a mixed crowd of men and women.

\textbf{Black Women Political Participation Reconstruction - WWI}

After the Lincoln Administration passed the 15th Amendment which enfranchised black men only, black women were disappointed but not daunted. Although black women did not have the right to vote, Prestage contends black women actively sought to influence the political decisions of their male counterparts.\textsuperscript{7} Prestage noted that some women in Louisiana continuously followed their state politicians around in efforts to influence legislation. Additionally, they attended political meetings and published documents in efforts to affect public policy.\textsuperscript{8} During the Reconstruction period Prestage also noted that black women sought to rebuild their families through marriage and by finding lost relatives. Black women, attempting to develop their roles in society, educated themselves and achieved economic success for themselves and their families. During


\textsuperscript{7}Prestage, 92.

\textsuperscript{8}Ibid.
this period white women distanced themselves from the concerns of black women. Many black women, however, continuously fought within those groups while other black women organized their own instruments for political activity. While winning the ballot was a major concern for black women, so were other issues affecting the black community. For example, in "Self Help Programs As Educatve Activities of Black Women in the South, 1895-1925: Focus on Four Key Areas," Cynthia Neverdon-Morton chronicled the activism of local groups like the Tuskegee Women's Club in Alabama, led by Mrs Margaret M. Washington, who worked toward "uplifting the race" through the development and funding of various educational programs.¹⁰

In Virginia, black women's and girls clubs were responsible for improving race relations between black and white communities and leaders.¹¹ Furthermore, Lugenia Hope and the Neighborhood Union organization, working along with Atlanta Anti-Tuberculosis Association, in Atlanta was successful in campaigning and organizing for better health and sanitation provisions in the black community.¹²


¹¹Ibid., 926,927.

¹²Ibid., 928-930.

¹²Ibid., 930-932.
Finally, Neverdon-Morton, described the efforts of Baltimore's black women's organizations. After the 1904 fire which virtually destroyed Baltimore, The Baltimore Colored Empty Stocking and Fresh Air Circle worked toward providing fire victims with much needed clothing and other necessities.  

Salem's article also listed other local organizations like the Dorcas Society, Sisterly Union, United Daughters of Wilberforce, Daughters of Absalom, and the African Female Union. These organizations, along with others like them, provided literacy programs, fought against crime, fought for social reform and provided other community needs. As local organizations matured the development of collective efforts also increased.

In her article "To Better Our World: Black Women in Organized Reform 1890-1920" Dorothy Salem argued that 1890 marked the beginning of the black women's club movement. Dorothy Salem contended that black women's commitment to issues transcended "regional and denominational differences." Additionally several incidents, like lynching, pushed local organization to organize nationally to promote the needs of black women and the community. Lastly, the development of local leadership helped to set

13Ibid., 933.
14Salem, 7.
15Dorothy Salem, To Better Our World Black Women in Organized Reform 1890-1920 (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Inc., 1990), 12.
the foundation for national initiatives. During the first World War, black women provided services for the black community and black officers going off to war. In New York, Susan Elizabeth Frazier and others organized the Women's Auxiliary Unit within New York's Fifteenth Regiment. This Auxiliary helped to win commendations for black officers and investigated exemption claims. Organizations like the Indiana Federation of Colored Women's Clubs created the State Female War Effort. In New Jersey the Colored Women's Volunteer League also developed a special female war effort division. Besides developing independent war efforts black women were also dedicated enough to work within segregated organizations like the Red Cross and the YWCA in efforts to improve medical, recreational and nutritional facilities. After the war local and regional organizations banned together under the National Association for Colored Women. With the leadership of Mary Talbert, this organization was the first black organization to mobilize people for an anti-lynching campaign.

During the First World War, there was also an increase in employment opportunities for black women. Black women

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16Ibid., 203.
17Ibid., 207.
18Ibid., 203-205.
19Ibid., 232.
worked as chambermaids, washerwomen, cooks, nurses, seamstress, and farmhands. Unfortunately many black women both in the south and in the northern urban areas found themselves in deplorable conditions. Dolores Janiewski argued that these women faced conditions that could easily be compared to slavery. In "Discontented Black Feminists: Prelude and Postscript to the Passage of the Nineteenth Amendment," Rosalyn Terborg-Penn cited a 1920 study by Benjamin Brawley. This Howard University professor found that in 1910 over half of the one million black women employed worked as farmers or farm laborers and a little over a quarter of black women worked as cooks or washerwomen. During this period women like Amy Jacques Garvey and Mary McCleod Bethune organized to raise the status of black women. In "Race, Sex, and Class: Black Female Tobacco Workers in Durham, North Carolina, 1920-1940, and the Development of Female Consciousness," Beverly W. Jones contended that black women's clubs were helpful in allowing black women to create a sense of "group


22Ibid., 269.
consciousness" or autonomy in order to fight for and protect themselves both on and off the job.\textsuperscript{23} Individual women like Mary E. Jackson helped to organize investigations into unfair employment practices in New York and other industrial areas.\textsuperscript{24} In "Sisters Under Their Skins: Southern Working Women, 1880-1950," Janiewski argued that black women organized societies in efforts to strike for better wages. Additionally, if striking was not possible, black women used migration as a strategic tactic. While organizing to uplift the race and change public policies which discriminated against themselves and the community, black women, on the eve of the passage of the 19th Amendment, still fought for the ballot despite the "unsisterly" acts of their white suffragist sisters.

Black women did not limit their participation to non-electoral activities. While black and white women both campaigned for suffrage rights, Paula Giddings argued that black women took their voting rights more seriously.\textsuperscript{25} For example, Adella Hunt Logan argued,

\begin{quote}
The fashion of saying I do not care to meddle with politics is disappearing among the colored woman faster
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{24}Salem, 215.

\textsuperscript{25}Giddings, 119.
than most people think, for this same woman has learned
that politics meddle constantly with her and hers. 26
Yet women like Carrie Chapman Catt, a major white female
suffragist remarked, "she didn't know what the vote was - a
right, duty, or privilege . . but whatever it was, women
wanted it." 27 As Gidding documented in her work, When and
Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in
America, it became apparent that white women only wanted
suffrage rights to gain access to power already held by
their counterparts. 28 During the women's suffrage movement
many white female suffrage organizations joined their white
brothers in efforts to maintain southern white supremacy.
Organizations like the Southern States Woman Suffrage
Conference, and later National American Women's Suffrage
Association pushed for limited suffrage rights. This tactic
was thought to be an "expedient" means of limiting the black
female vote and eliminating an effective black political
bloc. 29 Major black female suffragists like Ida Wells-
Barnett, who founded the first Black women's suffrage
organization, Mary Church Terrell of the National

27 Ibid., 125.
28 Ibid., 125-128.
29 Jane E. Schultz, "States' rights or women's rights?--New Women of the New South: The Leaders of the
Association of Colored Women, Adella Hunt Logan of the Tuskegee Woman's Club, and Lugenia Burns-Hope of the Atlanta Neighborhood Union also played major roles in the suffrage movement, yet their achievements along with other black female suffragists have been marginalized in favor of white female suffragists like Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Caddy Stanton, who did not completely support black women's voting rights due to "inexpediency." Nevertheless, in spite of the many racist and sexist schemes used to limit or eliminate black women's suffrage efforts, black women still attempted and in some cases registered to vote in large numbers after the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham noted in "Clubwomen and Electoral Politics in the 1920's" that the heavy emphasis placed on non-electoral participation would leave one to believe that because of the obstacles of race, class, and gender individual black women and black female club organizations turned away from traditional or electoral political participation to focus on such areas as "social service efforts, antilynching campaigns, and other Third World causes," however, such is not the case.

Higginbotham asserts that this conclusion "underestimates

30Gidding, 126.

the historical achievements and interests of black women leaders in the electoral process. Rosalyn Terborg-Penn argued that during the suffrage movement and immediately following the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, "antiblack woman suffrage sentiments plagued the Movement." White female and male suffrage supporters attempted to enact legislation like the Susan B. Anthony Amendment. This amendment was introduced during the National American Women's Suffrage Association Jubilee Convention in Saint Louis in March 1919. It was hoped that if passed this amendment would allow southern states to determine black women's suffrage rights." In addition to acts such as these, national suffrage organizations such as NAWSA denied membership to black women's organizations such as the Northeastern Federation of Colored Women's Clubs due to "inexpediency." When other organizations were faced with the possibility of black female membership, like the Woman Suffrage League of Jacksonville, they reorganized under new names in order to commit themselves to white supremacy." In Texas, where women had the right to vote before the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, "grandmother clauses" were enacted to prevent black women from exercising their

"Terborg-Penn, 263-265.

"Ibid., 264.

"Ibid., 265.
right to vote."

Black women also faced discrimination at registration sites. According to Terborg-Penn, black women were required to pay excessive poll taxes and take reading and writing exams aimed at disqualifying them from voting. When approached for help, Terborg-Penn argues the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was only able to offer valuable but limited assistance. Consequently, even when black women sought the assistance of national women's suffrage groups they were turned away because their problems were considered to be issues related to racism and not sexism."

Black Women's Political Participation—WWII through Present

Prestage noted in her article that after the Hayes-Tilden compromise many of the political, economic and social achievements gained by blacks in the south were violently erased. This had serious political effects on the voice of blacks, since a majority of blacks lived in southern states. After white Democrats regained control of southern political reins, they created many devices aimed at eliminating black political participation— at least in the electoral realm. Poll taxes, grandfather clauses, literacy tests, and white primaries are just a few of the devices

3Ibid., 266.
36Ibid., 267.
37Presage, 92.
that were used to prevent black men and women from either registering to vote or voting in a meaningful way until 1965. In this period black women used non-traditional forms of political activity in efforts to get Federal government legislation enacted for the right to vote and protection from lynching. Prestage noted that lobbying and litigation were two strategies successfully employed by black women during this period. For example, Constance Baker Motley worked as legal counsel for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and Thomasina Norford lobbied for the American Council on Human Rights in Washington, D.C. Additionally, other women were instrumental within organizations like the NAACP during significant court cases which challenged the laws which discriminated against black men and women. In South Carolina Modjeska Simkins, for example, worked with teachers who fought and won for the equalization of teachers' salaries. Barbara Woods noted that Simkins was the only woman appointed to a committee of four to raise money for the teachers' litigation. Additionally, she worked with the South Carolina chapter of the NAACP during the cases which

3Ibid., 95-96.

