Winter 12-8-2022

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by

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A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate School,
the College of Arts and Sciences
and the School of Humanities
at The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts

Approved by:

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December 2022

Published by the Graduate School

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI®

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the participation of domestic workers in the Civil Rights Movement, specifically in Gulf South bus boycotts in Baton Rouge, Montgomery, and Tallahassee; voter registration efforts in Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, and Florida; and Head Start work in those same Deep South states. Domestic workers engaged in activism by joining unions, women's movements, and the Communist Party to improve their treatment in Northern and Southern cities. Modern historians have expanded their research to explore the participation of domestic workers in the Civil Rights Movement, especially in the Montgomery Bus Boycott. In some cases, researchers also have explored the complicated relationships domestic workers had with their employers.

By looking at oral histories and secondary historical works on domestic workers, this thesis argues that Deep South domestic workers were significant participants in some of the most prominent civil rights demonstrations. They boycotted buses and worked with local groups to increase voter registration, improve education, and promote protests. These actions reinforced the idea that though domestic workers faced low pay, long hours, and oppressive work conditions, they also were activists for themselves, their families, and their communities.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis came together through persistence, creativity, and a love of research. I could not have created this body of work without the help of my three committee members. My committee chair, Dr. Rebecca Tuuri, always gave me encouragement and direction throughout this process. I would also like to thank Dr. Andrew Haley and Dr. Kevin Greene for their source suggestions. Additionally, I would like to thank my family, friends, and boyfriend for their pep talks and toleration of scattered books. Finally, I would like to thank the domestic workers mentioned in these chapters for their activism, and I hope their contributions will be studied further.

DEDICATION

Dedicated to my loved ones

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A.M.E. CHURCH	African Methodist Episcopal Church
BCC	Bogalusa Committee for Concern
BCVL	Bogalusa Civic and Voters League
CAP	Community Action Program
CDGM	Child Development Group of Mississippi
CORE	Congress Of Racial Equality
FAMU	Florida A&M University
FEPC	Fair Employment Practices Committee
GED CERTIFICATE	General Education Development Certificate
HTA	Household Technicians of America
HWO	Household Workers Organization
ICC	Tallahassee Inter-Civic Council
MAP	Mississippi Action for Progress
MFDP	Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party
MIA	Montgomery Improvement Association
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NCHE	National Committee on Household Employment
NDWUA	National Domestic Workers Union of America
OEO	Office of Economic Opportunity
SCC	Southern Consumers' Cooperative
SCLC	Southern Christian Leadership Conference

SNCC	Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee
TCA	Total Community Action
UDL	Union Defense League
VEP	Voter Educational Project
WPC	Women's Political Council

CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION

In April 1972, Governors William Milliken of Michigan, John J. Gilligan of Ohio, and Jimmy Carter of Georgia created executive orders to honor domestic workers.[1] Milliken put a Household Workers Week, while Gilligan implemented Household Employees Week to be celebrated on a yearly basis. Gilligan also called domestic labor "an honorable and indispensable profession which requires a high degree of skill and expertise," and he wanted to "pay just and proper tribute to the domestic specialists and technicians."[2] Carter created a Maids' Honor Day in Georgia.[3] Domestic workers and activists had been pushing politicians to create these celebrations for several years. They wanted to bring attention to their occupation. They also were inspired and empowered by the Civil Rights and Women's Liberation Movements, as they had fought in both. Domestic workers demanded that their voices be heard, their employers treat them better, and the public view household work in a more positive light. Unfortunately, before domestic workers had their messages accepted on the national level, they endured a long history of abuse and misunderstanding.

Domestic workers suffered many injustices, but some were able to make a difference within their communities because of their activism. Through their participation in political and social movements, domestic workers attempted to secure better pay and

[1] Premilla Nadasen, *Household Workers Unite: The Untold Story of African American Women Who Built a Movement* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2016), 83.

[2] Proclamation by Governor Gilligan, March 28, 1974, National Committee on Household Employment Records, series 003, subseries 01, box 12, folder 26, as quoted in Nadasen, 83.

[3] Nadasen, 83.

benefits for themselves through unionization and collective bargaining. Some historians also have identified domestic workers as bridge leaders in the Civil Rights Movement and, more recently, as militant symbols in the Black Power Movement. I draw upon these studies by presenting domestic workers in the Deep South as women who played a vital role in the Baton Rouge, Montgomery, and Tallahassee bus boycotts as well as voter registration and Head Start work in Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, and Florida. Additionally, I will be looking at domestic workers' experiences across Deep South states to show how their occupations influenced and even aided in their civil rights work.

Domestic workers demonstrated five different types of activist strength that I identify as numerical, organizational, economic, infrastructural, and symbolic. Numerical strength refers to the number of people involved in the different forms of activism. Organizational strength refers to an activist's power, either as an individual or through a group or club, to bring other people into the Movement. Economic strength refers to an activist's financial impact on the Movement. Infrastructural strength refers to an activist's work that fed, housed, and transported frontline activists. Finally, symbolic strength refers to the power of ideas about the activist to inspire others to join the movement. It is important to note that domestic workers demonstrated different strengths in various civil rights activities. During the bus boycotts, domestic workers demonstrated numerical, organizational, economic, and symbolic strength. A disproportionate number of Black women in Southern towns were domestic workers, and they rode the buses to work. They joined the boycotts in large numbers, helped others join the movement, and made a significant economic impact when they stopped riding the buses. Additionally, domestic workers were symbolic leaders in the movement as they were portrayed, by boycott

leaders and in the national news, as the hard-working women boycotting buses to demand respect. The depiction of these women walking hundreds of miles in protest helped build support for the boycotts on the local and national level. While domestic workers could not provide numerical, economic, or symbolic strength to voter registration efforts, some domestic workers provided organizational strength to encourage domestic workers and others to vote. They did this mainly through their involvement in organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). They also demonstrated infrastructural power, as they cooked for and housed voting rights activists. As with voter registration, domestic workers could not provide numerical or economic support to Head Start. However, those who did participate in Head Start demonstrated organizational, infrastructural, and symbolic power. First, they demonstrated organizational power by encouraging local community members to send children to centers and by building local support for the program. Second, they provided infrastructural support to the centers as volunteers. Finally, domestic workers employed for Head Start possessed symbolic strength as they became symbols of people who benefitted most from the War on Poverty's goal of "maximum feasible participation" of the poor.

While this thesis will draw upon domestic workers' personal stories to illuminate these different activist strengths, I also will draw upon historians who have studied domestic work. One of the earliest historians to analyze such work was David M. Katzman, who studied Black female wage earners between the Civil War and World War I. His historical contributions are essential to this thesis because his research gives insight into the struggles domestic workers have faced, including working long hours for little

pay. His work also illuminates how the occupation of household work has changed over time. Katzman's research became more tied to domestic work because most African American women worked as household workers.[4] Katzman showed that domestic workers often chose this occupation because they lacked the education to do anything else. Katzman highlighted some of the responses from a survey conducted by Lucy Maynard Salmon of Vassar College in 1889 and 1890: "I went into housework because I was not educated enough for other work" or "I would change my occupation if I knew how to do anything else."[5] Educational and training limitations pushed women into domestic work.

Katzman emphasized that races and ethnicities of domestic workers varied by region. He first mentioned the native-born white domestics and said they stayed in small towns and country districts in the Northeast. Immigrants worked in homes in the cities, and Black domestic workers dominated the South.[6] Katzman described the tasks expected in household labor, the work conditions, and the environment. However, he focused on the relationships between employers and employees, which remains an area of fascination among historians.

Donna L. Van Raaphorst also explained the general contours of domestic work in the U.S. as she documented the beginning of domestic service from early colonization to the 1930s, dividing the period into four distinct chronological eras.[7] Like Katzman, Van

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[4] David M. Katzman, *Seven Days a Week: Women and Domestic Service in Industrializing America* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 1.

[5] Lucy Maynard Salmon, *Domestic Service* (New York, 1897), p. 113, as quoted in Katzman, *Seven Days a Week,* 3.

[6] Katzman, vii

[7] Donna L. Van Raaphorst, *Union Maids Not Wanted: Organizing Domestic Workers, 1870-1940* (New York, NY: Praeger, 1988), 19.

Raaphorst examined the psychology of housework. She assessed the occupation from the perspectives of the employer and employee by using interviews from domestic workers to tell their stories, which include examples of early unionization or organization.

Micki McElya's work on Southern ideas about domestic workers is crucial to this thesis. She highlights the connection between the treatment of enslaved Black women from the Civil War Era to that of domestic workers. She analyzed how the white South embraced the "Mammy Stereotype," a trope created by whites that depicted "Black women who worked in white homes, cooked innumerable meals, cared for white children, and formed emotional ties to white family members" as "faithful slaved people."[8] They were supposed to be submissive and unintelligent but still a member of the family. The female employer often believed that her relationship with her domestic worker was a "unique, emotionally potent relationship."[9] In most instances children and other family members also believed in this type of relationship between employer and employee. In spite of this supposedly close-knit environment, employees also faced sexual harassment at the hands of male employers.[10] Domestic workers who became civil rights activists, however, rejected this "Mammy Stereotype."

More recent historians are starting to consider domestic workers' contributions to civil rights and Black Power activism. Premilla Nadasen's work is used heavily throughout this thesis because she described early forms of activism, such as domestic workers' attempts to participate in the Women's Rights Movement, where domestic

[8] Micki McElya, *Clinging to Mammy: The Faithful Slave in Twentieth-Century America* (Harvard University Press, 2007), 4.

[9] McElya, 224.

[10] McElya, 8.

workers often faced racism. She moves through time to include domestic workers' participation in the Montgomery Bus Boycott to 2010, where she sheds light on the National Domestic Workers Alliance's victory and the Domestic Workers' Bill of Rights. This legislation secured basic labor protections such as overtime pay and three paid days off a year for domestic workers in New York State.[11] Additional historians like Tera W. Hunter, Rebecca Sharpless, Susan Tucker, and Katherine S. van Wormer focused on the domestic experience in the South, primarily discussing domestic workers personal experiences with their employers during Jim Crow.[12] They all rely on primary sources like oral histories from domestic workers, newspapers, government papers, and magazines to convey what domestic workers were facing economically and politically in the South and how events like WWI, WWII, the 1960s, and 1970s caused a great strain between employers and employees. These works are particularly helpful for understanding what it was like for domestic workers in the Jim Crow South. I will expand on their works by focusing on the Deep South states of Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, and Louisiana. I chose to focus on these states because although they were prominent in the civil rights struggle, domestic workers' activism in these states is still under-studied.

Classic and recent historical works that explore civil rights in the Deep South have been instrumental to this thesis in providing a background of the Civil Rights

[11] Nadasen,175-176.

[12] Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); Rebecca Sharpless, *Cooking in Other Women's Kitchens Domestic Workers in the South, 1865-1960* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Susan Tucker, *Telling Memories among Southern Women: Domestic Workers and Their Employers in the Segregated South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002); and Katherine S. van Wormer, David W. Jackson, and Charletta Sudduth, *The Maid Narratives: Black Domestic and White Families in the Jim Crow South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012).

Movement. In his book *Local People,* John Dittmer, looked at the history of Mississippi and the activism such as voter registration and Head Start Programs that included domestic workers and sharecroppers.[13] The organizations that were established improved the lives of the poor and created more political autonomy for African Americans in the area. Dittmer demonstrated that local Mississippians did make large contributions to the Civil Rights Movement. Additional historians who have focused on Mississippi's Head Start story are Polly Greenberg and Crystal R. Sanders. Greenberg, first in 1969, and Sanders, today, have explored how the Child Development Group of Mississippi (CDGM) was created with the help of the government and community activists in 1965. Head Start gave African Americans (particularly women and children) educational, occupational, and political opportunities in the middle to late 1960s that they might have not gotten had Head Start not been established.[14]

Three historians who give an overview of the events that occurred in Louisiana during the Civil Rights Movement are Adam Fairclough, Greta de Jong, and Shannon Frystak. Fairclough documented grassroots activism such as voter registration efforts and explained that from the time of the first NAACP office's opening in Louisiana in 1915 through the 1970s, local people have always been involved in civil rights efforts in small towns and large cities.[15] He gives both the national and local interpretation of the Civil

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[13] John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

[14] Polly Greenberg, *The Devil Has Slippery Shoes: A Biased Biography of the Child Development Group of Mississippi: A Story of Maximum Feasible Poor Parent Participation* (Washington, D.C.: Youth Policy Institute, 1990), Crystal Sanders, *A Chance for Change Head Start and Mississippi's Black Freedom Struggle* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

[15] Adam Fairclough, *Race and Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915-1972* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2008).

Rights Movement in Louisiana and therefore is a very useful source. Greta de Jong examines voter registration, unionization, and other community improvement activism that took place in several parishes in Northern and Southeastern Louisiana for seventy years. Her work gives attention to Louisiana's grassroots activism and shows the large role working-class Black people played in Louisiana's Civil Rights Movement.[16] De Jong is especially important when discussing the idea of "maximum feasible participation" in voter registration efforts and Head Start programs because she explains how these efforts relied on the local working-class people to be successful and how the working-class wanted to be able to benefit from these programs. Lastly, I draw upon the work of Shannon Frystak, who focused on the importance of women in the fight for equality in Louisiana from the 1920s through the 1960s.[17]

The third state I focus on is Alabama. Danielle McGuire's *At the Dark End of the Street* described how Black women, particularly domestic workers, were mistreated on buses on their way to work in white employers' homes during Jim Crow.[18] She explained how working-class Black women were the main participants and symbols of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. In addition, Susan Youngblood Ashmore provided a detailed analysis of the War on Poverty in Alabama.[19] The last state I focus on is Florida. Glenda Alice Rabby and Samuel C. Hyde Jr. showed how Florida played a key role in the Civil

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[16] Greta de Jong, *A Different Day: African American Struggles for Justice in Rural Louisiana, 1900-1970* (United States, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

[17] Shannon L. Frystak, *Our Minds on Freedom: Women and the Struggle for Black Equality in Louisiana, 1924-1967* (Louisiana State University Press, 2009).

[18] Danielle L. McGuire, *At The Dark End Of The Street Black Women, Rape and Resistance – a New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2010).

[19] Susan Youngblood Ashmore, *Carry It On: The War on Poverty and the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama, 1964-1972* (Athens, GA, The University of Georgia Press, 2008).

Rights Movement and how the Tallahassee Bus Boycott gave Florida's civil rights efforts national attention.[20] Hyde looks at Florida and other Gulf South States' involvement in the civil rights struggle from 1866 through 2000 on a national and regional scale. His work is very helpful in illuminating Florida's voting registration and bus boycott activism.[21]

Recently, historian Ashley D. Farmer, has examined Black ideas about domestic workers' radical potential. Farmer's first chapter, "The Militant Negro Domestic, 1945-1965," in *Remaking Black Power* highlights Claudia Jones, who was a Black Communist who maintained that the domestic worker served as a symbol of the Black woman's experience because she faced racism, classism, and sexism.[22] According to Jones, Black domestic workers, as the most oppressed people in society, had the potential to become the vanguard of Black self-determination and revolution, but they would have to reject the norms and expectations white society had laid out for them and form a new radical view about their rights and roles.[23] Domestic workers during the Baton Rouge, Montgomery, and Tallahassee bus boycotts rejected norms and expectations of white society. Though not fighting for political revolution, they became a Southern version of a "Militant Black Domestic" who fought for better conditions for themselves and their communities.

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[20] Glenda Alice Rabby, *The Pain and the Promise: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Tallahassee, Florida* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2016).

[21] Samuel C. Hyde, *Sunbelt Revolution: The Historical Progression of the Civil Rights Struggle in the Gulf South, 1866-2000* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2003).

[22] Ashley D. Farmer, *Remaking Black Power: How Black Women Transformed an Era* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 29

[23] Farmer, 29-30.

Another important work for theorizing Black women's civil rights activism was sociologist Belinda Robnett's *How Long? How Long? African-American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights*, which identified Black women in the Movement as "bridge leaders" because they

> utilized frame bridging, amplification, extension, and transformation to foster ties between the social movement and the community; and between prefigurative strategies (aimed at individual change, identity, and consciousness) and political strategies (aimed at organizational tactics designed to challenge existing relationships with the state and other societal institutions).[24]

Domestic workers were able to serve as bridge leaders because they could use their close relationships with fellow community members to encourage others to participate in activism like boycotting buses, registering to vote or encouraging others to do so, or leaving their jobs as domestic workers in white homes to work for Head Start centers.

In addition to the previously mentioned secondary sources, I draw upon oral history and other manuscript collections. For instance, when discussing the Montgomery Bus Boycott, I utilize Georgia Gilmore's oral history because of her role as a well-known bridge leader and a former domestic worker. For voter registration efforts, I draw upon the oral history of Gayle Jenkins from Bogalusa, Louisiana, because of her experience as a domestic worker and her voter registration work with CORE. A third source I reference is a Head Start booklet that mentions Hattie Bell Safford's Head Start activism in Mississippi.

[24] Belinda Robnett, *How Long? How Long? African-American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999), 19.

Chapter Overview

The purpose of the second chapter, "History of Domestic Work Post 1900 in the South," is to illuminate how domestic work has changed over time from 1900 to the present. It will also illustrate how those changes impacted the lives of domestic workers and motivated them to become involved in activism to improve their work conditions. The sources in this chapter will be from both the North and the Deep South to describe and compare domestic workers' experiences.

Chapter three, "We started it. We were at the forefront of the bus boycott': Domestic Workers' Participation in Gulf South Bus Boycotts," is to show how domestic workers were prominent participants in the Baton Rouge Bus Boycott, Montgomery Bus Boycott, and Tallahassee Bus Boycott. Within these bus boycotts, domestic workers provided numerical strength as the majority of participants in the boycott. They also offered economic power because the transportation companies lost their customer base when they stopped riding. They also provided organizational strength as they helped plan and execute the boycott. Additionally, domestic workers sold food and used the money to fund transportation for those boycotting. They also possessed symbolic strength, as they became revered symbols of Black resistance when boycott leaders pointed to domestic workers' poor treatment on the buses as a reason to join the boycott. Domestic workers also inspired other activists around the country when they refused to move from their seats or got into conflicts with bus drivers. Other potential boycotters and supporters viewed boycotting domestics who walked to work as inspirational symbols of a fledgling Civil Rights Movement.

Chapter four, "Domestic Workers' Voter Registration Efforts in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida," covers organizations like the NAACP and CORE and their history with mid-twentieth-century voter registration. I make the important point in this chapter that domestic workers were not at the forefront of voter registration, but their participation within civil rights organizations mattered. In this chapter, domestic workers demonstrated organizational strength through participating in organizations like the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) to get others to vote. Many domestic workers also provided infrastructural strength to voter registration by feeding, housing, and supporting other activists. I also explain the transformation civil rights organizations underwent, starting with most elite members to later including working-class ones, including domestic workers.

Finally, chapter five, "Domestic Workers' Contributions in Head Start Programs in Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, and Florida," shows how some domestic workers joined and promoted Head Start to ensure their children (both their own and those from the local Black community) received good educations. This chapter provides the reader with examples of domestic workers who were cooks, aides, volunteers, teachers, secretaries, and maids in the centers. Domestic workers provided organizational, symbolic, and infrastructural strength to Head Start efforts. For organizational strength, domestic workers communicated with each other and their communities to support Head Start for their children and gain job opportunities. For symbolic strength, they became the symbol of the people who benefitted most from the War on Poverty's directive for "maximum feasible participation" of the poor within its programs. Though their example was politically controversial at times, it emboldened grassroots activists and national

supporters who sought to end white supremacy. They demonstrated infrastructural strength as they supported the centers. Additionally, this chapter discusses the conflict between local working-class people and elites over who should be employed in Head Start positions and the lengths white segregationists would go to in order to defund and discredit centers.

The conclusion will sum up the importance Deep South domestic workers had on activism in the Baton Rouge, Montgomery, and Tallahassee bus boycotts, as well as voter registration and Head Start programs in Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, and Florida. It will also encourage historians to view domestic workers in the Gulf South as bridge leaders and militant activists within the Civil Rights Movement and to study their efforts further.

CHAPTER II – HISTORY OF DOMESTIC WORK POST 1900 IN THE SOUTH

Before the Civil War Era, employers referred to domestic servants in the North as hired-girls. Families who were wealthy and those who were not hired women to help the ladies of the house finish their tasks, in exchange for payment. The ages of these women varied, but they were usually unmarried and used their jobs to get their own future homes ready. Northern domestics sometimes lived with their employer but sometimes returned home when they were finished. Before there was a strict separation between employer and employee in the domestic occupation, workers in the North would usually eat with the family and share in family activities.[25] This close and somewhat casual relationship changed when domestic service became officially categorized as a profession after the Civil War.

In the South, Black women participated in most domestic work duties, first as slaves and later as domestic workers. They engaged in midwifery, cooked, cleaned, and performed childcare. Slaves obeyed their master/mistress' orders or faced punishment. Later employers would often treat domestic workers in a demeaning way that would mirror the past. While domestic service became the norm in the South, the relationship between a hired-girl and employer in the North became more distant as more agricultural

[25] Mignon Duffy, "Domestic Workers: Many Hands, Heavy Work," in *Making Care Count: A Century of Gender, Race, and Paid Care Work*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 21–22.

economies industrialized. Domestic workers found employment mostly through verbal references but occasionally through advertisements or agencies.[26]

In the late 19th century in both the North and South, employees had a more distant relationship from the people they worked for. Domestic workers were forced to eat in places like the kitchen instead of the dining room to show their lower social station. Employers also insisted on a uniform to further this divide.[27] For domestic workers, the uniform was a significant symbol of inferiority because it eliminated their individuality and instead labeled them as the employer's possession. Workers wanted to wear their own clothes because such clothing demonstrated that they had a choice in their appearance that was not dictated by their employers. Historian Elizabeth Clark-Lewis writes,

> The women [in domestic service in the Jim Crow era] felt they took on the identity of the job—and the uniform seemed to assume a life of its own, separate from the person wearing it, beyond her control. As day workers, wearing their own clothes symbolized their new life as a series of personal choices rather than predetermined imperatives.[28]

Before this change occurred, domestic servants wore uniforms to accommodate their employers. It was a way for their employer to show status by showing off the fact they could afford to employ a domestic worker, but it was also dehumanizing for the worker.

