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"Western Resistance: Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale and
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**WESTERN RESISTANCE: LINCOLN AND ELEANOR RAGSDALE AND THE
TRANSFORMATION OF THE BLACK FREEDOM STRUGGLE IN THE
AMERICAN WEST**

VOLUME I

By

Matthew Corey Whitaker

A DISSERTATION

**Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of**

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of History

2001

ABSTRACT

WESTERN RESISTANCE: LINCOLN AND ELEANOR RAGSDALE AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE BLACK FREEDOM STRUGGLE IN THE AMERICAN WEST

By

Matthew Corey Whitaker

Historian Richard White posits that “without the special experiences of its minorities, the [American] West might as well be New Jersey with Mountains and deserts.” Contrary to Walter Prescott Webb’s 1957 proclamation that the American West is defined, in part, by the absence of “Negroes,” African Americans have been, despite their relatively small numbers, key players in creating a more socially, economically, and politically equal American West. “Western Resistance” examines the special experiences of African Americans, one of the West’s most understudied peoples. It does so by assessing the history of Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale, one of the most influential black families of the post World War II American West, and their role in the Civil Rights Movement in Phoenix, Arizona. Indeed, between 1946 and 1998, the Ragsdales represented the vanguard of black professionalism, activism, and entrepreneurship.

This study’s primary thesis holds that between 1940 and 1998, the Ragsdales played a critical role in the advancement of the black freedom struggle at the local and national levels. Like their counterparts in the North, South, and other parts of the American West, black Phoenicians, lead by outspoken leaders such as Dr. Lincoln Johnson Ragsdale, Sr., organized and collectively waged a systematic assault on discrimination and racism in “The Valley of the Sun.” Unlike the African Americans in the South and East, black Phoenicians never received sustained support from national leaders such as Roy

Wilkins, Ella Baker, Martin Luther King, Jr., or Malcolm X. They relied upon local leaders like the Ragsdales, and their own ability to contest white supremacy, and negotiate economic, legal, and political reform.

While it emphasizes the local leadership of one of the nation's most active and prosperous black families, this study also underscores the critical role of Western racial etiquette, black institutions, grassroots community organizations, and interracial alliances. Its primary objective is to offer a new model of civil rights activism that stresses the interconnectedness of professional and grassroots leadership, and the importance of region, race, class, and gender. This model will enable scholars of African American, Comparative Black, United States, and civil rights history, the opportunity to better comprehend the dynamics of insurgency at multiple levels in various regions. This study is built upon federal and state documents, private archives, organizational records, oral interviews, and relevant secondary sources. It is the first scholarly study to provide a sustained analysis of black resistance to white supremacy in the American Southwest, home of the fifth largest and one of the most urbanized cities in the United States.¹

¹ Richard White, "Race Relations in the American West," *American Quarterly* 38:3 (Winter, 1986); Walter Prescott Webb, "The American West: Perpetual Mirage," *Harper's Magazine* (May, 1957): 30; See Bradford Luckingham, *Minorities in Phoenix: A Profile of Mexican American, Chinese American, and African American Communities, 1860-1992* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1994); Richard E. Harris, *The First 100 Years: A History of Arizona's Blacks* (Apache Junction: Relmo, Press, 1983); United States Census of Population, 2000, General Characteristics by States (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1940-1990). Also see Bradford Luckingham, *Phoenix: The History of a Southwestern Metropolis* Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1989; Bradford Luckingham, *The Urban Southwest: A Profile History of Albuquerque, El Paso, Phoenix, and Tucson*. (El Paso: Texas Western University Press, 1982).

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To Doris, Covey, Gidget and Ami; four generations of Whitaker women.
You are my joy and my inspiration.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

“Western Resistance” is the product of six years of researching and writing about American Western history as a graduate student. As a result, I have cultivated myriad scholarly relationships and incurred many debts of gratitude throughout my intellectual journey. Indeed, this study could not have been completed without the direction and assistance of a plethora of people. My major advisor Darlene Clark Hine, John A. Hannah Professor of History at Michigan State University, championed this study, offered a great deal of “compassionate criticism” throughout its completion, and afforded me a great deal of intellectual freedom. Beyond the boundaries of this dissertation, Professor Hine has played an vital role in my personal and professional development. She is a historian virtuoso and mentor extraordinaire.

The other members of my doctoral committee, Professor Wilma King, Strickland Professor of History at the University of Missouri at Columbia, as well as Professors Peter Beattie, and Laurant Dubois, have all made this history better by asking “the difficult questions”. Thank you Dr. King for welcoming my family to Michigan, and reminding me that my purpose in attending Michigan State University was not to “homestead.” Professor Wanda A. Hendricks of the University of South Carolina, has helped to guide and critique this project from its earliest stages, as I began researching the subject for my Master’s Thesis. Professor Hendricks inspired me to be disciplined and undaunted in my approach to graduate study. Dr. Hendricks, thank you for the foundation and the ongoing support. Professor Quintard Taylor, Jr., Scott and Dorothy Bullitt Professor of American History at the University of Washington, has been a mentor and a constant source of support, as have Professors Albert S. Broussard, Ron Coleman, Brooks D. Simpson,

Albert L. Hurtado, and Bradford Luckingham. I must extend a special thank you to Mr. Richard E. Harris, Mrs. Janet Roe-Darden, and Mrs. Linda Werbish. Linda, everyone should have to opportunity to work with someone as efficient, accessible, and generous as you.

I am immensely grateful for the support of Lincoln Ragsdale, Jr. and Emily Ragsdale. Their willingness to share their time and resources, as well as rare family photographs, newspaper clippings, and oral interview transcripts, enriched this study in a plethora of ways. I must also thank Ms. Ragsdale and Mr. Ragsdale, Reverend George Brooks, Mr. Clovis Campbell, Sr., Mr. William D. Dickey, Mr. Travis Williams and Mr. Herbert Ely, for welcoming me into their businesses and homes to conduct oral interviews. Their illuminating accounts humanize statistics and other “privileged” sources. To demonstrate my appreciation, I have, therefore, endeavored to present their words in full and in context, allowing them to tell their own story. I must give special thanks to the staff of the Hayden Library at Arizona State University, including the archivists of the Arizona Collection, Arizona Historical Foundation, and the Southwest Collections, as well as the staffs of the History and Archives Division of the Arizona State Capitol in Phoenix, Arizona. To the archivists at the Arizona Historical Society and the Library of Michigan, thank you for your support.

This enterprise benefitted heavily from the financial support of the Martin Luther King-Cesar Chavez-Rosa Parks-Future Faculty Doctoral Program Fellowship, the Western History Association’s Sara Jackson Award, Michigan State University’s Department of History Research Travel Grant, Michigan State University’s Graduate College SAF Fellowship and Urban Affairs Fellowship. This dissertation would not have

been completed without the encouragement and camaraderie of my friends Mr. Robert J. Hackett, Jr., Mrs. Mary Ruth Hackett, and Professor Jeremy Levitt, Esq. Thank you as well to my friends, peers, and several former graduate students of the Department of History and Comparative Black History Program at Michigan State University; Dr. Jacqueline McLeod, Dr. Ernestine Jenkins, Ms. Hilary Jones, Mr. Eric Duke, Ms. Dawne Curry, Mrs. Christie Rutz-Robbins, Ms. Mary Mwiandi, and Ms. Chantalle Verna.

Finally, I must thank my grandmother, Doris V. Whitaker, whose life, wisdom, and unparalleled inner strength serve as a constant reminder of my responsibility to those who preceded me, and those who have yet to be born. It is because of my mother, Covey L. Whitaker, the first historian I ever knew, that I became aware of the power of history and unconditional love. All that I am I owe to you and the sacrifices you have made for me Ma. You are my shero. I also want to thank my one year daughter, Anastacia Ami, for her smile and sparkling eyes. She is a blessing and a constant source of inspiration. An immeasurable debt of gratitude is owed to my wife and eternal partner, Gidget M. Whitaker. Your unyielding support of my dreams, studies, and burgeoning career, is unmatched. You are my love.

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INTRODUCTION: AFRICAN AMERICANS, RACIAL INEQUALITY, AND PROTEST IN “THE VALLEY OF THE SUN”: PRELUDE TO THE FUTURE.¹

In Arizona the names Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale are legendary. Man and wife, activists and entrepreneurs, the Ragsdales fought for civil rights in their community, state, and nation for more than fifty years. Between 1940 and 1998, the Ragsdales were instrumental in generating progressive social, political, and economic reform. This study is an analysis of the Ragsdale’s family history, and how their familial traditions of entrepreneurship, professionalism, activism, and “race work,” helped desegregate Phoenix, Arizona, ushering in better opportunities for African Americans. It examines the intersection and impact of domination, resistance, and cooperation in Phoenix, and throughout American society; emphasizing the importance of race, class, and gender. “Western Resistance” analyzes the European American social, economic, and political order in Phoenix, which systematically empowered and valued “whiteness” while devaluing and subjugating non-European Americans.

More importantly, this study demonstrates how one of the most successful black families in American history used education, entrepreneurship, political activism, and a philosophy of nonviolent protest, to dismantle an apartheid like system in the largest and most urbanized city in the American Southwest. The purpose of this work is also to

¹ The intent of the introduction to this study is not simply to present this work’s thesis, areas of emphasis, and theoretical framework while placing the entire study in a larger body of literature. Its purpose is to also provide the historical context for the history that follows. I have, therefore, devoted a portion of this introduction to the development of Phoenix, its race relations, and the construction of the city’s social space prior to the arrival of the Ragsdales. Likewise, the first chapter of this dissertation discusses the history of the Ragsdale and Dickey families and their influence on the social, economic, and political philosophies of Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale.

present an unwritten chapter in the history of American race relations, the civil rights movement, and American professionalism. The legacy of Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale stands at the center of this history. Thus, this work focuses on “making history and biography reinforce each other,” as the lives of the Ragsdale’s are powerful metaphors for American history during the post World War II era.²

Local black institutions, grassroots community organizations, and interracial alliances were key to all systematic efforts to desegregate Phoenix. It was the leadership of the Ragsdales and several of their fellow activists, that also contributed to the advancement of the national civil rights movement. African Americans during these tumultuous years organized to confront virtually all aspects of segregation. When they did not occupy leadership positions, the Ragsdales also worked diligently behind the scenes to desegregate the Phoenix Public School system, places of public accommodation, and a surfeit of private employers. Black Phoenicians never received ongoing support and attention from the leaders of the national movement. They were left largely to their own devices to battle racism and white supremacy. African American struggles to acquire freedom and equality benefitted greatly from the courage, audacity, and creativity of local leaders like the Ragsdales. Endowed with these character traits, in addition to ambition

² Universal Memorial Center, Inc. *A Celebration and Worship Service Honoring the Life of Dr. Lincoln Johnson Ragsdale, Sr.* (Phoenix: Universal Memorial Center, 1995), 3. My approach to this study is influenced by theoretical frameworks put forth in the following works: Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-1963* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), xii, and *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years, 1963-1965* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), xiv ; Albert S. Broussard, *African-American Odyssey: The Stewarts, 1853-1963* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1998), 1; David Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868-1919* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1993), 4-10; David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963, Vol. 2* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2000), 1.

and a keen intellect, Lincoln Ragsdale redefined black leadership and respectability in Phoenix. His ability to combat white supremacy, and negotiate economic, legal, and political reform, was unprecedented in Phoenix.³

Prominent Phoenician attorney and fellow activist Herbert Ely, argues that one “cannot emphasize enough” the importance of Lincoln Ragsdale. As an intelligent, well spoken black crusader for equal rights, “Lincoln did things that had never been done” in Phoenix,” he maintains. “Lincoln was fearless.” “He always had a demeanor about him and a stature about him, and he made people understand that he was a business man. He wanted them to understand that he could compete with them at their level, and he was absolutely successful in that.” Reverend George B. Brooks, Ragsdale’s friend and fellow leader in the Phoenician movement, declared that all races, ethnicities, and religions in Phoenix, “owe Lincoln Ragsdale a debt of gratitude that they do not have enough time to pay.” Brooks argues that Lincoln, with the help of Eleanor, “made Phoenix and all American cities [more] inclusive cities.” “Without him,” he asserts, “Phoenix would still be on its way.”⁴

³ Lori K. Baker, “The Man Who Refused to Be Invisible,” *Phoenix Magazine* 28 No. 1 (January 1993), 97-99. For the purpose of this study, I define racism as the ordered socio-economic exploitation of racial minorities, and the political and cultural preeminence of capital’s interests over said minorities. Furthermore, I define white supremacy as the preservation of economic, political, and social privilege and power for Whites, in an effort to systematically exclude non-Whites from equal access to the production and distribution of resources, and political power.

⁴ Herbert L. Ely, interview conducted by Matthew C. Whitaker, July 17, 2000; Rev. George B. Brooks, interview conducted by NewsChannel3, KTVK., February 16, 1995. In “A Tribute to Lincoln Ragsdale,” (Phoenix: KTVK NewsChannel3, February 16, 1995).

The Ragsdale's history, their personal achievements, and the social, political, and economic advances they helped bring to all Phoenicians rival most stories of professional activism in post World War II America. This study, however, is not a hagiography. It does not present an uncritical analysis of the Ragsdales, their legacy, and the civil rights movement. The dearth of extant sources such as diaries and journals make some analyses about the inner lives and thoughts of the Ragsdales, their supporters, and detractors difficult. Whenever possible, however, this study illuminates the tensions that emerged as a byproduct of the African American community's needs and expectations, *vis-a-vis* the Ragsdale's status as financially successful, elite black leaders.

It must be noted that black Phoenicians have never been the majority "minority" in the Greater Phoenix area. Although the city had few "original -entry ethnic enclaves," Mexican Americans were perhaps the only minority group which had been present in substantive numbers from the city's birth. Their numbers would grow, and they would quickly become the largest minority group in Phoenix. As early as World War II, the number of Mexican Americans and Chicanos have greatly exceeded the number of black people in the city. Like African Americans, Mexican Americans and Chicanos have struggled against white supremacy. Seldom, however, have these groups formed multi-racial coalitions which stood in opposition to racial oppression. Ironically, multi-racial coalition building in Phoenix was practiced primary by black people and progressive whites. This work offers a critical analysis, therefore, of the relationship between black people and Mexican Americans and Chicanos, and African Americans and white Americans, in the struggle for racial equality. Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale, particularly in the final years of their lives, championed greater interaction among Chicanos and

African Americans. He was a member of a relatively small group of local leaders with his visibility who chose to do so.⁵

Like many local leaders who greatly influenced the course of the African American freedom struggle, however, the Ragsdale's history has been overshadowed by the more noted legacies of post War leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X (El Hajj Malik El Shabazz). Moreover, the study of the history of African Americans in the post World War II American West has garnered little attention. The absence of a substantial body of literature has left a scholarly vacuum in the field of black Western history. This has played a key role in cloaking the history of highly influential local leaders such as the Ragsdales.

The American West has long been narrowly labeled as a region with few if any African Americans, and virtually no black history. This obscures the diverse nature of the Western United States. Until the 1960s, academic and popular views of the American West were dominated by the work of historian Frederick Jackson Turner. He posited that rugged Anglo American pioneers, fighting to subdue an ever expanding Western frontier,

⁵ Wesley Johnson, Jr., "Directing Elites: Catalysts for Social Change," In Wesley Johnson, Jr. (ed.). *Phoenix in the Twentieth Century: Essays in Community History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 31. I have chosen to use the terms Mexican American *and* Chicano in this study. The term Mexican American will be used when referring to persons of Mexican descent in the United States prior to 1960. The term Chicano will be used when referencing people of Mexican descent after 1960. By the 1960s and 1970s Mexican American activists engaged in massive resistance to socio-economic subjugation, and waged a heated struggle for equal rights. This effort gave rise to myriad Mexican American civil and human rights organizations and labor unions. The movement escalated and eventually erupted into a national crusade for first class citizenship and cultural renewal. It was during this cultural renaissance that many Mexican Americans adopted the name Chicanos, a name that had been used for some time to ridicule them. They gave new meaning to the label, employed it as a call to arms, and ascribed to its use an oppositional consciousness, affirmation, and dignity.

ushered in the taming of the wilderness, civilization, and a process of self-redefinition. The “Tuner Thesis” argued that this process produced what we now consider to be “Americans;” an egalitarian people who champion democratic values that continue to shape the United States of America. Historian Allan G. Bogue argues that this thesis embraced stereotypes already rooted in American popular culture: pious pioneers, tough outlaws, barbaric Indians, chivalrous white men, and virtuous white women. Historian Quintard Taylor, Jr. maintains that it was eventually reinforced by western paintings, novels, and, most important, movies and television programs, which cemented into American consciousness, as no historical work could, the image of white settler’s as ‘conquerors’ who superimposed their will on a vast, virtually uninhabited virgin land.” In this interpretation, “African Americans were not considered an indigenous group, and they were not conquerors.” Black people, therefore, “had no place in the region’s historical saga”⁶

Seeking to fill this lacuna, scholars such as Albert S. Broussard, Douglass Henry Daniels, William Loren Katz, Shirley A. Moore, Gretchen Lemke Santangelo, and Quintard Taylor, Jr., six leading authorities on African American Western history, have opened new doors leading to the development of a more inclusive and sophisticated American history. They have done so by examining the special experiences of arguably one of the American West’s most marginalized minorities. Contrary to a once widely held

⁶ Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” American Historical Association, *Annual Report for the Year 1893* (Washington, 1894), 3; See Allan G. Bogue, *Frederick Jackson Turner: Strange Roads Going Down* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998); Quintard Taylor, Jr. *In Search of a Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1540-1990* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), 19.

belief that the American West is defined by it being devoid of, among other things, “Negroes,” African Americans have always been despite their relatively small numbers, vital contributors to the realization of a more socially, politically, and economically equal urban West.

The concept of the European American frontier is problematic, and has its roots in a vast body of historical literature. This literature, by accident and design, has misrepresented and ignored the experiences and contributions of African Americans to the development of this vast region (The area of the United States of America west of the 98th Meridian). African American Western history is rich and complex. Beginning in 1528 with the arrival of the Moroccan Esteban de Dorantes in Texas, the first of many Spanish-speaking blacks, African Americans were populating the region. By 1880 the earliest of English-speaking blacks had moved West as slaves, free farmers, fur trappers, or servants, creating the nucleus of post-Civil War communities. Thousands of African Americans later migrated to the high plains, while others like the legendary Nat Love, drove cattle up the Chisholm trail, or served on remote army outposts. By the 1900s black Westerners had been a part of the region for nearly four hundred years.

Above all, the history of African Americans in the West is a story of urban life and “the struggle for racial equality,” for black Americans in the West have lived primarily in cities which discriminated, subjugated and sometimes terrorized them. Reflecting this fact, it is important to give substantive attention to the twentieth century black West. Indeed, World War I and II, as well as the industries which arose to support them, greatly improved the prospect of good jobs and a freer life for African Americans in the West. Black populations in the Western United States increased tenfold as a result of this wave

of migration. This migration brought highly influential leaders such as Dr. Lincoln Johnson Ragsdale, Sr. and his wife Eleanor Dickey Ragsdale to Western cities like Phoenix, Arizona. This influx of professional black people helped intensify the region's civil rights movement. This heightened agitation eventually paved the way for black success in today's Western politics and surging interest in multiculturalism.⁷

African American progress in the West has always been achieved amidst omnipresent racial discrimination and systematic oppression. Black women have borne a triple burden of racial, sexual, and economic exploitation. A combination of Euro-American "Social Darwinism," Protestant ethics, exploitation, and frontier conditions, in conflict with the ever increasing numbers of "free" blacks, Asians, and Hispanics who were looked upon as being "un-American," produced a region ripe for disharmony and racial discord. The American South, North, and East had no monopoly on terrorism, mob

⁷ Walter Prescott Webb, "The American West: Perpetual Mirage," 30; Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier*, 27; Darlene Clark Hine, William C. Hine, and Stanley Harrold, *The African American Odyssey, Combined Volume* (New York: Prentice Hall, 2000), 518; David J. Weber, "The Spanish-Mexican Rim," in *The Oxford Dictionary of the American West*, Clyde A. Milner, II, Carol A. O'Connor, and Martha A. Sandweiss (eds.). (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 48; For a recitation of the exploits of Nat Love see Nat Love, *The Life and Adventures of Nat Love* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995). For some of the most current scholarship regarding African American Western history see: Albert S. Broussard, *African-American Odyssey: The Stewarts, 1853-1963* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1998) and *Black San Francisco: The Struggle for Racial Equality, 1900-1954* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993); Douglas Henry Daniels, Sucheng Chan, Mario T. Garcia and Terry P. Wilson (eds.). *Peoples of Color in the American West* (Lexington: D. C. Heath and Company, 1994); William Loren Katz, *The Black West: A Documentary and Pictorial History of the African American Role in the Westward Expansion of the United States* (New York: Touchtone, 1987); Gretchen Lemke-Santangelo, *Abiding Courage: African American Migrant Women and the East Bay Community* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Taylor, *In Search of a Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1540-1990* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998) and *The Forging of a Black Community: Seattle's Central District from 1870 Through the Civil Rights Era* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994).

violence, private and public segregation, or racialized and gendered economic inequality. Though the racial etiquette in the West was generally less rigid, most white Westerners systematically denied blacks equal access to employment, educational, health care, and housing opportunities. Despite adversities, African Americans as they have often done, resisted subjugation and shaped their designs on independence into individual action and an organized movement to find their “promised land.”⁸

Leading the way in African American efforts to secure their rights in Arizona was Lincoln Ragsdale, Sr. and Eleanor Ragsdale. Born and raised in Ardmore, Oklahoma, Lincoln Ragsdale lived his formative years in the West among a large extended family who owned and operated several mortuaries throughout Oklahoma. He received his primary and secondary education in Ardmore and graduated from high school in 1944. After completing high school, Lincoln entered the military, joining the more than three million African Americans registered for service, and the one million who would serve in the armed forces. Lincoln entered the Air Force and was stationed at the legendary Tuskegee Flying School in Alabama. Tuskegee Flying School was a segregated institution organized

⁸ The phrase “struggle for racial equality” is borrowed from Albert S. Broussard, *Black San Francisco: The Struggle for Racial Equality, 1900-1954*. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993); Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier*, 21; Lawrence B. De Graaf, “Significant Steps on an Arduous Path: The Impact of World War II on Discrimination against African Americans in the West,” *Journal of the West* Vol. 35, No. 1 (January 1996), 1; Bradford Luckingham, *Minorities in Phoenix: A Profile of Mexican American, Chinese American, and African American Communities, 1860-1992* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1994), 157-171; Hine, Hine, and Harrold, *The African American Odyssey*, 471-495; John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 438; Universal Memorial Center, *A Celebration, Lincoln Ragsdale*, 3. Luckingham’s study is the only published monograph which deals exclusively with Phoenix’s three largest minority groups. It is primarily an introduction to the subject which opens the door leading to more in-depth study and analysis.

to prepare what would be upwards of one thousand black pilots for missions overseas, primarily in the European theater. Lincoln graduated from the prestigious flying school in 1945. He then relocated to Luke Air Force Base in Litchfield Park, Arizona, becoming the first African American pilot to serve at the installation.⁹

Eleanor Ragsdale was born in Collingdale, Delaware. She spent her entire childhood, adolescent, and young adult years on the Eastern coast of the United States among a closely knit family. She completed grade school in Collingdale, but finished high school in Darby, Pennsylvania, after her family relocated to the Philadelphia suburb. After graduating from high school in 1943, Eleanor enrolled in the historically black college, Cheyney University of Pennsylvania. Many Northern religious institutions founded myriad universities, colleges, academies, and institutes throughout the South and in several border states during the nineteenth century. These institutions primarily offered programs in elementary and secondary education. Their primary goal was to prepare African American students to become teachers in their local communities. Eleanor graduated from Cheyney University in 1947. That same year she migrated to Phoenix, Arizona to pursue a career in elementary education.¹⁰

After relocating to Phoenix, Lincoln enhanced his education and continued in the family tradition by completing a degree in Mortuary Science. He earned a Bachelor of

⁹ Universal Memorial Center, *A Celebration, Lincoln Ragsdale*, 3; Lincoln Ragsdale interview conducted by Mary Melcher, April 8, 1990; Franklin and Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, p 438; Hine, Hine, and Harrold, *The African American Odyssey*, 479-482.

¹⁰ Universal Memorial Center, Inc. *A Celebration and Worship Service Honoring the Life of Mrs. Eleanor Dickey Ragsdale* (Phoenix: Universal Memorial Center, 1995), 14. Eleanor Ragsdale, interview conducted by Mary Melcher, Spring, 1990; Hine, Hine, and Harrold, *The African American Odyssey*, 268.

Arts Degree from Arizona State University, and eventually completed doctoral studies in Business Administration from Union Graduate School in Cincinnati, Ohio. Once in Phoenix, Eleanor began teaching and became active in various religious and secular associations. Eleanor and Lincoln met in 1947, and were married in 1949 as Lincoln's career as entrepreneur and activist were being launched. After taking-up permanent residence in Phoenix, it became clear to the Ragsdales immediately that "The Valley of the Sun" was not a bright place for African Americans.¹¹

Popular opinion has always held that Phoenix has offered newcomers opportunity to enjoy freedom from racial tensions and antagonisms of more densely populated cities. Celebrated Western poetry, novels, and films, bare witness to this fact. In 1940, as World War II escalated, the population of the Phoenix Metropolitan area was 86,638, of whom 4,263 were African American. Phoenix was a relatively small city when the Ragsdales arrived. Thus, there was a level of logic in the prevailing assumptions that African Americans would be able to enjoy more mobility and less discrimination in Phoenix. Generally, however, Phoenix's race relations mirrored those in most American cities. The Ragsdales, therefore, if they had entertained any notions of the existence of a more racially tolerant American West, were compelled to abandon such ideas quickly.

White and black migrants to Phoenix retained brought with them cultural attitudes about race that they attempted to adapt and negotiate after establishing themselves in the city. Concepts of race and ethnicity were only modified insofar as they would validate preconceived notions. Black Phoenixians were viewed as inferior beings by most non-

¹¹ Lincoln Ragsdale interview, Mary Melcher, Eleanor Ragsdale interview, Mary Melcher.

black Phoenicians. One historian went so far as to say that many Mexican Americans and Indians, prior to the Chicano and Indian movements of the 1960s and 1970s, viewed African Americans in Phoenix as a means to obtain acceptance by the dominant white society. Robert Nimmons argues that “ideally, if a Mexican-American or Indian could prove himself to be equal, or at least somewhat equal, to the member of the larger society, than he would be considered socially equal. Therefore, because of this natural ambition to succeed within the social order, the Mexican and Indian people developed deeply entrenched hostile feelings toward their Negro neighbors.” Although this claim may be very exaggerated, the fact remains that black Phoenicians’ dark skin placed them in a subordinate status lower and unlike any occupied by other racial and ethnic minorities.¹²

Like the majority of whites in American cities, Phoenix’s founders and ruling white elite supported systematic campaigns to create a flourishing community “run by Anglos, for Anglos.” Many of the city’s white founders, in fact, had southern roots and harbored many of the anti-black attitudes that dominated race relations in the Reconstruction and Jim Crow South. John William “Jack” Swilling, a former Confederate soldier and deserter, Arizona prospector, farmer, and speculator, has been credited for surveying and laying the foundation for what is now Phoenix, Arizona. Swilling, perhaps with the input of one or more of his fellow prospectors, christened the community Phoenix, after the mythical bird that rose from its own ashes. As Bradford Luckingham writes, “it seemed an appropriate symbol of life rising anew from the remains of the past,”

¹² Robert Nimmons, “Arizona’s Forgotten Past: The Negro in Arizona, 1539-1965,” (M.S. Thesis, Northern Arizona University, 1971), 92-93; Federal manuscript census schedule, 1940. Also see Michael J. Kotlanger, Michael, “Phoenix Arizona, 1920-1940,” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Arizona State University, 1983).

as “it was hoped that the Phoenix community would build upon the ruins of the ancient Hohokam civilization,” upon whose surviving irrigation system the city’s water networks were built.

The city was incorporated in 1870. Nestled at the bottom and surrounded by a series of upper Sonoran Desert mountain ranges, “The Valley,” as it has come to be called, soon became a Western outpost of white supremacy and racial inequality. The white male founders of Phoenix quickly imported mechanisms from states such as Texas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas, which formed the *gestalt* of a racial caste system, defining race relations and socio-economic mobility in Phoenix throughout the twentieth century. *De facto* segregation in the city existed from its birth. African Americans were systematically locked out of the dominant Euro-American society in Phoenix, as they were segregated from the European American community in restaurants, theaters, housing, hospitals, hotels, swimming pools, buses, social clubs, and other places of public accommodation. Black Phoenixians, in turn, established their own parallel sets of institutions which serviced the African American community.¹³

De jure segregation was implemented in the Arizona Territory in 1864, when an anti-miscegenation law prohibiting marriages between “Whites, Negroes, Mulattos, and Mongolians” was passed. The law was amended in 1877 to include Indians. Children of

¹³ Jeffrey Cook, “Patterns of Desert Urbanization: The Evolution of Metropolitan Phoenix,” in Gideon Golaney, (ed.), *Urban Planning for Arid Zones: American Experiences and Directions* (New York: Praeger, 1978), 205-08; Geoffrey Padraic Mawn, “Phoenix, Arizona: Central City of the Southwest, 1870-1920” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Arizona State University, 1979), 2-3; Michael H. Bartlett, Thomas M. Kolaz, and David A. Gregory, *Archaeology in the City: A Hohokam Village in Phoenix, Arizona* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1986), 17-34; Bradford Luckingham, *Phoenix: The History of a Southwestern Metropolis* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1995), 8, 15.

such marriages possessed no legal rights of inheritance. *De jure* segregation was encoded in law again by the territory's white supremacist leaders during the first decade of the twentieth century. On March 17, 1909 the territorial legislature passed a law enabling Arizona school districts to segregate students of African descent from pupils of European ancestry. Arizona's fledgling state constitution of 1912 also designated "interracial" marriages unlawful. Reflecting local bigotry, chapters of the Ku Klux Klan were organized around the state in 1917. Furthermore, by 1926 the meticulously constructed Phoenician residential Palm Croft District, and its European American home owners, created and maintained restrictive covenants limiting the sale of Palm Croft real estate to whites only. Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale were the first African Americans to integrate Phoenix's all-white communities in Northern Phoenix in 1952.

The economic, social, and political isolation black Phoenicians experienced amplified not only the effects of institutional racism, but the negative effects of the Great Depression in the 1930s, and demobilization in the 1940s. Being the last to be hired and the first to be fired effected black Phoenicians in many of the same ways in which it effected African Americans at large. The majority of black Phoenicians attended separate and unequal schools, worked in low wage, non-managerial, labor intensive occupations, lived in geographically segregated, substandard housing, and suffered physically as a result of there being few health care providers who administered to the black community.

Before the arrival of the Ragsdales and the coalescence of a streamlined, professional civil rights establishment, systematic resistance to oppression was waged by prominent individual leaders and progressive community activists. In 1919 Samuel Bayless and C. Credille formed the Phoenix Advancement League (PAL) to combat racial

injustice. The Phoenix Protection League (PPL) was founded by James L. Davis, Sidney Scott, H. D. Simpson, and others in 1931 to fight employment discrimination. The pistons which drove all organized acts, community building, and resistance were local black churches and the Arizona Federation of Colored Women's Clubs who owned and operated, as early as 1915, many of the halls in the city in which black people could assemble.¹⁴

World War II ushered in a new chapter in Phoenician history as the number of professional African Americans in Phoenix increased. Between 1940 and 1960 the number of black Phoenicians rose from 4,263 to 20,919, while the total number of Phoenicians approached 450,000. Despite the increase in numbers, the percentage of African Americans in Phoenix actually decreased from 6.5 percent to 4.8 percent. Nevertheless, the growing number of blacks in the area, in addition to persistent racial and gender inequality, gave rise to ideological, political, and sometimes violent confrontations between black and white Phoenicians seeking equality and opportunity, and white Phoenicians who fought to maintain their socio-economic domination. Lincoln Ragsdale participated in, and led a plethora of organizations, protests, and political campaigns to

¹⁴ Arizona Territorial Legislature, Comp. Laws, 1865, C. 30; Arizona Territorial Legislature, Comp. Laws, 1877, C. 30, Sec. 3; *Arizona Reports of Cases Argued and Determined in the Supreme Court of the Territory of Arizona, to April 16, 1893*, Vol. V.; *Arizona Republican*, 4, 7, 10, 1912; Mary Melcher, "Blacks and Whites Together: Interracial Leadership in the Phoenix Civil Rights Movement," *Journal of Arizona History* 32 (Summer 1991), 196; Richard E. Harris, *The First 100 years: A History of Arizona's Blacks* (Apache Junction: Relmo Press, 1983), 53-57; Whitaker, "In Search of the Racial Frontier," 66; Bradford and Barbara Luckingham, *Discovering Greater Phoenix: An Illustrated History* (Carlsbad: Heritage Media Corp., 1998), 58.

make Phoenix a more racially tolerant and inclusive city.¹⁵

The campaign for civil rights in Arizona was largely a grassroots movement, but key battles were won at the ballot box, in court, and in the state legislature. The Ragsdales worked to support change at each level. In the 1940s Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale became members of the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Phoenix Urban League (PUL). The Ragsdales were also among the founders of the Greater Phoenix Council for Civic Unity (GPCCU). Established in the 1940s the GPCCU worked to eliminate “discrimination in Phoenix and surrounding communities,” and to “cooperate with local, state, and national groups working toward the same ends.” In 1953 Lincoln and Eleanor, with the NAACP, GPCCU, and PUL, were instrumental in forcing the desegregation of Phoenix’s public schools, one year before the landmark Supreme Court *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* decision. Lincoln Ragsdale joined with six other local leaders in 1963 to form the Phoenix’s Action Citizens Committee (ACT) political campaign. ACT sought the election of its members to the Phoenix City Council. They erected a platform calling for a public accommodations bill, open housing, and job opportunities for minorities.¹⁶

Despite limited gains ushered in by the G. I. Bill and other postwar opportunities,

¹⁵ Federal manuscript census schedule, 1940, 1950, 1960; *Arizona Republic*, November 27, 28, 30, 1942, February 26, 1943; *Arizona Sun*, February 1, 8, 16, 23, 1951; Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier*, 270-271; Luckingham, *Minorities in Phoenix*, 156-157; Thomas E. Sheridan, *Arizona: A History* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1995), 273-274; Universal Memorial Center, *A Celebration, Lincoln Ragsdale*, 4.

¹⁶ Hayzel Burton Daniels, “A Black Magistrate’s Struggle,” In Anne Hodges Morgan and Rennard Strickland, (eds.), *Arizona Memories* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1984), 337-338; Melcher, “Blacks and Whites Together,” 201; Luckingham, *Minorities in Phoenix*, 161-162; Greater Phoenix Council For Civic Unity, (ed.), *To Secure These Rights* (Phoenix: Phoenix Sun Publishing Company, 1961), 6.

racial discrimination continued, and incidents of police brutality became more frequent. Activists continued to combat these inequalities and injustices with nonviolent protest throughout the 1960s. The majority of organizers in the Phoenician movement were African American or European American. Despite being the majority minority in Phoenix, and subject to many of the oppressive offenses of white supremacy, a relatively small number of Mexican Americans joined forces with black and white activists in the civil rights movement. The failure of Mexican Americans and African Americans to forge substantive coalitions during this decisive era of social and political change, profoundly effected the relationship between these two groups throughout the remainder of the twentieth century. Seemingly content to fight a war against white supremacy and inequality on two fronts, both groups sacrificed a measure of their collective social, political, and economic force at the altar of cultural defensiveness, ideological conflict and avarice.

It was the organizing efforts and fund raising capabilities of black women which provided the foundation of the Phoenician movement. As early as 1915 the Arizona Federation of Colored Women's Clubs (AFCWC) held meetings and supervised the activities of many of Arizona's smaller grassroots organizations. In 1927 the AFCWC erected the Phyllis Wheatley Community Center on the corner of Fourteenth and Jefferson Streets. The Phyllis Wheatley Community Center continued to serve in its umbrella capacity throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s. Until the 1970s, halls owned and operated by black women's clubs and organizations were among the few places in "The Valley" which permitted blacks to convene for social services and political gatherings.

Eleanor Ragsdale, like black women throughout the African diaspora, balanced

multiple agendas while endeavoring to realize her personal goals and those of her family and community. Early on she nurtured her own professional career as an educator. Compelled to choose between her career, and the needs of her husband and the prosperity of her family's business, however, she soon elected to give up her career to join Lincoln in the administration of their enterprises. Eleanor participated side by side with Lincoln in the movement. She did this while rearing their four children and responding to the unique concerns of local black women in ways that Lincoln could not, or perhaps would not.¹⁷

Women in Phoenix, like women nationwide, formed the foundation of the entire civil rights movement. Subjected to racism, sexism, and often poverty, black women fought for racial liberation while displaying a certain level of toleration for the sexism of black men. This is especially true of the 1960s, which according to Darlene Clark Hine, was in many ways a "decade of testosterone"; an era marked by the often zealous efforts of activists and historians to reclaim what they perceived to be usurped black male masculinity. Operating during this masculinist climate, female activists like Ragsdale, were nevertheless able to play a leading role in ushering in some social, economic, and political progress. While activists worked to attain significant strides, and Lincoln Ragsdale squared off in negotiations with white leaders, advancement during the 1960s was sluggish. Black people continued to fare far worse than their white counterparts. President Lyndon B. Johnson's "Great Society" eradicated some of the lingering legal barriers facing African Americans. It provided for the creation of many programs which

¹⁷ *Arizona Gazette*, May 24, 1919; Luckingham, *Phoenix*, 98; Jackie Thul, *Blacks in Arizona from Early Settlement to 1990: Historic Context Study* (Tempe: Arizona Collection, Hayden Library, Arizona State University); Matthew C. Whitaker, "In Search of Black Phoenixians: African American Culture and Community in Phoenix, Arizona, 1868-1940." (M.A. Thesis, Arizona State University, 1997), 77-94.

assisted black children and young adults seeking a college education, while reaffirming black citizenship rights and destroying legal barriers to the ballot box. The 1964 Opportunity and Civil Rights Acts, and the 1965 Voting Rights Act are examples of such measures. The masses of African Americans continued to lag behind, and issues such as education, economic opportunity and police brutality remained. Although measures like restrictive covenants were legally eradicated, “red lining” by real estate companies made it virtually impossible for African Americans to buy homes in areas to their liking. Job discrimination also prevented them from securing employment, and few educational opportunities made it difficult for black people to compete for well paying jobs.¹⁸

High unemployment, substandard housing, and poor educational opportunities, prompted many younger more militant organizers to call for more aggressive protests seeking an end to gradualism. Peaceful incremental change remained the goal of veteran

¹⁸ Darlene Clark Hine, “Which Way is Freedom?: Black Power and the Rise of Black Elected Officials,” A lecture given in IAH 211, Modern Black America: 1865 to the Present (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 1997). Also see Chana Kai Lee, *For Freedom's Sake: The Life of Fanny Lou Hammer* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999); Deborah Grey White, *Too Heavy A Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998); Darlene Clark Hine and Kathleen Thompson, *A Shining Thread of Hope: The History of Black Women in America* (New York: Broadway Books, 1998); Vicki L. Crawford, Jacqueline Anne Rouse, Barbara Woods, and Mrymal Dryden, (eds.). *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); Darlene Clark Hine, Elsa Barkley Brown, and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn (eds.), *Black Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia, Vols. A-L and M-Z* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); and Jo Ann Gibson Robinson, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It: The Memoir of Jo Ann Gibson Robinson* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1987); Lincoln Ragsdale interview, Mary Melcher; Lincoln Ragsdale, Sr., Testimony on Housing Discrimination in Phoenix. *Testimony before the United States Commission on Civil Rights* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, February 3, 1962), 9-13; Hine, Hine, and Harrold, *The African American Odyssey*, 538-539; Luckingham, *Minorities in Phoenix*, 164-165; Mary Melcher, “Blacks and Whites Together,” 203.

members of the movement like Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale. Calls for nonviolence and patience fell increasingly upon deaf ears by 1970. Organizations such as the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), and the Black Panther Party (BPP) pushed for an immediate end to police brutality and a redistribution of local and national resources. This new militancy eventually led to violence and destruction in Phoenix, as riots erupted in the city's African American and Mexican American neighborhoods during the 1960s.¹⁹

By 1970, as Lincoln Ragsdale began to relinquish his position as perhaps the most commanding civil rights activists Phoenix had ever known. More militant leaders emerged with new perspectives on race and equality. Younger, more militant black activists began to regard Ragsdale not as a progressive activist with a decidedly radical disposition, but a member of the establishment. He and Eleanor, at this time, were among the wealthiest African Americans in the Southwest. They counted among their friends and associates some of the most influential people in Phoenix and the nation. Lincoln Ragsdale's successful business career now garnered his full attention. He came to view financial independence and economic success as the goal for which African Americans should strive. By the 1970s and 1980s, he believed that legal reform had done virtually all it could for African Americans. Lincoln believed that economic inequality was the principle problem for African Americans as the 1980s drew near.²⁰

¹⁹ *Arizona Republic*, September 27, October 27, 1965, July 18, 26, 31, 1967, August 24, 1969; Taylor Branch, *Pillar of Fire*, 553-613; Manning Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction in Black America, 1945-1990* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi), 86-113; Hine, Hine, and Harrold, *The African American Odyssey*, 532-538; Franklin and Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 492-528.

²⁰ Lincoln Ragsdale interview, Mary Melcher.

Although Ragsdale's dedication to the betterment of African Americans never waned, his "work-within-the-system" approach to black empowerment was viewed with skepticism by many in the black community. Ragsdale's apparent traditional integrationist approach to racial healing conflicted with the neo-separatist ideologies of many young African Americans. By the 1980s, the Ragsdales, were sometimes looked upon by many militant activists as wealthy blacks whose economic goals, concerns and responsibilities operated in conflict with those of poor and working-class blacks. In a period when the most thunderous voices of racialized reform called for the fundamental restructuring of America's capitalist system, Lincoln Ragsdale continued to preach the virtues of the free market, entrepreneurship, and competition. Many African Americans were closing ranks while the Ragsdale's continued to advocate multiculturalism. Had leaders like the Ragsdales not established a history of winning major concessions, the tensions between affluent black people and the masses might have exploded into full blown intraracial class conflict.²¹

As acrimonious as the critiques of leaders like Ragsdale may have been at the time, they did highlight the volatile and vexing question of class and economics in the black freedom struggle. Ragsdale succeeded in helping to orchestrate the destruction of segregation in Phoenix and the nation, but failed to foresee the long term implications of the economic divide between African Americans and European Americans. He, like many of his generation and social class, did not conceive of the extent to which the interconnectedness of race, class, and gender would continue to menace black Americans. Assessing the successes and failures of the civil rights movement, Lincoln Ragsdale at

²¹ Universal Memorial Center, *A Celebration, Lincoln Ragsdale*, 4.

sixty-nine years of age, admitted that his generation of activists underestimated the importance of economic equality. The battle for financial stability is “where we lost” he confessed. “It’s about education and money now,” he maintained. “If you don’t get the two you’re in trouble.”²²

By the 1990s, as Lincoln and Eleanor’s lives neared their ends, America hosted the largest number of middle-class African Americans in its history. During this same period, however, the United States also had more African Americans living at or below the poverty line than it had at any time during its tumultuous history. The number of black elected officials reached unprecedented highs, while hate crimes rose dramatically and a neo-conservative white backlash enveloped the country. Middle-class and wealthy African Americans found employment in suburban communities, while the black working class faced squalid living conditions, myriad health crises, violence, poor schools, and joblessness in urban areas.²³

The Ragsdale’s legacy speaks to a profound dilemma which faced African Americans during the last decade of the twentieth century. The Ragsdales dedicated most of their lives to fighting discrimination and inequality. During these years they tallied an impressive list of victories along the way. These victories ushered in an era of unparalleled freedom and opportunity for many African American heretofore unattainable in American history. The Ragsdales were among the first generation of black people to enjoy this new freedom and opportunity. Even as the Ragsdales and other leaders relished

²³ Lincoln Ragsdale, Sr. and Eleanor Dickey Ragsdale, interview conducted by, Dean E. Smith, November 3, 1990.

²³ See Andrew Hacker, *Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995).

their successes, however, many lamented the fact that the majority of blacks were mired in poverty. Persistent racial discrimination, joblessness, severely limited educational opportunities, poor health conditions, unprecedented urban violence, and the hopelessness associated with them, were all directly related to almost four hundred years of white supremacy in America.

Lincoln and Eleanor's choice to focus on financial security rather than political agitation toward the end of their careers, placed them at odds with the new black leadership. Without substantive change at the state and federal level, in addition to the private sector, many African American leaders argued that the masses of black people would continue to lag behind economically. Black people with resources could not depend on their wealth to trickle down to impoverished blacks cornered by lingering prejudice and poverty. The uneasy alliance between working-class black people and leaders like the Ragsdales were never more precarious than in the 1980s and 1990s. This was a tenuous relationship. Individuals often remain loyal to others not only because of what was done for them in the past, but for what they hope will be done for them in the future. African Americans cherished and respected the service given to the black freedom struggle by leaders like the Ragsdales. Many, however, were quick to question the solidarity of such leaders as they moved up the economic ladder, and away from the black working class. The socio-economic and physical distance between middle-class and poor black people, some argued, created an ideological breach within the African American community, as it did in other communities, including the "white" community. Professional advancement and racial uplift had previously intersected. Black leaders, many working class black people believed, could never rise above the condition of the majority of black

people. By the 1980s, however, many affluent black people chose to sacrifice the bond between achievement and cultural responsibility at the alter of personal gain and class solidarity. Many pundits argued that toward the end of their lives, the Ragsdale's, like many wealthy African Americans, had undermined the balance between personal advancement and the well being of the race. Working class and militant black people accused the Ragsdale's of being more concerned with their financial status than the general status of black people. Ultimately, therefore, their "success" has been judged by the many black people not only by what they did for African American advancement in during the height of the movement, but also by the degree to which they interacted with and served the poor and black working classes toward the end of their lives. It seemed as though many ordinary African Americans were asking leaders like the Ragsdales a simple question: "What have you done for me lately?"

Despite the disquiet bred by class conflict, changes in ideology and leadership, the contributions to civil rights by leaders like the Ragsdales are on par with most histories of black professional activism in American history. Lincoln Ragsdale gave new meaning to entrepreneurship, and achievement became his trademark through myriad business endeavors. His influence in the community was reflected in the multitude of board and membership rosters that included his name throughout his life. Ragsdale's influence ultimately reached the White House, as he served as an advisor to President Ronald Reagan on small and minority business ownership during the 1980s.

"Western Resistance" demonstrates that despite the prodigious problems related to racial discrimination in America, Lincoln was willing to step to the fore and lead a movement to improve them when it would have been easier to stay in the shadows. The

“direct action” efforts of Western black civil rights activists and allies like the Ragsdales did not eliminate racial grievances or inequality. Their efforts, however, helped destroy generations of barriers to opportunity and equality. Their story is instructive and much can be gleaned from their life experiences. This study demonstrates clearly how far Phoenix and America has come since World War II, and how far it has to go. The Ragsdale legacy speaks directly to the nature of past problems, the power of individuals to confront them, and the possibilities of change.²⁴

²⁴ Universal Memorial Center, *A Celebration, Lincoln Ragsdale*, 4.

PART ONE

**“POWER CONCEDES NOTHING WITHOUT DEMAND”: FAMILY HISTORY,
WORLD WAR II, RACISM, AND REFORM IN A “DESERT OASIS”**

CHAPTER 1: "ORIGINS": LINCOLN AND ELEANOR RAGSDALE AND THE BLACK PROFESSIONAL TRADITION.

“One of the distinguishing characteristics of the black professional class is its service to people whom the larger society perceived to be marginal and peripheral by virtue of their race and subordinate in socioeconomic and political status.”

-Darlene Clark Hine¹

Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale were born into the black professional class.

Although they were reared in different regions of the country, East and West, their shared experience as beneficiaries of the black professional tradition influenced the course of their future lives together. Lincoln and Eleanor inherited inextricably linked traditions of leadership and service to their community. This tradition endowed the Ragsdales with an incentive to achieve, and expectations to assist in the advancement of African Americans. To prepare for their lives as stewards of the black community, they were educated and firmly grounded in the exigencies of professional work and “race work.” The Ragsdales were taught that black professionals were compelled to play leading roles in African Americans’ struggle for the most basic of American rights.²

¹ Darlene Clark Hine, *Speak Truth to Power: Black Professional Class in United States History* (Carlson Publishing, Inc., 1996), xvii.

² Also see: Carter G. Woodson, *The Negro Professional Man in the Community* (New York: Negro University, 1934); James Summerville, *Educating Black Doctors: A History of Meharry Medical College* (Birmingham: University of Alabama Press, 1983); Genna Rae McNeil, *Groundwork: Charles Hamilton Houston and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983); Darlene Clark Hine, *Black Women in White: Racial Conflict and Cooperation in the Nursing Profession, 1890-1950* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989); Willard B. Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880-1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); Stephanie J. Shaw, *What A Women Ought to Be and to Do: Black Professional Women Workers During the Jim Crow Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

Ever since slavery was abolished by the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States in 1865, black people in America have fought to secure their citizenship rights and to have their humanity respected. As Darlene Clark Hine has noted, “dimensions of this multifaceted and relentless struggle involved the acquisition of educational and material resources necessary for survival.” These resources were voluminous and included the procurement of land, the creation of educational establishments, health care services, and the administration of religious and secular institutions. Businesses such as funeral homes, banks, insurance companies, and newspapers, were also organized.

Striving to develop political power, black people secured and guarded the right to vote. This involved the support of the Civil Rights Act of 1866, which enabled them to “participate in organized politics,” the Fourteenth Amendment of 1868, which reaffirmed state and federal citizenship for *persons* born or naturalized in the United States, and the Fifteenth Amendment of 1870 which guaranteed that no American would be denied the right to vote on the basis of race. All of this occurred during America’s Reconstruction era, during which the first *legally* free generation of Southern black people competed for economic and political power to give meaning to their freedom, and to battle the venomous response of most whites to African American liberty.³

³ See Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988); James C. Mohr, *Radical Republicans in the North: State Politics During* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976); W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1935). Maldwyn A. Jones, *The Limits of Liberty: American History, 1607-1992* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

Following the Civil War, most Southern whites were headstrong in their desire to restore their hegemony. They were enraged and embarrassed by their loss in the Civil War, and undaunted in their efforts to perpetuate an American hierarchy built upon black servility and white supremacy. Following the compromise of 1877 and the end of Reconstruction, white supremacy reigned in the former Confederacy, with a less noxious form shrouding the North. What did remain was the enduring legacy of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments; African American's legal freedom, citizenship, and male suffrage. These rights were not dead. They needed only to be resuscitated and enforced. In the interim, a cadre of professional black Reconstruction professionals and politicians endeavored to do so.

Whites throughout the nation erected barriers to thwart African American autonomy. Southern "Black Codes" as they have come to be known, were instituted to limit the areas in which blacks could purchase or rent property in states like Mississippi and South Carolina. Vagrancy laws imposed heavy penalties that were designed to force African Americans to return to work on plantations from which they were recently liberated. African Americans were not permitted to testify in court, except in cases involving other African Americans. Fines were levied for alleged seditious speeches, insulting gestures or acts, absence from work, violating curfews, and the possession of firearms. In addition to enduring systematic political and economic oppression, African Americans had their freedom assaulted by white terrorist organizations as well. The prototype of these groups was the Ku Klux Klan, first organized in 1866 in Pulaski, Tennessee, as a "social club" complete with costumes and secret rituals. Klansmen focused their terror on prominent Republicans, black and white. The Klan was responsible

for whippings, mutilations, and murders of men and women. Although most Klansmen were poor farmers and tradesmen, middle-class whites, including planters and merchants, bankers, lawyers, doctors, even ministers, also joined the group and participated in its brutalities.⁴

Congress attempted to thwart the efforts of the Klan through the Enforcement Acts of 1870-1871. These Acts levied penalties on persons who interfered with any citizen's right to vote, placed the election of congressmen under surveillance, and outlawed forming conspiracies, wearing disguises, resisting officers, and intimidating officials. By the time of the compromise of 1877, the Klan had been formally suppressed. Its members, in turn, went underground and continued to wage a more clandestine war against African Americans and sympathetic whites. Although the violence continued, Allen W. Trelease explains, Klansmen became more influential politically through elections and outright political intimidation and corruption.⁵

Throughout the last decades of the nineteenth century and well into the second half of the twentieth century, white supremacists in the South constructed a society that was split in two, separate and unequal. Supported by silence, indifference, and Northern industrialist's use of race to prevent the formation of interracial alliances, white supremacy reigned. Quasi-scientific Social Darwinism was the prevailing "scientific" ideology of the

⁴ See Allen W. Trelease, *White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995). The terms "Klansman" and "Klansmen" are used because white women did not participate formally in Ku Klux Klan activities until its "second rising" in the second decade of the twentieth century. For an engrossing history of this movement, see Kathleen M. Blee, *Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

⁵ Ibid.

time, and it presumed that people of African descent were genetically inferior, beastly, and lascivious. Traditional prejudices were, therefore, reinforced with the measure of scientific legitimacy. African Americans were discriminated against and segregated as a result. Under the ruling climate of Social Darwinism and supercilious American imperialism, it was in essence open season on black people. They were lynched, raped, fleeced, and mocked with impunity. African Americans, during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, had reached what Rayford Logan christened the “nadir” of African American history.⁶

The black professional class rose out of this racialized disorder as a result of discrimination and segregation. They cultivated their institutions which promoted their well-being and advancement. The first generation of black professional leaders played a key role in preparing future generations for life in a white supremacist society. Hine argues that the astuteness and determination of African American leaders of earlier generations enabled them to better evaluate the *au courant* needs of black communities. With the advantage of hindsight, she argues, “the third generation of black professionals, especially in the 1930s, 40s, and 50s, fashioned appropriate resistance strategies and an oppositional consciousness required to launch the social transformation that generated the educational, medical, legal, cultural, and sexual rights movements of our age.” This is precisely what the first and second generations of Ragsdales in Oklahoma and the Dickeyes in Pennsylvania did for Lincoln and Eleanor. The seeds were planted for their careers as

⁶ Hine, *Speak Truth to Power*, xviii. Also see Howard N. Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865-1890* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996); C. Vann Woodward, *Reunion and Reaction: The Compromise of 1877 and the End of Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951); Rayford Logan, *The Negro in American Life and Thought: The Nadir; 1877-1901* (New York: Dial Press, 1954).

professional activist long before they were born and just as a small desert outpost became a city named Phoenix. It was in Oklahoma and Pennsylvania that their stories began.⁷

The Ragsdale tradition of professionalism, service, and activism began over one hundred years ago. William Ragsdale, Sr., Lincoln Ragsdale's paternal grandfather, was a pioneer businessman in Indian Territory, Muskogee, Oklahoma. He was born in Alma, Arkansas in 1871, and moved to Muskogee at an early age. He soon met a school teacher, and fellow Arkansas native, by the name of Malinda Haes. Haes was very active in several benevolent and activist organization in their community. The two were soon married and immediately set out to position themselves as a force in their community. William wanted to establish himself in business, and with a Mr. Baily, he founded a livery table in 1889. They named it the Creek Livery Barn. In 1890, George W. Davis succeeded Mr. Bailey at Creek Livery Barn, and formed a partnership with William Ragsdale. It was well equipped with all the new styles of carriages and wagons of that time period, and a fine stock of driving and saddle horses. Carriages were furnished for funerals, weddings, parties, and balls.⁸

The 1890s were a turbulent time in United States history. African Americans struggled to rebound from the destruction of Reconstruction, while most European Americans rallied around the banner of White supremacy. During the 1890s black people witnessed their participation in the American legislative process end. The remaining black members of the United States Congress following Reconstruction, Henry Cheatham of

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ United States Census of Population, 1920. Soundex Code R234 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1920); Universal Memorial Center Inc., *Ragsdale Family History in Funeral Service* (Phoenix: Universal Memorial Center, 1999), 1.

North Carolina, John Mercer Langston of Virginia, Thomas E. Miller of South Carolina, and George H. White of North Carolina, were unceremoniously removed from office by 1901. White was the South's last black congressman until 1972.

Economic instability and decline, in addition to separatist policies of farm coalitions created for whites, prompted black farmers to form the Colored Farmer's Alliance in 1889. Leaders such as Thomas Watson of Georgia spearheaded a campaign to recruit black people to the Populist party. Many poor white farmers supported populist objectives. They organized across racial lines and often risked their lives and livelihood to do so. Their effort was destroyed by segregationist whites and Southern Democrats. During the elections of 1892, several populist candidates were elected to some congressional and state offices. In response, white supremacists exploited the "negrophobia" that enveloped the South, alleging that black populist voters could alter the course of the election in favor of a Republican party dominated by Northerners if the Southern white vote was split in two. During this pivotal election year 235 people were lynched by forces seeking to maintain the existing hierarchy in the South. Black people represented 155 of the victims murdered. The Panic of 1893 inspired what became a serious depression, and in 1896 the U. S. Supreme Court established the practice of Jim Crow racial segregation as the law of the land in its landmark *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling.⁹

This climate of intense racial oppression and naked white supremacy often

⁹ Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Era of Jim Crow* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 175, 314, and *Been in The Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Vintage, 1980), 160; Hine, Hine, and Harrold, *The African American Odyssey*, 310; Hine, Hine, and Harrold, *The African American Odyssey*, 312, 315, 331; Also see Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955).

culminated in some of the worst incidents of violence in American history. This violence was constant, but it had peaks of intensity. Race riots of epic proportions unfolded in Phoenix, South Carolina and in Wilmington, North Carolina in 1898. The number of lynchings continued to escalate, as did the rape of black women by white men. African Americans displayed their opposition to this treatment and to the reigning political structure by “voting with their feet.” As early as 1865 thousands of black people elected to “quit” the South by migrating to other regions of the U. S. Although the majority of black people remained in the South, by 1890 scores of black migrants had relocated in cities such as Nickodemus, Kansas, Muskogee, Oklahoma, and Phoenix, Arizona. William Ragsdale was among the first generation of African Americans to migrate to Muskogee, Oklahoma, and by 1890 he had laid the groundwork for a future in business that would last for four generations.¹⁰

William Ragsdale and George W. Davis were highly respected within their community for their strict integrity. Since Ragsdale was so well equipped with horses and carriages needed for funerals, friends suggested that they go into the undertaking business. He pondered that suggestion and concluded that it was a worthwhile endeavor. In 1896 Ragsdale founded the Home Undertaking Company of Muskogee, Oklahoma. He elected not to use the Ragsdale name in the title of his business. As a sometimes outspoken

¹⁰ Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1976), 146-159; *Salt River Herald*, May 11, 1878; *Arizona Republican*, July 21, November 27, 1889; “History of Blacks in Phoenix Notes,” (Geoffrey P. Mawn Files, Arizona Historical Foundation, Hayden Library, Arizona State University); Richard E. Harris, *The First 100 Years: A History of Arizona’s Blacks* (Apache Junction: Relmo, 1983), 1; Kotlanger, “Phoenix Arizona, 1920-1940,” 444; Whitaker, “In Search of Black Phoenixians,” 14-20; Federal manuscript census schedule, Oklahoma Territory, 1880.

individual, and an emerging professional black man in his local community, Ragsdale's success would have been perceived as a threat to the existing racial order. Many African Americans believed that explicit promotion of their successes would invite violent retaliation from whites seeking to keep them dependent and deferential. In fact, one of William Ragsdale's sons, William Ragsdale, Jr., was assassinated by the Ku Klux Klan in 1926. William, Jr. challenged the racial protocol of the community by serving as the President of the NAACP in Oklahoma, and for serving black and white people while working as a taxi driver. Lincoln Ragsdale argued that despite white supremacist efforts to intimidate African Americans through lynchings and other violence, blacks were undaunted in their efforts to give meaning to their freedom. "It didn't put fear [in us]", he asserted, "it put aggressiveness in us that we're going to have to work it through the system. You can't work it with a gun because you can't outshoot white folks. There are more white folks than black folks. So you have to work it intellectually, hard work, saving your money...You have to out-smart him."¹¹

Unable to conceal his business acumen for long, William, Sr. later changed the name of his business from The Home Undertaking Company to Ragsdale Mortuary. Over time the business progressed from one centered around horse drawn transportation, to a completely motorized fleet of vehicles by 1917. Shortly after, William met school teacher Malinda Haes. After a brief courtship, the couple was married and on their way to starting a family of their own. They would eventually have two daughters and six sons.

Ragsdale's daughters were Beatrice and Celestine Ragsdale, and his sons were William,

¹¹ Universal Memorial Center, *Ragsdale Family History*, 1; Baker, "The Man Who Refused to Be Invisible," 96; Lincoln Ragsdale interview.

