Introduction

*Dayo F. Gore, Jeanne Theoharis, and Komozi Woodard*

The day has ended when white trade union leaders or white leaders in any organization may presume to tell Blacks on what basis they shall come together to fight for their rights. . . . Three hundred years has been enough of that. We Black people in America ask for your cooperation—but we do not ask for your permission.

Vicki Garvin, written for National Negro Labor Council, 1951

I had decided I would not go anywhere with a piece of paper in my hand asking white folks for any favors.

*Rosa Parks, My Story, 1992*

Legend has it that when the notoriously charismatic Representative Adam Clayton Powell Jr. from Harlem heard that fellow organizer Vicki Garvin had joined the Communist Party, he went to the Party’s Harlem leadership to plead for Garvin’s return: “*Can’t we share her?*” Garvin—a master strategist whose political career spanned more than a half century of leadership—seized the political stage in the 1930s working alongside Powell in the pioneering Harlem Boycott Movement. Vicki Garvin’s epic trajectory in the black freedom struggle reveals the distinct but hidden contours of the black radical tradition. Her activism took her from public school in working-class Harlem to the elite all-women’s Smith College; on to work as a vice president with the United Office and Professional Workers of America helping to build CIO unionism; and then to
membership in the Communist Party USA and leadership of the National Negro Labor Council during the 1950s. In the 1960s, Garvin embraced an expatriate’s life as a Third World internationalist in Nkrumah’s Ghana and Mao’s China, and then returned to the United States in 1970, where she mentored a group of activists in the African Liberation Support Committee and the National Black United Front.

In Harlem, Ghana, and Egypt, Malcolm X sought her revolutionary guidance; W. E. B. Du Bois, Paul Robeson, Robert F. Williams, Maya Angelou, and Communist Party USA leader Claudia Jones also looked to her political acumen and cherished her camaraderie. In fact, in describing African American politics in Ghana, expatriate Leslie Lacy proclaimed, “Want to start a revolution? See Vicki Garvin and Alice Windom.” Yet, this sentiment—that a black woman would be a commanding presence, indeed the “go-to” person, for revolution—sits at odds with popular perceptions of the black freedom struggle. In most studies of the period the impact of radical women’s leadership has been neglected. While it is now commonly understood that Malcolm X inspired a broad community of radicals, the circle of women who inspired and mentored him—and countless others—are much less known. Moreover, in standard understandings of the struggle, there is no place to imagine a black revolutionary like Garvin and “the mother of the civil rights movement” Rosa Parks joined in common struggle. However, in June 1956, Parks wrote a letter of thanks to Garvin’s revolutionary colleagues in the National Negro Labor Council, evoking the need for struggle over empty sentiments: “It awakens within our mind the fact that there are people of good will in America who are deeply concerned about justice and freedom for all people, and who are willing to make the noble precepts of Democracy living facts lifted out of the dusty files of unimplemented and forgotten court decisions.”

Although a new generation of scholars has greatly expanded our knowledge of black radicalism and the black freedom struggle, they have left largely intact a “leading man” master narrative that misses crucial dimensions of the postwar freedom struggle and minimizes the contributions of women. These narratives have centered men and located women at the margins of great social change—visible at times in the mass demonstrations but obscured in the ranks of revolutionaries and radical theoreticians. Such histories have neglected crucial dimensions of the postwar black radical tradition that held black women’s self-emancipation as pivotal to black liberation.
Most of the women examined in this book were not obscure figures of their day. In fact, many were nationally known activists. Rethinking the historiography of the Black Revolt requires interrogating a narrative of black radicalism that casts these radical women in supporting roles. This volume furthers that critical task, telling the stories of veteran leaders such as Vicki Garvin and Rosa Parks, as well as writer Toni Cade Bambara, 1972 presidential candidate Shirley Chisholm, feminist lawyer Flo Kennedy, welfare rights leader Johnnie Tillmon, and political prisoner Assata Shakur—among others—to introduce new dimensions to the concept of radical black politics.

Highlighting these women’s radical politics makes visible their convergence at the center of the Black Revolt. For example, as Black Panthers Elaine Brown, Bobby Seale, and Ericka Huggins campaigned for local political office in March 1972, some 16,000 people gathered at a rally in Oakland, California, to hear Tillmon and Chisholm support the grassroots politics and voter registration efforts of the Black Panther Party. For other women detailed in this anthology, their radicalism was hidden in plain sight. The cover photo of this book, taken by photographer Leroy Henderson, depicts Rosa Parks at the Gary Convention gazing at a poster of Malcolm X, whom she had long admired. Henderson photographed numerous demonstrations and Black caucuses in the 1960s and 1970s. “Like the time I was at the Black Political Convention in Gary Indiana. . . . [S]tanding at this poster table was a lady nobody even seemed to know who she was. . . . I knew it was Rosa Parks.” Pulling together the stories of Parks, Garvin, Bambara, Chisholm, Tillmon, and Shakur in one collection uncovers an obscured history of postwar radicalism. Their experiences reveal major contours of black radicalism that have been impossible to see because the political commitments, radical alliances, and expansive vision of these women have rarely been given center stage.

Just as the work of these radical women in the political arena changed the complexion of black political culture, the examination of women’s activism in this volume will reorient studies of black radicalism by expanding its boundaries beyond self-defense and separatism and by articulating its roots in labor, civil rights, and early autonomous black feminist politics that came to flower in the postwar era. Often defined in vastly different terms, these women seem to represent separate, mutually-exclusive political movements. Yet bringing their work together presents a powerful demonstration not only of their individual achievements but
also of the collective force of black women activists as strategic thinkers, leaders, and architects of postwar radicalism.

