This chapter focuses on a set of laws and policies referred to as Jim Crow laws, which excluded African Americans from full participation in society. It also discusses how African American women resisted these laws through their community organization and advocacy activities. Jim Crow laws reflected a belief system that defined one person as less human and deserving than another. African Americans have long been disenfranchised in America, but they also fought against this injustice.

The Civil War and the subsequent Reconstruction momentarily shattered white supremacy, which returned with vengeance and with whites’ flagrant determination to maintain control over the newly emancipated
population. Disenfranchisement of Africans in American was largely completed by 1890. The 1896 Supreme Court decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* crystallized the political process and provided a constitutional sanction for racial segregation (Franklin & Moss 1994; Walters, 2003). Even though these laws reigned supreme in American society, finding their way into the most mundane of life’s circumstances, African American women via the women’s club movement waged a constant war of resistance against their implementation. A manifestation of oppressive public policy, the Jim Crow Laws were unrelenting as were the African American women who, like Ida Bell Wells-Barnett, always “felt compelled to do something in the face of injustice or discrimination” (Bay, 2009, p. 10).

## GENERAL OVERVIEW OF JIM CROW LAWS

So intense was the resolve to keep former slaves controlled and bound to the plantation that the distinction between chattel slave and wage laborer became an irrelevant notion. Where lynching failed to control African Americans and as hostility toward them increased, many states and cities passed laws and issued ordinances to further formalize and legalize African American disenfranchisement. These various laws, statues, and ordinances formed the “Jim Crow” legislation that governed attitudes, behaviors, and practices. Jim Crow laws varied widely as did their enforcement. State, county, and city Jim Crow laws were buttressed by additional related oppressive practices that impeded African Americans’ economic and political involvement. These practices included sharecropping, debt peonage, convict leasing, school segregation, and voting restrictions (Barusch, 2009).

Jim Crow laws included various forms of exclusion and segregation. The plethora of Jim Crow laws separated African Americans in life and death. They were separated in courtrooms and cemeteries, in depots and on trains, in hospitals and on streetcars. They were banned from public and private establishments, including restaurants, parks, public pools, ocean beachfronts, libraries, and hotels. Georgia, for example, was the first state to pass Jim Crow streetcar laws in 1891. Like many of these laws, interpretation and implementation were left to the generally erratic discretion of the enforcer. By 1907, other states, including Florida, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia, followed with some version of state law, city ordinance, and/or company regulation, which segregated streetcars (Meier & Rudwick, 2002).
Jim Crow segregation affected nearly all aspects of African American life. Many courtrooms, for example, used specific Jim Crow bibles for African Americans and different ones for whites. Drinking fountains, public restrooms, and waiting rooms were segregated and differentiated with signs indicating “colored only” or “white only.” There were also rules for racial etiquette that, for example, demanded that African American men remove their hats in the presence of whites, required that they step aside for white customers in retail stores, forbid them from trying on clothing and shoes before purchasing them, and demanded that African American men look at the ground when speaking to whites. In many cases, the consequences for violating the rules of etiquette and breaking Jim Crow laws were equally dire. In addition to these humiliating and dehumanizing practices, African Americans also faced economic hardships that tied them to the land and effectively prohibited their mobility. Sharecropping, debt peonage laws, and convict leasing were practices that ensured a ready pool of laborers to work for white plantations owners.

**SHARECROPPING, DEBT PEONAGE, AND CONVICT LEASING**

Sharecropping allowed landless farmers to use land that someone else owned, usually whites. The farmers were responsible for providing all of the labor associated with producing the crop (Perry & Davis-Maye, 2007). The profit was split at harvest time, with the landowner usually receiving more that his or her fair share and the cropper barely eking out a living while becoming more and more indebted to the landowner.

Debt peonage laws that legally bound formerly enslaved men and women to serve the creditor/landowner until a debt was paid existed in many states, including Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina (Ruef & Fletcher, 2003). The U.S. Supreme Court upheld the peonage law on March 13, 1905, in the case of *Clyatt v. United States*, which was a White Georgia man convicted by the Circuit Court of Appeals of the Fifth Circuit of the State for holding two African American men in involuntary servitude (Ross, 1978).

