

6 African American Women and Electoral Politics

The Core of the New American Electorate

There they stood at center stage of the Democratic National Convention (DNC), dressed in mostly black and wearing big, bold red corsages, the Mothers of the Movement, all mothers who had lost a child to violence, many at the hands of police through state-based violence. They have become outspoken activists, a collective voice speaking out against the type of state-based violence enacted disproportionately against communities of color. The Mothers of the Movement took their place on the stage to speak during the DNC after a glitzy Hollywood-caliber video showing them spending extensive time with candidate Hillary Clinton on the campaign trail. The video showcased each mother's story of loss. Through their powerful individual testimonies on the impact of gun violence and state-sanctioned violence, each more emotionally gripping than the previous one, we were offered a glimmer of the horrors they continue to endure as grieving mothers. By witnessing their grief, we were made to understand their collective decision to organize, mobilize and speak out against gun violence and violence at the hands of police. Through their storytelling, we were also made to understand their justifications and reasoning for why candidate Clinton was the one, the candidate who best understood, and articulated support for their cause. Most of all, that night they made the case for why they could proclaim, "I'm with her," and why others should join them in this proclamation.

For sure, the appearance of the Mothers of the Movement during prime-time coverage of the DNC was an attempt by the Clinton campaign to signal its recognition and support of the #BlackLivesMatter global movement. We must also read that moment as the Clinton campaign's acknowledgment that its success in November would depend heavily on its ability to motivate support from Black women voters, and the Mothers

of the Movement became the central mode of outreach to the critical Black women voters that the DNC relies upon regularly, though it seldom recognizes them as central to Democratic party success. Black women voters make up a considerable portion of the Democratic party base and have been the party's most reliable voters for quite some time.

Sabrina Fulton, mother of Trayvon Martin and one of the most identifiable spokespersons of Mothers of the Movement considers herself "an unwilling participant" in this group. Yet she and the other mothers made a critical decision to endorse Hillary Clinton, and in doing so they offered the campaign an opportunity to appeal to a significant block of voters – African American women. At that point, the Clinton campaign likely recognized the significance of African American women voters, given their strong support of Democratic presidential candidates in previous elections. However, they likely did not suspect just how deeply Hilary Clinton would rely upon African American women voters to salvage some resemblance of Obama's winning coalition. In the end, this group offered Clinton the highest support of any group, with 94 percent of Black women voting for Clinton. Their strong support stands in particular contrast to the majority of white women voters who failed to respond to either Clinton's emphasis on the historical significance of her candidacy or the misogynistic behavior of the Republican candidate, Donald Trump. Only 43 percent of white women voted for Clinton. Despite the historic nature of the election and the brute sexism espoused by candidate Trump, white women continued to support the Republican presidential candidate, with 52 percent supporting candidate Trump. The Mothers of the Movement provided the Clinton campaign a means of outreach to African American women voters, as well as a pathway to discuss race in the context of the campaign, an issue Clinton surprisingly struggled to own in the primaries.

The extraordinarily well-produced Democratic convention centered these grieving Black mothers-turned-activists as part of its message; however, beyond that point, the campaign ultimately failed to maintain its interest in mobilizing Black women voters. Between mid-July and November, the campaign did too little to reach out, energize and mobilize Black women voters. Despite the campaign's limited outreach, Black women still proved one of the few remaining cornerstones of the "New American Electorate" that first emerged during the 2008 presidential campaign and is credited with President Obama's initial success.

I begin this chapter by situating African American women as political actors – particularly as voters at the presidential level – in the 2016 election cycle. In addition, I discuss African American women's representation

as elected officials and chronicle a number of electoral firsts for African American women in 2016. I argue that the future of progressive politics is contingent upon not only the continued mobilization of African American women as voters, but increasingly and aggressively converting these women from reliable voters to candidates for political office at the local, state, and national levels. From there, I chart how African American women are faring in electoral politics at the national, state, and local levels, illustrating the considerable challenges they continue to face. Traditional measures and indicators of political participation suggest that African American women would be among the least likely to participate in politics, yet they are heavily engaged in a range of political activities. After identifying what I term the *paradox of participation*, I trace African American women's participation in formal electoral politics from Shirley Chisholm's 1972 presidential campaign to the present day. African American women are still experiencing a number of electoral firsts, which signifies that their journey from the shadows to the spotlight in American politics is not yet complete. In response to the many barriers they encounter, African American women are organizing and exploring new strategies to ensure their future leadership in American politics. By focusing on their experiences, we can examine the extent of America's progress toward political inclusiveness along both race and gender lines and toward a society in which race and gender are less significant as determinants of electoral success.

AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN: THE CORNERSTONE OF THE OBAMA COALITION AND THE NEW AMERICAN ELECTORATE

To fully understand the significance of African American voters to progressive politics broadly and the 2016 presidential election in particular, it is essential to situate their political participation in a larger context. African American women voters were an important force in creating and supporting the Obama coalition in 2008, and they exercised an even greater force in 2012 when their voter turnout numbers surpassed all other groups in the electorate. As such, African American women voters were key to Clinton's hopes of capitalizing on the strength of the Obama coalition and the so-called new American electorate his presidency is credited with creating.¹ The power of "minority" voters beginning in 2008

¹ Pew Research Center. 2012. *Changing Face of America Helps Assure Obama Victory*. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center.

signaled pending changes in the American eligible voting population. By 2050, such voters will represent a majority of the nation's population and the majority of voters in the nation's elections.² With such changing demographics, minority voters will increasingly determine election outcomes, and to date Democrats have benefitted from these demographic shifts.

During the 2008 Democratic presidential primaries, African American women arguably offered the then-unknown Barack Hussein Obama, the self-proclaimed "skinny guy with the funny name,"³ his first real chance at national legitimacy as a presidential candidate. African American women voters offered early credibility to Obama in the face of African Americans who raised serious doubt regarding his commitments to Black interests and whether, overall, he presented as "authentically Black."⁴ African American women expanded their impact by assuring his early successes against Clinton in 2008. They contributed heavily to her defeat in the early primary in South Carolina, where African American women constituted a third of all Democratic voters. In that primary, by supporting presidential hopeful Obama in lieu of their anticipated support of Clinton, African American women led the defection of African Americans from loyalties to the Clinton family and ushered in the possibility of a successful Obama candidacy.

