

Developing and Sustaining Political Citizenship for Poor and Marginalized People:

The Evelyn T. Butts Story

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When I embarked on my doctoral work at Antioch University's Graduate School of Leadership and Change in 2015, I knew I would eventually share the fruits of my studies with my hometown of Norfolk, Virginia, which has given so much to me. I did not know at the time, though, how much the history of Norfolk would help me choose my dissertation topic, sharpen my insights about what my forebears endured, and strengthen my resolve to pass these lessons forward to future generations.

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Abstract

This study tells the deep, rich story of Evelyn T. Butts, a grassroots civil rights champion in Norfolk, Virginia, whose bridge leadership style can teach and inspire new generations about political, community, and social change. Butts used neighbor-to-neighbor skills to keep her community connected with the national civil rights movement, which had heavily relied on grassroots leaders—especially women—for much of its success in overthrowing America’s Jim Crow system of segregation and suppression. She is best-known for her 1963 lawsuit that resulted in the U.S. Supreme Court’s 1966 decision to ban poll taxes for state and local elections, a democratizing event hailed as a progressive victory over the entrenchment of property and wealth as prerequisites for suffrage. Virginia required an annual \$1.50 poll, while other Southern states had similar levies. Butts’ legacy from her 1954–1970 grassroots heyday is also built on what she did before and after her court victory to help blacks and poor whites attain political citizenship—the right to fully participate in political decision-making. Butts, who stood amid the continuum of black resistance leaders questing for freedom, civil rights, equality, justice, and dignity, exercised effective leadership on diverse concerns, including segregated schools, employment discrimination, and substandard housing. Self-determination for marginalized people lay at the heart of her crusades, especially for voter education, registration, and turnout. This first, full-length scholarly examination of Butts’ leadership is a qualitative study and narrative inquiry that includes the context of her times. This interdisciplinary study draws on literature in history, political science, sociology, civil rights, voting rights, critical race theory, and leadership theories, and is built on narrative analysis and constructivist/interpretivist techniques. Butts, who died in 1993, did not leave many personal writings, so research findings emerged from a triangulation of resources: interviews with friends; a self-published memoir by

Butts' youngest daughter; and newspaper archives. This study contributes to closing the gap in leadership literature about grassroots black women who remain unsung and understudied because of nontraditional leadership styles. This dissertation is available in open access at AURA: Antioch University Repository and Archive, <http://aura.antioch.edu/> and OhioLINK ETD Center, <https://etd.ohiolink.edu>

Keywords: Social sciences, Citizenship, African American women, Civil rights movement, Qualitative, Narrative inquiry, Narrative analysis, Poll tax, Bridge leader, Citizen leader, American history, Voting rights, Race, Class, Political development, Virginia

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Chapter I: Introduction

Overview

President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 to free black slaves in America's rebellious Southern states, but the liberation of black Americans from decades of white supremacy was far from complete—even 100 years later when the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his resounding “I Have a Dream” speech at the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. That same year, a low-income African American seamstress in Norfolk, Virginia, filed a lawsuit against one of the most onerous and offensive vestiges of suppression, the oppressive poll tax—an annual fee required before voting—that had prevented countless African Americans and poor whites from exercising their suffrage rights.

That seamstress was Evelyn Thomas Butts, the wife of a disabled World War II veteran, mother of three children, and an emerging grassroots civil rights leader, who was not afraid to speak up on social justice issues and challenge traditional power figures, white or black.

On March 24, 1966, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of Evelyn Butts and several other poll tax plaintiffs in a combined case that had been renamed *Harper v. Virginia State Board of Elections*. The 6–3 decision meant that Butts and her co-plaintiffs had knocked out poll taxes for state and local elections, the last bastion of the poll tax system in the Southern states that made up the old Confederacy. However, Butts did not rest with that achievement. Already a veteran of local voter-registration drives, Butts stepped up her grassroots work to help transform thousands of Norfolk African Americans into first-time voters.

Butts' accomplishments—the successful lawsuit that ended poll taxes and her nonstop voter-participation initiatives—still reverberate in both national electoral case law and local politics a half-century later. In addition, her activism and leadership included working on a

variety of civil rights, neighborhood, employment, and public school issues as well as outreach to help keep fellow citizens informed and motivated. Yet Evelyn Butts, who died in 1993 at age 68, is largely unknown outside of southeastern Virginia and is in danger of being forgotten among future generations—even in her hometown, where there is a street named after her.

Purpose

I have several purposes for wanting to tell the deep, rich story of the political citizenship of Evelyn T. Butts, who has not been the subject of any previous scholarly study of more than a few pages in books and articles about broader civil rights and voting rights history. My work aims to help close that gap in scholarly literature, which has also suffered from a significant underrepresentation of female leaders involved in the civil rights movement and an incomplete rendering of diverse forms of grassroots leadership in the activities of both women and men at the local level (Garrow, 2005, p. 196). I will discuss my methods later on in this chapter and in Chapter III, but I want to note here that this exploration was conducted as a qualitative study, which, as Creswell (2007) explains, may be used to help “fill a void in existing literature, establish a new line of thinking, or assess an issue with an understudied group or population” (p. 102).

While Evelyn Butts is usually remembered for the poll tax case, a more thorough review of her life should include her longtime work as a social justice activist, community advocate for neighborhood improvements, fearless fighter against job discrimination and segregated schools, and tireless political organizer who spearheaded many voter-registration, voter-education, and voter-turnout campaigns. Evelyn Butts possessed a unique array of talents, skills, and experiences that made her an essential grassroots leader in the modern civil rights movement as well as being representative of the travails, persistence, and triumphs of African Americans—and

especially of African American women—in their long struggles against the Jim Crow system of apartheid that segregated and suppressed African Americans across the South.

Evelyn Butts, in essence, exemplified what sociologist Belinda Robnett has termed “bridge leadership” in her 1997 study of African American women in the struggle for civil rights (p. 19). In Robnett's extended explanation, characteristics of a bridge leader include being able to “foster ties between the social movement and the community” and “cross the boundaries between the public life of a movement organization and the private spheres of adherents and potential constituents” (p. 19). Individually, the position of a bridge leader in a community or movement “was socially constructed and largely determined by one's race, class, gender, and culture,” says Robnett (p. 19).

From studying Evelyn Butts, I also intend to learn from her leadership techniques, especially her work to encourage voter participation, and to convey those lessons to new generations of political citizens. This is important because voter turnout in the United States has been in a general decline in recent decades, most profoundly in local elections (Capps, 2016; DeSilver, 2018; Maciag, 2014; Portland State University, 2016).

In presenting the story of Evelyn Butts, I hope, too, to capture some of the essence of the civil rights issues of the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, when Butts was in her heyday, to help explain what African Americans were struggling *for* and *against* in their quest for equality. As I situate Evelyn Butts in the context of her times, especially as related to African American history in Virginia, I aim for that history to transcend the generations to provide inspiration for continued political and community change. In doing so, I will also draw on some aspects of critical race theory to note that the successes of the civil rights movement and electoral reforms, such as the

Voting Rights Act of 1965, cannot be taken for granted but must be studied and tapped for continued vigilance (Crowley, 2013, pp. 719–720).

My exploratory qualitative study, which combines historical research and narrative inquiry with constructivist interpretations, primarily focuses on the first decade and a half of Evelyn Butts' activism—from about 1954 to 1970. However, I will include overall basic biographical information and some important selected highlights and disorienting dilemmas from her childhood and teen years as well as later years. I have keyed in on the 1954–1970 time period because that is when Butts was at the height of her activism as a community and grassroots civil rights leader before she turned many of her energies to partisan politics.

It is also important to solidify and honor Butts' role in history because Virginia has historically been a keystone state in America's experience with race relations (Barnes & Proctor, 1994). The first Africans to unwillingly come to British North America arrived just a few miles from Norfolk in 1619 (McCartney, 2018). Also, the Virginia colony not only was among the first to codify slavery between 1662 and 1705, its laws “became the standard that the other colonies followed” (Virginia Museum of History & Culture, n.d.). My study will provide additional details in Chapter II, including a subsection on the continuum of African American resistance to white supremacy laws and practices.

Political Citizenship

I want to also briefly remark on the phrase “political citizenship” in the title of this study and in several references so far. This term, popularized in the 1950s by British sociologist T. H. Marshall, is not frequently used in the United States nowadays, but it characterizes much of Evelyn Butts' activism. Marshall (1964) analyzed citizenship as having three components, civil, political, and social (p. ix) and defined the political as “the right to participate in the exercise of

political power as a member of a body invested with political authority or as an elector of the members of such a body” (pp. 71–72). Although Marshall was writing about political citizenship in Great Britain, the concept—although not by name—was at the core of what many American civil rights activists were promoting in their advocacy: the right to fully participate in the political decision-making of their localities, states, and nation. Political historian Eric Foner (1998), for example, uses a more common American phrase, "the right to participate in public affairs," in his analysis of concepts of freedom in the United States (p. xvii). And as historian J. Todd Moye (2011) observes, the essence of the modern civil rights struggle was rooted “preeminently as a movement for self-determination” (p. 166).

Evelyn Butts probably did not read academic discourses by T. H. Marshall, Eric Foner, or J. Todd Moye. But she might have gathered her notions about political citizenship much closer to home, albeit without the formal labels.

An avid newspaper reader, Evelyn Butts may have kept up with a weekly column, "Rights and Duties in a Democracy," that African American historian, educator, and public intellectual Luther P. Jackson once wrote for Norfolk's black-owned *Journal and Guide* newspaper. There, Jackson promulgated a philosophy about democracy that called for an “activist, engaged, and politically pragmatic version of citizenship that aimed at altering the political status quo” (Dennis, 2005, p. 182).

Jackson, who was a major voice in African American opposition to Virginia's poll tax, but died in 1950, wrote his political column in the 1940s, when Butts was just beginning her activism.

In Chapters II and IV, I will further discuss the poll tax as well as the 1966 Supreme Court decision that declared this levy unconstitutional. However, I want to briefly note here one

of the key points of the 1963 lawsuit filed by Evelyn Butts and her attorney, Joseph A. Jordan Jr. It said, “Denying the right to vote by requiring the payment of a poll tax deprives citizens of their First Amendment rights to petition the government and to freedom of speech” (Ligon, 2017, p. 117). Thus, it is clear that Evelyn Butts realized that the poll tax was a restriction on her ability and that of many other African Americans to participate fully as political citizens: this, in a country where the opening words of the U.S. Constitution—“We the people”—idealizes citizens as the basic building block of our democracy.

The Problems

With this dissertation, I aim to help address two concerns: the need for scholars and citizens to better understand the roles of grassroots leaders in the modern civil rights movement; and the need to give greater recognition to African American women whose contributions were so crucial.

Giving attention to these two issues is important because the modern civil rights movement of the 1940s, '50s, and '60s relied heavily on the grassroots leadership and organizational abilities of countless unknown local citizens across the South—especially women usually behind the scenes—who took it upon themselves to energize and mobilize their neighbors and connect them with the overall struggle to overthrow Jim Crow.

The late Richard A. Couto (1995) of the Jepson School of Leadership at the University of Richmond writes that such grassroots citizen leaders are essential despite a general tendency in the public, news media, and academia to ignore them for not fitting within traditional definitions of leadership or not holding traditional titles and being a part of established institutions and businesses. Couto asks, “What sets these largely ignored leaders apart?” (p. 12). Their shared characteristics, he says, are that they "facilitate organized action to improve conditions of people

in low-income communities and to address other basic needs of society at the local level. Their goal is to raise the floor beneath all members of society, rather than to enable a few to touch its vaulted ceiling” (p. 12). These citizen leaders, he adds, are often “transforming leaders who engage others in efforts to reach higher levels of human awareness and relationships” (p. 13).

But perhaps their truest “distinguishing characteristic of leadership,” Couto (1995) says, is the “gift of trust” that has been bestowed upon them by the people “with whom they work” (p. 13) or work for. Continuing, he writes that “citizen leaders act from fairly simple motives” and they speak in simple terms about the basic dignity of every human being. They act from the conviction that we, as a society, are responsible for redressing the conditions that undermine and understate the human dignity of any of its members (Couto, 1995, pp. 14–15).

As I will show in later chapters, much of Couto's descriptions fit Evelyn Butts (and so many other grassroots leaders in the civil rights movement) almost perfectly.

Similarly, the roles of African American women as civil rights leaders and organizers have also been largely overlooked in studies about the movement until recent years. Joy James (1997) is among the scholars who have noted this oversight, and she explains why it is important to study and recognize these grassroots female activists:

Remembering the contributions of lesser-known women activists and radicals increases understandings of antiracist leadership and progressive change. Male-dominated podiums or pulpits cannot completely hide the democratic agency of grass-roots workers. The majority of these activists were and continue to be women working in churches, schools, neighborhoods, farm fields, and factories, seeking democratic power, liberation, and sustenance. (p. 97)

In other words, women were also strong and important leaders in the civil rights movement. However, many times their leadership styles and contributions did not fit traditional male-oriented definitions of leadership or the conceptions of leadership as portrayed in the mass

media, which often focused on actions such as marches, demonstrations, sit-ins, stirring speeches, and the violent pushback of white supremacists (Robnett, 1997, p. 97).

Historian David Garrow (2005) also keys in on such critical points about traditional concepts of leadership and stereotypes when examining the civil rights movement. He says:

Too often those who write about the civil rights movement employ too narrow and exclusive of a concept of “leadership.” Implicitly if not explicitly, they presume that leaders are simply those individuals who are organizational chieftains or spokespersons. They thus restrict our definition of leadership to administrators and articulators, without looking as carefully and as thoughtfully as they should for a more meaningful understanding of “leadership.” (Garrow, 2005, p. 196)

Fortunately, trends are changing in the study of the civil rights movement and the broader struggle to overthrow Jim Crow. A growing number of researchers are now reframing the lives and experiences of African Americans—especially African American women—who vigorously participated in social justice movements to improve our country but whose contributions were not fully appreciated in traditional histories. For example, Janet Dewart Bell in her 2015 dissertation, *African American Women Leaders in the Civil Rights Movement: A Narrative Inquiry*, writes that “In the academic literature, particularly on leadership and change, there is little attention devoted to African American women and their leadership legacy” (p. V, para. 1). Bell not only hoped to help close this gap but encourage others as she writes, “More studies and books about individual African American women leaders in the Civil Rights Movement would add to our knowledge about leadership and how effective leaders bring about positive change” (p. 154, para. 1). Janice Y. Ferguson (2015) makes similar points in her dissertation, *Anna Julia Cooper: A Quintessential Leader*, and contends that leadership studies of African American women need expanded concepts that move “beyond the western hegemonic point of view and the more traditional ways of thinking about leadership, which narrowly identify effective leaders and ways of thinking about leadership development” (p. ii, para. 1).

Evelyn Butts should be included among the leaders being studied. As will be seen in later chapters, Butts was often recognized in Norfolk as an outspoken activist and organizer, but she was also often marginalized and not taken seriously as a leader. It is true that in her overall advocacy, Butts did not shy from picketing or other demonstrations of racial grievances (Chapter IV will describe those instances); however, Butts was not *just* a civil rights demonstrator and a participant in voting rights lawsuits, she was a talented and commanding political leader who developed an effective community network and encouraged many others. She also had a knack for combining her activism with her household skills, such as cooking, sewing, and child rearing.

In exercising such political dexterity, Butts exemplified a nontraditional but essential leadership role in the civil rights movement. Former Ambassador Andrew Young, who had worked closely with the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., described such forms of grassroots leadership this way: It was women going door to door, speaking with their neighbors, meeting in voter-registration classes together, organizing through their churches that gave the vital momentum and energy to the movement, that made it a mass movement (Olson, 2001, p. 394).

J. D. Bell, in her 2018 book, *Lighting the Fires of Freedom*, based on her dissertation, also summarized the crucial grassroots leadership roles of African American women: “Through activities in churches, schools, organizations, and the black women’s club movement, African American women were integral to their communities’ survival and advancement—developing social justice and social programs” (p. 2).

As noted earlier in this chapter, Robnett (1997) provided the term “bridge leaders” for women whose “activities ... in the civil rights movement were the stepping stones necessary for potential constituents and adherents to cross formidable barriers between their personal lives and the political life of civil rights movement activities” (p. 19). Bridge leaders, Robnett writes,

“operate through one-on-one, community-based interaction” (p. 21), adding that “mobilization could not have succeeded without the efforts of indigenous bridge leaders, who facilitated the connection between these (local) communities and movement organizations” (p. 143).

Robnett (1997) explains that there are a variety of formal and informal bridge leaders and that their roles often could change or take on a mixed range of characteristics depending on the situation. Bell offers a similar observation, noting that “African American women had to be creative and adapt nontraditional approaches for their particular circumstances” (J. D. Bell, 2018, p. 4).

By these definitions, Evelyn Butts was certainly a leader. I will explore her leadership traits, techniques and style later in this study. I believe that she began evolving as a leader early in her life and became more skilled as new opportunities arose.

A Brief Biography

Evelyn Thomas Butts was born in Norfolk, Virginia, on May 22, 1924, the third of six children to George and Lottie Thomas. Virile racism had again taken hold with the rejuvenated white supremacist Ku Klux Klan spreading across Virginia, and the Norfolk area was one of the Klan's hot spots. On Sept. 1, 1926, hooded Klan terrorists kidnapped a white Catholic priest, Father Vincent B. Warren, apparently because he taught African American children at the mostly black St. Joseph's Catholic Church and School in downtown Norfolk (Kneebone, 2016).

We do not know how such incidents affected the Thomases, but in 1929, George Washington Thomas, a laborer, took his family to New York City, where he helped build the Empire State Building, according to Charlene Butts Ligon, the youngest daughter of Evelyn Butts and author of a 2017 memoir-style biography about her mother (Ligon, 2017, pp. 11–12). The move would prove to have life-changing impacts on the family, and create a potential

disorienting dilemma for young Evelyn, because Evelyn's eldest sister, Julia, and then her mother, Lottie, both contracted tuberculosis in New York and soon died. During this time, George Thomas had moved his family back to Norfolk, where Evelyn and the other surviving children would live with their mother's sister, Rosa Lee White, or “Aunt Roz.” This was another building block in Evelyn's development because Aunt Roz was a model for entrepreneurship—as a real estate agent and owner of a small corner grocery store—and for paying attention to politics. “She understood the issues, voted in every election, and encouraged her friends and neighbors to do likewise,” Ligon writes (2017, p. 14).

While young Evelyn was being exposed to political news and values, she also encountered another potential disorienting dilemma as she stepped into the role of “female head of the family” as now the eldest girl, even as a 10-year-old fifth-grader (Ligon, 2017, p. 15).

Yet another potential disorienting dilemma came for Evelyn in the 10th grade, when she became pregnant and gave birth to the first of her three daughters. She never married the young father, and while she dropped out of school, she made sure her siblings would graduate. In 1941, she met and married Charlie Butts, a steelworker, who went into the Army in 1942, saw action in World War II, and returned home disabled from shrapnel wounds. With her husband away, Evelyn—still a teen—found work as a cook in a downtown Norfolk department store and also cleaned houses, as well as managed her family (Ligon, 2017, pp. 15–17). Eventually, her family's main sources of revenue came from her work as a seamstress and her husband's disability checks.

Many young mothers might break down in such trying circumstances, but apparently Evelyn Butts stayed strong. She even became active in the Oakwood Civic League, a community organization that promoted improvements for a poor, African American neighborhood that was

not yet absorbed into Norfolk's municipal boundaries. As such, Oakwood residents did not have running water or sewers, traveled on dirt or gravel streets, and contended with other infrastructure problems. Through the civic league, Butts learned to speak up in front of audiences and speak out. Her career as a political citizen was just now beginning (Ligon, 2017, pp. 17–18). In a few years, her activism led her to join the local National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and her interest in civil rights ripened with the Supreme Court's pivotal 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision that struck down segregated public schools (Ligon, 2017, p. 20).

It was a heady time for young civil rights activists feeling their way. Challenges to Jim Crow were coming on almost all fronts, albeit with serious and deadly threats on the lives of many activists—and even nonactivists. Even professional sports were ending Jim Crow segregation policies with Jackie Robinson's breakthrough into Major League Baseball in 1947, a beacon that inspired African American baseball fans in Norfolk to boycott the Norfolk Tars minor league team until management agreed to integrate the team and stadium in 1954. On the national scene, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks were leading the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955–56, other bastions were falling, and more people, black and white, were organizing against segregation and its brutalities.

In Norfolk, Butts stepped up her community and political activities, often in partnership with Norfolk-based civil rights attorney Joseph A. Jordan Jr., who would represent her in the poll tax lawsuit. She spoke out and organized against Norfolk's segregated public schools and picketed against various instances of discrimination in the community. Butts became an ardent follower of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., witnessing his “I Have a Dream” speech in Washington, D.C., in August 1963, and serving as secretary of Norfolk's new chapter of King's

Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) later that fall (Ligon, 2017, pp. 100–101). In November 1963, she would file her first lawsuit against the poll tax, *Mrs. Evelyn Butts v. Governor Albertis Harrison et al.* (Ligon, 2017), and worked with Jordan to form or revamp several grassroots political organizations, such as Virginia's Women of the Third Force (sometimes “3rd Force”).

As a problem-solving activist-organizer and as a civil rights litigant, Butts was on a path traveled by countless African American women who found ways to stand up against racial and sexual abuses throughout the brutal years of slavery and decades of Jim Crow apartheid. I will include examples in Chapter II.

Butts' lawsuit eventually was combined with one filed by several low-income African American plaintiffs from northern Virginia and went to the U.S. Supreme Court as *Harper v. Virginia State Board of Elections* (1966). After the court struck down the poll tax, Butts initiated many voter-registration, voter-education, and voter-turnout campaigns. The result was that voters elected Jordan as the first African American to serve on the Norfolk City Council since the end of Reconstruction, and then elected William P. Robinson Sr., a Norfolk State University professor, as the first black to represent Norfolk in Virginia's General Assembly, also since the Reconstruction Era. In 1975, Jordan successfully nominated Butts to serve on the powerful Board of Commissioners of the Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority, making her the first African American woman in that major policy-making post.

From 1980 to 1984, Butts tried three times to win election to the Norfolk City Council, but lost in all three hotly contested attempts. Her political power soon began to wane, and she once more found herself in bitter leadership fights, including within the black community.

Positionality of the Researcher

Evelyn Butts and I share ethnic heritage as African Americans. Like Evelyn Butts, I have lived most of my life in Norfolk, Virginia.

We also share a joy in doing politics, especially when working toward the goal of creating a more equitable and socially just society. Each of us has been known for being outspoken, albeit in different ways and with different tones. (Evelyn Butts was often considered too aggressive or bossy, while my outspokenness seemed to open doors for me, particularly among people who wanted to help develop my leadership potential. The contrast in how Evelyn Butts and I were received may be attributed to gender bias and different time periods: the 1950s–1980s for Evelyn Butts, 1980s–2018 for me.)

I also see some similarities in the community roles of Evelyn Butts and those of my grandmother, Ruby Rose Cooper, who raised me. Both Evelyn Butts and my grandmother were reputed to know everyone in their respective neighborhoods, were adept at enlisting neighbors in various community improvement efforts, and carried out many of their initiatives by going door to door or by telephone. My grandmother, however, was a much quieter person than Evelyn Butts. Both women, though, had something else in common: They appreciated the value of education and strove mightily for the educational advancement of the children they raised.

Here is what my aunt, Shirley Maxine Whitley, recalls about my grandmother, who was her mother:

She always told us to be participate in elections when we grew up. Even when we were not old enough, she carried us to go work the polls. She told us it makes a difference, that “we are going to have to fight for what we get in life.” (S. M. Whitley, personal communication, June 2, 2018)

Like Evelyn Butts, my grandmother also reached out to neighborhood children. Longtime community activist Bernard “Pee Wee” Thompson remembers. He told me this:

I was 15 or 16, and she was like an anchor lady for us, not just in politics but in life. She would call me and say, “I got some fliers. Can you help get them out?” Then she'd talk about the unborn generations, like “think about the future of your unborn children.” She emphasized politics and education, and if she saw someone not in school during the day, she would get you a ride or make someone give you a ride. (B. Thompson, personal communication, June 2, 2018)

Looking back, I see that my grandmother and Evelyn Butts had some other similarities when it came to political participation. During local elections, candidates would visit my grandmother at home or at her job as secretary for a large church in our neighborhood. My grandmother also walked door to door to help introduce candidates to neighbors and assigned me to distribute flyers. Over the years, I learned that these activities were among the basic touchstones for motivating people to vote. I also observed that it was important to provide rides to the polls on Election Day. My grandmother did not drive, but I noticed that she was involved in coordinating these rides and that nobody who needed a ride was overlooked.

I learned much about community outreach from my grandmother, and perhaps I inherited my frustration over low voter turnout from her. At any rate, voter turnout is another concern that I share with Evelyn Butts. Throughout my career in public life—from neighborhood leader, to state legislator, to mayor—I have been saddened about the problem of low voter turnout, especially at the local level. I have participated in some of the usual efforts to increase voter turnout, such as talking about the problem at neighborhood civic leagues, volunteering to give voters rides to the polls on Election Day, and successfully introducing legislation in the Virginia General Assembly to enable Norfolk residents to directly elect their mayor, which replaced the system of having the local City Council select the mayor from its own ranks. Now, as mayor of Norfolk, I am afforded even more opportunities to speak out on issues related to voter participation. I am often invited to speak at houses of worship and at community forums, and I usually spend at least a few minutes talking about issues that challenge our democracy. For

example, on September 10, 2017, I moderated a well-attended panel discussion called, "A More Representative Democracy," which keyed in on the problem of gerrymandering in Virginia. In addition, I wrote an op-ed commentary about gerrymandering for our regional daily newspaper, *The Virginian-Pilot* (Alexander, 2017), and appeared in *GerryRigged*, a public television documentary about gerrymandering in Virginia. When I speak to assemblies of schoolchildren, I always remind them about the importance of becoming voters when they grow up.

Even without this examination of the life and leadership of Evelyn Butts, I have already been helping our community to remember the contributions of Butts and her allies. In 2006, while serving in Virginia's House of Delegates, I sponsored a resolution commending Marie G. Young, who worked closely with Evelyn Butts on voter-participation issues through their organization, Women of Virginia's Third Force. In 2016, I was the keynote speaker at a 50th anniversary public commemoration of Butts' 1966 Supreme Court victory. In 2017, I wrote the foreword for a memoir-style biography of Butts by her youngest daughter, Charlene Butts Ligon.

I will mention one other intersection in Evelyn Butts' life with mine. She achieved her great victory against the poll tax in 1966, which was the year that I was born. While she helped elect the first African American in 1968 to the Norfolk City Council since the Reconstruction Era and the first African American from Norfolk in 1969 to the Virginia General Assembly, Evelyn Butts did not live to see the election of Norfolk's first mayor of African descent. That mayor is me, and I was elected in 2016, 50 years after Evelyn Butts defeated the poll tax.

Research Questions

In this section, I will state my "working research questions" because I have learned from Creswell (2003) that "research questions may change and be refined as the inquirer learns what to ask and to whom it should be asked" (p. 181). Creswell also provided this helpful explanation:

that research questions “become topics specifically explored in interviews, observations, and documents and archival material” (p. 106).

My central or overarching research question is this: How could a low-income African American woman—a high school dropout who grew up under a system of Jim Crow racism—become an accomplished civil rights bridge leader who helped destroy the oppressive poll tax, inspire thousands of voters, and change the political landscape of Norfolk, Virginia, all while spending decades caring for her disabled husband, raising three children, and juggling various low-paying jobs? In delving into this research question, I explored several thematic and contextual challenges that Evelyn T. Butts faced, such as racism, sexism, classism, and her husband's disability, and explored ways that these obstacles shaped her abilities as a grassroots leader and community organizer.

I have also broken down my central research question into several sub-questions, although I recognize that there will be areas that intersect, especially in exploring the racism, sexism, and class issues:

- What was the nature of the overt and institutional racism that Evelyn Butts faced in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, and how did she muster the will and determination to stand up against it?
- What were some of the forms of sexism that Evelyn Butts faced in both the black and white communities of Norfolk, and how did she counter it?
- What were some of the class issues that Evelyn Butts had to overcome as she rose in stature as a community leader?

- How did her husband's war-related disability affect the course of Evelyn Butts' life and ability to rise as an effective leader and community organizer?
- What leadership lessons can we learn from Evelyn Butts?

Research Approach

My research is based on an interdisciplinary constructivist/interpretivist approach, drawing on literature in history, political science, sociology, civil rights, voting rights, critical race theory, and leadership theories. My narrative inquiry, with elements of oral history and biographical research, mostly builds from public and private archival resources, including newspapers and voting records, and interviews with people who knew Evelyn Butts. One interviewee even kept a scrapbook of some of her activities with Evelyn Butts.

By “narrative inquiry” here, I use Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) definition, which is “the study of experience” especially in terms of how people relate to one another and act within the context of their time. For Creswell (2003), this form of inquiry includes studying “the lives of individuals” and asking individuals “to provide stories about their lives” that can be “retold or restoried by the researcher into a narrative chronology” (p. 15). This method, says Riessman (1993), “allows for systematic study of personal experience and meaning.”

Proceeding with this study, I was faced with at least three great challenges in trying to produce a worthy narrative of the life of Evelyn Thomas Butts: Evelyn Butts, having died in 1993, cannot be interviewed; many of her close friends and fellow activists have also passed or are in failing health; and there is no scholarly work about her life of more than a few pages in books and articles about broader civil rights and voting rights history. Fortunately, some of Evelyn Butts’ contemporaries agreed to be interviewed on the record (and granted permission to use their names) and make personal archives available to me, including Evelyn Butts’ youngest

daughter, Charlene Butts Ligon. Also, many of Evelyn Butts' activities generated news stories over her years in public life. My exploration included the archives of our local newspapers, white-owned and African American-owned, and of our local universities for details and local context. For historical and social context nationally, regionally, Virginia-wide, and local, I have read several volumes about the role of women and grassroots activists in the civil rights movement, especially at the local level, as well as books and numerous articles about white supremacy, African American resistance, the rise and fall of Jim Crow, black political engagement, and related topics.

Overview of Chapters

My study of Evelyn Butts is divided into five chapters, which I will summarize here.

Chapter I: Introduction to the study. In this first chapter, Evelyn Thomas Butts is introduced as the wife of a disabled World War II veteran, mother of three children, and an emerging grassroots civil rights leader who was not afraid to speak up on social justice issues and challenge traditional power figures, white or black. Readers will learn that she is best known for initiating the successful lawsuit that led to the U.S. Supreme Court banning the discriminatory and oppressive poll tax from state and local elections in 1966, and that she was also an effective leader who addressed other important concerns, such as segregated public schools, employment discrimination, and substandard housing. She did not rest after her Supreme Court victory but spearheaded many voter-registration, voter-education, and voter-turnout drives that led to Norfolk African Americans being elected to the local City Council and the Virginia General Assembly for the first time since the Reconstruction Era. This first chapter includes statements about the purpose of my study, defines the problems I address, introduces the term “political citizenship” and the concept and theoretical lens of “bridge

leadership,” situates my positionality as the researcher, lays out the research questions, summarizes my research approach, and attests to the ethical standards of my research.

Chapter II: Literature review. The second chapter of my study establishes the context for what Evelyn Butts and many other grassroots civil rights activists and leaders were fighting *for* and *against* in the time frame of the 1940s, '50s, and '60s. To best explain the context, though, my review introduced several key events and concepts in American race relations from as early as 1619, when the first Africans were taken to Colonial Virginia against their will. The discussion continues with historical highlights from several other eras before 1940. This includes time periods that take in the Civil War, Reconstruction, and emergence and solidification of Jim Crow apartheid, brutalities, and exclusion of African Americans from meaningful political expression in the South through the imposition of poll taxes and similar voter-suppression devices. Chapter II also discusses the wartime experiences of African Americans, most notably during World War II, and the impact of those experiences on the civil rights movement. I have also provided diverse examples from the continuum of black resistance to white supremacy from Colonial times into the 1960s.

Chapter III: Methodology. Evelyn Butts died in 1993 and did not leave much of a trail of writings and other personal archives, had never been the subject of in-depth scholarly research, and most of her closest allies had also passed on or were in their 80s or 90s and in frail health when I began my study. Chapter III describes my challenge of how to tell the story of Evelyn Butts without having the opportunity to interview her or some of her closest allies and friends or read what other scholars had published about her. Chapter III also reports that I chose to use the methodologies of qualitative research, historical research, and narrative inquiry along with an interdisciplinary constructivist/interpretivist approach. In addition, Chapter III explains

that I searched the archives of local black-owned and white-owned newspapers for news and feature stories about Evelyn Butts or about events in which she was involved. Chapter III notes the steps I took to contact surviving friends and allies of Evelyn Butts in order to schedule interviews, and it includes a list of guide questions I used in my interviews.

Chapter IV: Findings. This chapter generally follows a theme framework as set by my research questions regarding racism; sexism and gender-related issues; class issues, democracy, and voting rights; effects of the war-related disability suffered by Evelyn Butts' husband; and leadership. Information is presented from a triangulation of resources: interviews with surviving friends who knew Evelyn Butts well; a self-published memoir-style biography written by Butts' daughter, whom I also interviewed; and archives of local newspapers, plus books about or containing Norfolk history, including a few that mention Evelyn Butts. Among the highlights of Chapter IV are comments, examples, and anecdotes from Butts' surviving daughter and surviving friends regarding Butts' personality, leadership characteristics and techniques, and descriptions of Butts going into action, especially when encouraging voter participation. Chapter IV ends with a summary of patterns and preliminary conclusions about Butts' life and leadership.

Chapter V: Conclusion and recommendations. This chapter relates the findings in Chapter IV to the literature review in Chapter II and discusses Evelyn Butts activism within the theoretical framework of bridge leadership. In addition to creating new knowledge through this synthesis, I have made several recommendations, including on how Butts' voter-participation techniques might be adapted for current voter-turnout issues and on the need to research the lives of other grassroots civil rights leaders before they or people who know them are no longer available to be interviewed.

Ethical Considerations in Interviews and Historical Research

In January 2018, the Antioch University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved my ethics application for conducting interviews. In the IRB-approved consent form, all interviewees were advised, among other points, that their participation was voluntary with no compensation; I would be digitally recording their interviews; they could request anonymity in the use of any of their comments (none did; all were eager to be quoted by name); that the interviews would be done at their convenience; and that they could withdraw without penalty at any time. All agreed with these and other conditions stated on the consent form (see Appendix A), and signed and dated their consents.

In proceeding with the interviews, I consulted and adopted guidelines from Purdue University's Online Writing Lab (Purdue OWL), including the following as excerpted below:

You should have the permission of the people who you will be studying to conduct research involving them.

Objectivity vs. subjectivity in your research is another important consideration. Be sure your own personal biases and opinions do not get in the way of your research and that you give both sides fair consideration.

Many types of research, such as surveys or observations, should be conducted under the assumption that you will keep your findings anonymous. Many interviews, however, are not done under the condition of anonymity. You should let your subjects know whether your research results will be anonymous or not.

When reporting your results be sure that you accurately represent what you observed or what you were told. Do not take interview responses out of context and do not discuss small parts of observations without putting them into the appropriate context. (Ethical Considerations in Primary Research, n.d.)

Chapter II: Literature Review

Introduction

Friends and family recall Evelyn Thomas Butts as a force to be reckoned with when it came to protecting her family and neighborhood as well as for advancing the civil rights and voting rights of African Americans. She had to be strong and resilient during the decades of the 1940s, '50s, and '60s, a span that encompassed World War II, the beginning of the modern civil rights movement, and the tumultuous 1960s. Like many African American women, she had to swim through both the stormy waters of white supremacy and the fresh but uncertain tides of hope in the struggle to overthrow America's Jim Crow system of apartheid. At the same time, Butts had to be careful to not fall victim to the perpetual undertows of racism, sexism, and poverty.

Through my literature review, I visited those churning times to set the context for Butts' development into a grassroots community leader, social justice advocate, and voting rights champion. I have organized parts of Chapter II to roughly correlate with my research questions and themes, although there are some overlaps that reflect real-life realities when it comes to experiences related to race, gender, and class in America. These themes are also broken into time periods that correspond to the decades of Butts' development as a leader and her most active span, and subsections because of their immense nature.

I devote much of Chapter II to what was happening in Virginia, including Norfolk, where Evelyn Butts lived most of her life. As such, I have noted that racism and white supremacy manifested themselves in Virginia in certain critical aspects that differed from experiences in other Southern states, and that Jim Crow segregation varied across Virginia depending on local powers and conditions, according to Brent Tarter (2013) in *The Grandees of Government: The*

Origins and Persistence of Undemocratic Politics in Virginia (p. 315). Politically, Virginia was dominated by an oligarchy known as the Byrd Organization, a powerful statewide machine headed by longtime U.S. Senator Harry Flood Byrd Sr. While Byrd worked diligently to suppress African American political participation and preserve Jim Crow segregation in many ways, he and other powerful white leaders in Virginia tried to keep the lid on physical violence against blacks, at least since the late 1920s, because, as noted by historian J. Douglas Smith (2002) in *Managing White Supremacy: Race, Politics, and Citizenship in Jim Crow Virginia*, they were concerned about promoting Virginia's national image for so-called Southern gentility and the state's ability to attract tourists and recruit businesses (pp. 9, 154).

This so-called “Virginia Way” attitude, a suppressive paternalism developed and fostered by Virginia’s white political and social elites (Epps-Robertson, 2016, pp. 110–111; J. D. Smith, 2002, p. 4), continued for decades, even beyond the 1950s when federal courts ordered the end of segregated public schools and other so-called separate-but-equal facilities. As J. D. Smith (2002) concludes, the white governing powers of Virginia slowly allowed integration “in order to protect the state's reputation for continued industrial development—rather than out of any commitment to justice for African Americans” (p. 297).

White-owned newspapers also began to editorialize against white violence after a masked mob murdered and then mangled the body of a black man who was awaiting trial for allegedly assaulting two girls in 1926. The *Richmond News Leader* asserted “it was not the ‘Virginia way’” (as quoted in J. D. Smith, 2002, p. 167). Byrd was initially reluctant to pursue antilynching legislation in Virginia but, as governor in 1928, he eventually signed the law as he “came to recognize that the antilynching bill provided positive publicity and aided in the recruitment of new industry and jobs” (J. D. Smith, 2002, p. 180).

Byrd's decision not to encourage racial violence in Virginia contrasted with the approach of some politicians in other Southern states who threatened violence in his rhetoric. As noted in Ari Berman's (2015) book, *Give Us the Ballot: The Modern Struggle for Voting Rights in America*, Mississippi Governor James K. Vardaman, for example, was quoted in the early 1900s as saying, "If it is necessary every Negro in the state will be lynched; it will be done to maintain white supremacy" (p. 122).

Virginia's approach may have been the reason that Virginia had the lowest number of known racial-terror lynchings among 12 Southern states between the end of Reconstruction in 1877 and 1950 as compiled in a 2015 study conducted by the nonprofit Equal Justice Initiative. According to the report, the 12 states saw 4,084 lynchings, including 84 in Virginia, while Mississippi had the most at 654 (Equal Justice Initiative, 2017, *Lynching in the South*, Table 1).

Nonetheless, the nonviolent Virginia Way was devastating in itself to its African American citizens and communities in so many other regards, as I will discuss in this chapter. Indeed, NAACP Executive Secretary Walter White came to regard Byrd as more dangerous than some other white-supremacist political leaders in the Southern states because, according to historian Larissa M. Smith (2001) in *Where the South Begins: Black Politics and Civil Rights Activism in Virginia, 1930–1951*, he was "more sophisticated" in his policies and pronouncements, especially in trying to cast his rhetoric in the guise of states' rights instead of overt racial terms (pp. 270–271).

Angie Maxwell (2010) observes in *The Doctrine of Interposition: James J. Kilpatrick and the Radicalization of Virginia and the South*, when it came to white supremacy, Virginia also served as a model for other Southern states (p. 2). This "leadership" model was true even in Colonial times (Tarter, 2013; Virginia Museum of History & Culture, n.d.). As Maxwell (2010)

writes, “Virginia inspired a mythology all its own within the complex mythology of the states of the defeated Confederacy” (p. 2).

So, when Evelyn Butts fought against the poll tax or instances of employment discrimination at a supermarket, she was not just challenging an individual law or the unfair practices of one grocery store. Butts was going up against decades of entrenched white-supremacist attitudes and Jim Crow laws and policies that were embedded into the dominant white culture and its societal institutions, and often interlocked with gender and class biases. There were times when Evelyn Butts had experiences similar to what historian Earl Lewis (1991) describes when he writes in *In Their Own Interests: Race, Class, and Power in Twentieth Century Norfolk, Virginia* that “blacks must have felt they were aiming at targets in a shooting gallery, for as quickly as they eliminated one challenge, another appeared” (p. 177).

To better understand the multiheaded monster that Butts fought against, I have fashioned an interdisciplinary review of literature that samples the issues of racism, sexism and gender oppression, and class bigotry, as well as the wartime experiences of blacks in the 1940s and other decades. This chapter concludes with an appreciation of many of the ways that African Americans resisted white supremacy over the centuries and persisted in their struggles for freedom, dignity, and full citizenship.

As noted earlier, the arrangement of this chapter roughly corresponds to my research questions and certain key themes as follows:

- What was the nature of the overt and institutional racism that Evelyn Butts faced in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, and how did she muster the will and determination to stand up against it? This subsection includes a historical overview with respect to United States society at large and Virginia and Norfolk in particular.

- What were some forms of sexism that Evelyn Butts faced in both the white and black communities of Norfolk, and how did she counter it? Again, I engage this issue in contexts of the nation, state of Virginia, and city of Norfolk.
- What were some class issues that Evelyn Butts had to overcome as she rose in stature as a community leader? This section also features a review on the issues of democracy and voting rights as they have been affected by the intersection of class and racial oppression.
- How did her husband's war-related disability affect the course of Evelyn Butts' life and ability to rise as an effective leader and community organizer? My overview looks at the historical experience of African Americans in several major wartime periods through World War II, including the impact on the soldiers and sailors and their home communities during and after the wars, and the impact on black resistance to white supremacy.
- What leadership lessons can we learn from Evelyn Butts? This subsection includes examples of political and community African American resistance and leadership before World War II, but with emphasis on the continuum of resistance in diverse and inspired ways.

Overt and Institutional Racism and Paternalism

African Americans in the 1940s, '50s, '60s, especially in the South, were not only struggling to overthrow the Jim Crow apartheid of their era but to also address the accumulated white-supremacist political and social structures that had oppressed them since the Colonial era of the 1600s and that had become deeply embedded in American society from top to bottom. Therefore, in my review of literature, I explored some of the roots and practices of American white supremacy from their beginnings in Colonial Virginia. The events and policies of 17th

century Virginia became the toxic foundation of the overt and institutionalized racism that Evelyn Butts encountered in her life and activism. I also provide a variety of examples of white supremacy and black suppression from the Jim Crow era, which became politically and culturally entrenched after the federal government ended its supervised Reconstruction programs for the former Confederate states in 1877 and continued overtly into the 1960s.

It is important to have these historic insights to better understand the Southern society that Evelyn Butts was born into as well as the frustrations and aspirations that shaped her emerging generation. I start with the pre-1940s because so much of the accumulated white supremacy of the previous three centuries still influenced race relations in the mid-20th century. For example, the Southern political leaders who opposed the great Voting Rights Act of 1965 deployed many of the same arguments that Southern politicians used to undermine Reconstruction in the 1870s and 1880s and to launch the reign of Jim Crow apartheid that soon began. Historian Allan J. Lichtman (2018) in *The Embattled Vote in America: From the Founding to the Present*, notes the list includes states' rights, black inferiority and corruptibility, and tyranny of the centralized federal government (pp. 164–165).

Pre-1940s. The year 1619 was a watershed for setting the courses for politics and race relations in Virginia and North America. The first English settlers in Colonial Virginia were establishing racial and class divisions by suppressing Native Americans, importing Africans, against their will, who would soon become an enslaved workforce, and imposing restrictions on who could possess political power through voting rights and hold elective office, according to Brent Tarter's (2013) insightful and detailed book, *The Grandees of Government: The Origins and Persistence of Undemocratic Politics in Virginia*. Historian Jon Meacham (2018) makes a similar observation in his book, *The Soul of America: The Battle for Our Better Angels*, as he

notes that the events of the early 17th century had deep and long-lasting effects. Meacham writes: “While whites built and dreamed, people of color were subjugated and exploited by a rising nation that prided itself on the expansion of liberty. Those twin tragedies shaped us then and ever after” (p. 36).

In his *The Grandees of Government*, Tarter (2013) defines the “grandees” as “the richest white men... who ran the plantations and governed Virginia” by pursuing “their personal ambitions and acquisition of wealth and individual freedom in ways that led them to deprive other people of their freedom” (p. 6). As will be noted, the grandees' style of governance, as well as racism, continued to manifest itself well into the 20th century.