The nefarious practice of convict leasing was also part of the Jim Crow era. This practice allowed landowners and other businesses to bid on contracts to have convicts released to them as laborers. The convicts were not paid for their labor and were housed and fed at the business’s or
landowner’s expense. This practice also prevented race mixing among inmates, saved the state the expense of caring for the convict and provided lease holders access to cheap labor which was extremely attractive, but treacherous to the convicts. These workers had no protection and suffered atrocities at the hand of the property owners resulting in extremely high mortality rates (Rabinowitz, 1976).

THE JIM CROW CLIMATE OF VIOLENCE

The climate of Jim Crow created an atmosphere that encouraged whites to vent their anger and to engage in violent acts of aggression without fear of repercussions or retaliations. The violence of lynching, rape, and race riots robbed African Americans of any semblance of safety and protection. The practice of lynching was to intimidate and to punish via an atrocious and horrendous death often in a public venue. Lynching, often perpetrated by organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan, was justified by the purported ever-present menace of white women falling prey to African American men.

The usual response to lynching was to blame the victim for some imagined transgression and to ignore those who carried out the lynching. Prominent community citizens often actively or passively participated in lynching. Although lynching was allegedly associated with African American men victimizing white women, it tended to increase when interracial political and/or economic competition increased (Soule, 1992). The 1892 Memphis lynching of Tom Moss, Calvin McDowell, and Henry Stewart (Giddings, 1984) as well as the Wilmington Riots of 1898 are prime examples of the extent to which interracial political and economic competition were the obvious motives for the violence even though newspaper articles, in both cases, were said to have inflamed both groups’ sensibilities via articles about white women’s sexual abuse at the hands of African American men. So acceptable and justifiable was lynching that this form of homicide in polite company was differentiated as either a good or bad lynching. A good lynching was one that was orderly and methodical, without drunkenness and chaos. A good lynching, according to whites, was conducted by the best people of the community such as lawyers, farmers, merchants, and bankers (Allen, Als, Lewis, & Litwack, 2000).

Sexual violence was also used to control. Rape, by white men, indicated to African American women that they were always vulnerable and to
African American men that they were helpless to protect their wives, daughters, sisters, and so on. African American women were “sexual hostages” that, as historian Darlene Clark Hine (1989, p. 915) noted, “did not reduce their determination to acquire power to protect themselves and to become agents of social change.” Obviously African American women were quick to realize that sexual violence was political. These sexual violations were usually not challenged, whereas white women’s virtue was vehemently protected. African American women were even blamed for their victimization and labeled promiscuous and naturally immoral. On some occasions, African American girls were sent to training schools or institutions for wayward girls because of rape and/or resulting pregnancies, further victimizing and blaming them for being raped (Brice, 2005).

Violence against African Americans was further perpetuated through race riots. Whenever African Americans demanded fairer treatment, stood up for themselves, or audaciously pursued opportunities, whites responded with contempt and violence. The mass murders of African Americans at the hands of white mobs generally resulted from incidents that ignited the ire of whites in a particular community. Like many others, the Wilmington, North Carolina, riots of 1898 and the Atlanta Riots of 1906 resulted from claims that African American men sexually assaulted white women. Race riots were so widespread and deadly during the summer and fall of 1919 that the Renaissance poet James Weldon Johnson dubbed it the Red Summer. The most violent of these riots took place in Chicago, Washington, D.C., and Elaine, Arkansas.

The Elaine riot involved African American sharecroppers’ efforts to unionize. A white sheriff’s deputy tried to break up a union meeting at an African American church and was killed. The ensuing riot killed dozens of African Americans. Sixty-seven men were sentenced to prison for their alleged participation, and 12 others were convicted of the sheriff’s murder. No whites were prosecuted for the murders of dozens of African American sharecroppers (Hine, Hine, & Harrold, 2008). Instead the violent atmosphere created by the Jim Crow culture festered and grew with continuous victimization of African American women, men, and children.

