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"As Tough As It Gets": Women in Boston Politics, 1921-2004

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Research Report

Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy • McCormack Graduate School of Policy Studies

“As Tough As It Gets”:

WOMEN IN BOSTON POLITICS, 1921-2004

SPRING 2005

Kristen A. Petersen

Carol Hardy-Fanta

Karla Armenoff



The Center for
**WOMEN IN POLITICS
& PUBLIC POLICY**

About the Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy

Established in 1994, the Center is located at UMass Boston's John W. McCormack Graduate School of Policy Studies. The Center's mission is to promote women's leadership in politics and public policy by providing quality education, conducting research that makes a difference in women's lives, and serving as a resource for the empowerment of women from diverse communities in Massachusetts—and across New England.

The Center runs a Graduate Certificate Program for Women in Politics and Public Policy—a one-year, full-time graduate program combining rigorous academics and practical skill building in politics and policy making within an environment supportive of women, and offers a range of educational forums on issues of concern to women, which are open to the public.

The Center has a long track record of research that includes analysis of women's political status in New England; the intersection of gender, race/ethnicity, and political representation; and a wide range of public policy issues, including women and workforce development, welfare reform, women in the criminal justice system, and reproductive rights. We also maintain a library and information resource center, with extensive holdings that are available in an online searchable database.

The lead author on this report, Kristen A. Petersen, was this year's "Polly Logan Visiting Scholar." Her research was made possible with support from the Polly Logan Endowment Fund, which was established at the Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy by friends and colleagues of Polly Logan in recognition of her many years promoting women's participation in politics. The Polly Logan Endowment Fund provides ongoing support for visiting scholars like Kristen A. Petersen who report on innovative and timely research such as "As Tough As It Gets": Women in Boston Politics, 1921–2004. The Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy would like to thank Polly Logan and the Polly Logan Endowment Fund Board for their ongoing support.



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Whether you're a man or a woman, Boston city politics is as tough as it gets anywhere; this is "Politics 101." It is very aggressive; there are a lot of people who do not play by the rules. I say to people, you're in the big leagues, and you can't be meek and you can't be afraid of a very aggressive business.

—Peggy Davis-Mullen, 1997



Mildred Harris (top left): 1st woman elected to the Boston City Council, 1937

Catherine Craven (bottom left): 2nd woman elected to the Boston City Council, 1963, 1965

Willie Mae Allen (right): Candidate for the Boston City Council and Democratic Party Activist

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WOMEN IN BOSTON POLITICS, 1921-2004

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Introduction

When Mildred M. Gleason Harris joined the Boston City Council as a representative from Roxbury Center (Ward 9) in 1937, she broke a barrier for women in municipal politics. Despite passage of suffrage in 1920, and despite women's participation in local politics for decades prior to that, the city's ruling body was an elusive goal. A variety of cultural and structural impediments contributed to low numbers of women running for and winning elective office throughout the 20th century. This did not mean that women refrained from engaging in municipal politics; women were critical players in a variety of political arenas in Boston, including school committee, appointed commissions, neighborhood organizations and local campaigns, unions, the Democratic state committee, and the League of Women Voters.

Women first inserted themselves into electoral politics in the City of Boston almost fifty years before the 19th Amendment, granting women the right to vote, was passed. In 1872, women in Boston began agitating for access to the school committee, which was at that time an appointive body.¹ They realized their goal in 1875, when six women took seats on the Boston School Committee—after first winning state legislation that unequivocally stated: “No person shall be deemed to be ineligible to serve upon a school committee by reason of sex.”² Successful lobbying on the part of the New England Women's Club gave women access to serve, but not access to the vote; while women could run, they could not vote for school committee members until 1881.³

With access to the school committee, Massachusetts women continued to push for suffrage at the local and federal levels. Lobbying efforts placed

legislation in front of voters several times prior to 1920 but was unsuccessful. In 1895, women lost a battle for the right to vote in Boston's municipal elections.⁴ Between 1911 and 1916, Massachusetts women narrowly failed at attempts to secure a suffrage amendment to the state constitution. The amendment was a major campaign issue in the 1916 gubernatorial race, with incumbent Catholic

Governor David I. Walsh its key proponent. Both Walsh and the amendment were defeated.⁵

In the meantime, women in Boston had access to participation in city government through appointed positions. For example, in 1914, the City Council passed an ordinance establishing the City Planning Board. Its charter required that of the board's five members “one ... shall be a woman.”⁶ Women's participation on municipal commissions and as employees of city government grew consistently through the 1920s. By the 1930s, women sat on the Board of Overseers of Public Welfare, the Art Commission, the Election

and Health Departments, and the Institutions Department that oversaw Long Island Hospital and Child Welfare services.