**Key Interventions of Our Book**

In delving behind each of these women’s symbolic representations, significant commonalities emerge in their politics and visions for liberation. These are personal stories of self-transformation in the “white heat” of the struggle for social, economic, and political change. Each woman proved a long-distance runner and embraced a range of strategies. Each woman traversed a host of movements and invested in innovative coalition building; and each woman articulated an intersectional analysis that made connections between multiple movements for social justice: black freedom, women’s equality, anticolonialism, and the redistribution of wealth. Taken together, they show the day-to-day work necessary to sustain a radical movement, women’s intellectual contributions to the advancement of the struggle, and the broad vision of black liberation that was forged in the postwar era.

This volume reframes women in black radicalism by consciously not categorizing these women within one movement (whether the Left, Black Power, “second-wave” feminism, or Third World liberation movements) but tracing their work across many spaces. Bringing them together in one collection challenges the framework that has long presented the radical activism of the 1960s and 1970s in separate and distinct movements. Therefore, while it is clearly viable to organize these women’s contributions based upon their affiliation with the civil rights, Black Power, “second-wave” feminism, and U.S. communist movements, such a framework obscures the full breadth of their contributions to black radicalism. Rosa Parks’s iconic status within the civil rights movement overshadows her lifelong radical commitments; Johnnie Tillmon’s interventions in Black Power politics are often lost when viewed through the lens of welfare rights activism; and national radicals such as Florynce Kennedy and Vicki Garvin drop out altogether as their varied political affiliations resist neat categorization. In highlighting Rosa Parks’s brand of Black Power politics, Vicki Garvin’s journey from the Old Left to black liberation and Third World solidarity, and Denise Oliver’s radical roots and feminist politics in the Young Lord’s Party, this anthology intentionally resists marking these women as activists defined exclusively within any
singular movement and makes visible the ways these black women radicals redefined movement politics.\textsuperscript{8}

Thus, the essays in this book present three key interventions into contemporary understandings of postwar black radicalism. First, they expand the boundaries of black radicalism. In the postwar period, electoral politics, antipoverty activism, and trade union organizing, as well as mobilizing against Congress, setting up independent black schools, and creating art that asserted an intersectional notion of beauty, power, and self, all constituted the work of radical social transformation. These essays begin to tell that expansive story of black radicalism whose roots in labor, civil rights, and community organizing in the 1930s came to flower in the postwar era.

Second, these chapters examine women’s work in the movement and, in doing so, the labor of radical politics. This anthology takes as its starting point the twin assertions that women organized in the national and international arena as well as leading on the local level, and that women shaped the radicalism that developed in the postwar period by working as key strategists, theorists, and activists. Expanding beyond the “men led but women organized” paradigm of women’s leadership, these essays demonstrate how women’s leadership took many forms in the black freedom struggle and detail the work it took to sustain a radical vision and political engagement over the long haul.\textsuperscript{9} Challenging the limits of the “bridge leader” framework for understanding the breadth of black women’s roles in the movement, these essays show the diversity of black women’s experiences, roles, and philosophies.\textsuperscript{10} Some women assumed the position of charismatic leader; others stood philosophically opposed to such models for movement building and helped instead to build democratic organizing structures; still others had to create new structures and political movements free from racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia to nourish their visions of liberation. They show us the ways activists reemerged after the devastation of anticommunism, forged ties internationally, mentored younger activists, imagined new strategies, and then created institutions to promote these new directions.\textsuperscript{11} Not the least of that difficult work was the often unacknowledged intellectual labor of challenging old ideas and rethinking strategies, as they navigated the shifting U.S. political landscape over several decades.

Third, these essays help us see black women’s gender politics in expanded ways. Formative in developing the politics of the Black Revolt,
many women produced pioneering gendered analyses of economic, social, and political conditions that proved crucial to advancing the black struggle. Their feminisms developed in multiple spaces, many emerging from within civil rights, left, or Black Power organizations. By complicating the idea that black women felt they had to choose their race over their gender, these essays highlight the diversity of strategies and approaches black women employed and the differing ways black women imagined and enacted their “freedom dreams.”

While scholars studying the feminism of women of color have largely focused on the creation of separate, more inclusive spaces like the Third World Women’s Alliance and the Combahee River Collective, many of the essays collected here reveal the ways women negotiated race, gender, class, and sexuality within the black left, Black Power, and women’s movements. They show the early roots of black feminist politics and its influence on an emerging women’s liberation movement, challenging the still prevalent notion that black feminism was simply a reaction to the exclusions of Black Power and what has been framed as “second-wave” feminism.

Thus, the purpose of this collection is not simply to broaden the roster of known activists but also to enlarge the scope of how black radicalism is understood. This anthology is more suggestive than definitive—to expand what is known about women’s roles as theorists, leaders, strategists, and organizers, rather than lay out a strict definition of women’s leadership in the Black Revolt. Many women leaders and political mobilizations are left out of these pages: women of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) like Diane Nash, Gloria House, and Ruby Doris Smith Robinson; Mississippi militants such as Fannie Lou Hamer and Unita Blackwell; organizing campaigns that foregrounded black women’s right to defend their own bodies, such as those for Rosa Lee Ingram and Joan Little; leading black feminist organizations such as the groundbreaking Combahee River Collective, the Third World Women’s Alliance, and the National Black Feminist Organization; women of the Nation of Islam; peace activists such as Coretta Scott King; black women active in the gay and lesbian politics, such as Audre Lorde and Barbara Smith; and a host of well-known and lesser-known women radicals from Grace Lee Boggs, Mae Mallory, and Pauli Murray to Frances Beale, Sonia Sanchez, Amina Baraka, and Charlotta Bass. We hope, however, in presenting these three key interventions to create more space and interest for expanding scholarship in these areas.
Where Is the Black Woman?  
An Analysis of the Current Historiography

By uncovering the political and intellectual contributions of women radicals to the postwar black freedom struggle, this anthology engages a number of debates within the historiography. First, these essays begin to expand the boundaries of what is understood to encompass black radicalism. In most historical studies, postwar black radicalism has been defined by a limited set of principles: self-defense tenets and tactics, separatist organizations, Afrocentric cultural practices, and anticapitalist philosophies, as well as a rejection of the practice of lobbying the state. Thus, early histories on postwar radicalism often located radical politics solely within a narrowed time frame of Black Power politics that ostensibly emerged with the Watts riot of 1965 and Stokely Carmichael's call for Black Power during the Meredith March of 1966.

