

“IN SELF DEFENSE:” BLACK FEMALE JOURNALISTS’ ADVOCACY IN THE  
COLD WAR

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A Dissertation  
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the Faculty of the Graduate School  
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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctorate of Journalism

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by  
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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled  
IN SELF DEFENSE: BLACK FEMALE JOURNALISTS' ADVOCACY DURING THE COLD WAR

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## Chapter 1: Introduction-“Colored Women of the United States”

Mary Church Terrell, Black female journalist and civil rights activist, stood in front of the United Nations board in Lake Success, New York, on Sept. 21, 1949, to present a brief on Rosa Lee Ingram.<sup>1</sup> Ingram and her two sons had been sentenced in 1948 to life in prison after they were accused of murdering John Stratford, their white neighbor who attacked Ingram after her livestock ventured onto his Georgia property. As a mother of 14 children, Ingram believed she acted in self-defense, but the Southern justice of an all-white jury convicted her. In front of an audience of 75 people, Terrell stated: “Under similar circumstances it is inconceivable that such an unjust sentence would have been imposed upon a white woman and her sons.”<sup>2</sup> She went further in noting the role that both race and gender played in the Ingram case:

The colored women of the United States are appealing to the Commission on Human Rights carefully to investigate Rosa Lee Ingram’s case, feeling sure that when the facts are known justice will prevail and Rosa Lee Ingram with her two sons will be freed from the jail in which they have been unjustly incarcerated for more than two years.<sup>3</sup>

What Terrell highlighted in her speech were the unjust experiences that shaped the lives of thousands of Black women for decades. Rosa Lee Ingram’s experience reached beyond a single form of oppression and discrimination. As a southern Black widow and sharecropper, Ingram represented the second-class status of Black women, lack of bodily protection of Black womanhood and the exploitation of Black women as laborers. Both

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<sup>1</sup>Mary Church Terrell Presents Ingram Case to United Nations. *California Eagle*, October 12, 1949, 6-7

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

Terrell's commentary and Ingram's case highlight how the intersection of race, gender, and class contributed to twentieth-century Black feminist thought as both a practice and a theory.<sup>4</sup>

During this post-World War II period, Black women were at the center of the debate about human rights and liberation because their unique experiences spoke to an international network of oppressed people. As a turning point in the long struggle for civil rights, Cold War political conservatism positioned Black activists to accept less radical, militant tactics that would eventually make up the traditional, integration-focused Civil Rights Movement. Historian Daya Gore stated that a majority of Black women resisted this shift and continued the radical tradition by addressing a larger framework of racialized oppression that included gender and class.<sup>5</sup> Women's radical engagement with race and gender debates served as a tool to counter the rising tide of Cold War conservatism and anti-Communism politics. Terrell and other Black women activists continued their activist approach of addressing human rights and challenging the United States' democratic position. In her speech, Terrell stated how injustices against Black women were erased because the different statuses of white women and Black men. She argued,

Colored women in the United States are confronted by obstacles and perils of various sizes and kinds only because they are women but because they are colored women. There are difficulties and disappointments meeting them at every

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<sup>4</sup> See Patricia Hill-Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*. (New York: Routledge, 2000). Patricia Hill-Collins theorized that Black Feminism is a critical social theory designed to address social justice. All Black women can add to the understanding of Black feminism due to the importance of lived experiences.

<sup>5</sup> Daya Gore, *Radicalism at the Crossroads: African American Women Activists in the Cold War*. (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 74-75.

turn...Colored women have two high handicaps to hurdle—both race and sex. Generally speaking, a colored woman who is the victim of a white man’s advances or violence has no redress in the courts.

Scholars have described the Rosa Lee Ingram case as one of the most significant civil rights cases of the 1940s, advocating for social justice on multiple fronts.<sup>6</sup>

According to Gore, “In many ways, the activism in support of Rosa Lee Ingram exemplified the power of mass-based campaigns that advocated for Black defendants convicted by a racially biased criminal justice system. In fact, the fight to end what activists referred to as ‘legal lynching’ proved fundamental to African American civil rights activism and mass mobilizations during the 1940s and early 1950s.”<sup>7</sup> Rosa Lee Ingram as a black female sharecropper who owned land in Georgia presented a unique combination of identities and circumstances. Her economic status of livestock and property ownership represented another level of citizenship. Owning land represented another level of power because very few Blacks or women owned land. The incident with Stratford occurred on Ingram’s property which linked racism within the criminal justice system to Black women’s sexualized terror and the denial of protection of one’s land. Seizing the opportunity to campaign on behalf of Ingram, black female writers Mary Church Terrell, Charlotta Bass, Claudia Jones and Alice Dunnigan employed advocacy newspapers to campaign for Ingram’s freedom. In doing so, they spurred a national conversation about land ownership, body politics and racial injustice.

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<sup>6</sup> See Danielle McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape and Resistance—A New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2010); Charles Martin, Gerald Horne, *Communist Front?: The Civil Rights Congress, 1946-1956* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1988).

<sup>7</sup> Gore, *Radicalism at the Crossroads*, 74.

This dissertation expands previous scholarship by examining how Black female journalists advocated for Black women, particularly through the Rosa Lee Ingram case. In doing so, this study contributes to the historiographies of advocacy press institutions, including the Black press and communist newspapers, and Black feminist radical politics by examining the media activism of twentieth century black female journalists. Black women could speak on the multiple discourses because of their unique position in the social hierarchy, advocating for racial, gender, and class justice.<sup>8</sup> As such, the following questions frame this project: How did advocacy media contribute to twentieth century Black feminist thought and Black radical politics? How did Black female journalists shape what Black feminists have named "oppositional knowledge," particularly in regards to the racial, gender and class exploitation of Black women?

The Ingram case was a departure from other "legal lynching" cases.<sup>9</sup> Campaigns to free Willie McGee, the Martinsville Seven, and the notable Scottsboro Boys involved Black men who were wrongly convicted and sentenced to die for crimes against white

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<sup>8</sup> Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 20.

<sup>9</sup> Horne, *Communist Front?: The Civil Rights Congress, 1946-1956* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1988). McGee was a Black man from Laurel, Mississippi, who was sentenced to death in 1945 for the rape of Willette Hawkins, a white housewife in town. The Martinsville Seven a group of seven African-American men from Martinsville, Virginia who were convicted and executed in 1951 for raping a white woman in 1949. In 1931, nine black teens riding a freight train north toward Memphis, Tennessee, were arrested after being falsely accused of raping two white women. they were brought to trial in Scottsboro, Alabama. Despite evidence that exonerated the teens -- including a retraction by one of their accusers -- the state pursued the case. All-white juries delivered guilty verdicts and all nine defendants, except the youngest, were sentenced to death. From 1931 to 1937, during a series of appeals and new trials, they remained in prison. In 1937, four of the defendants were released and five given sentences from 20 years to life; four of those were released on parole between 1943 and 1950.

victims, particularly white women. Instead, for Ingram, the social justice campaign positioned her as a symbolic figure who pushed sexualized racial violence to the center of a national conversation.<sup>10</sup> Black women's denial of protection and self-defense reframed civil rights and women's rights in the sense that they could not be examined separately because one identity informed the other.

Black female journalists were primed to emerge in the forefront of media coverage, as Ingram's case served as a touchstone of Black women's daily experiences. Black intellectuals, activists and writers sought to represent the reality of Black life for themselves (rather than relying on white-dominated media organizations). These journalists often drew from their own experiences, blurring the line between journalist and activist. Jones, Bass, Dunnigan and Terrell spoke to the larger understanding of Black radicalism that intersected various forms of oppression, a strand that the status quo leadership of the Civil Rights Movement often ignored. Black feminists' work in the Cold War period set the stage for second-wave feminism and contemporary understandings of intersectionality, as it re-conceptualized the relationship between leftist politics, civil rights, Black power and second-wave Black women's movements.<sup>11</sup> The persistence and vision of Black female journalists during the Cold War illuminates the shift of the militancy of the Civil Rights Movement to follow. Scholar Michael Dawson argues that throughout Black history, different visions of freedom have significantly

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<sup>10</sup> Dayo Gore, *Radicalism at the Crossroads*. See also Sarah Haley, *No Mercy Here: Gender Punishment, and the Making of Jim Crow Modernity*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 5

<sup>11</sup> Cheryl Higashida. *Black Internationalist Feminism: Women Writers of the Black Left, 1945-1955*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 4



shaped Black political attitudes and practices.<sup>12</sup> Black communities used these visions to empower themselves, resist systems and institutions, and gain access to full citizenship. Black networks and institutions, therefore, have been responsible for crystalizing the shared historical experiences of Black people into a collective identity, particularly in further developing Black women's positionalities.

The post-World War II period saw a global shift toward politics and identity. Systemic race barriers in the United States were aided with the South's practice of Jim Crow racism.<sup>13</sup> President Harry Truman had revived his push for civil rights, courting support from northern Black citizens. In 1948, he promised to support federal civil rights legislation. Prior to his presidency, foreign politics and race were intertwined with campaigns like the 1941 March on Washington Movement and the *Pittsburgh Courier's* Double V. Truman said in his 1950 State of the Union speech that the United States was at "the center of world affairs."<sup>14</sup> He claimed communists were attempting to magnify the nation's imperfections and setbacks. The Soviet Union attacked the credibility of the United States on issues of democracy by pointing to Jim Crow segregation and U.S.

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<sup>12</sup> Michael Dawson, *Black Visions: The Roots of Contemporary African American Political Ideologies*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 10.

<sup>13</sup> See Penny Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: African Americans and Anti-Colonialism, 1937-1957*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), Philip A. Klinkner and Rogers M. Smith. *The Unsteady March: The Rise and Decline of Racial Equality in America*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999). Joan Quigley. *Just Another Southern Town: Mary Church Terrell and the Struggle for Racial Justice in the Nation's Capital*. (London: Oxford University Press, 2016), 10-12.

<sup>14</sup> Quigley, *Just Another Southern Town*, 10-12. *Pittsburgh Courier* launched its "Double V" campaign in February 1942 to bring attention to Blacks' rights and victory both domestically and abroad.

support for colonialism abroad.<sup>15</sup> The aversion to Communism had blinded causes to advance the issues of labor, civil rights and human rights. The House Committee on Un-American Activities investigated the activities of organizations and person who they deemed to be Communist. The probing of government officials increased the suspicions of the Black community. Between 1945 and 1965, over 3 million Blacks left the South and migrated to northeast, north central, and western states. This migration changed the racial composition of major cities and increased the push for equality.<sup>16</sup>

Historian Manning Marable stated that Blacks created a forum for oppressed people to dialogue about colonialism.<sup>17</sup> During this period, Black radicals advocated for nationalist internationalism, “a self-determinism for all oppressed nations.”<sup>18</sup> While tactics varied, Black women asserted that they had “special problems that could not be deferred or subsumed with the rubrics of working class or Black oppression and that in fact were integral to the universal struggle for human rights and economic freedom.”<sup>19</sup> Scholar Robin D.G. Kelley argued feminists of color revealed how race, gender and class worked together to subordinate most of society while complicating notions of universal sisterhood and racialized collectives. They challenged what is “normal” and showed how the state controls behaviors and bodies based on social status. As a counter movement to political conservatism, Kelley observed, the existence of radicalism within social

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<sup>15</sup> Manning Marable. *Race, Reform and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction and Beyond in Black America, 1945-2006*. (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi, 2007), 6

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8.

<sup>17</sup> Manning Marable. *Dispatches from the Ebony Tower: Intellectuals Confront from Africans Americans*

<sup>18</sup> Higashida. *Black Internationalist Feminism*, 2

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-3.

movements enables “participants to imagine something different, to realize that things need to always be this way.”<sup>20</sup>

Through writings, the Black Press, specifically Black female journalists envisioned freedom through different messages, tactics and discourses. This project centers on Black women’s lived-experiences and is presented in a way to highlight the lives of the Black female journalists within the larger, broader history. Each of the following chapter begins with a Black woman positioned in a moment of time. This is purposely done to reflect Black women as active participants within their own knowledge of Black Feminist Thought. By placing these Black female journalists their lived-experiences, it reinforces a key part of Black feminism as well as giving the reader context to their lives prior to the Rosa Lee Ingram case. The structure of the dissertation will first focus on the sequence of events in the Rosa Lee Ingram case. Then, Communist newspaper journalist Claudia Jones’ experiences introduce the theorization and beginnings of Black Feminism. In chapter three, editor and publisher of the *California Eagle* Charlotta Bass’ visit to the Soviet Union sets the stage for understanding the post-war and Cold War period and its effects on Black radicalism. As the first Black woman to be appointed to the White House Press Corps, journalist Alice Dunnigan maps out the evolution of Black female journalists and the Black Press. After noting the historical discourse methodology, the findings of the dissertation start with Black Press newspapers, the *Atlanta Daily World* and *Pittsburgh Courier* and their coverage of the Ingram case. Large newspapers like the *Daily World* and the *Courier* contributed to the

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<sup>20</sup> Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 9.

Rosa Lee Ingram case through a sympathetic larger discourse of race under the Jim Crow South. The Black Press maneuvered The *Daily World* worked closely with local and national NAACP to provide financial and material assistance to the legal defense and the remaining Ingram children. The discourse addressed the racial injustices of Black women within the court system. Neither newspapers' coverage wasn't guided by Black female journalists, but reflects how other groups like Black male journalists can produce and participate in Black feminism's oppositional knowledge. The *Courier* highlighted the voice of Rosa Lee Ingram in telling her struggles with sexual assault and violence.

The last two chapters will focus on the work of specific Black female journalists' writings, organizations and activism surrounding the Rosa Lee Ingram case. A Pan-African approach guided the work of Claudia Jones and Charlotta Bass as they addressed Rosa Lee Ingram as a symbol for global oppression through imperialism and capitalism means. These journalists as well as the Sojourners for Truth and Justice focused on the power of Black women to advocate for themselves and use their unique position to move towards freedom. Using a similar global approach, members of the National Committee for the Ingram Family centered on the universal status of motherhood to advocate for Rosa Lee Ingram, but included white women as key to spreading its message. As the committee's chairman, Mary Church Terrell produced a media activism campaign rooted in racial integration that was politically palatable to the conflict of the Cold War.

Over a six-year period, this media discourse shifted the Rosa Lee Ingram case from a sympathetic message of systemic oppression within the courts, then highlighting Black women's radical voices as the starting point for global peace and finally, a global universal interracial discussion of motherhood being the basis for humanity and equality.

This work contributes to the understanding of how media produce debates to challenge the status quo and create oppositional knowledge towards certain marginalized groups. Rosa Lee Ingram launched a space where Black women's visibility increased on a national and international scale because Black women gave their voices to her cause. Overall, the dissertation illustrated the different methods and tactics used by the news media to advocate for Black women through the lens of human rights during the Cold War period.

With the complexities of human rights, Rosa Lee Ingram's case questioned the network in which discrimination and oppression intersect. When proceedings of her case reached the United Nations, they altered the globe profoundly as the Black Press and civil rights organizations urged for efforts to be launched to free the Ingrams. Black female journalists produced writings and participated in activism that led the National and international interests and support for the family came in the form of letters, wires, and funds. The spotlight was set for those rallying for Rosa Lee Ingram's freedom against "Georgia Justice."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Black Press articles referred to the case as "Georgia Justice" in order to highlight the American racism of the case.

## Chapter 2: The Rosa Lee Ingram Case

On November 4, 1947, Rosa Lee Ingram and John Stratford argued for the last time. The two had a long-standing feud about Ingram's livestock running through Stratford's fields, but that morning Stratford had threatened to kill the animals if she could not control them. The exact sequence of events remains unclear, but in the end Stratford was found dead in the field road that led from his farm to the Ingrams.<sup>22</sup>

On that day, Mrs. Ingram and her four older sons were harvesting corn on their land. By mid-morning, they pulled about two loads when John Stratford stormed the field and yelled for them to get the mules and hogs out of his land. Mrs. Ingram told her sons, Sammie Lee and James to stay in the corn field, while she searched for the hogs. Her other sons, Wallace and Charles gathered the mules and took them back to the house.

Mrs. Ingram gave up on finding the hogs and headed back to her home. Near her cotton patch, she suddenly was attacked by John Stratford. Rosa Lee Ingram sent several of her sons in one direction to find the mules and went by herself to hunt down the hogs. Despite their efforts, a frustrated Stratford came after Mrs. Ingram with a .32 caliber rifle, cursing. According to her first account, Stratford threatened and insulted her and hit her on the head with the rifle. Stunned by the pain, Mrs. Ingram thought she had been shot but still managed to struggle with Stratford and get his gun away from him. Then she hit

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<sup>22</sup>Testimony of Willoughby Beauchamp, Brief of Evidence in Rosa Lee Ingram v. State, Record Group 92, Georgia Supreme Court Case Files, #16263, Georgia Department of Archives and History. Virginia Shadron. "Popular Protest and Legal Authority in Post-World War II Georgia: Race, Class and Gender Politics in Rosa Lee Ingram Case. PhD diss., Emory University, Atlanta, 1991. See also "Ingrams Shall Not Die!" Daily Worker 1948. S32 Cases-Ingram, Rosa Lee. Civil Rights Congress Papers Box 90. A148. Ingram, Rosa Lee-Press Releases Civil Rights Congress Box 8.

him twice on the head before her sons came to their mother's aid. Charles walked his mother to their home before he and his brothers went to inform Mrs. Irene Stratford of what happened. After seeing her husband's dead body, she quickly told the nearest "white family" and the news rapidly spread through the small town before it was reported to the sheriff. The local white community rallied around Irene Stratford and alerted her children, who were in school, about the incident. Highway Patrol Sergeant Willoughby Beauchamp arrived on the Ingrams' property with Sheriff Jack McArthur and Dr. Henry R. Fenn. Inspecting Stratford's wounds, Fenn and Beauchamp noticed a 2-inch laceration above his ear and three other injuries on the back of Stratford's head.<sup>23</sup>

As they came closer to the Ingrams' home, they noticed a hammer and hoe in the yard. When Rosa Lee Ingram emerged from the house, Beauchamp asked her whether she killed John Stratford.<sup>24</sup> She admitted to killing him after he shot at her and handed over Stratford's rifle to Beauchamp, who examined the weapon and stated it had not been fired. Mrs. Ingram explained how Stratford struck her and showed the officers her head wound, but Beauchamp dismissed her.

More officers arrived on the scene, and one found a red button off Rosa Lee Ingram's sweater in the field. The questioning of Mrs. Ingram and her boys began. She repeated her story, and her four sons individually and they corroborated her account. They all denied striking John Stratford, except Rosa Lee Ingram, who stated Stratford

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<sup>23</sup>Ingram Case Files. Shadron. "Popular Protest and Legal Authority in Post-World War II Georgia," 35-36.

<sup>24</sup>"Ingrams Shall Not Die!,"5. Ingram, Rosa Lee-Press Releases. Box 8., a218, Ingram, Rosa. Civil Rights Congress Papers. Box 70., a149 Ingram, Rosa Lee-Publications, General Civil Rights Congress, Box 8.

attacked her first. More than twelve white men trampled around the crime scene and directly or indirectly interrogated the Ingrams. By the end of the day, they were convinced it was murder.<sup>25</sup>

Around 4:30 p.m., Rosa Lee Ingram was taken into custody along with her 12-year-old James Frank Ingram. The authorities said he was the only son who might have helped his mother at the scene. At the jail, Mrs. Ingram was forced to remove her clothes to be examined for injuries, although the doctor dismissed any severe trauma. Probing into the case continued throughout the evening. The officers noticed evidence of more than one struggle and did not believe Mrs. Ingram's account due to the number of Stratford's wounds. Soon they returned to the Ingram home and arrested her sons Jackson, Charles, Wallace and Sammie Lee. While in custody Sammie Lee, 14, admitted to hitting Stratford with the hammer and his brother Wallace, 16, hit him with the gun. After continuous rounds of interrogation, both boys admitted to hearing their mother's screams and rushing to her aid by striking John Stratford dead with a gun, a hammer and a hoe.<sup>26</sup>

News of Stratford's death and the Ingrams' arrest spread through the area. The threat of mob violence forced officials to move the Ingrams. Statements from Mrs. Stratford and C.M. Delinger painted Rosa Lee Ingram in a negative light. As her landlord, Delinger, stated, Mrs. Ingram "had the devil in her all the time. As long as her

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 37-41. Also see Ingram, Rosa Lee-Press Releases., a218, Ingram, Rosa., a149 Ingram, Rosa Lee-Publications.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 43-45. Also see Ingram Case file. Also see u18 Ingram, Rosa Lee. Civil Rights Congress Papers. Box 92. Schomberg Center.



husband lived he could hold her down.”<sup>27</sup> Rumors of the case were fueled by racism and sexism. With public opinion, a confession and evidence, the trial and conviction would swiftly follow.

### **Her Lived-Experience**

Prior to her encounter with John Stratford, Rosa Lee Ingram’s story followed the narrative of Southern Black people during the period. She was born in Sumpter County in 1908 about ten miles from Americus, Georgia to Tom and Amy Floyd. As the second born of eight children, Rosa Lee Ingram attended three years of school before she joined her father on his farm around the age of eight. She and her oldest sister worked in the family’s fields because her six younger brother were not old enough to help. She served as her father’s plowboy and helped the family raise cotton. Rosa Lee’s father died in her teens, but around that same time she met Jackson Ingram, her future husband.

At the age of 15, she married Jackson Ingram on the Gatewood farm near Ellaville. Jackson Ingram was about 20 years older than Rosa Lee and the pair met in church.<sup>28</sup> They were married one year before Ingram gave birth to her first child and despite losing two babies in childbirth, their family eventually grew to 14 children. Living in a rural area, none of her children were born in a hospital, but Rosa Lee Ingram did go to the hospital for treatment before the last two were born.<sup>29</sup> With many mouths to feed, Rosa Lee Ingram recalled how her husband was a “good worker and he kept plenty

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<sup>27</sup> “Ingrams Shall Not Die!,” 5. Ingram, Rosa Lee-Press Releases. Box 8. Also see Ingram Case file.

<sup>28</sup> Robert Racliffe. Mrs. Ingram Married at Age of 15. *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 27, 1948, 1.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

of food and clothes for us.”<sup>30</sup> She explained how both Black and white people respected her husband and thought well of him, but tragedy struck on August 5, 1947 when Jackson Ingram had a stroke and died. Deeply religious, Rosa Lee Ingram described how her husband went to church sometimes, but wasn’t a member of a church. She relieved how few months prior Jackson “got all right before he died, though, because he told me he was going home to rest..., so I reckon he knew what he was doing.”<sup>31</sup>

Without her husband, Rosa Lee Ingram continued to work farm until the incident with Stratford, but times were hard. She received \$15 from C.M. Dillinger, her landlord the day before her husband died, but never borrow money from him again. The Ingrams worked the land on a 50-50 sharecropping agreement and raised 30 hogs, two milk-cows of her own. Among their private property, they claim 15 of the farm’s 30 hogs, half the money from \$500 worth of peppers marketed by the landlord, half of the quantity of cribbed corn, a quarter acre of cane and a bale of cotton.

The most common form of Black farming in the South was sharecropping. Virtually property-less workers paid with a portion of the crops raised, sharecroppers had little choice but to cultivate the landowner’s choice of staple crops. The landowner supplied the acreage, houses, draft animals, planting materials and nearly all subsistence necessities. These items were deducted from the sharecropper’s portion of the crop at an incredibly high interest rate. The system not only kept most tenants in debt, but perpetuated living conditions that were nearly intolerable. Families lived in poorly

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

constructed shacks and suffered from nutritional deficiencies. The economic conditions of Black sharecroppers presented another systematic way to oppression and injustice. In 1947, she claimed she didn't make any money on farm despite trying hard to make a living. Rosa Lee Ingram planned to leave after harvesting this last crop and work as a sharecropper on another farm, but John Stratford kept bothering her and making sexual advances. She described how he asked her to be his mistress in return her economic issues would be solved. The sexual violence, poverty and racism intersected within Ingram's life. Her life story connected the Black experience became the voice of Black women's oppression.

Increasing Black women's invisibility, Rosa Lee Ingram's lived-experience served as the media discourse because the elements of the Ingram case launched a network of social, political, and economic debates. Ingram's status positioned her as a symbol for Black radicalism and a direct challenge to the conservative Cold War views on race and gender discrimination and social justice. Scholars suggest that Black women represented one of the largest socially and economically deprived groups in America.<sup>32</sup> Black women fulfilling dual roles as mothers and economic providers were performing an unique action of matriarchs.<sup>33</sup> Among the other cases at the time, Mrs. Ingram was a Southern rural, widowed, working-class mother. Other "legal lynching" cases centered on

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<sup>32</sup> Angela Davis, *Women, Race & Class*, (New York: Vintage Book, 1981., Collins, *Black Sexual Politics.*, McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street.*, Barbara Ransby. *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina)

<sup>33</sup> bell hooks. *Ain't I a Woman: Black women and Feminism* (Boston: South End Press, 1981), 72. Also see Collins. *Black Feminist Thought.*, Collins. *Black Sexual Politics.*

Black men, who were perceived as criminal, but Rosa Lee Ingram was believed to be acting in self-defense. Her status and identity represent a complex framework that appealed to Black activists around the world. Ingram was not among the thousands of Blacks who migrated north in the Great Migration decades earlier. The rural South was steeped in Jim Crow segregation and white supremacy, where Blacks recognized their place in the social hierarchy. After World War II, Black veterans returned home hoping for equality but were met with a backlash of extreme racism. This change in racial attitudes was prevalent as civil rights organizations and activists challenged U.S. domestic policy.<sup>34</sup>

U.S. foreign policy was also affected as the international sensationalism of the case reflected the global aftermath of World War II imperialism and colonialism.<sup>35</sup> The end of colonialism Africa and Asia called into question human rights and freedoms. Eventually, the United States would be confronted with its domestic treatment of Blacks. The Rosa Lee Ingram case was one of the many instances when human rights and Black liberation was presented on the global stage.

Although race was a key part of Mrs. Ingram's status and identity, Black women saw her case as a means to reflect other components of oppression and discrimination. Gender, class, and violence were interwoven throughout the case and served as the lens for Black female journalists to address those issues. Rosa Lee Ingram appealed and

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<sup>34</sup> Klinkner and Smith. *The Unsteady March*. Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and Color Line*, (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2001). Erik S. Gellman, *Death Blow to Jim Crow: The National Negro Congress and the Rise of Militant Civil Rights*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

<sup>35</sup> Borstelmann, *The Cold War and Color Line.*, Horne, *Communist Front?*.

sympathized with Black women on many levels but still fit within the respectability politics that the majority of Blacks found favorable. The case was a unique situation for Black women in that it reflected a Black woman who was attempting to defend her physical (land) property and protect her womanhood (body). Despite her rural, working-class status, Mrs. Ingram owned livestock and property, which at that time positioned her among a select class of Blacks. The majority of Black women worked in the domestic field and very few opportunities were available to them in the South. Because most Black women received low incomes, only a few individuals were able to own property.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, a large population Black women had little control over their bodies despite the end of slavery because the constant threat of violence. Ingram's gender would be vital to the case because of John Stratford's sexual harassment and violence toward her. Rosa Lee Ingram moved the battle for racial, gender and economic equality forward, and opened more opportunities for Black women to advocate for themselves.

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<sup>36</sup> bell hooks. *Ain't I a Woman?*, 73

### Chapter 3: The Beginnings of Black Feminism

Claiming that a new movement of Negro women was unfolding in fall of 1951, Claudia Jones wrote in the Communist newspaper *The Daily Worker* about the Sojourners for Truth and Justice's rally in Washington D.C., where Black women spoke "their minds against intensified growth of lynch terror and national oppression of Negro people."<sup>37</sup> Jones was proud of the "new surge forward of Negro women to organize for peace and freedom in our country" and the "active leadership to many mass struggles for Negro freedom and for peace."<sup>38</sup> She recognized the unique position Black women and leading a movement of their own and fighting for full freedom. She wrote, "Negro women are triply oppressed, such a movement organized and led by them, represents something new—and that new feature is their rising desire for freedom!"<sup>39</sup> The Ingram case would be the first battle the Sojourners of Truth and Justice would tackle for full freedom. In the midst of her own deportation battle with the U.S. government, Jones voiced both her own and Mrs. Ingram's experiences with unjust practices of the criminal justice system.

As the only Black woman to serve on the Communist Party USA's National Committee, Jones made a great impact on Communist positions on race, gender, and class through her writings on Black women's superexploitation and triple oppression

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<sup>37</sup> Claudia Jones. "Half the World: Negro Women Launch New Movement for Peace and Freedom." *The Daily Worker*. November 25, 1951.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

logic.<sup>40</sup> Her path into radicalism was defined by her early entry into the workforce and her involvement in Harlem politics. When she wasn't working to support her family, she participated in local political and cultural events.<sup>41</sup> She acted as a forceful advocate of the Black working class and Black women leadership. Claudia Jones' writing fits within the historical trajectory of Black feminism by relating the oppression of Black women beyond the boundaries of race. Decades before the Cold War period, Black women helped forge organizations, movements, protests and pivotal moments of civil disruptions in the name of equality for all. Black women's burden of racial uplift, gender and economic equality present a historical continuation of their distinct form of radical activism. Scholar and activist Angela Davis argues that women resisted and challenged oppression and discrimination during slavery and beyond.<sup>42</sup>

The foundations of Black feminism are rooted in our nation's founding and have deep ties to slavery, when Black people were labeled as property, thus lacking any resemblance of humanity. In its earliest stages, the slave trade focused on the Black male slave and the Black female slave wasn't highly valued. Sexism was an integral part of white colonizers' social and political order for white and Black women.<sup>43</sup> As governmental efforts and laws curtailed the interracial interactions between white women and Black men, planters recognized the value of the Black female slave. When the Black

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<sup>40</sup> McDuffie, *Sojourning for Freedom*, 167. Also see Carole Boyce Davies. *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist, Claudia Jones*. (Durham: Duke University Press. 2008).

<sup>41</sup> Gore. *Radicalism at a Crossroads*, 21.

<sup>42</sup> Angela Davis. *Women, Race & Class*, (New York: Vintage Book, 1981), 5

<sup>43</sup> hooks, *Ain't I a Woman?*, 15-16. Davis. *Women, Race & Class*. Collins. Black Feminist Thought.

female slave bore children, her offspring would legally be slaves, regardless of the race of her mate.

The status of male and female slaves differed in suffering and oppression. The Black male slave was primarily exploited as a laborer in the fields, but Black female slaves was exploited as a laborer in the fields, a worker in the domestic household, a breeder, and an object of white male sexual assault. Blacks were forced to assume a “masculine” role as they labored in the fields.<sup>44</sup> Very few Black men labored as domestics, except as butlers, who held a higher status than Black maids. Rather, Black women were “unworthy” of the title of “woman” because privileged white women were rarely worked in the fields.<sup>45</sup> This masculinization of Black women during slavery reflects the dynamics of sexism and racism.

Not all Black women labored in the fields; many worked as domestics within the white household. The popular notion is that Black slaves in the white household received preferential treatment. However, Black women received the brunt of brutalization not only because they could be victimized via their sexuality but also because they were more likely to work intimately with the white family.<sup>46</sup> Working in close contact with the white mistresses and masters, Black women were frequently abused for petty offenses.<sup>47</sup>

Black women were hypersexualized and exploited sexually as well.

Institutionalized sexism was a social system that protected Black males, it socially

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<sup>44</sup> hooks, *Ain't I a Woman?*, Davis. *Women, Race & Class*. Collins. Black Feminist Thought.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> hooks. *Ain't I a Woman?*, 7-8.

<sup>47</sup> Saidaya Hartman. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery and self-making in Nineteenth-century America*, (New York: Oxford University Press)



legitimized sexual exploitation of Black females.<sup>48</sup> The white supremacy myth of the Black male rapist represented Black men as hypersexual “beasts.” Hence, the white community was concerned with protecting white womanhood from the violence of Black men. This protection of womanhood did not extend to Black women.<sup>49</sup> The female slave lived in constant vulnerability and fear that any male, white or Black, might single her out to assault or victimize her.<sup>50</sup> Because Black women were the opposite of white women, the sexual violence committed against them was seen as natural. The sexual exploitation of young slave girls occurred after they left their parents to work in the white domestic household. The slave girl commonly slept in the same bedroom of the master and mistress, which set a convenient situation for exploitation.<sup>51</sup> Often white male slave owners tried to bribe Black women as preparation for sexual advances so as to place them in the role of a prostitute, but Black women didn’t have a choice of their sexual partners. Rape was a weapon of domination and of repression, which extinguished a slave women’s will to resist and in the process to demoralize the power of Black men.<sup>52</sup> Any resistance from the Black female slave increased the determination of the white owners to demonstrate their power. White supremacy justified violence toward Blacks as a form of discipline and punishment because they were endowed with sexuality/criminality. Blacks were viewed “as sexual subjects. They were beyond the pale of the law and outside the boundaries of the decent and the nameable.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Davis. *Women, Race & Class*, Hartman. *Scenes of Subjection, hooks. Ain’t I a Woman?*

<sup>50</sup> hooks. *Ain’t I a Woman?*, 24-25.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>53</sup> Saidaya Hartman. "Seduction and the Ruses of Power." *Callaloo* 19, no. 2 (1996): 537.

Scholar Saidaya Hartman wrote that during slavery, rape was unimaginable because of the stereotypes about Black sexuality and seduction, and its repression was essential to the displacement of white culpability.<sup>54</sup> The enslaved were not subjects of common law, and raping them was not an offense. “The disavowal of rape most obviously involves issues of consent, agency, and will, which are ensnared in a larger dilemma concerning the construction of person and the calculation of Black humanity in slave law.”<sup>55</sup> Because the slave was both property and a person, the act of submission was required and deemed necessary. Therefore, the legitimacy of violence and the necessity of protection of one’s purchase allowed for a certain amount of injury. Most people saw the devaluation of Black women as occurring only within the context of slavery. The sexual exploitation of Black women continued long after slavery ended and was institutionalized by other oppressive practices.<sup>56</sup>

After the end of slavery, Black women fought their battles for equality by challenging their inferior status. During Reconstruction, Black women struggled to change negative images of Black womanhood perpetuated by whites. They emulated the mannerism and the conduct of white women, but in the eyes of the white public, Black women would never be seen as worthy of respect.<sup>57</sup> In 1850, at the first National Women’s Convention in Worcester, MA, Sojourner Truth, an invited speaker and celebrated Black orator, delivered her famous speech “Ain’t I a Woman.”<sup>58</sup> Her speech

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 537. See also Hartman. *Scenes of Subjection*.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 542

<sup>56</sup> hooks. *Ain’t I a Woman?*, 59.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 55.

<sup>58</sup> hooks. *Ain’t I a Woman?*, Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, See also Ula Taylor, “The Historical Evolution of Black Feminist Theory and Praxis,” *Journal of Black Studies* 29,

sparked the debate on gender rights among Black women because it sought to include Black women within society's social construction of white femininity. Truth questioned the protections she and other Black women received from the overt racial discrimination of white women, who claimed to be in the same fight for women's rights and equality.<sup>59</sup> Truth's speech was a rallying call for Black feminists because it opened the discussions of slavery and its impact on not only Black men and women, but also the social hierarchy of white women. She argued that the slave status denied Black women motherhood, protection from exploitation and femininity.<sup>60</sup>

Black women effectively defined a unique role in the abolition and suffrage movements. This dual identity remains an issue for Black women and separates their experiences from those of Black men and white women. As a result, in the antislavery movement, Black men and white women both defended their rights in the political struggle.<sup>61</sup> Both groups saw the benefit of working toward full (Black and white) male equality as the next step. As Black men dominated leadership roles in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they shaped the early Black liberation movement so it reflected patriarchal bias.<sup>62</sup> White women understood the patriarchal hierarchy requiring that all men, including Black men, would receive civil liberties before women. Also, southern white women held to the stereotypes about Black women's immorality and sexual behavior. This left little space

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no. 2 (November 1998): 234., Avtar Brah and Ann Phoenix. "Ain't I A Woman? Revisiting Intersectionality." *Journal of International Women's Studies* (2004), 5, no.3, 75-86

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Brah and Phoenix. "Ain't I A Woman? Revisiting Intersectionality."