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[26] Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After The Civil War* (Harvard University Press Cambridge, Massachusetts London, England, 1997), 52.

[27] Duffy, 22.

[28] Elizabeth Clark Lewis, "'This Work Had a End': African-American Domestic Workers in Washington, D.C., 1910–1940," in *"To Toil the Livelong Day": American Women at Work, 1780–1980*, eds, Carol Groneman and Mary Beth Norton (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 207. As quoted in Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working-class* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1996), 29.

According to David M. Katzman, the way that female employers treated their employees was through "benevolent materialism."[29] Katzman used a 1906 article by Helen Mar in *Good Housekeeping* to illuminate the employer's stance. Mar described the relationship with an employee as one a mother would have with her daughter. She wrote,

> My maid is free to go out whatever evenings I am at home…. Provided she is in at a reasonable hour. I never set a special hour, but make it felt that at "closing-up-time" I like my maid to be in. Then she has her regular days out, [with] which I seldom, if ever, let anything interfere. If a special entertainment promises late hours, she tells us freely that she cannot be home early, and goes away with a light heart, knowing that I trust her to come into my house with her key, but knowing too that I shall be wakeful until I hear her steps on the stairs – as when my family keeps late hours.[30]

These rules went beyond the employer just listing the desired tasks to do. In many cases, they controlled a large portion of their employees' lives even when they were not working, claiming they did it out of care.

Domestic workers often saw their employers' families more than they saw their own. The lack of time spent with their own family was one of the many issues that did not originate with domestic work but with slavery. From housework to fieldwork, slaves did more work for their masters than for themselves and, if lucky, would use Sundays to do their personal work. After emancipation, many husbands wanted their wives to stay home, and many wives agreed.[31] When given a choice, laundresses preferred to do laundry outside of their employer's home, so as to avoid working in their former master's

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[29] Katzman, 156.

[30] Helen Mar, "Good Service in Good Service in General Housework," *Good Housekeeping XLII* (February 1906), 171. As quoted in David M. Katzman, *Seven Days A Week: Women and Domestic Service in Industrializing America*. (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1981),156.

[31] Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom, 51.*

house. This helped laundresses feel like they had a choice and a personal life. This type of domestic worker could show she had free will when she was able to physically leave the property where her former enslavement took place. She also enjoyed the convenience of washing her family's clothes along with her employers, taking in laundry to make extra money, and being with her own family while working.[32] Mothers were able to spend time with their daughters through household work and laundry. The family could earn extra income, and the daughter could gain work experience.[33]

Aside from having to obey masters' and, later, employers' orders, household workers had to endure the terrifying risk of being in intimate proximity to a male employer and his family members, whether the employer himself or his son, brother, or friend. The domestic worker had to endure the possibility of sexual, physical, or verbal harassment or assault. This harassment could happen in various ways because the employer used intimidation, bribes, or brute force to convince the employee to do what he wanted. Domestic workers could quit, but they had difficulty reporting sexual harassment or assault. It was nearly impossible for enslaved women to do anything about harassment or assault because if they fought back, they or their relatives could be sold or beaten.[34] Domestic workers continued to face the threat of assault after emancipation. "It was always attempts made on black women from white men," a domestic worker from Atlanta recalled. "Sometimes he had a knack for patting you on your back, not on your

[32] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Every-day Life* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 25-26. As cited in Kelley, *Race Rebels*, 20.

[33] Hunter, *51.*

[34] Hunter, 106.

back but on your behind, and telling you that you was a nice-looking black gal and this type of thing. And I resented that."[35]

If employees tried to report the crime, they frequently faced reprisals, while the perpetrator faced few consequences. Harassment and assault further complicated the relationship between the employee and her female employer. Women employers often did little to stop the harassment and blame was commonly placed on the domestic worker.[36] The household worker was left with the choice to quit, tell others (which would typically result in termination and or legal/violent ramifications), or continue to endure the abuse in silence.[37]

Another trial that domestic workers faced in the home was when their employers intentionally tried to "test" them. For instance, domestic worker Ruthie L. Jackson from Crystal Springs, Mississippi, talked about an incident in one of her employers' homes where a family just left their money in a stack. Jackson told her interviewer,

> Now you know no money ain't going to fall stacked. When it falls it's going to roll. Well, I have found, I have seen it, not with these people, but with some people I worked [for] where they stacked their money. Well, then I had to clean all around that. But I had them to know the money don't be stacked up when it fall. And then I had them to know that my mother raised me that if I wanted anything from anybody, ask for it and if

[35] Clifford M. Kuhn, Harlon E. Joye, and E. Bernard West. *Living Atlanta: An Oral History of the City, 1914–1948* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990), 115. As quoted in Kelley, 28–29.

[36] Leslie K. Dunlap, "The Reform of Rape Law and the Problem of White Men: Age-of-Consent Campaigns in the South, 1885-1910." In *Sex, Love Race: Crossing Boundaries in North American History,* edited by Martha Hodes, (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 354-355. As cited in Rebecca Sharpless, *Cooking in Other Women's Kitchens Domestic Workers in the South, 1865-1960* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013)161.

[37] John Langston Gwaltney, *Drylongso: A Self-Portrait of Black America, (*New York: Vintage Books, 1981), 146-147. As cited in Sharpless, 140.

> they didn't give it to me, okay. I said, well, you don't find money stacked. That show you somebody stacked that thing.[38]

Other tricks would include laying out jewelry to see if the employee would steal. Sometimes, an employer used these tests to gauge the employee's honesty, and if the domestic worker turned in the money or lost item, nothing would come from it.[39] Some domestic workers like Jackson felt more comfortable not turning in the cash but instead cleaning around it. That way, the employer could not accuse them of stealing the money. Regardless, employers sometimes intentionally placed domestic workers in compromising positions.

However, it is important to note that domestic workers did have many ways of demonstrating defiance such as purposely taking longer than necessary when doing a task or taking items without their employer's knowledge. Domestic workers also left work before their shift ended or would threaten to quit to try to obtain higher wages and better hours. These examples of defiance gave domestic workers opportunities to seize more "personal autonomy."[40] Employees for the most part were successful with getting away with these small acts of undermining their employers and would do so for long periods of time.

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[38] Mausiki S. Scales and Ruthie Lee Jackson, Interview with Ruthie Lee Jackson, *Behind the Veil: Documenting African-American Life in the Jim Crow South,(J*ohn Hope Franklin Research Center, Duke University Libraries, August 10, 1995),16. https://repository.duke.edu/dc/behindtheveil/btvct03035.

[39] "Crime of a Negro Cook," Atlanta Constitution, June 18, 1899; "Valuable Jewelry Stolen," (Atlanta Constitution, April 9, 1912; King Diary, January 12, 1867, Hargrett Library, University of Georgia, Athens), As cited in Sharpless, 154.

[40] Kelley, 18.

Domestic workers had other ways to leverage their power, but those tactics depended on fellow workers' communal action. According to historian Robin D.G. Kelley, domestic workers in the urban South maintained a blacklist that helped them "collectively avoid working for employers who proved unscrupulous, abusive or unfair."[41] Employees who walked out or said they would right before a major event engaged in what is known as an "incipient strike," which was a bargaining tool of domestic workers. However, fellow domestic workers had to abide by the "code of ethics" and agree to not break the strike.[42]

The most common act of defiance from household workers was "pan toting." "Pan-toting" domestic workers would bring home food or other kitchen items from their employer's house. This action was received with mixed results. Some employers considered it a form of stealing and would fire or reprimand their employee. Others looked at allowing "pan toting" as showing their employees kindness. One employer stated, "When I give out my meals, I bear these little Blackberry pickaninnies in mind, I never wound the feelings of any cook by asking, 'what is under her apron."[43] This employer believed that she was charitable, despite her racist language. In reality, she did not give her employee a living wage, so her employee was forced to sneak food. Many domestic workers believed they had the right to do this since they were often not paid fairly for their work. One Southern worker declared, "We don't 'steal; we just 'take'

[41] Kelley, 18.
[42] Kelley, 18.
[43] Walter L. Fleming, "The Servant Problem in a Black Belt Village," *Sewanee Review* 13 (January 1905), As quoted in Kelley, 19.

things—they are a part of the oral contract, exprest [*sic*] or implied. We understand it, and most of the white folks understand it."[44]

Cooks were not the only domestic workers who were defiant. Laundresses would often keep their customers' clothes when an employer was unfair to them. Laundresses often washed their own family's clothes with their employer's clothes even though it was discouraged or not allowed. These examples of defiance show that while domestic workers had to endure many acts of discrimination and mistreatment at their employers' hands, they had their ways of getting back at their employers.[45] They were not timid or ignorant, as whites often assumed; they were hardworking and intelligent women who wanted to perfect their craft and earn the respect they deserved while working.

In both Northern and Southern cities, domestic workers found more employment opportunities than in rural areas. If they wanted to work extra hours, urban domestic workers could work for multiple families by cleaning houses, washing clothes, or sewing, in addition to working for their primary employer. There was more competition between workers for jobs in rural areas.[46] Employers talked to each other, and if they did not like the fact that a particular worker was working for other people, they could fire that employee. Performing jobs in urban cities also allowed household employees to communicate and gossip about who and who not to work for. If particular employers paid meager wages or were abusive, the women would stay away from them.[47] Cities were

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[44] A Negro Nurse, "More Slavery at the South," *Independent* (25 January 1912), 199. As quoted in Hunter, 132.

[45] Kelley, 20-21.

[46] Susan Tucker, *Telling Memories Among Southern Women: Domestic Workers and Their Employers in the Segregated South* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 104.

[47] Kelley, 18.

also hubs where activism occurred; workers' strikes for better pay and labor conditions sometimes improved their lives.[48] Women who worked in an urban atmosphere had the opportunity to learn about these movements and join them.

Training in domestic work was one avenue for increasing workers' opportunities. Starting in the early 20th century, employers complained about the lack of skilled domestic workers in cooking and house care. This concerned reformers who believed it was important for women to be skilled in domestic science in order to have more job security. So, reformers started offering formal domestic instruction at educational institutions. "Training fell into two categories: regular curricular offerings for young people and continuing education for women already employed as cooks."[49] Booker T. Washington required every woman at the Tuskegee Institute to take cooking lessons.[50] Mary L. Dotson stayed to teach cooking classes after finishing her academic work because she enjoyed cooking and was impressed with the vast types of cuisine introduced throughout her time as a student.[51] Cornelia Bowen attended Tuskegee, and when she graduated, she taught many subjects along with housekeeping at Mount Meigs, Alabama.[52] Out of the sixty of the graduates Bowen taught during her time at Mount Meigs, "thirty-eight of them have learned trades, and all of them are prosperous. They include dressmakers, cooks, housekeepers, laundresses, carpenters, blacksmiths,

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[48] Hunter, 74.

[49] Rebecca Sharpless, *Cooking in Other Women's Kitchens Domestic Workers in the South, 1865-1960* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 26.

[50] Sharpless, 27.

[51] Mary L. Dotson, "The Story of a Teacher of Cooking,"203, 205. As cited in Sharpless, 27.

[52] Cornelia Bowen, "A Woman's Work," 220. As cited in Sharpless, 27.

wheelwrights, painters, etc.," according to Booker T. Washington.[53] Bowen and other educators at the time considered occupations like domestic work to be useful and looked at the students who entered those jobs after graduation to be successful. In the late 1890s, Atlanta University offered domestic courses where model homes were built like the ones domestic workers would later work in.[54] In these models, students would learn "cooking, washing, sewing, the care of rooms and furniture… entertaining guests, and the thousand and one little things that contribute to the making of a well-ordered home."[55] The hope was that if students were able to learn housekeeping techniques in these model homes, then they could emulate their lessons in an employers' home.

Vocational training schools also gave working-class Black women opportunities for liberal arts education. One such school, founded in the early twentieth century by Nannie Helen Burroughs, was the National Training School for Women and Girls in Washington, D.C.[56] The school offered liberal arts courses in addition to vocational training.[57] Unlike other schools, it did not rely on funding from whites. The school also provided a missionary training program. Most students came from working-class homes, and most of the women paid their own way rather than relying on scholarships.

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[53] Cornelia Bowen, "A Woman's Work," As cited in Booker T. Washington, *Tuskegee and Its People: Their Ideas And Achievements* (D. Appleton and Company, New York, 1905), 211.

[54] Stephanie J. Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to Be and to Do: Black Professional Women Workers During the Jim Crow Era.* (Women in Culture and Society, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 77.

[55] Horace Bumstead, "Girls Industrial Work," AUB, November 1885, 3. Spelman's 1892-93 catalog noted that "all boarders are required to learn the art of housekeeping in all its branches. The time of seven teachers is devoted mainly to this department." See Twelfth Annual Circular and Catalogue of Spelman Seminary, 1893, 20. As cited in Shaw, 77- 78.

[56] Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York, NY: William Morrow and Company Inc, 1984)102.

[57] Giddings, 8.

Burroughs, who also served as the school's president, explained, "The Negro girl must be taught the art of home-making as a profession."[58] Burroughs believed that domestic science education would create more job opportunities and higher pay for Black women. She required students to be practicing Christians because, to Burroughs, a well-rounded education included religious training. Although vocational education did not challenge the assumption that Black women should be domestic workers, Burroughs hoped that training might offer women more options of employers and more room for negotiating payment. While criticized by some Black leaders as limiting Black people's options, other leaders such as Washington and Burroughs supported vocational training as a means to economic freedom. Whites who assumed African Americans should pursue this line of work donated money to these organizations. However, domestic workers did use these vocational programs to perfect their craft and become more marketable.[59]

Another vocational school was the Domestic Efficiency Association of Baltimore, Maryland. The Association began as a training school for Black and white domestic workers. Special lessons could be given in exchange for payment for room and board, books, and food. There were many times where girls could not afford the tuition fee and they would have to pay her debt to the school after she found a job and the amount was usually "$2.50 a week."[60] A vocational certificate from a school like this helped domestic workers find work in more elaborate homes, which would allow them to earn more

[58] Evelyn Brooks Barnett, "Nannie Helen Burroughs and the Education of Black Women." In *the Afro-American Woman: Struggles and Images*, edited by Sharon Harley and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn (Port Washington, NY.: Kennikat Press, 1978) 101. As cited in Sharpless, *Cooking in Other Womens Kitchens*, 27.

[59] Sharpless, 27.

[60] Elizabeth Ross Haynes, "Negroes in Domestic Service in the United States," *The Journal of Negro History* 8, no. 4 (1923): pp. 399, https://doi.org/10.2307/2713693.

money. Earning more money gave them the freedom to provide for themselves, their families, and their communities in ways they may not have been able to before.

Well into the twentieth century, domestic service continued to be an occupation disproportionately filled by Black women. "Nationally, Black U.S.-born women made up 28 percent of domestic servants, compared to 22 percent of the female labor force overall."[61] This phenomenon occurred for multiple reasons. Fewer factories offered jobs to African American women, and less vocational training was available for jobs besides domestic work.[62] The lack of formal education also limited the occupations that domestic workers could choose. Domestic work in the twentieth century would decline as more women, particularly white women, continued to move into other occupations outside of domestic labor. Also, by the 1920s, most domestic workers lived outside of their employer's home.[63]

Southern domestic workers had more independence with completing tasks and were not micromanaged as much due to whites' assumptions about their expertise in the kitchen and the household. Southern employers had authority over their employees, but they expected the domestic workers they employed to have detailed knowledge of Southern cuisine and childcare that they picked up from their Black ancestors.[64] Therefore, the Southern employer would expect the domestic worker to have enough knowledge in food preparation and cleaning to know how to run the house. This freedom in some of the decision-making processes occurred because white women, particularly in

[61] Duffy, 24.
[62] Duffy, 28.
[63] Katzman, 44.
[64] Katzman, 123-124.

the South, often did not know how to cook.[65] Therefore, they relied on the domestic worker to handle their cooking needs. Ultimately this led to the Southern domestic worker having more freedom and less hovering in her job, because the employer trusted her insight and expertise.[66]

White employers relied on domestic workers for their household labor, while domestic workers relied on these jobs to support their families. Katzman referenced Southern historian Walter L. Fleming, who studied domestic workers in Auburn, Alabama, during the early 1900s. Fleming maintained the notion that except for "several families of poorer people" all classes of whites were "absolutely dependent upon the African for all servant's work."[67] Going further, Fleming claimed that the Black community also relied on domestic workers to make a living. "Many a one of them supports herself and husband or lover and several children who live in idleness."[68] Though tinged with racism and oblivious to the irony of his sentiments, Fleming's assessment reflected the interdependent relationship that whites and Blacks had with each other at the time. The most desired quality for a domestic worker, other than being punctual and hard-working, was to not draw attention to herself. According to Katzman's analysis on domestic work during this period, she needed to be "invisible and silent, responsive to demands but deaf to gossip, household chatter, and conflicts, attentive to the needs of mistress and master but blind to their faults, sensitive to the moods and

[65] Sharpless, 168.
[66] Katzman, 124.
[67] Walter L. Fleming, "The Servant Problem in a Black Belt Village," *Sewanee Review* XIII (January 1905), 1,5. As cited in Katzman, 187.
[68] Fleming, "The Servant Problem in a Black Belt Village," 1,5. As cited in Katzman, 187.

whims of those around them but undemanding of family warmth, love, or security."[69] The household worker was supposedly a part of the family, but her employers were not obligated to love her or treat her fairly.

The mammy figure overall represented the "ideal loyal servant [who] embodied the harmonious view of race relations."[70] The height of the idealization of the mammy occurred from the 1890s to the 1940s.[71] During this period, the mammy was famous because she provided a false sense of security for white people that made them think that African Americans were satisfied, particularly domestic workers who were always in the home and around their white employers' family members. The mammy figure was not just a symbol used in the homes of Southern employers. It was also used in "advertising, the arts, and literature at the beginning of the twentieth century, as white northerners and southerners attempted to put the divisiveness and resentment of the Civil War behind them and mask contemporary racial violence."[72] This explains why fictional figures like "Aunt Jemima" and "Mammy" from *Gone With the Wind* were so beloved by white audiences; they confirmed the stereotypical belief that the Black maid possessed complete loyalty to the family she worked for.[73] Another example of white Southerners honoring the mammy was the United Daughters of the Confederacy's failed campaign in

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[69] Katzman, 188.

[70] K. Sue Jewell, *From Mammy to Miss America and Beyond: Cultural Images and the Shaping of US Social Policy* (New York: Routledge, 1993). As cited in Nadasen, 11.

[71] Nadasen cites Cheryl Thurber on this point. See "The Development of the Mammy Image and Mythology," in *Southern Women: Histories and Identities, ed.* Virginia Bernard (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1992), 87-108. Nadasen, 12.

[72] Nadasen, 12-13.

[73] Micki McElya, *Clinging to Mammy: The Faithful Slave in Twentieth-Century America* (Harvard University Press, 2007) and Nadasen, 13.

1924 to build a mammy statue in the U.S capital.[74] Black activists opposed the congressional bill, saying that it "glorified slavery and black subservience."[75] Although the plan for the monument never came to fruition, this proposal showed the servant/master relationship that white employers in the South fondly looked to when thinking about their relationships with their employees.

Attitudes towards domestic service in the early twentieth century were different in the North. While Northern employers considered themselves superior to their domestic employees, they did not look at their relationships with their employees with the same paternalism. In addition, far from embodying the image of the mammy, domestic workers in the North were idealized by leftists in the mid-twentieth century as what Ashley D. Farmer calls the "Militant Negro Domestic."[76] Black women Communists and other left-leaning activists believed that domestic workers could become the leaders of a Black political revolution. Black leftists portrayed domestic workers as potential militant activists who "advocated for community control, Black self-determination, self-defense, and separate Black cultural and political institutions."[77] During the Civil Rights Movement, domestic worker activists continued to be held up as symbols of militant activism. The image of them fighting for Black empowerment contradicted that of the "docile" mammy.[78]

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[74] Nadasen, 13.

[75] Joan Marie Johnson, "Ye Gave Them a Stone': African American Women's Clubs, Frederick Douglass, and the Black Mammy Monument," *Journal of Women's History 17, no.1* (2005): 62-86, As cited in Nadasen, 13.

[76] Ashley D. Farmer, *Remaking Black Power: How Black Women Transformed an Era* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 21.

[77] Farmer, 21.

[78] Farmer, 21.

Southern migration to the North in the early 20th century also belied whites' beliefs about racial harmony. Black Southern domestic workers frequently traveled north for work because the pay was higher. They would send money or return to the South to visit. This mobility gave migrant domestic workers a different sort of freedom than women who worked in other occupations. Some Southern domestic workers went to the North and worked in other occupations and then returned to domestic work in the South. Dorothy Bolden was one such woman. She was born in Atlanta in 1920 and began working as a domestic worker as a young child to support her family. At the age of seventeen, Bolden met Northerners who were visiting Georgia, and they offered her employment and higher wages in Chicago.[79]

Domestic work was not the only job Bolden did. She went to a clothing design school but left because of her vision issues.[80] In WWII, she was a mail clerk in the Sears Roebuck mailroom, and she also worked at National Linen Service.[81] After travelling to multiple states she came home to do railroad labor.[82] She met her husband and returned to domestic work.[83] Dorothy Bolden's example shows that opportunities did occur for women who took advantage of moving back and forth between the North and South for

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[79] Dorothy Bolden, interview by Chris Lutz, August 31, 1995, Transcript L 1995-12, Southern Labor Archives, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University Library, Atlanta, Dorothy Bolden oral history interview, 1995-08-31 (gsu.edu) See also Nadasen, 36.

