

"Resilience and Resistance: Examining the Socioeconomic and Cultural Impact of the Great Depression on Black Women, 1929-1935"

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Abstract

The 1930s Great Depression was a turbulent time in American history characterized by social unrest and extreme economic distress. The 1929–1935 Great Depression had a significant and varied effect on Black Women, bringing to light their extraordinary fortitude and resistance in the face of hardship as well as a turning point in the development of their activism and social engagement. By exploring the frequently disregarded experiences of Black women in this historical period, this study illuminates their extraordinary fortitude and defiance in the face of hardship. The research paper, "Resilience and Resistance: Examining the Socioeconomic and Cultural Impact of the Great Depression on Black Women, 1929-1935," delves at the various obstacles that Black women encountered and the methods they utilized to maneuver through the intricacies of that period.

Using a thorough procedure, this inquiry examines a wide range of primary and secondary sources, such as historical reports, government documents, and personal experiences. Through an analysis of the socioeconomic and cultural aspects of the Great Depression, the study seeks to offer a comprehensive comprehension of Black women's experiences during this challenging period. Black women suffered greatly from the Great Depression's socioeconomic effects. Many were forced to labor in low-paying, uncertain jobs, or struggle with unemployment as a result of their severe financial conditions. Discriminatory actions significantly reduced their chances of achieving financial success. Black women displayed incredible tenacity in the face of these obstacles by creating supportive networks, starting their own businesses, and actively taking part in labor movements that called for equitable treatment and improved working conditions.

Significant changes in culture were also brought about by this time period. The Great Depression compelled society norms and established gender roles to be reevaluated. Particularly Black women questioned prevalent norms and preconceptions. The path for increased acknowledgment of their agency and accomplishments was created by their participation in artistic expression, political activity, and community-building projects. This study also emphasizes how crucial the Great Depression was in determining the course of Black women's activism and social participation in the future. The Civil Rights Movement and the struggle for racial justice and gender equality were made possible by their tenacity and resistance at this time.

Generally, this research offers an important examination of the marginalized experiences of Black women in the 1930s. It highlights their resilience, resourcefulness, and the crucial part they played in redefining their cultural and financial standing. Black women's tenacity and defiance in the face of extreme hardship during the Great Depression (1929–1935) bears witness to their fortitude and the long-lasting impact of their contributions to American culture.

Keywords-

Great Depression, Black women, African American history.

Introduction

Unexpected economic unrest and social upheaval defined the Great Depression, a pivotal time in American history. The hardships of this time period are widely known, but Black women's experiences throughout the Great Depression are still a relatively little-known and frequently ignored part of history. In order to shed light on the lives of Black women between 1929 and 1935, this study examines the significant economic and cultural effects of this turbulent period on a group of people who experienced multiple forms of discrimination. The goal of research is to piece together the complicated web of difficulties that Black women encountered, highlighting their incredible fortitude and resistance in managing the complexity of a time of cultural upheaval and economic hardship.

The purpose of this project is to give voice to historically underrepresented voices by analyzing the Great Depression under the prism of Black women's tenacity and resistance. We are starting to piece together a story that goes beyond simple survival as we examine the economic struggles, cultural shifts, and acts of resistance Black women engaged in during this time. This narrative speaks to the resilience, agency, and cultural contributions of Black women in the face of adversity. This investigation aims to reveal more about the effects of the Great Depression while also highlighting the incredible fortitude and defiance found in the underappreciated accounts of Black women in America between 1929 and 1935.

Every neighborhood in the country was affected by the financial meltdown that the Great Depression brought forth. However, systemic racism and gender biases made things even more difficult for Black women, creating a distinct set of circumstances that required creative survival tactics. Black women had to deal with the hard realities of restricted economic prospects and discriminatory job practices as primary breadwinners, community builders, and cultural torchbearers.¹ This study explores the financial difficulties they faced, including unstable work and the fight for equitable pay, illuminating the creative ways in which they attempted to create areas of economic agency. In addition to its effects on the economy, the Great Depression also caused a reassessment of cultural norms and expectations, which led to a questioning and transformation of conventional roles in society. Often marginalized in historical accounts, Black women have been proactive change agents. In addition to challenging preconceptions, their involvement in political movements, artistic endeavors, and community-building programs at this time also set the stage for later social and political

¹ McMahan, Kathy A. "Invisible women of the Great Depression." (2009).

activism.²Through an analysis of the socioeconomic and cultural aspects of the Great Depression, this study seeks to advance our understanding of Black women's actual experiences throughout this critical historical period.³ We can reveal the frequently disregarded narratives that influence our comprehension of the Great Depression and the ongoing legacy of Black women's contributions to American society by carefully examining their tenacity and resistance.