In July 1619, Virginia's House of Burgesses—the predecessor of today's Virginia General Assembly (state legislature)—came into being. Virginia boasts of having the “oldest continuous law-making body in the New World” (Senate Clerk’s Office, n.d., para. 1), but the creation of the legislature and its early years also had an important role in the launching of America's dichotomous politics and culture (Tarter, 2013, Chapter 1). As Tarter (2013) writes, “The men who made the first laws and established representative government in Virginia also took the first steps toward creating a system of slavery” (p. 31).

This first foray into representative government also did not allow for equality among white settlers. Only white male property owners held the right to vote and to serve as elected leaders (Gottlieb, 2018; Virginia Historical Society, n.d.). Virginia's colonial government even involved itself in dictating what people should wear. “Men who violated standards of proper apparel for their stations of life—standards that the assembly's law did not specify—were to be assessed a penalty,” according to Tarter (2013, p. 24). As Tarter explains, “All men were not equal and they were not to appear dressed in such manner as to give a false appearance about

their rank in society” (p. 24). Thus, government and culture in Virginia were entwined from the beginning, and says Tarter, what this first legislature “did and how they did it influenced the whole future of Virginia's history and the history of the United States” (p. 13).

The colony's influence on black-white race relations began in August of that same year, 1619, when “20 and odd” Africans—possibly the first in Virginia—arrived unwillingly aboard the *White Lion*, an English privateer, which had pirated the enslaved Africans from a Portuguese slave ship headed to Mexico. The *White Lion* landed in Point Comfort (now part of Hampton, Virginia, just a few miles from Norfolk) and traded the Africans for food. Scholars believe this group of Africans and others soon to come, along with many of their immediate offspring, were put to work as indentured servants alongside poor whites from England in accord with the traditions of the time (McCartney, 2018).

Already concerned with establishing and preserving a class hierarchy, the legislature began taking steps to consign the first Africans, their offspring, and additional African arrivals to “one new lower level to the social ranks” (Tarter, 2013, p. 31), a status “degraded far below the most contemptible servant or Indian” (p. 31). For example, one early law, in 1662, established that slave status was inheritable through the mother (Welch, 2004, p. 16), and another, in 1669 automatically exonerated a slave owner or his employee from beating a slave to death for insubordination based on the assumption that a man would never willingly “destroy his own estate” (Welch, 2004, p. 8). By 1705, Virginia had enacted a comprehensive array of slavery laws that “became the standard that the other colonies followed” (Virginia Museum of History & Culture, n.d.), or as Tarter (2013) describes it, “a whole new body of law that permitted masters to rule their new laboring force more violently than their indentured servants, not a contractual law of master and servant but a brutal law of master and slave” (p. 31).

While it is not my intent to chronicle America's history of slavery or race relations, I include this brief summary from the 1600s to illustrate Virginia's prominent role in the codification and proliferation of slavery and the evolution of white supremacy culture. As Tarter (2013) observes, "White people, most of them men, made those laws, and the laws that they made reflected common and persistent attitudes that white people in Virginia and elsewhere in the United States held about black people" (p. 332).

Those "attitudes," according to examples from numerous scholars, such as C. Vann Woodward in his 1955 classic *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (2002), include the notions that blacks were an inferior breed of people, incapable of being completely civilized, tending toward violence and out-of-control sexual lust, lazy workers, untrustworthy, created to serve white people, that they actually benefited from slavery and second-class citizenship, and that they were impudent if they did not accept their inferiority and other forms of white domination (Foner, 1998, p. 74; Woodward, 2002, p. 70; Wynes, 1961, pp. 109, 125, 145). A president of Virginia's prestigious state-run Longwood College, Dabney S. Lancaster even proclaimed that black children were happier in separate, albeit inferior, public schools "due to the fact that the Negro race has a fine sense of humor" (as quoted in Kluger, 2004, p. 502).

At times, Southern whites seemed to also acknowledge that blacks could be capable and intelligent citizens, especially in the antebellum decades before the Civil War. However, political leaders sought to suppress the expression of free blacks and restrict black access to learning to read and write. In the early 19th century, the Virginia General Assembly required blacks to leave the state if they gained freedom after 1806 (Bogger, 1982, p. 10; J. D. Smith, 2002, p. 36) as well as enacted a series of laws governing the teaching of reading and writing to slaves. According to Bly (2017), "Elite whites worried that slaves who could read and write could travel through

white society more easily and be exposed to ideas of freedom, making them more inclined to rebel” (para. 1).

White-supremacist attitudes were so widespread and deeply ingrained among white Americans that they were voiced publicly, blatantly, and without shame at even the highest levels of government. U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice Roger B. Taney wrote the majority opinion in the infamous Dred Scott decision of 1857, which ruled that enslaved African Americans could not sue for freedom, even when taken to a free state, because they were not American citizens and had no standing in legal proceedings (Foner, 1998, p. 75; Glass, 2018; M. S. Jones, 2018, pp. 131–132; State Historical Society of Missouri, n.d.). Taney also described African Americans as “a subordinate and inferior class of beings, who had been subjugated by the dominant race” and as “beings of an inferior order, and altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in social or political relations; and so far inferior, that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect” (Africans in America: Judgment Day, n.d.).

During the post-Civil War Reconstruction era, from 1865 to 1877, the U.S. government officially recognized African Americans as citizens and required the 13 Southern states that made up the Confederacy to adopt new state constitutions that guaranteed voting rights for black men. The federal government sought to guarantee citizenship and voting rights with the 14th amendment, which included birthright citizenship and equal protection of the law, and the 15th amendment, which prohibited states from denying voting rights based on race (Foner, 1992, p. 55; M. S. Jones, 2018, pp. 5, 152).

However, deep-seated racism across the region could not be dislodged, and white-supremacist organizations, including the Ku Klux Klan, were founded to undermine black political, economic and social rights (Meacham, 2018, pp. 98–100). Such extremist organizations

even had influence with political leaders. Virginia Governor Frederick William Mackey Holliday, for instance, allowed the Ku Klux Klan to decorate the parlors and halls of the governor's mansion for his inauguration reception in 1878 (Tarter, 2013, p. 244). Anti-black public expressions of all types were common throughout Virginia during the Jim Crow era. A Danville, Virginia, newspaper in 1880 referred to "the viper of negroism" (Parramore, Stewart, & Bogger, 1994, p. 245), and *The Richmond Times* in Virginia's capital city demanded strict segregation in 1900 because "God Almighty drew the color line and it cannot be obliterated" (as quoted in Woodward, 2002, p. 96).

Meanwhile, prominent white Southern intellectuals and politicians reframed the Confederacy's losing war effort in a "strategy to bring victory out of defeat" (Meacham, 2018, p. 94). The early luminaries of this movement included journalist Edward Alfred Pollard, a longtime defender of slavery and best known for his 1866 book, *The Lost Cause: A New Southern History of the War of the Confederates*, and his 1868 sequel, *The Lost Cause Regained*. Describing *The Lost Cause* as "a bold call to fight on in the face of loss," Meacham (2018, pp. 95–96) notes that Pollard encouraged a long counter siege by waging a holy war of ideas in which the South reasserts the concepts of states' rights, white supremacy, and the illegitimacy of a strong, centralized national government. Examples of reshaping history included the work of Jubal A. Early, a former Confederate general who became president of the Southern Historical Society. From that perch, Early promoted the life and career of Confederate General Robert E. Lee "as a model of virtue" (pp. 96–97), and generations of Americans, not just Southerners, grew up believing that Lee was a noble and upstanding foe. In reality, Lee came from a family of slaveholders and believed in white supremacy as evidenced by this quote: "The negroes have

neither the intelligence nor the qualifications which are necessary to make them safe depositories of political power” (Guelzo, 2018, Race and Reconstruction section, para. 2).

By 1877, white-supremacist terrorism and the cultural war of ex-Confederates had begun to show their effects. The North gave up on Reconstruction, and the federal government withdrew its troops from the former Confederate states under a political deal engineered to win the presidency for Rutherford B. Hayes (Foner, 1992, p. 55; Meacham, 2018, pp. 109–110). Then, from 1890 to 1910, the Southern states replaced their Reconstruction constitutions with constitutions that largely disenfranchised African Americans by punching so many loopholes in the 14th and 15th amendments that these amendments became “dead letters” for Southern African Americans (Foner, 1992, p. 63). Common initiatives included enacting poll taxes that had to be paid months before an election along with establishing literacy tests, written voter-applications, and “understanding clauses” that allowed local voter-registration officials to quiz voter-applicants on their knowledge of government—all subject to the interpretations of voter-registration officials who were white and politically connected (Lichtman, 2018, pp. 94, 137; Ogden, 1958).

Alfred P. Thom, one of Norfolk's delegates to Virginia's 1901–02 Constitutional Convention, explained to that gathering how he expected local voter-registration boards to work in executing the understanding clause. “I do not expect an understanding clause to be administered with any degree of friendship by the white man to the suffrage of the black man,” he said, and added for emphasis, “I would not expect an impartial administration of the clause” (as quoted in Tarter, 2013, p. 268; & Breitzer, 2015).

Poor and illiterate whites were also hit but not as hard as blacks because Southern states had enacted so-called “grandfather clauses” that exempted Civil War veterans and also exempted

a man from poll taxes and tests if he, his father, or grandfather had voted before 1867 (Breitzer, 2015; Lichtman, 2018, p. 94; Woodward, 2002, p. 84).

I will further discuss the poll tax and other voter-suppression laws and practices in a subsequent section of Chapter II. But I want to note here that many important white political leaders were unabashed in their supremacist comments even as they rose in power on the national stage. Glass, who was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1902, served as United States secretary of the treasury under President Woodrow Wilson and then became a U.S. senator, famously declared in a national news interview that “people of the original thirteen Southern States (in the Confederacy) curse and deride and spit upon the 15th amendment—and have no intention of letting the Negro vote” (as quoted in J. D. Smith, 2002, p. 151). Referring to the accomplishments of the 1901–1902 Virginia Constitutional Convention, Glass also boasted that:

We obey the letter of the [14th and 15th] amendments and the Federal statutes, but we frankly evade the spirit thereof – and purport to continue doing so. White supremacy is too precious a thing to surrender for the sake of a theoretical justice that would let a brutish African deem himself the equal of white men and women in Dixie. (as quoted in J. D. Smith, 2002, p. 151)

White supremacy and black inferiority were also promoted through Virginia's educational system, including in textbooks, while powerful and respected professors continued the racist onslaught at the university level, thereby influencing generations of white Virginians (Tarter, 2013, pp. 258, 260, 346–350). Historian Charles E. Wynes (1961) reports in *Race Relations in Virginia 1870–1902*, that Dr. Paul B. Barringer, chairman of the faculty of the University of Virginia in 1900 (then equivalent to university president), characterized black people as “naturally a savage in whom the discipline of slavery had produced temporary elevation” (p.

102). A physician, Barringer spread his beliefs through medical curriculum and medical societies (as quoted in Wynes, 1961, p. 102). He later became president of Virginia Tech.

Virginius Dabney, a well-known Virginia patrician and editor of a Richmond daily newspaper in the mid-20th century, acknowledged how he and other white Virginians had grown up learning “that the white race not only is superior to the black race, but that every individual white is superior to every individual black” (as quoted by J. D. Smith, 2002, p. 33). Smith (2002) continues: “This lesson was taught, learned, and reinforced in homes, schools, and churches throughout Virginia” (p. 33). Even white children felt empowered to display their so-called superiority, as Ella Baker, the great civil rights organizer, recalled about her childhood in Norfolk, Virginia. Walking with her father through downtown Norfolk during the Christmas season one year, Baker was confronted by a young white boy taunting her with N-word epithets (Ransby, 2003, p. 39). She punched the boy before her father could stop her.

Indeed, Tarter explains that white and black children of both sexes usually grew up learning different dos and don'ts about interracial etiquette in the South. Whites, especially the middle to upper classes:

Almost never accorded courtesy titles of Mr. or Mrs. or Miss to black men or women of any social rank, including educators, bankers, or attorneys. Conversely, the racial etiquette that white people created for the segregated South required that black people of every class address white people of any class with courtesy titles appropriate to their status. (Tarter, 2013, p. 318)

Whites and blacks also had different interpretations of social equality. For whites, the notion of black social equality meant “interracial social mingling” (Lewis, 1991, p. 156; J. D. Smith, 2002, p. 259; Wynes, 1961, pp. 88–89, 116–119), an unthinkable concept that many Southern whites feared would lead to intermarriage and “‘mongrelization’ of the races” (Wynes, 1961, p. 88). For blacks, social equality meant equal access to public accommodations, such as

hotels, restaurants, theaters, mass transit, and to be accorded equal respect in these places. (Wynes, 1961, pp. 88–89, 116–119). In some ways, social equality to blacks also meant equal pay for the same work (Lewis, 1991, p. 156).

Yet, as Wynes (1961) notes, no matter how many times African Americans explained their definition of social equality, white segregationists maintained their different interpretation, a matter that Wynes suggests became susceptible to willful political manipulation to keep “the Negro in an inferior position” (pp. 116, 119).

Racist beliefs were reinforced even through the work of nonprofit and tourism organizations that promoted Southern history, such as the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities (Tarter, 2013, p. 258), which once limited African American visits to historic Jamestown Island to just two days per year, and then only in coordination with activities involving the Hampton Institute (now Hampton University; J. D. Smith, 2002, p. 234). This was ironic because Colonial Jamestown had played such an important role in the importation of slaves and the enactment of laws that governed them. However, the association, founded in 1889, then considered its mission was to reinterpret Virginia's history as glorious and progressive and “to win through monuments and pamphlets what [Confederate General Robert E.] Lee had lost at Appomattox” (Lindgren, 1993, p. 9).

The Byrd political machine had similar ambitions for Virginia's roadside historical markers, the first in the nation, when it created that ongoing commemoration program in 1926 to boost tourism (Bayless, 2011; Tarter, 2013, p. 349). Tarter (2013) writes that the highway markers, combined with the dedication of many monuments and statues honoring Virginia's Confederates, “made the landscape itself a powerful educational text” (p. 349). As Bayless (2011) elaborates, the historical marker program, which became a national model, emphasized

“Colonial, Revolutionary, and Civil War history to promote the popular conception of the past (as it also) blotted out histories relating to African American and Native American history” (p. 20), adding that “The lack of commemoration for African Americans was illustrative of the restrictions on black franchise and dominant class of whites in power” (p. 101).

Overall, observes historian Larissa M. Smith (2001), Virginia's organized historical homage initiatives encouraged its 20th century white citizens to:

Take pride in upholding “the Virginia tradition.” This tradition meant sustaining what was believed to be the values of the eighteenth-century elite—gentility, respectability, and moderation. Moreover, the code of gentility included a sense of paternalism and *noblesse oblige* to poorer whites and African Americans. A thick veneer of politeness often coated the racism of white Virginians. (p. 27)

In the 20th century, white elites in Virginia began referring to their paternalistic control of race relations as the Virginia Way, which included a bargain that “they ordained” for race relations and that they imagined blacks had consented to.

Powerful but genteel white Virginians were saying, in effect: You blacks stay out of politics, be deferential to whites, and don't push too hard for change. In return, we won't lynch you and we will allow you some basic services (J. D. Smith, 2002, p. 4). Longtime *Richmond News Leader* editor Douglas Southall Freeman, who grew up watching his father march in parades of Confederate war veterans, added this proviso: “The first law of the South— that a white man is a white man and must be treated as such regardless of his station” (J. D. Smith, 2002, p. 10). Some Southern white elitists also tiresomely counseled blacks to be patient and trust educated, well-bred whites to eventually change society for them.

African Americans, by and large, did not see things the same way. They attributed any reluctance to get involved in politics to frustrations related to voter suppression and the priority of trying to survive economically, especially during the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Verbal dust-ups over the Virginia Way became more frequent and public as the NAACP began winning more court cases against Jim Crow policies. White-supremacist elites voiced anger when black leaders talked about asserting full citizenship. In 1939, Roy Wilkins of the NAACP's national office proclaimed that blacks should be on the same “plane of absolute political and social equality” (J. D. Smith, 2002, p. 275), and lawyer Charles Hamilton Houston, who was one of the legal masterminds of school equalization and desegregation lawsuits, explained: “It is not a question of wanting to sit in the same classroom with white students. It is a question of vindicating one's citizenship” (J. D. Smith, 2002, p. 258). Virginius Dabney, editor of the influential *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, responded that blacks were ungrateful. His gentility fell away as he warned that black agitation, lawsuits, and “insistence upon complete equality in the South would result in a racial war in which blacks were bound to be losers” (as quoted in Suggs, 1988, p. 126) and the “worst internal clashes since Reconstruction, with hundreds, if not thousands, killed and amicable race relations setback for decades” (as quoted in J. D. Smith, 2002, p. 275). Dabney's intimation of violence infuriated many black Virginians, including the often-cautious P. B. Young Sr., publisher of the influential *Journal and Guide* newspaper in Norfolk, who shot back at Dabney that he was just as oppressive as the worst white Southern brutes. “While your language is always cultured and your attitude dignified,” Young wrote, “the result is the same” (as quoted in J. D. Smith, 2002, p. 276).

Jim Crow also infused some of the ugliest aspects of racism into consumer-oriented marketing of household products and family games. But instead of promoting semi-truthful and whitewashed memories of the past, the marketers capitalized on vicious stereotypical images of African Americans, emphasizing distorted facial and body features and sometimes invoking the N-word. In 2017, the Norfolk Public Library hosted “Relics of Racism: A Historical Portrayal of

African Americans in Advertising,” an exhibit of these stereotypes to educate people about racism. The display was organized by Therbia Parker Sr., an African American collector based in Suffolk, Virginia. Parker's artifacts included “Darkie Toothpaste,” a “Little Black Casper the Friendly Spook” wall clock, “Coon Chicken Inn” restaurant souvenirs, a can opener shaped like an alligator swallowing a Negro boy, a game called “Darkies in the Melon Patch,” a “Jolly Darkie Target Game,” and a toy-sized model of an obese black woman sitting on a toilet to promote laxatives.

Other forms of rampant racism in the private sector hit African Americans in their wallets. Kluger (2004, p. 88) notes that insurance companies charged higher premiums to black customers than to whites and that banks discriminated against African Americans when issuing mortgages.

Virginia's African Americans rarely gained attention from most of the state's white-owned newspapers, even when it came to routine news about accomplishments and human interest stories. “Daily newspapers gave little coverage of the events in the black communities,” notes historian Terry L. Jones (1982, p. 58), adding, “About the only time most Southern newspapers carried news about blacks was when one was involved in a crime.” As a result, “This condition tended to foster and continue stereotypes,” Jones (p. 58) writes. John Hope Franklin, who pioneered studies of African American history, made a similar point in observing that “this ignorance should soon breed contempt and later hatred” (as quoted in Wynes, 1961, p. 95).

Racial stereotypes and misconceptions during the Jim Crow era had consequences in public policy, especially when it came to public education for African Americans and voting rights. Robert Lewis Dabney, former chief of staff to Confederate General Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson and an influential theologian, used the bible to defend slavery and opined while

Reconstruction was being dismantled that “the Negro does not need (education) to fit him for the right of suffrage, since the Negro will soon be stripped of that ‘right’” (Dabney as quoted in Wynes, 1961, p. 122). Another influential Dabney—Richard Heath Dabney, a professor of history at the University of Virginia and father of influential journalist Virginius Dabney, proclaimed that “All lawful measures should be taken to remove any removable cause of economic, social, or political competition between the races” (as quoted by Wynes, 1961, p. 102).

The racism that fed into public decision-making often returned with even more vehemence, making Southern blacks feel they were caught in an endless loop. In Tarter's (2013) apt phrasing, “Even though the Confederacy had certainly lost the Civil War, its white Southern interpreters and their sympathizers won the history, and with that victory the right to regulate race relations as they pleased” (p. 313). Or as Kluger (2004) writes, “Stripping the African American of his civil rights... was not enough.... Restaurants and saloons and boardinghouses throughout the South soon sprouted signs declaring which race they served” (p. 86). Separated public washrooms and water fountains soon followed.

White supremacists found support for their apartheid policies in many courts. The 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision by the U.S. Supreme Court was perhaps the most well-known and most far-reaching of these decisions. The high court validated the state of Louisiana's 1890 law that required blacks and whites to sit in “separate-but-equal” railroad cars and asserted that the equal protection clause of 14th amendment did not apply (Klarman, 2004, pp. 16–23; Wynes, 1961, p. 76).

The Plessy decision emboldened white-supremacist state and local governments to codify Jim Crow seating in other forms of mass transit, such as streetcars and later with buses. African

Americans saw such forms of segregation as “as emblem of social retrogression” (Lewis, 1991, p. 22) and “the very symbol of the system” (Woodward, 2002, p. 140) because it meant they would face daily humiliation in a very public setting that they had to use for traveling to work.

The allegedly separate-but-equal standard stimulated the enactment of even more laws promoting segregation across the South. The movement snowballed after a 1908 Supreme Court ruling required separate educational facilities for black and white students at Berea College in Kentucky. Kluger (2004) writes that the Berea decision “flashed the green light” for the enactment of Jim Crow laws and policies, thereby ending any last vestiges of “biracial attendance in barbershops and baseball parks, in auditoriums and pool halls, at circuses and domino matches” (p. 88). In Norfolk, for example, laws requiring segregation in transportation and restaurants proliferated in the first quarter of the 20th century along with a residential segregation ordinance passed in 1925 (Parramore et al., 1994, p. 276; J. D. Smith, 2002, p. 140). In 1914, Virginia Governor Henry Carter Stuart did not mince words in a speech to African Americans at the Fifth Street Baptist Church in Richmond, vowing to his audience that they would “have no part in the government of this country” (as quoted in Tarter, 2013, p. 314).

Shutting out most blacks from political participation had severe consequences in the lives of African Americans as more and more restrictive laws were enacted and racist policies formulated without blacks having a voice in such decisions. Moreover, such governmental initiatives often had long-lasting effects. In 1924, the Virginia General Assembly approved “An Act to Preserve Racial Integrity,” which required Virginians “to register their (racial) status, pay a fee to be registered, and pay a fine if they failed to do so” (Tarter, 2013, p. 309). Among other things, the Racial Integrity Act and related legislation reinforced the banning of interracial marriages that Virginia had previously enacted in 1873, which then had made it the third

Southern state with such a law (Wynes, 1961, p. 89). The intermarriage prohibition lasted another 43 years until the U.S. Supreme Court declared this law unconstitutional in the famous *Loving v. Virginia* case of 1967 (Tarter, 2013, p. 329).

The lack of meaningful political voice also underscored the lie in so-called separate-but-equal schools for African Americans. According to Kluger (2004), 11 Southern states in 1910 “spent an average of \$9.45 on each white child enrolled in their public schools and \$2.90 on each black child” (p. 88) and the gap continued to widen. In 1916, Kluger writes, the states expended an average of \$10.32 per white schoolchild and \$2.89 for each black (p. 88). Huge disparities were also common in teacher pay throughout the South, with white public school teachers often earning about twice the salary of black teacher (p. 213). In Norfolk, in 1939, the white janitor at the black Booker T. Washington High School earned more than the black principal or black teachers (Lewis, 1991, p. 156).

Fed up with pay discrimination, Melvin O. Alston, a black Norfolk teacher filed a lawsuit in the late 1930s because his salary was \$921 per year while whites the same category earned \$1,200 (Kluger, 2004, p. 214; Parramore et al., 1994, p. 319). Alston was represented by Thurgood Marshall, the famous NAACP civil rights lawyer who years later would become the first African American appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court. At the time, Virginia did not give tenure to black teachers. I will discuss Alston's bravery and the significance of his lawsuit in another section.

Virginia, under the Byrd machine, held the purse strings tight when it came to funding education and programs important to the state's poorest populations, including African Americans. In the mid-1940s, Virginia was ranked 44th of the then-48 states for percentage of

state income spent on education, 44th in the percentage of people receiving assistance through welfare, and 48th in assistance to the elderly (L. M. Smith, 2001, p. 8).

Overall in Virginia, the results of this mostly nonviolent oppression were still so brutal that historians provide depressing characterizations, such as this from Wynes (1961): “For the Virginia Negro there was truly no hiding place and no refuge from the long arm of white supremacy” (p. 143).

By the 1940s, white supremacy was so entrenched in the United States, especially in the Jim Crow South, that it was a wonder that African Americans still found ways to persist against the range of obstacles. However, African Americans did persist, including by mounting challenges to legal aspects of discrimination and apartheid, especially in the arenas of education, transportation, and participation in the military.

In this chapter, I will discuss some of these initiatives and their results, particularly in the 1940s, '50s, and '60s, but in the context of further describing the racism and white supremacism of the times. This chapter's concluding section on resistance will provide more examples and details about how African Americans responded to oppression.

1940s. Many key issues facing African Americans in the 1940s involved discrimination during World War II in the military, in defense-related employment on the home front, and in the treatment of black veterans when they returned to their home communities. My review of those concerns is largely concentrated in the section on African Americans and the military.

In the years immediately following World War II, African Americans continued to experience racism and white supremacy in ways similar to what they had encountered before and during the war. However, there were signs of change: in terms of more emboldened demands for

equality, more favorable court decisions, wider gaps in the wall of white resistance, and, at the same time, a hardening pushback among some of the most demagogic racists.

On the victory side for African Americans were at least two 1944 court cases involving black women refusing Jim Crow seating arrangements on bus transportation that preceded the famous Rosa Parks incident and Montgomery Bus Boycott by 11 years. My discussion will include more about the Montgomery boycott in the section on sexism and gender issues.

In one 1944 incident, Sara Morris Davis, a teacher, sat between two whites on a Norfolk bus—the only seat she could find—and was arrested when she did not comply with the driver's order to move. She appealed, and the Virginia Supreme Court overturned her conviction on grounds that the driver did not give a similar order to a white passenger sitting in the black section of the bus. It was a narrowly focused ruling as the court did not overturn the law on segregated seating, ruling only that the driver had discriminated in how he enforced the law (Lewis, 1991, p. 190; Parramore et al., 1994, p. 337; J. D. Smith, 2002, p. 281).

In the other incident, Irene Morgan, a 27-year-old mother who was recovering from surgery, had spent some time convalescing at her mother's home in Gloucester County, Virginia. Returning to Baltimore, Morgan boarded an interstate Greyhound bus but had to sit on an uncomfortable bench-like seat in the back of the crowded bus. At a stop in Saluda, Virginia, Morgan and another black woman, Estelle Fields, took the seats vacated by a white woman and her child. Several minutes later, two white people climbed aboard, and the driver ordered Morgan and Fields to “get up so that the white couple might sit down.” Morgan refused and was charged with violating Jim Crow seating and resisting arrest. The case eventually made its way to the U.S. Supreme Court, which ruled in 1946 that interstate transit required “a single uniform rule to promote and protect national travel,” so blacks and whites must be treated alike when

journeying on interstate vehicles, thereby trumping Virginia state law, as noted in Margaret Edds' (2018, pp. 121–148) *We Face the Dawn: Oliver Hill, Spottswood Robinson, and the Legal Team That Dismantled Jim Crow*, and in Woodward (2002, p. 140).

While rare in Virginia, brutal acts of racism continued in other parts of the South and sometimes involved public transportation. In February 1946, Army veteran Isaac Woodard Jr., a 27-year-old decorated sergeant who had served 15 months in a Pacific combat zone, was arrested and beaten in Batesburg, South Carolina, on the same day he had been discharged from the military. He was still wearing his uniform. An Atlantic Greyhound bus driver cursed Woodard and accused him of taking too long in the colored restroom, and an argument between the two men escalated. The driver called local law enforcement, reporting that Woodard was drunk—even though the sergeant did not drink—and officers arrested the sergeant at the next bus stop. The officers then beat Woodard with nightsticks, which resulted in Woodard becoming totally blind (Edds, 2018, pp. 141–142; C. S. Parker, 2009, pp. 47–48).

President Harry Truman, a veteran of World War I, took notice of the Woodard beating and other incidents of white violence against black World War II veterans and spoke out, according to historian Christopher S. Parker, who quotes Truman in his 2009 book, *Fighting for Democracy: Black Veterans and the Struggle Against White Supremacy in the Postwar South*, as declaring:

When a mayor and a City Marshal can take a negro Sergeant off a bus in South Carolina, beat him up and put out one of his eyes, and nothing is done about it... something is radically wrong with the system.... I am going to try to remedy it. (p. 48)

Partly with such incidents in mind, Truman appointed a 15-member Commission on Civil Rights in December 1946 and directed it to devise a strategy to protect African American rights. The report, *To Secure These Rights*, issued the following October, called for the desegregation of

the military, creation of a permanent Fair Employment Practices Committee, passage of federal antilynching laws, the banning of poll taxes, and “elimination of segregation... from American life” (Edds, 2018, p. 154; C. S. Parker, 2009, p. 48; J. D. Smith, 2002, p. 291). Contemporary analysts and historians have noted that Truman was also motivated by wanting to preserve America's international reputation against the Cold War propaganda of the Soviet Union, which seemed to celebrate “every blunder committed by white supremacists” to undermine “America's fitness to lead the ‘free world’” (C. S. Parker, 2009, p. 48).

Nevertheless, Southern white-supremacist politicians blustered about leaving the Democratic Party of which Truman was a member. Some did, led by South Carolina Governor J. Strom Thurman, who unsuccessfully ran for president against Truman in 1948 under the new States Rights Democratic Party, nicknamed the “Dixiecrats” (Edds, 2018, p. 154). Mississippi Senator James Eastland condemned the civil rights report and recommendations as confirming “that organized mongrel minorities control the government” and were now aiming “to Harlemize the country,” while a Georgia congressman likened the recommendations to “the platform of the Communist Party” (L. M. Smith, 2001, p. 270).

In Virginia, reactionary political forces had also taken root in academia and, in at least one instance, caused the removal of a College of William and Mary student editor from her campus newspaper position. The student, Marilyn Kaemmerle, from Michigan, commemorated the February 12, 1945, anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's birthday by writing that “Negroes should be recognized as equals in our minds and hearts” (as quoted in J. D. Smith, 2002, p. 289) and urged educating “ourselves away from the idea of White Supremacy, for this belief is as groundless as Hitler's Nordic Supremacy nonsense” (as quoted in J. D. Smith, 2002, p. 289). But what apparently infuriated the campus, community, board of trustees, and politicians the most

was Kaemmerle's opinion that "Negroes should attend William and Mary; they should go to our classes, participate in college functions, join the same clubs, be our roommates, pin the same classmates, and marry among us" (as quoted in J. D. Smith, 2002, p. 289). Those who took issue with her, focused the most on her suggestion of the freedom to intermarry, says J. D. Smith (2002, p. 289). The college president not only pulled Kaemmerle from her editing position, he required faculty supervision of all future student publications (p. 289).

The prospect of desegregated public education would become one of the major arenas for reactionary rhetoric and racist backlash in the 1950s across the South, throughout Virginia, and in the schools and neighborhoods of Norfolk.

1950s. On May 17, 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court handed down its famous school desegregation decision in *Oliver Brown et al. v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, a case that had combined five lawsuits, including *Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County, Virginia*, along with the Topeka matter and suits from South Carolina, Delaware, and Washington, D.C. The unanimous 9–0 ruling proclaimed "that in the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal" (Kluger, 2004, p. 710; Sitkoff, 2008, p. 22; Woodward, 2002, p. 147).

The direct and indirect effects of this momentous ruling have continued for decades, not only in desegregating schools and improving the quality of education for generations of African Americans, but also in breaking down other racial barriers, refocusing the work of urban planners, and generating almost endless political debates about real-versus-imagined white flight to the suburbs and over the appointment of Supreme Court justices, to list just a few.

Political ramifications were among the most immediate. As law and history professor Michael J. Klarman (2004) notes in his prize-winning *From Jim Crow to Civil Rights: The*

Supreme Court and the Struggle for Racial Equality, “politics in every southern state moved significantly to the right” (p. 392). Political rhetoric got hotter and more extreme. “Georgia is going to resist mixing the races in the schools if it is the sole state of the nation to do so,” promised Governor Herman Talmadge (p. 389), while racially moderate candidates throughout the South were condemned as cowards, traitors and “burglars... (who) want to rob us of our priceless heritage” (p. 391). There were also shifts in the common meaning of certain words, notes Woodward (2002), as he writes, “A ‘moderate’ became a man who dared open his mouth, an ‘extremist’ one who favored eventual compliance with the law, and ‘compliance’ took on the connotations of treason” (p. 166).

Arguments about school integration even shook the sanctuaries of the faith community as Jane Dailey (2004) shows in *Sex, Segregation, and the Sacred After Brown*. Anti-integrationist clergy, such as the Rev. James F. Burks of Bayview Baptist Church in Norfolk, Virginia, preached that “This step of racial integration is but another stepping stone toward the gross immorality and lawlessness that will be characteristic of the last days, just preceding the Return of the Lord Jesus Christ” (p. 125). Clergy who applauded the *Brown v. Board* ruling issued remarks similar to those from the National Baptist Convention (a major group of black Baptists), which said, “the Social Gospel of Jesus received its endorsement by the Highest Court of the nation” (p. 130).

Rejoicing African Americans felt that their claim on first-class citizenship was finally vindicated and that their long-held prayers for the end of Jim Crow would soon be realized. Yet, as Woodward (2002) observes, that “end as to be agonizingly slow in coming” (p. 147) and often marred with violence. As enforcement of school desegregation spread throughout the South, resistance among segregationists stiffened. Extreme white supremacists in Mississippi began

forming Citizens' Councils (also called White Citizens' Councils) to oppose all forms of integration and black voter-registration efforts. The councils and similar groups started spreading across the South (pp. 152–155). A favorite tactic of the councils was to discourage black voter registration by threatening job loss for any African Americans who registered, voted, or were involved in voter-registration efforts. Civil rights historian Steven F. Lawson (1999), in *Black Ballots: Voting Rights in the South, 1944-1969*, quotes Tom Brady, the white Mississippi judge credited for devising this intimidation initiative in 1954, as saying: “Over 95 percent of the negroes of the South are employed by white men or corporations controlled by white men. A great many negro employees will be discharged and a deplorable situation will arise for the negro” (p. 135).

In Norfolk, a local chapter of the segregationist Defenders of State Sovereignty and Individual Liberties came together and its president, James G. Martin IV, asserted that school integration was a communist plot to “mongrelize Americans” (Parramore et al., 1994, p. 364).

In some quarters, white anger over the *Brown v. Board* decision, conflated with other civil rights victories, spawned violence. The home of a black family was bombed when they moved to Norfolk's then-all white Coronado neighborhood in 1954 (Klebau, 1954).

Emmett Till, a 14-year-old African American who allegedly whistled at a white woman in Mississippi, was brutally murdered on August 28, 1958. J. W. Milam, one of the killers, was found not guilty in court, but he bragged about his motivations in a *Look* magazine interview. His reasons, he said, were to set an example of what will happen when a black person steps out of line, including for attempts to integrate public schools or to register to vote. Milam told *Look*:

I just decided it was time a few people got put on notice. As long as I live and can do anything about it, niggers are gonna stay in their place. Niggers ain't gonna vote where I live. If they did, they'd control the government. They ain't gonna go to school with my kids. (Huie, 1956, para. 83)

In Virginia, Senator Harry F. Byrd, the state's political boss since the mid-1920s, organized a white-collar mob to try stop school desegregation without violence. His "Southern Manifesto," signed by 101 members of both houses of Congress from the South, asked Southern states to disobey the *Brown v. Board* court order in a show of "massive resistance" (Littlejohn & Ford, 2012, pp. 61–62). Byrd invoked an unproven legal concept called "interposition," meaning that states reserved the right to interpose themselves against Supreme Court rulings; in effect, nullify them. The interposition tactic was developed by Byrd's ally, James J. Kirkpatrick, the white supremacist editorial page editor of *The Richmond News Leader*, who drew from former Vice President and former South Carolina Senator John C. Calhoun, a staunch defender of slavery and agitator for secession long before the Civil War (Epps, 1993, pp. 19–36; Maxwell, 2010, pp. 14, 17; Parramore et al., 1994, p. 363; Sitkoff, 2008, pp. 25–26; J. D. Smith, 2002, p. 296; Woodward, 2002, pp. 156–158).

In the summer of 1956, Virginia took another major step. With spectators waving Confederate flags in the gallery, the General Assembly met in special session and approved several new laws as part of the now-formal Massive Resistance, as historian Andrew Buni (1967, p. 185) describes in *The Negro in Virginia Politics, 1902–1965*. These included the closing of any all-white public school that allowed black students to enroll, pupil placement tests, rescinding public funding for integrated schools, and approval of public grants for students who wanted to attend segregated (all-white) private schools. Other Southern states followed Virginia's lead by adopting all or some of such policies (Klarman, 2004, pp. 395-396; Maxwell, 2010, p. 27; J. D. Smith, 2002, p. 295). New all-white private schools emerged throughout the South, a trend that continued for many years. Such schools continued to make news in 2018 when the news media learned that the controversial U.S. Senator Cindy Hyde-Smith—who made joking

references to public hangings in her political campaign—had attended the segregated Lawrence County Academy in Mississippi in the mid-1970s and posed with a Confederate flag along with fellow members of her cheerleader squad (Pittman, 2018).

As Virginia dug in for a protracted fight, the NAACP asked federal courts to enforce the *Brown v. Board* ruling. On June 7, 1958, U.S. District Court Judge Walter E. Hoffman ordered the Norfolk School Board to begin assigning black students to all-white schools. Similar rulings affected other localities. Governor J. Lindsey Almond Jr. responded by closing some public schools in Warren County, Charlottesville, and Norfolk, including Norfolk’s six all-white high schools and junior high schools. That meant that nearly 10,000 white students—known as the “Lost Class of ’59”—did not have access to public schools in Norfolk (Littlejohn & Ford, 2012, p. 78; Parramore et al., 1994, p. 363).

On January 19, 1959, ironically, the birthday of Confederate General Robert E. Lee, federal and state courts decided two lawsuits that led to the reopening of Norfolk’s schools in February. The first black students in previously all-white high and junior high schools in Norfolk were referred to as the “Norfolk 17,” and they were greeted with racial taunts, bullying, threats of bodily harm, and other acts of humiliation and intimidation. At least two students had crosses burned in front of their homes (Littlejohn & Ford, 2012, p. 90). Teachers were among the culprits in insulting African American students. Patricia Turner, one of the 17 black students, later recalled that her history teacher, Hal Bonney, a future U.S. Bankruptcy Court judge and bible class teacher, was among the worst. Bonney, said Turner, continually embarrassed Turner in front of other students by putting on rubber gloves every time he collected her test papers and homework (Couteé, 2008, para. 10).

Virginia's Massive Resistance policy garnered volumes of negative news reports about Norfolk with in-depth stories appearing on CBS-TV and in *Life* and *Time* magazines, *The New York Times Magazine*, and *Boston Sunday Globe*. But as Parramore et al. (1994, p. 366) point out, Norfolk was saved from more disastrous publicity because of a two-year battle over the integration of Little Rock High School in Arkansas at about the same time. In Little Rock, President Dwight Eisenhower had to send the 101st Airborne Division and federalize the Arkansas National Guard to protect nine African American students from jeering mobs of white anti-integrationist whites. Even then, white students verbally and physically harassed their new classmates, and Governor Orval Faubus shut the school for a year in an attempt to undo desegregation (Sitkoff, 2008, pp. 30–31).

Meanwhile, attempts to maintain segregated schools in Norfolk continued on quite another track beyond the courts and schoolhouses. Pro-segregation Mayor W. Fred Duckworth devised a plan to circumvent the desegregation of neighborhood schools by using the powers of the Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority to condemn and tear down integrated neighborhoods and nearby public schools in the name of slum clearance, public health and public safety (Littlejohn & Ford, 2012, p. 41; Parramore et al., 1994, p. 367). Urban studies analyst Forrest R. White (1992, p. 292) provides an in-depth report about the “Bulldozer Mayor” in *Pride and Prejudice: School Desegregation and Urban Renewal in Norfolk, 1950–1959*, and contending that the dramatic actions in Norfolk “do not appear to be unique” among cities that tried to stave off school integration. He also cites a report by Robert C. Weaver, former head of the federal Housing and Home Finance Agency, who charged that “urban renewal too often seemed to be an instrument for wiping out racially integrated living” (White, 1992, p. 268).

Duckworth also figured in a controversy that ignited when the National Municipal League and *Look* magazine selected Norfolk in 1959 for an “All-American City Award,” which cited Norfolk’s new civic and medical centers as well as “the mighty citizen effort” to bulldoze “blight.” On March 3, 1960, the mayor hosted the local award ceremony with more than 1,200 guests. However, 41 African Americans had signed a statement pointing out that no blacks had been invited, so the city quickly added two blacks to the luncheon. The damage was done, though, as members of the Congress of Racial Equality and other African Americans picketed outside against Duckworth’s “malign neglect.” The peaceful assembly included World War II veteran Joseph A. Jordan Jr., a civil rights lawyer who would represent Evelyn Butts in her poll tax lawsuit in 1963. Jordan, crippled in the war, waved his protest sign from his wheelchair. It read, “Discrimination and Segregation are not All-American” (Littlejohn & Ford, 2012, pp. 116–118; Parramore et al., 1994, pp. 359–361).

The decade of the ’50s challenged Jim Crow on many fronts. Even the apartheid practices of professional sports were being dismantled. Jackie Robinson had already broken through Major League Baseball’s color barrier in 1947, and that became a beacon for African American baseball fans all over, including in Norfolk. Inspired by Jackie Robinson and other pioneering black athletes, African American sports fans in Norfolk boycotted the Norfolk Tars minor league team until management agreed to integrate both the team and stadium seating arrangements in 1954 (Knepler, 2017).

1960s. Civil rights histories usually include the 1955 murder of Emmett Till, the 1955–56 Montgomery Bus Boycott, and the need for federal troops to help nine black teenagers integrate Little Rock High School as among the turning points for awakening whites outside the South about Southern racism (e.g., C. Vann Woodward’s groundbreaking *The Strange Career of Jim*

Crow, 2002; Harvey Sitkoff's *The Struggle for Black Equality*, 2008; and especially Juan Williams' [2013] *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years, 1954–1965*, and its companion series on public television). But accounts of racial strife in that decade often focus on courtrooms, legislative arenas, and public schools. The 1960s would dramatically change this image.

On Monday, February 1, 1960, four African American freshmen at the North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College—Joseph McNeil, Franklin McCain, David Richmond, and Ezell Blair Jr.—who were tired of whites-only service at restaurants, sat down at the F.W. Woolworth Company five-and-dime store in Greensboro, North Carolina, and refused to leave when a waitress told them, “We don’t serve colored here.” They remained until 5:30 p.m., when the store closed (J. Williams, 2013, pp. 126–127). The next day, the four returned with more students, and on Wednesday, even more students came, filling 63 of the lunch counter’s 66 seats but never being served. White customers jeered at and threatened them, but the sit-in spread to the nearby S.H. Kress store. Then thousands of black students, joined by some whites, picked up on the idea and organized similar sit-ins at dozens of lunch counters across the South, including in the Virginia cities of Norfolk, Portsmouth, Richmond, and Petersburg. Some of the protests drew violence and arrests. But, one by one, the managers relented and dropped their Jim Crow policies (Sitkoff, 2008, pp. 61–77).

In Norfolk, civil rights lawyers Joseph A. Jordan Jr., Edward Dawley, and Leonard Holt fended off an intimidation tactic of a state agency called the Virginia Committee on Offenses Against the Administration of Justice, which tried to raid the law firm in September 1961. A lawsuit followed but dragged on. By September 1962, the law partners suspended their company, and Dawley and Holt moved to California (Littlejohn & Ford, 2012, p. 127).

On September 19, 1963, approximately 2,200 students of the all-black Booker T. Washington High School in Norfolk marched against poor conditions at their overcrowded facility, trekking two miles from their school to the city's school administration offices (Littlejohn & Ford, 2012, pp. 11–115; Parramore et al., 1994, p. 379).

Across the country, civil rights protests and demonstrations of other forms, especially picketing and marches, continued throughout the decade. The often-told stories include the Freedom Rides of 1961, in which mixed groups of blacks and whites rode interstate buses in the South to thwart Jim Crow segregated seating; the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom on August 28, 1963, where Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his riveting “I Have A Dream” speech; and the three Selma-to-Montgomery voting-rights marches of March 1965, including the March 7 “Bloody Sunday,” when state and local law enforcement officers beat demonstrators with billy clubs and dowsed them with tear gas (Sitkoff, 2008; J. Williams, 2013).

Many protests and peaceful gatherings were met by brutality, either from police, the Ku Klux Klan, white-supremacist mobs, or combinations of the three. Acts of deadly violence included the white terrorist bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, in which four black girls were killed on September 15, 1963; the June 1964 murders of civil rights workers James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner; and the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. on April 4, 1968 (Sitkoff, 2008; J. Williams, 2013).