<sup>61</sup> Davis, *Women, Race & Class*, 5.

<sup>62</sup> hooks, *Ain't I a Woman?*, 89.

for Black women due to the lack of willingness to integrate. White women failed to recognize that they were all systematically oppressed and exploited through white male patriarchy.

These events, demonstrate how historically, Black women have been excluded from gender-based advocacy as often as race-based issues. The evolution of U.S. social movements has been led by Black women, despite their status of “outsiders within.”<sup>63</sup> Black men relegated Black women to a subordinate position in both the political sphere and in home life.<sup>64</sup> Racism within the women’s rights movement positioned Black women as “outsiders” and forced Black women to form their own alliances to advocate for themselves. Black women have often been excluded from gender-based just as often as race-based issues. White women were not demanding social equality for Black people, but they never advocated a change in the racial hierarchy that allowed their status to be higher than that of Black women or men.<sup>65</sup> In terms of economic issues, the status of Black women as workers outside and within the home represent her existence of labor struggles.<sup>66</sup> As a group, Black women’s labor has not permitted freedom because of the stereotypical inferiority attached to their gender and race .<sup>67</sup> Even so, Black women have carried the burden to uplift the race, pushed for the gender question and have been exploited for their labor. For Black women, this invisible level of oppression has been

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<sup>63</sup> Ransby. *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*, 359-361.

<sup>64</sup> See also Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement.*, hooks, *Ain’t I a Woman*.

<sup>65</sup> Davis, *Women Race & Class*. hooks, *Ain’t I a Woman.*, 125.

<sup>66</sup> Joy James. “Women and Capitalism: Dialectics of Oppression and Liberation,” in *The Angela Y. Davis Reader*. (Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), 170-171.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, 184.

problematic. In her autobiography, journalist and activist Mary Church Terrell explained her position as a Black woman, “This is the story of a colored woman living a white world. It cannot possibly be like a story written by a white woman. A white woman has only one handicap to overcome – that of sex. I have two—both sex and race. I belong to the one group in this country which has two such huge obstacles to surmount.”<sup>68</sup>

During the club movement, Black women countered racist attitudes and behaviors from white women by creating their own clubs and leagues. These groups became instrumental in mid-20<sup>th</sup> century civil rights and women’s liberation organizations because they represented the Black intellectual elites and leader who used their positions to fight for freedom.<sup>69</sup> Black women like, Ida B. Wells-Barnett challenged the neutral racial stance of Susan B. Anthony and the suffragist’s movement. She worked for equal treatment of all Blacks and women’s right to vote. As a journalist, Wells-Barnett, rose to fame by dismantling the myths of the Black rapists in an effort to end brutal white-on-Black lynch mob violence. She argued the “protection” of white women and the “consensual” sexual encounters of Black women maintained the color line to the oppression of all women.<sup>70</sup> Wells-Barnett’s anti-lynching campaign represents Black agency as she positions her writing as a form of resistance. She also reflected agency in

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<sup>68</sup> Mary Church Terrell. *A Colored Woman in a White World*, (Salem, NH: Ayer Company, 1986) 1.

<sup>69</sup> Davis, *Women Race & Class*, 10-11.

<sup>70</sup> Mia Bay. *To Tell the Truth Freely: The Life of Ida B. Wells*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2009), 7. Also see Patricia A. Schechter. *Ida B. Well-Barnett & American Reform, 1880-1930*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina. 2001), Linda O. McMurry. *To Keep the Waters Troubled: The Life of Ida. B. Wells*. (New York: Oxford University Press. 1998)

her position of bodily determination where Blacks should have a say in what is done or not done to their bodies.<sup>71</sup>

From a first-wave Black feminism lens, Black women took an authoritative standpoint on their lived experiences to combat discrimination. Writer and public intellectual Anna Julie Cooper wrote about the lives of slaves and freed slave women to create consciousness and empowerment. She stated in 1892, “The colored woman of today occupies...a unique position in this country...She is confronted by both a woman question and a race problem, and is yet an unknown or unacknowledged factor in both.”<sup>72</sup> This statement expressed how if you could free the most oppressed people in society, then you would have to free everyone. Her writings built upon the intellectual connection of Black History and feminism as a form of activism.<sup>73</sup> As clubwomen, Wells-Barnett, Cooper, Mary Church Terrell, and Josephine Pierre St. Ruffin were members of the National Association of Colored Women or the National League of Colored Women and created a network of community activism encouraging all Blacks to stand up for themselves by challenging the mainstream racist ideology, but also focused on combating Black patriarchal leadership.<sup>74</sup> The Black women’s club movement allowed elite and middle-class Black women to fight for Black liberation, but excluded lower-class Black women.

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<sup>71</sup> Maria del Guadalupe Davidson. *Black Women, Agency, and the New Black Feminism*. (New York: Routledge, 2017), 74-76.

<sup>72</sup> Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor. *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective*. (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2017), 4.

<sup>73</sup> Brittany Cooper, *Beyond Respectability: The Intellectual Thought of Race Women*. (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2017). See also Davis, *Women Race & Class*.

<sup>74</sup> Davis, *Women Race & Class*, 10-11.

The 1920s marked the decade of the “New Negro,” and Black organizations represented a range of political and racial understandings.<sup>75</sup> The Universal Negro Improvement Association, led by Marcus Garvey was the largest Pan-African organization in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Garveyism was based on the idea that the needs of individuals of African descent throughout the diaspora were linked to Africans on the continent.<sup>76</sup> Driven by black nationalism and feminism, Amy Jacques Garvey, Garvey’s second-wife, as well as a journalist and activist, advocated for community feminism and contested the socially constructed categories and roles that limited women’s personal and intellectual development. Her feminism not only critiqued Black men, but it also sought to unite all Black women and encourage them to reach their full potential for an imagined Black nation.<sup>77</sup> Historian Ula Taylor theorized that Jacques-Garvey maneuvered between a doctrine of self-determination and feminism that challenged women’s oppression. During this period, women participating in community feminism challenged the notion of helpmate and leadership roles existing in contradiction.<sup>78</sup> Black women’s roles could reflect leadership qualities, but still support communities on a participatory level.

The introduction of transnational identities expanded feminism beyond the integration of Black middle-class respectability and pushed for radical, Black nationalistic separatism. The 1930s labor movement allowed for Black working-class

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<sup>75</sup> Lawrence Jackson. *The Indignant Generation: A Narrative History of African American Writers and Critics, 1934-1960*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011)., Colin Grant. *Negro with a Hat: The Rise and Fall of Marcus Garvey*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>76</sup> Grant. *Negro with a Hat*. See also Ula Taylor. *The Veiled Garvey: The Life and Times of Amy Jacques Garvey*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002)

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid,20-30.

women to fight against exclusionary policies of white labor groups. Black women contributed to a multi-racial movement of women's political rights, but "at every turn, they were betrayed, spurned and rejected."<sup>79</sup> Addressing economic inequalities, Black Communist women centered U.S. racism on the struggle between capital and labor.<sup>80</sup> These women brought consciousness to the intersections of Black women's identities in comparison to white women.

Black Communist women have been among the most militant and radical activists for civil rights.<sup>81</sup> These women participated in movements tied to the Communist Party because they saw it as a powerful movement within the larger global political stage. They addressed multiple levels of oppression including Black liberation, women's rights, decolonization, economic justice, peace and international solidarity. By addressing these issues, Black Communist women became trailblazers, activists, and leaders in the Black community.

The foundations of women's rights within the Communist Party takes its roots with white women after the suffrage victory of 1920. The "woman question" was minimized in the Communist Party compared to the "Negro question" because an increasingly multicultural nation influenced the party's strategies for liberation.<sup>82</sup> In the 1920s the Communist Party made "Negro rights" a component of its agenda and asserted that Blacks constituted an oppressed nation within the United States. "In 1928, the

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<sup>79</sup> Davis, *Women Race & Class*, 148. hooks, *Ain't I a Woman?*.

<sup>80</sup> Davis, *Women Race & Class*, 148.

<sup>81</sup> Gore, *Radicalism at the Crossroads*. McDuffie, *Sojourning for Freedom*, 4-5. Kelly, *Hammer and Hoe*, 10-12.

<sup>82</sup> Kate Weigand. *Red Feminism: American Communism and the Making of Women's Liberation* (New York: Johns Hopkins University Press 2001), 14-18.



American Communist Party adopted a resolution, commonly known as the Black Belt theory, which declared that African Americans had the right to self-determination in the southern states, where they formed a majority.”<sup>83</sup> Communist women sought to expand the women’s movement and argued that male supremacy impaired both individual and structural relations between men and women. Historian Kate Weigand stated that the Communist Party’s commitment to women’s liberation was put into practice at every level of the organization. Despite limited success, progressive women challenged the cultural and economic norms of the post-war period.<sup>84</sup> By the 1940s, many Communist leaders and rank-and-file members discussed the specific social, political, and economic issues faced by Black women. The Communist Left became an alternative for Black women radicals to fight for Black freedom and Black women’s dignity outside of women’s clubs, the church, and civil rights and nationalist groups.<sup>85</sup>

By centralizing on race and class, Black Left women separated themselves from the middle-class feminist thinking. Communist activists believed that the common interests of women and men required them to work side-by-side to opposed all the exploitative consequences of capitalism.<sup>86</sup> Black left feminism used Black women’s lived experiences to combine the interests of the American Communist Party with issues of race, gender, and class. Historian Erik McDuffie stated the historical significance of Black left feminism centralized on the theory of triple oppression.<sup>87</sup> The connections

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>84</sup> Weigand. *Red Feminism*, 2.

<sup>85</sup> McDuffie, *Sojourning for Freedom*, 12-14.

<sup>86</sup> Weigand. *Red Feminism*, 2.

<sup>87</sup> McDuffie, *Sojourning for Freedom*, 14.

between race, gender and class oppression required the dismantlement of all types of oppression. In a post-World War II world, Black Communist women recognized their unique position. Within the CPUSA, “the worker” was constructed as a white male factory laborer and the “working woman” as white.<sup>88</sup> Black Communist women recognized how their domestic employment in white homes, the racialized sexual violence and denigration of their bodies and reputations by their oppressors and the intractable issues facing diasporic communities’ very survival were critical in shaping Black women’s consciousness. Black left feminists “charged that Black women across the African diaspora, not white working-class men, represented the vanguard for transformative change globally.”<sup>89</sup> These women were committed to social justice and practiced a coalitional approach for political organizing. Black Communist women agitated on multiple fronts and in multiple communities. “Indeed, Black left feminists saw no contradiction in pursuing interracial, left-wing, separatist, liberal, local, and international political strategies, often simultaneously.”<sup>90</sup> They saw themselves as leaders of the race and challenged the sexism of Black spokespersons. By using Communism, these Black women rejected the middle-class political agenda and cultural norms of traditional Black protest groups.

As Black women radicals organized mass movements for human rights, they also expressed their concerns in their writing. The Cold War was the most prolific moment of Black Left feminist writing during the entire Old Left period.<sup>91</sup> These works linked racial

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-20.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-7.

justice to economics, peace, the protection of civil liberties, decolonization, and Black women's concerns and issues.<sup>92</sup>

In the Cold War, Black Communist women, such as Claudia Jones, provided a crucial intersectional analysis of how race, gender, and economic structures operate together to reshape social change. Jones was a leading theoretician on the Negro Question and the Woman Question. Black women activists and journalists created their own visions of equality through the Ingram case. Through the work of Black women over time illustrates how Black feminism as a practice and a theory. As a participant and observer, Black female journalists focused on how they lived and dealt with different forms of oppression. This position empowers Black women in the social hierarchy because they express their identities that are ignored or erased in the mainstream. No longer outsiders in terms of race, gender, and class, Black women became insiders in their own perspective.

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<sup>92</sup> See Weigand. *Red Feminism*. McDuffie, *Sojourning for Freedom*. Carole Boyce Davies. *Left of Karl Marx*.

#### Chapter 4: Black Radicalism and the Cold War

In August 1950, a year before joining the Rosa Lee Ingram cause and leading the Sojourners for Truth and Justice, an all-Black women organization, Charlotta Bass, editor-publisher of the *California Eagle*, arrived in the Soviet Union.<sup>93</sup> She learned as an American journalist that she could easily step behind the “Iron Curtain” and document her journey for her readers. She recognized that the Cold War drama eclipsed all other freedom stories being forged across the nation, and Bass was doing her part to speak to the hypocrisy of U.S. democracy. In her autobiography, she described her arrival in Moscow and immediately noticed a difference. She wrote, “I discovered on this very first day in Moscow there was absolutely no color bar or race prejudice of any kind whatsoever.”<sup>94</sup>

Throughout her journey in the Soviet Union, Bass continued to describe her experience with diversity, such as in a Moscow opera house filled with “factory workers, sales people from the shops, and farmers.”<sup>95</sup> Bass was captivated by the “many Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, Indians, and many other Asian people in the audience. They mingled as equals. People of all nations and colors were there. They enjoyed the wonderful opera together. No one looked askance at another. This friendly feeling in the audience helped

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<sup>93</sup> Charlotta Bass, *Forty Years: Memoirs from The Pages of a Newspaper*. (Los Angeles: Charlotta Bass, 1960), 161. In May 1912, Charlotta Spears [Bass] became the owner of the weekly publication after its founder, John Neimore’s death.<sup>93</sup> Less than two years later Charlotta married newspaperman, Joseph B. Bass, who took over as editor. She remained the managing editor until his death in 1934. The Basses’ changed the reputation of the *California Eagle* to the “people’s paper,” fighting on all fronts for Black civil rights. At its height in the 1940s, the paper had a circulation of 17,600, meaning that a quarter of the Black population in Los Angeles read the *California Eagle*.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 162-163

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

me to enjoy the play more than anything else.”<sup>96</sup> Later, in another column, she compared Soviet Georgia to the U.S. Georgia and the depth of freedom and opportunities presented under Stalin’s leadership. She stated how industrial progress in the United States could never match the vast abilities of the Soviet Union. <sup>97</sup>

Comparing the racial climate of the Superpowers, Charlotta Bass’ visit would make her a target of the U.S. government and eventually her newspaper would succumb to these efforts. On April 26, 1951, Bass announced the sale of the *California Eagle*, but not without noting the change in U.S. politics and the racial climate.<sup>98</sup> She was aware that former liberals in the middle and upper classes had abandoned the Black liberation cause, but warned them that “the path they had chosen will not bring them security.”<sup>99</sup> She praised the support and encouragement of the Black working-class. “In every phase of the struggle for democracy today, throughout the nation, it is my people who are providing much of the leadership,” Charlotta Bass wrote, “And in a real sense it’s my reward for years of struggle. Whether it be in the Progressive Party or in the trade unions or in the peace movements, Negroes are providing leadership. Even in the ranks of the non-Negro

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 164.

<sup>97</sup> Charlotta Bass, *Forty Years: Memoirs from The Pages of a Newspaper*. (Los Angeles: Charlotta Bass, 1960), 164-166.

<sup>98</sup> Patrick Washburn. *The African American Newspaper: Voice of Freedom*. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern Press, 2006), 188. The *Eagle* would continue to publish until 1964. The Black community grieved the slow decline of the Black press because it meant so much to them and their identity in segregated America. Edward “Abie” Robinson, a reporter for the *Eagle*, stated in the 1990s, “When the *Eagle* finally closed its doors for good, [what] can you say when you attend your own funeral? How can you do that? There would never be a group [of journalists] like this that would be able to do things that we thought we were capable of doing. We were buried, we were dead, and it was...a tragedy, it was a loss. And Los Angeles has never recovered from that.”

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 177.

progressives, where do you find men and women of Paul Robeson, Dr. DuBois, Joe Johnson, Claudia Jones or Lena Horne?”<sup>100</sup>

The demise of Bass’ newspaper became a cautionary tale of how Blacks entered a new period where radical ideas were not be tolerated and how anti-Communism government surveillance spread fear and suspicion.<sup>101</sup> Bass continued to promote a message in the fight for civil rights and social justice with the Ingram case and continued to use the Black Press as a mode of protest.

Many Black activists’ allegiance would be tested by Red Scare politics despite their lack of rights. Black resistance to the Cold War and the Red Scare created an issue within the United States’ image of democracy. The U.S. Communist Party was inspired by the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, which popularized its perception as an agent of Moscow. By the 1930s, the Communist Party had evolved into a “race” organization, specifically in the South. In his study of the Alabama Communist Party, Robin D.G. Kelley stated that the Communist Party was a southern, working-class organization because “the homegrown radicalism that had germinated in poor Black communities and among tiny circles of white rebels remained deep underground.”<sup>102</sup> Black Alabamians experienced and opposed race and class oppression as a totality, but the Communists drew women who sought to overcome gender-defined limitations. Kelley stated that

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 179.

<sup>101</sup> Washburn, *The African American Newspaper*, 187-188. By the 1950s, Black newspapers lost their influence and power. The aggressive stance of the Black press subjected it to criticism from its opponents. The strife tied to the Black press put many publications out of business because the radical and aggressive ideas discouraged many advertisers and publishing companies.

<sup>102</sup> Robin D.G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990.),xii.

World War I and the post-war period altered Black lives as a substantial population of southern Blacks made their way North for greater opportunities.<sup>103</sup> The expansion of industrialization in southern cities, like Birmingham, drew rural Blacks to factory work. The Central Committee of the CPUSA chose Birmingham as its jumping-off point to recruit new members and proposed the idea of Black self-determination in the Black belt.<sup>104</sup> The commitment to social justice and racial equality drew a large working-class Black membership.

Racism, combined with the Great Depression made it easy for Blacks to accept some of the Communists' ideas. Cases, like the Scottsboro Nine case in 1933, launched a new relationship between Communists and the larger Black community.<sup>105</sup> Black Communist leaders, such as Benjamin Davis were emblematic of this new relationship because the Left provided the Black community the representation and self-determination to face Jim Crow segregation.<sup>106</sup> Davis' reputation and legal training gave credence to the party and his work on the Scottsboro case laid the foundation for labor and progressive movements in the South. It also addressed legal precedents like the right to a fair trial, adequate counsel, and exclusion from juries.<sup>107</sup> The NAACP was uncomfortable with the

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 8

<sup>104</sup> Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*, 15.

<sup>105</sup> Gerald Horne, *Black Liberation/Red Scare: Ben Davis and the Communist Party*. (Newark: University of Delaware 1994), 48. The Scottsboro Nine Case involves nine Black males accused of raping a white woman. The Communist International were able to rally worldwide support for the Nine and condemnation of racism.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. Ben Davis Jr. was an African American Communist leader who symbolized Black liberation during the Cold War and Red Scare. In 1943, Davis became the first Black Communist elected to public office when he became a part of the New York City Council. Davis saw Blacks in the South as a nation worthy of self-determination.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 52.

Left-leading Blacks as well as U.S. Military Intelligence who spied on Blacks using Communism as the justification.

The analysis of racism as rooted in capitalism began to permeate the progressive Black community. Trade union and labor organizations provided the most prominent ideological bases in the 1940s. The Black community recognized itself as members of the laboring classes linked their struggles to exploitation of other working-class people. The Congress of Industrial Organizations' efforts to organize Black workers and an increase of Black workers in industrialized and unionized jobs during World War II, led to a stronger emphasis on the issue of jobs.<sup>108</sup> Black workers staged strikes to secure fair treatment. In an effort to desegregate the military and war industry, A. Philip Randolph, president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, proposed the March on Washington Movement, a national, Black-led march on Washington, D.C., in 1941.<sup>109</sup> The threat of millions of Blacks converging in D.C. pressured President Franklin Roosevelt to issue the first Fair Employment Practices Committee.<sup>110</sup> The MOWM signified the power of collective militant Black grassroots politics.<sup>111</sup>

As the Cold War developed, the Truman administration was forced to deal with African and African Americans redefining liberation movements by addressing

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<sup>108</sup> Washburn. *The African American Newspaper*, 45. See also Penny Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: African Americans and Anti-Colonialism, 1937-1957*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997),47.

<sup>109</sup> Erik S. Gellman, *Death Blow to Jim Crow: The National Negro Congress and the Rise of Militant Civil Rights*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012). A. Philip Randolph was a prominent Black Socialist and helped move the Black labor movement during the Depression as the president of the National Negro Congress.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.



oppression as a global issue. The struggles of Asian and African nations highlighted a larger network of alliances. People of color, specifically the U.S Black community, were equipped with the genuine democratic vision beyond the importance of race and anticolonialism. The Pan-African Congress challenged “the excesses of colonial rule, to establish intellectual existence of a bond between Africans and persons of African descent in the diaspora.”<sup>112</sup> Another organization committed to Pan-Africanism, the Council of African Affairs, sought to achieve the political liberation of colonized African nations by lobbying the U.S. government. Led by actor and activist Paul Robeson, CAA was a strong and credible organization, steeped in Black popular culture and featuring Black American artists, such as Duke Ellington and Lena Horne, in its rallies and fundraisers.<sup>113</sup>

The 1945 Pan-African Congress featured more working-class leadership and less middle-class-elite efforts than in the past but employed the same language linking all those of African descent. It supported African Americans and issued a declaration stating, “We believe the success of Afro-Americans is bound up with the emancipation of all African peoples and also other dependent peoples and laboring classes everywhere...American Negroes continue their demand for full rights of American citizenship, economic, political, and social.”<sup>114</sup> The conference received widespread attention and support from African American leaders and journalists. The racial

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<sup>112</sup> Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 9. See also Borstelmann, *The Cold War and Color Line*. Carol Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 5.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid*, 19-21.

<sup>114</sup> Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 52., Borstelmann, *The Cold War and Color Line*, 61-63.

oppression similarities of South African and United States drew African Americans to analyze the mutual plight. DuBois argued that Black Americans should recognize the pronouncements of South Africa whites as “the political philosophy that holds sway in Dixie.”<sup>115</sup>

From the formation of the United Nations to the first stirring of the Cold War, Black activists constructed a broad understanding of rights and citizenship that included anticolonial strategies.<sup>116</sup> The UN provided a forum for international debate, offering new opportunities for African peoples everywhere. Wartime alliances were still intact, which allowed Blacks to lobby for support for world peace.<sup>117</sup> During WWII, Secretary of the NAACP Walter White emerged as a strong advocate of anticolonialism. He wrote to President Roosevelt in 1944, asking him to make it clear that the U.S. would not perpetuate colonial exploitation.<sup>118</sup> White, DuBois, and Robeson challenged the idea that human beings had rights and agency only as citizens of a nation-state. Historian Taylor Branch argued those who fought for civil rights reduced power to human scale because they believed that ordinary people could create the bonds of citizenship.<sup>119</sup>

The UN Charter contained numerous clauses on human rights with provisions for equal rights and self-determination, but these principles didn't include means of

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid, 61.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 69.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 70. Gerald Horne. *Black & Red: W.E.B. DuBois and the Afro-American Response to the Cold War, 1944-1963*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), Carol Anderson. *Bourgeois Radicals: The NAACP and the Struggle for Colonial Liberation, 1941-1960*. (Oxford: Cambridge University Press, 2014)

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 74.

<sup>119</sup> Taylor Branch, *The King Years: Historic Moments in the Civil Rights Movement*, (New York: Simon Schuster Paperback, 2013), 80.

implementation. The U.S. government rhetorically supported colonial freedom, but that definition narrowed due to its oppressive domestic practices.<sup>120</sup> By the end of the 1940s, national assumptions was that Blacks could achieve full success when they assimilated to white American values and cultural models. In 1944, Gunnar Myrdal's *American Dilemma* argued the racial problem was rooted in moral incompetence, a failure to live up to a creed of belief.<sup>121</sup> The Swedish scholar affirmed that Americans' idea of themselves was grounded in liberal traditions of private property and individual rights, but Blacks were excluded. Historian Lawrence Jackson wrote, "Myrdal did not make an argument for Black misery on account of poverty of resources; nor did he believe that there was anything culturally specific or historically important about African American life. The only question revolved around whether or not whites would permit complete assimilation."<sup>122</sup>

After 1947, wartime alliances used to push anticolonial politics started to crumble and the rise of the U.S. and Soviet Union superpowers established a new global order. Escalating tensions by the two nations was viewed by Black leadership as a part of imperialism.<sup>123</sup> By 1946 an increase of violence against Black veterans challenged impressive gains of Black labor during the war. The issuing of the Truman Doctrine in 1947 shifted the terms of anticolonialism for many Black leaders.<sup>124</sup> Many abandoned their criticism of U.S. foreign policy to focus on racism at home because it undermined

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<sup>120</sup> Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 81-82.

<sup>121</sup> Gellman, *Death Blow to Jim Crow*, 90-98.

<sup>122</sup> Jackson. *The Indignant Generatio*, 5.

<sup>123</sup> Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 81. Gellman, *Death Blow to Jim Crow*, 91.

<sup>124</sup> Borstelmann, *The Cold War and Color Line*, 54. Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 81. Gellman, *Death Blow to Jim Crow*, 91

the legitimacy of the nation's global impact. Without the support of wartime alliances and the United Nations, Black activists and intellectuals worried political realignments would be devastating, specifically in the way of Communism. When President Truman issued the Truman Doctrine, he emphasized the nation's role in security wherever "aggression" threatened peace and freedom.<sup>125</sup> Historian Penny Von Eschen suggested that initially the Truman Doctrine seemed to abandon the purpose of the United Nations. This issuance, along with the Marshall Plan for European Recovery, which raised Europeans standards of living and U.S. exports, bolstered the economies of colonial powers without considering of the effects on colonized people.<sup>126</sup> For many Blacks, who supported Truman, there was a fear of Communism and the Soviet Union. For Walter White and the NAACP, the choice for supporting U.S. foreign policy was directly connected to the survival of the organization. Faced with the threats from former first lady Eleanor Roosevelt, who served on the UN and NAACP executive board, White's support of Truman's foreign policy was strategic.<sup>127</sup> Although she was concerned with the plight of Blacks, Roosevelt's role as chair of the UN Commission on Human Rights was vital to

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<sup>125</sup> Borstelmann, *The Cold War and Color Line*, 55. Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 107. Gellman, *Death Blow to Jim Crow*, 91. Truman argued that the United States could no longer stand by and allow the forcible expansion of Soviet totalitarianism into free, independent nations, because American national security now depended upon more than just the physical security of American territory.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid, 108. See also Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize*. The Marshall Plan over \$13 billion to finance the economic recovery of Europe between 1948 and 1951. The Marshall Plan successfully sparked economic recovery, meeting its objective of 'restoring the confidence of the European people in the economic future of their own countries and of Europe as a whole.'

<sup>127</sup> Ibid, 109.

the public relation tactics of the Cold War. This required her to sanitize and camouflage the reality of Jim Crow injustice.<sup>128</sup>

As anti-Communism dominated politics, Black activists argued that the abuses of colonialism opened the doors to Communism. White and others crafted a dominant stance on anti-Communist civil rights. Many Communists or leftists shifted their political views in a conservative turn and obscure the idea that racial prejudice had been an integral part of mainstream American life. Blacks like Walter White asserted that “Negroes are Americans” first, and in any conflict with other nations, “we will regard ourselves as Americans and meet the responsibilities imposed on Americans.”<sup>129</sup>

Although Walter White had shifted his stance on civil rights, W.E.B DuBois suggested that race was an international issue. After his dismissal from the NAACP in 1948, DuBois argued that racial discrimination within the United States would lead to the violation of the rights of foreigners.<sup>130</sup> Paul Robeson and other anticolonial activists struggled to maintain the focus on colonial peoples’ and working-class peoples’ control over their labor, land and resources.<sup>131</sup> The conflict emphasized the meaning and implementation of freedom.

The Truman administration rooted all international, national, and local politics in direct connection to the Soviet Union, and U.S. mainstream culture accepted the neutrality to other struggles. By 1950 Columbia University English professor Lionel Trilling argued in a collection of essays titled *The Liberal Imagination* that a public

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<sup>128</sup> Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize*, 3.

<sup>129</sup> Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize*, 113.

<sup>130</sup> Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 117. See also Horne, *Black and Red*.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid*, 123.

sensibility of fairness and a maintenance of the status quo.<sup>132</sup> He promoted an indifference to radical politics and racial prejudice. Ultimately, those with ideas differing from the United States' capitalist ideology were also criminalized by the U.S. government. By 1952, the U.S. Communist Party and Black and women's activism for civil rights was deemed to be against the state. All protests came to be seen as a threat to U.S. security.

Historically, the Black community was charged with instigating turmoil and political ferment. Not since Reconstruction had Black political activity surged to this level. Historian Penny Von Eschen stated by the last years of the World War II, the international anticolonial discourse was critical in shaping Black American politics.<sup>133</sup> This crafting of a new international political language and new political strategies was widespread among the Black community because the Cold War conservatism required a radical approach to push the façade of democracy.

The shifting political climate reflects the importance of Black women as powerful voices of resistance. They continued and maintained Black radical politics despite the anticommunist attacks. According to Carole Boyce Davis, the radical Black subject is one who resists the particular dominating disciplines, systems, and logics of a given context.<sup>134</sup> This subject challenges the “normalizing of state oppression, constructs and alternative discourse and articulates these both theoretically and in practice.”<sup>135</sup> During the Cold War, a movement was formed to dismantle oppressive systems such as

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<sup>132</sup> Jackson. *The Indignant Generation*, 6

<sup>133</sup> Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 117-120.

<sup>134</sup> Davies. *Left of Karl Marx*, 5-6.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

imperialism and colonialism. The interracial alliances with the Communist Party and the Black self-determination framed by the Pan-African Congress and Council of African Affairs created a global framework for human rights. Black women travelled extensively for their activism.<sup>136</sup> In the coverage of the Ingram case, their militant participation required them to build and maintain political ties among the Black community as well as the world. Their mobility, combined with their organizing experience and their international politics, helped solidify their contributions as leaders and strategists with a national and international reach.

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<sup>136</sup> Gore, *Radicalism at the Crossroads*, 10-12.

## Chapter 5: The Black Press-- Advocacy Media

The Rosa Lee Ingram case was Alice Dunnigan's first assignment in the criminal-justice area.<sup>137</sup> She was new to her role as a Washington D.C. correspondent for the Associated Negro Press and clearly saw the value of the case to the discussion for human rights. By this point, in order to avoid further scrutiny, the U.S. government published its own stories suggesting that reports of Black injustices in the South were Communist propaganda.<sup>138</sup> Using her voice as a journalist, Dunnigan joined the National Committee to Free the Ingram Family and went to Georgia to visit Ingram. Despite her professional entry to D.C., Dunnigan still met challenges by being a Black woman.

In 1947, Dunnigan became the first Black female reporter to be accredited to the Congressional press galleries along with Louis Lautier, the first Black male reporter, for the National Negro Press Association. As a Black man, Lautier was quickly accepted by the white reporters, but Dunnigan, who also had press passes to the White House and the State Department, encountered discrimination. She noted that during press conferences, government officials would ignore Black reporters because they were concerned the reporters would ask them about civil rights.<sup>139</sup> Recognizing her unique perspective as a Black female journalist, Dunnigan recalled, "Race and sex were twin strikes against me from the beginning. I don't know which of these barriers were the hardest to break down. I think sex was more difficult, because I not only had to convince members of the other race of my capacity, but I had to fight against discrimination of Negro men, as well as

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<sup>137</sup> Alice Dunnigan. *Alone Atop the Hill: the autobiography of Alice Dunnigan, Pioneer of the National Black Press*, (Athens: University of Georgia, 2015), 143-148

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid*, 148.

<sup>139</sup> Horne, *The Rise & Fall of The Associated Negro Press*, 5.



against envy and jealousy of female members of my own race.”<sup>140</sup> As injustice continued to mount in D.C. during the Cold War, Dunnigan profiled and gave voice to those trapped by the South’s racial injustice.

In *Raising Her Voice*, historian Rodger Streitmatter emphasized the importance of published writings of Black female journalists like Dunnigan. He stated, “Analysis of the words these women use and the topics they chose to write about identifies recurring themes in their journalistic work. Many statements from their writings are quoted, to ensure that the women have the opportunity to speak with their own voices.”<sup>141</sup> He noted the term “journalist” narrowly defines Black women, but he believed a broader definition is needed to understand the outlets available to Black women. He suggested that Black female journalists sought alternative routes to raise their voice. In particular, Black women had more opportunities to work and cover topics with the Black press, an institution that cannot be understood without acknowledging the impact of Black female journalists. At these outlets, many of the women saw themselves as agents of social change more than communicators of the news.<sup>142</sup>

As the mouthpiece and the source of the majority of Black leadership, the growth and spread of the Black press as an institution was vital to the Black liberation movement. The Black Press communicated the lives and issues of the Black community. Scholar Gunnar Myrdal stressed in his research that “the press defines the Negro group to

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<sup>140</sup> Washburn, 179-180. In 1955, Dunnigan became the first Black in the Women’s National Press Club.

<sup>141</sup> Rodger Streitmatter. *Raising Her Voice: African-American Women Journalists Who Changed History*. (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 6.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

the Negro themselves....This creates a feeling of strength and solidarity.”<sup>143</sup> Rather than being objective, Black newspapers utilized a compelling and powerful form of advocacy journalism to push for more rights.

The birth of the Black press began in 1827 with the *Freedom’s Journal* in New York City. The role of the Black Press was outlined in the first issue’s editorial page, “We wish to plead our cause. Too long have others spoken for us.”<sup>144</sup> This was one of the first collective effort of a Black community to protest racism and challenge the stereotypical image of Blacks. Between 1827 to the Civil War, the Black Press was a leader of protest, and these media were committed to the freedom cause. After 1865, the passage of Black Codes in the South and other oppressive tactics stripped Blacks of the protections of the Civil Rights Act of 1866.<sup>145</sup> In response, Black editors and publishers led the charge for social reform. In 1898, Ida B. Wells used her newspaper, *Free Speech*, to urge Memphis Blacks to leave the city after the lynching of a Black businessman.<sup>146</sup> Protest content and coverage was what kept the Black Press alive when other content failed. Newspapers like the *Chicago Defender* lived on scandal and crime stories, but thrived when they became the champions of the Black community.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Gerald Horne. *The Rise & Fall of The Associated Negro Press: Claude Barnett’s Plan Pan-African News and the Jim Crow Paradox*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017), 7.

<sup>144</sup> Carl Senna. *The Black Press and the Struggle for Civil Rights*. (New York: Franklin Watts, 1994), 13.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Roland Wolseley. *The Black Press U.S.A.* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1990), 5.

<sup>147</sup> Wolseley. *The Black Press U.S.A*, 40.

By the 20<sup>th</sup> century, more Black newspapers were founded as commercial ventures, but the century also saw the rise of Black leaders who used the press as a tool to support their causes and views. W.E.B. DuBois used journalism to advance his sociological studies of the Black race.<sup>148</sup> He founded five magazines, served as a correspondent for four newspapers, wrote as a columnist for both Black and white newspapers, and published several scholarly articles. He used the media effectively as educational tools and entries to discuss mostly politics. After World War I, *Defender* founder Robert Abbott spread the message for Southern Blacks to migrate north for better conditions.<sup>149</sup> In 1917, this great migration brought 110,000 Blacks to Chicago alone, almost tripling the population.<sup>150</sup> From 1920 to 1924, Marcus Garvey, founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, used his newspaper the *Negro World* to promote self-determination and his Back-to-Africa movement.<sup>151</sup>

Both World Wars strengthened the cause and development of the Black Press. The Black Press developed networks and organizations that would increase its impact. In 1919, The Associated Negro Press, a Black press news service began. It served over 150 US. Negro newspapers and 100 more in Africa in French and English.<sup>152</sup> Its founder, Claude Barnett, realized there was no dependable stream of news for the Black community and wanted to reach a more diverse audience. Over half of the Black press depended on the ANP for news copy. The news service filled a niche in international

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid, 57-61.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, 53

<sup>150</sup> Ibid, 51-56

<sup>151</sup> Ibid, 64-68.