[80] Dorothy Bolden resume, box 1624, folder 31, National Domestic Union Records (hereafter NDWU Records), Southern Labor Archives, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta, as referenced in Nadasen, 36.

[81] Dorothy Bolden, "Organizing Domestic Workers in Atlanta, Georgia," in *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History, ed. Gerda Lerner* (New York: Vintage, 1972), 234. See also Nadasen, 36.

[82] Dorothy Bolden, interview by Gerda Lerner, September 1978, Transcript, box 6, folder 218, Papers of Gerda Lerner, 1924-2006, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. As referenced in Nadasen, 36.

[83] Dorothy Bolden, interview by Gerda Lerner, As cited in Nadasen, 37.

jobs. Women like Bolden had to travel, knowing that the best way to try other jobs aside from domestic work was to go North because Northern working-class women were more likely to work in jobs aside from domestic work.

Wartime changes also helped domestic workers become more independent and assertive as higher wages for both men and women had a ripple effect in the South. For example, during WWI several laundresses in Clarke County, Georgia, left their jobs because the men in their lives moved to the North and had secured steady and comfortable wages.[84] Some domestic workers who had husbands or sons in the military received wartime payments allowing them to quit working if they chose.[85] This newfound financial independence made employers lash out. "Negro washerwomen during the war were the most independent I have ever seen," a family head told an investigator. "When negroes draw government money, it is a hard matter to get them to work. Never in my life have I seen such conditions in getting the family wash done."[86] World War II provided a moment of increased leverage as well. In Hattiesburg, Mississippi, the mobilization of Camp Shelby created new financial opportunities for domestic workers. There were more jobs available for laundresses that offered more pay than individual employers were paying. Laundresses who owned their own businesses, "tripled, and the wages earned by employees of those cleaners businesses went up by 50 percent."[87]

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[84] Katzman, 189-190.

[85] Katzman, 189.

[86] Frances Taylor Long, "The Negroes of Clarke County, Georgia, During the Great War." Phelps-Stokes Fellowship Studies No. 5, *Bulletin of the University of Georgia* xix (September 1919), 41-42. As cited in Katzman, 189-190.

[87] William Sturkey, *Hattiesburg: A City in Black and White.* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2019), 215.

Laundresses were able to escape working solely in a white employer's home and could make a profit either working for themselves or other Black laundresses.

Although over half of Black women remained domestic workers in the South in 1960, changes for domestic workers were afoot.[88] However, these changes were not uniform across the North and South. In the South, the lack of flexibility in an occupation was a stark contrast from the North where working-class women could work in factories and receive an education. Nationally, however, inventions were created that altered domestic workers' responsibilities. Starting in the mid-1960s, middle-class and upper-class women did and required less work around the house.[89] Activist and former domestic worker Geraldine Roberts noted that "so many employers seemed to have adopted a style that it is not that important anymore about how well the house is kept clean."[90] This occurred because female employers were hosting fewer events, and many entered the work force themselves.

Additionally, advancements of household appliances, including washing machines, gas and electric irons, gas stoves, vacuum cleaners, and dishwashers, made housework easier. Most of these appliances were not purchased on a wide scale until WWI.[91] It is important to keep in mind that while home technology increased all over

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[88] Trena Easley Armstrong, "The Hidden Help: Black Domestic Workers in the Civil Rights Movement." Electronic Theses and Dissertations. Paper 46, (University of Louisville, Louisville KY, 2012), 20.

[89] Susan M. Bianchi, Melissa A. Milkie, Liana C. Sayer, and John P. Robinson, "Is Anyone Doing the Housework? Trends in Gender Division of Household Labor," Social Forces 79, no.1(September 2000): 191-228. As cited in Nadasen, 149.

[90]Geraldine Roberts, interview by Donna Van Raaphorst, transcript of oral history project, p.114. Program on Woman and Work, Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations, University of Michigan-Wayne State University, 1978, As cited in Nadasen,149.

[91] Katzman, 130.

America during WWI, the South was slower to advance than in the North and the West. The advances in technology led employers to choose between a domestic worker or appliances.[92] In the North, those who could afford the machines chose to use them instead of paying a domestic worker on a regular basis, ultimately leading to a decrease in domestic work.[93] However, a majority of white Southern homes continued to employ domestic workers.

For the minority of homes that embraced technology while continuing to employ a domestic worker, appliances did not mean more rest time.[94] In fact, according to Donna L. Van Raaphorst who referenced Ruth Schwartz said, "the expectations and time spent in housework remained the same or increased" after the introduction of new appliances.[95] Employers now expected the cleaning to be perfect if the domestic worker had access to technology.[96] Despite the uncomfortable tensions that continued, employers still believed that domestic workers offered many advantages, including preparing home-cooked meals for and offering personalized instruction to employers' children. The domestic worker also provided a sense of familiarity and security that machines could not. Household work continued to change because white middle and upper-class women started seeking employment outside of the home.[97] This development caused the standards of domestic cleanliness to decrease because working white women lowered their expectations so that they could focus their energies on their job or education. Middle-class and even upper-

[92] Katzman, 131.
[93] Katzman, 131 -133.
[94] Donna L. Van Raaphorst, *Union Maids Not Wanted: Organizing Domestic Workers, 1870 1940* (New York, NY: Praeger 1988), 68.
[95] Van Raaphorst, 68.
[96] Van Raaphorst, 68.
[97] Nadasen, 149.

class families, for the most part, also were entertaining less, so the quality of cleanliness did not need to be as extravagant. This change in what white women wanted from a domestic worker and the new employment and educational opportunities for white women made white women employers uncomfortable with the relationship they had with their domestic workers in the past.

Changes in the interactions between domestic workers and employers finally occurred in the 1960s and 1970s in both the North and South because sizeable numbers of people became disturbed with the way white employers treated their Black employees.[98] One employer stated in *Westchester Illustrated* magazine in the late 1970s, "I didn't want to present the stereotype of the Black maid doing a white woman's work to my kids."[99] Northern white women were starting to voice a great degree of guilt and thought a solution to the problem was to avoid employing Black domestic workers. A similar sentiment eventually arose in the South. Historian Katherine van Wormer was a white woman born in the South who grew up with domestic workers. Van Wormer and her mother bought John Howard Griffin's 1961 bestseller *Black Like Me* at their town drugstore. It discussed Griffin's experiences when he disguised himself as a Black man.[100] Reading about the discrimination that Griffin went through caused van Wormer's mother to declare publicly that white Southerners needed to stop treating African

[98] Nadasen, 150.

[99] Sherry Suib Cohen, "Suburban Women and Their Maids," Westchester Illustrated, n.d. (probably late 1970s), 22-29, Ms. Magazine Papers, series 7, box 39, folder 12, As cited in Nadasen, 150.

[100] Katherine S. van Wormer, David W. Jackson, and Charletta Sudduth, *The Maid Narratives: Black Domestic and White Families in the Jim Crow South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012), 137.

Americans so poorly.[101] Van Wormer's mother felt so guilty about employing domestic workers that she fired all of them. The family left and tried to forget that they ever employed domestic workers in the first place.

Across the board, female employers began to keep greater distance from their employees, due to employers' discomfort. This new approach did create confusion because while employers did not want to micromanage their workers, they also maintained high expectations about how their households should be run. Historian Premilla Nadasen referenced one employer who said, "I want a competent person to come into my house, look around, know what's to be done and do it. I want a housekeeper who's as expert at her job as I am at mine."[102] Employers wanted to give workers space while still insisting on high quality service.[103] Employers also changed how they verbally addressed their workers. After the Civil War, domestic workers were instructed to refer to their employers as "Miss or Mrs.," while domestic workers were called by their first names.[104] The terms "Aunt, Uncle, Mammy, or girl" were also used up until 1930.[105] Domestic workers were not called the same titles as their employers until the end of the 1960s.[106] In this same environment of change, domestic workers were motivated to seek jobs in other fields, not just because domestic jobs decreased in availability. Like their white counterparts, working-class Black women sought better

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[101] van Wormer, 147.

[102] Sherry Suib Cohen, "Suburban Women and Their Maids," Westchester Illustrated,n.d.(probably late 1970s), 22-29, Ms. Magazine Papers, series 7, box 39, folder 12. As quoted in Nadasen, 150.

[103] Nadasen, 150-151.

[104] van Wormer, 34.

[105] van Wormer, 35.

[106] Susan Tucker, *Telling Memories Among Southern Women* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 75. Also in van Wormer, 35.

opportunities for themselves. However, it was difficult for domestic workers to leave service industries because of their lack of education and inexperience in other fields.

Working-class Black women who left private household labor often worked in occupations that resembled their domestic jobs. According to Nadasen, they "shifted over rather than out, thus recreating the racial and gender inequality in the workforce."[107] Former maids were able to use the tasks they performed in homes in other locations that allowed them the option to leave domestic work. Public settings that helped children, the elderly, or the sick offered former domestic workers jobs like "nurturant care, as well as other kinds of social reproductive work like cleaning, laundry, and food preparation."[108] However, while domestic workers were able to have more job options, they still received less pay than whites.

An example of a former domestic worker who entered the home-health industry was Mary McClendon, who had worked as a domestic worker for almost half a century. She left domestic work to become a home-care aide.[109] McClendon's later job included "cleaning, cooking, and caring for elderly or the disabled."[110] She received similar treatment that she did as a domestic worker. McClendon's home health job had lasting painful effects on her body.[111] She tried to sue for the suffering she faced because of the taxing job, but she lost her case because the city saw her as independently contracted and not an official employee.[112] McClendon decided to help found the Household Workers

[107] Nadasen, 152.
[108] Nadasen, 152.
[109] Nadasen, 153.
[110] Nadasen, 153.
[111] Nadasen, 153.
[112] Mary McClendon v. City of Detroit. Circuit Court for the County of Wayne, no. 77 704 376. April 18, 1980, p. 20, box 2, folder 30, McClendon Papers. As cited in Nadasen, 153.

Organization (HWO) to try to fix this and many other problems that domestic workers faced.

The HWO began conducting business on September 4, 1969, in Detroit.[113] The HWO offered multiple services that aimed to give employees "a minimum wage with lunch and rest breaks, and promised employers a neat, punctual, and honest worker."[114] The HWO also provided domestic workers with support and suggestions on how to deescalate conflicts with employers.[115]

McClendon prided herself most on the HWO's training program that provided a variety of areas of specialization such as "General Housekeeping Technician, Kitchen Manager, Child Supervisor, and Household Manager, Home Geriatric Aide, Party Aide, Party Supervisor, and Household Manager."[116] Within those areas she offered classes such as

> "Job Readiness" which taught basic remedial skills, attitude, rights, benefits, as well as grooming and appearance; "Home Safety and Sanitation," which included first aid, accident prevention, insect and pest control, and handling food and toxic materials. The course on "Home Geriatrics," covered the psychology of the elderly, home nursing, and recreational therapy.[117]

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[113] "Household Workers Organization," leaflet (minimum wage), n.d. (probably 1973), box 2. Folder 4, McClendon Papers. As cited in Nadasen, 98.

[114] Jeannette Smyth, "Union Maid: A Two Way Street," Washington Post, July 17, 1971. As cited in Nadasen, 99.

[115] Nadasen, 99.

[116] Household Workers Organization (HWO), proposal, "Household Workers Inc., Job Descriptions for Household Technicians," June 18, 1970, box 2, folder 19, McClendon Papers. As cited in Nadasen 100.

[117] "Appendix II," Training Proposal, n.d. box 2, folder 23, McClendon Papers. As cited in Nadasen, 100.

Women were also told to clearly tell their employer what they were and were not willing to do in order to maintain their professionalism. For instance, "picking up toys off the floor, cleaning cobwebs, mopping, dusting, and polishing were all acceptable. But we tell them not to pick up underwear."[118] McClendon expanded her focus to direct employers on how to treat their domestic workers properly. In 1971, McClendon and the Grosse Pointe Human Relations Council created a pamphlet called *You and Your Household Help* that taught employers how to find efficient workers and how to have a professional and appropriate relationship. Ways to do this included

> Paying employees fifteen dollars a day plus carfare, and live-in employees seventy-five dollars a week, with all meals, "a pleasant private room and bath," and two days off each week. Paid sick leave after three months of employment, paid vacations, overtime pay, paid national holidays, Social Security, a clear definition of household responsibilities, regular breaks--half an hour lunch plus two fifteen-minute breaks for an eight-hour day, -and a two-week termination notice should all be considered standard.[119]

The vocational education of the domestic workers and their employers professionalized the occupation of domestic work. Other new organizations, like the National Domestic Workers Union of America or (NDWUA) that Dorothy Bolden started in Atlanta in 1968, helped fix the harsh home environment that domestic workers often worked in.[120] The NDWUA organized events like Maids' Honor Day in 1970, which would become a national day in April 1972.[121] Bolden consulted with presidents Gerald Ford, Jimmy

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[118] Helen May, "Household Workers Push Wage Battle," May 26, 1972, Detroit Free Press, box 2, folder 6, McClendon Papers. As cited in Nadasen, 100.

[119] *You and Your Household Help,* pamphlet, 1971, box 2, folder 28, McClendon Papers. The wage recommendations came from the Michigan Employment Securities Commission, As cited in Nadasen, 100-101.

[120] Nadasen, 43.

[121] Nadasen, 83.

Carter, and Ronald Reagan to establish and preserve Maids' Honor Day. International Domestic Worker's Day is currently recognized on June 16.[122]

The purpose of Maids' Honor Day was to bring recognition and respect to domestic workers who were often underpaid and taken for granted. NDWUA sought to give legitimacy to domestic work. Another organization that sought to improve the occupation of domestic work was the Household Technicians of America (HTA), which Geraldine Roberts and Bolden (with the help of Josephine Hulett and Edith Sloan) started in 1971.[123] HTA created standards that gave employees suggestions for salary and hours.[124] Its message was that only money can be used as payment.[125] The members of HTA wanted their workers to be paid more for extra time worked.[126] Additionally, they wanted a "written agreement between employer and employee that clearly defined the duties of a position, including specific tasks, how often they must be performed and the desired standards."[127] HTA insisted on, "Schedules with provisions for rest period, meal times, telephone privileges, and time out for private activities (such as church attendance for live-in employees) should be agreed upon in advance of employment."[128] These contracts professionalized the relationship between domestic workers and their bosses and eliminated the notion that the domestic worker was inferior to her employer.

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[122] Daniel E. Slotnik, "Overlooked No More: Dorothy Bolden, Who Started a Movement for Domestic Workers," *New York Times*, February 25, 2019, sec. D, p. 8.

[123] Nadasen, 77-78

[124] Nadasen, 96.

[125] D.C. Household Technicians, "A Code of Standards," 1974, p.2, NCHE Records, series 003, subseries 01, box 06, folder 12. As cited in Nadasen, 96.

[126] Nadasen, 96.

[127] D.C. Household Technicians, "A Code of Standards," As cited in Nadasen, 96.

[128] D.C. Household Technicians, As cited in Nadasen, 96.

Domestic workers fought for training and professionalization through organizations like the NDWUA, HWO, and the HTA. These groups changed domestic workers' and their employers' views about domestic work. Employees openly challenged the Mammy stereotype that insisted that the domestic worker was a part of her employer's family and that she loved her employer's family more than her own. Workers in these organizations also started declining hand-me-downs of food and clothing and limited what jobs they would do and what they would wear. They also educated their employers on how they should be addressed and what resources should be provided to the domestic worker. In the 1970s, Bolden described the progress made to household work; she said,

> In the past seven years there has been a great deal of change. These women used to be embarrassed about saying they were maids. You had to take such hardship that you didn't want nobody to know you were. Now it's different. You can't tell a maid from a secretary anymore. In the past, if a Black woman was a maid you can tell by the way she dressed. Now they don't carry the shopping bags as much, they go neater, and they look more lively and intelligent.[129]

Domestic workers worked toward transforming their job into a professional occupation that should be respected and perfected.

While domestic work still exists today, the employee demographic has changed. The Hart-Celler Immigration Act of 1965, "abolished the discriminatory national-origins immigration formula established in the 1920s that gave preference to northern and western Europeans and completely excluded Asians and Africans."[130] Many new

[129] Dorothy Bolden, *Nobody Speaks for Me: Self Portraits of American Working-Class Women*, ed. Nancy Seifer (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1977), 167. As cited in Nadasen, 102.

[130] Nadasen, 154.

immigrants who were now allowed to enter the United States sought employment as domestic workers because of their limited English-speaking abilities. Immigrant women came especially from "Puerto Rico, the Caribbean, Mexico, and Europe."[131] Other countries invited private companies to recruit women for domestic work when they arrived in the United States.[132] Such women often were exploited and threatened. One agency head told a worker that if she broke a contract, "We could blackball them successfully from any other job."[133] The situation is even worse for undocumented domestic workers.[134] Students from the University of Chicago reported instances in which domestic workers were being treated badly. The Caribbean, Mexican, and Central American women were more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation due to their immigrant status.[135]

Meanwhile, African American domestic workers became more militant in the way they demanded fair treatment, yet they also began to work with domestic workers of different ethnicities. Josephine Hulet and Geraldine Miller saw the core of their organizations as African American women. However, they wanted to create a racially inclusive organization, particularly after one of the employees of the National Committee on Household Employment (NCHE), Elva Ruiz, complained about the lack of assistance

[131] Nadasen, 155.

[132] Nadasen, 155.

[133] Leonard C. Lewin, notorized statement, December 20, 1946, section 4, Presidente del Senado, series 2, Gobierno Ensular, subseries 9B, Employment and Migration Bureau, folder 277, document 17, Archivo Historico Fundacion Luis Munoz Marin, San Juan, Puerto Rico. As quoted in Nadasen, 156.

[134] Vanessa H. May, *Unprotected Labor: Household Workers, Politics, and Middle-Class Reform in New York*, 1870-1940, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 179.

[135] Nadasen, 159-160.

given to the Mexican American community.[136] Shortly afterward, the HTA created a Spanish handout to get Chicana women involved in the organization.[137] In 1971, Francisca Flores, an Chicana domestic worker activist in California published magazine issues for low-income Mexican women and formed the Chicana Service Action Center.[138]

Domestic work organizations continued to fight to ensure that employers met the domestic workers' needs and that domestic workers would not hurt each other for employers' benefit. Domestic workers continued to fight, and in 2003, Domestic Workers United in New York City successfully pushed for the passage of the "Nanny Bill" that requires agencies to have a "code of conduct" in multiple languages, outlining employees' rights under both the state and federal law.[139] New York domestic workers had a great victory in 2010 when the state adopted the Domestic Bill of Rights. The law "requires employers to pay domestic workers a living wage and either provide health insurance or add two dollars an hour to their wages, The Bill of Rights established a forty-hour work week and requires one day off per week and three paid vacation days a year."[140]

Domestic workers have fought to improve their lives by improving their work conditions. They also have combatted broader racial discrimination as civil rights activists. The next chapter explores domestic workers' notable participation in the Baton Rouge Bus Boycott, Montgomery Bus Boycott, and Tallahassee Bus Boycott.

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[136] All box 58, folder 1119, Peterson Papers: NCHE Press release, February 10, 1970; Elva Ruiz, "Memo to the Board of Directors" March 19, 1970. As cited in Nadasen, 162.

[137] Nadasen, 162.

[138] Nadasen,162.

[139] As cited in May, *Unprotected Labor*, 181.

[140] Domestic Workers United and Data center, "Home is Where the Work Is," 35. As cited in May, 181-182.

CHAPTER III – "WE STARTED IT. WE WERE IN THE FOREFRONT WITH OUR BUS BOYCOTT"– DOMESTIC WORKERS' PARTICIPATION IN GULF SOUTH BUS BOYCOTTS [141]

Patricia Ann Robinson remembered the words of her mother Ella May Robinson, a domestic worker who took part in the 1953 Baton Rouge Bus Boycott. Robinson's mother walked to work instead of riding the bus where Black passengers routinely were treated unfairly.[142] According to historian Shannon L. Frystak, who mentioned Robinson's activism, "Without the compliance of women, the mass action would not have succeeded."[143] Black women, especially domestic workers, were the ones who were primarily riding the bus before the Baton Rouge Bus Boycott. The Baton Rouge Bus Boycott influenced the Montgomery Bus Boycott, which later affected the Tallahassee Bus Boycott.

These boycotts also sparked other direct-action protests that would continue throughout the Civil Rights Movement. Domestic workers were crucial to these bus boycotts because of their numerical strength as they comprised the majority of boycotters. They also had organizational strength because they helped establish and continue the boycotts. Domestic workers also demonstrated economic strength because

[141] Patricia Ann Robinson, "Patricia Ann Robinson Oral History Interview," Mss. 4700.1045, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Interview by Erin Porche, (LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, La), 3.

[142] Robinson, "Patricia Ann Robinson Oral History Interview," 2.

[143] Shannon L. Frystak, *Our Minds on Freedom: Women and the Struggle for Black Equality in Louisiana*, 1924-1967 (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2020), 68.

their refusal to ride the buses made a considerable financial impact on the bus companies. Symbolically, they were essential because they inspired leaders, participants, and supporters in the boycott.