Air Force veteran James Howard Meredith needed court orders, the intervention of President John F. Kennedy and Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, and the protection of hundreds of U.S. Marshals, federal troops, and federalized National Guard members to become the first African American to enroll in the University of Mississippi on October 1, 1961. After a court desegregation order, Governor George Wallace threatened to personally block black

students trying to enroll in the University of Alabama in 1963, vowing, “Segregation now! Segregation tomorrow! Segregation forever!” (Sitkoff, 2008; J. Williams, 2013).

The voices of diehard opponents of desegregation, like newspaper editor James J. Kilpatrick, continued to stir hate, defend separate-but-equal, and pine for the white supremacy of yesteryear. “The ingrained attitudes of a lifetime cannot be jerked out like a pair of infected molars, and new porcelain dentures put in their place,” Kilpatrick wrote in his 1962 book, *The Southern Case for School Segregation*, before he launched a new career as a political commentator on nationwide TV and radio (as quoted in J. Williams, 2013, p. 30). In throwback language reminiscent of Roger B. Taney’s 1857 Dred Scott ruling, Kilpatrick added:

On the contrary, the Southerner rebelliously clings to what seems to him the hard core of truth... the Negro race, as a race, plainly is not equal to the white race, as a race; nor... has the Negro race, as a race, *ever* been the cultural or intellectual equal of the white race, as a race. This we take to be a plain statement of fact... (as quoted in J. Williams, 2013, p. 30).

Yet, for African Americans, the fight against discrimination, oppression, and abuse entailed a struggle to break the bonds of not only racism and white supremacy but also of sexism and class bias as we will see in the next two sections.

Sexism and Gender Issues

Black women certainly faced what society now calls sexism. Yet sexism may be too narrow of a word to describe America’s relationship with black women during the middle decades of the 20th century. Sexism, according to Swim and Hyers (2009), is defined as “individuals’ attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, and organizational, institutional, and cultural practices that either reflect negative evaluations of individuals based on their gender or support for unequal status of women and men” (p. 407). But black women had to contend with powerful combinations of racial and sexual hatred and bullying, sexual oppression and sexualized abuse,

demagoguery and political suppression, myths based on ignorance and purposeful lies about their gender and their abilities, and misconceptions about their contributions to society—all these not only in the attitudes and behavior of white men but also from white women and even from many black male civil rights leaders (Alston & McClellan, 2011, pp. 52–55; Gilkes, 1994, p. 232; Isoke, 2013, pp. 14–26, 33–35; Zinn & Dill, 1994, pp. 4–5).

For decades, African American women had to also frequently endure against a deep-rooted animosity, many times seething and malicious, that usually intersected with racism and class issues as well as with an odd fear among many white Southerners that African Americans—both male and female—had long-range designs on intermarrying with whites in order to destroy the white “Christian civilization.”

“Constantly, the [N]egro will be endeavoring to usurp every right and privilege which will lead to intermarriage,” declared Mississippi judge Thomas Pickens Brady (as quoted in Walker, 2012, p. 1023).

Virginia Governor J. Lindsay Almond Jr. was more graphic as he denounced court-ordered desegregation of schools in 1959. He warned statewide television and radio audiences that integration would bring “the livid stench of sadism, sex immorality, and juvenile pregnancy” to Virginia just as it had infested “the mixed schools of the District of Columbia and elsewhere” (as quoted in Edds, 2018, p. 298).

As part of their resistance, black women not only struggled to throw off the yoke of oppression. They also sought, even demanded, respect and to be treated with dignity as human beings as well as be accorded full and equal standing as citizens of the United States (McGuire, 2011, pp. 94–95).

American history abounds with diverse examples, even from slavery times. There were instances when enslaved women sued for their freedom, although mostly unsuccessfully, and there were court cases involving black female slaves who killed masters who had been trying to have sex with them, according to the Law Library of Congress' online report, *Slavery and Indentured Servants* (n.d.). United Order of Tents, a women's mutual aid society, established in Norfolk, Virginia, in 1867, evolved out of the Underground Railroad efforts of two formerly enslaved women who gave assistance to escaped slaves (Hucles, 2006, p. 45; Schley, 2013, pp. ii, 1, 15–16). Sojourner Truth, the abolitionist and women's rights crusader, described the unequal treatment between white women and black women in her famous "Ain't I A Woman?" speech at the 1851 Women's Rights Convention in Ohio. She reportedly proclaimed:

That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? (Modern History Sourcebook, n.d., para. 2)

These and other examples will be discussed in the section on resistance to white supremacy.

Sojourner Truth also sought voting rights for women (Terborg-Penn, 1998, pp. 14–16), a cause that black and white women shared for decades. Since Colonial times, men contended that women were too delicate to withstand the burden of decision-making during elections (Keyssar, 2009, p. 5). During the adoption of the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights, most men regarded women as childlike dependents "outside the political community" (Lichtman, 2018, p. 16). By the early 1800s, opponents to women's suffrage often argued that women "lacked the independence and strength of mind and body to cast a responsible vote" and that the nastiness in politics would "corrupt women," thereby harming home and family values (Lichtman, 2018, p. 100).

This attitude continued throughout the 1800s. As Collier (1992) writes:

As late as the late-nineteenth century it was believed by many—that is, many *men*—that contemplation of matters political—as with contemplation of any abstract field such as mathematics—would overtax the female intelligence and drive the adventuresome lady into the insane asylum. (p. 22)

For example, during debates in 1887 over a proposed constitutional amendment to give voting rights to women, U.S. Senator George G. Vest of Missouri said women were too emotional as well as susceptible to corruption. He added that women's voting rights would undermine families by disrupting God's arrangement of the sexes (Lichtman, 2018, p. 111). Other politicians opposed to women's suffrage made similar assertions in the last quarter of the 19th century and even up to ratification of the 19th amendment that granted women's suffrage in 1920 (Keyssar, 2009; Lichtman, 2018).

Virginia's history regarding voting rights for women was among the most stubborn. The 19th amendment to the U.S. Constitution, giving women the right to vote, was ratified after approved by 36 states between June 10, 1919, and August 18, 1920. Virginia was not one of them. Instead, Virginia joined with seven other Southern states to withhold ratification until decades later, with Virginia signing off in 1952—32 years after women's voting rights was already the law of the land (McDaid, 2018, The Suffrage Argument section, para. 4). The delay in Virginia did not deprive women from voting or running for office in that state, but it reinforced Virginia's reputation for foot-dragging and tepid endorsements of expanded suffrage.

The suffrage debate in Virginia was also infused with racism. White women who were opposed to women's voting rights often injected racial themes into their arguments in the years just before national ratification of the 19th amendment. An antisuffrage white women's group in Virginia warned:

Every argument for sexual equality in politics is, and must be, an argument also for racial equality.... If the white woman is entitled to vote because she bears, has borne, or might have borne children, the Negro women is entitled to the same right for the same reason. (as quoted in Lichtman, 2018, p. 117)

Meanwhile, Southern white male political leaders worried that suffrage for women would inspire African American women to be more aggressive and resourceful in overcoming various voter-suppression schemes that had disenfranchised black men so effectively. Keyssar (2009) quotes a Mississippi senator as saying, “We are not afraid to maul a black man over the head if he dares to vote, but we can’t treat women, even black women, that way” (p. 169). And the Virginia Association Opposed to Woman’s Suffrage warned that allowing voting rights for African American women would eventually lead to social equality for all blacks and intermarriage between blacks and whites (Buni, 1967, p. 73).

Antisuffragists also tried to incite racial fear in efforts to stop momentum toward the 19th amendment. “Providing women the vote, they argued, meant providing African American women the vote. This, in turn, would as much as double the total African American vote and lead to black control at the polls,” according to McDaid (2018, Suffrage and Race, para. 1).

The women’s suffrage movement, however, had its own problems with racism and class discrimination, a split that dated back to post-Civil War efforts to approve voting rights for black man via the 15th amendment. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a white woman long active in the abolitionist movement, lashed out against the idea that black men would gain suffrage before white women. She demanded to know why white women, especially those who are educated and affluent, should “stand aside and see ‘Sambo’ walk into the kingdom first?” (Lichtman, 2018, p. 104).

Racialized divisions among women suffragists would continue for decades, even up to and beyond passage of the 19th amendment. Lichtman (2018) notes a 1906 statement by the

Conference of Southern Women Suffragists that said, “We ask for the ballot as a solution of the race problem. There are over 600,000 more white women in the southern states than all the negro men and women combined” (p. 117). The meaning was that if women gained voting rights, then a male-female white voting bloc would be too great an obstacle for the combined forces of black men and women to overcome. Terborg-Penn (1998, pp. 108–109, 120) writes about white supremacy as an important factor in suffragist strategy to make inroads among Southern white women. And Hale (1998) provides a blatant example from a 1907 letter from Kate Gordon, a Louisiana suffragist, to Laura Kay, a Kentucky women’s voting-rights advocate, noting that white men who opposed women’s suffrage “would gladly welcome us as a measure to insure white supremacy” (p. 108).

Southern white-supremacist politicians feared voting rights for black women, according to Olson, who reports that South Carolina Senator Ben Tillman said:

Experience has taught us that Negro women are much more aggressive in asserting the “rights of the race” than the Negro men are, and that Mississippi Senator James K. Vardaman said ‘The Negro woman will be... more difficult to handle at the polls than the Negro man.’ (Olson, 2001, p. 46)

White women in Virginia’s suffrage movement, however, gave assurances that white voting strength would also be protected by Virginia’s poll taxes, literacy tests, and other devices that thwarted the black vote (McDaid, 2018, *Suffrage and Race*, para. 2; Terborg-Penn, 1998, p. 125). Indeed, as it became apparent in 1920 that the 19th amendment would be approved, Virginia’s white male political establishment pondered how to best thwart black women who were hoping to register and vote. U.S. Representative Henry Flood, an uncle of future-Senator Harry F. Byrd Sr., declared that it was “of paramount importance to protect the electorate from the colored female voters” (L. M. Smith, 2001, p. 44). Flood recommended another safeguard: that the state devise additional laws in the vein and spirit of discriminatory literacy tests,

residency requirements, property qualifications, and the understanding clause (Buni, 1967, p. 75).

Local voter-registration officials across Virginia, already given great leeway to discriminate among voter-applicants, took up the cause (Tarter, 2013, p. 270). Newspapers in Richmond reported in 1920 that white women applying to vote for the first time were quickly accommodated by the registrar's office on the main floor of city hall, while black women were sent to register in the basement and were often challenged or left in line without being served (Buni, 1967, p. 78; Terborg-Penn, 1998, p. 154). In Hampton, where there were many African Americans associated with Hampton Institute (now Hampton University), black women who went to the voter-registration office felt humiliated by delaying tactics, including being forced to stand in line all day and then told to come back the next day, while white women were registered first and within a few minutes. Also, black women reported being asked impossible questions such as, "How many people does it take to make a county?" and "What is the maximum and minimum number of section districts in the State of Virginia?" (J. D. Smith, 2002, pp. 58–59).

At the same time, white political leaders such as John M. Purcell, chairman of the Richmond Democratic Committee, were imploring white women to pay their poll taxes and register if they agreed that "the domination of the white race (was) essential to the welfare of the Southland" (J. D. Smith, 2002, p. 58).

White-supremacist politicians were also known to inject offensive language into their political campaigns—and with African American women serving as the unwitting foil. One of the most egregious (as noted earlier) occurred during the 1938 congressional elections when the campaign of Norfolk's Colgate W. Darden Jr. produced a flyer that labeled his opponent, Norman R. Hamilton, a "nigger lover" because he set up a campaign office in Portsmouth's black district

and hired young black women to work there (J. D. Smith, 2002, p. 252). Darden's staff sent photographers to capture the scene and circulated copies with captions that read, "Look Hamilton's a nigger lover!" "See the niggers are set up better than your own people by him," and "If you vote for Hamilton, niggers will be teaching your children soon!" (J. D. Smith, 2002, p. 252; L. M. Smith, 2001, p. 177). At the same time, Darden made his own duplicitous pitch for African American votes by contending he would be a stronger advocate of national antilynching legislation than Hamilton. Meanwhile, at least two influential black voters reported that Darden supporters were offering payments to help campaign for Darden (J. D. Smith, 2002, p. 252). Darden won by 1,547 votes.

While political trickery and demagoguery thwarted the quest of black women for full political citizenship, African American women also had to endure almost daily humiliations—and even physical danger—in other aspects of their lives. Enforcement of the Jim Crow regime included the reinvigorated legacy of sexual assault from the slavery era as a means to remind black women of the power of white male supremacy (Olson, 2001, p. 35).

Sexual assault against black female slaves was widespread, according to scholar-activist Angela Y. Davis (1983), who writes in *Women, Race & Class*, that slave owner rapes of enslaved black females had less to do with "excessive sex urges" (p. 175) and more to do with "ruthless economic exploitation" (p. 7). Davis (1983) observes:

Slave women were inherently vulnerable to all forms of sexual coercion. If the most violent punishments of men consisted in floggings and mutilations, women were flogged and mutilated, as well as raped. Rape... was an uncamouflaged expression of the slaveholder's economic mastery and the overseer's control over Black women as workers. (p. 7)

She adds, "The right claimed by slaveowners and their agents over the bodies of female slaves was a direct expression of their presumed property rights over Black people as a whole" (Davis,

1983, p. 175) and this “pattern of institutionalized sexual abuse of Black women became so powerful that it managed to survive the abolition of slavery” (p. 175).

Thus, the raping of black women by white men continued for decades during the post-slavery Jim Crow era. According to historian Danielle L. McGuire (2011) in her pioneering study, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance – a New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Civil Rights Movement*, reasons included Southern white men using rape as “a form of retribution [for the defeat of the Confederacy or other alleged affronts to Southern or white male pride] or to enforce rules of racial and economic hierarchy” (p. xviii). And, as Hale (1998) writes, white men who sexually exploited black women, including by rape, could usually do so “with little fear” of legal consequences (p. 32). If white men happened to be arrested for rape, they would frequently offer the excuse that “the women were asking for it,” according to Olson (2001, p. 35), who explains that “The flagrant humiliation of black women was tied to the widespread belief, stemming from the days of slavery, that they did not deserve respect or consideration, because they were sexual wantons who led men astray” (p. 35).

Black women as jezebels who invited rape with their allegedly loose morals and impudence was one common myth held by many white supremacists. Another was the black woman as a contented mammy, an all-purpose domestic worker who happily put the needs of white people before hers or her own family’s (Hale, 1998, p. 32). The mammy was often conceived as a desexualized large-bodied, very dark black woman with a big round face and deep laugh, who had an “implicit understanding and acceptance of her inferiority and her devotion to whites” (Wallace-Sanders, 2008, p. 2). African American women who did not

approximate the deferential qualities of the legendary mammy could be considered untrustworthy or uppity by whites.

In 1917 Norfolk, white residents were pining for the happy, hardworking “antebellum auntie” (mammy) who had become hard to find (Lewis, 1991, p. 56). Almost 82% of working black women in Norfolk at the time were employed as domestics or personal servants, and there was a movement afoot to enroll them in a labor union. That October, the organized domestics threatened to strike for wages of \$1 per day, but the local police department broke up the initiative before it could start. Whites labeled the black women involved as insolent, and one Norfolk resident reported his cook to federal agents because she “had recently been indulging in frequent and lengthy dissertations on the great injustice done the negroes by the whites” (as quoted in Lewis, 1991, pp. 56–57).

Meanwhile, J. D. Smith (2002) writes that affluent white women among the paternalistic elites “envisioned themselves ... as capable of providing the necessary guidance for black uplift and advancement” (p. 49; especially in being role models to their low-paid maids). In return, the black domestic service workers were expected “to be honest, to be truthful, to be polite, to be cleanly, to be on time in performing her tasks” (p. 49) or risk having part of their pay withheld.

White fear, ignorance, and stereotypes of African Americans, as well as condescending attitudes of superiority and perhaps guilt for abusing black people, fed into rumor-mongering about how African American domestic workers intended to change their relationships with the white families that employed them. Howard W. Odum (1943), one of the nation’s leading sociologists, was so concerned about the potential impact of these and other racial rumors on America’s democracy and military efforts during World War II that he put together a compendium, *Race and Rumors of Race: Challenge to American Crisis*. The widespread rumor

about domestic workers, reported in many Southern localities, including Norfolk, was that the African American maids and cooks were forming so-called “Eleanor Clubs,” named in honor of the progressive-minded First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. Various versions of this rumor had black maids planning massive strikes that went beyond demands for higher wages and shorter work weeks. Goals would include entering the white employee’s home by the front door instead of the back, requirements that maids be addressed as “Miss” or “Mrs.,” and not by first names, a place at the family dining table to share meals with the employers, tolerance when refusing to serve anyone who insults the maid or other African Americans, and respect for the purported club motto: “A white woman in her own kitchen by Christmas” (Lewis, 1991, p. 191; Odum, 1943, pp. 67–95; Parramore et al., 1994, p. 339; Schlegel, 1991, p. 194).

The steady flow of these rumors apparently caused so much political agitation that the White House directed the FBI to investigate. Even though the agency was headed by J. Edgar Hoover, who was not friendly to black civil rights initiatives and disliked Eleanor Roosevelt, the FBI’s extensive examination found the rumors to be just that—baseless fiction (Zeitz, 2017). While many Southern white households were frightened or angered about the purported Eleanor Clubs, African American women who depended on domestic jobs were being further marginalized by high-level political deals that excluded low-paid maids, nannies, cooks, farm workers and similar employees from the protections of federal labor laws for wages, overtime pay, and collective bargaining (Armstrong, 2012; Lin, 2013; Winter, 2010). Winter (2010), for example, notes that President Franklin D. Roosevelt agreed to Southern political demands for such exemptions because he needed the votes of Southern senators and representatives in order for his Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 to win congressional approval.

White-supremacist Southerners were also in both the figurative and literal driver's seat when it came to devising and enforcing Jim Crow laws and policies for local mass transit and inter-city transportation. Low-paid black women—again, mostly domestic workers—who needed these forms of transportation to travel to their jobs faced daily real-life humiliation because of segregated seating arrangements in streetcars, buses, railroad cars, and ferry boats, and train, bus, and ferry stations (McGuire, 2011, p. 59). Many Southern states and localities empowered bus drivers to enforce Jim Crow in whatever form they interpreted—and at gunpoint.

Many times, public humiliation went far beyond enforcing the segregated seating. Bus drivers let white people on before blacks, directed black riders to get in the bus through the back door, made blacks give up their seats for whites even in black sections of a bus, sometimes drove away after taking a fare and refused to stop when a black rider wanted to get off, and called black women racially and sexually offensive names (T. L. Jones, 1982, p. 60; Lewis, 1991, p. 190; McGuire, 2011, pp. 40–43, 58–61). There were even instances of sexual abuse. A black woman named Ferdie Walker in Fort Worth, Texas, said white bus drivers would expose themselves to her while she stood at a bus stop waiting to get on (McGuire, 2011, p. 59).

Although she lived in Montgomery, Alabama, civil rights icon Rosa Parks summed up the frustrations for low-paid black women throughout the South, explaining “You spend your whole lifetime in your occupation... making life clever, easy and convenient for white people, but when you have to get transportation home, you are denied equal accommodation” (McGuire, 2011, pp. 60–61). Thus, the way black women were treated on buses and streetcars became “a particularly powerful and symbolic issue for African American women,” Ransby says (2003, p. 127).

Montgomery's domestic service workers thus became the core of the thousands of African Americans who made the 1955–56 boycott a success by walking miles to work every

day rather than ride the Jim Crow buses. Olson (2011), who calls the maids and other low-paid women “the true heroines,” recounts how these domestic workers would also participate in the boycott’s weekly mass meetings and talk about their experiences, including being fired for joining the boycott. “For women who had spent all their lives being told they were inferior because of their race, sex, and social status, challenging the authority of those who had forced them into submission was a heady, if frightening, experience,” Olson writes (pp. 117–118).

Combinations of race, gender, and class biases or oppression also frustrated many more African American women in the workforce all over the country, including teachers in Norfolk. In 1930s, “Salary differentials based on race, sex, and educational level existed in the Norfolk school system,” Lewis (1991, p. 157) notes, adding that white teachers generally earned more than black teachers and men were paid more than women. For example, he says, a starting black female teacher at the secondary level “earned 72.1 percent of the salary earned by a similarly educated white female teacher” (p. 158).

In Norfolk’s private sector, black women, as a group, “had the highest female labor force participation levels in the country, although most were mired in low-paying, domestic service jobs,” Lewis (1991, p. 178) writes. New opportunities came with the start of World War II but with mixed results. Says Lewis: “When men left for the war, black women stepped in to fill the void. Their presence was not always wanted or accepted, but they were not deterred” (p. 178).

Lewis (1991) notes that black women applied for many war-related industrial jobs but were often rebuffed by hiring managers who said that employment sites or job-training programs could not accommodate black women (p. 178). “Despite a desperate need for war workers,” Lewis observes, “it seemed that a reservoir of labor would go untapped. Across the nation, black women were equally victimized by racism and sexism” (p. 178).

African American women also found they were given little consideration for leadership positions within civil rights organizations. Ella Baker toiled for years for the national office of the NAACP but had to work extra-hard for her ideas to be considered by the male-dominated leadership. “Women were indispensable but underappreciated,” Ransby (2003) writes. “The (NAACP) had never elected a woman as its executive secretary, and women were often excluded from the informal inner circle of decision makers” despite serving as “the backbone of many of the most active local branches, as well as of the national office staff itself” (p. 106).

But Baker persisted, even changing the minds of a few African American men. In the 1940s, the national NAACP sent her to help with branch organizational work in Richmond. She arrived to discover that John M. Tinsley, the Richmond branch president and state chairman, strongly preferred a man. According to Ransby (2003), Baker endured and, after 11 days, shattered Tinsley’s “sexist assumptions about a woman’s limited capabilities” (pp. 114–115).

Baker, though, continued to face sexism in the civil rights movement for the rest of her career. For example, she felt her work was not fully appreciated by the African American male leaders of the SCLC, mostly clergymen, including its first president, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. Baker helped organize important voter-registration drives for the SCLC, but as Ransby (2003) tells it, “She became especially annoyed that many SCLC ministers viewed her as a glorified secretary who was there to simply ‘carry out King’s orders.’ Although the SCLC needed Baker’s skills, it was not willing to recognize or affirm her leadership” (p. 189).

Because Ella Baker and many other talented women in the civil rights movement were rarely recognized, the general public still carries a misconception about the movement’s leadership. “They think it was all men. Even now,” says Judy Richardson, a former staff member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC; Crosby, 2011, p. 374).

Actions of black male leaders of the civil rights movement as well as the news media contributed to this misconception. A now well-known behind-the-scene story about the famous 1963 March on Washington, where Martin Luther King Jr. would give his “I Have a Dream” speech, exemplifies what happened. Key organizers of the march—all men—mostly excluded women in the leadership committee or did not let women share the speaker’s rostrum in any meaningful way. Only one woman, Anna Arnold Hedgeman, from the Commission on Religion and Race of the National Council of Churches, was a member of the march’s administrative committee. After Hedgeman and other women privately protested the exclusion of women as speakers, several women were added to the program as part of an almost separate “Tribute to Negro Women Fighters for Freedom” (Thompson, 2013). “For many black women who were actively involved in the civil rights movement, especially those in leadership positions, the blatantly insensitive treatment of black women leaders was a new awakening,” Dorothy I. Height (2001, p. 90), president of the National Council of Negro Women, later wrote.

Historians who have studied the civil rights movement attribute the discrimination against women to an overlapping of self-perpetuating factors that often reinforced each other. For example, African American churches held great sway in the struggle for civil rights, and most of the pastors were men. Also, the hierarchy of church structures was often gendered, with men in more publicly visible leadership roles and women assigned to positions in the choirs and social functions as well as serving as secretaries. Then, as black ministers stepped into the spotlight of the civil rights movement through organizations such as the influential SCLC, these men transferred their concepts about leadership to movement activities (Armstrong, 2012, p. 44). When the news media covered an event or needed spokespersons, male leaders seemed to be the most readily available (Robnett, 1997, p. 97).

Even the most prominent women in the civil rights movement, such as Rosa Parks and Coretta Scott King, could not break the cycle because, according to historian Jeanne Theoharis (2011), the civil rights leadership, the media, and the public all seemed to desire certain characteristics in their female crusaders. Both Rosa Parks and Coretta Scott King “were framed as having fought for justice sweetly and demurely” despite long histories of strident activism, Theoharis writes (p. 408), adding that “Both Parks and King were celebrated for their modesty and respectability, Parks for being quiet and never raising her voice, and King for being gentle and beautiful” (p. 408). As a result, other female African American civil rights leaders were overlooked as not being worthy of national attention, especially if they were too “outspoken and outraged, for being poor or overweight or loud and angry” (p. 408).

It seemed that in whatever they endeavored, and no matter how hard they toiled, African American women could not escape the interlocking, oppressive stereotypes for gender, race and class that have continued throughout American history.

Class Issues, Democracy, and Voting Rights

As with racism and white supremacy, issues related to class in the United States have their American roots in Colonial Virginia and the region that encompasses present-day Norfolk. American concepts about the allocation of voting rights also had their beginnings in Colonial times and then carried over into how our democracy evolved.

Among these early strictures was that wealth was a determinant for voting rights, a prerequisite that surfaced in various forms over the decades but was not eliminated until March 24, 1966, when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled state and local poll taxes unconstitutional in the *Annie E. Harper vs. Virginia State Board of Elections* decision, the same case that began as *Evelyn Butts vs. Albertis Harrison, Governor* (Keyssar, 2009, pp. 218–219).

During the period when Africans first arrived in Virginia and entered servitude, starting in 1619, the colony was also developing its caste system for political participation and social status (Tarter, 2013, p. 17). At first, the English colonists proclaimed voting rights for white male landowners. But they quickly made an exception for Eastern European artisans and skilled laborers who launched the first labor strike in British North America in protest against being excluded (Global Nonviolent Action Database, n.d.; Grizzard & Smith, 2007).

For the most part, though, suffrage was limited to only the “better” elements of society, which in Virginia meant white Protestant men who owned property, known as “freeholders” (Collier, 1992, pp. 19–24; Rogers, 1992, p. 7).

Around the same time, these early English colonists began a political and economic culture of deference that would grow and influence white-supremacist attitudes into the mid-20th century. As Rogers (1992) notes, “Extremely important also was the political custom of ‘deference,’ where potential voters of the middling and lower social orders deferred to the authority of their social betters” (p. 7). Collier (1992) expands on this aspect of social deference, explaining that colonists accepted a “a hierarchical society which was divided between the better sort, the middling sort, and the lower orders” and that:

The last of these were not eligible to vote, and the middling tended to let neighbor George do the voting when George was wealthy or enjoyed some other evidence of accomplishment or status. Those who came to the polls voted for their betters. (p. 21)

As tobacco plantations grew in importance in Virginia’s economy, the colony’s political system became essentially, in Tarter’s (2013) words, “a government of the tobacco planters, by the tobacco planters, and for the tobacco planters” (p. 82) with slavery as its underpinning. The system was so entrenched by 1772, the eve of the American Revolution, that Richard Bland, a powerful lawyer and longtime member of the House of Burgesses, explained that “societies of

men could not subsist unless there were a subordination of one to another, and that from the highest to lowest degree” (p. 85).

Plantation owners behaved as European aristocrats and considered themselves entitled to the bounties of Colonial culture, including its riches and unchallenged political power. William Byrd II, an ancestor of 20th century political boss Harry Flood Byrd Sr., boasted to an English earl that “Like one of the patriarchs, I have my flocks and my herds, my bond-men, and bond-women... so that I live in kind of an independence (sic)” (Tarter, 2013, p. 86). Yet, as Tarter (2013) observes, Byrd, and wealthy planters like him, were “utterly dependent on (their) bondsmen and bondswomen for (their) economic security and (their) social eminence. Without enslaved laborers there would have been no liberty or independence” (p. 86) in the ways they had become so accustomed.

The rhetoric of the American Revolution led political leaders to consider expanding voting rights to men who were not property owners. Revolutionary rhetoric, such as “no taxation without representation” and “consent of the governed” made it difficult for elites to continue denying voting rights to men who did not own property or were otherwise poor (Keyssar, 2009, p. 21). However, voting-eligibility rules varied from state to state and even among same-state localities, and they often involved requirements for paying certain state or local taxes (Keyssar, 2009, pp. 22–24).

Leaving it up to each state to determine who gets to vote was a critical omission by the delegates to the Constitutional Convention of 1787, according to political scholars such as Allan Lichtman (2018). In *The Embattled Vote in America: From the Founding to the Present*, Lichtman writes that the failure to set a national standard for suffrage has contributed to endless voting-rights disputes that continue “to rage in the halls of Congress and in the courtrooms of

federal judges” (pp. 2–3). In addition, as Lichtman observes, generations of American political leadership have “considered suffrage not a natural right but a privilege bestowed by government on a political community restricted by considerations of wealth, sex, race, residence, literacy, criminal conviction, and citizenship” (p. 3).

The lack of national standard for suffrage has meant that the evolution of American democracy has been marked by countervailing trends of expansion and contraction, and inclusion and exclusion, according to scholars such as Alexander Keyssar (2009, p. XXIV) and Hanes Walton Jr. (Walton, Puckett, & Deskins, 2012, p. 92). Furthermore, Walton et al. (p. 134) point out that the ever-changing fate of African American suffrage has been a major storyline in examining voting-rights trends.

Class tension has been a significant ingredient in the cycles of expanded and contracted voting rights, according to Keyssar (2009), who hastens to add that a “nuanced interpretation” of voting-rights history must include “race, class, gender, and ethnicity ... have always been overlapping, dynamic, intertwined dimensions” in examining American suffrage (p. XXIV), especially in the imposition of financial requirements such as the poll taxes that African Americans struggled against (pp. 89, 105, 218).

One of the earliest known instances of free blacks asserting suffrage rights against the intersection of race and class came in 1780, in the midst of the American Revolution, when brothers Paul and John Cuffe (sometimes spelled “Cuffee”) refused to pay their real estate taxes in Massachusetts unless they were permitted to vote. Their case led to the Massachusetts legislature approving voting rights for all free blacks in 1783 (M. S. Jones, 2018, p. 23).

Free African Americans generally had a mixed experience with voting rights in Northern states, including encountering years of discriminatory restrictions according to Foner (1992, pp.

55–58). For example, New York’s Constitutional Convention of 1821 eliminated the property-ownership requirement for white men but increased mandated that black men own at least \$250 worth of property, which was beyond the means of most of New York’s black population (p. 58). Peter Jay, a delegate to the New York Constitutional Convention and an opponent to this new restriction on black voting, asserted that the provision was an act of white supremacy, saying that whites were so “accustomed to look upon black men with contempt... that they ought not to vote with us” (p. 58). In 1837, Pennsylvania went even further by eliminating black voting rights all together (p. 58). The nationwide spread of such constraints on African Americans, Foner writes, indicated that race had “supplanted class as the major line of division between those who could vote and those who could not” (p. 58).

Virginia, however, continued to officially overlap race and class restrictions on voting until 1850, making it the last state to require voters to own property, albeit in a modified form (Keyssar, 2009, p. 24). That change came after years of petitioning by white non-property owners (nonfreeholders) who had pleaded their cause to Virginia’s planter aristocracy in terms of social deference—even while turning their own backs on other groups that did not have voting rights. For example, in an 1829 petition, nonfreeholders said they concurred with the upper classes that the right to vote was not a “natural right” but a “social right” that “must of necessity be regulated by society” and that women, children, foreigners and slaves should be excluded from voting (Keyssar, 2009, p. 30).

Slaveowners, though, successfully fought against giving voting rights to nonfreeholders during Virginia’s 1829–1830 Constitutional Convention out of fear that any sharing of political power eventually would be too democratizing and thereby “undermine slavery itself” (Keyssar, 2009, pp. 30–31). (Eerily, the phrases that “The right of suffrage is not a natural right.... It is a

social right and must necessarily be regulated by society” would be repeated by John Goode, a former member of both the Confederate Congress and the U.S. House of Representatives, as he presided over the Virginia 1901–02 state Constitutional Convention that largely disenfranchised Virginia’s black citizens; Breitzer, 2015.)

Other Southern states during 1820s and ’30s had expanded voting rights to all white men, including the poor, as a means of motivating them to serve in militias that guarded against slave rebellions (Keyssar, 2009, p. 31). For Virginia, though, the antebellum pattern of overlapping race and class biases was a precursor of what was to come in post-Civil War struggles over voting rights.

Soon after the Civil War, Congress enabled African American men to vote (only men had voting rights under the laws of the time) by ratifying the 15th amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1870. Congress also required the former Confederate states to add black voting rights provisions to their state constitutions in order to be readmitted to the Union. Almost immediately, Keyssar (2009) notes, the Ku Klux Klan and similar white-supremacist terrorist groups initiated “violent campaigns against blacks who sought to vote or hold office” (p. 84).

Nevertheless, black men enthusiastically embraced their voting rights, and the Southern states elected 22 African Americans to Congress and 600 state legislators during the Reconstruction period of 1865 to 1877 (Berman, 2015, p. 11).

Yet, even before Reconstruction’s end in 1877, Southern states were already developing ways to constrain the African American vote and, as in Keyssar’s (2009) words, to return blacks to “their place” (p. 85). Keyssar asserts that there were “important class dimensions to this political and racial agenda,” explaining that “emancipation and Reconstruction threatened white

control over needed black labor,” therefore revealing that white Southern resistance “to black voting was rooted in class conflict as well as racial antagonism” (p. 85).

Voting, though, was not the only arena for conflict involving the overlap of class and race. The combination showed up in how white Virginians still expected social deference when crossing paths with black men and women in public settings. Whites felt black people were insolent when not stepping out of the way of white people or ignoring them, and these brief encounters sometimes led to physical fighting on the streets (Tarter, 2013, pp. 250–251).

Whites sometimes recognized their class bias, but they usually explained it as part of the natural order. An exception was Lewis H. Blair, a Richmond-based businessman and economics expert, who wrote a book in 1889 that warned fellow white Southerners that their system of “oligarchy, caste, (and) vassalage” would be disastrous to the economic advancement of the region (Wynes, 1961, p. 109). In the same book, *Prosperity of the South Dependent Upon the Elevation of the Negro*, Blair also urged an end to segregated schools because educated African Americans would be more “useful and valuable citizens” (Wynes, 1961, p. 133).

A more common white political practice was to shortchange education for African Americans out of fear that educated blacks would use their knowledge on Election Day. Wynes (1961) quotes Virginian Walter A. Watson as being horrified that blacks were receiving too much education and that black schools were “turning out your voters by the thousands” (p. 132). Denying African Americans the same quality of education that white children were receiving would soon go hand in hand with taking away black voting rights.

Systematic efforts to comprehensively disenfranchise African Americans began in 1890 with Mississippi rewriting its constitution to add a \$2 poll tax and literacy tests that made would-be voters show they understood the U.S. Constitution or state constitution (Keyssar, 2009,

p. 89). Mississippi also made its residency requirement more stringent, with the state attorney general rendering an opinion that said “the negro is... a nomadic tribe” and therefore did not have a permanent residence (Keyssar, 2009, p. 89).

Poll taxes had come and gone over the previous decades in many states, even in the North, for various class- and race-discrimination purposes—or a combination of both. But 1890, says Keyssar (2009), “marked the beginning of systematic efforts by southern states to disenfranchise black voters legally” with “many of the disenfranchising laws... designed expressly to be administered in a discriminatory fashion, permitting whites to vote while barring blacks” (pp. 88–89). The other former Confederate states fell in line with constitutional actions that encompassed varieties and combinations of poll taxes, literacy tests, secret ballot laws lengthy residency requirements, complex voter registration systems, and white-only primaries (p. 89). Local voting officials—white political appointees—were empowered to judge the eligibility of voter-applicants as they saw fit, and that often translated into denying countless black applicants no matter how much they prepared themselves (pp. 88–90). Additional laws stripped voting rights from men who were convicted of relatively minor crimes, such as vagrancy, bigamy and petty theft (pp. 85, 89).

Historians point out that many of the new provisions technically applied to whites as well as to blacks, a matter that sometimes generated debates among white politicians. However, the Southern states usually found ways to create loopholes for white voters, such as enacting “grandfather clauses” for sons and grandsons of earlier generations of voters. Many times, though, white politicians, especially from upper classes, did not seem too concerned if poor whites also lost voting power, another indication of the fusion of class and race discrimination. As Keyssar (2009) observes, “Many of the landed, patrician whites... were the prime movers of

disenfranchisement” adding that disenfranchising African Americans and poor whites helped reduce “the threat of a troublesome electoral alliance between blacks and poor whites” (pp. 90–91). On March 25, 1965, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. picked up on this theme in his speech at the end of the famous Selma-to-Montgomery voting rights march as he said, “The segregation of the races was really a political stratagem employed by the emerging Bourbon interests in the South to keep the southern masses divided and southern labor the cheapest in the land.” The term “Bourbon,” as King used it, referred to politically influential white Southerners who had sought to overthrow Reconstruction (Jackson, 2016).

In Virginia, the push for a poll tax and voter tests gained greater momentum after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 1898 in favor of Mississippi’s disenfranchisement provisions (Lichtman, p. 137; Parramore et al., 1994, p. 269). The state undertook its formal disenfranchisement of African Americans at its 1901-02 Constitutional Convention.

White-supremacist politicians were unabashed in proclaiming their intentions. State Senator Carter Glass, among the leaders of the black disenfranchisement initiative, boldly proclaimed:

Discrimination! Why that is exactly what we propose; that exactly, is why this was elected—to discriminate to the very extremity of permissible action under the limitations of the Federal Constitution with the view to the elimination of every Negro who can be gotten rid of, legally, without materially impairing the strength of the white electorate. (Buni, 1967, p. 17; Keyssar, 2009, p. 90; Lawson, 1999, p. 12)

When the Virginia convention wrapped up on March 28, 1902, the state’s new constitution required a poll tax of \$1.50 per year, payable six months before any election along with any delinquent payments from the previous three years, plus any late-payment fines.

Frederic D. Ogden (1958), one of the first political scientists to study the administration and impact of poll taxes, said that Virginia’s poll tax was among the most burdensome at the time because of its requirement for cumulative payments. The basic payment of \$1.50 per year in the

early 1900s equates to \$44.03 in 2018 U.S. dollars, and the cumulative \$4.50 would now equal \$132.09, according to an online inflation calculator (www.officialdata.org, n.d.).

Another provision imposed an “understanding clause,” meaning that voter-applicants had to successfully answer any questions related to government to the satisfaction of local voter registration officials. Yet another provision, taking effect in 1903, required would-be voters to submit written applications, completed without assistance. The constitution exempted Civil War veterans and their sons from all these mandates (Breitzer, 2015; Buni, 1967, p. 18).

The “understanding clause” amounted to a cruel game played time and again all throughout the South. White politicians appointed white voter-registration officials who would devise and administer these oral exams to voting applicants. The game was rigged because passing the test was left entirely to the discretion of the registrars, who also had the power to ask voter applicants any question they’d please. Here are a few examples as compiled by Tarter (2013):

- Who discovered the Rocky Mountains and when?
- What state passed the Port bill and when?
- What state had its boundary changed three times by the U.S. Government and what was its number when admitted?
- What state was originally named Albemarle? (pp. 273–274).

Glass had predicted that “This plan will eliminate the darky as a political factor in this state in less than five years” (as quoted in Lewis, 1991, p. 21). He was correct. By 1904, black voters in Norfolk, for example, decreased in number from 1,826 to 504, and by 1910, only 44 paid the poll tax in order to vote (Lewis, 1991, p. 21). Statewide, there were about 147,000 African

Americans eligible to vote in 1900, but only 21,000 remained on the voting rolls by October 15, 1902, according to Buni (1967, p. 27).

Several years later, Carter Glass, by then a U.S. senator, continued to gloat about disenfranchising the South's African American populations. According to J. D. Smith (2002), Glass, in a national news interview, infamously declared that “people of the original thirteen Southern States [in the Confederacy] curse and deride and spit upon the 15th amendment—and have no intention of letting the Negro vote” (p. 151). Then, reflecting upon the aims of the 1901–02 Virginia Constitutional Convention, Glass boasted that:

We obey the letter of the [14th and 15th] amendments and the Federal statutes, but we frankly evade the spirit thereof—and purport to continue doing so. White supremacy is too precious a thing to surrender for the sake of a theoretical justice that would let a brutish African deem himself the equal of white men and women in Dixie. (J. D. Smith, 2002, p. 151)

Glass was not alone in expressing such white-supremacist glee. As old voter-registration records across the state were purged on July 10, 1902, to make way for new registration, the *Richmond Times* newspaper proclaimed, “At the hour of noon today the dark cloud will be lifted, and peace and sunshine will come to regenerated Anglo-Saxon people” (as quoted in Buni, 1967, p. 19).

Scholars say it is impossible to tabulate exactly how many African Americans and poor or illiterate whites lost or never gained voting privileges because of Southern disenfranchisement efforts (Keyssar, 2009, p. 91). But one indication of the devastation, says Keyssar (2009), is in noting that overall voter turnout in the South fell from a range of 60 to 85 percent at the end of Reconstruction to “50 percent for whites and single digits for blacks” (p. 92) after 1900.

While the brunt of disenfranchisement landed on African Americans, white elites celebrated the double victory as exemplified in a 1904 *Richmond Times* editorial that glowed:

“We have eliminated the objectionable negro vote and many objectionable white voters have been retired.... The Virginia electorate is now composed of the best white men in the State” (as quoted in Tarter, 2013, p. 272).

One other note regarding the class-driven clubbiness of white political insiders at the time: The delegates to Virginia’s convention reneged on their promise to submit the new constitution to public referendum, fearing that most voters—especially the classes of poor whites and blacks—would not agree to disenfranchise themselves. The delegates proclaimed the constitution *fait accompli* (Breitzer, 2015; Tarter, 2013, p. 270).

Many poor, illiterate whites may have been taken by surprise, according to Tarter, who illustrates this point with a quote from William C. Pendleton, an early 20th century journalist, who wrote the following on what he observed in southwestern Virginia:

It was painful and pitiful... to see the horror and dread visible on the faces of the illiterate poor white men who were waiting to take their turn before the inquisition.... They had seen some of their neighbors and friends turned away because they were unable to answer satisfactorily the questions put to them by the registrars; and it required much earnest persuasion to induce them to pass through the hateful ordeal. This was horrible to behold, but it was still more horrible to see the marks of humiliation and despair that were stamped upon the faces of honest but poor white men who had been refused registration and who had been robbed of their citizenship without cause. (Tarter, 2013, pp. 271–272)

Whether intended or not, a critical long-term result of the new Southern state constitutions, especially Virginia’s, was the drastic shrinking of the list of qualified voters, white or black, therefore making the remaining electorate “easily managed in the hands of skillful political manipulators” (Tarter, 2013, p. 283). In Virginia, that most dexterous manipulator came to be Harry Flood Byrd Jr., who had been just a teenager during the 1901–02 state Constitutional Convention but quickly learned the ropes of politics when elected to Virginia’s Senate in 1915. By 1922, when he took over the chairmanship of the central committee of Virginia’s Democratic

Party until his death in 1966, Byrd dominated his state's politics and government policy perhaps more than any other politician in America (Tarter, 2013, p. 282).

While he was an avowed segregationist to the end, Byrd suppressed not only black political advancement but effectively blocked most whites who did not fall in step with him. As Tarter (2013) writes, the Byrd political organization had “racist origins and effects, and it also had elitist social and political origins and effects” (p. 283). Francis Pickens Miller, a fellow Democrat who unsuccessfully challenged a Byrd man in the party's 1949 gubernatorial primary, likened the Byrd-dominated Virginia to the Soviet Union (pp. 302–303). Tarter, in summarizing the legacy of the Byrd machine, provided this succinct but apt phrase: They “did worse than steal money. They stole democracy” (p. 283).

Keyssar (2009), too, presents a horrifying summary of the results of the class and race voter-suppression efforts. As he writes:

Millions of people—most of them working class and poor—were deprived of the right to vote in municipal, state, and national elections. Their exclusion from the electorate meant that the outcomes of innumerable political contests were altered, different policies were put into place, different judges appointed, different taxes imposed.... Many of the core institutions of the modern American state—institutions built between Reconstruction and World War I—were indeed shaped and accepted by a polity that was far from democratic. (Keyssar, 2009, p. 138)

The intersection of class and race also played out in the operation of mass transit in both law and deference. Not only were blacks required to sit toward the back of a bus behind whites, but in many localities it became the custom for African Americans to continue waiting at a bus stop until whites climbed aboard first. In addition, historian Henry Lewis Suggs (1988) reports in his biography of the Norfolk black newspaper publisher P. B. Young Sr., *P. B. Young Newspaperman: Race, Politics and Journalism in the New South 1910–62*, white female

passengers often complained about getting their clothing “dirtied” by black workingmen passing through the bus aisle to get to the vehicle’s rearward seating (p. 126).