This historical framing has taken shape through a number of prominent studies. One of the most lasting definitions of black radicalism emerged in Harold Cruse's book *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* (1967), which drew a rigid distinction between nationalist and integrationist politics and sharply critiqued black communists. Indeed, by Cruse's gauge for Black Power, Robert F. Williams explicitly and Gloria Richardson implicitly did not make the cut. This boundary has been taken up in a number of more recent works that have helped to popularize a limited vision of black radicalism that excludes activists who affiliated themselves with electoral politics, civil rights desegregation demands, majority-white organizations such as the communist, socialist, and labor organizations, or feminist and gay rights groups. The impact of these constricted definitions has rendered a host of women leaders, artists, and strategists historically invisible and implicitly insignificant. Yet, while Cruse's critique engaged women's contributions, particularly the work of black feminist Lorraine Hansberry, black women radicals have dropped out of sight in more recent studies that have furthered Cruse's arguments. These works tend to focus solely on the militancy of black men and often define black radical ideologies from self-defense to black nationalism as exclusively male (and often masculinist) domains. From this scholarship, there is little sense that African American women also shared a philosophical commitment to and practice of self-defense and armed resistance.
A number of new studies have introduced significant revisions to the traditional narrative of black radicalism in the United States. Fueled by a growing emphasis on the “long movement,” this new scholarship argues for a more inclusive view of black radicalism and Black Power politics. Through monographs such as Timothy Tyson’s *Radio Free Dixie*, Nikhil Singh’s *Black Is a Country*, Martha Biondi’s *To Stand and Fight*, Robert Self’s *American Babylon*, and Peniel Joseph’s *Waiting ’Til the Midnight Hour*, a different picture of postwar black radical politics and its impact on the broader black freedom struggle has emerged. Such revisions have extended the periodization of black radicalism well before 1965 and recalibrated our understanding of the intersections of Black Power, black left-ist, and nationalist ideologies, as well as the civil rights organizing and transnational solidarity efforts. Moreover, they have recouped important leaders of the Black Revolt previously marginalized in Cold War scholarship such as Robert F. Williams, Paul Robeson, and Ewart Guiner and highlighted the radical politics emerging from those active in a range of organizations from the Communist Party to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

Such insights support a new framework for defining black radicalism, which takes into account the multitude of strategies that activists took up to challenge the structures of U.S. power, build coalitions, and claim liberation. Yet, for the most part, these studies are curiously silent on revisioning women’s radicalism. While several of these works acknowledge the contributions of women radicals, these women emerge as subsidiary or symbolic figures. Rather than examining women as pivotal historical actors, far too many of these studies simply acknowledge various women as key participants and note the damage of sexism and the relevance of gender politics. Critical theorist Michael Apple has defined this narrative technique as “dominance through mentioning.” In the current historiography, many radical women are mentioned, the sexism in many Black Power organizations is mentioned, black feminism is mentioned. However, a full exploration of these women’s lives and philosophies and the ways their contributions shaped all the movements of the postwar era has largely not been forthcoming.

Recent scholars of the civil rights movement have provided a strong model for revisioning the male-centered story of social change. Groundbreaking studies such as Charles Payne’s *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom*, John Dittmer’s *Local People*, Barbara Ransby’s *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*, and Belinda Robnett’s *How Long? How Long?*, along with a burgeoning scholarship on local organizing and women of the SNCC,
Highlander Folk School, and Montgomery’s Women’s Political Council, have demonstrated the pivotal role women played in the development and execution of modern civil rights activism. This scholarship has convincingly argued for the centrality of black women as long-distance runners and on-the-ground activists in the black freedom struggle. Accounting for traditional notions of male leadership that dominated during this period, these works have popularized the idea of black women as “bridge leaders” within black communities. However, these histories have largely focused on the southern civil rights struggle and often framed women within the gendered image of the backbone of the movement, reinforcing the construction of woman activists as respectable, stoic, and operating behind the scenes. This perspective makes less visible the radical politics and vision embedded in these women’s activism and often ignores their roles as central leaders and strategists. Pioneering biographies of Ella Baker, Fannie Lou Hamer, and Gloria Richardson have documented the breadth and expanse of these women’s work and radical philosophies; however, presented as individual stories, these women are often read as the exceptional women to stand alongside the great men.

Moreover, as scholars explored the rise of feminist politics in the post-war period, they often defined it as a movement emerging from white women’s experiences with civil rights activism but wholly separate from the Black Power movement or black radicalism more broadly. Such a definition is misleading in agency, substance, and chronology. The dominant perception that feminist politics and the fight for women’s equality occurred largely outside of the black freedom struggle and with little engagement from black women has emerged implicitly and explicitly in numerous studies, including Sara Evans’s early work *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women’s Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left*, Alice Echols’s *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America*, and Ruth Rosen’s *The World Split Wide Open*. Such framing has been reinforced by growing scholarship on sexism within the Black Power movements. These studies foreground the ways positions of formal or public leadership were often reserved for men, and many Black Power activists emphasized male leadership as a way to free black people from the emasculations of slavery and Jim Crow. These studies also uncover the pressures of Black Power discourses, national debates around the Moynihan Report, and many white women’s myopia about the parameters of women’s liberation. Works such as Winfred Breines’s *The Trouble between Us* and Deborah Gray White’s *Too Heavy a Load* reflect the continued dominance
of this interpretation. These books center an important discussion of the movement’s sexism—of what women were not able to do—but do not necessarily provide a full portrayal of the significant political work radical black women did do within the Black Power and women’s movements and the ways many black women carried feminist politics into and raised gender issues from within these organizations. This outlook has led to the perception that black women activists were summarily excluded from leadership roles and generally found it difficult, if not impossible, to raise gender concerns within black organizations.

