

# Contested Transformation

*Race, Gender, and Political Leadership  
in 21st Century America*

CAROL HARDY-FANTA

*University of Massachusetts Boston*

PEI-TE LIEN

*University of California, Santa Barbara*

DIANNE PINDERHUGHES

*University of Notre Dame*

CHRISTINE MARIE SIERRA

*University of New Mexico*



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*To our mothers*

HELEN ARAUJO SIERRA

1919–2015

SUE M. HARDY

1913–2013

ROSA C. PINDERHUGHES

1918–2012

YU-CHENG CHANG LIEN

1928–2006

## Introduction

On a freezing day in January 2009 hundreds of thousands of people lined the mall in front of the Capitol in Washington, DC, to witness Barack Obama take the oath of office as our first African American president of the United States. The changing face of the top US elected official symbolizes a changing of the guard in US political leadership and reflects the dramatic growth and diversification of the nation's population and governing bodies over the last five decades. This change is evident on Capitol Hill where, in January 1965, Patsy Takemoto Mink of Hawaii ascended to federal office as the nation's first woman of color in Congress. She served as the sole congresswoman of color for four years until joined by Shirley Chisholm of New York in 1969. It would be another twenty years before the nation's first Latina congresswoman, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen of Florida, joined their ranks. Today, women and men of color in the US Congress number in the double digits. A similar change also happened to the nation's highest court when Sonia Sotomayor, a woman from a working class Puerto Rican family in New York City, took the oath of office in 2009 and became the first Latina Supreme Court justice, having been nominated by President Obama. More recently, statewide officials such as Nikki Haley, the daughter of immigrants from India, and governor of South Carolina, argued for the removal of the Confederate battle flag from state property.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> As we discuss later, the impetus was the outcry over the murder of State Senator Reverend Clementa Pinckney by a White supremacist. Governor Haley, the Asian Indian American female Republican governor of South Carolina, broke ranks with South Carolina's tradition and called for the removal of the Confederate battle flag from state capitol grounds, flanked by both of the state's Black members of Congress, Rep. James Clyburn (D-SC) and US Sen. Tim Scott (R-SC) at the signing of the legislation. All twenty-nine Black state

## CHANGE AND PROGRESS

New faces of diversity appear not only in the halls of the White House, US Congress, Supreme Court, and state legislatures. Across the nation and at all levels of government – federal, state, and local – the racial, ethnic, and gender profile of America’s governing officials includes more people of color and women than ever before in the nation’s history. Add in the growing share of the population and increased electoral participation of Latinos and Asian Americans due to changes in immigration policies and demographic patterns and it is not surprising to see that people of color have gained greater influence in US society and politics.

They are changing the contours of political leadership and governance in this country. One measure of the scope of change is that the number of Black, Latino, Asian American, and American Indian women and men holding elected office today stands at more than 12,000, compared to just a few hundred prior to the implementation of the Voting Rights Act (VRA) of 1965. We discuss the growth for each group, the impact of the VRA, and the factors causing it more fully in Chapter 1.<sup>2</sup>

With the majority of elected officials of color in the United States serving at the county, municipal, and school board levels, their political leadership in those positions both reflects and has the potential to effect symbolic and substantive changes in local governance and for the communities they represent. As a whole, local elected officials oversee budgets totaling a trillion dollars or more every year and make critical hiring decisions, including those of particular concern to communities of color, such as police chiefs

representatives supported legislation to take down the flag compared to 69 percent of their White colleagues. Almost nine in ten women legislators compared to fewer than three-quarters of their male counterparts voted for the ban; the vote included 81 percent of White women but just 67 percent of White men. Source: GMCL Project analysis of South Carolina House Roll Call Vote Number 912, which passed on July 9, 2015, [www.scstatehouse.gov/votehistory.php?KEY=10618](http://www.scstatehouse.gov/votehistory.php?KEY=10618) (Accessed July 5, 2016). Because there is only one (White) woman in the SC Senate, we did not include analysis of the Senate votes supporting S897, which were as follows: Black (male) senators 100 percent; White male: 76 percent, [www.scstatehouse.gov/votehistory.php?KEY=10430](http://www.scstatehouse.gov/votehistory.php?KEY=10430) (Accessed July 5, 2016). State Representative Jenny Horne, a White Republican woman descended from the president of the Confederate States, Jefferson Davis, offered her impassioned plea: “I cannot believe that we do not have the heart in this body ... to do something meaningful, such as take a symbol of hate off these grounds on Friday.” For one example of the impact of her speech on the outcome of the legislation, see Miller (2015).

<sup>2</sup> The Leadership Conference on Civil Rights reported 300 Black elected officials as of 1964 (Henderson 2005). The numbers of Asian American and Latino elected officials were probably a few dozen; for a discussion of Latinos see Melissa R. Michelson (2010, esp. 166).

and school superintendents. Given that for centuries, people of color along with women of all races were deprived of their rights as equal citizens and excluded from political participation and representation, it is not an overstatement to describe recent progress made to local elective leadership and governance as transformational. It is in this historical context that we celebrate the election of Michelle Wu, a young Asian American woman who became president of the City Council of Boston in 2016; her swearing-in is featured in the cover photograph. She replaced a White man from South Boston, the epicenter of 1970s anti-busing protests, where “*It was like a war zone*” during fights over school desegregation (Gellerman 2014).

Although only time may tell if we are too optimistic, we also share the belief that positive political changes may ensue because of the changing faces of diversity in the city/town halls and elsewhere in the structure of governance. A case in point is that, with the rise of elected leadership of color in a former bastion of White southern dominance, Black elected officials were able to secure an apology from the county for the murder of Emmett Till – the African American Chicago teenager visiting Money, Mississippi, in summer 1954, who was abducted and murdered when he reportedly



FIGURE INT.1 Black officials mark Tallahatchie County’s apology for Emmett Till’s murder. Photograph by Clay McFerrin, *The Charleston Sun-Sentinel*, Charleston, Mississippi, 2007. Used with permission.

whistled at a White woman shop owner. Black local officials also erected a memorial (Figure Int.1) in recognition of Till and the violence perpetrated against civil rights activists and many Blacks in those days.