In the first year of women's eligibility to vote (1921), the Boston League of Women Voters (LWV) promoted women candidates for the City Council. Grace D. Chipman, a former schoolteacher and wife of a politician, was the first woman to run for a seat on that body. Her backing by the LWV was a part of that organization's campaign to break Irish-dominated ward politics from its control of the Council. She lost, as did the eight other women who ran between 1922 and 1937, when Mildred Harris became the first woman elected to the Boston City Council.

President Fitzgerald appointed as a committee to escort Councilor Mildred Harris into the chamber Councilors Doherty and Dowd, who performed the duty assigned.

Councilor Harris was greeted with applause upon entering the chamber.

Councilor Dowd: Mr. President, it is with pleasure that I present to the City Council our new colleague from Ward 9, Councilor Harris (applause).

President Fitzgerald: In the name of all the members of the City Council, I wish to welcome to our Body Mrs. Mildred Gleason Harris, the first woman to sit in this chamber as a representative of the people since the beginning of the city government (applause).

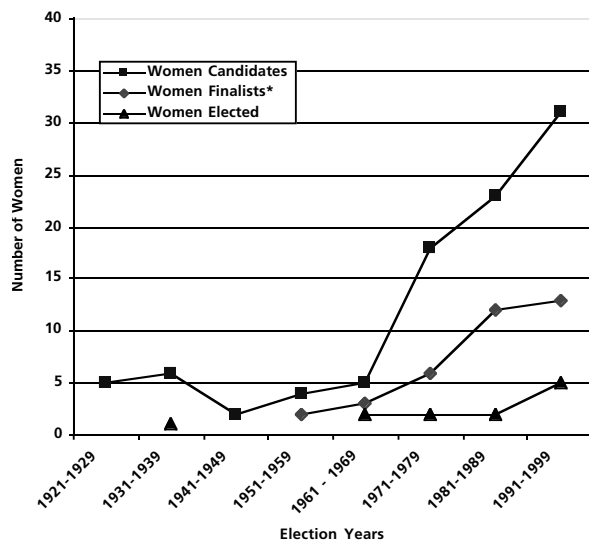
—*Proceedings of the Meeting of the Boston City Council, Monday, April 12, 1937*

Despite the advent of a new political era, Bostonians were not inclined to elect women, a phenomenon that mirrored civic government trends in other major cities throughout the United States. It was not until the 1960s that women earned a sustained presence on the Council, producing some of the most colorful and influential women in the history of Boston politics.

After Harris's failure to win reelection in 1939, it was 26 years until another woman won a seat: Catherine (Kitty) Craven in 1963. Since 1963, there has been at least one woman on the Council in all but two terms (1967–1969 and 1971–1973). Female representation on the Boston City Council was limited until the 1980s, despite women's consistent and prominent activism in neighborhood politics. Through the 1970s, an increasing number of women, sometimes as many as 13 each round, chose to run. (See Figure 1.)

FIGURE 1

WOMAN CANDIDATES AND ELECTED COUNCILORS, 1921-1999



With Louise Day Hicks's election in 1973 and Rosemarie Sansone's election in 1978, women maintained a consistent presence—one at a time—until 1987, when Maura Hennigan and Rosario Salerno sat in the chamber together. The heyday for women in Boston city politics came in the mid-1990s when women held four of the 13 City Council seats. (See Figure 1.) Between 1993 and 1997, Maura Hennigan, Maureen Feeney, Peggy Davis-Mullen, and Diane Modica constituted a critical mass, and with the support of City Council President Jim Kelly, they rose to positions of power on committees and became a galvanizing force for women in positions of leadership in other government offices and from the business community. In 1997, though, individual political ambitions and the realities of Boston's political culture began to erode the alliance. Since then, only two women have retained seats on the council: Maura Hennigan, who has the longest tenure of any current councilor, and Maureen Feeney, who joined the Council in 1993. In all, since 1921, 83 women have run for the Council but only nine women have been elected. (See Appendix A for a complete list of all women candidates for the City Council of Boston.)⁷

