

# Remaking Black Power

## *How Black Women Transformed an Era*

Ashley D. Farmer

The University of North Carolina Press CHAPEL HILL

*This book was published with the assistance of the Authors Fund of the University of North Carolina Press.*

© 2017 Ashley D. Farmer

All rights reserved

Set in Espinosa Nova by Westchester Publishing Services

Manufactured in the United States of America

The University of North Carolina Press has been a member of the Green Press Initiative since 2003.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Farmer, Ashley D., author.

Title: Remaking black power : how black women transformed an era / Ashley D. Farmer.

Other titles: Justice, power, and politics.

Description: Chapel Hill : University of North Carolina Press, [2017] |

Series: Justice, power, and politics | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017015698 | ISBN 9781469634371 (cloth : alk. paper) | ISBN 9781469634388 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Women, Black—United States—History—20th century. |

African American women—United States—History—20th century. |

Black Power—United States—History—20th century.

Classification: LCC HQ1161 .F37 2017 | DDC 305.48/896073—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2017015698>

Cover illustration by Marcus Kiser.

Portions of chapter 3 were previously published as “Renegotiating the ‘African Woman’: Women’s Cultural Nationalist Theorizing in the Us Organization and the Congress of African People, 1965–1975,” *Black Diaspora Review* 4:1 (Winter 2014): 76–112.

## *Contents*

Acknowledgments xi

Abbreviations in the Text xvii

Introduction 1

### CHAPTER ONE

The Militant Negro Domestic, 1945–1965 20

### CHAPTER TWO

The Black Revolutionary Woman, 1966–1975 50

### CHAPTER THREE

The African Woman, 1965–1975 93

### CHAPTER FOUR

The Pan-African Woman, 1972–1976 127

### CHAPTER FIVE

The Third World Black Woman, 1970–1979 159

Epilogue 193

Notes 199

Bibliography 229

Index 253

## Introduction

As readers finished the July 1, 1972, edition of the Black Panther Party's newspaper, they found a full-length, mixed-media image of a middle-aged black woman on the back page. The woman, dressed in hair rollers, a collared shirt, an apron, and no shoes, stares directly at the viewer, one hand on her hip; the other supports a bag of groceries from the Panthers' free food program. The woman also prominently displays her button in support of Panther leader Bobby Seale's mayoral campaign. The caption above contextualizes the woman's politics and party support: "Yes, I'm against the war in Vietnam, I'm for African Liberation, voter registration and the people's survival!"<sup>1</sup> This image was one of over a dozen pieces of artwork that Panther Party member Gayle Dickson created, many of which featured black women leading protests and championing party programs.<sup>2</sup> Not only did her artwork translate the party's expansive political agenda, it also reflected how the Panthers—often thought to be a male-dominated organization—expressed and promoted its agenda through images of black women.

Dickson's artwork was emblematic of the diversity of black women's political expression in the Black Power era. Beginning in the 1950s, black activists and intellectuals increased their efforts to develop oppositional institutions and practices designed to bring about black political, cultural, and social autonomy. By the time that Dickson became an artist for the Black Panther Party in the late 1960s, Black Power had coalesced into a worldwide movement dedicated to fundamentally redefining race, class, and gender hierarchies. The image described here was one of myriad expressions of Black Power that black women developed during the early 1970s, the height of the era in which black activists fundamentally reimagined black manhood, womanhood, and empowerment through political expressions that ranged from electoral politics to Pan-African solidarity efforts.

More than simply party propaganda, Dickson's art was a window into some of the common ways in which black women imagined their political roles and potential during the Black Power era. In this image alone, she illustrated how they envisioned themselves as militant domestics and revolutionary black women. She also showed how they often identified as

YES, I'M AGAINST THE WAR IN VIETNAM, I'M FOR AFRICAN LIBERATION,  
VOTER REGISTRATION AND THE PEOPLE'S SURVIVAL!



Mixed-media image by Gayle Dickson from the *Black Panther*, July 1, 1972.

Pan-Africanists through their solidarity with African liberation struggles. Many black women organizers imagined themselves as part of a Third World community, linking their fates and struggles with those of other women in Vietnam and Africa. Dickson's artwork reflected black women's global solidarities by featuring their rhetorical assertions of support. Through this image and other texts, black women collectively constructed ideas about how women should articulate and express their political and philosophical leanings. They also deployed these representations as a way to reshape Black Power-era symbols and politics to fit their needs and lived experiences.