Jr., Louis, Howard, Vernon, Theodore, and Hartwell Ragsdale. Like their father, five of Williams Ragsdale's sons became undertakers. Upon the death of William Ragsdale, Sr. in 1921, his son Theodore Ragsdale, Sr., took his place at the helm of the family business in Muskogee, Oklahoma. Other Ragsdale mortuaries were eventually established in Taft, Bristow and Ardmore, Oklahoma.¹²

Scattered across Oklahoma, the Ragsdale's mortuaries firmly established themselves as members of the black professional class. Ministers, teachers, attorneys, and physicians did not monopolize the professional class of black people in the U. S., and Oklahoma was no exception. Morticians have played leading roles as professionals in black communities for nearly one hundred and fifty years. In 1899 W. E. B. Du Bois, renown scholar and founder of the NAACP, argued that black morticians constituted a solid, upwardly mobile segment of the African American community. "In no branch of business, save one," he insisted, "has the Negro evinced so much push, taste and enterprise."¹³

Booker T. Washington, champion of industrial education, the founder of both the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama and the National Negro Business League, and chief Du Bois antagonist, agreed. He stated in 1889 that it was "a curious fact that with the exception of that of caterer there is no business in which Negroes seem to be more numerously engaged or one in which they have been more uniformly successful." Innovations in body preparations, coffins and caskets, embalming procedures, methods of

¹² Ibid.

¹³ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (Philadelphia: Publications of the University of Pennsylvania, 1899), 118.

training and certification, and the expansion of the funeral market, helped make the funeral industry a viable enterprise. This, coupled with the fact that black funeral directors tapped into an exclusive, ever expanding market base, propelled the funeral industry into a potentially lucrative business for many black entrepreneurs.¹⁴

Michael A. Plater argues that “as a segregated industry with loyal African American clients, the funeral industry had a consistent profile throughout the early twentieth-century.” Their service to African Americans has given rise to one of the most unique relationships in American history. Undertakers, though providing a necessary service in the preparation and interment of the dead, did much more than that for black people living in a segregated society. Plater posits that “funeral service was a profitable industry that African Americans engaged in without white competition, and as a result generated large amounts of capital.”¹⁵

The funeral director, in turn, redistributed tremendous amounts of this capital in the African American community. Moreover, because funeral service was a church sanctioned ritual and the industry had enormous economic influence in the community, morticians evolved into “major power brokers” in early twentieth century African American communities. For example, black undertakers provided meeting space in their businesses for African American organizations, functions, and mass meetings. Meeting in

¹⁴ Booker T. Washington, *The Negro in Business* (Boston: Hertel, Jenkins, & Company, 1907), 94; Michael A. Plater, *African American Entrepreneurship in Richmond, 1890-1940* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), 41-81; Jessica Mitford, *The American Way of Death* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963), 222-241; Vanderlyn R. Pine, *Caretaker of the Dead: The American Funeral Director* (New York: Irvington Publishers, 1975), 25-41.

¹⁵ Plater, *African American Entrepreneurship*, xx, xvii-xviii, 164.

spaces owned by black funeral home directors, Plater maintains, “meant that the fraternal orders did not have to use their capital for building construction costs or lose capital outside the community by renting from white landlords.” Funeral businesses strengthened the economic base of the entire black community.¹⁶

Morticians reached elite status in black and white communities, according to Plater, “by using economic segregation to achieve political integration.” The elite status of funeral directors such as William Ragsdale, Sr. and his heirs, and their willingness to be at the forefront of movements to improve the conditions of African Americans, provides a unique story about African American culture and its internal power structure. The ability of morticians to acquire wealth and rise to elite status within their communities, for example, was directly related to their understanding of the importance of African American death rituals. They capitalized on this knowledge and provided black communities funeral services which complemented their cultural traditions. As Plater states, “they became experts at using ethnicity to promote their business.” Morticians employed African American tradition, the black church, and black folklore to create an environment which catered to the wants and needs of black communities. They offered services that white funeral directors were either unwilling or unable to provide. At a basic level, they simply exploited a fundamental principal of supply and demand.¹⁷

Black people throughout the African Diaspora have placed a tremendous amount of importance on death rites. People of African descent, particularly in the U. S., have valued death ceremonies primarily because of their ability to transform and enhance the

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid. 162-65.

status of individuals who were somehow disinherited by society while they lived. For black people, extravagant and sometimes costly funerals are deemed necessary as meaningful proclamations of the deceased's intrinsic value. Joseph Holloway posits that these death rites and what they symbolized were cultural retentions, or "Africanisms," originating from African death customs. The Bakongo of West Africa, for instance, practiced grand burial rituals to acquire the spiritual support and protection of their ancestors. They paid tribute to the dead while employing elaborate funeral ceremonies to empower the living. Morticians also wielded a great deal of power because black people placed a great deal of importance on funeral services.

Funeral directors also secured wealth and status because the majority of African Americans who needed their services were not prepared to bargain with them on an equal basis. Most black people, who were primarily working class, were poor and unschooled in the art of negotiation. Furthermore, African Americans were forced to buy the services of black funeral directors if they wanted to be buried in a manner reflecting their cultural cosmology. In short, black funeral directors sometimes exploited their customers socio-economic condition and culture for financial and political gain. Often sheltered from the negative effects of racial economic isolation, and well suited to make use of their entrepreneurial niche, black funeral directors were able to nurture their sometimes powerful hunger for power and prestige. Despite their gracious manner and devoted service toward their clients for example, they were more often than not shrewd, hustling, and imaginative entrepreneurs.

R. C. Scott, a contemporary of William Ragsdale, Sr. and prominent mortician in Richmond, Virginia, between 1890 and 1940, stated that undertakers usually adhered to

the moral doctrine of “charity yes,” but “charity tempered with prudence.” Undertakers capitalized on black American culture to create community solidarity and provide a monetary foundation for economic development for themselves and their community. They cultivated social roles within the community beyond simply providing funeral services. They were business and social leaders. Although African Americans often had few if any alternatives, black communities supported this symbiotic relationship by consistently funneling cash into the funeral industry via services such as transportation fees, meeting rentals, and insurance organizations.

Following in his father’s footsteps, Hartwell Ragsdale had established himself in the family as skilled mortician by the early 1920s. During this period he also met, courted, and married a school teacher by the name of Onlia Violet Perkins. Their marriage produced two sons, Hartwell Ragsdale, Jr. and Lincoln Ragsdale. Lincoln Johnson Ragsdale was born on July 27, 1926. Onlia Ragsdale gave birth to young Lincoln “out in the edge of town” where his grandmother lived. The family remained in Muskogee for four more years, and in 1930, they moved to Ardmore where they settled at 803 E. Main Street. Once the family became settled in their new surroundings, Hartwell established the Ragsdale Mortuary in Ardmore. This business was the foundation upon which Hartwell and Onlia would cultivate their careers as entrepreneurs and advocates of African Americans in Oklahoma. Not only did they possess a desire to succeed in business, they believed they had a duty to support the black community.

As a child, Lincoln Ragsdale was taught that black people had a “responsibility to the community, to yourself, to your family, and to your race.” When it came to community activities, Hartwell and Onlia Ragsdale were “always involved.” Onlia was

president of the Oklahoma chapter of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW). Created in 1896, the NACW has been regarded by many scholars as “America’s premier Black women’s organization in the first quarter of the twentieth century.” Black women throughout American history have struggled to combat negative stereotypes which depicted them as licentious, irresponsible, and intellectually inferior. They have been faced with the challenge of fighting racism, sexism, and economic subordination. “In defense of themselves” and all African Americans, black women organized clubs at the local and state level to battle the forces which conspired against them. The NACW operated as an umbrella organization to which a network of state and local clubs were affiliated. These organizations “worked for self-improvement and community uplift as both benevolent and beneficial societies of an earlier period had.” Their motto was “lift as we climb,” and their agendas were defined by a commitment to education, economic independence, political activity, and health care. The NACW was organized, in part, to fight a racist, sexist society, which sought to demean and marginalize black womanhood. “The creation of the National Association of Colored Women,” argues Wanda A. Hendricks, “was both an affirmation of their efforts and a method of organizing women’s clubs nationwide in the struggle for voting rights and health and educational programs for women and their communities.”

Being the wife of a successful businessman provided Onlia flexibility that was illusive to most black women. Lincoln Ragsdale remembered her being “one of the few educated ladies who was able to retire from school teaching at a young age.” Although Onlia stayed devoted to her club activity, at thirty years old she decided to quit teaching school to assist Hartwell in the family funeral home. Onlia certainly had more than her

share of familial, organization, and occupational responsibilities. Lincoln, however, remembered her having “time to do a lot of things.” It is unlikely that Onlia had a great deal of time, and even less likely that she chose to “retire” for conventional reasons.¹⁸

When she left teaching in 1930, the Great Depression had transformed a prosperous American society into a nation reeling in an economic tailspin. In this environment, few Americans were spared financial troubles, and African Americans, including the black professional class, were often the hardest hit. Under these circumstances it is much more plausible that Onlia left her teaching career to help maintain the solvency of her family’s business. The effects of the Great Depression was not entirely lost on Lincoln, as he recalled his parents having to “raise money to send [their] kids to school.” Ragsdale children were taught that “you have to do what you’ve got to do.”

¹⁸ Joseph E. Holloway, *Africanisms in American Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 81-91. For a more comprehensive discussion of African cultural retentions in the U.S. see: E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939); Melville Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1941); Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974); Peter Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974); Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976); Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture Black Consciousness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); David R. Rodiger, “And Die in Dixie, Funerals, Death and Heaven in the Slave Community,” *Massachusetts Review* 22 (1981), 163-168; Charles Joyner, *Down by the River Side* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984); Daniel C. Littlefield, *Rice and Slaves: Ethnicity and the Slave Trade in Colonial South Carolina* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1991); Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992); Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake & Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Robert Crafton, Sr. *An Autobiography dictated to Anthony J. Binga, Sr.* (Richmond: 1953-1957), 18. Also Quoted in Plater, *African American Entrepreneurship*, 161; Universal Memorial Center, *Ragsdale Family History*, 1; Lincoln Ragsdale, Enlisted Record of and Report of Separation: Honorable Discharge WD, AGO Form 53-55, Air Corps (Washington, D.C.: U. S. Army Air Corps, November 19, 1945).

Doing “what they had to do” also involved living in a segregated society dominated by white supremacy and racial discrimination. Lincoln Ragsdale believed that Oklahoma was in many ways as segregated and sympathetic to racist beliefs and policies as any state in the union. In 1907, in fact, Governor William “Bill” Murray, referred to as “snuff-dipping or tobacco chewing Murray” by many blacks, played a key role in institutionalizing Jim Crow in Oklahoma. Governor Murray “made it illegal for blacks to use white folks’s telephones,” Ragsdale recalled. “He encouraged cities and towns to be all white and all black. We had towns like Henrietta, Durant, and Norman, Oklahoma. In fact, he worked to have the University of Oklahoma built in Norman, Oklahoma, because it was a town “where blacks weren’t allowed to spend the night.”¹⁹

Norman, Oklahoma instituted an ordinance which made it illegal for African Americans to spend the night, or be out at night, without the permission or sponsorship of

¹⁹ Lincoln Ragsdale interview, Dean E. Smith. In this interview Lincoln Ragsdale, Sr. states that Onlia Ragsdale “was president of the Colored Women’s Federated Association.” I have been unable to locate a record of an organization by this name. I suspect that Lincoln did not remember the exact name of the association. Having said this, I believe it is much more likely that the organization his mother presided over was the Oklahoma Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs, or the more plausible National Association of Colored Women; Elaine M. Smith, “Mary McCleod Bethune,” In Darlene Clark Hine, Elsa Barkley Brown, and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn (eds.), *Black Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia, Vol. A-L* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 117; Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy A Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999), 21-55; Stephanie F. Shaw, “Black Club Women and the Creation of the National Association of Colored Women,” In Darlene Clark Hine, Wilma King, and Linda Reed (eds.), *We Specialize in the Wholly Impossible: A Reader in Black Women’s History* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, 1995), 441; Darlene Clark Hine and Kathleen Thompson, *A Shining Thread of Hope: The History of Black Women in America* (New York: Broadway Books, 1998), 180-181; Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, *African American Women in the Struggle for the Vote, 1850-1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 90-106; Wanda A. Hendricks, *Gender, Race, and Politics in the Midwest: Black Club Women in Illinois* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), xii; Lincoln Ragsdale interview.

local whites. Murray maneuvered to place the university in Norman to “protect the white folks” from blacks, Ragsdale maintained. European Americans “were so bad in that town,” he remembered, that “if you drove your car through the town, to show respect [to whites] you had to take your hat off.” When Ragsdale and other African Americans would drive through Norman during the day hours, the majority of them would “automatically” take their hat off if they had one on, because if they did not, “the police would stop you.”²⁰

White supremacy and the inequality, terrorism, and violence it often spawned, angered Lincoln at early age. When he was told that his uncle William had been murdered by the Ku Klux Klan he was mortified and infuriated. His indignation was exacerbated by occasional reminders of this tragedy as he came of age. “After hearing about my uncle’s lynching all my life,” he revealed, his displeasure “became a subtle rage.” Lincoln worked hard to avoid becoming bitter, but at times it was difficult. “You push it back,” he conceded, “but it’s always there.” Lincoln chose to overcome his anger and frustration by using it as fuel to fire his passion for black empowerment and African American racial redemption. This required vigilance on the part of African Americans, he contended, because “you’re always proving something. You’re always pushing. You’re always fighting.” The lynching of his uncle did not stop his family from participating in organizations seeking to protect and advance black people. Lincoln’s uncle Theodore “Ted” Ragsdale succeeded William Ragsdale, Jr. as the president of the Oklahoma NAACP in the 1930s.²¹

²⁰ Lincoln Ragsdale interview, Dean E. Smith.

²¹ Lori K. Baker, “The Man Who Refused to Be Invisible,” 96.

In the 1930s, Lincoln also completed primary school and entered secondary school at Douglass High School in Ardmore. During these years he became enamored of aviation. There were only a few airplanes that were accessible in Ardmore, Lincoln believed, and one of them was owned by an older, stately fellow. This airplane, as he recalled, was old and resembled a crop duster. The owner of the plane hired a friend of the Ragsdale's, a Mr. Jones, to serve as his copilot in business, which was presumably crop dusting. After Mr. Jones learned how to fly the airplane, he became quite well known in Ardmore's black community as a pilot. Lincoln remembered him flying past his home "every day going back and forth with his goggles hanging down." He sported "leather jackets" and "a beautiful white scarf." Lincoln was duly impressed when he saw Jones adorned in his flying regalia. Jones died in a tragic automobile accident near Biloxi, Mississippi not long after becoming an experienced pilot. Lincoln's father was contracted to handle the funeral arrangement and was dispatched to Biloxi to recover Jones' body. When Hartwell, Sr. returned to Ardmore with the body, Ardmore's rumor mill was circulating outlandish stories about Jones dying in a dramatic plane crash. People in Ardmore were "cautious about flying" for quite some time as a result.²²

Lincoln knew the truth surrounding Jones' death, and continued to be interested in aviation. Occasionally a pilot from the Oklahoma Ford Tri-motor company would fly his airplane to Ardmore to provide rides around the city for one dollar. The Ragsdales looked forward to the pilot's visits with great eagerness. Lincoln's father would escort him and an equally excited Hartwell, Jr. to the airplane to help load the boys in the craft. After watching his sons enjoy their ride across the Ardmore sky, he would step aboard and

²² Lincoln Ragsdale interview, Dean E. Smith.

enjoy his own mid-air escape. He told the boys that he preferred to fly separately because he did not want the plane “to go down and kill” them, leaving nobody “to take care of your mother.” The area “didn’t even have an airport,” Lincoln recalled. The airplanes “landed in the field in a place that was flat and level.”

Hartwell, Sr. never paid for his son’s flights over Ardmore. He treated them to a good time, while also teaching them the value of money and the nature of entrepreneurship. Hartwell, Sr. would buy two sets of newspapers distributed by black publishers, each for one dollar. He would then give the newspapers, publications such as the *Pittsburgh Courier* and the *Chicago Defender*, to his sons. If they each sold all of their newspapers, they could make up to one dollar. Their one dollar allowance, and their trip across the Oklahoma sky, were earned.²³

The early 1930s ushered in a decade of change for the Ragsdales and all African Americans. Major developments inaugurated a new era of black political participation and economic nationalism. In 1930 the NAACP successfully blocked the appointment of John J. Parker to the supreme Court. Parker, an openly white supremacist Circuit Court Judge, had argued that “participation of the Negro in politics is a source of evil and danger to both races.” Fannie Peck also created the Detroit Housewives’ League (DHL) that year. Promoting economic nationalism, which called for black women’s self-determination, black people to only spend their money in institutions which employed them, the DHL assisted black families and businesses during the Great Depression by organizing a “direct spending” campaign. This effort consolidated black resources and buying power, and forced many white business owners to hire black women and children. Quickly spreading

²³ Ibid.

to other cities, the DHL eventually secured an estimated 75,000 new jobs for African Americans.²⁴

In 1932 Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected president, and in 1933, the first lady Eleanor Roosevelt, and Harold Ickes, president of the Chicago Chapter of the NAACP, organized the Federal Council on Negro Affairs, or the “Black Cabinet.” The “Black Cabinet,” led by Mary McCleod Bethune and consisting of thirty African American leaders, solicited the president and the federal government to improve the condition of African Americans. In 1934 Elijah Muhammad became the leader of the Nation of Islam. The following year the Supreme Court’s ruling in *Norris v. Alabama* declared the right to a trial by a jury of one’s peers, which in theory, rested away from white Southerners the ability to form juries consisting entirely of white men, and Mary McLeod Bethune formed the National Council of Negro Women. In 1936 President Roosevelt was reelected with the overwhelming support of African Americans, signaling a historic movement of black people from the Republican Party to the Democratic Party, and in 1937 William Hastie was selected as the first African American federal judge.²⁵

When World War II erupted in 1939, Lincoln was in high school. He augmented his studies, however, by assisting in the family business and continuing to sell newspapers. When black men were brought to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas to work for the war effort, the budding entrepreneur made the trip to sell his merchandise to the soldiers. It was during this point in time that Lincoln first heard rumors that the federal government was contemplating the creation of a flying school for black soldiers. This news, coupled with

²⁴ Hine, Hine, and Harrold, *The African American Odyssey*, 419-441.

²⁵ Ibid.

Lincoln's interest in aviation, set his spirits ablaze. He was not alone. When the rumors became official reality on January 16, 1941, newspapers, including all of the major black periodicals, trumpeted the historic news. On this day the U. S. War Department announced the creation of a training facility for black Air Force pilots in Tuskegee, Alabama. They would become the 99th Pursuit Squadron, 332nd Fighter Group, and the 477th Bombardment Group, better known as the Tuskegee Airmen.²⁶

Every week the black press "would tell about their progress" Lincoln recalled. The resulting enthusiasm within the black community made the sales of black newspapers increase dramatically. Lincoln was still selling the *Pittsburgh Courier* and the *Chicago Defender*, and was now earning up to five dollars a week. "I made a lot of money," he remembered. He charged "a nickel a paper," and "ten cents for the out of town papers, and they cost a nickel apiece to deliver" to a home or an office. His ready access to the latest news about the Tuskegee Airmen kept him in tune with the progress of the black soldiers being trained in Tuskegee.²⁷

Although the idea appealed to him, becoming a Tuskegee airman was not a specific goal of Lincoln's. He would later say that "I wanted to be a pilot because I wanted to prove something. I had no real desire to fly. The papers said that blacks could not do it. I wanted to prove that we could do it. We [as a nation] were very segregated. The Army was segregated. The Navy was segregated. We couldn't use any of the facilities. We were treated as second class citizens, but the only way to change something

²⁶ Lawrence P. Scott and William M. Womack, Sr. *Double V: The Civil Rights Struggle of the Tuskegee Airmen* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1992), i; Lincoln Ragsdale interview, Dean E. Smith.

²⁷ Ibid.

is to prove that you can do something.” Lincoln was interested in, and encouraged to further his education beyond high school, and in the process, work for the betterment of the race. He looked upon a career in the military, specifically the Army Air Corps, as an opportunity to secure the education he desired while also fighting the myth of black inferiority. Academically he was not sufficiently prepared to pursue an education after high school, however, whether it was in the military or elsewhere.²⁸

Lincoln cited his segregated education in a deprived school for his lagging behind. “Due to the fact that the high school was segregated” and unequal, he recalled, his training in mathematics and English was limited. Moreover, many of the students at his school lacked training in basic health and what the dominant society established as proper social protocol. “A lot of us had not had social graces taught to us,” Ragsdale remembered. “The teachers spent a lot of time teaching us cleanliness, how to eat, cook, nutrition, and all of those things.” In a “regular” school day, therefore, Lincoln and his classmates would spend “two hours a day just [learning] how to be people” and three hours a day doing school work. Clearly Ragsdale was a person, and as a member of the black professional class, he was surely exposed to the groups prevailing “social graces.” It is plausible, however, that many of his classmates, by virtue of their impoverished socio-economic status were not.²⁹

Lincoln and many of his fellow students were fortunate enough to have a teacher who would sacrifice his own time, and no doubt money, to help them strengthen their

²⁸ Lincoln J. Ragsdale, interview conducted by NewsChannel3, KTVK., February 16, 1995. In “A Tribute to Lincoln Ragsdale,” (Phoenix: KTVK NewsChannel3, February 16, 1995); Lincoln Ragsdale interview, Dean E. Smith.

²⁹ Ibid.

formal and informal education. H. F. Wilson, saw World War II as an opportunity for some of his students at Douglass School to advance themselves by joining the armed services, or capitalizing on some of the prospects that war mobilization created. He initiated an intensive after school program to prepare a small group of students to take and pass the military and college entrance examinations. He organized a body of “about seven” students who met in his home three nights a week. “We would stay there for an hour and a half,” Lincoln recalled. Wilson instructed them in “trigonometry, basic English,” and “how to read statements” and understand their meaning. He took advantage of his opportunity to make-up for lost ground, and excelled in his after school study. Lincoln graduated from Douglass High School in 1944, and with the help of Wilson, he believed he was prepared to take advantage of any opportunity that presented itself. Attending college appealed to him, but the immediate future for Lincoln was in the skies. The opportunity to fly, defend his country, and destroy the myth of the intellectually inferior, cowardly, unpatriotic “negro,” was to him a chance of a lifetime. Rising to the status of an elite Air Force officer was his immediate goal, and he promptly set out to reach it.³⁰

While the Ragsdales of Oklahoma were writing their own chapter in the long history of black entrepreneurship and activism, another family, which would eventually unite with the Ragsdales, were building upon their own history of hard work and industry. Eleanor Odell Dickey Ragsdale was born on February 23, 1926, to Estelle Ashley Dickey and William Dickey, Sr. in Collingdale, Delaware. William and Estelle Dickey had three other children; another daughter, Gwendolyn, and two sons, Earle and William. The

³⁰ Ibid.

family resided in Eden Cemetery in Collingdale, Pennsylvania from 1917 until 1938. Eleanor's father was the superintendent of the cemetery, and her mother was a school teacher. Eleanor often recalled the fun times she had with her siblings. Some of her happiest childhood days, she remembered, were "spent in a beautiful flower garden and playing hide and seek with her brothers and sisters behind the tall tombstones" in the cemetery where her father worked. The Dickey family migrated to a Darby Pennsylvania, a small Philadelphia suburb, in 1938. Eleanor's mother continued to teach, and her father became the head superintendent of the fifty-two acre cemetery. Their family again lived on the cemetery property.³¹

Eleanor Ragsdale grew, and during her teen years she attended Darby High School. Like Lincoln, Eleanor's parents and extended family taught her that achievement and duty to family and race were the criterion by which her success as an individual would be calculated. By virtue of her being black and female, however, Eleanor's initiation into the black professional class emerged along a different trajectory. Unlike Lincoln, Eleanor learned that her status in society was not only defined by her being an African American professional, but a woman as well. Stephanie J. Shaw argues that black female would-be leaders like Eleanor faced an array of constraints in their lives because of private sphere responsibilities bestowed upon them as women. On the other hand, she posits, they were entrusted to assume crucial public obligations because of the needs of African Americans. Historically, to meet these needs the black community formulated a social construction of gender that was consciously devised to empower black women, especially working

³¹ Universal Memorial Center, *A Celebration, Eleanor Dickey Ragsdale*, 14; Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale interview, Dean E. Smith, November 3, 1990.

women, to transcend the pernicious effects of racism, sexism, and economic oppression. Black women, like Eleanor, learned early on that “reconciling these seemingly opposing traditions” was “both necessary and difficult.” “To increase the likelihood of their success,” Shaw maintains, “interested persons generated a process that encouraged these women to take responsibility for their own futures and simultaneously to become agents of social change. The process produced some notable leaders among black women and had far reaching consequences in and beyond African American communities.”³²

The primary “interested parties” in Eleanor’s life were her immediate family and members of her local church. They provided what appears to have been a relatively quiet home life undergirded and sustained by black institutions and black culture. Eleanor devoted a great deal of time to reading and attending church services with her family, but was always mindful of the over all status of black people in relation to whites, and what challenges and responsibilities this dubious relationship held for her. Her recollections of race relations in Collingdale, unlike the aggravated memories of many blacks subjected to the prejudice and racism of the time, were atypical and somewhat innocuous. Coming of age in a Northern community, perhaps, can be cited as the reason for her developing memories devoid of the many of the overt racial indignities that Lincoln endured in Oklahoma. Eleanor maintained that “in the little community in which I lived, we just happened to be the only colored family in that community.” So, straight through elementary school,” she remembered, “each of my two brothers and sisters and I were the only colored child in each of our classes, up until we moved to Darby” where the school

³² Stephanie J. Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to Be and to Do: Black Professional Women Workers During the Jim Crow Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 4, 5, 10.

was integrated.³³

Despite growing up in a Northern town, however, Eleanor was astute enough to comprehend the nature and significance of the social construction of race in America. She was aware that she lived “an extremely isolated type of life.” Her family knew they “were of a colored race,” and that their marginalized experience “was integrated in the school system” with caution. The Dickey’s lived “in a community that was black,” and on Sundays they went “to a black church” where “Sunday School” and their “social life was with blacks.” Eleanor came to cherish her memories of interacting with the black communities of Collingdale and Darby.³⁴

With regard to *de facto* and *de jure* racial segregation, however, she believed that those affected by it “just grow up and accept that [it exists] because that is all you know.” Unlike Lincoln, she never felt oppressed by white citizens in the towns where she grew up. One of the few institutional manifestations of racial prejudice in Eleanor’s youth was the “colored section” in the movie theater near her family’s home. As a young person, however, she did not concern herself much with white prejudice. Eleanor was largely interested in what was happening in other black communities, not the often odious nature of racial segregation. She stated that “I always felt that reading the black newspaper [in town] was the most wonderful thing in the world, because that is where you found out [about] what was happening among black people.”³⁵

³³ Universal Memorial Center, *A Celebration, Eleanor Ragsdale*, 14; Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale interview.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

To Eleanor, much of the news she read about in African American newspapers was something of which to be proud. She recalled that “when Adam Clayton Powell came to speak in Philadelphia, we just made a big holiday of it.” She and other blacks in Philadelphia were happy “just to be able to sit and look at that beautiful man and listen to his elocution.” Notwithstanding *de facto* racial segregation, Eleanor’s experiences as a young black woman in Pennsylvania, were in some ways different than Lincoln’s life as a young black man in Oklahoma. The ubiquitous nature of racial segregation and terrorism that the Ragsdale’s faced in Oklahoma, was somewhat alien to the Dickey’s. Both families, however, knew that race mattered, it was simply a matter of degrees.³⁶

Eleanor excelled as a student and graduated from Darby High School in 1943. She was recognized for her hard work and sagacity, and was awarded an academic scholarship to attend college. Aided by her family and her fellowship award, she enrolled in a college established for the education of black people, Cheyney State Teacher’s College, now Cheyney University of Pennsylvania. Eleanor went to Cheyney, to further her education *and* her socialization into a culture of racial restoration. Indeed, most black colleges and university were not simply erected to provide their students with an education, their goal was to produce future generations of community leaders. Their goal was not simply to promote professional advancement and financial gain, but racial uplift and cultural enhancement. Struggling under the yoke of racial oppression, Black communities required its professional people to also pursue positive changes in health, social conditions, economic opportunity, and political standing on behalf of the race. Black communities considered devotion to racial reform and philanthropy to be a bedrock principle upon

³⁶ Ibid.

which a traditional higher education should be built.³⁷

Black women like Eleanor were expected to adhere to a higher standard than black men of equal standing. In addition to preparing themselves to be at once professional people, agents for social change, and gatekeepers for African American families, communities, and culture, they were compelled to defend themselves against racist and sexist attacks against their respectability, and physical and emotional well-being. The purpose of black female education went far beyond the classroom, and involved more than economic independence. To be sure, black women were encouraged to seek financial stability, but as Shaw indicates, black parents wanted their daughters to “use their education and their subsequent positions, paid or unpaid, in a socially responsible way.” Their success was gaged by their faithfulness to black community codes of service, sacrifice, and respectability. Thus, black women led the way in educating the unschooled, caring for the sick, aiding children in need, and protesting discrimination and sexual harassment, not merely to excel in a particular vocation, or to embrace a rewarding niche in the world of philanthropy. The safety, health, welfare, and prosperity of black women in America, and by extension all African Americans, was inextricably linked to their roles as key agents for social change. The well-being of black people depended upon the efficacy of their women.

Cheyney University prepared African American women to be teachers and leaders in black communities. In this capacity the institution was instrumental in shaping the professional, social, economic, political, and cultural lives of its students. Eleanor was a

³⁷ For a detailed discussion of African American attitudes regarding education, see James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

recipient of this legacy. At the time of Eleanor's training, she believed "Cheyney was one of fourteen state teacher's colleges" in Pennsylvania. It is, in fact, the oldest historically black college in the United States. It was founded in 1837 as the Quaker School for Colored Youths. Richard Humphries, a Quaker and outspoken supporter of black education, willed a ten thousand dollar endowment upon his death for the construction of an institution of higher learning to educate children of African descent. Located first in Philadelphia, the institution was moved to its present location at the meeting of Cheyney and Creek Roads in Cheyney, Pennsylvania in 1903. A Quaker Board of Managers had administered the institution for eight decades when it was purchased by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in 1922. In 1983, the college became part of the newly formed State System of Higher Education and was renamed Cheyney University of Pennsylvania. The institution, situated on rolling hillsides in the southeastern quarter of the state on two hundred and seventy-five acres, stands as the earliest representation of an institutional commitment to the education of people of African descent in the United States. There are over 7,100 Cheyney alumni throughout the United States, and 5,100 in Pennsylvania.³⁸

Eleanor did well at Cheyney and enjoyed the camaraderie between her classmates. She completed her Bachelor of Science Degree in Education in 1947 and earned an

³⁸ Paul Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1984), 9, 101, 103-104, 330; Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 2; Shaw, *What A Woman Ought to Be and To Do*, 13-67; Hine, *A Shining Thread of Hope*, 5, 205-208 and *Black Women in White*, 25, 203; 5, 205-208; Hendricks, *Gender, Race, and Politics*, 44; White, *Too Heavy a Load*, 11-18; Cheyney University of Pennsylvania, *Cheyney University of Pennsylvania Undergraduate Catalog, 1999-2002* (Cheyney: Cheyney University of Pennsylvania, 2000), 4-5.

Elementary Teaching Certificate. Eleanor did well enough in her studies to be offered a graduate school fellowship. Although she found the idea of living in the U.S. Capitol alluring, she declined a Masters Degree Fellowship at Howard University in Washington, D.C. to travel over two thousand miles to Phoenix, Arizona for her first teaching job. This decision proved to be a critical one, as she would soon find herself at the center of one of the most important local movements in the American Southwest. When she made her initial decision to make the move to Phoenix, however, her mind was not focused on the “race problem” or civil rights. Eleanor was simply happy and eager to be entering a new stage in her life. She was “excited” when she was given the assignment of teaching a first grade classroom at Dunbar Elementary School in Phoenix. Dunbar was one of two segregated elementary schools established for black Phoenician children during the second and third decades of the twentieth century. The school was adjacent to Block 41, which was bounded by Jackson and Madison, Fifth and Six streets. The school was a part of Phoenix Elementary School District Number One.³⁹

Phoenix was an attractive destination because Eleanor had relatives who lived in Phoenix. Her paternal uncle Thomas Dickey, Sr. and his wife Mayme Dickey, as well as her paternal uncle Lloyd Dickey, Jr., had migrated to Phoenix from the East coast in the early 1920s. Thomas Dickey, Sr. owned and operated a drug store within the segregated black community, and Lloyd Dickey, Jr. was principal of the segregated Booker T. Washington School in Phoenix. Although Philadelphia had just increased teacher’s salaries to \$2,000 a year, the excitement of relocating and reuniting with family members

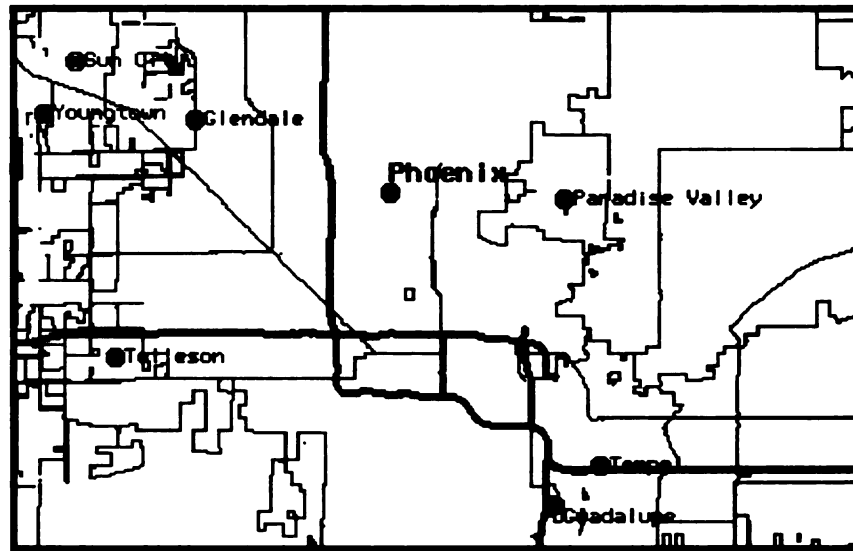
³⁹ Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale interview; Luckingham, *Minorities in Phoenix*, 134, and *Phoenix*, 53-65; Thul, *Blacks in Arizona*, 22-24.

in Phoenix, in addition to earning more money, convinced Eleanor to make the trip. Elementary School District Number One in Phoenix “was paying teachers \$2,470 for a teaching year” she recalled. Eleanor figured that the additional \$470 she would earn at Dunbar “would pay her way” to Phoenix.⁴⁰

Eleanor remembered being “fully prepared for teaching” at a segregated school for black children. Although she claimed that she “didn’t think in terms of color,” she probably had a good idea of what was going to be expected of her and what unique challenges awaited her students. “I knew that the school was all colored and I had done my practice teaching in a colored situation back in Pennsylvania.” Eleanor firmly believed that she was prepared to meet potential challenges because of the instruction received at Cheyney University of Pennsylvania. She recalled that “Dr. Lesley Hill was the president of the College and all of the faculty were colored.” Her “background of integrating the school [in Collingdale, Pennsylvania] and the elementary school [in Darby, Pennsylvania]” as one of the few black children in the community, her introduction to a “mixed situation through junior and senior high school,” and her experience at the historically black college Cheyney University of Pennsylvania, she believed, “fully prepared” her for what she had to face in Phoenix. Unlike her seemingly banal memories of the school systems in Collingdale and Darby, Pennsylvania, her memories of the segregated school system in Phoenix, Arizona were quite different. When Ragsdale arrived in Phoenix, she remembered the city being a place where the race divide was clearly marked and rarely crossed. Interviewer Dean E. Smith described Phoenix as an area that was “all settled by ex-confederates” who were determined to build Phoenix in the Southern image. “They

⁴⁰ Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale interview.

Figure 1. Map of the Greater Metropolitan Phoenix Area, Withstanding the Surrounding Burrows of Chandler, Gilbert, Mesa, Paradise Valley, and Scottsdale.



came flooding out here after the civil war,” he posits, “and they brought prejudices with them.”⁴¹

These prejudices were systematically sown into the social, economic, and political fabric of the city, and the Phoenix public school system was no exception. The European American dominated administrative hierarchy of the public school system greatly affected virtually all decisions made in the district along race lines. The superintendent and the other school administrators presided over the entire district, including white and black schools. The Phoenix Public School system attempted to create an illusion that no racial hierarchy existed in its system. It did so by staffing all of the African American schools with black teachers and administrators, and paying black teachers and white teachers equal pay.⁴²

Lincoln argued that despite the manufactured facade of a race neutral public school system, black educators and students were treated in a degrading and unequal manner. Although black and white teachers were paid equally, black teachers taught at segregated schools which were routinely underfunded and marginalized within the district. Although *Plessy v. Ferguson* provided for “separate but equal” institutions for white and black people, white people who dominated public institutions rarely provided for equal facilities for African Americans. In addition to institutional racism, African American educators had to also deal with the condescending color conscientiousness of white educators. Lincoln Ragsdale remembered being called “colored, negro and negroes.” “They called us that to make us feel very inferior, along with that word black” he argued. “Black” had

⁴¹ Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale interview.

⁴² Ibid.

been associated with negatives except when it came to finance Ragsdale maintained. “Normally you would think of black sleep, black night, black Tuesday”; all negative he argued. Ragsdale acknowledged the fact that many African Americans have chosen to refer to themselves as black in recent decades, but he believed they did so “just to get over the fear of the name.” “Africans did not associate [with] the word black” he declared; suggesting that African Americans and their kinsmen in diaspora, should not.⁴³

It took Ragsdale “a long time to accept that word,” opting in later years to refer to himself as “African American,” a term he described as being “universally accepted.” He believed that the term black obscures the many differences among people of African descent. He argued that in “talking to white folks you can’t classify all white people the same. You can’t say Germans are the same as the English.” Ragsdale suggests that many people choose to use the terms “European” and “Orientals,” while making “some designations,” some generalizations “because there are certain similarities.” He believed most people chose to use the label African-American because it reflects the unity and diversity of people of African descent. What links African Americans to other blacks, he believed, are some of their cultural characteristics and physical features. The biggest thing blacks have in common he asserted, is “oppression.” Generally, however, his comments revealed a tendency to focus upon that which distinguishes black people in diaspora. After all, “A black growing up in New York is totally different from a black growing up in Mississippi, the Bahamas, [or] Haiti,” he maintained. “A Haitian would certainly not feel as we [African-Americans] feel about white people. In Brazil, where the population consists primarily of people African descent he maintained, “they have a different feeling

⁴³ Ibid.

about people than we have because their experiences are different.” “My experience,” Ragsdale offered, “has been a very negative one.”⁴⁴

By the late 1940s, Lincoln and Eleanor had left their homes in Oklahoma and Pennsylvania to pursue careers in education and the military. Their pursuits would soon bring them together in what was still considered by many to be a relatively unknown, remote desert community. Soon, however, Eleanor and Lincoln would know quite a bit about the city in which they would live for the rest of their lives. They would witness first hand the retrograde nature of racial relations in the city; a place which was being marketed as a “desert oasis” overflowing with opportunity. The school teacher and would be fighter pilot were disappointed with the status of the African American community when they arrived, having found it faring not any better than many oppressed black communities throughout the rest of the nation.

For the masses of black Phoenicians, the Great Depression intensified an already tormented existence. The number of African Americans in Phoenix more than tripled between 1920 and 1940. The vast majority were new migrants from the American South who were poor and uneducated. Being denied equal opportunity to quality education and employment, black people were forced to the periphery of an already socio-economically depressed community. Even in starvation black people faced discrimination, for in few areas was aid forthcoming on a non-racial basis. During the Depression years, it was found that “the average black family in Phoenix was living under crowded conditions in a poorly furnished home.” Federal Census workers noted that there were “only a few

⁴⁴ Ibid.

modern homes, and many wooden shacks, trailers, tents, sheds, and abandoned stores” in the African American community. They also reported that “most homes are one to four room structures without benefit of running water or sewerage.”

Black men in Phoenix who had once found jobs in the unskilled labor market, and black women who had worked as domestics in the homes of white Phoenicians, now found it difficult to secure even these low paying jobs. Increasingly, “rank-and-file” black Phoenicians were faced with competing for jobs against “mobile white job hunters” who were considered to be inherently more “qualified.” Madge Johnson Copeland, a local black entrepreneur and political activist argued that many white Phoenicians feared the presence of black men in their homes and offices, and often refused them employment opportunities as groundsmen and domestic workers.⁴⁵

As a result African American men had fewer job opportunities than black women in Phoenix. Not only were African American men denied “white collar” jobs because of their race, but they were refused many domestic employment opportunities as well. Copeland noted that “[black] men were always far behind [black] women in employment. Far, far behind. They had to except very menial jobs. Some of them worked in garages, which didn’t mean mechanic, but they had to keep the place clean and be a helper for the mechanics.” A small number of black men found jobs in a domestic capacity in hotels as

⁴⁵ Harris, *First 100 Years*, 53-57; Alton Thomas, “Minority Housing in Phoenix,” In Greater Phoenix Council for Civic Unity, (ed.), *To Secure These Rights* (Phoenix: Phoenix Sun Publishing, 1961), 9; Shirley J. Roberts, “Minority Group Poverty in Phoenix: A Socio-Economic Survey,” *Journal of Arizona History* 14 (Winter 1973), 357-358; Kotlanger, “Phoenix, Arizona,” 447-448; Mattie Hackett, “A Survey of Living Conditions of Girls in the Negro Schools of Phoenix, Arizona,” (M.A. Thesis, Arizona State University, 1939), 17, 43; Madge Johnson Copeland, interview conducted by Maria Hernandez, Summer, 1981; John Barber quoted in Harris, *First 100 Years*, 124-125.

butlers and doormen, but these prospects were strictly limited. John Barber, who migrated to Phoenix on December 20, 1918, recalled his experience in Phoenix during the 1930s: “when the [Great] Depression hit, things were pretty bad around here until [Franklin] Roosevelt helped to get things straightened out. I got a job on the PWA in 1934, getting \$35 a week. Wasn’t that some money!”

Of all the aid programs in Arizona and Phoenix, the Public Works Administration (PWA) was the most hostile to black people. Only a small number of African Americans were ever hired by the PWA, and those who were could only count on menial tasks and employment as janitors. There were no black camps in this program because only twenty or thirty African Americans ever worked on the PWA projects, but if black laborers were employed, all camps were carefully segregated. African Americans lived in the most decrepit facilities, were fed unhealthy food, posted the highest disease and death rates, and received the most meager wages. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) was the first relief agency to address the troubled Phoenician community.

In 1935 the organization began to administer the state’s transient program. From its beginnings, the WPA established itself as one of the state’s most successful aid agencies. By July, 1935, it took control of Arizona’s entire public works program. Like other federal agencies, it was administered by and employed state residents. Unlike the majority of other projects, however, the WPA elected to appoint several black Phoenicians as local directors and project supervisors. The Reverend Charles Favors served as director of the WPA Day Care Center and Nursery School Program in the city, which was created in November, 1937. B. D. Reazir was state supervisor of the WPA’s Negro Adult

Education Program, and R. A. Lee was in charge of black education classes in Phoenix.⁴⁶

The WPA was not devoid of segregation, racism, and discrimination. The selection of black supervisors and directors belied the racial hierarchy in the agency. All programs were strictly segregated as was the case in previous government agencies. African Americans labored and lived separated from their white counterparts. Black people were the only participants permitted to work on all-black schools, parks, libraries, and community centers. Black people were the only ones allowed to teach and train black children and teachers, and only African American physicians, dentists, and nurses were permitted to treat and assist black patients. Negligent and insensitive, the school lunch program served cold lunches to black children during the winter and hot lunches during the summer. Most disturbing of all was the Household Workers Training Project. In this program, White and Black female training units were completely segregated. Nevertheless, white women only taught, trained, and supervised white students, while black women taught, trained, and supervised both white and black students, thereby doubling their work load and responsibilities without compensation.⁴⁷

For black Phoenixians, and most African Americans, the Great Depression delivered intense deprivation. Nevertheless, it was also a period in which black people made inroads in art, music, sports, and drama.. The WPA, for example, provided financial

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ *Arizona Republic*, November 13, 1937, August 21, 1938, October 9, 1938; Works Progress Administration, Division of Professional Service Projects, Narrative Report on Arizona Works Progress Administration, Vol., (ed.), W. J. Jamisson, State Administrator (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1939), 1-132.

support for a plethora of artists whose work would greatly influence American culture; inspiring the Chicago Renaissance and the growth in popularity of jazz music. All of this occurred while racism and discrimination raged on in American society. The New Deal stimulated some economic healing. More importantly, however, the New Deal, by World War II, helped to establish the U. S. as a powerful national state which witnessed the coalescence of political coalitions which would mount formidable dissent to the prevailing racial order. African Americans saw their participation in the federal government increase, black social scientists like E. Franklin Frazier and Charles S. Johnson influenced social policy, the NAACP led a successful fight against discrimination in government programs and, led by Charles Hamilton Houston, stepped up its attack on segregation and black political disfranchisement. Black women like Ella Baker continued to support the NAACP through critical fund raising activities, but also participated in and organized other reform associations like the YMCA and the Detroit Housewives League.⁴⁸

To address racial inequality and discrimination in labor, the Committee for Industrial Organization (CIO) was formed in 1935 as an interracial labor union. Black and white Communist Americans like Hosea Hudson, Al Murphy, Angelo Herndon, Clyde

⁴⁸ See Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue, Vol.I: Depression Decade* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Patricia Sullivan, *Days of Hope: Race and Democracy in the New Deal Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Christopher R. Reed, *The Chicago NAACP and the Rise of Black Professional Leadership, 1910-1966* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997); Mark V. Tushnet, *The NAACP's Legal Strategy Against Segregated Education, 1925-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987); Darlene Clark Hine, *Black Victory: The Rise and Fall of the White Primary in Texas* (Millwood: KTO Press, 1979), and *Hine Sight: Black Women and the Re-Construction of American History* (New York: Carlson Publishing, 1994).

Johnson, and Ruby Bates, mounted campaigns against social and racial inequality. They fought, for instance, for the freedom of the “Scottsboro Boys” in Scottsboro, Alabama; nine young black men falsely accused, tried, and convicted for allegedly raping two white women. This era ushered in improvements in black political participation and the florescence of black culture, but it also revealed the extent to which white supremacy was woven into the fabric of American society. The most repugnant example of white supremacy and the racism and prejudice it inspired, was the Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Male Negro, otherwise know as “The Tuskegee Experiment.”

Beginning in 1932 and ending in 1972, medical care providers at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama willfully subjected a pool of destitute, poorly educated black men with Syphilis, or “bad blood” as they were told, to painful, ineffective “treatments” and mendacious medical practice. In the name of science, this was done to measure the disposition and etymology of the disease. Not knowing the true nature of their condition, the vast majority of the men slowly died from the ravaging effects of the disease, and undoubtably spread the contagion to their unsuspecting spouses and sexual partners even as penicillin became available in the 1940s. To the medical care professionals at Tuskegee, the poor, uneducated, vulnerable, black sharecroppers in their experiment, were ultimately expendable by virtue of their race and subordinate socio-economic status.⁴⁹

Lincoln and Eleanor took up residence in a city where white supremacy and all that

⁴⁹ See William Harris, *The Harder We Run: Black Workers since the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); Robin D. G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); James H. Jones, *Bad Blood: The Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment* (New York: The Free Press, 1981).

it engendered was as pronounced as any place in the country. John Barber believed that Phoenix “wasn’t much different than in the South. The difference here was that they didn’t lynch you.” Shirley J. Roberts suggests that Phoenix was a city “where differentiation between the white and colored races” seemed to be “an accepted fact.” Eleanor and Lincoln would not accept the racism and discrimination that separated the Phoenician community. Although they had experienced racial discrimination and separatism early in their lives, their families did not expect them to except it and do nothing to fight it. On the contrary, they inherited familial traditions of professional activism and service which stood in direct opposition to such ideologies. They were reared in families of professional people who worked to eradicate discrimination and strengthen black communities.⁵⁰

Black professionals like the Ragsdales of Oklahoma and the Dickeys of Pennsylvania, emerged as a collective response to racial oppression, in addition to individual ambition and learned achievement. As a result, African Americans created institutions which fortified and cultivated their social, economic, and political status. Black families like the Ragsdales and Dickeys paved the way for the financial success and political effectiveness of third generation black leaders such as Lincoln and Eleanor. They enabled them to evaluate and respond to the needs of African Americans, particularly the need to develop effective strategies to resist white supremacy. Lincoln and Eleanor’s families nurtured their ability to use their talents to cultivate and deploy such strategies. By the late 1940s their professions had brought their ambitions, talents, and commitment

⁵⁰ John Barber interview, *First 100 Years*, 124-125; Roberts, “Minority Group Poverty,” 348-349.

to African American advancement to Phoenix, and soon thereafter the city would never be the same.

CHAPTER 2: THE “DOUBLE V”: TUSKEGEE, PHOENIX, WORLD WAR II AND THE NEW BLACK ACTIVISM.

“War is fundamentally a collision between conservative and liberal forces. It is a clash between those who would enslave the common man and those who would give him freedom.”¹
-Paul Robeson

“In fighting fascism and nazism, America had to stand before the whole world in favor of racial tolerance and...racial democracy.”²
-Gunnar Myrdal

On December 7, 1941, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor ended years of the America’s questionable “neutrality” during World War II. It propelled the nation immediately into a climactic event that changed the United States forever. Its participation in the war also altered America’s global status, making it the world’s wealthiest, industrialized, military power. The impact of America’s involvement in World War II on African Americans is complex. On the one hand, the war ushered in a period of unprecedented progress in black employment, mobility, and professional activism. On the other hand, America’s crusade in the name of freedom and democracy in World War II failed to reach millions of its black citizens at home. White supremacy and racial discrimination flourished in the United States during the war. African Americans like Lincoln Ragsdale joined the armed services to fight America’s fascist enemies, while resisting white supremacy and their own subordinate status at home.

Prior to the bombing of Pear Harbor, African Americans responded to the escalating conflict by supporting Ethiopia’s fight against Italian invasion. Ethiopia was the

¹ *Milwaukee Journal*, October 20, 1941.

² Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 12.

world's sole independent nation genuinely controlled by people of African decent. The Ethiopian-Italian conflict demonstrated to African Americans the ways in which fascism and racism were interconnected. This stimulated a keen interest in the link between Africans struggles against colonialism, and African American's fight for freedom and democracy within the United States. The military service rendered by black American soldiers later in the war, therefore, was inspired by their condemnation of fascism and European American racism. At home African Americans responded to the challenge of white supremacy and the lack of opportunity in several ways. Like Ragsdale, black people migrated in large numbers to Western cities like Phoenix, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, taking advantage of career opportunities created by war mobilization. African American soldiers like Ragsdale, fought fascism abroad and returned to America to play pivotal roles in the ensuing change.

Led by individuals like Ragsdale, black people established and restructured protest organizations which formed the backbone of the modern civil rights movement. When whites responded to their efforts to give meaning to freedom and democracy by resuscitating Jim Crow, black activists reinvented themselves. Out of this insurgent revival grew a new black activism rooted in greater political participation. Lincoln Ragsdale's life during this era illuminates the problems and progress which marked this riotous era. The experience which would profoundly influence Ragsdale's life during this era was his tenure in the military, culminating with his graduation from Tuskegee Army Air Corps Flying School in Tuskegee, Alabama.³

³ Tindall and Shi, *America*, 1235; Hine, Hine, and Harold, *African American Odyssey*, 473; Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale interview; Herb Whitney, "Shooting Down Racism: Civic Leader Recalls Battle to Win Dignity," *Arizona Republic* (1990), 1.

After finishing his after-school studies and secondary education at Douglass high school in Ardmore, Ragsdale passed the Air Force entrance exam in Oklahoma. He enlisted in the Air Corps on July 14, 1944. Ragsdale immediately prepared to be assigned to a training installation and relocated. Despite his hard work and practice, Ragsdale failed the written examination the first two times he took it. After finally passing the written portion of the test, he then “flunked the physical.” At five feet six and a half inches tall and 130lbs, Ragsdale was not a physically imposing man. Generally, however, he was in good physical condition. He had no reason to believe he would have trouble passing the physical exam. “My eyes were good, my depth perception was good,” he recalled, “everything was good except my pulse.”

Ragsdale’s average standing heart rate was around 150. When he was instructed to jump up and down, his heart rate would climb to 200. He was told by the test administrators that he was “going to flunk this thing again,” if he could not maintain a lower heart rate during increased physical activity. Ragsdale was informed that one more failed attempt would have brought about his dismissal. Concerned, Ragsdale consulted a doctor who prescribed a “sedative” to help him relax. When he took the test again, his standing heart rate “was beating about 50.” After he jumped up and down for a short period of time again, his heart rate registered 80. This conspicuous “improvement” in his heart rate gave the examiner pause. The test administrator believed it was “better than perfect.” This dramatic change made it necessary for Ragsdale to take the test yet again. The next time his heart rate was recorded at 45. Confused, and no doubt exasperated, the

examiner reluctantly gave Ragsdale a passing grade.⁴

After finally completing his examination in Oklahoma, Ragsdale relocated briefly to Howard University in Washington, D. C. At the time, Howard and Wilberforce Universities were the only “Negro” universities offering reserve officer training. As the war escalated and the likelihood of black pilot training increased, the Roosevelt administration considered the schools to be pools from which to recruit Air Force officer candidates. Ragsdale’s temporary stop in the nation’s capitol ushered in a series of sobering events. While stationed at Howard, Ragsdale was not present to accept and sign for his Air Corps certified recruitment letter ordering him to report to basic training. Since he was not present, Ragsdale recalled, “they didn’t give it to anybody.” After some searching, they eventually solicited the support of his mother Onlia Ragsdale, who gave the Air Corps representatives his address in Washington.⁵

Soon after, a cohort of Military Police brandishing “guns and big sticks,” arrived at Ragsdale’s residence in Washington announcing that they were taking him to jail. When he asked the MPs what he did to warrant the arrest, they told him that he failed to report for service. The MPs took him to the military base at Fort Meade, Maryland. It is not clear whether he was subjected to any disciplinary action. Once at Fort Meade, Ragsdale received a number of required inoculations and for ten days prepared for another transfer. As a “pre-aviation cadet” he was ordered to escort ten men south to the military base in Biloxi, Mississippi. He and the recruits boarded a train at Fort Meade and headed south,

⁴ Lincoln Ragsdale, Enlisted Record of and Report of Separation: Honorable Discharge WD, AGO Form 53-55, Air Corps (Washington, D.C.: U. S. Army Air Corps, November 19, 1945); Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale interview.

⁵ Scott and Womack, *Double V*, 84; Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale interview.

stopping briefly in St. Louis, Missouri. In St. Louis the black recruits were not met by “southern hospitality.” Rather, they were met by the southern white hostility and Jim Crow segregation.

An official at the train station told Ragsdale and the rest of his party that they could not ride the Pullman train, and that they had to remove themselves. Irritated, Ragsdale reminded the official that he and the other recruits had purchased a ticket to ride the Pullman train, and that they had every intention to do so. An argument ensued between the two which resulted in Ragsdale and his entire cohort being thrown off of the train. As he threw them off, the train controller bellowed “[No Negro] is going to be riding on this train to Mississippi.” Ragsdale, realizing that the group was going to arrive in Mississippi behind schedule, phoned the base in Biloxi to inform his command that as “Negroes” the group was denied access to Pullman trains. Ragsdale was told that it made no difference that they were military personnel. Racial segregation penetrated every segment of society, and the Air Force provided no special protections. The administrator who received Ragsdale’s call was not concerned about the indignities and problems the recruits faced. “Look here, nigger,” the officer barked, “you better be on that train and get down here the best way you can, right now, wherever they put you.” After a day and a half of waiting, the men managed to secure transportation. Ragsdale and his group were most likely made to wait until a train became available with few if any whites on board. Many black soldiers were forced to wait until trains and buses had been loaded with white soldiers before they were permitted to board.⁶

⁶ Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale interview; Franklin and Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 445.

They arrived at Keesler field in Biloxi, Mississippi and were housed in a segregated section of the base called KK. In the segregated bivouacs of the KK, Ragsdale went through three months of basic training and a battery of examinations. What Ragsdale remembered most about his introduction to the military was not the physical challenge of basic training, or the cerebral demands of the tests. What stood out in his mind was the unequal and demeaning nature of military segregation. Black soldiers were banned from almost all of the places where white soldiers trained and relaxed. African American soldiers were not allowed to enter a military club to dine or drink. “[When] we wanted a beer,” Ragsdale recalled, “we went to the window and asked for it. White guys walked inside. We had to stay on the outside to get it.” Despite this unequal treatment, many black soldiers made the most of opportunities to better themselves. For example, “Many of the brothers, blacks, who came to the induction station to get basic training couldn’t read and write,” Ragsdale asserted. “The good thing” about their military experience, however, is that it “made them go to school.”⁷

There were around five hundred pre-aviation cadets in Biloxi when he arrived. “They eliminated, of the five hundred of us, about four hundred and fifty” he remembered. Having succeeded in his training, Ragsdale was one of a relatively small number of recruits who were given the opportunity to attend officer training. He and the other remaining pre-aviation cadets were relocated to Tuskegee Flying School to receive pilot training. At Tuskegee, Ragsdale was subjected to intense instruction and myriad psychological challenges. Cadets at Tuskegee were subjected to the rigors of pilot training, and the frustrations of being black in an institution dominated by notions of white supremacy.

⁷ Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale interview.

During one of his first days at Tuskegee, in fact, one of Ragsdale's commanding officers told him and his fellow trainees to "look at the person to the left and to the right, because at the end of the program they won't be here with you." Indeed, most cadets did not complete the program. Dogged by an overwhelming military ethos, intense competition, internal military politics, and institutional racism, successful cadets had to possess a cornucopia of laudable character traits, including intellectual acumen, strong interpersonal communication skills, and strength of will. Lincoln Johnson Ragsdale, Jr. remembered his father telling him that over the years "there were a lot of people that started out in the program," but through natural and coerced attrition, "only so many people" graduated from Tuskegee Flying School.⁸

Despite the military establishment's lingering opposition to black people rising to the status of officer, it was pressured by black leaders and prompted by the urgency of war, to create the program. The first class of thirteen flying cadets of the 99th Pursuit Squadron began its training at Tuskegee on July 19, 1941. The men were labeled the "Lonely Eagles" by the black press because of their small numbers and segregated status. They were trained in four phases: pre-flight, primary flight; basic military flight, and advanced military flight training. The instruction was provided primarily by white military personnel with the exception of physical education and a limited amount of primary flight instruction, which was done by Tuskegee Institute Flying School chief C. Alfred Anderson. Cadets received their pre-flight education in a dormitory on the Tuskegee campus, and their primary training on Tuskegee's Morton Field. Their basic and advanced training was scheduled to be conducted on the Army Field which was under construction

⁸ Ibid.

during the summer of 1941. If a cadet was one of the few who successfully completed the four stages of training, they would receive their pilot's wings and a commission as an officer in the Army Air Corps.⁹

Reeling from the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the Air Corps intensified its training at Tuskegee Flying School. Late in 1941 the Air Corps transferred black fighter plane mechanics and specialists from Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, Alabama, to the airfield in Tuskegee and gave them rank. Five non-flying cadets also received commissions. These men were joined by the first class of black pre-aviation cadets at Tuskegee. The soldiers were housed in a bathhouse and in makeshift tarpaulin shelters supported only by mud and muck in what became known as "Tent City." Eight out of the first thirteen cadets were dismissed from the program, failing in at least one level before basic flight training. Most of the cadets who "washed out" could not handle the psychological stress associated with their service and training. The cadets were supervised primarily by white southern flight instructors, and many were not oriented to military discipline and the intensity of military drilling. Most of the cadets, especially those from the North, clashed with white Southern officers who used abusive, racially derogatory language. A cadet by the name of Jimmy Moore "washed out" one day before his graduation.¹⁰

The first class of Tuskegee cadets only produced five graduates in March, 1942;

⁹ Robert A. Rose, *Lonely Eagles: The Story of the American Black Air Force in World War II* (Los Angeles: Tuskegee Airmen, Inc., Los Angeles Chapter, 1976), 14-15; Ulysses G. Lee, *The Employment of Negro Troops* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1990), 118; Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., *American, An Autobiography* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1991), 63.

¹⁰ Scott and Womack, *Double V*, 159.