African Americans who lived in other parts of the country often were not accustomed to the rigidity of Southern white supremacy they encountered in public arenas. In 1946, boxing champ Joe Louis, for example, did not realize he had crossed a color line when he went into a white waiting area to buy magazines while he was waiting to board an Elizabeth River ferry to travel from Portsmouth to Norfolk. A white ferry employee scolded him (T. L. Jones, 1982, p. 61).

Class issues rose, too, among African Americans. Ella Baker, who traveled alone through the South to organize or bolster NAACP branches for the organization’s national office, told friends that she found class hierarchy in some communities to be a large impediment to overthrowing Jim Crow and that some branches operated like social clubs (Ransby, 2003, pp. 120–124).

With limited means, African Americans tried to fight back against disenfranchisement and racist public policies whenever and wherever they it was possible. The NAACP, created in 1909, began working on voting issues and eventually achieved several legal breakthroughs, including getting the Supreme Court to strike down the grandfather clause in 1915 (Klarman, 2004, pp. 69–71).

Racism dominated Southern politics for decades to come. For example, John J. Parker, a North Carolina judge who President Herbert Hoover nominated to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1930, characterized African Americans in politics as “a source of evil and danger to both races” (as quoted in Buni, 1967, p. 109). The U.S. Senate defeated the nomination of Parker by one

vote, which several scholars attributed to lobbying from the NAACP and labor unions (Buni, 1967, pp. 109–110).

As previously noted in the sexism section of this chapter, Norfolk’s Colgate W. Darden Jr. won a 1938 congressional election when his campaign labeled opponent Norman R. Hamilton a “nigger lover,” while simultaneously claiming to black voters that he would be a strong advocate for national antilynching legislation (J. D. Smith, 2002, p. 252; L. M. Smith, 2001, p. 177).

The Darden campaign tactic was just one of many examples of what several scholars meant by the sardonic comment that even though most African Americans could no longer vote, they still had an important presence in Virginia elections—as cannon fodder for politicians and political parties trying to out-do their opponents in deploying racist invective in their campaigns.

Such cynical, race-baiting political demagoguery began took off in the post-Reconstruction 1880s, as Wynes (1961) describes the trend, writing that:

Political regression was largely the work of both Democratic and Republican party leaders—politicians whose chief aim was to control the vote and who knew that making the Negro the scapegoat of the social ills of the day would appeal to most white voters (p. 148)

Politicians continued to deploy this strategy throughout the Jim Crow era, with Buni (1967) observing about the 1920s and ’30s: “The role of the Negro... was not to be a voter but an issue. As of old, he was depicted as a threat to white supremacy” (p. 108).

Darden continued his political climb, going on to serve as governor of Virginia from 1942 to 1946 and president of the University of Virginia from 1947 to 1959, and was appointed to a variety of other state and national positions. The University of Virginia named its graduate school of business after Darden in 1974. Over the years, Darden moderated his racial views and broke with segregationist political boss Harry F. Byrd in the 1950s (R. L. Heinemann & the *Dictionary of Virginia Biography*, 2015).

Despite the laws and schemes to suppress the black vote, African Americans persisted in their quest for full political citizenship. Sometimes they were assisted by white allies, including some labor groups that agreed poll taxes and other means of voter suppression were an affront to democratic values and civil rights, and the right to vote was perceived as so essential to overthrowing Jim Crow. “The ballot was expected to bring both material and psychological rewards,” writes Lawson (1999, p. xviii), continuing:

Once Negroes exercised their vote, they could help elect sheriffs who would be less likely to brutalize them; they would select officials who would see to it that ghetto streets were paved and cleaned; and ultimately they would use their ballots to dismantle the entire Jim Crow caste system. (p. xviii)

The ACLU joined the battle along with other groups, such as the National Committee to Abolish the Poll Tax. Opponents to the poll tax grew in number and tried repeatedly to appeal to the courts, individual Southern states, Congress, President Franklin Roosevelt, and even Eleanor Roosevelt. Nothing worked. The National Committee to Abolish the Poll Tax could not overcome the institutional unwillingness of both major political parties, the Democrats and the Republicans, to make poll taxes a high-priority issue, Lawson notes (1999, pp. 83–84).

Voting-rights activists and organizations employed other tactics as well, especially on the grassroots level in local communities (Lawson, 1999, pp. 58–63). Tactics included paying poll taxes for black citizens who could not afford these levies and conducting educational sessions on how to register, including how to prepare for literacy tests and similar roadblocks.

By the end of World War II, the voting-rights movement for Southern blacks gained new energy, especially from African American veterans returning from service in World War II who helped to organize voter-registration drives or ran as candidates. As evidence, Buni (1967) notes that black voter registration in Virginia climbed from 32,889 in 1944 to 38,020 in 1945 (p. 146), although it was still little more than 10% of the 365,717 blacks of voting age in the state. Still,

many scholars say that American rhetoric about saving democracy overseas spurred black veterans into political engagement against Jim Crow (e.g., Armstead, 2009; Baker, 2016; Morris, 1984; Olson, 2001; C. S. Parker, 2009; Sitkoff, 2008). This crucial aspect that will be discussed in this chapter's section on the wartime experience of African Americans, but as Buni (1967) writes, African Americans after World War II felt that "since Negroes had served the nation in its time of need, they should be allowed to do so in time of peace" (p. 148).

Black voter registration continued to increase in Virginia, Buni (1967) continues, noting 43,945 in 1946; 45,737 in 1947; 53,035 in 1948; and 65,286 in 1949. As a result, or perhaps in tandem, the late 1940s saw more black Virginians willing to run for political office. The two trends fed on each other: rising black voter registration encourage new candidates and the appearance of more African American candidates motivated more black Virginians to pay their poll taxes and register (pp. 148–149).

Among the black candidates, World War II veteran Victor J. Ashe made one of the strongest runs for office in his 1946 campaign for Norfolk City Council. He lost, although the 3,101 votes he had garnered represented about two-thirds of Norfolk's 4,235 black voter registrants that year. In Richmond, attorney Oliver W. Hill, who was also an Army veteran and was well-known for his civil rights work with the NAACP, produced an even stronger showing in 1947, losing by only 101 votes for the Virginia House of Delegates (Buni, 1967, pp. 152–153). Hill, though, continued to capture the political imagination of Richmond's black community by running for the Richmond City Council in 1948. African American voter registration in that city soared from 6,374 in 1945 to 11,127 in 1948. Hill won (Buni, 1967, pp. 155–157).

More black candidates stepped forward across Virginia in the 1950s, but few saw victory. Observers blamed a variety of factors, including poll taxes (Walton et al., 2012, p. 477). In

Norfolk, no African American won until 1968, when Joseph A. Jordan Jr., a civil rights attorney and World War II veteran, won a City Council seat. By then, the poll tax for federal elections had been eliminated in 1964 by the 24th amendment to the Constitution, while poll taxes for state and local elections were declared unconstitutional in 1966 after lawsuits were filed by several Virginia citizens, including Evelyn Butts.

African Americans During Wartime

Famous journalist Tom Brokaw wrote a nationally acclaimed account of the lives of World War II veterans, *The Greatest Generation*, which became a bestseller. In his book, Brokaw generally defined this generation as Americans who were born in the 1910s and 1920s, who endured the Great Depression of the 1930s, who developed a deep sense of duty to their country and the notion of democracy through their wartime experiences, and who looked forward to returning to their families and communities and building their careers but came back “encoded... [with] a selfless sense of commitment to a common cause” (Brokaw, 2004, pp. VII–VIII, XXVI–XXVII). Among the 50 veterans that Brokaw featured, two were African Americans. As I thought about Brokaw's book and other material I have read about World War II, it occurred to me that African Americans who served in the Second World War easily met or exceeded Brokaw's definition of “greatest generation.” Indeed, there probably should be an even more elite category for such African American veterans because they not only risked their lives to keep other nations free but they also struggled to uphold democracy in their home communities back in the United States. That is why black-owned newspapers at the time used the term “Double V” campaign to signify the importance of African American fighting for victory overseas and for civil rights (*and against oppression*) on the home front as well (Lawson, 1999, p. 65; C. S. Parker, 2009, p. 42).

About 1.2 million African Americans served in the U.S. military during World War II, and many of those who survived came back with a keener sense that the United States was not living up to its creeds about democracy, equality, liberty, and justice (Armstead, 2009; Baker, 2016; T. Bell, 2017; Morris, 1984; Olson, 2001; C. S. Parker, 2009; Sitkoff, 2008). While World War II had a far-reaching effect on the civil rights movement, this was not the first time that blacks returned from wartime service intent on overthrowing racial oppression in the United States.

In several ways, the story of how World War II significantly affected the civil rights movement began with the black experience in earlier wars, especially the Civil War and World War I (although African Americans also participated in the American Revolution, War of 1812, and Spanish American War). Famed abolitionist, orator, writer, and statesman Frederick Douglass, who had escaped slavery in 1838, helped lobby President Abraham Lincoln to allow free African American men to join the Union military and fight against the Confederates. He then encouraged African Americans to enlist and offered a variety of compelling reasons in his speeches and articles, including that it would help prove that blacks are entitled to full citizenship and that military service, especially in the fight against slavery, would be an ennobling effort that bolsters self-respect (BlackPast, 2007; Douglass, 1863; Douglass' Role in the Civil War, n.d.).

Even after African Americans began enlisting, Douglass continued to remind them of the importance of their military service. For example, in a January 29, 1864, speech to the 29th and 30th Connecticut Volunteer Infantry, made up of African American troops, Douglass implored:

You are the pioneers of the liberty of your race. With the United States cap on your head, the United States eagle on your belt, the United States musket on your shoulder, not all the powers of darkness can prevent you from becoming American citizens. And not for yourselves alone are you marshaled—you are pioneers—on you depends the destiny of four millions of the colored race in this country.

If you rise and flourish, we shall rise and flourish. If you win freedom and citizenship, we shall share your freedom and citizenship. (Drury, 2014, paras. 4, 5)

Among those inspired by Douglass was William H. Carney, who was born in Norfolk but had migrated to Massachusetts with his parents before the start of the Civil War. Intending for a career in the ministry, Carney changed course and enlisted in the all-black 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Regiment, where he was quickly promoted to sergeant. He became famous during the Union's July 18, 1863, attack on Fort Wagner, South Carolina, when, although severely wounded, he saved the United States flag from Confederate capture (Lange, 2017). Carney later recalled his actions with pride and how his battlefield comrades were equally proud of his heroics. "When they saw me bringing the colors," he said, "they cheered me, and I was able to tell them that the old flag never touched the ground" (West Point Monument, 2014, Inscription, para. 2). He was among the first African Americans awarded the nation's Medal of Honor for bravery under fire but had to wait until 1900 to be so honored (Newby-Alexander, n.d., paras. 16, 18).

It wasn't just free black men who heeded the call to join Union forces. The Civil War also increased opportunities for African Americans to escape from slavery, and many of men not only fled enslavement but joined the Union Army and Navy. Hucles (2006) notes that the Norfolk area, occupied by federal forces since 1862, "proved to be fertile ground for... eager black recruits" (p. 50) from throughout southeastern Virginia. About 1,200 black men from the Norfolk area joined the Union military (Bogger, 2006), including Evelyn Butts' great-grandfather, Smallwood Ackiss (Ligon, 2017, p. 25). Smallwood Ackiss fled a nearby plantation and joined a division of the United States Colored Troops in 1863 in Norfolk while the plantation owner, John Ackiss II, fought for the Confederacy, according to Ligon (Biga, 2018).

Actions taken by blacks during the Civil War had an even deeper meaning, according to Foner (1992, p. 59). Southern African Americans, like Ackiss, hastened the dismantling of slavery by fleeing the plantations and enlisting in the Union's armed forces. These initiatives, Foner writes, “were crucial to placing the issue of black citizenship on the national agenda” (pp. 58–59).

One proof of Foner's assertion is found in a founding document of the National Equal Rights League (NERL), which 145 African American leaders from Northern and Southern States created at a national black convention held October 4–7, 1864, in Syracuse, New York. This document, NERL's *Address to the American People*, posed the following questions:

Are we good enough to use bullets, and not good enough to use ballots? May we defend rights in time of war, and yet be denied the exercise of those rights in time of peace? Are we citizens when the nation is in peril, and aliens when the nation is in safety? May we shed our blood under the Star-Spangled Banner on the battlefield, and yet be debarred from marching under it to the ballot-box?... Shall we toil with you to win the prize of free government, while you alone shall monopolize all its valued privileges? (Walton et al., 2012, pp. 197–198)

Blacks, whether born free or former slaves, were proud of their participation in the Civil War and their role in liberating other African Americans from slavery. In all, about 200,000 African Americans fought for the Union and nearly 40,000 died in the cause (Douglass' Role in the Civil War, n.d.). In Norfolk, the pride manifested itself in a movement to create a cemetery for African American veterans of the Civil War, a project headed by James E. Fuller, one of the first two blacks elected to the Norfolk City Council. Fuller, a war veteran himself, finally succeeded in 1885 as the City Council designated a section of a former pauper's cemetery for black veterans and renamed it West Point because it was on the westerly margin of the then-all-white Elmwood Cemetery (Bogger, 2006). However, the city separated West Point from Elmwood with a 10-foot-high brick wall, a physical symbol that the Civil War did not win

first-class citizenship for African Americans. The wall, a reminder that blacks were to be segregated even in death, still remains as a historic edifice in Norfolk (Bogger, 2006) even though Elmwood Cemetery is now an integrated burial ground.

Norfolk's black residents also worked to honor their native son, Sgt. William H. Carney, by planning a monument to him as the main feature of West Point Cemetery. Led by Fuller, the mostly low-income black community raised money through chicken dinners, pie sales, raffles, and concerts for about 20 years to build the base of the monument and for almost 15 more years to top the structure with a statue of Carney, which was dedicated in 1920. As extra historical significance, the monument is the only known memorial in the South that salutes black veterans of the Civil War and Spanish-American War.

After the Civil War, a pattern emerged: Blacks continued to serve in the U.S. military, albeit in segregated units and usually with low-level assignments—yet with the quest for full citizenship high in their minds. President Woodrow Wilson's rhetoric about America's World War I goal of saving democracy in Europe reinforced this belief in achieving full citizenship at home but, again, this target proved elusive. African American soldiers and sailors endured harsh treatment, racial indignities, and segregated facilities, including latrines and showers (C. S. Parker, 2009, pp. 35–36). Their contributions were downplayed by high-ranking officers and politicians, and their efforts to succeed were often ridiculed or undermined by whites.

In a letter to his sister, Dr. James D. Fife of Charlottesville wrote about seeing “a couple of American coons today” but none “of our good Virginia niggers” (as quoted in J. D. Smith, 2002, pp. 44–45). Fife's sister, Ella, also in Europe as a nurse, wrote to another sister in America that she sometimes had to sit “at the next table to the blackest shines you ever saw.” While noting

that the African Americans were “excellent soldiers,” Ella added, “I’m afraid there are going to be some spoiled darkies coming back home” (J. D. Smith, 2002, p. 45).

Yet black soldiers and sailors persisted both during their active-duty years and when they returned to civilian life, even when knowing that displaying public pride in their military service could bring deadly consequences (C. S. Parker, 2009, p. 38). At least 10 black veterans were lynched while wearing their military uniforms in riots instigated by white mobs in 1918 and 1919 (C. S. Parker, 2009, p. 38). Atop the violence, U.S. Senator James K. Vardaman of Mississippi added insult: He warned fellow senators not to commend African Americans for serving patriotically in World War I because blacks would then conclude that their “political rights must be respected” (Equal Justice Initiative, 2018, para. 2).

More than 370,000 African Americans served in the U.S. military during World War I, which was 9% of American troops. (C. S. Parker, 2009, pp. 33–37). Among them was Charles Hamilton Houston, a young officer who was so angry about Jim Crow conditions in the army that he dedicated himself to a lifelong fight against discrimination as a civil rights lawyer, Howard University law professor, and a leading mastermind of the NAACP’s strategy to dismantle white supremacy (Armstead, 2009, p. 97; C. S. Parker, 2009, p. 36). Houston would later explain:

The hate and scorn showered on us Negro officers by our fellow Americans convinced me that there was no sense in my dying for a world ruled by them. I made up my mind that if I got through this war I would study law and use my time fighting for who could not strike back. (as quoted in Armstead, 2009)

Houston’s World War I military experience and subsequent engagement in civil rights foreshadowed what was to emerge from the black experience in World War II more than two decades later.

As World War II approached, many African Americans likely knew the racial horror stories of grandparents and parents who served in the Civil War, Spanish-American War, and World War I, or held their own memories of Jim Crow experiences in the military and poor treatment of black veterans by white politicians. Recalling the mistreatment, a group of black opinion-makers and African Americans who served as officers in World War I formed the Committee for Participation of Negroes in the National Defense Program in 1938 (C. S. Parker, 2009, p. 42). The committee, C. S. Parker (2009) says, “sought to avoid the disappointment of the First World War and the immediate postwar period by ensuring African Americans’ access to full, unencumbered military participation” (p. 42). Parker also cites the words of Roy Wilkins, editor of the NAACP’s *Crisis* magazine, who wrote that equality in the military and defense sector was a top priority, along with antilynching efforts, “among all classes (of blacks) in all sections of the country” (p. 42).

So, with World War II approaching, many African Americans again stepped forward as patriots willing to serve their country and its ideals. As in earlier wars, they also saw opportunity along with the risks: opportunity for work, for learning skills, for self-respect, for proving, again, to America that they were deserving of first-class citizenship. The long-running battle with Jim Crow also was central as evidenced in this quote from African American labor leader A. Philip Randolph (1942):

Though I have found no Negroes who want to see the United Nations lose this war, I have found many who, before the war ends, want to see the stuffing knocked out of white supremacy and of empire over subject peoples. American Negroes, involved as we are in the general issues of the conflict, are confronted not with a choice but with the challenge both to win democracy for ourselves at home and to help win the war for democracy the world over. (“Why Should We March,” para. 1)

Randolph (1942) concluded:

A community is democratic only when the humblest and weakest person can enjoy the highest civil, economic, and social rights that the biggest and most powerful possess.

By fighting for their rights now, American Negroes are helping to make America a moral and spiritual arsenal of democracy. Their fight against the poll tax, against lynch law, segregation, and Jim Crow, their fight for economic, political, and social equality, thus becomes part of the global war for freedom. (“Why Should We March,” paras. 9, 10)

African American soldiers and sailors had to endure indignities from white officers and comrades as they fought overseas and from white civilians as they waited for deployment in places like Norfolk. Tempers flared, especially on crowded streetcars and buses where black soldiers and sailors had to join with civilian African Americans pushing their way past white passengers in order to get to the back of the vehicles, historian Marvin W. Schlegel (1991) reports in *Conscripted City: Norfolk in World War II* (p. 194). Many black military men from more “liberal” parts of America were not accustomed to the requirements of Jim Crow segregation in mass transit.

Norfolk's African American civilians faced other forms of discrimination on the home front. The Great Depression of the 1930s had taken a greater toll on Norfolk-area blacks than on whites, as blacks were often the first to lose their jobs or were laid off and replaced by whites (Lewis, 1991, pp. 116–120; Suggs, 1988, pp. 66–67, 89). When World War II began and jobs started opening in defense-related industries, blacks rushed forward for the opportunities, and many times went away bitterly disappointed. For example, dozens of black carpenters who responded to an emergency hiring announcement for several regional military installations were sent home by the contractor who told them “we cannot mix the races” (Suggs, 1988, p. 120).

Black and white women also answered the call for defense workers, given that many men had joined the military. But, as noted in the section on sexism and gender issues, African

American women often discovered that their skin color was a disqualifier (Lewis, 1991, pp. 78–79). African American women and men who did manage to find defense employment were confronted with other forms of discrimination, including exclusion from proper training, segregated working facilities, assignment to the lowest-paying jobs, and being overlooked for promotions (Jones, p. 56; Lewis, 1991, p. 177; Parramore et al., 1994, p. 337).

Even though African Americans in Norfolk, as elsewhere throughout the country, wanted to participate in America's war effort, they were greeted with daily instances of racism that tested their beliefs. Norfolk's Civilian Defense Office, for example, issued identification cards to blacks that contained descriptions such as “woolly hair and maroon eyes” (Lewis, 1991, p. 189; Schlegel, 1991, p. 226). African American residents of Norfolk also had to endure and deny rumors that they were arming themselves with ice picks as part of a plot to rise up and murder thousands of whites in nighttime attacks (Lewis, 1991, p. 191; Parramore et al., 1994, p. 339; Schlegel, 1991, p. 193).

African Americans stationed or training in Norfolk were excluded from many venues for wholesome recreation. They were denied entry to the Navy YMCA and at most USOs. Finally, the black Smith Street USO was opened, but it was located in one of Norfolk's worst slums, which had streets that were almost impassable during rainstorms (Lewis, 1991, pp. 194–195; Schlegel, 1991, pp. 73–74, 316).

Black soldiers and sailors during the World War II era served in segregated units, although they sometimes fought alongside whites in certain battles when sent overseas (Armstead, 2009; T. Bell, 2017; C. S. Parker, 2009). Many knew how African American veterans of World War I had felt betrayed at home after fighting for democracy in Europe; still, they felt pride in wearing a United States military uniform and being part of the Allied effort to defeat

fascism in Europe and Japan's aggression in the Pacific (C. S. Parker, 2009). The black press bolstered this belief both among the troops and back home. The *Norfolk Journal and Guide* and several other black-owned newspapers sent their own correspondents and ran feature stories about the heroics of African American soldiers and sailors who were usually overlooked by white-owned periodicals (Suggs, 1988, pp. 132–136).

The black press also steadily reminded their readers of their continuing partnership with African American troops in what these newspapers termed the “Double V” campaign—for victory against antidemocratic enemies abroad and at home (Foner, 1998, pp. 243–244). Several poets made similar points, such as Langston Hughes (1995), whose World War II-era poem, “Beaumont to Detroit: 1943,” points out that black Americans were fighting to liberate oppressed people overseas while still struggling against Jim Crow repression in the United States.

C. S. Parker (2009), who interviewed a number of black veterans for his 2009 book, notes that “Fighting for democracy... symbolized the equality to which African Americans aspired” and that “Bearing arms to preserve America's democratic ideals... meant full membership in the political community, which included enjoyment of civil as well a political equality” (p. 10).

On such points, C. S. Parker (2009) quotes several veterans, including a “Mr. Carter” (first name not published by Parker), who enlisted in 1940 and spent his career in the army. Wearing his uniform, Carter said, “made me feel as though I was a true American—that I merited everything that I received” (p. 108). C. S. Parker concludes that the military uniform, especially for Southern blacks, “symbolized their equality, their membership in the political community” and a “sense of accomplishment” and a “commitment to American ideals” (p. 107).

Wearing the uniform also added to both the determination and the embitterment of many black veterans as they experienced the disparity between the democratic ideals for which they

were fighting and the racial realities they encountered in service and when they returned to their communities. “They returned with a new set of expectations, confident of their ability to achieve them,” C. S. Parker writes (2009). “Black veterans returned home determined to secure the rights to which they, and the community they represented, were entitled” (pp. 110–111), echoing the sentiments of Charles Hamilton Houston.

Although they were battle-worn, many black veterans of World War II followed through on their new mission, joining or forming grassroots organizations to pursue civil rights, voting rights, or community improvement—all in the quest of first-class citizenship for African Americans (C. S. Parker, 2009, p. 51). Some black veterans became well-known names during the civil rights struggles of the 1950s and '60s, including brothers Medgar and Charles Evers, Hosea Williams, and Aaron Henry (T. Bell, 2017; C. S. Parker, 2009).

In Norfolk, the list includes Victor Ashe, J. Hugo Madison, and Joseph A. Jordan Jr., each of whom became politically active lawyers as well as civil rights crusaders (Littlejohn & Ford, 2012, p. 37).

Oddly, the impact of the World War II experience is not always recognized, or perhaps is forgotten, even among African American scholars who write about leadership and the civil rights movement. For example, L. E. Williams (1998, pp. 101, 109), in *Servants of the People: the 1960s Legacy of African American Leadership*, offers only brief references to Whitney M. Young Jr., executive director of the National Urban League, developing negotiating skills while serving in the Army during World War II. An online U.S. Army news-feature article is more helpful by providing a telling quote from Young: “It was my Army experience that decided me on getting into the race relations field after the war,” Young said. “Not just because I saw the problems, but because I saw the potentials, too” (T. Bell, 2017, para. 12). (The same article includes discussion

about the war's impact on nationally significant civil rights leaders Medgar Evers, Hosea Williams, and Aaron Henry, along with lesser-known African American veterans.)

C. S. Parker (2009), though, goes to the heart of experience as he writes:

By virtue of their sacrifice, black veterans believed themselves—and the black community—to be entitled to first-class citizenship. Since this wasn't forthcoming, military experience gave them the confidence to take it. Compared to what they were forced to endure in the military—that is, fighting the enemy in addition to racism in the ranks—black veterans were eager to fight Jim Crow upon their return, something at which it's clear many of them excelled. (p. xii)

Despite their determination and confidence, black veterans found that Southern white supremacists remained intent on denying full citizenship to African Americans. Here are just two of many examples:

In 1946, Medgar and Charles Evers tried to register to vote in their hometown of Decatur, Mississippi. A group of whites blocked their way to the courthouse. The Evers brothers continued to advocate for voting rights, with Medgar falling to an assassin's gunfire in 1963 (Lawson, 1999, p. xv). Another veteran, Maceo Snipes, actually voted in a Georgia primary in July 1946, but one day later he was confronted by a gang of white men in a pickup truck and gunned down by one of them (Equal Justice Initiative, n.d., *Marching Toward a Movement* section, para. 27).

The black veterans persisted, and many helped to give courage, confidence, and wise counsel to their home communities for decades to come.

Inspiration for Resistance From African American History

Just as some scholars contend that the modern civil rights movement was actually a collection of many localized movements, sometimes with support from national organizations, pre-World War II black resistance to the practices of white supremacy was largely decentralized and often ad hoc based on the actions of local individuals, associations, and events. (At least

until the growth of the NAACP in the mid-1930s; Moye, 2011, p. 148). Nevertheless, local movements and social justice activists, says historian J. Todd Moye (2011), “drew inspiration, learned tactics from, and in many cases included the same cast of characters of resistance movements from previous eras” (p. 162).

Gloria Richardson, a Cambridge, Maryland, 1960s civil rights leader, for example, knew about the 1850s and 1860s’ heroics of abolitionist Harriet Tubman from growing up in the same region of Maryland’s Eastern Shore. “I came from an area that’s like fifteen minutes from Harriet Tubman’s home in Sharptown. And grandchildren of the Tubman family had gone to school with my children,” Richardson explained (as quoted in Robnett, 1997, p. 112).

The Double V campaign that linked fighting fascism overseas and Jim Crow in the United States had roots in the black military experience of World War I. In 1938, the black-owned Pittsburgh Courier newspaper worked with several African American military officers from World War I to create the Committee for Participation of Negroes in the National Defense Program. The group aimed to foster “a more dignified place in our armed forces during the next war” (as quoted in C. S. Parker, 2009, p. 42).

African Americans learned of the efforts of earlier generations in many different ways, including through churches, women's clubs, and community and fraternal organizations. Families also played a significant role as they pieced together genealogies, collected photographs, and held reunions (S. S. Hughes & Bogger, 2006, p. 81).

Annual Emancipation Day commemorations took place on January 1 in many communities for a number of decades. Events included parades, speeches, and ceremonies to reaffirm black history and citizenship (S. S. Hughes, 1982, p. 46; S. S. Hughes & Bogger, 2006, p. 90; Lewis, 1991, p. 91).

African American historians also had important roles in motivating continued resistance to Jim Crow—and the efforts of these historians also constituted their own form of resistance by promoting African American history to dispel white-supremacist myths of black inferiority as well as to encourage blacks to learn more about their heritage. Carter G. Woodson (1875–1950) and Luther P. Jackson (1892–1950)—each of whom had significant ties to Virginia—were central leaders in advancing black history and full citizenship.

Woodson, who was born in Virginia and known as the “Father of Black History,” founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, which promoted black history among both scholars and grassroots organizations, the *Journal of Negro History*, and the annual Negro History Week, which was set in February to include the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass. Negro History Week later evolved into Black History Month. Woodson also wrote histories of black Americans to counter white denial of African American contributions and spoke to many black organizations, including teachers. To supplement his work with teachers, Woodson produced and distributed “Negro History Kits” and other curriculum materials (Goggin, 2014).

Jackson, a professor of history at Virginia State College (now Virginia State University) in Petersburg, and a newspaper columnist, was the Virginia director of Woodson's Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, which he used to promote black political participation in the drive toward full citizenship. His pioneering books included *Free Negro Labor and Property Holding in Virginia, 1830–1860*; *Virginia Negro Soldiers and Seamen in the Revolutionary War*; and *Negro Office Holders in Virginia* (Dennis, 2014).

Black-owned newspapers also were key resources in transmitting knowledge about past and contemporaneous African American resistance, starting with *Freedom's Journal*, established

in New York in 1827. Others followed, and enabled “African American leaders and masses to be in touch with each other... express themselves, and opine about their burden, and... reach out to each other beyond local and regional and state boundaries,” writes Walton (Walton et al., 2012, p. 192). Walton adds that the existence of black newspapers helped facilitate national conventions of black people.

In the 20th century, many of the newspapers also shared news and features from across the country on topics important to African Americans via the Associated Negro Press, which had regular correspondents and other contributors in urban areas with large black populations and provided member publications with a twice-weekly set of reports (Hogan, n.d.). In Virginia, black-oriented newspapers included the *Norfolk Journal and Guide*; the *Richmond Planet*; *St. Luke Herald*, also in Richmond; and the *Newport News Star* (S. S. Hughes & Bogger, 2006, pp. 78, 90).

Many publishers and editors were multitalented and determined in the struggle against Jim Crow. Those men and women had their special roles in the history of resistance as did their newspapers. For example, Frederick Douglass published the abolitionist *North Star*, and antilynching crusader Ida Bell Wells-Barnett, co-owned *The Free Speech and Headlight* in Memphis, Tennessee, among their many other accomplishments.

Wells-Barnett's entry into journalism came as a result of her being dragged out of the white “ladies” car of a train in Tennessee and forced into the smoking car, where black passengers were relegated. She had purchased a first-class ticket and had just made herself comfortable with book, when a conductor demanded that she move. This was the post-Reconstruction South of 1883, and “no black woman was ever considered a lady,” Olson writes (2001, p. 33). She sued the railroad and, surprisingly, won a \$200 award from the

company. A similar incident in 1884 won her \$500 from the railroad, and a Memphis newspaper carried the headline, “A Darky Damsel Obtains a Verdict for Damages Against the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad.” Other black women were excited, and she was asked by a black church magazine to write about what had happened. Soon other black magazines, along with newspapers, sought her out as well. In 1889, she invested in the Memphis paper and in 1892, she conducted a three-month investigation into over 700 lynchings after a friend, a black grocer named Tom Moss, had been lynched. In 1896, Wells-Barnett co-founded the National Association for Colored Women, the first nationwide network of its kind, which later became the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs. Ending lynching and elevating the image of black women were among its goals (Olson, 2001, pp. 33–46).

In Virginia, leading black newspapers, publishers, and editors during the post-Reconstruction and Jim Crow eras included *The True Southerner* with Joseph T. Wilson; *Richmond Planet* with John Mitchell; and the *Norfolk Journal and Guide* with P. B. Young Sr.

Wilson also developed a literary reputation by authoring *The Black Phalanx; A History of the Negro Soldiers of the United States in the Wars of 1775–1812, 1861–'6*, in 1887, a book that was hailed in 1891 as exceeding the sales of “any other work written by an Afro-American” (Parramore et al., 1994, p. 255; Varon, and the Dictionary of Virginia Biography, 2018).

Thus, resistance throughout African American history came in many forms, ranging from physical to intellectual, from crusades to politics, and from arts to athletics. Such examples, and countless more, dispel popular notions over the years that African Americans were not very engaged in seeking civil rights, social equality, and full political citizenship before the mid-1950s—a misconception that continues in the 21st century. “There's this idea that it's not a

whole lot of black resistance before the Montgomery Bus Boycott,” Richardson observes (as quoted in Crosby, 2011, p. 374).

In slavery times, resistance included efforts by enslaved blacks to escape, to seek freedom through lawsuits (even when not successful), to rise up in violent rebellion, to help others through Underground Railroad activities, and even to learn to read and write. After Emancipation, community and political resistance entailed participating in politics during the Reconstruction era, organizing boycotts of Jim Crow business and mass transit policies, filing lawsuits, establishing civil rights associations, forming labor unions, and initiating public and political protests.

The celebration of the achievements of black athletes—and black fans—in white-dominated professional sports can be framed as resistance in some cases, or at least as defiant statements against white supremacy (Adelson, 1999).

Inspiration for resistance also came from the writings and speeches of intellectual activists, such as sociologist-civil rights leader W.E.B. Du Bois; Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, a poet and abolitionist, and women's suffragist; author-educator Anna Julia Cooper; Mary McLeod Bethune, an educator and humanitarian; and Maggie L. Walker, a business entrepreneur and civic leader based in Richmond, Virginia, who also promoted voting rights for black women. Many African Americans followed the work of civil rights organizations, such as the NAACP, and its legal representatives, especially lawyer Thurgood Marshall.

Details about the African Americans and black organizations involved in resistance are rich and extensive enough to fill a good-sized library. Here, I can present only a sampling, which I hope shows the diversity as well as creativity, resourcefulness, and determination of African American resistance and resilience.

Pre-20th century. Resistance began in the earliest days of slavery in Colonial Virginia of the 1600s in the form of black slaves escaping and sometimes joining with white indentured servants in conspiracies to rebel (Wolfe, 2017). The Law Library of Congress (n.d.) reports many times when slaves filed lawsuits in attempts to win their freedom, although with mixed results, and trials of female slaves who killed their masters for forcing them into sexual relations.

Examples of slave-initiated efforts to rebel include a planned insurrection in 1800 that became known as “Gabriel's Conspiracy,” named for an enslaved blacksmith who was a key leader. The plot would involve abducting Virginia Governor James Monroe and burning Richmond, the state's capital. Scholars consider this plot among the most important such activities even though it was discovered and stopped before the rebellion could begin (Nicholls, 2016).

Virginia was the scene of another famous slave insurrection, Nat Turner's Revolt, which began overnight on August 21–22, 1831, in Southampton County. In this slave rebellion, considered the most deadly in American history, Turner and his co-conspirators killed 55 white men, women, and children. The revolt was put down within several days. White mobs killed more than 30 blacks before they could be tried; another 19, though, were executed after convictions. As for Turner, he was finally captured on October 30 and executed on November 11 (Breen, 2018).

Slave Dred Scott and his wife, Harriet Robinson Scott, sued for freedom in separate legal petitions on April 6, 1846, in what became the most infamous of such court cases. The suit entailed 11 years of hearings and appeals before the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against the Scotts with a 7–2 vote on March 6, 1857. At the time, other slaves also were suing for freedom if they had lived in free states, but the Supreme Court, in an opinion written by Chief Justice Roger B.

Taney, ruled that Dred Scott was not a citizen of the United States and, therefore, was not eligible to file suit in a federal court (Glass, 2018; M. S. Jones, 2018, pp. 131–132; State Historical Society of Missouri, n.d.).

Perhaps the greatest mass participation in resistance came in the form of the Underground Railroad, a far-flung network of blacks and whites, in slave states and free states, who smuggled tens of thousands of slaves to freedom largely by via secret routes and safe houses. Escaped slave Harriet Tubman, from Maryland's Eastern Shore, was the Underground Railroad's most famous “conductor” because of fearlessness, resourcefulness, and daring in returning at least 13 times to slave territory to free about 70 people (Larson, 2004).

The Underground Railroad was very active in Virginia, which had the largest slave population in the South and was geographically close to several free states, such as Pennsylvania and Ohio. Virginia also had a number of port cities that frequently hosted commercial visits from northern ships with sympathetic captains and crew members. The ports gave Virginia's fugitive slaves another option for escape in addition to land routes. One of the oddest escapes came in 1849, when Henry Brown had friends ship him in a box from Richmond to Philadelphia, where he then worked as a magician, writer, and abolitionist (Newby-Alexander, 2018).

As noted in an earlier section, Underground Railroad activities in Norfolk included the assistance of two slaves, Annetta M. Lane and Harriet Taylor, who were said to have used tents to shelter refugees from slavery until they could be taken north to free states or Canada (Schley, 2013, pp. 15–16). After the Civil War, Lane and Taylor evolved and formalized their organization and network into the United Order of Tents in 1867 with a new mission: “to uplift the African-American community through mutual-aid and personal betterment” (Schley, 2013, p. ii). The “tents” part of the name then came to refer to how the founding members viewed their

organization as a “tent of salvation” (Schley, 2013, pp. ii). The order continues to have chapters in several states.

African Americans had been forming mutual aid societies at least since 1787 with the founding of the Philadelphia Free African Society, followed by similar organizations in Newport, Rhode Island, Boston, Massachusetts, and New York, New York. A fraternal group, the Negro Masonic Order, was chartered the same year (Walton et al., 2012, p. 192).

Boycotts, sit-ins, lawsuits. Resistance to white supremacy continued in other ways, even “as the noose of Jim Crow segregation tightened,” as noted in the words of Parramore et al. (1994, p. 254). I will mention a few in this subsection, including some from Virginia.

In 1896, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that racially segregated public accommodations on railroads were constitutional as long as there were equal facilities for blacks and whites. In 1904, the Virginia General Assembly codified permission to streetcar companies to follow suit, thereby enabling the Virginia Passenger and Power Company to devise and enforce segregated seating on streetcars in Richmond. Thousands of blacks responded with a boycott that lasted more than a year. The General Assembly tightened the law in 1906, and the boycott foundered (Library of Virginia, n.d.). Meanwhile, similar boycotts arose in Lynchburg, Newport News, Portsmouth, and Norfolk, although they did not last as long as in Richmond (Jim Crow Lived Here, n.d.).

However, in Norfolk, African Americans not only boycotted segregated streetcars for a while, they also created the alternative Metropolitan Transfer Company. The enterprise, though, could not draw enough regular riders and collapsed, along with the boycott (Lewis, 1991, p. 22).

On the national level, the NAACP was formed on February 12, 1909, the 100th anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's birth, with the aim of protecting the rights guaranteed in the

13th, 14th, and 15th amendments to the Constitution, which ended slavery, promised equal protection under the law, and enable universal adult male voting rights, according to the NAACP's website (Nation's Premier Civil Rights Organization, n.d.).

In its early years, NAACP activities included protesting President Woodrow Wilson's concurrence in segregating employees, toilets, and lunchrooms at the Treasury and Post Office departments of the U.S government and the removal of more than 100 black federal employees in favor of whites (Buni, 1967, pp. 67–68). The NAACP also helped to organize demonstrations in several cities against Wilson hosting a White House showing of *The Birth of a Nation*, the infamous pro-Ku Klux Klan, pro-white supremacy movie on February 18, 1915 (Buni, 1967, p. 67; Meacham, 2018, pp. 171–175).

No Hall of Fame of resisters would be complete without Charles Hamilton Houston, the World War I veteran who vowed to dedicate his life to civil rights after enduring bitter Jim Crow experiences in the military. In 1929, at age 33, Houston began his work as the legendary vice-dean of the Howard University School of Law and built the program into civil rights incubator that would produce transformative lawyers such as Thurgood Marshall, Oliver Hill, and Spottswood Robinson Jr. Throughout his tenure, he would tell his students time and again that “a lawyer's either a social engineer or a parasite on society” and focus them on the mission of using the 14th amendment's equal protection clause to bring down Jim Crow through “innovative and ambitious intervention” (Edds, 2018, pp. 37–40).

Some Howard-trained lawyers worked important cases for the NAACP, including in Norfolk, which also helped to revive the dormant branch in that city, along with the initiative of Daisy E. Lampkin, an NAACP regional field secretary, whose focus on Norfolk included the recruitment of 800 local residents in 1934 and 600 more in 1935 (Suggs, 1988, p. 160).

Meanwhile, a pair of pay-discrimination lawsuits by two teachers in Norfolk became part of the “continuum of African American resistance” to white supremacy (Littlejohn & Ford, 2012, p. 36). First, Aline Elizabeth Black, a chemistry teacher at Norfolk's black Booker T. Washington High School, agreed in 1938 to be the plaintiff in an equal-pay, equal-protection test case to challenge the city's two-track salary scale for teachers; e.g., \$970 per year for white high school teachers, \$699 for blacks with similar training (Littlejohn & Ford, 2012, p. 21). The Norfolk School Board admitted that its pay scale discriminated against blacks (Littlejohn & Ford, 2012, p. 49), but in May 1939, a state judge sided with the city attorney in ruling that Black had waived her 14th amendment rights when she signed a work contract to teach under the existing scale. A few weeks later, the Norfolk School Board denied her a new contract for the upcoming school year, and Black was jobless (Edds, 2018, pp. 78–80; Lewis, 1991, pp. 157–161; Parramore et al., 1994, pp. 317–319; J. D. Smith, 2002, pp. 256–258; Suggs, 1988, pp. 160–162). In addition, the School Board charged Black \$4.01 for the workday she missed while being in court (Littlejohn & Ford, 2012, p. 9).

The story then took some twists and produced some new resisters. On June 25, 1939, dozens of black students carrying signs such as “Dictators: Hitler, Mussolini, Norfolk School Board,” led about 1,200 black Norfolkiens in a demonstration against the dismissal of Aline Black (Edds, 2018, p. 80; Lewis, 1991, p.160; Parramore et al., 1994, p. 318; J. D. Smith, 2002, p. 257; Suggs, 1988, pp. 160–162). Lead attorney Thurgood Marshall then decided to try again, but this time with another teacher, Melvin O. Alston, president of the Norfolk Teachers Association. Like Aline Black, Melvin Alston lost in court on the first round, but he decided to appeal in late 1940. A three-judge federal appeals panel then ruled that Norfolk's two-track salary schedule was a discriminatory violation of the 14th amendment as well as the separate-but-equal

precedent of *Plessy vs. Ferguson* (Edds, 2018, pp. 83-91; Lewis, 1991, pp. 162-163; Littlejohn & Ford, 2012, p. 21; Parramore et al., 1994, p. 329; J. D. Smith, 2002, pp. 271-272; Suggs, 1988, pp. 160–162). Soon, black teachers, with the help of NAACP-affiliated lawyers, were filing similar lawsuits throughout Virginia and the South (Kluger, 2004, p. 215; J. D. Smith, 2002, p. 272).

The public library in Alexandria, Virginia, became the scene of another grassroots act of resistance in 1939 with an unusual sit-in—or “sit-down” strike, as it was called then. Samuel W. Tucker, a 26-year-old lawyer, walked into the public library two blocks from his home and filled out an application for a library card for a friend, George Wilson, who had accompanied him. An assistant librarian then told the two men that the public library “does not issue cards to colored persons.” Two weeks later, Tucker returned and the city's librarian told him that the city was discussing plans to open a library for “colored people” (J. D. Smith, 2002, p. 261).

As Alexandria officials continued their discussions, Tucker filed a lawsuit on behalf of Wilson, and at a hearing in July 1939, Tucker asserted that because Alexandria's public library “was maintained by the taxes of all the citizens,” that African American residents “had a right to the use of its facilities.” The judge gave time for the city to resolve the issue, but on August 21, 1939, Tucker moved ahead with other plans to force the issue. He arranged for five black residents of Alexandria to enter the library, one at a time, and request a library card (J. D. Smith, 2002, pp. 263–264).

Upon refusal by the librarian, each young man selected a book from the library shelves and sat down to quietly read. The librarian called the police, and they told the men they would be arrested if they didn't leave. The men politely refused, and the police escorted them out under arrest about an hour later (J. D. Smith, 2002, p. 264).

Meanwhile, Tucker, who had planned this very civil protest, had tipped off the press. When the police and the five black men exited the library, they found several reporters and photographers and a crowd of 200 to 300 onlookers. By then, the police had become confused about what crime to charge the five men with because there was no law prohibiting blacks from entering the library, only a library policy that they could not get library cards for the “white” library. The city manager then directed that they be charged with disorderly conduct. The next day in court, however, the police admitted that they had witnessed no disorder, and Tucker asked if “they were disorderly because they were black” (presaging by more than 70 years the phrase “driving while black” used by Black Lives Matter and similar groups; J. D. Smith, 2002, pp. 264–266; parenthetical comment added by Kenneth C. Alexander).

