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Claremont McKenna College

**Progressive Maternity and Reproductive Justice: The Identity of Motherhood
as a Conduit of American Social Policy**

submitted to

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by Sharanya Suresh

for Senior Thesis

Fall 2023

Dec 4, 2023

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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Professor BensonSmith for her guidance, patience, and support throughout the writing of this thesis. She inspired me to do a deep dive into gender and sexuality in social policy and equipped me with the knowledge to write on it. Thanks to Professor BensonSmith, I've found a new passion.

I also want to extend my gratitude to my beautiful, brilliant friends, the Losers™, who sat with me in the computer lab for countless hours and held my hand all the way to the finish line. They quelled my anxieties with endless laughter and affection. Here's to our continued tradition of shenanigans, everyday.

And finally, I want to acknowledge my mother, father, and brother for showing me what unconditional love is. And a special acknowledgement to my dog, Jude, for sitting with me at our dining table, day and night.

Thesis Roadmap

For this thesis, I will be exploring the following research questions: How did primary actors such as the activists and scholars within the Progressive Maternity and Reproductive

Justice movements use and construct maternal and gender identities within their respective movements? What are the policy implications for building coalitions around gender and motherhood? My hypothesis: The Progressive Maternity movement embraces motherhood as an identity by which we coalesce and create policy, while the Reproductive Justice movement has a nuanced understanding of motherhood and gender, with a rejection of the notion that citizenship is contingent on motherhood at the center of their political agenda.

Why is this research important? The Progressive Maternity and Reproductive Justice movements were and are about allowing individuals the independence to make their own informed decisions about their health, wellbeing, security, and financial support. Understanding the purpose behind these frameworks – particularly concerning the identity of motherhood – enables us to comprehend what our society deems necessary to attain full citizenship and probe at the public policy measures that have restricted, are restricting, and will restrict maternal and reproductive rights. This research also enables us to think critically about what deficits existed in the Progressive Maternity framework and what deficits exist currently in the Reproductive Justice framework. By understanding how gender operates as an identity in each space, we can consider how current movements may operate in future settings. Further, by critically examining each framework, we can assess who is represented and who is left behind in the existing scholarship and research. By exploring these insufficiencies, we can make key connections between who the literature forgets and who social policies target. This thesis will thus provide the contribution of situating the identity of motherhood within the broader context of the political sphere and the policies it imbues as either mechanisms of or hindrances to socioeconomic upward mobility, political participation, fully realized bodily autonomy, and sexual citizenship.

This thesis will look at the Progressive Motherhood and Reproductive Justice movements using an intersectional lens. Kimberle Crenshaw first laid out the term “intersectionality” in her article “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics.” In it, Crenshaw expresses her frustration that “Black women are sometimes excluded from feminist theory and antiracist policy discourse because both are predicated on a discrete set of experiences that often does not accurately reflect the interaction of race and gender,” and “because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated” (Crenshaw, 140). Thus, I use intersectional theory, a framework for understanding the unique oppressions individuals face based on their intersecting identities, to analyze the role of the Progressive Motherhood and Reproductive Justice frameworks in addressing disadvantages faced by diverse women through social policies. I will also analyze how Reproductive Justice uses intersectional theorizing within reproductive rights movements to expand into areas beyond the fight for abortion rights, inclusive of other forms of social, economic, and political injustices experienced by women of color.

This thesis will also look at the Progressive Motherhood and Reproductive Justice movements using a social justice lens. I will operate off of the definition provided by Maurianne Adams in “Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice”: “An analysis of how power, privilege, and oppression impact our experience of our social identities. ‘Full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. Social justice includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable’ and all members of a space, community, or institution, or society are ‘physically and psychologically safe and secure’”

(Adams et al. 2016). Using social justice theory alongside intersectional theory will enable me to critically examine if and where social justice fits within the political sphere, and if and where it is employed to equitably meet the needs of all of the government's constituents as those needs shift and change.

Furthermore, I will analyze how Reproductive Justice answers the deficits of Progressive Maternalism in how gender operates as an identity in political spaces and as a political movement. In particular, I argue that gender operates in Progressive Motherhood as: an extension of a white, middle-class, Protestant default, founded on white male political culture and white female cultural ideals, and is weaponized against women who strayed from the dominant group's traditional values. Further, I contend that gender operates within Progressive Motherhood as not only an extension but as a condition for membership; if you are not a white, cis-gender woman, the core tenets of Progressive Motherhood will not apply to you. Conversely, gender operates in the following ways in Reproductive Justice: if one is capable of motherhood they are free to choose the conditions, if desired, under which to have a child, to be sexually, economically, and politically autonomous, and to center the marginalized and unify across difference to ensure the full access to what the government is obligated to provide.

Literature Review

This literature review consists of a summary, analysis, and comparison of scholarly works on the Progressive Maternity and Reproductive Justice frameworks. It serves as a basis to answer the following questions: How do the strategies of Progressive Maternity and Reproductive Justice talk through identity of motherhood and the construct of gender? What are the policy implications for building coalitions around this identity? Both frameworks operate as a means to enable reproductively capable individuals the independence to make their own informed decisions about their health, wellbeing, security, and financial support. Understanding the purposes behind these frameworks – concerning maternity and the identity of motherhood – allows us to comprehend what our society deems necessary to attain full citizenship and probe at the public policy measures that have restricted, are restricting, and will restrict its correlative rights.

The most salient, visible feature of Progressive Maternity are its leaders: white, middle class, Protestant women. The maternalist rhetoric and ideology at its very core adhered to the idea that women have some sort of financial dependence on men. It also suggested that maternalist policies were conditional on women's willingness to conform to a culturally specific American lifestyle; this lifestyle was lived by middle class white women but failed to take into account the ways in which the intersections of race, class, and gender demoralized and subjugated poor women of color.

The principal features of the Reproductive Justice framework are as follows: reproductive justice combines the terms "reproductive rights" and "social justice" as a means to analyze reproductive health and motherhood through a human rights lens that acknowledges the intersections of race, class, and gender. Reproductive justice works to affirm citizenship for

reproductively capable persons by discrediting the white supremacist and colonialist narrative that links cultural differences with moral failings. Lastly, it is founded on three major beliefs: that people with the reproductive capacity have the right to bear children, they have the right to not bear children, and they have the right to bear children in a safe and healthy environment. These fully realized beliefs enable true self-determination.

Progressive Maternity

In Jeffrey P. Baker's "*When Women and Children Made the Policy Agenda – Sheppard-Towner Act, 100 Years Later*," Baker analyzes how the Sheppard-Towner Maternity and Infancy Protection Act has altered the trajectory of child and maternal-centered health and welfare policy. As he writes, "Sheppard-Towner represented the culmination of the Progressive Era crusade to reduce infant mortality." In 1912, the U.S. Children's Bureau was created, led by women with the intent to expand maternal education and infant hygiene resources. Sheppard-Towner built upon this foundation by bringing maternal education to the entire nation. The introduction of this act also marked the first instance of outreach to Black and Native American mothers. Baker surmises that historians' interpretations of the act's impact are mixed; some believe that the program either failed to meet crucial medical and maternal needs or fed into the existing bias of the "segregated health care system of the South." Yet historians agree on the basis that Sheppard-Towner generated backlash from organized medicine, with institutions like the American Medical Association considering the act a threat to privatized care.

Still, Baker remarks, the program tackled the imperative issue of infant mortality, contributing to a significant national decline in the 1920s. The article acknowledges the shortcomings of the Sheppard-Towner Act while standing firm on the belief that it opened the doors to preventative health policy in the form of government-funded healthcare and public and

private professional maternal consultancy. In his historical contextualization, Baker seems to miss which communities of women had a political role in the Children's Bureau and in the creation of the Sheppard-Towner Act. Indeed, when privileged women construct social policies like these, the policies address the niche and exclusive needs of those privileged women.

A parallel issue occurs in Virginia Sapiro's "*The Gender Basis of American Social Policy*." Sapiro remarks that the nineteenth and twentieth centuries marked a period in which women advocated for women's welfare, which ranged from citizenship via voting to the livelihoods of women's families and communities. Sapiro looks particularly at widows' or mothers' pensions, protective labor legislation, and the Sheppard-Towner Act of 1921 to make sense of how gender roles and ideology interacted with social welfare and policy. These three welfare programs had complex, progressive or traditionalistic consequences: the first removed stigma for recipients, the second – via *Muller v. Oregon* – regulated the contractual freedoms and defined the role of women, and the last expanded maternal and child health services. Sapiro contends that these examples indicate the pervasive relevance of gender in American social policy. This source, while useful in its analysis of gender and political power, misses the racial element of how gender and race intersect. Sapiro neglects to include in her work the ways in which women of color are implicitly or explicitly left out in policy despite the racialized nature of welfare policies, particularly aimed at Black women.

The issue of political power is once more addressed in Linda Gordon's "*Women, the State, and Welfare*," which is a collection of essays providing various theoretical viewpoints on women and the United States welfare state. Gordon's review and anthology cover a host of topics and ideas: that utility of gender as an analytically crucial lens to understanding contemporary social policy, that our political economy confused maximizing independence for

women with economic dependency, and that our welfare system, apparently designed to facilitate independence, regulated women and rendered them merely recipients or victims. Gordon looks at essays that show how white women of the Progressive era not only molded social policy but redrew “the boundary of the political sphere” (4), at comparative essays using a Marxist analysis or feminist analysis, and at articles on welfare policy as a means to regulate both public and private life. All of these pieces stand independently of each other, yet work as a mosaic piece, offering diverse and nuanced perspectives of the United States’ welfare state.

A particularly useful source for contextual analysis of the intersection of race and gender in social policy is Joanne L. Goodwin’s “*Gender and the Politics of Welfare Reform: Mother’s Pensions in Chicago, 1911-1929.*” Goodwin examines the suffragist movement in Illinois and highlights two significant issues: the evolving nature of citizenship and the increased expectations Americans have for their government. In her analysis, Goodwin looks at the role of women in expanding government-provided social services; the space for such a role opened up following the right to vote, though the agency that came with it did not extend to Black women. Accordingly, Goodwin acknowledges that there is no singular or homogenous definition of a group of “women,” as political participation looked different across class, sociopolitical, and race differences. She also redefines mothers’ pensions as a contradictory measure which created its own bounds of citizenship based on sex and race, deepened by a required proximity to marriage and men. Public welfare policy ultimately became dependent on wage-earning capabilities and status as a married or unmarried woman. Important to note is the way that Goodwin distinguishes maternalist politics from other women-led movements; maternalism relied on the identity of motherhood to justify citizenship and grounded itself in family relations rather than “feminists’ individual rights” (9). From this source, we get one distinction between

Maternalism and frameworks foundational to Reproductive Justice, which, in this reading, would be the Feminist framework. Maternalism relies on gender-specific ideas to push the movement forward and centered their arguments for citizenship on their identities as mothers whereas feminism seeks to “balance power between the sexes in all aspects of life” and is inherently opposed to society-imposed gender hierarchies.

Molly Ladd-Taylor offers a similar analysis in her book “*Mother-Work: Women, Child Welfare, and the State, 1890-1930*.” In this reading, Ladd-Taylor defines mother-work as “women’s unpaid work of reproduction and caregiving,” both “public and private, work and leisure” (1). Mother-work is not recognized as work because it is presumed to be borne out of love and obligation, and is considered a personal rather than a community or societal matter. Ladd-Taylor notes in the Introduction that contradictory sentiments regarding motherhood stem from maternal welfare from the twentieth century, in which Anglo-American middle class women played a pivotal role in expanding government services for women and children. She asserts that “mother-work” serves as a reminder for the importance of an intersection of private life and public policy; mother-work has sculpted our political and economic systems in ways we neglect to acknowledge.