#### REGRESS AND CONTINUING UNDERREPRESENTATION

Despite the trend of progress since the mid-1960s, incidents of regress and racial conflict persist. Well-publicized episodes of racial violence against non-White minorities have inundated the nation's traditional and social media in recent years. We have also witnessed a seemingly endless stream of videos posted to a variety of social media of young Black men and women interacting with, and all too often being killed by, local police – moving images that may dash any hope for racial harmony and limit our ability to imagine the nation making continued progress toward a more inclusive and multicultural leadership and governance. We are haunted by the tragic and senseless deaths of Black men such as Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida; Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri; Freddie Gray in Baltimore, Maryland; Eric Garner in Staten Island, New York; Walter Scott in North Charleston, South Carolina; and the death in police custody of Sandra Bland in Waller County, Texas. Let us also not forget twelve-year-old Tamir Rice in Cleveland, Ohio, or Latinos who have suffered the same fate – and on video: Antonio Zambrano-Montes, shot by three police officers in Pasco, Washington, for throwing rocks; and Ruben Garcia Villalpando, an unarmed Mexican immigrant, shot in Grapevine, Texas, while moving toward the police car with his hands up.

What do these events say about sociopolitical progress for communities of color in America today? Some argue race relations recently have become worse in large part *because* of the election of President Obama, which inflamed racial tensions (see, e.g., Lang 2015; Skocpol and Williamson 2012). According to polls taken shortly after his first inauguration, 69 percent of Americans thought race relations were “generally good”; but polling in 2015 showed that a majority of Americans thought race relations became worse under the nation's first Black president, and just 37 percent described racial conditions as “generally good” (Ross 2015). Some might argue that one result of the violence itself, brought to light by the widespread reporting of such incidents, is generating a heightened awareness of racial problems and an reexamination of race in this country that has been long overdue; see, for example, Ta-Nehisi Coates' best-selling, award winning book *Between the World and Me* (2015).

Yet, informed by our research, we also observe that minority elected officials can play critical roles in leading investigations of these racial events, challenging or investigating the police in individual cases, requiring changes to the racialized [mis]conduct of police departments as a whole, and prosecuting (often, but not always, White) policemen charged with crimes. We note that investigations into these deaths, and responses to the public outcry in communities of color, are typically determined by elected officials at the local level (see Chapter 2). In some cases, the race of the political leaders may factor into whether the responses are quick or slow, violent or peaceful, and result in indictments. It remains an empirical question subject to future scrutiny whether changes in descriptive representation in such troubled places will result in a more just society. We note the possibly contested nature of any assessment of substantive change that results from increased descriptive representation in governance; hence, we entitle our book “contested transformation.”

Another reason for questioning the pace and direction of change is that the demographic transformation that we observed in the impressive growth of the nation's elected officials of color is partial and incomplete. Although their numbers have grown dramatically, elected officials of color still make up a much smaller share of the total number of elected offices compared to their proportion of the population. When the US Census conducted a survey of popularly elected officials in 1992, there were 85,006 governments and a total of 513,200 elected officials.<sup>3</sup> Barack Obama was elected president in the 232nd year of the United States of America's existence. It has been only in the last decades since passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act that people of color have gained any significant number of elected offices in the United States; these dual narratives of recent progress and continuing exclusion are an integral part of Chapters 1 and 2.

This brings us back to Governor Haley, mentioned earlier, and another image in the media: the empty chair in the South Carolina state legislature that belonged to State Senator and Minister Clementa Pinckney, who, on June 17, 2015, was murdered along with eight of his fellow parishioners at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, one of the nation's oldest Black churches. This event reminds us that political

<sup>3</sup> The number of governments increased to 89,476 in 2007, but it is not possible to determine the total number of elected officials in the United States today. This is because, although the Census continues to issue periodic reports on the number of governments, it discontinued its survey of elected officials after 1992.

leaders of color have themselves been subject to attack, illustrating their own vulnerability in racially charged political environments.

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF STUDYING ELECTED OFFICIALS OF COLOR

The title of this book, *Contested Transformation*, reflects the tension between change (moving forward toward greater political representation and influence) and resistance toward that change. Such tension is typical of politics and remains uncomfortably at the heart of race and gender in American politics today: Whatever transformation of the polity that *has* been achieved has occurred on contested political terrain and can hardly be considered permanent. Such changes for the betterment of marginalized communities have not occurred without a fight, are vulnerable to setbacks, and have been bedeviled at every point and in numerous ways. Omi and Winant (2015) recognize the give-and-take of racial politics in America in their dynamic model of racial formation in the United States. They depict social change with regard to race as contested – whereby social structures and political elites define power/race relations and yet are impacted by forces pushing for change from the ground up.

The growth in the number of elected officials of color since the mid-1960s, however dramatic in terms of numbers or percentage change, has hardly resulted in permanent transformation of American politics. On the *best* day, the situation for people of color, including their elected officials, has taken on the character of “two steps forward, one step back.” In this scenario, there is some momentum toward a net gain over time. But the events on the very *bad* days such as those of racialized violence previously mentioned represent a situation in which one step forward is followed by two steps back, suggesting Sisyphean efforts with little gain. One of the most recent scholarly attempts to characterize this paradoxical nature of American racial politics is made by Wilson (2015). The attention we pay in this book to the women and men of color, serving mostly in subnational politics, adds an important and critical dimension to the nation’s dialogue and debate on this ever-riveting issue of progress and regress and how and why minority elected officials matter.

#### Why This Book

We would like to share another, more personal image: In 2004, before he was elected to the presidency, Obama was a state senator representing a

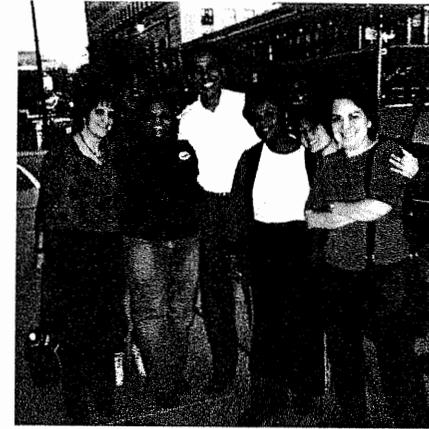


FIGURE INT.2 GMCL Project meeting, Chicago, 2004. (l to r): Carol Hardy-Fanta; (unidentified male); Wartyna Davis; Barack Obama, then candidate for US Senate; Dianne Pinderhughes; Pei-te Lien; and Christine Sierra. (Photograph courtesy of Wartyna Davis; used with permission.)

Southside district of Chicago and running for the US Senate. During one of the meetings of our research group at the University of Chicago, we happened upon him outside a barber shop late on a Saturday afternoon in Hyde Park, striding along 53rd Street near Harper Court.

After telling him about the Gender and Multicultural Leadership (GMCL) Project, he looked at us – a group of women, Black, Latina, Asian, and White (Figure Int.2) – and, with an air of considerable puzzlement, asked, *Who are you guys?* In a sense, the way we wrote this book responds to his question, not about who *we* are, as a multicultural group of women scholars, but rather about *who they are* – the women and men who make up the nation’s multicultural elected leadership and govern this country: their personal, family, and political backgrounds; why they first ran for office; and their views on and experiences with political leadership, governance, and representation.

