

MAKING “GOOD” CITIZENS: EDUCATION, CITIZENSHIP, AND THE NATIONAL
ASSOCIATION OF COLORED WOMEN, 1920-1941

by

QUIN’NITA FRANSHAE COBBINS

(Under the Direction of Chana Kai Lee)

ABSTRACT

After ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) experienced a myriad of changes that turned their focus to political education and citizenship. Clubwomen used formal and informal settings to disseminate civic knowledge, create civic programs, and educate women on their newly acquired franchise in order to achieve full citizenship rights and equal access to quality education. In the process, they articulated and practiced tenets of civic republicanism that shaped their concept of citizenship. The clubwomen committed themselves to civic responsibilities such as voting intelligently, respecting laws, pledging loyalty for protection of civil liberties, and actively participating in civic activities to work on behalf of the race and country; which in turn worked for the common good. Ultimately, these civic activists created spaces to achieve some level of political influence and agency within their communities and the government.

INDEX WORDS: civic republicanism, NACW, citizenship, civic education, African American women, democracy, Mary McLeod Bethune

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my mother, Cherylette Cobbins, who has been a remarkable educator for over 25 years, inspiring and giving the gift of knowledge to young children.

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INTRODUCTION

In an interview, Mary McLeod Bethune recounted to Charles S. Johnson, “I think that actually, the first hurt that came to me in my childhood was the contrast of what was being done for the white children and the lack of what we got.”¹ Around the age of nine or ten while playing outside with the children of the family whom her mother worked for, Bethune vividly remembered picking up a book for the very first time. Before she could take a peek at its contents, one of the white girls immediately said at her, “You can’t read. Put that down.”² This troublesome page from Bethune’s past exemplifies the painful experiences suffered by black children, in general, and black women, in particular, before and after the abolition of slavery. Freed African Americans experienced decades of quasi-freedom in the form of social inequalities, political disenfranchisement, economic setbacks, and a stream of virulent racism and violence. Even with these hindrances, African Americans demanded education and immediately worked to build institutions, furnish salaries for teachers, and finance schoolhouses and supplies. In the late nineteenth century, self-help services, especially in education, materialized in a national movement of African American women who responded to racial, gender, and education issues through the National Association of Colored Women (NACW). Bethune joined this social and political convoy of reformers who put education above all else in their social work programs to advance their communities more than what many scholars have realized.

¹ Charles S. Johnson Interview with Mary McLeod Bethune, 1940. Mary McLeod Bethune Papers, Mary McLeod Bethune Foundation, Bethune-Cookman College. Hereafter referred to as MMBF.

² Ibid.

Founded in 1896, the NACW and its regional, state, and local branches endeavored to provide and support education programs, primarily consisting of vocational and domestic training. But after World War I and the subsequent ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, the NACW shifted from an emphasis on vocational and domestic education to an emphasis on civic knowledge and political competence. Clubwomen found this new approach of civic education to be an effective avenue for African American women to pursue their political rights as citizens. Civic education was believed, on one hand, to reap educational benefits and, on the other, to achieve full citizenship. In their efforts to realize their goals, they formulated a citizenship ideology that stressed working for the common good and that promoted constitutional and democratic principles as the strength of the nation.

The NACW's practice and articulation of citizenship reflected a commitment to civic republicanism. While African American women rejected constrictive definitions of citizenship, republicanism serves as the best model in gauging their understanding of citizenship.³ Scholars have studied different notions of this ideology in the context of early American ideals where colonists used the rhetoric of republicanism to describe freedom as the right of independent citizens to pursue self-interests that would promote the common good.⁴ In the republic, a good polity rested on the participation of good and virtuous citizens, and it required identification with

³ Using civic republicanism as a tool of analysis is not necessarily meant to compartmentalize black women's citizenship in a neatly fitted box, obscure the complexities of their multi-dimensional experiences, or limit the expansive notions of citizenship.

⁴ Robert E. Shalhope. "Republicanism and Early American Historiography." *The William and Mary Quarterly*. Vol. 39, No. 2 (Apr. 1982), p. 335; Republicanism also meant "maintaining public and private virtue, internal unity, social solidarity, and vigilance against the corruptions of power." Others have broadened this definition, arguing republicanism was more embedded in political, social, and economic changes for the Revolutionaries. It was deeply rooted in protecting male liberty and entangled in a web of political and constitutional principles. However in the late nineteenth century, this idea did not cross class, race, or gender lines and was more individualistic and entrepreneurial in spirit than cooperative (347).

and commitment to the political community's goals, an expression of loyalty to the nation-state, and participation in civic activities.⁵

Clubwomen operated out of a sense of community and collective aspirations and redefined republicanism to fit their particular circumstances. Their practice of this concept represented the value of service to one's political community, believing only through race advancement could they work toward building a better nation. They expressed their patriotism by serving the local, state, and national communities through jury duty; supporting the defense of the country abroad; promoting national symbols and songs; and showing respect for the laws—many of which served as rhetorical strategies to give an impression of loyalty in exchange for assistance in obtaining rights. The Association dedicated itself to civic activities such as voter registration, election campaigning, and involvement with political parties.⁶ In order to contend with a civic identity, the NACW promoted a nationwide study of racial history to provide evidence of black citizens' contribution to the development of the country. This was also done in large part to incite among the generation of children a desire to serve the country. The tenets of republicanism ran throughout black women's political education programs, and it became evident in their ideals on citizenship.

Many women scholars have filled the shelves with fruitful scholarship on the NACW for over the last thirty years but have glossed over the essential connection between education and politics in the Association's mission. Historians have analyzed African American women's experiences through the explorations of race, gender, class, region, politics, and education, homing the argument that clubwomen sought to defend their womanhood and provide reform

⁵ Kathleen Knight Abowitz and Jason Harnish. "Discourses of Civic Republican Citizenship: Strong Political Community." *Review of Educational Research*, Vol. 76, No. 4 (Winter 2006). p. 658.

⁶ Civic republicanism provides one way of understanding how African American women conceived of their citizenship.

initiatives with the enduring commitment to lift as they climbed. Historian Deborah Gray White, for example, examined early firebrand black women's organizations such as the National Association of Colored Women, the International Council of Women of the Darker Races (ICWDR), and the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW).⁷ She maintained a conventional understanding that, in the 1920s, the NACW could not organize politically because of its official non-partisan stance to prevent conflict among the members.⁸ On the contrary, the NACW developed a calculated system of political strategies within the organization such as establishing political and citizenship study clubs on local levels, as discussed in Chapter 1 of this study. While the NACW chose to refrain from partisanship, they meant this in terms of aligning with and endorsing a specific political party that may not have served the individual or collective interests of the club members.

Because of this oversight, White missed the political connection to education, especially when they promoted the latter as the necessary step to tackle the racial and gender issues that affected women of color domestically and abroad. The NACW and ICWDR, for instance, believed that effectively studying these problems would produce better solutions to achieve their political goals. Michelle Rief, in *Thinking Globally and Acting Locally*, blended the work of the two organizations by investigating the international role of black clubwomen.⁹ Unlike White, Rief's work briefly mentioned the education mission of the ICWDR in crafting study clubs that addressed topics in international affairs, government, and education. However, she and White alike underemphasized how political education was central to the process.

⁷ Deborah Gray White. *Too Heavy A Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1999. Beverly Guy Sheftall, *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African American Feminist Thought*, produced the first anthology of feminist writings spanning over a century. She argued that black women were not monolithic but embraced ideological, religious, political, sexual, and class differences and worked to address the issues of racial and gender oppression from within and outside the boundaries of the race.

⁸ White, p. 134

⁹ Michelle Rief. "Thinking Locally, Acting Globally: The International Agenda of African American Club, 1880-1940." *The Journal of African American History*, Vol. 89, No. 3. (Summer, 2004).

Historian Rosalyn Terborg-Penn's monograph on black women's place in the suffrage movement, on the other hand, pointed out the overtly mass political participation of clubwomen prior to 1920.¹⁰ She argued that more black women than men took leadership positions, became active in politics, and advocated for votes to improve their economic conditions. Unlike their white counterparts, African American women campaigned for universal suffrage for all citizens rather than themselves. This ideal of citizenship revealed a deep regard for one central tenet of civic republicanism: active participation in state affairs for the common good.¹¹

In *African American Women and the Vote*, a cadre of female authors laid the foundation for a comprehensive political history of black women, addressing their exclusion from the mainstream political discourse.¹² The essayists reinterpreted African American women's notions of community and citizenship as seen in Elsa Barkley Brown's view on nineteenth century southern women. According to Brown, a political model such as liberal democracy was an inappropriate paradigm for reconstructing post-Civil War political history of African American women.¹³ She argued that individual freedom could only be achieved through collective autonomy where black women assumed men's vote as "equally theirs."¹⁴ Participation in the constitutional conventions, rallies, and meetings suggested to Brown that "African American

¹⁰ Rosalyn Terborg-Penn. *African American Women in the Struggle for the Vote, 1850-1920*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998. p. 3.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 165.

¹² In *Gender, Politics, and Jim Crow*, Glenda Gilmore investigated a much overlooked subject on black women's political efficacy and agency during the nadir period of African American life. She contended that when Southern black men became disfranchised and excluded from political participation, African American middle-class women assumed a major role in politics by becoming ambassadors for the black community. Gilmore's assessment suggested that women camouflaged or hid their political activism as a clever maneuver to obtain goods and services for them and their husbands. As this paper shows, a contingency of southern women were very much vocal, visible, and even openly critical in public/political affairs to attain education benefits for the community.

¹³ Liberal democracy is a form of democracy where representatives are elected by citizens to protect individual liberties and rights of minorities in society.

¹⁴ Elsa Barkley Brown. "To Catch the Vision of Freedom: Reconstructing Black Women's Political History, 1865-1880" in *African American Women and the Vote, 1837-1965*. Edited by Ann D. Gordon, Bettye-Collier, et al. Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1997. p. 82.

women assumed the political rights that came with being a member of the community even though they were not granted the political rights they thought should come with being citizens of the state.”¹⁵ Brown asserted that the very sense of community rather than individual citizenship was the basis for their political activities.¹⁶ This claim does not hold true for African American women after 1920. When black women gained recognition as individual political beings apart from men, they began to operate within a larger imagined political community on behalf of communal interests. Within this political system, they focused on education to lobby for full-fledged citizenship rights and for membership into American society.

While Penn and Brown provided critical insights into the political history of black women after Reconstruction, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham explored clubwomen’s active role in electoral politics during the 1920s. Higginbotham reasoned that black clubwomen pressed forward with their initiatives for political equality through “the emergence of new leaders, alliances, and strategies.”¹⁷ These new approaches manifested themselves within the black press, which promoted the political concerns of women; the formation of political clubs such as the National League of Colored Women Voters; and the circulation and mass distribution of pamphlets. Higginbotham, plainly, cites these knowledge-based avenues for civic learning but comes short of addressing the centrality of education to widespread political participation and demonstrating the ways in which clubwomen may have conceptualized their citizenship. The question steady remains in the literature: what constituted black women’s practice and understanding of citizenship?

¹⁵ Elsa Barkley Brown, “To Catch the Vision of Freedom,” p. 83.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 87.

¹⁷ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham. “Clubwomen and Electoral Politics in the 1920s” in *African American Women and the Vote, 1837-1965*. Edited by Ann D. Gordon, Bettye-Collier, et al. Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1997. p.150.

Historians have explored challenges faced by African Americans in their efforts to obtain full citizenship in the country. After the Civil War, the Fourteenth Amendment vaguely expanded notions of citizenship granting all persons “born or naturalized in the United States” as American citizens with equal protection and due process of the law. For freed African Americans, emancipation meant more than birth rights and gaining constitutional privileges but the opportunity to gain universal citizenship and acceptance in the nation. Martha Jones examined the world of public culture where African American women found spaces to exercise some form of authority and autonomy within their communities to make claims for freedom and citizenship.¹⁸ Her narrative, however, does not explicitly explain how black women defined or practiced their citizenship.

Katherine Mellen Charron’s study, *Freedom’s Teacher*, comes closer to understanding black women’s quest for citizenship and education in the early to mid-20th century. Charron demonstrated that southern female teachers’ linked their obligation to the community, rather than the state or their husbands, with citizenship training and rural education. Using Septima P. Clark, a South Carolina civic activist, clubwoman, and educator, as a central figure, Charron posited that she used schoolhouses as sites for freedom and citizenship training that led to the formation of Freedom Schools in the 1950s and ‘60s. Clark focused on political education as a means to garner fair wages and pay for teachers, access voting rights, and address the endemic poverty in rural areas. Charron’s work does much in illustrating and understanding the civic activism of southern black educators, but it only examines one of the mediums they used to train citizens—citizenship schools. However, her work fits Clark’s activism into the growing national

¹⁸ Martha Jones. *All Bound Up Together: The Woman Question in African American Public Culture, 1830-1900*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina.

movement of footsoldiering women who sought to empower and enable women for citizenship through education.

This thesis, *Making “Good” Citizens*, draws from Charron’s intersection of gender, politics, and education and adds civic republicanism as an interpretative lens to investigate how the pursuit of the Nineteenth Amendment and the turmoil of the Great Depression shaped clubwomen’s construction of citizenship and their relation to the government. The central question investigated is how did they specifically define and practice their notion of citizenship once they became recognized as political participants? This study demonstrates that clubwomen across the nation used civic education as a pedagogical-political approach to promote their understanding and appreciation of civic participation by black women. This approach aimed at forcing the political powers at play to address their educational and socio-political concerns. Spreading their message created ways to stimulate the masses of black women to ascertain their long-awaited desire to be full-fledged citizens and to be emancipated economically, politically, and educationally.

Chapter One, ‘*A Widespread University*,’ captures the intrepid spirit of the NACW’s mass civic education movement and traces their practices of republicanism in the 1920s. The grassroots movement sparked a mobilization of women voters, and it engendered knowledge and consciousness-building in formal and informal settings. These activist-educators disseminated information through public lectures, instructional meetings, the press, and political education programs held in black schools and colleges. Essentially, black women amassed an education agenda with political gambits to acquire more access to quality education, to achieve fair pay for teachers, to introduce race history in the schools, and to place representatives on school boards who would relate to social realities of black Americans.

Chapter Two, *Towards An Inclusive Democracy*, examines the clubwomen's continued efforts to make real their citizenship through political work and citizenship training during the Depression. Having gained some political influence, clubwomen engaged in more civic activism such as promoting civic virtue and identity, encouraging jury service, lobbying legislators, and writing their own bills. In the process, they challenged the government's role in providing education, as it extended its boundaries to salvage an economic calamity and a morally debased citizenry. Their critical arguments contended that education should be the foundation of democracy—all of which would provide for a stronger government and better America. The chapter also gives particular attention to Mary McLeod Bethune who used her role as club leader and political activist in Franklin D. Roosevelt's cabinet to advocate and place women as officeholders.

Essentially, this thesis demonstrates that as custodians of democracy and democratic education, black women championed a fuller vision of citizenship as being inclusive, participatory, and democratic. They did so for the good of their race and the American nation. This study hopes to make clear some notions of citizenship and how and why black women attempted to become members of the state.

CHAPTER 1

‘A WIDESPREAD UNIVERSITY:’ THE CIVIC EDUCATION MOVEMENT, 1920-1929

Education for African Americans, especially in the South, remained a peculiar phenomenon in the early 20th century. Club leader Ida B. Wells investigated the terrible disadvantages of black school children, wrote newspaper articles, and gave lectures on the appalling conditions of local schools. Inadequate school buildings, poorly paid teachers, and a lack of books and supplies bred intractable problems. African Americans struggled to fund a significant number of one-and-two room school buildings, usually held in churches or nearby sheds. In the winter, parents and community members provided firewood to warm the buildings. They often supplied black educators, many of whom possessed only six to eight years of formal training, with room and board during the school term.¹⁹ In response to these atrocious conditions, improving education became the essential service for clubwomen.

In the first two decades of the century, the Association emphasized domestic training that was commensurate with their philosophy of self-help.²⁰ New local and state clubs formed and responded to the needs of black education through the establishment of kindergartens, nursery schools, and day care centers. Giles Jackson observed that in New Orleans clubs started

¹⁹ Bonnie Krause. “‘We Did Move Mountains:’ Lucy Saunders Herring, North Carolina Jeanes Supervisor and African American Educator, 1916-1968.” *North Carolina Historical Review*, (Apr. 2003), Vol. 80. p. 191.