Ladd-Taylor defines maternalism by three key characteristics: that there is a “feminine value system,” that women are bonded across identities by their capacity for mothering, and that women and children are “dependent” on men who should be earning for them (3). She also writes that while the movements overlapped, maternalism differed foundationally from feminism on the basis that maternalists adhered to the idea that women had socioeconomic dependence on men and believed in the assimilation of racially different women into a culturally specific

American lifestyle. Important to note is Ladd-Taylor's focus on the Sheppard-Towner Act in Chapter 6, which she calls "the climax and defeat of the maternalist movement."

Another critical text in this thesis is Gwendolyn Mink's "*The Wages of Motherhood : Inequality in the Welfare State, 1917-1942*". In her book, Mink looks at how, since the inception of welfare programs, women have endured the contradictions of a government that sought to mitigate poverty and single motherhood while reinforcing domesticity, male dependency, and a reformed cultural character. "Maternalist" social policy reformers were more often than not middle-class Anglo American women who, in trying to uplift women, also tried to reconcile cultural differences by linking poverty to culture and behavioral attributes. Privileged women – white women with the right to vote – had a direct link to the government that less privileged women did not have. These privileged Anglo American women turned their attention – and their reformist ideas – towards less privileged women, acting as "social mothers of poor women" (7).

Mink writes that maternalists "claimed universal political rights for women but did not write universalistic social policies for them," with social policies for disadvantaged women grounded in homogenization and integration to the dominant culture's social norms and standards. As in Ladd-Taylor's work, Mink surmises that citizenship relied on a woman's maternal role, which in turn relied on culture and character. Mink offers insight on the arbiters of Maternalism by demonstrating that maternalist policies were conditional on women's willingness to conform to cultural standards created by white middle class women, and deepened existing racial sentiments tied to supposed moral failings and "hardened American ambivalence toward the possibility of difference among equals" (26).

Sociologist Theda Skocpol expands upon the concept of "republican motherhood" in her book "*Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United*

States.” Skocpol looks at the welfare policies and programs that stemmed from the Progressive Maternalist era, such as mothers’ pensions, minimum wage regulations, protective labor regulations, and the federal Children’s Bureau. Skocpol emphasizes the notion of deservingness associated with welfare by remarking that the term has a “pejorative connotation” referring to “unearned public assistance benefits, possibly undeserved and certainly demeaning, to be avoided if at all possibly by all ‘independent,’ self-respecting citizens” (5). She also seeks to answer the question of why, in a period when all women could not yet vote, the government created protective regulations for female wage earners; she entertains the possibility that it was American exceptionalism and a hegemony of liberal values (15), adjusted cultural and ideological factors (16), a “republican virtue tradition” (18) and “reworked republican ideals” (19).

This era saw “republican motherhood,” championed by white, middle-class Protestant women who sought to bring their private domestic values into the public sphere, made possible, for example, by their ties to religious organizations. Government policies of the welfare states sought to bring marginalized women into paid labor yet punished them for their unmarried status or made their benefits conditional on their proximity to marriage and motherhood. Additionally, policies like protective labor laws and mothers’ pensions had the adverse purpose of taking women out of the workforce and reinforcing unpaid, domestic labor. There was a hierarchy in the way the welfare state worked; it mattered if you were married or unmarried, widowed or not widowed, and even if you checked the boxes, your racial and ethnic identities influenced your level of qualification.

Reproductive Justice

The basis for my analysis of the Reproductive Justice framework draws from the impact of Black theorists on its creation. One source I will be using as a foundation for this thesis is Loretta Ross' "*Radical Reproductive Justice: Foundations, Theory, Practice, Critique.*" In the introduction, Ross writes that women of color have been excluded from political analyses despite their wealth of experiences and ability to occupy multiple diverse spaces. She opens with the fact that the reproductive justice framework was created by twelve Black women in 1994 as a way to center communities of color in the analysis of reproductive politics. The Reproductive Justice (RJ) movement is unique because it does not just seek to include women of color, but have women of color at the very center of the movement. Ross emphasizes that RJ is not "a peace-making ideology" but a radical theory that operates via a human rights framework, accommodating and recognizing shifting intersectional values. RJ serves as a foundation for activist organizing and resistance and stems from the three core beliefs that: people have the right to have children, to not have children, and to raise children in a safe environment.

RJ inherently opposes the ignorance of class and race as a determining factor, victim-blaming, religious fundamentalism and masculinist rhetoric, and the white supremacist and neoliberal alliance seeking to subdue self-determination. RJ allows us to, through a human rights perspective, fully access the personal choices that will give us total autonomy and agency. Finally, Ross defines reproductive oppression, which exists in the racial paradigm of colonialist and white supremacist ideologies. For this thesis, this source offers a nuanced and complex characterization of motherhood. Ross excerpts Aaronette White as "refuting the assumption that all women are meant to be biological mothers...Regardless of how we parent or of our legal and biological gender, we seek to create something new to celebrate our children, not as property, but

as offerings to themselves” (11-12). Ross helps distinguish the Progressive Maternity framework from the Reproductive Justice framework by demonstrating that reproductive justice looks at biologically defined women and transgender people as more than mothers, and does not ground their fight for “equity, dignity, and justice” in the identity of motherhood. Reproductive justice does not only seek to support reproductively capable people in their parenting decisions but also strives to understand the racial, economic, political, and social inequalities felt by women of color and trans peoples.

Like Ross, sociologist Dorothy Roberts looks at the experiences of Black women in her book *“Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty”*. Roberts asserts that policymakers have weaponized derogatory rhetoric and policies to delegitimize and regulate the reproductive decisions of Black women. State legislatures and government-sponsored programs have deliberately worked to make sure women on welfare – poor Black women, to be specific – do not bear children. The mainstream reproductive rights movement has forgotten Black women and the individualized challenges they face simply for being Black women. Roberts highlights the three core themes of this book: that the regulation of Black women’s reproductive choice is inextricably tied to racial oppression, that this regulation has molded the definition of reproductive liberty, and that to understand the “meaning of reproductive liberty” we have to “take into account its relationship to racial oppression.” Roberts looks at the phenomenon of reproduction as degeneracy, the image of the immoral Black mother, the negligent Black mother, and the unmarried Black mother, and the concept of the welfare queen. At the core of this book is the claim that we cannot talk about reproductive health policy without acknowledging both race and gender.

I will use Loretta Ross and Rickie Solinger's "*Reproductive Justice: An Introduction.*" in conjunction with the aforementioned source to ground the argument in more theory. Ross considers this book a "primer" which serves to lay out the fundamentals of reproductive justice, which she says differs greatly from pro-choice and anti abortion discussions. This work also hopes to bring women of color into the center of the conversation of reproduction and tackle issues of colonialism and white supremacy as a contributor to their reproductive prospects. In the Introduction, Solinger adds that the book, like her others, seeks to answer the questions surrounding "legitimate" motherhood and maternity and the role of religious and political institutions in deciding these choices. She looks at media representation of the "legitimate mother," which indicates class expectations or "class privilege." The trajectory of the book starts with a history of reproductive politics and pivotal policies – like the Hyde Amendment – then transitions to contemporary discussions of reproductive politics and the voices excluded in mainstream media.

The authors collectively make a note about language and gender in which they note they refer to folks with reproductive capacities as "people who can get pregnant and give birth" as well as "woman" to include a breadth of lived experiences. This source is useful in my exploration of the identity of motherhood because it situates this identity within a political culture that considers white, middle-class motherhood as the pinnacle of womanhood. And in response, Ross and Solinger seek to define "woman" as a term that "does not describe the identity of all persons who can or will get pregnant and give birth and mother and child...further, 'woman' does not describe the identity of all persons who decide whether to have an abortion or use contraception... 'woman' is also a self-defined category, especially for those denied the

recognition of their full humanity, who embrace the term as a particular marker of gender identity” (7).

One last source I will be discussing is Rickie Solinger’s *“Pregnancy and Power: A History of Reproductive Politics in the United States,”* which offers a historical and theoretical perspective of the Reproductive Justice framework. Solinger seeks to understand how reproductive capacity and the state of being pregnant assigns meaning to girls and women of different socioeconomic standings. In the Introduction, she writes a disclaimer that this book will cover the experiences of every demographic group; instead, the book will define reproductive politics and examine how policies and attitudes towards pregnancy and power had shifted over time, from the eighteenth century to contemporary society. The recent reproductive justice framework sees beyond pregnancy; it sees the right to parent, to not parent, and to parent in a safe environment. In contemporary America, advocates struggle to balance the attacks on previously secured reproductive rights – via religious objections, race and class-based policies – with new reproductive justice efforts.

The restrictions women face have also shifted with the political and cultural climate; where we once blamed women for their unwed status or impoverishment, we now guilt them with “fetal personhood,” and make abortions financially inaccessible. Solinger makes a point to note that we cannot examine single motherhood without looking into “questions of population, gender, labor, the distribution of wealth, and the nature of various belief systems” (24).

Ultimately, Solinger looks at how reproduction and mothering become “conditions of womanhood” and at the intersections of class, race, and gender as sculpted by reproductive capacity. To make the distinction between Progressive Maternity and Reproductive Justice’s conceptions of motherhood, I will draw from Solinger’s belief that motherhood issues are

“matters of self-determination and human rights”, (6) that reproductive choice is a matter of resistance (15) and that one can be a woman without being a mother (17) and be a mother without being married (25).

Chapter 1: Progressive Maternity

In chapter one of her book of essays, “Women, the State, and Welfare,” Linda Gordon writes that “welfare as an academic topic or a social issue cannot be understood without particular attention to the situation of women and the gender system of the society” (Gordon, 30). Chapter one of my thesis will look at the Progressive Maternity framework and movement through a critical social justice and intersectional lens. I will sample an array of literature on the topic and examine where and how the identity of motherhood is situated in progressive maternity’s foundations and evolution through the early twentieth century.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw women seeking to redeem what they believed the government owed them: welfare. The suffrage movement and the 19th amendment allowed middle class white women just enough space to get their foot in the door of American social welfare policy. Virginia Sapiro looks at three particular developments made by these women: widows’ and mothers’ pensions, protective labor legislation, and the Sheppard-Towner Maternity and Infancy Protection Act of 1921. Sapiro notes that, before widows’ pensions, public pensions were reserved for military personnel and civil servants in exchange for their labor; by contrast, widows’ pensions “provided for needy private persons” but broke down the stigma felt by a number of welfare recipients (Sapiro, 222-223). This was because of an existing bias against public home relief, now affirmed by widows’ pensions.

Protective labor legislation worked to regulate the working conditions of women in the workplace on the basis of particular gender ideologies. These policies operated via the 1908 Supreme Court case *Muller v. Oregon*, in which the Court unanimously decided that “the child-bearing nature and social role of women provided a strong state interest in reducing their working hours.” Protective labor legislation’s opponents sought to maintain agency over their

contract-making liberties. But the goal of protective labor legislation was as much to improve working conditions as it was to make women's employment seem less beneficial. Actual protective legislation – such as hours and weightlifting limits – were not extended to domestic workers and made hiring women more expensive (Sapiro, 230).

The Sheppard-Towner Act of 1921 was an initiative by the federal government, spearheaded by white middle-class women, to provide child and maternal health services to the public. This act was particularly important because it set the precedent for the government providing services that were not strictly educational or protective services. And added to the commonly held belief that individuals should provide for themselves was the idea that the government was liable, to some degree, for providing for the people.

Sapiro cleverly notes that “Women have been defined primarily as dependents, because others depend on their dependency. American social policy not only assumed, but helps to maintain this state of affairs” (Sapiro, 224-225). Yet women had to balance this imposition with the “protestant work ethic” coupled with the conservative notion that poverty was a product of indolence and that use of welfare was inextricably linked with immorality. All this in the context of an idealistic America characterized by individualistic drive for personal success and stability. Assistance moved via “spheres of justice,” most accepted between immediate family members and becoming increasingly indecorous as assistance was asked of community or state or federal government (Sapiro, 226).