This book offers a timely study of America’s multicultural elected leadership in the early part of the twenty-first century. It constitutes a first-of-its-kind, comparative study of racial and ethnic minorities, both women and men, that focuses on those holding elective offices at subnational levels of governance. It is national in geographic scope and comprehensive in the topics covered. Further, our study disaggregates analyses by race and gender (alone) and in combination and provides a baseline portrait of Black, Latino, and Asian American women and men holding elective

office in national, state, and local government in the United States today. (We also include a subsample of American Indians serving in nontribal elected positions in state legislatures.)

### About This Book

The words “contested” and “transformation” in the title carry multiple meanings. That the nation is undergoing a demographic transformation in its ethnoracial profile cannot be disputed. We show in this book how the leadership ranks in the nation’s governing institutions increasingly, if incrementally, reflect the demographic diversity evident in the population at large. The roads leading to demographic and political change, however, have been fraught with “contestation.” Focusing specifically on elected officials of color, we outline further considerations of “contested transformation” by exploring the reasons and ways they ran for their first office, their styles of leadership and governance, and their possible impacts on public policy that aim to protect and advance the interests of disadvantaged communities.

To what extent has American political leadership and governance been transformed by the growing presence of women and men of color in elective offices, especially at state and local levels of government? We do not have definitive answers but raise questions for consideration as we analyze elected officials of color along various dimensions of electoral politics and governing. In grappling with this central question, we submit that transformation implies profound and significant change in the way politics and political institutions function. Challenges to the status quo, that is, the usual ways of doing things, may be a prerequisite for, but do not necessarily involve, transformative change (a debate noted in Chapter 6 on styles of leadership). An increasing body of scholarship on the significance of elected officials of color in the American polity raises important questions regarding the impact of these officials, their connections to previously underrepresented groups (e.g., Dovi 2002; Mansbridge 1999; Philips 1995), and the institutional characteristics and structural constraints under which they govern.

As we examine elected officials of color and their ability to penetrate governing institutions that at points have been hostile to their inclusion, we draw upon the literature on political incorporation, which can take various forms with regard to how power is distributed within governing bodies (Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 1984; Schmidt, Barvosa-Carter, and Torres 2000). We draw attention to “four benchmarks of

incorporation” for racial minorities as outlined in Schmidt et al. (2010, 125): “(1) full access to political participation [among all groups], (2) representation in governmental decision-making offices, (3) substantial power/influence on governmental decisions, leading to (4) adoption of ethnoracially egalitarian public policies.” We discuss in the book various dimensions of political incorporation for the elected officials of color in our study (e.g., levels of office, leadership positions in Congress and state legislatures, political allies, etc.). We note here, however, scholarly critiques that point to limitations involved in governing that may *not* result in transformative change.

Dovi (2002, 736) notes that descriptive representatives may not fulfill the expectations of constituency groups who elected them; elected officials of color (like any elected officials) may “reach out to (or distance themselves from) historically disadvantaged groups.” Several studies on Black electoral politics question the commitment of Black elected leaders who seek elected office out of narrow self-interest and personal ambition, as opposed to commitments to empower communities of color (Gillespie 2010; Reed 1986, 2000; Smith 1996; Walters and Smith 2007).

Beyond individual attitudes and behavior are the rules of the game in governance that impose boundaries on elected officials’ decision-making processes and representational roles. Rosenthal (1998a, 16) draws attention to how leaders are constrained by institutional rules and norms: “Institutions reinforce behavior through powerful written and unwritten norms, through the selection and promotion of leaders who adopt those norms, and in daily processes, rules, and procedures.” Referencing Guinier’s (1994) *The Tyranny of the Majority*, Abdullah and Freer (2008, 99) suggest that the majority support rule “especially restricts the ability of Black legislators to propose more *transformative* policy solutions, since they must gain the support of a significant number of white colleagues for bills to pass” (emphasis added).

Hence, though we admit to a normative value of support for the expansion of elected leadership to underrepresented groups, which we consider expanding democratic participation, we also hold that their leadership may or may not result in transformational change in America’s governing structures and political processes. Bluntly stated by Junn and Brown (2008, 71): “... more women in government – does not always mean better government for women. As long as government – replete with gendered and discriminatory institutions – remains intact rather than transformed, populating it with diversity can at best alter outcomes incrementally. Is small change better than no change? *Perhaps, but let*

us at least acknowledge it is *small change*" (emphasis added). Thus, the notion of transformative leadership must be seen as contested, from above, below, and within institutional structures.

Finally, by placing elected officials of color – especially women of color – at the center of our work and consistently incorporating an intersectional lens in our analysis, we are challenging assumptions, practices, and findings of mainstream political science literature regarding elected leadership and governance. Studies of women and gender in American politics posit that women exercise leadership differently from men. Indeed, some scholars argue that women practice a transformative type of leadership that challenges, if not changes, American political processes and institutions in important and fundamental ways. We advance the argument that changes in America's elected leadership are under way, which is a more complex phenomenon than simply its demographic diversity and descriptive characteristics. The transformation rests in the descriptive and the substantive dimensions of the participation brought by this new cohort of elected officials.

In this book, we also argue that, if we are to understand fully who the elected political leaders of this country are, we must include a detailed portrait of the Black, Latino, Asian American, and American Indian women and men holding office today. Women of color constitute an especially important part of the demographic change among the nation's political leadership. As we demonstrate in Chapters 1 and 2, their numbers have increased over time steadily and at a comparatively more rapid pace vis-à-vis their male coethnics and White women, especially in particular offices. Yet women of color and their politics remain understudied in the field of political science. To be sure, a developing literature on women of color is emerging, largely associated with studies of women in American politics or of racial and ethnic minorities in the United States. Yet even these literatures, with their emphasis on the study of White women and/or racial groups (each considered "minorities") often ignore or overlook the case of women of color or the politics of gender in their analyses.

The central findings of this book show commonalities and contrasts between, within, and among the different groups by gender and race: in other words, between Blacks, Latinos, and Asian American elected officials; by gender within each racial group (e.g., between Latina women and Latino men); and among women by race (i.e., Asian American, Black and Latina women of color compared to their male counterparts). In this scenario, we present results for three races, two genders, and six groups by race and gender combined. Moreover, we include American Indians,

who are mostly state legislators in our sample, when analyses of that level of office or policies are of particular relevance to them. There is of course the full intersectional approach, which compares each combination by race and gender alone or in interaction on multiple socioeconomic and political dimensions included in this comprehensive study.