To know why domestic workers participated in bus boycotts, it is important to note how their jobs played a role in their decision to participate. The environment of the bus fostered the conditions for their activism. Domestic workers labored long hours, often for little pay, and faced discrimination from their white employers, bus drivers, and the Jim Crow laws that dominated every area of their lives. According to Robin D.G. Kelley, buses can be seen as "moving theaters," because a theater can be "the site of a performance and as a site of military conflict."[144] People either engaged or saw the chaos that occurred on the buses, such as bus drivers treating riders poorly, and riders fought back. Testimony from witnesses then increased the number of protesters.[145] The physical design of the buses themselves made for a perfect stage for conflicts to arise in the 1950s and 1960s because they were enclosed spaces. The tight seating forced passengers to engage in some manner with the tensions around them.[146] African Americans were forced to purchase seats they would often not be allowed to sit in.[147]

Historian Adam Fairclough described the harsh environment of the buses. He said, "The rear of the bus was more uncomfortable; back rows were located above the motors, and their occupants had to endure the discomfort of, literally, hot seats; in the

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[144] Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working-class* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1996), 57.

[145] Kelley, 57.

[146] Adam Fairclough, *Race and Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915-1972* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 156-157.

[147] Fairclough, 156

summer months the back of the bus was often enveloped in clouds of dust and dirt when the vehicle was in motion."[148] Black passengers despised having to sit in the back, separate from whites, especially because they often worked closely with them at jobs.[149] This was particularly true of domestic workers who worked in close proximity to their white employers by cooking, cleaning, watching their children, and doing their laundry. Kelley said that theater as a military term also applies here because bus drivers sometimes carried weapons to enforce their authority, and kicked off, physically harmed, and helped arrest passengers.[150]Aside from being a "moving theater," buses were marketplaces. Black working-class people were rarely able to afford their own car and were dependent on the bus for transportation. Bus companies took advantage of this and knew there would be times where there would be all Black riders, but drivers still forced them to move or stand to accommodate potential white customers. This enraged Black riders, and they would refuse, out of protest, to pay their fare or to ride.[151] The buses also served as economic hotspots for domestic workers, who played a critical financial role in these bus boycotts when they refused to ride the buses.

Another challenge domestic workers faced on the buses was being harassed by white men, specifically bus drivers or law enforcement officers. According to historian Danielle McGuire, during the Montgomery Bus Boycott "thousands of working and middle-class women, fed up with decades of abuse, took to the streets to protest their mistreatment and demand the right to sit with dignity… boycotts were women's

[148] Fairclough, 156-157.
[149] Fairclough, 157.
[150] Kelley, 57.
[151] Fairclough, 157-158.

movements for dignity, respect, and bodily integrity."[152] A domestic worker's story that illustrates the disrespect that Black women faced on the buses is that of Martha White. White was from Woodville, Mississippi, but worked in Baton Rouge and was getting on the bus in June 1953.[153] White was headed to work when she realized there was only one seat available in the whites-only section; she was tired and did not want to have to find another ride, so she took the seat.[154] White was told by the driver to move, and when she did, Black passengers began to laugh at her and then she sat back down. Community leader Reverend T.J. Jemison spoke on White's behalf, and she was able to avoid jail time for not obeying the bus driver. From that point forward, White refused to ride the bus.[155]

Bus boycotts were a way that domestic workers could demand the respect they deserved in a manner that would economically hurt the white-controlled economy, since domestic workers comprised a significant proportion of riders. Domestic workers knew that changes needed to be made, or they would continue to be disrespected on buses and in other environments, such as their employers' homes. After the Civil War, well into the 1960s, white men continued to

> lure black women and girls away from home with promises of steady work and better wages; attacked them on the job; abducted them at gunpoint while traveling to or from home, work, or church; raped them as a form of retribution or to enforce rules of racial and economic hierarchy; sexually

[152] Danielle L. McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Sexualized Violence, Community Mobilization and the African American Freedom Struggle* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2010), 51.

[153] Lexis Alexander, "Baton Rouge Bus Boycott," *The Southern Digest*, September 24, 2013, https://www.Southerndigest.com/article_2aaca566-5513-51c1-b1f5-ee28c571bc0d.html.

[154] Alexander, "Baton Rouge Bus Boycott."

[155] Alexander, "Baton Rouge Bus Boycott."

> humiliated and assaulted them on streetcars and buses, in taxicabs, and in other public spaces.[156]

Domestic workers faced the danger of harassment at work, and then had to get on and off buses where the drivers also were likely to be hostile. So, bus boycotts were created not only to combat economic or racial unfairness but also to put a stop to assault. McGuire uses the Montgomery Bus Boycott as a chief example of how Black women protested sexual assault. She said,

> It was much easier, not to mention safer, for black women to stop riding the buses than it was to bring their assailants—usually white policemen or bus drivers—to justice. By walking hundreds of miles to protest humiliation and testifying publicly about physical and sexual abuse, black women reclaimed their bodies and demanded to be treated with dignity and respect.[157]

Boycotting allowed working-class Black women to challenge the discrimination they faced in a way that was more effective than going to court. In the Deep South, segregation was supported by law enforcement, the state, and local government officials. Organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan and The white Citizens Councils also supported segregation but went further occasionally resorting to violence.[158] According to James W. Silver, "It was a closed society…as near to a police state as anything we have yet seen in America."[159] Since domestic workers could not have their complaints heard in the courts, they decided to take to the streets and protest. In some cases, boycotting women could take advantage of carpooling, ride-sharing, and taxi services. But more than anything,

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[156] McGuire, xviii-xix.
[157] McGuire, xxi.
[158] McGuire, 190.
[159] James W. Silver, *Mississippi: The Closed Society* (New York, 1964), 151. As cited in McGuire, 190.

Black domestic workers walked. They were symbolically vital to the movement because they were depicted in the national press as the brave citizens who were using their feet to protest Jim Crow. Federal civil rights leaders knew they needed to honor working-class Black women as the movement's main participants. The public leaders of bus boycotts, including Martin Luther King, used the image of the domestic worker to get other working-class people to join in protest.

The first of these bus boycotts was in Baton Rouge. Black residents had been frustrated by disrespectful treatment on city buses for years. Beginning in March 1953, the city of Baton Rouge tried to address some of Black riders' grievances and passed Ordinance 222, which enforced the "first-come, first-served" concept, which meant seats "reserved" for whites were in some cases eliminated or greatly decreased. Under this new system, Blacks riders could fill seats from the back, and whites could continue to fill seats from the front. However, Black riders could not sit on the same row with or in front of whites who were on the bus. This change sought to fix the problem of Black riders having to stand when white seats were empty. Typically, transit companies had been tolerant of black riders filling seats reserved for whites because they could make more money. Ordinance 222 helped make that informal practice law. The white city bus drivers opposed changes, like Ordinance 222, that allowed for more black passengers at the front of the bus.[160]

Drivers' resentment at the new ordinance came to a head in June when a Black passenger did not move to the rear and instead switched seats with a white rider; the Black rider was almost arrested but was saved by the new law. Enraged drivers sought to

[160] Fairclough,158-159.

get the ordinance appealed, but Mayor Jesse L. Webb Jr. did not accommodate them. On June 15th, two drivers were fired for not following the ordinance. This then led to a drivers' strike. On the 18th, state attorney Fred LeBlanc deemed that the ordinance went against segregation. Drivers went back to driving the buses, and attempts were made to try to alter Ordinance 222.[161]

Raymond Scott, who was the secretary of an organization named the "Union Defense League" (UDL) made an announcement that Black riders not ride buses. The UDL offered to provide rides for the protestors but also encouraged them to walk or get transportation elsewhere, if necessary.[162] This was particularly helpful for domestic workers who needed rides to and from their employers' homes.[163] The UDL's plan worked quickly because as early as the next day there were hardly any Black riders on buses. The members of the UDL came from all walks of life. For example, Fannie Washburn was a homemaker who devoted her time to voter registration efforts, T. Roosevelt Smith was a blue-collar worker who worked at a refinery, and Johnnie Jones was an attorney.[164] The leader of the UDL was Reverend Theodore J. Jemison who was from Selma, Alabama, and moved to Baton Rouge in 1949 to serve as pastor of one of the most populated churches in Louisiana, Mt. Zion Baptist Church.[165] He said,

> Invariably I would see buses going down in South Baton Rouge and as they pass the church and on those busses were maids, cooks and so forth, who had come from the white area of Goodwood and other areas and the maids who had cooked and cleaned for whites, they were not able to sit

[161] Fairclough, 159.
[162] Fairclough, 159.
[163] Frystak, 65.
[164] Fairclough,159 and Frystak, 65.
[165] Fairclough, 159.

> down…And I thought it was terrible that they could work all day for white folks and couldn't sit down on a bus.[166]

Reverend Jemison saw the injustices that domestic workers and others were facing, and he encouraged them to fight back. Had he not seen the hardships these women faced, he may not have been so motivated to help form a boycott. Jemison's quote highlights the domestic workers' symbolic power within the boycott.

Churches like the Mt. Zion Baptist Church provided numerical, economic, organizational, and infrastructural strength for the boycott. "More Money Raised in Churches Sunday to Support Bus Boycott," an article about the boycott published in the *Jackson Advocate*, highlighted how Reverend Jemison and the rest of the Baton Rouge Black community raised funds.[167] According to the article:

> More money was raised in Negro churches here Sunday to support the boycott of local buses which started here last Friday. While no exact figure on the amount raised was immediately available with all the Negro churches, including the Catholic Church, participating in the fund raising, some idea of the amount raised may be gained from the fact that more than $500 was raised at Mt. Zion Baptist Church.[168]

In addition to protesting by not riding the buses, domestic workers also contributed to the boycott as members of Mt. Zion's congregation. They attended these church meetings to organize the boycott, donated money, encouraged others to donate, and offered support.

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[166] Rev. T.J. Jemison, "Rev. T.J. Jemison Oral History Interview," Mss. 4700.0627, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Interview by Roderick Jones, Derrek Vaughn, Michelle Johnson, (LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, LA), 3.

[167] "More Money Raised in Churches Sunday to Support Bus Boycott," *Jackson Advocate*, June 27, 1953, p. 8, https://www.newspapers.com/image/835016818.

[168] "More Money Raised in Churches Sunday to Support Bus Boycott."

Shortly after the boycott was underway, vast numbers of vehicles helped the protest, and there were three gas stations that assisted by providing gasoline at cheaper rates. The boycott was hurting the bus companies. In fact, "each day of the boycott was costing the bus company $1,600."[169] On June 20th, there was a rally held at McKinley Junior High School, where Jemison suggested that the bus company give jobs to Black bus drivers for routes to and from Black neighborhoods. He also warned that Black passengers would continue to protest if they were not able to have the same rights on buses as white riders.[170]

The boycott abruptly ended on June 23 because Ordinance 251 replaced Ordinance 222. Ordinance 251 now provided two seats in the front for whites and one large seat in the back for Black riders. Now, Black riders would not have to automatically move toward the back if a white person needed a seat. Jemison accepted 251 as a short-term truce because he felt that this ordinance was a step in the right direction. This action made a lot of protesters angry. Jemison would not fight in the courts again until after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that bus segregation was unconstitutional in *Browder v. Gayle* in 1956. It wasn't until 1961, that Baton Rouge would fully eliminate segregation on buses.[171] Jemison saw *Browder v. Gayle* as an opportunity to fight for a ruling that would end bus desegregation in Baton Rouge.

Domestic workers may not have been highlighted as the most prominent participants of the overall Civil Rights Movement, but the conditions of their jobs, including transportation to work, motivated these women to become significant in bus

[169] Fairclough, 160.
[170] Fairclough,160.
[171] Fairclough,160-161.

boycotts. Gussie Nesbitt was a fifty-three-year-old domestic worker and NAACP member who was in the Montgomery Bus Boycott.[172] Nesbitt said the following in an interview to explain why she joined the movement:

> I walked because I wanted everything to be better for us. Before the boycott, we were stuffed in the back of the bus just like cattle. And if we got to a seat, we couldn't sit down in the seat. We had to stand up over that seat. I work hard all day, and I had to stand up all the way home, because I couldn't have a seat on the bus. And if you sit down on the bus, the driver would say, (Let me have that seat, Nigger) and you'd have to get up.[173]

Like the Baton Rouge Boycott, the Montgomery Bus Boycott included significant participation from domestic workers who were motivated by the hardship of their jobs and constant disrespect on the buses.

On December 1st, 1955, seamstress and activist Rosa Parks stepped on the Cleveland Avenue bus and sat in the middle row. She was asked by driver James F. Blake to move, but she denied his request. Blake called the police, and Parks sat in silence because she knew how serious her action was. As secretary for the NAACP, she had seen over a decade of information on brutality cases in Montgomery. Parks also attended the Highlander Folk School, where she was trained in nonviolent resistance, and worked with activist organizations such as the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. She was the perfect person to spearhead the boycott because she had a respectable reputation and could not be labeled a "troublemaker."[174] She also was involved in other forms of

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[172] Henry Hampton, Steve Fayer, and Sarah Flynn, *Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement From The 1950s Through The 1980s* (New York, NY: Bantam, 1990), 25.

[173] Hampton, *Voices of Freedom*, 25.

[174] McGuire, 95-98.

activism, such as her assistance in the Recy Taylor case in 1944. Taylor was kidnapped and raped by seven armed white men, and they were not brought into custody, even when they confessed to the crime. Taylor's house also was set on fire.[175] The NAACP got involved and spread the word about the injustice, which caused a national uproar.

When Parks was arrested, Jo Ann Robinson, who was an English professor at Alabama State College and a member of the Women's Political Council (WPC), a local civil rights organization, mobilized.[176] The WPC encouraged voter registration; helped women who were raped or assaulted; and after Parks's arrest, decided to call for a boycott.[177] Robinson and the WPC wanted bus drivers to show Black riders more courtesy and for Black bus drivers on majority-Black routes. They also insisted that Black riders be allowed to sit from the back toward the front and white passengers from the front toward the back so everyone could sit without giving up their seat.[178]

On December 2nd, word started to spread about the boycott that would take place on December 5th. Robinson and two students created a total of 52,500 flyers, and the message within the flyers was that the boycott was taking place to protect Black women.[179] The flyer stated

> *Another Negro woman* has been arrested and thrown in jail because she refused to get up out of her seat on the bus for a white person to sit down. It is the second time since the Claudette Colvin case that a Negro Women has been arrested for the same thing. This has to be stopped. Negroes have rights, too, for if the Negroes did not ride the buses, they could not operate. Three-fourths of the riders are Negroes, yet we are arrested, or we

[175] McGuire, 9, 16 and 21.

[176] Jo Ann Gibson Robinson, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It: The Memoir of Jo Ann Gibson Robinson*, (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1987) 24 and 45.

[177] McGuire, 76 and 98.

[178] Robinson, 78-79.

[179] Cited in Robinson, 45 and McGuire, 99.

> have to stand over empty seats. If we do not do something to stop these arrests, they will continue. *The next time it may be you, your daughter, or mother.* This woman's case will come up on Monday. We are, therefore, asking every Negro to stay off the buses Monday in protest of the arrest and trial. Don't ride the buses to work, to town, to school, or anywhere on Monday…. Please stay off all buses Monday.[180]

Women of the WPC such as Robinson, Geraldine Nesbitt, and other local women, delivered the flyers to local Black establishments.[181] E.D. Nixon, a Civil Rights leader and union organizer, went with Rosa Parks to her court hearing. She strategically dressed to present herself as an innocent, hard-working victim of Jim Crow (which she was).[182] Claudette Colvin was an African American girl who got arrested a few months before Parks for also breaking segregation laws. Even though she was arrested for the same reasons as Parks, civil rights leaders resisted making her a symbol for the movement. Although she was a good student in school, she also was a teenage mother.[183] Therefore, activist leaders did not believe she did would make an ideal symbol to bring Black activists together and build national support for the boycott. Parks was an ideal candidate to lead the movement because she was a "genteel and soft-spoken woman with a demeanor that more easily fit into the traditional standards of respectability."[184] Through her appearance and actions, she helped build support for local civil rights activism. Parks was found guilty of violating Montgomery segregation laws and was issued a small fine.[185]

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[180] Cited in Robinson, 45 and McGuire, 99.
[181] McGuire, 99.
[182] McGuire, 100.
[183] McGuire, 91.
[184] Nadasen, 22
[185] McGuire, 102.

The WPC decided that there needed to be an organization that was leading the movement. The leader chosen was Martin Luther King Jr., and he and other religious leaders formed the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) as the organization to lead the boycott.[186] Reverend T.J. Jemison, who was the leader of the Baton Rouge boycott, said "When May seventeenth 1954 [the day of the *Brown v. Board* ruling] came, people in Baton Rouge were riding integratedly, lawfully, before Montgomery started…we moved out of Baton Rouge and the next place was Montgomery. Dr. King came to Baton Rouge and got the pattern."[187] King was influenced by the Baton Rouge Boycott and thought that a bus boycott in Montgomery would be a good start.

There were some church leaders and men of other large organizations who wanted to remain anonymous in their support of the boycott. However, local leader Nixon was quick to call those men out, and he did so by drawing attention to the plight of domestic workers. He said,

> How the hell you going to have a protest without letting the white folks know? Here you have been living off the sweat of these washerwomen for years, and you have never done anything for them. Now you have a chance to pay them back and you are too damn scared to stand on your feet and be counted.[188]

Nixon continued to criticize these preachers in defense of Black womanhood, but ironically with highly gendered language, and said "We've worn aprons all of our lives, It's time to take the aprons off… If we gonna be mens, now's the time to be mens

[186] McGuire,104.

[187] Jemison interview, 11.

[188] Earl Selby, and Miriam Selby, *Odyssey: Journey Through Black America*, (New York, Putnam and Sons, 1971), 60, As cited in McGuire, 104.

[sic].”[189] Nixon’s words demonstrated that ideas about women, especially household workers, were at the heart of the bus boycott therefore further solidifying that domestic workers possessed symbolic power. Nixon and Robinson both thought that if these women had to endure the daily horrors of the bus, then male leaders needed to be open with their support of the boycott.[190]

Many household workers were forced to be discreet about boycott activities or to tell their employers. Most domestic workers hid or got rid of any evidence about activism in order to keep their white employers from discovering their involvement.[191] However, one domestic worker who was loyal to her white employer gave her the pamphlet. Soon after, the bus company, the Montgomery City Commission, law enforcement, and media knew what the pamphlet said. The *Alabama Journal* reported the story on Saturday, and another article retold the plan in the *Montgomery Advertiser* the next day. The boycott was no longer a secret. Leaders of the boycott wondered if the domestic worker’s actions were intentional to make the boycott succeed, as her action spread news of the boycott to more people.[192]

On Monday, December 5th at 5:30 a.m., workers gathered at street corners waiting to be picked up by Black taxi drivers or over one hundred private cars, which had been offered free to bus riders for Monday. There were two police officers trailing each bus, claiming that they were there to protect Black riders who might want to ride the buses. Whites had circulated the rumor that domestic workers had called off work

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[189] Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1963-1965* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 136. As cited in McGuire, 104.

[190] McGuire, 104.

[191] Nadasen, 29

[192] Robinson, 54-55.

because they were "afraid to ride the bus."[193] Other newspaper articles claimed that domestic workers called their employers to give them rides to work because they were too afraid to ride the bus. Most protesters ignored the mainstream news, but it did keep people from riding the buses, which was the boycott's ultimate goal. Some white riders respected the boycott and stayed off the buses to support it, and others gave their maids rides.[194]

However, most whites were not supportive. One white woman fired her maid because she did not give away any information concerning the boycott. Churches that were assisting Black workers had to listen for white women disguising their voices in hopes of learning about pickup locations. However, the ministers would quickly hang up when they were asked for directions because a member of the community would have already known where the churches were. The first night of the boycott, thousands of Black activists shouted "No!" when asked whether they should end the boycott.[195] There was a plan put in place that pleaded with everyone in the city, "regardless of race, color, or creed," to stay off the buses connected with the City Lines Bus Company "until some arrangement has been worked out between said citizens and the bus company." Until then, the MIA encouraged the following:

1. That every person owning or who has access to automobiles will use them in assisting other persons to get to work "without charge."
2. That employers of persons who live a great distance from their work, "as much as possible" provide transportation for them.

[193] Robinson, 57.
[194] Robinson, 57-58.
[195] Robinson, 61- 62.

3. That the Negro citizens of Montgomery are ready and willing to send a delegation to the bus company to discuss their grievances and to work out a solution for the same.[196]

The bus company would not concede to the Montgomery Improvement Association's demands, so the boycott continued.