TABLE 1

BOSTON WOMEN CITY COUNCILORS, 1921-2003

Years Elected	Councilor
1937	Mildred M. Harris
1963, 1965	Catherine Craven
1969, 1973, 1975	Louise Day Hicks
1977, 1979	Rosemarie Sansone
1981, 1983, 1985, 1987, 1989, 1991, 1993, 1995, 1997, 1999, 2001, 2003	Maura Hennigan
1987, 1989, 1991	Rosaria Salerno
1993, 1995, 1997, 1999	Peggy Davis-Mullen
1993, 1995	Diane Modica
1993, 1995, 1997, 1999, 2001, 2003	Maureen Feeney

Women of color have asserted their political will in the City of Boston for generations. We have identified at least 11 women of color candidates for the City Council (see Table 2)—and one who ran for mayor—but given the paucity and limitations of press coverage by gender and race, their history still remains to be told. What emerges, however, is a pattern of a number of women of color running for the City Council but being more successful in representing Boston in the State Legislature. This paradox will receive a more thorough treatment later in this report.

TABLE 2

WOMEN OF COLOR CITY COUNCIL CANDIDATES, 1973–2003

Year(s)	Councilor⁸
1973	Lena Saunders*
1975	Jacqueline LeBeau*
1979	Jeanette Tracey*
1979	Barbara Ware*
1981–1991, 1995–1999, 2003	Althea Garrison*
1983, 1985	Willie Mae Allen*
1991	Natalie Carithers*
1991	Hattie Dudley*
1995, 1997, 1999	Vikki Middleton*
2003	Jacqueline Payne-Thompson* Carmen Torres [‡]

*African-American; [‡]Latina

Note: Identifying women of color candidates is difficult given the limited coverage of preliminary campaigns and details about candidates' racial/ethnic backgrounds. For example, we were unable to verify the ethnic background of Socialist Party candidate Laura Garza, who also ran in 2003 and who may be Latina.

This study seeks to answer the question: Given the wealth of talent and resources women possess—and the state offers—why is it so tough for women to gain representation in Boston City Hall? To answer this question, and to document the efforts women have made over almost 100 years, we examine the history of women who have run for and won—or lost—election to the Boston City Council in the 20th century. How does the structure and culture of a given urban political arena (i.e., “Boston politics”) affect women’s opportunities as elected officials? What is women’s political culture and how has it differed from patriarchal models of urban political culture? What constitutes political ambition and participation for women? How do women fare in Boston compared to other capital cities in the United States?

This history of women and the Boston City Council uses public records, media reports, and oral histories with candidates and elected officials to tell a story that fills a gap in scholarship regarding the roles of women in Boston city politics. First, we will provide a brief description of the historical context—how “Boston politics” has shaped, hindered, or, in some cases, promoted women’s election to the City Council. Second, using data gathered from historical records, oral histories, interviews, and other sources, we will provide a chronological history of women who ran, won, and lost their bids for election. Finally, the paper concludes with an analysis of the reasons it has been so difficult for women to gain anything approaching equal representation on the Boston City Council. This analysis includes systemic constraints such as bias in gender roles and expectations; traditional notions about women’s capabilities and responsibility; familiarity with the political process; the role of gatekeepers; and fundraising and other forms of support.

“Boston Politics”: The Historical Context of Women’s Political Activity

Women’s political ambitions and motivations to participate in electoral politics have been shaped by a variety of forces: their perceptions of the meaning of participation (women’s role and perception of politics as public service); personal issues relating to gender roles and family responsibilities; and male-dominated political structures (including cultural tradition, gender biases and expectations, “gatekeepers,” and fundraising). But women in Boston did not enter the political arena without knowledge of the system and their opportunities. What worked in the 1930s for Harris continues to characterize contemporary candidates, such as Councilor and mayoral candidate Maura Hennigan and City Council candidate Patricia White. Kinship networks and parish and neighborhood connections, experience working on campaigns for candidates or issues, and a passion to serve all have made it possible and desirable for women to seek access through elected office.⁹