Black, Asian American, and Latina men and women of color have a lot to add not only about patterns and sources of growth in numbers over recent decades and the struggles that they have faced and those they face today (Chapter 1); but also about how they serve mostly at the local level and what that is like for them (Chapter 2); what resources they bring with them from their personal and family backgrounds (Chapter 3); why they ran for office (Chapter 4); how they navigated the campaign trail (Chapter 5); and how they view their leadership and governance styles and their representational roles (Chapters 6 and 7). We also hear their voices when we report what they said – in their own words – when asked in our GMCL Survey, "Why did you run for office the very first time?" and "What do you think are the most important policy issues facing your constituents?"

By the end of the book, we anticipate readers will have a better grasp of the nature of the tensions and struggles – as well as accomplishments – of the nation's men and women of color elected officials. We also project that the reader can answer affirmatively the question: Do minority elected officials, especially women of color, matter in contemporary American politics? By accounting for the voices of diversity among these officials, we wish to provide a clearer answer to the "so what" question of whether their election and public service have advanced America toward a more inclusive democracy in the early twenty-first century and onward.

#### FILLING A VOID IN PRIOR RESEARCH

Despite their importance for the current state and future of democracy in this country, there has been remarkably little research on elected officials of color that is comprehensive and comparative in scope, includes a national sample, and disaggregates findings by race and gender. Political science has produced voluminous amounts of research on elected officials, but race was largely ignored or discussed in the context of White ethnic politics and assimilation. Overall, the default norm for elected leadership was White men.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> It truly would be impossible to list even a partial list of scholarship demonstrating the hegemony of White men in the field as scholars or subjects. Dahl (1961) and Banfield and Wilson (1963) are two examples.

Once the field began studying race, it followed the larger American tradition of seeing race solely in terms of “black” and “white”<sup>5</sup>; gender was either studied separately or seen as another “minority” (i.e., results reported for “minorities and women”). Black women, as they assumed greater roles in women’s studies and feminist scholarship, decried the fact that *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men* (Hull, Scott, and Smith 1982). Subsequent scholarship drew attention to the politics of “women of color,” yet in cases obscured the differences there might be between women of different races.

Finally came intersectionality scholars (e.g., Brewer 1993, 1999; Cohen 1999; Cohen, Jones, and Tronto 1997; Crenshaw et al. 1995; Githens and Prestage 1977; Hancock 2007; Hill Collins 1990; Jordan-Zachery 2009; King 1988; Smooth 2006; Williams 2001, 2003; Baca Zinn and Dill 1994; see also works in Hardy-Fanta et al. 2006). These scholars argue that “the distinguishing categories within a society, such as race/ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, class, and other markers of identity and difference, do not function independently but, rather, act in tandem as interlocking or intersectional phenomena” (Manuel 2006, 175).

As we discuss and test in Chapter 3, intersectionality theory coexists with and contributes to a substantial scholarship on whether Black women, in particular, are “doubly disadvantaged” (Gay and Tate 1998) socioeconomically and politically by their sex and race compared to Black men and/or White women (see, e.g., Darcy and Hadley 1988) or are, like some argue for Latinas (Fraga et al. 2008; Navarro 2008), advantaged in some way (Bejarano 2013). And, as we discuss in Chapter 8, according to a number of theoretical and empirical studies (Dawson 2001; Fraga and Navarro 2007; García et al. 2008; and Simien 2006), intersectionality in identity of women of color may lead to the development of a bridging function, which can create opportunities for coalitions across race and gender.

Our book serves to change long-term traditions in research in political science, gender/women’s studies, and ethnic studies that privilege White men, White women, and men of color, respectively. We are putting women of color at the center of our analysis and conceptualization, documenting with empirical research the unique experiences they bring to

the political arena. There is nothing to be contested in this regard, despite their working in a political terrain that often challenges or opposes their equal rights to political participation and representation. Inspired by the title of Cohen, Jones, and Tronto (1997), our book discusses how women of color elected officials are transforming American politics from the bottom up.

#### AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH: FRAMING THE ANALYSIS BY RACE, GENDER, AND RACE\*GENDER

The landscape of our democracy becomes even more complex when examined through the lens of intersectionality. Throughout this book we often speak of using an “intersectional lens” to examine the backgrounds, trajectories to office, and views on leadership, governance, representation, and policy positions of elected officials by race alone, gender alone, and gender and race in interaction – for which we have coined the term “race\*gender.” What do we mean by the “lens of intersectionality”? And why henceforth do we use “race\*gender” rather than just “race and gender”?

We argue that race and gender, whether alone or in interaction, are not simply demographic classifications or identity markers, but rather factors that interact in dynamic ways with historical and structural political conditions. Being Black, alone, brings with it experience and struggles we discussed briefly earlier. Add in gender (as well as class, life experiences, whether easy or hard, and the historical context of the racial group), the *whole* (combination) becomes much more than the sum of its parts. Most models treat race and gender in an additive way, and may lead to situations in which being a Black woman, reduced to a demographic category, may lead one to see her as indistinguishable from any other woman (see a critical review in Hancock 2007). King (1988, 7) characterizes this issue as follows: “Unfortunately, most applications of the concept of double and triple jeopardy have been overly simplistic in assuming that the relationships among the various discriminations are merely additive. These relationships are interpreted as equivalent to the mathematical equation, racism plus sexism plus classism equals triple jeopardy .... Such assertions ignore the fact that racism, sexism, and classism constitute three, interdependent control systems. An interactive model, which I have termed multiple jeopardy, better captures those processes.”

We use race\*gender to make it clear that race and gender have multiplicative effects, and we consider the effects of the histories, disadvantages

<sup>5</sup> Below we discuss why we generally capitalize Black and White throughout this volume; in this case we have deliberately used lowercase to reflect the tradition in earlier years to designate race as a color, not as ethnoracial political groups in the same way Latinas are.

and/or advantages, conveyed to them as individuals who bring a host of personal, familial, societal, economic, and political resources as well as “baggage” with them. Thus, besides being shorthand for the analysis at the intersection of race and gender, the asterisk in race\*gender affirms the multiplicative nature of sociopolitical life for women and men of color.

#### ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK: WHAT WE GAIN FROM STUDYING ELECTED OFFICIALS OF COLOR

This book is organized into four parts. Part I, Transforming the American Political Landscape, addresses the question: To what extent and in what ways has the American political landscape been transformed by the increasing numbers of elected officials and populations of color? In Chapter 1, we address this question by providing the historical context for any discussion of political representation for Blacks, Latinos, Asians, and American Indians in this country, a context that is one of exclusion and continuing struggle. We also analyze factors that have infused their continuing growth as well as perpetuated their underrepresentation in the post-1965 era. We draw attention to two federal policies that greatly increased access to the political system (and nation) for people of color: the Voting Rights Act (1965) and the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965.