Captain Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., George S. Roberts, Lemuel Custis, Charles De Bow, and Mac Ross. Davis, the first black graduate of West Point in the twentieth century, was the son of Benjamin O. Davis, Sr., the only senior black officer in the Army; promoted to the rank of Brigadier General by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1941. Between March of 1942 and September 1942, thirty-three pilots received their wings. They were soon followed by more commissioned officers who were eager to see action. Once they were given the opportunity to fight, the Tuskegee Airmen proved themselves to be quite proficient in battle.¹¹

The 99th Pursuit Squadron was deployed to North Africa in April 1943, where it flew its first combat mission against the island of Pantelleria on June 2, 1943. Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., who had been promoted to Colonel, was placed in command of the 332nd Group when it was dispatched to Italy in January 1944. Davis would later rise to the rank of General. The Tuskegee fighters escorted bombers and took part in many other missions. The 332nd was instrumental in sinking an enemy destroyer off the Istrian peninsula, and it protected the 15th Air Force bombers in important attacks on the oil fields of Rumania. Under the command of Davis, the fighter group won the admiration of African Americans throughout the U.S. and the respect of many officials in the Air Corps. The Tuskegee Airmen flew over 15,500 sorties and completed 1,578 missions. They escorted heavy bombers into Germany's Rhineland in 200 separate missions without losing one fighter to enemy fire. They destroyed 409 enemy aircraft, sank one enemy destroyer, and eliminated myriad ground installations with strafing runs. On January 27, 1944, the 99th shot down five enemy aircraft in less than four minutes, despite being outnumbered

¹¹ Ibid. 159.

nearly two to one. The soldiers were revered and honored for their valor. In recognition of their service to their country, the Tuskegee Airmen collected 150 distinguished Flying Crosses, one Legion of Merit, one Silver Star, fourteen Bronze Stars, and 744 Air Medals.¹²

Despite their heroism in battle and their service at home, black soldiers routinely suffered from low morale and frustrations born of racial discrimination. The military's segregationist and white supremacist policies relegated the majority of the one million African Americans who served during World War II to auxiliary units in transportation and engineering corps. Throughout the South, black soldiers were refused service in places of public accommodation where German prisoners of war were often dining and enjoying the good life. World War II veteran Dempsey Travis remembered German prisoners being "free to move around the camp, unlike black soldier who were restricted. The Germans walked right into the doggone places like any white American. We were wearin' the same uniform, but we were excluded." In a "white only" waiting room in a railroad station in Kentucky, three black soldiers were beaten by civilian policemen for not deferring to white women when ordered to do so. An African American soldier had his eyes gouged out by a white policeman in an altercation in South Carolina, and in Durham,

¹² Whitney, "Shooting Down Racism," 1; Hine, Hine, and Harold, *The African-American Odyssey*, 480; Franklin and Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 443-444. Also see Richard Dalfiume, *Desegregation of the U. S. Armed Forces: Fighting on Two Fronts 1939-1953* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1969); Charles W. Dryden, *A-Train: Memoirs of a Tuskegee Airman* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997); Mary Penick Motley, *The Invisible Soldier: The Experience of the Black Soldier; World War II* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1975); Alan M. Osur, *Blacks in the Army Air Forces during World War II: The Problem of Race Relations* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1977); Lou Potter, *Fighting on two fronts in World War II* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992).

North Carolina, a white bus driver was found not guilty of murder after he killed a black soldier following an argument in July 1944.¹³

Military bases offered little sanctuary from Jim Crow and white racism. Many commanding officers banned black newspapers from their bases, and some resorted to burning them. Military markets were segregated and distributed inferior wares to black soldiers, and officer clubs and entertainment facilities were segregated. Military bases in the American West placed black soldiers in separate units, unlike Mexican Americans or American Indians, or confined them to labor roles. Due to racial segregation and their small numbers, African American troops found few sources of entertainment on-base. Moreover, since most bases were in predominantly white rural areas, Black soldiers had even fewer options when they left their stations. Many military authorities encouraged segregation in surrounding cities. Lawrence B. de Graaf demonstrated that in San Bernardino, California, white business owners posted “We Cater to White Trade Only” signs by 1944. When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, a twenty-two year old sailor named Dorie Miller pulled his captain to safety under heavy enemy fire, commandeered a machine gun, and having never fired a gun, shot down at least two and as many as six enemy aircraft. Miller was awarded the Navy Cross for his heroism, but was subsequently placed back in his old position as a mess attendant without promotion.¹⁴

Racial segregation during World War II affected black soldiers and civilians alike.

¹³ Hine, Hine, and Harold, *The African-American Odyssey*, 476; Franklin and Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 445.

¹⁴ Lawrence B. de Graaf, “Significant Steps on an Arduous Path: The Impact of World War II on Discrimination Against African Americans in the West,” *Journal of the West* Vol. 35, No. 1 (January 1996), 25; Hine, Hine, and Harold, *An African American Odyssey*, 476.

African Americans were excluded from many defense industries during the first years of the war. The effects of this practice was most striking in the American West, where a large allocation of government contracts were awarded. Western States received over half of the defense ship and aircraft building contracts. The San Francisco Bay area led the way in ship building, while Southern California became the leader in air craft construction. In Phoenix, World War II ignited an economic boom and unprecedented population growth. This growth led to the establishment of several high profile military bases in the area. Luke Air Field, now Luke Air Force Base, opened in June 1941, and was named after noted Phoenician World War I pilot Frank Luke, Jr. Mesa Military Airport, now Williams Air Force base, opened its doors in January 1942, and was named after an Army Air Corps pilot. The creation of these installations bought at least 6,000 jobs to the Phoenix area, and funneled millions of dollars into the local economy.¹⁵

Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, more air fields were opened in the Greater Phoenix Metropolitan area. Thunderbird II, a primary aviation training school was established north of Scottsdale in June 1942, and Litchfield Naval Air Facility, a research and development center, became operational in October 1943. American and foreign cadets flocked to these “Valley of the Sun” military complexes by the thousands. As World War II drew to a close, Luke Air Field, for instance, was the largest advanced aviation training school in the world. 13,500 pilots received their wings from Luke Air Field by 1945. Off duty white troops in the area found Phoenix to be “the desert’s greatest oasis.” Bradford Luckingham argues that “they filled every available facility,

¹⁵ *Arizona Republic*, January 15, 22, June 7, 24, August 11, 16, 1941; Edward H. Peplow, Jr., “The Thunderbirds,” *Phoenix Magazine* (May 1976), 36-39; Susan M. Smith, “Litchfield Park and Vicinity” (M. A. Thesis, University of Arizona, 1948), 94-101.

including temporary quarters erected at the Arizona State University Fair Grounds.”

Many white soldiers described their military experience in positive terms and remembered the Phoenix community for its warm “hospitality.” Black soldiers, however, did not benefit from the boom in the defense industry during the early years of the war.¹⁶

While white workers found jobs in aircraft factories, shipyards, and other defense industries, African Americans were routinely left behind. Defense industries would only hire black people in menial labor positions, even if they were qualified for more skilled labor. In shipyards, African American women engaged in scaling (cleaning), sweeping, and painting work, and Chinese women performed electrical work, while white women held welding jobs, which were considered to be the easiest positions to have. Most predominantly white American Federation of Labor (AFL) unions prevented their employers from hiring African American workers who were not members of the labor establishment. The president of North American Aviation articulated the position of many whites business and labor leaders of the time, declaring that “regardless of their training as aircraft workers, we will not employ Negroes. It is against our policy.” A top oil company official refused to hire African Americans, arguing that the drilling and producing of oil wells was a “white man’s job” and was “going to stay that way.” The federal government did nothing to discourage these discriminatory practices. In its own training and placement programs, the United States Employment Service (USES) filled “whites only” requests for employers and deferred to the social mores of local communities. Many USES employees themselves believed that African Americans were best suited for custodial labor. In a gross example of institutional racism, the primary USES training

¹⁶ Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier*, 257; Luckingham, *Phoenix*, 137-139.

facility in Inglewood, California, deemed any African American presence on the streets after dark to be cause for arrest.¹⁷

African American leaders demanded substantive change and an end to segregation in the armed services. Discrimination in defense industries found a formidable adversary in A. Philip Randolph, who was president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. Randolph had been working with a coalition which opposed the governments discriminatory practices. This coalition called upon African Americans to march on Washington in protest of institutional racism in the federal government. The March on Washington Movement (MOWM) became the largest mass movement of African Americans in twenty years. The threats of Randolph and the MOWM pressured president Roosevelt to issue Executive Order 8802, creating the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) in June 1941. The FEPC investigated complaints of job discrimination and tried to arbitrate their elimination of such disputes. The FEPC had limited success. Thanks to the federal government and Western industrialists who were now compelled to yield to government and private pressures, Western unions began to open their doors to African Americans, and black people were able to secure skilled positions in coastal shipyards and factories.¹⁸

Segregation and racism in the military continued and officials resisted demands for change vigorously. The black press, along with leaders like Randolph however, were undaunted. The black press had long been an outspoken supporter of U. S. participation in the war, while being a critic of American racism. On January 31, 1942, the *Pittsburgh*

¹⁷ de Graaf, "Significant Steps on an Arduous Path," 25-26.

¹⁸ See Dalfiume, *Desegregation of the U. S. Armed Forces*.

Courier published a letter to the editor which had a powerful impact on the course of African American history. In his letter to the editor, James C. Thompson of Wichita, Kansas, shared his hope that while African Americans “keep defense and victory in the forefront so that we don’t loose site of our fight for true democracy at home.” He argued that if the Allied nations evoke the “V” for Victory sign to rally them in opposition to aggression, slavery, and tyranny, then the black Americans should embrace the “double V”; victory over fascism abroad and victory over white supremacy at home. The *Courier* adopted Thompson’s concept and coined it “Double V” for “Double Victory.” The “Double V” concept and slogan was soon adopted by all of the black press and civil rights leaders and organizations.

The “Double V” campaign inspired black leaders and organizations to intensify their protests of inequality in the military. Randolph, Walter White of the NAACP, T. Arnold Hill and Lester Granger of the National Urban League (NUL), New York Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., Robert Vann, editor of the *Pittsburgh Courier*, and Mabel K. Staupers of the National Association of Colored Graduate Nurses (NACGN) led the way. Together, with other leaders and organizations, they mobilized African American workers, women’s groups, college students, and interracial alliances to resist inequality. When America’s leaders were working hard to present itself as a beacon of freedom and democracy to the world, these leaders forced government and military officials to confront the contradictions inherent in their professed ideals and practices. White supremacy endured throughout the war, but the efforts of black leaders and protest organizations, coupled with the military’s need for manpower, slowly reduced the

pervasiveness of segregation and inequality.¹⁹

Black soldiers themselves demanded equal treatment, and although most of them attempted to secure equal treatment without breaking military discipline, their dissatisfaction inspired by white malevolence and unequal treatment sometimes aroused heated and violent confrontations with whites. Their efforts included peaceful attempts to desegregate officer's clubs for example, and organized protests of racial discriminatory military justice. On July 17, 1944, for example, over 300 American sailors were killed by an explosion in Port Chicago north of San Francisco. 202 of the 320 men who lost their lives were black ammunition loaders. Following the incident 328 of the surviving black soldiers were relocated to another ship to load ammunition. 258 of the soldiers protested and were summarily arrested. Fifty of the soldiers were cited as leaders of what has come to be known as the "Port Chicago Mutiny." They were charged and convicted, and despite a brief filed in their defense by the NAACP's Thurgood Marshall, they were sentenced to prison terms as long as fifteen years.²⁰

Black soldiers also responded violently to white admonitions, coercion, and

¹⁹ *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 31, 1942, April 11, 1942. Also see Paula F. Pfeffer, *A. Philip Randolph, Pioneer of the Civil Rights Movement* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990); Walter White, *A Man Called White: The Autobiography of Walter White* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995); John Morton Blum, *V Was For Victory: Politics and American Culture during World War II* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1996); Wil Haygood, *King of the Cats: The Life and Times of Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1992); Andrew Buni, *Robert Vann of the Pittsburgh Courier* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1974); and Hine, *Black Women in White*.

²⁰ See Robert Loring Allen, *The Port Chicago Mutiny* (New York: Harper and Row, 1993). For examples of similar incidents of racial violence, see Ulysses G. Lee, *United States Army in World War II, Special Studies: The Employment of Negro Troops* (Washington D. C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1966).

brutality. On one such occasion, off-duty African American soldiers from the 364th Infantry Regiment stationed at Papago Park, Phoenix, Arizona, were involved in an incident in a “colored neighborhood” they often visited. On Thanksgiving night 1942, in a café at Thirteenth Street and Washington, one of the soldiers struck a black woman over the head with a bottle following an argument. A military policeman attempted to arrest the soldier, but he resisted with a knife. When the military policeman shot and wounded the soldier, black servicemen protested. Military policemen soon rounded up about 150 black soldiers at random, most of whom had nothing to do with the incident, to return them to Papago Park. Buses were secured to transport the group, but before the soldiers could be transported back to base, they became inflamed and broke ranks when a jeep full of armed blacks appeared. A “lone shot from somewhere” was fired, according to accounts; the source of the shot was never determined, but it ignited a riot. “This does it,” an observer shouted, “now all hell will pop.” Soldiers disbursed randomly as handguns, rifles, and high caliber automatic weapons furiously “snapped and barked.” A “hunt” for everyone who may have been involved ensued.²¹

Phoenix’s law enforcement authorities quickly summoned all available police officers, and ordered them to join the military police in apprehending the suspects. Twenty-eight blocks were cordoned off and searched. Several of the “hunted” soldiers hid in the homes of friends in the area. To “flush them out,” the military police mounted armored personnel carriers. An anonymous observer later recalled that “they’d roll up in

²¹ *Arizona Republic*, November 27, 28, 30, 1942, February 26, 1943, December 3, 1978; *Arizona Sun*, February 1, 8, 16, 23, 1951; Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier*, 270-271; Luckingham, *Minorities in Phoenix*, 156-157; Thomas E. Sheridan, *Arizona: A History* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1995), 273-274.

front of these homes and with the loud speaker they had on these vehicles, they'd call on him to surrender. If he didn't come out, they'd start potting the house with these fifty-caliber machine guns that just made a hole you could stick your fist through." Before the tumultuous ordeal ended, three men died and eleven were wounded. Most of the 180 men arrested and jailed were soon released, but some of those who bore arms during the riot were eventually court-martialed and sent to military prisons. This chapter in Phoenician history demonstrated the injustice and brutality with which the military treated its black soldiers, and the commitment of African American soldiers to resist it.²²

Despite the many obstacles that stood in his way, in November 1945, at the age of 19, Lincoln Ragsdale was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the United States Army Air Force. Ragsdale's parents, who were proud of their son's achievements, drove all the way from Muskogee, Oklahoma to Tuskegee Air Field to attend his graduation ceremonies. During their visit to Alabama, their joy was offset by realities of Southern race relations. During his parent's visit to Tuskegee, Ragsdale recalled, "I was feeling pretty good about the graduation and so I drove my parents' car, a 1940 Buick, off the base alone one day and took it to a service station. The attendant was white, and I asked him to look under the hood and service the car. I guess I must have sounded arrogant to him. I was a cadet captain, the head of my class, and I was used to barking out orders. He wasn't used to hearing a black man talk like that." Although Ragsdale's pride and burgeoning propensity to "bark out" orders probably offended the attendant on a basic level, his audacity and willingness to challenge white supremacy played a more substantial

²² Ibid.

role in what transpired next.²³

“I think the attendant called the police because when I pulled away from the station, a police car began to follow me. I picked up speed, and the guys in the police car picked up speed. I turned off on a little road to see if they would still follow me, and they did. I stopped the car, and they stopped, and three men got out of the car.” Ragsdale “was blinded by the pitch darkness of a rainy November night in Alabama.” He “heard the cold steel click of a shotgun being cocked,” and a belligerent police officer yelling “let’s get that nigger!” “They knocked me down and one of them started kicking me in the head.” Reeling and “aching from three officers’ brutal kicks to his face and body, he lay face down in the thick clay-like mud of a deserted field in the outskirts of Tuskegee, Alabama.” The only thing that saved me was [that] it was really muddy, and his foot was caked over with mud so he didn’t really hurt me.” After the police officer prepared to fire his shotgun, Ragsdale recalled, another one of the men said, ‘naw, he’s got a military uniform on. Let’s just scare him’. So they beat me up some more. I was scared, more scared than I’ve ever been in my life.”²⁴

At that point in his life, Ragsdale remembered, it was the closest he had ever come to death. Terrorized, Ragsdale returned to base and remained there for the rest of graduation week. “That is what fear can do to you,” he said. “My mother was hysterical when she found out what had happened to me. Still haunted by the “bitter memories” of the lynching of her brother-in-law in Muskogee, Oklahoma twenty years before,

²³ Whitney, “Shooting Down Racism,” 1; Baker, “The Man Who Refused to be Invisible,” 96-97.

²⁴ Ibid.

Ragsdale's mother feared for her son's life. Despite being beaten without provocation, Ragsdale was not surprised by the attack. Such an incident, he argued, was commonplace in the Deep South during this era. "We knew that was something to be anticipated," he maintained. "It was typical." What did astonish him, however, was the extent to which the racial injustices of the Deep South extended thousands of miles to Phoenix, Arizona, where he was relocated within weeks of his brutal brush with Alabama police officers and death. Ragsdale was not thrilled at the idea of making the move to Phoenix, as he recalled reading an old city directory that proudly promoted Phoenix as "a modern town of 40,000 people, and the best kind of people too. A very small percentage of Mexicans, Negroes or foreigners."²⁵

A couple of weeks later, just before Christmas in 1945, Ragsdale was one of eleven Tuskegee graduates assigned to Luke Army Air Field in Arizona. The group was relocated as a part of an experimental integrated gunnery team. This project was one of several test cases which influenced President Harry S. Truman's desegregation of the U. S. military through Executive Order 9981 in 1948. Ragsdale, because he was commissioned after World War II, never had the opportunity to fly a military mission, but during his four-month stay at Luke Air Field, he continued to engage a different kind of enemy at home. All of the eleven Tuskegee officers stationed at Luke Air Field were paired off with white roommates. With regard to race relations, "Phoenix was unquestionably the Mississippi of the West" Ragsdale believed. When Ragsdale arrived in the "Mississippi of the West," he was assigned to live with a white captain from the

²⁵ Ibid.

Mississippi of the Deep South.²⁶

Ragsdale recalled that his Southern roommate “didn’t come to the room until late that first night.” When he arrived he was incredulous. “When he saw me,” Ragsdale recounted, “he couldn’t believe it. He said ‘who are you staying with nigger?’ I said I was staying with him, and he stormed out of the room.” “He didn’t sleep in the room that night, and he complained to his superiors that I shouldn’t be with him; that there were other rooms available. None of us knew about Truman’s integration experiment. We were as confused and upset as the white officers. It wasn’t until April when I went back to Tuskegee that I learned about the experiment.”²⁷

Ragsdale “never forgot the humiliation he experienced as a black officer at Luke Air Field.” European American airmen refused to salute him and conspired to harass him throughout his stay. On one occasion, Ragsdale’s roommate filled a balloon with water and placed it in Ragsdale’s bed. “I didn’t notice it when I went to bed, Ragsdale recalled, “but I rolled over on to it and woke up. I was soaked and my bed as soaked. He couldn’t do much more harassing than that though. He outranked me, but I was still an officer.” Ragsdale’s roommate treated him with a modicum of respect only once during his entire stay, immediately after the two had joined together to place first in a target competition. “I was the wingman and we had one other wingman, Ragsdale remembers, my roommate flew in the middle and led the formation in the competition. After we had shot our bullets and had landed, he was feeling real happy about how well we had done, and he came up to me and slapped me on my back.” After two months of living together, Ragsdale and his

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

roommate began exchanging small talk. “He was not an ignorant man by any means,” Ragsdale remembers of his roommate, “but he wasn’t informed racially. We talked a lot about the two races. I had never been around white people very much, and he had never been around black people. We were both ignorant and reluctant to get too close.”²⁸

During one of their conversations, the captain told Ragsdale something that made him “shake his head in disbelief” for the rest of his life. “There was a bathroom where we were living,” Ragsdale recalls, “and often when we were showering I’d look up and catch him staring at my body. I wondered why he was staring. After a couple of months the Mississippi native told Ragsdale what had caused him to glare. The captain told him that “back in Mississippi, his church and family had told him that all niggers had tails.” “He was staring at me to see if I had a tail,” Ragsdale declared. “I guess to the white man’s mind back then it was only logical: We came from Africa, just like the baboons and monkeys, and we had black skin, just like the baboons and monkeys, and we had kinky hair, just like the baboons and monkeys. So naturally, we had tails, just like the baboons and monkeys.”²⁹

Ragsdale credited World War II and his tenure in the military for inspiring him to work toward eradicating such ignorance. Whether or not the captain had actually believed that black people had tails mattered less to Ragsdale than the extent to which America had produced racial ideologies that sometimes bordered on the insane. It was World War II and the Double V campaign that propelled Ragsdale into a lifetime of work on behalf of civil and human rights. Lincoln Ragsdale, Jr. believes this experience led his father to

²⁸ Lincoln Ragsdale interview.

²⁹ Whitney, “Shooting Down Racism,”2.

believe he could do anything. Lincoln, Sr. was a trained pilot of the P51, a craft which was the fastest single engine airplane in the United States or in the world at the time. It was the largest piston driven airplane in the world, and was motored by an engine built by Rolls Royce. The P51 was the first piston airplane to break the sound barrier at 700 miles an hour. To Lincoln, Sr., the ability to navigate the P51 was symbolic of the ability of black people to overcome many of the adversities which faced them. Ragsdale stated that it was “the Tuskegee experience” that gave him direction. “It gave me a whole new self-image” he maintained. He “remembered when we [Tuskegee Airmen] used to walk through black neighborhoods right after the war, and little kids would run up to us and touch our uniforms. ‘Mister, can you really fly an airplane’ they’d ask. The Tuskegee airmen gave blacks a reason to be proud.”³⁰

World War II had a significant impact on African Americans social, economic, and political attitudes and status. The fight to preserve democracy abroad fueled a massive effort by black people in America to make good on the promise of democracy at home. Ragsdale argued that although the attitudes of whites did not change, when the Tuskegee airmen came back home the attitude of blacks did. “If you’re told over and over again that you’re not worth anything, and you don’t have any contact with the people who are telling you that, then there’s no way to disprove what they’re saying. You start to believe what they say is true. But the Tuskegee Airmen disproved it, and men like Joe Louis and Jesse Owens disproved it. Those men were signals to our race that we were equal to whites.” The collective effort of African Americans culminated in the issuing of

³⁰ Whitney, “Shooting Down Racism,”2; Lincoln Ragsdale, Jr. interview, Matthew C. Whitaker, August 1, 2000.

Executive Order 8802 by president Roosevelt, the victory over the all white primary in the Supreme Court's *Smith v. Allwright* ruling in 1944, and the successful campaign to end formal discrimination against black nurses in the military led by Mabel K. Staupers in 1945.³¹

World War II had its most penetrating impact on the African American West. The region's black population grew by 443,000, or 33 percent, during the 1940s. The largest urban regions hosted increases in the African American population ranging from 798 percent in San Francisco, to 168 percent in Los Angeles. Increases were not as striking in the Hawaiian Islands and the Southwest, but these cities did witness rising black populations. Black Phoenicians saw their numbers surge from 4, 263 in 1940 to 5, 217 in 1950. The growing populations ushered in social, economic, and political change, and as a result of desegregation in defense industries, employment opportunities increased somewhat as well. Four states, Oklahoma, Texas, Louisiana, and Arkansas produced the majority of black migrants to the West. Fifty three percent of the migrants were women, and most of them were married. As historian Quintard Taylor, Jr. has indicated, "many migrants followed hot, dusty stretches of U. S. Highways 80 and 60 and route 66, made famous by the Dust Bowl migration a decade earlier across Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona."³²

Since most hotels and other places of public accommodation were off limits to African Americans, black migrants shared driving responsibilities and camped on the

³¹ Ibid.

³² de Graaf, "Significant Steps on an Arduous Path," 26-29; Hine, Hine, and Harold, *An African American Odyssey*, 476-77, Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier*, 256-257.

roadside. Black American also relied on the hospitality of other black people; staying in the homes of African Americans throughout their journey in Amarillo, Albuquerque, Flagstaff, and Phoenix. Once black migrants made it to the West coast, some were finally able to secure skilled work. Executive Order 8802 and the Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC) aided some blacks and gave them access to jobs in the region's shipyards and factories. Western African Americans, along with the rest of the nation, celebrated V-E Day 1945. Their optimism, however, was tempered by the reality of postwar cutbacks. As World War II drew to a close, Western industrialists and the federal government were downsizing war-related production and jobs. Many of the limited economic gains that black Westerners had made, eroded in the face of post-war reductions. Cities like Los Angeles, Oakland, and Portland, for example, hosted a large population of out of work African Americans. San Francisco and Seattle, on the other hand, suffered no significant economic downturn. In the Southwest African Americans never had access to skilled jobs and continued to work primarily as field labors or domestics. Prior to World War II and after, black people in the American West were generally expected to remain subordinated in socio-economic status. White supremacy and Jim Crow in the American West were most salient in Southwestern cities like Phoenix. Race relations in this region, though not as rigid, volatile, and capricious, most resembled that of the American South.³³

The segregation of black students in schools was also pervasive during this period, particularly in the Southwest. Local option segregation in states like Arizona endured.

³³ *Portland Oregonian*, June 16, 1947; Broussard, *Black San Francisco*, 206-08; Taylor, *The Forging of a Black Community*, 175.

Acts of violence to keep black people “in their place” during this era occurred often. In the Southwest, fears of black men raping white women ignited the Beaumont, Texas, riot of 1943. During this melee two African Americans were lynched, over fifty people were injured, and many businesses were looted and set ablaze. Police brutality became an important issue during this period. In the Los Angeles “zoot-suit” riot of June 1943, police officers singled out Mexican Americans and a number of African Americans for physical abuse. Dressed in sporty suits, Mexican Americans and Africans Americans were targeted for arrest, beatings, and other forms of persecution, at the hands of police officers and off-duty military servicemen. The media, dominated by whites, exacerbated racial tensions by producing coverage of the controversy which bordered on the theatrical. Ultimately the racist and violent behavior of the police during the 1940s, building upon a long history of racist transgressions by law enforcement, gave African Americans and other minorities further reason to distrust law enforcement. This set the stage for poor relations between minorities and law enforcement for decades to come.³⁴

African American migrants brought with them a race consciousness and a desire for positive change. Pressured by black activists, for example, the California Legislature was considering bills to outlaw racial discrimination in workplaces and public accommodation by 1943. In Denver, black protesters destroyed legal segregation in theaters. Victories over job discrimination and Jim Crow were more elusive in the Southwest. In Phoenix, for example, segregation continued to arrest the socio-economic

³⁴ Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier*, 256; de Graaf, “Significant Steps on an Arduous Path,” 29; Robin D. Kelley, “The Riddle of the Suit: Malcolm Little and Black Cultural Politics During World War II,” In *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 161-181.

mobility of African Americans. As oppressive as discrimination in the workplace and Jim Crow was, however, the residential segregation that accompanied black Western migration often proved to be the most critical problem. In cities like Phoenix, whose prewar African American population had been small, World War II created distinctive neighborhoods marked by low living standards, poor health, and socio-economic isolation. This “ghettoization” was the result of European American discrimination in the form of race “restrictive covenants” that barred the occupation or use of property by certain racial groups.³⁵

As historian Lawrence de Graaf argued, “one of the most significant impacts of World War II on African Americans was on their attitudes. Many became more aware of the discrepancies between America’s professed ideals and its practices, and of their ability to bring about change. African Americans in the West reflected this increased assertiveness.” This heightened confidence was essential to the development of the Civil Rights Movement. Black military personnel like Lincoln Ragsdale were particularly affected. Would be leaders like Ragsdale played a substantial role in the growth of protest organizations. The American West was a participant in a national trend that witnessed the number of NAACP branches triple and its membership increase over eightfold between 1940 and 1946.

The National Urban League, for which Ragsdale would eventually serve, also played a critical role in the advancement of African Americans. One of the most conspicuous manifestations of wartime activism were the many *ad hoc* black and

³⁵ de Graaf, “Significant Steps on an Arduous Path,” 29; Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier*, 269.

multiracial organizations that protested various forms of discrimination. Unlike the NAACP, these groups organized marches and picket lines. World War II also sparked an increase in black political participation. Distinguished historian Darlene Clark Hine has maintained that one of the most notable “black victories” occurred in Texas, where the NAACP in 1944 successfully petitioned the U. S. Supreme Court to nullify the all white primary, which had effectively disenfranchised black voters in Texas.³⁶

World War II also influenced white racial attitudes. African Americans, members of the press, and various officials, argued that the war for democracy necessarily involved the destruction of racial barriers. Their efforts often coalesced into unrivaled interracial cooperation. In 1943, for example, activists of various racial and ethnic backgrounds in Los Angeles established a Council on Civic Unity. The organization championed interracial understanding and contested racial injustice. The Los Angeles based group was duplicated in several Western cities. In Arizona, for example, a similar organization would be founded in the late 1940s.³⁷

Ultimately the Double V campaign proved to be bittersweet; sweet because many socio-economic advances were made; bitter because despite gains African Americans continued to be subjected to economic oppression and segregation in schools, places of public accommodation and residential areas. Despite the fact that military desegregation was not put into effect until the Korean War, it, along with the development of the Civil

³⁶ de Graaf, “Significant Steps on an Arduous Path,” 29. Also see Darlene Clark Hine, *Black Victory: The Rise and Fall of the White Primary in Texas* (Millwood: KTO Press, 1979).

³⁷ de Graaf, “Significant Steps on an Arduous Path,” 32; Greater Phoenix Council For Civic Unity, (ed.), *To Secure These Rights* (Phoenix: Phoenix Sun Publishing Company, 1961), 6.

Rights Movement, were perhaps the most significant advances. The African American vote, America's budding fidelity with emerging nations, and the rise of the Civil Rights Movement, facilitated the desegregation of the military. A Communist coup in Czechoslovakia in February 1948 reignited tensions between the U. S. and the Soviet Union. Many leaders in both countries believed a war between the superpowers was imminent. U. S. military leaders, however, were concerned because African Americans had already voiced their opposition to serving yet again in a racially segregated Army. In response to President Truman's resuscitation of the draft, A. Philip Randolph again posed the threat of massive black resistance.³⁸

In 1947 Randolph formed the League for Non-Violent Civil Disobedience Against Military Segregation, and through this organization, in 1948, he warned America that African Americans would not comply with a racially segregated draft. From his pulpit and seat in the U. S. Congress, the outspoken Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. championed Randolph's stance; proclaiming that the U. S. did not have enough jails to accommodate all of the African Americans who would refuse to serve. On June 24, 1948 pressures mounted as the Soviet Union instituted a military blockade on West Berlin. Truman, viewing this as a precursor to war, and scrambling to rally support for his re-election campaign, issued Executive Order 9981 desegregating the military. The Air Force was the first branch of the military and the first federal agency to integrate, five years before the landmark *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* decision. Following the issue of Executive Order 9981, Randolph and Grant Reynolds, co-chair of the League for

³⁸ Scott and Womack, *Double V*, 288-89; Hine, Hine, and Harold, *An African American Odyssey*, 488-89.

Non-violent Civil Disobedience Against Military Segregation, dissolved the organization and canceled all protests against the military and federal government.³⁹

If African American's successes against segregation in the federal government gave them reason to celebrate, the sobering reality of racial inequality in post-war America gave them pause. When the war came to an end, and hostilities ended in Europe, the 332nd came home to segregated reception centers and local separation stations. There were no New York ticker-tape parades, such as those given in honor of black soldiers who served in World War I. Black soldiers and veterans were not embraced like their white counterparts. All were subjected to the strictures of racial segregation and many suffered physical abuse at the hands of angry white mobs. There were many instances of attacks on black soldiers and their families, particularly in the South.⁴⁰

In Walton County, Georgia, an honorably discharged black soldier was allegedly involved in a fight with a white man who had been making sexual advances toward the soldier's wife. The World War II veteran was arrested and jailed without medical attention while the white assailant was taken to the hospital. Shortly afterward, a mob of whites enraged at the soldier's defiance stormed his jail cell, and escaped with him to an isolated area where his wife and another African American couple were being held prisoner. All four of them were tortured and brutally lynched. Although the NAACP attempted to intervene legally, and successfully secured a grand jury, no one involved in the lynching was ever brought to justice.⁴¹

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Scott and Womack, *Double V*, 271.

⁴¹ White, *A Man Called White*, 322-23.

The impact of World War II on black Westerners was complex. It ended unqualified discrimination in some areas, and throughout most of the West African Americans were no longer relegated to unskilled labor positions. In Southwestern cities like Phoenix, however, white supremacy continued to reign, and black people lagged behind their counterparts in other parts of the West and across the nation. The impact of wartime black migration was considerable. Over one million black people migrated from the South, ushering in more vocal black presence in politics. As early as 1948, African Americans political power influenced presidential elections, as both Republicans and Democrats included limited civil rights measures as part of their agendas. World War II also paved the way for African American leaders who participated, and sometimes greatly influenced race relations and the course of American history.

In some cases black Western leaders would secure national recognition as politicians, lawyers, or entertainers. Jackie Robinson, for example, a product of the University of California Los Angeles, was to many a symbol of African American progress and potential. Often, however, local leaders unknown outside of their communities played critical roles in black progress at the local level. African Americans and Latino Americans elected Gus Garcia and George Sutton to a San Antonio school board in 1948. Sutton was the first black elected official in Texas since the nineteenth century. In Arizona, Hayzel B. Daniels and Carl Sims became the first blacks to serve in the state's legislature in 1944. Led by local leaders, black Phoenicians organized systematic support networks to foster social, economic, political, and cultural enhancement. They established churches too provide spiritual support. Secular institutions were formed to heighten educational and intellectual development, improve medical care, and to cultivate camaraderie among

the black population. “*De facto* and *de jure*” segregation limited the mobility of Black Phoenicians and held them within the boundaries of their communities. Although confined, African Americans fought to overcome educational inequalities, labor problems, and ostracism from the larger more economically secure European American population. Simultaneously, black Phoenicians sought to retain their racial and cultural identity within their own neighborhoods, and though not immune to class consciousness and sexism, African Americans were able to flourish within their boundaries while being rendered “second-class” citizens in the larger community dominated by European Americans. After his stint in the military, Lincoln Ragsdale brought his business, activist, and military background to Phoenix. He became acquainted with the local community and established himself as a leading businessman and proponent of racial equality. It did not take long for his presence to be felt. After extensive combat training during World War II, Ragsdale set his sights on fighting three of the most insidious racial problems in Phoenix; school and residential segregation and black Phoenician economic isolation.⁴²

⁴² Hazel B. Daniels, “A Black Magistrate’s Struggles,” in Anne Hodges Morgan and Rennard Strickland, (eds.) *Arizona Memories* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1984), 336; Robert Garland Landolt, *The Mexican-America Workers of San Antonio, Texas* (New York: Arno Press, 1976), 268. For a detailed history of Jackie Robinson see Arnold Rampersad, *Jackie Robinson: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997).

CHAPTER 3: “SHOOTING DOWN RACISM”: LINCOLN AND ELEANOR RAGSDALE, AGITATION AND PROTEST IN PHOENIX, 1947-1954.

“I want to congratulate you for doing your bit to make the world safe for democracy and unsafe for hypocrisy.”¹
-A. Philip Randolph

Despite post-war cutbacks and persistent racial inequality, World War II and the industries which arose to support it, improved the prospect of good jobs and a freer life for African Americans in the American West. As a result, a huge migration ensued that increased black populations in the region. This migration furnished many of the leaders and participants in the region’s burgeoning Civil Rights Movement. It also paved the way for African American success in business, Western politics, and multiculturalism. Tuskegee Airman Lincoln Johnson Ragsdale, and educator Eleanor Dickey Ragsdale, were among this historic group of black migrants who moved West in search of opportunity. They brought with them a tempered optimism and a determination to capitalize on the meager gains made by African Americans during the war years. Their personal success and service to the African American community during the post-war years placed them among the most influential leaders in American Western history. Between 1947 and 1954, their efforts, and the work of many other activists, culminated in the destruction of residential segregation and *de jure* school segregation in Phoenix, Arizona, currently the fifth largest city in the United States.

After Lincoln Ragsdale graduated from Tuskegee and completed gunnery training at Luke Air Field in Litchfield Park, Arizona in 1947, he relocated to nearby Phoenix. He brought with him a distinguished military record, cunning, ambition, and brashness that

¹ A. Philip Randolph, *The Messenger*, (December 1, 1948).

was no doubt a product of his background as a third generation black professional in-the-making. Ragsdale's father and grandfather were morticians by trade, and his mother was a school teacher. One of the first things Ragsdale did when he settled in "The Valley of the Sun" was meet the woman who would eventually be regarded by many as the black "first lady" of Phoenix. Just before Ragsdale was honorably discharged from the military, he was introduced to school teacher Eleanor Dickey. Dickey arrived by train at Luke Airfield from Pennsylvania in 1947. She had arranged to live with her uncle Thomas Dickey, Sr. and his wife Mayme Dickey as she began her career as a teacher at the segregated Dunbar Elementary School. In a series of events that had all of the airs of a calculated effort, Thomas Dickey, Sr. and Thomas Dickey, Jr. collaborated to bring an ambitious young soldier from Oklahoma and an idealistic young teacher from Pennsylvania together.²

Thomas Dickey, Jr. was Eleanor's first cousin. He had returned to Phoenix in 1946 from his service in the U. S. Army during World War II. He met a young, confident, articulate Lincoln Ragsdale at "one of the many social events given at the home of Fred and Emily Crump Williams" in the city. Dickey and Ragsdale became good friends. Soon afterward, Dickey told Ragsdale that he had a "beautiful cousin coming to town to teach school and showed Lincoln a photo of Eleanor." Ragsdale was impressed by Dickey's description of his cousin and the photograph. He decided to join the match-maker when he made his way to the train station to receive Eleanor. Ragsdale was at the train station when Eleanor disembarked and he believed it was "love at first sight." Eleanor thought

² Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale interview.

highly of Lincoln, and the two began a courtship that would soon culminate in marriage.³

While Lincoln and Eleanor's relationship deepened, black Phoenicians and African Americans across the nation entered a critical period in their history. Their entry into a new era, marked by the end of World War II and demobilization, brought the reality of white supremacy and racial inequality to the forefront of local and national news. By 1947, as segregation began to exacerbate the socio-economic ills of the nation's black communities, black Phoenicians responded in a more strategic manner to the problems which faced them. By 1946, the same year President Harry S. Truman created the Committee on Civil Rights, African Americans in the desert community responded to legal and extralegal methods of segregation in the same manner that blacks across the nation did. After embracing the outwardly accommodationist principles of Booker T. Washington during the "Progressive Era," black Phoenicians by 1940 adopted the more aggressive political philosophy of Ida B. Wells-Barnett and W. E. B. Du Bois. A critical factor in the shifting tide of black Phoenicians socio-economic thought was the city's growing black population. Most whites responded to the burgeoning population blacks, and their more fervent calls for equality, by sounding the alarm of indignation and fear.

Racialized and gendered economic and political inequality gave birth to spirited dissent by black and white Phoenicians after World War II. On one such occasion, the Communist Party of America (CPA) responded to this inequality. The CPA stepping into a leadership vacuum created largely by the PUL and NAACP's reservations about fighting racial inequality in the streets rather than in the courts, led a protest of a Phoenician

³ Universal Memorial Center, *A Celebration and Worship*, Eleanor Dickey Ragsdale, 14.

Woolworth store that discriminated against African Americans.⁴

On Friday, May 17, 1946, Morris Graham of the black owned and operated *Arizona Sun*, reported that “a picket line of about 15 Negro and white people marched before the Phoenix Woolworth store protesting its discrimination policies.” Woolworth’s did not “allow Negroes at its food counter,” and did not “hire any Negro clerks.” The picketer’s signs reminded whites that “Negroes had fought a recent war for democracy, but were denied democracy in their own country.” Some proclaimed that their picket line was the “Frontline for Democracy,” while other carried signs that included statements such as: “Woolworth Pays Low Wages-Its Workers are not Unionized”; “We Fought for Democracy Overseas, Yet Can’t Eat in Woolworth’s”; and “Arizona Needs Fair Employment Practice Law”, “Arizona Needs Civil Rights Law.” The CPA distributed flyers which called for: No discrimination at lunch counters; the hiring of “Negro Girls” as clerks in proportion to the Negro population; for Woolworth’s to unionize; and for new American Civil Rights law.⁵

⁴ Whitaker, “In Search of Black Phoenicians,” pp. 60; Luckingham, *Phoenix*, 66. For discussions of the political philosophy of Booker T. Washington, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, and W. E. B. Du Bois, see: Louis R. Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); Booker T. Washington, *The Negro in Business* (Boston: Hertel, Jenkins, & Company, 1907), *Up From Slavery* (New York: Double Day, 1901); Aldreda M. Duster, (ed.), *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); Linda O. McMurry, *To Keep the Waters Troubled: The Life of Ida B. Wells* (Oxford University Press, 1998) W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1935), *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1903), *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (Philadelphia: Publications of the University of Pennsylvania, 1899); David Levering, *W. E. B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963, Vol. 2* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 2000), *W. E. B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868-1919* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1993).

⁵ *Arizona Sun*, Friday, May 17, 1946.

Despite the CPA's hands-on approach, the Phoenix Urban League, and the Phoenician branch of the NAACP, received much more public attention and support from those who championed change. At a rally at East Lake Park, on July 4, 1946, the NAACP again voiced its desire to push for change through the courts. It also verbally criticized the discriminatory practices of Woolworth's, and called for Civil Rights laws in Arizona. The NAACP officially assailed the practices of Woolworth's in a decree which described the NAACP "as protesting the un-American, undemocratic, pro-Fascist actions of the Woolworth store in its policy of not serving meals to Negroes at their lunch counters, notwithstanding they will serve them at the merchandise counters." Months later the PUL protested a sign which read: "This Entrance for Colored," which hung in a modest downtown restaurant. The duplicitous administrator of the eatery professed that he "meant no harm by displaying the sign." According to the manager, the sign "was only to inform the colored people that they could come inside and eat, since the custom had been to feed them standing up on the outside for many years."⁶

Despite limited economic gains ushered in by the G. I. Bill and other postwar opportunities, racial discrimination continued to arrest the socio-economic development of black Phoenicians. Despite their poor record of dealing with racial minorities with fairness and restraint, the Phoenician police force continued to betray their belief in white supremacy through their sometimes racist, reckless, reactionary, and repressive methods. In addition, racial tensions were worsened after the Phoenician military riot of 1942; a disorder in which the Phoenician police, tanks, and other military weapons were deployed

⁶ *Arizona Sun*, February 5, May 17, June 2, July 5, November 22, 1946; February 2, 1947.

in the streets of the “Valley of the Sun.” Organizational and grassroots leaders confronted these persistent problems by reorganizing the PUL and the NAACP. The Phoenix NAACP, under the leadership of James L. Davis, who helped increase the associations membership to upwards of six hundred by 1947, also stepped up its campaigns to address racial discrimination, as well as problems in employment, housing, and education.⁷

Leaders like Davis, many of them members of the black professional class, were not always confronted with the harshest indignities that poverty, discrimination, and segregation engendered. Nevertheless, they were affected by the most salient exigencies of white supremacy. Lincoln Ragsdale, for example, always maintained that white people in Phoenix were “just as bigoted” as most whites were in the South, and that all black Phoenicians were adversely affected as a result. To him race relations in Phoenix were not complicated. White supremacy ruled; “they had signs in many places, ‘Mexicans and Negroes not welcomed.’” Most professional black people, although they willingly distinguished themselves from poor blacks along class lines, believed that financially successful black people could not rise above the condition of their race. Many believed their success was inextricably linked to the success of the black community.⁸

Bradford Luckingham argues that conditions for African Americans in Phoenix following World War II “were generally deplorable.” The majority of black Phoenicians lived at or below the poverty line in segregated neighborhoods dotted by substandard housing and economic isolation. The vast majority of black Phoenicians rented their homes or apartments, over fifty percent of them “resided in dwellings without running

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

water or bathrooms.” Unsanitary conditions and inadequate nutrition created acute health concerns, and with the exception of a limited amount of educational attainment, African Americans in Phoenix were generally at the bottom of most socio-economic indices. Most of these conditions were fostered and intensified by the inability of black people to make inroads in the labor market. African Americans in Phoenix, unlike their counterparts on the West coast and other regions of the country, were excluded from white unions until the 1950s.⁹

Despite the obstacles which faced them, black Phoenicians continued to develop their own community and institutions as they had done since the second half of the nineteenth century. African Americans in “the Valley” frequented the Ramona and Westside theaters, where they watched films with “all colored casts.” Musician and disc jockey Curtis Grey provided music and news of interest to black Phoenicians on the KPHO radio station. The Miss Bronze Arizona pageant proved to be a popular event, and Zeta Phi Beta and Delta Sigma Theta sororities presented “outstanding women” of the community awards and sponsored charitable events. Eleanor Ragsdale became an active member of the Phoenician chapter of Delta Sigma Theta. Fraternities such as Lincoln Ragsdale’s own Sigma Pi Phi sponsored local programming and social events. Local leaders and groups worked diligently to enhance the black community’s cultural and

⁹ *Arizona Sun*, May 17, September 13, October 17, 20, 1946, February 2, 21, March 2, June 20, October 24, 1947, April 2, August 27, September 24, November 5, 1948, February 20, April 15, 1949, September 19, 1952, *Arizona Republic*, January 20, 1946; Mattie Hackett, “A Survey of Living Conditions of Girls in the Negro Schools of Phoenix, Arizona,” (M.A. Thesis, Arizona State University, 1939), 43-50; Luckingham, *Minorities in Phoenix*, 158-59.

political awareness.¹⁰

Occasionally these individuals and organizations hosted nationally recognized African American leaders. Roy Wilkins, Executive Director of the NAACP, visited Phoenix in September 1946. During his stay he was accommodated in the home of local educator Roy Lee, and entertained at the Phyllis Wheatley Community Center. The Phyllis Wheatley Community Center, located on East Jefferson Street, was remodeled after World War II by Wade Hammond and other local black leaders. Hammond, a retired veteran and administrator of the Arizona Voter's League, often "took it upon himself" to speak out in defense of black Phoenixians. "In return, local influentials occasionally offered political appointments and job opportunities to him and other blacks." The fact that such tokenism benefitted a relatively small number of middle class black Phoenixians was not lost on the Arizona Voter's League or the state's largest and most influential black newspaper. The Arizona Voter's League, declared the black owned *Arizona Sun*, would not "sponsor candidates who practice buying Negro voters with a slice of watermelon and red soda-pops."¹¹

Even though black Phoenixians worked to strengthen their community, they labored against the backdrop of socio-economic isolation and racial discrimination. By the late 1940s black and white activists organized to combat institutional racism. Mary Melcher posited that whites, "motivated by a deep aversion to segregation, strove to understand racial oppression and identify with the blacks who suffered under it." Though somewhat romantic in her appraisal of whites' motivations, Melcher was more astute in

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

suggesting that whites like attorney William P. Mahoney, Jr. and physician Fred Holmes “could not duplicate the tragic, bitter memories of someone like Ragsdale, yet they were equally determined to challenge segregation in Phoenix.”¹²

In 1947 Holmes invited Professor Lewis Wirth, a scholar from the University of Chicago, to speak about race relations. About three hundred Phoenicians, blacks and whites, attended the event. After the lecture, members of the assembly joined together in laying the foundation of one of the most progressive organizations in Phoenician history. Their drive culminated in the creation of the Greater Phoenix Council for Civil Unity (GPCCU) in 1948. Modeled after the Los Angeles Council on Civic Unity founded in 1943, the GPCCU was a middle-class, multiracial organization. The GPCCU hired John Lasso, a student of Wirth's, to direct the group. Within one year it boasted a membership of four to five hundred people. The GPCCU pledged to “foster and promote understanding” and positive relations among people of various racial, religious, and social backgrounds. They sought to “achieve these ends by means of education, consultation, cooperative planning and voluntary group action,” and by encouraging the “inclusion of the representatives of minority groups in all endeavors having to do with community activities and planning.” Few of these groups, however, including the GPCCU, openly challenged restrictive covenants or specific employers and unions.¹³

African American activists Thomasena and Eugene Grigsby were among the many

¹² William Mahoney interview, Mary Melcher, February 16, 1990; Thomasena Grigsby interview Mary Melcher, February 7, 1990; Eugene Grigsby interview, Mary Melcher, February 12, 1990.

¹³ Greater Phoenix Council For Civic Unity, *To Secure These Rights*, 6, 9-13, 17-46; Mary Melcher, “Blacks and Whites Together,” p. 195-216.

blacks who joined the GPCCU, having migrated to Phoenix in 1946, when Eugene accepted a teaching position at the all black Carver High School. Reactionary white supremacists in Phoenix bemoaned the activities of the Gigsbys and their fellow activists Mahoney and Holmes. In fact, many right-wing patrons of Mahoney's law practice, opted to take their business elsewhere as a result of his participation in groups such as the NAACP, the Urban League, and the GPCCU. Despite pressure to desert their African American comrades in struggle, whites like Mahoney continued to protest.¹⁴

Mahoney recalled that in 1947, when renowned black vocalist and friend Dorothy Maynor was visiting the Mahoney family, he came face to face with segregation and discrimination. Prior to selecting a restaurant to dine in, Mahoney did "a little checking," and to his surprise learned that all the "best" restaurants he contacted in Phoenix refused to serve Maynor. Angry and disgusted, Mahoney phoned Dr. Holmes in an attempt to locate another prospective restaurant. A restaurant named Cudia's was recommended, and was described by Holmes as a "fine place" owned by Salvatore P. D. Cudia. A cantankerous, yet progressive person in his own right, Cudia assured Mahoney when he phoned the restaurateur that "no Ku Klux Klan son-of-a-bitch is going to tell me who I can or cannot serve. Come on out." Mahoney and his guest welcomed the spirited gesture, and enjoyed a "delightful dinner featured right in the middle of the dining room." As a result of the dedication displayed by Mahoney and other white progressives, many blacks protested in earnest, side by side with whites. Thomasena Grigsby likens their

¹⁴ Hayzel Burton Daniels, "A Black Magistrate's Struggle," In Anne Hodges Morgan and Rennard Strickland, eds., *Arizona Memories*. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1984. pp. 337-338; Mary Melcher, "Blacks and Whites Together," p. 201; Luckingham, *Minorities in Phoenix*. pp. 161-162.

collaboration to “yeast in bread,” when mixed together things began to click.¹⁵

Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale joined the GPCCU in 1948, the same year that President Truman issued Executive Order 9981 desegregating the U. S. military, just as their businesses were being launched. The couple would play an active role in the GPCCU’s fight against racial injustice in Phoenix. Friend and fellow activist Herbert Ely, became the president of the GPCCU, and quickly established a life long friendship with the Ragsdales. Ely moved to Arizona, because he “wanted to make a contribution” to the field of racial equality in America. “I probably didn’t have the guts to move South,” he recalled, “but I fell in love with the West, and obviously I saw an opportunity as a young lawyer interested also in providing a good living and providing an opportunity to handle constitutional law cases.” The main reason he chose to move to Phoenix, he remembered, “was because Phoenix was at a crossroads in terms of its racial inequality, it was one step removed” from a typical segregated Southern community. “So it was where I wanted to make my mark in that field.”¹⁶

He and the Ragsdale’s objected to segregation in schools, residential areas, housing, and places of public accommodation. “When I came to town,” Ely maintained, “North of Van Buren, North of McDowell, blacks could not get into restaurants and could not go into places of public accommodation. Certainly there were very few, if any, hotels or motels of any merit that would allow them in. This needed to be changed. There were other problems, obviously in housing patterns and in employment, but the focus was on public accommodations because that was so patent.” Ely wasted little time in becoming

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Baker, “The Man Who Refused to be Invisible,” 97; Herbert L. Ely interview.

involved in the GPCCU and other organizations as well. He “became legal council, not as an occupation, but as an advocacy,” for the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). The ACLU was not really involved in discrimination cases. That was primarily the province of the GPCCU. The organization did not act through legal cases, but mainly through boycotts and other public pressures. The GPCCU did contribute to important legal actions, however, by investigating and organizing financial and political support of the NAACP’s official legal campaigns against segregation. Ely eventually became legal council and vice president of the NAACP. Lincoln and Eleanor had a potent ally in Ely, an attorney who specialized in constitutional law and liberal politics.

While Lincoln and Eleanor became involved in progressive politics and the desegregation movement in Phoenix, they worked hard to lay the foundation for decades of financial success. Ragsdale established himself in his new desert home with the money he earned while serving in the military. During his tenure in the Air Force Ragsdale set aside portions of his stipend and sent it to his mother for safekeeping. Once he was discharged, he retrieved the money his mother had been saving for him. Building upon their family’s history in the funeral industry, Lincoln decided to open a mortuary in the city. He used some of the money he had saved to begin his enterprise. In the fall of 1947, Lincoln’s father Hartwell, Sr. and his brother Hartwell, Jr. joined him to lend their support. Their goal, argues Lincoln Ragsdale, Jr. was to provide African American and Mexican American Phoenicians funeral services that were administered professionally and with care and compassion. Above all Ragsdale wanted to create a successful business, and he had reason to believe that the Phoenician community offered a unique opportunity. As he saw it, he had found a niche in “the Valley” that would bring him and his family

financial success.¹⁷

Lincoln Ragsdale planned to capitalize on the racial segregation that blanketed the city, by offering funeral services to those whom were refused such service by parallel white businesses. Lincoln Ragsdale, Jr. argues that his father “thought he would have the opportunity [to] bury the blacks and the Hispanics in the area, considering it was a segregated society.” African Americans and Mexican Americans were the largest minorities in Phoenix and both experienced the damaging effects of racial subjugation. In 1947 there were nearly 5,200 African Americans and 16,000 Mexican Americans in Phoenix. Ragsdale believed he would have a lock on the patronage of both of these groups. He believed that the Phoenix community “was a good market base.” It is safe to say that the fact that Ragsdale elected to exploit the white supremacist system that discriminated against him and other minorities for financial gain, was not lost on him. He was, after all, a member of a long line of businessmen who benefitted from America’s racial caste system. It appears that he did not see any potential contradiction between his business practices and his belief in a “color blind” society. He knew he was entering into an industry that he would engage in without white competition, and that he would probably reap large amounts of capital in return. This was an issue that many black business leaders dealt with at the time. Many, however, reconciled their position as exploiter and benefactor by redistributing portions of their capital to the African American community. This capital, in turn, often supported charitable efforts in the black

¹⁷ Lincoln Ragsdale, Jr. interview; *Arizona Sun*, October 10, 1947.

community and campaigns to fight racial discrimination.¹⁸

Ragsdale's first step in erecting his mortuary was finding and purchasing the land upon which he would build. Using his savings, Ragsdale found and purchased the land he desired at 11th Street and Jefferson, in downtown Phoenix. Buying the land, however, was not his toughest challenge. Securing a loan for the building itself was much harder. Local banks were controlled by whites, and they routinely denied loans to African Americans. Despite his service during World War II, Ragsdale was no exception. He had a difficult time securing the necessary loans to underwrite his venture as a result. "None of the banks would loan me one red nickel" he remembered. He owned the land he needed, but did not have the financial support to build anything on it. "He went to all the banks in the area and they wouldn't give him a loan," Lincoln Jr. recalled. Bank administrators would have him fill out stacks of paperwork without having any intention of lending him the money he needed. His application were always denied. One banking official went so far as to say that "they'll never give him a loan." It was their policy to "never give a black man a loan." "Eventually he had exhausted all of his opportunities and all [of] his resources." He had no one else to appeal to. Ragsdale was not one to accept racial discrimination and failure. If he was going to be turned away, he would never go quietly. William "Bill" Dickey, Ragsdale's future brother-in-law, argued that "Lincoln Ragsdale was a dynamo, a person with energy." He went back to the last bank that would not finance his mortuary, sat in the lobby, and said "I'm gonna stay here until you all decide to

¹⁸ Lincoln Ragsdale, Jr. interview; Plater, *African American Entrepreneurship*, 162-65.

lend me some money.”¹⁹

Ragsdale did leave the bank eventually. Feeling “dejected and humiliated, he wandered out onto the sidewalk adjacent to the bank and stood there for hours “pondering what to do next.” A man who worked in a nearby office building in downtown Phoenix walked by Ragsdale several times that day. Each time he noticed a despondent Ragsdale standing on the street corner as if he had no place to go. Finally, on the way back from his lunch the man stopped and asked Ragsdale why he had been standing in the same spot all day. Ragsdale told him his story; that he wanted to open a mortuary that would cater to black Phoenicians and other minorities in the community, that he was not able to secure the financing he needed, and that he had already bought the land. The stranger invited Ragsdale up to his office which was adjacent to the corner upon which Ragsdale stood. Ragsdale was escorted to the office of E. Harry Herrscher.²⁰

Once in Herrscher’s office, Ragsdale realized that his new acquaintance was an architect. The good samaritan told Ragsdale he empathized with him, and shared with him his own struggle to overcome adversity. The Grecian immigrant told Ragsdale that when he came to the U. S. he was penniless and hungry. The kindness of a black teacher who took him in, however, saved his life. After a lengthy conversation the architect agreed to lend Ragsdale \$35,000 of his own money in exchange for the contract to build his mortuary. Ragsdale agreed to pay him back over a ten year period. Ragsdale would eventually pay him back in five years. Ragsdale had finally obtained his financing, and in

¹⁹ Baker, “The Man Who Refused to be Invisible,” 97; Lincoln Ragsdale, Jr.; William Dickey interview, Matthew C. Whitaker, April 6, 2000; *Arizona Sun*, October 10, 1947.

²⁰ Ibid.

the process secured the services of a man who proved to be one of the premier architects in Phoenix.²¹

Although Ragsdale had purchased the necessary land, secured financing, and obtained an architect, he not yet earned his funeral director's license. Hartwell, Jr. came to Phoenix to help construct and administer the mortuary until Lincoln had gone to mortuary school and obtained his license. Hartwell, Jr. had already attended mortuary school while Lincoln was in the Air Force. Although Hartwell, Sr. graduated from Worsham College of Embalming in Chicago, Illinois, Hartwell, Jr. attended mortuary school in San Francisco. He returned briefly to Oklahoma after completing mortuary school, and moved to Phoenix shortly after. When he arrived in Phoenix, Hartwell was a licensed funeral director in California, Oklahoma, and Arizona.²²

On Friday, January 7, 1948, the *Arizona Sun*, reported that "Arizona's Finest Negro Mortuary" was scheduled to open on Sunday, January 9, 1948. The New Ragsdale Mortuary was named "The Chapel in the Valley." The *Arizona Sun* noted that the opening marked "a great step in this community for Negro people by providing a building and service equal to the best in the country, where a dignified memorial service can be held." The Ragsdale building came equipped with a reception room, business office, living quarters for a night attendant and "a complete modernly equipped operating room" which was "designed for efficiency and the highest quality preparations." The chapel, "designed exclusively to create a sacred atmosphere," was understated and refined with recessed indirect lighting. The "family room" and music room were "screened from

²¹ Ibid.