It is against this backstory that we must read Hillary Clinton's decision to place African American women center-stage in prime time coverage of the 2016 DNC. Clinton had a message of outreach to send to African American women voters who had once before slipped through her fingers. Clinton needed to galvanize the power of African American women voters on her behalf. She needed them to turn out in support of her as they had done for her opponent in 2008.⁵

Moreover, Hillary Clinton had a race problem. She needed to offer reassurances to voters of color and millennials alike that she was not the pro "crime and punishment" Hillary Clinton portrayed during the primary by the Bernie Sanders campaign. During the Democratic Party primary, Clinton had not come across as the champion on race and Black interests

² Paul Taylor and D'Vera Cohn. 2012. *A Milestone En Route to a Majority Minority Nation*. Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center.

³ Valeria Sinclair-Chapman and Melanye Price. 2008. Black Politics, the 2008 Election, and the (Im) Possibility of Race Transcendence. *PS: Political Science and Politics* 41(4): 739–745.

⁴ Gillespie, Andra. 2010. "Meet the New Class: Theorizing Young Black Leadership in a "Post-Racial" in *Whose Black Politics: Cases in Post-Racial Black Leadership*, eds Andra Gillespie. New Haven: New York University Press.

⁵ Mark Hugo Lopez and Paul Taylor. 2009. *Dissecting the 2008 Electorate: Most Diverse in U.S. History*. Washington, DC: Pew Research Center.

as she had hoped. She had trouble establishing her connections to progressives on criminal justice issues. Criminal justice activists, social justice organizers and scholars asserted publically that Hillary Clinton could not absolve herself of Bill Clinton's 1994 crime bill which, for many, created the context for increased policing of communities of color and accelerated incarceration rates for African Americans and Latinos.

Further, Hillary Clinton was plagued by her own words from a 1996 speech in which she used a term with racial overtones, referring to kids as "superpredators" who have "no conscience, no empathy." The speech was used as evidence that she shared her husband's criminal justice policy positions from the 1990s.⁶ Her own words, along with the reverberations of the Clinton crime policies, placed Clinton on defense during the primary season and into the general election when leading scholar-activists, such as legal scholar Michelle Alexander and historian Donna Murch, issued scathing critiques of the Clinton policies and called upon African American voters to discontinue their loyalty to the Clintons.⁷

The Mothers of the Movement offered the Clinton campaign a way to link directly to issues the global social justice movement #BlackLivesMatter symbolized and made salient throughout the campaign season. #BlackLivesMatter had also focused attention on the Clinton family brand, labeling it tainted by the politics and policies of the 1990s. As the Clinton campaign struggled to find its footing on race more broadly, and specifically on the key issues of state-based, police-sanctioned violence and criminal justice reform, the presence of mothers who had lost their sons and daughters due to these interwoven systemic issues held even greater political significance.

This moment allows a closer examination of the political sophistication of African American women voters, who distinguish themselves with shrewd calculations, complexities, and deliberations. I argue that African American women exercised their unique position to usher Black interests onto the mainstage of Democratic Party politics, both literally and figuratively. They became the pathway to center Black interests on the Democratic Party's national agenda. In that moment, African American women's presence provided entree for racialized communities' voices in the national debate and in the platform of the Democratic Party. Even more than Obama's campaign, Clinton's campaign underwent a public vetting

⁶ Hillary Clinton. 1996. Campaign speech. Keene State College. Keene, New Hampshire.

⁷ See Alexander, Michelle. "Why Hillary Clinton Doesn't Deserve the Black Vote." *The Nation*. February 10, 2016. Murch, Donna. "The Clintons' War on Drugs When Black Lives Didn't Matter." *New Republic*. February 9, 2016.

process on her commitments to Black interests, with African American women at the center of that process.

Far from uncritically following Clinton, African American women made a decisive choice in 2016 in the face of, as many have argued, “less than ideal choices.”⁸ In choosing to support Hillary Clinton, African American women were doing more than executing a “politics as usual” stance by supporting the Democratic Party candidate. Facing the choices before them, one of which was to simply stay home and not turn out for the election, African American women chose to demonstrate their political sophistication by resoundingly supporting Clinton. In doing so, they also made the choice to remain steadfast to the coalition of voters they were instrumental in building – the new American electorate.

The question for 2016 and going forward for African American women is the extent to which they are able to translate their support for presidential candidates into policy positions that improve the lives of women and girls of color. This was certainly the overarching goal of Mothers of the Movement. It is also an open question whether African American women can translate their political power as voters into political strength as candidates for elected office at all levels of government. In this chapter, I explore African American women’s political participation in electoral politics as candidates and their potential to move through the political pipeline to higher offices. As Black women increase their power as voters, are they also increasing their numbers as elected representatives?

The 2016 national elections marked some significant historic firsts for African American women that helped to propel the nation forward in some ways toward a more inclusive government. Kamala Harris, former California Attorney General, became only the second woman of African descent elected to the U.S. Senate (following in the footsteps of Senator Carol Mosley Braun, elected in 1992). Other firsts at the state level illustrate how African American women are still just making inroads into elective office, despite their political heft as voters.

AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN AND THE PARADOX OF PARTICIPATION

African American women have consistently participated in American politics despite formidable barriers to their participation in formal electoral roles as voters and candidates. At its inception in 1787, the U.S. Constitution limited the citizenship rights of African Americans, both

⁸ Murch, Donna. “The Clintons’ War on Drugs When Black Lives Didn’t Matter.” *New Republic*. February 9, 2016.

women and men, regarding each one as only three-fifths of a person. Later, as Mamie Locke argues, African American women would move from three-fifths of a person under the Constitution to total exclusion from constitutional protections with the passage in 1870 of the Fifteenth Amendment, which extended the right to vote to African American men only.⁹ When women earned the right to vote in 1920 with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, large numbers of African American women remained restricted from the franchise through the cultural norms of the Jim Crow South. African Americans were disenfranchised through literacy tests, poll taxes, grandfather clauses, and all-white primaries. It was not until the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 that African American women secured the right to freely practice the franchise.

The impact of the Voting Rights Act was keenly apparent in the states of the Deep South. African American voter registration in Mississippi, for example, increased from 6.7 percent in 1964 to 64 percent in 1980.¹⁰ The Voting Rights Act of 1965 was arguably the single most important piece of legislation in securing the franchise for African American voters and realizing political empowerment. The rapid growth in the numbers of African American elected officials is further evidence of the Act's impact. At the time the Voting Rights Act passed, fewer than 500 African American elected officials held office nationwide. Today the number of African American elected officials has grown to more than 9,000.¹¹

Studies of American politics have defined political participation narrowly in terms of electoral participation. As Cathy Cohen argues, such a limited definition of political participation has hindered the development of research on African American women's political activism because their political participation tends to extend beyond electoral politics to community organizing and civic engagement.¹² Because African American women were excluded from participation in formal politics until the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, first by the condition of their

⁹ Mamie Locke. 1997. From Three Fifths to Zero. In *Women Transforming Politics*, eds. Cathy Cohen, Kathleen B. Jones, and Joan Tronto. New York: New York University Press, pp. 377–86.