Such images and intratextual conversations were ubiquitous during the Black Power era. Black women across regions, organizations, and political ideologies produced artwork and articles that challenged popular, masculinist perceptions of Black Power and asserted the centrality of black women to the era's political projects. Multiple members of the Panthers' rank and file submitted articles outlining their ideas of what constituted a "Black Revolutionary Woman." Meanwhile, women who belonged to cultural nationalist organizations, like the Committee for Unified Newark (CFUN), created the "Nationalist Woman" handbook, a guide for teaching members how to embody the "African Woman" ideal. Others developed weekly series in black radical newspapers to promote an idealized, militant, working-class womanhood. Some activists crossed organizational and ideological lines, developing position papers aimed at redefining their roles in Pan-African organizing at major international conferences. They also joined forces with other women of color to position black women as part of black and Third World collectives and as the vanguard of antiracist, anticapitalist, antisexist liberation struggles. Dickson's artwork was part of a multifaceted and long-standing conversation among black women activists during this era, one in which they used their intellectual and cultural production to challenge hegemonic and patriarchal perceptions of black womanhood and to develop unifying symbols that could incite other women to radical political action.

Black women's collective, and, at times, conflicting, debates over black womanhood show that the gendered imaginary—or activists' idealized, public projections of black manhood and womanhood—was a critical site of Black Power activism and theorizing. To be sure, activists' social and political organizing transformed race relations in the second half of the twentieth century. However, organizers were also expressly interested in redefining black identity outside white, Eurocentric norms and values. To achieve this goal, Black Power activists collectively reimagined black identity

and gender constructs by developing oppositional, black-centered models of manhood and womanhood. These were collective symbols that united activists around a set of ideas and organizing goals. Many activists rooted their ideas about manhood and womanhood in a particular group's temporal, geographical, and ideological commitments. Taken together, they constituted idealized projections of organizers' gendered, raced, and classed political identities.

Activists' models of black womanhood were often utopian and symbolic; yet they were never apolitical.<sup>3</sup> If a central goal of Black Power mobilization was to overturn existing structures and cultures and replace them with black-centered ones, then redefining men's and women's roles, activists argued, was a seminal first step in the "revolution of the mind" required to effectively engage in this political project.<sup>4</sup> Individual and collective redefinition was the bedrock on which black Americans could reject white hegemonic cultural, political, and economic structures. New ideas about black manhood and womanhood were the scaffolding on which they could erect new ideas about Black Power and empowerment.

The common perception is that black men controlled these conversations and constructed the Black Power gendered imaginary. Yet images like Dickson's counter this claim. Black women activists developed distinct but overlapping bodies of literature and artwork dedicated to diversifying public perceptions of black womanhood. At times, they played on existing ideas about racialized gender roles and reshaped them to convey their gender-specific interpretations of ideologies and political agendas. In other moments, they pushed beyond racial lines to formulate capacious ideas about their roles in radical freedom struggles. Black women activists expressed their organizational and ideological commitments through their new formulations of black womanhood. They also used these ideals to reshape popular perceptions of black women's roles in political mobilization, masculinist ideas of black liberation, and the meaning of Black Power. Their attempts to theorize and embody these idealized political identities reveal how the gendered imaginary was an important space of political and ideological activism, and they demonstrate the centrality of black womanhood to the era's debates about race, class, and gender.

Black women activists' ubiquitous engagement with redefining black womanhood illustrates the importance of not just studying what black women did but also examining who and what they aspired to do and be. Black Power organizers participated in extensive and contested conversations over the definitions and contours of black womanhood *precisely* because

they believed these new gendered ideals to be legitimate forms of political opposition and a vital component of personal and collective self-liberation. As a result, we must treat the complex and highly idealized aspects of Black Power with the same seriousness that we examine political and social organizing. This approach can not only reformulate our archival methods for examining this period in history, it also has the potential to offer new insights into how we might better understand the future that black women imagined for themselves and those around them. If activists used the gendered imaginary to imagine new worlds, I am suggesting that it's equally useful for reimagining how we study Black Power.

Bringing together their political speeches, essays, pamphlets, and artwork, *Remaking Black Power* explores how black women's efforts to produce new models of black womanhood shaped the Black Power era. The book documents how activists developed different and, at times, competing models of black womanhood—such as the “Black Revolutionary Woman” or the “African Woman”—to advance Black Power tenets and assert the primacy of women in political organizing. It shows how their gender-conscious writings often bent the ideological and organizational trajectory of the movement toward more radical, intersectional approaches to black liberation and how they pushed activists and organizations to articulate a critique of patriarchy along with their critique of racism. Despite their efforts, black women activists were not able to completely subvert the very real Black Power-era sexism and misogyny. However, their reformulation of political and popular ideas about black womanhood did have palpable effects. Using their new models of black womanhood, black women activists reformulated Black Power ideas and symbols and bent the era's major organizations toward more inclusive emancipatory models.