²⁰ A cohort of black clubwomen leaders within their own personal lives pushed for higher education like Anna Julia Cooper, Hallie Quinn Brown, and Mary Church Terrell. Cooper believed women should receive higher education and pursue college degrees. She supported the equality of the sexes and that women should be admitted on the same terms as men. And yet, she also advocated for the professionalization of domestic work. She, along with many club members, advised women to learn the art and science of cooking, sewing, and cleaning. Cooper stressed that a professionally trained domestic servant would be able to demand pay for her service and would deserve treatment that would accord her intelligent and efficient service. Cooper’s logic reflected the notion that not everyone would attain a higher level of learning and needed to study a trade that would make them economically viable and secure.

kindergartens and training schools for nurses.²¹ Lucy Laney and Alice Carey, statistician of the NACW, established two of the first black kindergartens in the state of Georgia. The Colored Women's League of Washington founded a Kindergarten Normal Training Class for young women along with a free kindergarten for some of the city's black youth. These kindergartens and training classes for small children signified an important duty to prevent child delinquency and help working mothers and fathers with the instruction, care, and supervision of their children.

At the Fifth Biennial Convention in 1906, the organization established a Domestic Science Department, created to educate girls and mothers on maintaining good homes and on proper parenting. Beverly Guy Sheftall explained, "Their involvement in racial uplift activities can be viewed as a manifestation of their obligations to the race, but also as an indication of the extent to which they had taken quite seriously their obligations as women to join the "domestic crusade."²² Local delegations such as the Tuskegee Woman's Club and the Woman's League of Washington formed mothers' clubs and held meetings where the community women discussed and received instruction on subjects related to the upbringing of children. These mothers' clubs taught good sanitation, cleanliness, sewing, gardening, and canning. They were designed to improve the moral standard of women since society judged the upper crusts based on the masses.²³

While clubwomen focused on genteel notions of female domesticity, they engaged in political organizing and campaigning for women's suffrage. Many members participated in the

²¹ Giles B. Jackson. *The Industrial History of the Negro Race in America*. Richmond, Virginia: L.H. Jenkins Publishing, 1908. p. 133

²² Beverly Guy Sheftall. *Daughters of Sorrow: Attitudes Towards Black Women, 1880-1920*. Carlson Publishing, Inc. 1990. p. 23.

²³ The stress on mothers and wives preparing good homes in the domestic sphere reflected the social mores of a middle-class society. See Cynthia Neverdon-Morton, *African American Women in the Advancement of the South* (1989); Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter* (1984); Stephanie J. Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to be and to Do* (1996).

iconic March on Washington in 1913 and adopted resolutions to form political clubs to “stir up men to greater interest in matters concerning the welfare of the race.”²⁴ A number of suffrage clubs sprang up in states that had already enfranchised women. According to Penn, these clubs worked toward a universal suffrage amendment and strategized on ways to secure the vote.²⁵ Suffrage activities within some of the clubs were primarily educational such as the Tuskegee Women’s Club, where Adella Hunt Logan “organized a political parade for her civics class,” coached a suffrage debate team, and held suffrage lectures.²⁶ Hence, at the turn of the 1910s clubwomen were putting in place an ideology where politics and education went hand in hand, thereby, laying the groundwork for what was to follow in the next two decades.

Entering into the postwar years, Americans faced a mountain of changes in a vast and rapidly growing society. The role of black soldiers in the war, an emergent consumer society, expanding gender roles, the migration of southern blacks to Northern and Midwestern cities, and the renaissance in Harlem represented a new and defining age for African Americans. The NACW grew rapidly and boasted a membership rising from 100,000 to approximately 250,000 by the end of the 1920s.²⁷ At the same time, the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, which gave women the license to vote, changed the stratum of politics and became an impetus for the NACW’s widespread civic education movement.

In 1920, club leaders opened up the 12th Biennial Convention at Tuskegee in a spirit of overwhelming anticipation. Having discussed the momentous changes of the country, they

²⁴ *Minutes of the Eighth Biennial Convention, 1912*, NACW.

²⁵ Rosalyn Ternborg-Penn. *African American Women in the Struggle for the Vote*, p. 97.

²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 104,105.

²⁷ Records of the National Association of Colored Women. *Minutes of the Thirteenth Biennial Convention, 1922*. Box 1 Reel 1; Hereafter referred to as NACW. Elizabeth Lindsay Davis. *Lifting As We Climb*. Introduction by Sieglinde Lemke. New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1996 [1933]. p. xvii.

addressed the pressing need to adjust the direction of the organization. Mounting problems of violence, racial bigotry, separatism, educational disparities, and labor exploitation dominated the domestic terrain. Though the country had fought the First World War in the name of freedom and the preservation of democracy—where both black women and men contributed to the war efforts in various capacities on the battlefield and on the homefront—the nation continued to turn a blind eye away from the racial and gender discrimination toward its black citizens.²⁸ Georgia Nugent, chairwoman of the executive board, proclaimed, “Never was the Association called on of greater service and sacrifice in leadership than at this time.”²⁹ The country’s propaganda of freedom and democracy coupled with women’s suffrage spurred the NACW to join the bandwagon of full political freedom.

Out of optimism and service, club leaders spawned a civic education movement where they carved out their own spaces for citizenship. They did so by channeling women to learn about the democratic process and voting privileges and using education as a means to define citizenship in an unwelcoming and hostile nation. This development encompassed the formation of citizenship schools and political clubs, the study of all levels of government—including duties of officers, voting practices, the Constitution and local and state law—dissemination of literature to arouse political awareness, and home canvassing, all of which sketched their understanding of civic training.

The NACW began with establishing citizenship schools, instituting their own programs to school women and young adults on achieving full citizenship status. Historian Katherine Mellen Charron observed that citizenship schools “lay in the historical experiences of African American women teachers and in a frequently misunderstood tradition of black schooling in the

²⁸ See Nina Mjagkij, *Loyalty in Time of Trial: The African American Experience During World War I*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2011.

²⁹ *Minutes of the Twelfth Biennial Convention*, 1920, NACW. p. 40.

segregated South.”³⁰ In the 1920 executive board meeting, chairwoman Nugent encouraged that “the organization of schools of citizenship is a step in the right direction...The ballot without intelligence [sic] back of it is a menace instead of a blessing [,] and I like to believe that women are accepting their recently granted citizenship with a sense of reverent responsibility.”³¹ As laboratories of learning and political strategizing, citizenship schools marked a growing awareness to arm women-soldiers with the tools necessary to wield some form of control over their own destinies. These early citizenship schools introduced and taught practical lessons on how to vote efficiently; the guaranteed rights of all citizens outlined in the Constitution; what to expect at the registrar’s office and election polls; and basic information concerning political parties, poll taxes, and literacy tests.

Adamant in their pursuits to engineer effective schools for voter education, the NACW announced a much needed Citizenship Department during the presidency of Hallie Q. Brown (1920-1924). The department oversaw the development of such schools through researching and collecting data on issues concerning legislation and voting. These schools spread the message of voter empowerment and civic responsibility to help black women gain greater influence in politics. In 1922, a Boston newspaper reported that the Association had created a Citizenship Department that upheld the slogan “America Means Equal Opportunity for All.” In order “to live up to it [slogan],” the article proceeded, “they were establishing summer schools in connection with their [black] schools and colleges everywhere, having committees and sub-committees, to create interest and enthusiasm for these citizenship schools.”³² The colleges served as meeting places for clubwomen to hold sessions with community women and involve

³⁰ Katherine Mellen Charron. *Freedom’s Teacher*, p. 5

³¹ *Minutes of the Thirteenth Biennial Convention*, 1920, NACW. p. 40.

³² “Civics and Education by Colored Women: A Federation With Twenty-Five Years of Achievement.” *The Christian Science Monitor*. Boston, Mass. (5 Apr. 1922). p. 9; Katherine Mellen Charron captures these early citizenship schools throughout South Carolina and the South.

the young college students who were the race's next leaders and voters. These orchestrated schools of citizenship continued to function over the next four decades, reaching a pinnacle in the 1950s and '60s.³³

Accompanying the widespread emergence of citizenship schools, a plethora of black Republican and Republican affiliated clubs surfaced across the United States. Clubwomen encouraged cooperative participation and involvement with political parties, voting, and engagement in civic activities such as campaigning and forming political groups. The clubs not only sparked an interest in government but educated women on party platforms, surveyed the issues most sensitive to their needs, applied pressure to the Republican Party in addressing their concerns, and provided transportation services to voters. Elizabeth Lindsay Davis, official historian of the NACW, documented that women in Lansing, Michigan formed the Women's Republican Research Club to educate women on politics and ensure they had transportation to register and vote.³⁴

The NACW touted itself as a non-partisan organization that represented the general welfare of independent-thinking black women regardless of political orientation; but it was quite obvious the group overwhelmingly supported the Republican Party. Most of its members identified themselves as Republicans and held allegiance to the party for two reasons. First, it symbolized the party of Lincoln who was revered as the 'Great Emancipator;' and second, it offered an alternative to the staunchly anti-black representations of the Democratic Party.³⁵

³³ White women clubs also engaged in establishing citizenship schools that taught women and children the importance of civics and Americanism. For example, Georgia women of the General Federation of Club emphasized the study of the Constitution, observance and respect for the laws to prevent criminality, naturalization of immigrant women, and jury service. ("Georgia State Federation of Women's Clubs: Mrs. Charlton Battle's Report on American Citizenship." *Atlanta Constitution*, 7 Dec. 1924, p. 7.)

³⁴ Elizabeth Lindsay Davis. *Lifting As They Climb*. Introduction by Sieglinde Lemke. New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1933. p. 324.

³⁵ For discussions on African American membership in political parties of the twentieth century see Nancy Joan Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln: Black Politics in the Age of FDR*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press)

Cooperative participation in political parties fostered interracial collaboration where black women sought to gain the ear of powerful candidates. They made their requests known and negotiated their vote with the promise of obtaining rights for African Americans. Philadelphia clubwomen, J.G. Robinson, Edith Sinton, and Blanch Thomas, who all represented the Harding and Coolidge Club, met with Senator Warren Harding and informed the presidential hopeful about the concerted efforts by white Democrats to prevent black women from voting in the South.³⁶ Southern extremists used intimidation and violence along with poll taxes and literacy tests to humiliate, terrorize, and inhibit the progress of black citizens. They perceived black suffrage as a threat to white hegemony and a danger to the sustained social and political infrastructure of the South and other parts of the nation. The clubwomen therefore asked Harding, if elected, to investigate the matter and reduce the number of southern delegates to the number of votes they received or find an alternative measure to guarantee the enforcement of black women suffrage. These political advocates notified Harding on their community's concerns in hopes that he would use his power and office to aid them. In the meantime, black women remained strong stalwarts at the polling places and election centers while they conjoined efforts with the Republican Party to get out the vote.³⁷

But it was not until the presidential race of 1924 that the NACW's electoral involvement in campaigns and civic clubs escalated and devolved into a hotbed of partisan politics. At the Fourteenth Biennial Convention, the delegation announced that the National Republican Committee recruited Hallie Quinn Brown, president of the NACW, to direct its department on stirring political consciousness among black women voters. Brown's presidency of the NACW

Press), 1983; Simon Topping, *Lincoln's Lost Legacy: The Republican Party and the African American Vote, 1928-1952*, (Gainesville: university press of florida), 2008; Suzanne Ellery Greene, "Black Republicans On The Baltimore City Council, 1890-1931." *Maryland Historical Magazine*, (Fall1979), Vol. 74.

³⁶ "Harding Asked to Help Women." *Pittsburgh Courier*, (12 Sept. 1920), p. 2.

³⁷ Davis, *Lifting As They Climbed*, pps. 359-360.

may have contributed considerably to the Republicans' agenda in an attempt to win over the black female vote and elect Calvin Coolidge as president.

Rallying around the presidential election, women found ways to disseminate information and inform voters on the campaign, both parties' platforms, and voter registration. Clubwomen in Chicago discussed the importance of home-to-home canvassing and discovered that black women were more interested in topics that pertained to the home in the election. Home canvassing functioned as one of the most effective means of stimulating voter participation because of its intimate setting, one-on-one discussions, and personal interactions with voters. Through this medium, women laid out each party's agenda, spoke on the importance of voting in the upcoming elections, and collected data on what issues seemed important to women. Other clubs such as the Phyllis Wheatley Club of Buffalo conducted community seminars on the power of the black female vote and organized political clubs to get the vote out.³⁸ In Minnesota, clubs distributed pamphlets across the state urging women to register and vote. Florie Pugh of Oklahoma City held instructional meetings in the evenings and lectured on organizing a precinct and district, the duty of a precinct committeewoman, registering to vote, new voters' orientation, the necessity of voting by 10:00 am on Election Day, and the reason black people should be Republicans.³⁹

While it is difficult to measure the clubwomen's success or ascertain their degree of influence in Coolidge's campaign, club leaders took pride in their contribution to his victory and remained steadfast supporters of the Republican Party. Many of the members worked, in one way or another, with the national Republican Party during the election. Mrs. George S. Williams (Mamie Williams), Mary C. Booze, Hallie Q. Brown, and Mary Church Terrell all held positions

³⁸ White, *Too Heavy A Load*, p. 29.

³⁹ Higginbotham, "Clubwomen and Electoral Politics," p. 143.

in the party, and the latter two helped form the Women's Republican League in Washington, D.C as an outlet to express their personal political views.⁴⁰ Only in theory did the Association remain non-partisan; in practice, it told another story. However, Terrell made it clear, while giving a report on the Legislative Department, that the organization was not a political machine. If they inquired about her opinion, she would give it to them on the merits of the candidates.⁴¹

Higginbotham noted that the NACW's Citizenship and Legislative Departments were "designed to inspire civic duty and legislative study for race and sex advancement, not to advance specific political parties."⁴²

Many women voters, nonetheless, disagreed with women affiliating with a party. Ida B. Wells-Barnett asserted that black women should "go to the polls and vote our convictions" and not their political affiliations.⁴³ Terrell, though a staunch Republican, insisted the women not get bogged down in political parties, but to vote based on the candidate who has a "reputation of being just to all citizens without regard to race or color."⁴⁴ A black woman voter, Avonia D. Brown, stated:

I shall never forget the weak planks in the Republican platform as to the welfare of the colored people, that showed themselves more than thirty years ago From that time my views are as they will always remain . . . after careful study to select the "best man for the best peace" regardless of his politics.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Hallie Q. Brown served as the speaker for the National Republican Convention in 1924 and Director of the Colored Women Department; Mamie Williams and Mary C. Booze, represented the Republican National Committewomen; and Mary Church Terrell was named the director of Colored Women in the East by the Republican Party.

⁴¹ *Minutes of the Fifteenth Biennial Convention, 1926*, NACW. p. 73.

⁴² Higginbotham, p. 144

⁴³ *Minutes of the Fourteenth Biennial Convention, 1924*, NACW. p. 39.

⁴⁴ *Minutes of the Fifteenth Biennial Convention, 1926*, NACW. p. 77.

⁴⁵ Avonia D. Brown. "What A Woman Thinks About Candidates and Parties." *Baltimore Afro-American*, 8 Oct. 1920.

Brown urged women to become Independents and refrain from making the same errors made by men who only knew two parties.⁴⁶ Deborah Gray White indicated that many clubmembers felt that most black men failed to deal with the race issues because they had been distracted by the politics and activities of the Republican and Democratic parties.⁴⁷ Brown mustered up the women for a greater purpose and advised them against voting for a candidate simply because he represented the favored party. Pleading, she called upon the women to attend open forums where the candidate's messages and platforms would be explained. The issues would also be studied and made understandable in order to vote for the right person.⁴⁸

Nevertheless, clubwomen's engagement with a party gave them a boost of confidence. Their close involvement with the Republican Party engendered a sense of belonging to the wider political community and becoming recognized within the party. Lauded in the *National Notes*, the official organ of the NACW, clubwoman Estele R. Davis, who served on the Speaker's Bureau during the Coolidge campaign hailed:

How little have we realized in our club work for the last twenty-five years that it was God's way of preparing us to assume this greater task of citizenship. I often wonder what would have happened without our organized club work which has not only trained us for service, but has created a nation-wide sisterhood through which we know the outstanding women of each state who are able to serve our race in the time of need.⁴⁹

Davis congratulated and encouraged her fellow clubsisters to further participate in the civic affairs of the country, assuming it to be a critical part of citizenship and racial uplift.