The two cases—Tucker's original discrimination lawsuit on behalf of Wilson and the arrest of the five young black men—dragged on for months. Then, on January 10, 1940, Judge William Wools rejected the Wilson lawsuit on a technicality but declared that the city must allow blacks to use the “white” library and not be denied library cards that were properly applied for. However, two days later, the Alexandria City Council found money to build a “black” library, and the judge's decision became moot. Black newspapers and some leaders proclaimed victory when the black library opened in April 1940. But Tucker said he was disgusted because white paternalists had controlled the process, resolving the protest with yet another so-called separate-but-equal public accommodation and again relegating blacks to second-class citizenship (Edds, 2018, p. 83; J. D. Smith, 2002, pp. 267–270).

Resistance through sports, arts, and business. Denied meaningful political expression, African Americans still sought to resist the culture of white supremacy in other ways, even if momentarily. Sports sometimes became that arena, even though most professional leagues and

events prohibited interracial participation. On July 4, 1910, in Reno, Nevada, Jack Johnson, a black heavyweight boxing champion, defended his crown from former champion Jim Jeffries, known as “the Great White Hope,” because he challenged Johnson with the intent of restoring the championship to a white man. In the lead-up to the fight, Jeffries said, “I am going into this fight for the sole purpose of proving that a white man is better than a negro.” Billed as “the fight of the century,” the event “became a metaphor for an age,” according to historian Earl Lewis (1991, p. 26).

Whites, shocked by Johnson's victory over Jeffries, responded with racial violence in several cities across the country, including in Norfolk, where whites pulled blacks off streetcars and beat them. On July 5, 1910, the local white-owned *Virginian-Pilot* newspaper blamed the rioting on the “insolence of jubilant negroes” who had celebrated Johnson's victory (Lewis, 1991, p. 27).

Blacks living in southeastern Virginia used several strategies to gain access to the region's bountiful beaches after area localities, including Norfolk, closed such waterfront recreational areas to African Americans in the early 1900s. Black businessman Lem Bright opened three acres of his land in Norfolk's Willoughby Bay area around 1905 and built several shelters. A few other private property owners made similar arrangements. A fire of suspicious origins destroyed Bright's site in 1927. African Americans didn't give up. They called on the City Council to designate a beach area for black residents, even though many whites voiced opposition. A court battle ensued before the council finally allowed blacks to use a small, sandy tract in a then-rural section of neighboring Princess Anne County. That beach opened in 1934 (D. M. Watson, 2018).

African Americans also resisted white supremacy through homage to historical figures and through business aspirations. In Norfolk, the two came together in the 1919 construction of

the Attucks Theatre on Church Street, then the “Main Street” of the city's black population. The facility asserts African American culture in two ways: It celebrates its namesake, Crispus Attucks, who was considered to be the first Colonial American killed by the British in the Boston massacre, an important prelude to the American Revolution; and it was conceived, designed, financed, and developed entirely by African Americans (Virginia Department of Historic Resources, 1982).

For decades before and after the development of the Norfolk theater, the Attucks name, because of its power in black communities, was also attached to a range of African American entities, including political and social clubs, schools, apartment buildings, service and relief organizations, women's auxiliary groups, and fraternal orders (Kachun, 2017).

As Kachun (2017) observes, the invocation of the Attucks name has been more than a salute to one brave African American. The power of the Attucks name has been as a symbolic reminder of the resilience of African Americans to persevere for freedom, equality, and full rights as citizens of the United States.

Sadly, the out-of-town entertainers—greats such as Louis Armstrong, Nat King Cole, Count Basie, Billy Eckstine, Cab Calloway, and Ella Fitzgerald—were prohibited from staying at Norfolk's white-owned hotels while performing at Norfolk's Attucks Theater and even at local white venues. Bonnie McEachin, the African American owner of the Plaza Hotel on Church Street, used the opportunity to enhance her business and became nationally known for her hospitality and contributions to charity (Parramore et al., 1994, pp. 370–371).

Historian Charles E. Wynes (1961) wrote that, “For the Virginia Negro there was truly no hiding place and no refuge from the long arm of white supremacy” (p. 143). But many concerned

and inventive African Americans used their ingenuity to assist their immediate and widespread community. In so doing, they found their niche in resisting Jim Crow.

Victor Hugo Green, a mailman in New York City, created such a role for himself. From 1936 to 1966, Green compiled and published *The Negro Motorist Green Book*, an annually updated travel guide to advise African Americans about safe places to stay, eat, and buy gasoline while driving through the South and other regions. For the depth of care poured into every edition, Calvin Ramsey, who wrote a play about the Green Book, likens Green's work to “a love letter” (Moodie-Mills, 2016; Nazaryan, 2017).

Politics. In Norfolk, black freedom and pride after the Civil War translated to demands for full citizenship. As Lewis (1991) points out, in the decades between the Civil War and the modern civil rights movement, Norfolk's African Americans not only “struggled to improve their material conditions, they also fought for equal treatment, sometimes quietly and sometimes visibly. They never abided racism, ‘polite’ or otherwise, well; instead, they boycotted, rioted, petitioned, cajoled, demonstrated, and sought legal redress” (p. 3).

One of the first post-Civil War indications that Norfolk's black leaders were serious about asserting full citizenship for African Americans came in an 1865 with the creation of the Colored Monitor Union Club (Parramore et al., 1994, p. 226), which issued a nine-page *Equal Suffrage Address from the Colored Citizens of Norfolk, Va., to the People of the United States*. In this manifesto, the composers asked fellow citizens to recognize African American rights to “the full enjoyment of those privileges of full citizenship,” including for unfettered political participation. The document makes clear that voting rights were fundamental to everything else, declaring: “give us the suffrage, and you may rely upon us to secure justice for ourselves” (Colored Monitor Union Club, 1865, p. 4).

The phrase “give us the suffrage” would echo through the decades. In a May 17, 1957, speech, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. proclaimed the same demand in his famous “Give Us the Ballot” speech, which, in part, read, “Give us the ballot, and we will no longer have to worry the federal government about our basic rights.”

African Americans in other Virginia communities organized political entities similar to Norfolk's Colored Monitor Union Club, and together they held a statewide convention in Alexandria on August 2–5, 1865. Prefiguring the equal protection clause of the 14th amendment, which was to come in 1868, and the voting rights 15th amendment of 1870, Virginia's black convention of 1865 called for equal protection and “the elective franchise,” according to historian Brent Tarter's 2015 article, “African Americans and Politics in Virginia (1865–1902),” in the online *Encyclopedia Virginia*. In doing so, the convention invoked the concept of inalienable rights from the Declaration of Independence, again well before Martin Luther King Jr., who, in his 1963 “I Have a Dream Speech,” reminded America that it had long ago “defaulted on this promissory note” to African Americans.

In addition to political organizations such as the Colored Monitor Union Club of Norfolk, the early years of emancipation and the Reconstruction era produced black political luminaries such as Norfolk's James E. Fuller (as described in a previous section) and John Mercer Langston, who in 1891 became the first African American elected to the U.S. House of Representatives (Dinnella-Borrego & the Dictionary of Virginia Biography, 2018), and only one to serve in that legislative body until 1993, when Bobby Scott won election in Virginia's 3rd District.

After Langston, political victory became impossible for Virginia's African Americans as they were largely disenfranchised by the Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1901–02. Also, both major political parties, Democrats and Republicans, had made it clear by their words and

actions that blacks were not welcome as active participants in Virginia's in political process; that blacks were to serve only as negative campaign fodder when one candidate or party attacked its rival. White politicians seemed bent on outdoing each other in labeling competitors as “Negro lovers” or “the party of Negroes” (Buni, 1967, pp. 81–85; J. D. Smith, 2002, pp. 60–67; Wynes, 1961, p. 146). To that, Buni (1967) adds, “The role of the Negro, however, was not be a voter but an issue” (p. 108).

But blacks sometimes turned to the ballot box to make symbolic protests, such when the “lily-black Republican” slate ran in 1921 after the Republican State Convention, held in Norfolk, proclaimed that “the Negro was of little or no value” (Buni, 1967, p. 81; J. D. Smith, 2002, pp. 60–67), adding further insult to decades of similar treatment from Democrats. The lily-black slate included *Richmond Planet* publisher John Mitchell Jr. for governor and entrepreneur Maggie L. Walker for superintendent of public instruction (Buni, 1967, p. 84), and the black candidates knew they had no chance of winning (Buni, 1967, p. 88; Suggs, 1988, p. 52).

An observation that Lewis (1991) makes about the early 20th century black community in Norfolk seems to have applied throughout Virginia: “They understood... that a loss of power never meant absolute powerlessness” (p. 23).

Literature Review Summary

My goal for this chapter was to establish the historical context for Evelyn Butts’ development into a strong and resilient grassroots community leader, social justice advocate, and voting rights champion. Through this interdisciplinary literature review, I aimed to present the depth and breadth of the racism, sexism, and class oppression that Butts and other black women, especially in Virginia, were born into and struggled against even as the modern civil rights movement emerged, built momentum, and eventually overthrew the South’s system of Jim Crow

apartheid and brutality. To complete the context, I strove to illustrate the continuum of black resistance to white supremacy with examples of African American persistence, political citizenship, and creativity in the struggles for freedom, dignity, civil rights, and full citizenship.

As my review demonstrates, the roots of white-supremacist oppression of African Americans extended to the early years of Colonial Virginia, which included Virginia being a model for other colonies in the codification of slavery laws. In subsequent decades, white supremacy became so embedded in American culture, especially in the South, that the chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that blacks were not really citizens because they were “altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in social or political relations; and so far inferior, that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect” (Glass, 2018, para. 3).

The Civil War, civil rights amendments to the Constitution, and an era of Reconstruction could not dislodge centuries of white-supremacist attitudes and behaviors. The Supreme Court continued to be generally unsupportive of the black quest for equality, with the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* separate-but-equal case as the most famous example. That far-reaching decision also emboldened white-supremacist state and local governments to codify Jim Crow seating in other forms of mass transit, such as streetcars and buses, assuring that African Americans would face daily humiliation in many public places for decades to come. The 1890–1910 timeframe also saw all the former Confederate states devise state constitutions that essentially stripped political rights from African Americans through the imposition of poll taxes, literacy tests, understanding clauses, and similar means.

Although they were denied political voice, African Americans did not abandon hope. Presenting Norfolk as an example, historian Earl Lewis (1991) writes that African Americans not

only “struggled to improve their material conditions, they also fought for equal treatment, sometimes quietly and sometimes visibly. They never abided racism, ‘polite’ or otherwise, well; instead, they boycotted, rioted, petitioned, cajoled, demonstrated, and sought legal redress” (p. 3). In addition, the black community in Norfolk and elsewhere formed civil rights organizations and mutual aid societies as well as expressed itself through the arts, sports and business.

The 1930s saw the emergence of a cadre of talented and determined black civil rights lawyers who began chipping away at the separate-but-equal standard through the courts and eventually broke through with the pivotal *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court victory in 1954. The legal assault on Jim Crow was augmented on the political side by countless African American veterans of World War II who returned from fighting for democracy overseas to help lead the charge for democracy on the home front.

Jim Crow was shaken. Yet, white supremacists dug in during the 1950s and '60s with violent backlash in many Southern states and a strategy of Massive Resistance to public school integration in Virginia. While court cases proliferated, the energized civil rights movement swelled with a new generation of grassroots leaders and activists impatient for equality.

Evelyn Butts was among these emerging champions who built the civil rights movement from the bottom up, bridging with national organizations, and bringing long-sought justice to local communities. Finding ways to piece together their stories is important both to history and to future generations of political citizens.

Chapter III: Methodology

Overview

This dissertation is the result of my aspirations to learn about Evelyn Butts in a way that educates myself as a community leader, inspires fellow citizens and future generations, and establishes Evelyn Thomas Butts as an essential part of both the civil rights movement and ongoing lessons about voter participation.

The more I learned about Evelyn Butts, the more I thought of questions I would love to ask her—about her hardships and joy, her nonstop activism, her passion for social justice, how she motivated herself and motivated others, her ability to organize massive voter-participation campaigns, her fierceness and kindness, her determination and persistence, her love of Norfolk and her Oakwood neighborhood, and so many other aspects of her life. But as each wave of questions swelled in my thoughts, they would also crash on the reality that Evelyn Butts died in 1993, did not leave much of a trail of writings and other personal archives, had never been the subject of in-depth scholarly research, and whose closest allies were rapidly aging into frailty or passing from this Earth. So that was my challenge: How to tell the story of Evelyn Butts—neighborhood advocate, civil rights leader, voting-rights champion, social justice activist, political citizen—without having the opportunity to interview her or some of her closest allies and friends or read what other scholars had published about her.

My explorations led me to the methodologies of qualitative research, historical research, and narrative inquiry with an interdisciplinary constructivist/interpretivist approach that entailed drawing from multiple disciplines, such as history, biography, political science, sociology, civil rights, voting rights, and critical race and leadership theories. I had to build from pieces I would find in public and private archives, including local newspapers, and then test and retest in

interviews with the few friends and close relatives who remain alive. Knowledge gained from interviews sometimes would send me on new searches into the archives, which, in turn, sometimes sent me back again to my interviewees or new people I hadn't approached before. As I continued, I also studied an array of readings about qualitative research and narrative inquiry, and I discovered that what I was doing was quite normal and encouraged. It even had a name: the “reiterative method,” which can be “cyclic without finite interpretation,” according to Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen, and Snelgrove (2016, p. 103). Creswell (2003) also comments on this process, explaining that “Qualitative research is emergent rather than tightly prefigured” (p. 181) with a “cycling back and forth from data collection and analysis to problem reformulation and back” (p. 183). He additionally explains:

The research questions may change and be refined as the inquirer learns what to ask and to whom it should be asked. The data collection might change as doors open and close for data collection, and the inquirer learns the best sites at which to learn about the central phenomenon of interest. (Creswell, 2003, pp. 181–82)

Research Questions

The design of my research, as discussed in this chapter, derived from my overarching research question, which I stated in Chapter I: How could a low-income African American woman—a high school dropout who grew up under a system of Jim Crow racism—become an accomplished civil rights bridge leader who helped destroy the oppressive poll tax, inspire thousands of voters, and change the political landscape of Norfolk, Virginia, all while spending decades caring for her disabled husband, raising three children, and juggling various low-paying jobs?

An extended literature review proved crucial to my efforts to understand Evelyn Butts and interpret her life, activism, and achievements. This review, which entails Chapter II, sets the context of Butts' life, not only her civil rights heyday of the 1940s, '50s, '60s, but also the

pre-1940s Virginia that she was born into. As Creswell (2007) advises, “It is important... for the researcher to have contextual material available to describe the setting” (p. 95). Marshall and Rossman (2006) further explain that a literature review “provides intellectual glue” by helping to “identify established knowledge and, more important, develop significance and new questions and often turn old questions around” (pp. 44–45).

Research Design

As I deepened my understanding of qualitative research, I became more confident that I was on the right path. I also appreciated Huberman and Miles’ (2002) comparison of qualitative analysis to “a craft,” as they write: “There are many ways of getting analysis ‘right’—precise, trustworthy, compelling, credible—and they cannot be wholly predicted in advance” (p. 394). I was further buoyed by Denzin and Lincoln’s (2005) declaration that “Qualitative research is endlessly creative and interpretive” (p. 26), and Creswell’s (2003) statement that the “qualitative researcher adopts and uses one or more strategies of inquiry” (p. 183).

A key concept in qualitative research is that “the researcher is the instrument of both data collection and data interpretation” (Patton, 2002, p. 50). This meant I always needed to remain mindful of my own positionality and that I was situating myself as the collector and interpreter of information, including from archival resources and personal interviews. I was comfortable in these roles because they matched my ontological and epistemological perspectives, or how I view and construct reality.

Ontology

In my study, I aimed to understand Evelyn Butts in her time and place, the 1940s, ’50s, and ’60s in Norfolk, Virginia, even though I was viewing her from my position in the years 2018–2019. I had to learn what her life was like and what Norfolk, the South, and the United

States were like in that time span. Part of that effort meant carefully interviewing people who knew Evelyn Butts during that time frame and reading numerous books and articles related to the history of those decades. This approach is basic in a qualitative study, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), who wrote that qualitative research situates the observer in the world and acts to “make that world visible” (p. 3). They explain, “This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3).

In effect, I was striving to develop a sense for the racial and political settings of Norfolk during the heyday of Evelyn Butts' civil rights and voting rights activism by learning about the era, locally and nationally, from published and archival materials and interviews with people who worked with Butts or knew her well. As Denzin and Lincoln (2005) suggest in their phrase “activity that locates the observer in the world” (p. 3), the experiences and the point of view of the researcher are essential. They write that the qualitative research process must include “the personal biography of the researcher, who speaks from a particular class, gender, racial, cultural, and ethnic community perspective” (p. 21) or, in other words, my framework for relating to Evelyn Butts and her world. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) further elaborate:

The gendered, multiculturally situated researcher approaches the world with a set of ideas, a framework (theory, ontology) that specifies a set of questions (epistemology) that he or she then examines in specific ways (methodology, analysis). That is, the researcher collects empirical materials bearing on the question and then analyzes and writes about those materials. (p. 21)

Denzin and Lincoln's words align with the positionality I presented in Chapter I, which is about how I relate some of my life's experiences to those of Evelyn Butts and how her social justice activism has directly impacted my political career. I also drew from Creswell (2003) the

understanding that “The qualitative researcher systematically reflects on who he or she is in the inquiry and is sensitive to his or her personal biography and how it shapes the study” (p. 182).

Epistemology

In discussing qualitative research, Creswell (2003) adds the dimension of “constructivism,” which entails the way humans build knowledge or, as Schwandt (2007) describes: “The constructionist seeks to explain how human beings interpret or construct some X in specific linguistic, social, and historical contexts” (p. 39).

Creswell (2003) also writes of the “constructivist perspective,” which entails:

The multiple meanings of individual experiences, meanings, socially and historically constructed, with an intent of developing a theory or pattern) or advocacy/participatory perspectives (i.e., political, issue-oriented, collaborative, or change oriented) or both. It also uses strategies of inquiry such as narratives, phenomenologies, ethnographies, grounded theory studies, or case studies. The researcher collects open-ended, emerging data with the primary intent of developing themes from the data. (p. 18)

To this, Creswell (2003) adds the refinement of “social constructivism” (pp. 20–21), which means that historical, social, and cultural contexts are important in how we construct knowledge. In my study of Evelyn Butts, I had to construct her life from the triangulation of other sources: interviews with people who knew her, contemporaneous newspaper reports and other archival resources, and local and national civil rights history. The interviews I conducted were essential. As Creswell states, we must “rely as much as possible on the participants views of the situation” (p. 20) with the participants in this case, being people who knew Evelyn Butts. Epistemologically, the constructivist approach worked well for me also because I value the experiences and perspectives of others.

Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) also were helpful on this point, writing that “The basic tenet of constructivism is that reality is socially, culturally, and historically constructed” (pp. 8–9). Therefore, according to Bloomberg and Volpe, qualitative researchers “focus on the specific

contexts in which people live and work to understand particular cultural and historical settings” (pp. 8–9). Bloomberg and Volpe further explain that in carrying out their inquiries, “researchers pose research questions and generate or inductively develop meaning from the data collected in the field” (p. 9).

Ertmer and Newby (1993) further crystallized the concept of constructivism.

“Constructivism is a theory that equates learning with creating meaning from experience,” they write, adding that constructivists “contend that what we know of the world stems from our own interpretations of our experiences. Humans create meaning as opposed to acquiring it” (p. 16).

Interpretivist Perspective

Interpretivism often correlates with a constructivist approach because the researcher is known to be establishing a perspective or viewpoint of the subject. In a biographical study, “the author admits that the stories voiced represent an interpretation and presentation of the author as much as the subject of the study” (Creswell, 2007, p. 18). Thus, the audience “reads through” the perspective of the author (Creswell, 2007, p. 214).

In a constructivist/interpretivist approach, the researcher helps the reader imagine real experiences. This is valuable to a community's ability to understand a life and/or an event or situation. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), “Experience is the stories people live. People live stories, and in the telling of these stories, reaffirm them, modify them, and create new ones. Stories lived and told educate the self and others” (p. xxvi).

It is also my hope that my work helps readers imagine themselves as political citizens in the spirit of Evelyn Butts, meaning that they would be willing to further explore effective ways to engage in political decisions that affect their communities. In Chapter I, I mentioned that certain aspects of critical race theory may help new generations understand that the gains of the

civil rights and voting rights movements cannot be taken for granted but must be studied and tapped for continued vigilance (Crowley, 2013, pp. 719–720). For example, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) suggest there is room to grow politically by building “street-level cross-racial coalitions and alliances involving grassroots workers seeking to invigorate democracy” (p. 186). If imagination is important to such readers, then they should envision Evelyn Butts working beside them, knocking on doors, making phone calls, organizing car pools, and never being afraid to reach out.

Narrative Inquiry

My exploration of the life of Evelyn Butts is also a narrative inquiry, which Clandinin and Connelly (2000) define as “the study of experience” (p. 189), especially in terms of how people relate to one another and act within the context of their time. For Creswell (2003), this form of inquiry includes inquiring into “the lives of individuals” and asking individuals “to provide stories about their lives” that can be “retold or restoried by the researcher into a narrative chronology” (p. 15). This method, says Riessman (1993), “allows for systematic study of personal experience and meaning” (p. 70).

But again, I could not ask the late Evelyn Butts to provide stories about her life, so I interviewed her daughter and searched for Butts' surviving allies and friends. Everyone I contacted was enthused about my study and the opportunity to talk openly and on the record about their experiences and observations. One close friend even shared with me her scrapbooks of activities that she experienced with Butts. All signed Antioch University IRB forms and all gave permission to be audio-recorded and identified by real name in my dissertation.

The Antioch University IRB approved my ethics application for proceeding with the interviews in January 2018. This was fortunate because I believed that I needed to move forward

with interviews of people who knew Butts, especially her contemporaries, as soon as possible, even before the literature review. My reasoning was based on the fact that most contemporaries of Butts, if still alive, would be in the age range of mid-80s to late 90s. (Butts herself, born in 1924, would have been 94 in 2018. As previously noted, she died at age 68 in 1993.) I was also concerned about the health and well-being of the elderly people that might be candidates for interviews. As it turned out, two women in their 90s whom I had hoped to interview were too infirm for interviews, according to their families. Sadly, each died within 12 months of the initiation of my project. A third woman, also in her 90s, whom I interviewed in February 2018, died in early 2019. Another interviewee was a woman in her late 80s, but I had to wait more than a month to interview her because she had been hospitalized.

While searching for potential interviewees, I was already working to bolster my knowledge of Evelyn Butts. I had already known some of the basics from having grown up in the same hometown of Norfolk, Virginia, and having been interested in politics and civil rights since my high school days. I had also absorbed general information about her from the news and from other local people involved in politics or civil rights. In addition, I was allowed the opportunity to participate in public commemorations. The first of these ceremonies was in 2006, when I was serving in Virginia's House of Delegates. There, I sponsored a resolution commending Marie G. Young, who worked closely with Evelyn Butts on voter-participation issues through their organization, Women of Virginia's Third Force. Then, in 2016, I was the keynote speaker at a 50th anniversary celebration of Butts' 1966 Supreme Court victory.

Over the years, as someone keenly interested in politics and political science, I had watched election after election with low voter turnout, especially on the local level. Through Antioch University's Leadership and Change Program, I was able to spend some time focusing

on the voter-turnout problem. In this process, I began thinking about Evelyn Butts' efforts to encourage voter participation but found there were no scholarly examinations of her methods. At that point, the idea emerged to study her for my dissertation. Coincidentally, I learned that Butts' only surviving child, Charlene Butts Ligon, who lives in Nebraska, was self-publishing a memoir-style biography of her mother. I connected with Charlene and wrote the foreword for her book.

As I put together my thoughts for a narrative inquiry about Evelyn Butts, her daughter Charlene Ligon and several others of Charlene Ligon's generation suggested names of people who knew or worked with Butts. Unfortunately, many had already died or were in frail health. But I knew there still a few people left that I might be able to talk with. I began making notes about the types of questions I would like to ask them. (My actual list of questions appears later in this chapter.) When I received IRB approval to proceed, I reached out to the possible interviewees by IRB-approved letters and/or telephone calls. All who were well enough were enthused about my project and were willing to be interviewed and quoted by name in my dissertation. There was no need for me to promise anonymity. In further preparation for the interviews, I also initiated a search into the archival records of the local black-owned and white-owned newspapers for stories about Butts or issues and events related to her activism.

In all, I interviewed 12 people, eight of whom knew Evelyn Butts well or had observed her community and voter-participation activities. This list includes Butts' daughter Charlene Butts Ligon. Among these people, I interviewed one woman twice. Two of the 12 interviewees were people who did not know Evelyn Butts but knew my grandmother, so they were interviewed for my statement on positionality.

All the interviews with people who knew or had observed Evelyn Butts provided valuable insights about her character, leadership, and activities. The interviewees also shared anecdotes and examples regarding Butts' life.

However, narrative inquiry entails more than collecting stories; reflective, critical analysis is required as well. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), "the narrative inquirer may note stories but more often records actions, doings, and happenings, all of which are narrative expressions" (p. 79). Clandinin and Connelly also advise the researcher to think of his or her narrative inquiry as "a research puzzle" in which the sense of conducting a search may be more important than "qualities of clear definability and the expectation of solutions" (p. 124).

Collecting stories, records, and newspaper accounts bolstered my efforts to build a "biographical study" of Butts, which Creswell (2007) defines as "a form of narrative study in which the researcher writes and records the experiences of another person's life" (p. 55). Yet, as H. Lee (2009) contends, "biography is... not just a presentation of facts" (p. 5). The purpose of a biographical study can be more complex, especially as a biography intertwines with history. On this point, Ambrosius (2004) advises that "Biographical studies offer a way to analyze important historical questions" (p. viii). Ambrosius continues, "Biographers must use the best historical methodologies, utilizing all primary sources and interpreting them in creative ways, to reveal the life stories of subaltern as well as prominent and powerful men and women" (p. viii). And Lee (2009) again asserts that:

Biographies of leaders and activists must set the central performance of their subjects in the context of the political conditions that produce them, the society in and on which they operate, their race, class, nationality, and gender, and the many other figures who surround them. (p. 104)

I also saw the potential for qualitative research and its associated methodologies to help reframe the lives and experiences of African Americans, like Evelyn Butts, who vigorously

participated in social justice movements to improve our country but whose contributions were not fully appreciated in traditional histories. Barritt (1986) writes, “the rationale ... is not the discovery of new elements, as in natural scientific study, but rather the heightening of awareness for experiences which have been forgotten and overlooked” (p. 20). And Lee (2009) asserts: “The history of feminism, and of movements for racial equality, have a great deal to do with how a life is told. Biography always reflects, and provides, a version of social politics” (p. 14).

Methods

Interviewing is essential in producing a biographical-style dissertation, built upon qualitative research and narrative inquiry. Lee (2009) writes: “All biography involves an oral dimension—the recounting of memories, witness-testimony, much-repeated anecdotes” (pp. 5–6). Fontana and Frey (2005) apply this same assertion to research, noting that:

Both qualitative and quantitative researchers tend to rely on the interview as the basic method of data gathering whether the purpose is to obtain a rich, in-depth experiential account of an event or episode in the life of the respondent or to garner a simple point on a scale of 2 to 10 dimensions. (p. 698)

As I have previously noted, Evelyn Butts died in 1993 and many of her friends and allies have also passed away or are in frail health. Still, I persisted in efforts to locate several who survive to ask if I could interview them. My method for finding potential interviewees included personal knowledge; word of mouth among personal contacts who are interested in the subjects of local history, civil rights, and voting rights; people mentioned in local newspaper stories about Butts; and people mentioned in other archival resources.

I contacted each person by means of the IRB-approved letter and/or telephone call. All gave signed permissions for me to conduct audio-recorded interviews, take photographs, and identify them by name in my dissertation.

In most cases, I conducted the interviews in the comfort of the interviewees' home settings. Two wished to be interviewed in my offices.

Turner (2010) is most helpful by providing tips about the interview process. Here are his suggestions for the preparation stage:

(1) choose a setting with little distraction; (2) explain the purpose of the interview; (3) address terms of confidentiality; (4) explain the format of the interview; (5) indicate how long the interview usually takes; (6) tell them how to get in touch with you later if they want to; (7) ask them if they have any questions before you both get started with the interview; and (8) don't count on your memory to recall their answers. (p. 757)

Turner's (2010) suggestions for the actual interview include the following:

(a) occasionally verify the tape recorder (if used) is working; (b) ask one question at a time; (c) attempt to remain as neutral as possible (that is, don't show strong emotional reactions to their responses); (d) encourage responses with occasional nods of the head, "uh huhs," etc.; (e) be careful about the appearance when note taking (that is, if you jump to take a note, it may appear as if you're surprised or very pleased about an answer, which may influence answers to future questions); (f) provide transition between major topics, e.g., "we've been talking about (some topic) and now I'd like to move on to (another topic)"; (g) don't lose control of the interview. (p. 759)

I prepared a series of guide questions that I could use in each interview, with modifications as appropriate and room for spontaneous follow-up for clarity or new lines of inquiry. These general questions are as follows:

- Let's make sure we have your full name with correct spelling.
- What is your date of birth? *(This is not for inclusion in the dissertation. This is only for context in discussing the life and activities of Evelyn Butts.)*
- How long have you lived in Norfolk?
- What was your occupation?
- How and when did you first meet Evelyn T. Butts?
- What were your initial impressions of Mrs. Butts?
- How closely did you work with Mrs. Butts on her activities?

- Can you give some examples of your activities with Mrs. Butts? If possible, please give us a time frame for these activities.
- Did you ever go door to door with Mrs. Butts on voter outreach or other civic activities? If so, can you describe these scenes?
- What did you learn from Mrs. Butts about community and/or political organizing?
- Did your relationship with Mrs. Butts evolve? If so, can you describe that?
- At the same time, did your opinion about Mrs. Butts and her activities change? How so?
- How would you describe her leadership abilities? Can you provide a few examples of Mrs. Butt's form of leadership?
- Did Mrs. Butts' leadership abilities grow over the years? If so, how?
- How effective was Mrs. Butts' leadership? Can you provide examples?
- What did Evelyn Butts bring to an issue that nobody else could or would?
- How did Mrs. Butts go about encouraging people to register to vote and following up with them?
- Was there any difference in her leadership style before and after her poll tax victory at the Supreme Court?
- Did the nature of her voter-outreach activities change after her poll tax victory?
- How did you feel after the Supreme Court abolished the poll taxes for state and local elections?
- What was it about Mrs. Butts that got many people to do what she asked?
- Do you recall how Mrs. Butts felt when Joe Jordan got elected to the Norfolk City Council and William Robinson Sr. got elected to the General Assembly?
- Could Joe Jordan or William Robinson have succeeded in their election campaigns without Mrs. Butts?
- Do you recall the mood of the black community from these elections? Please describe.
- What was the most effective part of the Concerned Citizens organization and the Goldenrod Ballot program?

- How would you summarize Mrs. Butts' overall impact on (1) Norfolk's black community? (2) Entire city of Norfolk?
- What are your thoughts about how Evelyn Butts—a low-income African American woman and a high school dropout who grew up under Jim Crow racism—became such a powerful leader, even while caring for her disabled husband, raising three children, and juggling various low-paying jobs?
- Is there anything we missed that you would like to add about Mrs. Butts?

After I conducted each interview, I would ask the individual if he or she could suggest anyone else to be interviewed. That garnered a few more names. Unfortunately, most of the suggested names were for people who had died, moved out of Norfolk and could not be found, or too ill to be interviewed.

I found narrative inquiry interviews to be a humanistic in approach, something that I have deeply valued and practiced in my other endeavors, including as a funeral home owner, community activist, and elected political officeholder. I appreciate Wolcott's (2001) statement that “One of the opportunities—and challenges—posed by qualitative approaches is to treat fellow human beings as people rather than objects of study, to regard ourselves as humans who conduct research among rather than on them” (p. 20). Fontana and Frey (2005) underscore this advice in writing that “to learn about people, we must treat them as people, and they will work with us to help us create accounts of their lives” (p. 722) or of people they know, of events important to them, and of their communities.

Interviewing is certainly one of the hallmark methodologies of qualitative research and narrative inquiry. But interviewing is more than the mechanics and greater than even the craft of drawing out important information, memories and insights from interviewees. Interviewing is also a partnership, perhaps even a sacred time, for when at least two people come together to construct new knowledge. As Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) observe, “The knowledge is not

merely found, mined, or given, but is actively created through questions and answers, and the product is co-authored by interviewer and interviewee” (p. 54).

Thus, as elements of a narrative inquiry come together, the final product can be considered “a collaboration between researcher and participants,” as Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p. 20) wisely observe.

In that way, this study of Evelyn Butts has become more than an academic achievement in the advancement of my education. I hope it also gives cause for the surviving friends and allies of Evelyn Butts to celebrate what they accomplished with her years ago and in how they are honoring her again. By sharing their stories and memories, they have helped our community to understand how much we have benefited by the social justice activism, leadership, and legacy of Evelyn Thomas Butts.

Delimitations and Limitations

As noted earlier, I have chosen to focus my study of Evelyn Butts on the years of her heyday as a grassroots civil rights and social justice activist and leader. As a delimitation, that time period is from about 1954 to 1970, which roughly correlates with most of the pivotal civil rights-related events during her adult years. While there were certainly many important episodes in Butts' life before 1954, those were largely of the personal nature during her years as a child, teen, and young mother—albeit they had impacts on her development as a political citizen.

After 1970, Butts continued her work as a local grassroots activist, but she had increasingly turned toward partisan politics and had to contend with a confusing local political landscape in the 1980s as well health issues. In this delimitation, I will mention some of the mileposts in Butts' life from after 1970 but not dwell on them because they go beyond the scope of my study of Evelyn Butts as a grassroots civil rights leader.

I have also previously mentioned the key limitations of my study. The major challenge for me has been in finding contemporaries of Evelyn Butts to interview. Many have died or have become too infirm for interviews. Also, Butts did not leave much as a written record of her thoughts and accomplishments. I am grateful for what her daughter, Charlene Butts Ligon, has shared and for the opportunity to pore over a series of scrapbooks compiled by one of Evelyn Butts' close friends, as well as what I could find in local archives.

I have also conducted archival research in the local white-owned and black-owned newspapers, as previously noted. This search involved another set of challenges. Contemporaneous news accounts did not always quote or even mention Evelyn Butts' name, even when Butts was involved in various newsworthy events. In some cases, I still included material from these news stories based on interviews with those who knew her and my knowledge base from other readings (e.g., Ligon's memoir) and other contextual information.

Chapter IV: Findings

Introduction

The central or overarching research question is: How could a low-income African American woman—a high school dropout who grew up under a system of Jim Crow racism—become an accomplished civil rights bridge leader who helped destroy the oppressive poll tax, inspire thousands of voters, and change the political landscape of Norfolk, Virginia, all while spending decades caring for her disabled husband, raising three children, and juggling various low-paying jobs?

Chapter II depicted the overt and institutionalized systems of race, gender, and class oppression that Evelyn Butts' generation endured in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s along with the continuum and variety of African American resistance.

Chapter IV renders specific examples of the oppression that Butts faced and of how she responded. Through these examples, I illustrate Butts mustering the will and determination to stand up against multiple and overlapping systems of oppression by showing how everyday resistance looked like in her life as a mother, wife, main provider of her family's income, activist, and community and grassroots civil rights leader.

As noted in Chapter I and Chapter III, Evelyn Butts died in 1993 and left little in her own words about her life and activities. In addition, many of those who worked with her have also died or became infirm and frail in their old age so they were not available to interview. To present a deep and rich story about Butts' life and activism, I have had to cobble together the material in this chapter from several resources. They included interviews with a few surviving friends who knew Evelyn Butts well; a self-published memoir-style biography written by Butts'

daughter, whom I also interviewed; books about or containing Norfolk history; and archives of local newspapers.

In reaching out to surviving friends of Butts and in combing through the various print resources, I sought information that not only reported the dry factual data about Butts' poll tax lawsuit and her various civil rights and voting rights activities. I was also searching for material that illuminated Butts as a resident of the community, shed light on her motivations, showed her in action as a political citizen, and gave a personal sense of her challenges, frustrations, and determination.

My searches sometimes looped back into each other, meaning that I would compare material initially gleaned from interviews, publications, and newspaper archives, and return to sources to double-check or probe deeper. For example, contemporaneous newspaper and book accounts of the city of Norfolk's redevelopment proposals for Butts' Oakwood neighborhood did not include references to Butts. Yet a longtime neighbor, Herbert Smith, in his mid-90s when I interviewed him, recalled Butts' leadership in helping the neighborhood residents save their homes from redevelopment bulldozers. With that information, I would return to newspaper archives and book references and find that two Norfolk civil rights attorneys who were known allies of Butts successfully represented the neighborhood's interests. There were other examples, as well, where Butts' name did not appear in contemporaneous news stories on various issues but the names of her organizations were published instead.

Regarding the interviews, I usually quoted or paraphrased only the most exact memories from the interviewees, although I appreciated similar but vaguer recollections as contributing to impressionistic leads or possible directions to probe. All interviewees, whether quoted here or not, kindly gave me their time and enthusiastically shared their memories and reflections on what

they had experienced with Evelyn Butts or observed of her activities. Most of the interviews were conducted between January and July 2018, and all the participants approved being quoted or paraphrased in my study of Evelyn Butts. All interviewees were African American except for two: Ellis W. James and G. Conoly Phillips.

The interviewees whom I quoted or paraphrased were as follows, along with interview dates:

- Alveta V. Green, interviewed March 1 and June 1, 2018, is a retired educator and was a longtime friend of Butts. She hosted many meetings in her home that Butts led or in which Butts was involved. Also, Green's late husband, Walter H. Green Sr., was a stalwart ally of Butts in many of her activities.

- Herbert Smith, interviewed February 20, 2018, is a retired brick mason and longtime neighbor of Butts. He frequently volunteered to drive Butts to many of her public appearances (e.g., City Council meetings) and other events.

- Rachel Smith, interviewed February 20, 2018, is the daughter of Herbert Smith and a longtime neighbor of Butts. She provided memories of how neighborhood children looked up to Butts and appreciated her efforts.

- Ellis W. James, interviewed February 7, 2018, is a longtime civil rights activist in Norfolk. His late daughter, Karen James, was one of the "Jordanettes," a group of teenaged and pre-teen girls who campaigned for Butts' ally, Joseph A. Jordan Jr., and wore outfits made by Evelyn Butts. Ellis W. James also knew Jordan's father, Joseph A. Jordan Sr.

- Walter Dickerson, interviewed February 7, 2018, is a World War II veteran, longtime neighborhood activist, and husband of Lola Dickerson. He observed Evelyn Butts' activities over the years.

- Lola Dickerson, interviewed February 7, 2018, was a longtime secretarial employee of Tidewater Legal Aid, precinct poll worker, neighborhood activist, and wife of Walter Dickerson. She observed Evelyn Butts' activities over the years. She had been in declining health when I interviewed her and died on January 17, 2019.

- G. Conoly Phillips, interviewed November 28, 2018, is a retired businessman and former Norfolk City Council member. He knew the grassroots power of Evelyn Butts' voter-participation activities.

- Charlene Butts Ligon, interviewed January 11, 2019, is the youngest and only surviving daughter of Evelyn Butts. She wrote a self-published memoir (Ligon, 2017) about her mother for which I had the honor to write the foreword. Ligon's 2017 book was valuable in several ways, including providing biographical information about Butts' childhood and years as a struggling young mother and emerging activist, information that could not be collected from any other source. Ligon's book also offered behind-the-scenes looks at some of Butts' activities, eyewitness accounts that were mostly not reported in contemporaneous newspaper stories. My personal interview with Ligon added further detail and clarification, some of which I was able to use when revisiting newspaper archives and reading stories about events that did not include Butts' name. Similarly, Ligon's book and my interview of her provided names of people who were involved in activities led by Butts or were members of organizations that she headed. Although nearly every one of those people were already deceased, the names enabled me to find several more archived newspaper stories about events in which Butts was involved, although her name was not noted in the articles. The names also helped me find newspaper articles published after Butts died in 1993, stories in which Norfolk residents were sharing their memories of Butts,

especially about her fight against the poll tax. In many cases, the people quoted in those later-year newspaper stories have since died, so finding those articles proved to be a great resource.

In structuring this chapter, I followed the framework already established in Chapter II, which contains themes based on my research sub-questions. That way, Chapter IV correlates with Chapter II. Those sub-questions and themes generally entail—in this order—racism; gender-related issues; class bias, democracy, and voting rights; impact of World War II on African Americans; and the continuum and varieties of black resistance and community leadership, albeit with some intersections or overlap among these issues.

Everyday Resistance to Racism

I will start this subsection with an anecdote that reveals how racism in the Norfolk Public Schools system impacted Butts' family and how Butts responded, and then recount how education was one of the key issues that drew Butts into civil rights activism even years before. This subsection also provides other examples and anecdotes of Butts' encounters with racism.

When Evelyn Butts discovered in 1960 that her daughter, Charlene, and other children at their all-black school were given hand-me-down books from a nearby all-white school, she voiced outrage at the next meeting of the Norfolk School Board. Then, within days, new books replaced the old, Charlene Butts Ligon (2017) recalls about this example of how her mother encountered racism and her methods for confronting it (p. 75). "She didn't wait for others to do something for her. She just did it, and she always took a leadership role," Ligon said (C. B. Ligon, personal communication, January 11, 2018).

Evelyn Butts was not always as successful challenging racism as she was when obtaining new textbooks for her daughter and other students at the all-black combined Rosemont Elementary and Junior High School in 1960. Butts had been defeated in her efforts to integrate

Charlene into an all-white school before the city opened the Rosemont Elementary and Junior High School, and Butts had also unsuccessfully fought against the very creation of this school as well as the nearby Oakwood and Coronado elementary schools (Ligon, 2017, pp. 74–75).

Norfolk developed all three of these schools in attempts to thwart local enforcement of the U.S. Supreme Court’s *Brown v. Board of Education* decision to abolish segregation of public schools. (Ligon, 2017, pp. 74–75; “School Facilities Unequal,” 1959; White, 2018, pp. 104–105, 174–175).

Years later, Butts would note that she had long believed that “if you have two schools, one for black students and one for white students, there would be no quality education,” and that “segregated schools means inferior education.” In a newspaper comment she made for Martin Luther King Jr. Day in 1986, Butts attributed these statements to the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. (“What the Life of Martin Luther King, Jr. Has Meant to Me,” 1986).

Education had long been a central issue in Butts’ life even though she had dropped out of high school in the 10th grade after becoming pregnant with her first child (Ligon, 2017, pp. 15–16). In addition, Butts made sure her siblings stayed in school and that her own children valued education (Ligon, 2017, p. 16). It is not known when Butts moved from being an education advocate for her family to an advocate for equal opportunity in education for all African Americans. But pivotal times in her advocacy seemed to have occurred in the early 1950s after she joined the Norfolk Branch of the NAACP and again when the Supreme Court abolished segregated public schools in 1954, according to Butts’ daughter, Charlene (Ligon, 2017, p. 20; C. B. Ligon, personal communication, January 11, 2018).

During the 1940s and ’50s, several events and trends in Butts’ personal and civic lives likely contributed to her heightened civil rights activism and emerging leadership skills. During

World War II, Butts joined the Oakwood Civic League, a neighborhood group that advocated on community issues, and was mentored by the organization's president, Annie Nickens, a woman several years older than Butts. Then, in the early 1950s, Nickens invited Butts to a meeting of the Norfolk Branch of the NAACP (Ligon, 2017, pp. 17, 20). Butts already had a long-established interest in keeping up with current events on the news, but her interest probably was heightened when the U.S. Supreme Court declared segregated schools unconstitutional in 1954, a case closely watched by the national NAACP and branches all over the country.

On the personal side, the old Oakwood combined elementary and high school that Butts attended as a youngster had closed in the early 1950s. That meant that her eldest daughter, Patricia, had to ride by bus to the next closest black high school, which was 15 miles away in an area outside the city of Norfolk known as Norfolk County (Virginia has separate cities and counties). The county's school buses were not always reliable, so students sometimes were stranded. At some point, Butts and her husband decided to devote part of the limited budget to enrolling Patricia into the all-black St. Joseph's Catholic Church and School in downtown Norfolk, which was only seven miles away (Ligon, 2017, p. 53). Thus, the *Brown v. Board of Education* court decision of 1954 raised hopes for Evelyn and Charlie Butts and other black parents that their children would go to better and integrated public schools closer to home.

The *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, however, did not take immediate effect, and integration of public schools was delayed by several years of legal and political wrangling. In Virginia, key entities included the Norfolk Branch of the NAACP (Barnes & Proctor, 1994, p. 90; Littlejohn & Ford, 2012).