Chapter 2 responds to the question asked in *Who Governs?* by Robert Dahl (1961) by providing an in-depth look at the women and men of color who govern America’s cities, towns, counties, and school boards. Among the key findings of this chapter is the fact that, in contrast to prior research with its limited focus on large cities, the majority of city/town councilors and mayors of color serve in smaller cities/towns and counties – as do elected officials in general. It is in these smaller localities where key decisions that directly impact the livelihood of the nation’s racial minority communities are made.

We identify women of color as key to the phenomenal growth in local elective governance by people of color. Yet, any recorded growth that has occurred in local governance has not reached anything close to representational parity. They also typically preside over smaller jurisdictions than their male counterparts. Furthermore, our analysis challenges the prevailing, somewhat archaic, view that local government is not gendered because, supposedly, the decisions made at that level are of a more practical nature and focus on physical infrastructure.<sup>6</sup> On the contrary, the

<sup>6</sup> For a review of this literature, see, for example, DeSena (2008).

women and men of color who responded to our survey and hold elective offices at the local level help move the nation closer to the ideal of a more inclusive and multicultural democracy.

Chapter 3 provides a baseline portrait of elected officials with regard to their personal, political, and family backgrounds. We analyze the qualifications, experiences, and resources they bring with them in their trajectories to political office as well as the barriers that may exist for them on the campaign trail. Contrary to the “double disadvantage” thesis that posits that political women of color would be disadvantaged by the intersection of their racial and gender identities, we find that, at least among those we surveyed: “the winners,” that is, those who succeed in their campaigns and are elected to public office, Black and Latina women are significantly *less* likely to be disadvantaged in education and occupation, compared both to women in general and to their male counterparts. In the end, our portrait of advantages and disadvantages in the *backgrounds* of elected officials – that is, the personal and family resources they bring with them to their campaigns – is a mixed one, and certainly one that cannot be easily captured by the received wisdom of the double disadvantage thesis for women of color in general when Black and Latino men are often found to be the least advantaged.

A central question considered by the two chapters in Part II, Paths to Political Office, is, in what ways do race and gender shape the paths to political office for elected officials of color? Chapter 4 explores the trajectories to elective office for women and men of color. We suggest that the pipeline theory may be limited in its utility to explain the electoral experiences of women and men of color, and we provide a more nuanced understanding of why and how these women and men enter the world of electoral politics. Using qualitative and quantitative analyses of survey respondents’ comments, we uncover the commonalities as well as differences between women and men of color in why they first ran for office. As prescribed in the literature for “authentic” descriptive representatives of minority populations, the elected officials in our survey reveal in their own words multiple connections to community as they give expression to why they ran for office the first time. Overall, we find that no single reason (such as personal ambition) explains their motivation in seeking office. The chapter also uncovers how these elected officials are not newcomers to politics but rather were elected quite a number of years ago to the office they currently hold. We also find mixed evidence regarding their recruitment by parties and others to elective office.

Chapter 5 continues our challenge to the notion that personal ambition underlies paths to public office. Although political ambition carries a different meaning for racial minorities than for Whites, several key elements in the electoral structure examined in our survey show similar effects on the electoral fates of both White women and women of color. Personal ambition was far from the primary motivation for women and men of color to launch their first campaign for public office. Instead, we find strong evidence of minority elected officials' leveraging community-based resources as social and political capital to help launch their political careers. Among the race\*gender groups, Black women are particularly active in civic engagement.

Included in the analysis are institutional factors that influence elections (such as types of electoral systems, term limits, etc.) and perceived campaign disadvantages identified by survey respondents. Minority elected officials in our survey were elected more from single-member districts than from at-large or multimember districts. We find some evidence of legislative term limits having a positive impact on cracking open the opportunity structure for minority women. On perceived campaign disadvantages, men of color and especially Black men reported the highest incidence of feeling marginalized and discriminated against on the campaign trail because of their race. Women of color who perceived themselves as being disadvantaged on the campaign trail compared to other candidates tended to attribute their mistreatment to both their race and gender. We suggest that women of color's greater awareness of structural intersectionality may put them in a better position to support and champion political causes that require them to play a transformative role in bridging differences and building coalitions for social and/or political change.

The two chapters in Part III, Leadership, Governance, and Representation, provide an intersectional analysis of leadership styles, governance and representation, returning to the notion of "transformation." We begin the chapter by identifying various definitions and meanings of leadership – focusing especially on debates informed by feminist, womanist, and other critiques of traditional theories within the field of political science. We then pursue a key question that emerges from the literature: given the increase in their numbers as positional leaders, to what extent does – or will – the presence of women of color in government lead to a "politics of difference" – that is, significant change, even transformational change – in how government operates? We draw on our survey to provide answers to that question. We find that elected officials of color,

both women and men, think that women (and by implication women of color) – work harder, are better at building consensus, avoid the limelight to get the job done, and are more persuasive and more transparent when developing public policy. This provides a parallel to findings in the literature on women in general (i.e., studies of White women). Hence, our study supports the notion that gender does matter in how elected officials engage in the policymaking process within their governing bodies.

This chapter also evaluates aspects of political incorporation, that is, the degree of success with which elected officials of color have penetrated governmental institutions and exercised leadership within them. Data on leadership positions held by elected officials of color in Congress and at the state legislative level show some progress over time, but institutional constraints such as party control of legislative bodies limit their opportunities for advancement. At the same time, the elected officials of color in our study – overwhelmingly local officeholders – report they belong to voting majorities, for the most part, in their governing bodies, suggesting a level of effectiveness as substantive representatives for various constituencies.

In Chapter 7 we describe how well elected officials of color "match" their constituents on key dimensions of descriptive and symbolic representation: race, class, ideology, and partisanship. We then explore the links between these dimensions of representation for elected officials situated at the intersection of race and gender serving in state and local offices. Are those who "match" their constituents more likely to support legislation that protects minority rights? The degrees to which they "look alike" and "think alike" differ across race and gender groups and by level of office. The extent of perceived partisan and ideological congruence between minority officials and their constituents differs with the directions of partisanship and ideology. Providing empirical support to the concept of descriptive representation, the majority of non-White officials in our study perceived their jurisdictions as made up largely of constituents who shared their racial background and partisan affiliation, but not necessarily ideological outlook.