Supplementing the educational work of political clubs, local suffrage clubs across the country promoted awareness of the franchise by informing eligible voters on the meaning of local and state elections. The *Afro-American Baltimore*, a weekly publication, announced that

⁴⁶ Avonia D. Brown. "What A Woman Thinks," *Baltimore Afro-American*.

⁴⁷ White, p. 151.

⁴⁸ Brown, "What A Woman Thinks," *Baltimore Afro-American*.

⁴⁹ Cited in Higginbotham, "Clubwomen and Electoral Politics," p. 143.

the Colored Women's Suffrage Club of Maryland held "a series of citizenship meetings every Thursday evening from 8 to 9:30 for the benefit of the newly enfranchised women."⁵⁰ According to the publication, these meetings were considered to be highly instructive and well attended, where women prepared to vote and understand the election process. Augusta T. Chissell, a member of the Colored Women's Suffrage Club, carved out a space in the *Afro-American Baltimore* entitled, "A Primer for Women Voters." She designed this weekly column as a tool for political education, inviting readers to write in questions, which she in turn answered.⁵¹ Of course, this attracted the black female readership and literate voters, giving them an opportunity to ask pressing questions while at the same time publicizing the clubs' citizenship meetings. In this fashion, clubwomen hoped to educate on a more systematic level. For instance, an inquisitive and interested woman wrote to Chissell: "What is meant by party platform? And where may I go to be taught how to vote?"⁵² Chissell promptly replied, "Party platform simply means what either candidate promises to do after he is elected You will also do well to attend the Thursday Night meetings of the YWCA [Young Women's Christian Association] under the auspices of the Colored Women's Suffrage Club."⁵³

Chissell's primer offers insights on the concerns of black women in the area, their interests in politics, and also the skepticism of involving themselves in political affairs. When asked, "What good will it do women to vote," she clearly answered, "It will give women power to protect themselves in their person, property, children, occupations, opportunities and social relations. . . . it will make all classes of women more nearly equal with men and with each

⁵⁰ "A Word to the Women Voters." *Baltimore Afro-American*, (17 Sept. 1920), p.4.

⁵¹ Higginbotham, pps. 139-140.

⁵² Chissell, "A Primer for Women Voters." *Baltimore Afro-American*, p. 6.

⁵³ Ibid.

other.”⁵⁴ In this attempt to eliminate doubts about the ballot and voting in general, Chissell spelled out the importance of the franchise to women in gendered terms. She believed when women were properly taught, they “will vote [and] administer to the affairs of the municipality,” where “capability and originality have no gender.”⁵⁵ In other words, women’s intellectual prowess and ability to make sound decisions in the country had nothing to do with sex but human experience and perception. Like many clubwomen, Chissell paid particular attention to the gendered implications of voting and citizenship but emphasized the social responsibility of educated women to enlighten women of their power to fully engage in government or vote for candidates who would serve not only the interests of the race but women’s issues. These issues comprised of laws to protect women from sexual exploitation in domestic occupations, equal pay for teachers, a provision for a Mother’s pension, childcare and child labor laws, and anti-lynching legislation that would protect black women and men alike.

The Chairmen of the National Legislative Department, Mary Church Terrell, agreed with Chissell and urged the women to cast their ballots on behalf of women’s interests. Terrell declared, “No woman should work harder to have their ballots count for something worthwhile than colored women, because no group of women in the United States has more serious problems confronting them than they do.”⁵⁶ She insisted that “all women should inform themselves” and take on the “the duty of studying carefully the measures proposed and the questions discussed in the national Congress.”⁵⁷ Black women were at a peculiar disadvantage than white women due to their race. The former suffered from racial sexual exploitation, intensive labor, and inequities

⁵⁴ Chissell, “A Primer for Women Voters,” p. 6.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Mary Church Terrell. “An Appeal to Colored Women to Vote and Do Their Duty in Politics.” *National Notes*. (Nov. 1925) in Records of the National Association of Colored Women.

⁵⁷ Mary Church Terrell. “An Appeal to Colored Women,” *National Notes*, (Nov. 1925).

in education, healthcare, and industry. Therefore, the onus was placed upon the backs of black women to tend to their duties as citizens which translated into voting.

Terrell continued to advance and push forward her own understanding of race, gender, and citizenship through the power of the ballot. She stated that *if* women voted properly, they would put good men into office who, in her estimation, could work for the welfare of women—a slightly different view from Chissell. It appears striking that Terrell strongly supported men to handle the legislative and political affairs of the nation instead of championing women for the jobs. Historian Joyce Hanson suggested a reason for this sentiment in that women had a responsibility to support black male leaders and “not strike out on their own and assume leadership positions.”⁵⁸ This latter view seems troublesome since Terrell became a member of the D.C. Board of Education and throughout her life contested spheres of male dominance. According to historian Beverly Jones, the NACW under Terrell’s leadership (1896-1901) worked to enhance the lives of the masses and provide “a vehicle for the energies of middle-class women.”⁵⁹ This line of thinking may have shaped Terrell’s desire for the NACW to remain a social service organization comprised of cultured, refined women who sought to uplift their sisters—not a political playground. While the Association held firm to this stance, it emphatically became more political, especially in their pursuits and programs for education.

So then, a probable reason for Terrell’s reluctance can be found in her call to women who “must play the political game” rather than actually run for office. She reasoned, “Learn to play the political game as they [black women] would any other game in which they wish to become

⁵⁸ Joyce Hanson, *McLeod Bethune & Black Women’s Political Activism*. Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri, 2003, p. 112.

⁵⁹ Beverly Jones. *Quest for Equality: The Life and Writings of Mary Eliza Church Terrell, 1863-1954*. New York: Carlson Publishing, Inc., 1990. p. 29.

proficient and win.”⁶⁰ In this context, Terrell construed women’s persuasive power as a strategy to influence politicians and get what they needed for the community and, like her contemporaries, saw no use in promoting women when voting was such a new right for them. Women holding public office was a profoundly polarizing issue, especially with the extant reprisals by some men, both black and white, against women’s suffrage.⁶¹ But playing the “game” meant courting and pandering to politicians’ favor to access the political realm more directly. She emphasized writing letters as a defense and keeping a watchful eye on bills introduced in the legislatures of state and federal governments. The emphasis on electing men to office, in later years, would be challenged by her fellow clubwoman rival, Mary McLeod Bethune.

At this juncture, clubwomen were developing what modern day scholars have termed as participatory skills. In their study of education for citizenship, researchers have concluded that civic learning required more than the acquisition of knowledge but the development of skill sets characterized as interacting, monitoring, and influencing.⁶² Through African American women’s structures of civic knowledge, the skills acquired in educating voters followed this concept whereby they interacted with other women-citizens and built coalitions; monitored the government’s actions by attending and holding public meetings in addition to following up on

⁶⁰ Mary Church Terrell. “An Appeal to Colored Women to Vote and Do Their Duty in Politics.” *National Notes*. (Nov. 1925), NACW.

⁶¹ Most black men supported women’s suffrage, but a few did not and argued women’s place belonged in the home. In the Baltimore *Afro-American*, a number of articles reported the positions of men to influence women to stay away from politics. In one example James B. Dudley gives his opinion in “Stay Away from Polls.” 22 Oct. 1920, p.10 urged women to refrain from voting because it was not expedient and that white women in the South will not vote and become politicians.

⁶² “Civics Framework for the 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress.” NAEP Civic Consensus Project. United States, Council of Chief State School Officers, National Assessment Governing Board, American Institutes for Research. pps .28-29.

legislation; and influenced the process of politics and government through petitioning, writing letters, and voting.⁶³

The political landscape of the South, however, painted a far different picture than other regions of the country with regard to voting. Since white southerners' violent appetites for control led them to believe enfranchisement for black Americans would disrupt the deeply engrained racial hierarchies, Bertha Johnson of Mississippi believed she had to play the political game heralded by Terrell to fit the particularity of black women's situations in the South. In *Gender and Jim Crow*, Glenda Gilmore asserted that southern black women became "diplomats to the white communities," working on behalf of African American interests, and reshaped a new political stratum in the South for black women's activism.⁶⁴ Johnson openly advised the Association that "legislators listen to those whose ballots made them officers."⁶⁵ Her entreaty called for them to "speak to the white ministers and businessmen" and most importantly to "enlist the support of the leading white women." Everyone had a job to "use whatever influence," whether through speeches or inviting representatives of white women's clubs to their state or local club meetings.⁶⁶

Black women understood that institutional and social improvements had to be supplicated through white support; and so, the southern state club presidents sent the following recommendation to the Committee on Interracial Relations of the Women's Missionary Council of the Methodist Episcopal Church:

"We believe that the ballot is the safe-guard of the Nation, and that every qualified citizen in the Nation should have the right to use it. We believe that if there is ever to be any

⁶³ NAEP Civic Consensus Project.

⁶⁴ Glenda Gilmore. *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996. p. xxi.

⁶⁵ Bertha L. Johnson. *National Notes*, (Jan. 1926), NACW. p. 15.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

justice before the law, the Negro must have the right to exercise the vote. We ask therefore, that white women for the protection of their homes, as well as ours, sanction the ballot for all citizens.”⁶⁷

The southern presidents’ rhetoric embodied the deeper implications of race and gender politics. To ask for help without showing how suffrage could materially benefit white women fell on deaf ears. Playing on white reformers’ moral compasses seemed to be outdated and ineffective. These strategists sought to sway white women toward having a vested interest in black women’s suffrage to protect both their homes from the vices and impurity of alcohol. The Eighteenth Amendment, which prohibited the sale of alcohol, was an important issue to women and rumors of an annulment loomed the air. Lisa Materson, in her work on African American women reformers, explained that black women made the connection between prohibition and civil rights, recognizing that “Democratic success in repealing the Eighteenth Amendment would set a precedent for eliminating the Reconstruction Amendments” as well as women’s suffrage.⁶⁸ The Legislative Chairman, Mazie Mossell Griffin urged the women of the National to do “all in their power to prevent the repeal of the [18th] amendment to the Constitution of the United States, as this would place the 14th and 15th Amendments in jeopardy.”⁶⁹ Any violation of one amendment posed a threat to the viability of other significant laws.

More so for black southern women, they regarded the ballot as the “democratic and orderly method of correcting abuses and protecting the rights of citizens.”⁷⁰ The Southeastern

⁶⁷ An undated document ca. 1920-1924. Mary McLeod Bethune Papers, Amistad Research Center at Tulane University, New Orleans. Box 2, Folder 12; The letters were signed by Charlotte Hawkins Brown, NCFCW, Marion B. Wilkinson, SCFCW; Lucy C. Laney President City Federation of Colored Women's Clubs Augusta, GA; Mrs. Chmn. Com. Of Management, Charlotte Branch, Y.W.C.A.; Janie P. Barrett VFCWC; Mrs. Booker T. Washington, Honorary President, NACW; Mrs. R.R.Moton, Tuskegee; Mrs. John Hope (Lugenia Burns), Dept. Neighborhood Work, National Fed. CW Clubs; M.L. Crosthwait, Registrar Fisk University; Mary McLeod Bethune, Principal of Daytona, and President of the Southeastern Federation of Colored Women's Clubs.

⁶⁸ Lisa G. Materson. “African American Women, Prohibition, and the 1928 Presidential Election.” *Journal of Women's History*. Vol. 21, No. 1, (Spring 2009). p. 63.

⁶⁹ *Minutes of the Fourteenth Biennial Convention, 1924*, NACW. p.19.

⁷⁰ Mary McLeod Bethune. “Southern Negro Women and Race Co-operation (1921),” in *Mary McLeod Bethune*

constituency acknowledged that “as peace-loving, law-abiding citizens” they believed the “ultimate and only guarantee of fair dealing and justice for the Negro, as well as the wholesome development of the whole community, lies in the peaceful, orderly exercise of the franchise by every qualified Negro citizen.”⁷¹ The strong sentiment of nation-building through enfranchising the race ranked high in the women’s agenda to secure a place for African Americans at the table of democracy.

While the pressing need to exercise the franchise reverberated throughout southern African American communities, black women extended the civic duty of voting by teaching voters to cast their ballots wisely and intelligently. Educated voting and educated voters were a necessary component to garner the best benefits and assistance for the race. Under the Citizenship column listed in the *National Notes*, club members decreed, “We, urge as the sacred duty of every citizen, education in the use of the ballot, participation in all elections and endorsement of candidates on the basis of clean personal character and pledge of support of definite policies necessary to the best development of our national life.”⁷² Avonia D. Brown stated, “We must then show ourselves worthy of our franchise by following only [our] own convictions as to what will be best for the country and at the same time best for ourselves and vote accordingly.”⁷³ Women used republican language of working for the best of the country to address their race and gender specific issues. A lack of knowledge on a party’s agenda, the candidate, and the issues concerning the nation—which included the plight of African Americans and women—was not only seen as detrimental but a slap in the face in clubwomen’s eyes. Ida

Building a Better World: Essays and Selected Documents. Edited by Audrey Thomas McCluskey and Elaine Smith. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1999. p. 148.

⁷¹ Mary McLeod Bethune. “Southern Negro Women and Race Co-operation (1921),” in *Mary McLeod Bethune Building a Better World: Essays and Selected Documents*. Edited by Audrey Thomas McCluskey and Elaine Smith. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1999. p. 148.

⁷² “Citizenship.” *National Notes*, (May 1925), NACW. p. 6.

⁷³ Avonia D. Brown, “What A Woman Thinks,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, 8 Oct. 1920.

B. Wells pointed out that “if we as a group do not go to the polls and cast our ballots” or vote intelligently then “we are not in a position to demand the improvements that we should have for our people.”⁷⁴ Ultimately, black club leaders again feared and warned against party affiliation and voting blindly for the very fact that a candidate who may represent a black voter’s party may not serve the race’s best interests for advancement. Therefore, casting the ballot “appropriately” must come with some form of knowledge and prudence.

Reports from state presidents also reveal their perseverance and efforts to educate the masses of black women on using the ballot with discretion and understanding. For instance in 1925, Hettie B. Tilghman, eighth past state president and state chairwoman of legislation, claimed that the California League of Women “with its proper place of influence [was] established for the purpose of educating women in the responsibility of citizenship and the casting of the vote impartially and intelligently.”⁷⁵ Clubwomen in California boasted of being “pioneer voters,” having exercised the franchise before many of their Eastern counterparts.⁷⁶ Tilghman asserted that women were granted suffrage and “received recognition for their services through membership into the state body.”⁷⁷ According to Tilghman, black women became recognized through voting privileges, allowing them to directly fight for citizenship rights and the enforcement and protection of their civil liberties. Thus, the ballot represented the first tangible step towards full citizenship and becoming a member of the composite body politic. This idea held true for black women across the nation and in areas where Jim Crow laws restricted the amount of political influence and where most African Americans would remain disenfranchised.

⁷⁴ *Minutes of the Fourteenth Biennial Convention, 1924*, NACW. p. 39.

⁷⁵ Hettie B. Tilghman. “What the Study of Legislative Work Has Meant to Our Group.” *National Notes*, (Nov. 1925), NACW. p. 3.

⁷⁶ Women gained suffrage in California in 1911.

⁷⁷ Tilghman, “What the Study of Legislative Work Has Meant to Our Group,” p. 3.

Appalled at the disproportionately small subsidies given to African American education, clubwomen undoubtedly sought enfranchisement to seize every morsel of education opportunities and to push for reform in the school system. They targeted the limited resources for black school-age children who attended school for approximately three to four months out of the year. White male-dominated school boards controlled funding for public schools and gave only meager aid to black children for rudimentary instruction and learning. An Oklahoma member, Nellie W. Green, expressed that the “main medium of forcing the extension of [the] school term was by the ballot.”⁷⁸ The NACW understood that to vote for leaders who could and would change this phenomenon and extend the school term might create an increase in literacy and secure a better future for black children. They openly aimed at the South for the inadequate facilities and for the great discrepancy between the per capita amount spent on children of African descent in comparison with white students. They also pushed for their “constituent organizations to work against the false economy of education in the school budgets.”⁷⁹ The NACW resolved to appeal to all school and government officials to regulate the educational funds and salaries for teachers and students.⁸⁰ Addie W. Dickerson, national chairwoman of education, recommended each affiliated club to endorse 1) the National Educational Association’s proposition for a cabinet officer on education; 2) federal control of elementary schools; 3) a uniform system of education; and 4) an enlarged effort in all clubs to further education.⁸¹

Local and state clubs redoubled their efforts in furthering education by working with boards of education in their communities. In North Carolina, not only did club members report

⁷⁸ *Minutes of the Fifteenth Biennial Convention, 1926.* p. 32.