In the same time period, the city of Norfolk was moving to expand its boundaries by annexing an adjacent part of old Norfolk County that was known as the Tanner's Creek district

and included Butts' Oakwood neighborhood and the nearby Rosemont and Lincoln Park communities—a total of 370 acres with more than 1,000 dwelling units. Oakwood, Rosemont, and Lincoln Park were populated by low-income African Americans, many of whom lived on dirt roads in substandard housing without indoor plumbing. (Other parts of this county were later merged into what became today's city of Virginia Beach.) The Tanner's Creek annexation would go into effect on January 1, 1955 (White, 2018, pp. 34–40). By mid-1956, the city's Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority was proposing a massive urban redevelopment project for Tanner Creek, including tearing down many of the 1,000-plus homes and rebuilding the area with an assortment of 2,500 single-family and semi-detached houses and garden apartments, playgrounds, an elementary school, and a small shopping center (White, 2018, pp. 39–40).

Residents of Oakwood, where Butts lived, strongly opposed the redevelopment proposal, with many contending that they would not be able to afford the new homes or they would not be treated fairly in the real estate condemnation and compensation process. “There would have been a many elderly that would have been out of a home,” Butts said (T. L. Bogger, personal communication with E. T. Butts, 1989). The scared Oakwood residents also cited stories about African Americans who had lost their homes in the city's downtown-area redevelopment project that began in 1951. Local civil rights attorneys J. Hugo Madison and Joseph A. Jordan Jr. added another objection: that the proposed redevelopment project would perpetuate segregation instead of promoting residential integration (White, 2018, p. 40). “I believe this is when my mother became president of the Oakwood and Rosemont Civic League,” Butts' daughter, Charlene, would write in her biography of Butts, adding that “The threat of redevelopment made her intensely political (Ligon, 2017, p. 58).

In light of neighborhood resistance and faced with increasing controversy over court orders to desegregate public schools, the city indefinitely postponed action on the Oakwood-Rosemont-Lincoln Park urban renewal project and turned its redevelopment efforts elsewhere (White, 2018, pp. 78–79). Norfolk’s redevelopment and public school policies, however, would soon tie together in new ways, drawing Butts deeper into battles against the city’s system of institutionalized racism. The link between the city’s urban renewal program and public school policies also heightened Butts’ awareness on two concerns: the importance of voter turnout and how the poll tax impeded African American participation in elections, according to one of Butts’ closest friends, the late Marie G. Young. Young’s insights about Butts appeared in news interviews in both 1996, which was three years after Butts had died, and in 2001, eight years after Butts’ death.

Talking about how Butts became dedicated to fighting the poll tax, Young told a news reporter in 1996 that “Mrs. Butts realized the power of the vote. She realized how much of a voice Black people could have if only we had access to the vote” (Colvin, 1996). Young conveyed similar information in a 2001 newspaper interview, telling a reporter that Butts “was talking about the poll tax long before the lawyers carried it to the courts” (Knepler, 2001a).

The mid-1950s was also the period when Butts and her lawyer Joseph A. Jordan Jr. began working together on various issues related to civil rights, education, redevelopment, and politics, forging the strong bond and friendship that eventually led them to filing the poll tax lawsuit in 1963 (Ligon, 2017, p. 41). This period also coincided with the emergence of Butts as president of the Oakwood-Rosemont Civic League, even though she was still in her 30s and economically struggling as mother of three daughters, wife of a disabled World War II veteran, and sometimes a substantial provider of her family’s income.

Evelyn Butts' husband, Charlie Butts, received a "small" monthly disability payment from the Army, but it was a source of stability for the Butts family because it "paid the mortgage and the utilities," according to their daughter, Charlene Butts Ligon, who added: "My Mom supplemented the disability check with the day's work she did and later by sewing" (C. B. Ligon, personal communication, April 1, 2019). Ligon also said she cannot remember her parents having access to shop at the military commissary in those days, although she did not know the reason. She believes her parents lived below the federal poverty level until military disability benefits were increased in the 1970. Ligon did not provide information about her parents' income in the 1950s and 1960s, but the U.S. Census shows the poverty line being a range of \$2,324 to \$3,506 for families of three to five people in 1959, and being a range of 2,924 to \$4,415 for families of three to five people in 1969.

Meanwhile, Charlie Butts increasingly relied on Evelyn's caregiving, especially as his war-related disability worsened, Ligon said (C. B. Ligon, personal communication, April 1, 2019).

Despite her personal load of responsibilities, Butts continued to take on additional community, civil rights, and political leadership activities, including as president of the Virginia's Women of the Third Force, and as secretary of the Norfolk chapter of the SCLC. Butts and civil rights lawyer Joseph A. Jordan Jr. sometimes conferred "three or four times a week" during this period, according to Herbert Smith, who gave Butts rides to meetings and other events (H. Smith, personal communication, February 20, 2018).

Butts' opposition to the poll tax probably was reinforced by Jordan, who had long-opposed this voting prerequisite and whose father, Joseph A. Jordan Sr., a politically aware baker, often spoke about the poll tax as a civil rights issue (E. W. James, personal

communication, February 7, 2018; C. B. Ligon, personal communication, January 11, 2018).

Jordan's father would live to see the U.S. Supreme Court abolish the poll tax on March 24, 1966, but he died later that year on December 28. ("Funeral on Saturday," 1966).

The backdrop to Norfolk's wrangling over public school desegregation was the February 24, 1956, launching of "Massive Resistance" against public school integration by white supremacist U.S. Senator Harry F. Byrd Sr., who was Virginia's uncontested political boss since the mid-1920s (Littlejohn & Ford, 2012, pp. 61–62). As detailed in Chapter II, the initiative included the closing of any all-white public school that allowed black students to enroll, pupil placement tests, rescinding public funding for integrated schools, and approval of public grants for students who wanted to attend segregated (all-white) private schools.

As lawsuits continued, Norfolk Mayor W. Fred Duckworth, also as noted in Chapter II, decided to use the urban renewal powers of the Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority to circumvent school desegregation. In this plan, the redevelopment authority condemned and demolished integrated neighborhoods and nearby public schools in the name of slum clearance, public health and safety, thereby reinforcing de facto segregation in the remaining schools (Littlejohn & Ford, 2012, p. 41; Parramore et al., 1994, p. 367; White, 2018, p. 106).

Another element of Massive Resistance was the creation of public placement boards that would test students who wanted to integrate public schools and render judgment on whether they qualified. In summer 1958, Butts decided to have her daughter, Charlene, apply to integrate the nearby all-white Norview Elementary School for the fourth grade (Ligon, 2017, p. 61). The process included academic and psychological examinations, and black parents felt insulted because white children were not being tested (Ligon, 2017, p. 64). The results: Norfolk's

all-white School Board denied all 151 integration requests from the black students (Ligon, 2017, p. 66).

On August 19, 1958, U.S. District Court Judge Walter E. Hoffman ordered the School Board to reconsider the rejections. On August 29, the board announced its new results: It approved 17 black students for integrating six of Norfolk's all-white schools (Charlene was not among them; Littlejohn & Ford, 2012, p. 77). On September 27, 1958, Virginia Governor J. Lindsay Almond Jr. ordered the immediate closing of those six schools, a move that blocked nearly 10,000 students—most of them white—from several months of education. The six schools remained closed until the federal courts reopened them on February 2, 1959 (Littlejohn & Ford, 2012, pp. 78–79; Parramore et al., 1994, p. 363).

During the interim, the all-white Norfolk City Council held an advisory referendum in November 1958 on whether the schools should be reopened. Those who participated voted 12,340 to 8,712 in favor of keeping the six schools shuttered (Littlejohn & Ford, 2012, p. 100). Only about 3,600 African Americans voted, less than half the number eligible (White, 2018, p. 147). Butts considered that evidence that the poll tax had helped to suppress black voter turnout (Ligon, 2017, p. 73). “We were powerless,” close friend Marie G. Young said (as quoted in Colvin, 1996). And, years after the referendum, Butts would offer this reflection: “The struggle for freedom for black men and black women rests with our right to vote.... And (the) right to vote has been one of my pet projects since the beginning” (“What The Life Of Martin Luther King, Jr.,” 1986).

From the mid-1950s into the 1960s, Norfolk devised a variety of other ways to hinder school desegregation, some of which directly affected Charlene. The school system was led by Superintendent John J. Brewbaker, who, in 1955, tried to assure white Norfolk residents that the

Brown v. Board ruling would have little effect in Norfolk because of “existing ‘residential segregation.’” He added:

We are all in favor of segregation.... It is just a question of what is the best plan.... I’m not in favor of integration, I’m in favor of carrying out the Supreme Court decree with the least harm to pupils... and to the schools. (as quoted in White, 2018, p. 52)

In August 1958, when Butts was still hopeful that the School Board would approve Charlene’s application to integrate Norview Elementary School, Superintendent Brewbaker showed up in front of the Butts’ home in Oakwood to personally measure the distance between their house and the all-black Oakwood Elementary and the all-white Norview Elementary. The School Board submitted Brewbaker’s measurements to the federal court and claimed that Charlene needed to go to the all-black Oakwood Elementary because it was closer. On August 29, 1958, Butts contradicted the superintendent in court by noting that Oakwood was 11 blocks away while Norview was only five blocks from their house. Despite the evidence, Charlene’s application was not approved (Ligon, 2017, pp. 68–71).

Meanwhile, Norfolk used modular building construction techniques to quickly develop two new elementary schools for African American students: Rosemont and Coronado. Charlene was assigned to Rosemont for her 1959–1960 fifth-grade year and found that the modular structure had 10 classrooms but only one girls’ restroom and one boys’ restroom, no cafeteria, no library, no gym—and no principal. A year later, the new combined all-black Rosemont Elementary and Junior High School opened, again undermining Butts’ efforts to have Charlene integrate the nearby existing Norview Junior High School (Ligon, 2017, pp. 74–75).

Butts’ advocacy on school issues included speaking in favor of integrated schools at various city government meetings (e.g., McCollum, 1963) as well as urging the Norfolk City Council to give African Americans a voice on the city’s School Board and helping to organize a

protest march by students at the all-black Booker T. Washington High School (Littlejohn & Ford, 2012, pp. 129–131).

In July 1963, the terms of four School Board members had just expired, so Butts saw her chance to speak out on the need for African American representation on this important policy-making panel. Citing her stature as president of the Oakwood-Rosemont Civic League, Butts addressed Norfolk's Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC), a 25-member biracial board that the City Council had created to study Norfolk's racial problems and issue recommendations. In her remarks, Butts said that Norfolk should appoint an African American to the School Board for the first time (McCollum, 1963). Butts already had done some homework on the issue, and informed the CAC that "most of the larger cities in Virginia" (Littlejohn & Ford, 2012, p. 129), such as Hampton, Newport News, Portsmouth, and Richmond, already had black members on important public commissions, and that Richmond had a black vice chairman on its School Board (Ligon, 2017, pp. 76–77; Littlejohn & Ford, 2012, p. 129). The CAC agreed with Butts, adopted her recommendation, and sent it to the City Council. On July 30, 1963, the City Council then unanimously voted in attorney Hilary H. Jones Jr. as Norfolk's first African American member of the School Board (Littlejohn & Ford, pp. 127-129; Roseberry, 1963).

The year 1963 proved to be an especially active one for Butts in her advocacy for civil rights and equal opportunity. On August 28, she joined the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom and heard her hero, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., deliver his iconic "I Have a Dream" speech. (Ligon, 2017, p. 100; "Three Buses to Washington," 1963). Butts had previously met King when he spoke in Petersburg, Virginia, in the early 1960s and then again in 1964 when he came to Norfolk ("First Stop To Be In Area," 1964; "What The Life of Martin Luther King, Jr.," 1986).

In September 1963, Butts and Mary Humphrey helped organize a two-part protest against rundown and inadequate conditions at the all-black Booker T. Washington High School and the slow pace of school integration in Norfolk. Over 2,200 students left classes for a protest march, while parents and other adults picketed the school administration building in downtown Norfolk (Littlejohn & Ford, 2012, pp. 129–131; Parramore et al., 1994, p. 379). Students walked out of the school on September 20, 1963, and paraded about two miles to the administration building, where they presented nine grievances about “unbearable and over-crowded conditions, and the lack of facilities” (Scully, 1963). The list noted that Booker T. Washington High School had been built in 1924 with a capacity of 1,400 students but that 2,450 were enrolled in 1963; that it was so cold in the winter that teachers had to wear coats and gloves; that plaster was falling from the ceilings; and that the cafeteria, bathrooms, and gymnasium were grossly inadequate and outdated (Hollander, 1963; Scully, 1963). Students returned to school the next day, but adults, including Butts, continued their picketing on the integration issue for several more days (“No Let-Up In Protest,” 1963).

The picketing drew a public rebuke from Robert Ripley, chairman of Norfolk’s biracial Citizens Advisory Committee, who said: “I personally feel that picketing is an insult to the committee.... I think it’s wrong, but it’s up to the Negroes if that’s what they want.” Butts shot back:

I regret very much that the CAC has chosen to use its valuable time to criticize our conduct in the picketing of the Norfolk School Administration. In the first instance, it shows a serious lack of understanding of the Norfolk Negro citizens, and in the second instance it is a waste of time if this is intended to discourage us. (Ripley and Butts as quoted in Ligon, 2017, pp. 77–78)

Equality in education was not the only issue for Butts in her activism against racism.

In November 1963, with the help of her friend and attorney Joseph A. Jordan Jr., Butts filed a lawsuit, *Evelyn Butts v. Albertis Harrison, Governor, et al.* (Ligon, 2017), to challenge the legal validity of Virginia's poll tax in state and local elections. The suit eventually was combined with one from several low-income plaintiffs from northern Virginia to become *Harper v. Virginia State Board of Elections*. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in their favor in March 1966.

Like countless African Americans during the Jim Crow era, Butts encountered the anonymous institutionalized racism embedded in Southern society. These encounters came daily in forms such as the segregated neighborhoods where most African Americans had to live, the jobs available to most African Americans, and the restrictions on how African Americans could travel, shop, and vote.

Many times, the racism overlapped with class bias and/or gender issues. For example, Butts had noticed that a local Be-Lo supermarket, where she regularly shopped, had only a few African American employees and that these employees worked as baggers, stockers, and janitors, and were never promoted to the higher-paying and more visible cashier jobs. Butts and an ally, Walter H. Green Sr., then asked the store manager to hire more blacks and assign some of them to cashier positions. The manager apparently refused because Butts then organized a monthlong picketing demonstration just before Christmas, 1959. The marchers distributed leaflets about the store's employment practices, urged shoppers to go elsewhere, and offered rides to other markets (A. V. Green, personal communication, March 1, 2018; Ligon, 2017, pp. 83–85).

In addition to the picketing, the activity led to a courtroom tiff over the proper way to address a black woman, specifically Evelyn Butts. The courtroom incident occurred after a local magistrate approved the Be-Lo manager's request for a temporary injunction against the protestors, an action that led to a trial in Norfolk Circuit Court in March, 1960. At that trial, a

lawyer for Be-Lo (identified only as “A. Howard” in news reports), kept referring to Evelyn Butts just by her last name, “Butts.” Butts’ lawyer, Edward A. Dawley, told the court that Howard was being disrespectful to a black woman and asked that his client be referred to as “Mrs. Butts” in court. Howard then switched to calling her “Evelyn Butts,” a seeming refusal to use the courtesy title of “Mrs.” even though Howard referred to a white female witness as “Mrs. Schwartz” (Ligon, 2017, p. 86; “Many Witnesses Are Heard,” 1960).

Humiliations through terminology issues involving race, gender, and class, as evidenced in this experience, also generated from within the African American population, as noted in Chapter II (Ransby, 2003, pp. 120–124; Theoharis, 2011, p. 408). For example, even at the height of the civil rights movement in the 1960s, there were institutionalized artifacts of how stereotypes about gender and class were reinforced by Norfolk’s black-owned newspaper, the *Journal and Guide*. A laudatory opinion column that thanked civil rights attorney Joseph A. Jordan Jr. and Evelyn Butts for toppling the poll tax also characterized Butts only as “the housewife,” even though she already had a long track record as a leader in several civil rights, voting rights, and political organizations (H. Johnson, 1966). Also, articles that mentioned the names of women participating in community—which seem odd to us now—often referred to some women with courtesy references to their husbands, such as lawyers’ wives “Mrs. J. Hugo Madison” and “Mrs. William T. Mason” as a class-related social elevation in contrast to references such as “Mrs. Evelyn Butts,” who was married to a disabled Norfolk Naval Air Station employee (“More Than 800 Attend,” 1968).

The Be-Lo case concluded quickly when Judge Clyde H. Jacob imposed a permanent injunction that prohibited Butts and her fellow protestors from picketing (“Many Witnesses are Heard,” 1960). But the activity had been effective because the store’s co-owner reported that

business had dropped 90% during the picketing (“Many Witnesses Are Heard,” 1960). In addition, he agreed to promote one black woman—a stocker—to a cashier job with the same pay as white employees, and hire more African Americans (Ligon, 2017, pp. 86–87).

This same year, Butts helped back up the sit-ins and demonstrations of young African Americans who were protesting the segregated lunch counters of downtown W. F. Woolworth and W. T. Grant five-and-dime stores. James F. Gay, interviewed by a *New Journal and Guide* reporter in 2003, recalled being arrested with two other young men but that Butts and attorney Joseph A. Jordan Jr. “came and got us” before they could be taken to a police lockup (Colvin, 2003b).

During the late 1950s and early ‘60s, Butts began meeting often with a close-knit group of likeminded friends and fellow activists, including Walter and Alveta Green, and Jordan and his law partners, Leonard Holt Jr. and Ed Dawley Jr., who had reputations as civil rights firebrands. They would usually gather at Dawley’s home and then cross the street to Walter and Alveta Green’s, all the while discussing issues, brainstorming tactics and strategies, and enjoying popcorn and beer, Alveta V. Green recalled (Colvin, 2003a; A. V. Green, personal communication, March 1, 2018).

Discussions led to activities that even gained some national publicity, such as challenging the discriminatory hiring practices of the Washington Redskins professional football team. In 1961, the Redskins and the Baltimore Colts came to Norfolk’s Foreman Field for a preseason exhibition game sponsored by the local Kiwanis Club. Butts and several of her friends picketed the game, explaining that their protest had three targets: that the stadium’s seating was segregated, that the local Kiwanis did not have any black members, and that the Redskins were the only NFL team to not have any black players even though all other teams had integrated by

1952, nine years earlier. Two of the African American stars on the Colts, Lenny Moore and Johnny Sample, came out to talk with Butts and the protestors (Ligon, 2017, pp. 87–88; McKenna, 2011).

The early 1960s also saw the return of the city’s proposal to redevelop Oakwood, Rosemont, and Lincoln Park. Butts would not give in and organized her neighbors to show that Oakwood residents would take responsibility for renovating their own homes if the city paved the streets, installed sidewalks, and make other infrastructure improvements. In February 1961, she told the City Council that residents should be given a voice in deciding the future of their communities (“Call For Voice,” 1961). The city’s new plan then split the project area, with many Oakwood residents allowed to keep their homes but Rosemont and Lincoln Park being largely demolished and rebuilt.

Butts “saved this neighborhood out here,” said longtime neighbor Herbert Smith. “The city had put us on the demolition list,” he recalled. “She went around and got people to upgrade their bathrooms to get hooked into the city’s water system. Then she went down to City Hall and stayed in their faces until they agreed” (as quoted in Knepler, 2001a; Ligon, 2017, p. 234).

Another longtime neighbor, Claude Stevens, remembered how Oakwood had been “nothing more than a set of houses sitting along muddy unpaved streets with septic tanks and outhouses. But because of the work and persistence of Mrs. Butts, it was brought to a respectable level by the city” (as quoted in Colvin, 1995). Other neighbors also credit Butts with prodding City Hall to build the nearby Norview Recreation Center in the mid-1960s, a facility which was then replaced by a larger center in 2009 (H. Smith, personal communication, February 20, 2018; R. Smith, personal communication, February 20, 2018).

However, Butts wasn't done with making sure that the city lived up to its word. In November, 1963, she helped start a Norfolk chapter of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s SCLC, and this local unit hosted a visit by King in June 1964, and gave him a tour of the Oakwood-Rosemont area ("First Stop To Be In Area," 1964). On July 1, 1964, Butts, attorney Joseph A. Jordan Jr., and several more of their allies went to Washington, D.C., to meet with Robert C. Weaver, administrator of the Federal Housing and Home Finance Agency about school and redevelopment issues. Weaver then ordered an investigation into whether the Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority and the School Board were collaborating to maintain segregation ("Guide's Year-End Report," 1965; "Job, Housing Probe Due," 1964). In this phase of Butts' life, she had become not only a bridge leader connecting her neighbors to local civil rights chieftains, politicians, and City Hall, but also more directly with the national scene.

In 1968, Butts' deep admiration of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and his style of nonviolence, as well as her semi-public expression of grief, may have gotten her fired from a temporary part-time job after King was assassinated on April 4 of that year. She had already been hired by Stein's men's clothing store in downtown Norfolk to do alterations on Easter clothing, which was a popular sale item at the time. Although she was upset about King's murder, Butts followed through on her tailoring commitment to Stein's but reported to work decked out with "all the buttons she could find from the March on Washington and anything to do with King" (C. B. Ligon, personal communication, January 11, 2018) and talked nonstop about her sadness and anger. However, she had made the store owners uncomfortable with her style of grieving and was not asked to return for the Christmas buying season later in the year (Ligon, 2017, pp. 171–172).

Sexism and Gender-Related Issues

There is only a scant public record of Evelyn Butts encountering overt sexism and other forms of gender bias or gender abuse aimed at her individually, and Butts usually did not characterize her struggles with powerful men in terms of sexism. Similarly, there is no record of Butts specifically advocating for equal rights for women apart from crusading for civil rights and voting rights for all African Americans and poor people. However, throughout her many years of activism, there is ample evidence that Butts strongly encouraged African American women to participate in the civil rights struggle and in politics. She devoted countless hours to informing women about civil rights and political issues and helping them attain access to the political process. For example, in her Oakwood neighborhood, Butts combined sharing homemaking tips with other women while using the opportunity to dispense information about civil rights, voting rights, and politics (Knepler, 2001a). She also led a women's political organization on annual visits to Virginia's General Assembly ("Third Force Women," 1970; "Voters Club Tours General Assembly," 1968). I will further discuss these examples in at points later in this chapter.

The absence of printed or written contemporaneous records of Butts' encounters with overt sexism or of crusading for women's rights does not necessarily mean that Butts did not experience or observe sexism in Norfolk; in fact, there is evidence that Butts encountered sexism (as well as class bias) in the actions of several African American men, including the Rev. Jesse Jackson Sr., although Butts may not have described these events as sexist at the time. The sparse record also does not mean that Butts was dismissive about women's rights. It may mean that the news media never reported on Butts' position on sexism and equality for women, or it may mean that she was of a generation of black women who felt it was more important at the time to focus on the civil rights of African Americans (Robnett, 1997, pp. 36, 40–44, 51, 59–60). Meanwhile,

there were incidents in Butts' life that show she was not afraid to stand up to politically powerful or otherwise domineering men or go counter to their wishes as well as examples of when Butts helped African American women connect with civil rights and with the political system.

While Butts sometimes was described as stubborn and bullheaded (Swift, 1993), longtime friend and political ally Alveta V. Green, a retired educator, disagrees with the assessment, suggesting that such terms could be based in sexism because most male activists were not used to working with strong, outspoken women. "She might have been aggressive for the times," Green told me in a personal interview. "But that's what she needed to be to get the job done." Green added, "Looking back on it, ... she was also a black woman breaking some barriers" (A. V. Green, personal communication, March 1, 2018). Herbert Smith, a retired brick mason and also a longtime friend who drove Butts to many meetings and events, concurred with Green, saying that some men, including several African American ministers, did not respect Butts' leadership abilities because she was a woman (H. Smith, personal communication, February 20, 2018).

One example of Butts going against the wishes of a black male authority figure occurred during the 1959-60 picketing of the Be-Lo supermarket and follow-up injunction-trial. An African American minister, the Rev. John B. Gray of the nearby Mount Gilead Missionary Baptist Church, told Butts and her fellow picketers, and later testified in Circuit Court, that his entire community-based congregation of 700 members did not approve of the picketing (Ligon, 2017, pp. 86-87; "Many Witnesses Are Heard," 1960). Butts and her allies continued to picket, and at least two church members, Ruth Whitney and Willie A. Minggia, testified in the trial that they supported the picketing and their pastor was wrong about the entire congregation being against the protest.

The Be-Lo picketing apparently also became a factor when Butts and several of her allies challenged the leadership of Robert D. Robertson, the longtime president of the Norfolk Branch of the NAACP, later in 1960. The local NAACP leadership did not support the protest activity against the supermarket, according to the *Journal and Guide* newspaper (“No Radical—Robertson,” 1961). The newspaper reported that branch leadership believed that residents living near the store were already negotiating with Be-Lo management about hiring and more African Americans and that picketers were “outsiders,” even though at least Butts and Walter H. Green Sr. lived only a few blocks away (“No Radical—Robertson,” 1961).

The Norfolk NAACP Branch had been led since at least 1953 by Robertson, a former steelworker, stevedore, and longshoreman who had also worked as a labor union organizer (“R. D. Robertson Mourned,” 1969). Butts and her allies, though, found him to be too moderate, accommodating, and slow to respond to white authorities when it came to civil rights issues. Indeed, the *Journal and Guide* noted Robertson’s reputation for purposeful avoidance of “needless agitation” and his “policy of desegregation by negotiation wherever possible” (“No Radical—Robertson,” 1961).

Butts and her allies also charged that Robertson and his forces had scheduled a branch election for December 1960 without informing all members. Butts and her group notified the national NAACP, which then invalidated the branch election and arranged a new vote for March 13, 1961, with Butts running for president against Robertson (Ligon, 2017, p. 88; “No Radical Leadership Wanted,” 1961). In response, Robertson labeled Butts and her allies as militants, dissidents, and radicals, and then Butts sent a letter to branch members in which she characterized Robertson as a dictator (Ligon, 2017, pp. 89–90).

“Regardless of how this election comes out,” Butts wrote, “I think a service has been rendered our organization and the citizens of Norfolk by our slate of candidates, in giving the people this democratic opportunity to end dictatorial practices” (as quoted in Ligon, 2017, p. 90). Continuing in her letter, Butts accused Robertson of not being vigorous in challenging racial discrimination but then taking credit for the civil rights accomplishments of others. “We admit that we are militant in fighting for the civil rights of Negro citizens. The NAACP is supposed to be a militant organization. It was founded for this purpose,” Butts wrote, adding, “Because many of us, on account of our jobs, our families, or other reasons, cannot be militant, the NAACP was established to be militant for us. If the NAACP is not going to be militant, why do we need it?” (as quoted in Ligon, 2017, pp. 91–92).

With the Norfolk NAACP election scheduled for March 13, 1961, Butts and her slate of challengers to Robertson and his slate withdrew their candidacies a day before. Butts contended that Robertson was being given “improper and unfair” advantage (“No Radical Leadership Wanted,” 1961) by “unprecedented meddling in local affairs” from the national and state NAACP organizations (Ligon, 2017, p. 92). “We cannot accept a situation in which we must tolerate a dictatorship which is allegedly fighting for democracy and justice, regardless of what national or state official intervenes,” Butts huffed to a reporter (as quoted in Ligon, 2017, p. 92). The Norfolk Branch proceeded with the election anyway, and Robertson “won a smashing victory” with 361 votes against 45 for Butts (“Overwhelming Majority,” 1961). However, Butts and her slate of challengers did not quit the NAACP but continued to participate, even riding on buses chartered by the local branch to attend the March on Washington in August 1963 (Ligon, 2017, p. 93; “Three Buses To Washington,” 1963).

Perhaps the most significant of Butts' public disagreements with politically powerful African American men came in the 1980s after Butts had deepened her involvement in partisan politics. The story of her political fights with a man named Bishop Levi E. Willis Sr. involves the changing alliances of Norfolk's complicated local political scene of the 1980s. However, I will provide only a short summary because her conflicts with Willis came during Butts' period as a partisan politician in the 1980s, an activity that is beyond both the scope and timeframe of my study of Butts as a grassroots civil rights and voting rights leader. The example here is included only to help illustrate Butts' encounters with sexism.

In amassing her political power, Butts chaired the Concerned Citizens for Political Education, which endorsed candidates for the Norfolk City Council and candidates for General Assembly seats from Norfolk. She also rose in the Democratic Party to chair of the Second Congressional District Democratic Committee. Willis, meanwhile, was a charismatic preacher who had been born in poverty but had become a shrewd and wealthy businessman who owned a network of radio stations, a funeral home, and an ownership stake in a local bank. He then set his sights on political power and was able to outflank Butts in her activities. In 1983, he was successful in bringing the famous Rev. Jesse Jackson Sr. to Norfolk for a protest march with 6,000 people and then created a local Rainbow Coalition, borrowing the name from a national organization headed by Jackson. Jackson, at the time, was also preparing to seek the Democratic nomination for president in the 1984 election. Butts was among 225 people invited to a breakfast meeting with Jackson, but it was clear that Willis had Jackson's ear. As Butts' daughter Charlene tells it, Butts later confided to her three daughters that Jackson had pulled her aside to tell her that as a woman she needed to step aside and allow men to take the political lead in Norfolk. Butts felt insulted (Ligon, 2017, pp. 200–202).

Within months, Willis had engineered the ouster of Butts from her leadership position in the Second Congressional District committee and dramatically weakened the effectiveness of the Concerned Citizens (Ligon, 2017, pp. 202–213).

A few years later, Willis' financial empire began unraveling in a downward spiral that included actions by the Internal Revenue Service and federal banking regulators, the arrest of his daughter for embezzling, liens and lawsuits against his radio stations, and a federal felony conviction for mishandling a loan repayment. In 1989, Willis no longer held his political leadership positions (Vegh, 2009). By the late 1980s, however, Butts' health was declining, and she was stepping away from her remaining civic and political activities (Ligon, 2017, p. 219).

There is one other aspect to Butts' fearlessness in standing up against the political tides on gender-related issues; there is evidence that Butts spoke in favor of gay rights long before even most liberal politicians would add their public support. In 1984, while seeking election to the Norfolk City Council, Butts participated in a candidates' forum sponsored by the Tidewater Chapter of the Virginia Gay Alliance. Each of the eight candidates who attended were asked:

Would you be willing to introduce or support a city ordinance which would prohibit discrimination in city and private employment, housing, and public accommodations based on race, color, religion, sex, creed, age, national origin, physical handicap, marital status, sexual orientation, or any other non-merit factor? (“Candidates Attend First Gay-Sponsored Forum,” 1984)

Butts was one of only two candidates to voice unqualified support, saying she wanted “equal rights for everybody” (“Candidates Attend First Gay-Sponsored Forum,” April 1984).

Defying Class, and Demanding Democracy and Voting Rights

The intersection of class, race, and political expression lay at the heart of the famous lawsuit against the poll tax filed by Evelyn Butts.

In the initial legal complaint filed by Butts, her main attorney Joseph A. Jordan Jr. argued that Virginia's poll tax discriminated against both low-income citizens in general and African Americans in particular, thereby violating the equal protection clause of the 14th amendment and the voting rights guarantees of the 15th amendment, as well as the first amendment rights to freedom of speech and to petition the government. In addition, Jordan pointed out that Virginia's poll tax was infused with racial discrimination because state law required clerks to maintain separate records for black and white voters (*Butts v. Harrison*, 1964; Ligon, 2017, pp. 117–118). In his oral arguments before the U.S. Supreme Court, Jordan also said the poll tax had been a key factor in depriving African Americans of meaningful political representation after Reconstruction—"as if with the waving of a wand"—because black voters who could not pay the tax were quickly expunged from voter lists (Brooks, 1966).

Historians, such as Alexander Keyssar (2009, pp. XXIV) and Brent Tarter (2013, p. 272), have also noted the intersection of class, race, and politics when the former Confederate states imposed the poll tax in their new or revised state constitutions between 1890 and 1910, as I have referenced in Chapter II.

Butts lived half of her life in an era when white society, especially in the South, consigned most African American to the lowest-paying, most menial jobs, such as those of maids, cooks, nannies, and other domestic service positions (Lewis, 1991, p. 178). For example, Butts earned \$20 per week as a domestic employee of two white women, the Lambert sisters, in the late 1940s. When she asked for a raise to \$5 per day, the sisters agreed but then reduced her schedule to four days a week so Butts' take-home pay remained the same (Ligon, 2017, pp. 19–20). By 1963, the year that Butts initiated her poll tax lawsuit, domestic service workers with steady employment were earning \$800 per year before taxes, on average across the United

States, about a quarter of the annual average of \$3,100 for all wage earners nationwide (Tacker, 1970, p. 10). Also, simple math shows that the \$800 annual pay for domestic service workers equated to \$15.38 per week.

Virginia's \$1.50 per year poll tax was technically becoming a lighter financial burden for African Americans and low-income people because the \$1.50 levy had not increased since enacted in 1902. However, it was never that simple in Virginia, which was identified by political scientist Frederic D. Ogden (1958) as having the most burdensome poll taxes in the South "based upon poll tax rates, coverage, time of payment, and proof of payment" (p. 284). Virginia's stipulations required voter applicants to pay the \$1.50 for three consecutive years and show proof, such as the receipts, before being approved (Ogden, 1958, p. 32; Tarter, 2014). In addition, the last payment had to be made at least six months before the upcoming election, and Virginia also would impose a 5% penalty for late payment on delinquent accounts (Ogden, 1958, p. 65). Also, taking into account inflation, the \$1.50 poll tax of 1902 as the equivalent of \$5.34 in 1963, and if one had to pay three years of poll taxes at once, that would equate to \$16.01 in 1963, according to the online inflation calculator (www.officialdata.org, n.d.).

Voter-participation activists often reported psychological and emotional barriers among would-be voter applicants. Norfolk resident Alveta V. Green, who worked with Butts on voter-registration outreach, said that "when you would go ask folks to register to vote, [they would] say, 'I could buy two or three loaves of bread or something for my family'" (A. V. Green, personal communication, March 1, 2018). Some African Americans also continued to express anger, as noted by Lewis (1991), who writes, "some who could pay refused, insisting 'that they (wouldn't) pay \$1.50 just for the privilege of voting for some white man'" (p. 147).

Leaders in the African American community in Virginia tried to build momentum for increased voter registration. Scholar-activist Luther P. Jackson, who chaired the history department at the Virginia State College for Negroes (now Virginia State University), hated the poll tax but encouraged paying it and following through with registration and turnout as a co-founder of the Virginia Voters League, whose motto was “Pay the poll tax in order to abolish the poll tax” (Edwards, 1973, p. 95). Jackson also authored the weekly “Rights and Duties in a Democracy” column in the *Journal and Guide* newspaper in the 1940s and produced periodic reports on black voting strength (Dennis, 2014). Jackson’s 1941 report, for example, pointed out that Virginia had 329,000 African Americans of voting age but that only 25,000 had paid the poll tax for the requisite three consecutive years, only 15,000 were registered voters, and no more than 12,000 voted (Edds, 2018, pp. 104–105). Jackson sometimes scolded fellow black Virginians, but more than apathy was to blame. Edds (2018) notes that “hostile white registrars, ... and a dearth of candidates with appeal to working-class blacks or whites curbed any incentive to participate” (p. 105).

African Americans often also reported intimidation or trickery when trying to pay their poll tax (Edwards, 1973, pp. 61–60, 97). Ruses across the South allegedly included registrars failing to give or mail tax-paid receipts to blacks, thereby frustrating them when they arrived to vote on Election Day and were asked to show proof they had paid their poll taxes (Ogden, 1958, pp. 52–54). Additional suppression forms were at work as well, including literacy tests, as noted in Chapter II.

African Americans and many white voting-rights allies had tried for decades to get rid of the poll tax in the Southern states. There were national and regional anti-poll tax organizations, such as the Civil Rights Committee of the Southern Conference for Human Welfare and the

National Committee to Abolish the Poll Tax (Lawson, 1999, pp. 55–85), while Virginia had the Virginia Voters League. Lawsuits were rebuffed by the federal courts, including two initiated by low-income white men, *Breedlove v. Suttles* in 1937 (Ogden, 1958, pp. 260–264; Wallenstein, 2004, p. 179) and *Pirtle v. Brown* in 1941 (Lawson, 1991, pp. 60–61, 65; Ogden, 1958, pp. 260–264), and one by a black woman in Virginia, *Butler v. Thompson* in 1951 (Wallenstein, 2004, pp. 182–184).

Another tactic involved running more and more black candidates in local elections in hopes of encouraging more African Americans to register as voters despite the hardships (Buni, 1967, pp. 148–149). In Norfolk, World War II veteran Victor J. Ashe, who already had a law degree from Howard University, campaigned for a City Council seat in 1946, the first time an African American had tried since Reconstruction. His energetic campaign included a huge parade with floats and four bands (Parramore et al., 1994, p. 349). White politicians did not seem to know how to respond. Addressing a black audience, white incumbent City Council member Richard W. Ruffin declared that “the time has not come for Norfolk to elect a Negro to the council.” He went on to say that Ashe was “a credit to his race and the city, but... his election would be injurious to his race as well as to the white population” (as quoted in Parramore et al., 1994, p. 347).

Although Ashe lost, finishing seventh among eight candidates, he bested one white man and his ability to draw votes from every one of Norfolk’s 37 precincts, including white districts, was enough to keep incumbent Ruffin from winning another term (D. M. Watson, 2017). In all, Ashe garnered 3,101 votes (Buni, 1967, pp. 152–153; Edds, 2018, p. 162), but Norfolk’s black population “had to suffer more years of taxation without representation” (Parramore et al., 1994, p. 349).

In 1958, Jordan and Butts resolved to tackle the poll tax issue with the formation of the Virginia's Third Force and Women of Virginia's Third Force (sometimes spelled "3rd Force" by various members and local newspapers), so named by in reference to the potential political force represented uncounted thousands of voters who were disenfranchised by the poll tax (Ligon, 2017, p. 95). With Butts as president, the Women of Virginia's Third Force organized a variety of voter-participation initiatives for many years, including voter-registration, voter-education, and voter-turnout campaigns, petition drives, and the annual visit to Virginia's General Assembly (noted earlier in this chapter). Butts' youngest daughter, Charlene, accompanied her mother on some outreach activities, such as going to churches and asking the ministers to remind congregants to pay their poll taxes (C. B. Ligon, personal communication, January 11, 2018).

One of earliest efforts of the Women of Virginia's Third Force came in response to Virginia devising a "blank sheet" voter-registration form in 1958 to discourage black voter registration, a tactic that was part of the state government's policy of Massive Resistance to public school desegregation. The "form" amounted to a blank paper that voter applicants had to fill out in person in front of local voter-registration officials, correctly providing certain specific identification information, but without being allowed to ask an election official for help. The required information included name, age, birthdate, place of birth, current address and occupation, and any previous addresses and jobs for the past year, and the precinct location where the applicant last voted ("Death of Democracy," 1958). Butts and about 50 other Third Force women conducted classes in Jordan's law office to teach voter applicants what information was needed and how to correctly fill in these blank sheets from memory (Ligon, 2017, p. 96; "Norfolk Committees Push Drive," 1959). "We were teaching the people in the back room,"

Butts recalled when interviewed by Norfolk historian Tommy L. Bogger (T. L. Bogger, personal communication with E. T. Butts, 1989).

The Women of Virginia's Third Force also tried to make sure the voter applicants could pay their poll taxes, taught them how to learn about the candidates, and organized precinct rides on Election Day. "We'd take up a collection in the [Oakwood-Rosemont] civic league, even if all anyone could give was a nickel or 10 centers or 25 centers," Marie G. Young recalled about one way the women's group raised money to help voter applicants pay their poll taxes (as quoted in Knepler, 2001a). Another source of poll tax payment money came from the Norfolk Branch of the NAACP, according to Butts (T. L. Bogger, personal communication with E. T. Butts, 1989; C. B. Ligon, personal communication, January 11, 2018).

Butts wasn't vigilant on just the actions or inactions of politicians; she was unrelenting in making sure her neighbors paid their poll taxes so they could vote. "She would check with you, 'Did you pay it?' And, if not, she'd be 'Get down there and get it done! Thank you!'" says Herbert Smith (H. Smith, personal communication, February 20, 2018).

By 1962, the blank sheet tactic of Virginia's powerful Massive Resistance politicians had backfired on them, so Governor Albert S. Harrison was forced to sign a law rescinding the provision ("Blank Sheet Law Dead," 1962). It turned out that many white voter applicants did not know how to submit their applications correctly, while many black applicants benefitted from being successfully taught by the Women of Virginia's Third Force and similar African American groups across the state. Election officials from many localities complained to General Assembly members that the blank sheet law was not hurting black voter applicants as intended; instead, it was "creating confusion and ill will among whites, especially elderly people" (as quoted in "White Voters Suffering," 1961).

Meanwhile, Jordan had joined the growing list of African Americans in Virginia running for public office. His first parry came in 1959 as a write-in candidate for the General Assembly's House of Delegates. Jordan's campaign, which he also seemed to use for overall consciousness-raising about the poll tax, included driving a 1948—equipped with a loudspeaker and decorated with “Pay Poll Tax” placards—through the streets of African American neighborhoods. In addition, the Women of Virginia's Third Force assisted Jordan in organizing a rally that featured Rep. Adam Clayton Powell of New York, a well-known African American member of Congress. The event drew about 1,500 people (Dabney, 1959; “Final Details Completed,” 1959; Ligon, 2017, p. 97).

Jordan, however, did not come close to winning, getting less than 1,000 votes. But with Butts' leadership, Jordan and the Women of Virginia's Third Force gained insights and information that proved valuable in future elections. In his first quest for office, Jordan had asked Norfolk's voter-registration office to let him see the city's official list of voters as a public record. The office turned him down, so Butts assigned herself the tedious task of going to the registration office dozens of times over about two months and hand-copying the list (Ligon, 2017, pp. 98, 166). That's how she discovered that registration information for whites were compiled on white cards and for blacks on yellow cards—a fact that Jordan used in preparing Butts' poll tax lawsuit. Or as Butts herself said of the different colored registration cards, “it was segregation in itself down at the registrar's office (T. L. Bogger, personal communication with E. T. Butts, 1989).

The Third Force women, under Butts' leadership, would also build upon the list for future elections by cross-checking the names of registered voters with their addresses in a city directory and then looking for names of neighbors who were not registered. “That way they could see who

they needed to get to register to vote and what street they needed to work for more people to contact,” Ligon explained (C. B. Ligon, personal communication, January 11, 2018).

Over the next decade, Jordan, as well several other Norfolk African Americans, would continue to run for City Council or General Assembly seats. Strategy sessions for Jordan included some in the living room of Walter and Alveta Green, to which Butts would invite additional people, give “pep talk” speeches, and assign tasks such as gathering signatures for petitions and distributing flyers (A. V. Green, personal communication, March 1, 2018, June 1, 2018). Butts would also assist Jordan with her seamstress skills, making dress-like uniforms for the Jordanettes, a group of girls—her daughter Charlene and teenaged daughters of friends—who would pass out campaign material. One year, Butts spent “at least 108 hours” producing 36 uniforms (Ligon, 2017, p. 169).

During this time, national momentum for abolishing poll taxes had finally taken hold. On August 27, 1962, Congress authorized sending the 24th amendment to the states for ratification. That amendment, however, pertained only to poll taxes for federal elections, leaving the matter of poll taxes for state and local elections up to individual states to decide. Section 1 of the amendment read:

The right of citizens of the United States to vote in any primary or other election for President or Vice President, for electors for President or Vice President, or for Senator or Representative in Congress, shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any State by reason of failure to pay any poll tax or other tax. (U.S. Const. amend. XXIV)

Ratification came swiftly, with the necessary 38 states giving their approval by January 23, 1964 (Walton et al., 2012, p. 476). President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the amendment on February 4, 1964. Although the amendment went into effect, Virginia, North Carolina, Alabama, and Texas did not join in until year later, with Virginia ratifying the 24th amendment in 1977, and five other Southern states never ratified (Walton et al., 2012, p. 479).

The 24th amendment had immediate dramatic results as voter registration among African Americans in the South climbed by over 40% in 1964 (Keyssar, 2009, p. 210). By then, most Southern states had also already abolished poll taxes for state and local elections, but Alabama, Mississippi, Texas, and Virginia held out. A frustrated Butts and Jordan were prepared and filed suit on November 29, 1962. “I thought it was ridiculous that you had to pay to vote,” Butts told Norfolk historian Tommy L. Bogger (Bogger, Hucles, Newby-Alexander, & Jackson, 2018, pp. 262–266).

Meanwhile, friend Alveta V. Green termed Butts “courageous” for taking on Virginia’s poll tax. “Evelyn wasn’t scared of the governor or anyone. I can’t think of anybody else who would have taken that up because we were afraid of losing our jobs or something like that,” says Green, who had worked as a public school teacher at the time (A. V. Green, personal communication, June 1, 2018). Herbert Smith agrees, saying “She had more nerves than a red fox” (Knepler, 2001a).