²² *Arizona Sun*, October 10, 1947.

the audience by vertical natural finished wooden grills extending from floor to the ceiling.” The acoustical ceiling was “left natural,” while the walls were pale grey, “making a beautiful quiet background relieved by the old rose draperies at the windows.” Indirect sunlight was “admitted through a large glass block panel above the entrance door, diffusing the light across the ceiling.” The “appointments of the chapel” were made in such a way as to make it “available for weddings and other special occasions.”²³

Architects E. Harry Herrscher and his partner Mel Ensign devoted quite a bit of attention to the building’s design and construction. Their “careful research to obtain the latest ideas and requirements for such an establishment” was “reflected in the practical arrangement of the various rooms.” Ensign’s acquaintance with contemporary European architecture could be detected in the lines and proportions of the building. Architecture was a particular passion of Herrscher and Ensign, and the funeral industry was nothing new to the Ragsdale’s. This combination of interests and expertise fueled the construction of one the most modern and sophisticated mortuaries in the country. Hartwell Ragsdale, Sr. was already the owner and operator of the Ragsdale Funeral Home and Friendship Burial Association of Ardmore, Oklahoma; having also owned mortuaries in Tulsa and Lawton, Oklahoma.²⁴

While simultaneously opening The Chapel in the Valley, and working toward graduating magna cum laude from the California College of Mortuary Science in Los Angeles, California, Lincoln Ragsdale followed in the family profession. He became the second member of the third generation of Ragsdale’s to receive his funeral director’s

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

license. Ragsdale busied himself overseeing the construction of The Chapel in the Valley and completing mortuary school. He also managed to earn a diploma from the Lamson Business College in Business Administration and Income Tax, become a Notary Public, and acquire a commercial flying licence. Ragsdale's commercial flying licence proved to be extremely valuable to his business and the African American community. On Friday, July 2, 1948, the *Arizona Sun*, announced the Ragsdale mortuary was the first funeral home to furnish airplane service to black Phoenixians. This allowed African Americans, in what was still regarded by most people as an obscure desert town, to return the remains of their client's family members to their hometowns in other states for interment. It also enabled relatives of black Phoenixians in other states to travel to Phoenix to attend funeral services of relatives who had migrated to "the Valley." The Ragsdale's charter service flew its maiden flight to Omaha, Nebraska on June 29, 1948. Lincoln's schedule was becoming increasingly busy. To assist him and Hartwell with the administration of the business, Lincoln's brother Wallace C. Ragsdale, moved to Phoenix at the completion of his degree in Mortuary Science to assist in the business.²⁵

During 1949 the lives of Lincoln Ragsdale and Eleanor Dickey underwent significant changes. Lincoln and Eleanor's courtship blossomed. The two were married on May 29, 1949 in The Chapel of the Valley, and thus began a unique partnership characterized by love, productivity, protest, and pragmatism. Eleanor wanted to marry a man that possessed a "pioneering spirit," and someone "who was not boring." She got her wish. Lincoln and Eleanor's marriage "set in motion events that forever changed the

²⁵ *Arizona Sun*, October 10, 1947; Universal Memorial Center, *A Celebration*, 3; *Arizona Sun*, Friday, July 2 1948.

history of the city, state, and country.” Changes also occurred in The Chapel in the Valley. The transformations had nothing to do with the success of the business. Its standard funeral home functions, charter flight service, meeting rooms for local organization, and space for community events such as weddings, charitable events, and political gatherings, made it an instant community center. Living conditions for the Ragsdale’s, however, were becoming too strained and congested. Hartwell Ragsdale had recently married Hazel Williams Ragsdale, expanding the family and bringing another person to live in the chapel. “There were too many people” trying to carve out a living from The Chapel in the Valley, Lincoln Ragsdale, Jr. recalled. “They couldn’t sustain two families out of the funeral home.” To pursue their own dreams and business interests, Hartwell, Jr. and Hazel decided to move to San Diego, California. Hartwell eventually opened his own funeral business, the Anderson-Ragsdale Mortuary.²⁶

Lincoln Ragsdale remained in Phoenix and became the sole administrator of The Chapel in the Valley. He moved forward with his mission plan which was “providing service through the funeral industry for the people in the [minority] community.” He worked to secure the patronage of African American and Mexican Americans. Ragsdale soon “discovered that the Hispanics considered themselves white,” however, and that “they patronized the white funeral homes.” Religion, rather than race, may have played a major role in Mexican Americans frequenting white funeral homes. Many of the white funeral homes that they went to may have been administered by Roman Catholics, and inasmuch as most Mexican Americans in Phoenix were Catholic, their choosing to use

²⁶ Universal Memorial Center, *A Celebration and Worship*, Eleanor Dickey Ragsdale, 15; Lincoln Ragsdale, Jr.; Universal Memorial Center, *Ragsdale Family History*, 1.

white owned mortuaries may be better understood along religious lines, instead of race. Regardless, the market that he thought was probably as high as thirty-five percent “dwindled down to about four percent.” This dynamic “made it much more of a challenge to maintain cash flow in the business.” Always looking to tap into a potential source of revenue, Lincoln decided to enter the insurance and real estate market. He secured a license to sell insurance and a real estate broker’s license. Ragsdale again targeted the African American and Mexican American communities for his latest ventures. This time, however, African Americans were his primary target group.²⁷

Black people continued to migrate to the city from Southern states where many performed agricultural work. Phoenix’s cotton and citrus industries attracted many of these laborers. Ragsdale offered these migrants low-cost burial insurance, which was one of the few “investments in their future” they could make. Most black migrants could not afford much in the way of health care, but most managed to save enough money to buy inexpensive insurance policies. Insurance policies enabled black people to have elegant funeral ceremonies that provided a stark contrast to their spartan lives. That which they could not attain in life, black cultural tradition gave in death. Ragsdale’s efforts may not have been entirely altruistic. It can be argued that he was also exploiting the poor economic and social status of migrant labor as well. Ragsdale also saw a void in the housing market for African Americans in Phoenix. He soon entered the real estate business. When he elected to do so, the real estate market, housing opportunities for black Phoenixians were limited and primarily confined to the economically and politically

²⁷ Lincoln Ragsdale, Jr. interview.

isolated area of South Phoenix. In 1946 the Progressive Builder's Association, a company owned and operated by black builders J. S. Jones and D. W. Williams, built striking homes on parcels of land extending from Sixteenth to Fourteenth Streets, between Broadway and Roeser Roads. In 1950 Ragsdale founded the Ragsdale Realty and Insurance Agency. In doing so he capitalized on Phoenix's segregated burial industry and housing market, and offered new opportunities in commerce and housing to African Americans.²⁸

Lincoln's new enterprises pulled him in many directions and he soon figured out that he needed help in administering the family businesses. During the first year of the Ragsdale's marriage, Lincoln managed to keep things together. Emily Ragsdale, the youngest child of Lincoln and Eleanor, explained that by their second year as husband and wife, Lincoln needed Eleanor "to come work with him, because he knew that he wouldn't be able to continue the business without her help and support." Eleanor continued to teach for as long as she could, but by the end of 1950 she "ended up coming to work in the mortuary and helping to build the business."

Eleanor obtained her insurance license and was involved in every aspect of the Ragsdale Realty and Insurance Agency. She also resigned from her teaching position in anticipation of the Ragsdale's first child. Between 1951 and 1957, the Ragsdale's would have four children; three girls and one boy. Eleanor referred to them as her "stair-step

²⁸ Joseph E. Holloway, *Africanisms in American Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 81-91; Plater, *African American Entrepreneurship*, 162-165; Lincoln Ragsdale, Jr. interview; William Dickey interview; Travis Williams interview, Matthew C. Whitaker, April 6, 2000; George Brooks interview, Mary Melcher, January 31, 1990; Lincoln Ragsdale interview, Mary Melcher; Melcher, "Blacks and Whites Together," 195-216.

family,” as Elizabeth Estell, Gwendolyn Onlia, Lincoln Johnson, Jr., and Emily Ragsdale were born virtually one after the other. Lincoln was not the only member of the family with a demanding schedule. Eleanor’s many obligations placed her at the center of their growing family and their budding enterprises.²⁹

Although Lincoln Ragsdale has received the majority of the credit for building his family’s fortune and their legacy of activism, Eleanor’s influence on Lincoln and his ability to tap into specific resources in the black community are difficult to overstate. Her activities in the developmental stages of their family’s businesses and her role in the escalating Civil Rights Movement are as noteworthy as Lincoln’s. In addition to working in the family businesses, she devoted a great deal of her time negotiating political partnerships with their clients and associates, black churches in Phoenix and across the country, and most importantly, black women’s clubs and voluntary associations.

It was the organizing efforts and fund raising capabilities of black women which provided the foundation of the Phoenician and national Civil Rights Movement. The Phyllis Wheatley Community Center on Fourteenth and Jefferson Streets, established in 1927, continued to be the hub of such activity. It served in its umbrella capacity throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s. Certainly “too heavy a load” for one person to carry, Eleanor Ragsdale, like black women throughout American history, balanced multiple agendas while endeavoring to realize her personal goals and those of her family and community. As early as 1952 she was rearing her children, administering her family’s

²⁹ Universal Memorial Center, *A Celebration and Worship, Eleanor Dickey Ragsdale*, 15; Emily Ragsdale interview, Matthew Whitaker on April 6, 2000; Lincoln Ragsdale, Jr. interview; William Dickey interview.

businesses, participating in the surging Phoenician Civil Rights Movement, and responding to the unique concerns of women in ways that Lincoln could or perhaps would not.³⁰

Ironically, it was Eleanor's work in the real estate industry which led to the Ragsdales leading the way in desegregating Phoenician neighborhoods. Not long after Lincoln and Eleanor were married the couple decided to seek housing outside of the mortuary complex. With their growing financial success, experience in real estate, and their connections in the construction industry, Eleanor and Lincoln were soon able to purchase their first home and move out of the mortuary compound. In 1950 the couple built a duplex at 1110 East Jefferson Street and moved into one of its units. The duplex was located right across the street from East Lake Park. Lincoln remembered the area around East Lake Park as "the nicest neighborhood we had in Phoenix that was available to blacks. The Ragsdales lived in the home on East Jefferson Street for a couple years. During that time Eleanor gave birth to their first child, Elizabeth Estelle Ragsdale, on December 4, 1951. Eleanor became pregnant with their second child in 1953. The couple decided it was necessary to move into a larger home after learning of Eleanor's pregnancy. They set out to purchase a new home in the summer of 1953.³¹

The Ragsdale's had already set their sights on what they believed was the perfect home in 1952. The home was located in Northern Phoenix at 1606 West Thomas Road in a well-to-do neighborhood. The Ragsdales were riding a wave of financial success and

³⁰ Luckingham, *Phoenix*, 98. "Too heavy a load" is borrowed from White, *Too Heavy A Load*.

³¹ Lincoln and Eleanor interview.

opted to reward themselves and their growing family with a larger more expensive home. Lincoln and Eleanor were faced with a major problem, however, and it had nothing to do with being able to afford the home. The house on Thomas Road was nestled in the Encanto District, a predominantly white neighborhood near Phoenix's large Encanto Park. African Americans and other minorities were barred from purchasing homes in the area. It also bordered the historic Palmcroft Subdivision District, which was notorious for being an affluent, "whites only" neighborhood. The Ragsdale failed to appreciate the flagrant racial chauvinism that inspired and maintained such a restricted area. They found the home they wanted and undertook to acquire it.³²

The Palmcroft subdivision, and the white neighborhoods surrounding it had barred minorities in Phoenix for decades. The Phoenix Real Estate Board, after 1924, adopted the new code of ethics of the National Association of Real Estate Boards. Realtors had to conform to Article 34 of the national code, which stated that they "never be instrumental in introducing into a neighborhood members of any race or nationality, or any individuals detrimental to property values in that neighborhood." Any realtor willing to break this code was subjected to stiff penalties by the association.³³

Dwight B. Heard, a New England business leader who migrated to Chicago, then on to Phoenix in 1895, played a critical role in establishing one of Phoenix's most

³² Lincoln Ragsdale interview, Mary Melcher; Lincoln Ragsdale interview; Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale interview; Emily Ragsdale interview, Lincoln Ragsdale, Jr. interview; William Dickey interview; Baker, "The Man Who Refused to be Invisible," 97; Whitney, "Shooting Down Racism," 1.

³³ Kotlanger, "Phoenix, Arizona," 445-446.

exclusive racially segregated white neighborhoods. Dwight B. Heard Investment Company, the most powerful real estate brokerage firm in Phoenix, utilized its owner's Machiavellian entrepreneurial skills to establish itself as a dominant force in the economic, political, and social development of Phoenix. Heard not only operated his real estate business, he also owned the *Arizona Republican*, one of the city's most influential newspapers, and the Bartlett-Heard Land and Cattle Company. Herbert Ely argued that "the business community and the newspaper," led by leaders such as Heard, "were absolutely opposed to the notion" of changing the status quo. Representing the status quo from its beginnings was the *Arizona Republic*, "the dominant force in the community."

Heard wielded his formidable authority in politics and other aspects of life in Phoenix and the rest of the state. He has been credited with being the "driving force" behind the bringing of the Central Avenue Bridge, South Mountain Park, and other benefits to the Phoenix area. A friend of president Theodore Roosevelt, he also played a pivotal role in the construction of the Roosevelt Dam. In addition to being active in the Episcopal Church, the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), the Boy Scouts of America, and the University of Arizona, Heard provided land for what is now the Heard Museum. His Palmcroft Subdivision, heralded as "a high class development," was established in 1926 after his company bought 80 acres of land from the half-section estate of James W. Doris.³⁴

³⁴ United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service in Cooperation with the Phoenix Historic Preservation Commission. Encanto-Palmcroft Historic District Publication (National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form, Continuation Sheet 81, Item Number 8), 3. This document provides a detailed history of the development of both the Palmcroft and Encanto Subdivisions. It highlights the history

Bound by West McDowell Road, North 15th Avenue, West Thomas Road, and North 7th Avenue, the 80 acres were split into two 40-acre plats by Heard. The easterly 40 acres were the first to be developed. Advertisements for Palmcroft asked “why is Palmcroft the ideal?” The “contemplated palm bordered winding drives,” and “quiet and clean” location which was “only five minutes by auto from downtown” made it ideal the advertisement offered. Costs ranged from \$850 to \$5,000 for the most opulent homes. Heard affectionately referred to his picturesque Palm Croft home as the “Casa Blanca.”³⁵

What Palmcroft’s brochures did not reveal were the race restrictions which prohibited the sale of its property to “those having perceptible strains of Mexican, Spanish, Asiatic, Negro or Indian blood.” The creation of the Palmcroft subdivision by Heard helped firmly root an unequal racial hierarchy in Phoenix. It helped relegate black people to the periphery of Phoenix’s inner circle of socio-economic elite, by separating African Americans from substantive interactions and dealings with those whites who collectively controlled the means of production and distribution in Phoenix. Even those African Americans who could afford to buy a home in the Palmcroft area were refused.³⁶

On March 15, 1929, Heard was remembered as “Arizona’s greatest citizen” by the *Arizona Republican*. Heard was instrumental in the economic growth of Phoenix and the

behind the architecture, community planning and landscape of one of Phoenix’s oldest subdivisions. This document contains original photographs of the Palmcroft area, including residential maps and a residential legend; Luckingham, *Phoenix*, 90; Herbert Ely interview.

³⁵ Luckingham, *Phoenix*, 90-91; United States Department of Interior, *Encanto-Palmcroft*, 3, 9.

³⁶ Ibid.

surrounding valley, and in the introduction and maintenance of racial segregation and white supremacy in Phoenix until well into the second half of the twentieth century. Black Phoenicians like the Ragsdales were spurned by a restricted neighborhood which housed many of the communities most influential people; a neighborhood which was constructed by Heard. Heard did little, if anything, to challenge exclusionary practices based on race perpetrated by the Phoenix Real Estate Board and the National Association of Real Estate Boards. The silence and indifference on the issue of racial segregation by Heard was in many ways as detrimental to minorities as the vitriolic words and violent actions of the Ku Klux Klan. Restrictive race policies and the silent support or submission of powerful men like Heard, accomplished the objective of preventing black people from moving into the Palmcroft subdivision. More importantly, it kept African Americans out of the pipeline which ultimately lead to substantive economic and political power.³⁷

Heard, heralded as “Arizona’s greatest citizen,” while also being rumored to have been the Exalted Cyclops of the Phoenix chapter of the Ku Klux Klan, may have intentionally established a racially restrictive community, and secretly held more overt racial animosities. In fact, the Klan staged rallies, mass meetings, and marches in support of local candidates, most notably Dwight B. Heard himself, who was a Republican candidate for Governor in 1924. Whether Heard was a card carrying member of the Klan will most likely remain unsubstantiated, but what is certain is that Heard, whether by neglect or design, contributed to the maintenance of a white supremacist system and a history of prejudice.

³⁷ *Phoenix Independent*, July 20, 1922.

As early as the 1920s, and certainly by late 1940s therefore, a large number of Phoenix white male boosters, realtors, political leaders, and business owners, through overt action and tacit compliance, firmly rooted the pillars of racial segregation and caste. In fact, Ms. Hallie Q. Brown, the noted African American educator and national president of the Colored Federation of Women's Clubs, was compelled to purchase her winter home some four miles East of Phoenix, on Tempe Road, in the Portland tract, because African Americans were denied access to property in affluent white Phoenician neighborhoods. This area was marketed as "the first restricted district for colored people ever offered for sale in America."³⁸

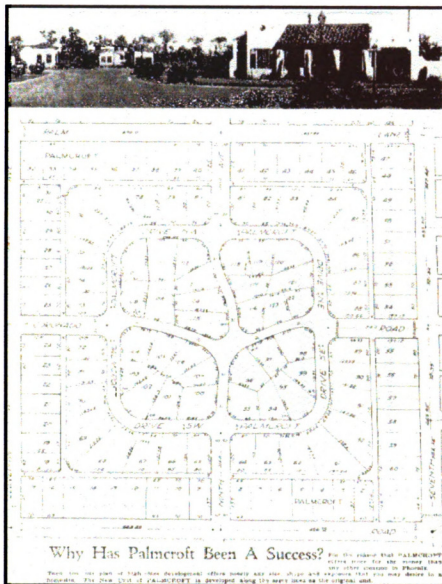
In response to being segregated from whites residentially, black Phoenicians formed their own neighborhoods. As early as 1911, an African American businessman named John E. Lewis purchased a building on West Washington Street from Frank Shirly and created the Lewis Apartments. Lewis "provided living accommodations for traveling blacks" who were denied the opportunity to stay in white owned establishments. Lewis, who was also co-owner of the Fashion Square Barber Shop with Frank Shirly, labeled his lodge a "hotel for colored people," while noting that "all the better class of hotels and rooming houses cater exclusively to white people. There are few cheap places where a colored man can find accommodations, but there are many colored men who do not care to patronize such places, both because the accommodations are poor and because of the low class of humanity often met there." Realtor Marshall Shelton "subdivided tracts of

³⁸ Nimmons, "Arizona's Forgotten Past," 101; *Arizona Republican*, March 30, 1924, September 9, 1928.

land on Van Buran Street,” and by 1930 on that land he had “created an exclusive black amusement park, pool, and dance pavilion.” As a result, the two black residential neighborhoods already in existence, gradually expanded. One concentration extended Southward from Washington Street to Buckeye Road and Eastward from Central Avenue to Sixteenth Street. The second black community was located in Southwestern Phoenix in the area bounded by Seventh and Seventeenth Avenues, extending from Madison Street to South of Buckeye Road.³⁹ Between 1920 and 1950, the majority of black Phoenicians migrated from highly segregated sections of the rural South. Many of these newcomers had never shared the same neighborhoods with white people, and were not inclined to do so in their new home. Moreover, a large portion of these new migrants were poor and did not possess the funds to live anywhere “but the most inexpensive areas of the city,” the economically depressed and politically estranged black neighborhoods. Regardless of their financial status, some African Americans simply wished to remain in the black community for ideological and cultural reasons. When Madge Copeland arrived in Phoenix in 1929, she noted that her new home wasn’t entirely dissimilar to her former home in the rural South. Phoenix was “very prejudiced,” she thought. “Very few opportunities” existed for black people, and minorities in general “always got less than anyone else.” She did, however, suggest that some minorities received better treatment than others: “Mexicans were segregated like Negroes. Of course, some of them got jobs because they could speak Spanish, and they wanted the Spanish trade [because of] so many being hired long

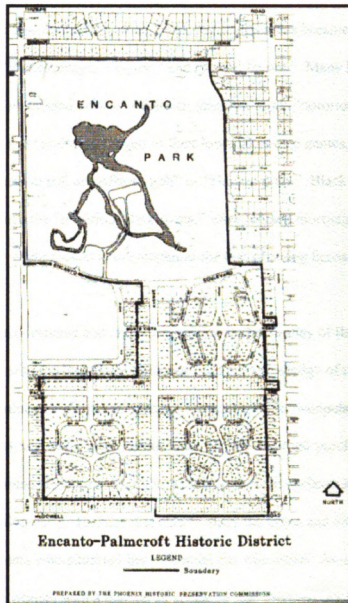
⁴¹ *Arizona Republican*, February 25, March 4, 7, 19, 1912; Thul, *Blacks in Arizona*, 12; Luckingham, *Minorities in Phoenix*, 133-34; Mawn, “Blacks in Phoenix,” 347-48; Kotlanger, “Phoenix, Arizona,” 445-46.

Figure 2. Original Palmcroft District Plat, 1927.⁴⁰



³⁹ Legend provided by the United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, in cooperation with the Phoenix Historic Preservation Commission. In Encanto-Palmcroft Historic District Publication. (National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form, Continuation Sheet 81, Item Number 8), 5.

Figure 3. Original Palmcroft - Encanto District Plat, 1940.⁴¹



⁴⁰ Legend provided by the United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, in cooperation with the Phoenix Historic Preservation Commission. In Encanto-Palmercroft Historic District Publication. (National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form, Continuation Sheet 81, Item Number 8), 8.

before the Negroes. So for that reason they got a number of jobs.”⁴²

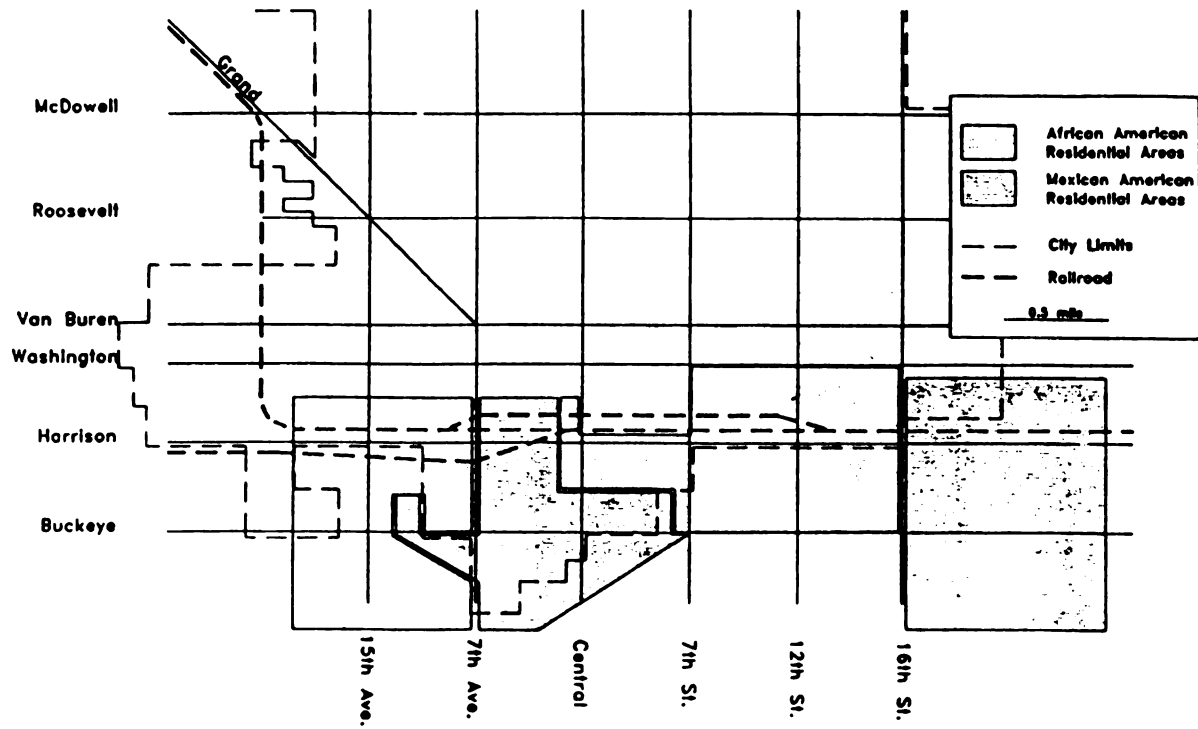
Between 1930 and 1950 socio-economic conditions in Phoenix deteriorated to the lowest point since Reconstruction, when black residential areas became noted for “illegal games of chance,” “illicit drugs,” “liquor,” and “sexual favors.” Many local law enforcement officers labeled African American neighborhoods “notorious darktowns,” or “Nigger Towns,” and routinely referred to their low-stakes dice games, an activity which landed many of them in jail, as “African golf” or “Harlem polo.” Black Phoenixians who could afford to leave the “notorious darktowns,” were refused mortgages in white neighborhoods by white owned loan companies for fear of losing licenses and “their white customers.”⁴³

Restrictive covenants and racial segregation in the “Valley of the Sun” found cunning adversaries in the Ragsdales. Eleanor used her knowledge of the real estate market, and the color consciousness of many white people, to manipulate the system. As a real estate broker, she knew what homes were for sale and their purchase price. The home on West Thomas Road, far from the African American enclaves in South Phoenix, came to her attention early. Eleanor was able to enter the home and view it carefully and patiently. The agents who admitted her presumed she was white. As a very fair skinned African American woman with a manner of speaking that betrayed her Eastern heritage,

⁴³ Thul, *Blacks in Arizona*, 12; J R. Feagin, *Discrimination American Style: Institutional Racism and Sexism* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1978), 87-90; Madge Johnson Copeland, interview conducted by Maria Hernandez, Summer 1981.

⁴⁴ *Arizona Republican*, January 21, May 26, 1920, September 29, 1921, November 19, 1922; *Arizona Republic*, July 14, 1935; Kotlanger, “Phoenix, Arizona,” 446.

Figure 4. African American Neighborhoods in Phoenix, 1940.⁴⁴



⁴² Legend prepared by Roberts, "Minority Group Poverty in Phoenix"; Luckingham, *Minorities in Phoenix*, 151.

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she was able to view homes that most black people could not. “My mother could have passed for white if she wanted to,” Emily Ragsdale posits, “but she was black, had [black] bloodlines and would not have done that.” She slipped into the home and never mentioned her race. She simply let the white agent’s rigid sense of color and race work against them. Eleanor figured that when she “moved in with her little black children and her black husband,” they would know that she and her family “were black.” The only glimpse Lincoln was able to get of the home was at night as Eleanor drove him down the alley behind the home. He would look out of the windows of the car at what he hoped would be his future home.⁴⁵

When they were not permitted to purchase the home at 1606 West Thomas Road, they found a way to circumvent the restrictive covenant which barred them. Lincoln and Eleanor had a white friend purchase the home, and when the contract was still in escrow the friend transferred the title to the Ragsdales. Since Eleanor spent her childhood years in integrated Pennsylvania communities, she had no qualms about the move. “Go ahead and buy the house if you like it,” Lincoln had told her. As a result of the under-the-table dealings which allowed them to purchase the home, the Ragsdales moved into the house almost sight unseen. Although they had acquired the house they wanted to buy, their problems were far from over.⁴⁶

When they arrived to move into their new home, Lincoln Ragsdale remembered,

⁴⁵ Lincoln Ragsdale interview, Mary Melcher; Luckingham, *Minorities in Phoenix*, 164-165; Melcher, “Blacks and Whites Together,” 203; Baker, “The Man Who Refused to be Invisible,” 97-98; Lincoln and Eleanor interview; Emily Ragsdale interview.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

the realtors “wouldn’t let me in.” This was the beginning of a relationship between the neighborhood’s residents and the Ragsdales that was fraught with discord. Journalist Lori K. Baker reported that “although the Ragsdales lived in the house for seventeen years and raised four children there, relations with neighbors remained icy at best.” “Within a month of their move,” three members of a neighborhood “improvement” committee appeared at the Ragsdale’s door step. They rang the door bell. When Lincoln answered, he was greeted by one of his neighbors who told him that “we know you’re not going to be happy here.” The committee proceeded to offer to buy the Ragsdale home if the family would be willing to move. Offended, Lincoln told the group in no uncertain terms that “the house is not for sale.”

Following this encounter the harassment worsened. One morning the family awoke to find the word “nigger” spray-painted on their white block home in “two-foot-high black letters.” Lincoln refused to remove the racial epitaph from his wall because he “wanted to make sure that the white folks knew where the Nigga lived.” Lincoln and Eleanor, through what historian Robin D. G. Kelley describes as “infrapolitics,” resisted the guardians of white residential purity. By refusing to remove the racial epitaph of their home, the Ragsdales flaunted their presence in a previously all-white neighborhood. By demonstrating their determination and courage, the Ragsdales transformed the humiliation of white despotism into a declaration of dignity. In the process, they alerted their neighbors of their distinction and self-respect.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Baker, “The Man Who Refused to be Invisible,” 97-98; Lincoln and Eleanor interview; Emily Ragsdale interview; William Dickey interview; Kelley, *Race Rebels*, 8-9. Kelley emphasizes the black working class, but I believe his analysis applies in this case.

Simultaneously the family was terrorized by threatening phone calls: "Move out, nigger," the callers demanded. Harassing Lincoln Ragsdale appears to have been a rite of passage for new police officers who patrolled the neighborhood. Lincoln often returned home late at night in his Cadillac sedan. Having been routinely stopped in his car, Ragsdale recalled that "I looked suspicious" to them. "All you have to do to look suspicious is to be driving a Cadillac and be black. When I'd see him coming with his lights, I'd get my ownership of the car out and [prepare it] show him my drivers' license." The police officer would interrogate Ragsdale: "What are you doing here, boy? Where are you going? The police queried. "It was always boy," Ragsdale recalled with a hint of acrimony in his voice. "Here were these guys just out of high school calling me 'boy'" he waxed.⁴⁸

The Ragsdale children were not spared the racist harassment that Lincoln and Eleanor were subjected to. They were treated poorly by many of the neighborhood's white children. Eleanor recalled one moment that left her disheartened and angry. One afternoon Elizabeth, Lincoln and Eleanor's eldest daughter, then in fourth grade, came home from school and told her mother that someone called her a "tar baby." Elizabeth surely knew that this was an insult and an attack on her physical appearance. Nevertheless, she asked her mother what that phrase meant. Eleanor was left with the arduous task of having to deflect the potentially damaging effects of white supremacist ideology and discrimination. "To soothe Elizabeth," Lori K. Baker reported, "Eleanor told her life was like a flower garden: 'You need many colors to make it beautiful.'"

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Eleanor's comforting words calmed Elizabeth and helped her as she moved through grade-school, but her high school memories proved to be even more bitter; one of a few black children in a predominantly white school, Elizabeth was isolated and was never asked to dance at any school function, such as homecoming or prom.⁴⁹

Eleanor worked hard to not let the racism which surrounded them effect her children. "My mother was very stern about the concept of her children becoming racist or being sensitive about the color issue," Emily Ragsdale recalls. "My mother never allowed my father to use the words black or white around the home. When they talked about [race] issues they said 'B' or 'W'. Emily Ragsdale argues that her mother and father understood the significance of race, and believed it was necessary to break the color line in housing in Phoenix. As a result, "they were forerunners to [integrate] into neighborhoods that blacks were not allowed. It added "extra pressure to us kids," she argued. "We didn't really know any different," however; "going to all-white schools, living in an all-white neighborhood. But we knew that, you know, we were the only ones who looked like us though."⁵⁰

Lincoln, Jr. believes that "after a certain age," the Ragsdale children knew that their harassment and estrangement was a direct result of white racism and their parent's roles as leaders and activists in the Phoenician community. Sometimes [white] teachers were hostile to the Ragsdale children because they believed their "father was doing something that he shouldn't be doing." Lincoln and Eleanor often feared for the safety of

⁴⁹ Baker, "The Man Who Refused to be Invisible," 98.

⁵⁰ Emily Ragsdale interview.

their children, and instructed them to be extremely careful with whom they chose to speak and interact. For Lincoln, Jr., his parent's instructions to "don't take candy from strangers" took on added meaning. If he would have taken candy from a stranger, "it might have been the last candy bar I might have eaten," he maintained. Not only because he might have been "taken advantage of or molested," but because "there might have been some other issues [at work]." Lincoln, Jr. argues that he had to also be concerned about his mortality because he may have fallen victim to "racism, [the Ku Klux] Klan, or some other white supremacy group." He was aware that he "might have been a victim" of white supremacy and of his "father's activity in civil rights."⁵¹

Breaking the color barrier in the Encanto residential district was not enough for Eleanor Ragsdale. She dedicated herself to helping other black people purchase homes in restricted areas. In assisting prospective buyers, Lincoln and Eleanor employed a method that was similar to the one that worked for them. They arranged to have homes listed, purchased by white people, and resold to African Americans. "Because my mother was light skinned," Lincoln, Jr. recalled, she was able to engineer the purchase of homes in white neighborhoods with the intent to "resell them to a black person." While Lincoln was emerging in his public role as local activist and civil rights leader, Eleanor did her part to challenge the existing system in more tacit manner. Her actions on behalf of black Phoenicians seeking housing in the Encanto district, and bordering neighborhoods, is a perfect example of these efforts.⁵²

⁵¹ Lincoln Ragsdale, Jr interview.

⁵² Ibid.

In addition to desegregating Phoenix's all white neighborhoods before the U. S. Congress passed the Fair Housing Act outlawing restrictive covenants in 1968, Lincoln and Eleanor helped strike down Phoenix's segregated school system. By 1909 Phoenix's ruling white elite, people such as land developers Clark A. Churchill and Dwight B. Heard, construction contractor William J. Murphy, banker William Christy, promoter James H. McClintock, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Thomas J. Morgan, school board members L. D. Dameron and W. G. Tolleson, prominent physician and editor of the local KKK newspaper H. A. Hughes, and Major Floyd B. Christy, decided that a strict etiquette of racial conduct was in order. In that same year whites sought to separate themselves educationally and residentially through various means of racial separation. In response to the reactionary moves of the white establishment, Fran Smith, a local black resident, wrote to the *Arizona Republican* in 1915 stating that "there is more race hatred right here in Phoenix to the square inch than in any city I have lived in."⁵³

Campaigns against school segregation occurred during the first decade of the twentieth century. The territorial legislature in March 1909 passed a law permitting school segregation in Arizona. This move both surprised and angered the black community. The vast majority of whites in Arizona supported the measure, with the exception of the Governor of Arizona, Joseph H. Kibbey, who swiftly vetoed it. When he refused to sign the bill and sent it back to the legislature, he attached a memo which characterized the reactionary move as "utterly ridiculous, un-Christian, and inhuman."

⁵³ Sue Wilson Abbey, "The Ku Klux Klan in Arizona, 1921-1925," *Journal of Arizona History* 14 (Spring 1973), 10-30; *Arizona Republican*, June 4, 5, 6, 1915.

Nevertheless, Kibbey did not oppose segregation solely on moral grounds. He stated that:

It would be unfair that pupils of the African race should be given accommodations and facilities for a common school education, less effective, less complete, less convenient or less pleasant so far as the accessories of the school and its operations are concerned than those accorded pupils of the white race in the same school district; and the bill in terms contemplates nothing less.

Kibbey opposed segregation primarily for economic reasons. He did not agree with allocating additional funds necessary to produce African American schools that were equal in every way to white schools.

The territorial legislature, however, overrode Kibbey's veto and segregation became legal on March 17, 1909. Dr. Benjamin B. Moeur, chairman of the Convention convened in 1919 to draft Arizona's Constitution for statehood, angrily bemoaned the anti-segregationist rhetoric of Governor Kibbey and his supporters when he stated that: "You gentleman can do what you please, but I for one, won't send my children to school with the niggers, and I will fight sending them until I die! Moeur, whose name is respectfully inscribed on buildings throughout Arizona, was to early twentieth century Arizona, what Eugene "Bull" Conner, George Wallace, and Ross Barnett were to the post World War II South. Chairman Moeur was Arizona's leading advocate for racial separatism, emphatically calling for "complete and total segregation."⁵⁴

William P. Crump, a local African American businessman, responded to the legislation by stating that "from the organization of the territory to the present time the

⁵⁴ *Arizona Daily Star*, March 16, 1909; Kibbey quoted in Mary E. Gill and John S. Goff, "Joseph H. Kibbey and School Segregation in Arizona," *Journal of Arizona History* 21 (Winter 1980), 411-22; Morris J. Richards, *The Birth of Arizona: The Baby State* (Phoenix: Arizona State Department of Education, 1940), 16-24.

children of all classes of its cosmopolitan citizenship have gone to school together and there has been no friction or trouble of any kind, and as a result there is not a community in America where the relations of the black and white are more amicable and peaceful than Phoenix.” Black Phoenicians clearly had whites who supported their efforts, but those who did were in the minority, and although few Arizona districts adopted segregated schools, Phoenix did, linking itself to a long list of American cities which sought to maintain white supremacy by denying black people the opportunity to improve their condition by receiving a quality education.⁵⁵

In August 1910, District Attorney George Bullard stated that African American residents favored segregation in the schools, indicating to him that their children would not get an “even break” with whites in integrated schools and that they would not “suffer from ostracism.” In response to this move to segregate black people educationally the African American community formed delegations, led by leaders such as Crump, J. T. Williams, Lucy B. Craig, and others. Crump disputed Bullard’s claim that black people wanted separate facilities. He countered by noting that “98 percent of the African Americans he knew in Phoenix bitterly resented the policy [of segregation]. In addition, he stated that:

We do not oppose it from any desire for social equality, for that is foreign to our thoughts. We fight it because it is a step backward; because there are not enough colored children here to enable them to establish a fully equipped school; because it is an injustice to take money of all taxpayers to establish ward schools and then force the colored children to walk two miles to school while their property is taxed to provide war schools for all other children. I wish to deny emphatically that

⁵⁵ *Arizona Republican*, March 31, 1910, January 3, March 12, 1911; Gill and Goff, “Joseph H. Kibbey,” 411-22.

there has been a revulsion of feeling among colored people themselves in favor of segregation. There may be a stray colored person or two who have drifted in from Texas or Arkansas who may have the idea that they would prefer separate schools. This is because they do not know any better.

In rejecting social equality, but insisting upon equal protection under the law, Crump and several other black leaders supported the philosophy of Booker T. Washington, the most prominent African American leader of the time. Like Washington, Crump supported the idea that in “purely social” matters, black Phoenicians and white could “be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress.” Washington would later visit Phoenix on September 22, 1911. During his stay he met with local black leaders and denounced desires to seek social integration as “filly.” Washington called for hard work and self-discipline, stating that “just in preparation as we learn to dignify labor in this generation, will we lay the foundation on which to rise and grow in what the world calls the higher and more important things in life.”⁵⁶

What Washington and Crump did conceding black people’s civil and political subjugation in return for limited economic mobility, was to allow white people to use segregation as a means of systematizing discrimination and inequality. Following the teachings of Washington, Crump was able to maintain his position as the axis between the races, but in doing so, he weighted down the boots he so strongly advised the majority of black Phoenicians to pull themselves up by. Crump was willing to temporarily accept “second-class” citizenship, political sterility and social invisibility, in hopes of acquiring

⁵⁶ Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery* (New York: Double Day, 1901), 162; *Arizona Republican*, September 23, 24, October 19, 1911; Booker T. Washington, “The Race Problem in Arizona,” *The Phoenix Independent* 71 (October 1911), 909-13.

economic viability.”⁵⁷

In spite of African American objections and protests, segregated schools became a reality in Phoenix. In September 1910 sixteen black students enrolled, and were forced to walk two miles across Southern Pacific and Santa Fe railroad tracks, to Douglass School to study under the instruction of black principal J. T. Williams and black teacher Lucy B. Craig. Douglass school was adjacent to Block 41 which was bounded by Jackson and Madison, Fifth and Sixth streets. Undaunted, however, African Americans, and the small group of white people who supported them, continued to organize and develop strategies for countering steps taken to force them into second class citizenship.

In 1910 Samuel F. Bayless, a local merchant, filed suit against the segregation of African American children in Douglass school. Joseph H. Kibbey, then former governor of Arizona, represented Bayless as his attorney. Bayless, with the legal aid of Kibbey, won an injunction that allowed African American children in grades one through four to attend their neighborhood schools. In 1912 the ruling was overturned, however, and all African American children were forced to attend separate schools. Many whites, however, were undaunted in their opposition to African American’s opposition to segregated schools. White separatists continued to attack African Americans verbally in the local press, and often their aspersions were paternalistic and threatening in tone. On

⁵⁷ *Arizona Republican*, June 1910, September 18, 1910. For more on W. E. B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington, and their views with regard to women and “the franchise,” see Manning Marable, *W. E. B. Du Bois: Black Radical Democrat* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987); Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois, Vol I. And II.*; Louis Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

October 12, 1912, the *Arizona Democrat* wrote: “The Negroes who are responsible for allowing a mass meeting to protest against the segregation law are doing their race a great injury. The colored people in Arizona are nicely treated, and we suggest that they conduct themselves in such a manner that this kindly feeling will continue.”⁵⁸

Between 1913 and September 16, 1926, black students continued to attend separate facilities. Most of them attended classes in a makeshift building located on the campus of Phoenix Union High School located on Van Buren and First Street in Downtown Phoenix. On September 15, 1923, the school was moved to a frame and brick structure at Ninth and Jefferson Street. This site was larger and provided room for athletics, a science room and a library. On August 18, 1925, the School Board passed a resolution to purchase approximately 4.87 acres of land at 415 East Grant Street as a site for high school students of the “African race” at a cost of \$11,000 from the city of Phoenix. Board minutes indicate that on December 21, 1925, Pierson and Johnson, the lowest bidders at about \$110,000, were awarded the construction contract for the Colored High School building. The building was completed and accepted on September 16, 1926. In 1943 the name of the school was changed from Phoenix Colored High School to Carver High School, in honor of the noted African American scientist George Washington Carver.⁵⁹

Due to lack of proper funding Carver quickly deteriorated and found itself in awful

⁵⁸ Kotlanger, “Phoenix, Arizona,” 455; Luckingham, *Minorities in Phoenix*, 134; Harris, *First 100 Years*, 65; *Arizona Democrat*, April 29, 1912.

⁵⁹ Donald R. Van Petten, *The Constitutional Government of Arizona* (Phoenix: Jahn and Tyler Printing and Publishing, 1952), 141; Harris, *First 100 Years*, 63-67.

condition when new principal W. A. Robinson was hired in 1945. The high school had no library, no music equipment, no modern home economics, no shop equipment, and no art equipment,” Robinson recalled. With regard to athletic equipment, the school possessed only “worn-out parts of football and basketball uniforms marked with the names of other schools in the system.” Under Robinson’s leadership, however, Carver improved. He stressed excellence and black pride. Meager improvement in the school’s infrastructure brought the school “up somewhere near the legal requirement that a segregated Negro high school be as good as the segregated white schools,” Robinson recalled.

Nevertheless, Robinson argued, Carver still offered “a separate but unequal education.” Despite its problems, the principal believed, Carver had dedicated, capable, and committed teachers. Although most of its students lacked resources, Carver produced graduates who became successful citizens and leaders in the Phoenician community. Carver became the center of much activity in the black community. Its auditorium offered community meeting room, while its administrators supervised a number of programs and expositions. Carver provided evening education for adults and its sports teams were routinely among the top in the state. Even though the school had its upsides, it continued to lack the financial resources its white counterparts had, and was thus unequal and costly to operate.⁶⁰

Irene McClellan King, a prominent African American female leader in Phoenician history, migrated with her family to Laveen, Arizona in 1920. McClellan remembered her

⁶⁰ W. A. Robinson, “The Progress of Integration in the Public Schools,” *Journal of Negro Education* 25 (Fall 1956), 371-79, Harris, *The First 100 Years*, 69-74, 81-98, 138-41; Lincoln and Eleanor interview.

experiences in the segregated school systems in Phoenix and its neighboring bureau Laveen: “We had problems with segregation [in Laveen also]. [If] they didn’t have enough black children to have separate schools, we had to be transported, and that’s why I went to Roosevelt School two different years. The Laveen District just transferred up there. When we moved here in 1920, they had put on four black teachers at Phoenix Union [High School]. They put in some cabins and that’s where the Blacks went under these black teachers. I have fought segregation for years because I resented it. We [had] to use an old Chevy to come to high school, and the whites had a school bus. They would pass by us and laugh because they were on the bus. There was always quite a bit of humiliation.”

King graduated from high school and became an active member of her community. She was secretary of the Junior Red Cross, attended Phoenix College, graduated from Arizona Teacher’s College in 1936, which became Arizona State University in 1958. King went on to earn her Master of Arts degree in Education from Western State College in Gunnison, Colorado in 1946. Upon her graduation she left immediately to preside at the 16th Regional Conference of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, of which she was a member and regional director, in Los Angeles, California. The conference was held between August 16 and 19, 1946, and included delegates and sorors from eight chapters. The Far Western Region of Delta Sigma Theta consisted of New Mexico, Arizona, California, Oregon and Washington. King served seven years on the board of directors of Phoenix’s YWCA, worked seven years with the Maricopa County Teacher’s Association, was a member of the NAACP and the board of directors of eight Maricopa County school

districts, and served on the Arizona Education Association Insurance Committee. She dedicated most of her life to education. She taught at Phoenix's Dunbar Elementary School, but left her position there to teach at Booker T. Washington Elementary School in Phoenix. She spent forty-one years at Booker T. Washington before retiring in 1977.⁶¹

Lack of resources and general inequality and isolation continued to fuel opposition to school segregation throughout the 1940s and into the fifth decade of the twentieth century. Between 1940 and 1950, protests against segregation in schools and public accommodations intensified. On Friday, October 8, 1948, the *Arizona Sun* reported that an interracial group representing the NAACP, and other organizations, formed a picket line to protest Phoenix's segregated Rialto Theater. Seven days later, renowned actor and vocalist Paul Robeson, spoke out against racialized social and economic inequality at the Phoenix Union High School Auditorium. Robeson, a graduate of Rutgers University, and all-American athlete, and a Phi Beta Kappa scholar, and a gifted entertainer, dedicated himself to opposing fascism at the height of his career during the 1940s. This led him to become involved with the Progressive Party, the National Negro Congress, the Council of African Affairs, and eventually leftist organizations such as the Committee for Industrial Organization (CIO). When the Allied victory and the "Double V" campaign did not end colonialism in Africa and racism in the U. S. following World War II, Robeson became a more vocal critic of Western powers. He was among the first black leaders to call for a

⁶¹ Irene King interview, conducted by Maria Hernandez, Summer, 1981; *Arizona Sun*, September 13, 1946. Also see Mary Logan Rothschild and Pamela Claire Hronek, *Doing What the Day Brought: An Oral History of Arizona Women* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992).

massive black freedom movement years before it became a reality.⁶²

To the oppressed, Robeson was a protagonist for freedom, to the ruling powers, especially in the Western world, he was simply a trouble maker. When Senator Joseph McCarthy launched his crusade against Communism in the 1950s, Robeson's activities were, like those of leftist leader W. E. B. Du Bois, labeled subversive. In 1950 Robeson was classified as a Soviet sympathizer, his passport was revoked, he was separated from his international following, and was essentially unable to perform or speak out. He was dogged by the FBI and forced into internal exile. With his career and physical condition crushed, Robeson was forced to the margins of the very Civil Rights Movement he helped to launch.⁶³

McCarthyism reached virtually every inch of American soil, including the Sonoran Desert, as many Phoenician activists would eventually be accused of "Soviet sympathizing" as well. Efforts to reveal and eliminate alleged communists and their sympathizers in Phoenix never snowballed into the witch-hunt that emerged nationally. Accusations of communist activity, tempered as they may have been, only added to the caldron of opposition which enveloped black activists in Phoenix. Despite this opposition, Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale played key roles in bringing the issue of school desegregation squarely to the front pages of public discourse. The couple joined the Arizona Council for Civil Unity (ACCU) and the Greater Phoenix Council for Civic Unity

⁶² *Arizona Sun*, October 8, 15, 1948. For a detailed telling of the life of Paul Robeson, see Martin Bauml Duberman, *Paul Robeson* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988).

⁶³ *Ibid.*

(GPCCU), which targeted area schools for desegregation in its original 1948 charter.

Lincoln soon became the president of the ACCU. He was also an influential member of the GPCCU. By 1950 the GPCCU joined with the Arizona Council for Civic Unity (ACCU), a statewide organization, the NAACP, the Urban League, and other state and local organizations to press for school desegregation. Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale helped raise the first \$5,000 the GPCCU needed to sue the state in a heated battle for school integration. Lincoln described the ACCU as a “group that tried to persuade people to do the right thing.”⁶⁴

Lincoln Ragsdale was intimately involved in raising money on behalf of the NAACP to challenge school segregation in Phoenix. Chairman of the organization’s legal defense fund, Ragsdale canvassed the community soliciting the community’s financial support. In October, 1951, he spoke out in favor of a systemic attack on school segregation. That month, at a NAACP mass meeting in the recreational building at Phoenix’s East Lake Park, Ragsdale took the stage and “made a fervent plea” to a large crowd to make financial sacrifices in order to give “financial support to the cause; that their children and generations to come may benefit in equal education and opportunities.” Ragsdale’s appeals resulted in the collection of \$3,066.05 that evening. He also secured another \$1,180 in pledges.⁶⁵

Tapping into every potential source of financial support, Ragsdale succeeded in persuading legendary conservative politician Barry Goldwater to donate \$500 to the city’s

⁶⁴ Baker, “The Man Who Refused to be Invisible,” 97.

⁶⁵ *Arizona Sun*, October 26, 1951

NAACP to “help desegregate the schools.” Goldwater “saw some of the things” that the Ragsdales were doing in the community, and decided to support some of their efforts while seeking their opinion in matters that concerned the “race question.” Ironically, the conservative politician “was a great inspiration” to Lincoln and Eleanor, and the three became good friends. Lincoln remembered Goldwater asking “questions about how we felt about certain things and we’d try to give him a very honest appraisal of it.” Despite his reputation and record as someone who stood in opposition to racial equality and African American rights, Ragsdale believed he may have been judged too harshly.⁶⁶

“Goldwater was perceived as being a racist,” Ragsdale stated, but he also made Tuskegee Airman Chappie James a four star general. Goldwater was the one [who] gave us five hundred dollars to fight for school integration. He was the one that gave another four or five hundred dollars to help save the Urban League when it was closing down. So Goldwater...what he said and what he did [sometimes] may [have] been totally different.” Goldwater’s local independent campaign to be elected on a Charter Government ticket may have had something to do with his interaction with black leaders like the Ragsdales. Goldwater had as his opponent Sylvanus “Breezy” Boyer. Boyer was popular, and the first highly visible black person to run for the Phoenix City Council. Although Boyer posed no serious threat to Goldwater’s bid, agreeable collaboration with black leaders certainly did not hurt his political career.⁶⁷

With Lincoln now holding important positions in virtually every majority civil

⁶⁶ Lincoln and Eleanor interview; Harris, *The First 100 Years*, 87.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

rights organization in the city, he and Eleanor were in the eye of Phoenix's protest storm. In April 1951, Lincoln was elected to the board of directors, with Alberta Garcia, Dr. J. O. Grimes, and Miss Ruth Robbins of the GPCCU. Later that year Lincoln and Eleanor had helped the GPCCU and other Civil Rights groups successfully lobby the legislature to obtain a statute giving area school boards the option to desegregate voluntarily. Lincoln believed that Arizona's separate educational system was designed to "humiliate" black children and "teach them that they were inferior." The long term effect of this treatment Lincoln argued, was to control African Americans and keep them "subservient." If a person is "beaten down and called a nigger often enough," he asserted, "he begins to believe it." "This is what the system [in] Arizona did." In the legislature, Arizona's first African American elected officials Hayzel B. Daniels and Carl Sims "worked their hearts out" soliciting the support of the white counterparts to end school segregation.⁶⁸

Daniels and Sims both represented predominantly black Phoenician neighborhoods in the South side of the city. With the help of white attorney William P. Mahoney, Jr., and other white liberals such as attorney Herb Finn, black leaders like Ragsdale were able to pressure the white male dominated legislature into passing the law. Other Arizona cities such as Tucson soon followed Phoenix's lead by desegregating their schools. Phoenix reneged. Not surprisingly, the measure lacked teeth and was not easily enforceable. White

⁶⁸ *Arizona Sun*, April 20, October 26, 1951, December 1, 1960; Daniels, "A Black Magistrate's Struggle," 335-338; Mary Melcher, "Blacks and Whites Together," 195-216; Luckingham, *Minorities in Phoenix*, 161-162; William P. Mahoney interview, Mary Melcher, February 16, 1990; Lincoln and Eleanor interview; Lincoln Ragsdale interview, Mary Melcher; Eleanor Ragsdale interview; Greater Phoenix Council For Civic Unity, *To Secure These Rights*, 9-13, 17-46; Harris, *The First 100 Years*, 69-74, 81-98, 138-141; Luckingham, *Minorities in Phoenix*, 161-162.

legislators and local law enforcement were not willing to support the measure. Phoenix schools remained segregated.⁶⁹

On June, 1952, however, attorneys Daniels, Mahoney, and Finn filed a lawsuit “on behalf of plaintiffs Robert B. Phillips, Jr., Tolly Williams, and David Clark, three black children seeking admission to Phoenix Union High School.” It named members of the school’s governing board as defendants. With the financial and social support of leaders like the Ragsdale’s, and organizations like the NAACP, the attorneys successfully argued the case in the Maricopa County Court against school segregation. Their arguments were based upon reasoning used in recent California segregation cases that attacked Mexican American school segregation. Lawyers in the California cases argued that the segregation of students for racial and ethnic reasons at the whim of school board members was an “unconstitutional delegation of legislative power.” In a landmark decision, Superior Court Judge Fred C. Struckmeyer handed down the first legal opinion in the United States declaring school segregation unconstitutional. Struckmeyer ruled that Arizona’s school segregation laws were specious because they constituted an unconstitutional delegation of powers by the legislature to subordinate bodies.⁷⁰

Struckmeyer declared that “if the legislation can confer upon the school board the

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ *Arizona Sun*, February 13, 1953; December 1, 1960; Daniels, “A Black Magistrate’s Struggle,” 335-338; Mary Melcher, “Blacks and Whites Together,” 195-216; Luckingham, *Minorities in Phoenix*, 161-162; William P. Mahoney interview, Mary Melcher, February 16, 1990; Lincoln and Eleanor interview; Lincoln Ragsdale interview, Mary Melcher; Eleanor Ragsdale interview; Greater Phoenix Council For Civic Unity, *To Secure These Rights*, 9-13, 17-46; Harris, *The First 100 Years*, 69-74, 81-98, 138-141; Luckingham, *Minorities in Phoenix*, 161-162.

arbitrary power to segregate pupils of African ancestry from pupils of Caucasian ancestry, then the same right must exist to segregate pupils of French, German, Chinese, Spanish, or other ancestry; and if such unlimited and unrestricted power can be exercised on the basis of ancestry, it can be exercised on such a purely whimsical basis as the color of hair, eyes, or for any other reason as pure fancy might dictate.” After delivering the decision, Struckmeyer proclaimed that “a half century of intolerance is enough.” Eleanor Ragsdale remembered sitting in the courtroom, after participating in a five year struggle to desegregate the city’s education system, the day Struckmeyer rendered his decision. “I felt it was a giant step in the right direction,” she recalled.⁷¹

Many Phoenix Union High School board members, including its president Dr. Trevor G. Brown, Frank Haze Burch, Dr. Norman A. Ross, and Hay Hyde, wished to appeal the decision. In the end the group decided that the U. S. Supreme Court would probably outlaw school segregation nationwide, and therefore voted to adhere to Struckmeyer’s ruling. With financial help from leaders like the Ragsdales, Daniels and Finn submitted a law suit against Wilson Elementary School District in Phoenix in 1953. Judge Charles E. Berstein ruled in this case that segregation in elementary schools was unconstitutional. Like the members of the Phoenix Union High School board, Wilson’s board members accepted and abided by the court’s decision. Largely ignored by historians of the larger movement to desegregate America’s schools, Phoenix, Arizona, in the words of Mahoney, is nothing more than “a footnote in *Brown vs. The Board of Education of Topeka*” decision of 1954. The Supreme Court requested a copy of the Phoenix, Arizona

⁷¹ Ibid.

ruling, but failed to acknowledge the important role it played in the national ruling against segregated schools.⁷²

The first casualty of school desegregation was George Washington Carver High school. It was closed in the days of 1953. 481 Carver students were directed to schools in their residential zones, primarily Phoenix Union High School and South Mountain High School. The action was taken in Phoenix's elementary schools, where students were instructed to report to schools in their neighborhoods. Demographics, residential patterns, and economics all contributed to an educational system that was far from integrated. White students remained in predominantly white schools, while minorities found themselves again in underfunded minority neighborhood schools. White children were relocated to other schools the least. Some black children ended up in former "Mexican schools," while some Mexican American children found themselves in former "black schools." Only a small group of black Phoenicians resided in white school precincts. The Ragsdales were among this small group. Elizabeth Ragsdale, in fact, was the first black child to be admitted to previously all-white Clarendon School in Phoenix.⁷³

W. A. Robinson, Carver's former principal, had conflicted views about the practicality of school desegregation. He believed that integration was in some way more favorably than the "former pattern of complete segregation in the schools" in principle. Nonetheless, Robinson argued that Phoenicians maintained "a sort of belief that

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ *Arizona Sun*, February 13, 1953; Luckingham, *Minorities in Phoenix*, 162; Baker, "The Man Who Refused to be Invisible," 97.

desegregation can be carried out successfully without greatly disturbing the former pattern of school attendance and teacher employment.” Like many African Americans, Robinson also was concerned about the possible negative effects of desegregation in black communities. Segregation allowed black institutions to emerge which catered to African Americans in ways that white institutions would and/or could not do. Leaders like Robinson wanted to know how black children would be treated in all white schools. If desegregation meant that black children would have to learn while being ostracized, mocked, terrorized, beaten, and humiliated, many black people wondered how efficacious such an education would be.⁷⁴

Robinson argued that black students “who were lifted suddenly out of the security of their own schools and placed in a new, uncertain, and insecure situation” would be subjected to undue emotional strains. He offered the example of a recent dance at a newly integrated Phoenix school. “Mixed dancing couples were called off the floor and told that mixed dancing was not permitted,” he stated. Despite school officials subsequent decision that the action “should not have been done.” “The harm to a budding friendly acceptance,” Robinson asserted, “had been done.” He believed that there were “still situations occurring in classrooms and in school activities in both elementary and high schools which the Negro students handle with awkwardness and frustration.” One American history textbook, Robinson noted, “still in use in the high school treats Negro slavery in America as a benevolent institution in which Negroes were happy and gay; calls

⁷⁴ W. A. Robinson, “The Progress of Integration in the Public Schools,” 371-79; Lincoln and Eleanor interview.

the abolitionists trouble-making meddlers; implies that the Union soldiers were cowards; and completely discredits the Negro legislators and congressmen during Reconstruction. The school libraries have been taking no Negro periodicals or newspapers and have, in most cases, few, if any references favorable to Negroes in America.”⁷⁵

Desegregation did little, if anything, to improve the financial condition of schools in black communities. While whites maintained the same neighborhood schools and strong tax bases, black schools had continued to rely on the support of communities which rested on the brink of poverty. W. A. Robinson did not believe African Americans were ready for desegregation and he did not lend much support to leaders like Lincoln Ragsdale. Lincoln believed Robinson wanted desegregation to happen eventually, “but the question would be timing; was it the right time for it?” Lincoln stated that in some ways Robinson believed that he and his fellow activists would be “hurting the people more than we’d help them.”⁷⁶

Although Phoenix established a precedent with its ground breaking ruling on segregation, black Phoenicians during the 1950s continued to experience poor living conditions. Housing and public facilities continued to be off-limits to blacks, and occupational discrimination remained omnipresent. In September 1952 bandleader Louis Jordan complained to the Phoenix City Council that the Sky Chef restaurant at Sky Harbor Airport, a municipal facility, had a “no negro policy.” After being hesitant to

⁷⁵ W. A. Robinson, Testimony on School Desegregation in Phoenix. Hearings Before the United States Commission on Civil Rights, Phoenix, Arizona, February 3, 1962 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1962), 17-18.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

intervene, the City Council eventually directed Sky Chef management to end its discriminatory practices. After Phoenician attorney Jack Hays indicated to then Mayor Hohen Foster that the Sky Chef's lease contract required it to be "open to all of the general public," the City Council took action. The Sky Chef feared the termination of its contract and yielded to the mandate of the City Council.⁷⁷

In an effort to secure national attention to pressure more whites in Phoenix to confront inequality and despair "once the limelight fell on them," Lincoln Ragsdale and Thomasena Grigsby worked to expose the socio-economic condition of blacks in Phoenix to the entire nation. Grigsby and her husband J. Eugene Grigsby, moved to Phoenix in the mid-1940s and quickly became involved in Phoenix's black community and the struggle for racial equality. The Grigsby's were teachers and both found position in the city's black schools. Phoenix's Carver High School hired Eugene Grigsby, and many in the black community were delighted to see him become a member of the school's faculty. "In view of the unusual successes which have been achieved in art circles in America by colored artists and the fine opportunities open to Colored artists both in Commercial and Fine arts," the *Arizona Sun* wrote, "it is gratifying that colored pupils with talent in Phoenix will have the opportunity to study under Mr. J. Eugene Grigsby." Grigsby majored in Art and Theater Staging under Hale Woodruff who was one of America's most renowned muralists. A graduate of Morehouse, Grigsby earned his Master of Art Education at Ohio State University. He also spent a year at the American Artist's School in New York and

⁷⁷ *Arizona Republic*, September 19, 23, 26, 1952.

studied at L'Ecole des Beaux Arts de Marseilles in France.⁷⁸

Supplementing her work with the GPCCU, the Urban League, and the NAACP, with editorials in several national black periodicals, Thomasena Grigsby used this medium to speak out against injustice in Phoenix. After being asked by Lincoln Ragsdale to comment on the white veterans' cemetery in the valley, Grigsby published an article in the *Chicago Defender*. In the polemic piece, Grigsby explained how Ragsdale's mortuary was holding the body of Thomas Reed, a black serviceman killed in Korea whose family wanted him buried with his fellow veterans in Greenwood Cemetery. Grigsby argued that:

To talk about that in Phoenix alone wasn't going to do it. The white newspapers weren't concerned about it particularly. The only thing you could do was to get this out of the community. Remember Phoenix has always been a tourist town. People who come to a tourist town want to feel it's peaceful, restful, etc. If they get the idea that this is going on in Phoenix, they might begin to question this [discrimination].