Further, women's economic rights came into conflict with the paternalistic idea that men were workers and women were wives and mothers. This mindset proved pervasive in the development of fair social welfare policy. Men were meant to be in the workplace because they were the breadwinners. So having women in that same sphere disrupted the status quo and

threatened notions of “manhood” that depended on women’s unfettered dependency and enabled their complete independence. Widows’ pensions and the Sheppard-Towner Act, then, became the mechanism by which the roles of “wife” and “mother” were developed and strengthened for the sake of the people – husbands, children, elderly people – who benefited from these roles (Sapiro, 230). And, as Gwendolyn Mink (1995) states in her book “Wages of Motherhood: Inequality in the Welfare State, 1917-1942,” “maternalist prescriptions fastened worthy woman’s citizenship to the maternal ideal, disparaged and regulated the role of paid labor in women’s lives, and legitimated gender segregation in the labor market” (Mink, 8). Here lies another contradiction: while the government decreed, through social policy, that women and children depend on a male earner, the underlying message was that only women and children attached to a white male wage-earner were eligible for benefits. There was no guarantee of financial support for nonwhite women and children by the government. As Mink writes, the targeted subjects of Maternalist policies faced the dual challenge of gender and cultural conformity in order to “earn” their equality (Mink, 8).

As Sapiro writes, “If for much of our history, women’s welfare was supposedly safeguarded by a husband, we are led to the deduction that for most of our history, women’s welfare has been of little concern to government, except insofar as it served instrumental purposes in providing care and services for others” (Sapiro, 232). While women’s livelihoods are contingent on a relationship with a man – a marital imposition – they are not assured spousal support. Women are expected to be self-reliant while relying on men and to be a part of a family while tending to the needs of every *other* member of said family: “It is not the family as a unit but rather women in families who care for children” (Sapiro, 232). Under paternalistic and patriarchal ideologies, it becomes increasingly difficult to recognize women’s care contributions

as economic contributions, deserving of payment. An added layer to this is the assumption that “a man cannot provide *and* care,” despite the fact that women do both (Sapiro, 235).

Homemaking is a cultural and social expectation, and thus rejected as a form of income-earning work.

Linda Gordon (2001) writes about the concept of care work in her article “Who Deserves Help? Who Must Provide?”. She argues that “there was never a time in U.S. history when the majority of men were able to support a wife and children single-handedly,” and that because policymakers presume a universal status of male-headed households, they obscure and fail to meet the needs of single female-headed households. Further, analyzing the relationship between familial relationships and domestic labor reveals the degrees of deservingness and obligation that situates single mothers as “less deserving” because of male absence and lack of male dependence. Because single mothers have lost their “virtuous” status, they are “less deserving” of welfare, and further, are deemed “less deserving” for receiving public support. This, despite the fact that these women are pressured into parenting labor with no compensation, and thus lack the time and resources to compete in the labor market (Gordon, 23). Motherhood is expected and respected but it is not supported, financially or otherwise.

Even when husbands believed otherwise, health care for women and children became increasingly requested and necessary. In her book “Mother-Work: Women, Child Welfare, and the State,” Molly Ladd-Taylor writes that “The most significant thing turn-of-the-century mothers had in common was fear of death, their own and their children’s” (Taylor, 18). Middle and upper-class white women looked to physicians and doctors to ensure safe and healthy births while working-class and women of color continued to look to midwives and religious healers. The use of a physician for working-class and mothers of color was less of a choice due to factors

like discrimination and cost. While “mortality rates were especially high among the poor” it seemed that “death and injury due to inadequate or incompetent medical care affected women of all classes” (Taylor, 26). But working-class women were facing the burden of balancing household and wage-earning responsibilities without the added privilege of appliances that could shoulder the labor.

It was middle-class white women who, with access and exposure to scientific theories of childcare, felt equipped to lead the Maternalist movement for child welfare reform. In came the U.S. Children’s Bureau in 1912. Maternalists found their activism propelled onto the nationwide scene and landed a recognized role in politics. Here, Taylor makes important distinctions by positioning the maternalists of the Children’s Bureau somewhere between the “women should stay in the home” sentimental maternalists and the “individual rights” feminists. She writes, “Progressive maternalists staked their claim to authority in welfare administration not on their feminine capacity for nurture but on their professional expertise,” but adds that “Progressive maternalism must also be distinguished from feminism, for maternalists understood the universe in terms of social relations and obligations, rather than political and economic independence and individual rights.” The Children’s Bureau and Progressive Maternalists “rejected a sentimental view of motherhood” but was staunchly believed that “women had a natural interest in child welfare because they were female” and that “scientific childrearing methods and the Anglo-American family structure afforded the best protection for children” (Taylor, 75). Progressive maternalists, while seeking to institute welfare for a greater population of women, catered their policies towards a very niche demographic.

The Children’s Bureau was an indication of “federal interest in child welfare” despite an initially limited budget and small team (Taylor, 77). Julia Lathrop was appointed chief of the

Children's Bureau, a move by the government that reinforced women's role in child welfare and symbolized their doubt in the new agency. Particularly important is the point Taylor makes about Lathrop and other maternalists of the time: "the language of progressive maternalists often betrayed their matronizing attitudes toward cultures different from their own" and "their tolerance of diversity generally stopped short at matters affecting children" (Taylor, 79).

Progressive maternalism was about cultivating the ideal American citizen, and that started and ended with a child. Lathrop was able to sustain the influence and relevance of the Children's Bureau by emphasizing the role of motherhood in marital partnerships and furthering the quality of children's lives; children were the future, and mothers would propel them forward. But she also did this by underplaying the reality of career-seeking women who sought something beyond the home.

Lathrop's use of motherhood rhetoric served to oppose those who did not want women in public life but had the adverse effect of insinuating the default role of women as wives and mothers and was shaped around middle class values. This rhetoric in particular had consequences for women and mothers whose families depended on their domestic labor for survival; for them, career-seeking was not a choice nor a reality. Maternalist policies cultivated social and cultural expectations for mothers; expectations that they would not work, that their sole purpose was motherhood. And they molded future market expectations for women and mothers, such as with maternity leave, or wages and compensation. Moreover, the Children's Bureau was limited: while it "facilitated women's entrance into politics," it also "confined them to traditionally feminine concerns such as child welfare" (Taylor, 81).

Following this maternalist campaign for child welfare policy was the Sheppard-Towner Maternity and Infancy Protection Act of 1921, designed by Lathrop. The purpose of the act was

to take what it had done with children's welfare and expand it out to diverse communities. Taylor asks readers to be mindful of the act's bounds: "Sheppard-Towner was intended to protect the health of women and children within the family; it did not challenge married women's economic dependence or try to empower mothers in other social roles" (Taylor, 167). But Sheppard-Towner aimed at more than what mothers' pensions and protective labor legislation could do by including mothers of all classes in its implementation. It supposedly bridged poor and middle class mothers, mothers who used private physicians and mothers who used free clinics, mothers seeking resources and maternalist reformers. And it made a private issue public. As Taylor notes, "Most mother appear to have welcomed the bill...those who lacked vital information about reproduction and their bodies, who had suffered a difficult pregnancy or birth, or who had lost a child, were desperate for any information that could give them more control over their health" (Taylor, 176).

The passage of the act was a success yet faced several barriers. For one, "it furnished no financial aid or medical care," and for another, it was "opposed by a coalition of medical associations and right-wing organizations" (Taylor, 169). The opposition against Sheppard-Towner succeeded in its eventual downfall in 1929. Taylor's theory was that the act's defeat could be attributed to the reality that women did not vote as a unanimous bloc; Mink herself credits this failure to the reformers' vision of creating "one motherhood from diversely situated women" (Mink, 10). With Lathrop linking infancy protection to the reform of the mother, she curated a program around a moral dilemma rather than preventative intervention, which Mink defines as "the education of mother by nurses, teachers, and social workers" (69). Motherhood would not be a be-all, end-all resolution to diversity. Also important was the public's discomfort with politicized motherhood. Taylor writes that opponents believed "women should not demand

care for themselves” (Taylor, 171). Right-wing organizations, medical associations, and right-wing government representatives exploited widespread fears of feminism and communism. The idea of a women-controlled welfare system chafed against those who feared for husbands’ reputations, the traditional family structure, for male doctors’ relevance within private healthcare.

Key to this background on the Sheppard-Towner Act and other significant markers of child welfare policies is recognizing the agents with power and those without. In “Wages of Motherhood,” Mink writes that middle-class white women had a point of entry to the government – the right to vote – while immigrants and women of color did not share that agency; they were merely “subjects of maternalists social policy” (Mink, 5). The downfall of maternity policy was in its insistence on a culturally strict formula: “Maternity policy favored medicalized, hospital births; asserted a partnership between women and (often male) physicians; assumed women needed to be trained for motherhood; and connected such training to the unlearning of cultural practices deemed unhealthful by reformers and physicians” (Mink, 54). And while it tried to standardize infancy protection measures, its impact was not felt everywhere. The Sheppard-Towner maternity policy gave states the authority of implementation, and as a result, regions of the country differed on how to follow through on the act’s initiatives. In chapter three of her book, Mink writes that “in southern and border states, infancy protection measures were developed either for whites only or on a Jim Crow basis” (Mink, 68).

Sheppard-Towner was repealed in 1929, leaving women who did not have the means to consult private physicians bereft and shifting the burden of children’s welfare back from society to individual people. But, as Taylor adds, the Sheppard-Towner Act had a somewhat indeterminate impact. It helped pave the way for public welfare and maternal healthcare while

“leaving women’s responsibility for child care unquestioned” (Taylor, 190). And it expanded the reach of healthcare resources to women and children of color while expecting them to subscribe to Anglo-American values of raising children. The identity of motherhood within the progressive maternity framework, while eventually broadcasted to all mothers, did not represent or accept the deeply individualistic and diverse ways of mothering. Mink surmises this phenomenon more emphatically, writing that maternalism of the time “modernized gender inequality by politicizing and codifying social roles and relations” (Mink, 8). Jeffrey Baker provides a succinct analysis of its impact in his article “When Women and Children Made the Policy Agenda – The Sheppard-Towner Act, 100 Years Later.” He writes, “Historians’ verdicts on Sheppard-Towner have been mixed. Some have underscored the program’s deficiencies – its failure to provide for medical treatment or maternity leave, its marginalization of midwifery, and most of all, its complicity with the segregated health care system of the South.”

Mink adds to this analysis in “Wages of Motherhood.” As she puts it, “Welfare asked society to honor women’s side of the sexual division of labor while naturalizing that division” (Mink, 3). It reached a hand out to poor, single women while asking for their cultural assimilation and domesticity in exchange; welfare was contingent on compliance and notions of “deservingness”. Mink is less forgiving than Taylor in her analysis of progressive motherhood. She plainly states that its policies were not “uniformly liberating,” holding the movement’s principal agents accountable for tailoring their vision around Anglo American motherhood: “Progressive maternalists claimed universal political rights for women but did not write universalistic social policies for them” (Mink, 7). By interweaving “woman’s responsibility with woman’s needs,” progressive maternalists made welfare policy conditional on proximity to the dominant culture’s social norms, done via “literacy and language instruction, vocational training,

civics lessons, health services” (Mink, 7-8). The material benefits of maternalist policy were prescriptions earned by conformity.

In chapter two of her book, Mink looks at cultural conformity through the lens of mothers’ pensions. She writes, “The beneficiary of these policies was the child, the conduit her mother, the social goals the fully Americanized citizen” (Mink, 27). The Anglo American way of mothering was positioned against ethnic motherhood in a way that held in contempt cultural behavior that deviated from the “American” way of life. Mink remarks that maternalist reformers did not see immigrants and women of color as hopeless, but rather bearing the potential to develop, and to meet the Americanized social norm. The intention was not to “erase cultural differences altogether but simply to eliminate their political significance” (Mink, 30). Furthermore, by culturally reforming the mother, maternalists could ensure the fulfilled Americanization of the child.

As referenced above, Mink believed that maternalist policies, though they tried to unite women under the identity of motherhood, did not uniformly liberate women. Progressive maternalists managed to associate means-tested aid with poor, single women of color. Mothers’ pensions were reserved for “morally worthy” and “assimilable” mothers who were tested on the quality of their characters and of their home life, “linking family customs and conditions to the quality of children’s minds and character” (Mink, 31-34). Even widows were not exempt from proving their morality for eligibility. And by making working-class and ethnic mothers governmental dependents and subjects of the public eye, they brought agents of the state into their homes.