<sup>152</sup> Horne. *The Rise & Fall of The Associated Negro Press*, 5.

news gathering.<sup>153</sup> Blacks intensified their foreign reporting in the 1920s as they became more engaged in issues affecting people of color overseas. Barnett's initial focus was national, but he built a world-wide service for "race journalism."<sup>154</sup>

In the 1930s, the "race journalism" genre increased as Black global journalism fed the desire to acquaint "America's millions of race members with their scattered brothers in other sections of the world."<sup>155</sup> In 1931, the Black Press not only continued to demand full rights for its race, but it also told Blacks to expect equality. Greater group-action positioned Black newspapers as the primary promoters of collective thinking. Black newspapers had the "opportunity to prick, hit, hammer and blast the conscience of white Americans that has nurtured fascism at home."<sup>156</sup> Metz Lochard, foreign editor for the *Defender*, stated, "Black editors were smarter as a result of their experience in the last war and the post-war years in which discrimination was not only continued but increased. Their newsgathering facilities had expanded to follow their men around the globe. Their protests were couched in terms of global responsibility and merged with the problems of subjugated people everywhere."<sup>157</sup>

During U.S. entry into both world wars, many Black Press editors and publishers were conflicted with the United States' war effort as it contradicted the "democracy" experience of the Black community. In an attempt to get the Black community on board with WWI, the War Department and Committee on Public Information hosted a

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<sup>153</sup> Jinx Broussard. *The African-American Foreign Correspondents*. (Baton Rouge; Louisiana State Press University, 2013), 57.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid*, 57-59.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid*, 72.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid*, 74.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid*.

conference in Washington D.C. with several Black leaders and journalists in attendance. In exchange for the support of the Black Press, the Black conference attendees asked the government for three things: “a statement from President Woodrow Wilson condemning lynching and the passage of legislation that would stop it; an end to discrimination against Blacks who wanted to work in government agencies; and a halt to the railroads’ discrimination against Blacks.”<sup>158</sup> The U.S. entry into WWI raised Blacks’ expectations of social equality, but this quickly changed during the summer of 1919 also known as the “Red Summer,” when race riots broke out across the nation.<sup>159</sup> Black newspapers promoted the right of Black self-defense.

Despite the setbacks of the between-war period, World War II propelled Black militancy to larger heights. By 1940, there were over 210 Black newspapers with a total circulation of 1,276,000.<sup>160</sup> “Before the war, more than a third of the country’s Black families subscribed to a black paper, and during the war, between 3.5 million and 6 million of the nation’s 13 million blacks read the papers every week.”<sup>161</sup> With massive support from its Black readership, the Black Press carried the message of resistance. In 1940, the Negro Newspaper Publishers Association was founded and the organization met with President Roosevelt to present a 21-point statement on the war aims and post-

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<sup>158</sup> Washburn, *The African American Newspaper*, 107

<sup>159</sup> Cameron McWhirter. *Red Summer: The Summer of 1919 and the Awakening of Black America*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2011). The Red Summer refers to the summer and fall of 1919, in which race riots exploded in a number of cities in both the North and South. The three most violent episodes occurred in Chicago, Washington, D.C., and Elaine, Arkansas.

<sup>160</sup> Washburn, *The African American Newspaper*, 140.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid*, 140.

war aspirations of Blacks.<sup>162</sup> When A. Philip Randolph organized of the March on Washington Movement, the Black press carried his message to end discrimination by defense contractors.<sup>163</sup> Even with the threat of imprisonment from sedition, the Black Press refused to print the patriotic stories the War Department insisted on and challenged Blacks' subordinate position in the war. *Oklahoma Black Dispatch* Editor Roscoe Dunjee argued that Blacks were supposed to fight Hitler's army with only "a mop and broom."<sup>164</sup>

Another social reform campaign reflected the Black Press' popularity. The *Pittsburgh Courier* launched its "Double V" campaign in February 1942 to bring attention to Blacks' rights and victory both domestically and aboard.<sup>165</sup> The campaign's timing was perfect as the government was stressing a united home front in order to win the war, but Blacks also felt their oppression should no longer be ignored. For example, on March 21, the paper reported, "The 'Double V' combines... the aims and ideals of all men, Black as well as white, to make this a more perfect union of peace-loving men and women, living in complete harmony and equality."<sup>166</sup>

World War II and the years immediately following were the golden age of Black American journalism.<sup>167</sup> Newspapers like the *Pittsburgh Courier* and *Chicago Defender*

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid, 172.

<sup>163</sup> Washburn. *The African American Newspaper*, 124.

<sup>164</sup> Anderson. *Eyes Off the Prize*, 11

<sup>165</sup> Washburn. *The African American Newspaper*, 129. The weekly publication began in January 1910. Future editor/publisher Robert Vann took over the struggling Publication and by 1914 it was financial sound. Vann had a rising reputation in the local Black community because of his law practice. The Courier had the largest circulation of any Black newspaper. His formula was to launch the paper on numerous crusades on the behalf of the Black community. After his death in 1940, Vann's wife took over as publisher.

<sup>166</sup> Washburn. *The African American Newspaper*, 150.

<sup>167</sup> Horne. *The Rise & Fall of The Associated Negro Press*, 8.

doubled their national circulation during the 1940 to 1946 period. The Cold War dominated the headlines, but in Black organizations, newspapers and alliances uncovered the hidden networks of change in the 1950s. Historian Penny Von Eschen concluded during the 1950s that the Black press was the main vehicle used by intellectuals to communicate with one another and the larger Black audience.<sup>168</sup> Print journalism served as the platform for international discourse to unify intellectuals and activists across the globe. As strikes and protests in the Caribbean and West Africa erupted, the Black press treated the news as a worldwide illustration of the oppression of the entire colonial system.<sup>169</sup> The media activism of the Black Press shaped the Black community through a vital social campaigns, further demonstrating how Black journalists have continually been at the forefront of pushing for freedom.<sup>170</sup> Media activism and coverage of the 1945 Pan-African Congress also showed how the Black press positioned itself as a social change agent. *Defender* reporter George Padmore served as the conference's principal organizer as well as a correspondent for newspapers throughout the United States and West Africa.<sup>171</sup> Organizations like the Council on African Affairs worked as a press

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<sup>168</sup> Von Eschen. *Race Against Empire*, 8

<sup>169</sup> Borstelmann. *The Cold War and Color Line*, 135-140. For the Caribbean, the period between the onset of World War II and the triumph of the Cuban Revolution marked the high age of decolonization. Between 1940-1960, the aims, strategies, and personalities differed across a region of republics, commonwealths, and crown colonies with diverse geographic and social character. See also Kevin Gaines. *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006). In 1957, Ghana's independence lent to rising demands for freedom and self-determination and the demise of systems of racial and colonial domination.

<sup>170</sup> Washburn. *The African American Newspaper*, 144.

<sup>171</sup> Von Eschen. *Race Against Empire*, 120-122., Gaines. *American Africans in Ghana*, 35-38. George Padmore shaped the theory and discourse of Pan-African anti-imperialism. Padmore's international journalism and other writings linked African American struggles

service, providing information on Africa to Black American organizations, newspapers and journals and later to the United Nations delegates.<sup>172</sup>

Black newspapers closely monitored U.S. foreign and domestic policies. Journalists continually linked the foreign policies of Secretary of State James Byrnes of South Carolina with Jim Crow practices and violence of imperialism with lynching and beating in the South. Black newspapers criticized how the government's refusal to address lynching was inconsistent with its "democracy" image.<sup>173</sup> The ANP's columnist, Gordon Hancock, stated in 1948 that "in the Negro's fight for deliverance, the Negro Press is a right arm."<sup>174</sup>

The Black newspapers and the mainstream white press were widely censored by the government in its questioning of Cold War policies. This wave of repression had an effect on circulation and the message of the Black Press after 1947. Labor and civil rights organizations faced massive changes in its anticolonial and African diasporic stance without the lack of Black newspapers.<sup>175</sup> Another challenge to Black radicalism was the U.S. government increased efforts to shape and alter perceptions of racism in the South. By 1950, Voice of America broadcasts and the State Department's "Cultural Affairs,

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with liberation movements in Africa and with African Diaspora peoples around the world and thus had a profound effect on the contours of black political thought.

<sup>172</sup> Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 108-110.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid, 111. See also Robert Justin Goldstein, *Little 'Red Scares': Anti-Communism and Political Repression in the United States, 1921-1946*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2014)

<sup>174</sup> Horne, *The Rise & Fall of The Associated Negro Press*, 7.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.



Psychological Welfare and Propaganda” programs attempted to defend foreign policy and discredit the voices of Black activists and journalists.<sup>176</sup>

During WWII and the postwar period, the Black press was critical in connecting of oppressed working-class people of African descent, but the Cold War shifted the focus of Black leaders and newspapers to focus on middle-class politics and narrowed their civil rights agenda. In 1955, E. Franklin Frazier attacked the Black middle class with *Black Bourgeoisie*.<sup>177</sup> Frazier observed the Black Press had fallen into the trap of not criticizing the Black middle class and showing a lack of interests in world affairs. He argued that the Black Press was retreating from social and economic issues and those who challenged existing systems of control over race relations were labeled as Communists and the Cold War’s red-baiting caused division between Black alliances and networks.<sup>178</sup>

Because of anticommunism politics, white advertisers began pulling out of the Black newspapers as they started to cover the Civil Rights Movement and some papers softened their tone to maintain advertising revenue. Also, as the violence and the movement escalated the mainstream white press saw the news value of covering race and started to recruit and hire Black reporters.<sup>179</sup> Historian Gerald Horne suggest that the

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<sup>176</sup> Borstelmann, *The Cold War and Color Line*, 119. Goldstein, *Little ‘Red Scares,’* 74-76.

<sup>177</sup> Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 149-150. E. Franklin Frazier, the most prominent African American sociologist of the 20th Century. His first major work, *The Negro Family in the United States* (1939), examined how social historical factors such as slavery, white terror, urban migration, and social disruptions affected the health of the African American family.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>179</sup> Washburn, *The African American Newspaper*, 191.

paradox of the Jim Crow crusade was that as Black institutions became more successful in eroding Jim Crow, they became “their gravediggers, preparing the ground for their burial.”<sup>180</sup> By the late 1950s, the Black Press had eroded, and the larger, remaining Black newspapers, like the *Courier* and *Defender*, changed their editorial direction to more positive matters, avoiding all controversy.<sup>181</sup>

At the same time Cold War conservatives’ intellectual writings were being pushed, the Black writers, activists, and intellectuals were creating a network and language to address human rights. Black women engaged in larger conversations about multiple and interconnected forms of oppression. Historian Lawrence Jackson believed the writer’s prime obligation to improve society was fulfilled by creating works that shaped the moral, ethical and psychological structure of the individual.<sup>182</sup> Black writers emphasized the need for resistance and to the cruelty of white supremacy. They wrote about the humanity of Black life in hopes of highlighting social and economic injustice.

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<sup>180</sup> Gerald Horne. *The Rise & Fall of The Associated Negro Press*, 7

<sup>181</sup> Washburn. *The African American Newspaper*, 191-192.

<sup>182</sup> Jackson. *The Indignant Generation*, 4.

## Chapter 6: Methods- Historical Discourse Analysis

This study uses a historical discourse analysis to examine power messages in media coverage and the production of media activism and social justice by Black women. In the Rosa Lee Ingram case, Black journalists created specific messages to accompany the physical activism occurring outside the newsroom. The media discourse influenced a larger framework of Rosa Lee Ingram and Black women that specifically Black female journalists used to discuss human rights and self-defense. They joined protest organizations to actively engage deeper in work towards Ingram's freedom. Discourse scholars Michel Foucault and Norman Fairclough stated the production of discourse is generated through actions/behavior as well as text.<sup>183</sup> Discourse is the whole process of social interaction, including the text itself, the process of production and the process of interpretation. These texts are socially determined by non-linguistic, behavioral, and behind-the-scenes social interactions, for example media production influences the messages presented to the public. It is through linguistic and non-linguistic messages that media discourse is established and reinforced. Fairclough described media discourse as a social interaction of media producers presenting the ideal subject or product to a media audience. These media products are commodities designed to create social knowledge to

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<sup>183</sup> See Michel Foucault. *Discipline and Power: the Birth of Prison*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1977). Jason Arac. *After Foucault; Humanistic Knowledge, Postmodern Challenges*, (New Brunswick; Rutgers University Press) Norman Fairclough (2010). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010), Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power*. (London: Routledge, 2015).

mass audiences.<sup>184</sup> Media discourse can exercise powerful influence in social reproduction and knowledge because of mass exposure and repetition.

Based on the social aspects of discourse, Black female journalists drew from their activism and lived experience to produce news media discourse about Ingram and the state of Black women's oppression. Through repetition of news media messages and activism, coverage of the Ingram case presented various discourses of Black women's identities over time. Black female journalist shifted the discourse based on the social, political and economic climates of the time to use Rosa Lee Ingram as a symbol for Black women. This reinforces the premise of discourse is a process but not a static phase because Black female journalists were strategic in their production and messaging. Words and ideas, behavior, and practices are observed and identified as themes in discourse. In highlighting of Ingram's voice, Black female journalists connected her to current events and societal issues for readers and supporters. Further, society, as participants in discourse, produce and reproduce it both consciously and unconsciously.<sup>185</sup> Society's participation in media themes about Black women's rights to protection and citizenship were reproduce consciously by Black women to create resistance. These discursive themes create patterns in the discourse, which shaped and reshaped the social and political atmosphere of the past and the present. These patterns are historical and political legitimizing principles that constitute the meaning for what is or is not appropriate for society. In understanding Black feminism's ability to challenge systems of oppression,

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<sup>184</sup> Fairclough, *Language and Power*. Nico Carpentier & B De Cleen."Bringing Discourse Theory into Media Studies" *Journal of Language & Politics* 6, no.2, 2007, 265-293.

<sup>185</sup> Fairclough, *Language and Power*, 252

themes within the Rosa Lee Ingram case shape historical and contemporary media representations of Black women. Legitimizing the concerns of Black women as discourse, Black female journalists positioned the Ingram case as a symbol of meaning.

### **Historical Discourse Analysis**

Within historical discourse analysis the concept of historical conjuncture is meant to capture what happens in those discourses and predict which ideas and practices will coexist when newer or older ideas or practices compete for normalization/legitimacy. For normalization to occur, societies have been educated to follow rules. In this process, we accept a variety of ideas and practices as truth, and we may even participate in silencing other ideas.<sup>186</sup>The participants in discourse consciously and unconsciously employ the various ideas and practices as their social strategies in the historical conjuncture. Normalization occurs indirectly through the visible and also through the invisible relations of power. Participants actively employ discursive themes as their social strategies rather than being passive recipients.

Historical discourse analysis is a “history of the present” to study the historical practices and social epistemological changes that produce the principles of who people are to be, by tracing ideas backward and forward to understand the previous and current historical conjunctures.<sup>187</sup>Johannesson suggested that use of official reports and newspapers offers insights into the reasoning behind social practices and institutional structures. He said newspaper articles often reveal contradictions in the social and

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<sup>186</sup> Ingólfur Ásgeir Jóhannesson. “The politics of historical discourse analysis: a qualitative research method?”, *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 31, no. 2, 2010, 253

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid*, 254

political struggles around the practices and policies at stake. The use of historical archives, newspapers and other primary sources provide insight towards Black female journalists' coverage of the Rosa Lee Ingram case. This analysis will use the following newspapers: *Atlanta Daily World*, *Chicago Defender*, *Pittsburgh Courier* and the *Daily Worker*, as well as other publications, where Black female journalists wrote about the case and Black womanhood. The *Atlanta Daily World* was the major local newspaper in the area surrounding Ingram's case and was the only Black daily newspaper in the nation. With a similarly high circulation like the *Daily World*, the *Pittsburgh Courier* serve as a regional comparison to the *Daily World* because northern newspapers tended to be more radical in their messages. This was due to the low backlash and less tense racial climate in the North. *The Daily Worker*, the publication of the U.S. Communist Party, covered the Ingram case through the perspective of challenging U.S. democracy. Claudia Jones, journalist and the only Black woman in CP leadership, wrote a weekly-column in the *Worker*.

A preliminary search of newspaper coverage was conducted to establish themes and depth of coverage. Over 300 news articles were found by searching for "Rosa Lee Ingram" using ProQuest digital Black Historic Newspapers and Communist Historic Newspapers database. Other terms including "Black womanhood," "sexism," "violence," and "Black mother" were searched to widen the coverage of larger issues facing Black women. By examining the newspapers' coverage of the case and the Black women involved in the mass campaign to free Ingram, the study examines how Black women were overall perceived at the time by the media and explain the social context of the Cold War period.

The study used archives from the Stuart Rose Archives at Emory University in Atlanta, Southern California Library of Social Studies in Los Angeles and Schomburg Center of Black Culture in Harlem. Personal documents, pamphlets and other materials from the Rosa Lee Ingram case give historical insight into organizations, Sojourners for Truth and Justice and the National Committee to Free the Ingram Family and their alliances created through the campaign. Biographies, diaries and correspondence helped create a personal sketch of the Black women's identities, specifically Rosa Lee Ingram and the Black female journalists. By uncovering these women's narratives, the study can connect their lived experiences to the writings by them and about Ingram. The study will start in 1948 when Rosa Lee Ingram's case first caught national attention in the *Atlanta Daily World* and ended in 1954 with the end of mass campaign for Ingram. By this point, most of the leaders were victims of Cold War politics, except for Mary Church Terrell, who died that year. As scholars stated the fight for human rights changed as its main leaders were silenced by Cold War politics or the Communists' abandonment of the Black community.<sup>188</sup> The period following would move to a judicial and political battle for civil rights as organizations like the NAACP would try to dismantle Jim Crow systems in the courts.

Intersectional identities and the creation of media discourse is this study's other focus. Scholars have noted that media tend to focus on certain single identities and erase other multiple, intersecting identities which normalizes media narrative stereotypes.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire*, 160.

<sup>189</sup> Davis, *Women, Race & Class*; Crenshaw. Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex; Crenshaw Mapping the margins; Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*

An intersectional media discourse presents a multiple-axis framework for understanding forms of oppression and discrimination by inviting social complexity in media narratives. The media produces and highlights identities over time based on the larger social, political and economic issues of the period. With this historical context, this study explores the media creation of identities and power. How did the intersectional discourse of Rosa Lee Ingram's identity evolve/change over time? What did the newspapers emphasize in their coverage (race, gender and/or class)? What themes or terms were used to identify Ingram? How did the Black press write about the case during the Cold War climate? What was the main message?

The contradictions of the U.S. as the "leader of the free world" offer opportunities to reveal how Black women contend with the depth of their identities through the Rosa Lee Ingram case. The writings and activism of Black women reveal the evolution of power struggles by historical debates and discussions of social justice and civil rights of that period. These materials shed light on the issue of Black women's positioning within the social hierarchy.

For analysis, the research questions serve as a guiding tool for the discursive themes within the news articles and other documents, which included, for example, the identity descriptions (race, gender, class) of Rosa Lee Ingram and descriptions of the Ingram's incident with Stratford (self-defense, murder, and rape/sexual assault). The discursive themes were analyzed in order to find the normalization principles and practices. These main patterns include the tensions among the Black press and community, which during this period abandoned addressing oppression as a global and imperialistic process. Another pattern used to examine the tensions of the Black women's



writings and activism is the politics of the Cold War and formation of the United Nations. The United States' foreign policy conflicted with the domestic realities of Jim Crow racism, but the spread of Communism threatened the effectiveness of protests, activism and advocacy for rights. The Ingram case was presented to the UN on several occasions as a way to address the violation of rights among Black Americans and those of African descent. The tensions of systematic racism within the criminal justice and prison system in the Ingram case give the perspective to the protection of land and body politics because of ideals of citizenship and freedom.

Black female journalists related their freedoms and rights to Ingram's case and oppression. This narrowing point of view allows for discursive themes of power to be revealed. These tensions reveal the power dynamics of the period and importance of Black women's role in addressing multiple frameworks of discrimination. For example, writings and pamphlets produced by Mary Church Terrell's National Committee to Free the Ingram Family, which comprised both Black and white women, highlighted the gender/feminine discursive themes of Rosa Lee Ingram's identity by using phrases like, "This can happen to you Mother too!," "defending her honor against a brute," or "she inspired free women on the delegation." Instead of structures of racism, the discourse struggles are about motherhood, rape, and women's rights and empowerment.

After identifying the themes, struggles and tensions of the media coverage and activism, this information will be placed within the historical conjuncture. The context of the discourse is positioned within the larger historical narrative because through earlier conjunctures, the observation of how ideas and practices transform meanings connect to other discursive themes based on the normalization/legitimacy of earlier principles. In a

historical discourse analysis, historical events help identify the normalization process over a period of time or as a result of an event. In this study, the Cold War period launched a new political climate, and how the Black Press reacted/responded to the political change can be seen through its coverage and activism through the Rosa Lee Ingram case. The tactics and message disseminated by Black female journalists center them within a larger human rights framework. For example, the all-Black women organization Sojourners of Truth and Justice acknowledged in a letter to President Truman that Black women were the “most oppressed in this great land of ours” and the Constitution and its Amendments do “not protect us from the evils of tyranny or against the illegal use of power.” The discourse theme of Black women’s unique identities contradicts U.S. democracy within the Truman’s administrative push to battle any threat to freedom.

## **Chapter 7: “Gross Miscarriage of Justice:” The Black Press Covers the Ingram Trial**

The Rosa Lee Ingram case presented a discourse shaped through a system of ideas and practices, including Black women’s individual behavior and U.S. government institutional policies, which helped produce the media messages. This process shows where different texts from various social, cultural and political arenas produced, circulated and contested intertwined assumptions about race, gender and class. The incorporation of various perspectives allows this study to examine the intersections of Black women’s identities and recover their voices that have been overlooked or marginalized.

This chapter explores the media discourses produced by the *Atlanta Daily World* and *Pittsburgh Courier* at the early stages of the Rosa Lee Ingram case. Through the Black Press and Black civil rights organizations, the Ingram case navigated through a network where aspects of identities, specifically Rosa Lee Ingram’s individual identity, was categorized to take shape in particular ways in particular moments. Thus, making her part of the process to develop an understanding of Black women’s humanity. Neither newspapers utilized the work of Black female journalists in its coverage and took different approaches to the case and its activism role. The *Daily World* associated itself closely with the local and national NAACP and focused on the systemic racism of the court system. The newspaper reported on local efforts to raise money for the legal defense, new home for the remaining children and Jim Crow racism in the South. It produced messages about Rosa Lee Ingram as poor Black rural sharecropper that opened discussions about race and class. In comparison, the *Pittsburgh Courier* took the approach of centering the narrative through Rosa Lee Ingram’s voice and adding

increasing her visibility as a Black woman. The newspaper focused on Ingram's lived-experiences prior to her encounter with John Stratford and empowered Black women to share their sexual and racial violence. The *Courier's* Black male journalists centered the Ingram case to address the construction of Black women's multi-level identities and injustices across them. Both newspapers created oppositional knowledge about Black women that challenged the mainstream framework by highlighting Rosa Lee Ingram's humanity. Through the lens of race, gender or class, Ingram was presented as having the right to self-defense which asserted the challenge to power.

### **A Doomed Mother and Her Two Sons**

After their arrests, the Ingrams swiftly moved through the court system. They were denied the right to an attorney until the date of the trial and the Schley County Grand Jury indicted the Ingrams on January 22, 1948; the trial was January 26 and the sentence was pronounced on January 27.<sup>190</sup> The all-white jury disregarded the testimony of the Ingrams that Stratford advanced on Rosa Lee Ingram with a rifle and engaged in a tussle with her, whereupon her sons intervened and death blows resulted in the self-defense.<sup>191</sup> The state of Georgia accused the mother and her sons of attacking the white farmer with Stratford's own rifle, a claw hammer and a hoe. At the time of the slaying and arrest, Sheriff Edgar Devane placed the Ingrams in separate, undisclosed jails as a precaution and guard against mob violence. The trio was sentenced to death in the electric chair. Judge W.H. Harper set February 27 as the execution date.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> "Ingrams Shall Not Die!" Daily Worker 1948. S32 Cases-Ingram, Rosa Lee. Civil Rights Congress Papers Box 90.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

Local news broke shortly after the Ingrams' sentencing and the Black Press' media campaign was launched. On February 3, 1948, *The Atlanta Daily World* announced the conviction of the "doomed" mother and her two sons.<sup>193</sup> With the Ingrams' execution scheduled for February 27, the Black community launched an immediate protest and organizing throughout Georgia and the nation. Also, the case had overwhelming grassroots-organizing movement of Black-women's right to self-defense from leading Black organizations including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

With the local and national NAACP at the head of the Rosa Lee Ingram campaign, discourse focused on race and class. The newspaper noted that "due to poverty," the Ingrams could not afford legal counsel and aid for the Ingrams poured into the *Atlanta Daily World* due to the notoriety of case.<sup>194</sup> The newspaper reported, "The tremendous response to the story carried in this paper, Wednesday Feb. 11 has resulted in the Butler Street YMCA, 22 Butler Street agreeing to accept clothing and assistance of any type for poverty-stricken and tragic family."<sup>195</sup> News stories described Ingram as an "improvised sharecropper," "poverty-stricken," and "country folk." The newspaper stress the urgent need of state aid and assistance. *Daily World* editor and publisher C. A. Scott suggested a statewide Citizen Defense Committee, with membership and representatives from each of Georgia's 159 counties. He stated the view that it be well to incorporate the

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<sup>193</sup> "Doomed Mother and Two Son Sentenced to Death," *Atlanta Daily World*, February 3, 1948, 1

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>195</sup> "Citizens Offer Aid to Forlorn Ingram Family," *Atlanta Daily World*, February 12 1948, 1

organization so that the group could operate on permanent basis.<sup>196</sup> Standalone photos featured masses of Black people giving money for the Ingram family. Citizens over the state responded to the call to defend the convicted Ingrams and to get a new trial and to help the children left behind.<sup>197</sup> The legal fight for the Ingram family initiated a conversation about the disenfranchisement of Black community and the court system.

### **Southern Justice: Race and Prison**

An all-white jury sentenced the Ingrams to their fate, which wasn't uncommon in the South. It was rare for Blacks to be judged by a jury of their peers. The Schley County jury system denied the majority Black population the right to jury service and the local atmosphere was not the type that would afford a fair trial. In the case of Rosa Lee Ingram, a one-day trial and lack of legal representation pointed to racism within the criminal justice system. The Black Press centralized its focus on equality and lack of justice. They reported on the U.S. government systems set on keeping the Black community enslaved and disfranchised. During their time in prison and jail, the Ingrams were transferred to more than five correctional facilities. While serving her prison sentence, Rosa Lee Ingram was subjected to forced convict labor in the fields. Eventually, Mrs. Ingram was transferred to work in a retirement home where she did laundry and other domestic services. The practice of re-entering Blacks into servitude and labelling them as convicted kept Blacks in inferior positions.

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<sup>196</sup> "Rehearing For Doomed Ingrams Set" *Atlanta Daily World* March 6. Feb. 18, 1948 1-5.

<sup>197</sup> Photo Standalone. *Atlanta Daily World*, February 19, 1948, 1

The South's practice of leasing convicts is part of the U.S. racial evolution. The brutality of the punishments received by Blacks was unjust and southern whites profited from the new forced labor in the criminal justice system. Restrictions were put in place to suppress Black citizenship and intimidate Blacks from political participation. The relationship of debt peonage and sharecropping compelled Blacks into servitude through the courts. The judges and sheriffs who sold convicts to corporate prison mines also leased Blacks to local farmers. New concepts of industrializing Black labor would be key to the economic development of the South. The future of Blacks in America rested on how white chose to "manage" them, whether in slavery or out of it. This would resonate through the next half century of national discourse as whites debated the proper role of Blacks in America. The resubjugation of Blacks was essential in solving the "Negro Question," in giving Blacks full-rights. The punishment of the majority of Black "criminals" was forced labor. Hundreds of forced labor camps were scattered throughout the South and served as a weapon of suppression of Black aspirations.

Where mob violence or the Ku Klux Klan terrorized Black citizens periodically, the return of forced labor as a fixture in Black life ground pervasively into the daily lives of far more African Americans. And the record is replete with episodes in which public leaders faced a true choice between a path toward complete racial repression or some degree of modest civil equality, and emphatically chose the former.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> Daniel Blackmon. *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II*, (New York: Anchor Books, 2008) , 7. The forcing of convicts to work as punishment was legal under the Thirteenth Amendment of the Constitution which formally abolished slavery, but permitted the involuntary servitude as punishment for convicted criminals.<sup>198</sup> Every southern state except Arkansas and Tennessee passed laws by the end of 1865 outlawing vagrancy and redefining it that virtually any freed slave not under the protection of a white man could be arrested for the crime. Four states legislated that Blacks could not be legally hired for work without a discharge paper from their previous employer, which prevented them leaving.

After Reconstruction, the South's judicial system refocused its purpose in the coercion of Blacks to comply with social customs and labor demands of whites. Historian Daniel Blackmon stated 1901 marked the final full disenfranchisement of nearly all Blacks throughout the South.<sup>199</sup> Sentences were handed down based on the need of forced labor. The South's evolved system of neo-slavery involved the leasing of slaves from one farm or factory to the next.<sup>200</sup> By the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Blacks lived in a world where the selling of their "criminalized" bodies was normalized. It wouldn't be until World War II when the unjust practices were addressed again due to the profound global forces of imperialism and discrimination.<sup>201</sup>

After Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, President Franklin Roosevelt and Attorney General Francis Biddle knew the exploitation of Blacks as second-class citizens would affect the war effort. Biddle was informed that federal policy had long been to cede virtually all allegations of slavery to local jurisdiction.<sup>202</sup> Five days after the attack on December 12, 1941, Biddle issued a directive—Circular No. 3591—to all federal prosecutors acknowledging the long history of unwritten federal law enforcement policy to ignore most reports of involuntary servitude. Year later, President Truman's

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<sup>199</sup> Blackmon. *Slavery by Another Name*, 351. In March 1909, the state of Georgia abolished the system of leasing prisoners. Social progressives applauded the abolition of state-sponsored forced labor as a sign of racial moderation.

<sup>200</sup> Blackmon. *Slavery by Another Name*, 288. During 1906, Alabama sold nearly 2,000 Black men to twenty different buyers. Nearly half were bought by the two biggest mining companies, Tennessee Coal & iron and Sloss Sheffield. The brutality of punishments against the "prisoners" in 1910 was the same as those used against slaves in 1840.

<sup>201</sup> Blackmon. *Slavery by Another Name*, 9

<sup>202</sup> Blackmon. *Slavery by Another Name*, 377.



Committee on Civil Rights recommended bolstering the anti-slavery statute to criminalize involuntary servitude.<sup>203</sup> In 1948, the entire federal criminal code was rewritten to further clarify laws against involuntary servitude. Finally, in 1951, Congress passed more explicit statutes, making any form of slavery in the US a crime. Witnessing the horrors of Nazi Germany, thousands of Black were unwilling to return to the docile state of helplessness.

### **The Struggle for Rights**

Meanwhile, back on the Ingram farm the remaining Ingram children were under the care of Sam Hill, a Black farmer who lived 12 miles from the residence. He took them to his farm for safekeeping in his one-story, three-room house. As a member of the local Americus Branch of the NAACP, Hill and other members started grassroots organizing the Black population of South Georgia for the fight of defense for the Ingram family. On February 22, W.R. Burleigh, treasurer of the Americus NAACP, reported he had received over \$1,000 in contributions for the Ingram defense fund. The local branch called for a national defense campaign in support of the demand for freedom. Hill stated, “Tell them up in New York that this is another Scottsboro case and we have got to out everything we can muster behind it, legally, financially and organizationally. But first, every American citizen must know the true story of the case.”<sup>204</sup>

The Black press played a vital role in telling and spreading the true story of Rosa Lee Ingram. As the trial date and the execution date approached, state court delayed and

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> “Ingrams Shall Not Die!” Daily Worker 1948. S32 Cases-Ingram, Rosa Lee. Civil Rights Congress Papers Box 90, 10

rescheduled the new trial motion twice for February 21 and March 6 because the “state indicated unreadiness” and the Ingram’s plea for new trial automatically stayed the execution.<sup>205</sup> The *Daily World* took credit for breaking the news and revealing “nationwide indignation” of the Ingram case. The newspaper displayed activism by revealing “the trial and conviction of the trio after it returned ‘guilty’ verdict.”<sup>206</sup>

Drawing comparison to the Scottsboro case, newspapers noted the “tremendous emotional response from the public.”<sup>207</sup> The case of this tragic family has been publicized by radio, newspapers and magazines all over the world resulting in thousands of letters and telegram of protest. Global publicity resulted in Russian propaganda to use the case to implement its foreign policy by “emphasizing the injustice and oppression prevalent in the United States.”

The *Daily World* reported how the consensus of opinion is the Ingrams were justified in killing Stratford.<sup>208</sup> S. Hawkins Dykes, the court-appointed lawyer for the Ingrams won a stay of execution on a motion for a new trial. On March 25, attorneys laid the foundation for an appeal for the trio. The Ingrams were not present at the appeal. A sparse group of whites filled the front row seats, but Blacks traditionally barred from the main floor in the Sumter County Courthouse packed the gallery. State troopers aided by county officers vigorously policed the corridors and for several minutes barred Black reporters from the main floor. The defense attorneys interceded on the behalf of the Black press and were admitted in the courtroom. Halfway through the trial Black photographers

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<sup>205</sup> “New Trial Motion for Doomed Mother, Son Set for March 20,” *Atlanta Daily World*

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>208</sup> “Ingram Case Motion Ready”, *Atlanta Daily World*, March 14, 1948, 1.

were asked to leave. The plea for a new trial was based on “the jury went beyond the evidence. Unless [the Ingrams] are granted a new trial they will suffer an injustice.” The defense attorneys insist there was no premeditation and the Ingrams did not intend to kill. Attorney Troy Marrow stated the trio engaged in “one continuous struggle and had no time to gain their composure.” Solicitor General E.L. Forrester contended the State Constitution only guaranteed anyone accused of crime ‘one fair trial.’ He said the defense attorneys filed only a skeleton motion for a new trial and had not challenged the fairness of the first trial. He described the case as “cruel and barbarous murder.”

“When they have had one fair trial” Forrester said, “they don’t have any right to another simply because they didn’t like the verdict. We have a case so clean that they can’t put their hands upon one single thing.”<sup>209</sup>

After a five-minute recess the court heard Attorney Hawkins Dykes, who stated that “Stratford meant to use the gun or he would have left it at home.” He argued that the state failed to prove malice and didn’t have evidence of malice. Also, the jury ignored the undisputed evidence that John Stratford struck the first blow. On April 6, 1948, the judge commuted the sentence to life, which surprise the Black community because ordinarily, conviction for murder, without recommendation of mercy by the trial jury, calls for imposition of the death penalty.<sup>210</sup>

### **“The Ways of Country Life:” the Economics of Rural Labor**

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<sup>209</sup> “Judge ponders new trial plea for Ingrams,” *Atlanta Daily World*, March 26 1948 1-6

<sup>210</sup> “Ingrams Given ‘Life;’ Higher Appeal Likely,” *Atlanta Daily World*, April 7, 1948, 1-6

In the beginning of the coverage, the *Daily World* reported how, “The grim picture of the mother and her 11 children posed on the front pages of the Negro press last week had a profound impression on the minds of those who are familiar with the ways of country life and Negroes in that life.”<sup>211</sup> This reflects the Black Feminist notion of the embodiment of lived-experiences and the important of highlighting them. The editorial points out how Black people embody different lived-experience, but each experience adds to the knowledge of resistance. Also, it hints to the class issues among Blacks in the South. By referencing “country life,” it denotes that the struggle of Blacks is diverse, but still a part of the larger systems of oppression.

