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African American Government Girls: Unspoken Narratives of Potential, Perseverance, and Power

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Abstract

A historical case study documented the lives and experiences of six African American Government Girls employed by the United States federal government during wartime. Five women served during World War II, and one served in the Korean War. The Government Girls sought advanced educational opportunities in their high school years and developed marketable skills. They earned their appointments to government service by passing the Civil Service examination, and in some cases, moving to another city to begin work. Their intentional decision to become Civil Service employees interrupted the expectation for Black women to work in domestic service positions. When the Government Girls entered federal employment, they encountered racism and sexism in the work environment and persisted in their decision to “keep their job.” Five of the six Government Girls retired from the federal government. Federal government employment affected the socio-economic status of the Government Girls by providing a steady source of income, benefits, and promotions. The Government Girls took advantage of academic and social opportunities. The story of the African American Government Girls offers a counter-narrative of Black women in the diaspora. Black Feminist Thought (BFT) and Social Mobility theory were used to interpret the complex nature of their experiences. A new chapter in American history unfolds in this study of six African American Government Girls. They challenged stereotypes, persisted despite consistent discrimination, and overcame their humble beginnings to achieve a middle class life in a pre-Civil Rights era.

Keywords: Government Girls, African American, Racism, Sexism, Social Mobility, World War II