As part of a larger body of work critiquing second-wave feminism as a framing device, this anthology contributes to an interpretive framework that positions black women radicals as central voices in feminist politics in both the women’s movement and black liberation organizations. Such an intervention builds upon the work of a number of studies, such as Kimberly Springer’s *Living for the Revolution*, Jennifer Nelson’s *Women of Color and the Reproductive Rights Movement*, V. P. Franklin and Bettye Collier-Thomas’s *Sisters in the Struggle*, and Benita Roth’s *Separate Roads to Feminism*, that produce a more nuanced view of black women’s feminist politics both outside and within the frameworks of civil rights activism and Black Power politics. These studies illustrate the ways black women challenged the direction of Black Power and black radicalism from within the ranks of those political movements, not only in opposition to these ideological dynamics. New work on black women’s antipoverty organizing by Rhonda Williams, Premilla Nadasen, Felicia Kornbluh, and Annelise Orleck has expanded beyond a southern movement focus by examining the ways black women drew attention to the fissures of race, class, and gender in deindustrializing America and built a web of local movements to challenge this inequality. Such scholarship has produced a series of important local studies of black women’s feminist politics but largely been treated separately from discussions of 1960s feminist movements. With this anthology, we hope to broaden this conversation by bringing together these disparate strands of black feminism and women’s activist politics.

*Enlarging the Boundaries of Radicalism*

*Want to Start a Revolution?* restores the contributions of leading women activists—and particularly black women radicals—into the history of U.S. social movements from the 1930s through the 1970s. Drawing on
extensive new research on women's contributions to a range of postwar social movements, these scholars have taken the paradigms forged out of pathbreaking studies that have begun rethinking the civil rights movement, black radicalism, Black Power, and women's liberation movements to examine women radicals' work as critical organizers, strategists, and leaders in a host of movements and mobilizations. In so doing, this collection not only enriches our understanding of the long black freedom struggle and postwar U.S. politics but also expands dominant conceptions of black radicalism.

Indeed, examining these women's experiences reveals far more than their presence in the ranks of the Black Revolt and encourages us to re-map the movements of the 1960s and 1970s. The chapters here on Vicki Garvin, Shirley Graham Du Bois, and Esther Cooper Jackson challenge contemporary notions that the anticommunism of the 1950s destroyed the black left. Red-baiting took an immense personal and material toll on these women, but they continued their activism in the sixties, thus revealing important yet neglected continuities between Cold War radicalism, Black Power, and black feminism. Serious analysis of these women's political lives also refuses the strict binaries between integrationist and black separatist politics, nationalism and socialism, and feminism and Black Power and reveals that such dichotomies often hide important commonalities and connections that people forged across and between ideologies and movements. In other words, what has been framed as hard sectarian divisions are not so hard-and-fast when we put Rosa Parks, Vicki Garvin and Esther Cooper Jackson, Florynce Kennedy, Denise Oliver, and Ericka Huggins side-by-side and examine their activism over a half century.

The political work of many of these women thus complicates the simplistic binary between reformist and radical and illustrates the connections between civil rights and Black Power politics. By some gauges of the period, people like Shirley Chisholm were criticized for not being radical enough. Yet Chisholm's presidential candidacy was simultaneously about working within the political system and transforming it. With the perspective of history, Chisholm's historic candidacy for the presidency of the United States, endorsed by the Black Panther Party, can be seen as a bold attempt to force open corridors of power. Hoping to amass enough delegate power to force the Democratic Party to have to deal with black issues, Chisholm's run charted a different path to social transformation rather than simply making a reformist compromise with power.29
These essays also ask us to rethink the simplistic binary between respectable and radical. The focus on respectability in much of the literature on middle-class black women has obscured the ways many working women hewed to and reshaped dominant notions of respectability as a vehicle to promote radical change. Rosa Parks and a generation of civil rights women waged struggle in ways that both adhered to and destabilized notions of respectability. This had as much to do with negotiating and transforming intraracial gender dynamics and creating a space for more militant protest as with an individual adherence to the politics of respectability. Graciously but firmly, Rosa Parks explained her decision not to join a group of civil rights activists in the summer of 1955 when they met with city officials months before her bus stand: “I had decided I would not go anywhere with a piece of paper in my hand asking white folks for any favors.” The respectable Parks had firm lines beyond which she “would not be pushed”; a devoted churchgoer and believer in self-defense, this shy woman spent nearly sixty years of her life vociferously advocating for the rights of black prisoners. Similarly, clad in stylish coat and hat, Juanita Jackson Mitchell journeyed in 1936 to meet with the imprisoned Scottsboro boys, strategically using her middle-class status to promote justice in this case and other campaigns.

Expanding the boundaries of black radicalism not only marks one of the key historiographical interventions of this collection but also reflects what happened on the ground within many of these movements. Women radicals often pushed their comrades to broaden their conception of liberation. Indeed, one of the strands that unite the disparate assortment of women in this book is the ways they prodded the organizations they worked with to take a more inclusive view of the struggle. For instance, the fight for welfare rights was not only about pushing local agencies and the federal government to expand access to welfare but also about getting other black organizations to see public assistance as a right of social citizenship and a path to self-determination and self-respect. Johnnie Tillmon and the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO) asserted a very different notion of rights that foregrounded entitlement to economic security as a key aspect of citizenship. Such politics pushed a diverse array of black leaders, from Martin Luther King, Jr. to Amiri Baraka, to see self-protection as a woman’s and family right and public assistance as a key to self-determination.
Women’s Work: Women Radicals as Long-Distance Runners, Strategic Thinkers, Behind-the-Scenes Organizers, and Charismatic Leaders