Black women activists' idealized forms of womanhood were not hermetically sealed categories. They were fluid and porous identifications that black women created, occupied, and moved between in their efforts to inch closer to freedom. The contours of these political categories changed over time, both shaping and being shaped by the political moment in which activists constructed them. This book identifies and explores *some* of the ways in which black women collectively constructed new ideals about gender roles in the Black Power era. However, it is not a complete account of black women's Black Power-era freedom dreams. It joins and contributes to a growing body of scholarship that explores black women's organizational, cultural, and theoretical contributions to presumed masculinist spaces. Adding to this scholarship, this study centers the theoretical, textual, and visual



representations of black women's ideas about the nexus of political ideologies and gender roles. In doing so, it shows how their flexible formulations of black womanhood challenged, reshaped, and, at times, even reaffirmed patriarchal imaginings of black women and their roles. Ultimately, the book argues that black women's formulations of womanhood were important sites of Black Power expression and explores how they represented black women's purposeful efforts to reformulate racial and gender hierarchies within the movement and society at large.

## Black Women and Black Power

Black Power activists' reformulations of womanhood foregrounded ideas that were more than a half century in the making. By the early 1900s, laborers, grassroots activists, and political leaders alike glibly surmised that, for black Americans, the new century would look much like the last. The racist rituals that characterized the postslavery era would remain intact in the first decades of the twentieth century, manifesting in turn-of-the-century Jim Crow laws and rampant black disenfranchisement. Black Americans migrated en masse to U.S. cities in the hopes of finding economic relief and a refuge from racial violence.<sup>5</sup> As migrants gathered in cities across the country, black activists, ideologues, religious officials, and political leaders attempted to make sense of black people's relationship to the modernizing American nation-state. On street corners and church pulpits, they debated which political philosophies and organizing strategies had the most potential to bring about black liberation.<sup>6</sup> Early twentieth-century luminaries such as Ida B. Wells and Anna Julia Cooper penned articles and theses weighing the merits of various liberation strategies, such as integration, separation, and expatriation. Whatever formulation these activists and intellectuals supported, they all grappled with concepts such as race pride, self-determination, black identity, black manhood, and black womanhood.<sup>7</sup>

In the face of rampant racial oppression and economic depression, black nationalist ideologies and groups gained widespread support. In the 1920s and 1930s, organizations including the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) and the U.S. Communist Party (CP) garnered significant black followings due to their backing of the idea that black Americans composed a separate nation within the United States, defined by their shared identity, culture, and heritage. Early twentieth-century women organizers made the advantages of radical organizing apparent. The activist Amy Jacques Garvey, wife of UNIA founder Marcus Garvey, published a weekly

column, “Our Women and What They Think,” in which she stressed the emancipatory potential of black nationalist organizing for black women. Meanwhile, Williana Burroughs and Maude White showed their fellow female activists how the CP’s support of the black working-class generated spaces for them to organize to end their race, class, and gender oppression.<sup>8</sup> Other women, such as Grace Campbell, helped found the African Blood Brotherhood in 1919, a group that combined nationalism and socialism to address black Americans’ race and class discrimination; cultural workers including Jessie Fauset used novels and essays to reevaluate black womanhood and motherhood amid early twentieth-century nationalist and Pan-Africanist discourses.<sup>9</sup> In women’s columns, on Harlem street corners, and at political rallies, these and other women debated issues of race, womanhood, black identity, and nationalism, sometimes collaborating and at other moments clashing. They also planted the seeds of Black Power-era ideologies and protest strategies that would germinate in the interwar and postwar years.

After two world wars, back home, black Americans still found themselves on the losing end of America’s global campaign for peace and democracy. During World War I (1914–18) and World War II (1939–45), black women watched as their brethren went off to battle racist and fascist regimes abroad while they still experienced the same discrimination at home. CP members such as Louise Thompson Patterson and Victoria (Vicki) Garvin capitalized on wartime discourses of freedom and equality to push the American government to live up to its democratic ideals. They were important leaders of the Popular Front, a group of ideologically and racially diverse organizations dedicated to advancing an antifascist, anticolonial, and antiracist agenda from 1935 through the 1940s.<sup>10</sup> These activists’ support of mainstream, liberal reforms and programs did not mean they relinquished their radical politics or nationalist principles. Leftist organizers and theoreticians such as Claudia Jones and Audley Moore actively promoted Garveyite and Communist frameworks in their wartime publications and political work, sustaining these ideological and organizing traditions amid the leftist populism that characterized the era.<sup>11</sup>