3Ibid.

challenged the white primaries. Again Woods, noted that Simkins was "actively involved in planning court proceedings and she attended the court sessions both in Columbia and Washington D.C." Fannie Lou Hammer is a well known civil rights activist. Mamie Locke contended that many women, like Hammer, became "key elements" in the Civil Rights Movement because of their ability to assert and articulate the needs of the entire community. Hamer was a successful grassroots organizer because of statements like "whether you have a Ph.D., D.D., or no D., we're in this bag together. And whether you're from Morehouse or Nohouse, we're still in this bag together." Hamer worked to help people register to vote, assisted in the development of welfare programs, and helped to circulate petitions in efforts to get federal assistance for needy families. Working as field secretary for the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, Hamer put her life on the line. As co-chair of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, she protested the exclusion of blacks from the state Democratic party. Another not so well known woman of the Civil Rights Era is

"Ibid., 108.


"Ibid., 35.

"Ibid., 30-37."
Gloria Richardson. She became the first female leader of a major civil rights movement in Cambridge, Maryland. Most attention is paid to the civil rights activities of the South. However, blacks in northern regions also had to fight for political, economic, and social rights during this period.45 In "Gloria Richardson and the Cambridge Movement," Annette Brock discussed the efforts of Richardson's fight against poverty, unemployment, and segregated housing and schools.46 As the first non-southern grass roots movement, the Cambridge Non-Violent Action Committee was also the first movement to focus on the economic plight of blacks.47 In "The Role of Black Women in the Civil Rights Movement," Anne Stanley discussed many other well known and not so well known female contributors to the movement.48

For example as chair of the Women's Political Council in Montgomery, Alabama and board member of the Montgomery Improvement Association, Jo Ann Robinson fought to improve the status of juvenile and adult


"Ibid.

"Ibid., 124.

delinquents." Joyce Ladner worked as a SNCC volunteer in Mississippi. After becoming "disillusioned" with the civil rights agenda, Ladner considered a more radical alternative for black equality through the examination of Marxism. Other women like Septima Clark, Daisy Bates, Kathleen Cleaver, and Ella Baker were also chronicled for their significant yet silent achievement during this period. During the 1960's black women continued to make inroads for the improvement of themselves and their community. The autobiographies of women like Angela Davis, Assata Shakur, and Elaine Brown give testimony to their leadership and grassroots contributions during the Black Power Movement. While many black women worked on various grassroots campaigns to secure the political, economic, and social rights of blacks during this period, other women continued this war as elected officials. In her article "Black Women in Politics: A Research Note," Shiela Harmon-Martin contended that despite the obstacles of racism and sexism black women made significant strides as elected public officials during this period, including Crystal Bird Fauset who was the first black women to be seated in the Pennsylvania State Legislature in 1938.\(^5\) Harmon-Martin

\(^4\)Ibid., 187.
\(^5\)Ibid., 193.
estimated that in 1969 black women comprised only 10 percent of the state elected officials. However, between 1976-1986 that number doubled to 27 percent. The greatest number of black women were in "education-related offices on state education agencies and municipal level offices." On the national level Harmon-Martin credited Shirley Chisholm with her pioneering efforts in 1968, Barbara Jordan and Yvonne Braithwaite Burke, who were also elected to the House of Representatives in 1972 from Texas and California respectively, Cardiss Collins, who was elected from Illinois in 1973, and Katie Hall of India in 1982. Harmon-Martin also noted that by 1994 ten black women held offices in the House of Representatives. Black women have made runs for the presidency and vice presidency. In "Black Female Presidential Candidates: Bass, Mitchell, Chisholm, Wright Reid, Davis, and Fulani," Hanes Walton argued that women continued to influence government on the national level. Charlotta Bass, was the first black woman to run for vice president. In 1952 Bass ran on the Progressive Party

(209-217).

53Ibid., 210.

54Ibid., 210-211.


56Ibid., 257.
ticket and was supported by people like W.E.B. DuBois and Paul Robeson. Charlene Mitchell ran on the Communist ticket in 1968. In 1972 Shirley Chisholm sought the Democratic nomination for president. The Socialist Worker's Party nominated Willie Mae Reid in 1976 and in 1992 she ran as their vice-presidential nominee. Margaret Wright ran for the presidency in 1976 for the People's Party. Angela Davis, was nominated by the Communist Party to run in 1980 and 1984 as vice president. An in 1992 Lenora B. Fulani ran for president on the New Alliance Party's ticket. As a side note, historically, third parties have not been very successful in American politics. However, Walton noted that Fulani's third party efforts were significant in that she was the first black and female candidate to get on the ballot in all fifty states.56

These are but a few examples of the political achievements of black women. Yet as Angela Davis contended there still remains a paucity of work on black women's achievements, both traditional and non-traditional, in the realm of political activity.57

56Ibid., 265.

CHAPTER 2
BLACK WOMEN AND THE STUDY OF BLACK POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Examining both "women's" political participation and "black's" political participation reveals how the intersectionality of race, class, and gender has created peculiar experiences for black women as we relate to ourselves, our community, and society.¹ These same dimensions have also worked to marginalize the political voices of black women in research on political activism. The more "appropriate" texts or gender studies attempting to dispel sexist myths about women have essentialized and normed the white woman's political experience. On the other hand, research focusing on black politics have equated and generalized primarily from the political experiences of black men. Consequently in spite of historical and contemporary evidence of black women's political activism, our political lives have been rendered invisible. Patricia Hill Collins asserts that the suppression of black women's achievements and the products of their knowledge help to maintain structured relationships based on sex, class, and

race inequality. The suppression of black women's achievements and knowledge are continued attempts to render us invisible objects. Seemingly, those who have no achievements and produce no knowledge cannot call themselves into being. For black women, our invisibility is critical because our responses to race, class, and gender oppression constantly challenge the stability of a patriarchal society. Hence our "unwomanly" responses to the "triple constraints" of race, sex, and class forced the introduction of negative images which aimed to devalue our efforts.

Although images and stereotypes are seen as independent descriptors, their societal function is critical to the maintenance of a society based on race, sex, and class inequality. Hazel Carby asserts that images and stereotypes are created to "function as a disguise, or mystification, of objective social relations." Carby contends that the images of black womanhood, as they were juxtaposed with the images of white womanhood, were created during the slave era. Engendered during the antebellum and Civil War period, Carby argues, these images were created and perpetuated to "resolve contradictions in the

2Ibid.


Ibid., 20.
sets of social relations in which women were located."\(^5\)

Just as the dominant ideology, "cult of true womanhood," worked to govern the behavior of white women, negative images and stereotypes of black womanhood were used as constant reminders of the consequences of moving beyond prescribed womanly parameters. True womanhood called for women to strive toward the four cardinal virtues - piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. Fulfillment and embodiment of these characteristics were supposed to guarantee happiness and power.\(^6\) To be pure and pious, women were told to repress their sexuality and maintain a "chaste reputation." Carby contends that embodiment of such behaviors reflected middle to upper class mores and were considered valuable commodities for the "prime objective of a woman's life was to obtain a husband and then to keep him pleased. These duties focused entirely on bearing and rearing heirs and caring for the household."\(^7\) Thus, the threat of being labeled unwomanly and undesirable worked to constrict white women's behavior for the purpose of perpetuating white male privileges to his posterity.

These images and stereotypes also allowed white males to perpetuate sexual and economic exploitation of black women, while blaming black women for their own oppression.

\(^5\) Ibid., 24.  
\(^6\) Ibid., 23.  
\(^7\) Ibid., 26.
Collins, hooks and Carby all assert that four interrelated images of black womanhood were fostered - the mammy, matriarch, Jezebel, and sapphire, to control black women's and white women's behavior.

According to Collins, the mammy symbolized the ideal black woman and aimed to shape black women's behavior. As a faithful and obedient domestic servant, black women were supposed to be unquestionably devoted to white male power. Sacrificing their own needs and the needs of their families, black women were expected to be continuously warm and nurturing.\(^8\) To resolve social contradictions created by the economic exploitation of black female slave labor, the image of matriarch was created to describe women who possessed "great strength, extraordinary appetite, and the ability to bear excessive fatigue."

\[^9\]

The matriarch was considered to be the image of the black woman who failed to fulfill her traditional "womanly" duties. Her aggressiveness and strength were the cause for the emasculation of her male counterpart. This image portrayed black woman as the cause and perpetuator of bad values and the ultimate oppressor of the black race. According to Collins, this image described black women who did not conform to the ideals of the "cult of true womanhood."\(^10\)

\[^8\]Ibid.

\[^9\]Ibid., 25.

\[^10\]Ibid., 75.
While white women were encouraged to suppress their sexual appetites, black women's sexuality served as the basis for their sexual exploitation. The image of Jezebel was born. The sexual violence against black women could partly be attributed to the economic gains of "breeding" black women.\(^{11}\) A. Leon Higginbotham noted that by 1662 colonial courts constitutionally sanctioned the perpetuation of slavery through black women.\(^{12}\) For, regardless of the race of the father, the status of the child was determined by the mother. Consequently the child was recognized as slave property. Thus, the stereotype of black women as "sexual savages" was used to justify the rape of black women. Carby contends that white men were considered to be the prey of his black female slave's sexuality and subsequently not responsible for their actions.\(^{13}\) The last of the dominant images is Sapphire. While the mammy image represented the ideal black woman, in the eyes of elite white male power, the matriarch represented the failed (yet overpowering) black woman in her own home; and the Jezebel image described the unchaste sexuality of black women, the Sapphire was used to describe any female that dared to speak out against injustice. bell hooks contends that the Sapphire image was popularized by the "Amos 'n' Andy" radio and

\(^{11}\)Ibid., 16.

\(^{12}\)Higginbotham, 43.

\(^{13}\)Carby, 27.
television show to generate sympathy for the black male's lot. Like the matriarch, whose strength emasculated her male counterpart, Jezebel's unsubmitness also affected him by not allowing him to be the true head of his household. hooks contends that this image presented black women as "bitchy and nagging," she argues that this image was "projected onto any black woman who overtly expressed bitterness, anger and rage about her lot."14

These negative images and stereotypes of black women, present further challenges for black women seeking to uncover the political achievements and efforts of their grandmothers, mothers, and sisters. Masking the realities which have forced black women's political activism, research on women's political participation has described black women's political attitudes and behaviors as atypical. Because of gender and a position in the lowest socio-economic class, black women have been expected to be apolitical and unassertive.15 This conclusion is based on the general sexist assessment that women exhibit lower rates of political participation than men.