African Americans responses’ to Jim Crow varied but usually involved establishing some mechanism for self-protection. Some migrated or fled to escape further victimization. Others directly protested the discriminatory practices, which generally resulted in further violence and death, while others resigned themselves to the patterns of segregation that ensured their second-class citizenship. The Jim Crow culture created a system of economy, polity, and ideology designed to control and oppress
all African Americans. African American women felt especially chal-
 lenged to confront this oppressive system of laws (Collins, 1990). As
 Giddings noted (1984, p. 81) these women “believed that their efforts
 were essential for reform and progress, and that their moral standing was
 a steady rock upon which the race could lean.”

 The discussion below examines ways that African American club
 women responded to the victimization caused by Jim Crow public poli-
cies during the early part of the 20th century. In addition to a constant
 stream of young African American women who migrated unaccompanied
 from the South to cities in the North, Midwest, and West, some African
 American women also dug in their heels, wherever they were, and fought
 the systemic tyrant of Jim Crow. Essentially, Jim Crow laws and practices
 negatively affected the African American community’s ability to garner
 economic, political, social, and physical security. In an effort to combat
 the deleterious affects of Jim Crow, these women used multifaceted
 strategies of attack. The women engaged in what was called race work or
 racial uplift. Their activism was designed to make their segregation a lit-
tle more tolerable or to transform the existing structures of oppression.

 THE WOMEN’S CLUB MOVEMENT

 Through the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs (NACW),
 which “quickly became the largest and most enduring protest organization
 in the history” of African Americans (Hine, 1989, p. 917), these women
 attacked the derogatory images and stereotypes that were projected onto
 them and moved on to establish strategies for change that endured well
 into the 20th century. According to Evans (2007), the African American
 club women’s movement consisted of different types of organizations and
 groups, including secret orders such as the Eastern Star and the Daughters
 of Zion, sororities such as the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, and an array
 of church groups such as the Ladies Auxiliary and the Women’s Baptist
 Home Mission Society. Organized professional groups were also part of
 their movement and included groups such as the National Association of
 Colored Graduate Nurses and the Madam C. J. Walker Hair Culturists
 Union of America. Through these groups, women strengthened their
 skills and political force.

 Founded in 1896, the NACW’s existence was believed to be imperative
 to fight racial oppression and to promote upward mobility. There was
sometimes friction and competition within and between these groups, but instead of inhibiting movement, this friction seemed to generate energy. More often than not, these women directed their indignation toward Jim Crow and not each other. In describing these club women’s political maneuvers, Evans praised their political proficiency, indicating that they “carried out administrative coups, filibustered and stonewalled reminiscent of the most powerful board rooms and staterooms” (2007, p. 64). Club women understood the importance of standing together for effective planned change. They identified a number of strategies, including voting and education, as necessary for the transformation of structures of oppression. Their aim was to model appropriate behavior while resisting oppression and advocating for equity and fairness.

RESISTANCE TO JIM CROW

Prestage (1995, p.179) notes that African American women have been engaged in political activity throughout history. She describes their political involvement as (1) determined by the cultural and legal circumstances of the particular period in time, (2) involving tactics to change their disadvantaged status, and (3) escalating from nontraditional activities to a preponderance of traditional activities over time.

African women, who came to America in chains, mastered strategies of resistance during their enslavement and life on plantations. For them, everyday plantation life fostered a social and political environment worthy of retribution (Carlton-LaNey, 1999; Perry & Davis-Maye, 2007). They learned to feign cooperation. This practice, used by both men and women, was so well-known and widely used that it was named “puttin on ole massa” or “fooling massa.” Always attuned to their vulnerability, the network of enslaved women in plantation communities provided an environment for training and testing political practices of resistance. This type of self-protection continued within the African American community and, in 1896, inspired Paul Laurence Dunbar to write what is arguably his finest poem, “We Wear the Mask.” Dunbar’s poem provides an insightful portrayal of African American life and captures what Hine called dissemblance. She describes dissemblance as behaviors and attitudes that African American women used to shield “the truth of their inner lives and selves from their oppressors” [1989, p. 912]. Hine postulates that dissemblance continues today as a valuable protective factor among African American women.
African American women took both individual and collective initiatives of political activism to counter Jim Crow laws. They understood that they could not afford to be obvious in their protestation of indignities. They instead engaged in small, personal strategies to express their contempt and to fortify their resistance. Like the enslaved women's strategies of relaying covert messages hidden in songs, quilt patterns, and storytelling, Progressive Era reformers also used stealthy and disguised mechanisms. Although their political acts were sometimes veiled, they willingly took the risk sometimes feigning ignorance or using other evasive actions to avoid cooperation and to register their discontent. Charlotte Hawkins Brown, founder of North Carolina’s Palmer Memorial Institute, masterfully ignored Jim Crow whenever possible. She, for example, turned a blind eye to racially separate waiting rooms, finding alternative seating in some neutral area. Described as a “political genius,” Brown preferred to “overestimate possibility than to underestimate it” and “pushed the color line to the limits” at every turn (Gilmore, 1996, p. 185). Similarly African American schools steadily and quietly raised academic standards while publicly acknowledging their support for industrial education. Obtaining funding from whites was far easier to get for training domestic servants and farmers than for training scientists and philosophers (Fairclough, 2000).