The lack of economic and racial advancement, the rise of independent African nations, and the onset of the Cold War in the 1940s rekindled black Americans’ widespread interest in nationalist frameworks. Former Garveyites joined with other radical women in an effort to achieve personal and collective freedom, making the late 1940s a period characterized by their transnational solidarities with other people of color.<sup>12</sup> By the early 1950s,

their calls for black separation and independence gained momentum as, year after year, another African nation threw off the yoke of European colonialism and gained its freedom. These activists also recognized the urgency to mobilize as the previous generation of black women activists, including Jones, Garvin, and Patterson, weathered governmental attacks for their support of nationalist and communist causes during what is now known as the McCarthy era.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the news of self-governing black nations abroad contrasted sharply with the antiblack attacks on activists at home, adding weight to the predictions of rising leaders such as Malcolm X who portended the potential of black nationalism.<sup>14</sup> Alongside, and in the absence of, these established organizers, a new generation of activists—including Alice Childress and Lorraine Hansberry—took up the mantle of nationalism and anti-imperialism in the 1950s.<sup>15</sup> By the early 1960s, women's groups such as the Cultural Association for Women of African Heritage and the Universal Association of Ethiopian Women inaugurated a new period of black nationalist organizing through their protests in support of black nationhood and self-determination on both sides of the Atlantic. Operating amid a shifting midcentury political landscape, these activists and organizations established the politics, style, and rhetoric now associated with post-1965 articulations of Black Power.<sup>16</sup>

Between 1961 and 1966, Black Power ideals and grassroots activism proliferated. In 1962, Moore revitalized UNIA members' earlier calls for reparations and African repatriation through the modern reparations movement.<sup>17</sup> The following year, Gloria Richardson, a member of the Cambridge Nonviolent Action Committee, an affiliate of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), made her way to Detroit for the Northern Negro Grassroots Leadership Conference. The event combined the organizational spirit of the 1963 March on Washington with decolonization-inspired nationalist militancy. Along with her friend Malcolm X, who gave his iconic "Message to the Grassroots" speech, Richardson broke with SNCC's nonviolent mantra and voiced her support of armed self-defense and black community control at the event.<sup>18</sup> If Malcolm's call for black people to achieve freedom by "any means necessary" inspired Richardson, his appeals for them to reclaim their African culture captured the attention of activists such as Dorothy Jamal and Brenda Haiba Karenga. In 1965, they joined other local organizers in creating the Us Organization, a Los Angeles-based cultural nationalist group that advocated for cultural reclamation as a precursor to political revolution.<sup>19</sup> Black women's distinct but coinciding calls for economic independence, armed self-defense, cul-

tural restoration, and political mobilization in the early 1960s were all manifestations of their increasingly unapologetic demands for control and autonomy.

By 1966, black women's various strands of activism became part of the fabric of the Black Power movement. The term *Black Power* evolved from a grassroots murmur into a national movement after Stokely Carmichael's June 1966 exclamation of the phrase in Greenwood, Mississippi. That same year saw the national debut of the original SNCC-supported Black Panther Party in Lowndes County, Alabama, and the Black Panther Party of Oakland, California, which Huey Newton and Bobby Seale created.<sup>20</sup> While the various iterations of the Black Panther Party challenged white supremacy through the ballot or the bullet, other black activists, including Amina Baraka, fused art, education, and community control through the African Free School, an independent educational institution supported by the CFUN in New Jersey. By the 1970s, members of these and other groups participated in national and international meetings such as the Black Power Conferences and the Sixth Pan-African Congress. Others joined the Congress of African People (CAP), a federation of Black Power organizations intent on realizing black self-determination and self-sufficiency on a global scale.<sup>21</sup> Black women consistently debated their roles and the meaning of black womanhood within these various Black Power projects and projections. Other times, women like Gwendolyn Patton and Frances Beal created independent, women-centered organizations, such as the Black Women's Liberation Committee (BWLC) and the Third World Women's Alliance (TWWA), designed to integrate Black Power, black feminist, and socialist principles.<sup>22</sup> Whatever form of Black Power they practiced, organizers, cultural workers, and theoreticians all engaged in the central slogans and principles of the era. Far from being marginal, violent, anti-intellectual, or male dominated, the Black Power movement of the late 1960s and 1970s was widespread and multifaceted in scope.

The new and proliferating histories of the Black Power era celebrate its diversity and challenge simplistic characterizations of its organizations, organizers, and political and cultural goals. They also reveal the rich, complex, and interlaced layers of the era by tracing postwar Black Power expressions, studying black women's Black Power politics, and considering the relationship of Black Power activism at the local, national, and international levels.<sup>23</sup> Although this new scholarship indicates that black women were an indispensable part of the movement, such activists still often remain ensconced in the popular imagination as a singular revolutionary

persona or as marginal figures within organizations and collectives.<sup>24</sup> This is due, in part, to Black Power's lingering reputation as a sexist and male-dominated movement. It is also because black women's interventions into these conversations are not always legible within our current conceptualizations of Black Power, gender roles, intellectualism, and identity politics. However, black women left a record of direct and copious engagement with Black Power theoretics, symbolism, and politics expressed through their ideas about their rights and roles. Acknowledging and historicizing the scope and reach of their Black Power praxis requires exploring their activism in concert with their political imaginings. It also means reconstructing and analyzing their diverse visions of black womanhood within the context of their political and cultural organizing.