Overview of the 1929–1935 Great Depression:

The 1929 economic collapse, which is frequently attributed to stock market disaster, started with a chain reaction that spread throughout the US. Banks closed, unemployment skyrocketed, and families had to confront the harsh reality of living in poverty.⁴ However, systemic racism and gender discrimination made things worse for Black women, creating a distinct set of circumstances that required remarkable fortitude and resistance. Black women had two challenges as the country struggled with the effects of economic unrest: they had to deal with the persistent legacy of racial and gender inequality in addition to the widespread economic downturn.⁵

² Boyd, Robert L. "Race, labor market disadvantage, and survivalist entrepreneurship: Black women in the urban North during the Great Depression." In *Sociological Forum*, vol. 15, pp. 647-670. Kluwer Academic Publishers-Plenum Publishers, 2000.

³ Helmbold, Lois Rita. *Making Choices, Making Do: Survival Strategies of Black and White Working-Class Women during the Great Depression*. Rutgers University Press, 2022, pp 2.

⁴ McElvaine, Robert S. *The great depression: America 1929-1941*. Crown, 1993, Pp 29-30.

⁵ Murphy, Mary-Elizabeth B. "African Americans in the Great Depression and New Deal." In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History*. 2020.

There were a few key elements that caused the Great Depression. The United States saw remarkable expansion in the 1920s. All socioeconomic classes invested their money in stocks, and as a result, national expenditure declined, which in turn caused a decline in output and an unintentional increase in inventories. The stock market grew at a startling rate as a result.⁶ Due to an imbalance between supply and demand, the market finally crashed. Subsequently, a decline in demand led to a number of manufacturing layoffs in the US, and in October 1929, one of the biggest stock market crashes in US history occurred, forcing Wall Street investors to evacuate. Almost 9,000 US banks failed shortly after the stock market crashed, depleting the life savings of its citizens. Thirteen million Americans were unemployed in 1933, the lowest figure in the history of the nation.⁷

American stock values had risen to levels that were unjustifiable by realistic expectations of future profits by the collapse of 1929. Consequently, investors lost faith in the stock market and it burst in October 1929 when a series of unimportant events caused prices to gradually decrease. On October 24, 1929, dubbed "Black Thursday," panic selling started. A large number of equities had been bought on margin, or with loans that were only partially secured by the value of the stocks. Consequently, some investors were compelled by the price reductions to sell their holdings, which made the price loss even more severe. The collapse of the stock market significantly decreased aggregate demand in America.⁸

⁶ McElvaine, Robert S. *The great depression: America 1929-1941*. Crown, 1993, Pp 25.

⁷ McElvaine, Pp 28.

⁸ McElvaine, Pp 27.

Following the crash, there was a dramatic decline in consumer purchases of durable goods and company investment. One plausible explanation is that the financial crisis created a great deal of uncertainty about future earnings, which in turn caused businesses and individuals to postpone buying durable items.⁹ Even while the drop in stock prices only resulted in a minor loss of wealth, the crash might have also reduced spending by making people feel less wealthy. Real output in the US plummeted sharply in late 1929 and early 1930 as a result of the sharp decline in company and consumer expenditure. Up until then, real output had been declining gradually. Therefore, even though the Great Depression and the Great Crash of the stock market are two entirely different occurrences, the drop in stock values was one of the factors causing the United States' production and employment to collapse.

Everyone in the nation was impacted by the economic slump, but how did women in particular fare during the Great Depression? The Great Depression had both beneficial and detrimental consequences on women. They had to come up with inventive ways to make ends meet, such as sewing their own clothing, canning, and preserving food, gardening, and obtaining employment outside the house.¹⁰ In 1930s America, women's duties remained primarily domestic. Men were primarily the breadwinners, and they were typically in charge of social duties and home administration, "Women's lives revolved around domestic chores, childrearing and childbirth, tight family relationships, and other supposedly "feminine" tasks."¹¹ But after the 19th Amendment which gave women the right to vote was ratified in

⁹ McElvaine, Pp 27-28.