This anthology’s second intervention moves the history of women’s work in the movement beyond a view of women as solely behind-the-scenes, local activists. Challenging the limits of the bridge leader concept and any single framework of black women’s leadership, a number of the essays look at a wider spectrum of women’s leadership roles. On one end of the spectrum, this included charismatic leadership. Women like Lillie Jackson, Shirley Chisholm, and Denise Oliver took public leadership roles, pushing aside barriers of sexism in their organizations. Indeed, as demonstrated in these pages, black women’s activism was not only local but also national and international. Shirley Chisholm had the audacity as a first-term congresswoman to challenge her placement on the Agricultural Committee and then to run for president at a moment when most political organizations—be they black or white—saw this kind of national leadership as the exclusive purview of men. She built a national organization run largely by women that made her presidential campaign a potent one, laying the groundwork for future progressive political campaigns. Similarly, Johnnie Tillmon, who began her welfare activism in Los Angeles, helped launch a national movement of welfare recipients and became a regular, disruptive presence on Capitol Hill. Along with such national presence, a number of these activists also spent a portion of their activist careers overseas. Vicki Garvin, Shirley Graham Du Bois, and Denise Oliver moved to Africa and joined the anti-colonial struggles there—to help forge a global politics of black liberation that linked anti-imperialist liberation struggles around the world.

On the other end of the spectrum, many women (and men) believed in participatory democracy and resisted public leadership and national roles. Activists like Yuri Kochiyama and Rosa Parks understood that no movement could be built without people creating an infrastructure, without the day-to-day work to enable the dramatic public action. These movement organizers rejected notions of the charismatic individual and instead invested heavily in building democratic organizing structures and completing the behind-the-scenes work the struggle entailed. Still others, like Toni Cade Bambara and Ericka Huggins, created alternate structures and institutions to nourish themselves and others in order to provide political spaces free from racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia.
However, these women’s contributions to the movement were rarely static. This volume follows a host of women who demonstrated a lifelong commitment to radical change that entailed embracing multiple roles to sustain the movement. Women radicals helped to create the groundwork for the movement by operating as local organizers in key periods. At other moments, they stood as national and international voices of resistance and charismatic leadership, founded numerous groups, took up or were thrust into the public spotlight, and then stepped aside to mentor younger activists.

In highlighting these multiple forms of women’s leadership, this collection of essays brings new texture to the work entailed in building and sustaining these movements. Such aspects are too often ignored in the literature or relegated to organizational histories, yet these articles reveal the day-to-day work of radical organizing. For example, while nearly every study of the Black Panther Party mentions its school, little attention has been paid to how people envisioned and enacted liberatory education. An analysis of the Oakland Community School (OCS), the longest-lasting Panther program, demonstrates the ways these Panther women created an institution of their own and made Black Power real at the educational grassroots. Such detail on Panther organizing has been overshadowed by discussions of the ideological contributions, internecine struggles, and federal repression that predominate in scholarly work on the Panthers.

*Uncovering Black Feminist Politics in Black Power Politics and the Women’s Movement*

This anthology joins a growing literature that pushes students to rethink the origins of black women’s feminism, women’s liberation, and the framing device of “second-wave” feminism more broadly. For many black women radicals, feminist politics did not simply emerge in the 1960s through white women’s experiences in the civil rights and student movements, nor did black women’s feminism develop primarily as a reaction to the limits of white feminism and black nationalism. Indeed, a number of women profiled here raised issues of sexism, called for greater attention to the specific struggles of black women, and put forth theories of more equitable gender relationships within Left organizations in the 1940s and 1950s. For instance, Esther Cooper Jackson’s master’s thesis, “*The Negro Woman Domestic Worker in Relation to Trade Unionism*” (1940), advanced an intersectional analysis that outlined the interconnections of
class, race, and gender oppression for black women domestics—the kind of analysis that most people associate with the 1970s. While Vicki Garvin advocated for the rights of black women workers as an important “litmus test of American democracy,” Juanita Jackson pushed the NAACP to recognize the value of “women’s work.” Uncovering the politics of women’s equality that emerged among the black left and civil rights groups in the 1940s and 1950s, these essays reperiodize our understandings of the trajectory of postwar women’s liberation struggles and highlight black women’s attacks on sexist discourse that often predated the emergence of majority-white feminist organizations in the 1960s.

Black women radicals continued this fight for equality into the 1960s and 1970s. Unwilling to keep silent about gender issues within all-black organizations, many of these women highlighted gender oppression as part of their political analysis. They opened up conversations about gendered structures and assumptions in the organizations in which they worked. Johnnie Tillmon’s organizing around welfare rights challenged and transformed the political agenda of women’s liberation by articulating a radical black feminism of bodily integrity and economic self-determination. Flo Kennedy did not see her radical feminism precluding her role in the Black Power movement, from her work with NOW to mounting the legal defense strategies for H. Rap Brown and Assata Shakur, who were both targeted by COINTELPRO. And she thought Black Power had much to teach her white feminist colleagues, which in part was why she brought them (and insisted upon their right) to attend Black Power meetings. When Shirley Chisholm ran for Congress in 1968 and James Farmer anchored his candidacy to the need for masculine leadership, Chisholm did not let him get away with it. And voters did not automatically gravitate to Farmer’s masculinist appeal but elected Chisholm to Brooklyn’s Twelfth District seat in 1968, making her the first African American woman in Congress. Such feminist praxis makes clear that many black women did not feel they had to pick their race over their gender, and that such politics enjoyed a mass constituency.