### Regendering and Reimagining Black Power

Black female activists inaugurated the scholarship on their organizing and intellectual production. Well-known intellectuals and organizers such as Angela Davis, Assata Shakur, and Elaine Brown published personal and political autobiographies in the decades immediately following the movement. These texts documented their various routes to political activism and highlighted black women's critical contributions to Black Power organizing.<sup>25</sup> They also foregrounded the gender constructs, sexism, and misogyny within individual organizations and the movement at large. Historians quickly complemented these volumes with biographies of individual activists, such as Amy Jacques Garvey and Ruby Doris Smith Robinson, showing how black women consistently positioned themselves on the organizational and intellectual front lines of black nationalist projects and groups before and during the Black Power era.<sup>26</sup> Scholarly essays published alongside and shortly after these biographical accounts situated individual activists in the constellation of Black Power organizations and ideologies.<sup>27</sup> Many of these initial studies focused on national organizations such as the Black Panther Party. The pioneering work of Angela LeBlanc Ernest and Trayce Matthews, for example, explored women's participation in the party, illustrating how they shaped and were shaped by its gender dynamics.<sup>28</sup> Although contemporaneous and post hoc assessments glorified black men as the hypermasculine leaders of the movement, these initial personal accounts, biographies, and organizational studies indicated that black women held key leadership positions, challenged sexism, and advanced Black Power philosophies and organizing.

Historians have since continued this trend, diversifying our understandings of women's contributions to well-known Black Power organizations. Robyn Spencer and Mary Phillips have led the way in developing a body of scholarship that documents black women's stewardship of the Black Panther Party. Their research not only charts the evolution of the organization, paying particular attention to how black women shaped its stance on women and gender roles. It also shows how Panther women integrated their feminist priorities into their party work.<sup>29</sup> Ula Taylor has challenged popular and scholarly perceptions of black women's participation in the Nation of Islam. Focusing on female members, she reveals how they balanced the organization's conservative gender prescriptions with their personal and political goals by regendering their familial and social relationships.<sup>30</sup> Other scholars have begun to reexamine cultural nationalist groups such as the Us Organization and the CAP. Women in these organizations have often been overlooked because of the sexist reputation of these collectives. New analyses move beyond indicting male leaders for their patriarchal practices and document how women in these groups foregrounded their gendered priorities and challenged patriarchal interpretations of Kawaida, an ideology designed to counter white cultural hegemony through black-centered practices and values.<sup>31</sup> This scholarship provides more nuanced understandings of organizational dynamics and goals, highlights women's visible and previously undetected influence, and documents how black women navigated national Black Power organizations, at times challenging patriarchy and at other moments acquiescing to it.

Others have turned their focus toward black women's grassroots and extraorganizational activism. In the process, they have exposed the ways in which black women engendered and regendered the principles and rhetoric of the era. Whether it was Rhonda Williams's study of how black women in Baltimore mobilized "outside of, but in the context of, Black Power radicals" or Premilla Nadasen's assessment of how welfare rights activists including Johnnie Tillmon advocated a form of Black Power politics "attuned to the specific interests of poor women," historians have documented how black women have adopted and transformed Black Power principles to fit their lived experiences.<sup>32</sup>

If exploring black women's grassroots activism has proved productive, so too has examining their organizing in women-centered and feminist groups. Previously, studies of this period indicated that Black Power masculinism forced black women to create separate groups in order to organize around their gender-specific concerns.<sup>33</sup> To be sure, patriarchal

interpretations of black nationalist ideologies fostered antagonistic relationships between male and female activists. However, the focus on these clashes has obscured instances of ideological and organizational convergence among nationalists and feminists. Recent scholarship by Stephen Ward and Sherie Randolph, among others, has delineated how black women fused Black Power and black feminist ideologies and protest strategies to create a women-centered radical identity and political agenda. Such scholarship argues for a new understanding of the relationship between Black Power and black feminism, one in which the former played a more generative role in cultivating the latter.<sup>34</sup>

The aforementioned studies have expanded our understanding of Black Power and challenged phallogocentric readings of the era by focusing on black women's activism, particularly in a single organization or geographical locale. Such studies have now become an indispensable part of developing a holistic understanding of this era precisely because they show how black women challenged limiting ideas of their roles and responsibilities in daily organizing. They have also generated new questions. If we now know that black women disagreed with the real and imagined roles that black men assigned to them, what new models of womanhood did they develop in response? How did this differ within and among organizations? What role did ideology play in their reformulations of black womanhood? And what material effects did their gendered reimaginings have on the era's organizational and ideological trajectory?