Mink writes that maternalists pushing for mothers’ pensions advocated increasing grant money in order to block wage work and keep women at home with their children. For example,

with the Sheppard Towner Act, “maternity policy expressly prohibited the use of federal funds for ‘pensions, stipends, or gratuities’” (Mink, 68). This was facilitated by the increased supervision of home life to regulate maternal behavior. In the case of certain programs, investigations into homes were conducted to evaluate the continued eligibility for pensions. And continued eligibility depended on the physical manifestation of “American” values on the household and on members of the household. From an intersectional lens, Progressive Maternalists grounded their policies in the experiences and the prototype of the white, middle-class, Protestant mother. These house investigations are an example of the pressure low-income, immigrant and women of color faced; welfare was transactional and conditional on the Americanization of their families and households. These policies attempted to eliminate all traces of diversity despite the glaring reality of a diverse America.

Though mothers’ pensions were geared toward poor, single mothers, “strong prejudice against African Americans meant that Black mothers whose economic need established eligibility were disproportionately excluded from the program” despite the greater relevance of Black single mothers working for wages compared to European immigrant mothers (Mink, 39). Maternalists aimed to target poverty among mothers and, in striving to “Americanize” the household, they insinuated a link between culture and poverty and envisioned its alleviation as cultural assimilation.

This, despite the fact that mothers’ pensions were not effective in practice. The program was “poorly funded and did not provide a survivable income for most families” (Mink, 42). A large population of recipients were working for wages while maternalists rallied against the idea of women earning a supplementary income due to her being outside of the home. Maternalists argued for the family wage and for a minimum wage for working women yet remained hesitant

about the implications; in other words, the disruption of the traditional American family, in which men support their families at work and women support their families at home.

In “The Lady and the Tramp: Gender, Race, and the Origins of the American Welfare State,” Mink argues that this republican motherhood-esque era of progressive maternity stemmed from the framework of the white man’s democracy. In such a framework, which strives for republican citizenship, the target audience is men and the target values are “virtues, industry, and independence” (Mink, 93). Virtue was synonymous with defense abilities which were in turn synonymous with masculinity. Industry was demonstrated by willingness to participate in the development of American capitalism, best achieved by economically driven men. And independence was, by definition, solely afforded to property-owning individuals: white men.

All of these values together emphasized the overarching theme of dependence: “For while woman’s dependency was the mainspring of woman’s virtue, men’s dependency was the sign of men’s inadequacy” (Mink, 96). Further, republican citizenship was gendered and it was racialized. Mink writes, “While assigning feminine traits to ethnic men, old-stock Americans not only neutered allegedly servile and dependent men but marked them as a peril to republican liberty as well” (Mink, 96). Southern and eastern immigrants, Black and Asian men were deemed incapable of independent manhood, and women were altogether deemed wives and mothers. And so, that assigned maternal role became the sole instrument of women’s political participation; women raised men, and men became the citizens that would embody the all-important American ideals.

Republican citizenship was thus a gendered and racialized construct that strove to foster a sense of citizenship and national identity, albeit around the identity of a white, property-owning, wage-earning, man. And republican motherhood was the conduit through which the values of

republican citizenship were passed down. Republican motherhood emphasized the roles of wife and mothers as teachers of republican ideals to the next generation. Indeed, as written, “From her role in political reproduction woman promised perpetuity to the republican order” (Gordon, 97). Progressive Maternalists perpetuated gendered subordination and racial assimilation through this republican motherhood framework.

In this essay, Mink makes an essential point about the progressive maternity framework. Progressive motherhood policies of the early American welfare state were the conduit for middle-class women’s politics. And middle-class women’s politics “linked the problem of racial order to the material and cultural quality of motherhood.” The ways in which one mothered their children determined their eligibility for citizenship, but maternal reform “socialized motherhood rather than citizenship” (Mink, 93).

The ineffectuality of this universal motherhood tactic, addressed by Teresa L. Amott (2002), examines the stigma single Black mothers face, starting in the mid-twentieth century with the Moynihan Report. Research indicates that until the 1950s, “most black families contained two parents” (Amott, 282). In the decades following, studies saw more female-headed Black families who were facing divorce, separation, and out-of-wedlock births. While Moynihan cited Black cultural pathology as the cause for economic misfortune, Amott argues that foundational biased welfare systems are responsible for the continued oppression of single Black mothers.

When the AFDC –(Aid to Families with Dependent Children)– was established in the 1930s, Amott remarks that the “southern racial caste system was firmly in place” (Amott, 287). This was best demonstrated by inaccessible policies under the New Deal, which excluded Black folks from Social Security coverage and unemployment compensation. Ineligibility became a

pervasive issue for single Black mothers who were obstructed by “suitable home,” “man in the house,” and “substitute father” rules, any evidence of men in the home (Amott, 288). The “suitable home” rule rendered a home with conditions such as an “illegitimate child” unsuitable, and the family ineligible for aid. The “man in the house” rule, which falls under the “substitute father” rule, refers to an able-bodied man who is cohabiting or frequenting the house of the potential welfare recipient, which makes the theoretical single Black mother ineligible for aid.

Amott references Gordon in her analysis, writing that the feminist influence on demands for welfare rights forgot Black women, a particularly challenging reality when the face of the feminist movement was more often than not middle-class white women.

As Linda Gordon writes in her opening essay, “The New Feminist Scholarship on the Welfare State,” the republicanism of the United States welfare system “was based not only on ‘manly’ definitions of dignity and independence but also on coexistence with a slave society, with black servitude as a foil against which (white) citizenship and self-respect were defined” (Gordon, 13). This exclusion was built-in, with even quality welfare programs catering to an upper-working-class, white population. And what white women assumed was a universally beneficial to all women was greatly skewed: Black women were “more likely to be employed than white women” and were “committed to the family wage ideal” but minority women activists “were considerably more likely than whites to accept women’s and even mothers’ employment as a long-term reality” (Gordon, 25). White women’s assumption became the standard, and, due to its inaccuracy, became inaccessible to women of color. Never mind that all women – including poor, immigrant white women – were already struggling under the “white male state” (Gordon, 25).

In her essay “The Historical Foundations of Women’s Power in the Creation of the American Welfare State, 1830-1930,” Sklar provides a timeline of the Progressive Era, chronicling the ascent and descent of power for middle-class white women. She writes that “the story of white women’s reform activism is a race-specific story in which their access to the resources of the state expressed their relatively privileged position in a race-segregated society,” citing the work of white women in focusing their efforts on industrialization in the north, which excluded Black workers until the 1920s. Sklar also goes beyond the concept of “republican motherhood” in her analysis of women’s participation in the public sphere; she is invested in the two salient features of Progressive Era activism, “its massive grass-roots scale and its institutional autonomy” (Sklar, 51).

Though they began as catalysts and as an extension of white male suffrage, middle-class white women in the early 1900s sought independence from the male political culture and were hopeful of their government’s ability to provide for women. For women of the welfare state, this autonomy depended on political cultures that “expressed deeply rooted gender-specific social structures and cultural values” while “established the preconditions for close cooperation between women and men” (Sklar, 69). Sklar, though she praises the efforts of women during this era, laments that “persisting traditions of limited government empower those who discredit social-justice programs, and the lack of class-based politics erodes the power of those who advocate such programs...Moreover, welfare policies today have become inextricably combined with attitudes toward race and social justice for African Americans” (Sklar, 78).

In her article “From Widow to ‘Welfare Queen’: Welfare and the Politics of Race,” Premilla Nadasen analyzes the narratives surrounding welfare, their impact on mothers under welfare, and the future of welfare, with a focus on the 1960s. Nadasen also looks at the AFDC as

an example of the racialized rhetoric surrounding welfare rights. She writes that “welfare has been constructed by a language of morality and racial fear,” felt predominantly by Black women, who were “vilified, ridiculed, and demeaned” despite not constituting a majority of welfare recipients (Nadasen, 52). Borne from this narrative of Black women was the resounding image of the “welfare queen,” characterized by racist performer Charles Knipp, who portrayed this community as “sexually promiscuous, illiterate drug addicts who are undeserving of assistance” (Nadasen, 53).

In the 1960s, the image of the “welfare queen” was constructed as more Black women were using welfare. In retaliation, the government made welfare eligibility narrower and narrower. In conjunction with what was insinuated about the Black cultural pathology in the 1965 Moynihan Report, welfare “came to symbolize the perceived problems within poor black communities—single parenthood, family breakup, and unemployment” (Nadasen, 53). But this association of the Black mother with welfare had greater implications for all mothers. Because where once the welfare program expected mothers to stay in the home and care for their children, it now asked them to join the workforce.

Nadasen writes about divisions within the Black community following the Civil Rights era. With the Black middle class assimilating into the dominant culture, poor Black women became “the new other” (Nadasen, 54). She also examines the history of welfare – back to state-level mothers’ pensions – and how racial and class biases came to inform the image of the deserving welfare recipient: the white mother. And it was the white mother who, in the 1930’s under Aid to Dependent Children, was dependent on government assistance. At the time, women of color in the South were not granted that same assistance. Even in following decades, regulations were passed denying eligibility on the basis of male presence in the home, physical

ability to work, and residential citizenship. Nadasen writes that caseworkers “applied stringent and humiliating eligibility criteria to prevent women with alternate sources of support from receiving assistance” (Nadasen, 60). Furthermore, what these regulations were really founded on were criteria of morality and worthiness – “often defined by divorce, a child born out of wedlock, or the racial or cultural background of a recipient” – linked to “nonwhite and African American women” whose pregnancies were not granted the grace of being dealt with in private.

For Black women, the “community values discouraging mothers giving up their children meant that black women kept their children and raised them at a far higher rate than white women did” (Nadasen, 57). Higher rates of single Black motherhood meant higher usage of the AFDC. And alongside government discrimination, “public alarm” had the press pushing the narrative that “promiscuity and laziness” was “synonymous with black women on welfare” (Nadasen, 58).

This narrative was further aggrandized by the Moynihan Report, published in 1965 by Daniel Patrick Moynihan. In his report, Moynihan attributed Black poverty to cultural pathology and the matriarchal family structure (Nadasen, 59). His characterization laid the burden of socioeconomic mobility on Black families’ willingness to culturally assimilate rather than holding institutional discrimination accountable for single-parent Black families’ gridlocked state.

The Moynihan Report is explored further in Dionne Bensonsmith’s article “Jezebels, Matriarchs, and Welfare Queens: The Moynihan Report of 1965 and the Social Construction of African-American Women in Welfare Policy.” The article specifically discusses the characterizations of Black women and its ensuing impact on welfare policies. Bensonsmith makes a few key claims: that the message of the Moynihan Report was not entirely new, but

rather drew from “existing racial, sexual, and class stereotypes,” and that it highlighted disparaging stereotypes about Black women and obscured those about white women (Benson-Smith, 244).

The Moynihan Report was borne from the Johnson administration and its focus on poverty and race. Moynihan, the Assistant Secretary of Labor, wrote the report to make sense of Black poverty, disenfranchisement, and more specifically, “why the assimilation pattern that had worked for white immigrants in the early 1900s failed to move African Americans into the mainstream” (246). In attempting to make sense of this phenomenon, Moynihan created more problems than he set out to solve. The report magnified already damaging cultural stereotypes about poor African Americans, such as associations with drug abuse or criminality. He drew upon the history of slavery to explain the family patterns of Black people, placing the onus of the blame on those affected by institutional racism rather than the institution itself.

Further, the Moynihan Report created an image of Black women as “welfare-reliant, emasculating matriarchs” and influenced the future of social policy discourse (Benson-Smith, 246). The report solidified three significant stereotypes that originated during slavery: “The emasculating black matriarch, the overly fertile and lazy welfare mother and the shiftless black male” (Benson-Smith, 247). And it was these associations with Black female welfare recipients that cultivated the archetype of the “welfare queen”.