The discourse of class generated by the newspaper connected the discrimination of Blacks was due to economic access and peonage systems rooted in slavery. On February 11, 1948, the *Daily World* featured two large photos of Rosa Lee and her sons and the other showed Rushin and the remaining children. The photo captions wrote, “The Ingrams are poor people as indicated by their dress. Note their bare-footed, poverty-stricken condition.”<sup>212</sup> While Blacks had migrated North for more economic opportunities, the rural South had continued to disenfranchise Blacks. By focusing on the poverty within the Black community, the *Daily World* showed how the cycle of slavery still entrenched in Black lives.

In their list of demands, the local NAACP visited the landlord C.M. Dillinger to demand return of the Ingram’s property.<sup>213</sup> The *Daily World* covered the discourse of

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<sup>211</sup> “A Worthy Appeal” *Atlanta Daily World*, Feb. 4, 1948.

<sup>212</sup> “Doomed Mother and Sons,” *Atlanta Daily World*, Feb. 4, 1948, 1.

<sup>213</sup> “Mrs. Ingram Sued by former Landlord,” *Atlanta Daily World*, June 11, 1948,1.; “Mrs. Ingram to Fight Landlord’s Suit,” *Atlanta Daily World*, June 5, 1948, 1.

protection and right to property within the Ingram case. Her role as a property owner added to another level of the violation of rights.

The newspaper's coverage identifying Mrs. Ingram as a widow presented the very common gendered condition of Black women during this period. Black women's lives were especially hard in farming culture because they rose before the rest of the family to prepare meals over a wood stove or open fire; gather water from distant wells or springs; washed laundry and other domestic duties. They also worked in the fields, especially during picking and chopping time. Many had little choice but to take in laundry or perform domestic work for tiny wages, thus tripling their work load. Women choppers and pickers generally earned half as much as their male counterparts. Many women served as the heads of households and were left to organize production without the benefit of adult male labor because their husbands and elder sons migrated to nearby cities to find work, escape family responsibilities or avoid persecution in one form or another.<sup>214</sup> Historian Robin DG Kelley stated on plantations the women's spokesperson was a defensive measure because the landowner's wife would negotiate in her husband's place.

After Mrs. Ingram went to jail, Dillinger confiscated the animals and tools. Her daughter stated, they would have had enough if Dillinger "hadn't taken our milk cow, a calf, our 15 hogs and a whole crop of corn, cotton, cane and peppers. The only things he would let us take from the farm were our household furniture and our mule."<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Kelley. *Hammer and Hoe*, 36

<sup>215</sup> Kelley. *Hammer and Hoe*, 9

In a pamphlet produced by the NAACP, called the Ingram case “an American tragedy.” It stated “This is the story of an American family. A family of Georgia sharecropper. A Black family. A poor family.”<sup>216</sup> The discourse produced by the organization discussed how the entire Ingram family were “victims of neglect and poverty.”

The discourse of connection race and class expressed the Ingram family’s urgency of need and support. The organization focused on the injustice outside the justice system, for example, the lack of care of the remaining Ingram children without the support of their mother. The complexity of Rosa Lee Ingram’s motherhood was further complicated by her imprisonment and the discourse created addressed the imprisonment of women, who are forced to leave their families. The pamphlet addressed the abandonment of Black children and noted,

One of the most coldblooded acts in this whole affair was the hauling of Mrs. Ingram off to jail, leaving the small children alone and helpless. The NAACP has undertaken the legal defense of Mrs. Ingram and her sons, feeding and clothing of the motherless children during the period of the emergency.

By appealing to the needs of the Ingram children, economic discourses were debated because access to welfare was based on who the government saw as deserving. The lack of aid represents Black socioeconomic struggles in the South.

The pamphlet featured photos of the Ingram children with captions relating to poverty and assistance. In a photo depicting young Ingram child carried a large box and noted, “More aid arrives to be carried from the car into the home by this youngster.”

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<sup>216</sup> “This is the story of an American family,” 1948. a147. Ingram, Rosa Lee- Literature, Civil Rights Congress Papers. Box 8, Schomburg Center for Black Culture.

Another photo showed five children digging through a box of clothes with the caption describing, “Listlessly, the destitute children look at a package of clothing sent by sympathizers.” On the last page, the pamphlet urged for help in raising a defense fund of \$50,000 for the NAACP to appeal for the Ingram family’s “unjust sentence will not fail because of lack of money to pay legal expenses. It described how the Ingram family “were condemned unjustly for the act of self-defense, an act which has its roots in the frustration and the racial passions of the impoverished backwoods country of American South.”

The *Daily World*’s coverage of the case focused on the efforts being made to raised money for the legal fund. For example, a news story about a mass meeting described how “Atlanta citizens reached deep into their pocketbooks and contributed for the defense of Mrs. Rosa Lee Ingram and her two sons.”<sup>217</sup> “Local citizens responding to this plea packed the basement auditorium of the church to express in words and money their indignation at the conviction of the Ingrams, who attempted a defense of their persons and property.”<sup>218</sup> The Black community within the state of Georgia joined together for the Ingram’s freedom through the newspaper’s debate of activism and injustices. The growing concern of the Black community was to provide financial support for Rosa Lee Ingram and her sons in jail, but also supporting the remaining Ingram children. By telling the Ingram story, the *Daily World* launched a grassroots campaign prior to the involvement of the NAACP national office. The localized coverage of

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<sup>217</sup> “Over \$500 Raised For Doomed Ingram Family,” *Atlanta Daily World*, February 17, 1948, 1. “A Citizens Defense Challenge” *Atlanta Daily World*, Feb, 7 1948. “A Worthy Appeal” *Atlanta Daily World*, Feb. 4, 1948.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*

community efforts generated were Black communities advocated for themselves and a collective based was formed. In a news story, the *Daily World* described the effects of this network, “A giant mass meeting was held in Atlanta, GA a few weeks ago where citizens of that community spearheaded contributions to the Ingrams’ defense. Similar meetings were held in Albany, GA and Columbus, GA. Contributions for their legal defense have come from all over the South. Clothing and other aid have been sent to Mrs. Ingram’s children.”<sup>219</sup>

As the case grew, contributions came from Princeton University’s Liberal Union.<sup>220</sup> In Los Angeles, over 600 people assembled at Phillips Temple CME church for the “Save the Ingram Family Drive” to protest Rosa Lee Ingram’s life sentence and demand President Truman release her and her sons.<sup>221</sup> From March 19 to 29, the Los Angeles Negro Congress hosted and led street demonstrations and circulated post cards by progressive groups throughout the city. Actress Lena Horne spoke to an enthusiastic audience as she pointed out that any normal sons would have rushed to the defense of their mother when she was threatened. She called upon the Negro people to ally themselves with all people and groups willing to help fight for the freedom of the Ingrams. Georgia-native Rev. Hicks of St. John Methodist church described “a vivid picture of the terrorism to which Negroes are subjected.”<sup>222</sup> He stated, “The church must begin to play its role in fighting for the civil rights of all groups and persons, as well as

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<sup>219</sup> “New Trial Motion for Doomed Mother, Sons Set for March 20,” *Atlanta Daily World*, March 3, 1948, 1.

<sup>220</sup> “Princeton Men Give to Ingram Fund,” *Atlanta Daily World*, March 7, 1948, 8.

<sup>221</sup> “Californians in Ingram Rally,” *Atlanta Daily World*, April 2, 1948, 2.

<sup>222</sup> “Churches Unite Over Ingram,” *Atlanta Daily Worl*, April 5, 1948, 1.



carrying on its struggle for Christianity.”<sup>223</sup> Even white protesters were present at the rally, including Al Caplan, Warehouse and Longshoremen, CIO, who urged white Americans to the ranks with the Black people in their fight for liberation.

The Eastern District Council of the International Workers Order launched a campaign to raise funds for education and care of the children. The organization supported the NAACP’s efforts, but developed a campaign among its own members where two Ingram’s sons, Charles and James toured through the nation. The labor union sought to educate the boys, but also sponsored a summer camp trip in New Jersey and secured the boys a tutor.<sup>224</sup>

#### **“A Sharp Contrast:” Southern Racism**

The discourse of race extended further by including the activism of the white community. In December 1948, Dr. James Logan Delk, a minister from Hopkinsville, Kentucky, asked the Georgia State Parole Board to release Rosa Lee Ingram into the custody of his church. He asked the board to intervene in the case and release the family to a 170-acre farm in Christian County, Kentucky. He guaranteed Black and white churches would provide the Ingrams a farm free for the first five years. The *Daily World* reported how Delk was a “nationally-commissioned social worker of the Church of God in Christ declared the three victims were ‘victims’ of circumstances and miscarriage of justice.”<sup>225</sup> The state board decided to withhold action from Delk’s request.

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

<sup>224</sup> “Campaign for Ingrams’ Welfare,” *Atlanta Daily World*, August 22, 1948, 1.

<sup>225</sup> “KY Minister Asks Ingrams’ Release to His Custody,” *Atlanta Daily World* December 23, 1948, 1.

In continuing the discourse on race, the *Daily World* wrote about “the sharp contrast which exist in the operation of justice for Negro and white citizens in the State of Georgia.” In discussing the criminal justice, the newspaper published a NAACP statement about the acquittal of William Howell, a white Georgia man charged with lynching Robert Mallard, a Black man. The article reported, “Comparing Howell’s acquittal with ‘Georgia justice’ which last year convicted Mrs. Rosa Lee Ingram in the self-defense slaying of a white neighbor, Mr. [Thurgood] Marshall stated: These two cases taken together completely refute any possible assignment for leaving the question of the enforcement of Negroes’ rights to ‘Georgia Justice.’ If there be any doubt in anyone’s mind, he needs only to look to the most recent actions of Governor Talmadge in his determination to reestablish the poll tax in Georgia.”<sup>226</sup> Marshall stressed that the NAACP would continue to fight for an anti-lynching law and the indictment for members of lynch mobs. He expressed his interest in seeing “what possible ingenious explanation can be made by the American representatives in the United Nations Assembly when questioned as to justice fair play, and the protection of civil rights for Negroes in this country in light of the Mallard and Ingram cases.” The discourse of race and human rights were linked to the protection of anti-Black violence. In comparing the work of the U.S. justice system, the newspaper kept the discussion of Rosa Lee Ingram around racial violence and the power of white supremacy. The mass terrorism of Black bodies has been associated with social control. Lynching and mob violence reverberated fear and horror

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<sup>226</sup> “Marshall Hits Farce.” *Atlanta Daily World*, January 16, 1949, 2.

in Black communities due to the barbaric, public violence sensationalism.<sup>227</sup> By the 1930s, most Americans had witnessed lynching through its media representations. The NAACP applied the Ingram case to the larger campaign to end anti-Black violence and to intact laws and policies to protect the Black community. The organization noted the involvement of the UN as a way to position racialized violence as a global debate.

### **“You Will Help Us:” NAACP Steps In**

In March 1948, an appeal for legal funds went to the 1600 branches of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Walter White called the Ingram case “one of the most shocking miscarriages of justice in the 39 years the NAACP existed” and urged the branches to arrange mass meetings and send speakers to churches, trade unions and other organizations in a campaign to raise funds for the family.<sup>228</sup> The appeal stated, “Unhappily our friends have been depleted by the heavy costs of the fights we made in recent years against restrictive covenants, disfranchisement, educational inequality, job discrimination and gross court injustice. We can fight for the Ingrams and others like them, you will help us.”<sup>229</sup>

The Georgia NAACP took over the legal defense of the Ingrams by the time of the new trial hearing in March 1948. On March 22, a special meeting was called by the executive committee of the Georgia NAACP with Walter White, National Association Secretary, fifteen Black newspapers and the Associated Negro Press present to ask for

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<sup>227</sup> Amy Louise Wood. *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Chapel, 2009), 11.

<sup>228</sup> “The Call for the Ingram Family.” March 1948. A147 Ingram, Rosa Lee- Literature, Civil Rights Congress Papers, Schomburg Center for Black Culture.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

cooperation in channeling the funds for the Ingrams.<sup>230</sup> The *Daily World* published the telegram it received about the gathering and its commitment to case. It read, “First, the legal defense for the Ingrams is entirely in the hands of the NAACP and no other organization are asked or authorized to raise funds for legal defense.”<sup>231</sup> All funds in Georgia were to be sent to the attorney A.T. Walden and those outside Georgia were to be sent to the national office of the NAACP in New York City.

Organizations, like the National Association of the Advancement of Colored People saw unlimited possibilities for freeing the Ingram family and sought to develop a mass movement to free Mrs. Ingram “as a most vital struggle, as an indispensable part of the struggle for the rights of the Negro people and for the civil liberties of all the people of our country.” Defense counsel for the Ingrams expected to carry the case to the Georgia Supreme Court. NAACP’s Thurgood Marshall declared the fate of the Ingram family was far from settled.<sup>232</sup> By June 1948, the legal counsel argued whether there was “extenuating circumstances and factors” and “if the verdict was contrary to the law.” The *Daily World* reported, “the primary issue before the High Court is to determine whether John Ethron Stratford entered the Ingrams’ cornfield with murderous intent.”<sup>233</sup>

The partnership of the NAACP and the *Daily World* reflected a focus on domestic issues of human rights. Historian Carol Anderson stated during World War II the NAACP voiced its concerns about human rights and colonialism, but feared the sense

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<sup>230</sup> “NAACP Calls Special Ingram Meeting,” *Atlanta Daily World*, 1

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>232</sup> “Ingram Appeal Set by NAACP Counsel in NY,” *Atlanta Daily World*, April 9, 1948, 1

<sup>233</sup> “State High Court Hears Facts in Ingrams’ Case: Walden Dudley Make Appeal for the Ingram Trio,” *Atlanta Daily World*, June 15, 1948, 1-6.

of a shared struggle with other oppressed nations would disappear once independence was gained. The component of being “American” was a shared belief between the NAACP and the *Daily World* in their assessment of Black equality. The newspaper expressed “sympathy” for India quest for freedom, but was clear on the difference in the Black liberation struggle. The editorial argued “The American Negro is neither a vassal nor subject but an American citizen, entitled to...every right and privilege of any other American citizen. While extending the fullest sympathy and support to the people of India, as Negro American citizens, ours must be first.”<sup>234</sup> Like the NAACP, the newspaper supported more conservative approaches that avoided communist ideas, but addressed the benefits of democracy and human rights as the sources of justice.<sup>235</sup> As Roy Wilkins, the assistant secretary of the NAACP, argued Blacks were “just a segment of the people’s revolution.”<sup>236</sup> Due to the Cold War, a less radical discourse served as the organization and newspaper’s basis for fighting injustices through U.S. government. Rather than addressing the Ingram case as a shared global oppression, the NAACP and the *Daily World* tackled domestic Jim Crow white supremacy.

### **“Railroaded to Death:” Power & Protection of Black Women**

The newspaper also addressed Ingram as a symbolic figure for the protection of Black women and presented the interactions of power between Blacks and white supremacy as unjust and exploitative. The language of the Black Press focused on the collective plight in the disfranchisement of the Black community. The *Daily World* often

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<sup>234</sup> Anderson. *Bourgeois Radicals*, 23.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid*, 25.

referred to her as “doomed” because of the societal identity of Blacks as culturally lacking the means to challenge the status-quo. The newspaper affirmed the need for social justice by empowering the collective Black narrative and experience within the Jim Crow South. It affirmed her humanity and rights by regarding her actions as self-defense. One editorial stated,

The facts in the case are indeed greatly involved. The woman, Mrs. Ingram, age 45, and her sons, are all country people. Those knowing nothing about the ways of country life. It is difficult to imagine a Negro living so far in the country stretches and having the habits and tempo of country life so long to have led an attack upon a white man. The whole order of the South betrays such an easy belief. They don't just go around hunting white people to attack.... It is most urgent that something be done for them now.<sup>237</sup>

The *Daily World* was the first newspaper to interview Ingram in March 1948 through a representative who visited Rosa Lee Ingram for the purpose of delivering money from the newspapers. She recalled the incident and showed the two places on her forehead which she said were cause by the Stratford's knife. She stated how grateful she was for the mail she has received from different parts of the country. The news article reported:

“In the midst of her very unfortunate situation she seems to be cheerful and her greatest hope is for a better day to dawn for her and her minor sons who have been sentenced to die. She asked that the people everywhere continue to pray that they may overcome the ordeal which awaits them.”<sup>238</sup>

The newspaper played a key role in establishing the Ingram case by covering the injustices of her trial, highlighting the economic need of Ingram's children and uniting the Black community. The *Daily World* introduced discussions of race, gender and class

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

<sup>238</sup> “Please Don't Beat My Mother”- Ingram Boy *Atlanta Daily World*, March 10, 1948, 6.

by noting the different lived-experiences among Blacks in the South. After World War I, large numbers of Blacks left the South to take advantage of opportunities in the urban centers of the North.

Race was at the center of the discourse and the newspapers engaged in debates about discrimination. In his “Seeing and Saying” column in the *Daily World*, William Fowlkes called Stratford a “mad man who attacked with a gun in hand” and defended the Ingrams. He wrote,

Had they been white the case would have gotten no further than a coroner’s jury and no arrests would have been made at all. It just happened that the principals were ‘the other way around.’ Thanks to God, however, their cause is being fought and their welfare assured. Fighting for yourself brings respect and finally admiration from the other side.<sup>239</sup>

Both publisher C.A. Scott and his mother were involved in the Local Atlanta Citizens Defense Committee. The organization investigated the case of the Ingrams and believed that “the terrorized family is being railroaded to death for a justified defense of their home and persons.” The organization’s plan was to create a giant demonstration with people “who are interested in in justice and fair play for our people in rural and urban areas.” Scott sponsored and spoke at mass meetings and asserted that the Ingrams “acted in self-defense and that their death in the defense of their home would be a gross miscarriage of justice.”<sup>240</sup>

### **‘All of Us in the South’: The Black Press Under Jim Crow**

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<sup>239</sup> William Folkes. “Seeing and Saying: Good Looking,” *Atlanta Daily World*, April 11, 1948, 4.

<sup>240</sup> “Mass Meeting for Doomed Ingram Family Monday Nite,” *Atlanta Daily World*, Feb. 15, 1948, 1.

Publisher C.A. Scott and the *Daily World* traditional took a more conservative view of defending the rights of Blacks. Being in the heart of the Deep South, Blacks understood the public terror of Jim Crow racism. As result, the *Daily World* steered away from a focus on politics and especially avoided partisan leanings. By deviating from the norm of the Black Press, the Scott family believed it could increase its influence on matters of Black Press because the voice of protest was attributed to the newspaper rather than the Scotts.<sup>241</sup> In the Rosa Lee Ingram coverage, C.A. Scott was very vocal in injustices towards the mother and her two sons. *The Daily World* frequently featured Ingram's case on the front page of the newspaper and focused on local efforts of the case. C.A. Scott was quoted in an article stating, "I was at the hearing for the new trial for the victims and after hearing the arguments, pro and con, I am convinced that these people have become victims of a gross miscarriage of justice and all of us in the South, we [who] have, more or less, at one time or another, experienced the suffering and persecution of racial prejudice, must rally to the end to the defense of these people."<sup>242</sup>

Since 1928, the Scott family had created a successful newspaper business. *The Atlanta World* succeeded largely because it was founded as a business venture, not a political enterprise.<sup>243</sup> Founder W.A. Scott II believed the newspaper could become an important Black voice, but focused first on it being a healthy financial investment. He envisioned an ever-widening market for advertising, beginning with Black businessmen

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<sup>241</sup> Leonard Ray Teel, "W.A. Scott and the Atlanta Daily World," *American Journalism* VI no. 32,

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<sup>243</sup> Leonard Ray Teel, "W.A. Scott and the Atlanta Daily World," *American Journalism* VI no. 32,



and expanding to capture a share of national corporate advertising for his syndicate. At the age of 26, W.A. Scott launched the weekly before turning it into a daily three years later. He had a formula to his success: persuade Black entrepreneurs that they could compete for customers and clients or lose them to white businesses.<sup>244</sup> Unlike other Black newspapers, W.A. Scott urged Black economic solidarity which helped drive advertising revenue.<sup>245</sup>

The Scott family, like many Black elites sought status, moral authority and recognition their humanity by separating themselves, as agents of civilization.<sup>246</sup> The Black press was a primary disseminator of Black middle-class values and the most effective way to reach and influence a mass, working-class audience. The newspapers also advanced the critical message of Southern racism and promoted a sense of humanity. By altering representations of Blackness, the Black Press offered lessons regarding how to become and remain respectable. The welfare and uplift of the race was at the center of Blacks newspapers during the post-World War II period. In *Black Bourgeoisie*, Franklin Frazier criticized the role of Black newspapers in promoting “desires for recognition and status in a white world.”<sup>247</sup> He wrote how the activities of society and recognition of the Black middle-class were considered newsworthy, but “society is a phase of the world of make-believe which represents in acute form the Negro’s long preoccupation with ‘social

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<sup>244</sup> Ibid.

<sup>245</sup> It worked and by 1932, he converted the *Daily World* into the only Black daily newspaper. In 1934, W.A. Scott was murdered and his brother C.A Scott took over the production of the newspaper and followed the same format as his brother

<sup>246</sup> Jane Rhodes. “Pedagogies of Respectability: Race, Media and Black Womanhood in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Souls, 201-214.

<sup>247</sup> Franklin Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), 25

life' as an escape from his subordinate status in America."<sup>248</sup> As the Black Press declined, it promoted solidarity within class politics and minimized its stance on racial injustices.

Racial solidarity was at the center of the *Daily World's* position of the Rosa Lee Ingram case. The newspaper urged for community support for the Ingram family by requesting clothes and monetary donations.<sup>249</sup> On April 8, 1948, the newspaper featured a "broad welfare program" for the family which included Scott on the list of Georgia citizens.<sup>250</sup> The group discussed how they planned to "insure the Ingram children a new home, farm equipment, clothing and education."<sup>251</sup> By focusing on her children, the *Daily World* sought to support the Black community collectively. Due to the regional conditions, the newspaper rallied around Black unity rather than direct, radical action. For example, after donations started coming in, an editorial discussed how rapid the response was. It stated, "A long distance telephone call from a South Carolina city late Tuesday afternoon also asked the name of some leader in Atlanta to whom funds and clothes can be sent."<sup>252</sup> Support came from uniting together for material and monetary aid.<sup>253</sup> Scott addressed the Ingram case on the violation of Black legal rights in the courtroom. On the editorial pages, he expressed the case of two minors would express concern to the judges and the state law that "parents and children may mutually protect

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<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

<sup>249</sup> "Donations for Ingrams Continue," *Atlanta Daily World*, May 23, 1948, 1.

<sup>250</sup> "Welfare Program for Ingrams," *Atlanta Daily World*, April 8, 1948, 6.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

<sup>252</sup> "A Citizens Defense Challenge," *Atlanta Daily World*, Feb, 7 1948, 1.

<sup>253</sup> Ingram Fund Soars Past \$32,000 Mark, *Atlanta Daily World*, June 22, 1948, 1.

each other” would allow an appeal for a new trial.<sup>254</sup> He supported Ingram through community action on a local level and dealt more with issues of race.

### **“Their Right to Life:” Black Women Speak Up**

Despite the proximity to the incident, the *Daily World* didn’t focus on the media discourse of Rosa Lee Ingram’s gender. Occasionally, the newspaper would cover out-of-state women groups, who rallied for Rosa Lee Ingram. Vivian Carter Mason of the Congress of American Women was interviewed by Editor C.A. Scott in March 1948 to document what the “Women’s section for the Defense of Rosa Ingram” were doing to investigate the situation. Mason expressed, “Every Negro woman in the United States is on trial with Rosa Lee Ingram...Negro women have died too many deaths for their right to life. They have suffered too long for their honor and a chance to raise their children without shame. This struggle, we won’t give up.”<sup>255</sup> The newspaper presented efforts led by women as a separate campaign, different from the localized efforts. By referring to this campaign as the “Women’s section,” the media discourse reflected a separation of power within the social hierarchy. This represents the division between Black liberation groups, which challenges monolithic historical narratives of civil rights.

From Mason’s point of view, Black women across the country saw themselves reflected in Rosa Lee Ingram and took a human rights approach to seeing themselves beyond the status of race. This was a call for exclusively to Black women that the *Daily World* did not push in its media coverage because of its conservative business format.

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<sup>254</sup> “The Ingram Appeal Case,” *Atlanta Daily World*, July 15, 1948, 6.

<sup>255</sup> Mrs. Mason in City to Form Women’s Ingram Defense Unit.” *Atlanta Daily World*, March 21, 1948, 1.

The voices of Black female journalists were not featured in the coverage, but Black women, like Mason did find spaces to express their experiences. Black women did not only follow the leadership of Black males, but set themselves apart to advocate for themselves and their unique issues. While the *Daily World* did not focus its coverage of the Ingram case on Black women's gender issues, the stage was beginning set for a larger discussion of equality. The case had raised concerns among Black women around the country who acknowledge efforts were not addressing the larger issues of Black women's struggles with race and gender.

Until the motion for a new trial the *Daily World* had not addressed or minimized the sexual harassment and violence between Stratford and Mrs. Ingram. Very few instances mentioned it in the news coverage. Also, it was mentioned She claimed "the white man had been picking after her and insisting she needed a man after her husband died."<sup>256</sup> Forms of protest against sexual violence were expressed in forms of poetry by Black women. For example, the *Daily World* published a poem by Atlanta-citizen Ruth Talmadge King, who addressed Rosa Lee Ingram's challenging "a white man's lustful line."<sup>257</sup> King wrote how Mrs. Ingram and Black women's struggle to "fight for her virtuous womanhood against a knife and gun" and the "true story" of "race-mixing." This reflected the lived experience of Black women and the discourse of sexual violence and lack of protection from white men. The poem concluded with addressing the "white world" where "justice is seldom done" and pleaded for the Black community to wake up

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<sup>256</sup> "Ingrams Given 'Life;'" *Atlanta Daily World*, 6

<sup>257</sup> Ruth Talmadge King "To The Ingram Cause," *Atlanta Daily World*, February 22, 1948, 6.

and give to the cause of the Ingram family. The newspaper allowed limited spaces for Black women to address women issues. This gendered discourse was downplayed in the Georgian newspaper, but the Black Press in the North would make Rosa Lee Ingram the central voice of the human rights in the midst of the Cold War.

### **From the Four Corners of America: The Courier**

Widely-circulated Black newspaper, *The Pittsburgh Courier*, began to cover the case after the *Daily World* in February 1948. Similar to the coverage in the *Daily World*, the *Courier* had Black male reporters cover the case, but they focused more on the national and international impact of racial injustices by highlighting the Black women's voices. As the case gained popularity, Southwest judicial circuit Judge W.M. Harper issued a stern rebuke to "northern newspapers" for current agitation of the case. "This is an attack on the court," Judge Harper stated." And when attacks are made upon the courts that is anarchy."<sup>258</sup> As a northern newspaper, the *Courier* was critical of the government, organizations and injustice practices used during the Ingrams. Regional racial tensions allowed the newspaper to emphasize state control of civil rights and the need for the federal government to intervene. The Black Press referred to "Georgia Justice," on several occasions in order to illustrate the discourse of the South and its racial discrimination. Headlines would emphasize the state of Georgia. For example, headlines like "Georgia Going 'All Out' to Execute Widow, Two Sons," and "Ingrams Denied New Trial by Georgia's High Court," written in the newspapers pointed to the lack of federal government intervention.<sup>259</sup> It noted, "Eloquently informed of the details of the Courier,

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<sup>258</sup> "Ingram Case Cited Greatest Miscarriage." *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 7 1948, 1.

<sup>259</sup> "GA High Court Upholds Ingram Conviction" *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 25, 1948, 1.

an aroused Nation quickly sensed a new, Dixieborn American tragedy and rushed to the rescue with their helpful deeds and dollars.”<sup>260</sup> The *Courier* encouraged readers to write and send telegrams to the offices of the Georgia Governor, President Harry Truman and Attorney General Tom Clark. In September 1948, the newspaper informed readers of a new law in Georgia, where the Governor does not have power to free prisoners unless action is recommended by the state Board of Pardons and Paroles. The news story called on “the entire Nation” to write.<sup>261</sup> The following week the newspaper reported the success of the campaign. “Hundreds of Americans last week responded to the campaign launched by the *Pittsburgh Courier* in its nationwide effort to free Rosa Lee Ingram and her two sons.”<sup>262</sup> The news story also noted one of the first persons to respond was a Virginian woman named Lelia Clark which noted the action of women in that nationwide campaign.

Taking a more national perspective, the *Courier* also described the Ingram case was “the most astounding story of the decade.”<sup>263</sup> It sensationalized the case with big, flashy headlines on its front-page. The newspaper covered the case heavily by taking different perspectives and highlighting different national and international efforts. As a national newspaper, it reported about how “from the four corners of America and from

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<sup>260</sup> Chester Washington. “Ingrams Have Spent Eight Months in Jail.” *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 26, 1948, 24.

<sup>261</sup> Robert Ratcliffe. Nationwide Action Urged: Help Free the Ingrams, *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 25, 1948, 1.

<sup>262</sup> Robert Ratcliffe. Free the Ingrams Campaign Gaining Nationwide Support, *Pittsburgh Courier*, Oct. 2, 1948, 1-5.

<sup>263</sup> “A Courier Exclusive Mrs. Ingram’s Life Story Starts Next Week,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 13, 1948, 1.

across the Atlantic in Great Britain help was rushing aid to a doomed Georgia widow.”<sup>264</sup> The *Courier* reported how the *London Daily Mirror* made a “trans-Atlantic telephone call to ascertain what it could do to aid the doomed trio.”<sup>265</sup> The case had captured global attention which added to the discussion of human rights within current political climate. The international interests widen the campaign beyond expectations of the Black community. The newspaper described the Ingram case a “battle for the freedom of the trio of doomed persons whose trial and convection rocked the entire world.”<sup>266</sup>

The national efforts were covered as different groups joined the fight for the Ingrams. In March 1948, the NAACP launched a weekend to “Save the Ingram Family from March 20-21, where the organization asked churches “to note the plight of the helpless sharecropper family.”<sup>267</sup> Networks like the Black church affirmed notions of Black respectability within the discourse of the Ingram case. The larger Black Press outlets promoted Black respectability, especially of Black women. The *Courier* referred to Mrs. Ingram as a “hard-working, church-going widow,” which emphasizes her identity and status with the discourse of power within the Black community. Integration into mainstream, white society as a means to Black liberation would be the main tactic of the non-violent Civil Rights Movement. She upheld a multi-level identity that unifies the Black collective because of its complexity in terms of humanity. For the Black press, it was its purpose to monopolize on gathering support from its middle-class readership.

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<sup>264</sup> Nation Rallies to Doomed Widow: New Trial Hearing Postponed 2<sup>nd</sup> Time, *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 6, 1948, 1-4.

<sup>265</sup> Nation Rallies to Doomed Widow, 4.

<sup>266</sup> “Map New Ingram Defense.” *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 14, 1948, 1-4.

<sup>267</sup> “Mrs. Ingram’s Mother Now Living in Philly Appeals to Americans,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 13, 1984, 4.

This was reinforced by both newspapers weekly highlighting readers' weekly monetary donations. Whether it was intended or not, Rosa Lee Ingram was a symbolic of class politics and racial politics.

As a Black newspaper, the *Courier* continued the activism role of the advocacy, alternative media through its blunt position on the Ingram case. The Black male reporters created a humanity discourse that revealed the importance and symbolism of Rosa Lee Ingram. They centered on Black womanhood as being unprotected by the U.S. government. On February 21, in a front-page news story, Black male reporter J. Richardson Jones described the discriminatory circumstances of the case as "Mrs. Rosa Lee Ingram, 40-year-old mother, who dared to protect her property, land and body from an enraged white neighbor."<sup>268</sup> Jones' statement reflects the intersectional aspects of Black womanhood by focusing on the aspects of identity Mrs. Ingram sought to defend. Demanding for the right of self-defense created a discourse for Black women to understand themselves as full citizens. This discourse would continue during the newspaper's coverage, but mostly by Black male *Courier* reporters, like Jones and Marion Jackson. Scholar Patricia Hill-Collins stated by advocating, refining and disseminating Black Feminist Thought, other groups such as Black men further its development, but other groups can not produce Black Feminist Thought without Black women. A collaborative enterprise requires Black women at the center because the

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<sup>268</sup> J. Richardson Jones. 'My Children Need Me,' Doomed Mother Cries: 'Please Get Me Out.' *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 21, 1948, 1-5.



primary responsibility for defining one's own reality lies with the people who live that reality, who actually have those experiences.<sup>269</sup>

### **In Her Own Words: The *Courier* Gives Mrs. Ingram Her Voice**

The nation experienced Mrs. Ingram's reality and heard her voice through the media coverage in the *Courier*. News coverage positioned Mrs. Ingram to be the creator of her own narrative. For example, the *Courier* described the case, but often had her "described the events leading up to the tragedy... Let her tell it in her own words."<sup>270</sup> In a four-part series of the "Rosa Lee Ingram Life Story," the newspaper allowed Rosa Lee Ingram to present herself in her own words. Her life story included illustrated comic strips dramatically unfolding the events. In a front-page teaser, the *Courier* described the exclusive story as "From the parched lips of Mrs. Rosa Lee Ingram herself comes the 'other side' of the story which has aroused an entire Nation. It's a story that will tear at your heart strings...grim...realistic...tragic...dramatic! Was the crime for which she was convicted MURDER OR SELF-DEFENSE?"<sup>271</sup>

Instead of primarily focusing on the discourse of race and class like the *Daily World*, the *Courier* added the discourse of gender into the national conversation by having Rosa Lee Ingram's voice reach the masses. The allegations of sexual harassment and assault between Mrs. Ingram and John Stratford was revealed in the telling of her own story. In the first installment of her "life story," the *Courier's* front-page headline wrote "He Tried to Go with Me."<sup>272</sup> This discourse wasn't a part of the case's narrative

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<sup>269</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, "Defining Black Feminism Thought," (1990) 389-391.

<sup>270</sup> Jones. 'My Children Need Me,' Doomed Mother Cries", 1-5.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

<sup>272</sup> Robert Ratcliffe. "He Tried to Go With Me" *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 5, 1948.

until this point. The news story explained the past relationship between Mrs. Ingram and Stratford. Rosa Lee Ingram stated in the story, “He tried to go with me... That’s the main thing [that] caused this trouble. He was mad because I wouldn’t go into the cotton house with him. He tried three times to make me go into the cotton house and have something to do with him.”<sup>273</sup> Later in the story, she clarified that Stratford never raped her, but “he tried to compel” her. The significance of the newspaper having Mrs. Ingram revealing her own sexual violence reflected her lived-experience as a Black woman. It allowed for Ingram as a victim to advocate for her cause and justify her own reasoning to protect her body. In another installment, Ingram told how John Stratford attacked her. She revealed, “This white man was hiding in my cotton field. I did not see him ‘til he spoke to me. I was going back to my field to pull corn but he would not let me go back. He threw his gun on me.”<sup>274</sup> The lived experience aspect of Black Feminist thought highlights an understanding one’s unique experience that can shed light on oppression and discrimination. Black feminism is rooted in social justice, and as a participant in the narrative Rosa Lee Ingram could speak on her own injustices. Seeing the success of giving her a platform, the *Courier* continued to feature news stories narrated by Ingram.<sup>275</sup> Rosa Lee Ingram shared her experiences in ways that were relatable to other Black women’s experiences. In discussing her life in the South, she said, “I ain’t never been outside of the state of Georgia except for down here but this is Georgia too ain’t it? I once thought I would take a trip to Philadelphia to see my mother, but I guess I won’t

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

<sup>274</sup> Rosa Lee Ingram. Tells Her Own Story. *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 10, 1948, 3.