A couple days into the boycott, taxis stopped giving Black locals rides. Local officials made drivers charge the same pay they were receiving before the boycott started rather than charge ten cents.[197] Therefore, boycotters switched to locating rides on their own. White bus drivers and their companies were losing so much money, they started to use desperate tactics that targeted domestic workers. On January 25th, the Montgomery police department declared that they would "break up congregations of Negroes who had been loitering in white residential districts."[198] The people who were accused of loitering were the domestic workers who were waiting for rides, and they were also accused of causing trouble in the white neighborhoods just by walking around asking for transportation.[199]

The Montgomery police department did not "intend to allow hitchhikers to become nuisances in white sections."[200] The mayor also issued a statement urging white employers not to give their domestic workers rides or money for taxi fares. He instructed them "to cease paying Negro maids, cooks, nurses 'Blackmail money' in extra weekly transportation fares in any shape, form, or fashion."[201] He said any help that whites gave

[196] Robinson, 62-63.
[197] Robinson, 91.
[198] Robinson, 116.
[199] Robinson, 116.
[200] Robinson, 116.
[201] Robinson,119-120.

their Black employees was directly helping the boycott and not to give in to their demands, even if they threatened to quit. While some employers stopped giving their employees rides to work, money for rides, or fired those who would not ride the bus or could not get to work, most employers did not support the mayor's demand. Domestic workers had power to leverage because they could seek employment in other homes and encourage other domestic workers to avoid working for their previous employer. One household worker was fired by one woman for "not riding the bus, and as she left the house, she was hired by the next-door neighbor."[202] Most domestic workers continued to take taxis or get rides from their employers, and many employers did not mind. In fact, one employer fired her domestic worker because she took the bus. According to Robinson, that worker's boss said, "'If she could not be loyal to her own people, she most surely would not be loyal to her employers!'"[203]

A few months into the boycott, researchers from Fisk University conducted interviews with domestic workers in Montgomery. One domestic worker interviewed, Allean Wright, a middle-aged cook, said, "I felt good, I felt like shoutin' because the time had come for them to stop treating us like dogs."[204] The discrimination in the workplace combined with the mistreatment they were receiving on the bus was pushing these domestic workers to their breaking point. Another older domestic worker named Beatrice Charles said, "This stuff has been going on a long time," "To tell you the truth, it's been happening ever since I came here before the war … But in the last few years they've been

[202] Robinson,120.
[203] Robinson,120.
[204] Mrs. Allean Wright, aged forty-five to fifty, cook, interview by Willie M. Lee, January 24, 1956, box 4, folder 3, Preston and Bonita Valien Papers, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University. As quoted in Nadasen, 20.

getting worse and worse."[205] Charles was speaking especially about the cruelty of the bus drivers. She also was upset about how Parks was mistreated on the bus, stating that Parks was a respectable person and did not deserve the treatment she received, so Charles called her friends and to ask them not to ride the bus. Charles's action demonstrates the organizational strength of domestic workers. Irene Stovall had ridden the bus for over a decade and immediately stopped riding and protested the discrimination Black passengers received. She said, "When I got home, Junior came running in with the paper, Mamma they say don't ride the buses.' I said Lord you … answered my prayer."[206]

Domestic workers were willing to participate in the boycott at all costs. They not only asked their employers for money to take cabs or rides but also talked back to them if they were disrespecting the movement. Dealy Cooksey was a worker who had such conflicts with her employer. Cooksey's employer asked her as she was driving her home from work. "Dealy, why don't you ride the bus? Reverend King is making a fool of you people." Cooksey angerly retorted,

> Don't you dare say anything about Rev. King … He went to school to make something out of hisself, and now he is trying to help us. Y'all white folks done kept us blind long enough. We got our eyes open and ain't gonna let you close them back. I don't mean to be sassy, but when you talk about Rev. King I gets mad. Y'all white folks work us to death and don't pay nothing.[207]

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[205] Mrs. Beatrice Charles, maid, age forty-five, interview by Willie M. Lee, January 20, 1956, box 4, folder 3, ARC. As quoted in Nadasen, 20.

[206] Irene Stovall, cook and maid, age thirty-five to forty, interview by Willie M. Lee, February 1st, 1956, box 4, folder 3, ARC. As quoted in Nadasen, 21.

[207] Dealy Cooksey, domestic, about age forty, Interview by Willie M. Lee, January 24, 1956, box 4, folder 3, ARC, as quoted in in Nadasen, 21-22.

Her employer did not understand Cooksey's frustration because she thought she paid Cooksey enough. She said "But Dealy, I pay you." Cooksey challenged her: "What do you pay, just tell me? I'm ashamed to tell folks what I work for." Cooksey got so tired of her employer, she stood up for herself and the cause. "I walked to work the first day and can walk now. If you don't want to bring me, I ain't begging, and I sure ain't getting back on the bus and don't you never say nothing about Rev. King."[208] Domestic workers were not afraid to stand up to their employers when it came to the boycott.

Some domestic workers took actions beyond simply not riding buses or refusing to get up for whites; some threatened violence. Willie Mae Wallace, a store cleaner who was annoyed with the treatment she received on the bus, said

> One morning I got on the bus and I had a nickel and five pennies. I put the nickel in and showed him five pennies. You know how they do you. You put five pennies in there, and they say you didn't. And you know that bastard [bus driver]cussed me out. He called me bastards, whores, and when he called me a mother-F-, I got mad and put a hand on my razor. I looked at him and told him Your mammy was a son-of-a-bitch, and that's why she had you bitch. And if you so bad, get up out of that seat.[209]

Wallace stayed a little while longer and then got off the bus. She looked to see if the driver would respond, but he did not. She said, "Colored folks ain't like they used to be. They ain't scared no more. Guns don't scare us…. I don't mind dying, but I sure Lord am taking a white bastard with me."[210] Wallace did not care about the consequences of reacting in a physical manner. To her, the bus boycott showed that Black people were not going to tolerate any more discrimination.

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[208] Dealy Cooksey Interview. As quoted in Nadasen, 22.

[209] Willie Mae Wallace, store maid, age thirty to thirty-five, interviewed by Willie M. Lee, January 27, 1956, box 4, folder 3, ARC. As quoted in Nadasen, 23.

[210] Willie Mae Wallace Interview, As quoted in Nadasen, 23.

One night Irene Stovall was coerced to give away information about the boycott meetings in exchange for bacon grease. Still, Stovall did not give anything away, which infuriated her employer whose husband was a bus driver, and an argument broke out. She decided to quit because she thought she would end up putting her hands on her employer.[211] She thought "I better quit before I have to beat her…She heard me say a heap of time that if you hit me, I hit back and I ain't big for nothing."[212] These examples illustrate that domestic workers played a role as boycotters, promoters, and militant participants in the movement.

Some domestic workers, such as Georgia Gilmore and Inez Ricks, were leaders of the boycott as well. In 1920, Georgia Gilmore moved to Montgomery, where she raised her six children alone and worked as a domestic worker. Gilmore had a lot of jobs; she worked as "a nurse and a midwife, delivering babies in the black community. She was employed as a cook in a cafeteria and also a maid in private households."[213] Gilmore used her experience as a domestic worker to assist with the boycott through her cooking and she opened up her home as a place for activists to meet in secret.[214] She did a lot for the movement but did not receive a lot of recognition for her efforts because of her working-class background. Gilmore sympathized with the protesters because she, and her elderly mother, had bad experiences.[215] A couple of months before Rosa Park's arrest, Gilmore

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[211] Nadasen, 24.

[212] Irene Stovall Interview, As quoted in Nadasen, 25.

[213] Interview with Georgia Gilmore, Blackside Films and Media, February 17, 1986 for *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years (1954-1965)*, Washington University Libraries, Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection. As quoted in Nadasen, 26.

[214] Nadasen, 26 & 30.

[215] Willie Mae Wallace, store maid, age thirty to thirty-five, interviewed by Willie M. Lee, January 27, 1956, box 4, folder 3, ARC. As cited in Nadasen, 22.

had an incident on the bus that would cause her to stop riding buses before the boycott occurred. On a Friday afternoon, Gilmore got on a busy bus, and after she paid for a seat, she was told to get leave and return through the back.[216] She begged to be allowed to stay where she was since she was already on the bus and most of the other riders were Black, but he declined her plea.

> So, I got off the front door and went around the side of the bus to get in the back door, and when I reached the back door and was about to get on he shut the back door and pulled off, and I didn't even ride the bus after paying my fare. So, I decided right then and there I wasn't going to ride the buses any more… And so I haven't missed the buses because I really don't have to ride them… I haven't returned to the buses—I walk.[217]

Gilmore attended every major event of the boycott, such as the evening gathering at the Holt Street Baptist Church and the Monday-to-Thursday Night meetings that consisted of organizing committees and creating rallies.[218]

She also founded a secret group where domestic workers could help the boycott anonymously. It was called the Club from Nowhere, The title hid support of the boycott because while some could afford to publicly embrace the cause, others were too vulnerable to do so. According to Gilmore,

> Some colored folks or Negroes could afford to stick out their necks more than others because they had independent incomes," but some just couldn't afford to be called 'ring leaders' and have the white folks fire them. So when we made our financial reports to the MIA officers we had them record us as the money coming from nowhere. 'The Club from Nowhere."[219]

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[216] Georgia Gilmore, Montgomery bus boycott trial transcript, March 19, 1956, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, 351-52. As cited in Nadasen, 27.

[217] Georgia Gilmore, Montgomery bus boycott trial transcript, As quoted in Nadasen, 27.

[218] Nadasen, 28.

[219] Vernon Jarrett, "Raised Funds For Blacks: 'Club From Nowhere' Paid Way of Boycott," *Chicago Tribune*, December 4, 1975. As quoted in Nadasen, 29.

This club provided organizational strength, financial assistance, and infrastructural support to the Montgomery Bus Boycott while keeping its members anonymous. It did not disclose who cooked, transported food, and gave money.[220] The club grew, and different neighborhoods competed to raise money.[221] The domestic workers sold their goods, and the money would then go to the boycott leaders. Gilmore said, "That was very nice of the people because so many of the people who didn't attend the mass meetings would give the donation to help keep the carpool going."[222] The Club from Nowhere demonstrates multiple strengths, especially organizational, economic, and infrastructural, that domestic workers brought to the boycott.

Inez Ricks was another domestic worker who played a leading role in the boycott. She created another club called the Friendly Club that raised money.[223] The boycott would not have succeeded without the support of domestic workers. The boycott was for, and by, them. While significant and well-known Civil Rights activists would be making decisions at the top, the grassroots activism was successful because of domestic workers. The boycotters continued to protest the challenge of the legality of bus segregation in court. The U.S Supreme Court deemed bus segregation unconstitutional in *Browder v. Gayle* on November 13th, 1956, and the boycott ended on December 20th.[224]

A third Gulf South Bus Boycott that domestic workers played a significant role in was the Tallahassee Bus Boycott, which began on May 27th, 1956, and ended on

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[220] Nadasen, 29.

[221]Georgia Gilmore, Montgomery bus boycott trial transcript, As cited in Nadasen, 29.

[222] Interview with Georgia Gilmore, Blackside Films and Media, February 17,1986 for *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years (1954-1965)*, Washington University Libraries, Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection. As quoted in Nadasen, 29.

[223] Robnett, 64.

[224] Robnett, 71.

December 22nd, 1956 (after *Browder v. Gayle*). This boycott began small and was started by Wilhemina Jakes from West Palm Beach and Carrie Patterson from Lakeland. Both attended Florida A&M University (FAMU). The women were on their way back from a shopping trip in Tallahassee.[225] The bus was packed, and there were no seats that they would be allowed to sit in, so they sat in two available seats in the front. Bus driver Max Coggins told them to move to the back of the bus, but they said they would not unless they could get a refund. Coggins called the police. Jakes and Patterson were arrested and charged with "inciting a riot."[226] They were released on a $25 bond, and the charges were quickly dropped.[227] The two women were not trying to start a protest; they were exhausted from their shopping trip. However, their refusal to move would lead to a bus boycott that encompassed people from all walks of life, including domestic workers. Just like in the Baton Rouge Bus Boycott and the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the Tallahassee Bus Boycott received numerical strength and infrastructural strength from churches whose congregations included domestic workers. In the Miami Herald, an article titled "Negro Bishop calls for Boycott Support" described,

> Bishop D. Ward Nichols, presiding bishop of the Florida area of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Tuesday termed the arrest of the Rev. C.K. Steele in Tallahassee bus boycott "a heinous offense against the principles of democracy."…The bishop said the churches are morally justified in backing a boycott under present conditions in Tallahassee and also in Montgomery, Ala. He said he was leaving for Jacksonville and has called a meeting for Thursday at the St. Paul A.M.E. Church there to organize support for the boycott and for Steele.[228]

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[225] Samuel C. Hyde, *Sunbelt Revolution Sunbelt Revolution: The Historical Progression of the Civil Rights Struggle in the Gulf South, 1866-2000* (University Press of Florida, 2003) 192.

[226] *Tallahassee Democrat*, May 27, 1956, As cited in Hyde, 192.

[227] Hyde, 192

[228] "Negro Bishop Calls for Boycott Support," *The Miami Herald*, August 29, 1956, 271 edition, pp. 1-14, https://www.newspapers.com/image/618422230.

This call to action from Bishop Nichols built numerical support for the boycott by saying that congregants had a moral obligation to assist the boycott. The church provided infrastructural strength because it served as a location for activists to meet to discuss boycott developments.

Soon FAMU students held a large meeting where Broadus Hartley, who was the President of the Student Government Association, called for a bus boycott. Students got on buses and tried to convince all Black passengers to exit the buses. Most Black passengers got off, except for Reverend R.N. Webb, who was forcibly removed. By the third day, the rest of the Tallahassee Black community was involved in the boycott. On May 29, the president of the Tallahassee Alliance, Dr. James Hudson and C.K. Steele, the president of the Tallahassee NAACP branch, held a meeting at the Bethel African Methodist Church alongside over 400 people.[229] The Tallahassee Inter-Civic Council (ICC) was a local organization made up of "professionals, ministers, small businessmen, laborers, housewives, teachers and domestics."[230] A large portion of Black women in Tallahassee worked as domestic workers in suburban neighborhoods. Just as with Baton Rouge and Montgomery, the buses were the domestic workers' main source of transportation.[231] The ICC created "three demands of the bus company: (1) Seating was to be on a first-come first-served basis; (2) white drivers were to treat 'Negro' passengers

[229] Hyde, 193.
[230] Hyde, 194.
[231] Florida Bureau of the Census, 1960, 8. As cited in Hyde, 191.

with courtesy, and (3) black drivers were to be hired for routes through the black community."[232]

The boycott continued until all the requirements were secured. In the meantime, boycotters provided maids with rides because they were the ones who would have ridden the bus the most.[233] According to historian Glenda Alice Rabby, "The boycott would depend upon Black women, particularly domestic workers, many of whom had difficulty getting to work without the buses and some who were fired for supporting the boycott."[234] The leaders of the movement wanted to make sure domestic workers were involved and protected.

The ICC had a quick effect on bus fare profits. On July 1, the company that controlled the Tallahassee buses, Cities Transit, sent out a message that it was going to stop running the buses because of the financial hardship caused by the boycott.[235] In August when Cities Transit restarted their service, it hired Black drivers on the predominately Black routes in the FAMU and Frenchtown areas.[236] This victory did not last because in October, city officials charged Black leaders with conducting an illegal "for hire operation without a franchise."[237] As mentioned in the previous quotation, Reverend Steele was arrested due to his connection to the carpools. As the boycott continued, police officers continued to harass boycotters.

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[232] Hyde, 194.

[233] Hyde, 194.

[234] Glenda Alice Rabby, *The Pain and the Promise: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Tallahassee, Florida* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2016) 15.

[235]Adam Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King Jr.* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987). As cited in Hyde, 197.

[236] Hyde, 199.

[237] Hyde, 201.

The bus boycott received promising news. In *Browder v. Gayle*, Alabama's busing laws that preserved segregation were deemed unconstitutional by the United States Supreme Court. Alabama was forced to desegregate its public buses. This led the ICC leaders to believe they would have the same outcome. Steele and several other prominent Tallahassee civil rights leaders wanted to test to see what they could get away with, so they sat in whites-only seats, and nothing happened.[238] However, larger demonstrations were called off because of the threats from whites towards Black activists boarding segregated buses. In January 1, 1957, Governor LeRoy Collins stopped all Tallahassee bus services in order to discourage the conflict.[239] A week later, the city eliminated segregated seating using Montgomery as an example.[240] A "reserved seating" policy, which gave bus drivers the authority to assign numbered seats was put in place that would not violate the Supreme Court's decision but would still maintain segregation. However, every Tallahassee city bus was integrated by the summer of 1957.[241] There was never a formal settlement, but there was a natural integration as more Black passengers began sitting wherever they wanted. As in other boycotts, domestic workers may not have been the main leaders, but they were significant to its success because of their large participation.

In conclusion, there were a number of similarities between the Baton Rouge, Montgomery, and the Tallahassee Bus Boycotts. Some of the similarities transcend the experiences of domestic workers. For instance, in all three boycotts, young Baptist

[238] Hyde, 203.
[239] Hyde, 204.
[240] Hyde, 207.
[241] Hyde, 207.

ministers who were not originally from the local communities they were representing became the most prominent leaders. Civil rights groups, such as the Montgomery Improvement Association, United Defense League, and the Tallahassee Inter-Civic Council used mass meetings to earn money and spread messages to every part of the Black community, both the middle and working classes. All organizations also started with similar demands for first-come, first-served seating. There were some differences to note. In Baton Rouge the UDL accepted Ordinance 251 as a compromise, and Tallahassee's ICC accepted assigned seating, while Montgomery boycott leaders never compromised. Most significant to this thesis was that domestic workers played a prominent role, both as actors and symbols, in all three bus boycotts because of their reliance on bus transportation and the bus companies' reliance on their business. They were significant through their numerical, organizational, economic, infrastructural, and symbolic strength. Domestic workers had numerical strength because they made up most of the boycotters. They were vital from an organizational point of view because they helped establish and continue the boycotts. Domestic workers were economically necessary because their refusal to ride the buses hurt companies so severely that they changed segregation laws. Symbolically they were essential because they helped inspire others to become involved in the boycotts. Through churches and organizations like the Club from Nowhere, domestic workers also provided infrastructural strength to support the movement.

CHAPTER IV – DOMESTIC WORKERS' VOTER REGISTRATION EFFORTS IN LOUISIANA, MISSISSIPPI, ALABAMA, AND FLORIDA

After the Baton Rouge, Montgomery, and Tallahassee Bus Boycotts came the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1957.[242] It was supposed to secure and preserve African American voters' rights based on the Constitution but did not fully do so, and therefore voting rights continued to be a central focus in the Black community.[243] The Act established a Civil Rights division within the Department of Justice and established a Civil Rights Commission for investigating voter restrictions. The subsequent Civil Rights Act of 1960 sought to address some of the limitations of the 1957 act. It "required all election officials to retain any copies of any voting-related records for twenty-two months and deliver copies of these documents to the attorney general of the United States upon request."[244] This allowed the Justice Department to investigate Southern local voting practices and file suit against registrars who were not letting Black citizens vote.[245] In 1960, newly elected President John F. Kennedy was cautious about implementing civil rights legislation.[246] To encourage using the ballot box as a means of protest, the Voter Educational Project (VEP) was created from 1962 to 1964.[247] This project encouraged

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[242] Shyrlee Dallard, *Ella Baker: A Leader Behind the Scenes* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Silver Burdett, 1990). As cited in Robnett, 71.

[243] Robnett, 71.

[244] William Sturkey, *Hattiesburg: A City in Black and White,* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2019), 279.

[245] Sturkey, 279.

[246] Steven F. Lawson, "Debating The Civil Rights Movement: The View From The Nation," in *Debating The Civil Rights Movement, 1945-1968,* ed. James T. Patterson,. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006), 19.

[247] Lawson, 24.

civil rights groups to come together to gain more Black voters. Some major groups such the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) were a part of VEP.[248] In spite of their work with the VEP project, these Black organizations often could not get assistance when white Southerners attacked and intimidated voter registration activists. VEP was still successful despite facing many obstacles, and Black voter registration almost doubled during VEP's operation.[249]

The fight for the right to vote was a central issue in the Black community, and it was one where elites and the working class both participated, but Black elites led most efforts. However, working-class participants, including domestic workers, used their resources to encourage communities to register to vote and supported others who were on the front lines of voter registration work. These women fought for voting rights because they knew that being able to select a candidate who catered to their interests might lead to better work conditions, education, and public accommodations for themselves and their children. Despite the risks of losing their jobs, hurting their family's reputation, and being physically attacked, domestic workers became involved, mainly by housing and feeding activists, which demonstrates their infrastructural strength. Some domestic workers also joined voter registration campaigns and encouraged others to join as well, demonstrating their organizational strength. They were what Belinda Robnett has identified as "bridge leaders" because they could use their close relationships with community members to

[248] Lawson, 24.
[249] Lawson, 25.

encourage others to vote, be trusted to shield activists, and, in some instances, be involved with groups like the NAACP, CORE, and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP). Despite the efforts of a few domestic workers, most did not provide financial, numerical, or economic strength to voter registration activism because they feared losing their jobs. However, many did provide infrastructural and organizational strength to the movement.

The first national organization to take on the issue of voter registration was the NAACP, which was established on February 12, 1909.[250] NAACP's early aim was to help Black men gain the right to vote; they expanded this mission to include Black women after the passage of the 19th Amendment. In Mississippi, civil rights activism had been connected with the NAACP since the first branch was established in Vicksburg in 1918.[251] However, the organization was not very active in Mississippi until after World War II. Part of the reason for this was that the NAACP was primarily an organization that dealt with legal matters and often on a national level. Leaders filed lawsuits when Black Americans were denied their rights. The NAACP also persuaded Congress to enact "antilynching legislation, abolish the poll tax, and established a permanent Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC)."[252] Most NAACP branches aimed to gain improvements in Northern and border states before making attempts to end segregation in the South.[253]

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[250] Patricia Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and The Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York, NY: New Press, 2010), 6.

[251] John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana, Il: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 29.

[252] Dittmer, 29.

[253] Dittmer, 29.

During the 1930s, the NAACP tried to increase its membership in Mississippi.[254] There were not many members during this period and membership would not increase in great numbers until the late 1940s. Leaders in the Jackson branch (and throughout the state) typically were not financially dependent on whites because they were "small business owners, doctors, lawyers, government workers, and land-owning farmers."[255] The Mississippi NAACP's leadership remained an elite organization throughout the next two decades as independent middle and upper-class African Americans dominated its leadership positions. These Black leaders were less vulnerable to economic intimidation than those more dependent on whites, like domestic workers. Another essential detail concerning voting rights leaders in the mid-twentieth century was that they were mostly men. There were female members who held important positions like Ella Baker, Director of Branches during the war years, and Ruby Hurley, Southeast Regional Secretary.[256] But despite this, male leaders still were in the majority. There were no women in leadership positions in local branches until the end of the 1950s. The domestic workers mentioned in this chapter were either members or secretaries of voting rights organizations, with the exception of one who was a vice president at her local branch. Their participation in these organizations demonstrates their organizational strength within voting rights efforts.