The *Arizona Sun* wrote in 1952: "He [Reed] was good enough to fight in combat duty alongside white boys, why can't they be buried side by side?" Grigsby's and Ragsdale's campaign on behalf of Reed was successful, as in the end Reed's body was interred in the previously exclusively white veterans' cemetery. Ragsdale's enlistment of Grigsby and her pen began the slow process of desegregating "valley" cemeteries. This entire episode, however, simply contributed to longstanding racial tensions and the poor state of race relations in the city. In Phoenix, declared Ragsdale in 1962, "not only is the Negro segregated while alive, but even when he is dead, when he goes to his final resting place, and to the sod. Every cemetery in Phoenix has some form of discrimination, either racial

⁷⁸ *Arizona Sun* September 13, 1946; Thomasena Grigsby interview, Mary Melcher, February 7, 1990.

or religious. As one man told us, ‘So shall you live. So shall you die. Segregated.’”⁷⁹

Religious leaders also contributed to racial discrimination in the city. The Catholic Church, according to Ragsdale, refused to allow his mortuary to handle any funerals that were scheduled at churches in the Diocese of Phoenix. “The Catholic Church was bitterly opposed to us burying Hispanics,” he remembered. “We had one fellow who had lived within a block of the mortuary, a Mexican fellow. The family called us to serve them. We picked up the body, but the priest at the Roman Catholic Immaculate Heart Church on 9th Street and Washington refused to let us have the services there” until the services were handled by a white owned mortuary. “Let me repeat this,” Ragsdale stated, “the Catholic white priest of the Catholic Mexican church refused to have the services when the body was brought from a black undertaker.”⁸⁰

Reactionary white supremacists in Phoenix bemoaned the activities of the Ragsdales and Grigsbys, and their fellow activists Mahoney and Holmes. In fact, many right-wing patrons of Mahoney’s law practice, opted to take their business elsewhere as a result of his participation in groups such as the NAACP, the Urban League, and the GPCCU. Despite pressure to desert their African American comrades in struggle, whites like Mahoney continued to protest.⁸¹

⁷⁹ *Chicago Defender*, January 19, 1952; *Hearings Before the United States Commission on Civil Rights, Phoenix, Arizona, February 3, 1962* (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1962), 16-26, 34-68, 101-139; Harris, *The First 100 Years*, 69-74, 81-98, 138-141.

⁸⁰ Lincoln and Eleanor interview.

⁸¹ William Mahoney interview; Thomasena Grigsby interview; Eugene Grigsby interview.

Many black women in Phoenix, like Eleanor Ragsdale and Grigsby formed the foundation which undergirded the entire Civil Rights Movement. Arriving in Phoenix from Louisiana with her husband, Clarence, in 1919, Madge Johnson Copeland proved to be not only an active participant in the struggle for Civil Rights, but a prominent entrepreneur. Upon her arrival in Phoenix, Copeland immediately saw a need for racial and economic healing in her new home. Phoenix was “very prejudiced” Copeland recalls, and as a result, black’s social and economic mobility was extremely circumscribed.⁸²

Widowed after her husband’s death in 1929, Copeland opened and operated a beauty shop in her home for twenty-five years. Copeland boasted a large clientele and employed six hairstylists. Many black women worked within large progressive organizations, but many also conducted their humanist efforts at the grassroots level. Copeland proved to be both a towering figure at the grassroots level, and a dedicated employee for the Democratic party. Acting independently in providing relief for impoverished blacks, Copeland “routinely brought baskets of food to shut-ins and helped elderly neighbors in her black South Phoenix neighborhood: ‘Church, community and any political field, I’ll be active as I can because I have a personal missionary project that I have of my own. I’m not depending on any organized missionary group, but I have my own missionary obligation.’”⁸³

⁸² *Arizona Gleam*, December 15, 1929; Madge Johnson Copeland, interview conducted by Maria Hernandez, Summer, 1981. Also see Mary Logan Rothschild and Pamela Claire Hronek, *Doing What the Day Brought: An Oral History of Arizona Women* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992).

⁸³ *Ibid.*

Copeland served her community throughout her life in Phoenix. She provided shelter and warm meals for soldiers stationed at nearby Army Air Corps installations. After establishing herself as a skilled registrar and active political agent, Copeland eventually became the first permanent Deputy County Recorder in the State of Arizona, a post she held from 1947 to 1961. A lifelong supporter of the Democratic party, Copeland devoted much of her life to working for this political organization, a group she believed “really helped the poor.” Copeland describes her allegiance in these terms:

I really launched out into the political field because I saw how the Democratic party would help the poor people. I knew the Republicans were always for the rich, and the Democrats really were [more] down to earth. I worked very hard at registration and on campaigning, anything to help the Democratic party. They helped the poor, and I’m always for the underdog, someone who really needs it.

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, Copeland endeavored to tear down the walls of segregation and inequality erected by racism and economic subjugation. She, participated in sit-ins, picketed, and marched, as a leader and supporter.⁸⁴

For black Phoenicians like Copeland, World War II and the industries which arose to support it, improved the prospect of good jobs and a freer life for them in the American West. Nevertheless, post war labor reductions exacerbated by racial inequality and discrimination off-set the promise of a better life. African Americans continued to migrate to the West however. Joining Copeland in her move to cities like Phoenix were leaders such as Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale. The Ragsdale’s became participants and eventually leaders in the region’s budding Civil Rights Movement. Their activities paved the way for African American success in business as well as legal and political reform. The Ragsdales

⁸⁴ Ibid.

infused the black Phoenician community with a sense of righteous indignation and urgency with regard to race relations.

The Ragsdales capitalized on the modest gains made by African Americans during the World War II, and used there personal success to improve their lives while also servicing the black community. In the process, they became one of the most influential black families in the American West. Between 1947 and 1954, their efforts, and the work of many other activists, culminated in the destruction of, among other things, residential segregation and *de jure* school segregation in Phoenix, Arizona. Their critical contribution to the black freedom struggle during these years, provided the basis for one of the most important court cases in American history; *Brown vs. The Board of Education of Topeka*. Between 1947 and 1954, activists in Phoenix propelled the city into a period of progressive organizing highlighted by increased national and international awareness. The cold war cast a shadow over the efforts of black activists and the budding black freedom struggle. While national and international leaders such as Paul Robeson and W. E. B. Du Bois came under attack, local leaders in Phoenix were also affected by the “red scare.” Progressive but gradualist organization such as the NAACP and the GPCCU pursued their goals “within the ideological and legal constraints of the nation.” They were, however, able to secure some major victories. The Civil Rights Movement which lay ahead would soon broaden ideologically and strategically. This transformation would create a more dynamic, intense, and effective challenge to racism. Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale were at the forefront of this movement.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Hine, Hine, and Harrold, *The African American Odyssey*, 493.

PART TWO
CREATIVE AND PERSISTENT: FROM CIVIL RIGHTS TO BLACK POWER IN
PHOENIX, ARIZONA, 1954-1970

CHAPTER 4: “CREATIVE CONFLICT”: LINCOLN AND ELEANOR RAGSDALE, COLLABORATION, AND COMMUNITY ACTIVISM IN PHOENIX.

“Race was the atmosphere one breathed from day to day, the pervasive irritant, the chronic allergy, the vague apprehension which made one uncomfortable and jumpy. We knew the race problem was like a deadly snake coiled and ready to strike, and one avoided its dangers only by never-ending watchfulness.”¹
-Pauli Murray

The years between 1954 and 1967 ushered in the most concentrated and productive civil rights activity in American history. The black freedom struggle during this period was so monumental that it has prompted scholars such as Manning Marable to dub the era America’s “Second Reconstruction.” Historic events from the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955-1956, to the passage of the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965, forever altered the ways in which Americans viewed race and democracy. During this period many factors prompted African Americans to adopt more direct and militant techniques in their battle for equal rights. Historians John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, Jr., argue that chief among these factors “was the wide spread, massive resistance” of whites to the extension of African American rights.

In many areas, particularly in the South, economic punishments were meted out against black people who involved themselves in civil rights activism. These sanctions included the loss of jobs, loan denials, and mortgage foreclosures. Violence was often employed to suppress black insurgency. In Phoenix, prominent black leaders Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale were instrumental in battling opposition to Civil Rights activism. They helped black Phoenicians win several important battles against racism and inequality. Like

¹ Pauli Murray, *Pauli Murry: The Autobiography of a Black Activist, Feminist, Lawyer, Priest, and Poet* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 36.

their counterparts throughout the nation, their efforts to desegregate Phoenix were often met with contempt and hostility by zealous white opposition. The Ragsdales responded by shoring-up their support base and reaching across racial lines to build a progressive coalition of civil rights activists. In doing so, they would add to their earlier victories by taking on leading roles in desegregating Phoenix's work force, and its places of public accommodation.²

After Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale and their fellow activists logged victories against residential, burial, and school segregation, they soon realized that most whites were loath to change. One year after the *Brown* decision, the Supreme Court handed down a second ruling known as *Brown II*. This ruling addressed the speed and manner with which schools were supposed to desegregate. The high court stressed that states should comply with their 1954 ruling expeditiously. The first ruling declared that desegregation should be carried out with "all deliberate speed." Most African Americans understood this to mean "immediately." Most whites, on the other hand, interpreted this to mean sometime in the distant future, or never. President Dwight D. Eisenhower was displeased with both rulings and failed to deploy the power of the presidency to pressure states to adhere to the court's mandate. In fact, Eisenhower pledged to James Byrnes, Governor of South Carolina, that he would be sure to "make haste slowly."³

² Manning Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction in Black America, 1945-1990* (Oxford: University Press of Mississippi, 1991); Hine, Hine, and Harrold, *The African American Odyssey*, 501; Franklin and Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 523; Steven F. Lawson and Charles Payne, *Debating The Civil Rights Movement, 1945-1968* (Lanham: Roman and Littlefield, 1998), 12.

³ Hine, Hine, and Harrold, *The African American Odyssey*, 502; Kenneth O'Reilly, *Presidents and Racial Politics from Washington to Clinton* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 170; Lawson and Payne, *Debating The Civil Rights Movement*, 12.

Such leadership emboldened segregationists. Politicians, religious leaders, and local business captains responded to *Brown* by organizing and supporting White Citizen's Councils in myriad Southern cities. Their goal was to maintain the prevailing racial hierarchy through intimidation and terrorism. The extent to which many Southern whites would go to suppress black people became painfully clear in 1955. Early that year, fourteen year old Emmett Till was shot in the head, tortured, brutally beaten, tied to a cotton gin fan, and dumped in the Tallahatchie River outside Money, Mississippi. Till had spoken "fresh" to Carolyn Bryant, a white woman, while buying candy in her store earlier that day. This minor indiscretion caused the worst manifestation of white supremacy to befall Till, and the entire African American community.⁴

Despite Southern white's massive resistance, desegregation occurred without incident in most of the country. The American West, for instance, did not host the vitriolic behavior that engulfed the South. Activists in Phoenix, however, still confronted racial discrimination and inequality. *De facto* segregation emerged as one of the primary obstacles to black social, economic, and political progress in the wake of *Brown*. Specifically, education, housing, and employment continued to pose major problems for black Phoenixians. By 1960 the African American population reached 20,919, up from 4,263 in 1940. Nevertheless, between 1940 and 1960 the percent of African Americans in Phoenix decreased from 6.5 to 4.8 percent of the total population. The Phoenix Urban League reported that at least 95 percent of black Phoenixians continued to live South of Van Buren Street in the "worst housing areas in the city." "Of the 21,000 Negroes in Phoenix, " the organization wrote, "19,000 live in 9 of the city's 92 census tracts, with 7

⁴ Ibid.

of these south of the Southern Pacific Railroad tracks. Three of these seven tracts contain roughly one-half of the city's Negro population."⁵

During the 1950s, North Phoenix continued to be predominantly white. This area of the city provided its residents with superior educational facilities and housing. The city's wealthy leaders all resided in North Phoenix. In 1960, a Phoenician resident noted that in South Phoenix "it would appear that in almost every instance in education, employment, and housing, the minority-group members are suffering some degree of deprivation, not necessarily civil rights deprivation, but less schooling, less employment, and more crowded housing." The cumulative effect of these substandard schools, unskilled low-paying jobs, and discriminatory white real estate patterns, oppressed the black Phoenician community. Housing opportunities increased in Phoenix during the 1950s, but they were few and restricted to the South side of the city. The Progressive Builders Association, founded by J. S. Jones and D. W. Williams, built many of the most attractive homes for black Phoenicians on the South side, while J. S. Jones, Travis Williams, and Clyde Webb built homes in the Park South subdivision, under the auspices of Williams and Jones Construction Company. These homes were marketed primarily to middle-class and professional black people however. Poor black Phoenicians continued to endure squalid living conditions. "Most blacks were too poor to qualify to buy homes" Webb recalled.⁶

⁵ *Hearings Before the United States Commission on Civil Rights, Phoenix, Arizona, February 3, 1962* (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1962), 16-26, 34-68, 101-139; Harris, *The First 100 Years*, 69-74, 81-98, 138-41.

⁶ *Phoenix Gazette*, December 1, 1960; *Hearings Before the United States Commission on Civil Rights, Phoenix, Arizona, February 3, 1962* (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1962), 16-26, 34-68, 101-139; Harris, *The First 100 Years*, 69-74, 81-98, 138-41; Clyde Webb quoted in Luckingham, *Minorities in Phoenix*, 166.

Black churches, as they had often done, continued to play a pivotal role in creating a more inclusive city. Church leaders and other civil rights activists frequently assembled at local churches to organize protests. Tanner Chapel African American Episcopal Church and the First Institutional Baptist Church, named the First Colored Baptist Church until 1951, provided financial support and leadership training. Dr. Robert B. Phillips and his wife, Louise Phillips, for instance, were members of the First Institutional Baptist Church, where they worked diligently as leaders of the church and the NAACP, particularly in the battles for better housing for minorities and the integration of Phoenix Union High School.⁷

Lincoln and Eleanor, though completely immersed in civil rights activity at the local level, found time to nurture their business interests and political contacts at the national level. It was during this period that the Ragsdale's began to work more closely with other leaders who had similar objectives. Thus, the 1950s and early 1960s can be thought of as an era of collaboration in the Ragsdale family. In mid-July, 1960, the Ragsdale boarded their "Cesna 172" airplane to cultivate their personal and professional relationships. They "scanned the U. S. during a three-week business and pleasure sojourn." Their itinerary and hosts included: The Illinois State Funeral Directors and Embalming Convention at the Conrad Hilton Hotel in Chicago; a short visit with members of the Dickey family in Cleveland, including Roosevelt Dickey, a member of the Ohio Fair Employment Committee, and Thomas Dickey, Jr., Cleveland Urban League Director of Housing.⁸

⁷ Luckingham, *Minorities in Phoenix*, 166.

⁸ *Arizona Sun*, Thursday, July 14, 1960; *Arizona Sun*, Thursday, June 29, 1961.

The Ragsdales also made stops in: Detroit, where they were the guests of Charles S. Diggs, Sr., President of the Detroit Mutual Life Assurance Company and father of Congressman Charles S. Diggs, Jr. of Michigan; Philadelphia, where they spent time with Eleanor's parents; and Washington, D. C., where they discussed civil rights and protest strategies with Congressmen Charles S. Diggs, Jr., Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., of New York, and John Rhodes and Stewart Udall of Arizona. Before they returned to Phoenix, the leaders visited North Carolina Mutual Insurance Company, Dr. William Hale, President-Elect of Langston University, and A.G. Gaston, President of the Booker T. Washington Life Insurance Company. The following summer, Lincoln Ragsdale took to the air again, as he flew to Oklahoma to present a scholarship to the Langston University Development Foundation.⁹

In August 1960, Ragsdale joined black builder J. S. Jones in Tucson as a guest speaker at Prince Hall Chapel AME Church. The members of Prince Hall Church invited the "two outstanding Phoenix businessmen," to deliver keynote addresses at their annual Men's Day program. On Sunday, August 28, 1960, Ragsdale and Jones traveled to Tucson to deliver their speeches and network with many of the city's black leaders. Ragsdale chose "The Businessman's Responsibility to the Community and the Church" as his topic, while Jones' topic was "Opportunities for Negroes in Arizona."¹⁰

In Phoenix, Lincoln Ragsdale and Eleanor developed professional and personal relationships that would ultimately lead to civil rights victories and financial prosperity. Lincoln established a life long partnership with Reverend George Brooks, leader of the

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ *Arizona Sun*, Thursday, August 25, 1960

Southminster Presbyterian Church. Southminster was founded in South Phoenix in 1953. Ragsdale and Brooks would work closely during the height of the Civil Rights Movement. They forged one of the most colorful and effective tandems during the fight for freedom in the 1950s and 1960s. By the late 1950s, Lincoln had become Vice-President of the Maricopa County, Arizona branch of the NAACP. Brooks was its president. The two canvassed Phoenician neighborhoods in an effort to integrate the city's labor force. He and Brooks, representing the local chapter of the NAACP, were able to make good use of community resources and obtain some socio-economic concessions for themselves and their constituents.¹¹

Brooks was born in South Carolina, but later moved to New York. A religious scholar, Brooks earned degrees from Johnson C. Smith University in North Carolina, New York Theological Seminary, and Arizona State University. He completed his doctoral studies at San Francisco Theological Seminary. Brooks moved to Phoenix in 1953 and "was devastated" at what he found. "I expected something entirely different than [what] I saw" he remembered. Having been reared in South Carolina, Brooks was very familiar with the nature of white supremacy and racism, but he did not expect to find racism so prevalent in Phoenix. The only difference in racism in the West and in the South was its face. "In the South you knew where you could go and where you couldn't go," Brooks maintained.¹²

In the West, however, racists were more apt to conceal their contempt for black people, he believed. Although "whites only" and "no colored allowed" signs could be

¹¹ Baker, "The Man Who Refused to be Invisible," 98.

¹² George Brooks interview, conducted by Matthew C. Whitaker, April 6, 2000.

found throughout the region, they were not as common. The racial etiquette in the West was more ambiguous but no less malignant. The ambiguity of Western race relations sometimes caught black people like Brooks off guard. Brooks claimed he had “become acclimated” to race relations in the South, but as he came West “I didn’t expect some of what I experienced.” His expectations were altered quickly. His notion of a more equal and hospitable American West were challenged before he reached his final destination.¹³

When Brook embarked upon his journey West from the South, he packed what he hoped would be enough food to sustain him during his journey. African Americans were routinely refused service at places of public accommodation, or reluctantly given the worst facilities and service. African Americans also put their health and life at risk by attempting to patronize white establishments on long journeys across the country. Brooks loaded his car with food to avoid humiliation, physical abuse, and possible death. “I had a box of chicken and all kinds of stuff that I ate as I drove,” Brooks recalled. As he approached Phoenix, Brooks eventually exhausted his supply of food and was forced to stop at a white owned restaurant for a meal. To his utter dismay, he was forced to eat in the kitchen “on a flower barrel.” The most disturbing thing about the restaurant was the “little girl who served me.” She was a little white girl, he remembered, and “she cried because she had to serve me like that.” It was “dehumanizing,” Brooks maintains, “but that’s what racism does to people. It dehumanizes them.”¹⁴

When Brooks finally made it to Phoenix he found white supremacy and segregation omnipresent. He took little time in dedicating himself to changing the racial

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

order. The *Arizona Sun* reported that Brooks blew into Phoenix “somewhat like a tornado.” In a short period of time, Brooks established the Southminster Presbyterian Church at 1923 East Broadway, and was instrumental in the construction of the church’s new building. “From a vacant lot owned by Dr. and Mrs. Robert B. Phillips he developed the first recreational areas for boys and girls” in Phoenix. Also “with his guidance,” Southminster “created a well baby clinic, to which came most of the babies” in South Phoenix. The *Arizona Sun* described him as “not a religious fanatic,” but a person who had “deep convictions” while carrying “the atmosphere of Christian service into all his activities.”¹⁵

Having been trained at the Veterans Hospital in Phoenix, Brooks was one of two black ministers who engaged in “ministerial counseling under the sponsorship of the Maricopa Mental Health Association.” He quickly became president of the Maricopa Country branch of the NAACP, and intimately involved with the Urban League, Phoenix Ministerial Alliance, Phoenix’s Social Actions Committee, the Migrant Ministry Committee of the Phoenix Council of Churches, and the city’s Committee on Evangelism. Brooks also added the Phoenix Council of Churches Training Program, Phoenix Memorial Hospital Chaplaincy Committee, Institutional Representative and Neighborhood Commissioner, Boy Scouts, Cub Scouts Master, Arizona Council for Youth and Adult Programs, and the YMCA to his resume. Brooks was active indeed. “In his spare time,” the *Arizona Sun* wrote, Brooks was a counselor for the Arizona Presbyterian Synod.¹⁶

Ragsdale and Brooks met not long after the minister moved to Phoenix. Initially

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ *Arizona Sun*, April 15, 1960.

Ragsdale did not think too highly of Brooks. "I thought [white people] were using him," said Ragsdale. He believed white Phoenicians encouraged Brook's new assembly as a means of keeping African Americans out of the central Phoenix Presbyterian congregations. Ragsdale's skepticism soon faded. In fact, Brooks was married in 1954, and the ceremony was held at Ragsdale's Chapel in the Valley. After the ceremony Brooks set out to pay the minister who presided, the organist, and Lincoln and Hartwell, Jr's limousine and driver. The Ragsdale's refused to accept payment for the use of their limousine and driver. "They said you pay us when you come back from your honeymoon," Brooks recalled. He appreciated the gesture and from that day forward Ragsdale and Brooks became friends and comrades in struggle. Brooks was particularly impressed with Ragsdale's influence and tenacity. "Lincoln, had a lot of connections," Brooks asserted. He also "had a kind of boldness about him, which for some ordinary [black] folk would have been a detriment to them." Like many black Phoenicians, "Lincoln owed the white folks money, being a businessman, but he did not allow that to keep him from doing what he needed to do to effect civil rights in Phoenix."¹⁷

Ragsdale and Brooks were soon spending many hours at the Ragsdale home discussing possible strategies for attacking white supremacy and racism in Phoenix. Eleanor also participated in their late night sessions. According to Brooks, "Eleanor was very much an activist as well. She was called upon to contribute her ideas and energy to the movement. She frequently was on the picket line with her children," Brooks asserted, "and she never complained. She was an activist." Lincoln "was tremendous," he declared. "I remember one day, Lincoln and I were moving around in the streets talking

¹⁷ *Arizona Republic*, February 28, 1993; George Brooks interview.

to people” about discrimination and racism in Phoenix. Ragsdale risked quite a bit by being so outspoken, Brooks believed, because the city’s white elite were watching him and they had the power to hurt him financially. “He was a businessman, he needed his business, I was a preacher and my congregation came to church whether I was there or not, but Lincoln was a businessman” and had a great deal at stake.¹⁸

Despite being vulnerable to white financiers, Ragsdale condemned racism and segregation with a particular disdain for white racial chauvinism and circumlocution. He was direct, audacious, and aggressive. With Brooks, Ragsdale aggressively fought discrimination in employment in the late 1950s and 1960s. Representing the NAACP, they were able to make good use of community resources and obtain some socio-economic victories for African Americans. For example, striving “to move into every aspect of economic life” in Phoenix, the two leaders targeted the powerful Valley National Bank, now Bank One of Arizona, for protest. “We had to pick out someplace to start the fight,” said Ragsdale, “so you had to figure out who will you knock off first, the king or the subjects? We figured it was best to start at the top.” Like other Phoenician banks, Valley National Bank had no black tellers.¹⁹

The fiery Ragsdale and the devout Brooks scheduled a meeting with Jim Patrick, president of Valley National Bank. At that meeting, the two leaders demanded that the bank cease its discriminatory practices and hire qualified African Americans for something other than unskilled positions. Patrick and the bank’s officials would not

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ *Arizona Republic*, February 28, 1993; Baker, “The Man Who Refused to Be Invisible,” 98; Luckingham, *Minorities in Phoenix*, 166; Melcher, “Blacks and Whites Together,” 204-205; George Brooks interview.

budge. Ragsdale and Brooks devised an alternative plan and scheduled another meeting. Brooks remembered the meeting well: "Lincoln was brash, nasty...he would back him [Patrick] up into a corner and I was the good guy. I would pull him out. Then he would get belligerent again, and Lincoln would back him up again, and I would pull him out...that's what you call creative conflict. We didn't know it, but that's what we did." Patrick would say something like, "what can I do for you people?" That's when Ragsdale tried to scare him. He ranted and raved, and at one point he pounded Patrick's desk with his fist in anger. "I remember hitting [Patrick's] desk so hard I thought I heard it crack" recalled Ragsdale. Ragsdale would say something like "you know goddamn well what we want," while turning to Brooks and complaining loudly that Patrick was "a bigot, a Hitler, a hater," Brooks explained. Brooks would then ask Ragsdale to leave and cool down, while he would continue from a considerably stronger position.²⁰

When "creative conflict" failed, Ragsdale returned to his naked aggression. Forceful and resolute, Lincoln threatened to chain himself and the other protestors to the Valley National Bank, and bring five hundred people to the institution in a mass protest. Protesters had already formed long lines at the bank windows. Others clogged up lines in the bank "requesting seventy-five pennies as partial change for a dollar" while singing *We Shall Overcome*. Nevertheless, Brooks thought to himself "oh my God," where are we going to get five hundred people? Ragsdale's threats and apparent sincerity, coupled with the protesting that was being waged in the lobby of the bank and on the street, was more than Patrick was prepared to endure. "Patrick," said Brooks, would "just be livid." The strategy worked and a mass protest involving five hundred people was not necessary.

²⁰ Ibid.

“It worked,” argues Ragsdale, because “white people weren’t used to belligerent Negroes.” Indeed, soon after his meeting with Ragsdale and Brooks, and during the same year that James Meredith desegregated the University of Mississippi with the support of the federal government, Patrick integrated the Valley National Bank, hiring Wilbur Hankins as the institution’s first African American teller in 1962.²¹

Ragsdale and Brooks squared off with many employers in Phoenix, imploring them to hire African Americans. Not every company proved to be as easy to convince as the Valley National Bank. Motorola, Phoenix’s technology giant, was steadfast in its refusal to hire black people. Motorola operated three major plants in “the Valley,” and employed thousands of white Phoenicians. The company’s refusal to hire black Phoenicians constituted a major barrier to black advancement in a city that was becoming increasingly dependent on a technology driven economy. On February 3, 1962, some of Phoenix’s leading activists, including Ragsdale, Brooks, Hazel B. Daniels, Herbert Ely, and Charles F. Harlins, Executive Director of the Phoenix Urban League, radio broadcaster Grace Gil-Olivarez, and businessman and former migrant worker Manuel Pena, testified before the United States Commission on Civil Rights in downtown Phoenix on racial discrimination in the city. The commission was created in 1957 by President Dwight D. Eisenhower, and chaired by John A. Hannah, President of Michigan State University, and Republican Delegate to the 1961 Michigan Constitutional Convention. The commission “served as a civil rights watchdog, with no real enforcement powers, but with considerable influence on public opinion.” Hannah, who championed civil rights, came to Phoenix on the heels of passing one of the most progressive state constitutions in the U.S. in Michigan. Hannah

²¹ Ibid.

hoped that his experience in Michigan would help him evaluate racial discrimination in Phoenix. Hannah believed that “[o]f all the Constitutions in the fifty states,” the Michigan Constitution does “more for civil rights than has been done in any state Constitution.” George Romney, former governor of Michigan, declared that Michigan’s constitution “contains the most complete, the most direct and clearest expression of state policy guaranteeing human rights of any state constitution in the country.”²²

Brooks’ testimony before the commission was direct and specific. He argued that racism and segregation was fiendish and undemocratic. “No doubt about it,” he proclaimed, “segregation has made the Negro poor. It has forced him into the slum areas, into bad schools, it’s cut him off from better jobs. Segregation has built a wall of poverty around the Negro, and psychologically it’s done worse than that,” he preached. “There’s hardly any mixing” of black and white Phoenicians he argued. “In most parts of the city, a

²² Lincoln J. Ragsdale, Testimony on the Negro in Phoenix. Hearings Before the United States Commission on Civil Rights, Phoenix, Arizona, February 3, 1962 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1962); George B. Brooks, Testimony on the Negro in Phoenix. Hearings Before the United States Commission on Civil Rights, Phoenix, Arizona, February 3, 1962 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1962); Hazel B. Daniels, Hazel B. General Testimony. Hearings Before the United States Commission on Civil Rights, Phoenix, Arizona, February 3, 1962 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1962); Herbert L. Ely, General Testimony. Hearings Before the United States Commission on Civil Rights, Phoenix, Arizona, February 3, 1962 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1962); Charles F. Harlans, Testimony on the Negro in Phoenix. Hearings Before the United States Commission on Civil Rights, Phoenix, Arizona, February 3, 1962 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1962); Grace Gill-Olivarez, Testimony on Mexican Americans in Phoenix. Hearings Before the United States Commission on Civil Rights, Phoenix, Arizona, February 3, 1962 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1962); Manuel Pena, Testimony on Migrants in Phoenix. Hearings Before the United States Commission on Civil Rights, Phoenix, Arizona, February 3, 1962 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1962); Matthew C. Whitaker, “Michigan Committee on Civil Rights,” In *Organizing Black America: An Encyclopedia of African American Associations*, Nina Mjagkij, (ed.). (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000).

white boy can get into his early teens before he sees many Negroes. Then the ones he sees are likely to be busboys, janitors, street sweepers. He never sees educated Negroes holding responsible jobs. He isn't going to like and talk about social equality. This is bad for the Caucasian, no matter what the bigots say, but it's even worse for the Negro. He grows up in a segregated or near-segregated neighborhood. That's all he knows; segregation. He accepts it, takes it for granted in housing, employment, schools. He's conditioned to it, and for a lot of Negroes, it's a crutch, a defense against the world."²³

In a feverish tone, Brooks announced to the commission that "the greatest problem facing the Negro in Phoenix is that of employment." There were perhaps three reasons the problem existed, he posited. "First," he roared, "there is a problems of skills which are demanded by industry. Most Negroes who are seeking employment must do so without adequate technical knowledge or experience. There are certain firms that have consistently refused to hire Negroes, and this is the second point, on the pretense that the community is not yet ready for integration in the work force. Though there are some eight major firms doing business with the federal government in this area, and hiring more than 15,000 people, less than 350 of them are Negroes. The retail and service industries hire Negroes for the most part in custodial positions only. With respect to banks, insurance companies, and to a lesser extent department stores, there are few Negroes employed in anything other than menial capacities. If the absence of Negroes on such jobs is due to racial discrimination, as at least one man has charged, it is a clear violation of Arizona

²³ George Brooks interview, Mary Melcher.

State Law, and, I believe, the Fourteenth Amendment.”²⁴

When Ragsdale took the floor to address the commission, he did so with passion and vigor. His comments were largely restricted to discrimination in housing. “With regard to housing,” he began, “the significant thing to point out is that 90 percent of all the Negroes living in Phoenix live south of Van Buren Street. It is also important to note that 97 percent of all Negroes live within a radius of one mile of the railroad tracks or the riverbed. Lets take one report, census tract 105. We have 4,000 Negroes that live in this area.” “73% of these units,” he posited, “are substandard, 34% of them are dilapidated; unfit for human occupancy.” “What has our industry done about housing for Negroes?” he queried. “Lets look at it. 31, 000 new homes have been built by three builders in the North East Section of Phoenix, and the North West Section of Phoenix. Not one of these new houses, not one, has been sold to a Negro when it was new. Not one!”²⁵

At this juncture Chairman Hannah asked Ragsdale if it would “be your judgement based on your experience that there are substantial numbers of Negroes now residing in the area of concentration who could afford to purchase housing outside their area if they had equal opportunity to obtain it?” Ragsdale responded by stating that “over 640 have qualified for and have been given FHA loans through the local office here in Phoenix. So we have 640 people to my knowledge.” When black Phoenicians arrive at the FHA office

²⁴ KSC Management Corporation, The Phoenix Urban League, and the United States Commission on Civil Rights, “THE SEARCH: Hearings Before the United States Commission on Civil Rights, Phoenix, Arizona, February 3, 1962” (Phoenix: AirLab Times, 1962); Brooks, Testimony on the Negro in Phoenix, 49.

²⁵ KSC Management Corporation, The Phoenix Urban League, and the United States Commission on Civil Rights, “THE SEARCH.”; Ragsdale, Testimony on the Negro in Phoenix, 48.

in Phoenix, however, officials “discovered they were Negroes.” “They said ‘we are very sorry. There must be some mistake. We cannot make this loan.’” Other lending institutions were more direct Ragsdale testified. “We cannot salt and pepper the community” one lender announced.²⁶

The few white Phoenicians who were willing to sell a home to African Americans were ridiculed and harassed by other white people. When one white seller decided to sell his home to an African American, Ragsdale reported, “a suit was issued against him by a white real estate broker.” The suit languished in court for two years. Eventually the lawsuit was thrown out, but not without having inflicted unwarranted “mental anguish” on the seller and the buyer of the home. Herbert Ely’s testimony supported all of Ragsdale’s allegations. “Private housing in Phoenix is virtually totally restricted, particularly to Negroes in the North part of town,” he stated. “If a man is financially able to buy a home in an area, then that’s all that’s necessary. As Mr. Ragsdale pointed out, there are 640 Negroes that have recently qualified for FHA [Federal Housing Authority] mortgages, and I state to this Commission that with rare exception, none of them could secure such a house in the North part of town.”²⁷

While activists took their concerns to the federal government, Lincoln Ragsdale continued to square off as the “bad guy” in negotiations with white leaders. Advancement was for the most part sluggish. Substandard housing, poor educational opportunities and

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ragsdale, Testimony on the Negro in Phoenix, 48; KSC Management Corporation, The Phoenix Urban League, and the United States Commission on Civil Rights, “THE SEARCH”; Ely, Testimony on the Negro in Phoenix, 48; KSC Management Corporation, The Phoenix Urban League, and the United States Commission on Civil Rights, “THE SEARCH.”

high unemployment continued to be a problem for Phoenician minorities. Ragsdale, however, was doing his part to challenge the existing racial hierarchy. He, with the help of Brooks and other leaders, decided to wage a full assault on the discriminatory practices of Motorola and other large companies such as Sperry Rand and General Electric. In their estimation, job discrimination was more damaging to minorities than segregation. “How can you go into places to eat or sleep when you don’t have any money?” Ragsdale asked. As early as 1960, He, Brooks, and other NAACP leaders started taking carloads of people to Phoenician employers to apply for jobs. To demonstrate their resolve, hundreds applied. Hundreds also had their applications rejected. Many “were cordial but firm,” Brooks remembered. “They told us, ‘We are not going to hire any black folks here. We must give these jobs to parents of white engineers we want to recruit.’”²⁸

Ragsdale and Brooks were incensed. They immediately marshaled all of their resources to stage an all out assault of Motorola’s practices. Having kept an eye on the company’s actions for months, NAACP leaders believed it was time to act. The organization decided to send a delegation to Motorola to discuss their minority hiring record. They scheduled a meeting with the president of Motorola. Travis Williams, a black builder and fellow NAACP member, accompanied Ragsdale and Brooks to the meeting. During the exchange, Williams recalled, the two leaders were cantankerous, indignant, and assertive. Initially the group attempted to be “diplomatic.” They argued that Motorola was “licensed to do business in the state of Arizona,” and as Arizona residents, black Phoenicians deserved an opportunity to work for them. “We do not want to be left out” the leaders stated. The president said that Motorola did not intentionally

²⁸ Lincoln Ragsdale interview; George Brooks interview, Mary Melcher.

leave anyone out, and that they had minorities under their employ. Soon after the president made this comment, Williams recalled, the group noticed an “Indian lady” making conspicuous passes by the conference room. Ragsdale stood up, looked at the lady making her synchronized passes, then turned back to president and said, “no wonder you don’t have any blacks here, you don’t know what a black person is.”²⁹

The group left the meeting with no concessions and no victory. It was not until Brooks was slipped a memo from the Maricopa County Welfare Department in 1962 that the leaders acquired the smoking gun they needed. The memo noted that a large electronics firm was looking for “a young woman on welfare, eighteen years of age, with a high school diploma, who must be white.” Rumors had already been circulating throughout the black community that the Welfare Department was practicing blatant discrimination. Until the NAACP secured the memo, however, the rumors could not be substantiated.³⁰

Brooks, with the help of attorney Herbert Ely, investigated the matter further and determined that the NAACP had found a verifiable case of racial discrimination. The state run employment office was, in fact, conspiring with private industry to deny black Phoenicians employment. The Brooks, Ragsdale, Ely, and the NAACP called for a meeting with state Attorney General Robert Pickrell, and secured the full attention of the Phoenician media. At the meeting, Brooks accused the welfare department of “being in collusion with firms to deny black people jobs.” “I was good that day,” Brooks

²⁹ *Arizona Sun*, April 6, 1961; Travis Williams interview.

³⁰ *Arizona Sun*, April 19, 1962. Melcher, “Blacks and Whites Together,” 206; George Brooks interview.

reminisced. "I got quoted." The publicity resulted in Motorola's capitulation. Soon it hired its first African American employee on the manufacturing line. In the future, Ragsdale, Brooks, and Williams "were asked if we could refer some blacks" to the company for employment.³¹

Ragsdale and Brook's tag team efforts worked enough to open the minds, if not the wallets of a few business owners, and it earned the two leaders, and the NAACP, respect from progressive Phoenicians, and contempt from many white people. Improvement in the overall condition of the black community was limited, however. City officials and white business leaders rejected urban renewal and similar federal assistance programs. With regard to assisting struggling minority communities, most white leaders encouraged "private industry to do it." With a poor economic base, black Phoenician communities continued to suffer. While activists began to make inroads in employment, many activists began to set their sights on eradicating segregation in public facilities. Mary Melcher writes that Barbara Callahan of Phoenix's Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance, organized a number of sit-ins during the summer of 1960 through its Youth Council. The NAACP also participated in the demonstrations at Valley businesses.³²

The nation's major sit-in movement was launched in the South and quickly spread like a wild fire throughout the civil rights movement. Energized and frustrated black college students devised the "sit-in" at local discriminatory places of public accommodation to draw attention to the injustice of prejudice and inequality. Ezell Blair,

³¹ Ibid.

³² George Brooks interview, Mary Melcher, Harris, *The First 100 Years*, 69-74; Melcher, "Blacks and Whites Together," 195-216, Luckingham, *Minorities in Phoenix*, 167.

Jr., Joseph McNeil, Francis McCain, and David Richmond, freshmen at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College (North Carolina A&T), took it upon themselves to act independently of the movement's older leaders and challenge segregation head-on. Inspired by the events taking place in the South, young black Phoenicians followed their Southern counterparts lead, and staged sit-ins at lunch counters in downtown Phoenix. Many businesses did not resist. They no doubt wanted to avoid the sort of mass hysteria that had overtaken many Southern states. On the other hand, some businesses flatly refused to serve African Americans.³³

William Dickey, Eleanor Ragsdale's younger brother, stated that two businesses were especially meanspirited to black people. At the Woolworth store in downtown Phoenix, Dickey recalled, "you couldn't sit at the counter and have a Coke or pop." The NAACP in Phoenix went on the offensive. Led by Lincoln Ragsdale, George Brooks, and W. A. Robinson, over 100 black Phoenicians concerned with "the sad and deprived economic state of themselves and their people," marched in protest to Woolworth's discriminatory practices on January 27, 1962. According to a NAACP spokesman, "they were protesting the previously stated and definitely applied policy of Negro discrimination in clerical and sales capacities in the Woolworth Stores in the Phoenix area." Up to that point, according to the NAACP, no black person has ever been "hired to sell goods at Woolworth stores or any of the other downtown 5 & 10 cents chain stores." NAACP leaders proclaimed that they had undertaken "this method to abolish job discrimination" and would continue to "fight until the walls of discrimination in jobs opportunities come

³³ Hine, Hine, and Harrold, *The African American Odyssey*, 510; Melcher, "Blacks and Whites Together," 206.

tumbling down.³⁴

Establishments owned by white Phoenicians were not the only ones that refused to service black patrons. There were several Mexican American restaurants that would not serve black folk as well Dickey remembered. El Rey Café on South Central Avenue, for example, refused to serve black Phoenicians. Fair skinned and green-eyed, Dickey, like his sister, could have passed for white or "Hispanic" if he chose to do so. He did not. Nevertheless, he did make use of his appearance to silently subvert the prevailing racial ethos. While picketing the restaurant for its discriminatory practices, Dickey and a "Hispanic" friend decided to sneak in to grab a bite to eat. "Well, they didn't realize that I was black," Dickey recalled, "so we went in and sat down to have lunch." It was not long before the owner of the restaurant new something was awry, because all of Dickey's fellow marchers started smiling and waving at him and his friend through the restaurant window. Once the proprietor was "tipped-off" to Dickey's cultural and racial identity, he decided to escort Dickey and his friend out of the eatery and close down for lunch.³⁵

Economics and class were as much at work when Mexican American restaurants refused to service black people as race was. As long as Mexican restaurants were serving other Mexicans, Ragsdale stated, there was "no problem." When white people came to eat at some of these restaurants, however, the owners were afraid that the presence of black patrons would scare off the majority of their business; white people. Moreover, white people "would threaten the owners," Ragsdale maintained. They would say: "We won't come back if you serve these niggers." One of the most stubborn and antagonistic

³⁴ *Arizona Sun*, Thursday, February 1, 1962

³⁵ Luckingham, *Minorities in Phoenix*, 177; William Dickey interview.

proprietors in the city was the owner of the Citris Drugstore located at Sixteenth and Van Buren streets. Rather than succumb to media and political pressure and allow black people to sit on stools at his lunch counter, the owner elected to remove the stools altogether.³⁶

Irene McClellan King, a participant in many of the protests in 1962, told an interviewer that white people “just didn’t serve you” during those days. Lincoln Ragsdale was much more indignant in his recollections: “The only bathrooms you could use downtown were Phoenix City Hall, the bus station, the train station and the County Building. You couldn’t even eat downtown.” One of Eleanor Ragsdale’s most disturbing memories was of her picketing at the State Capitol in 1962 to call attention to the need for a public accommodations bill. “It was the first time in my life that I had been spat upon and called ugly names,” she remembered. “There were people standing on the sidelines jeering. Because my skin is fair, they called me ‘White folks’ nigger.’ They thought I was white, and they were wondering what I was doing standing in a picket line trying to help black people.”³⁷

Clovis Campbell, Sr. also played a pivotal role in the Civil Rights Movement in Phoenix. Born in Elizabeth, Louisiana in 1931, Campbell migrated to Phoenix in 1945. After a brief stint in the military, Campbell returned to Phoenix in 1954, and began a long career in politics, community activism, and newspaper publishing. Elected to the legislature in 1962, Campbell ran a successful campaign for a seat in the State Senate in 1966, becoming the first African American in Arizona to serve in this capacity. Active in

³⁶ Lincoln and Eleanor interview; Luckingham, *Minorities in Phoenix*, 167.

³⁷ Irene King interview; Baker, “The Man Who Refused to Be Invisible,” 98.

the Phoenix chapter of the NAACP, Campbell protested discrimination and spoke out against injustice in his newspaper the *Arizona Informant*. Founded in 1968, the *Informant* is the largest African American owned newspaper in the state of Arizona.³⁸

Mentored by Lincoln Ragsdale, now a veteran member of the Civil Rights Movement, Campbell worked hard to end segregation in education and public accommodations. Alongside Ragsdale, Brooks, and other activists, Campbell attacked the discriminatory practices of local restaurants. Campbell recalled that African Americans were frequently greeted by signs in local eateries proclaiming their “right to refuse anybody service.” Well, you know what that meant, Campbell exclaimed: “nigga don’t come in here.” Campbell credits Phoenix’s history of conservative politics with the gradual way in which most civil rights issues were addressed. Despite the progressive nature of the legislation he sponsored and editorials he wrote, many of his proposals languished for years before being passed. Campbell, however, relished his role as progressive leader, and describes his approach in these terms: “I don’t believe in rocking the boat, I believe in turning it over to see who can swim you see. That way, you can find out who’s on what side of the fence. So I had quite a bit of legislation introduced that was considered quite a few years ahead of its time, and so naturally, it didn’t always get the approval of the people that it should have.”³⁹

The strategies that Phoenician activists employed were somewhat successful. Throughout the 1960s they were used to slowly dismantle the apartheid like system in the

³⁸ Clovis Campbell interviewed, conducted by Matthew C. Whitaker, Summer, 1996.

³⁹ Ibid.

"Valley of the Sun." Their efforts did not go unchallenged, however, and often activists were isolated, threatened and physically terrorized. The *Arizona Sun* in 1962, in fact, expressed its belief that "if anyone doubts that there is discrimination against Negroes in Phoenix, he must be deaf, dumb, and blind." As Lori Baker writes, the backlash against Lincoln Ragsdale's Civil Rights activities intensified as his profile and fortune grew. For example, the Federal Bureau of Investigation "warned him in the 1960s that the Minutemen, a self-named 'patriotic party,' were plotting his assassination." An FBI agent "advised him to carry a gun with him at all times." Ragsdale did not reduce his activities a bit and remained unmoved by the threats against his life. "I was young, and I didn't have as much fear as I have today" he recalled.⁴⁰

In Phoenix Ragsdale had both black and white detractors. "I was an antagonist," he maintained. He was a competitor who "never hesitated to become brash or confrontational with local business executives who refused to hire blacks." This certainly made him public enemy number one to a great many white Phoenicians, particularly the powerful. On the other hand, Ragsdale believed that some black people did not think highly of him because they believed that his efforts might cause more damage than reparation. "A lot of times I wanted to quit. I got tired of fighting. It felt at times like I wasn't making any headway." His family's painful legacy kept him from quitting. He kept pushing because he "felt a sense of obligation." "I was taught that growing up," he asserted.⁴¹

⁴⁰ *Arizona Sun*, February 1, July 19, 1962; Baker, "The Man Who Refused to Be Invisible," 98.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

Peaceful change continued to be the goal of national Civil Rights Movement, and the movement in Phoenix. Striving to build upon their successes in the schools, at the Valley National Bank, Motorola, and other businesses, Lincoln Ragsdale and other Phoenician activists attempted to motivate progressive black and white Phoenicians to push for further change. Ragsdale and Brooks solicited the support of the Phoenix Forum to extend an invitation to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to speak on civil rights on the campus of Phoenix Union High School on March 10, 1962. The Phoenix Forum was organized early in 1962 to provide programming that illuminated various social and political issues to the public.⁴²

King accepted the invitation, and was scheduled to speak about "Realizing this American Dream through Non-Violent Activity." Rev. George Schilling was the chairman of the Forum, and its board included William P. Mahoney, W. A. Robinson, Reverend Paul Alexander, Rabbi I. Schulman, Herbert Ely, Reverend William Bostrom, and Frances Waldman. King later canceled the event. He changed his speaking schedule in order to attend a Southern Christian Leadership Conference reception for outspoken Southern activist Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth. Shuttlesworth had just been given bail upon the writ of habeas corpus issued by Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black. For three months he lay in prison on trumped up charges relating to his civil rights activity in Alabama.⁴³

As in the national Civil Rights Movement, the tension between gradualists and militants posed a challenge to activists in Phoenix. As historian Mary Melcher has indicated, Phoenix "mirrored the nation at large in the sense that the NAACP pursued a

⁴² *Arizona Sun*, March 1, March 8, 1962; Herbert Ely interview,

⁴³ Ibid.

more confrontational approach than did the Urban League.” Eugene Grigsby concurred, stating that although the NAACP and the Urban League worked together to end discrimination, the NAACP was actually the “pusher” and the “firebrand.” Using different language, George Brooks likened the NAACP to “the War Department,” and the Urban League to “the State Department.” The NAACP did the “dirty work,” and the Urban League, according to Melcher, “cleaned up the mess.”

As the NAACP and the Urban League fought against employment discrimination and segregated facilities, the GPCCU, including Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale, worked to establish a city commission, much like the national Civil Rights Commission, to monitor and contest racial discrimination in the city. After having their pleas fall upon deaf ears for almost two years, the Phoenix City Council finally surrendered to the mounting pressure of the Ragsdales and their fellow activists. It created the Phoenix Human Relations Commission on July 2, 1963. One month later on August 28 Martin Luther King, Jr. would give his famous “I have a dream speech in Washington D. C. Two months later, on September 15, the Ku Klux Klan bombed the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, killing four little girls as they attended a church function.

Fran Waldman, a dedicated Jewish activist and original member of the Human Relations Commission in Phoenix, remembered the assembly investigating a number of complaints alleging racial discrimination during its first year in existence. The body had no power to force local businesses or anyone to integrate. The commission learned quickly that they could not rely on pressure or compassion. The Ragsdales and other leading members of the NAACP, Urban League, and GPCCU called for a public accommodation

law banning racial segregation in Phoenician businesses.⁴⁴

This was not the first time activists had tried to implement such civil rights legislation in Phoenix. Their previous efforts had been met with a fire storm of opposition. The local white press supported this resistance. As early as 1956, the *Arizona Republic* argued that "the way to the abolition of discriminating practices is not through law." Phoenix's ruling white administrators fought against and rejected nondiscriminatory measures every time they were proposed. In 1961 an editor for the *Arizona Republic* railed against civil rights legislation. "If there is a state in the union that doesn't need civil rights legislation," he wrote, "it is Arizona."⁴⁵

Dan Smoot, a local television personality, went so far as to accuse outspoken black leaders like Lincoln Ragsdale and George Brooks of being driven by a latent desire to intermarry with white people. He also suggested that the NAACP was a "Red" organization bent on undermining the "American way of Life." During his controversial television program "Dan Smoot Reports," the talk show host said that "Negroes are trying to loose themselves as a race completely. This is the reason why they want integration. They hope by living intimately with the whites that interracial marriages will follow." "Then the Negro race will be completely lost and just light tan people will remain," the

⁴⁴ Melcher, "Black and Whites Together," 207; George Brooks interview, Mary Melcher; Thomasena Grigsby interview; Eugene Grigsby interview; Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier*, 278-299; Stephen F. Lawson, *Running for Freedom: Civil Rights and Black Politics in America Since 1941, Second Edition* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1997), 78; Hine, Hine, and Harrold, *The African American Odyssey*, 527.

⁴⁵ Fran Waldman interview, Human Rights Commission, *First Annual Report, 1963-1964* (City of Phoenix, 1964), 2-6; *Arizona Sun*, May 17, 1946, November 14, 1947, October 10, 1952, April 19, December 7, 1956, January 29, September 1, 1960, April 6, 1961.

anchor pronounced. During his talk show, Smoot also charged the NAACP with being secretly controlled by the Soviet Union. The *Arizona Sun* reported that Smoot, once employed by the FBI to investigate Communist activity in America, was connected to various "White Citizens groups" and very adept at "psychological warfare." The *Arizona Sun* attributed his ability to "plant fear in people's minds" to the days he spent "learning many tricks of the commies in brainwashing" during his "days with the FBI. The *Arizona Sun* posited that Smoot knew "that the average American white is not opposed to living on the same social level with the Negro, but through very strong traditions, they fear the mixing of the races and nationalities whether it be Jews, Greeks, Italians."⁴⁶

There were white Phoenicians business owners who did voluntarily endorse anti-discrimination policies. For instance, local white utility magnate William P. Reilly, persuaded a number of white restaurant owners to make their businesses available to black people. Most businesses were not easily swayed. Some were ideologically in tune with civil rights activists, but many more desegregated their facilities for purely economic reasons. Despite the relatively small black population in Phoenix, many business owners were losing profits as a result of boycotts supported by black and white Phoenicians. In 1959, the Adams Hotel in downtown Phoenix opened its doors to baseball star Willie Mays, and his fellow black teammates, after New York Giants manager Leo Durocher "raised hell." Taking a stand, Durocher threatened to remove his team from spring training in Phoenix, and with it no doubt a great deal of tourist revenue.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ *Arizona Sun*, March 9, 1961.

⁴⁷ Luckingham, *Minorities in Phoenix*, 168; Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale interview.

Mays and his teammates were an exception. Most of the time, Lincoln Ragsdale remembers, the Adams Hotel was “flagrant” in its refusal to accommodate African Americans. The Westward Ho hotel, one of three major hotels in downtown Phoenix at the time, always refused black people comforts. Ragsdale recalled that he “could walk through the lobby if I had a message for someone to come to the counter, but I couldn’t have a seat in the place. I couldn’t go to the bathroom. I couldn’t have a room there.”⁴⁸

Ragsdale, frustrated and angry after being routinely barred from white establishments, and having few entertainment options, decided to add nightclub owner and restaurateur to his expanding endeavors. Bill Dickey, Ragsdale’s brother-in-law, remembered he and Lincoln wanting to provide somewhere for “professional black people” to go to and socialize, have cocktails, and perhaps something to eat. Their previous choices, he recalls, were limited to “maybe the [American] Legion, the Elks Club, or some of those V.F.W. places.” Ragsdale and Dickey’s associates, including the hand full of black doctors, business owners, and teachers in “the Valley,” originally conceived of the Skyroom as a private club. Despite their desire to establish what would have amounted to an elite club of well-to-do black people, the plans evolved along a different trajectory.⁴⁹

Ragsdale wanted to “send out applications asking people to join [their] private club, and be a member,” Dickey recalled. “This would be their place,” Ragsdale announced. Lincoln and his partners decided to “ask for three hundred dollars for a joining fee, and two dollars a month for dues.” Dickey remembered mailing “something

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ *Arizona Sun*, July 12, 1962; William Dickey interview.

like one hundred and fifty applications to all the professional people and so forth in town.” With amusement, Dickey recalled, “we only got two back.” “The brothers and sisters want some place to go,” he mused, “but they don’t want to spend no money.” Dickey believed that the chilly response may have been linked to jealousy or class divisions within the black community. “A lot people said, well [Ragsdale’s] just trying to use us to get a club.” Some black Phoenicians probably believed that as Lincoln’s power and influence in the community expanded, so too did the gap between his concurrent allegiance to civil rights and capitalism. Some may have wondered how he as a leader of a primarily poor people, could open a club that would, by virtue of its monetary requirements, exclude poor and working class black people. Many still believed that he truly relished working for the advancement of the black community, but some began to believe that he did not see himself as being of the black community.⁵⁰

Despite the cold response to his membership application drive and his critics, Lincoln decided to proceed with his plans. Reflecting on what they created, Dickey noted that “we made it beautiful.” “It had beautiful carpet” and “a grand piano.” Ragsdale eventually “eliminated the idea of getting members,” and “said we’ll just open it as a club, a restaurant club,” Dickey recalled. On July 8, 1962, Ragsdale, with the help of Dickey, opened the doors of the Century Skyroom Restaurant and Social Club to the public. The club was located on the second floor of the Ragsdale Valley Life Insurance Building at 1140 East Washington Street. Century Skyroom was soon known for its “fine restaurant and cocktail lounge, beautiful atmosphere, and lunch and evening dining.” The Century Skyroom hosted celebrated entertainers like Duke Ellington, and before long it was

⁵⁰ Ibid.

regarded as "one of the top jazz clubs in the country."⁵¹

The Century Skyroom, Ragsdale's ever expanding business interests, and his political activities, made the Valley Life complex the center of a wide variety of activities. At the center of the hustle and bustle was Ragsdale, who appeared to have endless energy. "He was a dynamo" Dickey proclaimed. The numerous business offices in his complex carried on a wide range of work in several fields of business and the professions. Housed in his building were: Lyles School of Beauty, Ragsdale's Century Skyroom Restaurant and Social Club, the offices of surgeon Dr. Mason C. Reddix, Dr. John Fitt's dental practice, the offices of attorney Karl N. Stewart, Ragsdale's Valley Life Insurance Company, Right Way Printers, and Ragsdale's Home Realty and Insurance Company.⁵²

In addition to the very extensive business community assembled at the Valley Life Building, the site also hosted political gatherings, as well as dignitaries and entertainers. In 1963, the Valley Life building hosted dignitaries from Liberia, Nigeria and Kenya. The African officials were attending a worldwide conference in Phoenix. Ragsdale was usually present when luminaries visited Phoenix. Often, however, Dickey ran the day-to-day operations of Ragsdale's many business interests. Executive Vice-President of the Ragsdale enterprises, Dickey's responsibilities, as he recalled, were "so extensive it would be difficult to describe them." Dickey kept Ragsdale's ship afloat when the businessman and civil rights leader made various trips to other states. Dickey manned the ship, for instance, when Ragsdale flew to Jackson, Mississippi to meet James Meredith, and to

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² *Arizona Sun*, Thursday, January 17, 1963; William Dickey interview.

become a 33rd Degree Mason.⁵³

Although Ragsdale seemed to be extending himself in every possible direction, he and his fellow activists continued to push for a public accommodations law in Phoenix throughout the spring of 1964. Progress was, as one observer put it, “agonizingly slow.” After some political maneuvering by the Human Relations Commission, and some heated debates between the NAACP, represented by Ragsdale and Brooks, and the City Council, supported by Governor Paul Fannin, the city council finally relented on July 16, 1964, enacting a Public Accommodations Law in Phoenix. . The law made it illegal to discriminate in places of public accommodation against any person because of race, creed, national origin, or ancestry.” The Human Relations Commission created a Public Accommodation Committee to supervise the implementation of the law. Phoenix’s new ordinance came on the heels of the national Civil Rights Act passed on July 2, 1964. One year later, Arizona passed a statewide civil rights law which banned discrimination in housing, employment, voting, and public accommodations. Phoenix, like many states elsewhere in the nation, made critical advancements in civil rights despite the relatively small number of black people in the city.⁵⁴

In addition to fighting for the desegregation of places of public accommodation, Lincoln Ragsdale, decided to confront the absence of minorities in city government. As Mary Melcher indicates, “prior to the mid-1960s, the Charter Government Committee (CGC) held a tight grip on Phoenix city elections.” The CGC was formed in 1949 and was supported by white Phoenician power brokers like Eugene Pulliam, and businessman

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Fran Waldman interview; Harris, *The First 100 Years*, 95-115.

and would-be political legend Barry Goldwater. The CGC and their deep pockets and extensive networks, continually persuaded Phoenicians to support its slate in selecting candidates for major and city council through the 1950s. Ragsdale criticized the CGC, arguing that it catered to middle-class and wealthy whites. The fact that Ragsdale had recently entertained the idea of creating a supper club that would cater specifically to professional black people, made this criticism ironic. Unlike the CGC, however, Ragsdale in his role as activist, did address the needs of poor black people. He may not have been inclined to socialize with poor African Americans, but unlike most members of the CGC, he was willing to speak out and act in their defense. Ragsdale's criticism of the CGC was not simple speculation. Practically all CGC candidates were white, conservative, Republican men, who lived in the affluent areas of North Phoenix.⁵⁵

In 1963 Lincoln Ragsdale and other members of the GPCCU formed the progressive, community based Action Citizens Committee (ACT) to challenge the CGC. The Act campaign operated independently of the GPCCU, and offered a roster of candidates for city council that included Ragsdale, business leaders Robert L. Aden, Ed Korrick and Manuel Pena, U. S. Congressman from Arizona Richard F. Harless, and teachers Madelene Van Arsdell and Charles J. Farrell. The slate ran on a platform that called attention to crime, political favoritism and corruption, the city's poor infrastructure, discrimination, and political elitism. Herbert Ely, the campaigns manager and legal advisor, remembers the Act Committee "taking on the City of Phoenix against hostile

⁵⁵ Action Citizens Committee Paid Political Advertisement, "ACT Slate Takes Lead in Election Campaign," (Phoenix: Actions Citizens Committee, 1963); Luckingham, *Phoenix*, 150-53; Herbert Ely interview; Lincoln and Eleanor interview; Melcher, "Blacks and Whites Together," 209.

forces.” The “business community and the [*Arizona Republic*] newspaper were absolutely opposed to the notion of taking on the then establishment, which included the progeny of Barry Goldwater.”⁵⁶

“Our leading candidate was Lincoln Ragsdale,” Ely maintained. “He wasn’t the leading vote getter, and leading is probably poor nomenclature, but [he was] the most significant candidate.” Ely and activist Fran Waldman believed Lincoln was instrumental because of the long term implications of his candidacy. Lincoln called attention to the fact that minorities were not represented on City Council. As one eyewitness noted, “the only areas being developed are the ones where councilmen are interested [in]. Look south of the [Railroad] tracks. Nothing is being done there.” Black Phoenicians and residents of South Phoenix were not represented on the City Council. Ragsdale’s bid for a City Council seat was an attempt to change that. “We didn’t win,” Waldman acknowledged, “but we did shake up city hall!” “We rallied this community like it had never been rallied before,” Ragsdale maintained. He remembered registering “more African Americans and Mexican Americans [to vote] than ever before.” The Act Campaign received forty-nine percent of the vote, and “changed the city forever” Ely boasted.