African American race women of the Progressive Era inherited the skills that enslaved women used to survive antebellum plantation life, further honing them through their churches and women’s clubs (Bent-Goodley, 2001; Giddings, 1984). For many African American women, race work or uplift work was ostensibly nonpolitical and innocuous enough so as to proceed with little skepticism from whites who saw it as harmless or nonthreatening (Fairclough, 2001). White women, via interracial cooperation committees, felt comfortable working with African American women and encouraged and supported their efforts albeit within the confines of strict Jim Crow laws (Carlton-LaNey, 2000).

African American women graciously accepted support, encouragement, financial contributions, and even reprimands from whites, yet they maintained clarity of purpose and unity of vision. They understood white women’s predilections and conducted themselves with the utmost caution in their presence. Even Margaret Murray Washington, who tended to be conservative like her husband, Booker T. Washington, instructed the staff at Tuskegee Institute to contact her immediately when white women visited the campus because they could be so nasty and were not to be trusted (White, 1999). White women embraced interracial
cooperation as a way to change African Americans’ behaviors and to encourage their self-help activities, but they felt no compunction to fight for “structural changes in American laws and institutions” (Higginbotham, 1993, p. 197) and left African American women on their own where this was concerned.

African American women continued their political activities both individually and collectively far beyond the Progressive Era. Some of these women were part of the elite, while others were regular working-class women who took their destiny in their own hands. Pinky Pilcher, for example, of Greenwood, Mississippi, wrote to President Roosevelt on December 23, 1936, complaining about the white women who headed the local Public Works Administration (PWA). She said that the “poor white people is not ing but Negro haters” who would not give work to blacks, but sent them to look for wash work when none existed. She further complained that the money paid out for poor white women to visit the colored people who were ill was being wasted and that African American women should be hired for that task since they visited their sick anyway (as cited in Lerner, 1972, p. 402). Pilcher’s audacity in writing directly to president Roosevelt indicated courage and determination in advocating for individual and groups rights commonly ignored in favor of Jim Crow laws.

GROUP SURVIVAL AND INSTITUTION TRANSFORMATION

African American women utilized many available resources, and when resources did not exist, they created their own resulting in a parallel system of social welfare and education. They relied on their education, oratory skill, journalistic abilities, research and organizational skills, and business acumen to combat the structural institutions that Jim Crow laws supported. Collins (1990) noted that African American women engaged in two interdependent dimensions of activism: 1) the struggle for group survival and 2) the struggle for institutional transformation.

Their struggle for group survival involved actions to create spheres of influence within structures of oppression. Women’s clubs, African American schools, and social settlements were some of the spheres of influence that these women created. Their struggle for institutional transformation included activities to change existing structures of oppression that were legalized by Jim Crow laws. Within this dimension of activism,
African American women fought against all legal and customary rules of suppression and subordination.

**VOTING**

African American women advocated for the vote as critical to their ability to demand equal access to resources and to transform structures of oppression. Suffragists believed that women armed with the ballot could better improve conditions in the African American community while challenging Jim Crow practices. The fact that most African American women worked and were wage earners purported that their “labor needed the protection of the ballot” (Giddings, 1984, p. 121). Elizabeth Ross Haynes, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, and Nannie Helen Burroughs, among others, were vocal advocates for women’s voting rights.