⁷⁹ *National Notes*, (May 1925), NACW. p. 77.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 30.

that the state led in educational advancement in the South, but it constructed the “only organized State Department for Negro Education in the world.”⁸² Connecticut women boasted to their club sisters that they were “keenly alive” to education and “played an active part in getting a colored teacher appointed in a city in Connecticut where none have ever taught.”⁸³ Mississippi women, along the same lines, worked with their State Department of Education in carrying out an investigation to locate all of the blind children in the state. Lucy C. Jefferson, state president, reported that by cooperating with the government and the State Blind Commission, the clubwomen found thirty six children so they might become self-supporting and independent members of society.⁸⁴

Black women and African Americans saw voting, generally, as a responsibility to the black community and as an individual right. The women linked voting with political freedom and as one of the first pathways to full citizenship. This is clearly seen in their rhetoric where they used voting and citizenship interchangeably. While some women related citizenship with voting, others expanded the concept to take on a broader meaning of what they considered to be a road to black citizenship.

Under the administration of Mary McLeod Bethune (1924-1928), the NACW moved forward with their civic education movement and continued to practice civic republicanism through the course of teaching women and children to love and serve one’s nation. These activists espoused communal goals and, by this, they urged women-citizens to love and serve the political community as a part of serving their own. This included respecting and obeying just laws and studying the Constitution. Citizenship thus changed from an emphasis on voting and

⁸² *National Notes*, (May 1925), NACW. p. 77.

⁸³ “Nutmeg State Federation Keenly Alive to Education of Youth.” *National Notes*, (July 1924), p. 14.

⁸⁴ “Mississippi Clubs.” *National Notes*, (July 1924), NACW. p. 15.

involvement in electoral politics to encompass an understanding of constitutional rights, citizenship entitlements, and the government's role.

Studying the Constitution held its importance among the many education programs of the NACW. In 1926, very active members, working within the Citizenship Department, politicized education to build a defense against the infringement upon their rights as citizens. Clubwomen in New Jersey urged women to research the Constitution and state laws in efforts to increase their pool of knowledge on their citizenship to understand the function of government. Mrs. George S. Williams (Mamie Williams), national chairwoman on citizenship, gave her assessment on what black women needed to do in order to make stronger claims for citizenship and all the constitutional protections that came along with it. Williams recommended for women to know the purpose of government, whether it functioned appropriately, and if states' laws corresponded with the Constitution. She also advised them on what clubwomen could do to make a seemingly democratic government representative of the people.⁸⁵ Williams remarked in her section of the *Notes*:

“We who live in a representative government must be familiar with its constitution, its construction and its [its] machinery in order to know whether or not our government is being properly conducted...hence, the first duty of every citizen is to familiarize himself with the constitution of his own state. The best way to ascertain the wisdom and strength of this remarkable document—the Constitution—which has not only preserved this nation but which has served as a model for the constitution of republics formed since the United States became a government, is to make a study of it...”⁸⁶

Williams called for more implementation of citizenship programs that emphasized the study of government and constitutions. To develop and implement these programs—mostly called study classes—throughout the nation was not an easy task due to the vast regional differences. What might have worked for one region did not for another. Since developing

⁸⁵ Mamie Williams. “Department of Citizenship.” *National Notes*, (July-Aug.1926), NACW. p. 16.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

comparable study classes locally and regionally proved to be a challenge, Williams suggested that each group or state “decide which methods would work best for their communities and organize accordingly.”

To help facilitate the process, Williams recommended that “a speaker’s bureau be organized in each community and that open forums be held for instruction in the essentials of citizenship.”⁸⁷ Furthermore, she asked women to implore the faculties of black universities and colleges as well as high schools to place citizenship courses in their curricula and allow summer sessions to be held for club women to conduct these classes.⁸⁸ Though she did not specify what was actually taught, it can be assumed that they would receive some instruction on the contents of state and national constitutions and government. Williams hoped this would lead to possible citizenship institutes to be held at least once a year at the annual meetings of each city, district, and state federation. Williams called for more political and educational organizing by adding what she called citizenship institutes to the programmatic thrusts of the National Association to ensure the masses learned about their citizenship beyond voting.

The outgrowth of citizenship education programs spawned the Southeastern Federation to take action. The Southeastern carried an intensive triple-planked platform that highlighted intensive organization, interracial cooperation, and constructive citizenship. The main objective of the latter was to simplify citizenship facts and make it easier for all women to learn and understand how the government functioned.⁸⁹ The Southeastern upheld the slogan, “Know the City government, Know the State Government, Know the Government of Thy Country.”⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Mamie Williams. “Department of Citizenship,” p. 16.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ *National Notes*, (May 1925), NACW. p. 2.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

Rebecca Stiles Taylor, president of the Southeastern, claimed that the federation “strove to broaden the meaning of citizenship so as to make it link up with the home and the school, thereby, laying the foundation of respect and observance for law and understanding of citizenship responsibilities.”⁹¹ This meant training for citizenship in the home as well as educating for citizenship in the schools. In African American communities, the home and the school were considered effective institutions of learning that, taken together, worked to reinforce communal values and lessons. Clubwomen saw both institutions as being responsible for training children to be morally “good” citizens. The citizenship plank also directed its attention towards convincing those voters in more rural areas on the importance of voting and studying the Constitution.

These civic republicans also strove to include themselves in the body politic by observing fair laws, respecting symbols, and displaying a semblance of loyalty to the country—all for the common good. The National Association declared, “We affirm respect for, and obedience to laws of this republic. . .we urge a greater insistence in the home and in the school on the duty of reverence for law to the end that the law be observed and enforced in every community and in the nation at large.”⁹² Black women voters supported the laws of the land to push America to fulfill its promises, but to also prevent criminality among the race that would reinforce stereotypes and easily give free labor to the states through the penal system. As much as this was well intentioned to protect and preserve the integrity of the race, history and their social reality taught that all it took was their “blackness” to provoke a vicious mob attack or any kind of racial assault, whether they respected the laws or not. Racism’s ugly head had a way of devaluing “law-abiding, patriotic black citizens.” Obeying the laws, nonetheless, characterized a

⁹¹ *National Notes*, (May 1925), NACW. p. 2.

⁹² *Ibid*, p. 6.

critical component of their responsibility and understanding of citizenship. If black women and children could validate their commitment to democracy and the legitimacy of the government to promote law and order, then society would shun unlawful lynch mobs and be more accepting of black people as equal participants even though they knew the reality.

Back during a 1924 convention in Chicago, Rev. Florence Randolph of New Jersey spoke briefly on serving America by observing the laws of the country. Randolph explained that “much of the burden of saving America depends and rests upon Negro womanhood” who “must answer the call and set the pace for observing law.”⁹³ M.E. Burrell, chairman of the Citizenship Department in New Jersey, related to other club women that their program was “first to interest and then to educate our women in the seriousness and responsibility of citizenship.” She explained that the women were advancing a program, “which included respect and observance of the law. . . , without special favor to any one law or Amendment.”⁹⁴ Even though many white citizens refused to accept the constitutionality of civil rights for black Americans in its entirety, the avid learners observed the Constitution in hopes to persuade and induce Americans to honor the law as a way to protect their rights.

As a deliberate strategy to build an argument as to why they deserved the same egalitarian rights and treatment as their white counterparts, clubwomen sent constant reminders to themselves and the country of the unparalleled allegiance black people had vowed to the nation. They invoked republicanism language that emphasized a sense of patriotism and commitment to Americanism in the age of a growing fascist regime around the world. By underscoring the government’s symbiotic relationship to its citizens, particularly African Americans, the proponents of racial uplift promised their patriotism with the belief that the

⁹³ *Minutes of the Fourteenth Biennial Convention, 1924*, NACW. p. 35.

⁹⁴ *National Notes*, (July 1924), NACW. p. 7.

federal government would, in turn, protect civil rights, provide education, and eliminate inequality found in the public school systems. In Mississippi, for instance, clubwomen petitioned the state legislature to secure funding for a much needed home for delinquent boys and girls, boldly proclaiming that it was the state's responsibility to issue this request due to the loyalty and faithfulness of "Negroes" to the state and country.⁹⁵

In 1926, Rebecca Stiles Taylor had urged clubwomen in every southern state to engage in maintaining and securing homes for delinquent "Negro" girls. It was hoped that these homes would be taken over by the state governments with black women and men in control of them.⁹⁶ Establishing these training schools were crucial to clubwomen because of the many children unfairly convicted of petty crimes and sentenced to a life of hard labor in the penal system, a reinstituted form of slavery. Lucy C. Jefferson, president of the Mississippi Federation, bluntly remarked, "As loyal Mississippians. . . We do not believe the great state of Mississippi would think of permitting us even to attempt to shoulder the responsibility very long."⁹⁷ These patriots expected a return for the endless services rendered to the state that extended over a hundred-year period. Bertha L. Johnson aptly charged in the defense of the needed home:

Whose Duty Is It to Provide This Home? To my mind this query has but one answer. We are citizens of the great state of Mississippi. Whether in peace or war, our allegiance has never been questioned...The millions we have accumulated in wealth are her's [sic] to tax. The many more millions that our labor has piled up for the other race are her's [sic] likewise. Without our loyalty her history would make different reading and her standing among the states of the union would be lowered. Then by what course of reasoning any fair-minded person, white or black, can decide other than that Mississippi should erect this Home and pay the bill.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Eight years prior in 1918, the state had founded the Industrial Training School at Columbia for wayward white youth. An estimated 700 children enrolled with more than half a million dollars spent the first year for buildings and expenses. The legislature appropriated \$20.00 per month for each child.

⁹⁶ Rebecca Stiles Taylor. *National Notes*, (Jan. 1926).

⁹⁷ L.C. Jefferson. "To Mississippi Public: L.C. Jefferson State President." *National Notes*, (Oct. 1929), NACW. p. 10.

⁹⁸ Bertha L. Johnson. "Statement of New Project, Mississippi Colored Women's Clubs." *National Notes*, (Jan. 1926), NACW, p. 15.

Johnson's approbation for the home demonstrates a strong belief in government obligation and black women's expectations of state governments. Their definition of loyalty, here, implied the economic stability of the cotton industry supplied through the blood, sweat, and tears of enslaved southerners. Johnson reminded the women that the government owed reparations for their labor and exploitation of black bodies. The accretion of wealth produced by these bodies belonged to African Americans and one way of obtaining payment consisted of petitioning the state and federal governments to fund and support the home. From their perspective, black women had already paid for whatever tax or expense the home or school buildings might accrue for the education of black children. Historian James Anderson observed that "southern public school authorities diverted school taxes largely to the development of white public education" even though more taxes were collected from black southerners than was appropriated to their schools.⁹⁹ More plainly, the state was indebted to black Mississippians and rightly owed them this institution to educate boys and girls so they could train to become better citizens and leaders.

In Georgia, however, the state government's response to the needs of education facilities and supplies was stagnant. Georgia clubwomen insisted that they were "no longer going to wait on their state and counties to furnish them with adequate school facilities, regardless of whatever others think of the state's responsibility."¹⁰⁰ The clubs assured they would continue to use the Rosenwald and Jeannes Fund to consolidate schools, build brick and wooden school houses, equip the buildings with modern equipment, and provide a firmer foundation for the education of the youth.¹⁰¹ According to Vincent P. Franklin, African Americans "recognized that if they

⁹⁹ James Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1988. p. 154,156.

¹⁰⁰ "Report of the Georgia Federation 1923-1924," *National Notes*, NACW. p. 8.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

were to advance themselves in American society, they would have to take responsibility for their own lives and educational destiny, and take advantage of the educational opportunities provided by the state and organized philanthropy.”¹⁰² Despite Georgia women’s frustration, the NACW resolved to hold these state governments accountable for their responsibility by “visit [ing] schools, colleges, institutions of learning,” and “study [ing] laws of your state, county, and city to know whether your schools are receiving their share of support.”¹⁰³

Because of the state governments’ failure to provide equal education for all, on the national level, Addie Dickerson labored to have the federal government establish a Department of Education to provide the means for black children to learn in formal settings. To clubwomen, a small Office of Education seemed preposterous when there existed a Department of Labor and Agriculture in addition to an alarming high rate of illiteracy among the nation’s citizenry. She believed the department would be very active in erasing discrimination in the schools across the board, and it would work on a larger level to eradicate illiteracy and conduct research on the education queries of the nation. Two years later, in 1928, the newly initiated president Sallie W. Stewart held fast to the idea of a national Department of Education because “research was needed for developing up-to-date, scientific methods of teaching, [and] economical and well structured school buildings on the federal level.”¹⁰⁴ The clubwomen, thus, lent their support for a new education bill (Curtis-Reed S. 1584 and H.R.7) which would create a Department of Education with a secretary in the president’s cabinet, coordinate existing educational activities in the federal government, provide for much-needed educational research, and create an advisory council of state Superintendents of Education. However, the bill did not provide federal aid to

¹⁰² V.P. Franklin. “Education for Life: Adult Education Programs for African Americans in Northern Cities, 1900-1942” in *Education of the African American Adult: A Historical Overview*. Edited by Harvey G. Neufeldt and Leo McGee. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1990. p. 130.

¹⁰³ “How to Put Over the Scholarship.” *National Notes*, (July-Aug. 1926), NACW. p.32.

¹⁰⁴ *National Notes*, (Sept.-Oct. 1928), NACW. p. 7.

the states for education or control education within the states—conversely an important necessity to ensure fair funding. The strong support for a federal education department reveals the women’s distrust of states in handling the affairs of education. For them, only the national government seemed to be the obvious choice for supplying adequate and proportionate education for all children.

Clubwomen worked diligently to advance the plight of women and advocate for schoolchildren. Evident in the NACW’S new civic education agenda and quest for citizenship rested on their belief that the future of the race was manifested in the youth.¹⁰⁵ Their commitment to providing political education to black women corresponded with the organization’s continued sponsorship and support to instruct black children and young adults to prepare for citizenship training, which also included voting intelligently, studying the Constitution to understand rights and the function of the government, engaging in civic activities, paying taxes, and keeping abreast of important political issues that affected their fates and destinies. Dickerson claimed that women as citizens and as individuals should be deeply concerned with the welfare of the community and the “just and equal collections and expense of our taxes” for the protection of life and property. “The children in our high schools,” she explained, “will be the voters ten years, hence, who will determine these matters and upon whose wisdom and progress our comfort and dignity must depend.”¹⁰⁶ Dickerson insisted that the

¹⁰⁵ Even in the western part of the country, black women experienced similar realities to their eastern counterparts. A report by the Northwestern Federation of Colored Women adopted resolutions, recommending that all club women of America make the education of the youth a necessary part of their local community programming. This included the matters of “school attendance everywhere, in acquiring equal facilities for colored children with their local Parent-Teacher associations. Western women were aware and stood in solidarity with their Northern and southern sisters by deploring the obdurate measures taken to separate black and white students in the public schools. Northwestern black women upheld that “co-education of all races tends to better understanding and better feeling among the races.”

¹⁰⁶ *Minutes of Fifteenth Biennial Convention*, 1926, NACW. p. 83.

schools in all communities hire teachers and superintendents who were knowledgeable in the cutting edge work in education to give every child the best educational opportunity.

While investing in the future generation to become productive citizens and saviors of the race, the women promoted higher education, especially for young girls. According to the NACW's constitution, its mission was to promote the education of "colored" women and hold an Educational Institute biennially at the conventions.¹⁰⁷ These educational institutes, unlike citizenship programs and study classes, were designed to research, study, and present lectures and topics concerning education issues of the country. At the first institute, held in 1924, Hallie Q. Brown, then president, launched a \$50,000 National Education Fund as a challenge to raise money for higher education to "safeguard the future advancement of the race through the education of the youth."¹⁰⁸ She raised the first \$1,000 for the campaign. Two years later, she recommended that a "young woman selected for a scholarship may choose the college of her choice and take the course suited to her bent of mind, whether in the wide range of philosophy, the broad field of history, the fascinating circle of the fine art, or the industrial arts."¹⁰⁹

This is significant because Brown, along with conscientious black women like Anna J. Cooper, encouraged women to branch outside of fields traditionally limited to black women and pursue whatever discipline best suited their tastes. "Religion, science, art, economics, have all needed the feminine flavor," Cooper exclaimed.¹¹⁰ Sarah Ella Wilson of Massachusetts, in correlation with other attentive members, firmly assisted in the promotion of the education drive to secure money for scholarships, claiming that "our race desires to play its part in the civic life of this great nation of which we are a part. We need more trained leaders and are willing to pay

¹⁰⁷ *National Notes*, (Jan. 1928), NACW. p. 4.