At the very core of the report was the attack on pathological behavior. The idea was that supposed features of the Black family – inverted gender roles of husband and wife and females as head of the household – “feminized” men and brought “political, economic, and social alienation” upon the Black community (Benson-Smith, 251). And in creating these great binaries of Black and white, man and woman, Moynihan homogenized Black lower class folks, fed into

harmful characterizations of Black women, and influenced attitudes towards welfare and citizenship indefinitely.

The Moynihan Report helps us understand developments in the welfare state because they draw from social constructions of deservingness for poor people: “one deserving and white (the working class), the other undeserving and racialized (the underclass)” (Benson-Smith, 258). Under the Johnson administration in the 1960s, the requirements for women seeking welfare changed: “new work rules shifted the focus of AFDC from counseling and rehabilitation to reducing poverty through training or employment” (Nadasen, 62). This transition was in part a pushback against Black women who claimed entitlement to welfare and was centered around the issue of motherhood, particularly Black motherhood. And in this debate about social roles and welfare, middle class white-women and Black women on welfare were treated astoundingly differently.

Nadasen claims that “Since the emergence of racial slavery, black women were valued primarily for their labor power, and, as slaves, their value as reproducers was limited to childbearing...Fueled by racial stereotypes of black women, the new welfare regulations devalued the mothering work of black women and reinforced their status as workers,” further the cycle of socioeconomic exploitation of Black people (Nadasen, 64). Welfare such as ADC and mothers’ pensions was cultivated around the image and ideal of the white mother; she was more deemed a more appropriate nurturer and caretaker. From a big picture perspective, Nadasen seems to point to the broader social phenomenon of the dominant class: the white political elite readapting and molding their strategy of a gendered, racial, and classist hierarchy to contemporary sociopolitical demands.

Welfare rights activists worked hard to reshape the image of the welfare recipient, drawing attention “to their work as mothers as a way to challenge the characterizations that they were lazy and choosing not to work,” and furthermore, establishing the idea that mothering was, in fact, work (Nadasen, 67). Welfare rights activists, much like the reproductive justice activists, championed sexual autonomy and choice. Some activists, such as those in Mothers for Adequate Welfare (MAW) emphasized the oppressive nature of the traditional marriage model “defended their status as single mothers,” and analyzed the “ways in which social pressures, the welfare system, and the institution of marriage all worked to discourage autonomy by forcing women into unequal relations with men” (Nadasen, 67). Accordingly, their activism involved the fight for reproductive rights; welfare rights activists believed that welfare recipients should have control over the circumstances, if any, to have a child. The concept of choice was at the very heart of their philosophy.

In her essay “The Power of Motherhood: Black and White Activist Women Redefined the ‘Political,’” Eileen Boris simplifies a key difference between the progressive maternalist and reproductive justice frameworks: the former composed citizenship on the basis of a racially-specific brand of motherhood. Boris bluntly states that the rhetoric of “motherhood” led to different results for Black and white women, and that white women were less generous with their diverse “clients” than Black women (Boris, 214). Black women activists were also able to connect with the poor in a way that white women with class privilege were unable to. Still, something reminiscent of the reproductive justice framework came out of this era: “Black suffragists’ discourse of female difference provided them with a unifying vocabulary, one that coexisted with, indeed complemented, another set of metaphors based on equal rights and universal claims” (Boris, 214).

White women had access to the state and thus were instituted as administrators of their programs, but Black women “gained few benefits from the emerging welfare state” (Boris, 215). This begs the question of how, when both white and Black women used the image of motherhood to wade into the political sphere, outcomes were different. While she provides a thorough explanation, Boris’ answer is simple: “For black women activists, the state was hardly neutral” (Boris, 215).

Black women activists had to work from the public perspective that they did not fit the image of sophisticated womanhood or motherhood; this made their claims to “highest womanhood” and “true womanhood” so much more powerful. They pushed back against and rewrote the social script that deemed them incapable of “nurturing, motherhood, and family maintenance” (Boris, 217). They celebrated womanhood not as an obstacle but as a condition of citizenship and asserted that cultural diversity and equality could coexist. And Black women activists resisted preconceived biases of racialized motherhood founded on the legacy of slavery and the stereotype of sexual immorality. Their claim to motherhood used the positive terminology most often associated with white women and emphasized the dignity and aspirations of Black women.

Mary Church Terrell, first president of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), believed that “motherhood was felt experience as well as an ideal” (Boris, 220). She pushed back against the negative link between slavery and Black motherhood, illuminating the reality of slavery, “in which women bore children as producers of labor power, where motherhood was not necessarily chosen and where the mother-child bond faced the threat of disruption through sale, under the blessing of the law” (Boris, 221). The circumstances of slavery did not make the Black mother a bad one; not only were they not afforded the privilege of

agency, but it also did not make sense to impress upon contemporary Black women the belief that they were inadequate mothers.

Boris remarks that Black activists “took their work directly into the home” (Boris, 224). And Black women’s organizations were closely intertwined with the church, who taught women to teach their children under moral and religious values. Boris also notes that the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs (NACW) “placed the establishment of mothers’ clubs—along with day nurseries and kindergartens—at the top of its priorities. In such actions we see an acceptance of paid labor for mothers as a necessary reality” (Boris, 226). This is a callback to what was written earlier in the chapter: labor legislation “sought to protect mothers, but excluded the paid labor of African-American women. Within the word ‘mother,’ as used by many reformers and makers of public policy, lurked the referent ‘white,’ the very associated fought against by activist black women” (Boris, 215). Accordingly, labor legislation worked to protect white women – the very image of the right mother – while forgoing the needs of women of color.

The NACW also curated programs that would educate Black women on motherhood and housekeeping, not necessarily to reinforce domestic service, but to merge the public with the private (Boris, 227). Additionally, these training schools were developed with the motivation to show white folks that Black women were more than capable, and that these housekeeping capabilities could translate to paid labor. In summary, Boris’ essay sheds light on the ways in which Black women had to defend both their womanhood and motherhood. Furthermore, she demonstrates the efforts by Black women’s organizations to prove their maternal abilities, central to the social, economic, and political rights that were undervalued by white men and particularly, the white Protestant middle-class women who believed themselves to be the blueprint of motherhood.

Racial and Gendered Citizenship Within Intersectional and Human Rights Frameworks

Evelyn Nakano Glenn's book "Unequal Freedom: How Race and Gender Shaped American Citizenship and Labor" rejects the past scholarly blueprint of studying race and gender in isolation. More specifically, she studies the default images of "race" – men of color – and "gender" – white women – and aims to highlight the population of people left out of both: women of color. As insinuated by Nadasen, Glenn writes that "explanations of gender inequality based on middle-class white women's experience focused on women's encapsulation in the domestic sphere and economic dependence on men. These concepts by and large did not apply to black women, who historically had to work outside the home" (Glenn, 6). Diverse scholars, drawing from the experiences of Black, Latina, Asian American, and Native American women, championed concepts like "intersectionality" and "interlocking systems of oppression" to express the ways in which race and gender were simultaneous. In other words, "the ways in which gender is racialized and race is gendered" (Glenn, 7).

From a wider lens, Glenn looks at gender as a mechanism by which we view definitions of womanhood and femininity, and adds that "if one accepts gender as variable, then one must acknowledge that it is not fixed but is continually constituted and reconstituted" (Glenn, 8). Additionally, Glenn sees gender as something both symbolic and material, manifested in the concept of division of labor and in the physical gendered act of caring.

Glenn states that race, as a concept, is undertheorized despite its pervasive role in maintaining white dominance. A part of its underdevelopment is owed to both the limited scope of the black-white binary – despite variation among people of mixed ancestry, for example – and the overindulgence in whiteness as a means to achieve full legal rights. And this dependence on the black-white binary to make sense of variation impacted, for instance, the Asian American

community of the late 1960s, who were “‘racialized’ within the black-white binary in the United States: Well-educated professional and managerial Chinese immigrants are ‘whitened’ and assimilated into the American middle class, while poor Khmer, dependent on welfare, are ‘blackened’” (Glenn, 11). She also asserts that the construction of class has been and continues to be “infused with racial as well as gender meanings...white working-class men and women drew on a long tradition of racial rhetoric, blaming immigrants and blacks, not corporations or capitalists, for their economic anxieties” (Glenn, 15).

What Glenn succeeds in doing – and what scholars like Linda Gordon *fail* to do – is approach identity and citizenship with an intersectional frame. As Glenn writes, scholarship of race defaults to men of color and scholarship of gender defaults to white women. But going a step further, scholarship on minority women defaults to Black women, oftentimes leaving other minority women – Latinx, Asian, Native American, *and* Black women – out of conversation about the intersections between gender, race, and class. What Glenn lays the groundwork for, and what the reproductive justice framework achieves, is affirming the ways in which the formations of race, gender, and class grow out of political struggle and the language of human rights (Glenn, 16).

Chapter 2: Reproductive Justice

The core tenets of the reproductive justice framework were first articulated by twelve Black women at a 1994 conference on the Clinton administration’s health care reforms. These women called themselves the “Women of African Descent for Reproductive Justice,” and their

names were: Toni M. Bond Leonard, Reverend Alma Crawford, Evelyn S. Field, Terri James, Bisola Marignay, Cassandra McConnell, Cynthia Newbille, Lorretta Ross, Elizabeth Terry, ‘Able’ Mable Thomas, Winnette P. Willis, and Kim Youngblood. After hearing how the administration planned to curtail reproductive healthcare, these women brainstormed the term “reproductive justice,” a melding of reproductive rights and social justice. These women “recognized that the women’s rights movement, led by and representing middle class and wealthy white women, could not defend the needs of women of color and other marginalized women and trans people,” the principle challenge of the Progressive Motherhood framework. SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective defines Reproductive Justice as: “the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities.”¹

The Reproductive Justice framework operates off of a few key principles: 1) A belief that reproductive justice is a human right, and as such, uses a human rights analysis in their approach, 2) that access is necessary for there to be choice, and that one does not exist without the other. 3) Finally, that Reproductive Justice is solely about abortion or the “pro-choice” and “pro-life” struggle. This is because the issue of reproductive choice is dependent on and determined by access. By access, we mean access to food, clothing, housing, medical care, social services, financial security, among other needs. These rights are necessary and underlie and bolster reproductive rights. So Reproductive Justice addresses the multitude of challenges – in healthcare and beyond – that marginalized women face in their reproductive decisions. In doing so, Reproductive Justice indicates that pregnancy is just one of a host of reproductive rights issues.

¹ “About Us.” Sister Song. Accessed December 1, 2023. <https://www.sistersong.net/about-x2>

Sistersong claims that in order to achieve Reproductive Justice, we as a collective must examine historical and existing power systems that enable the continued domination of persons affected by various isms, including but not limited to: sexism, racism, and classism. Further, to achieve Reproductive Justice, Sistersong states that we must center marginalized identities so that those most affected by systems of power can achieve self-determination. Lastly, they claim that we must unify across differences to acknowledge intersecting oppressions so that we may liberate ourselves and others.

Dorothy Roberts writes about this in her seminal novel “Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty.” In her conversation about the new meaning of reproductive liberty, Roberts writes that when the government grants reproductive liberty to an individual, such as a Black woman, there are broader positive implications for reproduction and racial equality (Roberts 1997). She contends that procreative liberty is an essential human right, and that theorists who seek to protect this independence should “explore how social justice could be made central to their conception of rights, or harms, and of the value of procreation” (Roberts 1997).

For Roberts, perceiving reproductive justice in the context of social justice alters our understanding of the dynamic between the individual and the state, the state and the individual. By this, we mean the ways in which the private sphere operates and how the public sphere engages with it. Marginalized women’s bodies have long been targeted by the state to fulfill some economic, political, or social goal; for instance, for the sake of managing overcrowding, welfare expenditures, or labor. Further, centering reproductive justice in this social justice framework makes it such that social justice is a “critical, rather than a separable, concern in

judging the value of individuals' procreative decisions and the legitimacy of government actions and inactions that affect these decisions" (Roberts 1997).