In 1965, during the following election year, the CGC selected African American teacher, Morrison Warren, as a candidate on its slate. Warren integrated the CGC and broke the stranglehold affluent white men had on the council. Warren won a seat on the Phoenix City Council that year, and was elected to a second term in 1967. Warren lost his seat in 1969, but Calvin Goode, a young black political force, was elected to the council as

⁵⁶ *Arizona Republic*, February 28, 1993; Luckingham, *Phoenix*, 179; Melcher, “Blacks and Whites Together,” 209; Herbert Ely interview.

a CGC candidate. Goode would be elected to his seat for over two decades.⁵⁷

While Ragsdale made a historic run for City Counsel to unseat the city's ruling white political establishment, he supported George Brooks' effort to make sure black Phoenicians had full access to the ballot. During the early 1960s some white Phoenicians deliberately tried to prevent African Americans from voting. Black activist Madge Copeland argued that members of the Young Republicans conspired to hinder black Phoenicians ability to vote by terrorizing them in front of the polls. George Brooks recalled having to confront William Rehnquist, future United States Supreme Court justice, about his efforts to disenfranchise black voters. As black Phoenicians arrived at polling places to cast their votes, Rehnquist would sometimes appear and administer a literacy test to them. The jurist would force African Americans to read passages from the U. S. Constitution. If they were unable or unwilling to do so to his satisfaction, Rehnquist would not permit them the cast their ballot.⁵⁸

Brooks who served as an election officer at Julian School where ballots were being cast, confronted the lawyer within sight of myriad witnesses. Brooks "told him that he was interfering with the people's right of franchise, and I was going to call the sheriff and have him arrested." Rehnquist reluctantly left without incident. This episode reminded Brooks and other leaders that there was still much work to be done in the area of civil rights in Phoenix. Despite advances, black Phoenicians continued to encounter adversity born of racism and discrimination. Economic and political gains were made, but were

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ George Brooks interview; George Brooks interview, Mary Melcher; Madge Copeland interview; Luckingham, *Minorities in Phoenix*, 168.

often mitigated by persistent inequality and problems in housing, employment, education, and healthcare. While activists worked hard to attain substantive victories, and Lincoln Ragsdale squared off as the “bad cop” in negotiations with white leaders, advancement was for the most part sluggish.⁵⁹

A younger, more radical black Phoenician population, began to call for more aggressive protests seeking an end to discrimination. These voices sought better opportunities and an end to gradualism. They wanted change immediately. In an effort to keep peaceful protest the priority, Ragsdale extended a second invitation to Martin Luther King, Jr. to speak to the issue of racism and peaceful protest in Phoenix. King accepting the invitation from Phoenix’s NAACP branch, visited the Valley on June 3, 1964. He extolled the virtues of non-violent action before a crowd of 450 Kiwanis members, and 3,000 at Goodwin Auditorium on the campus of Arizona State University. During the fleeting moments of his isolated stop, King spoke of brotherhood, asking his audience to continue to struggle for justice and equality so America could “get rid of the last vestiges of segregation.” “You throw us in jail...bomb our homes...threaten our little children,” King cried out, “and as difficult as it is, we will still love you. This is the meaning of non-violent action.”⁶⁰

Ragsdale escorted King to his home following the leader’s speech. Eleanor recalled that encounter as an event which changed her life. Lincoln and Eleanor remembered King as a “warm, dedicated man” who radiated distinction. “I brought a

⁵⁹ George Brooks interview; George Brooks interview, Mary Melcher; Luckingham, *Minorities in Phoenix*, 169; Lincoln Ragsdale interview; Ragsdale testimony.

⁶⁰ *Arizona Republic*, June 4, 1964.

great deal of anger and frustration to the Civil Rights Movement,” Eleanor admitted. She could not accept “the injustice of the laws that would keep black people in a spiral of perpetual frustration and denigration, and in a system that taught us we weren’t worth anything. But it was he [King] who really taught us the strength to love despite everything.” King’s visit to the “Valley” had a powerful impact on Lincoln as well. After King’s visit to Phoenix, Emily Ragsdale remembers that her father would often listen to “tapes of Martin Luther King’s speeches over and over again. I realize now, as I’ve gotten older, that he was building his spirit up; giving himself that spiritual lift that he needed.”⁶¹

Not long after King made his speech in Phoenix, *de jure* segregation was illegal in the city. In 1965, the Arizona legislature “followed the lead” of the U. S. Congress and passed a comprehensive Civil Rights Act that outlawed discrimination in housing, voting, employment, and public accommodations. The national Civil Rights Act was passed on July 2, 1964. These legal measures, however, did not end racial inequality or usher in true socio-economic integration. Black Phoenixians did enjoy some major gains secured by activist organizations and their leaders. Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale were major players in winning several important battles against white supremacy and discrimination in Phoenix. Lincoln often led the way in the battle to destroy segregation in employment and places of public accommodation. His efforts were often met with contempt and hostility. In order to overcome this massive resistance, Ragsdale was compelled to collaborate with other civil rights activists to devise viable strategies to combat discrimination. As Mary Melcher writes, “by working together, this small band of activists, black, white, male,

⁶¹ Baker, “The Man who Refused to be Invisible,” 99; Emily Ragsdale interview.

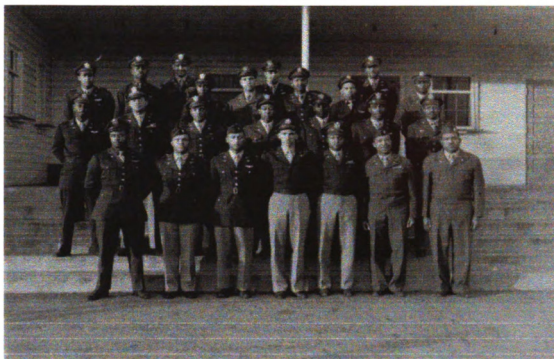
female, broke down the barriers of racial discrimination and profoundly changed the political and social fabric of Phoenix.” When racial injustice was encoded in law, and practiced by the majority of the people, the Ragsdales and their partners managed to change the law and transform the ways in which black Phoenixians and the civil rights were treated. Racism and discrimination survived to be sure, but the Ragsdale’s and their fellow insurgents dealt them a serious blow.



Standing from left to right, the Ragsdale men of Oklahoma: Adair Ragsdale and Fred Ragsdale, Seated From left to right: Ross Ragsdale, Williams Ragsdale, Sr., and Gus Ragsdale
 Courtesy of Lincoln J. Ragsdale, Jr.



The Dickey family, 1928. From left to right: Estelle Ashley Dickey, William Dickey, Sr., Eleanor Dickey Ragsdale (age two), Gwendolyn Dickey, Fannie Johnson Dickey, William "Bill" Dickey, Jr., Earl Dickey
 Courtesy of Lincoln J. Ragsdale, Jr.



Standing in the front row, third from the right, Lincoln Johnson Ragsdale, Sr. is photographed with his fellow cadets in Tuskegee, Alabama in 1945.

Courtesy of Lincoln J. Ragsdale, Jr.



Standing at center, Lincoln Ragsdale is pictured with his fellow pilots at Tuskegee Airfield, Tuskegee, Alabama, 1945.

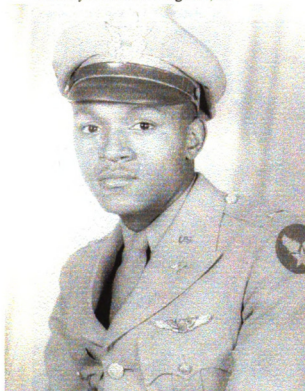
Courtesy of Lincoln J. Ragsdale, Jr.



Black athletes, entertainers, and politicians often took time out to visit and support black military personnel. Celebrated boxing heavyweight champion Joe Louis visited Tuskegee, Alabama in 1945. He signed autographs for Lincoln Ragsdale (far left) and his fellow servicemen. Courtesy of Lincoln J. Ragsdale, Jr.



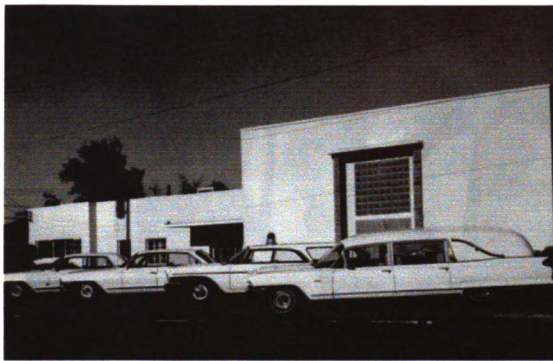
*Lincoln Ragsdale taking time out to pose with his father Hartwell Ragsdale, Sr.
Courtesy of Lincoln J. Ragsdale, Jr.*



*Lincoln Ragsdale photographed in his military uniform, 1945.
Courtesy of Lincoln J. Ragsdale, Jr.*



*Lincoln takes time out to pose for a photograph in his bomber jacket and radio head gear.
Courtesy of Lincoln J. Ragsdale, Jr.*



Established in 1948, the Ragsdale's Chapel in the Valley, later renamed the Universal Memorial Center, quickly became a fixture in the Phoenician community.
 Courtesy of Lincoln J. Ragsdale, Jr.



Christmas at the Ragsdale home at 1606 West Thomas Road in Phoenix, 1959 From left to right: Lincoln J. Ragsdale, Jr., Lincoln J. Ragsdale, Sr., Emily Yvonne Ragsdale, Eleanor Dickey Ragsdale, Gwendolyn Onlia Ragsdale, and Elizabeth Estelle Ragsdale.
 Courtesy of Lincoln J. Ragsdale, Jr.



Photographed around 1953 (from left to right) are Lincoln Ragsdale, John Van Landingham, J. D. Holmes, Arizona Attorney General Wade Church, and attorney Hazel B. Daniels. Courtesy of Lincoln J. Ragsdale, Jr.



*Standing to the far left, Lincoln Ragsdale raises his right hand to encourage **and direct** activists who marched in opposition to racial discrimination in places of public accommodation. This photograph was taken around 1962. Courtesy of Lincoln J. Ragsdale, Jr.*



Lifting a sign that reads "Help Phoenix to Help Negro and Mexican Americans Educate their Children," Lincoln Ragsdale, Jr. joins his father in a protest against racial discrimination.

Courtesy of Lincoln J. Ragsdale, Jr.



Dr. George Benjamin Brooks addressing activists and the media at a the Arizona State Capitol Building in 1962. Protesters were calling for a public accommodations bill and civil rights legislation in Arizona.

Courtesy of Lincoln J. Ragsdale, Jr.





Clutching her purse, this teenage girl is carried away to jail by Phoenix police officers. The activist was participating in a peaceful protest at the Arizona State Capitol Building in 1962. Courtesy of Lincoln J. Ragsdale, Jr.



Phoenix police officers show a mixture of amusement, apathy, and frustration, as they forcibly remove a peaceful "sit-in" demonstrator from the rotunda of Arizona's State Capitol Building in the spring of 1962. The protesters were calling for a public accommodations bill in Phoenix. Courtesy of Lincoln J. Ragsdale, Jr.



From left to right: civil rights activists Thomasena Grigsby, Eugene Grigsby, Sandra Wilks, and Richard Wilks.

Courtesy of Lincoln J. Ragsdale, Jr.



The Citizens Action Committee ("Act") Phoenix City Council Slate, 1963. Standing for left to right: Manuel Pena, Ed Korrnick, and Robert L. Aden. Seated from left to right: Charles J. Farrell, Madelene Van Arsdell, and Lincoln Ragsdale.

Courtesy of Lincoln J. Ragsdale, Jr.



The "Act" slate delivers campaign signature to city officials on October 22, 1963. From left to right: Robert Aden, Lincoln Ragsdale, Ed Korrick, Manuel Pena, Madelene Van Arsdell, Richard Harless.
 Courtesy of Lincoln J. Ragsdale, Jr.



Standing right of center, Lincoln Ragsdale poses with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in Phoenix. King visited the "Valley" on June 3, 1964.
 Courtesy of Lincoln J. Ragsdale, Jr.



Eleanor and Lincoln Ragsdale photographed with renown conservative politician, and 1964 Presidential Nominee, Barry Goldwater (center).

Courtesy of Lincoln J. Ragsdale, Jr.



Lincoln Ragsdale is presented with the Arizona State University Outstanding Alumni Award.

Courtesy of Lincoln J. Ragsdale, Jr.



A proud Lincoln Ragsdale poses for a photograph in his study at the Ragsdale estate in the Phoenician suburb of Clearwater Hills.
 Courtesy of Lincoln J. Ragsdale, Jr.



Standing in front of a photograph of their mentor, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Lincoln Ragsdale and Reverend Jesse Jackson, Sr. converse during one of Jackson's visits to Phoenix.
 Courtesy of Lincoln J. Ragsdale, Jr.





*Lincoln Ragsdale photographed during the mid-1980s.
Courtesy of Lincoln J. Ragsdale, Jr.*



*Friends and veteran leaders of the Civil Rights Movement, Lincoln J. Ragsdale, Sr. and George B. Brooks, fought for civil rights for nearly five decades. They are pictured above in front of the Arizona State Capitol Building where they fought against legalized segregation and discrimination in Arizona.
Courtesy of Lincoln J. Ragsdale, Jr.*



Distinguished leaders Eleanor and Lincoln Ragsdale photographed in the early 1990s.
Courtesy of Lincoln J. Ragsdale, Jr.

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Photographed in 2000, Emily Ragsdale and Lincoln Johnson Ragsdale, Jr., (seated from left to right) represent the fourth generation of Ragsdales to participate in the funeral home industry. They continue to lead their family's business after nearly sixty years of service in Phoenix. For over one hundred and ten years, the Ragsdales have used their success in business to promote African American advancement and interracial unity. Standing from left to right are Universal staff members Joe Ramirez, JoAnn Miguel, Kevin Weaver, Melissa Meraz, and Manuel Villelas.

Courtesy of Universal Memorial Center

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CHAPTER 5: THE QUICKENING: REDIRECTION, MILITANCY AND THE REFORMATION OF THE BLACK FREEDOM STRUGGLE, 1964-1979.

“**I** am for violence if non-violence means we continue postponing a solution to the American black man’s problem-just to *avoid* violence. If it must take violence to get the black man his human rights in this country, I’m *for* violence exactly as you know the Irish, the Poles, or Jews would be if they were flagrantly discriminated against. I am just as they would be in that case, and they would be for violence-no matter what the consequence, no matter who was hurt by the violence.”¹

-*Malcolm X (El Hajj Malik El Shabazz)*

“**R**attlesnakes don’t commit suicide. Ball teams don’t strike themselves out.

You gotta put em out!”²

-*Fred Shuttlesworth*

The years between 1964 and 1979 introduced America to a new era in the black liberation struggle. Despite the enactment of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act, proponents of civil rights realized that major obstacles remained. Despite the 1966 presidential victory of the progressive Lyndon Johnson over conservative senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona, the cause of civil rights and racial equality took a serious blow. In the Southwest, Phoenician activists such as Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale, were forced to deal with new legal and extralegal barriers that many white people erected. Many activists reasoned that these obstructions required new, more militant organizations and strategies to overcome them. The new groups and methods which emerged, unlike their predecessors, did not focus solely on racial discrimination.

The new black activism put forth a profound critique of the interconnectedness of white supremacy, capitalism, and racism. By 1964, activist organizations such as the

¹ Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1964), 401-402.

² Fred Shuttlesworth quoted in Judith Vecchione, “Eyes on the Prize, Vol. I: Awakenings, 1954-1956,” Narrated by Julian Bond (Boston: Blackside, Inc. 1987).

Phoenician chapters of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) protested the persistence of poverty and discrimination in South Phoenix. CORE was founded in 1942 by a group of interracial passivists in Chicago. Leaders James Farmer and Bayard Rustin played key roles in developing the organization. CORE was decentralized and very democratic, unlike the NAACP. The fluidity of CORE appealed to young activists in Phoenix who had grown tired of the more conservative NAACP.³

By 1966 many white Americans who opposed recent civil rights legislation, spearheaded campaigns that protested or revoked such measures in states across the country. In the South, the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), an alliance of workers in Mississippi, were bullied and beaten as they promoted non-violence and integration in the workplace. On the West coast, Californians adopted an amendment to their state constitution that revoked all legislation that banned discrimination in the sale or rental of housing, and prohibited such legislation from ever being legalized in the future. The measure was later struck down by the U. S. Supreme Court. Nevertheless, its initial passing revealed the extent to which many white people opposed integration and civil rights. It also reflected the fact that such resistance was not simply a Southern phenomenon. As whites demonstrated their objection to the Civil Rights Movement through systematic subversion and violence, young African Americans called for more radical ways of seeking black liberation.⁴

Leaders like Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture) of SNCC, and Malcolm X of the Nation of Islam, renounced the gradualism of the Southern Christian Leadership

³ Melcher, "Black and Whites Together," 211.

⁴ Hine, Hine, and Harold, *The African American Odyssey*, 532.

Conference (SCLC), and Martin Luther King's unyielding support of interracial cooperation and non-violence. As the tension between traditional organizations like the SCLC, and younger more radical groups like SNCC intensified, young activists further distanced themselves from conventional leadership. After the failed Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party effort of 1964, Carmichael, for example, popularized the maxim "Black Power," and founded the Mississippi Lowndes County Freedom Organization (LCFO) in 1965. This independent black political party was the first organization in the Civil Rights Movement to draw upon the image of the black panther as a symbol of black independence and potency. Drawing upon the imagery and symbolism of the LCFO, Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale formed the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (BPP) in Oakland, California, in October, 1966. The Black Panther Party, fused black nationalism and Marxist-Leninist philosophy in an effort to supplant capitalism, and eradicate racism and police brutality.⁵

SNCC and the BPP stepped into a vacuum in civil rights leadership. They appeared to offer an alternative to the traditional "work-within-the-system" approach that had been employed by groups like the NAACP. The "race problem," many activist now argued, could not be answered merely through legislation or good will, but through a

⁵ See Carmichael, Stokely, and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Vintage, 1967); Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); Steve Clark, (ed.), *The Final Speeches of Malcolm X: February 1965* (New York: Pathfinder, 1992); William L. Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1975* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Theodore Cross, *The Black Power Imperative: Racial Inequality and the Politics of Nonviolence* (New York: Faulkner Books, 1984); Malcom X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X: As Told to Alex Haley* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1964); Philip S. Foner (ed.), *The Black Panther Speaks* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1970); Robert L. Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1990).

fundamental restructuring of America's socio-economic system. These groups were vocal and often uncompromising in their demands for equality.⁶

The radicalism of leaders like Carmichael and X, and revolutionary organizations like the Black Panther Party, were emblematic of the frustration and rage which pervaded black communities. In 1965, Darlene Clark Hine, William C. Hine, and Stanley Harrold write, "29.1 percent of black households, compared to only 7.8 percent of white households, lived below the poverty line. Almost 50 percent of non-white families lived in substandard housing compared to 18 percent of white families. Despite a drop in the number of Americans living in poverty from 38.0 million in 1959 to 32.7 million in 1965, the percentage of poor black people increased from 27.5 percent to 31 percent." Clearly recent civil rights legislation did little if anything to address this inequality. U.S. jobs moved to the suburbs and became more technologically driven, and most middle-class whites followed, while predominantly black inner-city residents could not qualify for, or travel to, what amounted to remote, inaccessible jobs. Black communities descended further into poverty. School dropout rates exploded, crime and drug abuse became epidemic, and family structures were undermined. Sociologists Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton labeled this labyrinth of white supremacy, racial discrimination,

⁶ Paul K. Conkin, *Big Daddy from the Pedernales: Lyndon Baines Johnson* (Boston: Twayne, 1986), 208-242; Tidall and Shi, *America*, 1173-1186; Lawson and Payne, *Debating the Civil Rights Movement, 1945-1968*, 34-35; Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*, 86-113; Lawson, *Running for Freedom*, 113-127; Branch, *Pillar of Fire*, 571-613. Also see Robert Dalleck, *Flawed Giant: Lyndon B. Johnson and His Times, 1961-1973* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Peter Iverson, *Barry Goldwater: Native Arizonan* (Norman: University of Arizona Press, 1998).

segregation, and socio-economic inequality, “American Apartheid.”⁷

Many white people and pre-dominantly white institutions were unwilling to acknowledge and respond to the problems of black people, and most were entirely unaware of the intensity of black exasperation. This caldron of inequality, apathy and anger, propelled America into one of the most violent periods in its history. Staggered by the assassination of Malcolm X on February 14, 1965, and the ongoing devastation in their communities, inner-cities exploded into rebellion every summer between 1965 and 1969. Watts, California was the first city to experience some of the worst urban racial violence since World War II. African Americans in the Watts area, reeling from police brutality, high unemployment, crime, drug use, and poor health care facilities, took to the streets in revolt on August 11, 1965. During the Watt’s riot, Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale encouraged young black Phoenicians to channel their frustrations into constructive action. They did not want Phoenix to explode in the same way that Watts had. “During the riot,” Emily Ragsdale recalls, “my brothers and sisters were at the home on Thomas Road, and my parents were out playing their part,” trying to “making a difference.”⁸

Despite the pleas of the Ragsdales, frustrated black Phoenicians, like their counterparts in Watts and throughout the rest of the nation, sometimes responded to white supremacy and their poor socio-economic status violently. They occasionally rejected gradualism, and what they perceived to be the obsequious maneuvering of veteran civil

⁷ Hine, Hine, and Harold, *The African American Odyssey*, 536; Douglas S. Massey and Nancy S. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 1-16.

⁸ Jerry Cohen and William S. Murphy, *Burn Baby, Burn! The Los Angeles Race Riot, August 1965* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1966), 1-10; Emily Ragsdale interview.

rights leaders like Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale. At the behest of the Ragsdales, Martin Luther King pleaded for Phoenician activists to embrace non-violence in 1965. King's appeals were a distant memory in the minds of young activists by 1966. Persistent racial antagonisms, economic repression, political marginalization, and allegations of police brutality led to more disorder and destruction in the city. On July 25, 1967, a violent race riot erupted in the streets of Phoenix. Fire bombs were hurled in the air and guns were fired at a police wagon filled with officers on East Van Buren. At the Sidney P. Osborne Project, a public housing facility located between Seventeenth and Eighteenth Streets from Van Buren to Washington, a crowd of angry, dispossessed black people, including members of CORE, SNCC, and the Black Panthers, gathered to express their collective displeasure in a haze of cathartic rage.⁹

The inflamed group participated in "stoning, gunfire, and disorder in the streets." On the evening of July 26, the rioting exploded again. As a result Mayor Milton Graham imposed a curfew and ordered police to enforce it. Nevertheless, rioters, whom George Brooks referred to as radical noisemakers from CORE, proceeded to burn down a house belonging to a Mrs. Davis. Brooks tried his best to calm the rioters. He stood at a street corner near the Osborn Project and listened to their grievances. "We're not going to do anything foolish in this town," he admonished, "and if you do it, you're going to have to come by me." Despite Brooks' effort to prevail upon the respect younger activist may have had for the veteran leader, rioters continued to pillage and plunder. About 280 people, including 38 "juveniles," were arrested and taken into custody. Over 376 Phoenix

⁹ *Arizona Republic*, September 27, October 27, 1965, July 18, 26, 31, 1967, August 24, 1969, George Brooks interview, Mary Melcher.

police officers were on duty at various times in the battle zone, while their stations elsewhere in the “Valley” were taken over by 190 highway patrol officers, 148 sheriff’s deputies, and 64 firefighters. Despite isolated skirmishes around the city over the next few days, the curfew was retracted on July 30. Shortly after the riot, Brooks was able to convince a number of politically active young people to join him in a meeting with Mayor Graham to demand more aid for minority communities.¹⁰

In a reactionary response to the preceding events, Mayor Graham, choosing to refer to the violence as a “serious civil disobedience” rather than a riot, trumpeted Phoenix’s intention to provide more job training and jobs for minority groups. In a last ditch effort to quell allegations of police brutality in Phoenix, he pledged a city wide campaign to make “community relations” a more vital function of the police force. Despite these and other promises made to minorities, they continued to encounter a disproportionate amount of socio-economic adversity in their lives. Some observers have suggested that the money Graham pledged to improve “community relations,” was actually deployed to fight crime rather than poverty. Economic and political gains were made, but they continued to be offset by persistent inequality and problems in housing, employment, education, and healthcare.¹¹

CORE’s participation in the riot, and their protests, pushed Mayor Milton Graham to create Leadership and Education for Advancement of Phoenix (LEAP). LEAP functioned as a liaison between Phoenix government and federal programs created to improve conditions in urban areas. In 1966 LEAP was transformed into a city department

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

that administered federal monies generated by President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty. These government subsidized programs offered educational and employment opportunities for a limited number of minorities. The aid, activists like Lincoln Ragsdale believed, was insufficient and arrived too slowly. They were displeased with limited job training programs and Phoenix's dismal record of employing minorities. Activists argued that the War on Poverty in the city was "a day late and a dollar short." Indeed, despite the fact that the U. S. government had funneled \$15 million into South Phoenix, minorities saw little improvement in their overall condition.¹²

A year after LEAP was created, one journalist noted that its "target area is more impoverished than in 1965." "People are still not working because they lack the ability to compete for work in the labor market," the reporter argued. Another observer maintained that "the fact is that agency workers have been foundering in a sea of uncoordinated, limited programs that lead nowhere. All efforts have had a Band Aid effect." The vast majority of African and Mexican American Phoenicians were underemployed, poor, and lived in substandard housing in squalid living conditions. Historian Bradford Luckingham noted that "the 21.2-square mile LEAP target area contained most of the blacks and Hispanics in the city, and within its boundaries could be found some of the worst slums west of the Mississippi River. Thirty percent of those residing in South Phoenix earned less than \$3,000 a year."¹³

White and black Phoenicians spoke out against the violence in Phoenician streets.

¹² *Arizona Republic*, October 27, 1965, July 18, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 1967; City of Phoenix, *Chronological History of LEAP* (Phoenix: City of Phoenix, 1967), 1-16; Luckingham, *Phoenix*, 213-214.

¹³ *Ibid.*

Older African Americans in the city disapproved of the actions of young insurgents. One observer argued that “Eighty percent of all the kids who were making all the noise wouldn’t take a job if you offered it to them, or if they did, they wouldn’t work. They want to get paid, that’s all.” Some, however, attributed the riot to similar rebellions in Los Angeles, and other major cities such as Newark, and Detroit. Black Phoenicians, it was argued, were simply mimicking the behavior of black people in other cities. African Americans in Phoenix were not merely imitating the behavior of African Americans in other cities, however, they were lashing out against white supremacy, poverty, and police brutality in their own communities.¹⁴

Having seen civil rights laws circumvented and flagrantly ignored, young members of the NAACP, CORE, and SNCC staged a series of protests between 1964 and 1966 in Phoenix. Usually about one third of the protestors, as was sometimes the case in South, were college students, teenagers, and often school children. These young protestors usually participated with the reluctant approval of their parents and school administrators. Many of these young demonstrators ignored the teaching of their elders and sometimes acted upon their own activist agenda. For example, when confronted by Phoenician authorities, or others who attempted to mute the fervent calls for immediate redress for the socio-economic problems, teenage activist often broke ranks and lashed out violently against both black and white authorities. On one occasion, young activists responded to

¹⁴ *Arizona Republic*, September 27, October 27, 1965, July 18, 26, 31, 1967, August 24, 1969. Also see Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Robert H. Connery (ed.), *Urban Riots: Violence and Social Change* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1969); James N. Upton, *Urban Riots in the Twentieth Century: A Social History* (New York: Wyndham Press, 1989).

white racial slurs and the forbearance of their older leaders, by abandoning non-violence and engaging those who taunted them in a curb-side brawl. A reporter for the *Phoenix Evening Telegram* newspaper wrote that he “saw the look of shame and disgust on the faces of the older demonstrators, the NAACP faction, for the most part, as young CORE demonstrators turned what started out as an orderly protest, into a teenage rumble.”¹⁵

The name CORE conjured negative images in the minds of most white Phoenicians, and many older black activists as well. “The name CORE had developed a negative connotation among local authorities, based on its aggressive tactics on the national scene,” journalist Richard Harris has argued. Some white Arizona legislators went so far as to suggest that the “Black Muslims” were behind the protests.

Despite their frustration with militant local activists, local leaders like Lincoln Ragsdale sought to exploit white apprehension about “radical” groups like the Nation of Islam, and the gulf between traditional and militant black leaders and organizations. Ragsdale and Reverend Kermit Long, a local black Methodist minister, stated publically that legislators must decide with which group they preferred to deal with, “the NAACP, CORE, or the Black Muslims.” Many whites did not care who was organizing the effort to bring civil rights and equality to Phoenix. White people who opposed black advancement in the manner of socio-economic integration targeted all civil rights activists for intimidation and terrorist acts. These assaults prompted leaders like Lincoln Ragsdale to reevaluate the ways in which they would work toward equality and black liberation.¹⁶

For Ragsdale, reconsidering his role in the Civil Rights Movement did not simply

¹⁵ *Evening Telegram*, March 31, 1964.

¹⁶ *Arizona Republic*, May 20, 1964; Harris, *The First 100 Years*, 100.

involve choosing between traditional or militant strategies. Indeed, unlike minister George B. Brooks, attorney Hazel B. Daniels, and educator W. A. Robinson, Ragsdale was a business leader who risked the financial stability of his enterprises to promote civil rights. In fact, the more he pushed the civil rights envelope, the more his business interests suffered. Generally speaking, by the late 1960s, white Phoenicians who opposed his activist leadership stepped-up their efforts to intimidate him and undermine his success in business. Ragsdale had become the object of frequent acts of physical intimidation, death threats, and ongoing attempts to destroy his funeral home business. Rumors were again circulating that a confederation of local white Phoenicians had produced a short list of activists in Phoenix that were being targeted for assassination. Lincoln Ragsdale's name, argues Emily Ragsdale, was at the top of the list. The rumors came as no surprise to the Ragsdale family. "He was in danger," Emily Ragsdale maintains, "but that was just the part he played. We didn't dwell on that. We didn't dwell on the fact that he may not come home one night." Lincoln Ragsdale's family may have been able to ignore the danger he was in, but by 1966 the attacks on his business and the threats against his life caused him to lose much of his enthusiasm for leading Phoenix's Civil Rights Movement.¹⁷

As early as 1964, Ragsdale had reached the crossroads of his activist career. "I remember the hour. I remember the day," he recalled. While leading a protest against racial discrimination at Arizona's State Capitol Building on May 20, 1964, Ragsdale received an "emergency call" while "reading a long list of grievances" to reporters and law makers. A white creditor who opposed his activism and progressive politics phoned him

¹⁷ *Arizona Republic*, February 28, 1993; Emily Ragsdale, interview conducted by NewsChannel3, KTVK., February 16, 1995. In "A Tribute to Lincoln Ragsdale," (Phoenix: KTVK NewsChannel3, February 16, 1995).

with a threat. The lender warned Ragsdale that he was prepared to take away three automobiles he used for his mortuary because he was “three payments late.” “I was humiliated,” Ragsdale remembered. “I couldn’t talk.” He walked back to the demonstration, but he returned a changed man. It became clear to him during what was a long walk to the rally, that despite all of the victories he had help secure in recent years, most black Phoenicians still lived in poverty, and that black people with some means were largely dependent on white institutions for their livelihood. Financial independence, he now believed, was perhaps the most important challenge which faced African Americans.

As he participated in the protest that day, Ragsdale “stood back and listened” to demonstrators sing ‘We Shall Overcome.’ Despite desegregating Phoenix’s neighborhoods, schools, sectors of its job market, and places of public accommodation, what black people needed to overcome, he mused, was poverty. The masses of black Phoenicians, he argued, were “broke.” Ragsdale’s frustration and “humiliation” brought him to tears that afternoon. “How can you go into places to eat or sleep,” he questioned, “when you don’t have any money?”¹⁸

Ragsdale paid the creditor that threatened to confiscate his vehicles, but his mortuary was in shambles from neglect. His civil rights work had not allowed him to take care of his business properly. He lost both black and white customers as a result. White Phoenicians always represented a fraction of his mortuary’s clientele, but while he was at the acme of his civil rights career between 1953 and 1965, many that had done business with him stopped. Many of his black customers, who disliked the virtual monopoly he

¹⁸ *Arizona Republic*, February 28, 1993, May 20, 1864; Harris, *The First 100 Years*, 101-102; *Arizona Republic*, Sunday, June 11, 1995.

held over black burial in the city, and his immodest leadership style, also began to frequent his business less often. It is also reasonable to suspect that many black and white patrons also avoided his services for fear of white retaliation. To get a clearer picture of his companies status, Ragsdale had another Phoenician businessperson do a feasibility study of his mortuary. "He gave me three choices," Ragsdale said: "Leave town and start fresh; stay and go broke; or change the name of his company, take down Martin Luther King's picture, and cease agitation. "Which do you think I did?" asked Ragsdale, "I did the third one."¹⁹

Ragsdale's decision to drastically reduce his civil rights activity ushered in a whole new era in his life and in the Phoenician Civil Rights Movement. For the next two decades, Ragsdale worked largely behind the scenes for African American advancement and socio-economic equality. He continued to support progressive causes and the NAACP financially, while helping black Phoenicians and African Americans throughout the country by giving generous endowments to historically black colleges and universities. Ragsdale also devoted a great deal of time assisting aspiring black entrepreneurs in the city. While the Civil Rights Movement became more radicalized and began to lose momentum, Ragsdale turned most of his attentions to rebuilding his business. Content to allow younger, more militant leaders with less to lose assume leadership positions in Phoenix, Ragsdale quickly went from outspoken protest leader, to elder statesman and advisor to younger activists and would-be business leaders.²⁰

Meanwhile, Ragsdale set out to remodel and reorganize his mortuary. Due to his

¹⁹ *Arizona Republic*, February 28, 1993.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

poor feasibility study, however, he was not able to receive the necessary loan to finance his renovations. The bank reasoned that the percentage of black people in Phoenix was not high enough to constitute a market that would support the financial stability and expansion of his mortuary. The black population in Phoenix was approximately three percent, and banks indicated that he would not be able to pay them back on the ratio of seven black people dying per thousand annually. Moreover, there was another black owned funeral home in the city, so the market he targeted was split in two. Applying Martin Luther King's integrationist philosophy to his business, Ragsdale decided to integrate his funeral home. In 1964 he elected to change the name of the mortuary to Universal Memorial Center, and rethink the way he approached his business.²¹

In addition to renaming the mortuary, Ragsdale decided to integrate his staff. He hired European American, Mexican American, and African American workers. Considering the reality of race relations in the city at the time, his methodology was pragmatic and effective. He directed white people to service potential white customers, Mexican Americans to work with Mexican American patrons, and black people to assist black clients. Ragsdale initiated this practice, he maintained, because "you can have an ignorant, moron white person sitting at a front desk and [white] people would come in and talk to them, but if you had a well dressed, educated black man [at a front desk], people would walk in the door and just turn around and walk away." The only thing Ragsdale had to do, he reasoned, was "have someone who was white there" to work with clients, and make them feel comfortable. When he surrounded himself with a diverse workforce,

²¹ Lincoln Ragsdale, Jr. interview; Universal Memorial Center, *Ragsdale Family History*, 2.

he argued, he could manufacture a business environment that would be tolerable for white, Mexican American, and black Phoenicians. By 1967, the Ragsdale's mortuary, therefore, had gone from a funeral home that exploited racial prejudice and segregation, to one that exploited racial prejudice and integration. The Universal Memorial Center became one of the first integrated funeral homes in the U. S. By 1967, there were very few black owned funeral homes that buried black, white, and Hispanic Americans.²²

As Ragsdale reorganized his mortuary and assumed a lower profile in the Civil Rights Movement, he stepped up his support of less politicized organizations which addressed the socio-economic problems of black people. As a charter member of the Phoenix Urban League, for example, Ragsdale no doubt played a key role in battling urban decay and poverty. Following the passage of state and municipal civil rights legislation, and the coming of federal anti-poverty programs, journalist Richard E. Harris posits, the Phoenix Urban League assumed a unique role in the city. "Its expertise in minority affairs, Harris argues, "was welcomed by [government] agencies holding responsibilities of administering [anti-poverty] funds." The Phoenix Urban League's Executive Secretary, Junius A. Bowman, "an able administrator and negotiator," worked hard to ensure that his interracial board of directors included representatives from prominent businesses and social agencies. The league employed a staff of over one hundred, and created programs that dealt with job internships, housing construction, cultural enhancement, education, and health and day-care.²³

²² Ibid.

²³ Harris, *The First 100 Years*, 102; Phoenix Urban League, *A Brief History of the Urban League in Phoenix* (Phoenix: Phoenix Urban League, 1981), 10-11.

Some of the more militant activists in Phoenix who cried out for radical changes in the socio-economic system, also worked for traditional organization like the PUL. The PUL's intent was to use the current system to confront urban problems. Jim Williams, associate director of the PUL, reflected the elasticity of many "militant" activist's political philosophies. Although he was top administrator with the PUL, he was also a former CORE organizer and strategist. Williams was also instrumental in establishing the Phoenician branch of the Organization of Industrialization Center (OIC) in 1967. Like the PUL, the OIC was a moderate, grassroots organization which worked to address socio-economic ills in the black community. OIC was supported primarily by the rank-and-file, whereas the PUL was maintained by the local business establishment. Reflecting the contradictions inherent in Williams' evolving political philosophy and professional activities, the associate director played a key role in integrating the board of the OIC with white people who had recently been bitterly opposed to the agenda of CORE. Many members of the white power structure were "pleasantly surprised" by the action.²⁴

The experiences and actions of activists like Ragsdale and Williams represent a larger question which emerged during the later years of the Civil Rights Movement: What constituted "traditionalism" and "radicalism?," and how should one differentiate between concession and compromise? By 1967, historian Manning Marable argues, black radicalism, and Black Power in particular, had become the premier ideology among the majority of young African Americans. Black Power as a concept, however, was ambiguous. "Radical" activists created various definitions of Black Power, which often reflected the heterogeneity of the black community in general.

²⁴ Ibid.

Stokely Carmichael and political scientist Charles V. Hamilton described black power as the ability of black people to “exercise control over our lives, politically, economically, and psychically.” Radical CORE leader Robert Carson of Brooklyn, New York, believed that at its foundation Black Power was a racialized socialist movement. He declared in 1968 that Black Power advocates did not “want anything to do with the white power structure as it is now. I believe that capitalism has to be destroyed if black people are to be free.” Black communists also described Black Power as a systematic critique of capitalism. Julius Lester of SNCC suggested that Black Power was a socialist movement and “another manifestation of what is transpiring in Latin American, Asia, and Africa. People are reclaiming their lives on those three continents and blacks in America are reclaiming theirs.”²⁵

Socialist thinker Harold Cruse, however, stated that the Black Power concept is not revolutionary or connected with Marxism. Cruse argued that “Black Power is nothing but the economic and political philosophy of Booker T. Washington given a 1960's militant shot in the arm and brought up to date. The Black Power ideology is not at all revolutionary in terms of its economic and political ambitions; it is, in fact, a social reformist ideology. What does have a revolutionary implication about Black Power is the ‘defensive violence’ upheld and practiced by its ultra-extremist-nationalist-urban guerilla wing, which is revolutionary anarchist tendency.” There was not, therefore, a single intelligible definition of black radicalism or Black Power. Marable believes that black

²⁵ Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*, 96-97; Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Vintage, 1967), vi, vii; August Meir and Elliott Rudwick, *CORE: A study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1942-1968* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 423.

radicalism and black power was eventually “transmitted to all strata of black society as a contradictory set of dogmas, platitudes, political beliefs, and cultural activities.”²⁶

Amidst the emerging radicalism of the Civil Rights Movement, and the ongoing debate over the meaning of Black Power, the 1960s witnessed a revival of black communalism and pride. Despite his conversion to low-profile business boss from outspoken civil rights leader, Lincoln Ragsdale continued to influence civil rights through financial support and inconspicuous political maneuvering. He continued to open his wallet and lend his expertise to the NAACP, PUL, and OIC. There is little evidence to suggest that Ragsdale treated more militant groups like CORE, SNCC, and the Black Panthers with anything sort of suspicion and antipathy. For their part, the PUL, NAACP, CORE, SNCC, the Black Panthers, and other predominantly African American organizations, provided leadership, economic relief, legal assistance, and hope.²⁷

The militancy of the mid-to-late 1960s also ushered in a barrage of social services and cultural programming as well. The Black Panther’s breakfast program in Oakland, California was a perfect example. In Phoenix, the Broadway House apartments, supported by activists at the First Institutional Baptist Church, and the Tanner Chapel Manor nursing home, sponsored by leaders at the Tanner Chapel African American Methodist Episcopal Church (an institution that Eleanor Ragsdale’s family helped establish), were created. Leaders like Lincoln Ragsdale, George Brooks, and Olympic Gold Medalist Jessie Owens, who retired to Phoenix during the 1960s, supported new

²⁶ Harold Cruse, *Rebellion or Revolution?* (New York: William and Morrow, 1968), 201; Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*, 99.

²⁷ Luckingham, *Minorities in Phoenix*, 177.

community medical centers. Joe Black, former Brooklyn Dodger and vice president of Greyhound Bus Lines, and other leading figures, organized myriad youth programs for minorities in Phoenix, while Eugene Grigsby continued to teach African Art at various institutions throughout the city. The spirited activism and renewed cultural pride that matured during this era, helped reinvigorate the Civil Rights Movement and give new meaning to black history.²⁸

African American women continued to play a vital role in the socio-economic advancement and stability of the black community. Eleanor Ragsdale remained active in various civil rights and benevolent associations. Educator Arlena E. Seneca was a highly respected and active member of her community, while Vernell Coleman organized Juneteenth celebrations and Black History Month activities. Juneteenth was commonly referred to as “Emancipation Day,” by many black people in the Southwest. The annual holiday celebration in the month of June, which pays homage to the day in 1865 (June 19) when General Gordon Granger landed with the first Union soldiers at Galveston and announced that all the African Americans held in bondage in Texas had been liberated.

Although the Emancipation Proclamation, issued in September, 1862 by President Abraham Lincoln, had become effective on January 1, 1863, most black people in the Southwest did not learn of the news until Granger arrived in Texas in June, 1865. The Juneteenth celebration developed into a highly anticipated, well attended event in Phoenix. Also, Helen Mason, granddaughter of Phoenix’s first black resident, Mary Green, who

²⁸ *Arizona Sun*, May 9, 1957; *Arizona Informant*, December 4, 1974, July 30, 1975; *Arizona Republic*, July 16, 17, 1967, April 28, 1986; Harris, *The First 100 Years*, 102-138; Melcher, “Blacks and Whites Together,” 195-216; Phoenix Urban League, *A Brief History*, 10-11.

migrated to the city in 1868, worked diligently to make the Phoenix Black Theater Troupe a success. Middle-class and affluent black women like Eleanor Ragsdale promoted community projects, including educational opportunities for young black people. Through the local Links chapter, many of the city's leading black women also sponsored major social events like the annual debutante cotillion.²⁹

Despite the durability and creativity that African Americans demonstrated during this tumultuous period, their problems in many ways worsened. The urban unrest of the late 1960s substantially limited the amount of support the federal government was able to give black people through Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society" agenda. His successful 1964 and 1965 legislation is legendary, and his Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 gave rise to a numerous programs: Head Start assisted preschool children; Upward Bound gave poor teenagers an opportunity to earn a college degree, and Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) operated as a sort of native peace corps to assist the indigent and uneducated. Nevertheless, African Americans continued to lag behind their white counterparts in virtually every statistical category. This reality eventually prompted the imperious Martin Luther King to rethink the ways in which he should approach black advancement. Like the many proponents of Black Power, by 1968 King began to be more critical of America's economic system. It was not enough, he now reasoned, to attack discrimination. Socio-economically oppressed people, he now argued, were compelled to demand an end to the systematic economic inequality that was their true enemy.³⁰

Martin Luther King shifted his focus to poverty, workers rights, and what he

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Branch, *Pillar of Fire*, 30, 31, 291, 311, 556

believed to be an unjustified war in Vietnam. In the process, he alienated white and black people who may have supported his stance on the most virulent forms of racism, but were unwilling to question the foundation of American society; capitalism. The NAACP and the Urban League were particularly angry with his stance on Vietnam, as many of their members were middle-class, and loyal to Lyndon Johnson. In other words, wealthy and middle-class white and black Americans could tolerate his vision of a more equal society, but they were not willing to redistribute America's wealth on an equal basis to do so.

King's effort to construct a multi-cultural coalition which demanded civil rights, peace, and fundamental structural changes within American's capitalist system, eventually led to his death. He was assassinated by James Earl Ray at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee on April 4, 1968. King's death weakened the SCLC, and other organizations which benefitted greatly from his charismatic leadership. Immediately following King's murder, African Americans took to the streets again in a rash of violent riots from California to New York. Black communities in over 125 cities erupted, leaving forty-six people dead, 35,000 injured, and 20,000 arrested. In the wake of these rebellions, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1968 largely as a conciliatory gesture. The act made it illegal for homeowners and realtors to discriminate on the basis of race, class, or sex.³¹

The passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and the 1965 Voting Rights Act were the highpoints of the Civil Rights Movement. After 1965, the civil rights community split into many, sometimes warring factions: young and old; separatists and integrationists;

³¹ Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*, 105; Hine, Hine, and Harold, *The African American Odyssey*, 545.

socialists and capitalists; cultural nationalists and multiracialists; and moderates whose political philosophies reflected elements of each concept. As in other urban areas, older African American leaders in Phoenix had a difficult time adjusting to quickening pace and new militancy of the Civil Rights Movement. Young activists, however, took the lead in protesting white supremacy and inequality. The most active group of young leaders in Phoenix belonged to CORE, but many also joined SNCC and the relatively small group of Black Panthers in the city. Although their activist agenda and political ideology differed from older activists, young leaders in Phoenix continued to call upon leaders like Lincoln Ragsdale for moral, political, and financial support.³²

As in other cities across the nation, CORE, and particularly SNCC, continued to support separatism, while the older groups like the NAACP and SCLC maintained its traditional interracial agenda. By 1968 the BPP was the most widely recognized and controversial black activist organization in America. It continued to put forth its challenge to the existing capitalist, racial order. Internal conflicts involving sexism, violence, race, and questionable leadership, however, hurt the organizations and divided the movement. The Johnson administration, however, crippled the movement. With the support of Johnson, the FBI targeted, harassed, and threatened civil rights organizations and leaders. It had constantly investigated and badgered civil rights leaders like Lincoln Ragsdale at the local level, and Malcolm X and Martin Luther King at the national level. By 1970, the FBI conducted a covert Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) that succeeded in undermining and destroying Black Power groups like the BPP, and leaders such as Fred

³² Luckingham, *Phoenix*, 213.

Hampton and Mark Clark.³³

As black leaders searched for new ways to move African Americans forward, other leaders energized the re-enfranchised black electorate to seek victories in political office. The rise of black elected officials, in fact, stands as perhaps the most salient legacy of the Civil Rights Movement. Although black people had been voting for one hundred years in the North, their influence was negligible. The emergence of the Black Power Movement, however, and the power of the Voting Rights Act, prompted black communities to demand representatives which reflected their population. In Phoenix, a small number of black leaders were elected to positions that had previously been unoccupied by African Americans. With the improvement in his business interests, and a new mortuary at the base of South Mountain in Phoenix, Universal Sunset Chapel, Ragsdale was in a strategic position to assist these new officials in their campaigns and professional aspirations. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, with his support no doubt, William Bell became the city's first Assistant City Manager, and attorney Hazel B. Daniels was elected Municipal Judge.³⁴

Clovis Campbell, Sr., Lincoln Ragsdale's protegee, also played a pivotal role in the Civil Rights Movement in Phoenix. Born in Elizabeth, Louisiana in 1931, Campbell

³³ Lawson, *Running for Freedom*, 133-134; Kenneth O'Reilly, *Racial Matters: The FBI's Secret File on Black American, 1960-1972* (New York: The Free Press, 1991), 1-28; Clayborne Carson, *Malcolm X: The FBI File* (Carroll and Gaff, 1991), 45-46. Also see Angela Y. Davis, (ed.), *If They Come in the Morning* (New York: Bantam, 1975); Philip S. Foner, (ed.), *The Black Panthers Speak* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1970); Caroline Ross and Ken Lawrence, *J. Edgar Hoover's Detention Plan: The Politics of Repression in the United States, 1939-1976* (Jackson: Anti-Repression Resource Team, 1978); Thomas Wagstaff, (ed.), *Black Power* (Beverly Hills: Glencoe Press, 1969).

³⁴ Harris, *The First 100 Years*, 103.

migrated to Phoenix in 1945. After a brief stint in the military, Campbell returned to Phoenix in 1954, and began a long career in politics, community activism, and newspaper publishing. As a young man, Campbell followed the activities of the older Ragsdale, and as he matured, began to work periodically with Ragsdale on civil rights issues. The work paid off, as Campbell was elected to the legislature in 1962. In 1966, he launched a successful campaign for a seat in the State Senate, becoming the first African American in Arizona to serve in this capacity.

Active in the Phoenix chapter of the NAACP, and with the assistance of leaders like Ragsdale throughout the 1970s, Campbell protested discrimination and spoke out against injustice in his newspaper the *Arizona Informant*. Campbell credits racism and Phoenix's history of conservative politics with the gradual way in which most civil rights issues were addressed. Despite the progressive nature of his legislation and editorials, many of his proposals languished for years before being passed. Campbell, however, relished his role as a progressive leader, and learned to confront racism and inequality from leaders like Ragsdale. He describes his approach, which was similar to Ragsdale's in these terms: "I don't believe in rocking the boat, I believe in turning it over to see who can swim you see. That way, you can find out who's on what side of the fence. So I had quite a bit of legislation introduced that was considered quite a few years ahead of its time, and so naturally, it didn't always get the approval of the people that it should have."³⁵

The wall of political opposition which confronted Campbell and other black leaders and elected officials, demonstrated that early civil rights victories were first in a long line of victories that needed to be won. Poor people, regardless of race, continued to

³⁵ Clovis Campbell interview.

suffer from unemployment, poor education, insufficient health care, and political marginalization. Each president between 1963 and 1979, Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, and Jimmy Carter, tried to address these issues. Each had extremely limited success, and their efforts were marred by the Vietnam War and tremendous white resistance. Problems remained in black communities throughout the nation, including Phoenix, but progress was made. National and local civil rights legislation, coupled with anti-poverty programs, helped maintain black organizations like the NAACP, PUL, and OIC, as vital forces in the black community.³⁶

During the 1980s, however, conservative Republican politicians would exploit the political problems and blunders of progressive Democrats, and usher in a conservative era that would threaten to undercut much of the progress made in the area of civil rights over the previous thirty years. This return to conservatism, and the scaling back of civil rights policies and programs, was a call to arms for many civil rights leaders. Lincoln Ragsdale was among the activists who felt compelled to speak out against the attack on civil rights and the new face of discrimination. Resigned to lead from behind the scenes between 1964 and 1980, Ragsdale resurfaced during America's "conservative revolution" to lend his experience and power to a movement that was again under attack.³⁷

³⁶ Conkin, *Big Daddy from the Pedernales: Lyndon Baines Johnson*, 208-242; Tidall and Shi, *America*, 1173-1186; Lawson and Payne, *Debating the Civil Rights Movement, 1945-1968*, 34-35.

³⁷ Luckingham, *Minorities in Phoenix*, 178. Also see Robert Dallek, *Ronald Reagan: The Politics of Symbolism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984); Martin Carnoy, *Faded Dreams: The Politics and Economics of Race in America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

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**WESTERN RESISTANCE: LINCOLN AND ELEANOR RAGSDALE AND THE
TRANSFORMATION OF THE BLACK FREEDOM STRUGGLE IN THE
AMERICAN WEST**

VOLUME II

By

Matthew Corey Whitaker

A DISSERTATION

**Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of**

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of History

2001

PART THREE
MOVING FORWARD COUNTER CLOCKWISE: AFRICAN AMERICANS AT
THE INTERSECTION OF PROSPERITY AND PRIVATION, 1980-1995.....

CHAPTER 6: THE MYTH OF THE “THIRD WORLD COALITION”: AFRICAN AMERICAN AND CHICANO LEADERSHIP, AND THE STRUGGLE FOR POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC POWER IN PHOENIX.

“A true alliance is based upon some self-interest of each component group and a common interest into which they merge. For an alliance to have permanence and loyal commitment from its various elements, each of them must have a goal from which it benefits and none must have an outlook in basic conflict with the others. Many civil rights organizations were born as specialists in agitation and dramatic projects; they attracted massive sympathy and support; but they did not assemble and unify the support for new stages of struggle. The effect on their allies reflected their basic practices. Support waxed and waned, and people became conditioned to action in crises but inaction from day to day.”¹
-Martin Luther King, Jr.

Throughout the peak years of the Civil Rights Movement, African Americans like Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale led the way in disputing racial discrimination and the oppression of minorities in Phoenix. Interracial alliances of civil rights activists existed, but as in other regions of the country, African Americans ultimately shouldered the responsibility of dramatizing their oppression. The most visible interracial coalitions in Phoenix were largely alliances between progressive black and white citizens. Indeed, despite the fact that Mexican Americans have always comprised the largest minority population in Phoenix, and have also experienced the negative effects of white racism, both Mexican Americans and African Americans have never been able to form a sustained partnership in their respective quests for racial equality. Between 1950 and 1968, the number of Mexican American leaders who supported the efforts of people like the Ragsdales were small. In 1957, for example, the *Arizona Sun* reported that some Mexican

¹ Martin Luther King, Jr. *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967) In James M. Washington (ed.), *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 607, 612.

American leaders convinced their supporters to avoid visible contributions to the efforts of activist like the Ragsdales. The *Arizona Sun* argued that “even though they sympathized with the plight of the blacks,” they believed “that the black problem was a black problem.” This editorial flies in the face of the popular assumption that racial minorities were somehow inherently suited for, and willing to participate in cross-cultural collaboration with other minorities. During their crusade for justice, in fact, black Phoenician leaders like Lincoln Ragsdale, and his Mexican American counterparts, came to understand that their shared racial subordination was not enough to unite them in a common struggle for freedom.²

Before 1968 black Phoenicians were largely left to their own devices by other minorities to make Phoenix a more open and equal city. Not until the Chicano Movement hit the city of Phoenix in 1968 did collaboration between black and Chicano activists increase. Even at that juncture, cooperation was usually limited to individual acts of solidarity. Although their collective oppression occasionally brought African and Mexican American activists like the Ragsdales and their proteges together in such cases, the exigencies of race, ethnicity, culture, and class, ultimately undermined their ability to register a sustained, consolidated liberation movement on behalf of both groups.³

The *Arizona Sun* argued that the reason black and Mexican American activists did not unite was a result of the “divide and conquer” approach employed by European Americans in Phoenix. Some white Phoenicians met some of the socio-economic demands

² *Arizona Sun*, May 9, 1957; Luckingham, *Minorities in Phoenix*, 177. Also see Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier*.

³ Ibid.

of each group, but generally they played each group against each other, were antagonistic, and did not concede much. African and Mexican Americans, therefore, fought for the few resources that were made available. Neither group was able to make considerable gains as a result. Thus, the fact that African and Mexican Americans were unable or unwilling to form a lasting coalition, may be attributable, in part, to white subversion. Nevertheless, the two groups must also be held accountable for their inability and unwillingness to collaborate. African and Mexican Americans rarely attempted to forge a lasting coalition. This “lack of cooperation,” posits Bradford Luckingham, “encouraged deterioration and distrust in the relationship between the two groups.” The small number of Mexican Americans who demonstrated with, and lent their support to leaders like the Ragsdales in the early 1960s, formed lasting relationships with black Phoenicians. During the early part of the decade, however, the relationship between the two groups generally degenerated. This failure to find common ground would lead to poor communication and cooperation among the masses of the two groups for decades to come. As early as 1957, the *Arizona Sun* argued that African and Mexican Americans “made a great mistake not to work together for the benefits of both.”⁴

During the early years of the 1960s, the black liberation struggle was reaching its peak, while the Chicano movement had yet to emerge. African Americans, therefore, constituted the most vocal and organized group of oppressed minorities in the country who challenged white supremacy and inequality. Federal, state, and local government agencies in Phoenix, and across the country, responded to African American insurgency by creating agencies and programs to address the socio-economic needs of black people.

⁴ Ibid.

This allocation of resources for the advancement of black Phoenicians caused some Mexican American observers to question the fairness of such appropriations. For instance, in Phoenix's LEAP program, African Americans secured the majority of the leading positions. Mexican Americans, however, argued that they had many of "the same problems," and desired a more equitable distribution of assignments. This controversy only worsened a relationship marred by indifference and animosity, as the two groups became "rivals for goodies."⁵

Lincoln Ragsdale indicated that the inability of African Americans and Mexican Americans to cooperate carried over to other arenas as well. Although Ragsdale stated in a 1990 interview that "Mexicans did not discriminate against us [African Americans]," he and other leaders stated otherwise at times. Ragsdale and his fellow activists also argued that many Mexican Americans considered themselves to be a kind of white ethnic group when black Phoenicians needed their allegiance, but "Mexican" when African Americans had something they wanted. Some Mexican American businesses in "The Valley" had also refused to serve black people in Phoenix since the late nineteenth century, and continued to do so during the 1960s. Ragsdale's brother-in-law, William Dickey, led a protest of the discriminating El Rey Café on South Central Avenue in Phoenix. Following the protest, a group of black Phoenicians were so infuriated with the owner of the restaurant for refusing to accommodate black people, they threatened to "burn it down."⁶

Ragsdale's conflicting recollections probably reflect his desire to be critical of African and Mexican American relations during the 1960s, while also casting the two

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Lincoln and Eleanor interview; *Arizona Sun*, May 9, 1957.

groups in a favorable light. By 1990 Ragsdale was working to close the political gap between the two groups. He wanted to create a strong multiracial coalition of proponents of civil rights. Despite the reality of African and Mexican American relations in Phoenix in the 1960s, Ragsdale probably believed it was in the best interest of both groups to market themselves as partners in a struggle against an oppressive white majority. On the other hand, Ragsdale may not have believed that there was anything contradictory about his statements. Ultimately he characterized Mexican Americans' discriminatory actions as an unfortunate byproduct of white supremacy and economics. He did not believe Chicanos harbored any deep seeded racial animosity toward black people, or the kind of "negrophobia" that many white Phoenixians exhibited. When restaurants owned by Mexican Americans primarily served Mexican Americans, Ragsdale suggested, African Americans were treated fairly. When white Phoenixians dined at some of these establishments, however, owners would adopt the prevailing racial mores and customs of their white clientele.⁷

The distinct relationship between African Americans and Chicanos in Phoenix has a long history. African Americans and Mexican Americans had already settled in the area when the city was founded. Unlike black Phoenixians, however, Americans of Mexican descent, can trace their lineage in the Southwest to at least 300 A. D. Through a process called *mestizaje*, indigenous populations to the American Southwest and Mexico, through sexual liaisons with Spanish colonizers and Africans, and cultural exchange, produced persons of Spanish-Indian descent, and Indians who adopted the language, religion, and

⁷ Lincoln and Eleanor interview; William Dickey interview; Luckingham, *Minorities in Phoenix*, 167.

customs of the Spanish. By the late 1530s, these people were referred to as *mestizos* in “New Spain.” By the late nineteenth century *mestizos* constituted the majority population of what was by then the Mexican and the American Southwestern populations. Mexican Americans in early Phoenix, therefore, were largely a *mestizo* people; acculturated, Spanish speaking Indians, and persons with both Indian and Spanish ancestry. Since the late nineteenth century Mexican Americans with *mestizo* roots have been instrumental in the development of Phoenix.⁸

During Phoenix’s early years, Mexican Americans performed much needed agricultural work. They participated in politics, and a number of them, unlike their black counterparts, won election to minor offices as early as the 1880s. The number of Mexican Americans in Phoenix in 1880 was 772, of a total population of 1,708. As a result of their large numbers, their political participation and voting habits had to be taken into consideration. As more European Americans moved to Phoenix, the number of Mexican Americans in the city declined. By the early twentieth century, White boosters led an Americanization movement in Phoenix, and through, persuasion, intimidation, and coercion, they worked vigorously to “Americanize” Mexican Americans in the city. When

⁸ Francisco A. Rosales, *Chicano!: The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement* (Arte Publico Press, 1996), 1-52; R. Douglass Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination: Plebeian Society in Colonial Mexico City, 1600-1720* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), 66; Luckingham, *Phoenix*, 2-39. Also see Thomas E. Skidmore and Peter H. Smith, *Modern Latin America, 3rd Edition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); John Charles Chasteen and Joseph S. Tulchin (eds.), *Problems in Modern Latin American History: A Reader* (Wilmington: SR Books, 1994). For concise histories of Mexican American history and the Chicano Movement, see Rodolfo Acuna, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos* (New York: Addison Wesley Longman, Inc., 1999); Juan Gomez-Quinones, *Chicano Politics: Reality and Promise, 1940-1990* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990); Vicki L. Ruiz, *From Out of The Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

Americanization failed, some white Phoenicians simply engineered the deportation of many Mexican Americans.⁹

As with African Americans, Mexican Americans were subjected to the racism of Phoenix's ruling white elite. Like black Phoenicians, Mexican American workers were exploited, underpaid, and restricted to the most menial labor. Unlike African Americans, however, Mexican Americans with fair skin and European features were often deemed white by the dominant society. This racial dynamic afforded some Mexican Americans more socio-economic mobility than their black counterparts. The founders and early boosters of Phoenix were former southerners and embraced many of the anti-black attitudes that dominated race relations in the South. To them African Americans represented the antithesis of whiteness, while Mexican Americans, although they were deemed subordinate and inferior, were also viewed as partially European and exotic as early as the first decade of the twentieth century. Some Mexican Americans thought of themselves, and were viewed as a white ethnic group such as the Irish or Italians. The fact that some Mexican Americans considered themselves to be a kind of white ethnic group, was the cause of much tension between African and Mexican American Phoenicians for decades to come.¹⁰

Despite the fact that some Mexican Americans were deemed white, and considered

⁹ *Weekly Arizona Minor*, May 13, 1871; *Phoenix Herald*, August 17, 1883; *Phoenix Daily Herald*, May 8, 1896; *Weekly Arizona Minor*, April 13, 1872; *Territorial Expositor*, June 25, 1880; Federal manuscript census schedule, Arizona Territory, 1870, 1880.