¹⁰ Helmbold, Lois Rita. *Making Choices, Making Do: Survival Strategies of Black and White Working-Class Women during the Great Depression*. Rutgers University Press, 2022, Pp 2-4.

¹¹ Ejimofor, Ifunanya. "Native American Women's Cultural Diversity before and after the Arrival of the White Man: A Comparison between the Eastern Woodlands (North America) and

1920, women's roles changed. The manufacturing sector was most severely impacted by the stock market catastrophe. There were thousands of men laid off.¹² Women discovered careers in fields like services, which are more suited to the needs of the female sex. Restaurants, industries, laundry facilities, schools, offices, hospitals, and beauty parlors were among the places where people could find work.¹³

Women comprised about 25% of the workforce for the first time in American history. The Depression also changed the roles that men played. They were often left to look after the kids while their women went to work. This change in gender roles resulted in a rise in drunkenness, marital violence, and conflict and uncertainty between men and wives. The rate of marriage fell by 22% from 1929 and 1939.¹⁴ The American economy changed during the Great Depression from one that was thriving to one that was barely scraping by. The government forbade married women from joining the labor despite the financial struggles that many families faced, and opponents of the new social roles attacked women, charging them with stealing employment from men.¹⁵ A committee in Wisconsin, in particular, denounced the practice of hiring husbands and wives, stating that if the wives were fired, "it would bring employment to a normal trend."¹⁶

European Cultures." *International Journal of History* 5, no. 2 (July 1, 2023): 129–37.
<https://doi.org/10.22271/27069109.2023.v5.i2b.239>.

¹² Boyd, Robert L. "Race, Self-Employment, and Labor Absorption: Black and White Women in Domestic Service in the Urban South during the Great Depression." *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 71, no. 3 (2012): 639-640.

¹³ Murphy, Mary-Elizabeth B. "African Americans in the Great Depression and New Deal." In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History*. 2020.

¹⁴ Helmbold, 6.

¹⁵ Hapke, Laura. *Daughters of the Great Depression: Women, Work, and Fiction in the American 1930s*. University of Georgia Press, 1997.

¹⁶ Wexler, Joan G. "Husbands and wives: The uneasy case for antinepotism rules." *BUL Rev.* 62 (1982): 75.

The Socioeconomic Obstacles Black Women Faced

The already severe economic circumstances faced by African Americans were made worse by the Great Depression of the 1930s. Their unemployment rate was two to three times higher than that of White people, and they were the first to lose their jobs. Michelle Holder's comparative analysis of labor statistics during the early 21st century severe recession demonstrates that this pattern is still in place now. When the economy is down, white men are more inclined to look for labor positions that were held by African Americans.¹⁷ African Americans frequently received significantly less aid than Whites under the early public assistance programs, and some benevolent groups even forbade Black people from attending their soup kitchens.

Black unemployment rates in the South were twice or even three times higher than those of the white population, as historian Cheryl Lynn Greenberg notes in "*To Ask for an Equal Chance: African Americans in the Great Depression*". In 1934, almost 70% of black laborers in Atlanta were unemployed. About 25% of white workers in Northern cities were unemployed in 1932; in contrast, African American unemployment rates exceeded 50% in Chicago and Pittsburgh and 60% in Philadelphia and Detroit.¹⁸ Hundreds of thousands of African American sharecroppers who became indebted during the Great Depression became part of the Great Migration from the rural South to the urban North. 1.75 million African

¹⁷ Holder, Michelle. African American Men and the Labor Market during the Great Recession. New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2017. Pp. 23-34

¹⁸ Greenberg, Cheryl Lynn. *To ask for an equal chance: African Americans in the Great Depression*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009, Pp 8.

Americans, according to Greenberg, had relocated from the South to cities in the North and West by 1940.¹⁹

Analyzing African American women's economic data before and during the Great Depression is a good place to start when dissecting this conversation because many of them were employed while white women were only beginning to enter the workforce. Black American women had long been employed in some capacity, whereas white women were looking for opportunities to work in the public domain. "One in four married African American women labored for profit or wages at the turn of the twentieth century, while only three out of every hundred white wives pursued paid work," according to research.²⁰ Given the constant presence of African American women in the workforce and public arena, it is challenging to dissect the ideologies surrounding their involvement in this historical period. Due to their pre-existing employment commitments, African American women experienced increased marginalization from society as a whole. In addition, they were disproportionately affected by the economic downturn, with many leading two-wage households. Despite working in fields distinct from their spouses', these women faced significant obstacles due to the Great Depression. Numerous labor statistics highlight African American women employed in the service sector, mostly as domestic helpers for white middle-class and upper-class households.²¹

¹⁹ Greenberg, *To ask for an equal chance*, Pp 12.