Black women radicals fought to make feminist politics an intrinsic part of the black left and Black Power mobilizations, just as they pushed white feminists to address racism and economic exploitation as crucial to women’s liberation. Centering the roles and experiences of women in Black Power organizations, their contributions to the majority-white women’s movement and the separate organizations and campaigns black women built allows for a clearer view of black women radicals’ political
interventions in these spaces. Writer Toni Cade Bambara sought to challenge conservative notions of manhood and womanhood in Black Power politics and pulled together the anthology *The Black Woman* (1970). This book created an important space for women to articulate a black gender politics that challenged both Black Power’s masculinist politics and mainstream feminists’ privileging of white women’s experiences. In addition to articulating a diversity of black feminisms in *The Black Woman*, as a teacher and mentor, Bambara shaped a generation of younger artists ranging from the writer Pearl Cleage to performance poet Sekou Sundiata to filmmakers Louis Massiah and Spike Lee. Women in Atlanta’s Black Arts movement—like Bambara, Cleage, and Alice Lovelace—did not languish on the margins of the artistic world but brought their feminist-nationalist politics to the center of the black arts scene in that southern city, where Shirley Franklin became the first black woman mayor in 2001.

Finally, the women examined in this book are not all the same—they do not gender themselves similarly, nor do they necessarily imagine liberation in the same ways. They are gender nonconforming and conventionally feminine, queer and straight, brash and shy, comfortably middle-class and profoundly poor. While Juanita Jackson Mitchell sought a paid position in the NAACP to affirm her value to the organization and her need for paid child care, women like Tillmon fought for the choice to be able to stay home to raise their own children. Women like Shirley Graham Du Bois and Yuri Kochiyama saw mothering other movement activists as crucial to the longevity of the struggle; yet Denise Oliver and Shirley Chisholm resisted this role as too gendered. While some women in the movement, like Rosa Parks, attempted to maintain a judicious privacy about their personal lives, artists like Toni Cade Bambara, Audre Lorde, and other writers in *The Black Woman* fashioned art—and the weapons of social change—from the many strands of their selves.

In widening the boundaries of black womanhood, these histories also expand our ideas of how sexism affected women’s lives and political work at the time. The experiences of both Rosa Parks and Juanita Jackson Mitchell reveal the difficulties women had getting paid for their political work. Indeed, the Parks family plunged into a decade of economic insecurity after her Montgomery bus arrest; no civil rights organization offered her a job until newly elected John Conyers hired her as an assistant in his Detroit office in 1965. In addition to those economic dimensions, women also faced organizational challenges to their liberation and created structures within these organizations to root out sexism. While most work on the
Young Lords mentions the discussions of “machismo” that arose out of the Party’s thirteen-point program, there has been little attention to the structures that rank-and-file members built to address gender issues within the organization. Denise Oliver and other women in the Young Lords Party created separate men’s and women’s caucuses, built formal structures for disciplining misogynist behavior, and instituted affirmative action policies for including gender issues in the organization’s newspaper Palante and building women’s participation in multiple organizational roles.

Organizational Design of This Book

For the most part, these fourteen chapters, covering a vast range of women’s strategies, organizations, and leadership, are presented chronologically, spanning roughly five decades of turbulent struggle, from the labor and community organizing of the 1930s to the resistance to Nixon’s repressive law-and-order politics of the 1970s. Those years witness the rise and fall of the U.S. left during the Great Depression and Cold War era, the explosion of civil rights and Black Power in the 1950s and 1960s, the rise of the gay and lesbian movement, and the growth and decline of Black Power and Latino liberation organizations like the Black Panther Party and the Young Lords Party. The first four chapters present the early roots of black women’s radicalism, which sprout in the 1930s and incubate despite the anticommunist backlash of the 1950s. Chapter 1, “‘No Small Amount of Change Could Do’: Esther Cooper Jackson and the Making of a Black Left Feminist,” by Erik S. McDuffie, focuses on Esther Cooper’s embrace of communist politics and her early feminist analysis. In the second chapter, “What ‘the Cause’ Needs Is a ‘Brainy and Energetic Woman’: A Study of Female Charismatic Leadership in Baltimore,” Prudence Cumberbatch examines the assertive politics of mother and daughter Lillie Carroll Jackson and Juanita Jackson Mitchell. For two generations, the Jacksons boldly challenged the racial structures of the city of Baltimore and the gender strictures of male-dominated leadership within the NAACP. The next two chapters explore women who set their sights on the international struggle for black liberation. In the third chapter, “From Communist Politics to Black Power: The Visionary Politics and Transnational Solidarities of Victoria “Vicki” Ama Garvin,” Dayo F. Gore examines the rich political career of Vicki Garvin. Garvin’s leadership linked radical labor politics to community mobilization and women’s self-emancipation in the groundbreaking National Negro Labor Council and
continued to fashion such strategic political connections while she was in exile in Ghana and China. The fourth chapter, “Shirley Graham Du Bois: Portrait of the Black Woman Artist as a Revolutionary,” coauthored by Gerald Horne and Margaret Stevens, investigates the life of Shirley Graham Du Bois and her work in Ghana and China. Vicki Garvin and Shirley Graham Du Bois, both of whom mentored Malcolm X, returned to the United States to share the revolutionary lessons they had learned on their journeys as they mentored a new generation of activists in the Black Revolt of the 1970s and 1980s.

By contrast, the next three chapters present a rethinking of several of the women and organizations that stand as iconic figures in the civil rights and Black Power movements. Jeanne Theoharis’s “A Life History of Being Rebellious: The Radicalism of Rosa Parks” presents a careful rereading of Rosa Park as the quiet and stoic “mother of the civil rights movement.” Situating Parks’s bus protest in a lifetime of activism, this chapter uncovers Parks’s radical past as well as her continued investment in black liberation and self-determination post-Montgomery. Chapters 6 and 7 turn our attention to the Black Panther Party. In chapter 6, “Framing the Panther: Assata Shakur and Black Female Agency,” Joy James pushes beyond the iconic image of Assata Shakur as a black fugitive to examine her political contributions as a prison intellectual, including her theorizing of prison industry and black women’s resistance. In chapter 7, “Revolutionary Women, Revolutionary Education: The Black Panther Party’s Oakland Community School,” Angela D. LeBlanc-Ernest and former Black Panther leader Ericka Huggins provide an important detailed account of women’s leadership roles in formulating and fostering the Black Panther Community School specifically and its survival programs more generally. In many ways, the Black Panther Party drew attention to the depth of the urban crisis for black America; the survival programs the organization created provide a basic outline of the material exclusions from the robust social citizenship introduced by the New Deal and of the segregated and unequal education black children were receiving in northern cities. This chapter reveals not only the power of this local organizing but the ways it shaped the politics of the Black Panther Party more broadly and fundamentally challenged the dismal education system most black children endured.