After World War II, the NAACP had high hopes for *Hall v. Nagel*, which challenged voter restrictions in Louisiana. On August 4, 1944, some Black voters attempted to vote in Edgar and were directed by Edward T. Hall who was president of the

[254] Dittmer, 29.
[255] Dittmer, 30.
[256] Dittmer, 30.

St. John the Baptist Parish of the NAACP. [257] Typically, voters would have simply filled out applications, but registrar T.J. Nagel, asked each applicant questions. After the questions, Nagel wouldn't allow for Hall and the rest of the applicants to vote. Hall sued Nagel in July 1945, and the case went to the federal level. Nine months later, Hall won the case.[258] Hall and the NAACP believed that the decision would limit disfranchisement in Louisiana, but it did not. All over Louisiana, Black voters still were rejected in large numbers and were discouraged from voting through intimidation tactics. For instance, two white voters had to check the identification of each Black voter in Shreveport, but whites never had to go through the trouble of making sure they were who they said they were. Another even more drastic example occurred in Alexandria, where registrars would not allow Black voters to vote under any circumstances; and in St. James Parish, "whenever Negroes presented themselves at the registration office...the Registrar of Voters was always ill."[259] In Tangipahoa Parish, Black voters were threatened with violence. "Things are so bad in this Parish," the NAACP reported, "that Negro papers are not allowed."[260] In spite of these challenges, Louisiana had the most Black registered voters of any Deep South state in 1956. In the Fall of 1956, a Joint Legislative Committee created new laws with additional restrictions on Black voting. These laws drastically dropped the number of Black voters in 1958 going from "161,410 to 131,068."[261]

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[257] Adam Fairclough, *Race and Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915-1972* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2008) 104.

[258] Fairclough, 104.

[259] Fairclough, 111.

[260] Registration and Voting in Louisiana, September 1946," folder 67, NAACP (NO); Additional Information on the Discriminatory Practices in Louisiana," part 4, series 2, folder B-212, NAACP. As quoted in Fairclough, 111.

[261] Shannon Frystak, *Our Minds on Freedom: Women and the Struggle for Black Equality in Louisiana, 1924-1967,* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2020), 161.

In 1960, voting would become even more difficult when the Louisiana Legislature passed a set of laws known by critics as the "Segregation Law Package." Changes included prohibiting people for a multitude of reasons such as those who committed low level crimes or who had bad reputations such as petty theft, public intoxication, or had children out of wedlock.[262] These changes continued to increase the drop in Black votes. In 1962, more laws were enacted to limit Black voters and of the Sixth Congressional District's "92,216 African Americans of voting age, fewer than one-third were actually registered to vote."[263] Organizations like CORE that wanted to increase Black voter registration numbers were at a great disadvantage due to these new laws.

As in Louisiana, Black voter registration efforts in Mississippi in the early 1950s met limited success. By 1954, "22,000 blacks were registered, about 4 percent of those eligible. Six counties with black majorities were among the fourteen that had no blacks registered."[264] Black voting continued to be limited; in 1952 and 1954, Mississippi voters (the vast majority of whom were white) had voted to increase the requirements for voter registration and make it even more difficult for African Americans to vote. This led to an increase in voter registration campaigns, which the NAACP led. NAACP members who attempted to vote were not able to. For instance, in Forrest County, a minister with an education from Columbia University failed the test twice just because he was an NAACP member.[265] In spite of the difficulties they faced, local NAACP branches taught classes so that locals could learn about the state constitution and, therefore, have a better chance

[262] Frystak,161.
[263] Frystak, 162.
[264] Dittmer, 52.
[265] As cited in Dittmer, 53.

of passing the examination. NAACP members sometimes lamented that elite community members were not fighting for the cause as much as they should. Cleveland, Mississippi, NAACP leader Amzie Moore wrote of his frustration to Roy Wilkins in late 1955:

> The Negroes with money are in a world of their own here in the state of Mississippi. They live to themselves and they don't want things to change, they are happy, as you know they don't support our organization, they are not interested in the freedom of the common Negro of Mississippi, they have enough money in white banks to help all the Negroes of Mississippi, but they buy their fine cars, furs, homes, and stay very much to themselves. That's funny, isn't it. But that's how it is down here.[266]

While the NAACP focused its efforts on voter registration and filing court cases to challenge voter discrimination, other civil rights organizations like CORE and SNCC, which were new to the area, began to push for more direct action tactics. Despite the arrival of these two new groups, the NAACP would still thrive in the state and continue to be a part of voter registration efforts in the 1960s.

Alabama experienced similar issues. Three counties, in particular, were significant in Alabama's voter registration story. According to Brian K. Landsberg, the activism of small Alabama counties such as Sumter County, would lead to the passing of the Voting Rights Act. During Reconstruction, Sumter County had a reputation that it was dangerous for Black voters, and it continued to be so into the 1960s.[267] An agent of the Justice Department assigned to Alabama during Reconstruction stated he had

> rather be in the heart of Comanche country than Sumter County without soldiers, Klansmen in "bloody Sumter," reputedly led by notorious former Sheriff Stephen S. Renfore, conducted a sustained reign of terror, whipping blacks in daylight and murdering, along with several blacks, a

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[266] Amzie Moore to Roy Wilkins, Oct.11, 1955, NAACP Papers, As quoted in Dittmer, 72.

[267] Brian K. Landsberg, *Free at Last to Vote: The Alabama Origins of the 1965 Voting Rights Act* (Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas, 2007), 34.

white lawyer from New York who had been politically active among black voters.[268]

Most of the people old enough to vote in Sumter County were Black. Specifically, "76 percent of the Sumter County voting population in 1930 was black, and 69 percent black in 1960, 95 percent of the persons registered during that time period were white."[269] There were times when Sumter tolerated and promoted Black residents voting, and the first three African Americans voted in 1933. Another person voted after World War II, and then twenty-three Black locals would go on to vote in the next six years.[270] However, voting restrictions started to be heavily enforced in the early 1950s. Opportunities for Black Sumter County locals to vote looked like they were happening in January 1954, because Alabama eliminated its poll tax laws, which increased the number of Black and white voters, but registration nearly stopped after *Brown v. Board*. In May of 1954, after the Supreme Court decision, the registrars "rejected 47 percent of black applicants and 1.7 percent of whites."[271] Chances for black registration would be virtually impossible until the early 1960s.

Domestic workers witnessed the Alabama NAACP's difficulties with getting people to vote but still got involved. Leona Williams worked as a cook and maid for a banker. She was born in Meridian, Mississippi, but spent most of her life in Birmingham,

[268] As quoted in Landsberg, 36.
[269] U.S. Brief, United States v. Hines, C.A. 63-609, at 10. As cited in Landsberg, 37.
[270] Landsberg, 38.
[271] Testimony of Judge Willie Dearman, transcript, May 1964, United States v. Hines, C.A. 63-609, at 584-85. As cited in Landsberg, 38.

Alabama.[272] She described how the NAACP had a "hard way to go" to get people to register, and one of the reasons for that was that people were scared. Still, some like Williams tried. She first attempted to vote in the 1930s and was asked a series of questions, including "Where do your mama, daddy, and grandfather live?"[273] She responded with where her parents lived, but could not remember where her grandparents were from or lived. She ended up failing her test. She did not try to register again until the 1960s, when she passed the exam.[274] Most working-class locals were afraid to try to register because they could lose their jobs, be arrested, or be injured or killed for such efforts. Luckily, Williams did not face any punishment for attempting to register. However, she did face consequences when she refused the advances of a police officer and was arrested. She was forced to rely on the reputation of her white employers to be released from jail. This incident did not stop her from becoming an activist. She was involved in several marches, knew Martin Luther King Jr, and cooked and housed protesters. Though she was not fired for her activism, Williams's story still demonstrates the vulnerability that working-class Black women faced during Jim Crow. Her story also sheds light on domestic workers' organizational and infrastructural strength.

Another domestic worker who tried to vote during this time was Margaret Campbell Brown who was from Sumter County Alabama. Brown had a high school education but did not graduate and she cleaned at a white college in Livingston

[272] Leona Williams. "Interview with Leona Williams" *Working Lives Oral History Project*. The University of Alabama Special Collections, Interview by Peggy Hamrick, July 30, 1984, https://cdm17336.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/u0008_0000003/id/171.

[273] Leona Williams Interview.

[274] Leona Williams Interview.

County.[275] Despite being a domestic worker in the Deep South she was able to afford her own home. In order to gain more opportunities for herself she attempted to vote for the first time in 1957, when she was in her late thirties. She was asked questions such as "Name some of the duties and obligations of citizenship." Brown replied with "Honesty, obedience to all laws of our country."[276] And then she was asked, "Do you regard those duties and obligations as having priority to any other secular organization when they are in conflict?" Other registered people were confused by that question and incorrectly answered "no" or left it blank. Whites who answered incorrectly or left it blank still were allowed to register, whereas Black registrants were rejected. Brown answered the question correctly by saying yes, and she even had a white courthouse employee vouch for her. Brown did not know why her application was rejected and was never notified as to the reason. She tried to apply again in 1963 but was blocked on the grounds that her form was incomplete, and she had nobody to vouch for her.[277] Brown's story highlights the unfair treatment Black voters received compared to whites. Brown's example also showed the hierarchy of the Southern social order because she needed a white person to vouch for her to be able to vote to prove that she was "trustworthy" and "acceptable." Even after getting approved the first time, her paperwork was still marked as incomplete. Despite following the rules, Black voters were denied their right to vote.

However, some domestic workers in Alabama could register to vote the first time, especially if they did not seem to pose a threat to white supremacy. Ella Pegues was a domestic worker who later became an LPN at University Hospital and then worked at

[275] Landsberg, 65.
[276] As quoted in Landsberg, 65.
[277] Landsberg, 65- 66.

nursing homes. Pegues was born in Walker County, Alabama, in 1903 and was active in boycotts and sit-ins at segregated restaurants.[278] She was arrested a few times and was instructed on non-violent protesting by Martin Luther King Jr. Pegues described how the older generation of Black locals did not feel like the marches and other efforts to end segregation would accomplish much.[279] Their feelings changed quickly, and they started supporting the movement when they saw success was happening. In addition to meeting Martin Luther King Jr., she also met Fred Shuttlesworth and remembered Governor George Wallace's effort to block integration at the University of Alabama.[280] Interestingly, Pegues had a friend who was a nurse for Bull Connor, and that nurse told Pegues that she was tormenting him. Even though Connor was a notorious racist, Pegues still urged her friend to stop.[281] Pegues described segregation as nonsensical because when she was working as a domestic worker, she would have to be near her white boss but still could not use the same door or have dinner with her. She said, "Lord have mercy! I cook her food. I couldn't come through the front door. Wasn't that stupid?"[282]

Pegues and her husband had no issues registering to vote, but they were asked lots of questions before they were officially registered. The Pegues registered in the 1950s, and while they passed, two school principals were denied.[283] They were allowed to vote

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[278] Ella Pegues, "Interview With Ella Pegues." Other. *Working Lives Oral History Project*. The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections, Interview by Peggy Hamrick, August 22, 1984, 2. https://cdm17336.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/u0008_0000003/id/262

[279] Ella Pegues Interview, 15.

[280] Ella Pegues Interview, 4.

[281] Ella Pegues Interview, 12.

[282] Ella Pegues Interview, 8.

[283] Ella Pegues Interview, 2.

in every election except for the one that was occurring right when they registered.[284] Some of the questions were, "Where did they live, why did they think they were eligible to vote, and why did they want to vote?"[285] Pegues responded by saying, "Well, because I am 21. I am interested in the country as a whole, and I would like to select my leaders that's going to be in a position to run the country."[286] She also mentioned that once when she was trying to vote, a white woman in line asked if she would vote for George Wallace. Pegues responded by saying, "Oh yes, he's done me a lot of good." She said this to make sure she and her husband would be allowed to vote.[287] Pegues's experience shows how Black voters had to demonstrate that they would not challenge the status quo. Pegues was indeed a threat with her later activism, but when she and her husband first voted, she was not viewed as a threat.

A fourth state where African Americans were sometimes blocked from the vote was Florida. Unlike other Deep South states, Florida had a large Black population that was registered to vote. This was because Florida never enacted any literacy tests as a way to keep Black residents from voting.[288] However, in 1889, lawmakers did create a capitation, or poll tax, that was supposed to be paid annually by all males aged 21 or older as a prerequisite for voting.[289] Still, this did not stop Black voters from registering.

Another reason for Florida's success was because of the robust activism of NAACP activists. Harry T. Moore was born in Houston, Florida, on November 18th,

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[284] Pegues, 25.
[285] Pegues, 26.
[286] Ella Pegues Interview, 2.
[287] Ella Pegues Interview, 27
[288] Glenda Alice Rabby, *The Pain and the Promise: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Tallahassee, Florida*, (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2016), 164.
[289] Rabby, 164.

1905.[290] His father, Johnny Moore, worked with water tanks for the Seaboard Airline Railroad, and his mother, Rosa, owned a small store.[291] Moore's father died when he was nine years old, and he and his mother had to live with his aunts in Jacksonville.[292] His aunts in Jacksonville were educated, and they emphasized the importance of education and how it opens doors for opportunity. He returned and enrolled in Memorial College as a high school student in Houston in 1919, and he graduated in May of 1925. He took a teaching post in Cocoa, Florida, where he taught fourth grade for two years.[293] During this time, he met Harriette Vyda Simms, whom he married. Moore became a principal at Titusville Colored School. He had two daughters and became interested in civil rights.

In 1934, Moore started an NAACP branch in Brevard County.[294] In 1937, Moore wanted to equalize the pay between white and Black teachers and in order to do that, he filed a lawsuit and was the first person to do so.[295] Moore lost the lawsuit but continued the fight and got his wish. Expanding on this action; Florida's NAACP branches created a conference where Moore was chosen to be president in 1941. Even though Moore was a member of the aspiring class, he still protested nonstop about lower salaries, separate schools, and the disenfranchisement of voters for people from all walks of life. In 1944 the Progressive Voters League was created in large part due to Moore, and he helped over 116,000 Black voters become a part of the Florida Democratic Party.[296] This voting base

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[290] Ben Green, *Before His Time: The Untold Story of Harry T. Moore, America's First Civil Rights Martyr* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1999), 16.

[291] Green, 20.

[292] Green, 21.

[293] Green, 24.

[294] Green, 37.

[295] Patricia Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and The Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York, NY: New Press, 2010) 304.

[296] Green, 117

was 31 percent of all eligible Black voters in Florida, and this was 51 percent higher than any other state in the Deep South.[297] Florida was a one-party state, and the Democratic primaries were the ones that mostly decided elections. Even though Blacks were not banned from voting, the Democratic Party could and did label itself as a private organization to keep Black voters out.[298] After the 1944 Supreme Court decision in *Smith v. Allwright,* which ended the all-white Democratic primary, Black Floridians could become a part of the dominant party in the state. Black voting increased shortly thereafter. For instance, in 1946 there were only 508 Black voters in Leon County, but two years later there were 2,226 voters.[299]

Still, Moore and his wife paid the ultimate price for their activism. In June 1946 Moore and his wife both lost their jobs, and he worked fully for the NAACP.[300] He helped increase the numbers of the Florida NAACP to a peak of over 10,000 members in 63 branches.[301] On Christmas day in 1951, Moore and his wife were killed when a bomb was placed under their house. Moore was the first NAACP leader who was killed in the Civil Rights Movement.[302] Moore showed that the NAACP could bring about successful change; however, Moore was murdered for his voting rights activism. Despite Moore's bravery, Black Floridians were still hesitant to vote because of threats to their livelihoods and lives.

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[297] Green, 117.
[298] Green, 71.
[299] Rabby,165.
[300] Sullivan, 305.
[301] Green, 63.
[302] Sullivan, 413.

One Florida domestic worker who overcame her fear to become involved in voter activism in Gainesville, Florida, was Rosa B. Williams. Williams was born in Starke, Florida, in 1933 and moved to Gainesville when she was still a newborn.[303] She received her high school diploma, and she worked as an elevator operator at a hospital before working as a maid for a family for fifteen years.[304] She was involved in the local NAACP and served as a vice president. She attended meetings on Sunday nights downstairs at Mount Carmel Church. Meetings were always packed. Many people were involved due to the group's reputation as a respectable organization.[305] She also was a member of the League of Women Voters, where she encouraged Black locals to vote. Williams illustrates how some domestic workers had organizational strength to build up participation in local voting rights groups.

Williams made the point that working-class people offered crucial organizational strength in voting rights activism. Regarding encouraging Black citizens to vote, she stated, "If you really want something done, get the little people. If you notice in the election, the people knocking on doors are not doctors and lawyers."[306] She knew from her experience as a domestic worker how important it was to be able to have your voice heard, and she tried to convey this message to her own community. She said:

> I go out and campaign and try to get them to vote. Black people need to start going to the polls. Burning down a building or cussing some people out, means nothing. Everything is political. If you let those political people know that you will see them at the polls they will learn to respect you. They will at least try to represent something you want. Now, whether you

[303] Rosa B. Williams, "Interview with Rosa B. Williams," 1983-01-23. Other. (*University of Florida Digital Collection*. Samuel Proctor Oral History Program), 3. Interview by Joel Buchanan, January 23, 1983. http://ufdc.ufledu/UF00005394/00001, 1.

[304] Rosa B. Williams Interview, 4.

[305] Rosa B. Williams Interview, 4.

[306] Rosa B. Williams Interview, 7.

> vote for who I am supporting or not, go to the poll and vote. Make that a habit. [307]

Williams's goal was to make voting a habit for people in her community. She encouraged working-class people to join civil rights organizations and encouraged candidates running for office to utilize the working-class members of their communities, if they wanted to be successful.

One Mississippi domestic worker who was in the NAACP in the 1960s and participated in voter registration efforts was Leesco Guster. She was from Port Gibson, Mississippi, and was born on March 26, 1936. Her parents divorced when she was a young child, and she moved to Vicksburg with her mother when she was six years old.[308] Her mother was a domestic worker, and Guster received a tenth-grade education.[309] She lived in Skokie, Illinois, for a brief period to save money, where she worked at Montgomery Ward and for a white family she lived with.[310] In 1959, she moved back to Port Gibson Mississippi to get married to Harry Guster, who was a contractor.[311] Guster's activism began with her interest in voting and getting others to register to vote. She started going to McFatter's, which was a drugstore where activists would assemble.[312] It was there where Guster met Rudy Shields, who was responsible for over 30 boycotts in Mississippi. Guster wanted to do all she could to help, so she offered to drive Shields to

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[307] Rosa B. Williams Interview, 7.

[308] Leesco Guster, "Leesco Guster oral history interview," Emilye Crosby, Civil Rights History Project collection AFC 2010/039: 0118, (December 3, 2015), https://www.loc.gov/item/2016655409/, 2.

[309] Leesco Guster Interview, 2.

[310] Leesco Guster Interview, 4.

[311] Leesco Guster Interview, 6.

[312] Leesco Guster Interview, 10

plantations to attempt to convince others to vote and she gave people rides to the polls. She also donated her husband's gun to the cause.[313] Her enthusiasm for activism and working together with others shows her organizational strength.

Guster then started to become involved with boycotts and marches in the later 1960s and joined the NAACP. Her husband believed in activist causes, but he was ill, and Guster did not want her husband to wind up in jail, so she played the more active role.[314] Guster's boycotts included boycotting grocery stores that would not hire Black workers or treated Black customers them disrespectfully. The first boycott she was a part of stopped because they started hiring Black workers, and others stopped because people would continue to shop at places that were supposed to be boycotted.[315] She also was involved in one protest where she was sprayed with tear gas.[316] She regularly faced armed whites while working with Shields, and she armed herself to protect her home.[317] Even though the NAACP was mainly an organization that did not get involved with violence, many of its members, including Guster, found themselves involved in violent conflict.

A second civil rights organization that played a significant role in voter registration was the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). CORE was founded by college students, Bernice Fisher, James R. Robinson, James L. Farmer Jr, Joe Guinn, George

[313] Leesco Guster Interview, 12.
[314] Emilye Crosby, *A Little Taste of Freedom: The Black Freedom Struggle in Claiborne County, Mississippi* (United States, MS: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 137.
[315] Leesco Guster Interview, 21.
[316] Leesco Guster Interview, 24.
[317] Crosby, 137.

Houser, and Homer Jack in 1942.[318] CORE was a nonviolent organization that participated in Northern sit-ins to protest public segregation, and it spread all over the country. During its early days, CORE was an integrated organization (and white students even comprised a majority of its members) in the Midwest, but that changed as the organization made its way South in the 1960s. CORE used the method of nonviolent direct action in "sit-ins, jail-ins, and Freedom Rides."[319] While the NAACP primarily consisted of middle-class leadership with occasional working-class membership. CORE included more working-class leadership and membership.