Studies on women's orientation toward political participation have generally found correlations between

14bell hooks, Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism (Boston: South End Press, 1981), 85-86.

socialization and political activism. Sandra Baxter and Marjorie Lansing argued that in this patriarchal society where assumptions about male dominance affect a person's perception of their roles and responsibilities, the removal of structural or legal barriers for women was not enough to encourage female political participation. They concluded that the socialization process for women was a more important factor because it involved changing women's attitudes about their role in American society—particularly roles considered to be "outside the private sphere." Beverly Jo Walls noted in "The Impact of Sex Role Socialization on Political Participation of Women, A Thesis," that these roles were learned during childhood and reinforced and rewarded according to societal expectations. From the time sex is determined girls are taught to be submissive, dependent, and passive. This socialization is reflected in adult female behavior. Studies examining variables such as women's "personal control" and "interpersonal trust" and their political participation reveal that "personal autonomy" and independence affect a person's political efficacy. Walls argues that because females are "restrained in the personal


Ibid., 27-32.

"Ibid., 34.
control factor they subsequently feel less efficacious toward political system."19 Walls' study also noted that the stress and pressure affecting women who participate in politics may also have a negative impact. Noting Melville Currell's work on women's political participation, Walls further contended that because politics is considered to be a masculine sphere, a woman may feel pressured to reject her feminine role in order to participate politically. However, she faces a "double dilemma" according to Walls because if she rejects her femininity she may lose her "proper place" in society. If she retains it, she will be perceived as not competent at a "man's job."20 Finally, although women's political participation has increased, it is generally concluded that women are under-represented in the political sphere. This conclusion is also supported by Verba and Nie's research which found women to be over-represented in the category of "Inactives"21 and under-represented in the role of "Complete Activist."22 Research on black women's political participation yielded different conclusions.23

19Ibid., 34.
20Ibid., 48.
22Ibid.
A study conducted by Pierce, Carey, and William Avery examined whether or not sex differences affected black political beliefs and behavior. In this study they concluded that unlike mainstream theoretical expectations for women's political participation, women in "subcultures," like the black community are subject to different expectations for political behavior. They found that although black women had "less positive feelings" about the political system, their political participation rates were virtually equal to their black male counterparts.

However, despite findings such as these and others, negative images and stereotypes are continuously regenerated in research conducted mostly by mainstream researchers in order to explain black women's "enigmatic" behavior.

Interestingly, while the ground breaking research of feminist studies helped to counter sexist research with the introduction of gender studies, it failed to go any further. These "gender studies" failed to interrogate adequately the feminine world of non-white women. In Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center, bell hooks contends that the socialization

"Ibid.

"Ibid., 422.

"Ibid., 430.

"Patricia Bell Scott ed., "Debunking Sapphire: Toward A Non-Racist and Non-Sexist Social Science" in All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies (New York: The Feminist Press, 1982), 86.
of females or the gender factor is not the sole determining variable to develop critical feminist analysis. While gender analysis is more quantitatively and qualitatively substantiated, hooks argued that theories based exclusively on gender "mystify" the interlocking relationship of sex, class, and race oppression and its effect on the experiences of black women.

When examining the socialization of women, feminist analysis tends to rely on the historical significance of the "separate spheres doctrine" and its effect on women. Yet this doctrine leaves out a number of realities unique to black women. From slavery to contemporary times race, sex, and the political-economy have worked simultaneously to affect the "feminine world" and socialization of black women differently. In *Women Race and Class* Angela Davis contends that slavery was a reality for black women from the 17th century until the 19th century. Furthermore, "the economic arrangements of slavery contradicted the hierarchal sexual roles incorporated in the [sexist] ideology. European sexist ideologies like the "cult of true women," describing women as pure, pious, prissy, and feeble," excluded black women. Black women were viewed as "profitable labor-

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As Davis argued, "... where work was concerned, strength and productivity under the threat of the whip outweighed considerations of sex ... when it was profitable to exploit them as if they were men they were regarded, in effect, as genderless." Davis argues that slavery must have affected the black women's experience and socialization. In light of the denigration of black women during slavery, Paula Giddings contended that the "cult of true womanhood" caused Black women to prove they were ladies, and forced white ladies to prove they were women. Unlike white women, "sexual terrorism," "sexual exploitation," inadequate health care and other forms of violence were a constant reality for enslaved black females. As hooks argued in Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism, the black woman faced "peculiar sufferings" because of her color, sex, and economic position.

Quoting a passage from Linda Brent's narrative, "Slavery is terrible for men; but it is far more terrible for women. Superadded to the burden common to all, they have wrongs,

31Ibid., 6.
32Ibid., 11.
33Giddings, 54.
and sufferings, and mortifications peculiarly their own." Not only were these oppressions "peculiarly" those of black women, so were their means of survival. hooks argued that, against the threat of white male terrorism, black male slaves and sympathetic mistresses stood by when black female slaves were attacked. With "self preservation" as the first concern of black male slaves and white mistresses, black women had no protective allies. They had to learn to "exist independently." Consequently, in order to explain black women's willingness to survive in spite of the degradation and masculinization of her womanhood, scholars used the "black matriarch theory." The matriarchal system is one form of social organization in Africa. In various social organizations throughout Africa, black women held "privilege positions" not just in the immediate family or community but in the whole society. In *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality*, Cheikh Anta Diop argued that within matriarchal systems women exercised "a kind of economic ascendancy over African society." Felix K. Ekechi discusses numerous accounts of women's pivotal political and social activities in his

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3"Ibid.

3"Ibid., 36.


38Ibid., 144.
article "Perceiving Women as Catalysts." From Ethiopia and Nigeria to Kenya African women exercised great influence and authority. Some would argue that black women have historically exercised considered influence within the black community. According to bell hooks, scholars have used this term to explain the "independent and decisive role black women play within the black family structure." It is only within the context of "family" that the black woman, however, has significantly been valued. Unlike most pre-colonial African societies, American black women have never held privileged economic, political, or social positions outside the black community. Baxter and Lansing's research would lead one to believe that the obstacles of race, sex, and class have liberated the lives of black women. However, one must ask what have black women been liberated from if they are considered to be the lowest socio-economic group in American society. Again by basing their analysis of black women's behavior on stereotypical theories like that of the "matriarch" or "superwoman" mainstream feminism safely ignores the relevance of a theoretical framework appropriate for black women. The absence of such a framework ensures the suppression of potentially empowering scholarship on black women,


"hooks, 72-73.
scholarship that would truly liberate black women. Collins asserts that this absence works to maintain the "invisibility of black women" and a "patterned structural relationship of race, gender, and class inequality that pervades the entire social structure."\(^1\)

Baxter and Lansing did note that black women's political behavior could not be "adequately" explained by existing theoretical frameworks. However, Baxter and Lansing did not attempt to develop a much needed alternative theory which would address various forms of oppression and their effects on black women's political participation. They simply concluded that black women held a "unique" position in American society. Additionally they asserted the following, "It is difficult in the first place to define the questions, and virtually impossible to find systematic evidence to generate conclusions."\(^2\) Unfortunately, it is this difficulty or failure to go beyond the white woman's experience that helps to keep black women invisible. It is no coincidence that in a book that addresses the visibility of American women in politics, only two chapters out of a book of 10 are devoted to the political behavior of black women.

Just as the matriarch image is used to described the overly aggressive black woman, during the slave period, this

\(^{"Collins, 5."}

\(^{"Baxter and Lansing, 89."}\)
same image is used to explain why black women "over" participate in political activities. Mainstream feminist scholars, focusing on gender socialization and politicalization, as the sole determinant of all women's political participation, regard this image as representative of the liberated woman. Describing the "liberated" black women, Baxter and Lansing cite Joyce Ladner,

Women in American society are held to be the passive sex, but the majority of black women have perhaps never fit this model, and have been liberated from many of the constraints that society has traditionally imposed on women. Although this emerged from forced circumstances, it nevertheless allowed black women the kind of emotional well-being that women's liberation groups are calling for.43

Comments such as these preclude effective studies on black women's political participation by failing to move beyond images and stereotypes which hide the social and material conditions which produce various forms of black women's continued political activism in America. Suzanne Lebstock's case study of free black women in The Free Women of Petersburg: Status & Culture In A Southern Town - 1784-186044 "highlighted the feminist notion of associating employment with liberation."4 When examining the material situations of black women throughout history, as in Petersburg in the 19th century, Lebstock found that though

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43 Baxter et al., 102.
44 Lebstock, 87-111.
black women headed a majority of the households and were gainfully employed "[n]either was chosen from a position of strength; both were the products of chronic economic deprivation . . . ."46

As stated earlier, research analyzing the "black political experience," continues to support the argument of Hanes Walton that race affects the totality of black political activity within the American political process." Walton contends that "race" has been used as an excluding instrument limiting the effectiveness of black political agency. Although we agree with this assertion, this argument follows the same silencing tradition of mainstream feminist analysis, which leaves the realities of black women to "appropriate contexts" or footnotes. For example, even after the passage of the Civil War Amendments, black women like white women, were still excluded from traditional political participation." Yet in text after text the Fifteenth Amendment is noted as granting "Negroes the right of suffrage."49

Describing black politics as a linkage tool, Walton

46Ibid., 103.
49Ibid., 243.
asserts that it links black citizens to the state, political organization, other nation-states and/or international organizations. Additionally he asserts that the linkage concept may also be used to explain black citizens' political behavior to the overall thrust of black politics.\(^5\) This linkage concept ultimately views gender as only an "additive" factor affecting an individual's political behavior and attitude toward black politics. First, race and gender have simultaneously affected the totality of black women's political experiences. While initially concerned with only racial uplift, black women found that sexism, within and outside the black community, was just as oppressive as racism. As early as the mid-nineteenth century black women like Anna Julia Cooper, frustrated with sexism within the black community, argued for the necessity of including the "unacknowledged factor."\(^51\) A century later, Toni Cade Bambara asserted in 1970, sexism was never [and still has not] been critiqued as an equally oppressive factor for both black men and black women.\(^52\) Bambara ultimately called for a shift in political

\(^{50}\)Ibid., 8.


priorities. In Bambara's view what the black political experience amounted to, for some black women, is the quest for black men to "reclaim their manhood." A rereading of major political movements within the black community reveals the heightened invisibility of black women, as political agents, was not completely due to their gender socialization toward the use of black politics as a linkage tool but rather to black men's notions of women's "role." bell hooks argued that although sex roles were equal outside the home, sexist notions of a man's role and woman's role prevailed within the black home. In studies on women's role in the Civil Rights Movement Bernice Barnett's article "Invisible Southern Black Women Leaders in the Civil Rights Movement: The Triple Constraints of Gender, Race, and Class," a survey of civil rights participants, concluded that despite the multiple roles played by women in the Civil Rights Movement sexism prevented them from being fully recognized as leaders and organizers. Teresa Nance noted that many influential male leaders openly expressed sexist opinions that "contributed to Black women's invisibility during the

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"Ibid., 105.