<sup>275</sup> Robert Ratcliffe. The Ingram Story, *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 1, 1948, 3.

now.”<sup>276</sup> This empowered the voice of Ingram and brought racial and gendered experiences of Black women to the national conversation. The allegations of gendered violence were a media discourse produced by Ingram within her own voice and ignited another understanding of human rights. Rosa Lee Ingram recalled, “Me and this man had some words. It was about me giving him a date. I told him I was not that kind of woman. He told me that I would not live hard any more if I would do like he said, but I did not do what he wanted.”<sup>277</sup> Women issues were likely erased, silenced or ignored by the media at that time. Even within the Black Press, race issues took prevalence over gender due to Black male leadership.

Using Rosa Lee Ingram to tell her own story not only elevates her personhood and lived experience, but it also presents her voice without the filter of interpretation or censorship of the newspaper. Mrs. Ingram can advocate with her own words and perspective. This series of stories connects with Black feminist thought by allowing Mrs. Ingram to speak on her unique experience. She presented her life in order to address the multiple levels of oppression she experience leading up to the incident. For example, the *Courier* had Ingram tell the story of her relationship with her husband, who she married at fifteen. She told the newspaper how, “I first met Jackson at church... We waited about a year or two before we got married. Me and him loved each other. We had been married one year before I had my first child. I owned children pretty fast after that.”<sup>278</sup> This narrative of her marriage added to the dimensions of her humanity and inserts a gender

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<sup>276</sup> Robert Ratcliffe. It’s a Wonder I Ain’t Dead. *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 3, 1948, 3.

<sup>277</sup> Rosa Lee Ingram. Tells Her Own Story. *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 10, 1948, 3.

<sup>278</sup> Robert Ratcliffe, Mrs. Ingram Married at Age of 15. *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 27, 1948, 1-4.

element that challenged notions of Black sexuality. Rosa Lee Ingram said, “My husband was a good worker and he kept plenty of food and clothes for us... They told me I never would get another man like him after he died.” Her commitment to her marriage shaped the understanding of Black respectability by reinforcing a discourse of Black women’s self-defense and any advances from Stratford were not consensual. Representing Black women’s ability to protect themselves, Ingram recalled the cause of the incident and revealed “that is what it is about— me not having him. I did not want him and I did not have him. I hate it happened like it did, but I could not help it.”<sup>279</sup> She writes her body into the story in order to create discourses about her place in the social hierarchy of power. Scholars described this as textual resistance where to receive recognition one must insert the body into the text that challenges the identities signified in the labels.<sup>280</sup>

The insertion of her body demonstrates the ways in which public space was designed not only to render Black bodies as inferior, but Black female bodies as unrecognizable and unknowable in civic terms. Where Black women’s bodies had been inherently publicly knowable under conditions of slavery, after freedom and the conferral of citizenship, Black women did not fully fit into the categories propagated under Jim Crow.”<sup>281</sup> The *Courier* continued to direct the discourse towards the violation of Black women’s bodies by referencing Rosa Lee Ingram’s confession that “John Stratford had persistently tried to ‘go with me.’ And that when she resisted his advances, he became

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<sup>279</sup> Ingram. *Tells Her Own Story*, 3.

<sup>280</sup> Brittany Cooper. *Beyond Respectability: The Intellectual Thought of Race Women*. (Chicago: University of Illinois, 2017) 7

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid*, 7-8

abusive.”<sup>282</sup> In another account, Ingram described the last time Stratford approached her before his death. She said, “The last time he tried to make me go his way. I cursed him and then he called me everything because I would not do what he wanted me to do.”<sup>283</sup>

### **Black Women: Refashioning Public Opinion**

In a sense, Black women were positioned for racial uplift and the creation an honorable future for the whole race. Black women were expected to be concerned with the moral and social character of the race. Post-slavery ideas of Black womanhood were still being contested within both white and Black public spheres. The public was historically considered a male domain, but within the private sphere existed ideas that were deeply racialized. Political theorist Mary Hakesworth argued that because “only some men—men of a specific race, class, education and ancestry—are positioned to represent the public, the ‘public’ is a raced, classed and gendered concept.”<sup>284</sup>

Black female leaders felt such ideas about gender would prevent them from doing critical advocacy work and refashioning public opinion about Black people. Early on, Black women expanded the public role of their leadership by upholding respectability politics or a culture of refinement and nobility among the Black elite. The sexual and gender policing reflected the sanctity of Black women’s bodies as well as served as a guard to white male sexual objectification.<sup>285</sup> In coverage of the Rosa Lee Ingram case, another way the *Courier* expanded the public role of Black women was reaching out to

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<sup>282</sup> Chester Washington. “Ingrams Have Spent Eight Months in Jail.” *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 26, 1948, 24.

<sup>283</sup> Ingram, Tells Her Own Story, 3.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid, 14

<sup>285</sup> Ibid.

the Ingram's mother, Amy Hunt, a Philadelphia native, who toured northern cities on the behalf of her daughter. "Before an audience of reporters and sympathetic onlookers in the office of the local NAACP, Mrs. Amy Hunt repeated the story of injustice of the Southern white jury which sentenced her daughter to death for the self-defense slaying of a white farmer."<sup>286</sup> Hunt argued, "It was self-defense against an armed man. Self-defense by a mother of fourteen children."<sup>287</sup> The use of the motherhood narrative was another means of having Black women advocate for Black women because Hunt's pleas reinforced the discourses of self-defense and gender. The Black Press minimized the case's larger focus on the discourse of motherhood because the legal and racial aspects were being contested in court. The *Courier* created this discussion through Amy Hunt's narrative of Rosa Lee Ingram's freedom. It reported how "Mrs. Hunt is using all her spare time now to raise money for the defense of Mrs. Ingram and her sons."<sup>288</sup> The sympathetic pleas from Amy Hunt and her criticism of the South reinforced the newspaper's discourse for the Black community's humanity.

The post-Reconstruction push to style Black people as respectable men and women was the community's attempt to understand and articulate what it means to be human. The purposes of stripping the Black body of gender and human identifications was a political maneuver and justification for violence and oppression. The reconstructing of the Black body within terms of undisputed dignity preoccupied the Black community's focus because the social and political terrain rendered the Black body

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<sup>286</sup> "It Was Self-Defense: Mrs. Ingram's Mother Now Living in Philly Appeals to Americans." *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 13, 1948, 4.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>288</sup> Ratcliffe. "The Ingram Story," 3.

discursively illegible.<sup>289</sup> Black women took it as their political and intellectual work to give shape and meaning to the Black body in social and political terms, to give shape and meaning to the Black body in social and political terms, to make it legible as an entity with infinite value and social worth. So when Black leaders talked about Black personhood, after Emancipation, it constituted a new conception of Black life, Black gender and the human.<sup>290</sup>

The news coverage highlighted different aspects of Rosa Lee Ingram's humanity by appealing to audience through empathy. The *Courier* started news stories with emotionally-detailed descriptions of the circumstances of the Ingram case. This discourse addressed the power struggle of Blacks within the nation, specifically the South. Stories began with sensationalism and emotional imagery describing the conditions of the prison, physical appearances of Ingram and sequences of events, but include identity cues addressing race, gender or class. It described, "The cold hand of death reaching out to snatch three pitiful lives this week... failed to clutch its victims and a doomed Georgia widow and her two sons has a new lease on the life as the entire nation watched."<sup>291</sup> In another example, a news story explained the interaction between the reporter and Ingram as she told her story. It reported, "Peering from behind those prison bars, Mrs. Ingram described events leading up to the tragedy which suddenly broke up a home of its mother love that had stood twenty-five years of poverty and struggles."<sup>292</sup>

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<sup>289</sup> Ibid, 20

<sup>290</sup> Ibid, 21

<sup>291</sup> Widow, 2 Sons won't die Feb. 27, *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 28, 1948, 1-5.

<sup>292</sup> J. Richardson Jones. 'My Children Need Me, 1-5

The *Courier* advocated for Rosa Lee Ingram's health and blamed the horrible conditions of Southern prisons. In describing the conditions, Ingram said, "I've grieved so much, it's a wonder I ain't dead...I have kidney trouble and now this worry of being in jail and not seeing my children in causing me to have pains around my heart."<sup>293</sup> She suffered a heart attack in March 1948 and continued to "complain about pains over her heart."<sup>294</sup> The constant movement from prisons added to her declining health. In April 1948, she revealed, "I am glad they took me out of the jail at Perry. They was mean to me there. The food was bad and wouldn't let me see anybody. The food is good here." In less than a year, Ingram would be relocated over six times. She declared, "I have been in six jails...The white people hurt my heart so badly. I have been not treated right no way. The white men know more about the thing than me."

#### **"They've Taken Everything:" Labor & Economics**

As a sharecropper in the rural South, the newspaper noted Rosa Lee Ingram's involvement with class politics and the working status of Black women. The newspaper created a discourse surrounding labor and economic discrimination. The *Courier* reported her innocence and the exploitation within the larger labor system. Rosa Lee Ingram said, "I have been working on farms ever since I was about eight years old."<sup>295</sup> One news story described how, "all that Mrs. Ingram had done was simply what any other mother working from sunrise to sunset to provide for her family would have done. She dared to protect herself."<sup>296</sup> This discourse of protection now featured the economic protections of

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<sup>293</sup> Ratcliffe. It's a Wonder I Ain't Dead. *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 3, 1948, 3.

<sup>294</sup> Doomed Georgia Mother Suffers Heart Attack, *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 13, 1948, 1

<sup>295</sup> Ratcliffe. Mrs. Ingram Married at Age of 15, 4

<sup>296</sup> J. Richardson Jones. 'My Children Need Me, 1-5



Black women as laborers and how that class aspect was violated through Ingram's current inability to provide for her children. Another example, the newspaper reported how Rosa Lee Ingram planned to leave the farm. She admitted, "I didn't make any money on the farm last year and now this year they have taken everything from me. I was working on halves, but since I've been in jail they've taken everything."<sup>297</sup> By discussing the Black women as the heads of households, it addressed the lack of economic opportunities for Black women in the South. Discussing the struggle of maintaining a farm, Ingram noted, "I worked hard trying to make a living. I raised some fine hogs, shaked peanuts and picked cotton. Before this killing happened I had made up my mind to leave harvesting this last crop and go to work as a sharecropper on another farm. I wanted to leave because Mr. Stratford kept bothering me."<sup>298</sup> The newspaper connected the duty of motherhood, sexual violence and economic labor. It reported, "Forced to take over the duties of sharecropper farm, she was confronted by John Stratford, neighbor sharecropper, who tried to make her his mistress."<sup>299</sup>

Scholar LaShawn Harris stated working class Blacks claimed spaces as their own and dismissed Black elite ideas.<sup>300</sup> Black working class women refashioned middle-class interpretations of racial uplift and respectability. Conflicting notions of such politics operated on various levels within the Black community and shifted based on socioeconomic circumstances, personal politics and aspirations. Racial uplifters— those

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<sup>297</sup> Ibid.

<sup>298</sup> Ratcliffe. *It's a Wonder I Ain't Dead*.

<sup>299</sup> A Brief History of the Ingram Case. July 10, 1948, 3.

<sup>300</sup> LaShawn Harris. *Sex Workers, Psychics, and Numbers Runners: Black Women in New York City's Underground Economy*. (Chicago: University of Chicago)

striving for Black liberation, the legislation and implementation of equal rights statutes, and the eradication of Jim Crow segregation—viewed outward displays of cultural refinement and sexual restraint as preconditions toward race and gender equality.

### **Racism and Anti-Communism: The Cold War Influence**

After the motion for a new trial was denied, the Black Press shifted its focus to covering the remaining children. The *Daily World* and the *Courier* covered the NAACP's efforts to build the Ingram family a home. By the summer of 1949, the NAACP had raised thousands of dollars in contributions from around the nation. The *Daily World* referred to the house as “the nation’s tribute to Mrs. Ingram.”<sup>301</sup> The news article described in detail how the home feature the newest appliances, furniture and more. It reported, “It is a stunning contrast to the huts, hovels and farm houses nearby.” This discourse focused on class politics by comparing a physical property to Mrs. Ingram’s life. The story reported how the home was a “shrine to the martyred woman.” Honoring her through a house that she would not be able to inhabit is a narrowing of the civil rights focus of the Black organizations because it reinforced the middle-class respectability stance. The *Daily World* also reinforced this conservative stance by concluding the story by writing, “The house should also ease some of the suffering and distress of imprisoned Mrs. Ingram, who is missing the love and devotion of her children.”<sup>302</sup> The NAACP’s militancy to fight for her freedom had started to wane due to anti-communism politics. When contacted by the State Department in June 1949, Roy Wilkins explained the

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<sup>301</sup> Marion Jackson, “New Home Ready for Mrs. Ingram’s Family,” *Atlanta Daily World*, July 7, 1949, 1

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*

NAACP's work was on the Ingram's legal defense, but implied that other efforts to free the Ingram family were "communism-dominated." With the NAACP retreating, the Black Press had started to promote the campaigns by other organizations, including the National Committee to Free the Ingram Family and the Sojourners of Truth and Justice.

Anti-communism politics gave supporters of racial and economic status quo a new way to undermine Black freedom struggles, which could be equated with subversion. In the name of anti-communism networks, the government met Black demands for equality with opposition, including surveillance, harassment, intimidation and violence. The practice of labelling Black people and the fight for racial and economic justice as Communist. Organizing to defend Black equality inflamed the opposition, leading to terror in the south and repression and violence in the north. During World War II, the *Courier's* "Double V" campaign, FBI investigations of Black leadership and the strength of the Communist Party in the Black community contributed to the notion that Black liberation was Communist-leaning. This resulted in division within the Black community over the issue of Communism and the commitment to radical activism. This narrowing is illustrated within the NAACP. As the campaign gained more international momentum, the civil rights organization who helped fund and build the Ingram children immediately withdrew from the case when it was presented to the United Nations. The once-vocal national organization completely moved away from its efforts to get Rosa Lee Ingram and her sons released from prison. This was the moment Black female journalists shifted the media discourse of the case to their unique oppression and lived-experiences.

## Chapter 8: “Dignity of Negro Womanhood:” Black Women Advocate for Themselves

By 1948, Cold War politics slipped their way into the discourse of the Rosa Lee Ingram case. Black radicals and organizations outside of the NAACP took over Ingram’s cause. They promoted the Pan-African, imperialist position of Leftist Black radicalism and focused on the global impact of the violation of human rights. This chapter explores the media activism of Leftist Black female journalists used in the Black press and Communist newspapers for the Ingram case. By focusing only on the conditions of Black women, Black female journalists, like Charlotta Bass and Claudia Jones, advocated for Rosa Lee Ingram as a symbol of their racial, gendered and economic oppression. These Black female journalists forged spaces to debate for the totality of Black women’s identities and positions within the social hierarchy. As anti-communist, racial, and gender injustices unfolded, Jones and Bass inserted Rosa Lee Ingram in their writings, adding Black woman to the discourse about power. They challenged the narrowing, middle-class respectability and conservative stance by addressing larger, capitalist-driven, global liberation using Ingram to launch this discourse. Within the context of the Cold War, they challenged the U.S. government processes to repress radical voices and anti-Communism attacks. Claudia Jones connected the everyday oppression of Jim Crow and the 40 million Negroes who suffered from its cost. Jones’ editorial in the *Daily Worker* highlighted only one woman, Rosa Lee Ingram, who was at the center of the discussion of the U.S. government’s post-war hysteria of anti-communism trials and regressive legislation. She wrote,

The Truman Administration and Congress—all of this and other witch hunts, other trials and repressive legislation were characterized by President Truman as

the result of ‘post-war hysteria.’ ... A widowed mother of 14 children —Mrs. Rosa Lee Ingram rots in her Georgia jail with two of her sons for over 18 months, cries for her infant son, because in self-defense, she rose in her dignity in upholding Negro womanhood from the indecent advances of a white supremacist — and this is termed ‘post-war hysteria.’<sup>303</sup>

Jones illustrated the perspective of Black liberation was about unity and human rights, and inserted Black women’s rights in the framework of freedom.

As Ingram’s legal defense case waned, the human rights campaign went global as it tackled the newly created United Nations. As a new global governing board, the UN challenged abuses of power and violation of equal rights. Black activists saw the chance to put the Ingram case before the UN to address the lack of Black full-citizenship and equality in the United States. Black leaders took a different tactic to freeing the mother and her two sons and international coalitions soon learned the nature of Black women’s discrimination.

In September 1948, W.E.B. DuBois drafted a petition to the United Nations on Rosa Lee Ingram’s behalf. Black newspapers varied on its news coverage of the petition due to DuBois being ejected from the NAACP for the second time.<sup>304</sup> *The Atlanta Daily World* only quoted the racial aspects of the petition and focused on Ingram’s discrimination, but *California Eagle* editor and publisher Charlotta Bass published the petition in full because she saw the opportunity for a global platform for oppression and

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<sup>303</sup> Ibid.

<sup>304</sup> Gerald Horne, *Black and Red: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Afro-American Response to the Cold War, 1944-1963*, SUNY Press, 1986). Carol Anderson. *Eyes Off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944-1955*, 208

imperialism. She published DuBois' petition with the purpose to show those "fighting in the cause of humanity everywhere."<sup>305</sup>

In the news article, DuBois called the Ingram case an injustice typical of the treatment "thousands of our fellows receive who have slaved and toiled and fought for this country and yet are denied justice in its courts."<sup>306</sup> He listed the state of Georgia's racial oppression of over 500 Negroes who were publicly lynched by mobs without a trial in the last 60 years. He wrote how:

In this state a legal caste system is in vogue which condemns American citizens to unequal treatment education, unequal treatment for diseases, segregates them in their living quarters and discriminates against them in the right to work at decent wage. The government promised to maintain this 'race segregation.'<sup>307</sup>

He wrote, "The crucifixion of Mrs. Rosa Lee Ingram is of one piece with Georgia's treatment of colored women."<sup>308</sup> By discussing the discourse of Black women, DuBois acknowledged the unique position of their oppression and questioned the disregard for Black women as full citizens. He explained the history of sexual violence in the petition and criticized the U.S. reverence of white womanhood over Black women. He connected the diasporic African tradition and argued,

thus it is clear that the part of the nation which boasts its reverence for womanhood is the part where the women of Africa were slaves and concubines of white Americans for two and a half centuries; where their daughters in states like Virginia became human breed mares to raise domestic slaves when the African trade stopped; and where their granddaughters became mothers of millions of mulattos.<sup>309</sup>

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<sup>305</sup> "DuBois Petitions UN Behalf of Freedom for Rosa Lee Ingram," *The California Eagle*, August 25, 1949, 7.

<sup>306</sup> DuBois.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid.

Despite the lack of international and Pan-African discourse in the nation, DuBois represented the strain of Black radicalism that was theorized by colonialism and imperialism. He traced the exploitation of Blacks to the African slave trade which connects all people of color to a global network of dominance. He described white men's sexual assault of Black women as exploitation. This is a direct connection to the Ingram case because by this period the media discourse had shifted to the gender aspects of Ingram's identity. By addressing white womanhood's purity in comparison to Black women, DuBois positioned the double burden of Black women as slaves to racial injustice and slaves to sexual violation. His petition touched on racial, gender, and economic aspects of humanity through Rosa Lee Ingram. He described her as a defender of the Negro family from "pauperism, compulsory illiteracy and disfranchisement by poll taxes." DuBois position her as a symbol of human persecution.

Under Bass' leadership, the newspaper symbolized and advocated for Ingram's full humanity, outside the realm of race. In an editorial next to DuBois' Ingram petition, Bass wrote about National Ingram Week and urged for the Los Angeles community to participate. She wrote, "Rosa Lee Ingram and her two sons, sentenced to life imprisonment in a Georgia jail cell for defending themselves against a white man, represent not only themselves but all oppressed people of the South, of the American nation, and of the world. Not only Negro people, but all the people everywhere."<sup>310</sup> Bass encouraged local churches to engage in a week of prayer as the Ingram petition moved forward. Also, she wrote about the opportunity to educate the public about "this story of

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<sup>310</sup> Charlotta Bass. "National Ingram Week." *California Eagle*, August 25, 1949, 6

an American mother in Georgia defending herself against a white man, must be told again and again. She was a widow, a sharecropper and the mother of fourteen children.”<sup>311</sup> As a journalist, Charlotta Bass wanted the complexities of Rosa Lee Ingram’s identity to be the discourse presented to address global injustices. She called Ingram a “representative” and “her story must be told wherever tyranny and injustice” are present.<sup>312</sup> Bass was addressing the effects of the Cold War and the ideals of American patriotism, but criticizing the lack of status of Black citizenship, especially Black women. She declared, “Mrs. Ingram and her two sons must be set free. They should be lauded as American heroes as they would be in so many other countries of the world.”<sup>313</sup> Positioning her stance on the Rosa Lee Ingram case and publishing the petition, Bass was producing the media discourse of the Ingram campaign around a larger human rights debate.

Similar to Charlotta Bass, Communist-newspaper journalist Claudia Jones also commented on the presentation of the Ingram petition in *Political Affairs*. She supported the efforts being made by the National Committee to Free the Ingram Family, especially of the Black women leadership. Jones noted, “Support to the work of this committee becomes a prime necessity for all progressives, particularly women. President Truman must be stripped of his pretense of ‘know-nothing’ about the Ingram case. To free the Ingrams, support must be rallied for the success of the million-signatures campaign, and

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<sup>311</sup> Ibid.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid



for U.N. action on the Ingram brief to be filed.”<sup>314</sup> Both women supported the efforts being made, but eventually would navigate their own position for Rosa Lee Ingram’s freedom and human rights.

The media discourse generated a global understanding of equality, which for Bass and Jones meant a broader understanding of Black womanhood. Within the Black press, Black male leadership was at the center of the struggle, but Black female journalists covering the Rosa Lee Ingram case centered Black women as revolutionaries. As the Cold War intensified, the targeting of Black activists was presented in the mainstream as a threat to the nation. Claudia Jones and Charlotta Bass pushed the media discourse to center on Black women from different backgrounds and experience. Their activism and writings about Mrs. Ingram highlighted the complexities of power and the status of Black women.

**“From the Same Reactionary Cloth:” Communist journalist Claudia Jones**

The President of the Communist newspaper *Daily Worker*, Benjamin J. Davis wrote in an editorial “Most Negro communities recognized the case of Claudia Jones as cut from the same reactionary cloth as that of Mrs. Rosa Lee Ingram in Georgia.”<sup>315</sup> His statement was accurate as both Black women were victims of the government’s criminal justice system and their cases addressed larger conversations of criminalization issues toward race and gender. Davis described how “the millions of Negro women are like Claudia Jones, who for fifteen years has fought the lynch system in America, and like

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<sup>314</sup> Claudia Jones, “An End to Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman” *Political Affairs*, June 1949.

<sup>315</sup> Benjamin Davis, “Face to Face: Trotskyism in the Service of White Supremacists,” *The Daily Worker*, March 28, 1948, 6

Rosa Ingram who faces the electric chair for refusing to submit to concubinage for a Ku Kluxer. These women show the historical militancy, courage and honor of Negro womanhood in the struggle of Negro people against their ruling class oppressors.”<sup>316</sup> The power of Black womanhood would be celebrated as the foundation for freedom and equality in the Communist press and Jones would serve as its main voice.<sup>317</sup> Through her journalism and activism, Claudia Jones expressed her personal, lived experiences to the Ingram case and connected herself, Mrs. Ingram and Black womanhood within a social hierarchy. At the May Day Rally, Claudia Jones discussed her experience with American citizenship. In speaking for herself and thousands of others, she argued, “We are not citizens not because we don’t want to be but because they won’t let us.”<sup>318</sup>

Historian Carole Boyce Davies stated Jones expressed her activism through her writing as a way of social change. Her journey as an activist was rooted in her identity and experiences, which is reflected in her radical and personal approach to journalism. In 1936, Claudia Jones joined the Communist Party and started writing for radical political publications. As a prolific writer, she became the editor of several publications including the *Weekly Review*, *Daily Worker*, and *Spotlight*. She fused the Marxist-Leninist tradition with Black feminism and her Trinidadian origins to advance understanding of anti-imperialism. In her bi-weekly *Daily Worker* column, “Half of the World,” she shared her

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<sup>316</sup> Ibid.

<sup>317</sup> See Elizabeth Gurley Flynn. Life of the Party. *Daily Worker*, October 23, 1948, 10. 700 Honor the Wives of Communist Defendants. *Daily Worker*, April 27, 1949. Wives of CP Leaders Honored in Queens, *Daily Worker*, June 15, 1949, 2.

<sup>318</sup> Marian Inglewood. “Things I See,” *California Eagle*. May 13, 1948, 5.

thoughts on gender and race.<sup>319</sup> Claudia Jones expressed, as many Black activists, she was under FBI surveillance. She was first arrested and imprisoned on Ellis Island under the 1918 Immigration Act in 1948.<sup>320</sup> A few days later after being released on bail and threatened with deportation, Claudia Jones continued her activism by speaking at a May Day rally in Los Angeles and toured forty-three states, recognizing state-level women's commissions, recruiting new party members and organizing mass rallies.<sup>321</sup>

Across different Communist and political publications, Claudia Jones wrote often about Rosa Lee Ingram through her unique status as a working-class Black woman. As a journalist and Communist activist, Jones was instrumental in launching discussions and theorizing the linkage of the Negro Question and the Woman Question. She asserted, "What is the root of the matter of the question of male superiority? First, this noxious idea of 'theory' about women is perceived on the notion that women are inferior. The 'theory' that women are inferior is part and parcel of the ideology of the ruling class, tool in its fight against democracy."<sup>322</sup> She concluded by arguing for the millions of working-class women "taking direct and active part in the struggle for peace and security, in the struggle of burning demands of working class and oppressed peoples."<sup>323</sup> Her position as the only Black woman on the executive board of Communist Party USA's National Committee allowed her to gain influence with the Black community.<sup>324</sup> In commenting

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<sup>319</sup> Cristina Mislán "Claudia Jones speaks to "Half the World": Gendering Cold War politics in the *Daily Worker*, 1950–1953," *Feminist Media Studies*, 17:2, 2016, 281-296,

<sup>320</sup> Boyce Davies, *Left of Karl Marx*, xxv

<sup>321</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>322</sup> Claudia Jones. "Half the World." *The Daily Worker*, April 23, 1950, 11.

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>324</sup> McDuffie, *Sojourning for Freedom*, 166.

on the Harlem Women Communist, Jones agreed with the efforts being made to reach Black working class women. She explained, “We must go to the housewives, but also we must reach the Negro women in their clubs, their churches, in the beauty shops to let them know that to have peace, they must act on it. It is our special responsibility as women to put pressure on Truman and others.”<sup>325</sup> She also headed the Communist Party’s National Negro Commission and National Women’s Commission. It was through her journalism where she impacted Black women rights. She critiqued the how Black women were position in the U.S. government institutions. For example, the selection of two Black women jurors for a trial for Communist Party leaders. She argued the insertion of Blacks in U.S. political life was not a move toward racial progress. She explained, “The Negro people recognized as they have since the days of slavery the use of Negroes in positions of house slaves for their masters. They understood the very choices of the Negro women jurors was to falsely identify the most oppressed sector of the Negro people (Negro women) with anti-Communist hysteria and allegiances to the war.”<sup>326</sup> She highlighted the “honor” given to Black juror Thelma Dial for serving on the jury, but questioned the “validity” of having her convict those fighting for liberation. In the conclusion of her column, Claudia Jones pointed out the “honor” given to the Black community and challenge the “honor” given to Rosa Lee Ingram. She said, “This ‘honor’ contrasts sharply with the continued Wall Street imprisonment of Mrs. Rosa Lee Ingram, who fights on the side of social progress and whose negative answer to Klux rapists is

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<sup>325</sup> Claudia Jones. “Half the World.” *The Daily Worker*, August 13, 1950, 7.

<sup>326</sup> Claudia Jones. “Half the World.” *The Daily Worker*, August 27, 1950, 7.

heard around the world.”<sup>327</sup> Jones connected the “frame-up” of Ingram to the injustices found in the U.S. democracy and citizenship. She highlighted the “crime” of citizenship was relegated to those being targeted by the U.S. government and oppressed people around the world.

Her own deportation trial and repeated arrests shaped her writings about the case and she highlighted gender, punishment and global liberation. After her 1950 jail release from Ellis Island, Claudia Jones wrote how her “sojourn” in prison should have never happened in the first place.<sup>328</sup> She declared, “the experience of being jailed for one’s conscience and one’s conviction a ‘lost’ experience. For it is a mirror—of the dedication of thousands of anti-fascists in our land to hold fast to one’s convictions which are the convictions of peace, equality and security.” These experiences would shape Jones’ position in the Black community because of her fight for equality was a global and domestic as well. In discussing her deportation and citizenship, Claudia Jones released a statement discussing her experiences in the U.S. She said, “I early learned as do many native born American Negro children that second-citizenship is the lot reserved by the rulers of America for her fourteen million Negro citizens. But also I learned from experience and from the history of the struggles of other peoples and nations that the real path to freedom rests with working people in alliance with the Negro people of this land.”<sup>329</sup> Jones felt her only “crime” was fighting for full equality and her Community Party participation, but questioned the government’s judgement of citizenship and who

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<sup>327</sup> Ibid.

<sup>328</sup> Claudia Jones. “Half the World.” *The Daily Worker*, November 10, 1950, 7.

<sup>329</sup> “Claudia Jones. “Blasts American Democracy in Deportation Trial.” March 2, 1950, 1-5.

deserved it. She concluded, “Judge my service to the cause of peace, economic security and pursuit of happiness. Let Negro women, whose status is symbolized in the case of Rosa Lee Ingram, widowed mother of children, imprisoned in the foul hellhole of Georgia jail, judge my devotion to their needs.” Jones’ commentary of the criminal justice system redirects the criminality of gender because she and Ingram were judged through a lack of rights and protection. She connected her right to defend her people to Rosa Lee Ingram’s right of self-defense.

By directing the conversation to Black women’s imprisonment, Claudia Jones addressed racial and gender punishment through a larger system. Scholar Sarah Haley argued the imprisonment of women is important to the history of white supremacy and the penal regime because their existence transcends the penal world.<sup>330</sup> Black women’s presence in the prison system enforced the radical otherness of the status-quo and contributed to the ideal gender formation of white women. Haley stated prison is a regime that generates domination through the regime of neoslavery.<sup>331</sup> Like slavery, Black criminality structured the social, economic and legal boundaries of both race and gender. Historically, Black women’s boundaries are complex because neither their race nor gender provided a framework for their identities because debates for equality select Black men or white women as the center of discrimination. Black women must highlight their own experiences in order to be visible.

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<sup>330</sup> Sarah Haley, *No Mercy Here: Gender Punishment, and the Making of Jim Crow Modernity*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016)

<sup>331</sup>Haley. *No Mercy Here*, 9.

Like other Black women across the country, Claudia Jones found the circumstances of the Rosa Lee Ingram case to be another U.S. political attack on equal rights and joined the campaign for her freedom. On June 2, 1949, Jones was among female delegates who brought the Ingram case to the Justice Department, where they were told the department didn't have the "power" to take action in the case.<sup>332</sup> Jones pointed out that when the Justice Department really sets out to accomplish something their attorneys have no trouble in finding a so-called legal basis. She referred to the frame-up prosecution of the top twelve Communists. She and other women understood the production of power within the government. The members of the female delegation were quoted as saying, "If Mrs. Ingram were not a Negro...you know she would be now free." They also declared the conditions of Mrs. Ingram's jail were indescribable.<sup>333</sup> The parallels of Claudia Jones and Rosa Lee Ingram's lives symbolized the invisibility of Black women's experiences. Both Ingram's and Jones' health would deteriorate while serving time in prison. Jones discussed Mrs. Ingram's heart attacks in prison and the strain on her body due to labor. After her repeated arrests, Jones would be diagnosed with a heart condition.

These parallels would be traced in Claudia Jones' writings. Based on her own experience as a target of the government, Jones criticized the inner-workings of the government's justification for intervention. After her visit to the Justice Department, she wrote an editorial about Negro political prisoners affected by the Cold War politics.<sup>334</sup>

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<sup>332</sup> Ingram Delegates Put Case to Clark, *Daily Worker*, June 3, 1949, 4.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>334</sup> Claudia Jones. "Henry Winston: Prisoner of Wall Street's Cold War" June 27, 1949, 5.

Claudia Jones connected the everyday oppression of Jim Crow and the 40 million Negroes who suffered from its cost. Jones' editorial highlighted only one woman, Rosa Lee Ingram, who was at the center of the discussion of the U.S. government's post-war hysteria of anti-communism trials and regressive legislation. She wrote,

The Truman Administration and Congress—all of this and other witch hunts, other trials and repressive legislation were characterized by President Truman as the result of 'post-war hysteria.'... A widowed mother of 14 children —Mrs. Rosa Lee Ingram rots in her Georgia jail with two of her sons for over 18 months, cries for her infant son, because in self-defense, she rose in her dignity in upholding Negro womanhood from the indecent advances of a white supremacist — and this is termed 'post-war hysteria.'<sup>335</sup>

Jones illustrated the perspective of Black liberation was about unity and human rights, and inserted Black women's rights in the framework of freedom.

She continued to insert Rosa Lee Ingram among the names of Black leaders like Ralph Bunche, Paul Robeson, and Henry Winston as part of her writings on oppression.<sup>336</sup> She argued, "Among sections of all Negro people (except for renegades and brought-out reformists) their oppressed status makes for an ideological unity against the Jim Crow lynch system to which Negroes are subjected. From Ralph Bunche to Rosa Lee Ingram, the virus of white supremacy and Jim Crow haunts our tracks."<sup>337</sup> She explained the Communist Party's approach to the "Negro Question" as a means to show white Americans, specifically workers that the fight for full equality of the Black community was in their self-interest. She wrote that to deny these rights was un-American. By using American patriotism, Jones created the media discourse of full

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<sup>335</sup> Ibid.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid.

<sup>337</sup> Claudia Jones. "Un-American Committee and the Negro People," *Daily Worker*, August 3, 1949, 9.



citizenship tied to race, gender, and class and employed U.S. government rhetoric to legitimize Cold War ideology. She questioned, “Why should we fight an imperialistic war—a war against the Soviet Union, which has wiped out discrimination and prejudices within its borders?”<sup>338</sup> She positioned Ingram in her message of solidarity and created a space where Black women were part of the global liberation struggle. The connection to imperialism is rooted in the Pan-Africanism and transnational connection of oppressed, colonized peoples. Jones saw the civil rights of Blacks as just one part of liberation and criticized Blacks who hoped the Truman administration would keep its promise of civil rights legislation. She wrote about the administration’s goal of global democracy despite the prevalence of white supremacy that attacks Rosa Lee Ingram and other Black women. She explained,

Consider the hypocrisy of the Truman Administration, which he boast about “exporting democracy throughout the world” while the state of Georgia keeps a widowed Negro mother of twelve children under lock and key. Her crime? She defended her life and dignity--- aided by her two sons--- from the attacks of a white supremacist... Only recently, President Truman spoke solicitously in a Mother’s Day Proclamation about manifestation of ‘our love and reverence’ for all mothers of the land. The so-called ‘love and reverence’ for all mothers of the land by no means includes Negro mothers, who like Rosa Lee Ingram, Amy Mallard the wives and mothers of the Trenton Six or other countless victims, dare to fight back against lynch law and ‘white supremacy’ violence.