Historically, women have participated actively in local and national politics through a variety of venues and for a variety of reasons. Women’s activities in the Boston neighborhood of Roxbury exemplify how and where women participated in municipal politics. Mildred Gleason Harris grew up in a politically active and well-connected family, a family that was an integral part of the “machine” in Roxbury.¹⁰ Both of her

brothers were elected officials from Ward 9. She and her sister-in-law, Mary B. Gleason, campaigned alongside family members, as well as eventually running for office against one another.¹¹ Their participation as women took many forms—from door-to-door campaigning to hosting meetings and going to rallies, to handing out fliers and helping people get to the polls. In this way, they participated within the context of their family’s activism as family members and within the parameters of what constituted traditional participation in the political arena for women. Yet both ran for office; both stepped outside those boundaries to run for office and did so with the support of family, the “machine,” and residents of the district. Mildred Harris bridged the boundary between traditional women’s roles and the arena of elective office that was closed to women prior to 1920.

Less than two decades after Harris’s service on the Boston City Council, Alice White Yancey devoted her life to community activism on behalf of the African-American community in Roxbury and in Boston, and by the early 1960s she had a significant impact promoting civil rights issues as well as improving quality of life for children in the neighborhood. She did this without being an elected official. She instilled a sense of civic duty in her family—a

Alice White of Roxbury, community activist and mother of Boston City Councilor Charles C. Yancey, died Wednesday at Boston City Hospital....She was 82.... A community activist, Mrs. Yancey was president of several home and school education associations. She was involved in the Boston schools desegregation fight and had many heated discussions with the Boston School Committee. Mrs. Yancey was also involved in the civil rights movement in Boston during the 1960s, meeting many times with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. After his assassination, she worked to rename the Patrick T. Campbell Junior High School in honor of Dr. King. Mrs. Yancey organized many Savin Street cleanup campaigns and fought successfully for tot lots and playgrounds for the children of Boston. Mrs. Yancey held meetings in her home with Mayors John F. Collins and Kevin H. White....She served on the board of directors for Action for Boston Community Development, the Roxbury Multi-Service Center, Model Cities and Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary. She also founded and was president of the Women’s Improvement League of Boston. Mrs. Yancey taught a cooking class at the Roxbury Boys Club and served as a warden for the Election Department for more than 20 years.

—“Obituary: Roxbury Community Activist Alice Yancey,” *The Boston Globe*, March 22, 1996

sentiment that drove her son, Charles Yancey, to successfully seek a place on the Boston City Council in 1983, when he became the third African-American elected to that body. While the Gleason-Harris women stepped outside traditional roles for women in politics, Alice Yancey epitomizes the multifaceted world of women's political participation. Both families also typify the experiences of the majority of Boston's female City Council candidates and elected officials: a family tradition of service and local activism created a belief in (and desire for) access to elected and appointed positions in government. There are numerous other women of color who played critical roles in shaping the political culture of Boston. These include, for example, Melnea Cass, Doris Bunte, Sandra Graham, and many others. Melnea Cass's contributions were so important that she has a boulevard in Boston named after her and she was known as the "Mayor of Roxbury." Because this study is primarily devoted to women who ran for City Council and other elected offices, we are unable to do justice to women such as these who deserve much greater attention that is possible here.

Women who sought and won elected office in Boston also entered a unique political culture. There are several key features that have shaped Boston's political culture and system¹²: (1) the city's historical tension between Protestant "old stock Bostonians," also known as "Yankees" and "Brahmins," and the Irish Catholic immigrants who took power of municipal government by the end of the 19th century; (2) neighborhood or ward-based politics and machines (Boston is composed of 17 distinct neighborhoods); (3) racial tensions between white and black Bostonians; (4) class issues between a coalition of state and city politicians and the business community around the issue of urban development and social changes; and (5) the structure of the municipal government itself.

All of these characteristics affect contemporary Boston political culture. Today, the most pressing issue for city leaders is increasing pressure to change due to

the changing racial and ethnic composition of the population. Irish Catholic politicians have lost ground to Italian-Americans, while minority communities have recently outnumbered white Bostonians.¹³ This has led to an erosion of the traditional base constituency, two characteristics of which had been entrenched kin networks and parish-based political identities.