¹⁰⁸ *Fourteenth Biennial Convention*, 1924, NACW. p. 33.

¹⁰⁹ Hallie Q. Brown. "An Educational Awakening!" *National Notes*. (June 1926). NACW

¹¹⁰ Anna Julia Cooper. *A Voice from the South*. [1892]. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990. p. 57.

the price.”¹¹¹ Black women proffered to compensate and sacrifice whatever they could to make certain girls would have an opportunity to rise above their present conditions as well as abolish the menace of illiteracy to actively participate in civic life. The following year in 1925, clubwomen maintained:

...the best foundation for democracy, as well as its best means of defense is an intelligent and enlightened citizenry...we must depend, for the most part, on the public school training for training our young people for their place as citizens of America and the World.¹¹²

This early belief that education was a means for sustaining and defending democracy became more prominent in the 1930s. The NACW, however, marketed education with the intent to make and train young, intelligible citizens for America. A few years later, Brown proclaimed that “not only should the voters be intelligent and good, but the whole population, yes, even the children into whose hands the reins of government will fall, may put forth a powerful influence for good or for evil.”¹¹³

Mary McLeod Bethune discussed in her 1926 presidential appeal of the *National Notes* the women’s commitment to the education and preparation of children. She decreed, “Let us say to the world that Negroes are alive to their responsibility to their children in matters of education and that organized black womanhood can successfully bear their part of the burden. . . to prepare the children of today for the citizenship of tomorrow.”¹¹⁴ In the same year at the Fifteenth Biennial Convention, a clubmember addressed to the delegation that “children will be the voters and leaders of the race” and must ensure they were equipped and knowledgeable of issues relating to black people.¹¹⁵ Another member pointed out that “real education [for students] tends

¹¹¹ *National Notes*, (July 1924), NACW

¹¹² *National Notes*, (May 1925), NACW, p. 6.

¹¹³ Hallie Quinn Brown. *National Notes*, (March 1929), p. 8.

¹¹⁴ Mary McLeod Bethune, *National Notes*, (Mar. 1926), p. 2.

¹¹⁵ *Minutes of the Fifteenth Biennial Convention, 1926*, NACW. p. 83.

to promote mutual understanding, breaks up class division and misunderstanding as well as make better and more intelligent citizens.”¹¹⁶ Massachusetts club members reported that “northern women were working against segregation in education for the purpose of making better citizens” out of the children.¹¹⁷ Cora M. Allen, state president of Louisiana, reported that the object of their federation was “to inspire, elevate, and encourage the advancement of the women of our race and train the youth for better citizenship.”¹¹⁸ Furthermore, a fellow club lady pronounced that “when children find their government interested in them, the results will be more regular and longer attendance at school, and ultimately active participation in civic affairs by a more intelligent citizenry.”¹¹⁹

These civic republicans envisioned a collective black citizenship rather than just individualistic freedoms that inspired among the youth a responsibility to the common welfare of the nation. Moreover, they hoped to promote a civic identity to make them feel like a part of the community, which was believed to lead to more civic participation. But in order for women to even assert a national identity, they needed to first maintain a racial identity in America. Jo Ann Johnson writes, “As mothers and as teachers, women assumed much of the burden of teaching children their history” and long before the founding of black history week, women worked to expose children to black history through books, plays, and pageants. In 1926, Carter G. Woodson instituted a “Negro History Week” to commemorate the achievements of people of African descent, educate the youth on their history, and bring national attention to black history and life.¹²⁰ Woodson’s reasoning for the study of black history served to imbue race pride by

¹¹⁶ *Minutes of the Fifteenth Biennial Convention, 1926*, NACW. pps. 82-83.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 32.

¹¹⁸ *National Notes*, (March 1926). NACW

¹¹⁹ *National Notes*, (March 1929), p. 11.

¹²⁰ Carter G. Woodson, historian and pioneering scholar of African American history, was founder of the *Journal of Negro History* 1916 established the *Association of Negro Life and History* in 1915, was instrumental in starting the national “Black History Week” which later became “Black History Month” in 1976.

which African Americans could “base a claim to share in the blessings of democracy.”¹²¹ It would bolster the argument for inclusion and access to civil rights and negate the theories on biological racism.

At the Sixteenth Biennial Convention in 1928, Bethune invited Woodson as a guest to speak on the necessity of black history. He asked for the cooperation of black women to teach “Negro” history to the children.¹²² The Association readily endorsed Carter’s call for the integration of Black History Week in schools and universities across the country, making the study of the race a political endeavor to provide unequivocal evidence of blacks’ contribution to the nation and the world stage as civilizers.¹²³ Nettie J. Asberry, president of the Washington State Federation, contacted the superintendents, presidents of state institutions, and the state superintendent of instruction, asking for the observance of “Negro History Week” throughout the state and jurisdiction.¹²⁴ Asberry pointed out that “history records no race, under greater handicaps as making more progress than the Negroes in the United States, and the time has at last arrived when enlightened people recognize this fact and give credit due to this group of citizens.”¹²⁵ Club member Katherine Johnson spoke to the delegation about encouraging cultural and racial self-respect among black people by installing a two-foot bookshelf of black literature in all the black schools. The emerging black intelligentsia, artists, and writers producing major works out of Harlem increased the number of books and works published by black authors. The

¹²¹ Carter G. Woodson. “Some Things Negroes Need to Do.” *Southern Workman*. Vol. 51. p. 36

¹²² Bethune later became president of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History from 1936 to 1950, continuing the work and legacy of its founder, Carter G. Woodson.

¹²³ While seeking to uncover the histories of African Americans, they paid particular attention and tribute to preserving women’s history. Hallie Quinn Brown’s book, presented lectures on the achievements of notable black women. The National Council of Negro Women established a repository to collect histories of black women in 1936.

¹²⁴ “Campaigning for Negro History Wk. Observance,” *National Notes*, (April 1928), p.21; Clubwomen in the West petitioned the governments to include works and literature about black authors and writers. Nettie J. Asberry, of Washington State, conceived of the idea to place black speakers in the schools on Lincoln Birthday programs.

¹²⁵ *National Notes*, (May 1928), p. 12.

Kansas City Federation affiliated clubs announced that they had “influenced the Federation of the Parents-Teachers Association to adopt Carter G. Woodson’s history in the public schools.”¹²⁶ The introduction of black history in white and black institutions such as schools, libraries, clubs, and public negotiated an identity for black Americans.¹²⁷ This identity presented a public representation of African Americans as heroes and heroines and as courageous, respectable, and intelligent.

At the same time, the message of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) offered a counter-representation of black masculinity, and it placed women on a pedestal. Garvey and his followers celebrated the beauty and finesse of black women and sought to free them from sexual violence and domestic labor in white homes. His black nationalist ideology called for a separate black nation that dismissed mixed-race or “colored” leaders who comprised much of the NACW’s leadership. This new movement counteracted the NACW’s efforts toward racial inclusion, interracial cooperation, and female leadership. The NACW and UNIA articulated two different concepts on advancing the race: the former through active civic participation in the country and the latter through separation from the “American” system. The NACW, however, seemed to not speak much on the separatist philosophy, but their ideas conflicted with those espoused by the new emerging male leaders.

Clubwomen struggled with finding a civic identity on the account of sustaining a race identity. This is clearly seen through the arrangement of songs at the biennials and the creation of a Junior Department—a prototype of the National Association designed to train young girls to carry on the work of the mother organization. Particular to this department, clubwomen created programs that specifically addressed “Americanism” for younger girls. A chairperson of the

¹²⁶ *Minutes of the Fifteenth Biennial Convention*, 1926, p. 35.

¹²⁷ *National Notes*, (June 1929), p. 6.

department made suggestions for programs to have an Americanization Day followed by the singing of the national anthem, “The Star Spangled Banner.” Topics included, “Why Should I Vote,” “What Should the Fourth of July Mean to Us,” a “Reading of the Preamble to the Constitution,” “Neglected Aspects of Negro History,” and “Name Prominent Negro Historians.”¹²⁸ After discussion of these topics, the participants were encouraged to sing the “Negro National Anthem.” The second program was entirely dedicated to citizenship where the women endeavored to inculcate in the girls to “know your city, know your county,” and to know some biographies of America’s leading citizens.

At the same time, club members opened up the biennial sessions with the singing of patriotic songs of the country. For instance at the 1926 convention, they sang “America” and the “Star Spangled Banner,” but throughout the convention they sang a rendition of the “National Negro Anthem” multiples times during each day.¹²⁹ The duality of the songs and topics represented what W.E.B. Du Bois identified as a twoness—“an American, a Negro” with “two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body.”¹³⁰ Du Bois indicated that African Americans wrestled with these inescapable, conflicting identities. Clubwomen found themselves battling with this “twoness” or “double consciousness” in trying to shape a civic identity while retaining their cultural distinctiveness. Considering their unique experiences, black women also wrestled with what can be considered a “threeness”—that of gender, race, and nationality. Moreover, the sudden nationalist feeling of belonging in the nation at the biennial may have been sparked by the significance of the year.

The year 1926 marked the Sesquicentennial of the United States’ independence. It seemed to be a timely consideration for them to highlight the African American contribution to

¹²⁸ Beatrice Childs. “Junior Federation Department.” *National Notes*, (Nov. 1927), p. 8.

¹²⁹ *Minutes of the Fifteenth Biennial Convention*, 1926, p.43.

¹³⁰ W.E.B. DuBois. *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009 [1903]. p. 3.

the development and protection of the government in the time of war, especially honoring the symbolic death of Crispus Attucks who was the first to die in the Revolutionary War. The NACW declared, “As a fair return for services rendered that all segregation be eliminated and our people be guaranteed the protection of the government.”¹³¹ Adamant, nonetheless, in their petition for inclusion, black women called on the federal government to protect their rightful civil liberties and to recognize their appeals to be identified as “devoted” Americans, to have always been committed to the safety of the nation.

Throughout the decade, however, the cultural changes of the ‘20s had caught some of their attention that would spill over in the Depression years. The rise of blues singers such as Bessie Smith and the new dress styles publicly revealed the sexuality of African American women. The exploration of female sexuality had contradicted their mission of projecting a respectable persona of women. One club member remarked, “It appears that women are trying to free themselves from everything that is feminine. The consequences [sic] of this is THE HOME, the very backbone of society.”¹³² Clubwomen, according to Angela Davis, in the process of defending black womanhood and women’s moral and sexual purity “almost entirely denied sexual agency” and sought to impose their middle-class standards on working-class black women to be more like them.¹³³ The organization vehemently opposed female individualism and condemned the new seductive and hyper-sexualized black woman that resembled the flapper.¹³⁴ As the NACW entered into the cusp of a new decade wrought with economic as well

¹³¹ *Minutes of the Fifteenth Biennial Convention*, 1926, p. 52.

¹³² “Relief Ahead.” *National Notes*, (March 1929), p. 13.

¹³³ Angela Y. Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude ‘Ma’ Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday*. New York: Random House Inc., 1998. p. 44; But these “new” women rejected the genteel conscriptions of gender and expressed a starkly contrasting feminism predicated upon individualism and sexuality that was informed by their lived experiences.

¹³⁴ The flappers had begun to attract young, black rural girls to the nightclubs of the city. In the *National Notes*, they had scorned, “The flapper mother or grandmother, the elderly flapper with boyish bobbed hair, the painted face, and, doll baby dress or mannish costume, deprives our girls of noble womanhood.” She claimed that “they have

as these social challenges, they looked to the home to bring about a moral path of citizenship through respectability alongside political participation.

Rightly summing up their work, mission, and goals at the close of the decade, the NACW likened themselves to an educational institution. In comparison, Hallie Q. Brown saw the organization as a school “with every club a schoolroom to train alike teacher and pupil.”¹³⁵ But the women considered the Association to be a widespread university with a campus as broad as the United States with sorority houses and administration buildings in every state. It admitted students from every walk of life and graduated some of the most noble and useful women in the country.¹³⁶ It gave a stamp of approval upon all who lifted as they climbed.¹³⁷

Civic education formed the nucleus of the NACW’s service programming in the 1920s. The Association helped young black women and children learn about their citizenship and their responsibilities as citizens. The approach to political education reflected their optimism of using their newly acquired franchise to influence politics and wield some form of power and assistance for black Americans. In this intertwining web of education and politics, African American women voiced their concerns publicly, working within the community to avail the consciousness of the people and government while practicing their view of citizenship.

not character” and that “the greatest need of the Negro Woman is to set up a standard of her own.” The NACW called upon young women to define their femininity on high morals, fine charms, and refined womanhood.

¹³⁵ *National Notes*, (March 1929), p.8. Brown left the lasting educational philosophy of the association in the decade. Her reasoning rested upon the belief that the people of a country were the supreme adjudicators of government and public officials were servants of public trust. Therefore, she reiterated the decade long message that in order to gain citizenship benefits, the women must study the principles which lie at the foundation of their civil liberties outlined in the Constitution and, then, contend for justice. She echoed earlier sentiments of her club sisters that the first lesson citizens should learn was obedience—obedience to parents, to the laws of God, and to those of the country.

¹³⁶ *National Notes*, (March 1929), p. 7.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

More significantly, black women voters saw challenging the government to own up to its responsibility of the citizen and to the ideals of democracy as an important addition to citizenship. This became quite clear in the 1930s where millions of Americans were out of work, homeless, and starved. While striving for education in the tumultuous Depression years, clubwomen developed a critique of democracy and challenged antiquated ideas of the government's role as it became more accessible in providing for the general welfare of the nation. Their arguments for education helped to expand and make comprehensible their conception of civic republicanism and what the fight for freedom and democracy really meant. By pledging their apparent loyalty to the state and feeling encumbered to assume a national identity, their ideas of citizenship materialized when they needed the government in the country's most critical hour of economic decline.

CHAPTER 2

TOWARDS AN INCLUSIVE DEMOCRACY: THE DEPRESSION YEARS, 1930-1941

At the turn of the decade, the NACW charted on shaky grounds. In autumn of 1929, business and industry had crashed, leaving the country shattered in economic ruin in the 1930s. Clubwomen witnessed the United States plummet into the worst depression of the century. Globally, they followed the progression of Adolf Hitler's fascist regime and his palpable message of white supremacy that threatened democratic nations everywhere. Though in this period of epic change and uncertainty, clubwomen felt empowered by the new political influence and knowledge they had gained from the previous decade.

In the 1930s, clubwomen found ways to address their citizenship and assert their presence as political beings. They used the home as a political institution to train upstanding citizens, encouraged jury service, and promoted nationalism. Cleverly playing on the nation's fears of Communism and fascism, they reassured their loyalty to democracy but argued for a universal and systematic form of education in order to build a stronger government and a united front against ominous powers. More importantly, these civic activists called for a more participatory engagement in the democratic process through lobbying legislators, writing bills, and acquiring positions as civil service workers.

In the midst of trying to survive the calamity, a dash of hope was found in President Franklin D. Roosevelt's creation of New Deal programs that expanded the government's role and his establishment of a "Black Cabinet." The integration of black leaders as consultants and heads of programs, though not fully representative of the people, symbolized a government

awakening to the plight of African Americans, and it opened a new foray into black political activism. The appointment of Mary McLeod Bethune to this cabinet made her an eminent figure throughout the period. Exemplifying the NACW goals of “education for citizenship,” Bethune took it to another level by focusing on women leaders in government who could vote and pass laws to assist the mother, child, home, and subsequently the race on a larger scale than the NACW imagined.

The Great Depression affected all Americans in one way or another, but certain groups were hit harder than most. High unemployment among black laborers led to increased competition between black and white workers, homelessness, and deprivation. In 1931, the unemployment rate for black working women in the North (46.8%) was significantly higher than their counterparts in the South (30.9%).¹³⁸ Part of this phenomenon, according to William Sundstrom, was due to the lower unemployment statuses of white and black southerners, who comprised the bulk of the black population, than the North.¹³⁹ Sundstrom observed in a 1937 snapshot census that 32.4 percent of African American women sought employment or was on some form of aid.¹⁴⁰ To a large degree, unemployment remained substantially higher for black women than their white counterparts.