These foundations are significant because they are uncompromising and inflexible in their fight against white supremacy and racial, economic, gender, and political domination. And by making the movement about more than just reproductive rights to encompass a range of human rights issues – trans and queer rights, indigenous rights, refugees' and migrants' rights, rights for people with disabilities – Reproductive Justice advocates devote themselves not only to "rights" but "justice" for all people. The human rights framework they draw from makes the movement inclusive, holistic, and empowered.

Andrea O'Reilly, who coined the term "motherhood studies" in 2006, writes of these fundamentals in her book "Twenty-First-Century Motherhood: Experience, Identity, Policy, Agency." In it, she argues that contemporary white supremacist and elitist understandings of motherhood follow eight principles: "(1) children can be properly cared for only by the biological mother; (2) this mothering must be provided 24/7; (3) the mother must always put children's needs before her own; (4) mothers must turn to the experts for instruction; (5) the mother must be fully satisfied, fulfilled, completed, and composed in motherhood; (6) mothers must lavish excessive amounts of time, energy, and money in the rearing of their children; (7) the mother has full responsibility but no power from which to mother; (8) motherwork, child rearing specifically, is regarded as a personal, private undertaking with no political import (O'Reilly, 369). Reproductive Justice advocates consciously move away from this line of thinking, reminiscent of the Progressive Maternity framework. Their mission is to ensure the total self-determination and self-determination of people with reproductive potential.

Loretta Ross sets the groundwork for this framework in her article “Reproductive Justice as Intersectional Feminist Activism.” In it, Ross argues that an intersectional perspective is used by Reproductive Justice advocates to make sense of relevant events over time. This includes but is not limited to: marital rights, suffrage and political participation, property rights, and welfare policies. Straightaway, we know this is something that Progressive Motherhood failed to do. Intersectionality is used to “describe the confluence of oppressions, not merely enumerate diverse identities,” a particular struggle for the Black women who championed this movement and whose multiple identities have been forcibly separated so that their specific and unique challenges are not adequately recognized nor addressed.

The degradation of Black motherhood and sexuality has been documented by supposed authorities E. Franklin Frazier in his book “The Negro Family in the United States,” Daniel Moynihan in the Moynihan Report, and William Julius Wilson in his book “The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy,” as a means to control Black women’s reproductive decisions. These writers ascribed their socioeconomic circumstances bigoted cultural pathologies. For instance, Black women were vilified for female-headed households, for their marital status, for having children, and for working. Further, Black women were held responsible for the economic misfortune and unemployment of young Black men.

Ross also recognizes how gender and sexuality influences our economy, writing that they are drivers of “late-stage capitalism and right-wing political mobilizations” (Ross, 291). She also states that Reproductive Justice is endangered by white supremacy, which comprises “racism, Christian nationalism, homophobia, nativism, settler colonialism, transphobia, misogyny, and authoritarianism” (Ross, 291). Ross thus uses the intersectional framework to understand the myriad of ways in which reproductive rights are challenged and which identities are challenged,

and roots these challenges in systemic inequality. For example, this intersectional outlook enables us identify the challenges of undocumented immigrant women in detention centers who are “denied counseling after sexual assault, reproductive health care, and access to menstrual supplies” because they are civil detainees under the jurisdiction of immigration authorities and the criminal justice system (Ross, 291). This intersectional community undocumented immigrant women of color face unique barriers to accessing legal and healthcare resources.

Ross also drives forth the immense importance of reproductive capacity by using a human rights framework. It is important to note that by reproductive capacity, I mean the ability of an individual to produce offspring. And because “empires need bodies,” it is important to look at the plethora of human endeavors that implicitly or explicitly affect pregnancy and motherhood (Ross, 292). The state’s political maneuvering to puppeteer the reproductive choices of marginalized women cements white superiority and control. So Reproductive Justice moves beyond the pro-choice and pro-life discussion to encompass biological and non-biological dynamics such as healthcare, housing, food, financial security, and social services. Additionally, advocates address macro issues of economic and racial power imbalances, such as disparities in education, job opportunity, incarceration rates, or political participation. In doing so, they attack the issue of reproductive coercion and control. By coercion, I mean behavior by an external party or parties pressuring an individual with reproductive capacity into an unwanted reproductive decision. By control, I mean the greater phenomenon of an external party or parties exerting dominance over an individual with reproductive capacity with the goal to dominate their life decisions.

Further, Ross states that Reproductive Justice operates from eight principles of human rights: “(1) Civil; (2) Political; (3) Economic; (4) Social; (5) Cultural; (6) Environmental; (7)

Developmental; and (8) Sexual” (Ross, 293). Intersectionality within the framework is about meeting everyone’s needs, and is thus an ongoing process. Human rights within the framework is the objective.

In “Pregnancy and Power: A History of Reproductive Politics in the United States,” Rickie Solinger (2005) offers an in-depth philosophical and historical context to supplement Ross’ groundwork. In the Introduction, Solinger writes that she will cover the history of the meaning of pregnancy though, for the sake of this thesis, we will look primarily at the post-Roe era. Solinger also adds the disclaimer that her book will exhaust and represent the experiences of every demographic group; she does this, in part, because “where the bulk of historical sources exist, the experiences of white women and African American women are more fully discussed than those of Latina and Native American women and other women of color” (Solinger, 1). Solinger expands upon the aforementioned principle of Reproductive Justice, which claims that choice does not exist without access. Solinger writes that access to resources such as “quality medical care, decent housing, a living-wage job, a safe and healthy environment for raising children, and good schooling” is essential for the safety and dignity for every individual (Solinger, 3).

The book strives to use a definition of “reproductive politics” to look at the trajectory of policies and attitudes about pregnancy. Solinger notes that reproductive politics is a late twentieth-century term meant to encompass “struggles over contraception and abortion, race and sterilization, class and adoption, women and sexuality, and other related subjects” (Solinger, 5). For the sake of Solinger’s own study, she understands reproductive politics as referring to “the question *Who has power over matters of sex-and-pregnancy and its consequences?*” (Solinger, 6).

The struggle for reproductive rights goes as far back as the eighteenth century, when religiously motivated scientists and politicians, with the support of the Supreme Court, denied reproductive resources to those seeking them. And these nativist, racist, classist, and sexist politics persist today, in an age where individuals still do not have complete bodily autonomy. Solinger writes that immigrant women in some states still have no health insurance, that states are making Medicaid eligibility intentionally challenging, that policies targeting the living wage impacts the ability to raise children in a safe and sustainable manner (Solinger, 4). Indeed, the Kaiser Family Foundation reports that as of 2023, about half of undocumented immigrant and one in five immigrant adults report being uninsured “compared to less than one in ten naturalized citizen (6%) and U.S.-born citizen (8%) adults.” Access, especially to healthcare, is absolutely necessary; for example, “before the Hyde Amendment went into effect, 295,000 poor women a year had abortions paid for by Medicaid”, and since its enforcement, that number has dropped to about 2,000 abortions a year. (Solinger, 210). For mothers who do not have the resources to raise a child, Medicaid is invaluable. When this resource is not available, an individual’s well-being and financial security are compromised. Even now, our political system makes healthcare inaccessible for those who need it most, and without this access, marginalized folks do not truly have “choice.”

Solinger states that the term “reproductive politics” invites questions about who defines what makes a legitimate mother, and that reproductive capacity has been defined, debated, and decided by external sources, rather than the individual. But in recent decades, “millions of girls and women have defined sex, reproductive, and motherhood issues as matters of self-determination and human rights, claiming power for themselves” (Solinger, 6). There exists a gap in understanding in public perception of reproductive politics and the actual reproductive

politics; it is perceived to be about women and reproductive capacity and access, though in political discourse, women are seldom the center of discussion. In official discussions, the right to reproductive choice becomes less the concern of the individual and more the concern of the wider public, who situate reproductive capacity in the context of “large social problems facing the country” with the intention to “use the reproductive capacity of certain populations to solve these problems” (Solinger, 8).

One of these social “problems” Solinger references is in 1865, when slaveholders decreed that “enslaved men and women have several or serial sexual partners ‘to promote the rapid birth of slave children’” (Solinger, 8). Enslaved girls and women with neither access nor choice were used for the economic profit of white people so that they may continue the cycle of exploitative labor. And then, in the 1960s, the tactic was changed such that white people wanted to limit the number of Black babies born into this country. Those in power have repeatedly taken the choice away from individuals, to have children or to not have children, for the supposed betterment of our society and so that we may solve social problems. Whether it be overcrowding in cities or high welfare expenditures, marginalized women were held responsible for abiding by reproductive decisions made by politicians and policymakers.

Women’s reproductive capacity has been justified as a state matter under the belief that women’s lives are, as white feminist Charlotte Perkins Gilman writes, related to the betterment of the human species. As Solinger writes, President Theodore Roosevelt looked down upon “Native Americans, Mexican immigrants, and other women of color as incapable of improving the species” (Solinger, 10). Worry about the “purity” of the nation was code for ensuring the future of a dominant white, Christian group. And because women of color were a threat to this mission of white supremacy and racial purity, anti-immigration, anti-miscegenation, and

sterilization policies were enforced to secure the future of a white nation. And in the middle of the nineteenth century, men in the household and men with political power were encouraged to restrict both access and choice for women by shaming women for either not choosing motherhood or desiring an abortion. This concept of purity is a remnant of Progressive Maternalism and evidence of the breadth and reach of progressive maternal politics and its effect on shaping gender identity in the public sphere.

Solinger references Daniel Patrick Moynihan's 1965 report, in which Moynihan laid out an analysis and recommendations for the Black family to improve their socioeconomic conditions. In doing so, Moynihan insinuated that cultural pathologies and behaviors supposedly specific to African Americans were to blame for cycles of poverty affecting Black households. Solinger writes, "Moynihan did not blame employment, education, and housing discrimination for the poverty of African Americans. Rather, the reproductive (and other) misbehavior of African American women was the core source of the degradation of these people. Adjust that behavior, Moynihan counseled, and African American men could assume their rightful place at the head of the family" (Solinger, 12). His solutions enticed privileged Americans who were reluctant to give up their resources. Because immigrants and women of color have been the targets of reproductive shame, middle and upper-class white women have had more agency in the household and the political sphere. Moreover, marginalized women have been decentered in sociopolitical spaces.

Reproductive control by policymakers has ceaselessly persisted over the decades. Solinger writes that when Congress instituted the Affordable Care Act (ACA), "the law encoded limits on health care for immigrants," making it such that undocumented individuals were denied access to healthcare programs that covered maternity and pregnancy care (Solinger, 12). Further,

many immigrant women today struggle with sexual health concerns, physical markers of the ways in which discriminatory politics have created health disparities. Politicians and policymakers have seen marginalized women as the battleground for the social problems they wish to remedy for the sake of “a more stable country, a safer country, a fiscally sounder country with lower tax rates, a morally and religiously righteous country,” all placeholders for a racially homogenous country.

A prime example of reproductive oppression and the state removing reproductive agency is the Supreme Court decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* in 2022, which overturned the 1973 case *Roe v. Wade* and the 1992 case *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*. *Dobbs* reversed fifty years of the constitutionally protected right to abortion, and as a result, “Approximately 22 million women and girls of reproductive age in the US now live in states where abortion access is heavily restricted, and often totally inaccessible.”²

Dobbs also disproportionately impacted low-income women of color, migrants, and people with disabilities by making access to reproductive healthcare inequitable and unattainable, thereby equating women’s rights to their reproductive capacities. These communities bear the burden of ineligibility for health insurance, the cost of interstate travel for abortions, and documentation for parental consent, among other barriers. These impediments deepen the existing plight of poverty and marginalization faced by diverse populations.