²⁰ Blackwelder, Julia Kirk. *Now hiring: The feminization of work in the United States, 1900-1995*. Texas A&M University Press, 1997.

²¹ Blackwelder, Julia Kirk. *Now hiring: The feminization of work in the United States, 1900-1995*. Texas A&M University Press, 1997.

Family Structure

Because of "the experiences of slavery, racism, and African and Afro-American cultural practices and values," African American families had radically different family structures. The nuclear family is a particularly Caucasian notion. African American women have continuously worked outside the home while raising a family and being present in the so-called "public" sphere. Recent research on African American family structures has challenged this binary concept of the family economy by focusing on larger kinship networks.²² According to this study, "marital and parental relationships are not the only factors that can be used to explain family decisions; neither do they exclude from consideration women who are neither wives nor daughters."²³ The Great Depression brings to light certain particular distinctions in the ways that families battled and coped with the crisis, even though both white and black women employed elements of cooperation in their domestic life. Both groups' family stability weakened, but the women suffered differently since family structures were presumably different before the crisis.²⁴

More white women joined the workforce. Despite facing significant backlash in their official positions, they persisted in engaging in diverse labor actions during the Great Depression. This created tension within the 'nuclear' family structure. In addition to endangering masculinity, it created a void in the home that others were compelled to fill. In terms of perspective, African American women fared the hardest during this crisis because, although

²² Helmbold, Lois Rita. "Beyond the Family Economy: Black and White Working-Class Women during the Great Depression." *Feminist Studies* 13, no. 3 (1987): 629-55. doi:10.2307/3177885. Pp, 635

²³ Hapke, *Daughters of the Great Depression*, Pp 13.

²⁴ McMahon, Kathy A. "Invisible women of the Great Depression." (2009).

they had previously been performing this task, they were not highly acknowledged for doing so, while white women were, in certain situations, praised for their sacrifices in domesticity. As white women advanced down the occupational desirability ladder, black women were displaced. There was no lower step for black women who were already at the bottom, and they were essentially forced out of the labor force.²⁵

Many Americans had various economic difficulties during the Great Depression, but Black women faced especially severe difficulties because of the intersections of race and gender. Systemic racism, discriminatory policies, and deeply ingrained gender biases made their financial struggles much worse. When the distinct economic difficulties Black women faced during the Great Depression are examined, a story of resiliency and creativity in the face of hardship is revealed. The career prospects available to Black women were limited due to discriminatory hiring practices.²⁶ Many were restricted to labor-intensive, low-paying employment like housework, farm work, or service roles. There were significant barriers for Black women seeking jobs. Discrimination hampered access to a variety of professions and was ubiquitous in the labor market. Many Black women were forced into low-wage, precarious employment, frequently working in domestic service, agriculture, or other economically disadvantaged fields. Furthermore, when businesses had to make cuts due to financial difficulties, they were frequently the first to be let go.²⁷

²⁵ Helmbold, Lois Rita. "Beyond the Family Economy: Black and White Working-Class Women during the Great Depression." *Feminist Studies* 13, no. 3 (1987): 629-55. doi:10.2307/3177885. Pp, 636

²⁶ Ward, S., 2018. *Women and Work: African American Women in Depression Era America*.

²⁷ Ward, S., 2018. *Women and Work: African American Women in Depression Era America*.

Black women saw large income gaps from their white colleagues, even in the workplace. Discriminatory pay practices that devalued Black women's labor contributed to the widening wage disparity. Black households experienced more financial instability as a result of this economic inequality. In addition, many of those who were able to find work were underemployed, putting in less hours than what was required to support their families.²⁸

Much of the Black people lived in rural areas, where the agriculture sector was severely disrupted. The already unstable sharecropping agreements, characterized by exploitation, worsened. Many Black women fell deeper into poverty as a result of discriminatory lending policies and a fall in agricultural output. There was a lot of discrimination in the job. Black women faced discriminatory policies, poor treatment, little possibilities for advancement, and segregated work environments frequently. Their Great Depression-era financial difficulties were made worse by these obstacles.²⁹

African Americans saw significant political developments as a result of their worsening economic situation. The St. Louis Urban League started a nationwide "jobs for Negroes" campaign in 1929 by threatening to boycott chains that employed primarily White workers despite having a predominantly Black client base. Following efforts to bring African American organizations and youth groups together, the National Negro Congress and the Southern Negro Youth Congress were established in 1936 and 1937, respectively.