She confronted the weakness of U.S domestic policy and its effects on the nation’s foreign policy, but inserted the attack on Black motherhood. She included Black women in Truman’s message of love and respect by demanding equality.

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<sup>338</sup> Ibid.

U.S. domestic policy was rooted in the belief of Black inferiority and segregation. Therefore, Black women's inability to conform to mainstream society standards was sensationalized to promote Black criminality and lack of rights. In order to challenge this, Claudia Jones addressed Negro women's status as the most oppressed people. She wrote how Rosa Lee Ingram's status was fought "on the side of social progress and whose negative answer to Klux rapist" was heard around the world.<sup>339</sup> Also, she noted how Ingram and Rosalie McGee, widow of Willie McGee, were true representations of Negro womanhood because they were actively in the supported in the civil rights cases as a vital part in the larger fight for peace.<sup>340</sup> Jones continued the radical imperialistic tone of Black radicalism. She connected nations like Vietnam and South Korea, to show how imperialism seeks to utilize corrupt forces among oppressed peoples themselves by exploiting, perpetuating slavery, and division.<sup>341</sup>

In a 1949 *Political Affairs* essay, "An End to Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman!," Jones outlined the multiple forms of injustices Black women face. In coining the term, "triple oppression," Jones addressed the superexploitation of Black women and argued oppression issues of Black women in CPUSA.<sup>342</sup> Jones wrote, "For the progressive women's movement, the Negro woman, who combines her status the worker, the Negro and the woman, is the vital link to this heightened political

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<sup>340</sup> Willie McGee, a Mississippi man sentenced to death in 1945 after his white female lover accused of him of rape.

<sup>341</sup> Claudia Jones. "Half the World." *Daily Worker*, Aug. 23, 1950, 7

<sup>342</sup> Claudia Jones, "An End to Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman" *Political Affairs*, June 1949. See Boyce Davies, *Left of Marx*, 168-169

consciousness.”<sup>343</sup> Jones creatively drew from Marxism to link issues of race, gender and class among Black women. Timely to her own personal lived-experiences, Jones wrote the essay while a target of U.S. authorities who threatened deportation to her due to her Communist Party connection.<sup>344</sup> The urgency of her essay was key as she expressed her own struggle with red -scare oppression, but advocated for Black militancy and Third World independence movements. In her discussion of key issues facing Black women, she used Rosa Lee Ingram to address Black women’s status. She wrote,

The Ingram case illustrates the landless, Jim-Crow, oppressed status of the Negro family. It illumines particularly the degradation of Negro women today under American bourgeois democracy moving to fascism and war. It reflects the daily insults to which Negro women are subjected in places, no matter what their class, status or position.<sup>345</sup>

The impact of Jones’ work focuses on her understanding of her and other Black women’s lived-experiences of oppression. Also, Jones linked Rosa Lee Ingram’s case to all womanhood by challenging white women to unite for freedom. She said, “Rosa Lee Ingram’s plight and that of her sisters also carries with it a challenge to progressive cultural worker to write and sing of the Negro woman in her full courage and dignity.” She theorized, “The Negro woman became schooled in self-reliance in courageous and selfless action.”<sup>346</sup> She empowered the characteristics of Black women by noting their self-reliance position to advocate for themselves. Scholar Patricia Hill-Collins argued that by defining their own meanings of Black womanhood, Black women have formed a resistance against the white mainstream ideas. Through Black Feminism Black women

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<sup>343</sup> Ibid.

<sup>344</sup> Ibid, 166.

<sup>345</sup> Ibid.

<sup>346</sup> Hill-Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 239.

create “oppositional knowledge” due to their unique lived experienced as racialized, gendered beings.<sup>347</sup> Black women are insiders in their own perspective. Through her writing, Jones explored the multi-dimensions of Rosa Lee Ingram’s identity. As a sharecropper, mother of fourteen and a widow, Rosa Lee Ingram represented how triple oppression manifests and results in systemic oppression. The lack of protection addressed here could only be illustrated through Claudia Jones’ analysis. The vulnerability of Black women lacks the complexity needed to understand human rights. Jones highlighted Ingram in her essay and praised her as a “courageous, militant Negro mother.”<sup>348</sup>

While most Black and mainstream media focused on the violence and lynching of Black men, Claudia Jones’ writings concentrated on the racial and gendered violence of Black women. She echoed the voices of anti-lynching activists, like Ida B. Wells, when she used the Ingram case to uncover the “hypocritical alibi of lynchers of Negro manhood who have historically hidden behind the skirts of white women when they try to cover up their foul crimes with the ‘chivalry’ of protecting ‘white womanhood.’”<sup>349</sup>

On September 4, 1949, attendees of a Paul Roberson concert were attacked by anti-communist and anti-black locals in Peekskill riots. In her coverage of the riots, Claudia Jones wrote, “The thousands of women who formed part of the magnificent labor-progressive audience at the Peekskill Robeson concert on Sept. 5<sup>th</sup> at Peekskill again testify to the determination of American women to fight against the war and fascist

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<sup>347</sup> Ibid, 240-242.

<sup>348</sup> Boyce Davies, *Left of Marx*, 166.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid, 170

danger.”<sup>350</sup> She described how these “real heroines arose” against the mob. Jones wrote, “Many felt for the first time even as do Rosa Lee Ingram and the widow of the lynched Negro Robert Mallard, Mrs. Amy Mallard, what it is to feel the cold terror from lynchers who cry for blood of defenseless Negro women, children, and men because of their determination to fight for freedom and to associate themselves with ideas that stand for peace, security and peace.”<sup>351</sup> She equated the white women’s “first-time” rioting experience to Rosa Lee Ingram and other Black women’s feelings. She stated those who “resort to violence” at Peekskill represented the ruling class were confronted by the progressive concert attendees, specifically women who intended speak up for “greater unity” among Blacks and whites.<sup>352</sup> Increasing the visibility of violence against Black women, Jones elevated the status of Mrs. Ingram and called for unity of women of all nationalities to fight for democratic rights.

Claudia Jones influenced Communist newspapers to view Rosa Lee Ingram and Black women as a “political force” because of their roles as fighters within the Black liberation movement. She explained the consequences of resistance under political forces and the violent attacks against Black women. Jones positioned Black women within the media discussions of the Communist Party and helped increase Communist newspaper coverage of the Ingram case. She established a media discourse that positioned Black women at the center of large frameworks for protests and social movements. In 1948, the *Daily Worker* would produce “The Ingrams Shall Not Die” pamphlet with the purpose

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<sup>350</sup> Claudia Jones. “Heroines of Peekskill Made Stirring History,” *Daily Worker*, September 15, 1949, 9.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid.

“to help kindle the movement that will save their lives, and free them.”<sup>353</sup> The pamphlet described other cases including Claudia Jones, as being used as a “new tactic of reaction and fascism which is to single out Negro women for persecution.”<sup>354</sup> The same fervor was seen in the coverage of the newspaper. For example, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, a *Daily Worker* columnist, connected Jones and Ingram experiences together in her discussions of womanhood. She wrote, “We are calling all our Negro women readers... Your families are threatened. As one of the most militant fighting groups in New York City, we need you to raise your voices for these two noble Negro women and all others.”<sup>355</sup> Flynn also served as a guest columnist for Jones’ “Half the World,” where she declared the “special problems of women” must give “special emphasis” on Black women, “who are last to be employed and then at menial, low-paid jobs and are the first to be laid off.”<sup>356</sup> Another *Daily Worker* article reminded readers about the counter-attack of a movement by noting how Black women’s work toward freedom would be challenged. Using the Ingram case as an example, the article cautioned, “But we must never forget that the oppressors of these women will increase in fury. Witness the life imprisonment of Rosa Lee Ingram... for defending herself from a sex-crazed white farmer.”<sup>357</sup>

### **Working-class Black Women as ‘Third-Class Citizens’**

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<sup>353</sup> “Ingrams Shall Not Die!” *Daily Worker* 1948. S32 Cases-Ingram, Rosa Lee. Civil Rights Congress Papers Box 90, 3.

<sup>354</sup> “Ingrams Shall Not Die!” *Daily Worker* 1948. S32 Cases-Ingram, Rosa Lee. Civil Rights Congress Papers Box 90, 4.

<sup>355</sup> Elizabeth Gurley Flynn. “Life of the Party,” *Daily Worker*, October 23, 1948, 19.

<sup>356</sup> Elizabeth Gurley Flynn. “Half the World: About Communist Women.” *Daily Worker*, November 25, 1950, 11.

<sup>357</sup> John Hudson Jones. “Negro Women—Vanguard Fighters,” *Sunday Worker* February 12, 1950, 15.

After the United Nations presentation of the Ingram petition in September 1949, UN delegates began discussing the case globally. A month later, Jan Drohojowski, Poland's ambassador to Mexico and "one of the UN's hard-hitting debaters," exposed the truth about American civil liberties during the Alternative Political Committee's agreement on charges of human rights violations.<sup>358</sup> He questioned the "moral qualifications" of the U.S. to condemn Bulgaria and Romania and read the Ingram petition during the meeting. He stated how the American judiciary serves the purposes of a "corrupt party system."<sup>359</sup> As the Ingram case gained momentum on an international level, Claudia Jones wrote how the Ingram case devalued U.S. criticisms of Soviet Union human rights because of its own hypocritical oppression. Jones was ultimately convinced that Ingram's freedom would challenge U.S. imperialism. She believed Black women would play a key role in ending global struggles.

The United Nations became a platform for oppressed, colonized people to petition for human rights. As the U.S. continued to reshape its image as a democratic nation, it recruited Blacks to counter Jim Crow racism. In 1950, Edith Sampson, a Black female Chicago attorney was appointed as the first African American to serve as alternate delegate to the United Nations, an unprecedented step in the U.S.'s tactics to downplay its civil rights issue. In the highest post ever held by a Black woman at that time, Claudia Jones questioned whether her appointment would lead to the liberation of Blacks. She critically analyzed Mrs. Sampson's interviews and perspective of her post. She wrote,

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<sup>358</sup>Polish Delegate Lays Ingram Case and Peekskill Before UN. *Daily Worker*, October 12, 1949, 2.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid.

What occasioned Mrs. Sampson's 'thrill' at being named to this high international post? Was she 'thrilled' at the opportunity to raise the innumerable pitfalls faced by the thriced-oppressed Negro working woman, whose sons, victims of Jim Crow on Tokyo's beaches, are today expendable in Wall Street's Korean war against the heroic colored peoples of the Far East? Was she 'thrilled' perhaps, at the opportunity through the UN to raise the case of Mrs. Rosa Lee Ingram, mother of 14 children, falsely imprisoned for three years in a foul Georgia jail for defending her dignity against the assault to her person by a KKK landlord?

It appears that Mrs. Sampson's source of pleasure stemmed from quite another source. Hastening to guarantee herself, and aligning herself with the tenor of press reports that appointment of a Negro would 'counteract Soviet propaganda' regarding racial discrimination in the U.S.<sup>360</sup>

Jones questioned Edith Sampson's motivations not to use her position to challenge the injustices of Black people, specifically her lack of concern to help other Black women. She reinforced the duty of Black women to advocate for themselves by mentioning the Black women's triple-oppression and the imprisonment of Mrs. Ingram.<sup>361</sup> She noted Sampson's purpose was to be counteractive and anti-Communist. She argued against the idea that Sampson's appointment was not a "step towards integration of Negroes in American life," but the work of "a racist-minded imperialist crew" to show the world that the Soviet Union's propaganda was wrong about race in the U.S. Jones described this is appointment as "American propaganda of equality, opportunity and free enterprise."<sup>362</sup>

Knowing the value of Black women to occupy public spaces, Jones refuted Edith Sampson's appointment completely: "No appointment, even of a Negro woman, can erase from the consciousness of darker peoples, including millions of Negro working women, the ever present status of lynching, polling taxes, segregation and third class

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<sup>360</sup> Claudia Jones. The Leopard Hasn't Changed Its Spots, *The Daily Worker*, September 20, 1950, 5-8.

<sup>361</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid, 8.



citizenship.”<sup>363</sup> She recalled the “millions of our sisters” working in the fields or doing menial work, but who continue to stand and fight like Rosa Lee Ingram and other women “who hurl lie for lie into the teeth of reaction.”<sup>364</sup> Jones’ argument centered on Black women as the basis of understanding the “people’s struggle” against imperialism. She called Black women a key part of the Black liberation movement, but not in “bipartisan token appointments.” She proposed the liberation movement would be because of the “powerful and growing militancy of the Negro people—of Negro working women.”<sup>365</sup> This empowerment discourse of working class Black women weaved itself into Jones’ position of equal rights, but addressed the complexity of oppression as a human, global issue.<sup>366</sup> She believed the duty of oppressed Black women was to create their identities to challenge the “lies.” She saw working class Black women as the “most potentially powerful sectors for growing anti-fascist, anti-imperialist coalition.”<sup>367</sup> She believed Black government appointments reinforced the ruling class in order for “oppressed peoples” to do their “dirty work.”<sup>368</sup>

### **The Begrudging Status Of “Workers”**

Using her Marxist-Leninist influences, Claudia Jones described the battle between the working-class and ruling class as embedded in aspects of gender and race. She wrote, “Negro women as workers, as Negroes and as women—are the most oppressed stratum of

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<sup>363</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid.

<sup>366</sup> Richard Boyer. “Why 6 Negro Leaders Defend Claudia Jones?” *Daily Worker*, February 25, 1952, 5. Pettis Perry. “Negro People and Labor,” *Daily Worker*, March 10, 1952, 5.

<sup>367</sup> Ibid.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid.

the whole population.”<sup>369</sup> She discussed how the capitalist process exploited Black women as mothers and as the breadwinners in segregated, impoverished communities. Jones tackled the economic repercussions of the Marshall Plan and its effects on impoverished families who could not afford the high prices on food. She wrote, “As every working-class Negro housewife knows, there are no price controls today. What is more, a full shopping bag is beyond reach. This is because their husbands’ pay checks are shrinking and slight wage increases won as a result of the recent strike wave, which scared the bi-partisans stiff have been accompanied by big business increases of food and other consumer items.”<sup>370</sup> She challenged the “ideological campaign is on Women’s magazines to place the blame for high prices on the ‘inefficiency’ of women’s plan.”<sup>371</sup> Drawing back to economic struggles, she argued, “Working women, mind you, who have to pinch and scrape to make ends meet.”<sup>372</sup> Historian Lashawn Harris noted that Black women carved niches for themselves within the informal economy as wage-earners and entrepreneurs. With a flexible structure, the informal labor sector offered employment and economic opportunities that complemented Black women’s desire to maintain occupational mobility.<sup>373</sup>

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<sup>369</sup> Ibid, 168-167.

<sup>370</sup> Claudia Jones. “Half the World,” *Daily Worker*, Oct.22, 1950, 7

<sup>371</sup> Ibid.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid.

<sup>373</sup> LaShawn Harris. *Sex Workers, Psychics, and Numbers Runners: Black Women in New York City's Underground Economy*. (Chicago: University of Chicago), 2. Black women explored possibilities through underground labor and negotiated the conditions of their work. Informal labor opened the door for Black women to “radically disrupt” and push pass the limits of respectable public behavior for Black women. According to Harris, “Notions of public space and uplift politics, constrained economic opportunities, and daily living expenses and necessities attracted Black women to illegal and quasi-legal

Adding economics and capitalism to the media discourse of the Ingram case, Jones wrote about working-class issues of unemployment, lack of job advancement and labor discrimination. She argued,

Of course, no one will deny that Negro women by dint of struggle, sacrifice and by clearing tremendous hurdles have made significant advances in the last 50 years. For women generally in our capitalist society to break into the professions or other fields of endeavors as is still true even in the trade unions they must contend against numerous anti-women prejudices, designed to perpetuate the inferiority of women in our society. How much more true is this of Negro women—thrice oppressed as Negro, worker and woman.<sup>374</sup>

She described the plight of Black women as breadwinners because of the high unemployment rate of Black men, but they were empowered to take the cause for all oppressed peoples of the earth, with the cause of peace, social progress, and equality for the Negro masses. Following the lineage of “Negro women peace heroines” like Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth, Jones described Ingram in a similar tone. She wrote, “Imprisoned for over three years in the foul hellhole of a Georgia jail, Rosa Lee Ingram, whose freedom must be won in a revived struggle, stands as a shameful and courageous example of the fight of Negro women for full equality and human dignity!”<sup>375</sup> Jones theorized the exploitation of women workers and the need to protect the Negro women from the triple-exploitation of their rights. She wrote about the millions of women workers who needed equal pay for equal work and the special problems of Negro women in the South and the North. Jones described how Black women were unique because their labor wasn’t seen as “real work” or “a matter of necessity” until recently. She wrote

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labor that fell outside the scope of domestic work and also other menial employment reserved for working-poor women of color.”

<sup>374</sup> Claudia Jones. “300 Years of an Uphill Fight.” *Daily Worker*, February 11, 1951, 5.

<sup>375</sup> Claudia Jones. “Half the World,” *Daily Worker*, February 11, 1951, 8

about “the millions of Negro women domestic workers, who recently won the begrudging status of ‘workers’ in the new social security regulations, but who have lost nearly all gains achieved in industry seven to eight years ago”<sup>376</sup>

Understanding the intersection between white supremacy and the constraints of household labor, Black women actively contested white constructions of Black labor. Despite the threat of being dismissed from their jobs or physical and verbal assault, working-class Black women constantly strove to maintain their dignity and humanity. Black women wage earners refused to be inferior and exhibit deference toward their white employers. They embodied what scholar Robin D.G. Kelley labeled *infrapolitics*, that is the “daily confrontations, evasive actions, and stifled thoughts” that formed resistance patterns. They recognized the worth and value of their labor and redefined labor equality and fairness. For many, workplace equality was intertwined with broader interpretations of individual and collective liberation, which included inherent rights to dignity and self-respect, economic and income equality, physical well-being and labor control and mobility.<sup>377</sup>

Since the end of slavery, Black women’s goal of obtaining occupational autonomy was connected to the quest for American freedom and citizenship.<sup>378</sup> Black women not only viewed labor autonomy as a way to construct their identities and family structures, but as a weapon against race, gender and class discrimination. White society viewed Black women’s labor as menial, subordinate, and cheap therefore reinforcing their lack of

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<sup>376</sup> Claudia Jones. *Half the World*, *Daily Worker*, October 29, 1950, 7

<sup>377</sup> Kelley, *Race Rebels*, 39

<sup>378</sup> Harris, *Sex Workers*, 57.

human dignity, rights to fair wages, and descent work environments. White men and women demanded that Blacks adhere to the codes of racial etiquette of inferiority and attempt to integrate into white mainstream society.

Challenging the codes of racial etiquette, the Black Left presented an alternative to fight for Black liberation by focusing on self-determination and Black nationalism. In the post-war period, the NAACP had resolved to help the United States in its anti-Communist crusade and undermined the credibility of other Black radicals.<sup>379</sup> The organization contended strides could be made in areas such as, education, voting and housing by addressing issues through the justice system.<sup>380</sup> By aligning with the Truman administration, the NAACP separated itself from other Black activists by deeming other protests as “Soviet propaganda.”<sup>381</sup>

Struggling against anti-communism and anti-racism, the Black Left was discredited and silenced by the U.S. government.<sup>382</sup> Activists raised questions and created debates around international skepticism of America’s democracy. Using her work with the Communist Party, Jones, like other Black Left women writers, worked in and against established forms in representing the link between the everyday lives of Black women and internationalist projects. Historian Carole Boyce Davies stated Claudia Jones’ sense of statelessness under deportation created an international identity in diaspora. Jones’ writings reveal that she was very clear about membership in the Caribbean diaspora and

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<sup>379</sup> Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize*, 176-180.

<sup>380</sup> *Ibid*, 176-177.

<sup>381</sup> *Ibid*. 175.

<sup>382</sup> *Ibid*. 181-183.

equally clear about her identification as an African American under the oppression of U.S. racism.<sup>383</sup>

Journalists created spaces for gender issues by developing of international alliances for national liberation. Scholar Cheryl Higashida stated racism, patriarchy and homophobia have combined with anticommunism to marginalize and silence radical Black women.<sup>384</sup> Black Feminism was developed by women affiliated with the post-World War II Black Left, who were analyzing oppression specific to women of color. Higashida argued the narrowing conditions of the Civil Rights Movement privileged “a patriotic, straightforward civil rights or integrationist spirit that evolves or devolves depending on the writer’s perspective.”<sup>385</sup> Black Left women national liberation movements in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean signaled social transformation in the United States. By exposing racial violence, segregation and exploitation in the U.S. society, Black radicals invoked the need for universal rights. Black Left women writers challenge the conflict between nationalism and Black feminism. Claudia Jones positioned Black women at the center of the revolutionary struggle. She claimed that “the Negro question in the United States is prior to, and not equal to, the woman question.”<sup>386</sup>

With Black women at the center of her revolutionary struggle, Jones wrote about the formation of the Sojourners for Truth and Justice in 1951. She described the meeting

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<sup>383</sup> Carole Boyce Davies. “Deportable Subjects: U.S. Immigration Laws and the Criminalizing of Communism.” *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 100, no. 4, Fall 2001, 949-966.

<sup>384</sup> Cheryl Higashida. *Black Internationalist Feminism: Women Writers of the Black Left, 1945-1955*, (Chicago: University of Illinois, 2011), 5.

<sup>385</sup> *Ibid*, 6

<sup>386</sup> Jones, “An End to Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman”

she attended in New York as a gathering of Black women “from all walks of life” who “met as “Negro women to unite and fight against every insult and every indignity suffered for centuries by our people.”<sup>387</sup> Jones would eventually join this organization and continue to promote the power within Black women to organize for the “struggle of peace and freedom.”<sup>388</sup>

### **“A Fighting Spirit:” the Sojourners for Truth and Justice**

Sojourners for Truth and Justice focused the Rosa Lee Ingram as the center of its cause. Members worked to free Ingram and centered Black women’s lived experiences of oppression by addressing Ingram’s sexual violence and right to protect her property as a discourse of human rights and equality. Symbolizing the protection of Black womanhood, Mrs. Ingram was praised and lauded for her strength to challenge white supremacy. As an all-Black women organization, the tone and tactics used represented a continuation of international and Black self-determination within anti-Communism politics.

During the group’s short two-year period, the Sojourners defied the Cold War political order. Led by the *Eagle* editor/publisher Charlotta Bass, it was the “first and only group during the entire Old Left organized to fight for full freedom of Negro people and dignity of Negro womanhood.”<sup>389</sup> Describing her newspaper as a “progressive newspaper for progressive people,” Bass’ *California Eagle* covered the Ingram case by

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<sup>387</sup> Claudia Jones. “Half the World: Negro Women Launch New Movement for Peace and Freedom,” *Daily Worker*, November 25, 1951,8.

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

<sup>389</sup> Membership application. Box 12 Folder 17, Louise Thompson Patterson papers, 1909-1999, Stuart Rose Library, Emory University.

focusing on the global impact of the human rights movement.<sup>390</sup> Prior to forming the Sojourners for Truth and Justice, she supported Mary Church Terrell's "brilliant" presentation to the United Nations and published the entire speech in the newspaper. As an executive board member of the National Committee to Free the Ingram Family, Bass presented the case as a larger debate on human rights. The *Eagle* published a letter written to President Truman from the British Committee of Women's International Democratic Freedom explaining how "all the evidence points to the fact she and her two sons acted purely in self-defense and a life sentence for such an action is more than severe."<sup>391</sup> A letter from Britain's Tobacco Worker's Union noted how America's justice was misdirected and "in the name of humanity and justice" Mrs. Ingram and her sons should be set free.<sup>392</sup> Similar sentiments were addressed in letters from Romania, Cyprus, Brazil, Argentina and other countries. Bass wrote how she expected more letters as more women around the world learned about the case.<sup>393</sup>

Similar to the anti-communist attacks against Claudia Jones, Charlotta Bass and her newspaper were targeted by the government. In her weekly "Sidewalk" column, she accused the government of using policies like the Smith Act to "deprive not only American Negroes of their freedom, but it is also stretching to a point of denying all liberal minded Americans freedom of thought and advocacy."<sup>394</sup> The Smith Act or Alien Registration Act of 1940 was designed "to prohibit certain subversive activities; to

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<sup>390</sup> DC Woman presents Ingram case to UN., *The California Eagle*. October 13, 1949 1-4.

<sup>391</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>392</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>394</sup> Charlotta Bass, "The Sidewalk." *The California Eagle*, April 27, 1950, 1-5.



amend certain provisions of law with respect to the admission and deportation of aliens; to require finger-printing and registration of aliens; and for other purposes.”<sup>395</sup> The *Eagle* was monitored for its content. Also the government closely watched during her Bass’ trips to the Soviet Union. She criticized how persons speaking and writing about the government, trying to “make for a better world” had been put in jail. Rosa Lee Ingram was among those she listed as trying to improve the world through advocacy.

A united act of activism and advocacy would bring Bass and other Black women together and establish this organization. In September 1951, a group of Black women organize a protest described as a Sojourn for Truth and Justice where they sought to bring Black women across the country to Washington D.C. Often described as “sojourners,” Blacks throughout history have struggled to receive equality, but these women used the historical figures, like Sojourner Truth, to inspire a new movement.<sup>396</sup> They encouraged the idea that “those who would be free must strike the first blow.”<sup>397</sup> Leading up to the D.C. march, Black women wrote letters to President Truman and Attorney General J. Howard McGrath in which they addressed their status as “second-class citizens.” They requested an audience with both leaders in order for the men to hear from “the most oppressed in this great land of ours, that the Constitution nor the unenforced Amendments—does not protect us from the evils of tyranny or against illegal use of power?”<sup>398</sup> The organization presented the lack of protection of Black women from the

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<sup>395</sup> Boyce Davies, 957.

<sup>396</sup> Boyce Davies. *The Left of Karl Marx*, 955.

<sup>397</sup> Gore, *Radicalism at the Crossroads*, 85.

<sup>398</sup> Letter to White House. 1951., Box 12 Folder 17, Louise Thompson Patterson papers, 1909-1999, Stuart Rose Library, Emory University. Letter to Attorney General Howard.

government and reinforced their invisibility as a result of their oppression. By asking for a meeting to express their lived-experiences, the Black women showed they couldn't let their social position be expressed by others, for example by Black male leadership. This radical thinking of advocating primarily for Black women laid the foundation for discussions to follow, and Black women would serve as the basis for human rights and freedom.

The need for Black women to advocate for their freedom and for the freedom of others was reflected on the Capitol steps. On September 29, 1951, the group led a march on Washington D.C. where more than 132 women from fifteen states convened to voice their protest against violence and discrimination of “the wives, mothers and victims of race hatred” and drew inspiration from Rosa Lee Ingram, whose “militancy had become the symbol of the Sojourn itself.”<sup>399</sup> The group demanded their rights from President Truman.<sup>400</sup> As a focal point of the event, the organization discussed Black women who had experienced firsthand the brutality of Jim Crow justice. With the slogan, “Negro women dry your eyes and speak your mind, we have a job to do,” Black women united at the Justice Department to share their stories of struggle and demanded justice be done. After three days of protest, including a press conference at the home of Fredrick Douglas, the event highlighted Black women's work in linking women's organizing to civil rights activism.

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1951., Box 12 Folder 17, Louise Thompson Patterson papers, 1909-1999, Stuart Rose Library, Emory University.

<sup>399</sup> Ibid.

<sup>400</sup> Abner Berry. “Patterson Tells 4,000 at Rally of Plan for Colonial Peoples' Parley” *Daily Worker*, January 29, 1952, 8.

After the D.C. protest, the leadership of the Sojourners of Truth and Justice leaders included Communist and non-Communist Black women, but many of whom were journalists, writers and activists including Shirley Graham Du Bois, Claudia Jones, Eslanda Robeson, and Alice Childress.<sup>401</sup> Dedicated to activism in the Black community, these Black women had been at the forefront of creating of mass movements and protests in the defense of Black men such as Willie McGee, a Mississippi man sentenced to death in 1945 after his white female lover accused of him of rape; the Trenton Six, a group of men sentenced to death in 1948 for allegedly killing a white shopkeeper; and Wesley Robert Wells, a San Quentin prisoner sentenced to death in 1951 for injuring a prison guard. Members of Sojourners of Truth and Justice were key in these cases.<sup>402</sup> Audley Moore, head of the Harlem branch of the Civil Rights Congress, organized demonstrations for McGee. Relocating from Birmingham to Detroit, Esther Cooper spoke as the organizational secretary of the CRC of Michigan in support of the Trenton Six.<sup>403</sup> Editor and publisher Charlotta Bass served as the head the Wesley Roberts Wells Legal Defense Committee.<sup>404</sup> Black women radicals were part of mass support of the Paul Robeson, leader of the Council of African Affairs, who was labeled as a Communist and “un-American.” Louise Thompson Patterson, CAA’s director of organization, organized Robeson’s national tour to publicly defend himself.<sup>405</sup>

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<sup>401</sup> Ibid.

<sup>402</sup> Ibid, 166-169.

<sup>403</sup> Ibid, 166.

<sup>404</sup> Horne, *Communist Front*, 200.

<sup>405</sup> McDuffie, *Sojourning for Freedom*, 168-169

The Sojourners focused on Black feminism's lived experiences by including those directly affected by the nation's racialized terror. Serving on the Initiating Committee were Rosalie McGee, Willie McGee's wife; Bessie Mitchell, a sister of one the Trenton Six defendants; Amy Mallard, whose husband was lynched in Georgia; and Josephine Grayson, the wife of one of the Martinsville Seven.<sup>406</sup> In highlight these women who were directly affected by the legal lynching, Claudia Jones wrote how "the most oppressed of the oppressed in our land—the Negro working woman—is to be found the most powerful factor in the current struggles for Negro rights."<sup>407</sup> She celebrated the leadership of McGee, Mallard, and Mitchell because "they give the lie to those who speak of women's innate weakness, for they compose a strength born of struggle, experienced in poverty, consecrated in hatred of indignity suffered by us for centuries through the hypocritical white supremacy system which operates against Negro men doubly and triply for Negro women."<sup>408</sup>

Historian Erik McDuffie stated the Sojourners sought to mobilize Black women against Jim Crow, Cold War domestic and foreign policy and colonialism. He stated the group "provides a lens for critically understanding broader trends in Black Left Feminism during the Cold War. These years signaled the best and worst of times for Black women radicals."<sup>409</sup> The Red Scare marked a pivotal point for Black women because they drew from the multi-axis framework of "triple oppression." Black women rarely described their work as human rights, but viewed white supremacy, the exploitation of Black

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<sup>406</sup> Ibid, 166.

<sup>407</sup> Claudia Jones. "Half the World." *The Daily Worker*. June 10, 1951, 7.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid.

<sup>409</sup> McDuffie, *Sojourning for Freedom*, 167.

womanhood, lynching and Black poverty as forms of genocide. These practices represented a violation of universal, inalienable human freedoms, which were protected under United Nations human rights.

By the time of the Rosa Lee Ingram case, these women were fully-equipped and trained in mass campaigns. While the U.S. Communist Party publicized the case in the *Daily Worker*, it Black women took the lead in freeing Ingram.<sup>410</sup> For Ingram's supporters, her case represented the intersecting systems of oppression suffered by Black women: sexual violence of Black women, the lack of protection of Black motherhood, and the economic and labor exploitation of Black women. The Ingram case reflected the lack of status for Black women because her act of self-defense and history of sexual harassment were questioned. Her position as a Black woman created a media discourse where her race, gender and class could only be understood by other Black women.

In order to increase its understanding of Black women's experiences, the Sojourners of Truth and Justice held an Eastern Seaboard Conference on March 23, 1952 in New York City.<sup>411</sup> The organization declared, "We will not be trampled upon any longer!" and announced "the mighty force this freedom movement of Negro women."<sup>412</sup> Black women came to speak their mind and draft a plan of action "that will free Rosa Lee Ingram; that will bring an end to the killing and terror of our people at home and bring our boys home from the slaughter of colored peoples in other lands; that will win full

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<sup>410</sup> Ibid, 167.

<sup>411</sup> Eastern Seaboard Conference of the Sojourners for Truth and Justice. Box 12 Folder 17, Louise Thompson Patterson papers, 1909-1999, Stuart Rose Library, Emory University.

<sup>412</sup> Ibid.

dignity for Negro womanhood and peace and security for the Negro family.”<sup>413</sup> At the conference, they discussed anti-lynching legislation, fair employment practices and the genocide of globally-oppressed people. The conference addressed Black women’s role with the fight for global liberation. The organization asked Black women to put aside fear, speak up and share their lived-experiences with each other and the world. It create a space to discuss the daily, fully-human experience of Black women.

Scholar Robin D.G. Kelley stated that, after World War II, working-class Blacks utilized white-dominated public spaces, “democratic spaces,” as a means of resistance.<sup>414</sup> The lives of working class, “ordinary” Blacks break from traditional notions of politics and history. By shifting the focus to what motivated the Black working class to participate in the struggle and the strategies they developed, Black women redefined their participation in mainstream politics. History diverges from the heroes and connects the everyday struggles to politics. The Black working class, specifically Black women, operated within “the mask” that allowed them to be invisible and permitted them to fight underground battles.<sup>415</sup> Black female journalists utilized this “mask” to push a more radical and militant message and activism. Their media messages were personal and connected to their identities, as well as being a tool to rally Black women. By its end, the conference spoke to Black women’s multiple identities and called for “all Negro women from Maine to Florida, housewife and worker, mother and daughter and speak loud for unity of Negro women in this nation that will withstand every storm till our people are

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<sup>413</sup> Ibid.

<sup>414</sup> Kelley, *Race Rebels*, 54-56.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid.

truly free, and justice, peace and plenty prevail in the land.” The message’s discourse focused on unity and an elevation of the complexity of identities and experiences.

Sojourner President Charlotta Bass knew challenging racism was key to uniting the cause for Rosa Lee Ingram and sought the help of NAACP leader Walter White to gain access to government institutions like the Department of Justice. In a letter to White, Bass wrote telling the denial of pardon to Mrs. Ingram and her two sons, our organization has dedicated as its first task the fight to free this courageous mother. We intend going into every state of this nation, North and South, to arouse women around this case.”<sup>416</sup> “Also, she hoped White would join them in the fight “to state the many grievances of the Negro people and particularly Negro women.”<sup>417</sup> Bass addressed the Black community’s position in government systems and institutions, specifically the criminal justice system. Through her years as editor of the *Eagle*, Bass had continually corresponded with Blacks in prison or jail. She met with the wives and mothers of Willie McGee and the Scottsboro Boys.

As the leader of the Sojourners, she could gather more women to join their fight because Mrs. Ingram’s case was one of the few legal lynching cases with a Black woman at the center of the injustice.<sup>418</sup> In the organization’s 1952 bulletin, she noted that the main goal of the Sojourners that year was the freedom of Rosa Lee Ingram and her two sons because “she dared to fight for her honor against the attacks of a white

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<sup>416</sup>Charlotta Bass to Walter White, 1950, Box 13 Folder 1, Louise Thompson Patterson papers, 1909-1999, Stuart Rose Library, Emory University.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid.