¹⁰ Frank R. Parker. 1990. *Black Votes: Count Political Empowerment in Mississippi after 1965*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

¹¹ Linda F. Williams. 2001. The Civil Rights-Black Power Legacy: Black Women Elected Officials at the Local, State, and National Levels. In *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement*, eds. Bettye Collier-Thomas and V. P. Franklin. New York: New York University Press, pp. 306–32.

¹² Cathy J. Cohen. 2003. A Portrait of Continuing Marginality: The Study of Women of Color in American Politics. In *Women and American Politics: New Questions, New Directions*, ed. Susan J. Carroll. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 190–213.

enslavement and then by equally oppressive systems of exclusion, their nontraditional political activism developed outside the electoral system and was informed by their political, economic, and social conditions.¹³

Defining political participation beyond the narrow framework of voting and holding elected office allows us to see the consistent levels of African American women's political participation across history. By asking new questions and examining the nontraditional spaces of women's activism, such as churches, private women's clubs, and volunteer organizations, feminist historians have uncovered countless activities of women of color involved in social movements. African American women have been central to every effort toward greater political empowerment for both African Americans and women. As the historian Paula Giddings attests, African American women were the linchpin in struggles against racism and sexism. They understood that the fates of women's rights and Black rights were inextricably linked and that one would be meaningless without the other.¹⁴

In spite of this rich legacy of activism, African American women's political participation represents a puzzle of sorts. African American women appear to be overrepresented in elective office while simultaneously holding the characteristics that would make them least likely to be politically engaged. African American women account for a greater proportion of Black elected officials than white women do of white elected officials.¹⁵ In the 115th Congress (2017–18), roughly 30 percent of African Americans in the House are women, compared with only 19 percent of all members of the House who were women. Further, since the early 1990s, there has been a steady increase in the number of African American women elected officials. The steady increase in African American women reverses the trends of the 1970s immediately following the passage of the Voting Rights Act, when 82 percent of the growth in Black elected officials was attributed to African American men.¹⁶

Scholars who study the intersection of race and gender argue that African American women suffer from a "double disadvantage" in politics,

¹³ See Paula Giddings. 1984. *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*. New York: Bantam Books; Darlene Clark Hine and Kathleen Thompson. 1998. *A Shining Thread of Hope: The History of Black Women in America*. New York: Broadway Books; Dorothy Sterling. 1997. *We Are Your Sisters: Black Women in the Nineteenth Century*. New York: W. W. Norton.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Williams, *The Civil Rights-Black Power Legacy*.

¹⁶ David A. Bostis. 2001. *Black Elected Officials: A Statistical Summary 2001*. Washington, DC: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies.

in that they are forced to overcome the ills of both sexism and racism.¹⁷ Darcy and Hadley, however, conclude that African American women defied expectations, proving more politically ambitious than their white counterparts and enjoying greater success in election to mayoral, state legislative, and congressional office in comparison with white women throughout the 1970s and 1980s. These authors link the puzzle of African American women's achievement to their activism in the civil rights movement and the skills developed during the movement, which African American women quickly translated into formal politics once passage of the Voting Rights Act opened opportunities.¹⁸

Studies of political participation have consistently concluded that the affluent and the educated are more likely to participate in politics at higher rates.¹⁹ However, for African American women, the usual determinants of political participation – education and income – are not strong predictors of participation.²⁰ African American women's high level of officeholding contrasts with their material conditions, which suggest that they would be far less politically active. As of the 2000 U.S. Census, 43 percent of Black families were headed by a single mother, and the poverty rate among African American women was more than twice that of non-Hispanic white women.²¹ Regardless of their socioeconomic status, African American women are far more likely than African American men to engage in both traditional forms of political participation (including voting and holding office) and nontraditional forms of participation (such as belonging to organizations and clubs, attending church, and talking to people about politics). For example, the proportion of voters who were African American increased from 11 percent in 2004 to 13 percent in 2008 and 2012. In 2012, African

¹⁷ See Robert Darcy and Charles Hadley. 1988. Black Women in Politics: The Puzzle of Success. *Social Science Quarterly* 77: 888–98; Gary Moncrief, Joel Thompson and Robert Schuhmann. 1991. Gender, Race and the Double Disadvantage Hypothesis. *Social Science Journal* 28: 481–7.

¹⁸ Darcy and Hadley, *Black Women in Politics*.

¹⁹ See Andrea Y. Simpson. 1999. Taking Over or Taking a Back Seat? Political Activism of African American Women. Paper delivered at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Atlanta, September 1–5. For an extensive discussion of political participation, see Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Scholzman and Henry E. Brady. 1995. *Voice and Equality: Civic Volunteerism in American Politics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

²⁰ Sandra Baxter and Marjorie Lansing. 1980. *Women and Politics: The Invisible Majority*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

²¹ U.S. Bureau of the Census. 2003. U.S. Census. The Black Population in the United States. www.census.gov/prod/2003pubs/pg20-541.pdf February 23, 2005.

American women were 61.5 percent of the Black vote.²² Social scientists do not fully understand these inconsistencies in African American women's political participation.²³

AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN AND THE PRESIDENCY

African American women have a long established history of seeking political inclusion via the highest office in the land, the presidency. Across history, at least six African American women have had their names on the general election ballot for the presidency, including Cynthia McKinney, who ran in 2008 representing the Green Party (see Table 6.1).²⁴ As was the case with McKinney in 2008, most of these candidates represented fringe or third parties. Two African American women have run for the presidency seeking to represent the Democratic Party. Shirley Chisholm ran in 1972, and more than thirty years later, Carol Moseley Braun ran in 2004. Both Chisholm and Braun's candidacies were declared nonviable from the outset, but in both cases the women offered serious challenges to the status quo that suggests that presidential politics is not the domain of women of color. In this section, I highlight the candidacies of Chisholm, Braun, and McKinney, showing the differences among their campaigns and the challenges that mark women of color's ascension to the highest political office.

TABLE 6.1 Six African American women have appeared on general election ballots for president

Candidate	Political party	Year
Charlene Mitchell	Communist Party	1968
Lenora Fulani	New Alliance Party	1988 and 1992
Margaret Wright	Peoples' Party	1976
Isabel Masters	Looking Back Party	1992 and 1996
Monica Morehead	Worker's World Party	1996 and 2000
Cynthia McKinney	Green Party	2008

Source: Compiled by author using data from www.jofreeman.com

²² David A. Bositis. 2012. *Blacks and the 2012 Elections: A Preliminary Analysis*. Washington, DC: Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies.