Ross Haynes said, “I have no fears in urging the women of the country, irrespective of race, to awake, register, vote, work and enlarge the fight for equality of opportunity in jobs, in office for women” [n.d.]. Nannie Helen Burroughs, founder of the National Training School for Women and Girls in Washington, D.C., indicated that with the right to vote, African American women could influence the enactment of legislation for protection from rapists. In Burroughs’ mind, voting would give women the ability to defend their virtue in court and would become a weapon of moral defense (Higginbotham, 1993; Hine, 1989, p. 918). Essentially, voting was viewed as a weapon that African American women could use to protect children and themselves from the vices of the streets such as gambling houses, saloons and political corruption.

Similarly, Ida B. Wells-Barnett was a zealot who vigorously attacked unjust policies while calling on African Americans to become more politically judicious. In January 1913, she organized the Alpha Suffrage Club of Chicago, which was the state’s first African American women’s suffrage group. These women’s fight for suffrage was challenged by white suffragists’ racism. To ensure inclusion in the 19th amendment, which granted women the vote, African American women had to lobby strenuously because white women were inclined to exclude them. African American women engaged in “speech making, in petitioning federal and state governments, and in campaigning for women’s suffrage referendums . . . founded at least thirty groups, which were either women suffrage associations or women’s clubs that had suffrage leaders” (Terborg-Penn, 2005, p. 207). Their struggles for
both group survival an institutional transformation were obviously inter-
dependent and overlapping.

African American women also ran for political office as a way to com-
bat Jim Crow laws and to transform structures of oppression. Elizabeth
Ross Haynes was elected coleader of the 21st Assembly District of
New York in 1935. She was confronted with what she perceived to be gen-
der prejudice primarily from her male coleader. She attempted an unsuc-
cessful bid with another male coleader whom she respected as a fair and
committed person. Although she failed to get reelected (Carlton-LaNey,
1997), she continued to adhere to the importance of women stepping
“forward as aspirants, bargainers, and if necessary, contenders for the
choices official plums” (Haynes, n.d.). Ida B. Wells-Barnett ran for Illinois
State senate in 1930 but was defeated. She, like many other women’s
club leaders, held a political appointment as an adult probation officer
for Chicago in 1913.

Maggie Lena Walker, president of the St. Luke Penny Savings Bank in
Richmond, Virginia also ran for political office as Superintendent of the
Public Instruction on Virginia’s Lily Black Republican ticket (Schiele,
Jackson, & Fairfax, 2005). She also held a political appointment as the
governor’s selectee to the Virginia Industrial School for Colored Girls’
board of advisors after the institution came under state auspices (Marlowe,
1993). The Virginia Industrial School represented a sphere of influence
within Virginia’s segregated criminal justice system, and Walker’s guber-
natorial appointment to the board put her into a position to challenge
existing rules that subordinated African American girls who were involved
with this system. Many other African American clubwomen held political
positions such as Mary McLeod Bethune, who was the Director of the
Negro National Youth Administration during the Roosevelt administra-
tion, and Mary Church Terrell, who was appointed superintendent of the
Washington, D.C., schools.

SCHOOLS, EDUCATION, AND
AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY

_Plessy v. Ferguson_ had enormous implications, turning back the clock in
many spheres, including the educational arena. Even Oberlin College,
which had modeled a 50-year history of admitting students irrespective of
color, with no limitations on college campus life participation with the
exception of interracial dating and marriage, embraced the segregation implicit in *Plessy v. Ferguson*. By 1882, the school had begun to separate students based on race in dining, housing, and in campus literary society participation (Waite, 2001). Prominent club woman Mary Church Terrell, a 1884 graduate of the school, found that 30 years later her daughter was denied housing in the campus dormitories because of the school’s increased policy of racial discrimination. Terrell wrote to the university president expressing her anger and hopelessness at the school’s backsliding. She also articulated her dismay with a “wicked and cruel country in which everything is done to crush the pride, wound the sensibilities, embitter the life and break the heart” of African Americans (cited in Waite, 2001). Even though Terrell was dispirited and disappointed, she seemed to be fortified in her resolve to challenge Jim Crow. Some years later she was instrumental, as a school board member, in getting the Washington, D.C., schools to incorporate African American history in their curriculum and to institute the celebration of Frederick Douglass Day (White, 1999) and, at age 72, she was picketing in protest against a segregated at a local restaurant in Washington, D.C.