"Ibid., 103.

civil rights Movement."56 Quoting Septima Clark from an interview with G.J. McFadden in "Septima P. Clark and the struggle for human rights,

The thing that I think stands out a whole lot was the fact that women could never be accorded their rightful place even in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. I can't never forget Reverend Abernathy saying, "Why is Mrs. Clark on the Executive Board?" And Dr. King saying, "Why she designed a whole program." "Well I just can't see why you got to have her on the Board!" They just didn't feel as if a woman, you know, had any sense.57

While women were encouraged to be nurturers, friends and the background support of the black political movements, they were castigated by many of the male political leaders when attempting to assert visible leadership skills.

The failure to expand the "black" or/and "feminist" agenda to become more interrogating hindered the concerns of black women in both the community and the academy. Consequently, this research will begin with the understanding that race, sex, and class simultaneously have affected the black women's political strategies and attitudes. These three factors intersect to create a distinct yet different political environment for individual black women's political participation. These particular realities may be reflected in a black woman's choice of political activism within her particular location.

57Ibid.
CHAPTER 3
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Research on political behavior has put forth substantial findings with the use of quantitative methodologies. Seeking to move political science beyond opinion and speculation to more grounded facts, political behavioralists in the 19th century argued for a "scientific method" which would explain regularities in society.¹ This "scientific method" involved the use of empirical or quantitative data, surveys, and statistics. This methodology is also referred to as positivism.

During the 1960's the increased acceptance and use of this research method in political behavioral studies resulted in what was called a "behavioral revolution."² However, in "Political Theory As A Vocation," Sheldon Wolin lamented that this methodology "re-enforces an uncritical view of existing political structures and all that they

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¹Lawrence W. Neuman ed., Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1997), 63.

Criticism of positivist methodology has centered around the concern that this methodology supports the status quo of society. In "The Study of Black Politics: Notes on Rethinking the Paradigm," Ricky Hill added that when used to examine black political behavior this methodology, which ultimately compares white and black behavior, begins with the assumption that white behavior is normal and black behavior is abnormal. Hill concluded that this problem has retarded the capacity of black people to evaluate their political predicament in the United States. . . . this type of analysis should be avoided because it perpetuates the dominant-dominated relationship of whites and blacks.

Hanes Walton raised similar criticisms. Walton also argued not against the use of quantitative studies but rather, for the inclusion of other research methods. Walton found that qualitative data associated with critical methodology and political behavioralist studies could offer a more accurate view of factors affecting black political participation. The need for a more accurate view of variables affecting political behavior was also a concern for producers of feminist research. Some feminists have argued that quantitative research based on positivist methodologies can never be used to paint an accurate picture of women's lives.

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3Ibid., 1064.

In "Quantitative and Qualitative Methods in the Social Sciences: Current Feminist Issues and Practical Strategies," Toby Jayaratne and others argued that feminist scientific methods that have primarily represented masculine concerns — values of autonomy, separation, distance, and control. More specifically, Stewart and Jayaratne state that research topics, selecting mostly male subjects, have been sexist and elitist and have ignored critical issues important to women. Criticizing positivists' use of quantitative data, feminists argue that this data is often simplistic, superficial, and used for overgeneralized interpretations. Consequently, more feminists have moved toward qualitative methodologies. Qualitative research may be described as a more "connected" methodology. Jayaratne contended that qualitative methodologies are less mechanical and more human. Further, Feminists argue that as opposed to reducing people to statistics, qualitative analysis allows voices being studied to actually be heard. Feminist researchers have used interviewing as a primary qualitative methodology. Feminist exclusive use of qualitative tools has also been criticized. Positivists have argued that these methods are

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Ibid., 86.

Ibid., 90.
"unscientific." They contend that feminist researchers are too subjective, biased, and politically motivated."8

Also, black women researchers state that feminist research has long reflected the values of white women. Black women have been long time negative beneficiaries of "objective" studies seeking to explain their behavior through the lives of white women. Collins asserted,

As a result, black women's experiences with work, family, motherhood, political activism, and sexual politics have been routinely distorted in or excluded from traditional academic discourse.'

Making the positivist assumption that all lives are the same10, Angela Harris argued that "feminist essentialism" works to "ensure black women's voices will be ignored and white women stand as the epitome of Woman."11

Black women, like Patricia Collins, seeking to make their lives visible in women's studies have found that these various methodologies are created and used to reflect forms of "specialized thought" which work to support only their creators.12 Like Walton and Hill, Collins' critique of Eurocentric masculinist epistemology does not completely

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8Ibid., 90.
9Collins, 201.
10Neuman, 69-70.
12Collins, 201.
dismiss its relevance. She does, however, argue that black women should interrogate methodologies that "ask African-American women to objectify ourselves, devalue our emotional life, displace our motivations for furthering knowledge about black women and confront in an adversarial relationship those with more social, economic, and professional power."^{13} In reexamining the claims of quantitative and qualitative knowledge black women must apply alternative methodological approaches and use standards created by black women.

The research for this thesis will involve both qualitative and quantitative techniques. As supported by Walton and Jayarantne,

"We propose that although quantitative research may have been used in the past to obscure the experience of women, it need not always be used in that way. That is the association is an historical one but not a logical one. Similarly, we propose that although some feminist researchers use qualitative methods to reveal important aspects of women's experience, there is no guarantee that they always will be used to do so."^{15}

Additionally, reflecting the Afrocentric feminist sentiments expressed by Collins this study is based on the argument that standards used to evaluate Black women should reflect their contextual reality. Locating research in the Black woman's experience not only gives voice to the black women,

^{13}Ibid., 205.

^{15}Ibid., 93
it also challenges white interpretations and knowledge claims about black women.\textsuperscript{16} Thus qualitative methods will be employed. This research is guided by Walton's notion of multidimensional analysis, this research will also incorporate dimensions of Collin's Afrocentric Feminist Epistemology.

There are four elements particular to Afrocentric feminist epistemology that distinguish it from traditional social science approaches:

1. **Concrete Experience as a Criterion of Meaning**

   Afrocentric feminist epistemology argues that there are two types of "knowing" - wisdom and knowledge. In the reassessment of knowledge claims made about black women, this method takes into account "those individuals who have lived through the experiences about which they claim to be experts as more believable and credible than those who have merely read or thought about such experiences."

2. **Use of Dialogue in Assessing Knowledge Claims**

   Contextualizing the subject and object relationship is the primary purpose of dialogue. Afrocentric feminist epistemology assumes that this function is critical to the "knowledge validation process."\textsuperscript{18} This dimension draws its importance from African "call and response" traditions where

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\textsuperscript{16}Collins, 207

\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., 209

\textsuperscript{18}Ibid., 212
importance and validation is placed in everyone's hands. Unlike "adversarial debate," Collins asserts that dialogue emphasizes harmony.

3. Ethic of Caring

This dimension of Afrocentric feminist epistemology is composed of 3 interrelated sub-groups. The first sub-component is individual uniqueness. According to African traditions, each individual "is a unique expression of a common spirit, power, or energy in all life." As a result importance is placed on the community by examining each individual's unique experience. The second sub-component is the appropriateness of emotions in dialogue. This sub-component stresses the importance of the researcher believing in the validity of the research. The third component, the capacity for empathy, involves each person's understanding of the other's position. This allows for connectivity instead of "objectivity."

4. Ethic of Personal Accountability

The last dimension of Afrocentric feminist epistemology, namely the ethic of personal accountability, asserts that the researcher must be responsible for their knowledge claims. Thus the researcher's character, values, and ethics are also called into examination.

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19Ibid., 215
20Ibid., 215
21Ibid., 216.
Afrocentric feminist epistemology does not assert itself as the only theoretical framework for black women. Rather, it lends itself as a useful tool that centralizes black women's experiences and standards. As Collins argues, an alternative epistemology challenges all certified knowledge and opens up the question of whether what has been taken to be true can stand the test of alternative ways of validating truth. The existence of a self-defined Black women's standpoint using an Afrocentric feminist epistemology calls into question the content of what currently passes as truth and simultaneously challenges the process of arriving at that truth.22

Methodology

This research has examined various factors affecting the types and levels of black women's political participation. This approach incorporated personal interviews, experiences, and surveys as a major part of my investigation. I have interviewed a cross-section of women, ages 18 and up in Atlanta. Secondary sources from the following sources also assisted me.

1. Robert W. Woodruff Library
   Atlanta University Center, Inc.
2. Georgia State University
   Pullen Library

22 Ibid., 219
3. Auburn Avenue Research Library
4. Atlanta/Fulton County Public Library
Capturing an accurate picture of black women's political participation is a challenging research endeavor. As stated earlier, not only is there a tendency to focus on electoral forms of political participation, there is also a tendency to lump black women with black men and ignore black women in favor of white women's lives. Consequently studies focused on black political participation or on women's political participation overgeneralize to exclude or marginalize significant factors and achievements associated with black women. Before a criticism of methods and strategies used to examine black women's political participation it is necessary to get a general definition and conceptualization of political participation.

In *Political Participation: How and Why Do People Get Involved in Politics*, Lester Milbrath used Robert Dahl's definition of a political system as the starting point for his discussion on political participation: "a political system is any persistent pattern of human relationships that involves, to a significant extent, power, rule, or
Thus, how one acts to influence his or her government and institutional policies, whether as an ordinary citizen or political leader, falls within an abstract definition of political participation. Political participation may be conceptualized and measured in a variety of ways. This is due in part to the somewhat ambiguous nature of politics as a scientific discipline. George Graham argued that political science represents a "disciplined attempt to identify and understand political phenomena." Yet, because of its various dimensions, what is or is not considered to be political science is determined by the political scientist. Thus, beyond the study of how individuals and groups interact over limited resources, the symbols used to describe political participation also depends on the particular political scientist. This fact has a great bearing on what is considered or ignored when studying black women's political participation.

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4 Ibid.

5 Ibid., 21.
participation. For example, Walton found that early studies of black political participation in the area of party behavior, failed to consider how racist and classist laws and structures emasculated conventional black political participation. Assuming that blacks only had a Democratic or Republican choice, early political scientists ignored black political participation within black independent and satellite political parties. Consequently, early research on black political participation concluded that blacks were not "sophisticated" enough to participate in party politics.