²³ Simpson, Taking Over or Taking a Back Seat.

²⁴ Jo Freeman. The Women Who Ran for President. <http://jofreeman.com> January 15, 2009.

In 1972, Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm broke barriers as the first African American woman to make a serious bid for the presidency.²⁵ Chisholm was well positioned to run for president, with political experience at the community, state, and national levels. She served in the New York General Assembly before becoming the first African American woman elected to Congress. As the lone African American woman in Congress, she joined her twelve African American male colleagues in founding the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC).²⁶

After two terms in the House of Representatives, Chisholm decided to run for president. Her run came at a point when civil rights leaders were calling for greater political engagement and the women's movement was at its height. In running for president, Chisholm hoped to bring the concerns of these communities to the forefront of national politics. She spoke out for the rights of African Americans, women, and gays. She was quickly dismissed, perceived as not a serious candidate.

Chisholm faced a 1970s America that was just becoming accustomed to women in the workforce and in politics. She challenged notions of women's proper place. On the campaign trail, she routinely encountered hecklers who were happy to tell her the proper place for a woman. She told the story of a man at a campaign stop who questioned whether she had "cleaned her house" and "cared for her husband" before coming there.²⁷ Chisholm often faced such blatant sexism and, in other encounters, racism in her campaign, but she continued to press toward the Democratic National Convention.

Although Chisholm fashioned herself as both the "Black candidate" and the "woman candidate," she found herself shunned by both Black leaders in Congress and the feminist community. Far from supporting her, members of the CBC, an organization she had helped to found, charged that her run was detrimental to the Black community, dividing it along gender lines at a time when the Black community could not afford such divisive politics. Chisholm, a founder of the National Organization for Women (NOW), was dealt an equally devastating blow when prominent

²⁵ Although Shirley Chisholm's 1972 run for the White House is most often cited, there is a long legacy of African Americans running for the presidency, largely as third-party candidates. For a full discussion, see Hanes Walton Jr. 1994. *Black Female Presidential Candidates: Bass, Mitchell, Chisholm, Wright, Reid, Davis and Fulani*. In *Black Politics and Black Political Behavior: A Linkage Analysis*, ed. Hanes Walton Jr. Westport, CT: Praeger, pp. 251–76.

²⁶ Katherine Tate. 2003. *Black Faces in the Mirror: African Americans and Their Representatives in the U.S. Congress*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

²⁷ Shirley Chisholm. 1973. *The Good Fight*. New York: Harper & Row.

feminists such as the cofounder of the National Women's Political Caucus (NWPC), Gloria Steinem, and fellow U.S. Congresswoman Bella Abzug decided not to endorse her candidacy publicly. Instead, they opted to protect their political leverage by supporting Senator George McGovern, who was considered at that time the more viable candidate of the Democratic contenders and the candidate most capable of defeating then President Nixon.²⁸

Deserted by both the leaders of the CBC and the feminist community, Chisholm survived the primaries and remained a candidate at the outset of the Democratic National Convention. She received 151 delegate votes on the first ballot, far short of the roughly 2,000 needed to secure the nomination. In the end, Chisholm acknowledged that her bid for the White House was less about winning and more about demanding full inclusion for African Americans and women. By waging a national presidential campaign, her candidacy had shown the world what was possible for women and men of color with increased access to political empowerment in a more democratized America. Indeed, Chisholm blazed the trail that would eventually lead to the election of Barack Obama.

More than three decades later, there was no doubt that Carol Moseley Braun benefited from Chisholm's pioneering candidacy. The differences between the two experiences signify some progress for African American women as high-profile candidates, even as they bring to light enduring problems African American women face in achieving greater political empowerment.

Carol Moseley Braun's treatment in the 2004 election cycle symbolizes some progress from the blatant, overt sexism and racism that Shirley Chisholm encountered in 1972. Moseley Braun experienced more subversive, structurally embedded sexism and racism, which are more difficult to recognize. Her experiences reflect the extent to which the office of the president is consistently associated with white men, a pattern Georgia Duerst-Lahti documents in Chapter 1 of this volume. There is an understanding that the president of the United States will be a man and white, and this sentiment has dominated thinking about the presidency.²⁹ Because Moseley Braun was neither a man nor white, she struggled constantly to convince the public that her candidacy was, in fact, viable. The

²⁸ For a more elaborate discussion of Chisholm's supporters and detractors during the 1972 presidential campaign, view "Chisholm '72 Unbought and Unbossed," a documentary by the filmmaker Shola Lynch.

²⁹ Georgia Duerst-Lahti and Rita Mae Kelly, eds. 1995. *Gender Power, Leadership, and Governance*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

doubts surrounding the feasibility of her candidacy affected all aspects of her campaign, but they were most devastating to her fundraising efforts. The negligible and trivializing media coverage she received reinforced doubts and further stymied her campaign. Such struggles are reflective of the institutional racism and sexism that continue to impede qualified candidates who differ from societal expectations about who should serve as president. Moseley Braun campaigned promising to “take the ‘men only’ sign off the White House door,” but this seemed to be a challenge America was not ready to accept.

By objective measures, Moseley Braun was well positioned to run for the presidency. Once questioned as to why she was running, Moseley Braun quickly responded, “Why not?” adding, “If I were not a woman – if I were a guy – with my credentials and my experience and what I bring to the table, there would be no reason why I wouldn’t think about running for president.”³⁰ In the field of Democratic contenders, Moseley Braun’s political record was among the most stellar. She was the only candidate to have experience at the local, state, national, and international levels of government.

Despite the energetic responses Moseley Braun drew from crowds at campaign stops, political pundits remained dismissive of her campaign. According to her, this was nothing new, “Nobody ever expected me to get elected to anything. For one thing, I’m Black, I’m a woman and I’m out of the working class. So the notion that someone from my background would have anything to say about the leadership of this country is challenging to some.”³¹ Like Shirley Chisholm, she also faced charges of running a purely symbolic campaign to establish that women are capable of running for the country’s top executive office.

Weak campaign fundraising plagued Moseley Braun’s campaign from the outset, and her fundraising efforts continuously lagged behind those of most other candidates, even after she gained impressive endorsements from NWPC and NOW, two of the leading feminist organizations. Notable white feminists, including the legendary Gloria Steinem and Marie Wilson, director of the White House Project, a nonprofit organization dedicated to getting a woman into the White House, publicly supported the campaign. Black women’s organizations, including the

³⁰ Monica Davey. December 18, 2003. In Seeking Presidency, Braun Could Win Back Reputation. *New York Times*.