²⁸ Helmbold, Lois Rita. "Beyond the Family Economy: Black and White Working-Class Women during the Great Depression." *Feminist Studies* 13, no. 3 (1987): 629-55. doi:10.2307/3177885. Pp, 650

²⁹ Helmbold, "Beyond the Family Economy, Pp, 651.

Adaptability in Financial Condition:

The domestic program of U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration from 1933 to 1939, known as the New Deal, was described as "vastly increasing the scope of the federal government's activities, taking action to bring about immediate economic relief as well as reforms in industry, agriculture, finance, waterpower, labor, and housing."³⁰ Despite the fact that the New Deal legislative process made great attempts to provide protection and assistance for American workers and unemployed citizens, a sizable portion of the people was disregarded in favor of others. Minority populations were disproportionately affected by legislation and employers who catered to white Americans.³¹

More importantly, not many special laws were designed to support African American men. Very few were put in place to support women in the workforce. Some claim that the New Deal and the social programs that followed it were primarily designed for the breadwinner. Numerous federal organizations were established by legislation in order to rehabilitate rural regions, give direct relief to the disenfranchised, and create jobs in the infrastructure sector. However, not many of these organizations appeared to be concerned about women who work.³²

While African Americans benefited greatly from the economic support offered by New Deal programs, these programs were implemented at the state level, where racial segregation remained pervasive and institutionalized. Racial discrimination and Jim Crow laws, which

³⁰ Rauchway, Eric. *The Great Depression and the New Deal: A very short introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2008, Pp 1.

³¹ Skotnes, Andor. *A New Deal for all? race and class struggles in depression-era Baltimore*. Duke University Press, 2012, Pp 13.

³² Ward, Sarah. "Women and Work: African American Women in Depression Era America." (2018).

were common in the 1930s, were not significantly challenged by the New Deal.³³ Segregation camps were created by the Civilian Conservation Corps, and mortgages in African American communities were not insured by the Federal Housing Administration. White landowners were paid by the Agricultural Adjustment Association to leave their fields fallow, but they were not compelled to give any money to African American tenant farmers and sharecroppers who farmed the property but were not entitled to Social Security payments.³⁴

The mere act of being excluded was one of the several ways that New Deal programs harmed African American women. In order to preserve worker safety, the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act placed special emphasis on minimum salaries in addition to basic sustainable maximum hour limitations. The goal of this measure was to harmonize labor laws throughout the nation. However, farmers and domestic laborers were expressly exempt from this measure. Because of decades of racism, enslavement, and misogyny, African Americans occupied the majority of these two jobs.³⁵ FERA camps were forcing African American women domestic workers out of their regular jobs, and even if they were able to stay in them, they had to deal with unsafe and discriminatory working conditions.³⁶

During the Great Depression, African American women showed a strong will to fight for financial security. They used a variety of tactics and got involved in activism to combat systematic racism and financial troubles. Their actions helped ensure their immediate

³³ Sklaroff, Lauren Rebecca. *Black culture and the New Deal: the quest for civil rights in the Roosevelt era*. Univ of North Carolina Press, 2009, 13.

³⁴ Sklaroff, *Black culture and the New Deal*, 22

³⁵ Levine, Rhonda F. "Class struggle and the New Deal: Industrial labor, industrial capital, and the state." *Class: The Anthology* (2017): 413

³⁶ Linder, Marc. "Farm workers and the fair labor standards act: racial discrimination in the new deal." *Tex. L. Rev.* 65 (1986): 1335.

survival as well as the long-term advancement of economic empowerment. Small companies, catering services, and beauty salons are just a few of the entrepreneurial ventures that African American women started and grew. This entrepreneurial attitude helped African American communities flourish economically by laying the foundation for long-term financial freedom in addition to providing immediate cash.³⁷ African American women formed mutual assistance organizations and cooperatives to share resources and provide financial support for one another as part of group economic endeavors. These programs promoted a feeling of community cohesion, acting as a safety net and laying the groundwork for cooperative economic endeavors.³⁸

They took an active part in political activism, pushing for equal chances and fairness in the economy. Their participation aided in the expansion of the Civil Rights Movement and helped to raise awareness of economic disparities, which in turn paved the way for reforms and legislative changes targeted at stopping discriminatory practices. Notwithstanding the difficulties posed by racial prejudice in these endeavors, black women pursued employment through New Deal efforts. African American women's involvement in New Deal initiatives led to some economic relief and job opportunities, even though the results varied. It also created a foundation for conversations about fair labor standards.