Our respondents were remarkably accurate in their estimation of the constituent makeup by immigration generation. And the majority of them also correctly identified the majority class status (by household income) of their constituents. Their reported degrees of responsiveness to issues related to disadvantaged constituents are found to be positively associated with the degrees of congruence in race and partisanship with their constituents. Their support for minority-targeted legislation appears

to be influenced more by the degree of congruence in partisanship than in racial identity or ideology.

The vast majority of our elected officials, especially those holding higher levels of office, reported a great deal of contacts with their constituents, but gender differences did appear. There are few racial or gender differences, however, among minority elected officials in their perceptions regarding policy issues of concern for their constituents – suggesting minorities have a more unified policy outlook than found among Whites.

Part IV, *Advancing Democracy in the United States*, examines the prospects for advancing democracy in a country that is increasing its demographic diversity. Chapter 8 compares the positions of each group of elected officials of color on a number of public policy debates, including immigration, voting rights, welfare reform, and women's rights. We evaluate the implications of these findings for the prospects of advancing political representation and coalition-building abilities of women and men of color. In the conclusion to Chapter 8, we return to the discussion of “contested transformation,” and share our thoughts on the possibilities for advancing democracy.

#### A NOTE ON DATA AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research for this book draws heavily from two primary sources constructed for the GMCL Project: a national database of minority elected officials from the selected populations mentioned earlier and a telephone survey of a national sample of those elected officials serving in state legislative and local office from 2006–2007. (See Box Int.1 for who was included in the database and survey. For more on the data and methodology, see Appendix A; the Survey Questionnaire may be found in Appendix B.) Although the data from these sources are from 2006–2007, we contend that they offer an important – and still unique – baseline portrait of elected officials of color at the beginning of the twenty-first century, and one that includes women and men of four ethnoracial groups; is national in coverage; and provides the opportunity to study not only members of Congress and state legislators, but also the vast majority of officials who serve on elected county, municipal, and local school boards.

We decided to update certain aspects of the National Database in 2012–2014 to include members of the 113th Congress; we then gathered data on the occupations, prior offices held, religion, marital status,

#### Box Int.1. Who's Included in the GMCL National Database? In the Survey?

##### *In the Database:*

- Members of Congress
- Statewide officials who hold the position of governor, lieutenant governor, secretary of state, attorney general, state treasurer, or state auditor/controller
- State legislators
- Members of county commissions and boards of supervisors
- Mayors and members of city governing bodies (i.e., city/town councils and boards of aldermen/ selectmen)
- Members of school boards (including county-wide, unified-district and local, but excluding college/university boards of trustees)

##### *In the GMCL Survey?*

- State legislators
- Members of county commissions and boards of supervisors
- Mayors and members of city governing bodies (i.e., city/town councils and boards of aldermen/ selectmen)
- Members of school boards (including county-wide, unified-district, and local boards, but excluding state boards of education and college/university boards of trustees)

and other characteristics of congressional members of color in the original database.<sup>7</sup> We also updated the database for the state legislators of color in 2012–2013 and gathered data on whether the state legislators who were surveyed in 2006–2007 had subsequently run for higher offices. We gathered comparable information on a sample of local officials in 2014. And, finally, we gathered information on leadership positions and committee assignments for members of color in the 113th Congress.

<sup>7</sup> Members of Congress exclude delegates except for the delegate from the District of Columbia.

CHALLENGES IN UNDERSTANDING  
RACE/ETHNIC IDENTITY

As we began to work on the GMCL project, we found ourselves challenged by several issues. How would we define race? We could approach the question (1) *theoretically*, drawing from the fields of political science, sociology, anthropology, racial and ethnic studies; (2) *historically*, considering how definitions have been defined in changing fashion over the centuries<sup>8</sup>; (3) *legally*, as defined by American law (or by the law of other nations in the Americas); or (4) *administratively*, as used by the US Census Bureau (which circles back to the analysis of historical change). The definitions used by the Census have shifted and evolved over time; since the 2000 census, individuals have had the option of self-identifying with more than one race.<sup>9</sup> Above all, (5) *structurally*: we need to heed the postmodern tendency suggesting that racial distinctions are products of “social construction.” (See Hardy-Fanta et al. 2013.)

Whatever the definitional possibilities, and this short list by no means exhausts the range, our team assumed that racial categories would be clearly delimited as we began our research; that is, an official (or any other person) could be classified into a racially singular category. One would be Black, or White, or Asian, or Latino, and the officials would fit, with few exceptions, into racially discrete categories, rather than overlap, be racially mixed, or offer some combination of them. We based our assumption in part on the fact that, on combining the directories/rosters of Black, Latino, and Asian American/Pacific Islander elected officials to construct the GMCL National Database, there was almost no overlap between them. We had expected that the Joint Center and National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO), in particular, might include individuals of multiracial backgrounds, given

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Nobles (2000) and Cox (1948).

<sup>9</sup> Source: US Census (2011; CB11-CN.125). By 1995, the Census Bureau’s About Race reported: “The data on race were derived from answers to the question on race that was asked of individuals in the United States. The Census Bureau collects racial data in accordance with guidelines provided by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and these data are based on self-identification. The racial categories included in the census questionnaire generally reflect a social definition of race recognized in this country and not an attempt to define race biologically, anthropologically, or genetically. In addition, it is recognized that the categories of the race item include racial and national origin or sociocultural groups. People may choose to report more than one race to indicate their racial mixture, such as “American Indian” and “White.” People who identify their origin as Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish may be of any race. OMB requires five minimum categories: White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander.” [www.census.gov/topics/population/race/about.html](http://www.census.gov/topics/population/race/about.html) (Accessed March 4, 2016).

that, on the East Coast especially, Dominicans and Puerto Ricans typically include those who are racially Black. As it turned out, of the more than 10,000 elected officials in the database, there were very few who appeared in more than one of the four groups.<sup>10</sup>

Confounding our assumptions and political science practice more broadly, we found that, when asked to describe their racial/ethnic backgrounds, the officials surveyed provided a diverse and complex picture. Thus, to the five ways to define race described earlier, we must add a sixth: *methodologically*.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> One of the few was Adam Clayton Powell IV, who is both Black and Latino (and the grandson/great grandson of the late Congressman of the same name); to confound matters further in this case, there are two Adam Clayton Powell IVs, one who was born in Puerto Rico. Another involved a Latino state legislator who was – it turned out – mistakenly included in the Black directory, most likely because he was a member of the Black Legislative Caucus in his state’s legislature. And Alberto Torrico, who served on both the Hispanic and Asian Pacific Island Caucuses in the California State Assembly from 2004 to 2010, was listed in the NALEO and Asian Institute directories because his father is from Bolivia and his mother is Japanese. [www.smartvoter.org/2010/06/08/ca/state/vote/torrico\\_a/bio.html](http://www.smartvoter.org/2010/06/08/ca/state/vote/torrico_a/bio.html) (Accessed January 22, 2016).