About 1 1/2 years later, in March 1964, four residents of Fairfax County, Virginia, joined the legal fray with a similar lawsuit. They were Annie E. Harper, 79, a retired domestic worker; World War II veteran Curtis Burr, 41, a brick mason; Burr’s wife Myrtle, 37; and Gladys A. Berry, 42, a divorced unemployed domestic worker; who were represented by attorney Allison W. Brown Jr. of the American Civil Liberties Union (W. P. Johnson, 2017).

Butts and Jordan encountered several legal setbacks in their suit and had to refile twice. There was also the distraction of Jordan’s law firm engaging in a four-year battle with Virginia’s Committee on Offenses Against the Administration of Justice, which had tried in 1961 to raid the law firm’s offices to seize all files dealing with the SCLC, Congress of Racial Equality, and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. The protracted battle siphoned the firm’s resources

and led to it breaking up, leaving Jordan as the sole practitioner (Bogger et al., 2018, pp. 260–262; Littlejohn, 2011).

By late 1965, the Butts case was bundled with the suit from Fairfax County, and the combined lawsuit became known as *Harper et al. v. Virginia State Board of Elections et al.* Nationally famous civil rights attorney Thurgood Marshall, then serving as U.S. solicitor general under President Johnson, joined in as a friend of the court on the side of the plaintiffs (W. P. Johnson, 2017).

The U.S. Supreme Court heard oral arguments for *Harper v. Virginia* on January 24, 1966. On March 24, 1966, the Court announced its 6–3 decision in favor of the plaintiffs. The majority opinion, written by Justice William O. Douglas, agreed that Virginia had violated the 14th amendment by denying equal protection of the laws when the state had imposed the poll tax. Yet the court went even further by emphasizing and re-emphasizing that “Fee payments or wealth, like race, creed, or color, are unrelated to the citizen's ability to participate intelligently in the electoral process.” The ruling continued:

Voter qualifications have no relation to wealth nor to paying or not paying this or any other tax.... To introduce wealth or payment of a fee as a measure of a voter's qualifications is to introduce a capricious or irrelevant factor. The requirement of fee paying causes an ‘invidious’ discrimination that runs afoul the Equal Protection Clause. ... For to repeat, wealth or fee paying has, in our view, no relation to voting qualifications; the right to vote is too precious, too fundamental to be so burdened or conditioned. (*Harper v. Virginia*, 1966)

Accounts vary about Butts’ reaction. The *Virginian-Pilot* newspaper displayed a photo of Butts and Jordan—both—on page A1, but the news story reported a low-key response from Butts in contrast to the picture. The news story quoted her saying that “the impact will just be that we will have more registered voters” and that there will be “better treatment” of blacks trying to

register or vote (McAllister, 1966). The newspaper report continued with a few more brief quotes from Butts:

“I was sewing this morning when a friend called me about the decision. I was very glad it was over,” she said. “It will help the state of Virginia to progress.”

“No, I don’t feel much different today,” she said in response to a question. “All the decisions on civil rights make me feel better.” (McAllister, 1966)

A forthcoming book on Norfolk’s African American history reports that Butts “was unflappable as always” (Bogger et al., 2018, pp. 262–266). Daughter Charlene remembers her mother being “pragmatic” and already focusing on “registering voters—thousands of them” through her efforts with the Women of Virginia’s Third Force (Ligon, 2017, p. 163). Neighbor Herbert Smith, though, paints a more vivid and active image of Butts’ reaction as he recalls, “Oh yeah, she was happy! My goodness, she’s running around telling everybody, ‘We won! We won!’” (H. Smith, personal communication, February 20, 2018).

Either way, Butts poured herself into even more voter-registration efforts, and was reported to have guided the registration of 2,882 (although some news reports say “about 3,000”) new African American voters during one six-month period (“Legendary Local Activist,” 1993; Ligon, 2017, pp. 98, 166). It was through such work that the milestone victory at the U.S. Supreme Court in 1966 would translate into political victory for Norfolk African Americans in 1968. Running for office again, Joseph A. Jordan Jr. drew 13,551 votes out of a record 28,000-plus that June (Colvin, 2003b). That put Jordan second among eight candidates running for three seats on the City Council, and it made him the first African American elected to Norfolk’s council since Reconstruction. A year later, William P. Robinson Sr., a political science professor at Norfolk State College (now Norfolk State University), became the first African American from Norfolk elected to Virginia’s House of Delegates.

The victories were sweet for Butts and Jordan and vindicated one of the essential points of their 1963 poll tax lawsuit: that during the post-Civil War Reconstruction Era, African Americans often won political seats in Virginia's General Assembly and on local city councils, but such victories had become impossible after Virginia's 1901–02 state Constitutional Convention imposed the poll tax and other voter-suppression devices. In his 1966 oral arguments, Jordan had told the Supreme Court, "The Negro had been effectively eliminated from any political power in Virginia—eliminated and separated from the political power which is now exercised by the whites exclusively, to the exclusion of Negroes" (Ligon, 2017, p. 158). Such exclusion was no longer the case.

The Jordan and Robinson victories were also not the only local political yields of the poll tax ruling. African Americans made similar breakthroughs in nearby Portsmouth, electing Dr. James W. Holley III and Raymond Turner to that city's seven-member City Council in 1968. Black candidates also won that year in several other Virginia cities, including Fairfax, Buena Vista, Martinsville, Danville, and Staunton ("7 Va. Communities Pick Negro Councilmen," 1968). "The elimination of the poll tax opened the door of opportunity," said state Del. William P. Robinson Jr. ("A Worthy Celebration," 2006), who succeeded his father in Virginia's House of Delegates.

In addition, Butts' political power would continue to rise. The Concerned Citizens for Political Education, which she now chaired, became a sought-after endorsement by candidates until the mid-1980s. Butts and other leaders of the group would interview candidates and then print its endorsements on yellow-colored paper under the title "Goldenrod Ballot." Political scientists Elsie M. Barnes and Ronald E. Proctor (1994) observed, "In its heyday, in the 1970s, it was considered to be the most influential endorsement a candidate in Norfolk could receive.

Such an endorsement would reap several thousand black votes” (p. 91). The Concerned Citizens organization had evolved from the Committee of Forty and the Citizens United for Representative Government (CURG), the latter founded in the 1960s by Thomas W. Young who had succeeded his father, P. B. Young Sr., as publisher of the *Journal and Guide*, but then died in 1967 (Barnes & Proctor, 1994, p. 91; Ligon, 2017, p. 167; Suggs, 1988, p. 187).

Butts also hosted many gatherings where voters could meet the candidates. Some such events became legendary as when Charles S. “Chuck” Robb, a white man who was the son-in-law of President Lyndon B. Johnson, stayed overnight in Butts’ home while campaigning for lieutenant governor of Virginia in 1977 and held a press conference there. Not only did Robb win, but his visit also generated some humor in the Butts family as a niece, Roxanne, teased her Aunt Evelyn: “He don’t have enough money to stay at a hotel? Dude must be hard up if the best he can do is stay in Oakwood.” The only reply from Butts was, “It’s politics” (Ligon, 2017, pp. 185–186).

Visits from out-of-town and state-level politicians created a buzz in the Oakwood neighborhood. “You could tell when people like that came to her house,” neighbor Rachel Smith recalled. “There were police cars or state troopers or something, so everybody would be going, ‘Who’s at Ms. Evelyn’s house today?’ And you went by to see what’s going on” (R. Smith, personal communication, February 20, 2018).

While Butts never achieved elective office, she earned appointments to various government-related boards and commissions over the years. The list includes Norfolk’s Model Cities Commission in 1972, which advised the Norfolk government on policies for improving several low-income neighborhoods through U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development programs. In 1974, the City Council appointed Butts to the biracial Citizens

Advisory Committee, the entity that had heard her request in 1963 that an African American be appointed to the Norfolk School Board (Ligon, 2017, pp. 177–178). In 1975, the council appointed Butts to the board of commissioners of the powerful Norfolk Housing and Development Authority, where she served until 1987, and the state appointed her to the Virginia Board of Housing and Community Development from 1982 to 1990 (“Evelyn T. Butts,” 1993).

Meanwhile, Norfolk’s power structure continued to grow more inclusive. Even though Jordan was the lone African American on the seven-member council, he gave Norfolk’s black community a voice at the city’s top decision-making table for the first time since the 1880s. His policy proposals weren’t always accepted by his council colleagues, but they selected him to serve as vice mayor in 1972. His effectiveness included engineering the appointments of more African Americans to various municipal boards and commission, and especially Evelyn Butts to the Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority’s Board of Commissioners. He also successfully proposed the erection of the city’s 83-foot-high Martin Luther King Jr. memorial monument, but Jordan died in 1991 and did not live to see its dedication in 2000 (S. Parker, 2012). Even one of the white opponents whom Jordan defeated in the 1968 council election, incumbent and segregationist Paul Schweitzer, conceded that Jordan’s victory represented “a new era that we’re coming into” (“People Express Desire For Change,” 1968). Jordan was elevated to a General District Court judgeship in 1977, a first in Norfolk.

Today, the City Council is evenly divided with four whites and four blacks, including me as mayor. Also, the city’s General Assembly delegation (shared with neighboring cities) has one black state senator, and two white state senators, as well as three black state delegates and three white delegates. African Americans in some other key positions in Norfolk include the

commonwealth's attorney, city treasurer, police chief, schools superintendent, and three of the seven School Board members.

“She had a great impact,” said longtime friend Alveta V. Green, who served on the Norfolk School Board for seven years after retiring from teaching. “She pushed us to vote and inspired us to work for a better Norfolk. As a result, I think we have a more viable city than we had in those days” (A. V. Green, personal communication, March 1, 2018). The white-owned *Virginian-Pilot* daily newspaper agreed. When Butts died in 1993, The *Virginian-Pilot* observed in an editorial that Butts “made a unique contribution in Norfolk by bringing the black community into the political process in a way that has nourished rather than stifled effective biracial governance in the city” (“In Norfolk, From Plaintiff to Political Force,” 1993).

The U. S. Supreme Court's *Harper v. Virginia* (1966) decision has also had profound impact beyond its effect on voter registration and electoral victories, according to voting rights experts and legal scholars. Political historian Alexander Keyssar (2009) says the poll tax ruling was both innovative in its use of the 14th amendment and historic in that it drove “the final nail” into a “vestigial class limitation” on voting. “Almost two centuries after the nation's founding, economic restrictions on voting had been abolished in all general elections,” Keyssar writes. “What once had been believed to be the most essential qualification for the franchise—the possession of property—officially had been judged irrelevant” (pp. 219–220).

Historian Brent Tarter included Butts in a chapter about Virginia's modern transforming revolutionaries and revolutionary actions in his 2013 book, *The Grandees of Government: The Origins and Persistence of Undemocratic Politics in Virginia*. Tarter notes that the *Harper* case (1966)—in combination with the 24th amendment, which banned poll taxes in federal elections, and the 1965 Voting Rights Act—“finally removed the most important of the barriers that for

more than a century had prevented most black Virginians and many poor white Virginians from registering and voting” (p. 329). The *Harper* case, Tarter continues, was also among “the most important of the civil rights cases that arose in Virginia” because it helped to “profoundly” influence “the course of American law and race relations” and begin “a slow transformation of the ways in which black people lived in their home state” (p. 329).

Furthermore, Tarter (2013) suggests that the *Harper* (1966) case in combination with other Virginia civil rights cases helped to make the “civil rights movement in Virginia... both a democratic and a democratizing event” (p. 329). The movement in Virginia was democratic, says Tarter, in that it sprung from the grassroots and from community activists who “pushed further and faster against racial segregation than the state’s principal civil rights organization, the NAACP, wished to move,” while being also “democratizing in that it brought into the political process many people who had been disenfranchised or excluded from participation in public life” (pp. 329–330).

Ronnie L. Podolefsky, in her 1998 law review analysis, *Illusion of Suffrage: Female Voting Rights and the Women's Poll Tax Repeal Movement after the Nineteenth Amendment*, also comments on the *Harper* case as intersectional. This 1966 poll tax decision, Podolefsky writes, was important to the rights of poor African American women because, in part, it “was not decided as an issue of race or of gender, but rather upon one manifestation of the intersection of the two: the inability to participate in the political process by reason of poverty” (p. 887).

Meanwhile, the democratic and democratizing aspects of the Supreme Court’s poll tax ruling are highlighted by Bruce Ackerman and Jennifer Nou (2009) in *Canonizing the Civil Rights Revolution: The People and the Poll Tax* as they discuss *Harper* case’s impact on the political citizenship of all Americans. Our society should celebrate the *Harper* victory, Ackerman

and Nou say, because it codifies “a larger effort by the American people, during the 1960s, to create a more egalitarian democracy. *Harper* is not the product of an activist Court, but of an activist People” (p. 133).

John Bonifaz, founder of the nonprofit, nonpartisan National Voting Rights Institute and the Free Speech for People organization, has called Butts a hero and notes that the *Harper* (1966) ruling became a legal precedent for the 1972 *Bullock v. Carter* Supreme Court ruling that struck down high filing fees for candidates in Texas primaries (Knepler, 2001b).

Impact of World War II: Up Close and Personal

Evelyn and Charlie Butts did not like to talk about Charlie’s experiences in World War II, according to their youngest daughter, Charlene (Ligon, C. B., personal communication, January 11, 2018). But their behavior and activities sometimes spoke for them.

Evelyn and Charlie were married on September 7, 1941. Charlie, a steelworker who had recently returned to Virginia after nine years at a steel mill in upstate New York, was 17 years older than Evelyn. They met when Charlie was staying with his cousin in the same neighborhood where Evelyn lived. Evelyn was already raising her first child, Patricia Ann, as a single mother, as well as helping to raise her own three younger sisters, all of whom lived with Evelyn’s aunt, Roz White. After marrying, Evelyn and Charlie rented a small house four blocks away. In 1942, Evelyn and Charlie became the parents of daughter Jeanette. Later that year, on September 30, 1942, Charlie joined the war effort, serving in the U.S. Army’s 839th Engineering Battalion and operating and maintaining gas- and diesel-powered shovels and working with a bridge crane. Severely injured in a blast, Charlie returned to the United States in 1945 with shrapnel wounds in his back and spent seven months in a Kentucky hospital before coming home to Norfolk (Ligon, 2017, pp. 15–18).

Charlie Butts worked for a while as a civilian employee of the Norfolk Naval Air Station, and he and Evelyn were able to buy the small house they had been renting. But Charlie had to retire early when his disability grew worse. He took on odd jobs around the neighborhood to supplement his Army pension. The couple's youngest child, Charlene, was born in 1948 in the segregated Norfolk Community Hospital (Ligon, 2017, pp. 18–19).

Evelyn Butts also worked both while Charlie was in the Army and after he returned home. Her culinary skills got her a job as a cook in the Ames & Brownley department store in downtown Norfolk, and she cleaned houses on the side. She eventually left the department store and then performed domestic work for two white women, the Lambert sisters, and ironed at home for a “Mrs. Brown.” At some point in the early 1950s, Evelyn decided it would be easier for her to care for her then-100% disabled husband and the children by working in her home as a seamstress (Ligon, 2017, pp. 17–20). “She started staying home and sewing, and sometimes people would bring their laundry and clothes and bedsheets for ironing,” Ligon recalled, adding that her mother also made or tailored much of the family's clothing (C. B. Ligon, personal communication, January 11, 2018).

By working at home, Evelyn could also avoid having to ride the local segregated buses and trolleys to jobs in other parts of Norfolk. But as her community and political activities expanded, Evelyn saw that she needed transportation to meetings, forums, rallies, and similar events. Her family did not own a car at the time, but she did not let that problem stop her. Evelyn began enlisting neighbors to drive her (C. B. Ligon, personal communication, January 11, 2018; (H. Smith, personal communication, February 20, 2018).

The late 1940s and the decade of the 1950s also was an era when many African American veterans of World War II were involving themselves in civil rights, community, and political

activism (as this study discussed in Chapter II). Black veterans in Norfolk were no different, and Evelyn Butts' life was influenced by her association with them, especially a trio of attorneys, Victor J. Ashe, J. Hugo Madison, and Joseph A. Jordan Jr., the latter who had become severely disabled while serving with the U.S. Army in Europe. As noted earlier in this chapter, Madison and Jordan represented the concerns of Butts and other Oakwood residents in the community's fight against Norfolk's proposed urban redevelopment project in the 1950s (Ligon, 2017, p. 59; F. R. White, 2018, p. 40), while Ashe, Madison, and Jordan were involved in lawsuits related to trying to integrate Norfolk's public schools after the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* U.S. Supreme Court decision (Littlejohn & Ford, 2012, p. 71). Jordan and Butts worked closely on many civil rights and political issues, including Butts' 1963 lawsuit to overthrow state and local poll taxes.

In addition, Butts seemed to have an affinity toward veterans. For example, in the 1961 picketing of the Washington Redskins preseason football game and segregated football arena, Butts brought along her daughter, Charlene, then age 12, and gave her a placard to carry that read "In War We Fight Together. Why Not Sit Together In Peace?" (Ligon, 2017, p. 88). According to her daughter, Butts also apparently felt both pride in working with Jordan and a need to protect him because of Jordan's World War II-related disability that had left him reliant on a wheelchair for mobility for the rest of his life. Ligon (2017) writes that Butts would quickly correct people who thought Jordan was suffering from a birth defect (p. 87).

As in some of her other enterprises (such as keeping neighborhood women informed about politics and civil rights), Butts combined her interests and skills as a matter of necessity. She deployed this ability, too, in regards to veterans. In the late 1970s, Evelyn and Charlie Butts were able to tap into a Veterans Administration's (VA) grant program as they moved from their

old home to a new one, and the VA money also could be used to add wheelchair access and other features to accommodate disabilities. Unfortunately, Charlie enjoyed the house for only a few years as he died on November 9, 1979. A year later, however, Evelyn was able to turn the new house into another home-based business, taking in up to three elderly, disabled veterans as boarders for whom she would also provide meals. The arrangement supplemented her seamstress income until the end of her life (Ligon, 2017, pp. 187–193).

Yet another way that veterans figured in Evelyn Butts' life came nearly a quarter-century after she had died. Although daughter Charlene Butts Ligon did not serve in World War II, she was a military veteran, serving in the U.S. Air Force.

Legacy of Leadership

Evelyn Butts is best known as the initiator of the successful lawsuit that led to the U.S. Supreme Court declaring state and local poll taxes unconstitutional. However, her legacy in leadership extends far beyond that historic legal victory; indeed, it could be argued that her great victory at the Supreme Court was more the doing of a team of gifted lawyers, the makeup of the Supreme Court in 1966, the political mood of the nation in the early to mid-1960s, and being in the right place at the right time. To discuss the leadership lessons from Butts' life, one needs to start many years before she filed her poll tax law suit against Virginia Governor Albertis S. Harrison in November 1963.

When considering the longer-range perspective, it is apparent that the ingredients that made Butts an important grassroots civil rights leader actually entail a continuum of activism that began in the mid-1940s and continued for many years after her victory against the poll tax. Most notably, Butts' leadership legacy wasn't just that her lawsuit knocked out the poll tax but that she parlayed that victory into tireless efforts to help register, educate, and encourage the turnout of

thousands of new African American voters. The fruits of those efforts included the election of African Americans Joseph A. Jordan Jr. to the Norfolk City Council and William P. Robinson Sr. to the Virginia House of Delegates (as discussed in this chapter's subsection class issues, democracy, and voting).

Taking a few more steps back in time, we can also see that the story of Butts' leadership began with a confluence of events that occurred before she became active in her community. As noted in Chapter I, Butts' childhood was marred by the early deaths of her eldest sister, Julia, and her mother, Lottie, both from tuberculosis (Ligon, 2017, p. 13). Young Evelyn was 10 at the time of her mother's passing, and she and her younger siblings moved into the home of their aunt, Rosa Lee White ("Aunt Roz"), in the Oakwood community. Even so, Evelyn, as the now eldest girl, had to assume the role of "female head of the family" and take on much of the responsibility of rearing her siblings (Ligon, 2017, p. 15).

"My momma was strong, and maybe she was because of all the adversity in her young life that she knew she needed to be strong," Butts' daughter, Charlene, observed. "It also meant a lot to her to be able to do things for people" (C. B. Ligon, personal communication, January 11, 2018).

Aunt Roz had a strong interest in politics, listened to the news on the radio every evening, and discussed the issues with a neighbor, according to an interview that Norfolk historian Tommy L. Bogger conducted with Butts in 1989. "This is where I got part of my political aspiration from," Butts told Bogger (T. L. Bogger, personal communication with E. T. Butts, 1989).

The time period coincided with the Great Depression of the 1930s and the start of America's buildup to World War II. Living with her Aunt Roz exposed Evelyn to more than an

interest in politics: Aunt Roz was an entrepreneur who owned a small grocery store, and neighborhood women were very willing to teach Evelyn to become an excellent cook (Ligon, 2017, p. 14–15).

Another significant step in Butts' development as a leader came a few years later when she joined the Oakwood Civic League, a group that represented all residents of the Oakwood neighborhood and tried to address community issues. Butts was mentored by the organization's president, Annie Nickens. Then, in the early 1950s, Nickens invited Butts to a meeting of the Norfolk Branch of the NAACP (Ligon, 2017, pp. 17, 20).

The combined experiences contributed to Butts' emergence and growth as a grassroots leader, for she learned to pay attention to the news, saw how neighbors could help each other, began developing her public speaking skills, and experienced the importance of mentors and of connecting community concerns with larger issues (through the NAACP). "This is how I got involved more politically," Butts would tell Bogger when she reflected on her life in 1989 (T. L. Bogger, personal communication with E. T. Butts, 1989).

In these early years of Butts' emergence as a grassroots leader, we can also see a certain leadership style take form, the style that sociologist Belinda Robnett (1997) calls "bridge leadership" (p. 19), as discussed in Chapter I, especially Robnett's point about bridge leaders fostering ties between a social movement and a community.

By the mid-1950s, Evelyn Butts, standing at 5 feet 7 inches, had also become a physical presence. Her family and friends used terms such as the following to describe her: large, loud, gravel-voiced, and, at times, stubborn, domineering and bullheaded (Ligon, 2017, p. 20; Swift, 1993). Daughter Charlene Ligon writes that her mother was "a big woman... stout and pillowy, and her size was part of her personality." Ligon continues:

She had a big voice and big laugh to go along with her girth, and under the right circumstances she could come across as intimidating. She knew it, too. She did not mind that people in and outside the family called her bossy. (Ligon, 2017, p. 20; E. W. James, personal communication, February 7, 2018)

She also alternated between commanding and encouraging, “caring and nurturing,” says Ligon (2017), adding, “She knew when to be bold and when to be soft. It was a rare gift.” (p. 20). To friends and allies, Butts’ personality made it hard for them to say “no” to her ideas and requests. “She had this way of magnetizing people,” says friend Charlie Bryant, while Walter H. Green Sr. says, “She was the type of person, if she came to your door, you couldn’t tell her to go away” (Knepler, 2001). State Del. William P. Robinson Jr. describes Butts as “a woman who didn’t know the meaning of the word ‘no,’” (“A Worthy Celebration,” 2006).

Butts, though, won over people with more than the force of her big persona. Friends, such as retired educator Alveta V. Green and longtime Norfolk civil rights activist Ellis W. James have described her as a spirited and joyful warrior. “She really liked what she was doing,” Green said. “Even when she was angry, she never got down” (A. V. Green, personal communication, March 1, 2018). Or as James said of Butts, “she had an indomitable spirit... and she used it in a joyful way” (E. W. James, personal communication, February 7, 2018).

According to friends, Butts was also deeply committed to the causes of civil rights, social justice, and meaningful political participation—in other words, political citizenship. As fellow activist Ellis W. James noted, Butts did not slow down after winning the poll tax legal challenge at the U.S. Supreme Court in 1966. “Her work was still the same, trying to improve participation for African Americans and poor whites in the Norfolk and Virginia governments, to change it from an all-white oligarchy,” James said (E. W. James, personal communication, February 7, 2018).

A long list of Butts' leadership traits emerges from interviews I conducted with friends and observers as well from memories about Butts that I gathered from newspaper articles written after Butts had died in 1993. I will note some of the most repeated characteristics here along with sources, followed by a few longer embellishments from either the personal interviews or newspaper stories.

Alveta V. Green, Herbert Smith, and Rachel Smith regarded Butts as knowledgeable, resourceful, reliable, and trustworthy. "She would do her homework," said Green (A. V. Green, personal communication, March 1, 2018), while Rachel Smith noted,

She was the one person you could go to get the right information about something. And if she didn't know the answer, she'd say, "Let me call somebody because that doesn't sound right. Let me call somebody to find out exactly what it is." (R. Smith, personal communication, February 19, 2018)

Rachel Smith described Butts as "authentic" (R. Smith, personal communication, February 19, 2018), with other friends agreeing and adding that Butts was sincere and hardworking. "Whatever she did, she poured her heart into it, and she was always the same way," James said (E. W. James, personal communication, February 7, 2018), while Green said Butts "was always working on something out in the community and always talking to people" (A. V. Green, personal communication, March 1, 2018).

As a grassroots leader, Butts was acknowledged to be genuinely interested in the well-being of her neighbors, especially the children, and always grounded in her roots, according to friends Herbert Smith and Rachel Smith. "She knew everybody in Oakwood or at least knew someone in your family," Rachel Smith said. "And she'd say something like, 'Your aunt is such and such, but I haven't seen her in a while. What's going on?'" (R. Smith, personal communication, February 19, 2018).

Butts' concern about her neighbors extended even to newcomers. One time, she learned that the principal of the nearby Rosemont Elementary School would not allow a new boy named Francis to attend classes because his parents did not submit the correct paperwork, according to Alveta V. Green, who was teaching at Rosemont at the time. "So his mother went to see Evelyn, and the next thing you know is that Evelyn is walking the mother and the little boy into the school and getting him registered with the principal" (A. V. Green, personal communication, June 1, 2018).

"Right from when I first met her, I knew she was a real go-getter," said Green, who recalled meeting Butts in the late 1950s at a meeting in the offices of local civil rights lawyer Joseph A. Jordan Jr. (A. V. Green, personal communication, March 1, 2018). In addition, Butts had a knack for engaging people to join with her, Green said, observing that "She had a personality for winning people over because she could explain something so they would know what she was talking about" (A. V. Green, personal communication, March 1, 2018).

Butts also would not ask others to do something she had never done or would not do alongside them. "She wasn't afraid to ask people to do things, and she set the example by doing those things herself" (A. V. Green, personal communication June 1, 2019). A newspaper feature several years after Butts had died provides further evidence of this trait with a comment from former neighbor Andrew Smith, who remembers Butts as "a great role model for us." Said Andrew Smith: "She'd always fight for us. She was right there in the neighborhood doing these things. We could actually see her working. It gave us all a sense that you can fight City Hall and that you can win" (as quoted in Knepler, 2001a).

Butts also proved to be tenacious when fighting against perceived injustices, whether in the streets of Norfolk or in City Hall, according to friends such as Herbert Smith and activists Walter and Lola Dickerson.

Herbert Smith remembered driving home from work one winter day and noticing a family being evicted from an apartment building in the nearby Chesapeake Gardens community—with snow coming down on all their belongings. Minutes later, Smith said, he told Butts what he had witnessed and she said, “Take me over there.” Butts marched up to the apartment employees and a deputy sheriff who was enforcing the eviction and “told them ‘you can’t put people out like this,’” Smith recalled (H. Smith, personal communication, February 19, 2018).

“Whatever else she said, it looked like she (had) scared them to death,” Smith continued. “The deputy sheriff turned those guys around and made them put all that furniture back in the house” (H. Smith, personal communication, February 19, 2018).

Such incidents helped make Herbert Smith willing to assist Butts on many of her missions, usually by driving her to meetings and events even after he had just come home from a long, hard day of labor as a brick mason (H. Smith, personal communication, February 20, 2018).

For friends and other allies, it could be a treat to watch Butts in action, talking to the local authorities, or even going door to door with petitions. Herbert Smith said Butts would lecture the City Council for 15 to 20 minutes about one issue or another but would not get angry if the council rejected her plea. “She just told them, ‘I’ll see you again next week,’” Smith said (H. Smith, personal communication, February 20, 2018). Alveta V. Green said Butts could be equally tenacious with a neighbor who was reluctant to sign a petition. Green would mention the name of

a neighbor who didn't sign, and Butts would respond, "Give me that petition. I'm going to get her to sign," Green recalled. "And that's what she did" (A. V. Green, personal communication, March 1, 2018).

Butts also wasn't afraid to take on African American institutions. Marie G. Young, a close friend and her chief lieutenant in Women of Virginia's Third Force, recalled in a 1996 news interview (Colvin, 1996) that the organization, under Butts' leadership, once picketed the black-owned *Journal and Guide* newspaper after disagreeing with a political endorsement.

"Evelyn was fearless," Green repeated several times in my two interviews with her (A. V. Green, personal communication, March 1, 2018, & June 1, 2018).

Butts would naturally command attention when she led a neighborhood meeting or a gathering of the Women of Virginia's Third Force. "I can always remember her gesturing with her right hand and arm while talking," said Butts' daughter, Charlene. "And no matter what topic, she would always get in something about voting because she said that was the way for us to have our voice heard" (C. B. Ligon, personal communication, January 11, 2018). She also had an aptitude for rousing audience members into action. "When anything came up, she had somebody, some man with a car, one of her drivers, and she could say, 'Go take this petition and that one,' and she knew it would get done. We were like her army," recalls Alveta V. Green (as quoted in Ligon, 2017, p. 94).

Creative and entrepreneurial like her Aunt Roz, Butts seemed to have a knack for combining her talents in ways that grassroots people would be comfortable connecting with her. Annette Bryant told a news reporter some years ago that Butts was always available to help with a question about cooking or sewing—just as Oakwood neighborhood women assisted her years earlier—and then use the opportunity to pass on information about civil rights or politics. "And

we always got a good laugh out of her. She was an all-around person. She loved her family, loved her neighborhood and, oh yeah, she could cook!” Bryant said (as quoted in Knepler, 2001a).

In a similar way, Butts tried to combine her membership in the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) at one of daughter Charlene’s schools with her interest in voter participation. One year, Butts installed a large cardboard chart in the school and listed the names of all the parents, with a star next to each one who was registered to vote as a way to motivate other parents to register. She had cleared it with the principal, but then the principal took it down apparently on orders from Norfolk’s school superintendent or in fear of losing his job (T. L. Bogger, personal communication with E. T. Butts, 1989; Ligon, 2017, p. 76).

Butts somehow also found time to serve as secretary to the Norfolk NAACP (Ligon, 2017, p. 88) and later as secretary to the then-new Norfolk chapter of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.’s SCLC. The Norfolk SCLC was established in November 1963, and King sent a congratulatory telegram that thanked the local members “for joining in the great struggle for freedom” (“Officers, Purposes Listed,” 1963). She also joined the local chapter of the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE) for a while (C. B. Ligon, personal communication, January 11, 2018).

From time to time, Butts would help organize and lead other local civil rights and political organizations, such as the Women for Political Action (“Women Group Gets Name,” 1969), and would be appointed to the boards of several government-related entities, such as the Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority and the Virginia Board of Housing and Community Development, as noted earlier in this chapter.

But there are three community-based organizations where Butts made her greatest contributions as a grassroots leader, directly affecting the lives of untold thousands of her fellow Norfolk citizens: the Oakwood-Rosemont Civic League, serving as president from 1959 to 1985; Women of Virginia's Third Force, serving as president from 1958 until her death in 1993; and Concerned Citizens for Political Education, for which she was chairperson from 1968 to 1990. In each, she applied similar methods of leadership, which included hours of personal outreach through door-to-door canvassing and telephone calls, organizing carpools or van rides for dozens of people to attend local government meetings and other events, carefully maintaining rosters of registered voters, and mentoring other African Americans with leadership abilities.

Norfolk historian Tommy L. Bogger describes Butts as “a wizard of grassroots organization” in a forthcoming book on Norfolk’s African American history (Bogger et al., 2018, pp. 262–266), while Alveta V. Green said she witnessed Butts’ organizational ability many times. For example, she said, Butts helped launch Joseph A. Jordan Jr.’s successful candidacy for the Norfolk City Council with a meeting of dozens of women convened in Green’s living room in late 1967. Butts told the gathering that Jordan needed to collect a certain threshold of voter signatures to properly file as a candidate, and she explained to the women how to collect the signatures and make sure the signers were registered voters in Norfolk and had clearly printed their addresses. “This happened right over there, and we set up folding chairs all over the room,” Green said. “Evelyn gave them a real good pep talk about going out and getting this petition signed” (A. V. Green, personal communication, March 1, 2018).

With the Oakwood-Rosemont Civic League, Butts helped lead neighborhood resistance to Norfolk’s proposed massive clearance and redevelopment of the all-black, low-income community, saving the homes of hundreds of African American residents, as discussed in the

racism sub-section of this chapter. Then, as president of the Women of Virginia's Third Force, Butts organized innumerable voter-registration, voter-education, and voter-turnout drives both before and after the U.S. Supreme Court struck down poll taxes in March 1966, as noted in this chapter's sub-section on class issues, democracy and voting rights. Butts' activities as a leader of the Concerned Citizens for Political Education are discussed in that same sub-section.

Longtime Norfolk City Council member Paul R. Riddick, a former president of the Norfolk NAACP, told a news reporter after Butts died:

She single-handedly helped transform the political process of Norfolk to make it a useful tool for Black empowerment.... No one has or will equal her role and ability to mobilize the masses to vote and make an impact on an election. (Colvin, 1993)

When she died in 1993, Horace Downing, a longtime grassroots leader of Norfolk's Berkley neighborhood, said of Butts:

She taught me everything I know about working with the community and politics. I didn't have to go to school. I got a master's degree from her. She taught a whole lot of fellows who now enjoy the benefit of her work. ("Legendary Local Activist," 1993)

Butts' political mentees included Dr. Yvonne B. Miller, who got her start in helping Butts' voter-registration drives in the 1960s (Hansen, 2002). In 1983, Miller was elected to Virginia's House of Delegates and, in 1987, she was elected to the state Senate—the first African American woman to have that distinction. She died in 2012.

In Butts' heyday, the small home where she raised three children, cared for her disabled husband, and worked as a seamstress, also served as her command headquarters for organizing neighborhood, civil rights, and political activities. "I remember her having her legal pads with lists of people she had to coordinate," Ligon said. "And if they were doing something for Election Day, she had to make sure they all had their lunches" (C. B. Ligon, personal communication, January 11, 2018).

Family and friends say she was also so prepared with handwritten lists of neighbors and other Norfolk residents that she could quickly determine who she needed to reach out to and either call that person, knock on his or her door, or send a volunteer with a car to give the person a ride. Butts would use the same process over and over for a variety of issues or when trying to make sure that everyone she knew voted on Election Day. As the years went by, the main changes in her techniques were learning how to drive herself and using computer-generated voter lists (C. B. Ligon, personal communication, January 11, 2018).

As Ligon (2017) recalls, her mother, on Election Day, would arrive at her precinct polling place at 6 a.m., toting lunch with her because she planned to be there all day. She also had either a handwritten list of everyone registered to vote in her precinct, or computer printout in later years, and arranged to have “four cars and drivers on hand” (p. 188). “She knew everyone in the community, and as they came to vote, she marked them on the list,” Ligon said. “But if they didn’t vote by a certain time” then Butts would send one of the drivers to the person’s home and expect the person to show up at the polls (C. B. Ligon, personal communication, January 11, 2018).

Herbert Smith, Butts’ reliable driver for so many other activities, was always among the drivers on Election Day, too, and said he sometimes would carry “four or five voters at a time” (H. Smith, February 20, 2018).

Whether it was politics or civil rights, Butts always tried to help others around her gain greater insight and access to the political process. She was even able to procure a voting machine and take it to various community meetings, where she would demonstrate how to work it. “She would go around to the neighborhoods to educate the people with it and then encourage them to go register to vote,” said Alveta V. Green (A. V. Green, personal communication, March 1,

2018). “Evelyn would tell them, ‘You don’t need to be afraid to go and vote. This is how you vote on the machine’” (A. V. Green, personal communication, June 1, 2018).

Butts was so passionate about voting power that whenever she met newcomers to Norfolk she would ask about their voter-registration status, Green recalled (A. V. Green, personal communication, June 1, 2018).

The Women of Virginia’s Third Force provided Butts with additional opportunities for educating voters—and politicians. The group not only helped register, inform, and turn out voters, but also worked to influence state legislators by making annual visits to Virginia’s General Assembly under Butts’ leadership (“Third Force Women,” 1970; Voters Club Tours General Assembly,” 1968). Unfortunately, local newspapers did not provide in-depth coverage of these visits to the legislature; the black-owned *Journal and Guide* published only posed photos of the women standing in groups, while the white-owned *Virginian-Pilot* and *Ledger-Star* did not run anything at all. Despite the inadequate coverage, the tactic of organizing citizens to visit their elected officials is an essential component of any political education activity and lobbying campaign, and it suggests excellent leadership. I say that based on my experience as a Virginia state delegate for 10 years and a state senator for four. I found most such legislative visits by citizen groups to be rewarding for both the citizens and the legislators. Typically, the citizen groups would meet with their respective representatives and discuss community concerns and proposed legislation, try to visit several key legislators, and attend—or perhaps even testify at—hearings held by various committees or subcommittees. Citizens would go away with a better understanding of the legislative process and knowledge into what their own district representative was working on, while legislators would gain insights about why certain issues were important to their constituents.

As for insights into how Butts operated, newspaper accounts during her civil rights heyday acknowledged her skills in being “politically astute, knowledgeable... and not afraid” (“Enter Evelyn Butts,” 1980) but rarely described her in action or fleshed out her personality in feature stories until late in her political career or after her death. Here is an example of what the news media missed: In 1968, the *Journal and Guide* ran a news story about more than 800 people attending a political event at which Butts was one of the main speakers. But the only reporting about Butts was as follows: “Mrs. Evelyn Butts spoke on ‘What Women Can Do in This Election’”—*period*—with no information about what Butts had actually recommended or otherwise said (“More Than 800 Attend,” 1968). The same article was only slightly better when it came to reporting the remarks of keynote speaker Juanita Jackson Mitchell as the story noted only that Mitchell “addressed the importance of the issues involved in the general election” (“More Than 800 Attend,” 1968). Also, the story identified Mitchell only as an attorney from Baltimore but left out that she was the first African American woman to practice law in Maryland and had a long record of filing discrimination lawsuits and organizing voter-registration drives. Three more women were named in the story, but their comments were not quoted or paraphrased.

Despite newspapers at the time not explaining well what Butts did to encourage voter participation, Norfolk politicians – white as well as black – knew and respected Butts’ reputation for getting voters to the polls, even after her own political demise. G. Conoly Phillips, a white businessman, had served on the Norfolk City Council from 1976 to 1980 but lost in his re-election bid—with Butts being among his opponents who obtained more votes, even though Butts was defeated as well. Phillips decided to run again in 1986. However, he had lost political favor with a politically powerful group of other white businessmen, so he turned to Butts, his former opponent, for help. Beating the odds, Phillips was elected in his 1986 run and credits

Butts for making the difference. “She was able to get me 5,000 black votes,” Phillips said. “If it hadn’t been for Evelyn Butts, I would never had been elected in ’86” (G. C. Phillips, personal communication, November 28, 2018).

Butts also seemed to be popular with Oakwood neighborhood children, according to Herbert Smith’s daughter, Rachel Smith. She would frequently engage with children playing outdoors, ask about their well-being and about their parents. Invariably, she’d also ask about their grades in school, remind them that they were the future, and fuss at them if she caught them playing hooky. “She really pushed education. One of the things she’d say was ‘Your moment is going to come, but you got to be ready for it. That’s why you got to school and go to college so you’ll be ready for a different day. You got to be ready,’” Rachel Smith recalled (R. Smith, personal communication, February 20, 2018).

Her talks with children weren’t always about school. She loved watching them play, and many times she’d give youngsters a little money to run errands for her. As the children grew, Butts told them she would give them job references. “If we had a question about something and she didn’t know, she said she’d look into it. And she did,” Rachel Smith said. “That’s how the kids grew to love her because she was a woman of her word” (R. Smith, personal communication, February 20, 2018).

“Ms. Evelyn was the go-to person to get stuff done in Oakwood, and you saw every day she was doing something,” Rachel Smith added (R. Smith, personal communication, February 20, 2018). Some youngsters were so impressed with Butts that they chose to write essays about her for Black History Month, according to Rachel Smith, who explained, “I didn’t know Booker T. Washington, but I knew Evelyn Butts.”

From such anecdotes, insights, and patterns, a multifaceted picture begins to emerge about Butts' leadership qualities. With brief recapitulations of examples, they include:

- Personal communication is effective for building momentum or support for a cause or a political candidate. Butts' daughter, Charlene Butts Ligon, and surviving friends Butts was tireless in going door to door and telephoning neighbors about community, civil rights, and political issues.

- Even if you do not possess many tangible or financial resources, be creative and entrepreneurial with what you do have. When Norfolk's voter-registration office refused to give Joseph A. Jordan Jr. a copy of registered voters, Butts assigned herself to go to City Hall and copy the list by hand, a task that took about two months. She also acquired a voting machine to take to community meetings, where she demonstrated how to vote. And she tried to encourage voter registration through a PTA project until stopped by a school principal.

- Be persistent. Friends remember how Butts would return to speak out at City Council meetings week after week after being initially turned down on requests. She applied similar persistence to making sure her neighbors paid their poll taxes, registered to vote, and showed up on Election Day. She and her lawyer, Joseph A. Jordan Jr., had to refile her poll tax lawsuit three times before it was combined with another lawsuit and considered by the U.S. Supreme Court.

- Don't be afraid to speak up when trying to right a wrong. Butts did not hesitate to challenge local and state government officials, newspaper editors, ministers, NAACP leaders, and anyone else she thought was blocking the way to social justice for marginalized people.

- Be a good organizer or have someone on your team who has such skills. And be prepared. Butts realized the importance of having lists of registered voters and used them well to

recruit new voters and also for voter turnout on Election Day. She also prearranged for volunteer drivers to make sure that voters would show up at the polls.

- Follow through on promises. If someone had a community- or government-related question that Butts could not immediately answer, she would find out the information and report back.

- Stay connected with your base but also reach out to forge additional alliances. The Oakwood neighborhood remained as Butts' anchor throughout her many activities, but she built bridges across Norfolk through Women of Virginia's Third Force and the Concerned Citizens for Political Education, and to national civil rights organizations, such as the SCLC.

- Teach others. As a young mother, Butts learned about politics, community organizing, and cooking from the likes of her Aunt Roz, Annie Nickens, and Oakwood neighborhood women. Over the years, she gave similar lessons to younger generations, even inspiring some mentees to eventually run for political office.

- Walk the talk. Butts had a reputation for never asking others to do things she had never done. Neighbors saw her in the trenches alongside them every day. Sometimes this lesson was forgotten by younger politicians and activists. For example, by 1992, a year before Butts' death, several emerging Norfolk leaders admitted to a news reporter that they did not include voter registration as part of their strategies because they thought other people and organizations would do it for them (Knepler, 1992).

In 1995, the City Council agreed to rename Oakwood's Elm Street as Evelyn T. Butts Avenue. Alveta V. Green concluded the ceremony by reciting the poem, "The Bridge Builder," by Will Allen Dromgoole. "It's about an old man waded through a stream but turned around to build a bridge for others who might need it someday. This is what Evelyn embodied," Green said

when I interviewed her. “She wasn’t building things just for herself. She was always building for others who would come after her (A. V. Green, personal communication, June 1, 2018).

In Chapter V, I will examine how Butts, as a grassroots leader and community organizer, fits within the continuum of African American civil rights movements.

Chapter V: Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

Introduction

As I embarked on my narrative inquiry into the life and grassroots leadership and political citizenship of Evelyn Butts, I was guided by a research question that asked: How could a low-income African American woman—a high school dropout who grew up under a system of Jim Crow racism—become an accomplished civil rights bridge leader who helped destroy the oppressive poll tax, inspire thousands of voters, and change the political landscape of Norfolk, Virginia, all while spending decades caring for her disabled husband, raising three children, and juggling various low-paying jobs?

The answer that emerged is based on speculation—albeit well-informed speculation—because Butts is no longer living to tell her own story. That answer, in the form of a narrative analysis, was also constructed from a triangulation of resources: interviews with friends who knew Evelyn Butts well; a self-published memoir-style biography written by Butts' surviving daughter, Charlene, whom I also interviewed; and archives of local newspapers, plus books about or containing Norfolk history, including a few that mention Evelyn Butts. I became convinced that Butts had learned about survival, bravery, and self-reliance in her pre-teen and teen years during the Great Depression of the 1930s and then as a young wartime bride in the 1940s managing her household while her husband served in the U.S. Army thousands of miles away. In these formative years, Butts saw that survival depended on taking action, grew confident in her leadership abilities, and recognized that the skills for self-reliance extended from mutual help among family members and neighbors.