<sup>418</sup> Charlotta Bass, Sojourner Bulletin, 1950, Box 13 Folder 1, Louise Thompson Patterson papers, 1909-1999, Stuart Rose Library, Emory University.

sharecropper.”<sup>419</sup> Ingram’s case presented a united front for Black womanhood’s racial, economic and gendered oppression, but Bass recognized the sexual violence that all women endure. She continued, “While this is an all Negro women’s organization, we know that to secure the freedom of this brave woman we need all American women to join us in the fight.”<sup>420</sup> The plan was to help mobilize at least 500 women to visit the governor in Georgia and demand Ingram’s release. Recognizing the exploitation of labor of Black women, Charlotta Bass discussed the nature of the organization’s name and “fighting spirit” against slavery and justice. She wrote that the organization grew because “its goal appeals to all people who believe in justice and who know we might fight today for that justice, even as Sojourner Truth fought in the days when chattel slavery darkened our land.”<sup>421</sup> In the first bulletin newspaper, Bass mapped out the goals of “the first all Negro women’s organization with the unalterable purpose of winning complete and equal rights for American Negro citizens residing in the United States or anywhere else in the world.”<sup>422</sup> She ended the bulletin by encouraging readers to “draw inspiration for a more intensive fight and a greater determination to reach our goal.”<sup>423</sup>

The all-Black woman’s organization attracted Black women from both the Communist Party and the local chapters of the NAACP, who felt their specific need of social justice wasn’t being met. The Sojourners for Truth and Justice’s core support came from a range of political perspectives: women who had a history of working on the Rosa

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<sup>419</sup> Ibid.

<sup>420</sup> Ibid.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid.



Lee Ingram case and Communist Party-affiliated groups, for example, Audley Moore, who had left the Communist Party because of its lack of attention to the “Negro question” and Black nationalism.<sup>424</sup> *Freedom* journalist Janet Wilson described “the tradition of heroism has continued to shine in the deeds of Negro women of our time” and deemed Sojourner of Truth and Justice members Bessie Mitchell, Amy Mallard and Josephine Gray heroic because “they have travelled far and spoken out with moving eloquence in defense of their own men—and their entire people. They will not be silenced.”<sup>425</sup> Wilson focused specifically on the dignity of all womanhood. She explained, “Many died rather than submit to the lust of their ‘owners.’ Until today in this land of Jim Crow and lynching, Negro women must still fight back against double insults... In the light of these shameful facts the heroism of Rosa Lee Ingram stands out clearly.”<sup>426</sup> The media discourse surrounding the power of Black women as a means of humanity and peace was symbolized through the work of the Sojourners. Noting the suffering and struggles of the women, the heroism of Black women was celebrated through the voices of Black women.

Following the September 1951 protest, the Sojourners developed a strong base in New York city and national reach with chapters in California, Chicago and Richmond, Virginia. They created a youth division “in order to give full expression to the needs and capabilities” of young Black women and hosted events where they could be mentored.<sup>427</sup> For example, the “Cocktails with Claudia” event was for the Young Sojourners Group,

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<sup>424</sup> Gore. *Radicalism at the Crossroads*, 86.

<sup>425</sup> Janet Wilson. Negro Women Planted and Tended the Tree of Freedom, *Freedom*, July 18, 1952, 7.

<sup>426</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>427</sup> J35 *Civil Liberties Statements*. N.d. Papers of the Civil Rights Congress. New York Public Library. *Archives Unbound*.

where members communicated with Claudia Jones in an informal setting as a means of creating a Black-woman network.<sup>428</sup>

In the organization's messaging, it sought to create debates about Black women's leadership within a male-dominated civil rights platform. The Sojourners for Truth and Justice emphasized through the Rosa Lee Ingram case the opportunities and vision of an alternative civil rights framework that could utilize Black women's lived-experiences. In February 1952, Claudia Jones highlighted the organization by using its name in the headline of the *Daily Worker's* Negro History Week article and using the subhead "Negro women are in the forefront of this fight." She reported the tremendous potential and reception of all sections of Negro women, specifically working-class women in "a movement which fights for peace and freedom—a movement conceived by them, organized and led by them."<sup>429</sup> In mentioning the Rosa Lee Ingram case, Jones described Mrs. Ingram as "a living sacrifice to the degradation imposed upon Negro women by the lynching system."<sup>430</sup> The article also featured a photo of Rosa Lee Ingram and her sons with a caption describing how the case was one of the Sojourners' key demands. Jones wrote how "the lot of the Negro woman in every sphere of American life—economically, politically, and socially, is one of continuing indignity. Jim Crow national oppression which has its source in the heartland of American imperialism monopoly oppression of the Negro people in the Black Belt of the South."<sup>431</sup> Jones was hopefully that the

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<sup>428</sup> Invitation. February 17, 1952, Box 12 Folder 18, Louise Thompson Patterson papers, 1909-1999, Stuart Rose Library, Emory University

<sup>429</sup> Claudia Jones. "Sojourners for Truth and Justice," *Daily Worker*, February 8, 1952.8.

<sup>430</sup> Ibid.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid.

Sojourners would “add a new quality to the present struggle for a democratic America in a free and peaceful world.”<sup>432</sup>

The Sojourners embraced human rights, Black equality, peace and international solidarity. Black women’s knowledge production has always been motivated by a sense of care for Black communities in a world where non-Black people did not find value in the lives and livelihood of these communities. Black female textual activism is a form of embodied discourse, in which they demand the inclusion of their bodies by placing them in the texts they write or speak.<sup>433</sup>

The Sojourners for Truth and Freedom used the Rosa Lee Ingram case as a way to include Black women’s bodies and voices into the media discourse. Parole for Mrs. Ingram had been denied in January 1952. As a result, the organization planned a Mother’s Day campaign to protest at the Georgia state capital and a visit with Governor Talmadge and the state parole board. In April 1952, letters were mailed to gather support, the group asked for financial support and participation in delegation. The letter described how the Ingram family’s imprisonment was “a monument to racial bigotry and injustice. It is an outrage to all American motherhood and womanhood...Let’s lend significance to Mother’s Day of 1952 by gaining freedom for Mrs. Ingram. If You Would Be Free, Help Free Mrs. Ingram and Her Two Sons!”<sup>434</sup>

White progressives and Black radicals criticized the Black-woman organization. Both groups questioned whether the organization’s tactics could reach the mainstream by

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<sup>432</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>434</sup> A Mother’s Day Appeal to You.1952., Box 12 Folder 17, Louise Thompson Patterson papers, 1909-1999, Stuart Rose Library, Emory University.

just focusing on Black women's needs.<sup>435</sup> During an executive board meeting, the Civil Rights Congress acknowledged the impact of the Sojourners in opening "up a broad avenue through which Negro women can pass on to democratic struggles. Their activities must find a parallel course opened to white women."<sup>436</sup> The concern for white women to have access to the liberation struggle entered the mainstream discourse and diminished the unique oppression of Black women by emphasizing all women's rights. An editorial in *Freedom* newspaper, stated the organization needed to unite "the Negro domestic worker...with her white sister in the labor movement for a common assault against the special exploitation of all working women."<sup>437</sup>

By the end of 1952, the Sojourners' Ingram campaign and activities waned. Historian Erik McDuffie stated that the repressive Cold War climate combined with the Communist Party's ambivalence toward the group led to its demise. The challenge to fit among the politics of the period stunted the organization's growth, but the vision was in place and made a lasting impression. The political power of Black women would eventually lead to Charlotta Bass' groundbreaking 1952 vice presidential campaign on the Progressive Party ticket. In 1953, members of the Sojourners for Truth and Justice established the Women's Committee for Equal Justice, with the "sole purpose of fighting for the complete, unconditional freedom of Mrs. Rosa Lee Ingram."<sup>438</sup> Women's

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<sup>435</sup> Gore, *Radicalism at the Crossroads*, 87.

<sup>436</sup> *N99 C.R.C. - National Board Meeting 7.52 - Reports - Nat'l Ex. Sec'y*. N.d. Papers of the Civil Rights Congress. New York Public Library. *Archives Unbound*.

<sup>437</sup> Gore, *Radicalism at the Crossroads*, 87.

<sup>438</sup> *A148. Ingram, Rosa Lee - Press Releases*. N.d. Papers of the Civil Rights Congress. New York Public Library. *Archives Unbound*.

advocacy for the Ingram family continued to evolve and shape larger discussions in the media.

The next chapter will consider the narrowing of the civil rights agenda being dominated by anti-communist ideology. The Rosa Lee Ingram case shifted into woman-dominated cause that would unite both Black and white women. The media discourse of motherhood would position Mrs. Ingram in a gendered framework, in which reuniting her with her children was the primary goal.

## Chapter 9: Women From All Walks Of Life

In its statement to the government, the National Committee to Free the Ingram Family positioned the Ingram case as a cornerstone to civil rights. It stated “The case of Rosa Lee Ingram is a symbol of the oppression of the Negro people. It could only happen to a Negro woman in America, but because it can happen to a Negro woman, it remains a threat to the honor and dignity of all American women.”<sup>439</sup> The committee centered on the intersection of race and gender in its statement by addressing Mrs. Ingram’s complete identity and status as a Black women. It created a discourse expanding the framework of human rights towards a more universal appeal of motherhood rather the radical stances addressing imperialism. Throughout the campaign, the discourse leaned more towards Black respectability politics and the gradual acceptance of Black community of integration ideas. Several supporters would come from trade unions, but exploitation of capitalism and colonialization would be a less visible discourse in comparison to race and gender. In the 1950s, many civil rights organizations muted economic demands as the national political climate turned hostile to radical ideas during McCarthyism.<sup>440</sup> The removal of influence and exile of Black Leftists labelled discussions about labor and colonialism to be “red.” Ideas about respectability and class were important to racial protest. Restrained and orderly gatherings of Black citizens became the vision and influence class-appropriate behavior. Drawing on the gender representations, Black women were assigned distinct roles and behaviors and Black masculinity became a

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<sup>439</sup> Statement, 1948. *A148. Ingram, Rosa Lee - Press Releases*. N.d. Papers of the Civil Rights Congress. New York Public Library. *Archives Unbound*.

<sup>440</sup>Daniel Geary. *Beyond Civil Rights: the Moynihan report and it legacy*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2015), 44

visible source of racial health and a popularized resource for protest.<sup>441</sup> Black female journalists use of the press to generate unique forms of protest for Black women challenged ideas of gender roles within the Black community.

Journalist and chairwoman of the National Committee to Free the Ingram Family Mary Church Terrell emphasized the political significance of the Ingram case through the campaign's materials and message. For example, a pamphlet on the case listed seven-points on political significance including:

- 1) Ingram freedom struggle of vital significance in Negro liberation struggle
- 2) Matter of vital importance in struggle of women against male superiority
- 3) Vital to exposure of hypocrisy of American ruling cliques' presentations that they stand for peace and democracy
- 4) Can be integrated and made a vital issue in the struggle for labor as a point of propaganda if not immediately made an issue of practical programmatically importance
- 5) Extremely rich in emotional and moral content, more church, student, fraternal forces, especially women and youth
- 6) Freedom of Rosa Lee Ingram responsibility of progressive America will be taken upon by the progressive peoples of the world
- 7) No phase of present political struggle upon which the Ingram case does not impinge<sup>442</sup>

With the political focus mapped out, the media discourse was based on these points and illustrated in the physical activism forces. The national committee used press releases, slogans, memos and newsletters to promote their primary purpose and plan.

This chapter explores the interracial alliances of Black and white women in the Ingram case. The Cold War period moved the focus from human rights where Blacks started to take a more integrationist focus and eventually shape the modern Civil Rights

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<sup>441</sup> Feldstein, *Motherhood in Black and White*, 73-74.

<sup>442</sup> Facts of the Rosa Lee Ingram Case. n.d. *A148. Ingram, Rosa Lee - Press Releases*. N.d. Papers of the Civil Rights Congress. New York Public Library. *Archives Unbound*.

Movement. The National Committee to Free the Ingram Family under Mary Church Terrell created a media activism campaign around the Ingrams. Black female journalists and activists would frame their protest in the discourse of woman's rights and motherhood through interracial unity. Journalists, like Alice Dunnigan participated in the delegation visits and wrote about experiences with the case in Washington D.C. *Chicago Defender* columnist Rebecca Stiles Dodson popularized Rosa Lee Ingram's plight on the society and women's pages of the national Black newspaper. She, Dunnigan and Terrell would still discuss the oppression of Black women, but mostly through the lens of gender in order to include white women in their alliance. The discourse of gender united women to be sympathetic to Mrs. Ingram as a mother. Black radicals' Pan-African discussions were lessened as Black activists started to approach the message of universality. By creating a framework on the universal connections, the understanding of human became central to the national committee's discourse. Motherhood became key in promoting Rosa Lee Ingram's connection to all women and humanity because racism became secondary and allowed for white women to contribute to the message.

Like Black Pan-African activists, the National Committee to Free the Ingram Family included an international element but not through the radical focus of political and economic injustices. The organization took a different international approach to women's rights by narrowing the discourse on sexual assault and self-defense as mothers. Scholars argued the revering the position of motherhood helped define healthy citizenship and national strength because anticommunism and civil rights initiatives gave way to fears against liberals in the 1940s and 1950s. Restrained masculinity disrupted society's norms, but women in the domestic sphere could be widely accepted and



approved. Based on the political climate, Black and white women had to possess respectable femininity and motherhood. The national committee used motherhood to show Rosa Lee Ingram as the good mother and good citizen.

Scholar Ruth Feldstein stated representations of women as mothers developed in conjunction with debates about who was a healthy citizen.<sup>443</sup> In 1939, sociologist E. Franklin Frazier established the concept of the Black matriarch, a black woman who has failed as a mother. By the 1940s, images of “good” versus “bad” mothers had become normalized in political and popular discourse. “Ideas about maternal failure that might seem focused only on gender actually advanced the racial liberalism that was a benchmark of mid-twentieth-century liberalism.”<sup>444</sup> Media coverage of Ingram highlighted her as a mother, who needed to return to her children. Black female journalists sought to discuss the theme of motherhood, but also address the protection of women’s bodies from violence.

### **“Arousing the Conscience of America”**

On March 21, 1949, the National Committee to Free the Ingram Family was formed in Harlem as a non-political, non-partisan, interracial committee, organized for the sole purpose of “securing the unconditional freedom for Mrs. Rosa Lee Ingram and her two sons in Georgia, by arousing the conscience of America.”<sup>445</sup> Using “moral pressure,” the committee welcomed moral and financial support to move its campaign.

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<sup>443</sup> Feldstein, *Motherhood in Black and White*, 2.

<sup>444</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>445</sup> National Committee to Free Ingram Family statement. 1949. *AI48. Ingram, Rosa Lee - Press Releases*. N.d. Papers of the Civil Rights Congress. New York Public Library. *Archives Unbound*.

Embracing a solidarity of womanhood, the National Committee to Free the Ingram Family including Black and white women from the nation. Ada Jackson, the vice-chairwoman of the committee, declared, “The formation of the National Committee of women from all walks of life to work for Rosa Lee Ingram and her sons is the deepest demonstration of sisterhood. Our visit to Rosa Lee Ingram is a symbol of women’s solidarity and determination to achieve for all Negro women the right to walk this American soil in freedom and dignity.”<sup>446</sup>

The national committee was affiliated with the Civil Rights Congress and led by the founder of the National Association of Colored Women, Mary Church Terrell, who established her activism career in the clubwomen’s era. Respectability framed most the work during that period, but Terrell and others fought against institutionalized gender violence. Historian Sarah Haley stated, “If clubwomen were embroiled in a contested ideological battle with their working-class sisters in the city, they were also engaged in an intense confrontation with the state, whose violent oppression of poor Black women they would not tolerate.”<sup>447</sup> While Terrell’s class status influenced her politics, she cannot simply be viewed as conservative. Haley stated her race and gender politics included race moral uplift, but confronted the state’s violence targeting poor Black women. The local court was primarily charged with prosecuting poor people’s crimes, which Black women were more likely to commit. They were more likely to be working for low wages and,

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<sup>446</sup> Press release March 31, 1949. *A148. Ingram, Rosa Lee - Press Releases*. N.d. Papers of the Civil Rights Congress. New York Public Library. *Archives Unbound*.

<sup>447</sup> Sarah Haley, *No Mercy Here: Gender Punishment, and the Making of Jim Crow Modernity*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 123

therefore, were more likely to be in public and subject to arrest. Terrell spent her life working to eradicate and dismantle systems that halted Black women's political and social progress.

Mary Church Terrell was born to an affluent Memphis family in 1863 and educated at Oberlin College. She would eventually teach at Wilberforce University before traveling to Europe for two years and returning to serve on the U.S. Board of Education. She was a founding member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Terrell was the NACW's first president in 1896 and held the position until 1901.<sup>448</sup> Like other Black female journalists, Terrell used the press as a vehicle to comment on society's issues and seek equal rights for women.<sup>449</sup> She argued intensely in her writings for civil rights and social justice in order to advance the activist agenda for women and Blacks. In 1898, Terrell addressed the National American Women's Suffrage Association about the progress of Black women. She discussed the litany of obnoxious systems that degraded Black women. She called Black women the "principal victims" at the center of the discourse about Southern punishment and the Jim Crow state, despite the mainstream representations of being male-focused.<sup>450</sup> She sought to redeem Black women's identities because their presence in prison was significant despite the gender politics of mainstream media.

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<sup>448</sup> Ibid, 124-125.

<sup>449</sup> Jinx Broussard. *Giving a Voice to the Voiceless: Four Pioneering Black Women Journalists*. (2004), 47-48.

<sup>450</sup> Ibid.

As the chairman of the National Committee to Free the Ingram Family, Mary Church Terrell led the coalition of white and Black women to fight for Ingram.<sup>451</sup> She focused on the common bond of womanhood as her political activism, but recognized the differences in lived-experiences based on race. Using her experiences as journalist and activist, she launched a media campaign for Rosa Lee Ingram's freedom by raising the platform for Black women to be made visible in U.S. and international political discussions. She focused on a Black women-centered discourse rooted in Black feminism in which the complexities of identities addressed power and oppression. In presenting the Ingram petition to the United Nations in 1949, Mary Church Terrell connected her and Black women's social justice into the understanding of human rights.

Using foreign policy to create a discourse of human rights, the national committee positioned Jim Crow racism and injustice as the nation's moral issue. On November 17, 1949, the committee visited President Truman and presented petitions with more than 25,000 signatures. They also met with Assistant Attorney General Alex Campbell and left a statement with Attorney General McGrath that described that Rosa Lee Ingram could not receive a fair trial in Georgia because "No Negro can...No nation that fails to exert moral authority at home can hope to exert it aboard."<sup>452</sup> The statement addressed how the state of Georgia was disgracing the nation's international credibility and how it was wrong for individual states "to violate all laws of human rights and decency."<sup>453</sup> The

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<sup>451</sup> Ibid, 132-133.

<sup>452</sup> Statement to McGrath, A148. *Ingram, Rosa Lee - Press Releases*. N.d. Papers of the Civil Rights Congress. New York Public Library. *Archives Unbound*.

<sup>453</sup> Mass Pressure n.d. A148. *Ingram, Rosa Lee - Press Releases*. N.d. Papers of the Civil Rights Congress. New York Public Library. *Archives Unbound*.

petitions sent to Governor Herman Talmadge and the State Board of Pardons and Paroles, featured a picture of Mrs. Ingram and her sons and described the injustices surrounding the case. It read, “Every hour Mrs. Rosa Lee Ingram suffers imprisonment widens and deepens the stain of dishonor on America’s record for democracy. Her imprisonment is an overwhelming tragedy...because she, a colored woman, dared to defend her honor and all womanhood.”<sup>454</sup> The petition declared that the life and freedom of a Black woman reflected the honor of the country because “the case was based on prejudice and not on law and facts.”<sup>455</sup> The delegation believed that winning support for the campaign could only be done by “consistently keeping the facts before the public.”

In keeping the Ingram case in the public, mainstream media discussions about the case challenged the negative stereotypes of Black women through countering the mainstream discourses with Black women’s lived experiences to produce new discourses and knowledge. Black female journalists used current events and inserted Rosa Lee Ingram in the issue to extend ideas of human rights. On July 23, 1949, *The New York Times* published the editorial “Toward Human Freedom” that addressed the United Nations’ investigation of human slavery as a personal, sociological and religious problem.<sup>456</sup> On July 25, 1949, in response to the editorial National Administrative Secretary Maude Katz White wrote the newspaper about Rosa Lee Ingram in terms of human rights. As a former editor for the *Harlem Liberator*, Katz was a longtime member

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<sup>454</sup> An Appeal to the Honor of the State of Georgia and Our Country. A148. Ingram, Rosa Lee - Press Releases. N.d. Papers of the Civil Rights Congress. New York Public Library. *Archives Unbound*.

<sup>455</sup> Ibid.

<sup>456</sup> Toward Human Freedom, *The New York Times*, July 23, 1949, 10.

of the Communist Party and labor union activist. She had studied at the University of the Tilers of the East in the Soviet Union, where she became immersed in a community of young Black and Third World radicals.<sup>457</sup> She handled the day-to-day operations of the National Committee to Free the Ingram Family but also served as the spokesperson in the committee's interactions with the mainstream media. She voiced her experiences and issues with white supremacy as the core barrier to building black and white unity.<sup>458</sup> She wrote,

Now you speak of “a human and sociological and personal and religious problem.” The case of the Ingram Family is such a problem. You commented the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations for passing a resolution investigating the “problem of human slavery.” Very Good. We want that same Economic Council to investigate the degradation of womanhood, the debasement of motherhood, and the humiliation of humanity as symbolized in the inhumane treatment of Mrs. Rosa Lee Ingram and her two sons. Where is our ‘moral sensibility’ and our “essential personal dignity” when we permit this mother and her two sons to remain in jail? Where is the moral conscience of America?<sup>459</sup>

Katz wanted mainstream attention to be given to the Ingram case with the same concern. She questioned the moral conscience of the UN and American in their position for the equality of Black women by using Mrs. Ingram as a symbol for injustice. Katz inserted the discourse of womanhood and motherhood and equated them to humanity. She addressed the freedom of those enslaved and the audacity to “preach one thing but practice another.” She called the Ingrams’ imprisonment a shame on the nation because a mother defending her honor was torn away from her children. She wrote,

This is human degradation on our own front door-steps for the world to behold. America is enslaved while Mrs. Ingram and her two sons languish in prison. America is enslaved to the warped minds of those evil men (themselves the

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<sup>457</sup> Gore, *Radicalism at the Crossroads*, 25.

<sup>458</sup> *Ibid*, 32.

<sup>459</sup> An Open Letter to the *New York Times*. July 25, 1949

product of an evil institution the planation system) who decided death in the electric chair for Mrs. Ingram and her two sons. White America should bow its head in shame to this greatest of travesties of justice.<sup>460</sup>

She concluded that the Ingrams' freedom would be the landmark of real human freedom. Katz challenged white America to address its racism issues, but placed it within the larger understandings of imperialism and control. She highlighted how the U.S. criminal justice system was an institution set on disfranchising and enslaving Blacks.<sup>461</sup>

This message of disenfranchisement would be publicized through other political platforms. Progressive Party member Henry Wallace spoke about the national committee and organized rallies around the case. He wired Georgia Governor Melvin Thompson about Ingram's death sentence stating, "Indications are that Negroes were systematically excluded from the jury notwithstanding numerous decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court which denounced this practice as unconstitutional."<sup>462</sup> Following the media coverage created by the committee, he stated, "The Ingram case seems to me the epitome of the traditional oppression of Negro womanhood—oppressed because they are Negroes, doubly oppressed because they are women."<sup>463</sup> The committee had created a clear argument focusing on Black women and launched its gender and racial message into domestic and foreign politics.

Race and gender always intersected to give ideas about womanhood and motherhood. Historian Ruth Feldstein stated representations of women as mothers might

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<sup>460</sup> Ibid.

<sup>461</sup> Ibid.

<sup>462</sup> Mass Pressure, n.d. *A148. Ingram, Rosa Lee - Press Releases*. N.d. Papers of the Civil Rights Congress. New York Public Library. *Archives Unbound*.

<sup>463</sup> Wallace Statement 1949. *A148. Ingram, Rosa Lee - Press Releases*. N.d. Papers of the Civil Rights Congress. New York Public Library. *Archives Unbound*.

seem beyond the realm of politics, but ideas about motherhood developed in scholarly, popular and explicitly political arenas in relation to liberalism.<sup>464</sup> She argued the intersections between psychology, gender, and race in Cold War liberalism called for increasing the calls for activism in certain areas, but for halting government assistance in other areas. Scholars, who have critiqued the liberalism within this period stressed that civil rights alone would not be sufficient. They explained race as a psychological problem. Liberal scholarly works, like Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma*, were used to divert focus from the social and economic dimension of anti-Black racism and toward racism's moral and psychological elements.<sup>465</sup>

In relation to gender and race, Cold War liberalism affected social welfare legislation, civil rights advances and anticommunist liberalism.<sup>466</sup> In postwar discussions of welfare, concerns were raised on the destruction of the nuclear family and disciplined women in their homes and their bodies. With masculinity and citizenship being motivating forces, working-class mothers were excluded from the discourse that celebrated domesticity. The postwar gender backlash drove many white middle-class women out of the workforce. For Black women, the discourse represented them as deviating from normative ideas of appropriate motherhood and female sexuality. "Promiscuous" behavior of Black women was deemed unworthy of social welfare and assistance.<sup>467</sup> Attacks on the welfare system with Black women had to be connected to civil rights struggles. Access to public money was a means of resisting Blacks' demands

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<sup>464</sup> Feldstein, *Mother in Black and White*, 10-11.

<sup>465</sup> Geary, *Beyond Civil Rights*, 48-50.

<sup>466</sup> *Ibid*, 63.

<sup>467</sup> *Ibid*, 70-71.



for equal rights.<sup>468</sup> By demanding equal rights within the growing debate of appropriate motherhood, the Ingram case fit within the mainstream discourse because it challenged representations of Black women as “bad” mothers.

With discussions on motherhood being debated and restructured, the National Committee to Free the Ingram Family focused its message on the family and Rosa Lee Ingram as a “good” mother. Mrs. Ingram, as a symbol for mothers around the globe created the emotional appeal of motherhood. In defending herself from sexual harassment and violence, Rosa Lee Ingram created a new debate to challenge social, political and economic ideas toward Black women. The committee stressed the need for children to be with their mother as way to appeal to national gendered discussions. In honoring Mrs. Ingram’s motherhood, the National Committee to Free the Ingram Family issued a Mother’s Day card every year to the president and other government officials. In the first year, they sent 10,000 Mother’s Day cards to President Truman. The cards, which featured Mrs. Ingram’s picture, described how “on Mother’s Day – May 14, 1950—we honor and revere this widowed sharecropper and mother of fourteen children for her dignity and courage. Make 1950 Freedom Year for Mrs. Ingram and her two sons.”<sup>469</sup> On the back, the card described Mrs. Ingram as an “innocent,” “brave” mother and her human rights. In promoting her innocence, the committee addressed the power struggle of sexual violence in its campaign. One pamphlet, described how “white southern men have been taught that they have the right to violate colored women,” which gave context to the

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<sup>468</sup> Ibid, 72.

<sup>469</sup> Mother’s Day Appeal. 1950. A148. *Ingram, Rosa Lee - Press Releases*. N.d. Papers of the Civil Rights Congress. New York Public Library. *Archives Unbound*.

social hierarchy and power relations of white men over Black women's bodies. The pamphlet inserted Rosa Lee Ingram into this struggle and explained the right to self-defense by arguing:

The resistance of women like Mrs. Ingram is a constant occurrence. The Ingram case brings to light this heroism of colored women. The attempt to electrocute the Ingrams, and subsequent sentence of life imprisonment, was the age-old "law of white supremacy," which says that no colored person dare lift a hand in self-defense against a white.<sup>470</sup>

Reflecting on the historical structure of slavery, the discourse of race and gender was positioned with continuing attitudes and ideas about Black people inferiority. The committee stated the Ingram case was an extension of white supremacy that had not disappeared despite society's gains. The notion of bringing to light Black women as heroes emphasized the importance of lived-experiences in overcoming oppression. The committee's dedication to centering on Black women challenged stereotypes of Black women's ability to protect themselves and Southern racist attitudes and practices. By highlighting white supremacy as an ideology, it presented how power could not be easily disrupted without a counter movement to address current injustices. Slavery may have been abolished, but a new system of racism was in place to disenfranchise Black women and men. The Ingram case launched more evidence of racialized, domestic discrimination and questioned the U.S. dedication to democracy.

While work on domestic politics was key to Rosa Lee Ingram's freedom, the National Committee worked to increase international solidarity as well. They planned to

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<sup>470</sup> The Facts of the Ingram Case, 1954. A148. *Ingram, Rosa Lee - Press Releases*. N.d. Papers of the Civil Rights Congress. New York Public Library. *Archives Unbound*.

appeal to the World Federation of Women and call for resolutions from every country. In August 1949, the delegation visited the offices of thirty-two countries and sent information about the Ingram case to fifty-nine countries.<sup>471</sup> In a statement to the president, the committee wrote that women around the world “are shocked at the wanton disregard for human rights in the Ingram case” and how it has been a “demoralizing influence” on American women as well.<sup>472</sup> By mentioning the world’s eyes on the U.S., the committee drew on the civil rights of the Black community as needing to be a foreign policy debate. The statement described how “[t]he test for civil rights for Negroes is the freedom of the Ingram family. The moral and spiritual leadership of the nation is on trial in the Ingram case.”<sup>473</sup> The case stood as a symbol of discrimination, and the committee addressed the issue of human rights by informing other countries about the case.

Feminist scholars argued the impact of local feminist conversations and debates within a global perspective. Scholar Amrita Basu observed the use of the term “global” is still associated with Western feminism and recognize transnational movements add to the complexity of theories.<sup>474</sup> Transnational refers to the literal movement of people, ideas and resources across national boundaries. The process of crossing geopolitical borders and identity boundaries evokes the struggle of equality because not all women have the same concerns. Basu contends, “Global civil society reverberates with historical power

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<sup>471</sup> Mass Pressure, n.d. *A148. Ingram, Rosa Lee - Press Releases*. N.d. Papers of the Civil Rights Congress. New York Public Library. *Archives Unbound*.

<sup>472</sup> Statement to the President, 1950, *A148. Ingram, Rosa Lee - Press Releases*. N.d. Papers of the Civil Rights Congress. New York Public Library. *Archives Unbound*.

<sup>473</sup> Statement to the President, n.d. *A148. Ingram, Rosa Lee - Press Releases*. N.d. Papers of the Civil Rights Congress. New York Public Library. *Archives Unbound*.

<sup>474</sup> Amrita Basu

relations of race, colonialism, class and gender. These shifting sites of power continue to shape the possibilities and limitations for feminist politics.”<sup>475</sup> Therefore the uniqueness of the discourse within the Rosa Lee Ingram case reflects how the human rights and gender equality had similar meaning and the use of global or local terms are rooted in specific contexts. The international conceptualization of motherhood stood as a special context that produced the oppositional knowledge of Black women and redefined their status on a transnational level.

The transnational idea of human rights became the focus of the committee’s protests and marches throughout the nation. On April 13 and 14 1950, more than fifty women participated in a two-day protest in New York City in front of the office of the United States delegation to the United Nations. Before the event, Maude White Katz informed members of the slogans for the protest in a letter.<sup>476</sup> Participants carried signs stating, “Human Rights Mean Freedom for Mrs. Ingram,” “We Fought for Abolition of Slavery and Won!” and “We Fought for Women’s Suffrage and Won!”<sup>477</sup>

As part of the campaign, letters, post cards, resolutions and telegrams were designated to be sent to specific UN delegates and countries based on the committee member’s city and state. In writing to Marie Henena, a UN delegate on the Commission on the Status of Women, southern Black women signed a UN petition asking “for an investigation and consideration of the case of Mrs. Rosa Lee Ingram of Leslie, Georgia,

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<sup>475</sup> Ibid.

<sup>476</sup> National Committee Letter, April 6, 1950, A148. *Ingram, Rosa Lee - Press Releases*. N.d. Papers of the Civil Rights Congress. New York Public Library. *Archives Unbound*.

<sup>477</sup> Ingram Newsletter. April 1950. A148. *Ingram, Rosa Lee - Press Releases*. N.d. Papers of the Civil Rights Congress. New York Public Library. *Archives Unbound*.

USA to be freed and cleared of the injustice imposed upon her for defending her family against racial bigotry. It is important that she be returned to her home and children.”<sup>478</sup>

The committee strategically planned to contact as many nations as possible in order to create a global concern for the Ingram case. They provided feedback on how to contact women’s organizations, churches to radio stations, and even guidelines for horse-wagon Ingram floats. In its planning, the committee advised that “every organization should be asked to carry out activities of this kind. Such activities should be conducted in every community to arouse public opinion and interest.”<sup>479</sup>

On the its one-year anniversary, the National Committee to Free the Ingram Family, reported how, “[t]he Ingram story has been retold by thousands of voices, over the radio and by the press to millions. Mrs. Ingram has not borne the cross of this injustice alone. Wherever women and men hear about her crucifixion, voices will rise in protest. It is this ever swelling tide of protest that will free her.”<sup>480</sup>

### **“You Wives and Mothers”: The Committee’s Newsletter**

The discourse of race and gender extended into the committee’s daily operations and structure. The committee produced the “Ingram Newsletter” to recruit supporters and financial support and to spread the news of the work and activity going on throughout the

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<sup>478</sup> Letter to Mrs. Marie Henena 1951, Box 13 Folder 1, Louise Thompson Patterson papers, 1909-1999, Stuart Rose Library, Emory University.

<sup>479</sup> Memo on Ingram Committee Activities for Human Rights, n.d. *A148. Ingram, Rosa Lee - Press Releases*. N.d. Papers of the Civil Rights Congress. New York Public Library. *Archives Unbound*.

<sup>480</sup> Ingram Newsletter March 1950. *U123. Ingram, Rosa Lee - Newsletter*. N.d. Papers of the Civil Rights Congress. New York Public Library. *Archives Unbound*.

world.<sup>481</sup> In the newsletter, the committee reminded readers that a monthly dollar pledge was needed for “the active support of all of those who are sincerely concerned over the plight of this mother who has been torn from her young children at a time when they need her most.”<sup>482</sup> They committee asked, “You wives and mothers, you who know the suffering and worry of any mother who cannot be with the ones she loves—to you, we ask what more worthy purpose can your dollar serve?”<sup>483</sup> Also they used the newsletter to continue discussions about injustice within the U.S. In the July 1950 newsletter, the main topic was rape and violence against Black women which they connected to the Ingram case. They called these incidents, “but a few of the typical Ingram cases which happen daily in the United States...only an infinitesimal number ever reach the public.”<sup>484</sup> The materials produced by the committee stressed the importance of Black women’s experiences while still connecting them to the Ingram case. They addressed larger issues of oppression by discussing the lack of persecution or punishment for raping Black women.

Within the newsletter, letters to government officials and politicians were published to keep supporters informed about its attempts of direct contact and the lack of interaction with or progress of those in power. In the fight for Rosa Lee Ingram’s freedom, the committee wrote the U.S. president often demanding he intervene on the

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<sup>481</sup> Ingram News Letter. October 1950. *UI23. Ingram, Rosa Lee - Newsletter*. N.d. Papers of the Civil Rights Congress. New York Public Library. *Archives Unbound*.