<sup>11</sup> We found seven local officials, for example, whose ascriptive identity was Black (based on the original Joint Center roster) but, when asked how they would describe their racial identity, gave answers that could only be coded as American Indian (e.g., “Amerindian,” “American Indian,” “Native,” etc.). Given the small number, the fact that American Indians in our sampling frame (the GMCL Database) were all state legislators, and the history of Black American Indians in this country, it would render their inclusion as American Indian local officials meaningless; we therefore returned them to the “Black” category for analytical purposes. In other cases in which the elected official was publicly known to be of two races, we coded him or her within the group with the smaller number in the database. To an important extent, our research had begun with an assumption of the importance of the categorical, and that we could and should assign each official to a specific box. Given the rapid growth in the overall racial and ethnic population, our failure to think through definitions of race, whether static or changing, or at least to think about the fact that this would be an important element in our analysis, led us into difficult methodological issues. What should we do with officials who did not respond compliantly with our categories? What did it mean that some proportion, but by no means all of the officials offered mixed, multiracial, or other challenging responses that did not fit the survey? Nevertheless, even if we had addressed these issues earlier, and even after taking these methodological issues into account, race is a complex issue that has had and continues to generate many different configurations. Our efforts to “force” our elected officials into specific, discrete racial categories is one that offers a fascinating challenge: our theoretical expectation that there be specific categories for each official and into which each official should fit, is necessarily challenged by the reality that the rapid increase in “new” racial/ethnic groups since 1965 would lead to population interaction, intermarriage, and change. The presence of Blacks and Latinos in cities such as Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, and Miami and of Asians, Latinos, and Blacks in Houston and Los Angeles, would lead within some reasonable period of time to changes in the racial boundaries of some portion of the population. For a number of reasons, we did not include a sample of White elected officials. First, we debated the relative importance of centering the research on people of color – in other words, not privileging the White “norm” versus the scientific demands for a White sample. Second, practical

At a very basic level, how do scholars carry out research with race/ethnicity as a key variable if it is not possible to “fit” the research subjects into mutually exclusive categories?

What might seem to be the simplest of analytical tasks – the distribution by race/ethnicity – therefore turned out to be more complex than expected. First of all, simply selecting what terms to use in discussing each group was complicated and based in the political struggles detailed in Chapter 1. For the sake of consistency, we use Black (rather than black or African American); Latino/a rather than Hispanic; and Asian American, which includes native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders. We use the term American Indian rather than Native American, and this category also includes Alaskan Natives.

Second, each decision related to terminology reflected oft-irresolvable tensions associated with racial identity and relations: Are they, as a collective, “minorities”? Should they be called “non-White?” Who is Black, who is Asian, who is Hispanic/Latino, and who is American Indian? For reference to all non-White groups in our study, we sometimes use the term “elected officials of color.” We are aware of the scholarly argument that “White” is itself a “color” in a social and political sense. We respect the differences in scholarly opinion on this issue, but for our purposes, references to people of color do not include non-Hispanic Whites. In addition, the discussion of racial and ethnic identity – whether ascriptive, self-selected, or what Márquez (2003) calls asserted – is important theoretically, as the tendency in the early phases of comparative racial and ethnic group social science research was to elide the differences among Blacks, Latinos, Asian Americans, and American Indians in an effort to aggregate political coalitions beyond minority status in relationship to the majority White population. The common group identity names we use were settled on after considerable discussion. We’ve settled on “multicultural” for the four groups as a collective, but readily acknowledge that tensions remain.

Third, we have chosen to capitalize Black (and White) when the words refer to racial groups of people for a number of reasons. These include the fact that, otherwise, Blacks would be visually diminished compared to Latinos/as, Asians, or American Indians, who, by virtue of their nationalities, are capitalized. Tharps (2014, A25) makes “The Case for Black

considerations (including the daunting task of generating comparable samples of Whites) influenced our decision. Finally, we concluded that there was sufficient information on White elected officials in the literature to allow for meaningful comparative analysis.

with a Capital B. Again” because “Black refers to people of the African diaspora. Lowercase black is simply a color.” The third reason is political: Clark (2015), for example, locates her argument with publishers’ style editors in current events: “As media coverage of networked activism in the #BlackLivesMatter movement revives discussions of how media talk about race, the question persists: Why won’t mainstream news outlets capitalize the b in Black?” She responds: “It’s a question of social and political will ... If you put it up – capital B – you are really trying to call attention to a very political identity, very much a communal activity, as ‘Black’.”

### Illustrating Complexities of Race in the GMCL Project

Elected officials in the GMCL Survey were first asked: *How would you best describe your primary racial or ethnic background?* Almost nine in ten (88 percent) gave a response to this question that was a singular racial/ethnic category: 45 percent Black/African American; 34 percent Hispanic/Latino; 7 percent Asian/Pacific Islander; and 2 percent American Indian (see Figure Int.3). Seven percent gave responses that diverted attention away from race or ethnicity, essentially providing nonracial responses: one of the most common was a statement such as “good,” “very good,” “excellent,” or “super.” There were also 4 percent

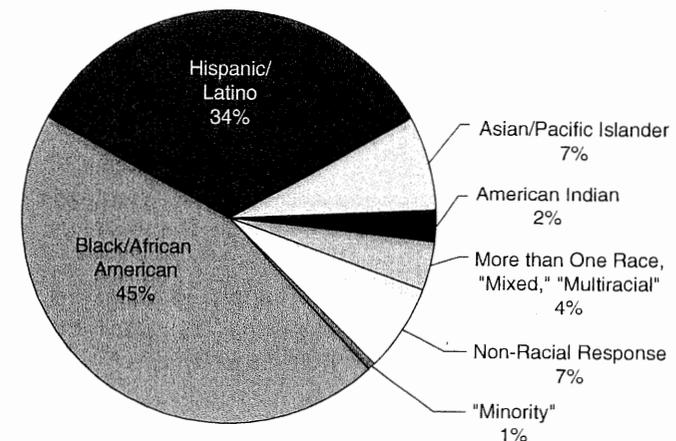


FIGURE INT.3 Primary racial/ethnic background, elected officials of color.  
 Note: Percentages are those reported by elected officials of color when asked, *What is your primary racial or ethnic background?*  
 Source: GMCL National Survey, N = 1,170.

who said their *primary* racial or ethnic background included more than one race (with an Hispanic/Latino group included as analogous to Black, Asian, or American Indian) or said “mixed” or “multiracial.”