Each club member, representing both rural and urban areas, faced these harsh realities as they transitioned into a new phase of interwar activism. In the midst of this rapid economic meltdown, the hard-pressed organization found its mission difficult to accomplish with the loss

¹³⁸ William A. Sundstrom. “Last Hired, First Fired? Unemployment and Urban Black Workers During the Great Depression.” *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 52, No. 2 (Jun., 1992). p. 424; Other works on women and labor see Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*; Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*: Other works on women and labor see Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow*; Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States*.

¹³⁹ Sundstrom, p.419; For other works on African Americans in the Depression see Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks*; Patricia Sullivan, *Days of Hope*; Raymond Wolters, *Negroes and the Great Depression*.

¹⁴⁰ Sundstrom. “Last Hired, First Fired?” p. 419.

of women laborers and financial assistance to operate its numerous departments. Though strained for resources, the NACW, under the direction of Sallie Stewart, moved forward to provide education and tend to their civic duties. Stewart and the Association carried on a campaign for better homes in concert with a growing national movement to improve domestic life for the welfare of the country. In 1929, Herbert Hoover had launched the 'Better Homes in America' project and advocated for the improvement of housing management so families could cultivate character and spiritual qualities.¹⁴¹ Corresponding with the nationwide project, Stewart instituted the NACW's own national campaign in order to ensure the development of the home through the "necessity of educational work."¹⁴² She argued that spacious and sanitary homes, clean backyards, and "mothers who read instructive materials were far more conducive to wholesome citizenship."¹⁴³ Stewart further contended that the better homes movement was "educational in its scope and works for the good of all. . .It believes that every citizen should have a chance to live in a simple, well built, modern home that is attractive and beautiful."¹⁴⁴

The NACW presented a conservative and yet radical objective. They were radical in the sense that they sought to enfranchise women and make them more independent in decision making for public affairs and participating equally in society. But this attitude did not touch their conservative middle-class positions on piety, purity, domesticity, and improving the home life. As a matter of fact, the campaign for clean homes ignited their drive to amplify these tenets for saving black womanhood, stressing that the conditions caused by the Depression were threatening the moral education and suasion of black women.

¹⁴¹ Herbert Hoover helped to organize the Better Homes in American Campaign which worked towards improving housing and home conditions.

¹⁴² *Minutes of the Seventeenth Biennial Convention*, 1930. p. 78.

¹⁴³ Deborah Gray White, p. 131.

¹⁴⁴ *National Notes*, (Apr. 1931). p. 6.

The organization more exclusively focused on the home to defend black personhood amid the new challenges of modern life, including the emergence of the “New Woman” as the seductive flapper and the rise in Depression-era crime rates. Many club members felt that beautification of homes and its surroundings would lessen the number of child delinquencies and small crimes and save young girls from immorality. The economic system and the changing social order had demoralized and modified black family life.¹⁴⁵ Focusing on character and leadership development of the youth, Stewart firmly stated that “once this thought is fixed in the mind of the women, the future of our girls and women in the civic and national affairs will be assured.”¹⁴⁶ She added that women would be able to “contribute our share to the building of our nation” as respectable and model citizens.¹⁴⁷ The idea of the home, used to cultivate and instill morality and character, was deemed necessary to clubwomen in order to participate intelligently in civic affairs. It was also seen as a path to citizenship through respectability.

While Stewart made strides to carry out the homelife program, her predecessor, Bethune, began conceiving of a separate organization. Bethune, although a proponent of homelife, believed the organization should tackle broad political issues and have a stronger presence in international affairs that represented the concerns of “darker people in the United States.” Stewart had already thought Bethune to be too intrusive and overbearing and, consequently, tried to maintain her authority as the new president. In a 1929 letter she had written to Minnie Scott, the executive secretary, about Bethune’s upcoming visit, she ordered her to “make Bethune feel comfortable, but in no way take orders from her. Just listen to her talk. All affairs are no longer

¹⁴⁵ *Minutes of the Eighteenth Biennial Convention, 1933*. p. 47; The emphasis on mothers preparing suitable homes presented major class implications. Many black women did not have homes or a backyard to maintain or upkeep. Especially giving the severity of the Depression, home beautification was of least concern.

¹⁴⁶ *National Notes, NACW*, (Sept. 1930).

¹⁴⁷ *National Notes, NACW*, (Jan. 1931).

her business anymore.”¹⁴⁸ Bethune’s rivalries with present and past leadership as well as her own personal ideologies on how to attain racial, political, and gender equality may have gradually turned her attention to other endeavors.

Moreover, the speculation of a new organization fomented controversy and spurred chatter among club leaders. Many characterized this move as a line of attack to undercut the activities of the black women’s clubs and posed a serious threat to their slowly shrinking membership. A 1930 letter to Sallie Stewart revealed the skepticism of Bethune’s plans. Daisy E. Lampkin, who served as past national organizer and chairwoman of the executive board, wrote, “I cannot attend the meeting which she [Bethune] is calling and I regret that I cannot because I do not understand her reason as outlined for wanting to form such an organization.”¹⁴⁹ Bethune’s close friend Charlotte Hawkins Brown expressed similar reservations but supported the idea. She told Stewart, “I frankly admit that I do not see the necessity of another national organization, but I think it is Mrs. Bethune’s idea to get the heads together to confer. . . I am sure she is far too big to do anything that would cripple the National in any way.”¹⁵⁰ Little did she know that in 1935 a newly established Council would further stifle the organization.

Despite the tensions and gossip surrounding Bethune’s plans, New Jersey women pushed the envelope, in other areas than homelife, to secure their citizenship. The constituents encouraged women to serve on juries. One scholar has remarked that although women had gained the vote, they remained disenfranchised in the courts.¹⁵¹ In a wave of a lesser known women’s jury movement in the decades after suffrage, women activists fought for the

¹⁴⁸ Sallie W. Stewart to Minnie Scott in Correspondence File, NACW.

¹⁴⁹ Daisy Lampkin to Sallie W. Stewart, (5 Mar. 1930) in Correspondence File, NACW.

¹⁵⁰ Charlotte Hawkins Brown to Sallie Stewart. (12 Mar. 1930) in Correspondence File, NACW.

¹⁵¹ Holly McCammon. *The U.S. Women’s Jury Movements and Strategic Adaptation: A More Just Verdict*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

opportunity to determine justice.¹⁵² To have significant representation on the jury provided a voice for them, especially on cases involving women. But for black women, in particular, jury service constituted a rather racialized and gendered responsibility as well as a necessary tactic. Too often, all-white juries were quick to wrongly convict black defendants. Conversely, these racially same jurors, more often than not, were inclined to acquit white defendants accused of heinous acts against a black plaintiff or victim. For the most part, sitting on a jury denoted an important part of their citizenship status to serve the race and women's interests in this capacity.

In 1930, the New Jersey delegation informed the Association that women in their state were eligible to serve as jurors and boasted that several black women had sat on juries one or more times.¹⁵³ Clubwoman Armita A. Douglas recalled a lady named Portia Stalling who served as foreman on a Morris County jury and eagerly reported, "The judge highly commended her for the comprehension she displayed in the performance of her duties."¹⁵⁴ Linda Kerber has noted that members of the founding generation interpreted jury service to be central to the process of democracy where republics rested on the virtue and intelligence of its citizenry.¹⁵⁵ As an important civic duty to republicanism, jury duty granted the license for black women to serve among their peers, to analyze cases, and make sound judgments in the courts and for society.

¹⁵² McCammon, p.2; McCammon argued that women continued to broaden their citizenship to serve on a jury after 1920 led by a variety of women organizations. These jury campaigns served to gain rights for women's citizenship to benefit society.

¹⁵³ Elizabeth Lindsay Davis, *Lifting As They Climb*, p. 359; In 1921, women gained eligibility to serve on juries in the state. The *Baltimore Afro American* reported that Daneva W. Donnel was the only black woman to serve on the first all-woman jury in an Indianapolis court. "Colored Woman Sits on Jury" (17 Sept. 1920) p.1; It also reported that black voters in St. Louis demanded the right to serve on juries and that an all black jury was instituted for the first time in history (p.10).

¹⁵⁴ *National Notes*. (Sept. 1930), p.11.

¹⁵⁵ Linda Kerber. *No Constitutional Rights to be Ladies: Women and the Obligations of Citizenship*. New York: Will and Wang, Inc., 1998. p. 129.

For this very reason among others, the New Jersey delegation persisted in conducting educational programs on citizenship knowledge that included jury duty.¹⁵⁶

In a more aggressive campaign to seize their citizenship rights and defend black womanhood, the NACW challenged the ‘Americanism’ and integrity of government officials. In a 1932 letter written to Stewart, Elizabeth Lindsay Davis of Illinois informed the president that club members had sent letters to Senator George W. Norris, Chairman of the Judiciary Committee, protesting his confirmation of B.B. Montgomery of Clarksdale, Mississippi into the office as United States Marshal. Davis angrily wrote that Montgomery “had publicly declared among other vile assertions that there are no chaste Negro women in the world.”¹⁵⁷ She further bemoaned, “It is the same old fight we had in 1895 when Jacques [James Jacks] of Missouri made the same statement.”¹⁵⁸ In a letter to Florie Belgarnie, the secretary of a London anti-slavery society, James Jacks, a white male president of the Missouri Press Association, had stated, “the Negroes of this country are wholly devoid of morality; the women are prostitutes and are natural thieves and liars.”¹⁵⁹ In 1939, with the NACW meeting back in Boston, where the founding foremothers had first organized to refute Jacks’ crass and insulting remarks, newly elected President Jennie B. Moton aptly remarked, “We are still resenting all insults to Negro Womanhood; we are still trying to disprove all false accusations; we are still lifting as we climb.”¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ Though the minutes and *National Notes* do not explicitly cite jury service as a major objective of the programs on civic activities, newspapers reported the interest among black voters to sit on juries.

¹⁵⁷ Letter to Sallie W. Stewart from Elizabeth Lindsay Davis, 14 Mar. 1932., in the Records of the National Association.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin. “Address to the First National Conference of Colored Women, 1895” in *Lift Every Voice: African American Oratory, 1787-1900*. Editors Phillip Foner and Robert James Branham. University of Tuscaloosa, Alabama: Alabama Press, 1998. p.797.

¹⁶⁰ *Minutes of the Twenty First Biennial Convention, 1939.*

Again, image took precedence in women's political fight. Deborah Gray White in her assessment on black women's organizations noted that the National Association was the "vehicle wherein black women could change their image."¹⁶¹ The NACW could not help but pull itself into the exhausting battles of black imagery as it tried to project an alternative perception to the image of wanton African American females. The women used their new political influence on President Hoover to fight against attacks on their womanhood. In a follow-up telegraph, Mary C. Booze congratulated Stewart and members of the Association for forcefully objecting to the President's proposal and persuading him to withdraw the name of Montgomery.¹⁶² The victory gave the clubwomen a vote of confidence in influencing the senator's and chief executive officer's decision.

The following month, clubwomen, asserting their rightful places as concerned citizens and voters, demanded other officials to follow suit. Nannie Helen Burroughs and the members of the National League of Republican Colored Women sent letters to Herbert Hoover and rejected his appointment of Judge John Parker to the Supreme Court bench.¹⁶³ Burroughs called attention to Parker's partisanship and claimed that "he is unsound in his Americanism."¹⁶⁴ Her appeal reveals an interesting insight into what Americanism meant to some black women and even more so what they expected of their representatives and adjudicators in a republic. She reasoned that since the judge believed the constitutional rights of certain groups of Americans should be abridged based on race, it was "unsafe to appoint any man to the court of Supreme

¹⁶¹ Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy A Load*, p. 24.

¹⁶² Nannie Helen Burroughs to Sallie W. Stewart, (25 Apr. 1930), in Correspondence files, NACW.

¹⁶³ In 1930, Herbert Hoover nominated Judge John Parker as the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit to the Supreme Court. Just a decade earlier, he campaigned as a gubernatorial candidate of North Carolina, supporting black disenfranchisement. The NAACP, the NACW, and local organization waged a fierce and aggressive campaign against the appointment. The Senate, thus, rejected the nomination on May 7, 1930. Library of Congress. The NAACP: A Century in the Fight for Freedom, 1909-2009. "The Rejection of Judge Parker."
<<http://myloc.gov/Exhibitions/naacp/greatdepression/ExhibitObjects/RejectionOfJudgeParker.aspx>>

¹⁶⁴ Nannie Helen Burroughs to Sallie W. Stewart, (25 April 1930) in Correspondence File, NACW.

Justice who would tamper with the Constitution in any way.”¹⁶⁵ Black women, in their citizenship training, were taught to respect the Constitution and use it as a weapon of defense and security to fight for their citizenship rights and protections. Burroughs use of the term “unsafe” to describe such an appointment suggests that he was a formidable foe to American democracy and worked against the best interests of the nation. One of the purposes of civic education was to learn the function of government and use it as a corrective to combat political abuse.

Black women believed that judicial members should judge the constitutionality of laws and not interpret them to accede to the bigotry of the country. Racist politicians in government was to black people what Americans perceived Communism to be to democracy—a menace and an antithesis to liberty, freedom, and individual rights for all. Burroughs strongly claimed, “We gave ourselves unreservedly in the national campaign in 1928 because we believed in the soundness of Mr. Hoover’s Americanism,” or belief in an inclusive democracy. Anna Julia Cooper even wrote to the Treasurer of Oberlin: “My own vote, it is true, *if I had one* [emphasis added], should go to Hoover as. . .the man coming nearer to representing the best in American ideals.”¹⁶⁶ African Americans saw a transparent Supreme Court and federal offices as a gateway to realize their full emancipation coupled with the enforcements of the laws. If Supreme Court justices tainted or improperly interpreted the law, black women would have nothing left on their side but their character—and even that was questioned.

When Stewart’s term of office expired in 1933, Mary F. Waring assumed the presidency of a weakening and nearly bankrupt organization. Though she believed, like her predecessor, “good housing will do more to make a higher and better type of citizenship,” she did not just

¹⁶⁵ Nannie Helen Burroughs to Sallie W. Stewart, NACW.

¹⁶⁶ Cited in Charles and Esme Bhan. *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper: Including A Voice From the South and Other Important Essays, Papers, and Letters*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998. p. 336.

focus on the plank of the mother, home, and child.¹⁶⁷ Rather, she pushed club members to challenge discrimination within federal programs created to temporarily aid Americans during the Depression.¹⁶⁸ The disparity of aid between black and white Americans and the soaring unemployment rates among women led Waring to request of the members:

Wipe from the statute books laws that discriminate against Negroes. Study the Constitution of this United States, interpret the amendments, make better citizens of the people by enforcing the law, organize stronger groups, [and] make the N.A.C.W. to be known not as a militant, but as a diligent, preserving, educational organization upholding right, harmony, justice, and equality.¹⁶⁹

Here, Waring made a careful plea for the Association to continue political work along the lines of education in a non-threatening way to prevent unwarranted attention. By understanding the Constitution, Waring wanted the women to better tackle all forms of injustices, weaken the strongholds of segregation, and make the organization nationally recognized as a powerful institution committed to interracial progress and educational advancement.

But two years later in 1935, Bethune plunged into full-scale national politics, influencing educational policy and social services on a larger platform. President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed her to his “Black Cabinet,” known as the Federal Council of Negro Affairs, where she served as the Director of Negro Affairs in the National Youth Administration (NYA). Government officials had in the past few years appointed Bethune to various committees, welcoming her advice and expertise on black education. In 1928, Calvin Coolidge selected Bethune as a delegate to a Child Welfare Conference, and later Herbert Hoover named her a member of his National Committee on Child Welfare. But the appointment by Roosevelt opened

¹⁶⁷ *Minutes of the Eighteenth Biennial Convention, 1933.* p. 17

¹⁶⁸ For instance, two years prior when Waring first took office, the Association sent a telegram to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, requesting that “he use his executive power under the National Industrial Act Codes to prevent discrimination in all contracts under the Public Works Act and that qualified Negroes be appointed to administrative positions to ensure just treatment of Negro workers. *Minutes of the Eighteenth Biennial Convention, 1933.* p. 22

¹⁶⁹ *Minutes of the Nineteenth Biennial Convention, 1935.* p. 45.

up an avenue for her to provide black youth benefits and opportunities in education and employment as well as employment for women. In this regard, Bethune became a sounding board and an instrumental figure for African American women.