CORE made its major debut in the South during the Freedom Rides. CORE first organized the rides in May of 1961, during which seven African Americans and six whites took two buses through the Deep South to test the *Boynton v. Virginia* ruling that said bus and railway station segregation was unconstitutional. During the second week of the trip, riders were physically attacked, and one of their buses was firebombed in Anniston, Alabama. A white mob also beat the riders of that bus. Despite this, CORE found more volunteers and continued with the trip, and it went well from Birmingham to Montgomery. Still, once in Montgomery, the riders were attacked by 1,000 white protestors, and this received national attention. Hostilities would continue in

[318] CORE, "The History of CORE," https://web.archive.org/web/20220308062106/http://www.core-online.org/History/history.htm

[319] CORE, "The History of CORE," https://web.archive.org/web/20220308062106/http://www.core-online.org/History/history.htm

Mississippi.[320] By the end of 1961, CORE established 53 affiliated chapters and continued to be dedicated to the fight for civil rights in the Deep South.[321]

After the publicity it received from the Freedom Rides, CORE turned its sights on voter registration. CORE began voting rights work in 1961, around the same time as the Freedom Rides, and later joined the Voter Educational Project (VEP). CORE workers wanted to provide potential voters with the knowledge and confidence to vote. CORE aimed to involve working-class Black Southerners who had personal experience with white hostility in the area. Black domestic workers provided infrastructural strength by providing CORE activists with food and housing. Sharecroppers and domestic workers pushed for CORE to address labor union discrimination, unemployment, and "special problems," referring to federal food surplus food distribution and federal programs such as job training and farm subsidies.[322] CORE hoped that if it began to address these issues, then the locals would further organize their own communities.

One Mississippi domestic worker, Bea Jenkins, became inspired by the example of the CORE Freedom Riders and began organizing others to vote. Jenkins was a domestic worker from Sardis, Mississippi, in Panola County.[323] She was started working in the 1950s and her wage was $12.00 a week.[324] Jenkins got involved with Civil Rights efforts because she felt she needed to participate in the movement when Emmett Till was

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[320] CORE, "The History of CORE," https://web.archive.org/web/20220308062106/http://www.core-online.org/History/history.htm

[321] CORE, "The History of CORE," https://web.archive.org/web/20220308062106/http://www.core-online.org/History/history.htm

[322] Frystak, 175.

[323] Harriet Tanzman, "Oral History with Bea Jenkins; 2000." Digital Collections at The University of Southern Mississippi, January 17, 2000, 1 mus-coh_jenkinsb | Digital Collections (preservica.com)

[324] Bea Jenkins Interview, 8.

murdered. She later joined the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party.[325] The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party was founded on April 26th 1964 by Black Mississippians who were kept out of the white Democratic party of the state.[326] Jenkins was persuaded to become a member of the party when civil rights workers whom she called "Freedom riders" spoke at the Second Pilgrim Rest Church where she attended services in her local area of Holmes County.[327] Hattie Saffold, a domestic worker, and Eugene Saffold, a cotton chopper, helped organize the meetings, and Jenkins attended. Holmes County opened up a campaign office where Jenkins and the Saffolds would encourage people to register to vote in Holmes County. Both Bea Jenkins and Hattie Saffold are proof of domestic workers' organizational strength within voting rights activism.

Another domestic worker who was involved with CORE, NAACP, SNCC, and other organizations was Daisy Harris Wade. Wade was born in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, on April 22nd, 1931.[328] Her father worked at the Hercules Plant, and her mother was a housewife. In 1949, she completed her high school education at Eureka High School, and she soon married. Wade wanted to expand her education and she took night classes so she could spend time with her children and work during the day.[329] She went to Pearl River Community College while she was a domestic worker in 1955 or 1956.[330] After getting her education she became a secretary receptionist at WORV, a Black radio station, and at

[325] Bea Jenkins Interview, 9.
[326] Dittmer, 325.
[327] Bea Jenkins Interview, 10.
[328] Daisy Harris Wade, "Oral History with Daisy Harris Wade," Other. Accessed April 9, 2022. Interview by Misty Lambert, Dick Conville, Tonya Blair, and https://usm.access.preservica.com/uncategorized/IO_83bef402-ff07-4086-b55a-2ef0f0bb50cf/, 3.
[329] Daisy Harris Wade, 20.
[330] Diasy Harris Wade Interview, 20-21.

WDAM-TV, a television station, for four and half years.[331] When she was not working, she was a part of many organizations such as CORE, SNCC, and MFDP, and was a secretary for the NAACP for almost a decade. Wade's work within these organizations shows her organizational strength. Wade attempted to register to vote three times before she succeeded. In 1964, she was involved in a picket line concerning voter registration. She went in and tried to interpret the constitution, then failed, but she continued to go and encouraged others to keep trying.[332] Wade experienced frustration with the NAACP after Vernon Dahmer's murder. After his death, some locals, like Wade, wanted to take a more radical approach in their activism and conduct direct action protests and demand economic inclusion for the working-class.[333] The NAACP held marches and meetings, but mostly conducted negotiations with the white city leaders, which ultimately led to the silencing of the radicals.[334] Wade felt the NAACP was not doing enough for the movement after Dahmer's death. Wade was willing to call out these groups and demand that more be done for voter registration efforts.

In Louisiana, CORE teamed up with the Bogalusa Committee for Concern (BCC), which consisted of Bogalusa Civic and Voters League (BCVL) members and employees of the Crown-Zellerbach Company, and they started a boycott to protest segregated "water fountains, bathrooms, and time clocks."[335] The BCC also sought to eliminate separation of races in unions and restrict them to certain low paying jobs.[336] Gayle

[331] Daisy Harris Wade Interview, 21.
[332] Daisy Harris Wade Interview, 33.
[333] Patricia Michelle Boyett, *Right to Revolt the Crusade for Racial Justice in Mississippi's Central Piney Woods* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2015) 485.
[334] Boyett, 485.
[335] Frystak, 210.
[336] Frystak, 210.

Jenkins, a domestic worker who was involved in the BCVL and BCC, was born in Poplas Quarters, Louisiana, on February 24th, 1927.[337] Her father was a mill worker who died when she was a baby. Her mother and grandmother were both domestic workers. Her grandmother washed white people's clothes for 50 cents.[338] Her mother made $2.50 a week, and Jenkins worked for a quarter.[339] She later worked at another job making $2.50 a week. Her employer would tell her what she could and could not do.[340] Her employer said, "Now if you see anything, she said (Don't take it, ask me for it, and I give it to you.)"[341] Jenkins agreed and her employer tried to trick her and told her to clean her daughter's bookshelf, but Jenkins saw a nickel and did not want to be accused of stealing, so she did not clean the bookshelf. This same employer told her to clean the bathroom but would not give her a brush and, so she left that job and refused to be treated unfairly again.[342]

Jenkins got involved with both the BCC and BCVL in the 1950s. They helped her to register to vote and they gave her lessons. She later became a secretary of the BCC and BCVL during the summer of 1966. Her duties included helping people vote, boycotting segregated restaurants and stores, and challenging the segregated jobs.[343] Jenkins tried to get a job at Sears after the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, but she was not successful. She also mentioned the NAACP and said that they were not very involved in

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[337] Gayle Jenkins, "Gayle Jenkins Oral History," Other. *Louisiana Digital Library*, Interview by Richard B, Sobal, February 2, 2001. https://louisianadigitallibrary.org/islandora/object/hicks-sobol%3A57, 1.

[338] Gayle Jenkins Interview, 8.

[339] Gayle Jenkins Interview, 12.

[340] Gayle Jenkins Interview, 12.

[341] Gayle Jenkins Interview, 12.

[342] Gayle Jenkins Interview, 13.

[343] Frystak, 211.

the movement in her area. She said, "People talk about NAACP, but I've never seen anything that the NAACP's done. Even in the movement, the NAACP people weren't involved. They talk about NAACP people; I don't know nothing they did."[344] Jenkins went on to explain how in her opinion the NAACP did not help working-class Black people as much as other organizations because of their elitism. Jenkins wanted to help the Black working-class be able to vote and be able to go into segregated areas. Jenkins, her mother, and her grandmother had experienced cruel treatment from whites when they were domestic workers. She used her experiences to fuel her activism in organizations like CORE and the Bogalusa Civic and Voters League to help working-class women and others vote and go to public places without being discriminated against.[345]

By 1966, CORE's tactics of targeting local problems in rural areas were successful in many ways. As 1966 came to a close, Black Louisiana voters increased by 17 percent going from 30 percent to 47 percent.[346] In some parts of Louisiana, as many as 80 to 90 percent of Black residents registered to vote.[347] These numbers were some of the highest amounts of Black voters that Louisiana had ever seen.

Domestic workers not only participated in voter registration efforts by joining organizations but also contributed to the movement by housing activists. Housing activists is an example of infrastructural support. For instance, Ella Baker went to Shreveport, Louisiana, in February 1959 to help with voter registration. During her visit she stayed with Willa Bell Clark who lived alone and was a domestic worker. While

[344] Gayle Jenkins Interview, 29.
[345] Jenkins, 26.
[346] Frystak, 229.
[347] Frystak, 230.

Clark supported Baker's activism, she was afraid of what consequences she would face if her employers discovered that she was housing Baker.[348]

In the end, the Voting Rights Act became law in August 1965, and this ensured African Americans could vote by eliminating literacy tests and poll taxes. After the law was passed, organizations like the NAACP continued to receive complaints of voter discrimination. For instance there were sixty-seven complaints made to the NAACP in Laurel, Mississippi, and Black locals requested that the federal government send in registrars. Less than a week later, they came to assist with registration in Jones County. The registrars registered 325 people.[349] After the Voting Rights Act was passed, Black citizens in Sumter County, Alabama, began voting and winning county office positions. Currently, African Americans in Sumter County hold most political offices in the county and make up most of the population.

Many domestic workers were finally able to register to vote after the act was passed. One such voter was Georgia Clark who was born on May 10, 1923, on the Bob Montgomery Plantation in Holmes County, Mississippi.[350] Her parents were sharecroppers, and she had an eighth-grade education. In the 1940s, she was working as a domestic worker while her husband worked in the logging business. Clark was paid $1.25 a week.[351] In 1963 some boys came to her house and asked if she wanted to register to

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[348] Simpkins, C. O. Telephone interview by Barbara Ransby, August 27, 1997. As cited in Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement : A Radical Democratic Vision, (*The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 226.

[349] Boyett, *Right to Revolt,* 139.

[350] Duncan Arrow, "Oral History with Georgia Clark; 1999." Digital Collections at The University of Southern Mississippi, October 7, 1999, https://digitalcollections.usm.edu/uncategorized/digitalFile_e28cf38b-63bd-4349-96dd-5a6455987329/.

[351] Georgia Clark Interview.

vote. At first, she said no because her father and other community members were afraid of the repercussions of voting. After the Voting Rights Act, she decided to register to vote and encouraged others in her community. Clark became a member of the National Council of Negro Women and helped start an emergency food pantry in town.[352] She ran for election commissioner and won in 1977.[353] Clark is an example of organizational strength because she encouraged other people in her community to vote, helped start a food pantry in her area, and joined the National Council of Negro Women.

In conclusion, domestic workers were not the leaders of voter registration efforts during the Civil Rights Movement. Still, a small portion contributed by joining organizations like the NAACP and CORE and encouraging community members to vote, thus providing organizational strength to the Movement. These bridge leaders knew that they could make changes in their community if they could vote for a candidate who represented their interests. Also, domestic workers who housed, fed, and supported frontline voter registration activists demonstrated infrastructural strength. Domestic workers and other working-class people involved with voter registration efforts may not get the credit they deserve, but they were essential in the fight for voting rights. Unfortunately, domestic workers were not able to make an impact numerically, economically, or symbolically (as they had during the bus boycotts), but their infrastructural and organizational roles were still important.

[352] Georgia Clark Interview.
[353] Georgia Clark Interview.

CHAPTER V – DOMESTIC WORKERS' CONTRIBUTIONS IN HEAD START PROGRAMS IN MISSISSIPPI, LOUISIANA, ALABAMA, AND FLORIDA

Education has served as a central means of social advancement for African Americans since Reconstruction. In the 1960s, domestic workers and others, through their support of Head Start, helped Black children secure better educational opportunities. Head Start came to fruition from President Johnson's War on Poverty; it was given the final approval through the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, and overseen by the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO).[354] Richard "Dick" Boone, a member of the White House Special Projects staff who helped write the Economic Opportunity Act, had wanted to ensure that poor people were heavily involved in OEO work.[355] The act created the Community Action Program that called for "maximum feasible participation" of the poor in the planning and implementation of its initiatives. Head Start was created as a CAP program in Spring 1965.[356] Head Start sought, primarily, to improve the lives of disadvantaged American children (especially Black children) and, secondarily, to provide impoverished community members with well-paying jobs as administrators, teachers, cooks, bus drivers, and maids, without state interference. This chapter sheds light on a portion of domestic workers in the Deep South who used Head Start programs to gain better educational opportunities for their children and as a means to leave domestic work.

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[354] Crystal R. Sanders, *A Chance for Change Head Start and Mississippi's Black Freedom Struggle* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 1.

[355] Polly Greenberg, *The Devil Has Slippery Shoes: A Biased Biography of the Child Development Group of Mississippi (CDGM)*, Reprint (Washington, D.C.: Youth Policy Institute, 1990), iv; Sanders, 41–2.

[356] Sanders, 2.

Essentially, Head Start programs enabled a small percentage of domestic workers to be able to shed the stereotype of the "Mammy" who loved whites from slavery onwards.[357] Instead of using their housework skills to work for white families, such domestic workers now worked for their own families and communities. Head Start centers also relied on other domestic workers, who were not employed at the centers, for their support. It is important to note that Head Start faced threats aside from segregationists and limited funding; there also was internal fighting between Black leaders over who should control local programs. This divide impacted some centers, but in many cases, domestic workers and others could obtain positions at Head Start centers and ultimately improve the quality of life for themselves and their children.

While this chapter focuses on the domestic workers who worked at Head Start centers, it is important to note that these jobs were still few and far between. Most domestic workers continued to labor in white homes. Still, the domestic workers who were a part of Head Start programs made an organizational, infrastructural, and symbolic impact on the program. They helped Head Start organizationally by building parental and community support for the program and by advertising available job positions. They demonstrated infrastructural strength by volunteering in the centers and by offering additional support, including by helping to house Head Start centers at their churches. Finally, they possessed symbolic strength when they built national support for Head Start as the people empowered most by the War on Poverty's philosophy of "maximum feasible participation" of the poor.

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[357] Micki McElya, *Clinging to Mammy: The Faithful Slave in Twentieth-Century America* (Harvard University Press, 2007), 4.

Head Start began as a summer program in 1965 but became permanent the following fall.[358] A total of 561,359 children were enrolled in 11,068 centers during that first summer.[359] The OEO financed 90 percent of Head Start programs' needs; 10 percent had to be covered by local communities either through cash, location, equipment, or other contributions.[360] The total cost was of the program was $84 million, or $150 for each student.[361] Head Start targeted four-to-five-year-olds because that seemed to be the earliest age where students could retain information.[362] Lesson plans included manners and vocabulary, students were checked for disabilities, illness, and malnourishment.[363] The students also received one meal daily, and, in some cases, that would be their only balanced meal that day. For instance, in Kemper County, Mississippi, "a survey of sixty-three Mississippi Head Start families showed that 75 percent of them did not have a sufficient amount or variety of foods in their households."[364] Head Start centers attempted to tackle hunger by providing not only meals to children but also livable salaries for workers.

Domestic workers employed at Head Start centers drew upon expertise from their previous jobs. Sometimes they had primary responsibility over classrooms. In the Child

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[358] Sanders, 2.

[359] Ura Jean Oyemade Bailey and Valora Washington, *Project Head Start: Models and Strategies for the Twenty-First Century* (Garland Publishing Inc. New York and London, 1995), 24.

[360] Rebecca Tuuri, *Strategic Sisterhood: The National Council of Negro Women in the Black Freedom Struggle* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018) 85.

[361] Tuuri, 86.

[362] Oyemade, 38.

[363] Edward Zigler and Jeanette Valentine, *Project Head Start A Legacy of the War on Poverty* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1979) 73.

[364] "Teacher Development and Program for Children," pp. 18-19, box 3, folder 1, JMR; Studies of Economic and Nutritional Factors, 5 October 1967, box 1, folder; 9 ML; John Dittmer, *Local People,* As Cited in Sanders, 64.

Development Group of Mississippi (CDGM), the largest Head Start program in the state in 1965, teachers were called "teacher trainees" during the first summer, even though they managed the classrooms and taught students. Sanders writes, "According to CDGM policy, [trainees] did not need 'COLLEGE DEGREES OR TEACHER'S CERTIFICATES' (caps in the original document), but simply needed to read on an eighth-grade level, have lots of energy, and enjoy 'The noise young children make when they play.'"[365] Most domestic workers had such qualifications.

Former domestic workers also drew upon their caregiving expertise. Crystal Sanders points to the example of domestic worker Ardella Jordan, who now worked for CDGM. Though Jordan had not even attended high school, she was working as a teacher. The *New York Times* featured Jordan but focused on a typo in one of her lessons. A second newspaper, located in Memphis, the *Commercial Appeal,* pointed out the grammatical mistakes in content created by the children in the CDGM centers. As Sanders points out, the newspapers "failed to realize that CDGM valued content over grammar."[366]

Other domestic workers served as cooks and maids for Head Start centers. Some even took Head Start jobs after losing their jobs when their family members became activists. One such woman was Susie Morgan who had lost her job after her children were protesting a few years before Head Start began.[367] Another CDGM cook, Roxie Meredith, had been fired when her son famously enrolled at the University of

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[365]"Position Description: Resource Teacher," box 2, folder 17, ML. As cited in Sanders, 50.

[366] Gene Roberts, "Antipoverty Aid Stirs Ire In South," *New York Times*, 7 March 1966, 16. As cited in Sanders, 108.

[367] Sanders, 93.

Mississippi.[368] At CDGM, cooks and janitors were paid twenty-five dollars per week, which was much higher than their previous salary.[369]

Head Start was a new opportunity for Black education and labor in the Deep South because most states had no public kindergartens, and well-paying jobs for non-educated Blacks citizens were hard to find. Though some civil rights activists encouraged locals to reject the federally sponsored program, Local Black Mississippians decided to support it. Activists were angered by the national Democratic Party's unwillingness to seat MFDP delegates at the 1964 Democratic National Convention. However, the Head Start project, under federal Democratic leadership, gave optimism to many local NAACP and SNCC leaders such as Amzie Moore, Winson Hudson, and Victoria Jackson Gray.[370] Black women in particular were crucial to CDGM; they outnumbered men even though men were the ones in top positions.[371] Women comprised at least 90 percent of the 1,100 employees who worked for the CDGM. Within Head Start programs, domestic workers provided organizational strength as they took on a variety of roles from administrators, teachers, to support staff.[372] They also boosted support from their local community.

Aside from feeding and caring for children, the main focus of Head Start programs was to provide an opportunity for Black children to receive high-quality preschool educations that they had not received previously. As mentioned before, domestic workers could teach in some Head Start programs. Ideally, there would be one

[368] Sanders, 4.
[369] "How to Recruit the Center Staff," undated, CDGM; "CDGM Fact Sheet," undated, CDGM; Polly Greenberd to Center Chairmen,12 October 1965, CDGM. As cited in Sanders, 50.
[370] Sanders, 3.
[371] Sanders, 4.
[372] Sanders, 76.

teacher and two aides for a group of fifteen students, and one or both of those aides would be volunteers.[373] A domestic worker who became a teacher for Holmes County's Head Start program was Hattie Bell Saffold, who had been involved in voter registration efforts, as previously mentioned. Before getting her teaching position, she had a variety of jobs such as a driver who brought cotton workers to the field, a weigher and recorder of cotton, and a maid. Saffold made less money being a maid than in her other occupations because she made $3 dollars a day for that and made $5 a day for weighing cotton and an extra 50 cents a person she took to the field.[374] At the end of spring in 1965, she established six Head Start centers. She was able to advance her education through weekly training, and she took a course at the University of Southern Mississippi. Her salary from Head Start helped her put her daughter through college. So, Saffold was able to use her role at Head Start to advance the education of her daughter, herself, and the children in her community. Her efforts to establish and support six Head Start centers demonstrates her organizational strength.

Another domestic worker who worked with Head Start in Mississippi was Gaynett Flowers, a teaching supervisor on the Gulf Coast. Flowers stated that if the CDGM program ended, she would never return to domestic work. She said, "I would probably try to set up a garment and sewing shop. I wouldn't be satisfied with anything

[373]Zigler and Valentine, 74.

[374] Childhood Development Group of Mississippi, Child Development Group of MS Booklet, Mrs. Hattie Bell Saffold Biography, p. 13, Henry and Sue Lorenzi-Sojourner Civil Rights Movement Collection, M502, Series 3, Subject 1, box 21, folder 6, McCain Library and Archives, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, MS. See also Sanders, 86–87.

less than that."[375] Flowers was born in 1916 in Grove Hill, Alabama, where she only had an eleventh grade education.[376] Flowers did not have the money to advance her education so she got a job at a garment shop and as a maid for a white family in North Gulfport before getting a job at CDGM.[377] Flowers's stepmother and first husband beat her, and her experiences impacted how she thought children should be disciplined. She was happy to find out that the teachers at CDGM did not punish through cruelty and fear.

> The first few months in area teaching guide workshop, we just talked about how we felt about children, which were good and bad teachers, whether we should teach through cruelty—I thought these were exactly the things I had always felt strongly about, more importantly than anything else you can talk about having to do with teaching. I felt that now I could put into practice all I feel so strongly about people being kind and fair to each other.[378]

Head Start taught teachers to avoid physical discipline and instead use positive reinforcement so students would feel encouraged to speak up and ask questions. Positive reinforcement also helped build Head Start students' confidence. After getting a teaching job, Flowers became a secretary for the Gulfport district of the NAACP.[379] Head Start also allowed her to send her four children to college. Hattie Bell Safford's and Gaynett Flowers's work for Head Start illustrates the role domestic workers played in community education. Gaynett Flowers's teaching methods highlighted a goal for Head Start, which was for students to be "self-reliant, have high self-esteem, and self-confident."[380] This

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[372] Childhood Development Group of Mississippi, Mrs. Gaynette Flowers Biography, Henry and Sue Lorenzi-Sojourner Civil Rights Movement Collection, M502, Series 3, Subject 1, box 21, folder 6, 9.