Fortunately, the study of political participation has gone through several analytical phases. Milbrath argued that early studies on political participation produced narrow conceptions of activism. Sidney Verba and Norman Nie added that there were different styles and modes of political participation that needed to be explored. Verba and Nie argued for the need to look beyond the vote or electoral system when examining types of political participation. Verba and Nie pointed out that different forms of political participation could suggestively reflect "what that political act could get the citizen," "what that

—Walton, 73-166.

—Milbrath, 11.

—Ibid., 11-12.

—Verba et al., Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality, 44-45.
political act could get the citizen into," and finally "what it takes to get into a particular political act; for example initiative, time, resources, skills, etc."¹⁰ Unlike the one dimensional approach which only rated the levels of electoral participation, the multidimensional analysis of political participation revealed that these different levels of political participation represented the "different styles by which citizens attempt to relate to government and politics."¹¹ These acts also represented what the citizens wanted to get from the government.¹² Milbrath identified the different styles of political participation such as voting, party and campaign work, community activism, contacting officials, protestors, and communicators. He further classified these styles, based on their appropriateness and acceptance by the dominant culture, as conventional or unconventional and active or passive. Expanding Milbrath’s conclusions, Verba and Nie "clustered" these various forms of political acts, along with others,¹³ into four different modes - voting, campaign activity, cooperative activity, and citizen-initiated contacts.¹⁴ Further Verba and Nie argued that these different modes

¹⁰Ibid., 45.
¹¹Milbrath, 12.
¹²Verba et al., 45.
¹³Ibid., 31.
¹⁴Ibid., 47.
reflected several important factors. Most importantly they found that the type of influence the particular political act has over government officials, or the citizen's immediate circumstances, could be reflected in the choice of a certain political act.\textsuperscript{15} Secondly, the type of political act chosen usually reflected the type and impact of the outcome a citizen expects.\textsuperscript{16} Thirdly, these acts may be grouped by the amount of "conflict" involved.\textsuperscript{17} Finally, Verba and Nie grouped various political acts together based on the amount of initiative required to participate in a particular activity.\textsuperscript{18} Their study further concluded that these modes could further be divided into electoral and non-electoral activity.\textsuperscript{19}

Verba and Nie not only classified political behavior based on electoral and non-electoral activity, they also conceded that different political activists could be further classified as - totally inactive, totally active, voting specialist, parochial activists, communalists, and campaigners.\textsuperscript{20} Verba and Nie argued that these

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., 47.
\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., 49.
\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., 50-51.
\textsuperscript{18}Ibid., 51.
\textsuperscript{19}Ibid., 73.
\textsuperscript{20}Ibid., 77.
Verba and Nie's findings focussed on the "overrepresentation" and "underrepresentation" of particular groups in the American political process. As stated earlier research on political participation, like Verba and Nie's, generally correlated socio-economic status with political involvement or non-involvement. Socio-economic status is determined by measuring the education, income and occupation of a person. Their studies have shown that "citizens" with higher social and economic status arguably "have a greater stake in politics." Further, this status supposedly gives them access to greater skills, resources, other political participants, and information regarding political matters. As citizens use various resources and develop skills for political participation, it has been argued that these individuals gain a greater sense of efficacy and orientation toward political participation.

Using research, conducted in 1972, Raymond Wolfinger and Steven Rosenstone agreed that these generalizations held true regardless of socio-economic variables analyzed. Margaret Conway's discussion on political participation

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22Verba and Nie., 96.
23Ibid., 126.
24Ibid.
shared similar agreements. She contended that "social circumstances" affected an individuals' opportunities and attitudes toward political participation. She, however, added another factor quite similar to socio-economic status - "life experiences." Such factors such as race, gender, ethnicity, educational attainment, age, income, employment patterns and career choice may affect an individuals political views and the subsequent political activity chosen to express those views.

While the study of political participation in America has evolved from a narrow one dimensional view to a multidimensional scope, there is a consensus that the purpose of political participation is to influence government and government policies. Contemporary approaches to the field of political science have given consideration to the fact that different political acts are not necessarily better or worse than one another. Rather these different political styles reflect a citizen's socio-economic situation, their expectations, degree of perceived influence, and life situation. Unfortunately, if knowledge is to be empowering for those in lower-socioeconomic classes


Ibid., 15.

Ibid., 16.
it must seek to move beyond conclusions that rest on the -
"socioeconomic and political participation correlation"
theory.
CHAPTER 5
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR BLACK WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Just as Hanes Walton identified structural and individual variables that affected black political behavior as a group, both feminist and non-feminist research has also identified independent variables that affect women's political behavior. These variables, however, have been established from the experiences more reflective of white middle class women. Still, these frameworks have been used to describe and explain the political behavior of all women. Black women, however, have begun to conceptualize their own theoretical frameworks to explain how the various obstacles have affected their "feminine world." Unlike Baxter and Lansing's conclusion that black women have just "recently" become more sympathetic to the women's movement of the 1970's, black women have long been concerned about race, class, sex issues. They engaged in both "feminist thought" and "feminist activities" long before the beginning of the women's suffrage movement which began in 1848 at Seneca Falls. According to Collins, our foremothers "have laid a vital analytical foundation for a distinctive standpoint on
Contemporary political analysis asserts black women's "feminist consciousness" as a recent and anomalous phenomenon which has contributed to their increased political participation. However, in *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*, Beverly Guy-Sheftall argues that black women's understanding of their multiple oppression has always forced them to be involved in the political realm. In fact she argues that black feminist political analysis may be traced back to women like Maria Stewart, Sojourner Truth, and Frances E. W. Harper. Writings and political speeches by these and other black women who played significant roles in the middle class and working class black women's movement give evidence not only of the tradition of black women's political participation but also for a black woman's political culture.

Critical to understanding this conceptual possibility is the idea that political attitudes and beliefs are shaped by responses received from the political environment. Two studies, led by John C. Pierce, support this concept. In

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1. Ibid.


3. Ibid., 1.


5. Milbrath et al., 35.
"Efficacy and Participation: A study of Black Political Behavior," Pierce and Addison Carey argued that the extent to which one felt she or he could influence outcomes determined that person's political activity. Focusing on political efficacy and political participation, Pierce et al, revealed that despite environmental obstacles erected to hinder black political, social, and economic participation, black political efficacy was just as high as whites. What determined black political participation outside of traditional spheres (voting, attending political meeting, helping in political campaigns, and contacting public officials) was the extent to which they felt their political actions beyond traditional activities had an increased impact on institutional outcomes.

The second study conducted by Pierce, Carey, and William Avery examined whether or not sex differences affected black political beliefs and behavior. They concluded that black women and black men participated at equal rates. Additionally, they found that black women's

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6Ibid., 204.

7Ibid., 206.

8Ibid., 211.

9Pierce et al. "Sex Differences in Political Beliefs and Behavior," passim.
experiences in the political sphere affected their level and style of political participation.\textsuperscript{10} Patricia Hill Collins' study of black women's political activism also revealed similar conclusions.\textsuperscript{11} She concluded that social science's inability to examine non-traditional locations for political participation prevented a thorough examination of black women's political activity.\textsuperscript{12} Additionally, factors such as time constraints, retaliatory factors, along with the obstacles of race, sex, and class have failed to be considered when examining black women's choice of traditional or non-traditional political participation. Leisure time, a necessary component for participation in traditional types of political action, was often limited for black women who worked long hours.\textsuperscript{13} McNair-Barnett noted that during the civil rights Movement black women were "economically vulnerable" and specifically risked losing their jobs.\textsuperscript{14} In fact, the threat of job loss affected black women professors, domestics, and teachers. Citing one respondent,

\begin{quote}
Many male leaders were really free to make contacts and relay information. Female leaders many of whom were public school teachers, were constrained by family
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{10}Ibid., 429-430.

\textsuperscript{11}Collins, 139-160.

\textsuperscript{12}Ibid., 140.

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., 139.

\textsuperscript{14}Mcnair-Barnett, 173-175.
roles and more so by their jobs and the school superintendent. If he found out we were involved in any way, the superintendent could fire any of us any time he wanted to.\textsuperscript{15}

Black women's participation in both protest and traditional spheres was also limited, in some cases, due to sexism and racism within black and white political institutions.\textsuperscript{16} For example, that black women's political activism faced challenges from within the black community is also no surprise. Discussing her experiences and disappointment with the absence of black women at the historic March on Washington, Pauli Murray contended that,

"What emerges most clearly from events of the past several months is the tendency to assign women to a secondary, ornamental or "honoree" role instead of the partnership role in the civil rights movement which they have earned by their courage, intelligence and dedication."\textsuperscript{17}

Murray observed that black women were not given the opportunity to make a major speech in Washington. Furthermore, she noted that the media tended to look toward the black men of the community for political or social responses as opposed to seeking the opinions and aspirations of black women. In "The Liberation of Black Women," Murray later remarked, "throughout the history of black America, its women have been in the forefront of the struggle . . .

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., 173.

\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., 154-155.

\textsuperscript{17}Pauli Murray, "The Negro Woman in the Quest for Equality," \textit{The Acorn}, (June 1964).
one cannot help asking: Would the black struggle have come this far without the indomitable determination of its women?" 18 Again, McNair Barnett argued that the Montgomery Bus Boycott was engendered and successful due to the black women living in the Alabama community. She argued that although Martin Luther King Jr. was given credit for this civil rights protest, JoAnn Robinson must be credited for planning and organizing the boycott. 19 Likewise it is not women like Georgia Gilmore who organized the Club From Nowhere, Ella Baker who organized young college students to register and vote, along with countless other women who risked their jobs, homes and lives for their people during the Civil Rights Movement but instead men who have been recognized as the only civil rights leaders. In fact to maintain the image of black male dominance during the Civil Rights movement, Barnett concluded, sexism within black organizations more often than not limited black women's political participation to nonexecutive positions. 20

Black Women's Political Culture

In spite of the obstacles of race, class, and gender, Collins concluded that black women have employed numerous


19McNair-Barnett, 168.

20Ibid., 170.
and creative strategies to influence institutions and policies.\textsuperscript{21} Thus it is argued that black women's political culture may be conceptualized as a "set of attitudes" and "sentiments" shaped by an environment created by the intersections of race, class, and gender. Furthermore, these attitudes and beliefs have shaped distinct ideologies which provide meaning and order for their level and mode of political participation.