Working to find a more efficient way to politically involve women in government and to coalesce all the black women's organizations in efforts to "make a stronger appeal for putting over big projects," Bethune launched her new, controversial organization with the help of a few club members. Two of them included the suspicious Daisy Lampkin and a reluctant Mary Church Terrell—neither of whom attended the meeting Bethune called five years earlier. In a telegram sent to Bethune about the founding meeting, Terrell candidly responded:

Reluctantly, I did not believe in the idea. Theoretically, I believe everything that has been said. But I can't see how this organization can help. I do not see how the mistakes made by other groups will not be made by this one. Back in 1896, I organized a NACW. I may not be so hopeful and I don't think this Council will be any more successful than other organizations have been. I cannot see any reason how this group can do any more than others...¹⁷⁰

Terrell in the 1920s had advocated for "having the right type of men nominated for the various offices" and urging their representatives "to vote for bills which will help improve our condition as a race."¹⁷¹ For her, black women's responsibility was to support men (white or black), use persuasion to encourage them in making learned decisions, and push them to enact laws to benefit the black community. Perhaps this thinking changed over time or it was Bethune's access to power in government that she decided to stick close by. Whatever the reason, Terrell moved that the secretary cast a "unanimous ballot that Mrs. Bethune be president."¹⁷² Interestingly enough, Terrell became one of the vice-presidents.

¹⁷⁰ *Minutes of the Nineteenth Biennial Convention*, 1935, pps. 172-173.

¹⁷¹ Mary Church Terrell. "Report on Legislation" in *National Notes*, Nov. 1926, p.4

¹⁷² Audrey Thomas McCluskey, *Building A Better World*, p. 173.

The new organization, National Council of Negro Women (NCNW), was hoped to be a clearinghouse for studying and advocating black women's political concerns as well as a bulwark for black women's participation in the formal political sphere as administrators and managers.¹⁷³ Bethune believed the organization would be a political foreground for women to become active leaders in politics and assume political positions. Her efforts to motivate women towards these ends, to a certain extent, had proven to be unsuccessful within the more conservative NACW.

Bethune's actions were met with a sharp line of criticisms from the NACW's current leadership. At the Nineteenth Biennial Convention, Waring expressed deep anger and warned clubwomen against Bethune in which she felt had made the Association "lose ground" with the National Council of Women.¹⁷⁴ She chidingly remarked, "We lost this standing, not by any fault of theirs, but by one of our own women suggesting it go to some other organization."¹⁷⁵ At the Twentieth Convention in 1937, Waring and other club members denounced the NCNW, and argued that it served to undermine and "replace the purposes for which the National Association of Colored Women is organized."¹⁷⁶ This suggests that members of the NACW believed their organization was very political and active in serving the interests of and speaking on behalf of women. Bethune, on the other hand, disagreed and wanted a much larger and united coalition of all the black women organizations under one umbrella to have a larger political voice and representation in government. She exclaimed, "We have a great civic responsibility to discharge.

¹⁷³ Joyce Hanson. *Mary McLeod Bethune*, p.119.

¹⁷⁴ Cited in Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, p. 212; The National Council of Women was a predominantly white organization that sought to represent women's issues nationally and internationally. The NACW was the only black women's organization permitted to be affiliated in 1899. Bethune, however, believed that was not enough and recommended the NACW withdraw its membership. She argued black women needed a council of their own to speak for them.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ *Minutes of the Twentieth Biennial Convention*, 1937. p. 49.

We have a profound duty to participate in politics on every level.”¹⁷⁷ The inherent jealousies, personal rivalries, and politicking for club positions within the NACW, to her, had hindered black women’s progress.

The NACW, however, could not battle a national crisis that completely disrupted its base of support—women. The Depression’s indelible imprint on the nation wounded the organizational activities of the Association. In 1937, the Minnesota clubs held that they maintained adult educational programs but noted that the Depression left an enduring “mark on its membership.”¹⁷⁸ Arizona state clubs became inactive for a number of years.¹⁷⁹ Detroit clubwomen reported that since the city suffered the hardest hit, “unemployment, financial losses, business reversals, and loss of homes brought club work to a low ebb.”¹⁸⁰ Despite the strongholds of severe economic woes, they assisted in instructing voters on how to use the ballot and promoted education.¹⁸¹ The NACW tried to hold fast to implement their education programs, but with a diminishing membership and lack of funds to carry out most of their major projects, the NACW lost ground and had to revamp the organization again to change with the times. Many programs were either slashed or curbed to meet operating expenses. Departments were down-sized and grouped as subcommittees of one major department. Consequently, the Citizenship, Illiteracy, Race History, and Temperance Departments now fell under the larger Department of Education.

Due to the lack of funds, the *National Notes* was discontinued and temporarily replaced by a column in the *Chicago Defender*, designated for the activities of the NACW. This made sense since the president hailed from Chicago and the Association could reach a broader

¹⁷⁷ Undated document, MMFB.

¹⁷⁸ *Minutes of the Twentieth Biennial Convention*, 1937. p. 82.

¹⁷⁹ *Minutes of the 21st Biennial Convention*, 1939. p. 102.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

audience of black women to promote club life and recruit more members at little to no cost. Rebecca Stiles Taylor edited the weekly edition and made appeals for all women to write in their opinion and concerns. The platform allowed Waring to disseminate her messages to the clubwomen weekly and encourage them to continue on their work. To pay the bills on the Frederick Douglass Home and the National Headquarters, the Association tried to squeeze money out of the local and state clubs. But most members felt the National Association pinched their pockets too hard by incessantly asking for money and raising taxes on clubs and membership dues. They proposed that the money could be directed towards educational work in the departments.¹⁸² Waring reassured the women that “the subject on education runs through our entire program. It is the beginning and end of our work. No matter what we do or where we go it is our effort and our business to keep before us educational facilities and the just distribution of educational funds and to ask for the removal of incompetent supervision.”¹⁸³

In the *Chicago Defender*, Florida Ruffin Ridley, daughter of Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin (founding member of the organization) suggested that the NACW “could drop some of the petty projects that are cluttering its program” and cooperate with government agencies that were specifically trained to address and supervise public affairs issues.¹⁸⁴ In this way, the women’s clubs could see to it that these programs were supervised by trained professionals and “operated by the right people.”¹⁸⁵ Now that the government extended its broad arms around the welfare of its citizenry, making it closer to the people, Ridley recommended them to take advantage of the government agencies, which could relieve the NACW of the burden.

¹⁸² *Minutes of the Nineteenth Biennial Convention*, 1935. p. 80.

¹⁸³ *Minutes of the Twentieth Biennial Convention*, 1937. p. 45.

¹⁸⁴ Florida Ruffin Ridley. *Chicago Defender*, 29 May 1937, p. 15.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

While Ridley gave her input on the direction the NACW should take, at the Twentieth Biennial Convention in 1937, Waring insisted to move the Association towards a civic identity and promoted national pride in order to bind them as Americans. In the midst of the austere conditions black people faced across the nation, she announced the aim for the year as “develop[ing] National pride and to make toward a condition so that we can feel the reality of the song ‘My Country ‘Tis of Thee.’”¹⁸⁶ The short turn of events toward a civic identity is difficult to ascertain but may have been precipitated by the burgeoning recognition of black athletes on the national and world stage. In 1936, Jessie Owens became the country’s most celebrated athlete after bringing home an Olympic medal in track. He displayed to the world the talent, skill, and dexterity of African Americans. According to Gregory Kaliss, “Jessie Owens dominating performance in the 1936 Olympics in Berlin. . .challenged German leader Adolf Hitler’s assertions of Aryan supremacy” and white hegemony in the states.¹⁸⁷ A year later in 1937, Joe Louis defeated James Braddock for the world heavyweight championship.

A closer reason may have been the second inauguration of Franklin D. Roosevelt. As his closest adviser on black issues, Bethune remarked, “In the first time in the history of our race” African Americans could voice their concerns with “the expectancy of sympathetic understanding and interpretation” from the government.¹⁸⁸ Bethune mustered up hope and faith in Roosevelt and the symbolism of his presidency to African Americans, no matter how much of it was idealism. Speaking on his inauguration, she unreservedly stated, “I realized that thirteen million Negroes of America were included in that oath and received great hope for the

¹⁸⁶ *Minutes of the Twentieth Biennial Convention*, 1937. p. 43.

¹⁸⁷ Gregory Kaliss. “Sports.” *The New Jim Crow Encyclopedia: Greenwood Milestones in African American History*. Edited by Nikki L.M. Brown and Barry M. Stentiford. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2008. p. 754.

¹⁸⁸ Cited in Harvard Sitoff. *Toward Freedom Land: African American Struggle for Racial Equality in America*. Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2010. p. 32.

protection, for the integration, for the participation of my people into the American way of living.”¹⁸⁹ Despite the bickering, her ultimate purpose as well as the NACW’s was for African Americans to be included in the nation as equal citizens and to enjoy their full citizenship rights and privileges in a democracy. Waring, nonetheless, thought it important to recast black women’s identities as Americans, especially at a time when women gained some political clout.

In many of their biennial sessions and programs, the NACW blended their nationalism with black pride as a distinctive part of their heritage and practice of republicanism. During the 21st Convention in Boston, the women honored the nation’s heroes in a special program coordinated by Julia West Hamilton, chairwoman of the memorial services in Boston. Hamilton reported that “a wreath was placed on the monument of Robert Gould Shaw [the white general who commanded the all-black 54th Massachusetts Regiment during the Civil War] by two soldiers’ daughters of the Regiment.”¹⁹⁰ The women sang ‘America’ followed by a rendering of ‘Lift Every Voice and Sing.”¹⁹¹ At the Crispus Attucks monument, Madge Carey and Nellie Walker, both representing the Crispus Attucks Association of D.C., placed a wreath on his monument. The attendees sang, this time, the ‘Star Spangled Banner’ and then ‘America’ to commemorate their patriotism and cause for liberty. They celebrated what they believed to be the nation’s true heroes and examples of honorable citizens.

Honoring national monuments of a white and black “patriot” symbolized the complexity of women’s experiences who juggled multiple identities as woman, voter, citizen, and American with race intersecting at each angle. A civic identity, despite other overlapping identities such as race, gender, religion, class, and so forth, was the only strand that equally tied citizens together in the polity. A civic identity was critical to clubwomen’s quest for citizenship and

¹⁸⁹ Mary McLeod Bethune. “Speech on Roosevelt’s Inauguration,” (29 Jan. 1937.), MMFB

¹⁹⁰ *Minutes of the National Association of Colored Women 21st Biennial*, 1939. p. 50

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

inclusiveness. To be sure, at the close of the Nineteenth Biennial meeting, the delegates took the following pledge printed in the program:

Holding sacred and worthy of unfailing loyalty my membership in the National Association of Colored Women, I will sustain its good work and guard its reputation. I pledge myself to my country, the United States of America. I will uphold with unswerving loyalty; government, laws and ideals.¹⁹²

An inclusion of a loyalty oath, first to the Association and then to the country, in the program underlies a strategy to employ rhetorical language emphasizing a sense of loyalty and commitment to government. The subtleties of the language and their actions played on the consciousness of whites to make clear their avowed commitment to the country. White benefactors, mayors, senators, businessmen, and white women activists were invited to the conventions as platform guests.¹⁹³ Through rhetorical political manipulation, they spread their own propaganda of unwavering patriotism and nationalism. In every forward movement, clubwomen were cognizant of their status as citizens and worked to make real the idea of Americanism for African Americans. In doing so, they exposed the inconsistencies and hypocrisy of the nation and redefined a democracy that corresponded with the plight of oppressed people. Terrell remarked, “The chasm between the principles upon which this Government was founded. . . , and those which are daily practiced under the protection of the flag, yawn so wide and deep.”¹⁹⁴ On this note, clubwomen, including Bethune, sought to move the nation away from democracy theorized to democracy practiced, thereby, enlarging their conception of republicanism.

¹⁹² *Minutes of the Nineteenth Biennial Convention*, 1935, NACW. p. 70.

¹⁹³ For example at the Fifteenth Biennial Convention, Earl Warren, the District Attorney of Alameda County, California who later was appointed as a Supreme Court Justice, gave 1,000 pounds of sugar for the convention and extended greetings to the “colored” women of the country in a complimentary manner. *Minutes of the Fifteenth Biennial Convention* 1926, NACW, (p. 35).

¹⁹⁴ Mary Church Terrell, “What It Means to be Colored in Capital of the U.S” (1907) in *We Must Be Up and Doing: A Reader in Early African American Feminisms*. Edited by Teresa C. Zackodnik. New York: Broadview Press, 2010. p. 148.

Well aware of the rising fascist and Communist threats abroad and at home, clubwomen became more vocal in their commitment to democracy. Their support for this political system also accommodated criticisms of the state. In an opening statement to the Second National Conference on the Problems of the Negro and Negro Youth as a response to Roosevelt's call for a united patriotism, Bethune stated, "We recognize that no such "united patriotism" can possibly exist unless this "common opportunity" is available to all Americans regardless of creed, class, or color." She added that only through a common goal of equality would "our country be able to stand before the world as the unsullied champion of true democracy."¹⁹⁵ Bethune spoke of equality and social justice to argue her point about realizing American democratic principles. Clubwomen characterized democracy as an all-inclusive form of government that operated for the benefit of the commonwealth.

Noticing the expansion of government, Ella Stewart spoke ardently on the specific meaning of democracy for black women. She opined that the phraseology "'of the people, for the people, by the people'" was not the democracy of clubwomen."¹⁹⁶ Rather, she expressed that democracy was "a government that allows each individual to participate to the fullest extent of his ability and influence and gives to him as [much] power to select officers of his own choosing as any other member."¹⁹⁷ Clubwomen, in addition, believed that democracy required the government to be kept subject to "popular control" that could be operated "with reasonable ease and voters who will give sufficient attention to their part in its operation."¹⁹⁸ Part of civic

¹⁹⁵ Mary McLeod Bethune. "Opening Statement to the Second National Conference on the Problems of the Negro Negro Youth (1939) in Audrey McCluskey, *Building a Better World*, p. 233.

¹⁹⁶ *Minutes of the Twentieth Biennial Convention Minutes of the Twentieth Biennial Convention*, 1937. p.78; Similarly Fannie Lou Hamer, in later years, remarked, "With the people, for the people, by the people. I crack up when I hear it; I say, with the handful, for the handful, by the handful, 'cause that's what really happens."

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p.78.

¹⁹⁸ *Minutes of the Eighteenth Biennial Convention*, 1993, NACW. p. 47, 48

learning and responsibility expected citizens to understand the function of government and challenge the system if improperly managed.

These activists also argued that in order to defend democracy and strengthen the nation, education and full citizenship rights must be provided to all of the citizens. As Adele Logan Hunt indicated, black women “believed deeply in the underlying tenets and promised inclusiveness of American democracy.”¹⁹⁹ This idea included universal citizenship and access to better schools. The Political and Civic Club of Harlem acknowledged that its chief purpose was to “assist those who desire to become citizens by naturalization” and to enjoy all benefits and privileges a democratic nation endowed upon its citizens.²⁰⁰ Other club members expressed that “social security in a democracy rests on a basis of public education” and that there existed “inadequate educational provision[s] for rural groups, lower economic groups, Indians and Negroes.”²⁰¹ In her work on black women and democracy, Courtney Thomas observed that black women activists “viewed black students’ access to a standard education as part and parcel of democratic practice and the absence of it, a breach of the democratic promise.”²⁰² Accordingly, the Association adopted resolutions at the 21st national convention that stated: “Believing in the democracy of education—be it resolved that the National Association of Colored Women go on record as making for equal education opportunity for our Youth throughout the nation as a major project of every state.”²⁰³ Subsequently, the clubwomen

¹⁹⁹ Alexander, Adele Logan. “Adella Hunt Logan and the Tuskegee Women’s Clubs: Building a Foundation for Suffrage.” In *Stepping Out of the Shadows: Alabama Women, 1819-1990*, ed. Mary Martha Thomas, pp. 96-113. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1995. p. 96.

²⁰⁰ *National Notes*, (Mar. 1930), p. 8.

²⁰¹ *Minutes of the Eighteenth Biennial Convention*, 1933. pps. 46-47.

²⁰² Courtney L. Thomas. “Capturing Democracy: Black Women Activists and the Struggle for Equal Rights, 1920s-1970s. Ph.D dissertation, Purdue University, 2011. p. 14

²⁰³ *Minutes of the Twenty First Biennial Convention*, 1939. pps. 50-51

advocated continuing citizenship training as an important part of every club throughout the nation so that women could become informed and responsible.²⁰⁴

The women championed education for democracy as an essential component of republicanism. They used civic education to teach citizenship and asserted that an enlightened citizenry would provide a better defense of the country and sustain the foundation of democracy for the commonwealth. In this light, clubwomen read from the playbook of Thomas Jefferson, known to some as the father of democracy, who warned that “democracy cannot long exist without enlightenment” and that “information is the currency of democracy.”²⁰⁵ The theory behind civic education was that it provided the panacea for the country’s political, economic, and social ills. Otherwise, democracy would fail without it.