³¹ Nedra Pickler. May 2, 2003. Washington Today: Braun Appears with the Presidential Candidates, but Isn’t Running Like One. Associated Press State and Local Wire.

National Political Congress of Black Women, invested in Moseley Braun's campaign, and she enjoyed public endorsements from legendary African American women, from Coretta Scott King to Dr. Dorothy Height, president emerita of the National Council of Negro Women. Receiving such ardent support from the women's community and Black women's organizations, Braun's candidacy represented progress over the struggles faced by Shirley Chisholm's campaign.

Garnering media attention proved to be an equally challenging problem for Moseley Braun's campaign, creating a circular effect; without media visibility, her ability to raise funds was limited, and with minimal funding, her campaign drew less media attention. She had extreme difficulty getting her message to the voters. When she received any coverage at all, it most often referred to her as "improbable," "nonviable," a "long-shot" candidate, or at worst an "also-ran."

Whatever its challenges, Moseley Braun's campaign was certainly not confronted with the overt sexism and racism that Chisholm had experienced. Instead, a much more subtle, indirect brand of racism and sexism plagued her campaign, characterized by the outright dismissal of her candidacy as a serious bid for the White House. Consistent slights affected all facets of her campaign. The failure to garner media attention, along with fundraising challenges, forced Carol Moseley Braun to pull out of the race in January 2004, even before the first primary.

David Bositis of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies may have best captured her predicament when he argued, "Part of Carol Moseley Braun's problem is that she is a Black woman." Bositis observed that Democratic voters were looking for a candidate who could beat George H. W. Bush, and unfortunately she was not perceived as a candidate who could do that.³² Further, the political scientist Paula McClain argues that Moseley Braun was disadvantaged from the onset in crafting a name for herself in this campaign, given the Democratic Party leadership's preference that candidates forgo more leftist politics. As she argues, Moseley Braun's identity as an African American woman positioned her clearly as a "left-of-center candidate" and subsequently constrained her ability to establish an alternative identity as a candidate in the minds of voters.³³

³² Adam Reilly. December 12–18, 2003. Hitting with Her Best Shot. *Portland Phoenix*. www.portlandphoenix.com March 15, 2005.

³³ Paula McClain. 2004. Gender and Black Presidential Politics: From Chisholm to Moseley Braun Revisited. Comments made at Roundtable on Black and Presidential Politics, American Political Science Association meeting, September 1–5, Chicago.

The 2008 presidential election was considered by all accounts one of the most memorable in modern history. That election is certainly remembered for electing the first African American man, then-Senator Barack Obama, to the presidency. It will also be historicized for Senator Hillary Clinton's remarkable primary run, during which she won more than 18 million votes. Moreover, that presidential election cycle is noted for giving rise to the vice-presidential candidacy of Alaska Governor Sarah Palin, only the second woman to be named to a major party's presidential ticket. Buried among all the historic firsts of the 2008 election cycle, few noted that the 2008 presidential election cycle also marked the first time two women of color – an African American and a Latina – ran on a political party's ticket as the presidential and vice-presidential candidates.

Former Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney, an African American, was tapped as the Green Party's presidential candidate. McKinney selected Rosa Clemente, a Latina, New York-based hip-hop community activist, as her vice-presidential running mate. McKinney and Clemente appeared on the ballot in thirty-one states and the District of Columbia, ultimately receiving 157,759 votes to finish sixth among all tickets. During their campaign, they raised a range of social justice-based issues, including an end to racial disparities in health, housing, education, and incarceration. They supported a right-of-return policy for New Orleans residents displaced by Hurricane Katrina; greater access to reproductive choice, including the right for poor women and women of color to bear children; and an end to Social Security policies that disproportionately harm women. Their platform pushed beyond the Green Party's more familiar stances on the environment to include a broad, progressive social justice-based platform.

Like most third-party candidates, McKinney and Clemente struggled to gain attention from media outlets and raise critical campaign dollars to execute a robust campaign. With so much attention focused on the major party candidates, the 2008 election cycle was especially hard for third-party candidates. As a progressive, McKinney was particularly pressed to articulate a rationale for posing even the potential of a threat to Obama's campaign success. McKinney and her supporters were challenged to make an argument for supporting their ticket in the face of Obama's historic run. The Green Party advocated a strategy of supporting Obama in critical states, even campaigning on his behalf, but in Democratic Party strongholds or states in which polls showed Obama well ahead of McCain (such as California, Illinois, and New Jersey), Green Party activists urged

voters to open the dialogue to the Green Party by supporting their candidates. With a dismal showing in the polls, the Green Party failed to obtain the 5 percent of the national vote that would make it eligible to obtain federal matching funds for the subsequent presidential election.

Although McKinney is a former member of the Democratic Party and a six-term congresswoman (serving from 1993 to 2003 and again from 2005 to 2007), by all accounts her run for the presidency was a long shot. Not only her third-party candidate status, but also her own reputation in politics placed her outside the mainstream. McKinney has long articulated a politics to the left of most members of the Democratic Party. She garnered national attention for her outspoken support of Palestine and for one of her final acts as a member of Congress – the filing of impeachment charges against President Bush on the grounds that he misled the American people in going to war in Iraq. Many argue that her extreme leftist politics and brazen approach accounted for the loss of her congressional seat in 2003.³⁴ After an altercation with a congressional security guard who failed to recognize her as a member of Congress and attempted to detain her, McKinney's reputation was further tarnished.

McKinney's fate was sealed in many ways by running as a third-party candidate in a two-party electoral system. Yet even in coverage of those who "also ran" during the 2008 presidential race, McKinney hardly garnered a mention from most press outlets, particularly in comparison to Ralph Nader, who ran as an independent, or even the former congressman Bob Barr, who ran on the Libertarian Party ticket during the 2008 election. Green Party activists launched a strong critique of mainstream and even progressive media outlets for their refusal to recognize the historic nature of the McKinney-Clemente ticket, even in the midst of an election cycle marked by a continuous nod to history.

McKinney's experiences in 2008 were somewhat reminiscent of those of Chisholm and Braun, who were treated as nonviable candidates, thus diminishing their chances of reaching the American people. Although the 2008 presidential election is heralded for all the ways it disrupted the status quo in politics, on some level that election cycle continued the legacies of past elections by reaffirming the belief that African American women are not appropriate, viable contenders for the presidency.

³⁴ See Wendy Smooth. 2005. African American Women in Electoral Politics: Journeying from the Shadows to the Spotlight. In *Gender and Elections*, eds. Susan J. Carroll and Richard L. Fox. New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 117–42.

AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN AND ELECTED OFFICE: ON THE PATH TO HIGHER OFFICE?

The presidential candidacies of Chisholm, Moseley Braun, McKinney, and the other African American women who have sought the presidency across history compel us to ask whether there are African American women poised to run for the presidency in future elections. Women and politics scholars and activists discuss increasing the numbers of women elected to public office at lower levels as the first step toward moving women into higher offices.³⁵ Feeding the political pipeline has become a critical strategy in preparing women to successfully seek the highest offices, including the presidency. Are African American women moving through that pipeline? Are they securing offices at the local, state, and national levels in preparation for the highest political offices? Are they poised to run for the presidency in future elections? In light of the contributions of African American women in making up the new American electorate, are they also contributing to diversifying elected offices from national to local levels? Are they seeking political office in step with their participation as voters?

To date, African American women's engagement in electoral politics as a means of securing greater political empowerment and placing their concerns on the political agenda has produced mixed results. On the one hand, they are gaining increased access to political offices, often outpacing African American men in winning elections. On the other hand, they continue to face considerable obstacles to securing high-profile offices at both the state and the national levels.

AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN IN STATE AND LOCAL POLITICS

Of the more than 3,000 African American women elected officials, most are elected to sub-state-level offices, such as regional offices, county boards, city councils, judicial offices, and local school boards. African American women have gained increasing access to leadership positions at the local level. In 2016, twenty-five African American mayors led cities with populations of 30,000 or more,³⁶ and five African women led the largest U.S. cities (see Table 6.2).³⁷ Though African American women have

³⁵ For a full discussion on getting women into the political pipeline, see Jennifer Lawless and Richard L. Fox. 2005. *It Takes a Candidate*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

³⁶ U.S. Mayor's Conference.

³⁷ For a complete listing, see the Web page of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Research, www.jointcenter.org July 31, 2009.

TABLE 6.2 Five African American women are mayors of the large cities in 2016

Mayor	City	Population
Ivy Taylor	San Antonio, TX	1,469,845
Muriel Bowser	Washington, D.C.	646,449
Catherine Pugh	Baltimore, MD	629,921
Paula Hicks Hudson	Toledo, OH	287,208
Sharon Weston-Broome	Baton Rouge, LA	229,493

Source: Center for American Women and Politics, Women Mayors in U.S. Cities Fact Sheet, 2017.

held these significant leadership posts, few scholars have devoted attention to women of color in sub-state-level offices, largely because variations among localities make comparisons difficult.

As African American women move beyond the local level, they face greater challenges in winning office. In many ways, statewide offices are more difficult for African American candidates to secure, especially for African American women. No state has ever elected an African American woman as governor, and only two African American women currently hold statewide offices. Democrat Denise Nappier of Connecticut made history in 1998 as the first African American woman elected as state treasurer, and in 2017 she continues to serve in that capacity. Republican Jenean Hampton serves as Kentucky's lieutenant governor.³⁸

In running for statewide offices, African American candidates do not have the benefit of African American majority electorates, as they often do when they run in district-level races. As a result, they must depend on the support of white majorities for election. Because African Americans are generally significantly more supportive of African American candidates than whites are, attracting white voters is a significant challenge. Depending on racially tolerant whites to win,³⁹ African American candidates⁴⁰ face the dual challenge of offering strong crossover appeal for

³⁸ Center for American Women and Politics. 2013. Fact Sheet. Women of Color in Elective Office 2013. www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast_facts/levels_of_office/documents/color.pdf January 2013.

³⁹ See Lee Sigelman and Susan Welch. 1984. Race, Gender, and Opinion toward Black and Female Candidates. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 48: 467–75; Ruth Ann Strickland and Marcia Lynn Whicker. 1992. Comparing the Wilder and Gantt Campaigns: A Model of Black Candidate Success in Statewide Elections. *PS: Political Science and Politics* 25: 204–12.

⁴⁰ Sigelman and Welch, Race, Gender, and Opinion; Strickland and Whicker, Comparing the Wilder and Gantt Campaigns.

white voters while maintaining a connection to communities of color to ensure their high voter turnout.

In state legislatures, African American women are steadily increasing their numbers, yet their gains still appear minuscule, especially relative to the number of available legislative seats. As of 2017, there were 7,383 state legislators, of whom only 436 were women of color. African American women led women of color in holding state legislative seats with 264 (260D, 3R; 1 Working Family Party), followed by 110 (95D, 14R, 1 Progressive Party) Latinas, 37 (29D, 8R) Asian American–Pacific Islander women, and 20 (16D, 4R) Native American women.⁴¹ Although the numbers of women of color in state legislatures remain small, they have increased steadily, while the overall numbers of women in state legislatures, as reported in Kira Sanbonmatsu's Chapter 10 in this volume, seem to have reached a plateau. In 1998, for example, only 168 African American women served as state legislators; today their numbers have increased by ninety-six.⁴² Similar trends hold for Asian American–Pacific Islander, Latina, and Native American women.

African American women's influence in state legislatures is concentrated in a limited number of states (see Table 6.3). Forty-two state legislatures have African American women currently serving. Georgia leads the states with 31 African American women serving in its legislature, followed by Maryland (20), New York (19) Illinois (15), and Mississippi (13).⁴³ Overall, women have traditionally fared poorly in southern and border-state legislatures, yet the trend is different for African American women, who have experienced some of their greatest successes in these states. This is largely a result of the significant concentrations of African American voters in these states.

In 2016 we witnessed evidence of the shifting demographics of the nation, particularly among new immigrant groups. For the first time, a first generation Somali immigrant woman serves in the Minnesota state legislature, representing a section of Minneapolis. Representative Ilhan Omar is the highest-level elected Somali-American public official in the

⁴¹ Center for American Women and Politics. 2013. Fact Sheet. Women of Color in Elective Office 2013. www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast_facts/levels_of_office/documents/color.pdf January 2013.

⁴² See Center for American Women and Politics. Women of Color in Elected Office Fact Sheets for 1998 and 2013. www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast_facts/levels_of_office/documents/color.pdf July 31, 2013.

⁴³ See Center for American Women and Politics. African American Women in Electoral Politics. www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast_facts/levels_of_office/documents/color.pdf January 2013.