Years later, Butts proved to be fearless when challenging the Jim Crow system and anyone—white or black—who got in the way of her crusades. She had already overcome the

premature deaths of a sister and mother, survived being a single mother during the Great Depression, and became the key caregiver for her disabled husband; it was as if she said to any would-be racist or sexist oppressor, “I am stronger than you. You can’t keep me down.”

Butts’ daughter, Charlene Butts Ligon, reached a similar conclusion about her mother. “My momma was strong, and maybe she was because of all the adversity in her young life that she knew she needed to be strong,” Ligon told me. “It also meant a lot to her to be able to do things for people” (C. B. Ligon, personal communication, January 11, 2018). Longtime friends Alveta V. Green and Herbert Smith agreed with this assessment.

While the answer to my research question may not be conclusive, the act of conducting interviews with those who knew Evelyn Butts proved rewarding in several ways. For one, it personalized for me what qualitative research experts Steinar Kvale and Svend Brinkmann (2009) mean when they wrote that “The knowledge is not merely found, mined, or given, but is actively created through questions and answers, and the product is co-authored by interviewer and interviewee” (p. 54). Such interviews also become the building blocks of a narrative analysis, which, in essence is the story telling that describes human experience, legitimizes the experiences, extends knowledge in new ways, and helps us interpret the world (Riessman, 1993).

Through narrative analysis, I not only gained deeper insight into the life of Evelyn Butts but also into world she was born into and significant events—personal and societal—that impacted her life. The process, at times, became cyclical in that I collected data, analyzed it, collected more data, and reanalyzed.

In addition, my exploration into the historical context for what Evelyn Butts was struggling *against* and fighting *for*, gave me—even as a longtime student of history—a more profound personal appreciation of the impacts of white supremacy, Jim Crow apartheid, the

so-called Virginia Way, and the mountains that civil rights activist had to climb. Those insights left me feeling even more amazed about the life, leadership legacy, and political citizenship of Evelyn Butts.

I came away also with a firmer conviction that local grassroots leaders were essential to the success of the modern civil rights movement and that African American women often led in ways that differed from the leadership styles of men. Historian Kathryn L. Nasstrom (1999), for example, has pointed out that grassroots organizing by African American women is increasingly “recognized as a critical movement activity in its own right and as an under-appreciated form of leadership” (p. 114). And, as sociologist Belinda Robnett (1997) has maintained, black women in the civil rights struggle were also, among many other roles, “instrumental as leaders in the recruitment and mobilization process and effective, influential leaders who elicited loyalty from their followers” (p. 191). Echoing Robnett, history professors Bettye Collier-Thomas and V. Franklin (2001) have written that “Many African American women leaders operated at the local level, establishing the links and connections with grassroots organizations that provided the mass support for civil rights goals and objectives” (pp. 3–4).

Evelyn Butts was all that Nasstrom, Robnett, Collier-Thomas, and Franklin have described—and more. And she continues to be relevant. She not only gives scholars insights into how the civil rights movement achieved success at the local level but also can teach and inspire us if we broaden our notions about leadership and explore ways to adapt her methods to today’s lifestyles and concerns. Addressing the ongoing problem of low voter turnout is always high in my mind; however, I can also conceive of other community issues to which the Evelyn Butts’ style can be applied.

Why Evelyn Butts?

Growing up in Norfolk, Virginia, I had heard about Evelyn Butts many times, especially in a historical context: She was a black woman who lived across town and who, as a civil rights activist, defeated the racist poll tax in a U.S. Supreme Court decision that had happened in 1966, coincidentally the year I was born. By the time I was a teenager in the early 1980s, I knew a few other things about her: that she was a commissioner for the powerful Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority and that she was part of a political organization that endorsed local and state candidates on gold-colored flyers sent to my grandmother and neighbors.

By the mid-1980s, Butts' political influence and her health both were waning. Black Norfolkkians who avidly followed local politics engaged in seemingly endless debates about African American community leaders. As much as I loved learning about government and politics, I was mostly oblivious due to the demands of my undergraduate college studies and my time spent helping my father in his mortuary business. In a few years, I became even busier as my father died and I had inherited his business and started my own family. When there was spare time, I became involved in my neighborhood civic league in hopes of helping to build up my inner-city community, which seemed neglected by City Hall for many years.

As for civil rights, I already had my heroes from history: the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., of course, but also James Howard Meredith, an African American Air Force veteran who had risked his life in 1962 to integrate the University of Mississippi with help from President John F. Kennedy and his brother, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy. It would be several years more before I gained a deeper understanding that the civil rights movement was not something played out mostly on the national level but also in many communities like Norfolk and that there were direct connections between civil rights issues and government decisions that affected

neighborhoods like mine. In other words, it mattered whom we elected to the Norfolk City Council and the Virginia government just as much as it mattered that the Kennedys were in power when James Meredith broke through the color barrier at Ole Miss. I began taking on leadership positions in my neighborhood and city, and eventually was elected to public office. All the while, lessons from history became more sharply focused.

Telescoping years forward, I became interested not only in what leaders did but also what made them tick and what we could learn from them. Through additional formal studies, I began to see that books and articles about history and leadership did not seem very inclusive. For example, not only were many African Americans and other minorities left out (other than prominent leaders on the national stage), but especially so were women and leaders at the grassroots level. I also saw that for many years my own understanding of the civil rights movement had been influenced by this narrow perspective.

Fortunately, I have also learned that many scholars have begun to recognize the gaps in their knowledge and are now working to add those missing pieces. I wanted to contribute, especially toward helping to address two problems: the need to better understand the roles of grassroots leaders in the modern civil rights movement; and the need to give greater recognition to African American women whose contributions were so crucial to the movement.

In recent years, a growing collection of scholars have spent more time on such issues. Pulitzer Prize-winning historian David Garrow, for example, observed in 2005 that many earlier scholars of the civil rights movement constructed their work on concepts of leadership that were too narrow and limited, mainly presenting those who led or represented the major civil rights organizations.

Similarly, more scholars have come to recognize that the civil rights leadership contributions of African American women have gone unstudied and unsung for too long. According to Judy A. Alston and Patrice A. McClellan (2011), “The achievements of Black women have not been celebrated, recorded, or deemed important enough to be included in the canon of leadership and organizational studies” (p. 51), adding that, “The exclusion of Black women’s roles in leadership literature and the overusage of the ‘great man’ leadership analysis limits our understanding of leadership as practiced by Black women activists” (p. 54). To help make the literature more representative, scholars such as Bettye Collier-Thomas and V. P. Franklin (2001) have suggested greater use of narrative inquiry, particularly with elements of oral history, biographical research, and eyewitness testimonies.

However, the antidote to the gaps in literature about women’s leadership in the civil rights movement is not in merely finding and writing about more African American women who helped organize civil rights activities. Scholars must take a deeper dive and examine these female leaders, their achievements, and how their leadership styles contributed in ways that were outside the bindings of traditional male-based leadership definitions. Black women, for example, could frame issues in different ways than men and they resisted oppression differently as well. As Rosa Parks said about the everyday frustrations of many African American women working low-paid domestic service jobs: “You spend your whole lifetime in your occupation... making life clever, easy and convenient for white people, but when you have to get transportation home, you are denied equal accommodation” (McGuire, 2011, pp. 60–61). It was no wonder that black women became the backbone of 1955–56 Montgomery Bus Boycott and that women such as Georgia Gilmore and Inez Ricks emerged from their toils to organize bake sales to help provide financial support (Robnett, 1997).

Thus, I became intrigued and excited with the prospect of helping to expand the scholarly literature on grassroots civil rights leaders, and even more so because the leader I had in mind was someone from my own hometown who had been vastly understudied. That person was Evelyn Butts.

Leadership Summary

As evidenced through the findings of Chapter IV, Evelyn Butts was a spirited and joyful warrior for civil rights, social justice, and meaningful political participation. Her characteristics, according to those who knew her, included being knowledgeable, resourceful, astute, reliable, trustworthy, authentic, sincere, hardworking, determined, creative, entrepreneurial, passionate, persistent, genuinely interested in the well-being of her neighbors (especially the children), tenacious, fearless, unafraid to speak up to politically powerful people, and committed to her causes. In addition, Butts was always grounded in her community roots, had a knack for engaging people to join with her, would naturally command attention, was well-organized and an excellent organizer for action, and would never ask others to do something that she had never done or would not do alongside them.

Best-known as a voting rights champion, Butts is associated with a landmark victory at the U.S. Supreme Court on March 24, 1966, when the justices ruled that poll taxes are unconstitutional for state and local elections. Butts filed the lawsuit, *Evelyn Butts v. Albertis Harrison, Governor, et al.*, that initiated this case in 1963 and that later became known as *Harper v. Virginia State Board of Elections* when combined with a similar lawsuit from plaintiffs in northern Virginia. While Butts will forever have a place in voting rights history because of the 1966 Supreme Court ruling, I believe that her contributions as a civil rights leader entail a much deeper legacy. In Chapter IV, I observed that one could argue that Butts' great victory at the

Supreme Court was more the doing of a team of gifted lawyers, the makeup of the Supreme Court in 1966, the political mood of the nation in the early to mid-1960s, and being in the right place at the right time.

Based on my research, especially my interviews with people who knew Butts well, I am more certain that Butts' legacy as a grassroots civil rights leader is also firmly planted in what she did both *before* and *after* her great Supreme Court victory. I would also suggest that Butts' record as a grassroots civil rights leader could stand on its own without her even being involved in the lawsuit that knocked out poll taxes for state and local elections.

Butts, as seen in Chapter IV, emerged as a grassroots civil rights leader in the mid-1950s, soon after the Supreme Court ruled that segregated public schools were unconstitutional. She was part of a generation of African American parents who had attended separate-but-*unequal* schools and were determined not to have their children endure the same deprivations and humiliations. Butts' activities in the late 1950s and early 1960s included speaking out at a School Board meeting to demand that Norfolk provide new textbooks for her daughter's all-black public school instead of hand-me-downs from a nearby all-white school (Ligon, 2017). Another of Butts' many civil rights activities occurred in 1963, when Butts helped organize a series of protests against rundown and overcrowded conditions at the city's outdated, all-black Booker T. Washington High School (Littlejohn & Ford, 2012).

Butts' concern for equality extended also to employment issues. For example, in 1959, she and a friend, Walter H. Green Sr., led the picketing of a local supermarket that paid African American employees less than its white workers and relegated the black workers to more menial and less visible jobs (A. V. Green, personal communication, March 1, 2018; Ligon, 2017). Then, in 1961, Butts and several friends took on the NFL's Washington Redskins for not having any

black players and picketed the team when it came to Norfolk to play an exhibition game in a segregated stadium (Ligon, 2017; McKenna, 2011).

From the late 1950s to early 1960s, Butts rallied her neighbors in the Oakwood community to resist efforts by the Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority to condemn and demolish the neighborhood. Instead, Butts encouraged her neighbors to renovate their own homes while she persuaded the city to pave the streets, install sidewalks, and perform other infrastructure improvements (Colvin, 1995; Ligon, 2017; White, 2018). Butts “saved this neighborhood out here,” said longtime neighbor Herbert Smith. “The city had put us on the demolition list,” he recalled. “She went around and got people to upgrade their bathrooms to get hooked into the city’s water system. Then she went down to City Hall and stayed in their faces until they agreed” (Knepler, 2001). The *Journal and Guide* newspaper reported that Butts demanded to the City Council that residents be given a voice in deciding the future of their communities (“Call for Voice,” 1961).

Butts’ extraordinary persistence was also apparent in her political work on behalf of her friend and attorney, Joseph A. Jordan Jr., especially when she took it upon herself to hand-copy Norfolk’s official list of voters after the city’s registration office refused Jordan’s request to see it. This tedious, self-assigned task of hand-copying the names of thousands of voters took more than two months. Another major example of Butts’ persistence came when Butts and Jordan had to refile her poll tax lawsuit two more times and endure defeats from lower courts before it was combined with another lawsuit for consideration by the U.S. Supreme Court.

Throughout her activism, Butts aimed to help give fellow citizens a meaningful voice in public decision-making, to help them achieve full political citizenship. Self-determination lay at the heart of Butts’ many campaigns for voter registration, voter education and voter turnout.

That's why, in Butts' heart and mind, discriminatory impediments, such as the poll tax, needed to be destroyed—a crusade that began years before Butts filed her 1963 poll tax lawsuit. Her efforts included fundraising to help people pay their poll taxes, perpetually reminding people to pay their poll taxes, holding voter-application classes, educating voters about the candidates, and organizing rides to the polls on Election Day.

Butts usually conducted such voter-participation efforts through the auspices of one of her main community leadership organizations, the Women of Virginia's Third Force, for which she served as president from 1958 to 1993. After her Supreme Court victory, Butts expanded her Third Force activities to include educational and lobbying visits to the Virginia General Assembly. She also chaired the Concerned Citizens for Political Education from 1968 to 1990.

In all of her grassroots mobilization activities, Butts applied similar methods of leadership: They included devoting hours of personal outreach through door-to-door canvassing and telephone calls, organizing carpools or van rides for dozens of people to attend local government meetings and other events, carefully maintaining rosters of registered voters, and mentoring other African Americans with leadership abilities. Butts personified what former-Ambassador Andrew Young, who was one of Martin Luther King Jr.'s young lieutenants, said when describing some of the invaluable contributions that women made to the civil rights movement. Young said: "It was women going door to door, speaking with their neighbors, meeting in voter-registration classes together, organizing through their churches that gave the vital momentum and energy to the movement, that made it a mass movement" (Olson, 2001, p. 394).

Young's words, although salutary, still did not represent the complete picture. For example, Septima Poinsette Clark, who developed and promulgated civil rights leadership

training in the 1950s, conducted a door-to-door petitioning campaign in 1918–1919 to ask the South Carolina state legislature to allow black women to teach in Charleston, South Carolina, public schools (Robnett, 1997, p. 88). “Black women all over the nation were leaders in the struggle for civil rights,” Robnett wrote (1997, p. 86), with author Anne Standley (1993) pointing out that black women “demonstrated a heroism no less than that of men. They suffered the same physical abuse, loss of employment, destruction of property, and risk to their lives” (p. 184).

Butts also was a teacher and mentor. As I read through newspaper archives, I was buoyed to find a comment from the late Horace Downing, who had been one of my community mentors for grassroots civic engagement. When Butts died in 1993, Downing told a local news reporter:

She taught me everything I know about working with the community and politics. I didn’t have to go to school. I got a master’s degree from her. She taught a whole lot of fellows who now enjoy the benefit of her work. (“Legendary Local Activist,” 1993)

Downing’s words made me feel closer to Evelyn Butts, that some of her lessons had coursed through Downing and into me.

Synthesis

As a grassroots leader and community organizer, Evelyn Butts stands amid a long continuum of African Americans in their quest for freedom, civil rights, equality, justice, self-determination, and dignity. Each may have stepped forward in his or her own way, place, and time, with unique contributions that emerged from distinct personalities and talents. Leadership styles varied widely, but that did not matter; all were united in a common drive to cast off oppression and take their rightful places as full-fledged participating citizens of their communities and nation.

Individual circumstances differed, of course. Enslaved African American leaders risked death or serious harm to escape or revolt, often leading others. Free-born or liberated black

leaders formed, joined or supported abolitionist efforts. Harriet Tubman on Maryland's Eastern Shore was not satisfied with her own freedom; she crossed back into slave territory to guide others to freedom. Annetta M. Lane and Harriet Taylor, enslaved in the Norfolk area in the mid-1800s, provided shelter to escaping slaves and eventually evolved their efforts into a mutual aid society now known as the United Order of Tents.

During the Civil War, some 200,000 African Americans joined the Union's military forces, including about 1,200 in the Norfolk area who had fled from slavery. Among them was Smallwood Ackiss, a great-grandfather of Evelyn Butts (Ligon, 2017). In 1865, at the end of the Civil War, several black leaders in Norfolk formed the Colored Monitor Union Club political organization, which issued a nine-page manifesto that asked white citizens to recognize African American voting rights and included the declaration, "give us the suffrage, and you may rely upon us to secure justice for ourselves" (Colored Monitor Union Club, 1865).

Even during in the depths of the Jim Crow apartheid era, African Americans continued to assert themselves against the forces and devices of white supremacy. Blacks in the Virginia cities of Richmond, Lynchburg, Newport News, Portsmouth, and Norfolk organized boycotts against segregated streetcars, and Norfolk African Americans even began an alternative transportation company.

The NAACP came into being in 1912. Headquartered in New York City, the NAACP not only took on concerns at the national level but tried to support civil rights struggles in dozens of localities, especially through the efforts of its team of lawyers. This two-pronged approach included sending famed attorney Thurgood Marshall to Norfolk in the late 1930s to handle the lawsuits of two African American public school teachers seeking equal pay with white counterparts. Although the Norfolk cases had mixed results, the effort encouraged similar

lawsuits across Virginia and promoted a strategy of mixing legal action with activities such as boycotts and demonstrations. Thus, when Evelyn Butts helped organize a school-related protest march in 1962, she was somewhat following in the footsteps of 1,200 Norfolk African Americans who had demonstrated in 1930 against the dismissal of Aline Black, a teacher who had filed suit against the city's unequal race-based salary system for teachers (Edds, 2018, p. 80; Lewis, 1991, p. 160; Parramore et al., 1994, p. 318; J. D. Smith, 2002, p. 257; Suggs, 1988, pp. 160–162).

Writing about the continuum of grassroots activism in Norfolk, historian Earl Lewis (1991) has noted that the city's African Americans not only “struggled to improve their material conditions, they also fought for equal treatment, sometimes quietly and sometimes visibly. They never abided racism, ‘polite’ or otherwise, well; instead, they boycotted, rioted, petitioned, cajoled, demonstrated, and sought legal redress” (p. 3).

When Evelyn Butts stepped forward as a grassroots civil rights leader in the mid-1950s, she not only joined in an ever-flowing stream of such African American activist-leaders. She was something more. She was active in at least three channels of resistance tradition—as a community organizer, civil rights demonstrator, and lawsuit initiator—and was the personification of what black feminist theorist Zenzele Isoke (2013) has described as “alchemists of resistance” (p. 2).

In each endeavor, Butts proved to be more than an activist. Throughout her all her work, she served as a flesh-and-blood link between the activity and her neighbors. In such ways, her leadership style fit both within—and beyond—what sociologist Belinda Robnett (1997) has termed “bridge leadership.”

Bridge Leadership

Two scholars of leadership, Belinda Robnett and Richard A. Couto, provide keys to interpreting Butts' leadership work and style as bridge leadership. In this subsection, I will recap

their main points and discuss their work as it relates to the grassroots civil rights leadership of Evelyn Butts.

Couto's (1995) analysis of what he termed "citizen leaders" serves as a backdrop to Robnett's (1997) more specific depiction of bridge leaders (p. 19). To Couto, grassroots citizen leaders are vital to a democracy but are not often appreciated, especially early on in their efforts. Couto (1995) observed that all political systems erect barriers to change but that the work of citizen leaders inherently entails trying to reduce or remove those obstacles to enable the broader citizen participation and allow new issues to surface for serious consideration.

Couto (1995) ascribed several characteristics to grassroots citizen leaders, including that they organize action to improve life in low-income communities; work to elevate conditions for all people instead of further enable a chosen few; step forward when there is a need for sustained leadership; recognize and respect existing communities; have simple motives; and base their actions on a belief that society is responsible for conditions that impair human dignity.

Another essential trait of grassroots citizen leaders is that they have earned the "gift of trust" from fellow citizens, Couto (1995) contends.

Those who knew Butts as a grassroots civil rights leader described her in similar terms to those used by Couto, including with many expressions about how deeply they trusted her.

Robnett (1997) has defined a particular category of grassroots leaders, whom she calls "bridge leaders" (p. 19). She devised the concept of bridge leader to explain the important roles of grassroots leaders—usually women, but sometimes men—who were "not simply organizers within the civil rights movement" but "critical mobilizers of civil rights activities" (p. 20). As such, they were often figures who were not necessarily in the formal hierarchy of a civil rights organization but trusted and relied upon by fellow citizens for problem-solving, information, and

emotional support. Bridge leaders, according to Robnett, created and maintained linkages between a local community and a larger social movement and helped fellow citizens connect their lives with the larger civil rights effort.

Like Couto (1995), Robnett (1997) suggested that bridge leaders share some key characteristics. They include being adept at one-on-one contact for recruitment and mobilization; tending to advocate nontraditional or even more radical tactics than formal leaders of older, established organizations; being initiators of new organizations or impromptu crusades; and operating in the civil rights movement's informal or "free spaces," which were defined as niches "not directly controlled by formal leaders or those in their inner circle" (Robnett, 1997, pp. 20–21). Some bridge leaders also held formal positions in civil rights entities, but being a bridge leader and an organizational officer were not mutually exclusive (Robnett, 1997).

The descriptions provided by Robnett (1997) certainly resemble Butts' multiple roles and activities in civil rights. Butts excelled at one-on-one interaction with neighbors and other fellow citizens, and served as a bridge between them and the activities of formal organizations such as the NAACP or in mobilizing them for various crusades, including voter participation. Butts, at times, also wore multiple hats, including as secretary for the local NAACP and SCLC chapters, while also leading the Women of Virginia's Third Force, Oakwood-Rosemont Civic League, and various ad hoc activities, such as picketing against job discrimination and rundown segregated schools. Established leadership of the Norfolk NAACP called her a radical and militant when she challenged them.

Butts enjoyed the flexibility of operating within free spaces, and she did so with both creative flair and the instinct of a protective mother, sometimes in combination. For example, while serving as a PTA president at her daughter's school, Butts saw an opportunity to install a

hallway chart to promote voter registration among other parents. Unfortunately, the principal backed away from the project, fearing for his job (T. L. Bogger, personal communication with E. T. Butts, 1989; Ligon, 2017). At the same school, Butts discovered that the administration stopped a new youngster from enrolling because his parents did not fill out the paperwork correctly. Taking the family under her wing, Butts marched to the school office and saw to it that the child was given permission to attend” (A. V. Green, personal communication, June 1, 2018).

Known as an expert seamstress, Butts combined her sewing talents with politics by making dress-like campaign uniforms for the Jordanettes, a group of girls helping the City Council candidacy of her friend Joseph A. Jordan Jr. (Ligon, 2017). Butts enjoyed opportunities to combine her skills with politics in ways to help her neighbors. She always welcomed visits from Oakwood neighborhood women who had questions about cooking, sewing, or other homemaking concerns—and then used the time to talk with her visitors about civil rights or politics, according to a 2001 newspaper feature that quoted Annette Bryant, a former neighbor (Knepler, 2001). As such, Butts’ kitchen became an intimate space “that makes sustained public resistance possible,” as described by Zenzele Isoke (2013, p. 35) in *Urban Black Women and the Politics of Resistance*, and “everyday life” became part of “political struggle” with the kitchen, living room, or doorway of a school” transformed into “political space,” as Philomena Essed (1996, p. 97) has observed in *Diversity: Gender, Color, and Culture*.

In effect, Butts was building upon the community esprit de corps that she had learned from her Aunt Roz and other Oakwood neighborhood women who had assisted her years earlier when she was a single mother and then a young bride, whose husband had gone far away with the Army during World War II. In giving back to her neighborhood through homemaking tips, Butts demonstrated that “community mothering” could also serve as “political agency,”

according to Isoke (2013, p. 81). Moreover, such everyday activism enhanced Butts' role as a bridge leader.

I would like to suggest that Butts was a bridge leader in more ways than contemplated by Robnett. Butts certainly connected her neighbors to the civil rights movement and political issues, but she also served as a bridge between her neighborhood and the Norfolk city government and as a bridge builder to the future.

There are many examples of how Butts bridged the gap between struggling low-income black neighborhoods and the operations of Norfolk City Hall. She attended and spoke out at City Council and School Board meetings—and returned home with information; she learned the rules of voter registration—and gave confidence to thousands of first-time voters, even traveling around with a voter machine to demonstrate how to use it; she brought political candidates, black and white, to her home for meals—showing neighbors that these flesh and blood politicians needed them as much as they needed the ear of City Hall. Butts encouraged neighbors and mentored others to join with her when she crossed bridges—and like Harriet Tubman, she returned time and time again to pull more people over the bridges with her.

As Butts built bridges to City Hall and to other neighborhoods, she also helped Oakwood children build bridges to their future by encouraging them to do well in school, behave in the community, and use her name as a reference when looking for jobs. Friends new that Butts was helping to build a different type of future for Norfolk's African Americans than they knew under Jim Crow domination. A few years after she died, when the City Council named a street after Evelyn Butts, longtime friend Alveta V. Green recited a poem at the ceremony. The poem was "The Bridge Builder," by Will Allen Dromgoole, and it was about an old man who crossed a deep and wide river but turned around to build a bridge back to the other side. When asked why,

the old man explained that he did so to help young people cross safely. “Evelyn was always thinking this way,” Green told me (A. V. Green, personal communication, June 1, 2018).

Continued Relevance: Reflections

One way that our society honors extraordinary citizens is by naming streets after them. For Evelyn Butts, that accolade came in 1995, two years after her death, when the City Council rechristened the 12-block Elm Avenue as Evelyn T. Butts Avenue. The activity generates a day or two’s attention in newspaper and television headlines. Then, month by month, year by year, the memory fades, not just about such a ceremony but in its essence. Newcomers and new generations rarely learn about Evelyn Butts or anyone else posthumously honored with a street name. There must be a better way to educate citizens about important people and what they did to help our communities so that their achievements continue to teach us, make us think, inspire us to improve our country. I have some ideas, which I will share further below.

First, though, I will briefly recapitulate some of what Butts’ leadership has meant to the political citizenship of our city and state and the potential for greater fairness and inclusion in our nation’s electoral system.

In her heyday as a grassroots civil rights leader from the mid-1950s to 1970, Butts motivated and taught thousands of Norfolk African Americans to register to vote and cast ballots for the first time. In 1968, that translated into Norfolk electing an African American to the City Council for the first time since Reconstruction. A year later, city voters elected an African American to the Virginia General Assembly, also the first time since Reconstruction. Encouraged by these successes, more black citizens in Norfolk and other Virginia cities stepped forward to run for public office. Change did not come about overnight, but within 50 years Norfolk elected an African American as mayor for the first time (May 3, 2016) and City Council evenly divided

by race and gender (four black, four white; four women, four men; August 31, 2016). Today, black representation on the School Board and other key municipal commissions has greatly increased. Over the past four decades, the city has hired many African Americans to key governmental positions more than once, including city manager (1998, 2011), police chief (1993, 2003, 2016), schools superintendent (1984, 1998, 2011, 2015), and executive director of the Norfolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority (2001). Norfolk has also helped send black candidates to victory as a governor (1990), a member of the U.S. House of Representatives (1993), state delegates (1970, 1984, 1988, 1996, 2002, 2003, 2014, 2018) and state senators (1988, 2012, 2016).

The region's white-owned daily newspaper, *The Virginian-Pilot*, acknowledged the roots of this record of inclusion when Butts died in 1993. Editorial writers wrote that Butts "made a unique contribution in Norfolk by bringing the black community into the political process in a way that has nourished rather than stifled effective biracial governance in the city" ("In Norfolk, From Plaintiff to Political Force," 1993).

While Butts and her co-plaintiffs knocked out poll taxes in the 1966 *Harper v. Virginia State Board of Elections* Supreme Court decision, this democratizing event also amounted to an important progressive victory over the long entrenchment of property and wealth as prerequisites for suffrage in the United States. Voting for formal government in North America began in Virginia in 1619 with the first election for the House of Burgesses, the forerunner of the General Assembly. However, only white male property owners were allowed to vote, while everyone else was expected to quietly defer to the privileges of this class (Tarter, 2013). Virginia did not drop its property-ownership suffrage caste system until 1850, making it the last state to do so (Keyssar, 2009). Virginia also lagged behind the majority of other states in ratifying the

nineteenth amendment that extended suffrage to women; the amendment took effect in 1920, but the Virginia General Assembly did not give its official blessing until 1952—and it still has not approved the proposed Equal Rights Amendment.

In saluting the *Harper v. Virginia State Board of Elections* (1966) decision, political historian Alexander Keyssar (2009) wrote:

Almost two centuries after the nation’s founding, economic restrictions on voting had been abolished in all general elections. What once had been believed to be the most essential qualification for the franchise—the possession of property—officially had been judged irrelevant. (pp. 219–220)

Legal scholars Bruce Ackerman and Jennifer Nou (2009) were even more celebratory, declaring that the victory over poll taxes represented “a larger effort by the American people, during the 1960s, to create a more egalitarian democracy. *Harper* is not the product of an activist Court, but of an activist People” (p. 133).

The *Harper v. Virginia State Board of Elections* (1966) victory also continues to encourage voting-law progressives to envision a day when the ban on poll taxes can help tame the role of big money in politics. In *Harper* (1966), Justice William O. Douglas wrote that “Fee payments or wealth, like race, creed, or color, are unrelated to the citizen's ability to participate intelligently in the electoral process.” Today, voting rights lawyers John Bonifaz and Ron Fein say they want a similar economic justice concept to apply to running for office. In an essay published March 24, 2018, to commemorate the 52nd anniversary of the *Harper* decision, Fein wrote, “the wealthiest Americans are legally able to govern who runs for office and which issues are addressed in political debates,” thereby making “the votes of average American citizens... diluted through a corrupt political process in which only those with money can participate” (After *Harper*, para. 4). He concluded that the United States must adopt a constitutional

amendment “to get big money out of politics and ensure political equality for all” (Fein, 2018, *Ending the Wealth Primary*, para. 3).

While Evelyn Butts crusaded against the poll tax, she also rallied neighbors to turn out on Election Day. Low voter turnout, especially in local elections, has long concerned me. So I have wondered many times what Butts would be doing in the 21st century to motivate her fellow citizens. In the summer and fall of 2017, I conducted an observational experiment about voter turnout in one mixed-demographic voting precinct in the middle of Norfolk. With an eye toward the then-upcoming November 2017 Virginia gubernatorial election, I engaged a neighborhood civic league in discussions about what it might take to increase turnout in comparison with previous gubernatorial elections.

In my discussions with civic league members, I had framed the voter-turnout problem as a community issue that could perhaps be addressed by appealing to a sense of civic ownership. I had noticed that this neighborhood seemed to apply a can-do sense of ownership—and partnership with the city government—in other concerns, such as working more closely with police to prevent crime and with the Department of Parks, Recreation & Open Space to develop a community dog park. At neighborhood meetings, I noticed that residents were robustly engaged and constructive in discussing crime prevention and the dog park. But when talk turned to low voter turnout, the same people became testy and distant.

Sadly, I did not find a collective—or an individual—sense of ownership of the problem of low voter turnout and for developing hands-on, grassroots solutions as they might on crime, recreation, and other neighborhood concerns. What I encountered seemed to stand in stark contrast to the days when Butts battled the poll tax and the whims of election officials, and

African Americans and poor whites did not take voting for granted. A half-century after Butts helped expand the right to vote, dozens of citizens told me they couldn't be bothered.

Discussions quickly became mired in general diatribes about real or perceived shortcomings of politicians—current and past, and at any level of government. The comments, although usually voiced with large doses of cynicism, were insightful and educational about voter beliefs and feelings but very troubling. I learned that many citizens believe that our elected leaders are rarely honest in what they say, that elected leaders—no matter which party—are interested in voters only during campaign seasons, that elected officials of both major parties are part of and beholden to the same dominating political class, that this political class prefers low voter turnouts so they can more easily manipulate elections. It sounded as if many citizens had completely given up on our political system. When I pointed out that candidates closer to home—for governor, attorney general, General Assembly seats, mayor, city council, and school board—are much closer to the concerns of local voters, the citizens said they understood, but they would invariably shift back to listing the alleged lies and misdeeds by former presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, and even the affairs of John F. Kennedy. I left these discussions better appreciating how embarrassments and scandals at any level of politics hurt all political aspirants.

The distrust and cynicism voiced in this one precinct reminded me of the findings in a landmark report, *Fault Lines in Our Democracy*, compiled by Richard J. Coley and Andrew Sum in 2012. The authors suggested that there is a direct correlation between satisfaction with government and willingness to participate in the democratic process. Coley and Sum (2012) wrote:

A significant obstacle to increasing voting rates is declining confidence in America's political leaders. The lower voter turnout may be due in part to the declining trust of the

public in key governmental institutions and the current American system of government, which has been accompanied by a growing polarization of politics. (p. 33)

As the clock ticked closer to Election Day in my experiment, it became clear that no one in the neighborhood civic league seemed interested in organizing—or even constructively discussing—a neighbor-to-neighbor door-knocking or telephone-call campaign to encourage voter turnout. I had suggested such a get-out-the-vote strategy because it was the hallmark of Evelyn Butts as well as a proven technique, according to political scientists, such as Donald P. Green and Alan S. Gerber (2015), authors of *Get Out the Vote: How to Increase Voter Turnout*. Green and Gerber, who have conducted experimental research of voter turnout many times since 1998 and have studied the work of other researchers, have concluded that “there no longer is any doubt that face-to-face contact with voters raises turnout (p. 37).

They advised:

To mobilize voters, make them feel wanted at the polls. Mobilizing voters is rather like inviting them to a social occasion. Personal invitations convey the most warmth and work best. Next best are phone calls in which the caller converses with the respondent, as opposed to reading from a canned script. (Green & Gerber, 2015, p. 156)

One man finally but reluctantly took it upon himself to place an Election Day reminder on social media and install a few handmade, low-visibility signs along neighborhood sidewalks. The prevailing attitude seemed to be, “Politicians will do whatever they want. No matter who wins, they are all the same.” It was a far cry from the likes of Evelyn Butts’ inspirational activism during a time when black voters could choose only among candidates who openly espoused racist policies.

My experiment with this one neighborhood civic league made me better appreciate what a rare grassroots leader Butts was in her ability to motivate neighbors to vote as well as

participate in other social justice issues as she relentlessly worked *for* and *together* with neighbors and other Norfolk residents on various concerns year-round.

My experience also reinforces the urgency to share in better ways with communities the profound gifts of Butts' leadership legacy. I remain upbeat that localities and new generations can learn about her and find inspiration. I hope to assist by turning this study into a book and/or several articles for publication—not only in scholarly journals but in periodicals that focus on local communities. I also envision teaching college students about Evelyn Butts or the context of her times. It would be fascinating to hear students discuss how they might marry modern social media with Butts' hallmark techniques of going door to door with her crusades, although I believe it would be hard to replace personal, face-to-face conversations, which Green and Gerber (2015) describe as “the gold standard mobilization tactic” (p. 9).

Like Evelyn Butts, as well as my grandmother, I believe it is important to get children to start thinking early about becoming full-fledged citizens, which includes political citizenship, by keeping up with the news, participating in elections, and encouraging others to do so as well. Butts and my grandmother did this through small steps, such as assigning children to distribute political flyers. As I grew older, my elders would also ask me to help drive neighbors to the polling places on Election Day.

Voting, though, is only part of full citizenship. Evelyn Butts' gift was in how she combined her political citizenship with her everyday arts of being a good neighbor, especially with other women. As Green and Gerber (2015) wrote more generally about ways to motivate voter turnout, “Face-to-face interaction makes politics come to life and helps voters to establish a personal connection with the electoral process.... Many voters need just a nudge to motivate them to vote. A personal invitation sometimes makes all the difference” (p. 38).

In appreciation of Evelyn Butts' overall community spirit, I would like to encourage Norfolk public school students to learn about Butts as someone who was important both in voting-rights history and in the everyday life long-term sustainability of her community, who worked side by side with neighbors on a range of concerns. Would it not be great to see our school system or a community agency conduct an annual "Evelyn T. Butts Memorial Voting Rights Essay and Art Contest" with scholarship money among the prizes?

Learning about the poll tax and the voter-participation crusades of Evelyn Butts would also be a way to approach voting rights issues in the frame of critical race theory, especially when studied as action. Ryan M. Crowley (2013) suggests a similar type of classroom learning experience in connection with the history of the Voting Rights Act. "Discussing the VRA as part of an ongoing struggle rather than a simple triumph is an opportunity to engage in a meaningful conversation about race and the persistence of racism," Crowley writes, adding that "Instead of presenting the story of the Civil Rights Movement as a foregone conclusion, teachers can highlight converging factors that provided the appropriate political climate for the significant legislative and moral victories won through sacrifice and mass mobilization" (pp. 719–720).

I also have an observation about the news media and a recommendation for scholars.

In researching the life of Evelyn Butts, I was disappointed many times to find unsatisfactory news reports about Butts' grassroots civil rights activities or a complete absence of Butts' name. In Chapter IV, I mentioned a few examples, such as the time she spoke to 800 people about "What Women Can Do in This Election," but that the newspaper did not report what Butts had said. I was baffled. Butts, who had encouraged thousands of fellow citizens to participate in elections, surely must have imparted some interesting advice.

I will never know the exact reasons for such lapses, especially when they occurred decades ago. However, I have learned from scholars such as Belinda Robnett (1997) that “bridge leaders often went unrecognized... by the media” (p. 193), while Lynne Olson (2001), among many others, point out that most journalists covering the civil rights movement were men, and that these male reporters gravitated their coverage toward the male civil rights activists on the front lines and to the spokesmen, who also were men (p. 15).

Whatever the issue, journalists must remain vigilant against their own inadvertent biases. Also, if it’s true that news media responsibility includes accurately reflecting the life of its community, then journalists should always ask themselves if they are looking in all the right places for the full story or merely following the crowd.

Journalists are fond of referring to the longtime assertion that news stories are “the first rough draft of history” (Shafer, 2010, para. 1). Therefore, the work of journalists has consequences for the work of historians. Olson (2001), for example, points out that “For the most part, historians followed the journalists’ lead: Virtually all the major early works about the period portray the [civil rights] movement through the filter of the men and their organizations” (p. 15).

Historians and students of the civil rights movement should appreciate that local newspapers and other news media are usually excellent sources for learning about people involved in the movement—but not always. And when they are not, then historical researchers must also seek out the participants to hear firsthand about their personal experiences, especially before these participants and witnesses become too frail to share their stories or have passed on. As I write these reflections in mid-April 2019, I am also following the news of the fire that devastated the landmark cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris. A paragraph in one story reads: “Fortunately, Notre Dame is a thoroughly documented building. Over the years, historians and

archeologists have made exhaustive plans and images” (Lawless & Casert, 2019). My point is that researchers may be doing an excellent job of documenting the great physical landmarks of our human history, but historians should be mindful, too, of the need to probe deep under the surface of the landmarks of great human activity, such as the civil rights movement, and document the contributions of many more people at the grassroots level.

Evelyn Butts was an uncommon person in history because she was among a handful of plaintiffs who beat back the poll tax. Therefore, her name has been permanently and rightly etched into history books and law journals.

It’s the other work that Butts did as a civil rights bridge leader before and after the Supreme Court’s 1966 poll tax decision that makes her life so interesting and enriching to study. Butts, however, was not so rare in that regard. We owe it to history and to future generations to find many more of these behind-the-scenes grassroots leaders, especially while they still survive, and document their stories and understand what they can teach us about citizen leadership, community self-determination, and changing the course of history.

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Appendix A

IRB-Approved Consent Form

IRB-Approved Consent Form

Participant Consent for Research Interview About the Life, Activism, and Leadership of Evelyn T. Butts.

This informed consent form is for people who worked with the late Evelyn T. Butts on various voting rights, voter participation, civil rights, and community issues at any time from the 1940s through the 1990s. I am inviting you to participate in my PhD dissertation research project, titled "The Life, Activism, and Leadership of Evelyn T. Butts, a Forgotten Grassroots Leader Who Challenged the Poll Tax and Motivated Thousands of New Voters."

Name of Principle Investigator: Kenneth Cooper Alexander

Name of Organization: Antioch University, PhD in Leadership and Change Program

Name of Project: Dissertation: The Life and Activism of Evelyn T. Butts, a Forgotten Grassroots Leader Who Challenged the Poll Tax and Motivated Thousands of New Voters

You will be given a copy of the full Informed Consent Form

Introduction

I am Kenneth Cooper Alexander, a PhD candidate for Leadership and Change at Antioch University. As part of this degree, I am completing a project to better understand the life, activism, and grassroots leadership of Evelyn T. Butts, who was known for her activism against the poll tax, and for organizing voter-registration, voter-education, voter-turnout initiatives, and other efforts related to voter participation and citizen participation in Norfolk, Virginia. I am going to give you information about the study and invite you to be part of this research. You may talk to anyone you feel comfortable talking with about the research, and take time to reflect on whether you want to participate or not. You may ask questions at any time.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this project is to gain insight into the life of Evelyn T. Butts and her grassroots leadership techniques and strategies. This information may help us to better understand how community-based African-American women, who are often forgotten from history, were important in helping to advance the goals of the national voting rights and civil rights movements.

Types of Research Intervention

This research will involve your participation in personal interviews, where you will be asked about your memories, insights, reflections, observation, and/or experiences with Evelyn T. Butts. Each of these interviews will be digitally recorded for research purposes, including for possible quotations or paraphrasing in my dissertation. Your name may be used in my dissertation unless you do not feel comfortable having your identity revealed. You will have the opportunity to remove any quotations from the interview(s). If you decide not to have your identity revealed, your contributions will be de-identified prior to publication or the sharing of the research results. These recordings, and any other information that may connect you to the study, will be kept in a locked, secure location.

Participant Selection

You are being invited to take part in this research because I believe that you were in a position to closely observe the activities of Evelyn T. Butts in issues such as voting rights, civil rights, employment discrimination, school integration, neighborhood improvement, and/or other community and/or political issues in which she was involved. You should not consider participation in this research if you were not in position to observe Evelyn T. Butts in any such activities.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to participate. You will not be penalized for your decision not to participate. You may withdraw from this study at any time. If an interview has already taken place, your identity will not be attached to the information you provided.

Risks

No study is completely risk free. However, I do not anticipate that you will be harmed or distressed during this study. You may stop being in the study at any time if you feel uncomfortable.

Benefits

There will be no direct benefit to you, but your participation may help others in the future.

Reimbursements

You will not be provided any monetary incentive to take part in this research project.

Confidentiality

You can request that any or all of the information you provide be de-identified so that it cannot be connected back to you. Your real name will be replaced with a pseudonym in the write-up of this project, and only the primary researcher will have access to the list connecting your name to the pseudonym. This list, along with the digital recordings of the interview sessions, will be kept in a secure, locked location.

Limits of Privacy Confidentiality

Generally speaking, I can assure you that I will keep everything you tell me for the study de-identified, if you so wish. Yet there are times when I cannot keep things private (confidential).

The researcher cannot keep things private (confidential) when:

- The researcher finds out that a child or vulnerable adult has been abused.
- The researcher finds out that a person plans to hurt himself or herself, such as commit suicide.
- The researcher finds out that a person plans to hurt someone else.

There are laws that require many professionals to take action if they think a person is at risk for self-harm or are self-harming, harming another or if a child or adult is being abused. In addition, there are guidelines that researchers must follow to make sure all people are treated with respect and kept safe. In most states, there is a government agency that must be told if someone is being abused or plans to self-harm or harm another person. Please ask any questions you may have about this issue before agreeing to be in the study. It is important that you do not feel betrayed if it turns out that the researcher cannot keep some things private.

Future Publication

The primary researcher, Kenneth Cooper Alexander, reserves the right to include any results of this study in future scholarly presentations and/or publications. Any information that you wish to be de-identified will be de-identified prior to publication.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

You do not have to take part in this research if you do not wish to do so, and you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Who to Contact

If you have any questions, you may ask them now or later. If you have questions later, you may contact Kenneth Cooper Alexander at [REDACTED]

If you have any ethical concerns about this study, contact Lisa Kreeger, Chair, Institutional Review Board, Antioch University Ph.D. in Leadership and Change, Email: [REDACTED]

This proposal has been reviewed and approved by the Antioch Institutional Review Board (IRB), which is a committee whose task it is to make sure that research participants are protected. If you wish to find out more about the IRB, contact Dr. Lisa Kreeger.

DO YOU WISH TO BE IN THIS STUDY?

I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

Print Name of Participant _____

Signature of Participant _____

Date _____

Day/month/year

DO YOU WISH TO BE AUDIOTAPED IN THIS STUDY?

I voluntarily agree to let the researcher audiotape me for this study. I agree to allow the use of my recordings as described in this form.

Print Name of Participant _____

Signature of Participant _____

Date _____
Day/month/year

To be filled out by the researcher or the person taking consent:

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

A copy of this Informed Consent Form has been provided to the participant.

Print Name of Researcher/person taking the consent _____

Signature of Researcher /person taking the consent _____

Date _____
Day/month/year