¹⁰ Robert Nimmons, "Arizona's Forgotten Past: The Negro in Arizona, 1539-1965," (M.S. Thesis, Northern Arizona University, 1971), 92-93; Federal manuscript census schedule, 1940. Also see Michael J. Kotlanger, "Phoenix Arizona, 1920-1940," (Ph.D. Dissertation, Arizona State University, 1983).

themselves to be white, most were subjected to the indignities of Jim Crow.

Most white Phoenixians discriminated against Mexican Americans and let it be known that they did not desire their presence in the city. White Phoenixians placed signs throughout the city which declared “No Mexicans Allowed.” When Mexican Americans were permitted to enter certain establishments, they were limited to certain days. For example, local swimming pools hosted “Mexican Day.” There were Mexican nights at the Riverside Ballroom, and the *Arizona Republican* sponsored a picnic for “Mexican kiddies.” Like black Phoenixians, Mexican Americans in the city were segregated in schools, churches, hotels, theaters, and parks.¹¹

Most Mexican Americans in Phoenix’s barrios lived apart from white Phoenixians by constraint and by choice. When Lincoln Ragsdale arrived in Phoenix in the late 1940s, Mexican Americans were still the majority minority in the city, with a population of over 9,740. Mexican Americans made up over fifteen percent of the Phoenixian population. Like African Americans, Mexican American Phoenixians lived primarily in poor neighborhoods in South Phoenix. Their communities were located in two central areas. The most impoverished neighborhoods were located between Sixteenth and Twenty-fourth streets, from Washington Street South to the Salt River. The second area could be found South of Washington Street between Second and Seventh Avenues. Both neighborhoods suffered from poor health and high death rates. Exclusion and inequity, coupled with inexpensive land and lodging, common language and cultural mores, bonds

¹¹ *Arizona Republican*, August 4, 1935; Roberts, “Minority Group Poverty,” 358-359; Kotlanger, “Phoenix,” 403-406. Also see Gordon Connell-Smith, *The Inter-American System* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962); Federico G. Gill, *Latin American-United States Relations* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971).

to family and friends, and the desire to maintain connections to their homeland and a link to American society, brought more people of Mexican descent to Phoenician barrios.¹²

Although they were discriminated against by Phoenix's white establishment, Mexican Americans, like black Phoenicians, created vibrant communities. Mexican American churches, schools, voluntary associations, and parks emerged to promote Mexican American advancement. As Bradford Luckingham has indicated, the Mexican American community also "cultivated a cultural identity and a cultural agenda. Most important was the family, the perspective bastion of Mexican culture." Mexican families and friends intermingled at birthday parties, dances, weddings, and funerals. There were Mexican American musical and theater performances. Spanish-language newspapers emerged, and by 1950 Phoenix hosted a Mexican American community as developed as any city in the Southwest.¹³

As Mexican Americans began to make inroads in employment, a small Mexican American middle-class developed in Phoenix. By 1940 this group began to call for better opportunities for themselves in "the Valley." These leaders laid the foundation for a more intense Mexican American freedom struggle that would commence in the years to come. As these leaders became more politically active, moved up the socio-economic ladder, and worked closer with the white establishment, many black leaders became suspicious. They did not want the few resources that were available to minorities to be given disproportionately to Mexican Americans. They also knew that many Mexican Americans

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Luckingham, *Phoenix*, 95-96; Kotlanger, "Phoenix," 443. Also see Luckingham, *The Urban Southwest*.

did not want to share some of the resources they had secured. For instance, in 1935 the Latin American Club of Arizona presented a resolution to the Phoenix City Commission requesting the exclusion of black people from Southside Park, in a predominantly Mexican American neighborhood located at Second Avenue and Grant Street. Mexican Americans, some black observers noted, viewed themselves as being superior to black people, and were, therefore, their adversaries.¹⁴

African Americans were encouraged to adopt this competitive outlook by a racial order which often reserved its most disparaging attacks for people of African descent. As a result, leaders like Ragsdale and Madge Copeland have suggested, the discrimination that Mexican Americans experienced, though capricious and damaging, was not as rigid as that experienced by African Americans. There is some evidence to support this observation. Mexican American leaders were able to overcome discrimination and segregation in some socio-economic areas in Phoenix long before African Americans secured such freedoms. Indeed, the segregation of Mexican Americans in places of public accommodation such as restaurants, schools, theaters, and swimming pools abated during the 1940s and 1950s. With the exception of schools, African Americans would not be able to access these venues until the 1960s. The fact that Mexican Americans, like European Americans in Phoenix, would conspire to bar African Americans from their neighborhoods, reveals the extent to which both groups demonized people of African descent. It appears that black Phoenicians rarely, if ever, undertook to systematically exclude anyone from predominantly African American neighborhoods on the basis of race,

¹⁴ *Arizona Republic*, June 20, 1934, August 15, 1935, July 23, 1936, September 16, 1938, August 1, 1940; *Phoenix Gazette*, July 20, 1940.

class, sex, religion, or national origin.¹⁵

The ability of Mexican Americans to make some advancements in the realms of finance and public accommodations at a time when black Phoenixians could not, contributed to uneasy relations between the two groups. These advancements can be attributed to Mexican Americans, African Americans, and the America's social construction of race in America. "The conditions that led to the inequality of Mexican Americans," argues F. Arturo Rosales, "are steeped in a legacy of conquest and then labor exploitation." The oppressive treatment of African Americans, on the other hand, can be attributed to a more fixed construction of race. This construction places black people, by virtue of their dark skin and African origins, at the bottom of the racial hierarchy. Mexican Americans were "cast as undesirable because of their Indian features," Rosales posits, but they were not often perceived to be another species altogether. Discrimination against Mexican Americans, like white ethnic groups like the Irish, had more to do with white American stereotypes which portrayed Mexicans and Mexican Americans as poor, culturally divergent, and idle.

These dissimilar racial constructions greatly influenced the courses of the Mexican American and African American freedom struggles. The social construction of race as it pertained to Mexican Americans was more fluid. This more elastic construction of race caused many Mexican Americans to believe their problems were largely cultural and economic, not racial. African Americans, therefore, found it objectionable that Mexican Americans were a "race" when they benefitted from race conscious remedies, but an

¹⁵ Greater Phoenix Council for Civic Unity, (ed.), *To Secure These Rights* (Phoenix: Phoenix Sun Publishing Company, 1961), 14-16, 62-65.

“ethnic group” when they sought to set themselves above and apart from African Americans and other socially constructed racial minorities. Black people in the American context did not have escape clauses when it came to the “race problem.” The “race problem,” after all, can be viewed as a euphemism for the “black problem.”¹⁶

Historian Carl Degler in *Neither Black Nor White: Slavery and Race in Brazil and the United States*, provides a cogent analysis of the experience of black people in the U. S., by comparing them to the experiences of black people in Brazil. Degler maintains that light-skinned Brazilian black people, known as *mulattos*, were subjected to less racism than their darker brothers and sisters. To guard this privilege, *mulattos* separated themselves from Afro-Brazilians with dark skin. This schism substantially hindered the ability of people of African descent in Brazil to launch a sustained national Civil Rights Movement. Fair skinned African Americans, however, have not received such preferential treatment to the degree that fair-skinned Afro-Brazilians have. This fact united black Americans, and enabled them to initiate and carry out one of the most extensive fights for

¹⁶ F. Arturo Rosales, *Chicano!: The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement* (Arte Publico Press, 1996), xxi. For a fascinating discussion of the treatment of Irish immigrants by Anglo Americans, and how Irish Americans viewed themselves and African Americans, see David Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995). Ignatiev posits that the Irish were initially discriminated against in the U. S., by Anglo Americans, and that they “became white” by embracing racism; a concept that Ignatiev describes as uniquely American. Ignatiev illuminates the cause of racial conflict between Irish Americans and African Americans, and “draws a powerful connection between Irish ‘success’ in nineteenth-century American society and their embrace of white supremacy.

freedom and equality in world history.¹⁷

In contrast, prior to the emergence of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement (the *movimiento*) in the 1960s, Mexican American leaders did not focus on white supremacy and racial injustice the way that African American leaders like Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale did. Nevertheless, the persecution of black people by the white majority kept the black liberation struggle at the forefront of American political culture, and eventually tapped into the frustration of oppressed Mexican Americans. The abuse of black people at the hands of European Americans outraged younger, more militant Mexican American leaders. As Rosales posits, this outrage helped raise the race “consciousness that was necessary for Chicanos to take the first step into activism.” One reason that Mexican American activism developed more slowly than black activism, is that they enjoyed an “escape hatch” similar to the one Degler characterizes for Afro-Brazilians.¹⁸

¹⁷ See Carl N. Degler, *Neither Black Nor White: Slavery and Race in Brazil and the United States* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994). For further discussions of blackness and the social construction of race in Latin America, see Franklin W. Knight, *The African Dimension in Latin American Societies* (New York: Macmillan, 1974); Kim Butler, *Freedoms Given, Freedoms Won: Afro-Brazilians in Post Abolition Sao Paulo and Salvador* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998); Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886-1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1995); Elisa Larkin Nasimento, *Pan-Africanism and South America: Emergence of a Black Rebellion* (Buffalo: Afrodiaspora, 1980); George Reid Andrews, *Blacks and White in Sao Paulo, 1888-1988* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991); Anthony W. Marx, *Making Race and Nation: A Comparison of the United States, South Africa, and Brazil* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Thomas E. Skidmore, *Black Into White: Race and Nationality in Brazilian Thought* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993); France Widdance Twine, *Racism in a Racial Democracy: The Maintenance of White Supremacy in Brazil* (New York: Rutgers University Press, 1997); John Burdick, *Blessed Anastacia: Women, Race, and Popular Christianity in Brazil* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

¹⁸ Rosales, *Chicano!*, xxii.

Mexican Americans who were not directly influenced by intense racial bigotry, because of their color or class, were able to disregard the condition of their more tyrannized black brothers and sisters. By the late 1960s, however, young individuals from the more oppressed Mexican classes in America became educated, and began to identify with their Indian heritage, and the salience of race. Although the concept of race is a social construction, it has had real, detrimental, social, economic, and political effects on all Americans. As a result, young, more radical Mexican Americans during the late 1960s, like their black counterparts, realized that race could not be treated simply as a specious theoretical phenomenon, but a genuine verity that must be denounced to be truly rendered immaterial. By the late 1960s, Mexican American activists began to call attention to the negative ways in which racism adversely affected them as an oppressed racial group. They initiated a grass roots quest for civil rights which would evolve into the Chicano Movement.¹⁹

While Mexican and African American communities “fought for goodies” during early 1960s, individual African American and Mexican American leaders began to collaborate in efforts to bring attention to the poor socio-economic state of minorities in Phoenix. Both Mexican and African American communities continued to suffer from economic and political isolation, inadequate housing, schooling, and employment. Although African Americans in Phoenix had created a community of civil rights activists by 1960, they were unable to move through the Phoenician community with the same kind of fluidity that Mexican Americans could. Despite their being ahead of black Phoenicians in several categories, however, some studies indicated that Mexican Americans displayed a

¹⁹ Ibid.

lesser achievement in areas such as education. Although they did not form a substantive coalition, individual Mexican American and African American leaders between 1960 and 1968, addressed problems that were common to both groups, such as voter participation and poverty.²⁰

In the early 1960s, Lincoln Ragsdale worked with members of the Mexican American Political Association (MAPA) and other activist organizations to promote increased voter registration and political activism. Ragsdale worked closely with Manuel Pena, Jr., future Arizona legislator, in the ACT campaign of 1963. Pena, owner of the Pena Realty and Insurance Company, was born in the agricultural community of Cashion, Arizona in 1924. From 1953 to 1956 Pena served as president of the Phoenix Community Service Organization, and from 1956 through 1960, along with Ragsdale, was a member of the Phoenix Urban League. When he and Ragsdale helped launch the ACT campaign, they were both a members of the Phoenix Council for Civil Unity. Ragsdale and Pena bemoaned the lack of minority representation on the Phoenix City Council. Pena worked with Ragsdale and other leaders to improve educational opportunities for minorities in Phoenix. He argued that the problems of Mexican Americans and other minorities “lies in education, and it is our great hope that as more and more youngsters and adults become educated they will be able to take their rightful place within the larger community.”²¹

²⁰ *Arizona Sun*, May 9, 1957; Luckingham, *Minorities in Phoenix*, 57, 177.

²¹ Action Citizens Committee Paid Political Advertisement, “Pena Supports Opportunity for Underprivileged Youth.” (Phoenix: Actions Citizens Committee, 1963); Greater Phoenix Council For Civic Unity, *To Secure These Rights*, 16; Manuel Pena, Testimony on Migrants in Phoenix. Hearings Before the United States Commission on Civil Rights, Phoenix, Arizona, February 3, 1962 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1962), 74-75.

Ragsdale also collaborated with Grace Gill-Olivarez, a Mexcian American radio broadcaster in Phoenix who spoke against racial discrimination. Gill-Olivarez championed better educational opportunities and increased political participation for Mexican Americans, and cited white fear as the cause of many of the problems of minorities. “That small but vociferous group of Anglos that dislike us undoubtedly base their dislike on fear. They fear us because they don’t know us, and they don’t know us because they haven’t bothered to find out what we are really like. They judge the masses by a few individuals. And this sort of attitude, I think, is harmful to this nation, or should I say, ‘our’ nation, because, regardless of how anyone feels about us, we are American citizens.”²²

Pena and Gill-Olivarez’s efforts to improve educational opportunities for minorities opened the door for more militant Mexican American leaders to emerge in the late 1960s. Mexican American students at Arizona State University (ASU) in the Phoenician suburb of Tempe, followed the lead of California activists and brought the Chicano *movimiento* to “the Valley.” During the spring of 1968 students at ASU, led by Alfredo Gutierrez, who was inspired by the Chicano Movement after visiting Los Angeles and working with Cesar Chavez and the farm-workers movement, extended an invitation to San Francisco leader Armando Valdez to speak on campus. His fiery oratory launched a wave of activism on ASU’s campus and throughout the city. These young Chicano activists soon organized under the banner of the Mexican American Student Organization (MASO). Gutierrez and his supporters, which included radical white students from the Young Socialist Alliance (YSA) and Students for a Democratic Society (SDS),

²² Grace Gill-Olivarez, Testimony on Mexican Americans in Phoenix. Hearings Before the United States Commission on Civil Rights, Phoenix, Arizona, February 3, 1962 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1962), 89.

demonstrated against discriminatory practices targeted at Chicanos. Gutierrez, along with Joe “Eddy” Lopez, Rosie Lopez, Manuel Dominguez, and Gustavo Gutierrez, also helped establish organizations such as Chicanos por la Causa (CPLC) in Phoenician barrios to combat the racial discrimination in the city.²³

The kind of collaboration that occasionally occurred between Lincoln Ragsdale and local Mexican American leaders like Manuel Pena would be rare by the 1970s. Although the Chicano Movement was inspired by the black liberation struggle, these two movements never formed an alliance. Chicano activists, having a more sophisticated race consciousness than predecessors, were not as prone to harbor the same anti-black feelings however. They understood that the white supremacy that had terrorized and oppressed African Americans, was in many ways the same white supremacy that had subjugated them. Nevertheless, Chicano activists, like the more radical black leaders of the 1960s and early 1970s, were primarily interested in justice for their people, not integration with white or black Phoenicians. This approach, although it helped usher in positive change in the short term, would continue to undermine the ability of these two groups to work together effectively in the future.²⁴

Like African Americans, greater numbers of individual Chicanos advanced as educational and employment opportunities developed in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement. With the support of their individual constituencies, Chicano and black leaders make progress in the political arena. Black leader Calvin Goode, and Mexican American

²³ *New Times*, June 11-17, 1986; Patricia A. Adank, “Chicano Activism in Maricopa County—Two Incidents in Retrospective,” In Manuel P. Servin, (ed.), *An Awakened Minority: The Mexican Americans* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1974), 246-265.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

Rosendo Gutierrez won seats on the Phoenix City Council. Similarly, Mexican American Alfredo Gutierrez, and African American Art Hamilton were elected to the Arizona Legislature. Gutierrez participated in a close, heated contest against incumbent, and Lincoln Ragsdale understudy, Cloves Campbell, Sr. Both were running for seats from neighborhoods primarily composed of Mexican and African Americans. Revealing the improved ability of Chicano activists to “get out the vote,” Gutierrez won a tight election where the greater numbers of Mexican Americans in the area for which he wanted to serve proved to be the deciding factor. Cloves Campbell believed that the election “got down to who got out the more votes—Hispanics or blacks. He got out more Hispanic votes.”²⁵

During the 1970s and 1980s, the percentage of Mexican Americans in the Phoenician population increased, and they remained the largest minority group in Phoenix through 1990. Between 1970 and 1990, additional members of both minority groups enjoyed the professional and financial success that Ragsdale and Pena did. Eventually those who could afford it scattered throughout the city, leaving their African and Mexican American communities. It was easier for middle-class Mexican Americans to move into predominantly middle-class white neighborhoods than it was for African Americans however. More Chicanos, therefore, found their way into affluent neighborhoods than black Phoenicians. The successes of the Chicano and Civil Rights Movements, coupled with economic expansion, made it easier for Mexican Americans to benefit from new opportunities. Like African Americans, however, the masses of Mexican Americans

²⁵ *New Times*, June 11-17, 1986; Adank, “Chicano Activism in Maricopa County—Two Incidents in Retrospective,” 246-265; Luckingham, *Minorities in Phoenix*, 60.

TABLE A

AFRICAN AMERICAN AND CHICANO/MEXICAN AMERICAN PHOENICIAN
POPULATION STATISTICS BETWEEN THE YEARS 1940 AND 1990²⁶

Year	African American/ Black	Chicano/ Mexican American	Total
1940	4,263	9,740	65,414
1950	5,217	16,000	106,818
1960	20,919	61,460	439,170
1970	27,896	81,239	584,303
1980	37,672	116,875	789,704
1990	51,053	176,139	983,403

¹ United States Census of Population, 1940-1990, General Characteristics by States (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1940-1990). Between 1940 and 1990, Chinese Americans were perhaps the next largest “racial” or ethnic group to be found in Phoenix. The Chinese population was recorded as being 431 in 1940, 448 in 1950, 1,092 in 1960, 1,483 in 1970, 2,493 in 1980, and 4,254 in 1990.

continued to be mired in poverty.²⁷

Despite the fact that most African and Mexican Americans lived in poverty born of historic and lingering racial discrimination, each group continued to have a difficult time assisting one another. Coalition building was extremely difficult amidst competition for resources and cultural distinction. This failure to find common ground was more than a minor concern. Often it proved to be counterproductive. In 1991, some Mexican American leaders voiced their concern over the inability or unwillingness of both groups to work together. These leaders announced that “we’ve fought over limited resources, and we’re tired of doing that. We want to unite for a greater share of the resources.” Many people praised these ideals, but to create such a coalition proved to be quite complicated. The relationship between Chicanos and African Americans in Phoenix continued to be fragile. Both groups persisted in their bid for the status of most favored minority.²⁸

Their efforts to promote their unique cultures and socio-economic problems, sometimes instigated bitter conflicts between the two groups. For instance, in September of 1990, African American parents called for the firing of predominantly Mexican American and African American Roosevelt School District Superintendent Alexander Perez. The parents accused Perez of being “insensitive” to the needs of black students and African American personnel. Leaders of the African American Parents for Quality Education (AAPQE) also accused Perez of favoritism, charging him with hiring more

²⁶ *Arizona Republic*, December 13, 1981; Federal manuscript census schedule, Arizona, 1970, 1980, 1990.

²⁸ *El Sol*, January 18, February 1, April 12, July 5, 12, August 2, 16, 30, 1991. The newspaper *El Sol*, or *The Sun* in English, is one of Phoenix’s oldest and most widely read periodicals which focuses on the experiences of the city’s Hispanic residents.

Mexican Americans than African Americans in the school district. The controversy lingered for months as African and Mexican Americans participated in “educational politics.”²⁹

Some black and Chicano leaders denied that a racial conflict existed between the two groups, but the competition for jobs in the district, the largest employer in South Phoenix, was formidable. The predominantly Mexican American and African American neighborhoods of South Phoenix suffered from economic isolation and deprivation, and high unemployment. Jobs, where ever they could be found, were precious. Each group wanted them. Ultimately the Roosevelt District Board purchased the contract of Perez and initiated a search for a new superintendent. The vote to buy out his contract was three to two. The three African American board members voted in favor of his departure, and the two Mexican American board members voting for his retention.³⁰

Mexican Americans and African Americans have never been monolithic groups. Conflicts within the two communities, therefore, have also contributed to the inability of black and Chicano Phoenicians to form lasting alliances. Mexican Americans and African Americans found it difficult to agree among themselves, let alone with other racial minorities. Thus, any attempt to form an alliance with another racial minority was bound to be fraught with complications. By the 1980s and 1990s, African Americans were debating new strategies to obtain socio-economic equality. A new cadre of black conservatives emerged who stood in opposition to the traditional liberal politics of many

²⁹ *Arizona Informant*, September 19, October 8, 1990, April 3, 10, June 5, August 7, November 28, December 25, 1991.

³⁰ Ibid.

African American activists.

These new black conservatives, or “negrocons,” as historian Robin D. G. Kelley has called them, “placed much of the blame” for the poor status of most African Americans during the 1980s and 1990s “on racial preferences” rather than racism. Black neoconservatives include Thomas Sowell, Ward Connerly, Shelby Steele, and Glen Loury. Collectively these leaders have argued that race conscious remedies and civil rights legislation are meaningless, as the socio-economic woes of poor black people are the product of retrograde cultural practices, fragmented families, and black irresponsibility. Despite the outward acceptance of such thinkers by the white conservative establishment, most African Americans have rejected the anti-black overtones embedded in their message. The political philosophies of these leaders are rooted in a capitalist ethos which privileges individual attainment, competition, and hubris.³¹

Likewise, by the 1980s and 1990s, noted one observer, Mexican American’s “personal goals for higher political office and greater material wealth eroded that one-for-all sense of solidarity” that many had believed existed in the past. Mexican American leaders, it was argued, “no longer see themselves exclusively as part of a struggling community, but like so many of their Anglo, me-generation contemporaries, have begun to look out for *numero uno*. Competing ambitions have, at last, emerged.” During this period many Mexican American activists became part of the Phoenician establishment. Although they remained active, their politics now reflected their economic status. They became less involved in CPLC and similar groups. The Chicano leadership during this era,

³¹ Robin D. G. Kelley, *Yo Mama's Disfunktional!: Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 89; Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*, 201-202.

“a product of the activist Sixties and Seventies,” one observer posited, “may be the victim of its own earlier success.” Bradford Luckingham maintains that:

“The prevailing mood among the leaders appeared to be one of ‘middle-class malaise,’ with too few flashes of ‘minority’ concern.’ The ‘good life’ seemed to have carried them away from ‘the struggle.’ Hispanic leaders, it was said, were losing touch with the people they were supposed to be leading. Splits fragmented the Hispanic community and made it tougher to solve common problems.”³²

The conflicts which developed between individuals and groups within the African American and Mexican American communities in Phoenix demonstrated the heterogeneity of each group. Multiplicity permeated the lives of all African and Mexican Americans in Phoenix. Despite the fact that the majority of their respective communities demonstrated solidarity in the face of sometimes overwhelming adversity, the 1980s and 1990s brought fragmentation and heightened ideological separatism to African and Mexican American communities in Phoenix. Each group made progress, however, largely due to the efforts of leaders and activists like Lincoln Ragsdale, Manuel Pena, Alfredo Gutierrez, and Clovis Campbell, Sr. Some African Americans and Mexican Americans like Ragsdale and Pena made more gains than others.

By the 1950s and 1960s, Mexican Americans began to see that the success of black civil rights leaders like Lincoln Ragsdale, was secured by insisting that racism was responsible for many of the problems that both African and Mexican Americans faced. The success of leaders like Ragsdale in integrating the armed forces, for instance,

³² *El Sol*, January 18, February 1, April 12, July 5, 12, August 2, 16, 30, 1991; *Phoenix Gazette*, May 4, 1983, June 14, 1984, January 21, 1985, November 7, 1986, January 1, 2, February 3, March 9, 26, 1987, May 3, 10, June 2, 15, 1990, February 28, March 29, April 1, 22, September 13, 30, November 11, 1991; *Arizona Republic*, December 20, 1983, May 17, 1986, January 4, 17, 25, March 27, April 12, 1987, August 30, 1990, January 17, September, 25, 1991; January 27, 1992; *New Times*, January 30, February 5, May 4-10, 1985, May 21-27, 1986; Luckingham, *Minorities in Phoenix*, 72.

demonstrated that victories could be won by appealing to the conscience of the white establishment. The efforts of Ragsdale and his contemporaries, posits Rosales, inspired Mexican Americans to forgo their claims of being “white Americans of ethnic descent-like Italian Americans or Polish Americans-and to start identifying with the course favored by blacks.” Chicano activists also rejected the white ethnic identity because sometimes it “backfired.” For example, “demands for a jury of peers,” argued Rosales, “when the defendant was Mexican, were met with retorts that seating all-Anglo juries did not exclude the Mexican race since it was supposedly white.”³³

By the late 1960s, Mexican Americans were very impressed with the “success” of the black liberation struggle and its leaders, and “consciously or unconsciously emulated many of its strategies.” Mexican Americans in Phoenix witnessed the victories black leaders like Lincoln Ragsdale were helping to win by employing boycotts, sit-ins, and the courts, and by directly charging white Phoenicians with racism. As Mexican American leaders such as Manuel Pena championed these methods, they opened the door for an entire generation of militant young Chicanos like Alfredo Gutierrez to become influential players in local and national politics by the 1990s. Lincoln Ragsdale’s leadership in Phoenix, therefore, not only proved to be critical to the black freedom struggle in the city, but to the Chicano Movement in the area as well.

Although black and Chicano Phoenicians were unable to form a sustained alliance, Phoenix did benefit from the development of two racial liberation movements in the region. “In terms of strategy, tactics, and objectives,” Quintard Taylor, Jr. argues, “most western protests paralleled those waged east of the Mississippi River. However, many of

³³ Rosales, *Chicano!*, 108.

these protests occurred in a milieu where African Americans were only one of a number of groups of color.” As a result, Taylor maintains, “the region’s multiracial population moved civil rights beyond ‘black and white.’” Perhaps unwittingly, African and Mexican Americans, and their respective liberation movements, forced the region’s white population to address race in ways that other parts of the country had not.

The Chicano population in Phoenix also challenged African Americans in ways that their Southern and Eastern counterparts did not have to contemplate. The Chicano population in Phoenix, and throughout the West, “represented a paradox to black activists,” Taylor writes. The presence of Mexican Americans in Phoenix, “deflected prejudice from African Americans” at times, but “because they suffered less discrimination than blacks, most Chicanos remained silent on discrimination.” Like white Phoenicians, Mexican Americans also supported systematic campaigns to discriminate against black people. These facts inspired San Antonio NAACP leader Claude Black to state that “It’s like having a brother violate [your] rights. You can hate the brother much more than you would the outsider because you expected more from the brother.” The vital contributions of individual Chicano leaders to the Civil Rights Movement, however, may have been the best that leaders like Ragsdale could have expected. For African Americans and Chicanos, race, culture, and class, were difficult to transcend, even in the face of an overwhelmingly oppressive white establishment.³⁴

Despite Ragsdale’s efforts, and the individual efforts of his Mexican American counterparts, by the end of the twentieth century, the masses of each group continued to

³⁴ Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier*, 292-293; Robert Alan Goldberg, “Racial Change on the Southern Periphery: The Case of San Antonio, Texas, 1960-1965,” *Journal of Southern History* 49:3 (August 1983), 362, 370.

struggle, while leaders from both sides debated the degree to which each oppressed minority suffered the most. Under this competitive atmosphere, a sustained coalition of African and Mexican American activists continued to be difficult to build. Nevertheless, hope for such an alliance remains. As long as each group experiences the negative effects of racial inequality, however, there will exist a common ground upon which a union can be formed. This union cannot be one union based on a romanticized notion of solidarity, but practical prescriptions of cross-cultural collaboration.³⁵

³⁵ Ibid.

CHAPTER 7: “JAMES S. CROW, ESQUIRE”: LINCOLN RAGSDALE, RACE AND RACISM IN PHOENIX, ARIZONA; THE POST CIVIL RIGHTS ERA, 1980-1998

“We leave a problem of racism for a period, but it returns. It always will. Race is a perpetual global dilemma.”¹

-Glover G. Hankins

“We have deluded ourselves into believing the myth that capitalism grew and prospered out of the Protestant ethic of hard work and sacrifices. Capitalism was built on the exploitation of black slaves and continues to thrive on the exploitation of the poor, both black and white, both here and abroad.”²

-Martin Luther King, Jr.

Between 1950 and 1980, the Civil Rights Movement was very effective in breaking down legal and political barriers to African American socio-economic equality. By the 1980s, however, black activists like Phoenician leader Lincoln Ragsdale realized that racism continued to be a debilitating obstruction between the masses of African Americans and socio-economic equality. As the eighth decade of the twentieth century commenced, African Americans had reached an unprecedented period in their history. The largest black middle-class in the nation’s history had emerged, while the masses of black people lived at, or below the poverty line, as a result of historic and persistent racial discrimination. Despite ongoing racial inequality in America, many conservative pundits cited the “success” of the black middle-class, and the notion of a “color blind” republic, as reasons to abandon race conscious remedies to America’s racial inequality. Acting on these beliefs, and others, these conservative leaders ushered in a return to conservative ideology and politics in America, the likes of which had not been seen since the 1950s.

¹ *Crisis*, June 1986.

² Martin Luther King, Jr. In a speech given at the National Conference for a New Politics, Chicago, Illinois, August 1967.

The impetus of this conservative renewal drew substantially from a negative reaction to African American advancement. These neo-conservative forces sought to undermine the laws, court cases, and symbolic victories that leaders like Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale had struggled to win. Lincoln Ragsdale saw a need to oppose this movement. During the 1980s and 1990s, Ragsdale resurfaced as an outspoken progressive leader. His goal was to work publicly again to help correct the problems of socio-economic inequality and continual racial discrimination.³

Between 1950 and 1980, the Civil Rights Movement, in addition to producing an impressive list of accomplishments, gave rise to intense divisions within the African American community. For generations, slavery, Jim Crow, and racial discrimination, and the arduous struggle to destroy them, had inspired black solidarity. Black people have never been a homogeneous group, but acute oppression compelled them to conceal many of their ideological differences. By 1980, however, African Americans began to publicly disagree on social, economic, and political issues more often. They no longer dissembled. Conflicts between the expanding black middle-class and dispossessed African Americans locked into decaying inner-cities broadened. Disputes between the proponents of integration, assimilation, and black nationalism surged. Chief among the warring factions which emerged were a band of black neo-conservatives such as Thomas Sowell, Shelby Steele, Ward Connerly, and Armstrong Williams, and the black liberal establishment which included leaders like Jessie Jackson, Randall Robinson, Mary Francis Berry, and Cornel West. By the 1980s, African Americans were embracing myriad strategies to obtain and

³ Tindall and Shi, *America*, 1231-1282; Franklin and Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 492-572; Hine, Hine, and Harold, *The African American Odyssey*, 563-564.

maintain socio-economic equality. Regardless of the various philosophies that were bandied about, however, at issue was still the progress and stability of the black community.⁴

By 1980 in Phoenix, Lincoln Ragsdale had led a Civil Rights Movement that had improved the lives of many African Americans and made the city a freer place in which to live. Also by this time, the African American population in Phoenix was 37, 672, or five percent of the total population. This was an increase of 9,776 since 1970. By 1990 the number of African Americans reached 51,053. During this period, many African Americans, a substantial percentage of whom were business people, made their way into the middle-class. "The positive effects of civil rights awareness," argues Bradford Luckingham, "made it easier for individual blacks to benefit from new economic and political opportunities." Socio-economic advancement for African Americans "as a group within the larger Phoenix population," however, continued to be sluggish.

Progress was made in education and employment for individuals like Lincoln Ragsdale and his family, and changes in the composition of Phoenix's political structure yielded greater African American representation. For example, Phoenix switched to a

⁴ For examples of black neoconservative political philosophies, see Martin Carnory, *Faded Dreams: The Politics and Economics of Race in America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Thomas Sowell, *Preferential Politics: An International Perspective* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1990); Shelby Steele, *Content of Our Character: A New Vision of Race in America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990); Joseph Perkins, (ed.), *A Conservative Agenda for Black Americans* (Washington, D.C.: Heritage Foundation, 1987). For examples of traditional black liberal political philosophies, see Eddie Stone, *Jessie Jackson* (Holloway House Publishing, 1981); Randall Robinson, *The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks* (New York: Dutton, 2000); Mary Francis Berry, *Black Resistance, White Law: A History of Constitutional Racism in America* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1995); Cornel West, *The Cornel West Reader* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 1999); Cornel West, *Race Matters* (New York: Vintage, 1994).

district system of government in 1983. This allowed South and West Phoenix to elect more minorities to the Phoenix City Council. Black Phoenix City Councilman Calvin Goode represented District 8, while Councilwoman Mary Rose Garrido Wilcox represented District 7. Wilcox represented a district where Chicanos made up the majority of the residents, and Goode represented a district where both African Americans and Chicanos made up the voting majority. Progressive black leader Art Hamilton, and Chicano leader Alfredo Gutierrez represented predominantly African American and Chicano voters in the Arizona legislature.⁵

During the 1980s, many African Americans who could afford it followed Lincoln Ragsdale to the suburbs. By 1980, Ragsdale had helped found the Southwest Savings and Loan Association and the Sun State Savings and Loan Association, expanding his financial connections and influence on Arizona's financial community. Ragsdale was now a millionaire, and one of the Southwest's wealthiest African Americans. It came as no surprise, therefore, when the Ragsdale family sold their home near the affluent "old-money" Palm Croft neighborhood in central Phoenix, to purchase a new, palatial estate in the elite, predominantly white Phoenician suburb of Clearwater Hills in Paradise Valley, Arizona. For most black Phoenicians, however, moving into wealthy white neighborhoods continued to be extremely difficult for economic and social reasons. Although racism was "not as overt, not as blatant as it was," declared Phoenician television reporter Evelyn

⁵ *Arizona Republic*, March 1, 1984, June 16, 1985; *Phoenix Gazette*, January 19, 1983, March 9, 1984, March 16, 1986, April 6, 1987; *New Times*, December 31, 1986-January 6, 1987; James, Franklin J., Eileen A. Tynan, and Betty L. McCummings (eds.). *Minorities in the Sunbelt* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1984), 62-81, 135-139. Also see Data Network for Human Services. *Demographic Trends in Maricopa County: Cities, Towns and Places, 1880-1990* (Phoenix: Data Network for Human Services, 1992).

Thompson, racial barriers still existed in Phoenix. “When I first came here in 1971,” she maintained, “a real estate agent said to me, ‘Blacks don’t live north of Thomas Road. I’m not going to show you any apartments in that area because nobody will rent to you.’” Indeed, the Equal Opportunity Department of the City of Phoenix stated in 1987, that housing discrimination persisted in “the Valley,” and continued to exacerbate segregated living patterns.⁶

Many black Phoenicians were disappointed when the Ragsdales moved to Paradise Valley. Persistent white antagonisms and housing discrimination, the deterioration of black Phoenicians neighborhoods, and the flight of “successful” black leaders from predominantly African American communities, caused some black leaders to be critical of the Ragsdale move. Moreover, between the mid-1960s and 1980, Lincoln Ragsdale had come to be regarded not as a progressive activist with a decidedly radical disposition, but a member of the establishment. Although his dedication to the betterment of African Americans never waned, his behind the scenes, “work-within-the-system” approach to black empowerment, and the physical space between him and the masses of black people, began to conflict with the more nationalistic agenda of less conservative black leaders. Local leaders of the black liberation movement questioned Ragsdale’s willingness to live in, and publicly support the black community he had so willingly represented.

The relatively small number of black Phoenicians who reached the middle and upper-classes, and moved to the city’s suburbs, left less fortuitous African Americans behind in communities replete with economic and social challenges. Some observers

⁶ Universal Memorial Center, *A Celebration, Lincoln Ragsdale*, 3; Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale interview; Herbert Ely interview; Boye De Mente, “Living Black in Phoenix,” *Phoenix* Vol. 17 (September, 1982), 102-105, 125-126.

celebrated the ascendancy of wealthy African Americans, despite the fact that wealth continued to be less common among black people than their white counterparts. The exodus of “successful” African Americans from black communities hastened the deterioration of black neighborhoods. Moreover, their departure divested inner-city communities of positive black role models for many young black people.⁷

Clovis Campbell, Sr., former representative to the Arizona State Senate, African American newspaper publisher, community activist, and one-time Ragsdale protege, believes that Ragsdale’s suburban emigration represents a destructive trend in post-civil rights African American history. Campbell declared that “if you leave the neighborhood, you leave it for nothing but the hoods.” Leaders like Campbell have called attention to the fact that the movement of African American professionals from black urban communities to suburban areas, has lowered the numbers of black role models in the communities they have left behind, and “if [there’s] one thing black young people need,” Campbell argues, “[it’s] good images of their professional people.” You’ve got a lot of people who want to teach and preach in South Phoenix,” Campbell exclaims, “but they don’t want to sleep in South Phoenix.” “They want to take all of the [black] resources out to Paradise Valley, Scottsdale, and Glendale. There’s nothing wrong with [black professionals] moving [to the suburbs], that’s great!” When these professional do move to the suburbs, however, Campbell believes it would be appropriate for them to “go work there.”⁸

Activists like Campbell also called for leaders like Ragsdale to return to active duty

⁷ Luckingham, *Minorities in Phoenix*, 184.

⁸ Clovis Campbell, Sr., interview conducted by Matthew C. Whitaker, August 6, 1996, Phoenix, Arizona. Audiotape is housed in the Matthew C. Whitaker Papers of the Arizona Collection in the Hayden Library, Arizona State University.

in the fight for black advancement during the 1980s. The decade ushered in a resurgence of white conservatism, attacks on gains made during the Civil Rights Movement, and racialized violence. This resurgence prompted many local and national leaders to rededicate themselves to African American progress and racial healing. Lincoln Ragsdale stood tall throughout the fight for black freedom during the 1950s and 1960s, and many local activists were calling upon him to speak out on again on behalf of the subordinated classes of minorities in Phoenix.⁹

Subtle and overt discrimination saturated life in Phoenix and across the nation during the 1980s. “Racism is still a significant factor in the lives of blacks in Phoenix,” argued one observer, “discrimination and barriers are more subtle than they used to be, and the perception of them is defined by the individual’s own attitudes and personal experiences, but it is still here.” Judis R. Andrews, local attorney and Lincoln Ragsdale apprentice, believes that racism is still an issue, and argues that recent racial discrimination is rooted primarily in economics. Segregation and discrimination has been curbed for the most part, he suggests, but “[racial] segregation [and discrimination] remains along income and financial lines which impact all Americans inasmuch as we live in a fiscal country where the dollar remains king.”¹⁰

During the 1980s, Phoenix held on to its reputation as one of the “whitest” cities in the U. S. E. J. Montini, a local newspaper editorialist, posited in 1987 that “Phoenix is, by far, the whitest big city in America.” He described the “Valley of the Sun” as “the

⁹ Judis R. Andrews, interview conducted by Matthew C. Whitaker, April 18, 2000, Phoenix, Arizona. Transcript is housed in the Arizona Collection of the Hayden Library, Arizona State University.

¹⁰ Ibid.

polyester suit of cities, the white bread, the fox trot, the Pat Boone of cities.” Many of Phoenix’s white citizens failed to appreciate the truth or humor in Montini’s message. One reader of Montini’s article responded by writing “Wake up white man! You and the rag you work for are what is wrong with America. You probably want to Speak Spanish too, you nigger-loving son of a.....Racism is alive and well in Arizona as well as the entire country. Don’t ever forget it.” Judis Andrews cited the “whiteness” of Phoenix, its relatively small black population, and the unwillingness of national African American leaders to bring their influence and visibility to Phoenix, as the main reasons racism continued to flourish in the city. “When people have no power and cannot secure the help of their brothers and sisters throughout the country, then they suffer at the hands of those in power. For years the leaders of the African movement wrote off this area as ‘Goldwater Country’ and did little or nothing to secure the dream for this small minority of citizens. Those in power yield to the ‘squeaking wheel’ philosophy.”¹¹

Phoenix’s “whiteness,” its small African American population, and the absence of national civil rights leaders from the areas black liberation struggle, contributed to past racial tensions and inequality in the city, but it was all of these issues, *and* the white conservative reaction to the civil rights establishment that nurtured racial inequality in Phoenix, and kept it going. With the presidential election of Barry Goldwater admirer and conservative Ronald Reagan in 1980, the federal government rescinded its support for the extension of the civil rights superstructure. Moreover, it actively reduced programs for the indigent and mounted an aggressive attack on progressive strategies to correcting past

¹¹ *Phoenix Gazette*, March 24, June 17, 1987, July 17, 1989; *Arizona Republic*, March 24, May 31, June 12, 1987; Judis Andrews interview.

and present discrimination such as affirmative action. Many powerful members of this “New Right,” opposed many of the structural changes that had occurred in the U. S. since the 1960s, such as expanded equal rights for minorities and women, the Supreme Court’s decision to ban mandatory prayer in schools, and the reconfiguration of voting districts to allow greater political participation and power to underrepresented racial minorities.

Southerners who stood in opposition to the progressive changes created by the Civil Rights Movement, and white Northerners who condemned affirmative action, the busing of black students to predominantly white schools, and welfare programs identified with black indolence and irresponsibility, created the core of this new conservative alliance.¹²

The top priority of the “New Right” it seemed, was to undermine progressive social welfare programs which targeted minorities and the poor. Between 1981 and 1993, Reagan and his conservative Republican heir George Bush, Sr. substantially reduced federal aid to social welfare programs in American cities, and simply dissolved others. Much of this aid, and the programs they supported, had stood between stability and abject poverty for millions of African Americans. The substantial reduction in federal aid to inner-city communities was reflected in the sharp decrease of city appropriations. As Hine and others argue, “the percentage of city budgets derived from the federal government declined from 14.3 percent to 5 percent. As a consequence of these policies, inner-city neighborhoods, where 56 percent of poor residents were African American, became more unstable.”¹³

¹² Hine, Hine, and Harold, *The African American Odyssey*, 566; Tindall and Shi, *America*, 1231-1282; Franklin and Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 492-572.

¹³ Ibid.

Reagan and his supporters championed what became known as the “trickle-down” theory. This economic “theory” held that if financial betterment of the nation’s richest citizens continued, their good fortune would “trickle-down” through the middle, working, and underprivileged classes. This did not happen. In fact, studies have shown that while America’s wealthiest citizens became wealthier, the country’s “truly disadvantaged” fell deeper into economic despair. The “trickle-down” theory, coupled with Reagan’s laissez faire attitude toward civil rights, and his hostility toward race conscious remedies to black socio-economic inequality, helped thwart some of the progress African Americans had made.¹⁴

By 1982, for example, the unemployment rate for black Americans had increased to twice that of white Americans at upwards of twenty percent. Moreover, between 1980 and 1993, salaries for American CEOs skyrocketed by five hundred and fourteen percent, while the wages of American workers rose by sixty-eight percent, which lagged well behind inflation. In 1992, argues Robin D. G. Kelley, “the average CEO earned one hundred and fifty-seven times what the average factory worker earned. And as a result of changes in the tax laws, average workers are paying more to the government while CEO’s and their companies are paying less. Corporate profits are reaching records highs, while ‘downsizing’ and capital flight have left millions unemployed. Between 1979 and 1992, the Fortune 500 companies’ total labor force dropped from 16.2 million world-wide to 11.8. Yet, in 1993, these companies recorded profits of 62.6 billion.”¹⁵

¹⁴ William Julius Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 220-229.

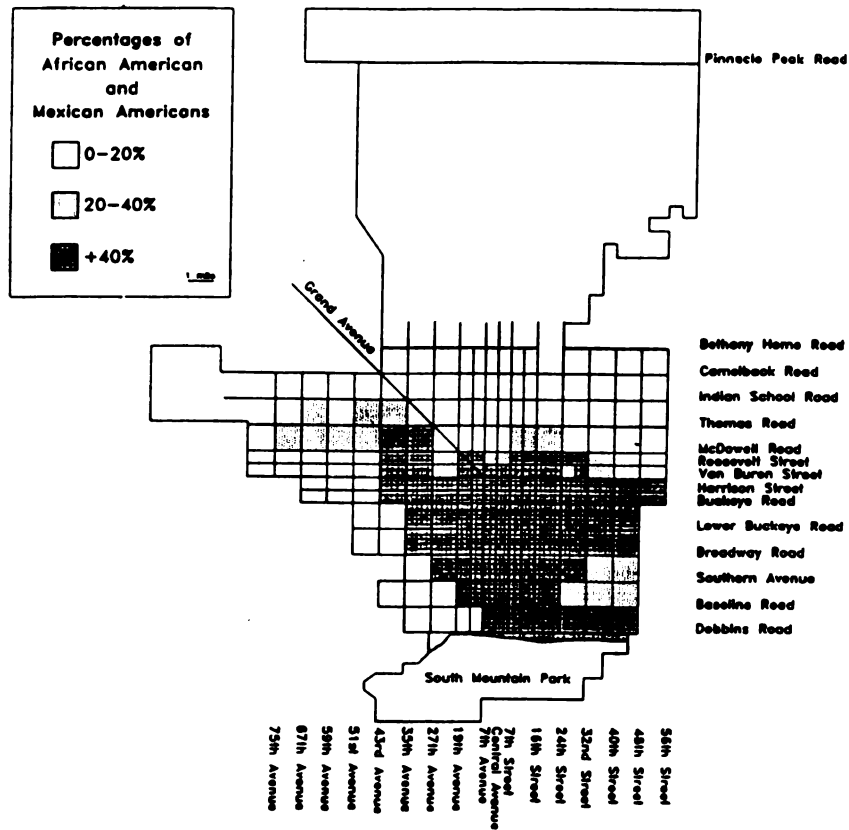
¹⁵ Kelley, *Yo’ Mama’s Disfunktional!*, 7-8.

Racism, racial segregation, and racial inequality had always existed in Phoenix, and the apparent indifference of the “New Right” to the plight of black Phoenicians did very little to end this retrograde tradition. In Phoenix, the failure of “trickle-down” economics was clear. Throughout the *de facto* segregated black poor neighborhoods in Phoenix, high unemployment, poor educational opportunities, and substandard infrastructures were ubiquitous. The condition of black Phoenicians only worsened after World War II, when the economy became more technologically based and suburbanized. Moreover, acclaimed Harvard sociologist William Julius Wilson has argued that as neo-conservatives dismantled Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society agenda, cutting government and private support of local programs which once supplied job training, health care, and family planning, the inner-city became home to concentrated poverty, health crises, unstable families, and gang violence. As jobs, better educational opportunities, and social support networks moved to suburbs, socially and economically segregated and subordinated inner-city minorities became trapped in a vicious cycle of joblessness and hopelessness.¹⁶

Poor socio-economic conditions wreaked havoc on the stability of black Phoenician families, particularly in the predominantly black and Chicano housing projects in South Phoenix. Hopelessness and the angst associated with it increased. A predominantly black neighborhood around Twenty-fourth Street and Broadway Road was characterized as “a war zone” where gangs ran amuck. The distribution of crack cocaine escalated to epidemic proportions, and drive-by shootings became commonplace. One South Phoenix resident consumed with fear and frustration proclaimed that “You can’t

¹⁶ William Julius Wilson, *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), 3-50.

Figure 5. African American and Chicano Neighborhoods in Phoenix, 1983.¹⁷



¹⁷ Legend prepared by the *Phoenix Gazette*, 1983; Luckingham, *Minorities in Phoenix*, 181.

walk out your door without being afraid of getting hurt.” Block Watch and other community based support programs were created to combat the rising tide of urban decay during the 1980s, but the distressing conditions in black Phoenician communities were racial and economic, and therefore required socially based, race and class conscious remedies to address them effectively.¹⁸

The social and economic problems which faced black Phoenicians, and all African Americans during the 1980s, were inextricably linked to the longstanding institutional and private exploitation, and the political control of people of African descent within a capitalist system based upon competition and the exploitation of marginalized individuals and groups. In short, the masses of black people during the 1980s were disproportionately mired in poverty and locked into besieged inner-city communities, because of anti-black prejudice undergirded and nurtured by a European American dominated capitalist regime; what Harold M. Baron labeled “the web of urban racism.” The individual and institutional manipulation of black people, Baron maintains, has undergone large-scale transformations throughout American history: from slavery to peonage and Jim Crow, to the present web of urban racism.¹⁹

“For the present era,” however, Baron argues that “it is within the institutional life

¹⁸ *Arizona Informant*, August 20, October 8, 1980, February 27, May 1, 1985; *Phoenix Gazette*, March 30, 31, 1983, April 1, June 15, July 3, 1984, March 13, 1986, March 24, June 17, 1987, July 17, 1989, March 16, June 28, August 3, 8, November 30, 1990, December 25, 1991; *Arizona Republic*, September 19, 1984, February 22, 27, 1985, March 24, May 31, June 12, 1987, May 5, 1988, April 30, June 12, August 20, 1989, January 13, April 2, 1990, August 8, October 27, December 10-13, 19, 20, 29, 1991, June 13, 1992; *New Times*, December 19-24, 1984, February 13-19, April 24-30, 1991.

¹⁹ Harold M. Baron, “The Web of Urban Racism,” In Louis Knowles and Kenneth Prewitt (eds.), *Institutional Racism in America* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1969), 134-135.

of metropolitan America-North, West, and South, that the most characteristic structures of racial subjugation are found. Therefore, American racism today cannot be understood apart from the operation of the major social systems with the large cities.” He argues that within prominent institutional systems that function in urban areas, there has developed distinct black “subsectors” which operate on a subordinated basis, subject to the advantage, control, and priorities of the prevailing systems dominated by white people. White prejudice and the leading economic and social systems which they maintained, have inspired and cultivated a “circular pattern of reinforcement between barriers that define the various black subsectors.” If any one institution, the school system or the labor market for example, would maintain its current activities outside the web of urban racism, its effectiveness in racial differentiation would significantly decline. “This is not to say that explicit racial barriers and discrimination no longer exist,” argues Baron; “it does say that once the fundamental institutional relationships have been established, overtly exclusionary barriers become less important for the overall oppressive functioning of the system of urban racism.”²⁰

What appears to be impartial institutions of large urban areas, such as corporations, financial establishments, real estate brokerage firms, schools and universities, have been threaded into a web of urban racism that marginalizes and “entraps black people much as the spider’s net holds flies-they can wiggle but they cannot move very far.” The racial barriers created and maintained by each institution are meticulously pronounced and connected. One institution standing alone may not be the sole perpetrator

²⁰ Ibid. 144. It must be noted that despite the fact that Baron makes this argument in 1969, it is still applicable in 2001.

of racial inequality, but the myriad threads of most institutions link together to form a formidable web. Here, however, Baron maintains, “the analogy breaks down.” “In contrast to the spider’s prey, the victim of urban racism has fed on stronger stuff and is on the threshold of tearing the web.” The proliferation of racial controls through such a variety of institutions, coupled with differences in ideology, have made it very complicated to recognize the actual superstructure that “makes urban racism operational.”²¹

To the masses of black people trapped in inner-cities, it appears that “there is just a massive white sea that surrounds a black island.” Indeed, the poorer and more isolated the individual is, the more likely they are to embrace this perception. White liberals, influential business and governmental administrators, and members of the black bourgeoisie, are more likely to view the urban race problem as a plethora of issues directly related to the culture of inner-city black people. They tend to believe that the problems of beleaguered inner-city black residents are correctable via the allocation of resources on the prevailing methods of business and social management, and through the acceptance of a kind of white middle-class ethos.²²

It was once fashionable, and remains so in some circles, to argue that the inner-city environment is antithetical to racism. Rural African American peasants, it was postulated, would simply require a generation or two to assimilate into the urban “melting pot.” After all, Baron asks, “were they not just the newest immigrants—a kind of black Irish.” Statistics and scholars such as Wilson and Kelley have demonstrated otherwise. The emigration of black people to urban areas has had little effect on the socio-economic

²¹ Ibid. 144-145.

²² Ibid. 145.

status of the masses of African Americans *vis-a-vis* white Americans in urban areas. The racial gap in social and economic advantage, though smaller between middle-class black people and their white counterparts, remains strikingly wide between the masses of African Americans in inner-cities and most white Americans, even in a period of unprecedented economic prosperity. Urban areas, as Wilson and Kelley have shown, have their own mechanisms for locking African Americans in. A careful reading of the historical record will reveal that the functioning of the urban superstructure still involves a perpetuation of racial prejudice and discrimination, segregation, subordination, and exploitation.²³

Some black Phoenicians fared better than most. As in other major cities, elite African American athletes lived a privileged life in the “Valley of the Sun.” In 1991, one black professional Phoenician athlete stated that “most players feel they can reside in any neighborhood and send their kids to good schools, as well as dine out, shop and go about life’s routines without incident.” Certainly the lifestyles of professional athletes, regardless of their color, were atypical. Black professional athletes, in particular were, and continue to be, statistical outliers with regard to wealth, status, and mobility in the American racial context. By this period, Lincoln Ragsdale, as a wealthy and influential black Phoenician, was also a statistical aberration. What this meant to Ragsdale is unclear. What is apparent, however, is that he recognized the persistence of racial inequality and discrimination. During the 1980s and early 1990s, as a man entering the winter of his life, he answered the calls of leaders like Clovis Campbell, and responded to new attacks on

²³ Wilson, *When Work Disappears*, 3-50; Kelley, *Yo’ Mama’s Disfunktional!*, 1-13; Baron, “The Web of Urban Racism,” 145.

black progress and persistent racial segregation by returning to the activism which defined his youth.²⁴

Although the Ragsdale family was wealthy enough to buy into an expensive, predominantly white suburban neighborhood, and despite laws barring racial discrimination in places of public accommodation, Lincoln Ragsdale was barred from Paradise Valley's "lily-white" country club. For almost thirty years after national and state-wide legislation rendered racial discrimination in places of public accommodation illegal, Phoenix's most prestigious country clubs remained all white. Phoenician country clubs routinely turned down the few African Americans who requested membership. For twenty years Ragsdale tried unsuccessfully to integrate the Paradise Valley Country Club. Ragsdale, who lived virtually "across the street" from the country club, said he asked two friends who were members to recommend him for membership. They declined, citing the probability of their being shunned by other white members if they were to support Ragsdale's candidacy. One of his "dear friends" said: "Lincoln, I would like to do it for you and I'm not a racist, but they would ostracize me and they wouldn't like it." The other stated that: "I asked them and they said they didn't think the time was right to bring in the black guys." They informed him, under no uncertain terms, that "the club would not

²⁴ *Arizona Informant*, August 20, October 8, 1980, February 27, May 1, 1985; *Phoenix Gazette*, March 30, 31, 1983, April 1, June 15, July 3, 1984, March 13, 1986, March 24, June 17, 1987, July 17, 1989, March 16, June 28, August 3, 8, November 30, 1990, December 25, 1991; *Arizona Republic*, September 19, 1984, February 22, 27, 1985, March 24, May 31, June 12, 1987, May 5, 1988, April 30, June 12, August 20, 1989, January 13, April 2, 1990, August 8, October 27, December 10-13, 19, 20, 29, 1991, June 13, 1992; *New Times*, December 19-24, 1984, February 13-19, April 24-30, 1991.

accept him because he is black.”²⁵

Ragsdale argued that his initial desire to be a member of the Paradise Valley Country Club was financially motivated. Joining the club, he reasoned, would have allowed him to make important business contacts and to socialize with prominent members of Phoenix’s financial community. Although Ragsdale was a millionaire, his fortune was primarily secured through service to, and interaction with minorities. Membership in the Paradise Valley Country Club would have opened doors, financial relationships, and markets that had previously been inaccessible to him. The club conspired to keep Ragsdale from reaching a larger financial pool, which would have given him the opportunity to expand his fortune and influence.²⁶

When all of his neighbors in Clearwater Hills moved in, remembered Ragsdale, the country club would invite them over, “show them through the Country Club and let them see what the facilities are,” and then ask them: “Are you interested?” If they were interested, “somebody in the club, a neighbor,” recalled Ragsdale, would initiate a petition for the candidate’s membership, and “get two people to recommend them” for admission. Once they secured two recommendations, they were then admitted to the club, “assuming they wanted to pay the money.” “They had different types of memberships,” Ragsdale said, “one with golf, one without, one was social, whatever.”²⁷

When one of Ragsdale’s neighbors became president of the club, he asked them for

²⁵ Baker, “The Man Who Refused to Be Invisible,” 99; *Arizona Republic*, August 2-3, 1990; Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale interview.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Lincoln and Eleanor interview.

a recommendation for admission. "I went to see him and said: 'Now that you're president, can you help me?' He and I had been friends for ten years, I watched him build his home up here in Clearwater and I knew the man; still lives here by the way. He said 'let me think about it.'" After asking his neighbor for his help for three months, Ragsdale was finally given an answer. "Lincoln," the neighbor said, "they wouldn't take you. These people up here are not ready yet." In 1990, when Keven Willey, a reporter for the *Arizona Republic*, asked Leon Bentley, president of the Paradise Valley Country Club, to comment on the club's record of not admitting African Americans, he was told such information was "of no concern to you or anyone else."²⁸

Joining Ragsdale in his efforts to integrate the country club was wealthy black businessman, Ray Johnson. In 1987, Johnson obtained the necessary recommendations, submitted photographs of himself and his wife upon request, and visited the club with their sponsors. They were then told that the membership fee would be \$80,000. Johnson replied, "where do I send the check?" The membership committee then promptly rejected his petition. "I was turned down and never given a reason why," Johnson recalled, "Nobody would talk about it." Undaunted in his efforts to desegregate the club, Ragsdale took his case to the court of public opinion. Submitting to a series of interviews and public appearances, Ragsdale brought attention to the perpetuation of *de facto* racial segregation at the country club. Although he used his efforts to integrate the Paradise Valley Country Club as his primary example, he also voiced his displeasure with lingering

²⁸ Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale interview; *Arizona Republic*, August 2, 1990.

racial segregation throughout Phoenix.²⁹

Ragsdale's efforts were eventually brought to the attention of many of Arizona's top politicians. The local media approached former governor, millionaire, and member of the country club, J. Fife Symington, III, about Ragsdale's ongoing ordeal with the country club. Symington said that he was unaware of any discriminatory practices by the club and that he would work to change them if they existed. Symington said the club had no written policy banning black people, and denied the accusation that the country club had a formal policy of discrimination, saying that "I know they have Hispanic members and many Jewish members." Symington spoke to Ragsdale and offered to sponsor his petition for membership to the club. Symington told reporters that he wished to "put the system to a test."³⁰

John McCain, Arizona's Republican member of the United States Senate, indirectly challenged Symington to go a step further. "I strongly feel there should be black members at Paradise Valley Country Club," McCain declared, "and if they do not take steps to allow black members, I will return my membership." Ragsdale ultimately declined Symington's offer, citing his desire to see a "more natural" process of inviting black people into the country club. He brought a substantial amount of attention to the fact that the club was racially segregated, and that had become his primary goal. Although he was still interested in becoming a member of the club, he had lost interest in the prospect after being the object of steadfast white resistance. "Don't get me wrong," Ragsdale said, "I

²⁹ Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale interview; *Arizona Republic*, August 2, 1990; Luckingham, *Minorities in Phoenix*, 184-185.

³⁰ Ibid.

want to be a member, but I do not wish to be a token. I do not want to be used so they can say, 'look, here's a black person.' What I'm, saying is, let it be a very natural thing.”³¹

Ragsdale, who had once entertained the idea of creating an exclusive club for “professional black people,” had no problem with private clubs setting up “some kind of criteria” for membership. After all, he declared, “this is America.” The question, Ragsdale asked, however, was “what kind of criteria are you going to have?” He did not object to the idea of racial or gender specific private organizations *per se*. He did, however, believe that there is a fine line between private groups who promote a specific form of solidarity, and government sanctioned and supported groups who discriminate in an arbitrary and capricious manner. Country clubs and similar private institutions and groups that benefitted from “the protection, of the government; through liquor licensing, police protection, fire protection,” and tax relief, were obligated to be as inclusive as possible. With regard to the Paradise Valley Country Club, Ragsdale argued that their golf greens were not being taxed, and that this constituted government support of their institution, including its racially discriminatory practices. Since the club profited from governmental tax relief, Ragsdale reasoned, they had “no right to exclude people on the basis of race.”³²

The negative media publicity Ragsdale brought to Paradise Valley Country Club helped motivate the institution to open its doors to African Americans in 1992. Ragsdale did not renew his effort to join the club. As he saw it, his business and social ties were now well-established. The primary reason he had wanted to join no longer existed. Some

³¹ *Arizona Republic*, August 2-3, 1990.