United States. Omar, a Muslim American, came to the United States as a refugee fleeing the war in her home country. Yet, in the midst of the 2016 election's heightened anti-immigrant and Islamophobic rhetoric, Omar won election to the Minnesota state legislature with 80 percent of district voters' support, the highest number of votes ever in her legislative district.⁴⁴

Further, she upset a 22-year incumbent during the Democratic Party primary contest. In doing so, she upset conventional wisdom. Running as a challenger is typically ill-advised, given the significant name recognition of incumbents, which makes it difficult for emergent candidates to contest. Omar's election illustrates the expansion of the electorate, as well as the expansion of the pool of potential elected officials in the midst of shifting demographics. As a relatively new African immigrant, Omar summed up the symbolism of her win in her victory speech, "Minneapolis said no to the narrative of making America hate again. Minneapolis tonight said yes to diversity. Minneapolis, and [the] 60B district particularly, you said Muslim women have space in the governing body of our state."⁴⁵

AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN IN CONGRESSIONAL POLITICS

When the 115th Congress convened in January of 2017, it was the most diverse Congress in history in terms of gender, ethnicity, race, religion, and sexual orientation, though Congress continues to lag behind the nation's overall diversity.⁴⁶ This diversity is especially evident within the Democratic caucus, which is likely to spur more robust debate on the issues before the body. Former Representative Donna Edwards of Maryland contends that the diversity of the Democratic Caucus is actually more representative of the American electorate. According to Edwards:

Come January, women and minorities for the first time in U.S. history will hold a majority of the party's House seats, while Republicans will continue to be overwhelmingly white and male. The chamber, already politically polarized, more than ever is going to be demographically polarized, too. One thing that's always been very startling to me is to

⁴⁴ Doualy Xaykaothao. 2016. Somali Refugee Makes History In U.S. Election. www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2016/11/10/501468031/somali-refugee-makes-history-in-u-s-election

⁴⁵ Xaykaothao. 2016.

⁴⁶ Kristen Bialick and Jens Manuel Krogstad. 2017. 115th Congress sets new high for racial, ethnic diversity. Pew Research Center at www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/01/24/115th-congress-sets-new-high-for-racial-ethnic-diversity/

see that on the floor of the House of Representatives when you look over on one side where the Democrats caucus and you look to the other side and it looks like two different visions of America.⁴⁷

In the 115th Congress, eighteen African American women members are serving in the House, a slight increase from the 114th Congress (see Table 6.4). The numbers of African Americans elected to Congress increased by four. Two African American women, Representatives Lisa Blunt Rochester of Delaware and Val Demings of Florida, became the first African American women elected from their respective districts (and Rochester was the first woman of any race elected from her state).

Representative Val Demings of Florida's 10th Congressional District found herself caught in a historic redistricting battle that cost veteran Congresswoman Corrine Brown her seat. Congressional District 10 was created by moving Black and Latino voters from Brown's nearby District 5, which was originally created with the intent of making it possible for minority voters to elect a candidate of their choosing through the creation of a majority-minority district. Such districts were designated following a federal court order that drew on the principles of the Voting Rights Act to assure minority representation in government.

Majority-minority districts remain the primary means of electing African Americans to Congress. Ironically, Demings election and Brown's subsequent defeat were both part of a larger redistricting framework that both provides opportunities for African American women's election to Congress and limits the possibilities for expanding minority representation.

Majority-minority districts resulted from provisions in the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and its subsequent extensions, which allowed for the formation of new districts where African Americans constituted a plurality or majority of the electorate. In these new districts, African Americans could run for open seats, which not only alleviated the incumbency advantage but also freed them from dependence on white voters. Many scholars concede that historically, it has been nearly impossible for African American candidates to win in districts without Black majorities, as some whites continue to resist voting for African American candidates.

The number of African American women serving in Congress today is largely a result of the presence of majority-minority districts. Although 1992 was widely proclaimed the "Year of the Woman" in politics, reflecting the phenomenal success of women candidates for Congress, for

⁴⁷ Timothy Homan. November, 8 2012. White Guys Running the U.S. House Face Diverse Democrats. *Bloomberg Business Week*.

African American women 1992 was also the “Year of Redistricting.” A number of open seats were created nationally as a result of redistricting following the 1990 Census, and most were majority-minority districts. African American women (including Cynthia McKinney) claimed five additional seats in the U.S. House of Representatives in 1992, more than doubling their numbers. Four of the five African American women won in newly created majority-minority districts, including Corrine Brown, whose Florida district was contested in a subsequent redistricting plan. The fifth African American woman elected in 1992, Eva Clayton of North Carolina, won a special election for a seat that was vacant because of the death of the incumbent, also in a majority-minority district.

While majority-minority districts have helped to secure African American women’s place in Congress, these districts have been challenged in the courts as a means of increasing Black representation. As a result of a string of cases in the 1990s from Georgia, Louisiana, North Carolina, and Texas, the future of majority-minority districts is now in question. Many scholars insist that African Americans’ continued success in winning elective office, particularly congressional seats, is dependent on the preservation of majority-minority districts. Because of the precarious future of such districts, the number of African American women elected to Congress is likely to grow at a considerably slower pace than it did in the 1990s. To the extent that the number of African American women does grow in future years, the increase in their numbers will likely come largely at the expense of African American men who must compete with them for the limited number of seats available in majority-minority districts.

Beyond the firsts 2016 presented in the House, former California attorney general Kamala Harris⁴⁸ became only the second woman of African descent to win election to the United States Senate. Senator Harris’ election marks the first time an African American woman has served in the Senate in nearly 20 years. She ran in an open-seat election after longtime Senator Barbara Boxer retired after serving five terms in the Senate. In California’s non-partisan blanket primary election system, the two candidates receiving the most votes face off in the general election, regardless of party. The primary election resulted in two Democrats, both women of color, running in a head-to-head race. Both enjoyed the unusual benefit of considerable name recognition due to having been elected to other

⁴⁸ Harris identifies as both African American and Indian American. As a U.S. senator, Harris has joined the Congressional Black Caucus.

TABLE 6.3 The proportion of African American women among state legislators varies across the states

	No African American women in state legislature	0.1%–5% African American women in state legislature	>5% African American women in state legislature
States with African American population of less than 5%	Nebraska Alaska Arizona Hawaii Wyoming South Dakota North Dakota Montana	Minnesota Washington West Virginia New Mexico Iowa Oregon Utah New Hampshire Maine Vermont Idaho	Colorado
States with African American population of 5–15%		Arkansas Michigan Missouri Pennsylvania Connecticut Indiana Kentucky Massachusetts Oklahoma Rhode Island California Kansas	New Jersey Ohio Texas Illinois Nevada
States with African American population of 15.1–20%		Wisconsin	Virginia Tennessee Florida Arkansas New York
States with African American population greater than 20%		South Carolina Delaware	Georgia Maryland Alabama Mississippi Louisiana

Note: In each cell, states are listed in descending order by African American population. Georgia has the highest proportion of African American women in its state legislature (13.1%), followed by Maryland (10.6%), Alabama (9.3%), and New York (8.9%).