Simply asking for a primary racial/ethnic background fails, however, to capture the full picture on how the elected officials see their racial and/or ethnic backgrounds. When asked in an open-ended question, *How would you describe your ancestry or ethnic origin?* the officials in our survey provided considerable detail. Combining the responses from both questions, we find that more than a quarter of elected officials of color claim a racial identity that is not exclusive or singular – and this varied significantly by group.

### “Latino” and Race

Finally, we fully recognize that “Latino/Hispanic” is not a race as in the conventional usage of Black, Asian, American Indian, or White.<sup>12</sup> For simultaneously theoretical, historical, and methodological reasons (although not, according to the current US Census, administratively), there are times when they should be included in analysis as one of their more traditionally racial counterparts. There is some justification for this. Schmidt, Barvosa-Carter, and Torres (2000, 564), for example, describe the racialization of Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans that occurred following these groups’ “violent incorporation” into the United States. Hochschild and Weaver (2010, 748), in their study of multiracialism, discuss the logic of “including Hispanic as a ‘race’ analogous to Black, White, Asian, and American Indian.” Comparing Hispanics/Latinos to Blacks, Asian Americans, and Whites is also common practice in public opinion polls (see, for example, the *Race and Ethnicity in 2001: Attitudes, Perceptions and Experiences Survey* [Kaiser Family Foundation 2001]).

This decision to treat Latinos as a racial group is not dissimilar to Masuoka’s (2008, 258) study of a nationally representative sample ( $N = 1,709$ ) of the general population: she found that 18.5 percent responded Yes to the question, “*Do you consider yourself to be of mixed race, that is, belonging to more than one racial group?*” Furthermore, drawing on the data she used,<sup>13</sup> we found that the percentage of Blacks

<sup>12</sup> For a more theoretical discussion of race, see, for example, Omi and Winant (2015), *Racial Formation in the United States*; Nobles (2000), *Shades of Citizenship*; and Stokes-Brown (2012), *The Politics of Race in Latino Communities: Walking the Color Line*.

<sup>13</sup> We would like to thank Natalie Masuoka for generously sharing her data from the *Kaiser Family Foundation/Washington Post/Harvard University 2001 Race and Ethnicity Poll* (Kaiser Family Foundation 2001); Masuoka’s and our analysis of the data were based

in the general population reporting a multiracial identity (31.1 percent) was virtually identical to that among elected officials in our survey (31.8 percent).

The percentage of Asian Americans in the general population reporting a mixed/multiracial identity (16.6 percent) was higher than that among elected officials of that group (5.7 percent), as was that for Latinos (36.5 percent in general population compared to 24.1 percent in the GMCL Survey).

### Gender and Multiracial Identities

But what does a “multiracial identity” mean? The answer to this question is that it differs significantly for each group – and these differences reflect the theoretical, historical, legal, socially constructed, and administrative challenges discussed above. We also found that women officials (at 33.7 percent) were significantly more likely than their male counterparts (at 21.2 percent) to claim a background that included more than one group.

## RACE, GENDER, AND DESCRIPTIVE REPRESENTATION IN AMERICA IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Political theorists generally consider there to be four types of political representation: descriptive, symbolic, substantive, and formalistic.<sup>14</sup> Though we discuss the meaning of each type in Chapter 7, here we describe the ways race and gender interplay when it comes to *descriptive* representation for Blacks, Asian Americans, and Latinos in America at the start of the twenty-first century. We consider as well some aspects of the *symbolic* dimension for elected political leaders of color and their constituents.

What is descriptive representation? John Adams, one of the framers of the US Constitution and the nation’s second president, said it best: a

only on the survey of 1,709 people conducted March 8 to April 22, 2001. See documentation in her report for more details.

<sup>14</sup> According to Hannah Pitkin’s (1967, 209) “dimensions of political representation,” which we discuss and use in the analysis in Chapter 7, descriptive dimension refers to the extent to which the social characteristics of the representatives “look alike” or resemble in important ways the characteristics of the represented. The symbolic dimension refers to the extent that representatives “think alike” or “stand for” the values of the represented through the taking of a certain stance or making a certain speech that may earn the constituents’ trust and confidence. In the substantive dimension, the representatives are expected to be “acting in the interests of the represented, in a manner responsive to them.” The formalistic dimension refers to the institutional arrangements that regulate the selection and removal of representatives such as through the electoral mechanism.

representative body “should be in miniature, an exact portrait of the people at large” (Adams 1776). In its most basic and normative sense, achieving descriptive representation for people of color in this country would mean that the racial and gender composition of America’s governing bodies from Congress, State Houses, city/town halls, to county and school boards would be, as a national average, about half women and about 40 percent people of color. This number would vary, naturally: all should still be 50 percent women, but the racial makeup could fluctuate from close to 0 to 100 percent depending on the demographic makeup of the jurisdiction.

What we find, instead, is that despite the remarkable growth overall, each group – whether by race, gender, or race\*gender – is severely underrepresented in Congress, statewide offices, state legislatures, and local governing bodies. In Chapter 1 we demonstrate that White men are considerably overrepresented, and the Black women in Congress do as well as White women, although both rank well below where they should be by at least 50 percent. If government reflected proportional percentages, women, with more than half of the population, should hold at least 50 US Senate seats (instead of 20) and 218 House seats (instead of 82). Neither women in general, White women, nor women of color do better in other levels of office. And, as of mid-2016, no woman has ever been elected president of the United States.

In sum, we posit that, rather than assuming the growth in political representation and influence of minorities and women to be the result of a natural progression in a country that has become more diverse demographically, the United States has not become a “postracial” nation but one in which reforms move in the direction of racial change, but are constantly contested. Setbacks may be fully expected, given our institutional structures, and they have been an intrinsic part of our nation’s history (Shaw, DeSipio, Pinderhughes, and Travis 2015). Getting elected to public office may just be the first step toward a more inclusive nation and exerting influence may take more than descriptive representation. We wish to contribute to a better understanding of what happens on the ground in American politics by accounting for evidence and possibilities of progress, however slow in coming or small in impact, by elected officials of color serving in state and local level offices. In fact, we argue in Chapter 1 that there may be two competing narratives in the post-1965 era: one is of important change or the promise of it, while the other is a continuing story of struggle as new dimensions of resistance to racial marginalization reveal themselves.

## PART I

### TRANSFORMING THE AMERICAN POLITICAL LANDSCAPE