African American women engaged in labor movement, pushing for better working conditions and equitable pay. Through their activity, they helped to advance workplace equality by

³⁷ Boyd, Robert L. "Race, labor market disadvantage, and survivalist entrepreneurship: Black women in the urban North during the Great Depression." In *Sociological Forum*, vol. 15, pp. 647-670. Kluwer Academic Publishers-Plenum Publishers, 2000.

³⁸ Butler, John Sibley. *Entrepreneurship and self-help among black Americans: A reconsideration of race and economics*. State University of New York Press, 2012.

opposing discriminatory practices and strengthening the labor movement as a whole. Through painting, writing, and music, African American women expressed the struggles and victories of their lives and contributed to cultural narratives. They developed a sense of identity and pride and these cultural contributions contributed to a wider knowledge of African American living throughout the Great Depression. In hard times, they looked to their church and community networks for both financial and emotional help. These support systems laid the groundwork for community resilience by highlighting the need of interpersonal relationships in weathering difficult financial times.

African Americans organized to protest for more economic, social, and political rights from the very beginning of the Great Depression. Editor of the Chicago Whip Joseph Bibb coordinated boycotts of department stores in the city in 1929 because they would not hire African Americans. A result of the successful grassroots campaigns against racially biased hiring practices, 2,000 African Americans were hired. Picketing and boycotts under the slogan "Don't Buy Where You Can't Work" quickly extended to other Northern cities.³⁹ African American activism began to flourish in the 1930s, paving the way for the Civil Rights Movement. The National Council of Negro Women was founded in 1935 by Mary McLeod Bethune.⁴⁰ The National Negro Congress, an umbrella organization of various African American organizations, was first met the following year and advocated for legislation against lynching, the removal of the poll tax, and the Social Security eligibility of domestic and agricultural workers. The Southern Negro Youth Congress was established in 1937 by

³⁹ Hunter, Gary Jerome. "DON'T BUY FROM WHERE YOU CAN'T WORK": BLACK URBAN BOYCOTT MOVEMENTS DURING THE DEPRESSION, 1929-1941. University of Michigan, 1977.

⁴⁰ Smith, Elaine M. *Mary McLeod Bethune and the National Council of Negro Women: pursuing a true and unfettered democracy*. Alabama State University, for the Mary McLeod Bethune Council House, National Historic Site, National Park Service, 2003.

young African Americans who organized boycotts and voter registration drives.⁴¹ The SNYC understood the significance of gender equality in the larger civil rights movement. Advocating for the rights of African American men and women, the SNYC actively tried to address the intersections of race and gender, in contrast to certain other groups at the time. African American women were given the chance to take on leadership positions inside the SNYC. In order to make sure that the opinions and concerns of black women were taken into consideration in the organization's decision-making processes, this dedication to representation was essential.

Roosevelt was the first president to appoint an African American to the position of federal judge, and he appointed a considerably higher number of African Americans to positions inside his administration than any of his predecessors. The Roosevelt Institute claims that FDR increased the proportion of African Americans employed by the federal government by thrice. African Americans were designated as special advisors by New Deal leaders.⁴² These policy advisors were called the "Black Cabinet" and the "Black Brain Trust,"⁴³ even though none of them held cabinet-level positions. Being the sole female member of the Black Cabinet and a personal friend of First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, Bethune founded Bethune-Cookman University and is arguably the most well-known member of the group.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Hughes, C. Alvin. "We Demand Our Rights: The Southern Negro Youth Congress, 1937-1949." *Phylon (1960-)* 48, no. 1 (1987): 38.

⁴² Watts, Jill. *The black cabinet: The untold story of African Americans and politics during the age of Roosevelt*. Atlantic Monthly Press, 2020.

⁴³ A group of African Americans known variously as the Black Cabinet, Federal Council of Negro Affairs, or Black Brain Trust advised President Franklin D. Roosevelt and First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt on public policy during their tenure in office from 1933 to 1945.