<sup>482</sup> Ingram New Letter. January 3, 1950, a150. Ingram, Rosa Lee- Publications Papers of the Civil Rights Congress. New York Public Library. *Archives Unbound*

<sup>483</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>484</sup> Ingram News Letter. August 1950. Papers of the Civil Rights Congress. New York Public Library. *Archives Unbound*

Ingram family's behalf. Mary Church Terrell presented a statement on June 1, 1949 to the president on the behalf of the National Committee to Free the Ingram Family, in which she addressed the concerns of Black and white women about the Ingram case. She stated, "The colored women of the United States are shocked and pained at the inhuman treatment of Mrs. Rosa Lee Ingram, who has been given a life sentence for a crime she did not commit and is now lodged in a Georgia jail because she fought to preserve her honor."<sup>485</sup> Terrell discussed the how this violates the UN human rights declarations and how she was disappointed that the president refused to hear their concerns in person. Terrell promoted the "great humanitarian task" of having the support and sympathy of women of "the dominant race who realize that by identifying themselves with this just cause they are assuring the protection of the women of all racial groups in the United States." She discussed women of color's lack of protection from the government's "unfriendly attitude."<sup>486</sup> She addressed the importance of the case for all citizens, but "especially it is the duty of the colored women to acquaint the citizens of this country with the details of this crime perpetrated upon an innocent, upright women of their own group."<sup>487</sup> She argued that despite the hard handicaps of both race and sex, Black women "have made such progress along all lines of human endeavor." Even with the support of white women in the delegation, she positioned Black women at the center of the advocacy debate of their own discrimination and oppression. She distinguished the

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<sup>485</sup> Statement of Mrs. Mary Church Terrell, June 1, 1949. *A148. Ingram, Rosa Lee - Press Releases*. N.d. Papers of the Civil Rights Congress. New York Public Library. *Archives Unbound*

<sup>486</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>487</sup> *Ibid.*

difference of “attitudes” between races and its effects on gender issues. She established Black women as being human and deserving of protection and full citizenship.

In an April 1950 letter to the president, Mary Church Terrell defended Rosa Lee Ingram’s in her right of self-defense. Terrell wrote, “A woman has a right to defend her honor. A mother who is a widow has a right to defend her home and her loved ones. Does it matter in a democratic nation that this mother is a Negro?”<sup>488</sup> Drawing from the racial tensions in the U.S., Terrell centered on the plight of Black women and their lack of protection within their bodies and land. She asserted a larger sense of freedom would have to be granted in the multiple levels of Black women’s discrimination. As a leader, Mary Church Terrell influenced other Black female journalists to publicize the Rosa Lee Ingram case.

### **The Importance of Women’s Counsel: ANP’s Alice Dunnigan**

During the first delegation’s journey to Georgia in 1949, among the Black women supporting the Ingram case was Associated Negro Press White House correspondent Alice Dunnigan. Despite her years of professional experience, she had never covered an assignment in the criminal-justice arena. In her autobiography, she claimed the Georgia state court overlooked three important factors:

- 1) it was said to be common knowledge that the victim was not as much enraged about the trespassing livestock as he was about Mrs. Ingram’s rejection of his advances; 2) it was never proven in court which of the three was responsible for the fatal blow, and no matter which one it was, it appeared to be in self-defense; and 3) the court apparently gave no consideration to what many saw as an inhuman, coldblooded act on the part of local law officials in hauling

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<sup>488</sup> Letter to the President. April 1950. A148. *Ingram, Rosa Lee - Press Releases*. N.d. Papers of the Civil Rights Congress. New York Public Library. *Archives Unbound*



Mrs. Ingram and the older boys off to jail, leaving all alone the younger children.<sup>489</sup>

She concluded that she joined the committee in hopes that something could be done to free Mrs. Ingram. Dunnigan wrote a three-part series about her time in Georgia with the National Committee delegation. The first article described the committee's initial meeting with Rosa Lee Ingram. She described how the three-car caravan met the "dignified looking lady" who was a "perfect hostess" to "her guests."<sup>490</sup> Mrs. Ingram was a gendered-symbol of courage for the delegation. Dunnigan explained how the delegation was impressed by Mrs. Ingram's strength and peace through her situation as they interacted with her. She wrote,

The women of the group seated themselves leaving space in the center of the bench for their honored hostess. Talking in turns they explained to Mrs. Ingram how the national committee was formed for the purpose of trying to obtain her freedom.

'We want you to know,' said one of the ladies, 'that women all over America, whether colored or white are in sympathy with you and are willing to pool their efforts in an attempt to win your freedom.'

They shared with her their plan to first present a petition to President Truman on Mother's Day and a request for Mrs. Ingram to be paroled. They also planned to send petitions to the attorney general, the governor of Georgia and the Georgia Pardon and Parole board. The second part of the campaign included calls to city councils, state legislators, and the U.S. Congress to pass resolutions asking for Mrs. Ingram's and her

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<sup>489</sup> Ibid.

<sup>490</sup> Alice Dunnigan. National Committee to Free the Ingram Family Impressed with Mrs. Ingram. *Atlanta Daily World*. April 20, 1949, 2.

two sons' freedom, and finally to carry the case to the United Nations Council of Human Rights.<sup>491</sup>

Dunnigan's first story also touched on the oppressive and forced labor aspects of the prison system. She explained how Mrs. Ingram wasn't allowed a coat or other clothes from the outside and how she wasn't permitted extra food unless she had money. The story emphasized Rosa Lee Ingram's heart attack and declining health due to the prison's poor conditions and lack of medical attention. She also discussed how Mrs. Ingram worked in an almshouse where she and seventeen other Black inmates "were bought for the purpose of doing the work and caring the poor whites who are housed there."<sup>492</sup>

In her stories, Dunnigan reported the delegation's reactions that reflected the range of emotions between the women. For example, she mentioned that white Virginian delegate Eloise Stafford "burst into tears as the weight of injustices done Negro people by her southern forefathers now rested on her shoulders."<sup>493</sup> By writing about white women's roles in the struggle, Dunnigan showed how Black liberation needed the involvement of whites to address systemic issues. The National Committee embraced an interracial stance in order to appeal to anti-communist critics.

The second installment from Dunnigan's Ingram story series focused on Ingram's children and home. Dunnigan discussed the poor conditions of the house and the poverty of the remaining Ingram children despite help from the NAACP national office. She argued the solution of building the Ingram family a home was limiting because the

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<sup>491</sup> Ibid.

<sup>492</sup> Ibid.

<sup>493</sup> Ibid.

organization had not provided transportation for the children to see their mother. Using the discourse of gender, Dunnigan explained the difference of male-dominated versus women-dominated leadership in activism. She wrote,

While a man looks at the whole situation from a business angle a woman will look out for the humanitarian interest. A woman knows what it means for a mother to be deprived of the right to see her children for almost a year. Thus, a woman on the committee would see to it that the children visited their mother often. A woman has some idea of the cost of clothing and knows the embarrassment of trying to purchase clothing with insufficient funds. She realizes the necessary work in keeping eight children clean when they scarcely have changing clothes.<sup>494</sup>

She criticized NAACP's aid monetary relief because it wasn't meeting the emotional needs of the Ingram children. She wrote from the perspective of a mother caring for Ingram's children and focused on women's daily needs. This discourse promoted the importance of women's roles in activism through local, humanitarian work that expanded into larger campaigns. Dunnigan's news article served as a way the national committee differentiated itself from other organizations involved in the Ingram case.

In the final part of Ingram series, Alice Dunnigan wrote about the national committee's "southern tour" and the racism they encountered<sup>495</sup> During their overnight stay in Augusta, Georgia, she reported how word of the interracial delegation had caused the city officials to go "up in arms" and a "shroud of fear" entered the Black household in which they were staying. She described the delegation's experience to give understanding of the possibility of racial violence in the South. She wrote, "The delegation, which had

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<sup>494</sup> Alice Dunnigan. Ingram Family Fund Needs Woman Counsel. *Atlanta Daily World*. May 2, 1949, 2.

<sup>495</sup> Alice Dunnigan. Ingram Delegation Found Both Contempt and Courtesy on Their Southern Tour. *Atlanta Daily World*, May 18, 1949, 3.

suddenly become interracial, so disturbed the host that he called in the pastor of his church and several other influential people of the city for consultation.”<sup>496</sup> She continued in the news article to discuss the “good hospitality” the delegation was shown despite the lack of federal protection Mary Church Terrell had requested. In describing their tour encounters with white males, Alice Dunnigan wrote how the reluctance to work with the delegation had completely changed by the time they left Georgia.”<sup>497</sup> This discourse of race and gender illustrated the attitude and differences of power in the South because the interracial group of women was not met with a threat or direct challenge and their unity represented progress for social change. Dunnigan described how A.T Walden, attorney for the Ingrams was concerned for the women’s safety, but was “convinced for a long time that the rank and file of Negro people is right and that the ordinary people see our problems with greater discernment than many of the supposed leaders.” She also quoted Walden’s high regard for Mary Church Terrell’s leadership and reported Walden saying, “It is most fitting and becoming that a woman of the stature of Mrs. Mary Church Terrell should sponsor such a movement among the women of the nation because she has in her life and personality exhibited the finest type of womanhood in the nation.”<sup>498</sup> Based on the response and actions, Dunnigan concluded the delegation was a success in its “efforts to free the “symbolic ‘mother of 1949’” because of “the friendship and cooperation” of the citizens and officials.

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<sup>496</sup> Ibid.

<sup>497</sup> Ibid.

<sup>498</sup> Ibid

Throughout her writings about Mrs. Ingram, Alice Dunnigan held Ingram in reverence and symbolism of freedom. The discourse she generated focused on the strength of womanhood and motherhood because Dunnigan described Mrs. Ingram using adjectives, such as, “gracious and courageous,” “matron-like,” and “poise and control of emotion.” She represented Rosa Lee Ingram as a good woman and mother, which presented the human rights framework that appealed to women’s rights at the center. Respectability politics forced Black women into altering their identities in order to uplift the race. By conforming to middle-class ideals, Black women were participating in oppositional knowledge by redefining stereotypes, but this conversion reinforced the status quo. By trying to be accepted by white mainstream culture, it downplayed issues of oppression and refocused on those worthy of equality.

Her writings unified Black and white women under a gendered experience, but featured the responses of white women in the delegation to acknowledge the difference of Black women’s complexities of race and class. The discourse of all women advocating for equal and human rights elevated the status of Black women because Rosa Lee Ingram symbolized the experiences of injustice and oppression.

### **“Our Negro Sisters:” White Women and Black Feminism**

In response to opening the debate of gender rights, white women began writing letters to officials to address the oppression of Black women. An unnamed white woman wrote to the committee about the differences of their discrimination because of race issues. She described, “White women all over this country owe our Negro sisters our profound gratitude for your courageous leadership in the fight against the ever-mounting brutalization of the American people. Far too long have we passively stood by while you

have suffered untold indignities and violence.”<sup>499</sup> The 1951 letter described how Jim Crow policies had intensified through “militarization of our country” and targeted Blacks through “legal murder.”<sup>500</sup> Letters like this illustrated the contradictory nature of democracy because citizens were becoming aware of how national policies diverted attention to other forms of foreign military controls. Again, domesticity and family were at the center of reasoning for Ingram’s freedom, but Black women also addressed the racial injustice of the country.

In 1951, five white women being held in a Los Angeles jail on Smith Act indictments called for an intensified campaign for Rosa Lee Ingram. They released a statement to the State Board of Georgia asking for her pardon and declared,

We five California women, part of the 15 indicted in this under the Smith Act have spent 98 days in the Los Angeles County jail. Because of our experiences, we have increased understanding of what it has meant to this mother in a Georgia prison torn from her family with the terrible knowledge that her young children are left without the protection of their parents to the mercy of a Ku Klux Klan-dominated southern community. We are more determined than ever to do everything we can to win Mrs. Ingram’s freedom. Her pardon will depend to a very large extent on the sea of letters and telegrams sent from all parts of the country demanding her freedom. We therefore appeal to our friends and comrades to reach especially women and mothers asking them to deluge the Georgia pardon board with letters and telegrams.<sup>501</sup>

Experiencing imprisonment themselves, these five women illustrated how lived-experiences highlight oppression. As white women, they recognized the plight of Ingram

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<sup>499</sup> Letter to the National Committee 1951, Box 13 Folder 1, Louise Thompson Patterson papers, 1909-1999, Stuart Rose Library, Emory University.

<sup>500</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>501</sup> 5 Women Smith Act Victims Call Drive to Free Mrs. Rosa Lee Ingram. *Daily Worker*, November 7, 1951, 5.

and other Black women and asked women and mothers to acknowledge the larger system that discriminated against their identities and statuses.

The National Committee to Free the Ingram Family put a lot of production to incorporate white women in its protest and activism. For example, in 1954, the national committee increased its recruitment of white women by producing a pamphlet to point out “the double standard of justice and will be directed especially toward white women, showing their stake in and responsibility for the freedom of Mrs. Ingram.”<sup>502</sup> Also, plans for a white women’s delegation scheduled in the last two weeks in August “to gain support for Mrs. Ingram especially from white women.”<sup>503</sup> Instructions were to ask only one question of the women approach as possible delegates, “Should Mrs. Ingram be freed?” White women delegates were told to “secure at least one white man delegate on this basis; and arrange a list of Georgia contacts among white women or contacts in the state which could help with names of white women there.”<sup>504</sup>

As interracial alliances continued to forge, white women placed more emphasis on Ingram as a mother than on racial injustices. One letter stated how Rosa Lee Ingram was “the most poignant symbol of the base of ingratitude and brutality to which we have descended. Instead of the highest honors being bestowed on her as a working mother, she lies in jail ill and separated from her children, while her two sons share her miserable fate.”<sup>505</sup> The voices of white women would aid in the campaign through the discourse of

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<sup>502</sup> Chapter Bulletin July 9, 1951, 9. A148. *Ingram, Rosa Lee - Press Releases*. N.d. Papers of the Civil Rights Congress. New York Public Library. *Archives Unbound*

<sup>503</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>504</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>505</sup> Letter to 1951, Box 13 Folder 1, Louise Thompson Patterson papers, 1909-1999, Stuart Rose Library, Emory University.

gender by empathetically presenting Mrs. Ingram within the norms of motherhood, while also noting the brutality and violence she endured because of her race. The letters reflected how white women's roles in the campaign were to be a mainstream justification for womanhood and humanity for Black women. But soon the appeal of human rights would shift.

The 1952 presidential election would intensify the conditions of the Cold War as well as shift the debate of human rights. President Dwight Eisenhower had the reputation of being timorous on civil rights issues. NAACP's Walter White argued Eisenhower's plan on civil rights was not a plan at all because Eisenhower felt civil rights had no place in American politics.<sup>506</sup> Resentment against the UN increased among Americans as the belief that it was a direct threat to U.S. power and sovereignty grew. In 1952, more than 25,000 petitions had been presented to the UN and U.S. political leaders criticized Black organizations for bringing domestic issues to the international scene. To protect America from the United Nations, Republican Senator John W. Bricker of Ohio led the campaign to cut ties with the Commission on Human Rights. Historian Carol Anderson saw Bricker's move as an indication that the comprehensive needs of the Black community were secondary to anti-communist policies."<sup>507</sup> The campaign for Rosa Lee Ingram would continue to tackle issues of equality through the discourse of gender with Black women at the center of the struggle.

#### **1954: "Ingram Freedom Fight"**

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<sup>506</sup> 211

<sup>507</sup> Carol Anderson. *Eyes Off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944-1955*, 208.



In 1954, the Ingrams were one year from being up for parole and supporters intensified their efforts to free the trio. The National Committee to Free the Ingram Family created an “Outline of Ingram Freedom Fight” where they mapped out the strategic aim of exposing the “tactics of persecutors.”<sup>508</sup> Among the calendar of steps was sending delegations to Attorney General Herbert Brownell in February, to the United Nations in April, and to the Georgia State Capitol on Mother’s Day.<sup>509</sup>

In preparation for another delegation to Attorney Brownell’s department on February 27, 1954, a memo was sent out to participants detailing the order of events. It described how “every effort must be made to see Brownell despite his opposition” and how chairwoman Mary Church Terrell was to introduce to the Civil Rights Division with evidence of violations of the federal Civil Rights statutes in the trial and conviction of Rosa Lee Ingram. Also, a female youth speaker named Damon was to be made more active in the fight. The memo emphasized the importance of “the dual citizenship of Americans, especially Negroes who are as the Constitution prescribes citizens of the State.”<sup>510</sup>

After the delegation visit in a letter, Church recalled how they were well-received, but were told again they could do nothing because the statute of limitations had run its course and more than three years had lapsed since the conviction of this woman. She explained how Mrs. Ingram was “framed because she defended her honor and the honor

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<sup>508</sup> Outline of Ingram Freedom Fight, 1954. A148. *Ingram, Rosa Lee - Press Releases*. N.d. Papers of the Civil Rights Congress. New York Public Library. *Archives Unbound*

<sup>509</sup> Ibid.

<sup>510</sup> Memo, 1954. A78. *Ingram, Rosa Lee - Press Releases*. 1954. Papers of the Civil Rights Congress. New York Public Library. *Archives Unbound*

of American Womanhood; convicted only through the gross violation of her Constitutional rights.” She blamed the government for its persecution of colored men and women and its “barrier to prevent us from securing the justice which all decency demands.”<sup>511</sup>

### **“One Purpose in Mind:” The Last Stand**

As the 1954 campaign continued to strike at the government’s violation of Black civil rights, the Black Press had dwindled to a minimal existence. Despite the industry decline, *Chicago Defender* Black female journalist Rebecca Stiles Dodson remained active in addressing Black women’s role in activism. Writing about women’s clubs and organizations in her weekly column, Dodson addressed the unity of women surrounding the Rosa Lee Ingram case and praised the work women can do in solidarity. She believed, “Remember—one woman is useful, one hundred women are forceful; one thousand women are powerful, and one million women united are invincible.”<sup>512</sup>

For her, Black women were part of an interracial, global community of women and needed to be recognized as such.<sup>513</sup> In explaining Mrs. Ingram’s significance, Dodson wrote, “This case must be fought with one purpose in mind. The status of Negro womanhood in the United States of America.”<sup>514</sup> She wrote about the National Committee to Free for the Ingram Family as an unusual gathering of women from all

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<sup>511</sup> Letter To National Committee. A78. *Ingram, Rosa Lee - Press Releases*. 1954. Papers of the Civil Rights Congress. New York Public Library. *Archives Unbound*

<sup>512</sup> Abner Berry. On the Way: Make Mother’s Day Mrs. Ingram Day. *Daily Worker*, April 30, 1954, 4.

<sup>513</sup> Caryl Cooper. Selling Negro Women to Negro Women and to the World Rebecca Stiles Taylor and the Chicago Defender, 1939-1945. *Journalism History*.

<sup>514</sup> Rebecca Styles Dodson. “Rosa Lee Ingram Gets a New Trial.” *Chicago Defender*, June 12, 1954, 16.

backgrounds as proof of peace, freedom and democracy.<sup>515</sup> She explained, “The unity of the delegates, Negro and white, from North and South was an indication of what women can do when they get together.” Dodson centered Rosa Lee Ingram in the global understanding of oppression when she described how “four-fifths of all the people in the world are dark skinned; that people all over the world know about Mrs. Ingram, and the atrocious punishment meted out to her.”<sup>516</sup> The discourse of racialized oppression was positioned around Mrs. Ingram and her experiences as a means of discussing freedom and “true democracy.”<sup>517</sup> Focusing on peace and democracy, Dodson critically argued about the perspective of the U.S. government. For example, she wrote about President Dwight Eisenhower’s speech to the United Nations about peace, but soon after in his “State of the Union” message addressed America’s freedom being threatened by the world of communism. She wrote, “In every utterance, Mr. Eisenhower took the side of the forces counter to the peoples’ liberation movements in Asia and Africa and the Middle East.”<sup>518</sup> Arguing on the side of peace, she wrote women must continue to show that “co-existence is possible” and call for peace.

While Dodson called for peace and unity, she pointed out the discrimination between white and Black women. “The defense of womanhood can never called a crime and womanhood knows no skin coloration,” Dodson wrote in her April 1954 column. “Had she been the humblest and poorest illiterate white woman...she would be lauded to

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<sup>515</sup> Rebecca Styles Dodson. “Chicago Women Act for Peace.” *Chicago Defender*, February 6, 1954, 16.

<sup>516</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>517</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>518</sup> *Ibid.*

the skies for courageous act, but she belonged to a minority group of color, which no white man has need to respect.” She addressed lack of advocacy from Black women in the Ingram case and claimed that they were “sleeping at the switch” by not joining the campaign. When the committee sought to make Rosa Lee Ingram “Mother of the Year” in 1954, Dodson described Mrs. Ingram as deserving “the honored consideration from progressive mankind, especially from thinking women.” Dodson focused on Black women honoring and empowering other Black women. She wrote, “The women are out to secure protection for themselves and their children. It is well that Rosa Lee Ingram and her children get some of that protection NOW.”<sup>519</sup> She continued this message outside of journalism as well. Prior to her March 13 column, she wrote Mary Church Terrell reminding her to “keep up the good work” and telling her she was proud of the work Terrell was doing.<sup>520</sup>

In response to Dodson’s column, the *Daily Worker* joined behind Dodson’s plea. Journalist Abner Berry wrote, “There is anger mixed with the deep humanism expressed by Miss Dodson; it is an anger which cries out for action by millions. Can we not buy Mrs. Ingram flowers for delivery on Mother’s Day? Can we not send her mountains of cards?”.<sup>521</sup> Berry proposed readers to join the Mother’s Day movement to, “end the martyrdom of Mrs. Ingram! Give her the honor due her as a mother who would not surrender her honor and who never complained of the burden which was hers as a

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<sup>519</sup> Berry. On the Way

<sup>520</sup> Letter to Mary Church Terrell. February 1954. A78. *Ingram, Rosa Lee - Press Releases*. 1954. Papers of the Civil Rights Congress. New York Public Library. *Archives Unbound*

<sup>521</sup> Berry. On the Way

Georgia Negro widow.” In his article, Berry reference the significance of Dodson and Mary Church Terrell as leaders “for democracy and justice.”<sup>522</sup>

On Mother’s Day 1954, the committee of Black and white women gathered in Atlanta and completed its fourth delegation for Rosa Lee Ingram. In a report following the event, it stated how “each successive delegation has deepened and extended the struggle for the freedom of Rosa Lee Ingram. The Ingram case has reached all corners of the earth.” Black women made up more than half of the 75 delegates in attendance with the majority being from New York. *Atlanta Daily World’s* Mrs. W.A. Scott proposed the establishment of a permanent committee on a state and citywide scale to work the Ingram case. This committee would coordinate the work throughout the state of Georgia and the city of Atlanta and would receive communications on activities elsewhere and cooperate with women in other states.<sup>523</sup>

Ill at the time, chairwoman Mary Church Terrell was absent from the May 1954 delegation. In a letter, Terrell expressed that she hoped this event would be “successful to liberating this woman.”<sup>524</sup> A few months later, on July 24, Terrell would pass away and the momentum of the campaign would die with her. The proposed permanent local committee would take over the Ingram case, but the national movement would end as other civil rights cases, like *Brown vs. Board of Education* would usher in the modern-day Civil Rights Movement.

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<sup>522</sup> Ibid.

<sup>523</sup> A Report from Georgia, 1954. A78. *Ingram, Rosa Lee - Press Releases*. 1954. Papers of the Civil Rights Congress. New York Public Library. *Archives Unbound*

<sup>524</sup> Letter to Southern Patriot, December 29, 1953.



## Chapter 10: Conclusion-Understanding Black Women's History

“Thank God, we’re free!” After 12 years of imprisonment, those were the first words expressed by Rosa Lee Ingram on August 28, 1959 as she and her two sons were released from prison.<sup>525</sup>

“I never lost the faith...almost, but just kept praying,” Mrs. Ingram told the *Atlanta Daily World*.<sup>526</sup>

The Ingram family was released into the custody of Clayton R. Yates, who promised to employ them. The trio was picked up taken to Yates’ home in Atlanta. They were met by the press and a large crowd of citizens “on hand to welcome them to Atlanta and freedom and to question them about the past and the future.” The international campaign to free them had succeeded and those who had campaigned were eager to see them move forward with their lives.

Now 51, Mrs. Ingram and her sons, 27 and 25 expressed their thanks to Mr. Yates for advocating on their behalf while still acknowledging the past efforts made. In the *Daily World* article, controversy around the one question still swirled in the media discourse— surrounding the “affair,” or John Stratford’s “advance of intimacy on her.” Rosa Lee Ingram denied a relationship, but not the fact that Stratford sexually harassed her. The media discourse was still fixated on her right to consent and defend herself. The larger discussion of her humanity and human rights positioned her lived experiences to the background as the narrowed understanding of Black liberation focused on stereotypes

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<sup>525</sup> William Folkes. “Mrs. Rosa Lee Ingram and Two Sons Arrive in City to Begin New Life,” *Atlanta Daily World*, August 29, 1959, 1.

<sup>526</sup> *Ibid.*

of hypersexuality. The questioning of her self-defense affirmed the lack of protection given towards Black women. After twelve years of imprisonment, Ingram's multi-level identity diminished and mainstream stereotypes of Black women remained the main discourse. As result of late-1950s political climate, the Black women's voices were silenced and erased from the larger discussions of oppression because the discourse centralized on U.S. racial inequality and less on global understandings human rights. Due to the effects of the Cold War, the Rosa Lee Ingram case reflected the shaping of media discourse over issues of race, gender and class. The complexity media coverage of social justice issues is shaped by the production of power through language and social behavior. Within the larger Black newspapers, specifically the *Atlanta Daily World*, in its coverage the case served as an example of the Jim Crow's hold in the criminal justice system. The *Courier* took the approach of focusing on Rosa Lee Ingram's lived experience prior to the incident and empowered the voice of Black women. The case positioned Black female journalists to have a space for multi-level discussions about Black women oppressions within the framework of human rights.

### **The Black Female Journalists' Perspective**

As the previous chapters outlined, Black female journalists elevated Rosa Lee Ingram's status and wrote about the complexity to Black women's lived experiences. They wrote about the case by highlighting their lived-experiences and presenting unique perspectives of Black women's oppression and discrimination. Black female journalists, like Claudia Jones, Charlotta Bass, Mary Church Terrell and Alice Dunnigan, combined journalism with activism in their actions with the Ingram case. They advocated beyond the newsroom and created a countermovement that addressed human rights. The media



discourse of race, gender and class were important aspects of Rosa Lee Ingram's fight for freedom as the media language and practices challenged power dynamics within society. This project highlights how some Black female journalists were among the leading voices in the activism and equality on multiple levels. The overtime shift of the discourse reflected how advocacy media evolve to challenge political climates. It contributes to the historical understanding of Cold War politics and how Black women engaged actively in international political ideologies. Within the climate of the Cold War, Rosa Lee Ingram served as a symbol for Black female journalists to rally behind because full citizenship and human rights was a global political discourse.

As Black female journalists, these women held special responsibility to advocate for their race as well as their gender and class. Black women have struggled with which form of their oppression to challenge first and which identity markers to push to the background. Historically, racial prejudice has been at the forefront of the fight for citizenship, but most recently scholars have discovered that Black women activists addressed women's rights issues at the same time. Black female journalists realized their race and gender could make them agents for change.

The erasure of Black female journalists speaks to the foundation of Black feminist thought because their writings highlight their unique perspectives.<sup>527</sup> Most the dominant history has been chronicled by white men, who have discounted Black women as contributing to important events in the historical narrative. Historian Gerda Lerner argued

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<sup>527</sup> Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 10.

four stages of conceptualizing women's history.<sup>528</sup> First comes compensatory history, which fills in the gaps of historical records to include significant women and describing their accomplishments. The second stage describes the contribution history, which situates women's accomplishments and status in a male-defined society. Next comes a transitional stage that depends on women's own words, including personal archives, letters, diaries and autobiographies. This allows historians to create new categories of discovery. The final stage is one of synthesis which blends women's history with men's history to create a history of all people. For Black women, this process is ongoing. Recent scholarship has highlighted the prejudice against these women by telling their stories of defiance, but still centralizes on Black female journalists being pioneers. Breaking barriers does little to explain how Black women have been leaders in their community or the everyday lived experiences of Black women. As journalists, Black women have added to the voice of the Black community, specifically for other Black women. They spoke to both racial, economic, and sexual discrimination, some more than others, but each had to situate themselves in a profession dominated by white men. Some of them were driven by their journalistic mission: to be objective and cover the news. Then others did not centralize their identities to the profession and sought to be more militant, bold and aggressive in their voice to address systems of oppression. Regardless of their tactics or tone, each Black female journalists chose to fight back and change history.

### **The Long Struggle Against Racism**

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<sup>528</sup> Gerda Lerner. "Placing Women in History: Definitions and Challenges." *Feminist Studies* 3, no. 1/2 (1975): 5-14.

For Rosa Lee Ingram, her plight gained international concern because she represented different intersections of marginalized communities. The media produced coverage focusing on racism within the courts, but widened the debate because Ingram's gender symbolized the importance of Black women's rights. Class dynamic played out in the Black Press as efforts with the NAACP, the *Daily World* and the *Pittsburgh Courier* reinforced middle-class respectability and integration practices popular in the Civil Rights Movement. Blacks leaders often stressed racial self-help as a complement to political action. They drew on a long tradition that suggested the duty of middle-class Black to "uplift" lower-class Blacks.<sup>529</sup>

The position of Black women as leaders within the struggle would decline after the World War II, but the symbolism of women would continue with 1950s events and actions like Rosa Parks and Montgomery Bus boycott. It would be Black women who moved the civil rights discussion into the mainstream society. The circumstances and issues of the Rosa Lee Ingram case are not new phenomena because oppression and discrimination of Black women still exist. The protection of Black women are shrouded in complex networks that have been pushed to the background or decentralized Black women from the social hierarchy.

Due to their unique outsider-within position in the United States' social, political and economic hierarchies, Black women have ushered in and served as the driving forces behind grassroots organizing of civil and women's rights. In the long struggle for freedom, Black radicalism was diverse and intersecting, but collective in its racial goal

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<sup>529</sup> Geary, *Beyond Civil Rights*, 46.

for rights. With a demand for rights, Black women's activism represents a strand of Black radicalism rooted in the layered identities of race, gender, sexuality and class.

### **Media Representations of Black Women**

News media coverage of recent movements like Black Lives Matter reflect the long history of women standing at the forefront of issues like racial discrimination and police violence. Advocacy media and public forums, like Black Twitter and the Black Press serve as the voice for the Black community to address salient community issues. The BLM movement's three Black queer women founders' message changed from the primarily on police violence and brutality against the Black community to narrowing the focus to Black males. As a result, in mainstream news media discourse, the purpose of protection of "all" Black lives diminished and Black women became invisible within their own community reinforcing an outsider-within notion.

The 2015 death of Sandra Bland reignited Black women's position and establish #SayHerName, a separate movement from Black Lives Matter protesting anti-Black police violence for Black women, and trans and queer identities. Gender politics were missing from the news media discourse.<sup>530</sup> This campaign transformed to include a wider understanding of racism and sexism in order combat injustices that primarily center on Black women and non-binary individuals.

In the combating injustices, we still see Black women's activism taken and transformed to fit within mainstream culture. In 2017, #metoo became a social media movement popularized by white actresses and celebrities, but Me Too, a nonprofit that

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<sup>530</sup> Sandra Bland was a 28-year-old black woman who was found hung in a jail cell in Waller County, Texas, on July 13, 2015

helps survivors <sup>531</sup>of sexual violence, was created over ten years ago by Tarana Burke, a Black woman. The denial of Black women within their own movements relate to the evolution of the Rosa Lee Ingram's media discourse. As other lived-experiences maintain the social and political value for change, it comes at a cost of other marginalized communities. Black women are invisible or erased from the media discourse and activism because there isn't a framework for their identities. Kimberle Crenshaw argued that Black women have been theoretically erased due to the single-axis framework.<sup>532</sup> People's experiences are much broader than a general framework of discrimination. Therefore, Black women have been erased physically and theoretically from the discussions and understandings of oppression and discrimination. Identities are multi-leveled due to power struggles through networks of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class and ability. Crenshaw presented a position of intersectionality to delve deeper into the understanding of oppression.<sup>533</sup> Scholars have noted that media tend to focus on certain single-identities and erase other multiple, intersecting identities which normalizes media narrative stereotypes.<sup>1</sup> An intersectional media discourse presents a

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<sup>532</sup> Kimberlee Crenshaw. Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. U. Chi. Legal F. 1989, 139. Crenshaw presented a position of intersectionality that delved deeper into the understanding of oppression. She noted that Black women are oppressed on many levels, but mostly on race and gender. Black women's experiences are much broader than a general framework of discrimination. As the larger society devalues this multi-dimensional existence, scholars have promoted the existence of varied, diverse experiences. Oppression goes beyond one set identity/characteristic. Ignoring the other identities of a person adds to the devalue and subordination.

<sup>533</sup> Kimberle Crenshaw Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. Stanford law review, 1991, 1241-1299.

multiple-axis framework for understanding forms of oppression and discrimination by inviting social complexity in media narratives.

The activism and advocacy of intersectional identities have embraced the larger discussion of human rights by highlighting the complex framework of oppression and discrimination in social, political, and economic systems and institutions. It is this framework of oppression that Black women have historically navigated in the margins, in order to advocate for themselves and their identities in pursuit of creating social change.

Despite a lack of visibility as leaders, Black women have emerged as symbolic figures for particular moments in history and offered oppositional knowledge to the hegemonic identities whose perspectives are typically privileged. Black feminist scholar Patricia Hill-Collins suggested that Black Feminist thought as oppositional knowledge means doing serious, diligent, and thoughtful work to dismantle unjust power structures.<sup>534</sup> Black women as symbolic figures continue to look beyond the difficulties and victories of one's own labor and contributed to oppositional stances on systematic, societal oppressions.

Black women have continually demanded agency through their writing and advocacy. Like other subordinate groups, Black women have not only developed a distinctive Black woman's standpoint, but they have done so by using alternative means of producing and validating knowledge. Hill-Collins argued that our knowledge or truth shapes our power relations of who is believed and why.<sup>535</sup> Black women's standpoint is

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<sup>534</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, "Black Feminist Thought as Oppositional Knowledge," *Departures in Critical Qualitative Research*, Vol5, No. 3, (Fall 2016), 133-144.

<sup>535</sup> Collins. *Black Feminist Thought*, 252

reaffirmed in presenting the experiences of Black women because it suppresses the prevailing knowledge.

### **Reclaiming Our Bodies**

From slavery through most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, white America denied Black women citizenship and equality, especially the right of ownership, control and self-defense of their own bodies. The exploitation of Black women in the U.S. is a central part of our history that has been unrecognized which is why we still see these discourses recur again and again. To examine the details of violence and rape is crucial to understanding the institutionalized silence reflected in mass media. The discourse surrounding the lack of protection and self-defense reaffirms society's stereotypes of Black women's identities as hypersexualized through both their race and gender. The brutal injustices of Rosa Lee Ingram in 1947 and the oppression of Black women have been challenged by the work of Black women whose efforts continue to recognize their personhood. Until the advocacy for Black women becomes a priority, Black women will continue the work of voicing their lived experiences within mainstream discussions and social movements. As Black women persist to tell their stories, they reclaim their bodies and humanity against years of abuse. Their public protests have sparked national and international liberations and freedom movements, but the analyses of complexities surrounding Black women's full citizenship, specifically their racial, sexual and economic rights, play small role in the main discourse.

Mainstream history has yet to recognize the process of Black women fighting for their bodily integrity, economic freedom and racial liberation. Historian Danielle McGuire argued the real story of the civil rights movement is rooted in Black women's

long struggle against sexual violence.<sup>536</sup> Segregationists responded to the Black liberation movement with a sexually charged campaign of terror to derail the freedom movement. A number of campaigns during the 1950s and beyond, challenged white supremacy by addressing the relationship between sexual domination and racial equality.

Our negative notions of sexual violence and race still dominate the news media, but the existence of alternative and non-traditional media continue to give voice to Black women and other oppressed communities in the U.S. It is through these outlets and the growing access to technology that social movements have been able to break through and address larger discussions of social issues.

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<sup>536</sup>McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street*, xix.



## **VITA**

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