“Reproductive politics” thus exist less as a means to assure the needs, rights, and dignity of women; the term serves to demonstrate the ways in which controlling a person’s reproductive decisions solves the socio, economic, and political issues the country faces. Solinger references welfare reform legislation in the mid 1990s as an example. Policies at that time pointed to single

² “Human Rights Crisis: Abortion in the United States After *Dobbs*.” Human Rights Watch, April 19, 2023. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/04/18/human-rights-crisis-abortion-united-states-after-dobbs>

motherhood as the principal reason for poverty. And on a broader level, social and economic troubles were the cause of women's "reproductive misbehavior" (Solinger, 13). Accordingly, reproductive decisions – the government's decisions – were the conduit through which America's problems were caused or resolved.

This does not mean that women have been powerless in the fight against patriarchal reproductive control. Solinger writes that throughout United States history, "millions of women looked for and found abortion practitioners to end pregnancies they were unwilling to carry. Women got abortions even in a culture that honored motherhood as women's true destiny. Women got abortions even in a culture that shamed those who did not fulfill their destiny as child-bearers" (Solinger, 15). Women have taken control of their reproductive capacity even when the government said otherwise. Reproductive Justice shone through in this regard, in an individual's personal decision to choose if, when, and under what conditions to raise a child. And while the government seeks to define legitimate motherhood, women's behavior is what shapes and represents legitimate motherhood.

Womanhood, however, has held different definitions for different communities, and legitimate motherhood has been conditionally applied to those who meet the traditional gender model. Where women of color may be seen as vessels for labor or inadequate for motherhood, white women may be viewed as and pressured into the image of the "legitimate mother." Solinger quotes a doctor writing in 1871 about white women getting abortions: "She yields to the pleasures—but shrinks from the pains and responsibilities of maternity; and destitute of all delicacy and refinement, resigns herself, body and soul, into the hands of unscrupulous and wicked men" (Solinger, 17). Doctors have had a heavy hand in defining womanhood, insinuating through her reproductive capacity that if she does not choose motherhood, she is not a woman.

Thus, one's personal decisions surrounding their reproductive capacity determine their status as a woman. It was important for the dominant group that women choose motherhood, because motherhood ensured the continued subordination of women and the continued inaccessibility of economic independence. Reproductive politics thus teaches us the ways in which the "public" invades the "private".

Solinger continues that "Race and class have always been key to the ways that women experience their own fertility" (Solinger, 23). Reproductive policies have shifted and changed over time to accommodate different social and political issues; to understand the role of motherhood in this, Solinger asks us to look at "questions of population, gender, labor, the distribution of wealth, and the nature of various belief systems" (Solinger, 24). In this age, pregnancy and motherhood are focused on "fetal personhood" and states will withhold insurance or enforce policies so that abortion services are inaccessible. These tactics are racialized and classist, denoting apathy towards marginalized persons and "assigning low social 'value'" to different communities (Solinger, 28). Understanding the ways in which race and class intersect in the cultural authority and white supremacy of the dominant group allows us to situate Reproductive Justice in the greater context of citizenship and human rights, both of which fuel the foundations of the Reproductive Justice framework.

In chapter four of their book "Reproductive Justice: An Introduction," Loretta Ross and Rickie Solinger write about the right to parent. They write that reproduction is not just biological, but a political, religious, cultural, and racial process. Accordingly, motherhood as a concept varies across these boundaries. This makes what is private a public issue. Motherhood is "deeply politicized, both as a means to control women and a means by which women seek to gain control over their lives" (Ross & Solinger, 168). So where does Reproductive Justice fit in?

Reproductive Justice demands of the state that it does not unfairly intrude on women's reproductive access and choice, but it also demands that the state create an environment that makes access and choice possible. In terms of the identity of motherhood, Reproductive Justice operates off of four key principles, defined by SisterSong as: "the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities." In this framework, chosen and dignified parenthood is paramount. Reproductive Justice, as a framework, draws from foundational social justice concerns such as how "immigration, incarceration, gentrification, and other processes and practices shape the sexual and reproductive lives of women and individuals, for example, by deepening white supremacy" (Ross & Solinger, 169). Reproductive Justice also denies that supposed pathologies influence fate and instead examines how social policies – such as segregation and gentrification – create the adversities disproportionately faced by marginalized folks. And it vehemently denies that supposed cultural pathologies are indicators of illegitimate motherhood.

The framework refuses the "fitness standard" set by politicians and policymakers and instead prefers measures such as those created by Dr. Camada Jones, a public health expert who states that "The social determinants of health are the contexts of our lives...They are the determinants of health which are outside of the individual. They are beyond individual behaviors and beyond individual genetic endowment. Yet these contexts are not randomly distributed, but are instead shaped by historical injustices and by contemporary structural factors that perpetuate the historical injustices" (Ross & Solinger, 172). By following this philosophy, Reproductive Justice advocates hold politicians and policymakers to a social justice standard and turn over the burden of responsibility unjustifiably placed on the shoulders of marginalized women. Indeed,

the authors write that “When we apply a social-determinants-of-health model to analyzing reproductive politics, we can see how social and economic resources create advantages and disadvantages for parenthood based on income, education, social class, race, gender, and gender identity” (Ross & Solinger, 173).

The authors, like the Reproductive Justice framework itself, use an intersectional lens to make sense of the racialization of reproductive health. The “dog whistle politics” aspect of conversation on reproductive health allows public figures to encode their racist agenda in racially-charged – but not explicit – rhetoric. The tactic simultaneously reaches white voters and allows white people to claim innocence due to its implicit nature. Ross and Solinger provide the model of presidents Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton’s exploitation of the “welfare queen” concept to end welfare in 1996 and replace Aid to Families with Dependent Children with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, a non-entitlement, short-term aid program. These programs aimed to cut off access for Black women and enforce population control for the Black community.

Racialized attacks on lower income also affect low-income white people. Ross and Solinger write that when educational, housing, and healthcare resources are taken, there are repercussions among white men and white women, particularly white teens: “Less-educated women are less likely to be competitive in a diminishing labor market and more likely to become pregnant multiple times” (Ross & Solinger, 177). The reproductive rights struggle emphasizes the intersectional impact of these policies, and as a response, the Reproductive Justice movement calls for unity across our differences.

Ross and Solinger state that the Reproductive Justice framework includes a “radical critique of the U.S. economic system that consistently benefits wealthier people, white people,

and men and confers or denies citizenship rights and obligations depending on conduct, identity, and relationships” (Ross & Solinger, 178). When the government affords the same rights to the same people over time, the communities who have routinely been excluded because of their race, class, and gender continue to be excluded. Authorities believe that if one is too poor to be pregnant, they are too poor to have sex; this line of thinking galvanizes them into telling lower income people whether or not they can have children.

The authors look to the concept of “sexual citizenship,” or the granting or denying of sexual rights to people, to assess these kinds of violations of people’s bodies and decisions. Diane Richardson writes about sexual citizenship in her article “Constructing sexual citizenship: theorizing sexual rights.” She states that to understand sexual citizenship we must first understand our sexual rights. Under the umbrella of sexual rights, Richardson includes: the right to participate in sexual activity, the right to pleasure, the right to sexual (and reproductive) self-determination, the right to self-definition, the right to self-expression, the right to self-realization, the right of consent to sexual practice in personal relationships, the right to freely choose our sexual partners, and the right to publicly recognized sexual relationships. Further, Richardson perceives citizenship as “a system of rights, which includes a concern with conduct, identity and relationship-based claims” (Richardson, 128). And in turn, this system “offers a way of beginning to theorize the varying ways in which a social policy structure intended to support a particular version of heterosexuality shapes the context within which debates about sexual rights take place and the meanings of sexual citizenship are constructed” (Richardson,129).

Reproductive Justice draws upon the human rights framework to advocate for sexual citizenship. This was in part inspired by a statement by the Platform for Action at the 1995 UN World Conference, in which they call for equality between the sexes and for immigrants,

disabled people, and queer people. Full sexual citizenship has proven intangible for, say, disabled folks, who are often pushed towards compulsory sterilization, or queer folks, who still face challenges in employment, housing, or adoption.

By using the human rights framework, Reproductive Justice asks for “public support for private actions” (Ross & Solinger, 180). The U.S. Supreme Court has had a key role: in 1942 with *Skinner vs. Oklahoma* by prohibiting the sterilization of the convicted, or in 1967 with *Loving v. Virginia* by banning the antimiscegenation statute that disallowed interracial marriage. Adversely, the Supreme Court has repeatedly enforced the separation of race and gender to alienate the most marginalized of people from full sexual citizenship.

The denial of sexual rights to poor women of color has been an intentional strategy used to dictate and control a person’s reproductive behavior at both the federal and state levels. Ross and Solinger use the example of Mike Pence, who in October of 2015 diverted funds from Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) to “Real Alternatives,” an anti-abortion center. At the beginning of 2016, eleven other states followed in Pence’s footsteps and reallocated money to anti-abortion centers, concurrently regulating family-planning and divesting from financial support for low-income families.

The narratives around lower income people today – that they are responsible for their financial circumstances and that if they worked harder, they may overcome poverty – allow politicians and policymakers to deny economic, social, and healthcare services under the guise that they are “saving the poor from their own bad decisions” (Ross & Solinger, 183). The authors argue that because the state gains from the reproductive capacity of individuals, these individuals are entitled to sexual and reproductive health services to ensure the sexual rights and personhood of all.

Reproductive Justice analyzes womanhood and motherhood in contemporary political, social, and economic contexts. For example, “Is the right to be a mother primarily based on the biological ability to give birth? Is everyone who gives birth a woman?” (Ross & Solinger, 184). By asking these questions and thinking critically about their answers through intersectional and human rights lenses, we recognize what the “right to be a mother” and “legitimate motherhood” mean and if they are effective standards by which to understand mothering. And while asking these questions, we might keep in mind the four core tenets of Reproductive Justice, defined by SisterSong as: “the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities.”

Reproductive Justice folds transgender issues into its movement because both confront identity-related sexual rights as well as concepts of womanhood and motherhood. Additionally, both “do not fit neatly into the male-female binary, a construct that feels oppressive, anachronistic, and invisibilizing to some people” (Ross & Solinger, 196). Identity movements are less concerned with what an individual does and more interested in what an individual is and identifies as, teaching us vital lessons about self-ownership, self-determination, and further, recognition and accessibility. In this way, identity movements meet the human rights framework (Ross & Solinger, 197).

In our heteronormative society, trans individuals face reproductive oppression on a different plane. Trans people can get pregnant, give birth, and have abortions. But “as society denies the identity of trans people, it also visits the indignities of violence, homelessness, and high rates of unemployment and incarceration on trans people” (Ross & Solinger, 197). When the state criminalizes gender-nonconfirming identities, turns a blind eye to disproportionate rates of sexual violence, or denies medical treatment to trans people – a “forced feminization” – this is

reproductive injustice. Ross and Solinger reiterate the ways in which the state reproductively controls marginalized people: for trans people, they might be locked up when they are fertile and be denied prenatal care to limit their reproductive choice. Additionally, trans people face discrimination when their identity papers do not match their gender identity; especially for diverse trans people, welfare or healthcare benefits are compromised.

And in a society that prizes white, upper and middle-class, cis motherhood, “policy makers, law enforcement officials, and service providers have pushed more mothers with dependent children into the workforce, and have incarcerated ever more parents with dependent children” (Ross & Solinger). The combined force of discriminating against poor mothers and closing all channels of social and economic support indicate the state’s low value allocation to child welfare services and the criminal justice system. The state decides who is a good and bad decision maker and decides, by siphoning diverse children into foster care and separating families, what a family should look like.

The authors also recognize low-income children, who are more likely to be disabled. This intersection makes access to quality healthcare narrow, especially because these children have disabilities “in a context that dehumanizes disabled people by tacitly suggesting that they should not exist because they are ‘burdens’ on their parents and nonproductive drains on society,” rather than a context that holds the social policy accountable for meeting the needs of low-income and working-class parents with children with disabilities. (Ross & Solinger, 203). Again, the Reproductive Justice framework cares less about what a diverse person does and more about who the person is, and recognizes their individual and intersectional identities as a means for the unique and inclusive social support they are entitled to. And the Reproductive Justice

framework, drawing from the human rights framework, understands the difference between rights and needs, equality and equity.