The study of and appreciation for race history were seen as essential to race work and African American race pride. Race pride was political and antithetical to the mundane drudgery associated with a life of discrimination, isolation, and oppression. Although efforts to generate race pride may not appear to be political, these women knew full well that having a positive sense of self was essential to race empowerment, race preservation, and upward mobility.

Victoria Earle Matthews, via her White Rose Home (Waite, 2001), held an extensive collection of African American books in the home’s library. Surrounding guest and residents of the home with books and newspapers that provided both information and positive images of themselves was a strategic mechanism for education, developing race pride, and encouraging activism. Ida B. Wells-Barnett’s Negro Fellowship League and reading room similarly provided a place for residents and nonresidents alike to have access to newspapers and books, which were denied them through public libraries that were segregated. Libraries and reading rooms were a “common expression of racial pride” (Salem, 1990). These women also understood that ignorance doomed African Americans to powerlessness. Ergo education was empowering and represented a form of political activism (Collins, 1990).

Much like the club women of the era, Amy Jacques Garvey of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) believed that
women needed to accept their roles as “intellectuals and as political architects.” To facilitate this development, she pleaded with them to cultivate a “taste for serious reading,” to read widely, to give books as gifts, and to make reading a family event (as cited in Taylor, 2000, p. 115). She offered simple strategies to the UNIA women, encouraging them to save their old newspapers and to send them to others once they had read them (Taylor, 2000). Jacques Garvey’s Women’s Page in the Negro World effectively provided an arena for political activism and for teaching UNIA women.

**MECHANISMS FOR PROJECTING THE POLITICAL AGENDA**

African American women were skillful organizers, attentive to political, economic, and social issues. They relied on each other to maintain motivation and to develop timely and appropriate strategies. In 1908, the National Association of Colored Graduate Nurses (NACGN) was organized. With 26 charter members, these professional women organized to address the “punitive power exerted over Black nurses by the state boards of examiners” (Mosley, 1996, p. 23). The NACGN campaigned against selected state boards of nursing and separate state boards of nursing examinations. They demanded to be evaluated based on the same standards as their white counterparts. In 1909, Ludie Andrews began legal proceedings against the Georgia State Board of Nurse Examiners for the opportunity to take the same licensure examination as whites. This continued for 10 years, after which time the Board of Examiners offered to license her. She refused unless other African American nurses were accorded the same opportunities. The Jim Crow racist attitudes of white nurses relegated African American nurses to the servant class, which limited opportunities for their full professional participation (Mosley, 1996).

In 1922, building on Wells-Barnett’s legacy, African American women organized the Anti-Lynching Crusaders. This organization was founded by the NACW’s sixth president Mary Talbert under the aegis of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) (“How Did Black Women in the NAACP Promote the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill, 1918–1923?” n.d.). The Anti-Lynching Crusaders’ mission was to advocate for the passage of the Dyers Anti-Lynching Bill and to put an end to lynching.
Their strategy was to target 1 million women in an effort to raise 1 million dollars. Although they did not reach their financial mark, nor did they encourage legislators to enact an antilynching legislation, they made an impact by calling attention to lynching, and some suggest that they were instrumental in decreasing the number of lynchings that took place between 1924 and 1928 (Giddings, 1984).

As orators and public speakers, African American women fueled the discussions and engaged in activism that demonstrated the interwoven nature of politics, economic and social conditions, race history, and strategies for fighting Jim Crow. As a journalist, Wells-Barnett relied on accurate fact-finding. She believed in collecting evidence to inform her writing, public speaking, and activism. She was especially vigilant at using evidence to illustrate the heinous nature of lynching and to refute erroneous newspapers, which tried to justify various incidences of lynching. Confronting the culprit with indisputable evidence was part of her strategy. She often hired Pinkerton agents (from Allan Pinkerton’s Agency) to assist her in investigating lynching incidents.