[376] Flowers Biography.

[377] Flowers, Biography.

[378] Greenberg, 381.

[379] Flowers.

[380] Zigler and Valentine, 75.

would benefit students beyond an academic standpoint. Both her ability to inspire students to believe in themselves and her work with the Gulfport NAACP demonstrates her organizational strength.

Additionally, students were taught how to stand up to injustice.[381] Black women supported Head Start because this was a way for their children to earn an education that did not neglect Black history or insult African Americans by using textbooks with derogatory imagery or stereotypes.[382] CDGM and other Deep South Head Start programs also fought to eliminate the Jim Crow etiquette such as referring only to whites as "sir" and "ma'am"[383] This language was forced onto the Black population to reinforce racial hierarchy. According to historian Adam Fairclough, "Being civil to Blacks as one might to whites subverted segregation, because the caste system demanded an etiquette that made explicit, in all social interaction, the superiority of the white and the inferiority of Black."[384] Black children learned these lessons at a young age. Historian Emilye Crosby references former teacher and Claiborne politician Julia Jones who said that by age twelve, Black children had to use courtesy titles for white friends, but not vice versa.[385] Head Start programs wanted to educate children to use courtesy for both Black and white people. For domestic workers, who worked in close proximity with white employers, changes to the hierarchical etiquette were especially revolutionary.

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[381] Sanders, 4.
[382] Sanders, 5.
[383] Sanders, 6.
[384] Adam Fairclough, *Race and Democracy*, 41, and Emilye Crosby, A Little Taste of Freedom: The Black Freedom Struggle in Claiborne County, Mississippi (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005) 10.
[385] Nathaniel Jones 1992 interview; Julia Jones 1992 interview; Marjorie Brandon 1992 interview, As cited in Crosby 14.

Another component that Head Start emphasized was the importance of parental involvement. Parents were able to be involved on a "nonprofessional basis, as either aides to teachers, nurses, and social workers, or as cooks, clerks, storytellers, or supervisors of recreational activities."[386] Parents sometimes would do these jobs as volunteers, but often they would work at a Head Start location. One CDGM worker explained her feelings as follows:

> When they [whites] gave us the Headstart program they thought it would be a real quiet-like thing. But we have some real good people teaching our children, and they give us food for them, and a woman like me, they've given me a job, not sweeping after Mrs. Charley for five dollars per week and maybe a donut I'd get to share with the dog and the coffee that otherwise would be spilled out, but a real job and one that pays me good to do what's important for me and my family. I never believed that there were jobs like that, where you could get paid a good salary, to spend your time helping your own children and your people's children instead of the white man's kids. They call me an aide and pay me, but I'll tell you I'd do it for nothing the way I feel.[387]

Head Start allowed this woman to provide her children an education and provided a job and higher status. Though this woman was paid, others offered infrastructural support through volunteering for the center.

While working for Head Start, women were able to secure educations for themselves as well. Frankie King was an example of a parent who dedicated much time to the Lee County, Alabama, Head Start program and benefitted from the opportunity. She started as a volunteer and eventually worked for the center. She started with an eighth grade education before getting involved with Head Start, much to her father's

[386] Zigler and Valentine, 75.

[387] James L. Sundquist and Corinne S. Schelling, *On Fighting Poverty* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1969) 113. As cited in Sanders, 90.

dismay. She said, “I was dumb as grits when I got married, and my father told my husband that my idea of cleaning was shoving stuff under the bed.”[388] She went on to work as a domestic worker, where she cleaned other people’s homes from 8 a.m. until her children came home from school. In the fall of 1965, she started working for Head Start as a clerk-typist although she “couldn’t type a lick.”[389]

At the same time as she worked at Head Start, King went back to school to get her GED certificate.[390] She went on to get a master’s at Alabama A&M. She then became a human services coordinator for the Alabama Council on Human Relations, a private, non-profit agency that runs two Head Start Centers that have 350 children enrolled.[391] King and her husband also encouraged their children to get an education, and all six of them completed college, with one son running a Head Start center in Baltimore.[392] Head Start allowed King to leave her job as a maid and fulfill her and her father’s wish of continuing her education. Because of her dedication to the Head Start program, she was able to give her children opportunities to receive college educations as well. King’s example demonstrates activist organizational strength as she ran two Head Start centers and passed that knowledge on to her son. She also had organizational strength because of her involvement in Alabama Council on Human Relations.

Domestic workers also sometimes worked as maids and cooks in the Head Start Centers. According to the *Tallahassee Democrat*, the Leon County Florida Head Start

[388] Kay Mills, “Head Start: Helping Alabama's Poor Survive,” 1996, *APF*, accessed April 5, 2022, https://aliciapatterson.org/stories/head-start-helping-alabamas-poor-survive.
[389] Mills, “Head Start: Helping Alabama's Poor Survive.”
[390] Mills, “Head Start: Helping Alabama's Poor Survive.”
[391] Mills, “Head Start: Helping Alabama's Poor Survive.”
[392] Mills, “Head Start: Helping Alabama's Poor Survive.”

Program enrolled "600 children" with more than "$91,000 would be furnished by the government."[393] In addition to a director and teachers, the program needed minor posts including "a clerk, 11 cooks, 15 helpers, 17 bus drivers, 11 custodians, 15 maids, and 5 volunteers."[394] Leon County's Head Start program shows how domestic workers were able to keep their jobs as caretakers without having to work in a white person's home, and it shows that domestic workers' skills were viewed as important enough to utilize.

Finally, some domestic workers did not work at the centers as teachers, cooks, aids, clerks, or maids, but could still offer their assistance in other ways. Minnie Ripley of Vicksburg had been raised by formerly enslaved grandparents. Though she briefly attended the Piney Woods School, she left school when she was nineteen.[395] She worked as a domestic worker for white families just like her grandmother did before her. Ripley reflected on her early interactions with whites she met when coming to work with her grandmother. She said, "I could play with the children's things, their little play things, I ate meals over there; naturally I didn't eat at the table with them."[396] Ripley had an excellent reputation in her community for being one of the first African Americans in Issaquena County, Mississippi, to try to register to vote in 1964; she passed the registration exam a year later.[397] She became involved with Head Start when "a young lady asked me would I help them get it started. And we didn't have no place but the

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[393] Mike Petit, "Program OK Due for 600 Children: Pre-School Age Assistance Here," *Tallahassee Democrat*, May 12, 1965, p. 13, https://www.newspapers.com/image/244164724/?terms=Head%20Start&match=1.

[394] Petit, "Program OK Due for 600 Children," 2-3.

[395] Minnie Ripley, interview with R. Wayne Pyle, 7 November 1979, transcript, 8, Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage, McCain Library and Archives, University of Southern Mississippi, and Sanders, 74.

[396] Ripley Interview and Sanders, 76.

[397] Ripley Interview and Sanders, 76.

church house at the time."[398] There was a meeting at the church to decide if the building could be used as a Head Start center. Many members disapproved, stating, "The church isn't a schoolhouse no more."[399] Ripley made a convincing case for why the church should be used as a Head Start center. The church did become the Head Start center and added to the infrastructural strength behind Head Start. She inspired her community so much that she was selected to be the chairperson of the Mayersville CDGM center, where she was in charge of hiring employees and running the center this shows her organizational strength. Ripley's story shows that domestic workers were not only helpful as teachers, cooks, aides, clerks, and maids but as administrators too. Her organizational strength allowed her to build support to start a Head Start center in her town. Her efforts also illuminate the infrastructural power that domestic workers created when they helped open up their churches (and other local institutions) to Head Start activities.

Most white segregationists opposed Head Start. Segregationists tried to hurt the program in various ways, such as physically, financially, and by smearing the program's reputation. Physical reprisals occurred less frequently than other types of retribution, but they happened occasionally. Head Start staff had to be prepared for anything. For instance, staff in the Washington County CDGM centers held classes under pecan trees after Klansmen burned down one of their centers.[400]

There were staff members who faced violence toward their homes for being members of Head Start. Former domestic worker Hattie Bell Saffold's house was shot multiple times in the first summer that she worked for Head Start; the Second Pilgrim's

[398] Ripley Interview and Sanders, 76.
[399] Ripley Interview and Sanders, 76.
[400] Jim Dann's Valewood Report, TL, As cited in Sanders, 60.

Rest Center where she worked was almost set afire by an arsonist.[401] Saffold later recalled how this violence impacted her children and how she used armed self-defense to stop it. She later recalled the violence to a CDGM colleague,

> You remember when I came home from one of your teaching workshops and we couldn't find our children? We couldn't find them anywhere. Finally, they came scrambling out from under the beds. We had trained them, "If anybody comes by shooting when we're away, drop to the floor, stay low, stay away from the windows and doors." The way we gradually got all this shooting stopped was standing up for our rights and not being afraid. And we'd shoot right back. I myself don't do much aiming, but I can shoot pretty good.[402]

CDGM workers had to be prepared to defend themselves if need be. Saffold was determined to do that, and she trained her children and the children at CDGM centers to be prepared for danger.

In order to rival CDGM, several white and Black moderates created a less radical Head Start program.[403] This rival group was known as Mississippi Action for Progress (MAP). On its board was Leroy Percy, a wealthy white Delta planter; Owen Cooper, a white Yazoo City industrialist, and Aaron Henry, a Black pharmacist and statewide leader of the NAACP. MAP leaders believed that organizations like CDGM, which uplifted the poorest Black Mississippians to positions of power, were hurting African Americans' opportunities for significant change because their demands were too extreme. The OEO pulled funding from CDGM because they believed that centers were mismanaging funds and because of political pressure from powerful white politicians.[404]

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[401] Saffold Biography, p. 13.

[402] Saffold Biography, As quoted in Greenberg, *The Devil Has Slippery Shoes*, 733.

[403] Childhood Development Group of Mississippi, As cited in Greenberg, *The Devil Has Slippery Shoes*, 733.

[404] Dittmer, 370–78.

The OEO then invested money into MAP instead.[405] Several Mississippi movement leaders, however, opposed MAP and the OEO's ultimate decision to defund CDGM. One leader who opposed MAP was Fannie Lou Hamer who said, "we aren't ready to be sold out by a few middle-class bourgeoisie and some Uncle Toms who couldn't care less."[406] Centers were forced to operate with volunteers if needed. MAP had no women or poor people on its board, and most leaders were white. CDGM had embraced the concept of "maximum feasible participation," but this had been too much for the white power structure and even some Black moderates.[407]

Domestic workers played a major role in Louisiana's Head Start programs as well, but there was tension between working-, middle-, and upper-class Black community members. Historian Greta de Jong points to East Feliciana Parish, Louisiana, where many locals argued that the jobs should go to "people who ain't got no jobs," not highly-educated professionals.[408] The locals with this mindset supported the idea for domestic workers to be able to have job opportunities in their Head Start facilities despite not having a formal education. Domestic workers likely endorsed this idea because of the promise of a pay increase, fewer hours of work, and most importantly, the opportunity to aid in the education of their own children rather than their white employers' children.

However, at a meeting attended by many parish representatives, some members argued that educators needed to have some higher education. Bernice Noflin, a resident of West Feliciana Parish, opposed this sentiment because it sidelined the poor, saying, "in

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[405] Sanders, 152.
[406] As quoted in Dittmer, 378
[407] Dittmer, 370.
[408] Greta de Jong, *A Different Day: African American Struggles for Justice in Rural Louisiana, 1900-1970* (United States, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 201.

poor parishes, you don't find many people running around with college degrees."[409] Noflin's sentiment reflected the ideal of "maximum feasible participation" and that the best people to run antipoverty programs were the poor. De Jong continues to highlight such sentiment when she points to a 1966 St. Landry Parish homemakers' Club that wrote to the OEO, "Our club is not very big because most of the people who really need to learn and get help do not come to our meetings. Most poor people have to work too hard and have too many children to come to our meetings." They then pointed out that they were trying to listen to those people's voices: "Most people don't have time to listen to small people, but we will take the time and learn by what we hear." Finally, they wrote,

> We want to help poor people learn to stick together to fight for the things they really want. This is the only way we will change things for poor people. This is what we think community action is all about… We feel that the real purpose for the Anti-poverty program was to HELP THE POOR TO HELP THEMSELVES [sic] and our own proposal was written by concerned poor people in our community through employing other poor people to bring this assistance to them.[410]

Giving the poor federal money to help themselves was a concept that made segregationists fearful because they did not want poor people to take charge in programs like Head Start. Such control would mean that Black locals would challenge their inferior economic, social, and racial position. Some Black elites were also hesitant in allowing uneducated people to become teachers because they wanted to make sure well-educated teachers and administrators were teaching their children.

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[409] As quoted in De Jong, 201.

[410] Notre Nouveau Jour A Commence Inc., "Rual Community Visitors Proposal," n.d [1966], 1,4,8-9, file 6, box 1, JZP. As cited in De Jong, 202.

Much like with the creation of the Mississippi Action for Progress (MAP) program, East Feliciana Parish's white leaders organized a group to create a Community Action Program (CAP) that had twenty-five whites and five Blacks who were "bankers, education leaders, political leaders, and businessmen."[411]The organizers wanted to increase development in the parish. Some of these members oppressed activists, and some Black leaders, like extension agent Prince Lewis and school principal W.W. Wilson, "had all distanced themselves from civil rights activity."[412] The CAP agency applied and received an OEO grant that was $40,000 to create a Head Start program in the parish. The CAP agency appointed W.W. Wilson director. As director, he hired the "certified" teachers, aides, secretaries, cafeteria workers, and bus drivers. Little advertising was done and as De Jong writes, "no African Americans who had been active in the civil rights movement were hired."[413] This meant that civil rights activists were not hired for MAP or CAP programs that were controlled by the white power structure. Black domestic workers had fewer opportunities to take on Head Start positions after these more moderate groups took over. Though the federal government tried to ensure that local CAP boards were representative, there still were many other cases of whites controlling federal money for Head Start from 1966 onwards. Another example that de Jong points to was the Head Start program in St. Mary Parish:

> In 1966, the OEO rejected an application from a conservative, segregationist, and white-dominated CAP in St. Mary Parish and granted funding to operate Head Start programs in the region to SCC [Southern Consumers' Cooperative] instead. The white people responded by persuading Governor John McKeithen to exercise his right to veto the

[411] De Jong, 202
[412] De Jong, 203
[413] De Jong, 203–204.

> project and putting pressure on administrators at the OEO's regional office in Austin, Texas, to support their own grant proposal.[414]

Tension especially revolved around people who were perceived to be civil rights agitators. In Rapides Parish, the Black members who were a part of an organization called Total Community Action successfully created a Head Start program for a year.[415] However, members were torn between hiring Civil Rights activists or avoid having them in the centers. Local activist Louis Berry said, this disagreement caused some employees to leave and start their own centers where they felt free to participate in activism. This division of activists left some centers like TCA weak because of the lack of employees they had to run the centers. In the end Berry's group joined CAP.[416] Berry had to listen to the control of a white CAP because having some financial assistance for his community was better than nothing. Debates continued over the role that working-class parents like domestic workers should have on their children in Head Start and what jobs should be offered.

In conclusion, Head Start was an opportunity for children to receive a high-quality preschool education and for their family members to gain employment. Domestic workers' involved had a solid connection to Head Start by sending their children and employees working for the program—as cooks, aides, teachers, clerks, volunteers, and even maids—instead of working inside white people's homes. Head Start taught students and employees to avoid physically disciplining students and eliminated the racial imbalance of using courtesy titles only when addressing whites. This helped build

[414] As cited in De Jong, 204.
[415] De Jong, 204.
[416] De Jong, 204.

students' and employees' confidence. The creation and continuation of Head Start relied on "maximum feasible participation," where all local people, especially the poor, got to be a part of the organization designed to improve their lives. There were multiple threats to Head Start, such as the danger of white segregationists harming the centers and staff, and from rival moderate organizations like MAP that worked to undermine the most grassroots-led Head Start programs. Despite these obstacles, local people, like domestic workers, were able to make a difference to their children, community, and selves through their organizational skills, infrastructural strength, and symbolic power by working at Head Start Centers.

CHAPTER VI – CONCLUSION

Black domestic workers have fought against racial oppression in many different ways in the South in the mid-twentieth century. The first place they fought discrimination was inside their employers' homes, with methods such as pan toting, slowing down work speeds, or telling other domestic workers to avoid working for certain employers.[417] There have been attempts over the years to improve the conditions of domestic workers, such as getting employers to see their employees as professionals and not just as a member of the family who can be exploited. Mary McClendon was a domestic worker who established the Household Workers Organization (HWO) to help workers get a guaranteed minimum wage, and breaks.[418] She also offered classes for domestic workers to improve their skills and provided classes to employers who wanted to improve their relationship with their employees. These efforts are examples of how domestic workers took steps to improve domestic work itself or stand up to their employers.

Going beyond activism inside the home of the employer, the Baton Rouge Bus Boycott, Montgomery Bus Boycott, and Tallahassee Bus Boycott were instances where domestic workers refused to ride buses, where they had been regularly harassed or forced to move to the back of the bus to accommodate whites. Domestic workers' participation in these boycotts caused many of them to lose their jobs or be forced to find other transportation methods, including walking, to their jobs. However, despite the abuse and

[417] Robin D.G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working-class*, (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1996), 19.

[418] Premilla Nadasen, *Household Workers Unite: the Untold Story of African American Women Who Built a Movement*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2015), 99.

inconveniences they faced, they still participated in the boycotts because they knew that this was an area where they could make a difference. Some women even were willing to retaliate violently, such as Willie Mae Wallace and Irene Stovall, who were tired of giving in to whites' demands. One domestic worker in communication with leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr. was Georgia Gilmore, who started the Club From Nowhere, an organization of domestic workers in Montgomery who wanted to help with the bus boycott but wished to remain anonymous to avoid being fired.[419] The Club from Nowhere sold food and used the money to pay for transportation for people instead of the bus. The domestic workers involved in these bus boycotts provided symbolic, numerical, economic, organizational, and infrastructural strength because they were the ones riding the buses, motivating others to join the boycotts, and inspiring national leaders and churches to take up their cause.

After the bus boycotts, domestic workers continued to be active in Civil Rights efforts. In the Deep South (specifically in Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, and Florida) domestic workers had a significant impact on voter registration efforts. Leesco Guster was involved in voter registrations, protests, and store boycotts. Guster helped people register to vote with the assistance of activist Rudy Shields through work with the NAACP.[420] Rosa B. Williams encouraged her community to vote in Gainesville, Florida, and she also was a member of the NAACP.[421] Gayle Jenkins, from Bogalusa, Louisiana,

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[419] Nadasen, 28.

[420] Leesco Guster Interview, 10.

[421] Rosa B. Williams, "Interview with Rosa B. Williams," 1983-01-23. Other. (*University of Florida Digital Collection*. Samuel Proctor Oral History Program), 3. Interview by Joel Buchanan, January 23, 1983. http://ufdc.ufledu/UF00005394/00001.

was a part of CORE and got people in her community to vote when elite organizations failed to do so.[422] Within the fight for voting rights efforts, domestic workers possessed organizational and infrastructural strength as they encouraged their peers to vote, especially within the NAACP and CORE. Some of these domestic workers would go on to have leadership positions in these organizations. They also provided infrastructural assistance to frontline voting rights activists by letting the activists stay in their (domestic workers') homes.

Finally, domestic workers were the backbone of many Head Start programs. Mississippians Hattie Bell Saffold and Gaynett Flowers helped children in their communities receive educational opportunities hoping that their children and the community would not have to work in white people's homes. Safford and Flowers were domestic workers who found employment as teachers at the Child Development Group of Mississippi (CDGM), Mississippi's earliest and most inclusive Head Start program.[423] In Lee County, Alabama, Frankie King was a volunteer who became a teacher, and she would eventually open up centers of her own.[424] Safford, Flowers, King, and other domestic workers demonstrated organizational power. Domestic workers also volunteered countless hours as community members to helping to support Head Start programs. Finally, they became symbolic of the people whom the War on Poverty, with

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[422] Gayle Jenkins, "Gayle Jenkins Oral History," Other. *Louisiana Digital Library*, Interview by Richard B, Sobal, February 2, 2001. https://louisianadigitallibrary.org/islandora/object/hicks-sobol%3A57,

[423] Childhood Development Group of Mississippi, Booklet Child Development Group of MS, Mrs. Gaynette Flowers, Biography, Henry and Sue Lorenzi-Sojourner Civil Rights Movement Collection, M502, Series 3, Subject 1, box 21, folder 6, 9.

[424] "Head Start: Helping Alabama's Poor Survive," APF, accessed April 5, 2022, https://aliciapatterson.org/stories/head-start-helping-alabamas-poor-survive.

its philosophy of “maximum feasible participation,” helped most. Overall, the domestic workers who were a part of Head Start programs made an organizational, infrastructural, and symbolic impact. In conclusion, domestic workers have been fighting against oppression inside and outside of their employer's homes for centuries. Domestic workers have fought for professional treatment from their employers, and it is a fight that still carries on today. Domestic workers were activists in the Baton Rouge, Montgomery, and Tallahassee Bus Boycotts; Voter registration efforts; and Head Start Programs. These women gathered up members of their communities and either boycotted buses, spread the word about voting, donated money to food drives for funding activist's efforts, or worked at Head Start centers. Their actions as activists have proved that domestic workers were not simply victims of their circumstances but often activists trying to improve their lives and the lives of others.

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