Further into the chapter, Ross and Solinger analyze assisted motherhood and various types of motherhood: birth mother, surrogate mother, othermother, and radical mother. But they are particularly interested in how the eugenics movement perseveres through assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs), which create a mirage of desirable genes and seek to filter out “undesirable” racial, gender, and ability-related characteristics. These identity-based “eugenically inflicted assaults” on cultural pathology and “patterns of dependency” serve to “reinforce the idea and the reality of unequal power relationships—racial hierarchies—and emphasize individual and group ‘failings’ instead of fundamental social and institutional injustices that must be addressed” (Ross & Solinger, 207). This prompts proponents of Reproductive Justice to question the ethical and tangible implications of the intersection between reproduction and technology. And they take special consideration of surrogacy as a financially exclusive, white-dominant, and oftentimes exploitative – of low-income women – route to motherhood.

Moreover, Ross and Solinger look to biological and nonbiological mothering to understand the deeply complex and vast imprint of motherhood on people, families, communities, and entire societies. This “radical mothering” helps us comprehend how intersectional oppressions compromise reproductive access and choice.

Further, Reproductive Justice views motherhood as a human right. This is articulated by Articles 16 and 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Ross & Solinger, 186):

Article 16: Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family.

Article 25: (1) Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing, and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control. (2) Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.

Although mothers and motherhood benefits our societies, politicians and policymakers do not consider motherhood a human right, nor do they support it as such. And studies show that because they do not support motherhood via housing or childcare or employment, individuals seek abortions. Equally important is the health disparities that endanger pregnancies, particular for African American women. Ross and Solinger write that “African American women are four times more likely to die during childbirth than white women,” and that “African American women die from heart disease and related conditions within one year of pregnancy at a rate more than three times that of white women” (Ross & Solinger, 187). This is a direct example of what Reproductive Justice stands for: the right to parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities. When women of color do not have even the basest of needs – food, medication, a source of income – they are rightfully reluctant to embrace motherhood.

Ross and Solinger write about coercive medicine, another violation of the Reproductive Justice framework, which calls for women to choose how they give birth. Many women feel pressured into accepting certain birth practices and are denied the practices they prefer – the use of midwives and doulas, for example – because physicians

will prioritize the child while minimizing the needs of the mother. The mother is “merely a womb,” and her pregnancy denies her the “bodily integrity and decision-making authority that she would have legally possessed had she not been pregnant” (Ross & Solinger, 189). When the mother is treated as a vessel and nothing else, Reproductive Justice renders it a human rights violation. And when the state holds the mother responsible for an unexpected and dire outcome of a pregnancy, that too is a violation.

The authors reiterate a key aspect of Reproductive Justice, which is to center poor, disabled, immigrant, and women of color in discussions about reproduction. Diverse women often receive negative attention because their behavior is often pathologized and their bodies sexualized. Ross and Solinger write that this is a “white supremacist system of thought” that “nonwhite and nonheterosexual women’s bodies are inherently pathological” (Ross & Solinger, 190-191). White supremacy remains a relentless presence, showing itself in biased law enforcement policies, heartless immigration policies, or the justice system’s failure to support sexual violence survivors.

“White anxiety about the need to exercise social controls” over marginalized folks makes inaccessible the right to parent children in safe and healthy environments (Ross & Solinger, 193). This right becomes virtually impossible when our citizenship is endangered by white supremacy. Further, the rhetoric of cultural pathology allows politicians and policymakers alike to burden the mother with her family’s circumstances, even when those circumstances have been molded by white supremacist systemic oppression. Reproductive Justice recognizes the dialect of racial superiority and adamantly opposes it.

As Loretta Ross writes in “Reproductive Justice as Intersectional Feminist Activism,” Reproductive Justice “resists white ethnocentric feminist histories, theories, and practices that claim to represent ‘all’ women” (Ross, 298). This is a foundational aspect of the framework that stands in direct opposition to the Progressive Motherhood movement. Ross goes one step further in adding that Reproductive Justice resists the idea that one voice, or one community, can speak for all women. She acknowledges the work of Asian, Latina, and Native American women in incorporating and promulgating the strategy of Reproductive Justice in healthcare and social justice spaces.

It is through the collective and allied efforts of women of color activists that advances have been made, socially and politically, as with the defeat of the Hyde Amendment. These advances are imperiled under the “masculinist gaze of white supremacy,” which renders bodies “reproductively unmanageable, unrapeable, and unrestrained in our passions” (Ross, 300). Although Reproductive Justice does not relent on its pursuit of fully realized autonomy and self-determination, the malleability of its framework – founded on diversity and difference – allows for a depth of perspectives and approaches to these goals. Ross provides a list of possibilities of its application, which include: “Connects the local to the global,” “Makes the link between the individual and community,” “Addresses government and corporate responsibility,” “Fights all forms of population control (eugenics),” and “Understands that political power, participation of those impacted, and policy changes are necessary to achieve reproductive justice,” among others.

Reproductive Justice honors the knowledge and input of diverse and marginalized voices. And it critically analyzes categories of race and gender: “Women have assumed

labels we did not create; we are performing gender...In fact, we take on and embody the constructs; we endure them because society requires it, and is dangerous not to” (Ross, 304). Reproductive Justice seeks not to dismantle these categories but analyze the ways in which they are used; when categories are weaponized to scapegoat marginalized groups, a hostile environment has been created with its use. These constructs are tangible. It is up to us to understand how they manifest themselves in social, political, and economic contexts. The Reproductive Justice framework lends a platform to those with the knowledge and experience to distinguish and decipher these manufactured realities.

Chapter 3: Conclusion

This thesis has analyzed two movements, Progressive Maternity and Reproductive Justice, with the goal of exploring the following research questions: How do the strategies of Progressive Maternity and Reproductive Justice talk through identity of motherhood and the construct of gender? What are the policy implications for building coalitions around this identity?

For this thesis, I analyzed the aforementioned frameworks through an intersectional and social justice lens. The intersectional framework suggests that we cannot socially and politically address the needs of each citizen without tackling the unique and intersecting oppressions they face. The social justice framework recognizes these individual oppressions and advocates for the full and equitable participation, access, and safety of every person. Social justice sits at the center of intersectionality, and the intersectional framework enhances the possibilities of social justice by addressing multiple intersecting identities and lived experiences. More specifically, intersectionality recognizes an individual's unique set of identities and experiences, and social justice identifies an individual's unique set of needs, such that the state meets those needs as they shift and change.

As a reminder, Molly Ladd-Taylor defined Progressive Maternalism as a movement led by women that “Combined their motherhood rhetoric with progressive appeals to justice and democracy, rather than morality and social order. Finally, they rejected a sentimental view of motherhood and embraced science and professionalism as values equally available to women and men...They saw maternal and child welfare as a step toward broader government protection for male as well as female members of the working class” (Ladd-Taylor, 111). Reproductive Justice is defined by the Sistersong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective as “the human

right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities.”

As the chapter summaries suggest, there are outstanding variations between the Progressive Maternity and Reproductive Justice frameworks. This last chapter will include my analysis of how both position motherhood in their respective movements, and whether or not their strategy is effective, from a social policy standpoint, for a diverse population of reproductively capable persons.

To start, I consider how Molly Ladd-Taylor writes about the mission of Progressive Maternalists. What she forgets is that, although their political strategy was an appeal to justice and democracy, Progressive Maternalists did in fact operate with an undercurrent of morality and social order. Although it was working-class women pushing for policies that would target the uplift of marginalized women, it did so under the condition that they follow the culturally specific formula of Anglo-American values such as marital submission, motherhood and mother-work, assimilation, and the Americanization of the child. But the welfare policies meant to promulgate this vision – like mothers’ pensions or protective labor legislation – had the adverse effect of making single and poor women government dependents in a political environment that resented, and later, pathologized this dependence.

Furthermore, the way Progressive Maternalists positioned themselves was not intersectional, and as a consequence, the movement left out nonwhite mothers. The Progressive Motherhood framework was devised and championed by white, middle-class, Protestant women who already had a foot in the door after being granted their citizenship via the 19th Amendment. This movement was molded around their lives and experiences, and their political point of entry bestowed them with the agency and privilege that low-income women of color were not privy to.

These theoretical gaps are addressed by Evelyn Nakano Glenn, who encourages readers to look not just at policy but at positionality. Glenn writes that race and gender do not exist separate from each other, but rather simultaneously. If these constructs are studied and perceived in isolation, marginalized struggles will never be acknowledged. In this way, an intersectional perspective is used to make sense of the formations and junctions of race, gender, and class. And by understanding these intersectionalities, scholars can approach issues like motherhood while analyzing how diverse identities influence the criteria and bounds of citizenship. The Progressive Maternity framework insinuated that womanhood was contingent on motherhood, but a “good” woman and a “good” mother defaulted to white women. Additionally, the framework’s framing of ideal motherhood as white motherhood implied that citizenship depended on a woman’s ability to conform to their standard. By making this standard virtually impossible for ethnic and diverse mothers, Progressive Maternalist policies – such as mother’s pensions, protective labor legislation, and minimum wage regulations – were inaccessible and ineffective, “universal” only to wealthy white women.

I surmised that the Reproductive Justice framework stands in direct opposition to Progressive Maternalism. Reproductive Justice is founded on four core tenets, defined by SisterSong as: “the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities.” It uses a human rights framework to bolster its mission to ensure self-determination and accessibility for every person. The more glaring factor of Reproductive Justice activism is the fact that the movement does not operate from the image, viewpoint, or experience of a niche group; say white, middle-class, Protestant women. It rejects this exclusive coalition approach and uses an intersectional, human rights framework so that each person’s needs are recognized and met.

In Reproductive Justice, motherhood is honored and supported but not expected. The movement sees reproductively capable people as humans first and foremost. In contrast, Progressive Motherhood positions women as wives and mothers first, humans second. Their utility to the state is rooted in their reproductive capacity. Citizenship thus relies on a person's willingness to give birth and contribute – economically, socially, and politically – to American society. A person is reduced to what they *do* rather than who they *are*. Selfhood is sacrificed for the myth of American exceptionalism; peel back the layers, and white supremacist ideals prevail.

The Reproductive Justice framework is thus vital to dismissing this white supremacy, encompassing Christian nationalism, homophobia, racism, nativism, transphobia, misogyny, and authoritarianism (Ross, 291). Because the framework operates from a human rights lens, the folks afflicted by these oppressions are centered and heard. It is more effective than Progressive Maternalism because it does not ostracize or pathologize nonwhite persons, nor does it deny their marginalized, intersectional existences. Reproductive Justice does not evade the obvious – that difference exists – by trying to minimize or “fix” it. It envelops this difference into its framework so that the movement can cast a wider net over our diverse society.

Motherhood within Progressive Maternity strives for uniformity and fails because we do not live in a country that is racially, economically, or socially uniform. Motherhood within Reproductive Justice celebrates diversity, and its acknowledgement legitimizes unique needs and entitles marginalized persons to equitable opportunities, access to resources and political participation. Only with these tools can people with reproductive capacities feel confident to have and raise children. Safe and sustainable communities cannot be conditional or contingent; they must be guaranteed.

The most salient criticism of the current literature on these frameworks is that the focus tends to be on white and African American women. The defaults of scholarship on race to men, gender to white women, and minority women to Black women bears the risk of homogenizing the intersectional experience, and isolates Latina, Asian, and Native American women from being represented in literature and beyond.

This prompts me to consider how the Reproductive Justice framework might operate in future settings. New research should explore reproductive health, reproductive rights, and reproductive justice in a global and transnational context. By organizing people at the local, state, national, and international spheres, we might see greater coalition and community-building for the implementation of Reproductive Justice efforts. This is especially important in the aftermath of *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, which has the potential to inspire solidarity among abortion rights advocates around the world. Studying how these dynamics work globally among a diverse range of racial/ethnic identities – other than those I've analyzed – will be an important next step for this framework.

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