Wells-Barnett was particularly angered by the lynching of Sam Hose in Georgia. Hose was lynched after killing a white man in self-defense. Erroneous rumor had it that Hose raped the man’s wife. With prominent whites involved, Hose was tortured and burned alive in a picnic-like atmosphere. His charred body parts were sold as souvenirs. Wells-Barnett immediately organized a committee in Chicago to raise funds needed to hire a detective to investigate the lynching. The investigator found that whites lied about the lynching. Wells-Barnett publicized the investigator’s report at a mass meeting. She further circulated the report via articles written in African American and white newspapers, and finally issued the report via a publication titled Lynch Law in Georgia (McMurry, 1998).

The written word was an especially valuable tool for African American women’s political work. Newspapers, newsletters, pamphlets, and even tracts provided the vehicle for club women to inform the community, spread their ideas, and gather support of those ideas. Wells-Barnett owned and edited four newspapers in her lifetime. The Memphis Free Speech and Headlight was the first and perhaps the most prominent. She used the pages of this rag to urge the people of Memphis to leave town after her friend Tom Moss was lynched.

Many African Americans heeded her words and left Memphis for presumably safer havens to the West. As the Memphis economy began to reflect the departure of droves of African Americans, two white representatives
from the Memphis streetcar service approached Wells at her newspaper office asking her to encourage her readers to return to the streetcars and to reassure them that any discourtesy shown to them would be punished severely (Bay, 2009). Their appeal only reiterated to Wells-Barnett that her newspaper editorials were effective. Subsequently, she urged Africans Americans to continue the streetcar boycott and to save so that they could leave Memphis permanently. Wells-Barnett continued to avoid the streetcars and armed herself with a pistol and urged that others do the same, noting that in a lawless town a Winchester rifle ought to have an honored place in all African American homes.

Wells-Barnett also owned The Chicago Conservator, which she purchased from her husband. From 1878 to 1914, the Conservator provided coverage of racism and violence against African Americans with a focus on racial unity and militant responses as strategies for change. Between 1911 and 1914, she published the Negro Fellowship League newspaper, The Fellowship Herald (Bay, 2009; Giddings, 2008).

Others used newspapers similarly. Amy Jacques Garvey, as associate editor of the Negro World, wrote articles for the Women’s Page. This section of the paper spoke specifically to women, urging their participation in the Pan-African movement and creating an open forum for them to share their opinions, ideas, and information (Taylor, 2000). Jacques Garvey was also a prolific writer. While she was the unofficial head of the UNIA, she wrote an editorial for the Negro World from 1924 to 1927. Simultaneously she produced the Women's Page nearly every week.

The Women’s Era, the “first Black women’s newspaper” (White, 1999) and the literary organ of the Boston Women’s Era Club, was edited by the organization’s founder Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin. The Women’s Era kept members informed about “fashion, health, family life, and legislation” and served as a way for women to communicate and create a “viable national network” (Salem, 1990, p. 19). The Women’s Era became the official publication of the NACW and served notice that they would “always have a defender as well as a national voice” (White, p. 54). The Women’s Era was superseded by the National Association Notes.

In addition to newspapers, public speaking was also used to project their political voices. Maggie Lena Walker was known for her public speaking ability. She was said to have a powerful, low story-telling voice that sometimes moved listeners to tears about disenfranchisement while urging them to seek economic self-reliance (Marlowe, 1993). Mary Church Terrell was also an influential and highly sought after multilingual speaker. Mamie Garvin Fields, a South Carolina community activist
and teacher, recalled Terrell’s visit to Charleston, South Carolina. She described Terrell’s voice as “wonderfully resonate” (1985, p. 191). Speaking at the Mt. Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church, the always elegant and picturesque Terrell wore a pink evening gown and long white gloves. She told the huge crowd of women that they had “more to do than other women [and that] they must go into [their] communities and improve them [and] go out into the nation and change it.” She so enamored and inspired the women at the church with her message, poise, and regal affect that they “felt so stirred up, nobody wanted to wait till morning to pick up our burden again. Everywhere you might look, there was something to do” (1985, p. 191).