Beverly Guy-Sheftall argues that black women's consciousness of race, class, and gender constraints led to the creation of "single-sex, self-help organizations like, Salem Massachusetts Female Anti-slavery Society, the first female abolitionist organization," or the Afric--American Female Intelligence Society of Boston.\textsuperscript{22} Shirley Yee argued that these organizations represented the earliest forms of black women's political activism in the "New World."\textsuperscript{23} Other examples include the National Association of Colored Women (resulting from a merger of the General Federation of Women's Clubs and the National League of Colored Women of Washington D.C.), and the Women's

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{21}Ibid., 155-160.
\item \textsuperscript{22}Guy-Sheftall, 3.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
When suffragists argued for women's voting rights, "triple jeopardy" once again forced black women to form their own organizations for political participation. As Paula Giddings contended in *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*, not only did black suffragist clubs like the Tuskegee Woman's Club and the Alpha Suffrage Club continue the tradition of black women's formal organizational political participation, these efforts reflected the more progressive political attitudes of black women. As one of the elements of black women's political culture, the creation of black women's organizations was not only a response to the sexism within some black organizations led by black men or racism within the white women's groups but chiefly a mechanism for voicing black women's particular political concerns. Today sororities and other political, social, and cultural organizations continue as important institutions for black women's agendas.

In addition to the creation of black female political organizations, black women also published journals like *Women's Era* which also provided a forum for the discussion

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24Ibid., passim.
25Giddings, 121.
26Ibid., 120.
27Ibid., 119.
28Ibid.
of their political ideas in the late nineteenth century.\(^{29}\)

While this journal was only published through 1867,\(^{10}\)
autobiographies and literary works have served as important
organs for the political voices of black women.\(^{31}\) Today
numerous black women's publications continue this tradition.
Black women's political culture is also distinguished by
other elements. Barriers to traditional spheres of
political participation forced black women to create their
own spheres of political influence within so called "private
locations".\(^{32}\)

Gerda Lerner's discussion on black women's efforts in
America documented the various strategies employed by black
women.\(^{33}\) Gaining education has always been considered a
liberating act. Consequently early non-traditional and
radical political strategies used by black women's
organizations included teaching.\(^{34}\) In the north black
schools were established for children. However in the
south, due to the slave rebellions of 1800, 1822, and 1831,
education was outlawed. This, however, did not discourage

\(^{29}\)Ibid., 8.

\(^{30}\)Ibid.

\(^{31}\)Ibid.

\(^{32}\)Ibid.

\(^{33}\)Gerda Lerner, *Black Women in White America* (New

\(^{34}\)Ibid., 75.
black women. Many black women like Margaret Douglas of Norfolk, Virginia were jailed because of their teaching. Teaching, particularly during the civil rights era was important for women like Septima Clark who worked with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. In fact Bernice Barnett asserts that Clark was responsible for teaching those who had been disfranchised by grandfather clauses, literacy tests and other citizenship requirements which aimed to prevent black voter registration. During the Black Power struggles black women's study groups were organized to discuss agendas that were ignored by black men and white America. M. Rivka Polatnick's article "Poor Black Sisters Decided for Themselves" highlighted the achievements of two groups - the Mount Vernon and New Rochelle groups. These two groups mobilized and politicized to get involved in issues like poverty, race, abortion, and Vietnam. Other non-traditional strategies were used by black women who were limited by the constraints created by "expected" gender roles.

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3"Ibid.

3"McNair-Barnett, 169.


Both Collins and James discuss how mothering has also served as an important political act. Collins believes that black women who removed their efforts from the labor market and cultivated farms strictly for the survival of their families both in maroon societies and after the Civil War - are primary examples.39

By placing family, children, education, and community at the center of our political activism, African-American women draw on Afrocentric conceptualizations of mothering, family, community, and empowerment40

In black extended families Collins contends that black women used their "sphere of influence" to indirectly challenge controlling and oppressive institutions by refusing to inculcate their posterity with "externally defined images" of African-Americans.41 Collins argues that black women used their influence, authority, and power within the family and community (as extended family) to ensure group survival through education and "racial uplift." Thus in addition to traditional and protest political activism, black women have also utilized various "radical" and invisible strategies throughout their American history.

What is important to note, however, is that black women have always participated in politics and that the various forms participation took reflected of what Guy-

39Ibid., 146.
40Ibid., 151.
41Ibid., 146.
Sheftall terms "triple jeopardy." Hence, despite racist, sexist, and classist obstacles limiting the ways in which black women could politically participate, they ironically worked to engender non-traditional routes to influence government and public policies.
CHAPTER 6
BLACK WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN ATLANTA, GEORGIA

In chapter three of *Quiet Revolution in the South: the impact of the Voting Rights Act, 1965-1990,*' Laughlin McDonald, Michael B. Binford, and Ken Johnson describe black political participation in Georgia as a history of "centuries of deliberate and systematic discrimination by the state against its minority population."' From 1867 through 1965 the state of Georgia enacted legislation deliberately aimed at nullifying the votes of black men and women. In 1872, after black men had been granted the right to vote and held twenty-five seats in the Georgia House of Representatives and three seats in the Georgia Senate. Blacks' political powers were weakened, however, after several "reconstruction era" Supreme Court cases. In 1876 the Supreme Court ruled in *United States v. Cruikshank* that the Fourteenth Amendment did not protect blacks from private acts of discrimination. Furthermore, using the precedent

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'Ibid., 67.

'Blaustein et al., 246-281.

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set in *The Butchers' Benevolent Association of New Orleans v. the Crescent City Live-Stock Landing and Slaughter-House Company, etc.* the Supreme Court concluded that the Fourteenth Amendment only granted protection for federal citizenship rights not citizenship rights that applied solely to the states. Thus, in the *Cruikshank* case the Supreme Court concluded that "voting" was a "state-created, not a federal, right." With this ruling black men were disfranchised through a series of discriminatory acts. By 1873 these acts included "violence, vote buying, ballot-box stealing, and the use of "tissue ballots" that facilitated stuffing ballots boxes and altering the results of elections." White Democrats reimplemented poll tax schemes, abolished local elections in majority black districts, eliminated district elections for county school boards and allowed all white grand juries to appoint individuals to the school board. Because whites wanted to increase white voting numbers they eliminated the poll tax in 1945 and instead relied on the "white primary" to exclude black males the most important part of electoral politics. The Supreme Court's ruling in *Smith v. Allright* in 1945 conclusively held that "white primaries" which excluded

'Ibid., 252.
'McDonald et al., 68.
'Ibid., 69.
'Ibid.'
black political participation were unconstitutional.8 However, by 1947 Georgia Governor M.E. Thompson scraped a revised legislative scheme as "an invitation to fraud."9 Even after white primaries were held unconstitutional Georgia legislators still attempted to exclude black male political participation. In 1958 a new registration act was passed which required "good character" and "understanding qualifications" for applicants who were required to correctly answer up to thirty questions related to the Constitution.10 The County Unit System, which was enacted in 1917, also worked to reduce black political strength in urban areas. However, by 1962 this "malapportionment" plan was abolished and ruled unconstitutional because it violated the "one man, one vote" concept. Thus, the Georgia Senate was reapportioned. Additionally, as a result of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 literacy tests and poll taxes were abolished. Consequently, the Georgia House of Representatives was reapportioned.11

As a result of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, the number of black men and women registered to vote increased from 27.4 percent in 1964 to 69.7 percent in 1980.12

9Ibid.
10Ibid., 71.
11Ibid., 74-75.
12Ibid., 75.
et al., attribute some of the increase in black registration to the visibility and intervention of federal examiners. However, they also credited the Voter Education Project, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and Core for their efforts. Others like Mary Louise Frick attributed the increase to the active involvement of other local black community leaders, organizations, and the black media. In her 1967 thesis, "Influences on Negro Political Participation in Atlanta," Frick argued that Atlanta blacks held influential electoral power long before the 1965 Voting Rights Act. In fact as early as 1950 "the Negro vote [was] credited with the election of numerous officials." The increase in black political participation also led to Blacks being elected to the Democratic Executive Board, the Atlanta Board of Education, and running for office in Black wards. Unlike other cities in the south, blacks in Atlanta exhibited high levels of political participation. Organizations like the Atlanta Negro Voter's League, which

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13Mary Louise Frick, "Influences On Negro Political Participation In Atlanta, Georgia" (Thesis, Georgia State University, 1967).

14Ibid., 2.

organized in 1949, provided voter education and registration
classes for blacks. The NAACP under the leadership of
Charles Harper, the All Citizen Registration Committee, the
Atlanta Urban League directed by Grace Hamilton, the League
of Women Voters, the Women's Volunteer Groups for
Registration Efforts under the leadership of Mrs. F.V.
Brookes, along with the Atlanta Daily Word helped to
increase voter registration during the 1950's and prepare
blacks in anticipation of the 1965 Voter's Right Act. Still
other organizations like the Hunter Hill group, Atlanta
Negro Voter's League, Junior Voter's League, Westside
Voter's League, and the Joyland Civic League must be given
create for their participatory activities which helped to
increase black political representation. Additionally while
fighting for voting rights, black women in Atlanta were
active in local chapters of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Zeta
Phi Beta, and Delta Sigma Theta Sororities and had also
formed organizations like the College Park Civic and
Educational Club, Inc., which was organized in 1943, by
Viola Sims, Carrie O'Neal, Eva Thomas, Thelma Abbot, Mattie
Dollar, Emeritus and Eloise Thomas, Annie Hightower, Amanda
Cannon, Ozell Blackmon, and Clara Williams with over 23
other black women. These clubs worked toward the
establishment of a Nursery School, education scholarships,
and helping physically challenged community members." On June 2, 1959 the *Atlanta Daily World* published an article on the League of Negro Women Voters. Celebrating their seventh anniversary, women like Mr. Angelin Hanson took the opportunity to voice the issues concerning the organization as "awakening interest in the importance of voting, improvement in transportation facilities, and safety programs for cross walks around churches and schools." The Metropolitan Council of Women was also another active black women's organization. Its officers included Mrs. Ida F. Henderson, Mrs. Geneva Haugabrooks, Miss Genelle Barner, Mrs. Cleveland Lyons, Ms. L.D. Shivery, Ms. Juilia Pate Borders, Ms. W.A. Scott, Ms. Anne Hall, Ms. G.T. Alexander, Ms. L.D. Keith, Ms. Raymond Simmons and Ms. Rosalee Wright. Issues such as cancer, the study of heart sickness, poor housing, unsanitary conditions, and the registration of people in Atlanta and Fulton County were of importance to these black women. Black Republican women were very active. Meeting at locations like the Phyllis Wheatley Branch YWCA, these women organized to help Richard Nixon's campaign for U.S. President. These participants noted


particularly the "non-discriminatory nature of the Republican Party in Georgia as well as on the national level as compared to the past history of the Democratic party which they claimed is discriminatory." 19 Atlanta women took leadership roles in various community organizations. As president of the Westside Voters League, Cassandra Maxwell organized meeting and debates in efforts to help people make qualified decisions during primary elections. 20 Black women like Miss Ruth Morgan and Mrs. Jacquelyn Greenmall helped to register blacks. 21 Between 9 a.m. and 4:30 p.m these two women would walk through the court house corridors asking people whether they had registered to vote and urging them to register and vote. Newspaper accounts estimate as many as 175 people were marshalled through the registration doors on a daily basis because of their efforts.