Citizenship training, however, stretched the ideals of black citizenship and called for a more participatory democracy to thrust them in the wider political sphere. By forcefully engaging in the democratic process, black women hoped to help restructure the system and provide for education improvements. In 1939 at the 21st Biennial, Grace Wilson Evans of Indiana and chairman of legislation conducted a round table discussion on “How the Negro May Obtain His Rights by Legislation.”²⁰⁶ Evans reported that she fostered Bill 252 which provided that African Americans constitute one of six members on the Board of Education in Indiana. She notified the women that all persons in Indiana had to pay a fee of \$10.00 in order to be commissioned lobbyists. Evans had qualified and kept abreast on the bill and its transition from the House of Representatives to the Senate until it eventually passed.

²⁰⁴ *Minutes of the Twenty First Biennial Convention*, 1939, pps. 50-51.

²⁰⁵ Cited in Saul K. Padover, *Jefferson: A Great American’s Life and Ideas*. New York: New American Library, 1970. p. 43.

²⁰⁶ *Minutes of the Twenty First Biennial Convention*, 1939, NACW. p. 40.

For Evans, it was imperative that black women became more proactive in their pursuits in political affairs instead of only writing letters and petitioning. Evans urged the women to also become lobbyists and not wait on the government to act. She pleaded with the women to organize and stand firm in their states to create policy, secure places for themselves in government positions and education boards, and to wage a fight for justice. In capturing the spirit of participatory democracy, she asked every local club and state to “organize legislative departments, study bills that affect the Negro, sponsor bills for the benefit of the Negro, and follow through to their passage.”²⁰⁷ In this way, a direct and present black voice would reach the halls of Congress and activate the wheels of democracy to work more efficiently and properly. According to Evans, her achievement made Indiana the first state to get a bill passed by a person of color for the good of the group.²⁰⁸

At the following convention in 1941, Bethune spoke to her altruistic constituents on the updates of the current presidential administration to get them on board with her ideas about black women leaders in government. As more and more opportunities opened up for black women to serve, Bethune’s major concern was for them to imagine these new obligations, duties, and positions and be well-prepared and well-educated to qualify. Thus, she called upon the NACW to prepare themselves for new roles. As Bethune indicated, the responsibility of women leaders included promoting qualified black women for decision-making positions in local, state, and national governments.²⁰⁹ Evans agreed with Bethune and exclaimed, “We as one of the largest and strongest organizations in the country, need lobbyists and live wire politicians regularly on the job at Washington, D.C., and elsewhere.”²¹⁰

²⁰⁷ *Minutes of the Twenty First Biennial Convention*, 1939, NACW. p. 40.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p. 44.

²⁰⁹ *Minutes of the Twenty First Biennial Convention*, p. 44.

²¹⁰ *Minutes of the 22nd Biennial Convention*, 1941. p. 25.

While Evans was on board to push the organization out of its comfort zone, Bethune felt obliged to persuade the seemingly stubborn ones to move forward in exploring other avenues women could serve in the government. The NYA director advised them to keep in close contact with outstanding black women who worked in the division of the NYA such as the President Jennie B. Moton (1937-1941) and Constance Daniels.²¹¹ These women, she explained, were in a position to best guide the race to the literature and methods of securing information on how to carry out programs in their communities.²¹²

Though Bethune congratulated Moton on her duty in government, Lu Ann Jones observed that Moton had almost been typecast in her roles. Her role in the Farm Agency, while serving as NACW president, may have put Moton more in the limelight of the ambitious Bethune who may have caused added pressures for the president to lead the organization toward full women's political participation. Unlike past leaders, Moton had not put up a fight against Bethune and was one of the few attendees at Bethune's organizational meeting in 1930. As a clubwoman, the new first lady of Tuskegee, and woman activist, Moton seemed to have lived in the shadows of Margaret Murray Washington and her husband Robert R. Moton, President of Tuskegee Institute. In the earlier days, one club member and southern reformer, Lugenia Burns Hope, had described her as "weak, very weak" and invited to places "as company for Mrs. Washington, not to speak."²¹³ Jones writes that Moton was plagued by "social responsible individualism" relegated to educated black women of the time.²¹⁴ She asserted that a pressured Moton joined the network of southern reformers and was thrust into black women's activism, but

²¹¹ Jennie Booth Moton was the wife of Dr. Robert R. Moton, president of Tuskegee and immediate successor of Booker T. Washington.

²¹² *Minutes of the 22nd Biennial Convention*, p. 74.

²¹³ Cited in Jacqueline Rouse, *Lugenia Burns Hope: A Southern Reformer*. n.34 p.151-152

²¹⁴ Lu Ann Jones, "In Search of Jennie Booth Moton, Field Agent, AAA." *Journal of Agricultural History*. Vol. 72, No. 2, (Spring, 1998). p. 449

she failed to blossom as “a strong, innovative leader or effective spokesperson.”²¹⁵ The legacy of Jennie B. Moton to rural southern farmwomen in the Farm Agency, Jones concluded, was the promotion of black field agents and helping to increase their numbers.²¹⁶ However, she mainly served as a ceremonial figurehead. The strain of the NACW’s depleting treasury, the death of her husband, the seemingly high expectations warranted by clubmembers, and trying to salvage the organization from ruins placed a tremendous burden on her.

It seems likely Bethune may have used Moton’s position as a catalyst to get clubwomen with her program on government training, even though the NACW refused to affiliate with her council. But the importance of Bethune’s numerous addresses to the NACW warrant attention. Though an administrator, Bethune’s growing interest in the government providing education for black youths nationally reflected the clubwomen’s attitudes on the government’s responsibility. The work was too large and burdensome for black women to carry. The federal government then became a vehicle in which black women could elicit some form of control of programs and resources directly to the black community while simultaneously serving the nation. Who would know more about the needs of black citizens and women other than black women? How could a body of legislators or advisors know or understand the concerns and needs of the people and best solve the race’s problems without representation of the people who they were actually trying to help?

Bethune perhaps saw the political potential of the NACW that already had an established political and strategic system in place with many outstanding black women leaders in various occupations. Using her own life as an example, Bethune insisted that clubwomen fill government positions in order to gain citizenship rights for the people and have a direct influence

²¹⁵ Lu Ann Jones, “In Search of Jennie Booth Moton,” p. 449.

²¹⁶ Ibid, p. 456.

in politics. The director informed them that the NYA had afforded larger opportunities to black children for education, explaining that “the optimistic awakening to the responsibility of citizenship [was] made possible through the channels of training provided through the program of the National Youth Administration.”²¹⁷ During the latter part of the decade as director of Minority Affairs, Bethune had positioned twenty-three African Americans as state administrators and project supervisors for the NYA and other departments, whereby, six were black women.²¹⁸ They all worked to develop training programs and dispense funds directly to the black community.²¹⁹

In this role as NYA Director of Negro Affairs, Bethune established herself as a stateswoman and one of the most influential black women in government. She lobbied for education, job training for the youth, and money to fund black graduate programs at Howard, Fisk, and Atlanta. Asking for a sum of \$100,000 for the purpose of expanding graduate education at black colleges, Bethune exclaimed, “Give it to me on my desk; let me say where it will go. Let me be boss of that.”²²⁰ As Joyce Hanson stated, Bethune “firmly believed that educational decisions that affected the lives of black children belonged in the hands of black parents, educators, administrators and professionals.” Sitting on boards or donating money and materials “did not give white philanthropists [or white officials] the right to make life-altering

²¹⁷ Mary McLeod Bethune, *Building a Better World*, p.216.

²¹⁸ Some of the women in government included Frances Williams in the Council of National Defense, Constance Daniels in the Farm Security Administration, Venita Lewis in the Children's Bureau of the Department of Labor, Corienne Robinson in the United States Housing Authority, Jennie B. Moton in Farm Security Administration, Ora Brown Stokes, Venice Spraggs, Pauline and Nell Hunter in the National Youth Administration, and Crystal Byrd Faucett of the Office of Civilian Defense. Many of these women happened to also be clubwomen.

²¹⁹ While a few African American filled these positions in government, it was by far the most black appointments made by a U.S. president in the nation's history. The Black Cabinet did little to bring national attention to the civil rights issues. Harvard Sitoff noted the race advisers only “articulated the problems of blacks, the ultimate goal of integration, and the specific responsibility of federal government in the area of civil rights.” Harvard Sitoff. *Toward Freedom Land: The Long Struggle of Racial Equality in America* (p. 32).

²²⁰ Mary McLeod Bethune. “NYA Regional Conference on the College Work Program for Negroes” (1940) in *Building A Better World*. p. 223.

decisions for black children.”²²¹ She felt more comfortable with black women over these funds. She received the money and distributed it as she saw fit to the programs at the black colleges.

In addition, Bethune made sure that whenever an opportunity presented itself for black women to serve in government, she honed in on getting them placed in those positions. In a letter to Eleanor Roosevelt, Bethune informed her that back leaders had supported the abolishment of the NYA Division of Negro Affairs in California, believing it would bring about a form of segregation. As such, she recommended Vivian Osborne Marsh for one of the staff administrative positions and for more appointments of black administrative and clerical workers in the state office to diversify and fairly distribute resources in the NYA program in the state.²²² Bethune strategically and diplomatically used her power and influence to the best of her ability to garner resources for the community.

In her attempts to inculcate in African American women the importance of expanding their roles, her idea of citizenship reflected black women’s commitment to civic republicanism. She cautioned women to be unwaveringly patriotic race-loving citizens, dutiful participators in the political arena by disseminating knowledge to enfranchise voters, and civil service workers. In 1941, she advised the Association to continue to study the Constitution and laws, teach the masses of black women of their citizenship rights, and recommend proposals or write bills to win a fair representation in government.²²³ For Bethune, however, black women had an added citizenship responsibility “to maintain and upkeep the management of the cities, states, and the federal government.”²²⁴

²²¹ Hanson, p. 69.

²²² Mary McLeod Bethune to Eleanor Roosevelt (1940) in *Building A Better World*.” p. 220.

²²³ Undated document ca. 1941, MMBF.

²²⁴ Ibid.

In the 1930s, the Association continued its interwar activism but repositioned its strategy for citizenship largely due to the Depression. Unlike the 1920s, where a massive civic education movement shaped civic participation, women expanded their ideals of citizenship through the home, jury service, civic identification, lobbying representatives, sponsoring bills, and championing a participatory democracy. Engaging in civic activities and inspiring a civic identity among the women did not necessarily net them the identification with the national political community as they had hoped. In their quest, clubwomen found it impossible to assume only a national identity because they could not separate their blackness from their Americanness. Given that, the NACW worked to challenge the government and hold officials to live up to the American ideals of freedom and bring the principles of democracy into fruition so they could feel like a part of the community. Their declaration was premised on the importance of education as a critical asset to the advancement for all including the government. As a result, women created spaces to transcend the boundaries of race and gender to exert agency in their lives and in their communities.

In light of the NACW's history of teaching citizenship through various mediums, club leader Mary McLeod Bethune helped women to assume somewhat of a political identity. While many members were reluctant to thrust women fully in the political field, others welcomed the opportunity as a doorway to freedom. Stretching beyond the organization's boundaries, Bethune used her varied positions to advocate for women in government and industry and tackle education issues on a national level. Her exemplary role blazed the steep and thorny political trail for women and made a lasting impact on black female leadership, education, and citizenship.

CONCLUSION

Clubwomen, like their enslaved and free mothers, worked tirelessly in the vineyard to ensure equality for black women and youth. Their civic educational activities and interwar activism encompassed a political agenda to achieve their goals for citizenship. They understood that civic education was an important part of American democracy, citizenship, and American education; and so they stressed that black women needed to understand politics, government, and civic life. Civic knowledge and civic participation were crucial to the welfare of the nation but particularly to African Americans in order to gain political competence. To know the foundations of government; what it should or should not be doing; whether there existed abuses of political power or authority in government embodied the essential knowledge and duty of the citizen to contribute one's share in society and ensure the continuance of a strong democracy. These political activists exhibited a multi-layered consciousness of their position in society and cultivated their organization as a mecca for racial and civic enlightenment. They were keen strategists, competent educators, and masterful communicators. While club members did not convey monolithic ideals on how to achieve citizenship rights or women's role in the making of government, their rhetoric and practice of citizenship exemplified common tenets of republicanism—civic participation and democracy for the good of all people.

In correspondence with this ideal, black women defined their citizenship in collective terms to meet the demands of the black community and the polity. Only through race advancement could they work toward building a better nation, and only through the education of the race and race history could they bring about a different representation of black Americans

and inspire racial pride among the children and then the nation. The club women imparted knowledge to women by holding sessions in schools, canvassing homes, holding forums and community meetings, and establishing citizenship schools and institutes to teach their ideas of citizenship. These various mediums promoted their messages of service to the black community and to Americanism. The adamant expression of patriotism and loyal service to the local, state, and national political community was materialized through their support for the defense of the country abroad, respect for the nation's laws, and the celebration of national symbols and songs within their programs. They sought to prepare and incite among the future generations of youth to commit to "race work" and the political community by actively participating in the voting process and becoming elected to change conditions for African Americans.

Their participation as suffragists and then as electors presented new complex political identities. Because of the generations of oppression as black females, these identities were at odds with balancing racial and civic identification in the country. However, they called attention to their own Americanness and nationalism and found outlets to express grievances and influence politics. Black women understood the importance of demanding their rights as women, as African Americans, and as citizens, thus expanding the definition of civic republicanism to include the government's duties and responsibilities to its citizens. They linked voting with acquiring quality and fair education. Since communities and the private sector could not execute this task alone, they needed a much larger, powerful entity to educate the masses which in turn would produce intelligent citizens who would become contributors to the state instead of liabilities. Accordingly, they pressed for a federal Department of Education to handle and wipe out the massive wave of illiteracy. While shedding light on southern tactics to reject black civil rights and enfranchisement, they reminded the federal government of its

constitutional obligations to them. But citizenship was more than about voting, although they used it as a powerful tool to voice their concerns and put pressure on representatives to serve their interests.

Clubwomen, in addition, labored to fulfill their responsibilities and duties as citizens as they understood it through participation in elections, writing letters to representatives, and studying the constitution and laws to make informed decisions—the basis of civic education. However, knowing the principles of the Constitution was used as one of their greatest defense strategies to strengthen arguments on attaining first class citizenship status. They sought to pursue the common good for all, professing faith in the country and in the Constitution, that if placed in the right hands, the ideals of democracy would work. The desire for education offered opportunities to expand their knowledge of the world, allow for different career options, gain social acceptance, and engage in the affairs of the nation—a deviant step from normative tasks society imposed upon them. Not only did they seek to elevate and raise standards among women and children through education, but they worked to increase political involvement in order to push their own political agenda such as in the case of Bethune.

The NACW constituted only a small minority of black women, but these women-activists raised awareness and action toward the plights of women and their citizenship status across the country. These paragons of virtue championed a fuller vision of citizenship as more inclusive, participatory, and democratic. Despite the decades' long fight for citizenship and education, black women did not attain their hope of equal civic, racial, or gender statuses and knew it would continue to remain a challenge. Stewart lamented in 1929, "We shall never live long enough to bring about our ideals of Negro citizenship—the task is too great and long, and life is too

short.”²²⁵ Even though these disheartening yet prophetic words rang true, the women had planted seeds in the infertile political soil for the next generation of women activists. Early clubwomen’s work, arguably, set the stage for and was a precursor to the adult educational programs such as literacy instruction, voter training, Constitution reading, and political awareness found in freedom schools that were pivotal during the 1950s and ‘60s Modern Civil Rights Movement.

Moreover, the National Association of Colored Women’s civic education campaign gives an interesting insight to American citizenship in the current period of growing contested citizenship surrounding immigration, gay marriage, women’s reproductive rights, voter identification, and presidential politics. They combated their issues by studying and involving themselves in civic life, government, and politics. This study touches only certain aspects of citizenship, education, race, and gender in the twentieth century. It leaves room for scholars to explore how other black women experiences may have informed their meanings of citizenship. Nevertheless, the activities of black clubwomen shed light on early minority women approaches to gain access to citizenship rights for the sake of making good citizens.

²²⁵ *National Notes*, (Oct. 1929), p.5.

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