Madam C. J. Walker [Sarah Breedlove], a businesswoman and pioneer in African American women’s hair and skin care products, also used the speakers’ platform to urge women to seek economic self-reliance and political kudos. To ensure group survival, Walker organized a sales force of agents to use their economic self-reliance to combat racism and lynching. Her model of political activism helped to move African American women out of their roles as domestics and agricultural workers to empowered and self-efficacious independent business women.

In 1917, Madam C. J. Walker was part of a small group of Harlem leaders who attempted to persuade President Wilson to support anti-lynching legislation in the United States. The group traveled from New York to meet with President Wilson in Washington, D.C., but to no avail as he refused to see them. They left a 16-signatory petition for the President in lieu of their planned meeting. Madame Walker recalled this event later when she met with her agents at their annual Madam Walker Beauty Culturists Union Convention (Bundles, 2001). In her speech Women’s Duty to Women, she urged the Walker Company women to become politically conscious. So motivated by Madam’s speech, and conscious of the power that their number and money rendered, these women immediately sent a telegram to President Wilson requesting that he use his political and personal will to end race rioting and lynching.

Madam Walker, like most of the club women of the era, understood that the “purpose of her leadership was to build more leadership,” and, as Nikki Giovanni later lamented, “The purpose of being a spokesperson [was] to speak until the people gained a voice” (Giovanni, 1988, p. 135). African American club women of the Progressive Era spoke until more and more women gained a voice. They petitioned, lobbied, marched, and pamphleteered. Despite extraordinary obstacles and numerous efforts
that fell short of their target goal, they tacked Jim Crow from every angle and refused to give up their fight for equity and justice.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK AND POLICY PRACTICE

The resistance activities in which these women engaged stand as a testament to their dogged determination, passion, and intellectual prowess. Contemporary policy practice could benefit from building on their legacy. The increasing numbers of women involved in the political arena today stand on these pioneer women’s shoulders. Madeline Albright, Condoleezza Rice, and Hillary Clinton should recall Mary Church Terrell’s 1904 multilingual speech (delivered in German, French, and English) at the International Congress of Women in Berlin, Germany, as an example of the initiation of women’s policy practice on an international level. Maryland Senator Barbara Mikulski, MSW, whose social work practice evolved into community activism, stands on the shoulders of women like Ida Wells-Barnett, who failed in her bid for Illinois Senate in 1930 but whom, nonetheless, provided a model of determination, political independence. Others like Elizabeth Ross Haynes and Eartha Mary Magadine White successfully held public office in New York and Florida, respectively, and used their social work skills to become change agents for community empowerment. Moreover, social workers today must continue to lobby, both formally and informally, for intervention on behalf of out-groups and low power groups. We must use our voices as instruments for social change encouraging and politicizing social work students in the academy and new colleagues in the field.

Furthermore, it behooves our schools of social work and those engaged in policy practice to model race work via research, scholarship, and direct practice. As social work touts the imperatives of evidence-based practice, we must be certain to ensure that out-groups are included in the research. Anything short of that is unacceptable and renders the “evidence” invalid and faulty. Research implications are clear. It is unethical to apply practice interventions that have been tested on one group to another and expect the same results. History and culture have already negated this approach.

Future research could benefit from efforts to measure the contemporary effects of institutionalized discrimination and oppression and their effects on out-groups. Research should also include studying contemporary social
work policy practice strategies to gauge their effectiveness and to improve and better target change activities. Our research should also involve analyzing evidence-based social work interventions to ensure that out-groups are appropriately represented and that application of the intervention is effective and does not further victimize vulnerable populations.

**CONCLUSION**

African American female reformers were loathe to tolerate Jim Crow laws. They mobilized to fight these oppressive laws and policies on every front. They worked individually and via their webs of affiliation. Their efforts included nondramatic protest as well as aggressive and vehement resistance.

As with any intelligentsia, they did not always agree on strategy or tactic; nonetheless, they worked together with incredible adroitness and strategic subterfuge to ensure the sustainability of their families and communities. For them, issues of race were far more important that issues of gender, yet enmeshed in the politics of respectability, they especially targeted the uprightness of womanhood as essential to their work and engaged in their resistance movement with the *righteous discontent* of a people who knew that they deserved better.

**REFERENCES**