The examination of Atlanta gives yet another small example of the political activism of black women in both individual and collective efforts. Additionally, what is


20 "Westside Voters To Hear Candidates Tuesday Night," Atlanta Daily World, 5 April 1959, 1.

also found is that in spite of the discriminating efforts of the white Democrats black women still actively asserts their political voice.
CHAPTER 7
SURVEY OF BLACK WOMEN IN ATLANTA

It has been argued that race does not represent the totality of the black political experience. It has been argued that in order to understand black women's participation in both electoral and non-electoral participation one must look at realities of racism, sexism, and classism within the American political process.

Questionnaire

A non-probability simple random survey was conducted in efforts to identify contemporary black women's attitudes and interests in different forms of electoral and non-electoral political activity. The questionnaire used in this study was modeled after Sidney Verba and Norman Nie's questionnaire discussed in Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality. Verba and Nie used their questionnaire to measure levels and types of electoral and non-electoral behavior. Because Verba and Nie's survey only examined traditional or conventional political activity, additional questions were added which related to non-conventional or protest political behavior. These questions were taken from a study conducted by John C.
Pierce and Addison Carey Jr. In "Sex Differences in Black Political Beliefs and Behavior," Pierce, Avery and Carey Jr. measured traditional political participation by questioning voting, discussion of political issues, work on political campaigns, and contact with public officials. They measured protest behavior by looking at whether or not individuals talked or actually participated in boycotting, marching, picketing, and sitting-in. Questions relating to black women's efficacy were based on Pierce and Carey Jr.'s study of efficacy and participation. Additionally, because of the historical evidence of black women's use of non-traditional political activism qualitative space was allowed for non statistical responses.

After pretesting, the survey questions were reduced from seventy questions to fifty-seven questions. The questions were then divided into five sections. Section One examined black women's overall interest in the subject of politics. Section Two looked at black women's efficacy and political attitudes regarding issues such as education, housing, and unemployment. Section Three was divided into four parts. This section focused on different methods of traditional electoral and non-electoral political participation like voting, campaigning, community activity and personalized activity. Section four looked at socio-

\footnote{Pierce et al., 424.}

\footnote{Ibid.}
economic variables necessary for a comparative analysis. One hundred surveys were passed out in March 1997 within the Metro Atlanta area. Although self-addressed envelopes were included with the surveys that were passed out in only twenty seven were returned.

Respondent's Profile

Of the survey's returned, 25.9 percent represented black women ages 18-25. Black women ages 26-30 comprised 7.4 percent of the returns. Eleven percent of the surveys were returned by black women 31-40 years of age. Almost fifteen percent or 14.8 percent were returned by women ages 51-65 and 7.4 percent of the surveys were returned by black women over the age of 65.

Residency

Almost half (48.1%) of the black women who returned the survey have lived in Atlanta all their life. A little over twenty percent (22.2%) of the women had lived in Atlanta one to eleven years.

Overall Interest in Politics

Sixty-three percent of the respondents stated that they were "somewhat interested" in politics. Almost thirty percent of the women or 29.6 percent described their attitude toward politics as "very interested." Only 7.4 percent responded as "not at all interested" in politics. Almost fifty-two percent of the women responded that that
talk about local or national political issues at least once or twice a week. Eleven percent discuss politics everyday. A little over thirty-three percent of the women said they discuss politics less than once a week and almost four percent (3.7) said that they never discuss politics. Of the women who discuss politics, the issues of concern included housing, education, abortion, student aid, welfare reform, economics, laws, America in the 21 century, government policies, racism, water, school, community issues, crime, and taxes.

Efficacy

When asked about the current situation for black women in America, forty-eight believed that the situation for black women is better. A little under 18 percent believed that the situation is either worse or don't know. Although less than half of the respondents believed that black women's situation is better, eighty-one percent of the respondents believed that "black women have a say in politics." While eighty-one percent of the women believed that they had a say in politics, only 74 percent believed that politics was not just for men.

Traditional Political Participation

When questioned about party partisanship, almost fifty-two percent (51.9) considered themselves to be Democrat. Roughly fifteen percent (14.8%) responded as Republicans. A
little over seven percent (7.4) described themselves as Independent and 3.7 said "other." Although a majority of women identified with some political party only 33.3 percent of the women were aware of some "major group or organization" in their community. Furthermore, only 25.9 percent of the women said that they supported any of the groups. Some of the groups and organizations identified included the Church, PTA, NAACP, National Black Women's Health Project, International League of Muslim Women - Muslim American Political Action Committee, Atlanta Women's Political Caucus, SCLC and the Urban League.

Voting/Party Behavior

Sixty-three percent of the women said that they voted for Bill Clinton in the 1992 presidential elections. However only 59.3 percent voted for Clinton a second time in 1996. More black women voted for third party candidates in 1996 (33.3%) than in the 1992 presidential elections (3.7). On the local level, 33 percent of the women said they would vote for Bill Campbell. This is an increase from 1993 when only 29.6 percent of the women said that they voted for Bill Campbell. While there are other contenders in this year's Mayoral race, many consider Marvin Arrington to be Bill Campbell's closest competition. However only 3.7 percent of the respondents said they would vote for Mr. Arrington. When asked about attendance at political meetings and rallies, 81 percent said that they did not attend political
meetings or rallies. More women contributed money to political campaigns (22.2%) than attend meetings (18.5%).

Community Activism

Sixty-three percent of the women said that they had worked with others in their community to solve a problem. Some of those problems included hunger, religion, keeping the parks clean, making peace, sewer problems, land use, developing a community center, teenage pregnancy, garbage pick-up, drugs, violence, crime, the homeless population, improvement of south Dekalb schools, and improving the percentage of registered voters. When asked about taking part in forming a new group to solve the various community problems only 11 percent said that they had actually taken part in forming an organization. Some of these organizations include the "Atlanta Chapter of the International League of Muslim Women," neighborhood block associations, and "Glorify Your Body." According to the respondents these organizations still function today. More women said that they worked with others and helped to form organizations in the community to solve problems specifically affecting black women. These organizations included the "National Political Congress of Black Women," "Glorify Your Body," "Wyncres," "Muslim Women Limited, Atlanta chapter."
Protest Politics

Measuring protest politics, 37 percent of the women responded that they had "talked" about boycotting while only 25.9 percent actually participated in a boycott. Strangely while only 25.9 percent said they talked about marching, 33.3 percent of the women said they participated in a march. Again, when questioned about picketing and sitting-in fewer women actively participated in those forms of protest activity while more women discussed those forms of protest activity.

Overall Effectiveness of Political Activities

The survey concluded by asking respondents what their overall opinion was regarding the effectiveness of various political acts. Overall 85.2 percent of the respondents concluded that voting was an effective form of political participation. Seventy percent of the women said that working with a political campaign is effective. Almost 80% of respondents (77.8) also believed that writing or calling a public official is an effective form of political participation. Almost 80 percent of the women (77.8) believed that working with a black women's organization is an effective form of political participation. Eighty-five percent of the women concluded that working with the community is an effective form of political participation. Finally, forty-eight percent of the women said that were other ways of influencing government while 37 percent did
not believe there was any other way to influence government. The other ways of influencing government included "demonstrations like the Million Man March," direct non-violent protest, religion, and "shutting them down."
CHAPTER 8
CONCLUSION

From this study and survey, it may be concluded that black women in Atlanta have high levels of political efficacy. The organizations and groups listed by the respondents suggest that while issues and concerns have shifted from voting rights to welfare reform, economics, and abortion black women are still very active in asserting the concerns of their sisters and community. Thus the new organizations like the National Black Women's Health Project, sororities, women's religious groups, and block associations are carrying the torch lit by the Negro League of Women's Voters and the Metropolitan Council of Negro Women. Thus, not only are black women aware of the issues that have both hindered and benefitted them, they also believe that they have a say in affecting government and public policy. Prestage argued that conclusions may suggest that black women have progressed from a "predominance of nontraditional activity to a predominance of traditional activity."¹ This may reflect the increase in the number of black women running for elective office, at least here in

¹Prestage, 89.
Georgia. For example, by 1970 Juanita Terry Williams became the first woman to run for the state of Georgia's comptroller position. In 1982 Mildred Glover became the first black woman to seek the Democratic gubernatorial nomination. Georgia State Representative Barbara J. Mobley decided to run because she realized the incumbent was not prepared to deal with women's issues. The survey also found black women to be very active in black women's political, economic, and social organizations - thus continuing the legacy of black women's clubs. Many of the respondents identified sororities, book clubs, investment clubs, volunteer organizations, alumni associations, tenants' associations, labor unions, political groups and youth groups. In fact, Mobley identified 100 Black Women and Delta Sigma Theta Sorority as organizations with which she is actively involved. Such a high level of involvement with local political, social, and economic organizations may be correlated with high levels of political activism. In "The Political Behavior of Black Women: Contextual, 2


Ibid.


Ibid.
Structural, and Psychological Factors," Saundra C. Ardrey noted that women who were not active in organizations were least likely to be active political participants. Similar to the findings in Ardrey's study of black women in North Carolina, this survey of black women in Georgia found that active women believed that they could act in order to solve their problems. For example, during an interview one woman said that it is "good to call and get to [the] head person." Upset about a new city ordinance requiring leaves and yard trimming to be placed in special bagging, this woman called the mayor's office to voice her concerns about the expense required of her due to her fixed income. Another woman living in a senior citizens home was moved to run for office in her tenants' association after problems regarding building policies.

