



The Politics of Public Housing: Black Women's Struggles against Urban Inequality (Transgressing Boundaries: Studies in Black Politics and Black Communities)

By Rhonda Y. Williams

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Black women have traditionally represented the canvas on which many debates about poverty and welfare have been drawn. For a quarter century after the publication of the notorious Moynihan report, poor black women were tarred with the same brush: "ghetto moms" or "welfare queens" living off the state, with little ambition or hope of an independent future. At the same time, the history of the civil rights movement has all too often succumbed to an idolatry that stresses the centrality of prominent leaders while overlooking those who fought daily for their survival in an often hostile urban landscape.

In this collective biography, Rhonda Y. Williams takes us behind, and beyond, politically expedient labels to provide an incisive and intimate portrait of poor black women in urban America. Drawing on dozens of interviews, Williams challenges the notion that low-income housing was a resounding failure that doomed three consecutive generations of post-war Americans to entrenched poverty. Instead, she recovers a history of grass-roots activism, of political awakening, and of class mobility, all facilitated by the creation of affordable public housing. The stereotyping of black women, especially mothers, has obscured a complicated and nuanced reality too often warped by the political agendas of both the left and the right, and has prevented an accurate understanding of the successes and failures of government anti-poverty policy.

At long last giving human form to a community of women who have too often been treated as faceless pawns in policy debates, Rhonda Y. Williams offers an unusually balanced and personal account of the urban war on poverty from the perspective of those who fought, and lived, it daily.

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Editorial Review

Review

"...takes an important look at how the trajectory of public housing in this country was experienced, embraced, contested, and resisted by those who lived in the developments Williams [reminds] us that while public housing may have failed, that does not always mean that those who lived there failed."--*American Historical Review*

"This is an important book that should be read by policy makers, activists, and scholars alike. The story of public housing is one that needs to be remembered." --*Political Science Quarterly*

"...an intimate account of the leadership of black women in public-housing policy.... Her creative use of oral history and straightforward writing style enhance her central thesis.... Williams's description and analysis of black women and public-housing policy add a new dimension to the growing body of scholarship on this topic, and she should be applauded for her efforts."--*Journal of Southern History*

"Williams has exquisitely and mercifully corrected the deeply etched image of public housing as an utter failure. Her carefully researched, well-written and critically balanced study of public housing forces housers, historians, political scientists, and sociologists alike to reconsider the pall of negativism that at least since 1957 has beclouded all conversation about public housing and about the enduring need for government support for decent, low-income housing."--*The Journal of American History*

"Well-researched, well-written.... Highly recommended."--*Choice*

"Her carefully researched volume chronicles the personal lives and political activism of the low-income women who voiced their claims for 'rights, respect, and representation' in public housing and beyond. Using personal histories culled from more than 50 interviews, Williams vividly demonstrates these women's setbacks and triumphs.... this is a valuable look at social welfare policy."--*Publishers Weekly*

"Baltimore native Williams demonstrates how poor black women mobilized to address the evolving crisis in Baltimore's public housing. In the 1930s and 1940s, Baltimore's segregated public housing served mostly whites, but both black and white residents felt grateful for the new apartments. Before long, local corruption and obdurate racism along with income caps and white mobility left public housing only to the black poor.

City officials ignored deteriorating buildings and rising crime rates, while urban renewal further displaced and isolated poor black families. The Civil Rights Movement, the War on Poverty, and the welfare rights movement found a ready constituency in the projects, and black women became "part of the vanguard of community activists"--Cynthia Harrison, George Washington University, *Library Journal*

About the Author

Rhonda Y. Williams is Associate Professor of Women's Studies and History at Case Western Reserve University.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Eugene O'Brien:

As people who live in often the modest era should be up-date about what going on or facts even knowledge to make them keep up with the era which can be always change and move ahead. Some of you maybe can update themselves by looking at books. It is a good choice in your case but the problems coming to a person is you don't know which one you should start with. This *The Politics of Public Housing: Black Women's Struggles against Urban Inequality (Transgressing Boundaries: Studies in Black Politics and Black Communities)* is our recommendation to make you keep up with the world. Why, because book serves what you want and want in this era.

Ellen Omalley:

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Rose Davies:

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