⁴⁴ Hapke, *Daughters of the Great Depression*, 10.

In order to fight for the organization of mass-production workers on an industrial rather than craft basis, Lewis, Hillman, and Dubinsky founded the Committee on Industrial Organization (CIO) within the AFL together with nine other like-minded union leader in 1937, The CIO welcomed a variety of unskilled and semiskilled workers the AFL had typically ignored, by admitting all workers when organizing an entire industry, including African Americans women, immigrants from eastern and southern Europe and their children. African American women played a significant role in the CIO's initiatives to organize industrial workers and advance workers' rights, including individuals like Lucy Randolph Mason. In the 1930s, she was the director of the Congress of Industrial Organizations' (CIO) Women's Bureau. She addressed the problems and worries that black women and other female workers faced in this capacity.⁴⁵

Mason pushed hard for women's equality in the workplace and equal pay, stressing the value of acknowledging the achievements of female employees. Her efforts were focused on eliminating discriminatory behaviors in the workplace as well as challenging salary discrepancies.⁴⁶ The sit-down strategy by CIO members was employed by young, female salesclerks at Woolworth's who were underpaid to demand better working conditions.⁴⁷

Communists protested racism, poverty, and injustice in the streets during the Great Depression. Black women were among them. Some Black activists moved to radical settings

⁴⁵ Noyes, Harry Albert. "The history and development of the Committee on industrial organization in the United States." (1938).

⁴⁶ Glisson, Susan Milane. *"Neither bedecked nor bebosomed": Lucy Randolph Mason, Ella Baker and women's leadership and organizing in the struggle for freedom.* The College of William and Mary, 2000.

⁴⁷ Goldfield, Michael. "Race and the CIO: The Possibilities for Racial Egalitarianism during the 1930s and 1940s." *International Labor and Working-Class History* 44 (1993): 1-32.

in response to the harsh realities of the Great Depression, which made the already bad circumstances for many African Americans even worse. Notable African American women were among those who joined the Communist Party of the United States of America (CP). Many working-class black women looked to the CP and other militant groups for assistance in confronting the day-to-day problems of unemployment, unfair relief distribution, and persistent race-based discrimination," writes historian Lashawn Harris, explaining their motivation.⁴⁸

The party's emphasis on uniting Black and White workers and working against "racism, inadequate relief payments, and unemployment" is what made it appealing to certain African American women.⁴⁹ Communist groups that prioritized activism included the Unemployed Councils and the League of Struggle for Negro Rights. These groups carried out actions on the streets, and you could contact them when you received an eviction notice. Harris observes that party membership gave African American women a sense of empowerment in both the urban North and the rural South. African American activist women were expected to behave in a certain way, but Black Communist women changed that. In order to combat racial prejudices, traditional campaigners placed a premium on "respectability." This excluded the street-corner speeches, boycotts, and picketing those Communist women both black and white sometimes spearheaded against the wishes of their male counterparts.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Harris, Lashawn. "Running with the reds: African American women and the Communist Party during the Great Depression." *The Journal of African American History* 94, no. 1 (2009): 21-43.

⁴⁹ Harris, *Running with the reds*, Pp 43.

⁵⁰ Murphy, Mary-Elizabeth B. "African Americans in the Great Depression and New Deal." In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History*. 2020.

Conclusively, Black women showed incredible tenacity in the face of these challenges by actively looking for opportunities for economic agency. Many started small enterprises or offered services to their communities, participating in informal economies like entrepreneurship. In order to manage the economic uncertainties, group efforts were also made to build networks of mutual support and cooperative ventures. To withstand the economic catastrophe, black women relied on strong links to their families and communities. Networks of extended families were essential in offering both financial and emotional support, highlighting the value of social ties in bad times. Black women throughout the Great Depression showed not just their resilience in the face of hardship but also their creative solutions for economic survival in overcoming these particular economic obstacles. Their experiences during this time period contributed to the continuous struggle for economic fairness and equality by laying the foundation for later social and political activism.

These efforts produced a variety of results. Even if networks of community support and entrepreneurial endeavors helped to create immediate economic stability, the long-term effects were far more significant. The Civil Rights Movement was sparked by the activity of African American women during the Great Depression, which also paved the way for subsequent initiatives toward more economic justice and equality. These laws and regulations addressed economic inequality. Their tenacity and pursuit of economic security made a substantial contribution to the larger American struggle for social justice and civil rights.

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