Another influence on political participation may be correlated to influential role models in their lives. Barbara Mobley recounted that her family had a very strong political participatory history. Her grandfather Matthew Gregory, was a member of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. Although this question was eliminated in the final survey, a majority of pretesting respondents

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7Hemmons, 44.
affirmatively stated that fathers, mothers, brothers, husbands, children, sisters, partner, and extended members were family members who talked about politics with them. Furthermore half of the respondents stated that they "teach" others about politics or political participation. Other influences that were not the focus of this study included contextual pressures or peer pressure. In one interview a senior citizen who got involved in a tenants' association was harassed and ostracized because she was considered to be "too militant and too radical." Considering Verba and Nie's classification of political participants one could suggest that from this survey older women age 51-65 are more likely to engage in "parochial" activities such as contacting government officials and letter writing. Black women ages 31-40 could be considered community activists and women 18-25 and 26-30 could be classified as voting specialists/community activist.

The conclusions from this study leave need for a more advanced survey that may yield more exact findings. Furthermore, better questions need to be designed in order to better conceptualize nontraditional political participation such as "mothering." For example, while "teaching" was identified earlier as one historical method of political activism, other more invisible forms may be more difficult to conceptualize for empirical purposes. Additionally, more research needs to be conducted on the
political participation of black women in the aesthetic areas. For example, during the slave period many black women used "music" as a cryptic political strategy. When a popular song "Dancing in The Streets was" recorded in the 1960s it was temporarily banned on some radio stations because it was considered to be a black revolutionary song. Other singers like Abbey Lincoln, Odetta, and Nina Simone also use music to speak out against injustices. Women fought against racism, sexism, and classism within the context of literature. Other aesthetic forms of political activism would include "quilting," "cooking," "art," "photography," and "choice of hair styles." Sonja Peterson-Lewis argued that black women's hair styles were even political expressions. In "A Hair Piece: Perspectives on the Intersection of Race and Gender," Paulette Caldwell discussed a black woman who challenged American Airlines' policy which devalued black women's natural hair styles. All this leads to the conclusion that black women have always continued to affect public polices which discriminate against the black community through traditional and non-traditional methods.


APPENDIX
SURVEY

Black Women's Political Participation in Atlanta

The purpose of this questionnaire is to determine the different styles and levels of black women's political participation here in Atlanta, Georgia. It contains five sections: Section I looks at the types of interests you may have toward politics. Section II regards your political attitude to such things as civil rights and social welfare. Section III is divided into four parts. This section asks questions regarding different methods of traditional political participation like - voting, campaigning, community activity and personalized activity such as contacting a political official. Section IV asks for social background information which permits comparative analysis. For example, the responses of those who are married can be compared to those who are not, etc. Finally, Section V looks at your opinion regarding the overall effectiveness of political participation.

Most questions can be answered by circling or checking one answer, so please don't mark more than one answer unless the instructions ask for more than one. If you wish to explain an answer or offer a comment, use the margin or attach an additional sheet. Please remember that your answers are confidential and will be used only as data in the research report. Thank you.

The deadline for returning the completed questionnaire is March 26, 1997. You may send your response in as early as possible to Black Women's Political Participation Survey 65 Biscayne Drive #6 Atlanta, Georgia 30309.
Questionnaire

Please circle the appropriate response. Thank you.

Section I:

1. Are you interested in politics?
   Very Interested          Somewhat Interested          Not at all Interested

2. How often do you talk about local or national political issues?
   Everyday                Maybe once                      Less than once a week
                        or twice a week

3. What issues do you talk about?

4. Do you read newspapers or magazines regularly?
   Yes                    No

5. If yes, which ones?

6. How often do you watch the news on TV?
   Everyday                Maybe once                      Less than once a week
                        or twice a week

7. Could you name any of Georgia's local politicians

Section II:

8. Black women like me don't have any say in politics?
   True                    False

9. The situation for black women in America is
   Better                  The same                  Worse              Don't Know

10. Politics is for men.
    True                    False

11. Do politics affect your every day life?
    Yes                     No

12. Politics and government seem so complicating to me.
    True                    False
13. Listed below are several issues. Please indicate whose responsibility you think it is to solve this issues by circling the correct number.

1-Individual  
2-Local Government  
3-State Government  
4-Federal Government  
5-Private Groups  
6-Other (If other please explain)

a. Education  
1  2  3  4  5  6

b. Unemployment  
1  2  3  4  5  6

c. Adequate housing  
1  2  3  4  5  6

Section III:

14. Do you consider yourself a Democrat Republican Independent Other

15. Are there major groups or organizations in your community?  
Yes  No

16. If yes, who are they?

17. Do you support any of these groups?  
Yes(Who)  No

18. Do you think the government should enforce racial integration?  
Yes  No  Other

19. Has the condition for blacks in America Improved a lot Improved a little Improved a Has not Worsened Don't know

20. How did you vote in the 1996 Presidential elections?  
Clinton  Dole Third Party Did not vote Candidate

Clinton  Bush Third Party Did not vote Candidate
22. How did you vote in the 1993 Mayoral elections?  
   Bill Campbell   Myrtle Davis   Michael Lomax   Did not vote

23. How will your vote in the 1997 local elections?  
   Bill Campbell   Marvin Arrington   Other   Will not vote

24. Do you talk to others about participating in politics?  
   Yes   No

25. If yes, what kind of political activity?  

26. Do you attend any political meetings or rallies  
   Yes   No

27. Have you ever contributed money to a political party or candidate?  
   Yes   No

28. Have you ever worked for a political party or candidate?  
   Yes   No

29. The following is a list of various organizations. Please place a check by the organization (s) you belong to. Thank you.  
   a. NAACP
   b. SCLC
   c. 100 Black Women
   d. Links, Inc.
   e. Sorority
   f. Tenant's Association
   g. Block Club
   h. Sister Circle
   i. Book Club
   j. Professional Association
   k. National Council on Negro Women
   l. National Black Women's Health Project
   m. Investment Club
   n. Hobby Club
   o. Youth Group
   p. Political group
   q. Volunteer organization
   r. Eastern Star
   s. Alumni Association
   t. Sports Club
   u. Labor Union
v. Cultural Organization
w. Other

30. Have you ever worked with others in community in order to solve a problem?
   Yes     No

31. If yes, what problem did you try to resolve?

32. Have you ever taken part in forming a new group or organization in order to solve a community problem?
   Yes     No

33. If yes, what is the name of group or organization? Does it still exist?

34. Have you ever taken part in forming a new group or organization in order to solve a problem affecting black women?
   Yes     No

35. If yes, what is the name of the group or organization? Does it still exist?

36. Have you ever worked with others in the community to solve a problem affecting black women?
   Yes     No

37. If yes, what problem did you try to resolve?

38. Have you ever written or tried to contact a political official
   Yes     No

39. Have you ever talked about the following?
   Circle 1-Yes or 2-No
   a. Boycotting  1  2
   b. Marching    1  2
   c. Picketing   1  2
   d. Sitting-In  1  2

40. Have you ever acting in any of the following?
   Circle 1-Yes or 2-No
   a. Boycott    1  2
   b. Marches    1  2
   c. Pickets    1  2
   d. Sit Ins    1  2
Section IV:

41. How long have you lived here in Atlanta?
   Less than 1-5 years 6-11 years all my life
   one year

42. Age?
   18-25 26-30 31-40 41-50
   51-65 65 and older

43. Education?
   1-8 some high completed some completed graduate
   grades school highschool college college school

44. Please circle your family's current income before taxes
   $0- $11,000- $20,000- $30,000- $40,000- $50,000-
   10,999 19,999 29,999 39,999 49,999 59,999

45. Please circle your current income before taxes
   $0- $11,000- $20,000- $30,000- $40,000- $50,000-
   10,999 19,999 29,999 39,999 49,999 59,999

46. What kind of work do you do?
   Service/ Blue Professional/ White Sales Other
   Domestic Collar Managerial Collar

47. Marital status?
   Married Single Widowed Divorced Other

48. Do you have any children?
   Yes No

49. What is your religion?
   Protestant Islamic Catholic Other
   (Baptist)

Section V

50. Overall, do you think voting is an effective form of political participation?
   Yes No

51. Overall do you think working with a political campaign is an effective form of political participation?
   Yes No
52. Generally do you think writing or calling a government official is an effective form of political participation?

Yes     No

53. Generally do you think working with the community is an effective form of political participation?

Yes     No

54. Overall do you think working with a black women's organization is an effective form of political participation?

Yes     No

55. Overall do you think working with a women's organization is an effective form of political participation?

Yes     No

56. Do you believe there are other ways of influencing government?

Yes     No

57. If yes, how?

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR COMPLETING THE QUESTIONNAIRE

If you need additional writing space, please use the reverse side of questionnaire; or you may staple comments to questionnaire. Thank you

Would you be willing to participate in an interview? If so, please give your name and a contact number or you may contact me at (404) 367-0916

Name:

Number where you may be reached:
GLOSSARY

1. Electoral Participation

Citizen activities such as voting, contacting political officials, participating in campaign and political party activities in order to influence government or public policy.

2. Political Socialization

The act of structuring an individual's attitude toward participatory activity or a nonparticipatory role within a political system.

3. Conventional or Traditional Political Participation

Any political behavior/activity recognized by a government.

4. Unconventional or Nontraditional Political Participation

Political behavior which may include both illegal activities such as terrorism and rebellion and legal protest behavior such as picketing, boycotting, and marching. Other forms of non-traditional behavior may include individual, group, and/or community acts outside the electoral and protest arena which aim to influence government and public policies.

5. Political Behavioral Studies

Methodology which focuses on and identifies normal and abnormal individual regularities within a political system.

6. Socioeconomic factors

Variables such as income, age, race, gender, occupation, and life circumstances used by political behavioralists to describe the regular or absence of regular political behavior in a political system.
7. Sexism

The institutionalized practice of subordinating one gender over another through social, economic, political, and cultural structures.

8. Classism

The practice of excluding an individual from certain benefits or resources in society because of lower socio-economic status.

9. Racism

The institutionalized practice of excluding or reducing benefits or resources from a group because of their hair, color, skin, or ancestry through social, economic, political, and cultural structures.

10. Intersectionality

The argument that racism, classism, and sexism operate as mutually reinforcing obstacles in the material realities of an individual.

11. Civil War Amendments

13th, 14th, and 15th amendments to the United States Constitution, enacted soon after the Civil War, which outlawed involuntary servitude and granted equal protection and enfranchisement to former slaves and their progeny.

12. Multidimensional Analysis

The use of qualitative and quantitative methodological tools in various forms of research.

13. Traditional Methodology

This knowledge validation process stresses objectivity and the use of empirical research tools. This method is also referred to as "positivism."

14. Epistemology

Problems associated with ways knowledge is gained and validated.
Bibliography