I argue that some of these questions can be answered by mapping black women's engagement in the Black Power gendered imaginary. I begin with the premise that although activists' definitions of Black Power differed, they were united in their declaration of a new militant racial consciousness and driven by the collective goal of creating a new black identity. On the surface, this manifested in a cumulative shift from identifying with the term *Negro* to adopting the moniker *black*. It was also a deeper, more encompassing effort to transform the black condition by developing interpretations of black manhood and womanhood unbridled by Eurocentric definitions. Activists' new assertions of black identity were more than simply rhetorical expressions of militancy. They were the cornerstones of Black Power-era radicalism.<sup>35</sup> Reimagining themselves as Black Revolutionary Women or Pan-African Women empowered female activists; the Black Revolutionary's or Pan-Africanist's agenda became the rubric for their social, cultural, and political organizing.

*Remaking Black Power* documents *some* of the popular models of black womanhood that female Black Power-era activists produced. Historicizing black women's engagement in the Black Power-era gender debates means reconstructing their gendered political visions from multiple vantage points. As a result, my analysis spans from the political essays and satire of postwar women radicals of the 1950s, to the artwork of the Black Panther Party of the late 1960s, to the editorials of women's groups such as the TWWA, a Black Power-era feminist organization in which members reimagined black womanhood throughout the 1970s.<sup>36</sup> I show how black women remade black identity from multiple ideological and organizational positionalities; they did not always agree on how black womanhood should be redefined, and they both reinforced and defied the patriarchal parameters in which they worked. Comparing activists' visions of black womanhood foregrounds black women's pervasive engagement in Black Power principles and highlights the complexities and contradictions of the era. It also reveals the need for a conceptual remapping of the Black Power era, one in which their definitions of black womanhood were indispensable to organizational activism and critical to the era's ideological advancement.

A study of the gendered imaginary invites us to reconfigure previous conclusions about the Black Power era and women's roles within it. Centering black women's debates about black womanhood, for example, suggests the need for a temporal reframing of the era. Histories of Black Power often begin in 1966—the year Carmichael introduced the “Black Power” slogan into the mainstream, national consciousness. However, a closer examination shows that, in reimagining black womanhood, postwar women radicals developed and sustained “Black Power-style radicalism” before and alongside the civil rights movement of the 1950s and well before the rise of the New Left movements of the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>37</sup> It also indicates that black women continued to theorize and enact Black Power principles after 1975 and the demise of well-known Black Power organizations.

*Remaking Black Power* locates the origins of Black Power and its gendered debates amid the political organizing of postwar black women radicals who moved in and through leftist organizations including the CP and the Sojourners for Truth and Justice in the 1940s and 1950s. Chapter 1 shows how activists such as Claudia Jones, Alice Childress, and Mae Mallory revived black nationalist frameworks espoused in the 1920s and 1930s and infused them into a new political identity for black women in the postwar era. Organizing in a period in which 80 percent of black women were employed



as domestic workers, Jones, Childress, and Mallory, among others, collectively created the trope of the “Militant Negro Domestic” as a way to reimagine working-class black women as nationalist political actors. Using political tracts, satire, fiction, and autobiographical accounts, they reimagined the black domestic worker as a militant activist who espoused a politics that fused Garveyite nationalism, communist class critiques, and gender-inclusive (later called feminist) visions of black liberation. In theorizing new ideas about black womanhood, postwar black women radicals challenged the common gendering of the black working-class as male. They also sustained and further developed early twentieth-century black nationalist formulations, laying the groundwork for future expressions of Black Power. This expansive temporal frame shows that black women’s gendered redefinition was more than simply a response to popular male activists’ sexism in the 1960s. It was a driving force behind the development and evolution of this era.

Examining black women’s ideas about black womanhood also reframes our understanding of Black Power ideology, intellectuals, and intellectualism. Activists’ formulations of black womanhood reflect a preoccupation with advancing a particular doctrine—such as revolutionary nationalism or cultural nationalism—as part of their gendered political redefinition. The new Black Power scholarship emphasizes the importance of the ideological development and trajectories of men like Malcolm X, Huey Newton, and Maulana Karenga.<sup>38</sup> Important additions to the historiography, these studies reveal that Black Power was a generative ideological era replete with liberal, radical, and revolutionary political philosophies. However, they also position men as the primary progenitors of Black Power thought and imply that the flow of ideas moved in only one direction: from the top-ranking male leaders down to the female rank and file.

This book moves beyond a framework in which men theorized and women organized. Heeding the advice of scholars like Ula Taylor, who has argued that we must pay attention to the ways in which black women “ground their ideas in the personal, antidotal, and subjective modes,” this book illustrates how they devised more expansive understandings of political theory by reimagining and enacting new gendered political identities.<sup>39</sup> In chapter 2, I show how women in the Black Panther Party theorized new ideas about the Black Revolutionary Woman in concert with the party’s changing political ideology. Charting the evolution of this ideal from 1967 to 1975 reveals how Panther women engaged with the organization’s evolving ideological outlook, applied it to their lived experiences, and then pro-

mulgated their gender-specific interpretations of the organization's philosophy in their writings and artwork. I show how their debates over the contours of the ideal female revolutionary actor shaped how party leadership perceived and enacted the ideological tenets to which they were beholden. This and other chapters indicate that black women's writings about black womanhood were critical sites through which they constructed more inclusive applications of political theory. Their influence on the ideological direction of organizations foregrounds the importance of considering black women as Black Power theorists in their own right and interrogating the reciprocal relationship between their intellectual and activist work.