Black Arts movement politics are the subject of the next two chapters. During that critical period of identity formation, women artists challenged both blinders and barriers to their self-discovery and self-determination within the black community and American society at large. Chapters 8
and 9 examine black women’s contributions to postwar black radical culture in general and the Black Arts movement more specifically, as well as exploring the impact of debates over gender and sexuality in shaping black cultural politics. Margo Natalie Crawford’s chapter, “Must Revolution Be a Family Affair? Revisiting The Black Woman,” reminds us that black male writers also brought an intersectional paradigm to their writing, seeing black liberation as intrinsically connected to issues of black masculinity and the restoration of the black family. Black women writing in The Black Woman thus sought to reframe intersectionality to demonstrate the interlocking nature of sexism, racism, economic inequality, and homophobia and push black liberation outside the narrow parameters of a “black family affair.” James Smethurst’s “Retraining the Heartworks: Women in Atlanta’s Black Arts Movement” examines the central contributions of Atlanta’s Black Arts women and the ways writers like Toni Cade Bambara and Pearl Cleage saw their feminism and nationalism as politically compatible.

The essays that make up the final five chapters of the anthology bring to light a number of women traditionally excluded from the pantheon of the Black Revolt to reorient the ways we define black radicalism and feminist politics during the 1960s and 1970s. Sherie M. Randolph’s “Women’s Liberation or . . . Black Liberation, You’re Fighting the Same Enemies: Florynce Kennedy, Black Power, and Feminism” and Joshua Guild’s “To Make That Someday Come: Shirley Chisholm’s Radical Politics of Possibility” look at two black women—lawyer Florynce Kennedy and New York congresswoman Shirley Chisholm—whose feminism in the 1960s and 1970s was boldly pronounced and publicized. While both women were household names in the 1970s, they have faded into obscurity, Randolph and Guild argue, because their feminist radicalism and connections to Black Power seem at odds with prevalent histories of Black Power and “second-wave” feminism.

Rethinking the boundaries of the Black Revolt even further are the stories in chapters 12 through 14 of a black woman in the leadership of the Young Lords Party, a Japanese American member of Malcolm X’s Organization of Afro-American Unity, and Johnnie Tillmon’s Black Power politics in welfare rights. Johanna Fernández’s “Denise Oliver and the Young Lords Party: Stretching the Political Boundaries of Struggle” and Diane C. Fujino’s “Grassroots Leadership and Afro-Asian Solidarities: Yuri Kochiyama’s Humanizing Radicalism” reveal that the ethnic boundaries of black radicalism were porous and permeable. African American Denise Oliver
emerged as a leader of the Puerto Rican Young Lords Party, and Japanese American Yuri Kochiyama served as an organizer of Malcolm X’s Organization for Afro-American Unity. In chapter 14, “We Do Whatever Becomes Necessary: Johnnie Tillmon, Welfare Rights, and Black Power,” Premilla Nadasen provides an important corrective to the presumed whiteness of the mass base of 1960s feminism. Nadasen examines NWRO leader Johnnie Tillmon’s philosophies, demonstrating the traditions of self-defense and self-determination at the heart of the struggle for welfare rights. In concert, these final chapters show that black radicalism, feminism, and Black Power flowered in the midst of Third World frameworks where African American, Puerto Rican, Chicano, Native American, and Asian American radicals developed common antiracist and anti-imperialist politics, as well as welfare rights campaigns for economic justice.

Taken together, these fourteen essays push us to refocus how we understand the history of the black freedom struggle and to reconceptualize the trajectory and cross-fertilization in radical movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Centering women in this anthology provides a wider lens on the range of postwar black radicalisms and thus a much-expanded view of postwar U.S. social movement history.

NOTES

4. This gathering reflects one of numerous shared political actions and meetings black women radicals attended or held during this period. For example, at the “Symposium on Black Women” on January 7–8, 1972, a number of elder leaders met in Chicago on the eve of the Gary Convention in order to pass on black radical traditions to the younger political generation. Septima Clark of the Citizenship Schools and Fannie Lou Hamer and Unita Blackwell of the Mississippi Movement, as well as Charlayne Hunter and Johnetta Cole, met with Amina Baraka of the Congress of African People and Nikki Giovanni, Audre Lorde, Jayne Cortez, and Mari Evans of the Black Arts movement to fashion an agenda for Black women’s struggles within the larger Black national agenda. See Report: “A Symposium on Black Women,” January 7 and 8, 1972, Deering Special Collection (7–22–91), Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois.
5. For Leroy Henderson’s full description of the photo, see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OrCUgW6Qw40.


7. The Left is that broad array of ideas, as well as social, cultural, and political movements, that have stood in opposition to exploitation and have debated ways to end injustice. There have always been many factions with conflicting definitions of what constitutes the U.S. left. The 1960s witnessed endless debates about an Old Left, including earlier generations of socialists, communists, and pacifists as well as feminist and civil rights activists, and a New Left, including a wide array of radicals initially in support of the 1960s civil rights activism and opposed to the war in Vietnam. The New Left introduced a host of social and cultural issues that may have had less political status and emphasis than economic exploitation in the Old Left. The origin of the term “Left” as a political definition is more obscure. It may be traced back to the French Revolution and seating arrangements in the Legislative Assembly. Those factions who supported the monarchy sat on the right wing of the assembly and became known as the Right—and, by that measure, counterrevolutionary. By contrast, the factions who advocated the overthrow of the French king were seated on the left wing and became known as the Left—and, by that measure, radical.