Source: Center for American Women and Politics, 2017 Fact Sheets. State percentage of African American population is drawn from 2010 U.S. Census data.

offices; Harris had been elected statewide as California's attorney general, and Loretta Sanchez had served in the U.S. House of Representatives for nearly 20 years. This election promised to end with an historic first regardless of who won, given that Sanchez would have become one of the first Latinas elected to the U.S. Senate (along with Nevada's Catherine Cortez-Masto, elected in 2016). In this unusual contest of two women of color running for a Senate seat, Harris prevailed.

THE FUTURE OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN IN POLITICS

African American female elected officials are enduring symbols of the long fight for political inclusion in U.S. electoral politics. Although legal barriers preventing their participation in politics have been removed, African American women continue to confront considerable barriers when seeking political office. The higher profile the office, the more formidable barriers they face to being considered viable candidates.

In light of the formidable challenges they confront as they seek higher-profile offices, African American women are not leaving their political futures to chance. They are forming political action committees, political trainings, and outreach and recruitment initiatives to address the serious barriers they face. Beginning in 2002, groups like Women Building for the Future (Future PAC), formed to capitalize on the growing voting power of African American women. Future PAC's major objective was to increase the numbers of African American women elected at every level of government by supporting candidates financially and identifying women to run for office. In describing the purpose of the group, Donna Brazile, a strategist for the Democratic Party, argued that African American women face three major hurdles in seeking office: achieving name recognition; overcoming the tendency of the "old-boy network" to endorse other men; and garnering financial support. Brazile added, "Our objective is to try to help women overcome one of the major barriers – financial – which will hopefully break down the other two."⁴⁹ Future PAC endorsed African American women with proven records in their communities and who share the group's views on a range of issues from education to health care.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Joyce Jones. January 2004. The Future PAC. *Black Enterprise*.

⁵⁰ Robin M. Bennefield. July/August 2004. Women Join Forces to Support Black Female Politicians. *Crisis (The New)* 111: 12.

TABLE 6.4 Eighteen African American women were serving in the U.S. House of Representatives in 2016

Congresswoman	Party	District	Major city in the district	Year first elected to Congress
Rep. Karen Bass	D	33rd/37th	Los Angeles, CA	2011
Rep. Joyce Beatty	D	3rd	Columbus, OH	2012
Rep. Corrine Brown	D	3rd	Jacksonville, FL	1992
Rep. Yvette Clark	D	11th	New York, NY	2006
Rep. Val Demings	D	10th	Orlando, FL	2016
Rep. Marcia Fudge	D	11th	Cleveland, OH	2008
Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson	D	30th	Dallas, TX	1992
Rep. Robin Kelly	D	2nd	Chicago, IL	2016
Rep. Brenda Lawrence	D	14th	Detroit, MI	2015
Rep. Barbara Lee	D	9th	Oakland, CA	1997
Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee	D	18th	Houston, TX	1994
Rep. Mia Love	D	4th	Salt Lake City, UT	2014
Rep. Gwen Moore	D	4th	Milwaukee, WI	2004
Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton ^a	D	–	Washington, D.C.	1991
Rep. Stacey Plaskett ^b	D	AL	Virgin Islands	2016
Rep. Lisa Blunt Rochester	D	AL	Dover, DE	2016
Rep. Terri Sewell	D	7th	Birmingham, AL	2010
Rep. Maxine Waters	D	35th	Los Angeles, CA	1990
Rep. Frederica Wilson	D	17th/24th	Miami, FL	2010

^a Eleanor Holmes Norton is a nonvoting delegate representing the District of Columbia.

^b Stacey Plaskett is the nonvoting delegate representing the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Source: Compiled by author from Center for American Women and Politics, 2016 Fact Sheets; and representatives' websites.

This type of organizing is essential if African American women are to continue increasing their representation. Such organizing efforts hold the promise of translating African American women's high voting rates into increased officeholding. Other national groups, such as the Black Women's Roundtable, established by the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation, are also working to increase political participation by mobilizing African American organizations, including Greek-letter fraternities and sororities, around voter education and civic

empowerment.⁵¹ During the 2012 campaign, when efforts to suppress voter participation surfaced in minority communities across the country and particularly in the battleground states of Florida, Ohio, Michigan, and Virginia, African American women organized to protect voter rights and to educate African American women about their rights as voters. These groups are invested in the important work of empowering citizens, mobilizing voters, and identifying likely candidates. Their mobilization efforts have focused on maintaining and fully realizing the potential of African American women as voters. The challenge remains to translate African American women's power as voters into increasing their numbers from the local to the national levels.

The numbers of these groups have increased since 2002 to capitalize on black women's increased political engagement. Groups such as Higher Heights for Women, a national organization focused on harnessing African American women's political power and encouraging Black women to not only vote, but run for political office; Three Point Strategies, a Washington, D.C. consulting firm that trains progressive, underrepresented groups to run for office; and the New American Leaders Project, which focuses attention on first- and second-generation new immigrants running for elected office, all conduct training that prepares Black women to run for office. Such training programs focus on the hard and soft skills of running for office including fund-raising; building donor networks; refining communication messaging; and cultivating the confidence to execute a run for office. These groups have become particularly critical to identifying and recruiting African American women candidates, doing the work that political parties are assumed to do, yet don't undertake when it comes to African American women.⁵² The most difficult work for these groups remains transforming American society to fully embrace African American women as political leaders. This issue must be addressed both inside the African American community and in the greater American society. The public's willingness to regard these well-prepared women as viable, appropriate political leaders is essential. The political parties, in particular the Democratic Party, with which most African American women are affiliated, must stop assuming that African American women are left-of-center by virtue

⁵¹ See the Black Women's Roundtable (BWR), a part of the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation at www.bigvote.org/bwr.htm February 20, 2005.

⁵² Kira Sanbonmatsu. 2015. Electing Women of Color: The Role of Campaign Trainings. *Journal of Women, Politics, & Policy* 36(2): 137–60.

of their intersecting identities as both African Americans and women. Many African American women elected officials prioritize both women's issues and minority issues and build on their ties to multiple communities. In this way, their intersectional identities represent a strength that results in greater representation across under-represented groups. Not until such core cultural issues are addressed will we see women of color reach their full potential in politics, with well-qualified women of color successfully moving through the political pipeline to hold elected offices at the local, state, and federal levels.