Centering these activists' writings about black womanhood also transforms the body of evidence on which much of the history of the Black Power era has been written. Previously, studies of this period have primarily relied on white and black men's characterizations of black womanhood and black women's rights and roles. This archival method stems from a position that assumes that black women did not articulate their own perspectives on the intersection of political ideology and gender. It also derives from bias in what we decide "counts" as intellectual production during this period.<sup>40</sup> The same periodicals, publications, and collections that scholars often use to frame Black Power as a male-dominated era are brimming with information about black women's thoughts, actions, and philosophical leanings. These sources are often overlooked because they do not take the "traditional" form of ideological expression or because they undermine popular perceptions about black women and gender politics during this era. In reading black women's intellectual production as authoritative sources on gender politics and political thought during this period, this book destabilizes dominant perspectives and archival practices and highlights how, by redefining black womanhood, black women developed a vibrant genealogy of black thought.

These same documents also transform conventional understandings of what constituted Black Power activism. For many of the women in this study, a key part of redefining black identity and liberation was reimagining their roles and responsibilities within movement organizing. They based their claims on their lived experiences as activists. Black women also drew on the larger Black Power-era goal of overturning the social order to push for more expansive understandings of women's roles within the era's organizations or groups. Many argued that heading voter registration drives, creating black community schools, developing black cultural practices, leading community programs, heading organizations, and myriad other forms of

activism were the purview of women. Irrespective of how they reimagined black womanhood, these activists consistently argued that they should not be confined to traditional interpretations of “women’s work.”

A focus on black women’s ideas about black womanhood foregrounds their ideas about their roles and responsibilities in political organizing. Chapter 3 explores women who were part of two cultural nationalist groups: the Us Organization and the CFUN. Both of these groups originally practiced the philosophy of Kawaida, a culturally driven doctrine that originally relegated black women to marginal activist roles in the private sphere. I show how, by redefining their roles and responsibilities as African Women, women in these groups expanded the range of organizing activities for which cultural nationalist women were responsible. Not only did they consider developing new cultural ceremonies, such as birth rites, wedding ceremonies, and naming rituals, as the purview of the African Woman, in their columns and handbooks on “African Womanhood,” they also pushed for women to be active participants in protests, voting drives, community education, and ideological debates. This chapter illustrates how, by constructing more expansive definitions of the African Woman, Kawaidist women encouraged this faction of the Black Power movement to adopt more equitable conceptualizations of gender roles. They also played on activists’ goals of redefining black manhood and womanhood to theorize more inclusive ideological and organizational expressions of cultural nationalism.

Black women did not confine these expressions to specific organizations or groups; they also reimagined black womanhood in ways that traversed organizational, ideological, and geographical boundaries. Recognizing that Black Power was not a strictly U.S. phenomenon, many activists expressed global solidarity and formulated imagined communities through the lens of Pan-Africanism, a political ideology based on the belief that peoples of African descent around the world share a common past and destiny, as well as similar political aims. Black American activists developed gendered political identities that reflected their appreciation, solidarity, and identification with other women across the diaspora. One of the many ways that they accomplished this goal was by envisioning themselves as Pan-African Women, or by identifying as members of the African diasporic rather than the American populace. Women from across the political spectrum, including some from the aforementioned groups, theorized forms of black womanhood that embraced a unified, African-centered politics and subjectivity across sectarian lines. They rhetorically repositioned black American women as part of the vanguard of diasporic liberation struggles, challenging black

men's real and imagined positions as leaders of the global black liberation struggle.

In chapter 4, I explore how black women extended these gendered debates beyond American borders. I contextualize their interest in and identification with African and Pan-African liberation struggles within Black Power activists' deepening investment in internationalizing the movement. I then read their speeches, working papers, and conference resolutions from the 1972 All-Africa Women's Conference and the 1974 Sixth Pan-African Congress as examples of how some female activists articulated the ideal of the Pan-African Woman. Black American women's formulations of Pan-African womanhood reflect the global scope of Black Power, as well as their interest in redefining their roles on an international scale. Their ideas about the intersection of Pan-Africanism and black womanhood highlight the need to look beyond organizational, ideological, and geographical borders for evidence of black women's intellectual activism. It also shows the gendered imaginary to be a critical but understudied site of Black Power internationalism.