8. In its broadest meaning, inside the United States, “Third World” refers to oppressed people of color such as African Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, and Mexican Americans, as well as Puerto Ricans and other peoples from the Caribbean. However, beyond the United States and in terms of world geography, the term emerged during the Cold War when the great military powers attempted to divide the world into two spheres of power. The influential former British premier Winston Churchill defined the First World as the West, headed by the United States, and the Second World as the sphere of communist nations headed by the Soviet Union. What was the Third World? According to Vijay Prashad, the peoples and nations emerging from colonialism were termed, in 1952, the Third World by French journalist Albert Sauvy when he insisted that beyond the heated Cold War conflict, there was an “ignored, exploited, scorned Third World” that “demands to become something as well.” The idea of a Third World further crystallized at the Afro-Asian political summits in Bandung, Indonesia (1955) and Cairo, Egypt (1961). See Vijay Prashad, The Darker Nations: A People’s History of the Third World (New York: New Press, 2007), xvi, 11.


11. McCarthyism, which draws its name from the staunchly anticommunist Senator Joseph McCarthy, refers to the government-supported harassment and political repression of a wide range of activists, artists, and intellectuals who were accused of being affiliated with, sympathetic to, or members in the Communist Party during the early Cold War period, roughly the late 1940s to the 1960s.

12. We borrow this formulation from Robin Kelley, Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002)

13. In this introduction and throughout the collection of essays, we use the term “second-wave” feminism as a shorthand to refer to the rise of feminist activism in the 1960s and 1970, yet we also seek to problematize the term. Indeed, several of the authors in this volume join a growing number of scholars who critique this term for its framing of feminist politics through moments of upsurge and decline within white women’s organizing.


16. Jama Lazerow and Y ohuru Williams’s most recent collection, *In Search of the Black Panther Party: New Perspectives on a Revolutionary Movement* (Chapel Hill, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), includes little examination of women Panthers in any of the essays despite the fact that the conference the collection came out of had many papers on and much discussion of women Panthers.

17. In Christopher Strain’s study of self-defense in the civil rights era, *Pure Fire: Self-Defense as Activism in the Civil Rights Era* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005), for instance, there is no consideration of the countless militant women who claimed the right of self-defense as they organized to fight white terror and rape. In these years women like Mae Mallory were legendary in black self-defense from New York to North Carolina, and they served prison sentences for their militant political work in supporting Robert F. Williams and in protesting the murder of Congolese premier Patrice Lumumba. For other women, like Daisy Bates, a show of force was not tactically sound, but concealed self-defense weapons were crucial and effective. For still others, women as well as men, self-defense involved issues of racial and class “respectability.” For them, a black woman openly advocating self-defense was seen as “lower-class.” Still, insisting on their own definitions of womanhood, many women carried or owned weapons for self-defense as a crucial tool of political survival and self-determination.


20. Important works that still do not do full justice to women's radicalism include Kevin Gaines, American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Joseph, Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour; Singh, Black Is a Country; and Biondi To Stand and Fight.

21. Indeed, as historian Robyn Spencer has observed, “Black women have remained on the outskirts of Black Power [historiography]: their marginality central to the movement's definition, but their agency and empowerment within the movement effectively obscured.” Robyn Spencer, “Engendering the Black Freedom Struggle: Revolutionary Black Womanhood and the Black Panther Party in the Bay Area, California,” Journal of Women's History 20 (Spring 2008): 91.

22. Apple argues, “Dominance is partly maintained here through compromise and the process of ‘mentioning.’ Here limited and isolated elements of the history and culture of less powerful groups are included in the texts. Thus, for example a small and often separate section is included on ‘the contributions of women’ and ‘minority groups,’ but without any substantive elaboration of the view of the world as seen from their perspective.” Michael Apple, Official Knowledge: Democratic Education in a Conservative Age (New York: Routledge, 2000), 61.


27. Historian Stephen Ward makes this point in his essay on the Third World Women’s Alliance, where he writes: “I aim to challenge the notion that black feminism and Black Power were ideologically incompatible or locked in an inherently antagonistic relationship. To the contrary, the Third World Women’s Alliance’s feminism was not simply a critique of Black Power politics but a form of it.” Stephen Ward, “The Third World Women’s Alliance: Black Feminist Radicalisms and Black Power Politics,” in *The Black Power Movement*, ed. Peniel Joseph (New York: Routledge, 2006), 120. While Benita Roth argues that these black women represented a “vanguard center” in the civil rights/Black Power movements, she also marks the rise of Black Power with a move to northern organizing and increasing sexism that limited black women’s roles in these movements.


31. Inadvertently, this has contributed to their own obscurity, since “backgrounding” oneself makes the record more difficult for scholars to follow. Charismatic leaders such as King and Malcolm X are always already understood as important and left a public record for scholars to follow.

32. COINTELPRO is the name given to a set of secret Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) counterintelligence programs. Between 1956 and 1971, the FBI designed a series of illegal counterintelligence programs aimed at American citizens and their political activities. Initially focused on the Communist Party, the programs came to include Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Assata Shakur and the Black Panther Party as well as Rap Brown and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. Under the leadership of J. Edgar Hoover, the FBI defined the aims of the civil rights movement and many of the social movements of the 1960s as subversive activity. They attacked activists in a number of ways, ranging from misinformation, disruption, and psychological warfare, to targeting activists for the loss of employment, for IRS harassment, and for political and physical attacks by other activists. These efforts at their most destructive included the torture, murder, and assassination of leaders. The specific impact of this FBI program on radical women is discussed in several of the chapters that follow.