³² *Arizona Republic*, August 3, 1990; Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale interview.

black nationalist leaders in Phoenix no doubt questioned the wisdom and motivation behind Ragsdale's crusade to be included in the elite white country club. It could be argued that Ragsdale's desire to become a member of the club demonstrated a yearning to assimilate further into what George Clinton called the "Vanilla Suburbs." Also, critics believed that there were more critical issues that Ragsdale could have shed light on, such as police brutality and racial profiling. As they saw it, Ragsdale was simply a black millionaire trying desperately to be included in a club of white millionaires. All of the parties involved were privileged individuals, and as a result, Ragsdale's efforts did not always resonate with poor black inner-city residents. To Ragsdale, however, Paradise Valley Country Club's discriminatory practices were a product of naked racism; the same racism which locked poor black Phoenicians in decaying inner-city communities.³³

While Ragsdale was calling attention to persistent racial segregation in Phoenix during the late 1980s and early 1990s, he also spoke out against what he classified as the Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airports racially unequal distribution of business leases. During the fall of 1990, the Phoenix Aviation Advisory Board recommended the city renegotiate leases with shops in Sky Harbor's Terminals Two and Three. This action, Ragsdale and other minority leaders argued, would continue to prevent them from participating equally in airport business by bidding for the space. Without a process of open bidding, the predominantly white owned business at Sky Harbor would be given top priority through a private renegotiation process. Ragsdale, who served for seven years on the aviation board, said "minorities had been shut out of the process or running shops at

³³ Baker, "The Man Who Refused to Be Invisible," 99; *Arizona Republic*, August 2-3, 1990; Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale interview; Parliament, "Chocolate City," *Chocolate City* (Polygram Records, 1975).

Sky Harbor” by not being allowed to bid for space. Although federal law required minority participation of at least ten percent in businesses at airports receiving federal funding, the law did not require that the city take bids for concessions at Sky Harbor.³⁴

At issue were profitable contracts. The Advisory Board supported renegotiation because the airport and the city stood to benefit from higher revenues from established businesses, and minority businesses supported bidding because they would be poised to reap substantial profits from newly secured contracts. The drive to win airport concession compacts was intense because stores in Terminal Two and Three were likely to gross sales of around twelve million dollars. Ragsdale led a charge of minority activists who protested what they said was a form of racial discrimination at Sky Harbor. The debate was heated, and Ragsdale proclaimed, “I haven’t been in a fight like this since the blacks went into the restaurants to eat.”³⁵

Airport shop owners said that it was good business practice, and not discrimination, that was at the heart of the proposal not to place the leases out to bid. “There are some things government can’t do,” said Phoenix City Councilman Skip Rimza, who favored bidding, “and negotiating in private contracts is one of them.” Rimza and his supporters suggested that after the owners renegotiated their contracts, they would put forth a “good-faith” effort to hire minorities at airport concessions. Ragsdale wanted minorities to be prime contractors, not just subcontractors and employees. He also likened labor conditions for black airport workers to slavery, and suggested that such

³⁴ *Arizona Republic*, August 31, 1990. Estimates for concession contracts in fiscal year 1991, were based upon the total airport business gross of fiscal year 1990. During that year the concession gross was twelve million dollars.

³⁵ *Arizona Republic*, September 22, 1990.

conditions would improve if black people owned and operated airport concessions. “We don’t need a job [at the airport]. In slavery we had a job.” What black people needed, he argued, was “ownership.”³⁶

The intent of the bidding, Ragsdale reasoned, was for minorities “to have equity.” “With renegotiation,” he declared, “there is no equity.” Airport records indicate that the Federal Aviation Administration’s (FAA) civil rights division reviewed Sky Harbor’s minority-hiring program in 1988 and “found it to be lacking in ‘good faith’ efforts to meet its hiring goals.” Moreover, the FAA stated that the airport failed to hire a designated personnel officer to encourage minority businesses to apply for contracts. Ragsdale cited the FAA’s evaluation throughout his public campaign for renegotiations, and balked at additional promises to put forth ‘good faith’ efforts to promote racial equality. He continued to fight through the fall of 1990. Ultimately, however, the advisory board voted to allow owners to renegotiate their contracts, much to the chagrin of Ragsdale and his supporters. The issue was far from resolved by 1991, however, and even at the time of Ragsdale death four years later, the topic remained a political and economic hot potato. During the last years of his life, however, Ragsdale rededicated himself to fighting publicly for black social and economic empowerment.³⁷

For black Phoenicians like Lincoln Ragsdale, who were upwardly mobile during the 1980s, progress continued to be made. Despite uphill battles with institutions like Sky Harbor Airport, gains were made in employment, housing, and education. Civil rights measures, including affirmative action, created many of these opportunities. The majority

³⁶ *Arizona Republic*, September 22, 1990.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

of black Phoenicians, however, remained mired in poverty. Social service programs and private black organizations worked diligently to improve conditions in the black community. African American churches such as First Institutional Baptist Church, led by Dr. Warren H. Stewart, also spearheaded major movements to assist needy members of the black community.³⁸

Black organizations and Phoenician leaders like Lincoln Ragsdale, George Brooks, and Clovis Campbell, called attention to the problems of African Americans. “I was the arrogant one,” Ragsdale recalled, “Reverend Brooks was the one that would console and work with the people. My job was to go in and shake up the water, and his job was to come along and say he’s [Ragsdale] a little too far out.” Ragsdale was shaking up the water in Phoenix again, when he argued that job discrimination still existed in the city during the 1980s and 1990s. Campbell argued that “job discrimination is not as open as it used to be in the Phoenix area, but it is still here.” The change that did occur, he argued, was created by affirmative action and civil rights groups like the NAACP, not because of “any substantial change in the basic belief of white businessmen.”³⁹

Campbell placed a great deal of the blame for the persistence of white racism and discrimination on Ronald Reagan and his fellow conservatives. Reagan and his supporters, he maintained, “sort of signaled to the business community that ‘hey, you can go slow. You don’t have to worry about [racial equality] as long as I’m here.’”

³⁸ Luckingham, *Minorities in Phoenix*, 186. Also see Mays, June, Sylvia Anderson, and Terri Dunlap (eds.). *Greater Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church: From Then Until Now, 73rd Anniversary Celebration* Phoenix: Greater Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church, 1997.

³⁹ Lincoln Ragsdale interview, NewsChannel3, KTVK; *Arizona Informant*, August 20, October 8, 1980, February 27, May 1, 1985.

Reaganesque reductions in federal and state aid to the impoverished were extremely damaging, Campbell stated. Indeed, Junius Bowman, leader of the Phoenix Urban League in 1985, argued that “a lot of programs that were begun during the Great Society have been cutback. There used to be a great and conscious promotion of economic development for blacks. Some of that is happening but not with such intensity as before.” The Reagan-Bush years, argued Marvin Perry, leader of the Black Board of Directors Project in Phoenix, popularized a return to conservative politics which promoted racial inequality and demonized civil rights. “Jim Crow is dead,” he announced while talking about the birth of a new cynicism about civil rights during the Reagan-Bush years. “That is true. But James S. Crow, Esquire, his grandson, is alive and well.”⁴⁰

Neo-conservative policies, white resistance to civil rights programs, and institutional racism led to a resurgence of racial antagonisms during the 1980s at the national and local levels. In March 1991, members of the Los Angeles police department removed motorist Rodney King from his vehicle by force, following a high-speed pursuit, and beat him repeatedly. The episode was captured on videotape and continually broadcast on television around the world. The incident placed the ongoing issue of police brutality and African Americans squarely at the forefront of American political and intellectual debates. A jury of eleven white Americans and one Hispanic American acquitted the four police officers charged in the beating of King. Following the verdict, South-Central Los Angeles erupted in protest. Believing that verdict demonstrated the perpetuation of American racial injustice, rioters looted and set buildings ablaze.

⁴⁰ *Arizona Informant*, August 20, October 8, 1980, February 27, May 1, 1985; *Arizona Republic*, August 28, 1993.

Thousands of people were injured, four thousand were arrested, and upward of one-half billion dollars in property was damaged or decimated.⁴¹

The Rodney King affair reverberated through black communities across the nation. In Phoenix, black activists like Lincoln Ragsdale cited local police brutality and the retreat from civil rights, for thwarting the cultivation of constructive race relations. For instance, he and other black leaders characterized the “overwhelmingly” white Phoenix Police Department as being “insensitive to blacks.” Insensitive may have been an understatement. For example, in March 1998, a jury awarded a \$45 million judgment to the family of Edward Mallet, a twenty-five year old black man and double amputee, who died at the hands of Phoenix police officers in 1994. Wrongly suspected of gang activity because of, among other things, his “physical appearance,” Mallet was stopped, doused with pepper spray, and put in a neck hold by police officers. The neck hold administered by the police officers cut off Mallet’s flow of oxygen and suffocated him to death. The police supported their actions by arguing that Mallet had resisted arrest. Despite the fact that Mallet was a double amputee, police officers claimed that he was a large man who displayed superior strength. His extraordinary strength, they argued, caused them to apply the life ending neck hold to Mallet. Mallet’s family filed a forty-five million dollar lawsuit against the city for the actions of the Phoenix Police Department. The city later settled, paying the family about five million dollars.⁴²

Racism and discrimination was reported in other sectors as well. The NAACP

⁴¹ Hine, Hine, and Harold, *The African American Odyssey*, 574-575; Tindall and Shi, *America*, 1231-1282; Franklin and Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 492-572.

⁴² *Arizona Republic*, March 19, 1999.

issued a report in September of 1991 that highlighted “about 250 cases of discrimination each year in metropolitan Phoenix.” The report underscored “a continuing cycle in the Valley of people being discriminated against in housing and jobs.” Thirty years after Lincoln Ragsdale helped Phoenix desegregate its banks, and its major corporations, many black Phoenicians said that a “usually subtle, but occasionally overt racism still clouds their lives.” “Black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics,” Paul Brinkley-Rodgers of the the *Arizona Republic* wrote in 1993, “they are not all, as [Martin Luther] King dreamed, free at last.” “Advances have been made toward equal opportunities in employment,” Brinkley-Rodgers wrote, and “blacks no longer are denied voting rights. ‘White only’ signs are gone, but racist acts against African-Americans, two recent cross burnings at a black home in Phoenix, for example-are on the increase according to the U. S. Department of Justice.”⁴³

Dr. Duane Wooten, a Phoenician pediatrician, stated that when he enrolled in medical school at the University of Arizona, he was the first African American to do so in seven years. While he attended medical school, he recalled, the director of family practice, who was white, asked a class, “Why do you think there’s so much black-on-black crime?” “A lot of students looked at me,” in response he said. “In the thirty years since he [Martin Luther King, Jr.] made that speech, there’s been so little change made in racism,” Wooten believes. “Too many Caucasian-Americans feel themselves liberal and open-minded, but, at the same time, they feel superior in lifestyle. They feel they have an inherent right to protect their privilege, and it is so bad they don’t even think about it.”⁴⁴

⁴³ *Arizona Republic*, September 13, 1991; August 28, 1993.

⁴⁴ *Arizona Republic*, August 28, 1993.

The general status of African Americans in Phoenix during the 1980s and 1990s reflected a national trend. Equal opportunity in housing was sometimes a myth. There were no black chief executive officers in the top one hundred corporations. Federal statistics indicated that black unemployment at 13.8 percent in 1993, was higher than it was in 1963 when it was 10.8 percent. Twenty-three percent of all black men age twenty to twenty-nine were in prison, on parole, or on probation in 1990, more than were in college. In 1992, unemployment among black men age twenty to twenty-four was 24.5 percent, compared with 10.4 percent for their white counterparts. Despite these startling statistics, however, black Phoenixians and African Americans throughout the country had made progress. Lincoln Ragsdale and Clovis Campbell remembered that thirty years ago, there were only two African American attorneys in Phoenix, Hazel B. Daniels and Carl Stewart. In 1993, there were more than seventy. In 1965, there were only two hundred and eighty black elected officials in America. In 1993, there were over seven and a half thousand. The Census Bureau reported household incomes among African Americans at \$4,325 in 1967. In 1991, it was \$18,807. Forty-two percent of African Americans were living in poverty in 1966, in 1991 it was 32.7 percent.⁴⁵

Lincoln Ragsdale believed that despite persistent racial adversity, African Americans had made substantial progress. When Democratic president William Jefferson Clinton celebrated his forty-seventh birthday in 1993 at the Martha's Vineyard home of his black friend Vernon Jordan, Ragsdale was pleased. "That means something," Ragsdale said, "things are changing." Ragsdale spoke with Jordan about the visit, and shared his

⁴⁵ *Arizona Republic*, August 28, 1993; Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale interview, Clovis Campbell, Sr. interview; United States Census of Population, 1970.

delight over the event. Ragsdale and Jordan met and became friends while Jordan served as president of the Urban League, and board member of American Express in Phoenix. On the other hand, Ragsdale acknowledged that his dream of a better future was not shared by many young African Americans. “So many young black men look at life as having nothing for them,” he argued. “It’s like ‘Nigger, you have your civil rights now, but there’s no future for you.’ If I were seventeen or eighteen, sure, I’d know there were teenager jobs, but when I get to be twenty years, who wants me?” “Some whites resent it if we get a job and if we succeed and get ahead. But this problem is an African American thing too. I’m 67, but when I go to the toilet, sometimes in my mind I see a ‘white only’ sign there. I have a Ph.D., I have been with the U. S. president [Ronald Reagan], and I have met the queen, but sometimes I get screwed up because I remember how humiliating it was.”⁴⁶

Although progress was made, maintaining it was often difficult for leaders like Ragsdale, As Bradford Luckingham notes, “the population and the needs of the African American community were diverse. The gains made by middle-class African Americans increased the differences between them and the less fortunate classes, especially the so-called underclass left behind in the problem-plagued poorer neighborhoods.” White Americans were not the only critics of poor African Americans and civil rights. Often, by the 1980s, African Americans who were “successful” argued that the problems of poor inner-city black people were their own fault. Moreover, many of these members of the black bourgeoisies endeavored to dissociate themselves from what they perceived to be a

⁴⁶ *Arizona Republic*, August 28, 1993, June 11, 1995; Lincoln and Eleanor interview.

fallen and corrupt black inner-city population. Among the class of well-to-do African Americans, existed a growing circle of neo-conservatives who were extremely critical of poor black inner-city residents, and progressive policies and programs which sought to help lift them out of poverty. This ever expanding cadre of conservative black thinkers was opposed to the more liberal politics of many of their fellow African Americans. These two groups reflected the ideological diversity of, and conflict within the black community. Each wanted to set the socio-economic agenda for black America. Debates over the merits of their prescriptions for black progress became intense and acrimonious. As the two camps escalated their efforts to persuade and lead, it became increasingly difficult for African Americans to continue to mount a unified campaign for black socio-economic advancement. The movement was weakened through fragmentation.⁴⁷

Black neo-conservatives such as Thomas Sowell, Shelby Steele, Alan Keyes, and Clarence Thomas, have suggested that many of the problems of poor urban black people are caused by flawed cultural traits and the American welfare system. For instance, Thomas Sowell believes that often African Americans in the inner-city suffer from sloth and indecency, which perpetuates their poverty and socio-economic isolation. Rather than expand social programs to help impoverished black people, however, Sowell would like to see affirmative action and welfare programs terminated because he believes they undermine middle-class values of hard-work and frugality. These conservative leaders suggested that racism as it was known in the 1950s and 1960s, no longer existed in the 1980s and 1990s. As a result, they have argued, the problems of masses of African Americans during the Reagan-Bush years were not rooted in government policy or

⁴⁷ Luckingham, *Minorities in Phoenix*, 187.

TABLE B

**THE POPULATION OF THE GREATER PHOENIX METROPOLITAN AREA
BETWEEN THE YEARS 1940 AND 1990⁴⁸**

City	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990
Phoenix	65,414	106,818	438,170	585,303	789,704	983,403
Tempe	2,906	7,684	24,897	63,550	106,743	141,865
Mesa	7,224	16,670	33,772	63,049	152,453	289,020
Glendale	4,855	8,179	15,696	36,228	97,172	148,134
Scottsdale	1,000	2,032	10,026	67,823	88,412	130,059
Chandler	1,239	3,799	9,531	13,763	29,673	90,533
Total	86,638	145,182	532,092	829,716	1,264,157	1,783,014

⁴⁸ United States Census of Population, 1940-1990, General Characteristics by States (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1940-1990).

corporate capitalism. Rather, they have maintained that their problems stemmed from black folk themselves; their delinquent youth, welfare mothers, and deadbeat dads.⁴⁹

These leaders generally defined government assistance of any kind as the antithesis of personal responsibility, unless, as Robin D. G. Kelley argues, “one is talking about government subsidies to industry or tax breaks for the wealthy.” Their arguments, many liberal black leaders suggested, revealed a questionable faith in the free market to inspire and promote equality. These conservative supporters of black capitalism, black liberals posited, believed profits obtained from black businesses would “trickle down to impoverished black people without any system to redistribute wealth. They take for granted that the ‘free market’ actually operates free of racism and that the playing field is even, which is why they have called for ‘color blind’ social policies completely rejecting any race-based entitlements or special privileges.”⁵⁰

Liberal black leaders like Jessie Jackson attempted to counter the effects of the new conservatism, and its loyal black supporters. In 1983, Jackson and his People United to Serve Humanity (PUSH), spearheaded a campaign to inspire black progressive political activism. In November of that year Jackson announced his candidacy for the Democratic nomination. Throughout his campaign, he appealed to the traditional black liberal establishment, working-class white Americans, Latinos, feminists, and young people. This alliance became known as the Rainbow Coalition. Building upon a long liberal tradition, his platform included, among other things, increasing employment opportunities. Jackson visited Phoenix often during his campaign, and during his stops he and Lincoln Ragsdale

⁴⁹ Kelley, *Yo ' Mama's Disfunktional!*, 7-8, 91.

⁵⁰ Kelley, *Yo ' Mama's Disfunktional!*, 91; West, *Race Matters*, 73-90.

became friends and comrades in the struggle for racial equality. Jackson garnered nearly one-fourth of the Democratic primaries and caucuses, and one-eighth of the delegates to the convention. Ultimately Walter Mondale won the Democratic Party's presidential nomination. Mondale, in turn, lost to incumbent Ronald Reagan by a wide margin. Reagan logged a landslide victory, winning fifty-nine percent of the popular vote.⁵¹

Jackson's ascendancy and his liberal response to the new conservatism, and its black supporters, reflected the expanding ideological and political heterogeneity within the black community. The public solidarity African Americans demonstrated during the 1950s and 1960s appeared to be a thing of the past. Some observers wondered if African Americans would ever enjoy the kind of unity they forged during the height of the Civil Rights Movement. The deepening conflict between liberal and conservative African Americans was not the only problem. Much of the ideological dislocation rested in the fact that a great many "successful" black leaders, liberal and conservative, no longer had substantive connection to the truly disadvantaged in the black community. Some observers wondered if the black community would ever be able to produce a unified movement on behalf of African American advancement again. In Phoenix, for example, one black observer indicated that:

Recently a group of successful blacks were called together with the intent of alleviating the many severe problems of youth in the black community. Several good suggestions were offered. Unfortunately, 90 percent of those at the meeting did not live within the area where so-called black problems exist, and did not seem to understand problems in the black community.⁵²

⁵¹ Hine, Hine, and Harold, *The African American Odyssey*, 574; Tindall and Shi, *America*, 1231-1282; Franklin and Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 492-572.

⁵² Quoted in Luckingham, *Minorities in Phoenix*, 187.

During the 1980s, poverty in South Phoenix rose sharply among African Americans and Chicanos. White Phoenicians, however, saw their poverty rates decline. By 1990, argues Bradford Luckingham, “47 percent of African American children, 39 percent of Hispanic children, and 17 percent of Anglo children under age five lived in poverty.” “The dichotomy of poverty in Phoenix is so drastic,” noted one observer in 1993, “it’s not just that white people don’t see it. Black people who are in a different economic group don’t see it.” Class divisions appeared to be contributing to socio-economic despair in black inner-city neighborhoods.⁵³

Although class conflict contributed to the segmentation of the black community, some common “affronts and setbacks” united it. For instance, in 1982 Representative Art Hamilton introduced legislation to create an official state holiday honoring the life and philosophies of Martin Luther King, Jr. The Arizona legislature, however, continually rejected his efforts. In 1986, Governor Bruce Babbitt, who supported a paid holiday honoring the slain civil rights leader, handed down such a holiday by executive order. Evan Mecham, his successor, argued that Babbitt exceeded his power in creating the holiday. Mecham nullified the order, substituting it with an unpaid holiday which was observed on the third Sunday in January. Many Arizona residents, particularly African Americans, were furious with Mecham’s actions. Lincoln Ragsdale, George Brooks, and Reverend Warren Stewart, all leading supporters for a paid King holiday, led a march of 10,000 supporters to the state capitol. Stewart called for public acknowledgment of King’s vision of an America free of racial inequality. “America is different because of Dr. King, and we can’t ever forget that,” Stewart proclaimed. “He deserves his day and I’ll

⁵³ *Arizona Republic*, January 1, 1993.

fight for it as long as I live in this state.” Ragsdale, Stewart, and all Arizona residents believed that it may have taken a lifetime to create such a holiday, as the state legislature continued to reject legislation that proposed a paid King holiday. Each year, however, civil rights activist marched to the state capitol in protest to the absence of a paid King holiday.⁵⁴

In 1989 the Arizona legislature approved a King holiday. It did not want to increase the number of paid state holidays, however, so it moved Columbus Day to a Sunday. Italian Americans were extremely vocal in expressing their displeasure at the movement of Columbus Day. The legislature responded by restoring Columbus Day to a paid holiday while retaining the King holiday. In a 1990 referendum, however, the King holiday was again defeated by less than 1 percent of the vote. This pleased Mechem and his supporters immensely, but it angered African Americans and their supporters. Lincoln Ragsdale voiced his displeasure with the holidays rejection, and helped lead the way in labeling Arizona as a racist state. Individuals and organizations throughout the nation boycotted Arizona because of its handling of the issue. The National Football League (NFL) removed its 1993 Super Bowl from Phoenix because of the controversial proposition. Arizona lost hundreds of millions of dollars in tourism and convention revenue as a result.

Lincoln Ragsdale, other black leaders, and many white Arizonans wanted a paid King holiday and continued to work to obtain it. Proponents believed they lost the election because of questionable ballots and what was perceived to be the intrusion of the

⁵⁴ *Arizona Informant*, January 1985, April 11, July 25, October 3, November 14, 21, 1990, January 16, August 21, 1991; *Arizona Republic*, May 10, 1986, March 23, April 4, May 28, 1987, September 26, December 22, 1989

NFL. Voters had two ballot propositions on the King holiday during the 1990 election. One of them established a paid King holiday and another exchanged a King holiday for Columbus day. The yes vote split and the no vote did not. Polls demonstrated that each proposition failed because the yes vote split. Polls also indicated that many people voted no because they were offended by threats rendered by the NFL. Some critics also bemoaned the added expense of creating another paid holiday. Arizona's rural vote, and questions about King's character were also among the major reasons why people voted against the measure.⁵⁵

Ragsdale and other local leaders continued to apply pressure, and in 1991 Phoenix joined many other cities, states, and the federal government in creating a paid King holiday. During that same year, however, Arizona was the only state in the union that did not boast some kind of King holiday. Another King holiday proposal was placed on the November 1992 ballot. It advocated Martin Luther King, Jr.-Civil Rights Day on the third Monday of January, corresponding with the federal commemoration of the legacy of King. It also proposed to combine the Washington and Lincoln state holidays in February into a single holiday, corresponding to the nation's President's Day holiday. It guaranteed that the number of paid state holidays remained the same. Ragsdale and others looked forward to the proposal passing. It did in November 1992. The King day conflict revealed many of the problems black Phoenixians, and African Americans in general, faced during this era. Socio-economic problems continued to challenge leaders like Ragsdale well into the

⁵⁵ *Arizona Republic*, November 8, 15, 1990, January 22, May 15, September 13, November 3, 1991, January 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 1992, January 1, 1993; *Phoenix Gazette*, March 30, May 17, 1990, February 5, 7, May 15, August 8-15, 19, December 2, 1991, June 6, 1992; *New Times*, May 25-31, November 14-20, 1990, February 27-March 4, April 24, 30, 1991, November 4, 1992.

1990s, but he and other leaders remained hopeful that black Phoenicians, and all black people, would continue to build upon their past successes. The symbolic victory of the King holiday appeared to be a step in the right direction.⁵⁶

After celebrating one last victory in helping to create a holiday honoring a man that had helped inspire him to be one of the most influential leaders and activists in American history, Lincoln Ragsdale pondered his legacy and shared his hope for the future. He was sixty-seven years old in 1992, and had devoted a tremendous amount of energy to the black liberation struggle. For the first time in the controversial and fiery civil rights and business leader's life, he was "mellowing." "Twenty years ago I was very bitter, I wanted to blame more people," he stated. "I'm in my sixties now, and I don't have that fight like I used to. I'm looking for peace. I'm looking for solace. I'm looking for something other than fighting battles."⁵⁷

Ragsdale was pleased with the victorious he helped secure in many of his civil rights battles, and was encouraged that Arizona finally passed a paid Martin Luther King, Jr. state holiday. Nevertheless, he was still troubled about the economic status of poor and working class black people. "What good is a Martin Luther King Day if you're unemployed?," he asked. When you are unemployed he declared, "every day is a holiday." Ragsdale believed that discrimination against black people in the labor market was subtle, and perhaps the most damaging. "It's not overt anymore," he argued. "Employers don't put up signs anymore that say: 'No coloreds allowed, no need to apply.' They just take your application and file it." In battling discrimination, Ragsdale believed that black

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Baker, "The Man Who Refused to be Invisible," 99.

people have three choices: “You will either accept [it], rebel, or excel.”⁵⁸

Eleanor Ragsdale, who substantially reduced her civil rights activity during the 1970s, believed that the passing of the King holiday reflected “marvelous and positive attitude changes” in Phoenix and across the nation. “I’m wondering,” she said however, “whether the battle is ever won when you’re talking about one human being’s acceptance of another.” While denouncing racial segregation at the Paradise Valley Country Club, fighting racial discrimination at Sky Harbor, and lobbying the Arizona legislature for a paid King holiday, Ragsdale continued to fight despite his deteriorating health. Indeed, as he fought for the King holiday, he also fought the cancer that was claiming his life. None of this, however, stopped him from speaking out on the status of African Americans.

Ragsdale believed at the end of his life that African Americans should dedicate themselves to excellence, particularly in the realm of business. African Americans, he argued, were “not economically oriented.” According to Ragsdale, African American’s best hope for overcoming the effects of racism, lay in their ability to improve their understanding of economics. He also called upon black people to rededicate themselves to diligence and hard work. In 1993, he stated that: “I battle racism every day. I do it through excellence. I do it through hard work.” Only by embracing these habits did he believe that black people would blaze new trails for themselves and their children.⁵⁹

As hard as he worked, he could not have accomplished what he did without the help of Eleanor. “She’s been my friend, she’s been my companion, she’s been my wife, the mother of our children,” he asserted. He also credited Eleanor with challenging him to

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

be undaunted in all of his efforts. “She had more guts about these things than I have even had” he maintained. Ragsdale was undaunted until the day his body could no longer fight the cancer that overcame it. Lincoln Johnson Ragsdale, Sr. died on June 9, 1995, at sixty-nine years of age, leaving a legacy of leadership and activism. The lists of names of those who attended his funeral reflected the deep impact he had in business and civil rights. Tributes and addresses were given by several influential leaders, including Earl Graves, publisher of *Black Enterprise Magazine*.⁶⁰

Eleanor Dickey Ragsdale died just three years later at seventy-two years of age. She too was eulogized and remembered by family members and many local leaders. The Universal Memorial Center and the Universal Memorial Sunset Chapel continue to serve the Phoenicians community. Two of their children, Lincoln Johnson Ragsdale, Jr., and Emily Yvonne Ragsdale, both of whom are fourth generation morticians and business leaders, are guiding their family’s enterprises into the twenty-first century. During the 1980s Lincoln Ragsdale, and to a lesser extent Eleanor Ragsdale, recognized that despite nearly thirty years of civil rights activism, the effects of racism and socio-economic inequality continued to be serious problems for the masses of African Americans. Despite the neo-conservative forces which sought to undermine the laws, court cases, and symbolic victories that they had helped secure between 1950 and 1980, Lincoln Ragsdale fought to create more opportunities and symbolic victories for African Americans. He resurfaced during the conservative Reagan-Bush years as an outspoken proponent of black socio-economic progress. He ended his life in Phoenix in the same way it began, working

⁶⁰ Baker, “The Man Who Refused to be Invisible,” 99; Universal Memorial Center, *A Celebration, Lincoln Ragsdale*, 4-5; Universal Memorial Center, *A Celebration, Eleanor Dickey Ragsdale*, 1-5.

publicly to help reverse the negative effects of racism and black socio-economic isolation. Despite many setbacks and persistent problems in employment, education, health care, housing, and police brutality, Lincoln Ragsdale, with the help of his wife Eleanor, recorded a significant list of victories. Their experiences and legacies place them among the most compelling black leaders and activists in American history.

When asked, however, to reflect upon their contribution to the black freedom struggle, and their work on behalf of racial equality, Eleanor Ragsdale spoke for the couple. “I would have liked that we would not have had to do that all,” she said. “I would have like to have thought that because we were born in America, and we were trying to be upright citizens, that we should not have had to go through that kind of struggle. But certainly I would not have changed the fact the we were involved in it. I think that was very important at the time. You have to live in the time in which you were born, and you have to deal with the challenges you meet at the time you are alive. And then you look back, and you have to be proud that you could be apart of it, and that you had enough strength, courage, and faith to have done it.” Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale had the strength, course, and faith to accomplish much, and although Phoenix and many other urban centers still suffer from racial inequality and intraracial conflict, without the contribution of such leaders, the condition of African Americans would probably be much worse than many in the present generation could possibly imagine.⁶¹

⁶¹ Eleanor Ragsdale interview, NewsChannel3, KTVK. “A Tribute to Lincoln Ragsdale.” Presented at the Phoenix Urban League Whitney M. Young, Jr. Awards Dinner. Phoenix: KTVK NewsChannel3, February 16, 1995.

CONCLUSION: THE PROFESSIONALS: LINCOLN AND ELEANOR RAGSDALE AND THE CHALLENGE OF “RACIAL UPLIFT” IN THE AMERICAN WEST

“A diamond is the result of extreme pressure. Less pressure is crystal, less than that is coal, less than that is fossilized leaves or plain dirt. Pressure can change you into something quite precious, quite wonderful, quite beautiful and extremely hard.”¹

-Maya Angelou

“May we rise to the challenge to struggle for our rights.
Come what will or may and let us never falter.”²

-A. Philip Randolph

“The heights of great men, reached and kept, were not attained by sudden flight, but they, while their companions slept, were toiling upward in the night.”³

-Longfellow

On April 8, 1990, looking back on a long and celebrated life in Phoenix, Arizona, a city many observers have described as a model Western community, and nearing the day of his passing, Dr. Lincoln Johnson Ragsdale, Sr. reflected upon what he believed was a rewarding career. The entrepreneur, civil rights activist, World War II veteran and Tuskegee Airman, and philanthropist, thankful and resolute, declared that “Phoenix has been wonderful.” During his tenure as a leader in Phoenix, however, circumstances were not always “wonderful.” What Ragsdale might have been referring to, was the impressive victories African Americans secured against a Phoenician system which oppressed and exploited them. The city, like the rest of the nation, played host to social and economic inequality cultivated and sustained by European American hegemony. Ragsdale, with the

¹ *USA Today*, March 5, 1985.

² A. Philip Randolph in a speech given to the March on Washington Movement, Detroit, Michigan, September 26, 1942.

³ Quoted by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in “Amazing Grace: The Life of Martin Luther King, Jr. Like it Is,” Narrated by Gary Noble (American Broadcasting Company, McGraw Hill Films, 1978).

assistance and support of his wife Eleanor Dickey Ragsdale, fought to eradicate white domination and African American socio-economic inequality. Although the Ragsdales, other Phoenician activists, and members of the black Phoenician masses, encountered many obstacles during the black liberation struggle, Lincoln Ragsdale believed that “the good thing is that through it all,” African Americans “have been able to overcome” a great deal. Even though the degree to which the Ragsdales and their fellow activists were “successful” may be debated, Lincoln Ragsdale believed that their work “speaks for itself.”⁴

Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale occupy an important place in Arizona history. Together they resisted social, economic, and political subjugation for more than a half century. Between 1944 and 1998, the couple was instrumental in provoking progressive social, political, and economic improvements in the city. This study demonstrates how one of the most successful black families in American history used education, entrepreneurship, political activism, integrationism, and a philosophy of nonviolent protest, to dismantle an racially oppressive system in the largest and most urbanized city in the American Southwest. It examines the intersection and impact of domination and resistance in Phoenix; emphasizing the importance of race, class, and gender. “Western Resistance” evaluates the European American social, economic, and political order in the “Valley of the Sun,” which systematically empowered and valued “whiteness” while devaluing and subjugating non-European Americans. This study is to offers an unwritten chapter in the history of American black professionalism, race relations, and the American

⁴ Luckingham, *Phoenix*, 69; Universal Memorial Center, *A Celebration, Lincoln Ragsdale*, 3-5.

Civil Rights Movement. The legacy of Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale stands at the center of this history. This work also offers a unique marriage between history and biography, inasmuch as the lives and legacy of the Ragsdales serve as a prism through which a more intimate analysis of post World War II American history can be viewed. This work is in many ways a bi-biography.

The Ragsdale's history and their personal achievements rival most stories of professional activism in post World War II America. Like many local leaders who greatly influenced the African American freedom struggle, however, the Ragsdale's history has been overshadowed by more noted legacies of post War leaders. Moreover, the study of the history of black people in the post World War II American West has garnered little attention. The absence of a substantial body of literature has left a scholarly vacuum in the field of black Western history. This lacuna has helped cloak the history of black American Western history and influential local leaders such as the Ragsdales. "Western Resistance" examines the experiences of black people in the American West, one of the region's most understudied groups. It does so by examining the lives of one of the region's most influential black families and their contribution to the cause of freedom.

Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale were raised in the black professional tradition. Despite being reared in different regions of the country, their shared experience as heirs to a legacy of black professional leadership paved the way for their futures as influential American leaders. As beneficiaries of the black professional tradition, leadership and community service were a part of their heritage. Their familial backgrounds inspired the Ragsdales to accomplish much personally, while also motivating them to work for the advancement of the African American community. To prepare them for their lives as a

“race man” and “race woman,” their families educated them in the demands of professional work and “race work”. Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale learned that black professional people were often called upon to be leaders in their fields, and in the black freedom struggle.⁵

By the late 1940s, the Ragsdales had left their homes in Oklahoma and Pennsylvania to follow career paths in teaching and the military. Eventually their interests brought them together in a small desert community named Phoenix. Although it was billed as a hub of freedom and opportunity, the city was greatly influenced by white supremacy. There were few opportunities for black people and other people of color. Lincoln and Eleanor were surprised and disappointed with the socio-economic status of the African American community when they relocated to the city. They found out quickly that the black Phoenician community was similar to the ones they left behind; racially isolated, impoverished, and terrorized. Although the Ragsdales were familiar with racial discrimination and segregation, they were not reared to ignore it. They were taught to fight it. They were instructed to labor for the destruction of racial discrimination and the betterment of black people. By the late 1940s, Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale established a home in Phoenix, and they began to use their skills and commitment to “racial uplift,” to combat the problems of the African American community in Phoenix. They quickly began to change the city forever.

The Ragsdales began their careers in Phoenix on the heels of World War II, an event that had a profound impact on African Americans throughout the nation. The

⁵ See Woodson, *The Negro Professional Man in the Community*; Summerville, *Educating Black Doctors*; McNeil, *Groundwork*; Hine, *Black Women in White*; Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color*; Shaw, *What A Women Ought to Be and to Do*.

impact of World War II on black Westerners, however, was considerable and complicated. It hastened the end or curtailment of racial discrimination in some areas, particularly in the Pacific Northwest, while others went virtually unchanged. White supremacy continued to rule in Phoenix, even as wartime migration brought more African Americans, including Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale, to the city. An outgrowth of this migration was the rise of more vocal black leaders in business and politics. Having served as a Tuskegee Airman during World War II, Lincoln had recently developed the confidence and determination to demand personal and cultural freedom and justice. He soon became an outspoken leader. "Tuskegee changed my life," Ragsdale declared. "I had been told all my life that I was insignificant, I was black, I was dumb, I couldn't do it. At Tuskegee, they told me I could do it, and they treated me with respect." "Of all the experiences I've ever had, of all the accolades, being an officer and a pilot in the forties during war time, and the prestige that went with it, changed my whole life. It made me feel as though I could do anything." He, with the help of Eleanor, and the confidence he cultivated at Tuskegee, undertook to improve race relations and the status of African Americans in Phoenix.⁶

The Ragsdales infused the black community in Phoenix with a controlled optimism and resolution to build upon the advances black people made during World War II. Their heads for business, and desire to work on behalf of the African American community following World War II, made them two of the most compelling leaders in the American West. Between 1947 and 1954, the Ragsdales helped push Phoenix into an era of aggressive progressivism which emphasized elevated national and international awareness of racial equality. During these years, their civil rights activism reached its peak with the

⁶ Lincoln Ragsdale interview, NewsChannel3, KTVK

defeat of residential segregation and *de jure* school segregation in Phoenix. The leaders participated in and led traditional, liberal organizations such as the NAACP and the GPCCU, but as the 1960s drew near, massive white resistance, and a new, more radical Civil Rights Movement posed new challenges for the Ragsdales and their supporters. Despite the ideological and strategical changes in the movement, Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale continued to be at the forefront of the black freedom struggle. Lincoln Ragsdale had a notion of freedom and justice that was betrayed by his unyielding desire to question the ruling Phoenician regime. Retired Colonel Lloyd McKeethen, a longtime friend of Lincoln Ragsdale, and fellow war veteran, remembered Lincoln as someone who always had goals and high personal standards. "Lincoln really had some vision, had some goal that was probably in his mind all of the time. Not that he always talked about it, but Lincoln was a thinker."⁷

Between 1954 and 1967, the Civil Rights Movement quickened, producing the most intense and effective civil rights activity in American history. From the Montgomery bus boycott, to the passage of the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts, activists like Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale changed the ways in which race and democracy were perceived. Although most white Phoenicians, like many white people throughout the nation, vigorously resisted legal and structural changes in American society, Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale continued to fight. They lead African Americans in Phoenix to multiple victories against racism and inequality. Like black people across the nation, they were met

⁷ Retired Colonel Lyod McKeethen interview, NewsChannel3, KTVK, "A Tribute to Lincoln Ragsdale," Presented at the Phoenix Urban League Whitney M. Young, Jr. Awards Dinner Phoenix: KTVK NewsChannel3, February 16, 1995.

with defiance and aggression by staunch white counteraction. They responded by embracing their supporters, and cultivating an interracial coalition of civil rights activists. By doing so, they were able to log more victories against racial inequality by helping to desegregate the Phoenician labor market, and places of public accommodation in the city.

A new era in black activism emerged between 1964 and 1979. Although the enactment of 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act were major victories for proponents of civil rights, they did not end racial discrimination. Many white Phoenicians, in fact, reacted to their enactment by circumventing their directives, or ignoring them altogether. Many European Americans created legal and extralegal barriers to thwart African American progress. Many white Americans who opposed progressive legislation, forged campaigns that protested or abolished such decrees in states throughout the nation. Many civil rights leaders argued that these barriers needed new, more radical strategies and organizations to overcome them. As whites paraded their disapproval to the Civil Rights Movement through sabotage and violence, young black activists called for more radical ways of securing black liberation. The new black activism that emerged in response, offered a critique of the link between white supremacy, capitalism, and racism. By 1964, activist organizations such as the Phoenician chapters of CORE, SNCC, and the BPP, lamented the constancy of poverty and racial discrimination in South Phoenix.*

Unlike the NAACP, for which Ragsdale served as vice-president, CORE was decentralized and more democratic. The aggressiveness of CORE, SNCC, and the BPP, appealed to young Phoenician activists who believed that the NAACP was to

* Melcher, "Black and Whites Together," 211; Tindall and Shi, *America*, 1231-1282; Franklin and Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 492-572; Hine, Hine, and Harold, *The African American Odyssey*, 563-564.

conservative. SNCC, and especially the BPP, attracted activists who supported black nationalism and rejected integrationism. Ragsdale, who described himself as “a radical for love and integration,” balked at cultural nationalism and supported multiculturalism. His integrationist philosophy was often at odds with the more vocal and militant leaders and organizations of the late 1960s and early 1970s. By the early 1970s, the Ragsdales were looked upon by many younger, more militant activists, as people whose economic and social goals, concerns, and responsibilities operated in conflict with those of poor and working-class black people.⁹

As acrimonious as the critiques of Ragsdale’s social, economic, and political philosophy may have been at the time, they did highlight the volatile and vexing question of class and economics in the black freedom struggle. Ragsdale succeeded in bringing attention to the problems associated with racial discrimination in Phoenix and American society, but failed to sufficiently understand or address the interconnectedness of race, class, and gender. Had Lincoln Ragsdale not accumulated an impressive list of concessions from the white Phoenician power structure, tensions which simmered between his inner-circle of conservative leaders, and working-class militants, may have exploded into full-fledged intraracial class conflict. Sexism, particularly as it related to black women, was never given any substantive attention by Lincoln Ragsdale. It appears as though Eleanor Ragsdale took it upon herself to use their resources to aid black women in their unique struggle. Due to the paucity of sources, this study was unable to analyze the nuances of their relationship, and their particular views on feminism and women’s rights. Nevertheless, it is safe to say that Lincoln was quite comfortable with Eleanor interacting

⁹ *Arizona Republic*, June 12, 1995.

and administering to the needs and desires of black Phoenician women, as he appeared to be quite unable or unwilling to do so himself.

Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale led the way in protesting white supremacy and racial discrimination in Phoenix. Bonds between African Americans and other minority activists existed, as in other areas of the nation, however, black Phoenicians bore the responsibility of calling attention to their oppression. The most visible interracial alliances in Phoenix were primarily coalitions among liberal black and white citizens. Although Mexican Americans have always been the city's largest minority population, and have always been subjected to white racism, oppression and exploitation, most Mexican Americans and African Americans never developed a sustained union throughout their own crusade for equality. Lincoln Ragsdale, and his Mexican American counterparts, came to understand that their mutual racial subordination was insufficient to bridge many of the cultural and political barriers which stood between the two groups.¹⁰

The Chicano Movement, which made its way to Phoenix in 1968, helped brought about an increase in cooperation between African American and Chicano activists. Still, collaboration was primarily limited to individual efforts to build coalitions. Although the negative effects of white supremacy and racial discrimination periodically brought African and Mexican American activists like Pena and Ragsdales together, the demands of race, ethnicity, culture, and class, usually impaired their capacity to record a sustained, combined liberation movement. Although African American and Chicano Phoenicians were unable to form a sustained coalition, Phoenix did benefit from the development of two racial liberation movements. Since the black liberation struggle in Phoenix unfolded

¹⁰ *Arizona Sun*, May 9, 1957; Luckingham, *Minorities in Phoenix*, 177.

in an environment where African Americans were simply one of several racial minorities, Phoenix's multiracial population pushed the issue of civil rights and social justice beyond black and white. The black freedom struggle and the Chicano Movement, forced the city's ruling white elite to deal with race and democracy in ways that other regions of the country did not.¹¹

The presence of Mexican Americans in Phoenix, occasionally ameliorated the effects of "negrophobia" in Phoenix by diverting intolerance from African Americans. Nevertheless, inasmuch as Mexican Americans endured less discrimination than most black people, most Chicanos did not speak out in opposition racial discrimination against black Phoenixians. Like white Phoenixians, Mexican Americans also discriminated against African Americans. The occasional contributions of individual Chicano leaders to the Civil Rights Movement, was perhaps the most that leaders like Ragsdale could have hoped for. For both groups, race, culture, and class, were ultimately too difficult to overcome, even though each group was discriminated against by an oppressive European American community. Despite Ragsdale's efforts, and the individual efforts of his Mexican American counterparts like Manuel Pena, most members of each group continued to struggle, while leaders from both camps jockeyed for the unenviable title of leader of the most deserving minority. It came as no surprise then, that a viable alliance of African Americans and Chicanos continued to be problematic.¹²

Between 1950 and 1980, Lincoln Ragsdale led a Civil Rights Movement in

¹¹ Rosales, *Chicano!*, xxi-xxiii; Luckingham, *Minorities in Phoenix*, 57, 177; *New Times*, June 11-17, 1986; Adank, "Chicano Activism in Maricopa County," 246-265.

¹² Ibid.

Phoenix that was effective in tearing down social, economic, legal, and political barriers to African American socio-economic equality. By the 1980s, however, Ragsdale understood that racism was still a major obstacle which stood between the most of African Americans and socio-economic equality. As the nation hosted the largest black middle-class in its history, its poor and working class black citizens were locked into decaying inner-cities marked by poverty, inferior educational facilities, poor health care, and violence. A troubling dichotomy emerged between upwardly mobile beneficiaries of the Civil Rights Movement, and those who were left behind. Race, it appeared, still mattered, but so did class.¹³

Historic and ongoing racial discrimination generated and nurtured poverty and hopelessness among black people, especially those sequestered in decaying urban areas. Despite persistent racial inequality, many conservative leaders pointed to the “success” of the black bourgeoisies, and idealistic concepts of “color blindness” as basis to destroy race conscious antidotes to America’s racial inequality. Crusading on behalf of these ideals, conservative scholars, lawmakers, activists, and politicians, propelled America into a new conservative era in American history; one in which individualism and personal responsibility were touted as panaceas for ever socio-economic problems. African American progress and progressive activism helped inspire this conservative rebirth among white Americans, while the problems of poor blacks helped inspire a conservative renaissance among middle-class African Americans. The forces of this neo-conservative movement worked to reverse the legal, political, economic, and symbolic victories that leaders like Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale had fought to win. Lincoln Ragsdale, in

¹³ Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale interview; West, *Race Matters*, 35-49.

particular, saw a need to oppose this brand of conservatism. During the 1980s and 1990s, Ragsdale resurfaced as an outspoken progressive leader.¹⁴

The Civil Rights Movement, between 1950 and 1980, was able to illuminate the retrograde nature of American race relations, plight of African Americans, and the need for systemic solutions to the “race problem.” It also helped unmask and intensify divisions within the African American community. Black people no longer had slavery and Jim Crow to contend with, or the struggle to destroy these institutions and systems, to unite them. Nonetheless, by 1980, black people began to disagree more often on fundamental social, economic, and political issues. Conflicts between the expanding number of affluent black people like the Ragsdales, and impoverished African Americans seemingly trapped in distressed inner-cities widened. Arguments between integrationists and black nationalists intensified. The competing parties included black neo-conservatives like Thomas Sowell and Clarence Thomas, and black liberals such as Lincoln Ragsdale’s confidant, Jessie Jackson. As always, the ultimate issue was what was in the best social, economic, political, and cultural interest of African Americans, in spite of the acerbity and multifarious theories that each faction put forth.¹⁵

The Ragsdales and other activists welcomed progress and the growth of the black middle-class during the 1980s and 1990s. Problems, nevertheless, remained. African

¹⁴ West, *Race Matters*, 35-49; Tindall and Shi, *America*, 1231-1282; Franklin and Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 492-572; Hine, Hine, and Harold, *The African American Odyssey*, 563-564. Also see Carnory, *Faded Dreams*; Sowell, *Preferential Politics*; Steele, *Content of Our Character*; Perkins, *A Conservative Agenda for Black Americans*; Stone, *Jessie Jackson*; Robinson, *The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks*; Berry, *Black Resistance, White Law*; West, *The Cornel West Reader*.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Americans who were able to access the middle-class, reflected the ability of some African Americans to free themselves from the “web of urban racism.” For most, however, employment, housing, and educational opportunities were scarce. Similitude with white Americans appeared to be within reach for middle-class black people like the Ragsdales, but improbable for the masses of African Americans isolated in inner-cities. Many unskilled Americans, including white people and other minorities, also found socio-economic advancement elusive during the late 1980s and early 1990s because the nation slipped into a recession. African Americans, who were often disproportionately represented among the truly disadvantaged, were especially vulnerable to the economic downturn.¹⁶

Lincoln Ragsdale and other observers argued that jobs and higher salaries would suspend the deterioration of poor African American communities. Urban areas were especially in need of increased employment opportunities, as the “deindustrialization of America,” and the movement of corporations to suburban areas devastated inner-cities and the economic viability of black communities. Black Phoenixians, and other minorities, as in most major urban areas, remained in the interior of the city. The Ragsdale’s “successful” emigration to Clearwater Hills was atypical. In 1980, just twenty-one percent of black households, and thirty-one percent of Chicano households in the Phoenix metropolitan area, resided beyond the bounds of the central city of Phoenix. Forty-nine percent of white Phoenixians, on the other hand, called the suburbs home.

By 1995, in Phoenix, Lincoln Ragsdale had led a black liberation movement that had improved the lives of many African Americans and made the city a more tolerant and

¹⁶ See Baron, “The Web of Urban Racism.”

inclusive place. He was content, having reemerged during the 1980s and 1990s, to lead progressive activists, business leaders, and politicians to more victories in the name of freedom, equality and democracy. As late as 1993, Ragsdale had helped call attention to persistent *de facto* segregation in Phoenix, was instrumental in opening the door which led to more opportunities for minorities to own their own businesses, and had played a critical role in establishing a paid Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday in the state of Arizona. Ragsdale displayed a righteous indignation and anger about racial discrimination, and he relished his role as an agitator. "I was very controversial. I was a radical," he proclaimed.¹⁷

Many people prefer to remember the young Lincoln Ragsdale of the 1950s and early 1960s, when he was truly "radical." "I like to hear about the Lincoln who came here forty years ago or more, because that's the radical Lincoln," Dr. Warren Stewart maintained. "That's not the Mercedes driving, you know, suave, debonair Lincoln. That's the guy who used to cause trouble on behalf of civil rights and equal rights. I like to hear him talk about when they boycotted, or sat-in at the Woolworth's department store that didn't serve blacks at that time because of their color; about how he led the Civil

¹⁷ Nicolas Lemann, "Healing the Ghettos: A Vision of the Possible in Race Relations," *Atlantic* Vol. 203 (March 1991), 22-24; Leonard Gordon and Albert J. Mayer, "Housing Segregation and Housing Conditions for Hispanics in Phoenix and Other Southwestern Cities," In Elizabeth D. Huttman, (ed.), *Urban Housing Segregation of Minorities in Western Europe and the United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 285-300; *Phoenix Gazette*, February 11, 1993. Also see Andrew Hacker, *Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995); Wilson, *The Declining Significance of Race: Blacks and Changing American Institutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978); Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged*; Alphonse Pickney, *The Myth of Black Progress* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984); Phyllis M. Palmer, "White Women/Black Women: The Dualism of Female Identity and Experience," *Feminist Studies* Vol. 9 (Winter 1983), 153-170; Bart Landry, *The New Black Middle-Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

Rights Movement in Arizona.” Many people did not appreciate some of the things Lincoln Ragsdale did or said, in his youth, or as a senior activist and business leader. “He was a splash of water in the face of the status quo,” wrote the *Arizona Republic*. “He made sure people knew when things were wrong, and he was there to help make things right.”¹⁸

As Lincoln aged, and the Civil Rights Movement evolved, he was perceived less as a radical or militant activist, than he was regarded as an elder statesmen of the Civil Rights Movement who championed antiquated notions of racial integration. Lincoln was not completely out of step, however. By 1990, in fact, he admitted that his generation of activists overestimated the efficacy of racial integration. As he and other black activist saw it, the only people who truly benefitted from integration were white Americans. According to Lincoln Ragsdale, Jr., Lincoln, Sr. “believed that black people were not ready for integration.” When American society began to desegregate, “black people who had black businesses lost out. They lost their market.” African Americans began to patronize white owned businesses, but “white people did not come to the black entrepreneur.” “The black entrepreneur, the black businessman who had his cleaning business, [black] restaurants and clubs,” as the country began to integrate, their black customers “ventured off into other areas, and those businesses went bankrupt.”¹⁹

Desegregation, Ragsdale believed, virtually destroyed the economic base of the

¹⁸ Dr. Warren H. Stewart interview, NewsChannel3, KTVK, “A Tribute to Lincoln Ragsdale,” Presented at the Phoenix Urban League Whitney M. Young, Jr. Awards Dinner Phoenix: KTVK NewsChannel3, February 16, 1995; *Arizona Republic*, June 12, 1995.

¹⁹ Lincoln Ragsdale, Jr. interview.

African American community, but it also severely damaged black social and cultural networks. That which bound black people together and sustained them through generations of white supremacy; the black church, black schools, and black social and political orders, have suffered dislocation and fragmentation. Despite Lincoln Ragsdale's inability to acclimate himself to an activist environment during the 1970s and 1980s which popularized black nationalism and embraced quasi-socialist solutions to inequality, he clearly understood the extent to which his generation of activists had underestimated the insidiousness of racism and socio-economic inequality. Toward the end of his life, he, like many black nationalists and more militant black leaders of the 1960s and 1970s, believed that "economics was the new way of segregating people," argued Lincoln Ragsdale, Jr. He believed at that point, for black people to advance, they had to combat racism and economic oppression simultaneously. The Civil Rights Movement created many opportunities for black people, he mused, but opportunity in a capitalist system means very little, without money.²⁰

Lincoln Ragsdale, it seems, did not concern himself much with gender equality. He did, however, work closely with Eleanor in their businesses and in the movement. Although Lincoln has received the majority of credit for building his family's fortune and their legacy of activism, Eleanor Ragsdale's influence on Lincoln and his ability to tap into specific resources in the black community cannot be overstated. After the death of her husband, Eleanor continued to work on behalf of their family interests. Her activities during the height of the Civil Rights Movement are as noteworthy as Lincoln's. In addition to teaching at Dunbar School, Eleanor Ragsdale, went to work in their family

²⁰ Lincoln Ragsdale, Jr. interview.

businesses, participated in the Civil Rights Movement, and bore four children. She also devoted a great deal of time negotiating political partnerships with their clients and associates, black churches in Phoenix, and most importantly, black women's clubs and voluntary associations. Eleanor Ragsdale reduced her civil rights activity during the 1970s, but continued to support progressive activities aimed at improving the lives of African Americans, women, and the poor. As hard working as Lincoln was, it is doubtful that he could have accomplished what he did without the benefit of Eleanor's intellectual acumen, hard work, and moral support.²¹

The contribution of the Ragsdales to the civil rights struggle in Phoenix rivals most, if not all, of the more privileged histories of black professional activism in American history. Lincoln Ragsdale gave new meaning to entrepreneurship, as achievement became his trademark through myriad business endeavors. His influence in the community was reflected in the multitude of boards and membership rosters that included his name over the past four decades. Lincoln Ragsdale's influence ultimately reached the halls of the White House, as he served as an advisor to President Ronald Reagan on Small and Minority Business Ownership during the 1980s. Regardless of Lincoln and Eleanor's social, economic, and political philosophy, they were often willing to step to the fore and lead when it would have been much easier to stay in the shadows.²²

The "direct action" efforts of Western black civil rights activists such as the Ragsdales did not eliminate racial inequality, but their efforts helped destroy generations

²¹ Universal Memorial Center, *A Celebration, Lincoln Ragsdale*, 3-5; Universal Memorial Center, *A Celebration, Eleanor Dickey Ragsdale*, 14-17.

²² Ibid.

of barriers to opportunity and equality. The progress that they helped usher in was always achieved amidst omnipresent racial discrimination and systematic oppression, black women carrying the dual burden of racial and sexual exploitation. A combination of European American “Social Darwinism,” Protestant ethics, capitalist exploitation, and Western frontier conditions, in conflict with a steady influx of black emigrants, made Phoenix a place ripe for disharmony and racial discord. As the lives and legacy of the Ragsdales reveal, the area of the U. S. East of the Mississippi River had no monopoly of white supremacy.²³

Although the racial etiquette in the West was generally less rigid, white Westerners systematically denied black people equal opportunity to access the primary means of production and distribution. Despite these adversities, Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale resisted subjugation, and helped shape African American designs on independence into a dynamic movement to secure peace and prosperity in the “Valley of the Sun.” Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale, particularly in the 1950s and 1960s, fought a battle that is incomprehensible to many in the generations that have followed. Indeed, pursuing civil rights and racial equality often required risking life and limb, and to say that it was mentally and emotionally exhausting would probably be a gross understatement. Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale rose to the occasion, however, and because of their efforts the “Valley of the Sun” is a much brighter place.²⁴

²³ Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier*, 17-23; Broussard, *Black San Francisco*, 1-7 ; De Graaf, “Significant Steps on an Arduous Path,” 1; Luckingham, *Minorities in Phoenix*, 157-171; Hine, Hine, and Harrold, *The African American Odyssey*, 471-495; Franklin and Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 438; Universal Memorial Center, *A Celebration, Lincoln Ragsdale*, 3.

²⁴ Ibid.

APPENDIX A

AMERICAN WESTERN CITIES WITH BLACK POPULATIONS EXCEEDING 50,000 AS OF 1990¹

City	Black Population	Total Population	Black Percentage of Total Population
Austin	57,868	465,622	12.4%
Dallas	296,994	1,006,877	29.0%
Denver	60,046	467,610	12.4%
Fort Worth	98,532	447,619	22.0%
Houston	457,990	1,630,553	28.0%
Long Beach	58,761	429,433	13.6%
Los Angeles	487,674	3,485,398	13.0%
Oakland	163,335	372,242	43.8%
Oklahoma City	71,064	444,719	15.9%
Phoenix	51,053	983,403	5.1%
Sacramento	56,521	369,365	15.3%
San Antonio	65,844	935,933	7.0%
San Diego	104,261	1,110,594	9.3%
San Francisco	79,039	723,959	10.9%
Seattle	51,948	516,259	10.0%

¹ United States Census of Population, 1990, General Characteristics by States (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1990).

APPENDIX B

COMPLETE LIST OF RAGSDALE COMPANIES AND FINANCIAL ENTERPRISES (IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER)

Ragsdale Realty & Insurance Agency (1950)
International Investment Company (1952)
International Construction Company (1953)
Valley Life & Casualty Insurance (1955)
Century Skyroom Restaurant & Jazz Club (1963)
Valley Life & Casualty Insurance of Louisiana (1980)
Valley Life Insurance Company of Alabama (1980)
Valley Life & Casualty Insurance Company of Texas (1983)

APPENDIX C

COMPLETE LIST OF PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND BOARDS FOR WHICH LINCOLN RAGSDALE, Sr. SERVED (IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER)

Arizona Club Board of Trustees
Arizona Historical Foundation
Arizona State University Alumni Association, President
Downtown Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) Board of Directors
Kiwanis Club of Phoenix
Municipal Aeronautics Advisory Board, Chairman
National Conference of Christians & Jews
National Urban League Board of Trustees
Olta Sigma Alha, Honor Society
Phoenix Chamber of Commerce
Phoenix Press Club, Associate Member
Phoenix Urban League
Planned Parenthood Advisory Board
Rust College Board of Trustees (North Carolina)
Sigma Pi Phi (Boule) Fraternity, Inc.
Sun State Savings and Loan
Union Graduate School Board of Trustees (Ohio)
University Club Board of Trustees

APPENDIX D

COMPLETE LIST OF PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND BOARDS FOR WHICH ELEANOR RAGSDALE SERVED (IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER)

Arizona Coordinating Committee for International Women's Year
Arizona Historical Foundation
Black Women's Task Force and the University Club of Phoenix
Coalition '76 (Group Concerned with the passage of E.R.A.)
Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Golden Life Member. Three Years President of Phoenix
Metropolitan Chapter, Alumni Chapter of Phoenix, Far West Region; National
Committees: Constitution and By-Laws
Chairperson: United Negro College Fund, Phoenix, Arizona
First Institutional Baptist Church
Greater Phoenix Urban League, Life Member
NAACP, Life Member
KAET Channel 8 (PBS), Community Advisory Board
Knights and Daughters of Tabor #6
National Smart Set, Scottsdale Chapter
Phoenix Chapter of Links, Inc. (Chair of social and publicity committees)
Planned Parenthood of Central and Northern Arizona Advisory Board
UJIMA House
Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA)

APPENDIX E

COMPLETE LIST OF LINCOLN RAGSDALE, SR'S HONORS AND DISTINCTIONS

Black Lawyers Association Community Service Award (Phoenix)

Young Men's Christian Association:

Leadership Development Center Community Service Award

City of Phoenix Human Rights Award for 25 Years of Community Service

Hall of Fame - Arizona State University College of Business Administration

National Outstanding Business Man - Washington, D.C.

U.S. Small Business Administration

Outstanding Business Man - First Institutional Baptist Church, Phoenix

Booker T. Washington Award, National Outstanding Business Man

National Business League, Washington, D.C.

Arizona State University Outstanding Alumnus Awards:

1) School of Liberal Arts

2) School of Business Administration

First in Class and Cadet Captain of the Cadet Corps 45-H, Tuskegee, Alabama

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