Similarly, black women's ideas about black womanhood invite us to rethink the relationship between black feminism and Black Power. It is traditionally assumed that male activists promoted a monolithic form of black identity that did not account for women's gendered or class-based identifications. As a response to and as a criticism of this approach, some argue, black women created separate women's or feminist organizations and developed a political identity based on their intersecting race, gender, and class oppression.<sup>41</sup> Many female activists did critique this aspect of Black Power organizing and formed independent women's or feminist organizations during the early 1970s.<sup>42</sup> Others challenged sexism and pushed for multifaceted ideas of blackness from *within* Black Power groups. Whichever avenue these activists chose, they were typically addressing sexist *interpretations* of black nationalist philosophies and principles rather than a given ideology itself. Nevertheless, post hoc assessments of these debates have positioned black feminism and black nationalism as oppositional theoretical and activist pursuits.

Exploring Black Power-era debates about gender roles reveals a more complicated story. Black women's formulations of black womanhood indicate that they consistently simultaneously identified as nationalists and feminists. A survey of their intellectual production also illustrates how, as members of multiple Black Power-era organizations, ranging from the Sojourners for Truth and Justice to the Black Panther Party, they developed

definitions of black womanhood with these concurrent ideological allegiances in mind. Chapter 5 reflects this point in greater detail by exploring the TWWA. I chart how this group created the identity of the Third World Black Woman, a radical, intersectional model of womanhood based on their real and imagined commonalities with women in and from Third World countries. In this particular formulation, alliance members imagined black women as activists who retained their commitments to Black Power principles while also integrating feminist and socialist principles into their political and cultural work. Tracing the evolution of the alliance's redefinition of black womanhood challenges long-held assumptions about the incompatibility of black feminism and black nationalism. It also shows that intersectional approaches to identity formation and activism that we uphold today emanated from Black Power activists' efforts to envision black women's liberation in holistic and generative ways.

Black Power activists continued to engage in debates over women's roles throughout the late 1970s. However, their freedom dreams were not enough to overcome the very real obstacles that their groups faced due to government repression, internal divisiveness, and financial crises. After Black Power organizations and collectives fell apart, a new generation of activists continued to debate the meaning of manhood and womanhood, albeit amid very different historical circumstances and political conditions.<sup>43</sup> Subsequent activists often looked to the Black Power-era generation to develop liberatory models and identities to meet the political and economic challenges of their day. Here again debates about black manhood and womanhood played an important role, as later generations have both rehearsed the gendered antagonisms of the era and drawn from the symbols and political models that female activists produced. Even if the organizations and activists of the Black Power era were blunted by the late 1970s, their ideas about gender roles and women's liberation live on in popular and political organizing and theorizing traditions.

In the pages that follow, I historicize and analyze the alternative roles and identities that black women imagined for themselves. This book is not a definitive history of women in the Black Power era. Rather, it is a history of Black Power told through black women's ideas about black womanhood. It is a study of how black women rhetorically and imagistically engaged in the Black Power-era goal of identity making, as well as of the effect of their gendered identity models on this period and how we understand it. My purpose is to foreground some of the nuances, complexities, and possibilities imbedded in black women's attempts to imagine a different world and their

roles within it. I also aim to illustrate that histories of the Black Power era that do not account for black women's gender-specific freedom dreams are incomplete.

I undertake this task by detailing some of the many definitions of womanhood that female Black Power activists produced. Balancing the inherent messiness of identity politics with the usefulness of gender as an analytical category, I have isolated and named these different models of womanhood in each chapter of the book. My titles for these categories stem from the historical record in which these activists implicitly or explicitly referenced them and the political moment or organization in which they were created. This is an inexact approach. However, I maintain that in embracing rather than shying away from the ambiguities of these debates, we might be better able to see the possibilities and limitations of Black Power ideals and reframe well-worn debates about this period. This approach also extends to the source material of the book. Its emphasis on intellectual and artistic production biases the book toward well-known organizations that produced substantial amounts of print media. This means that I offer an analysis of only a handful of the many important actors and organizations that defined the era. However, this method also provides the opportunity to focus on black women's engagement and racial redefinition in some of the most well-known and male-dominated groups. Ultimately, the book invites a conversation about how black women's real and imagined ideas about black womanhood shaped the Black Power era and how they can help us move toward different understandings of Black Power, as well as its present and future lessons.

The Black Power era was transformative not only for its critique of American race relations but also for the generative models of black identity that activists created. *Remaking Black Power* shows that black women's theorizing, particularly their new tropes of black womanhood, was an important engine of this ideological and political experimentation. Just as their male counterparts challenged racial hierarchies by redefining gender roles, black women worked to promote revolutionary change among their peers by redefining their roles and communal gender constructs. Their models of womanhood were, at times, contradictory, problematic, and essentialist. Nevertheless, by demonstrating the different radical identities that black women could adopt, and how these models were related to the liberation of black men and women everywhere, they shaped the evolution of the era and molded a movement that redefined the meaning of race and identity in American life.