The historical struggle for control of governance of Boston between Protestant Brahmins and Irish

Catholics dated to the 1870s, when the increasing numbers of Irish living in the city allowed their political strength to coalesce. By the 1880s, Irish Bostonians were able to elect one of their own to mayor partly through the appropriation of the ward system of neighborhood political activity.

Shortly thereafter, Progressives targeted municipal government for reform, decrying patronage systems that they believed made the government inefficient and corrupt. Unable to recapture the mayor's office, they turned their sights on the state legislature, prefiguring black women's turning to the

state legislature after unsuccessful attempts to gain seats on the City Council. Dominance in that body made it possible to enact legislation to curb the ambitions and actions of Irish municipal politicians. However, when Yankee Bostonians, in the words of historian Thomas O'Connor, abandoned city government and concentrated their attention on retaining control of state government, Irish politicians staffed city departments such as police and fire with Irish Bostonians and controlled the election of Council and School Committee members using a strong ward politics system. According to Samuel P. Hays, "The source of support for reform in municipal government did not come from the lower or middle classes, but from the upper class. The leading business groups in each city and professional men (and their wives) closely allied with them initiated and dominated municipal movements."¹⁴

The conflict between two major social groups—Yankee/Protestant middle and upper class versus

Boston is a small town; it's very neighborhood-oriented, and there have been very prominent players in various neighborhoods, and they really have strong footholds; the ethnic piece plays very heavily. Many of the neighborhoods are Irish, and more recently, you see the ascendancy of the Italians, politically and otherwise. So what you have in Boston is a small town with a handful of people who have been politically engaged for generations....I am sure this is a factor in other cities, but it plays out very heavily in Boston because of its size...

—Former City Councilor

Irish/Catholic Democrat and largely working class—has shaped the restructuring of the municipal political landscape and its governing bodies at several moments in the 20th century. One way in which this battle played out was in changes to the size of the council membership, reconfiguration of wards, and Council composition based on nonpartisan elections. By eliminating party politics from municipal elections, Yankee Bostonians and Progressives sought another method of reducing the power of the Irish machine.¹⁵ In 1909, Progressive reformers succeeded in changing the city's charter to reorganize the power structure of municipal politics. The charter modifications increased the power of the mayor over the Council, limited the power of the wards, and diminished the power of Irish Democrats by imposing a municipal nonpartisan electoral system. In addition, the 1909 reforms created a strong mayor/weak council system by which the mayor had greater autonomy to pass or reject City Council acts, and to hire and make appointments.¹⁶

Each such change reflected a power play between political factions. There have been two key ramifications: As will be discussed below, Boston's governing structure is that of a strong mayor/weak council. It is also characterized by strong neighborhood or ward-based politics in which key figures, mostly representing traditional kin and local hierarchical networks, act as gatekeepers in an entrenched system of patronage and succession. Throughout the 20th century, mayors have used their citywide organizations to manipulate municipal elections. Mayors James Michael Curley, Kevin H. White, and Thomas Menino all used their organizations of 1,500 to 2,000 volunteers to work behind the scenes on behalf of City Council candidates they wanted to see win election.¹⁷ City Councilors and Council candidates who challenged a mayor's position on issues were perceived to be a threat. Women Councilors have faced the same battles as their male counterparts when crossing the mayor.¹⁸

Despite Yankee efforts, "the Boston Irish exerted near monopoly control over the workings of Boston's city government. By 1920 the Irish had transformed the city's bureaucracy into an elaborate political fiefdom....The school committee was an Irish bastion of power. The Boston City Council was overwhelmingly Irish as well. Of the 110 elected City Councilmen between 1924 and 1949, there were only 12 Jews, 9 Yankees, 4 Italians, and 1 Black. All the remaining councilors were Irish."¹⁹ And, of course, only one Councilor was a (white) woman. Harris's status as the

first woman member of the Council was such that when her departure was imminent, her co-Councilors voted to commission a portrait of her to be displayed in the Council chambers along with portraits of the Council presidents.²⁰

Structural impediments, both unofficial and official, hindered the election of a diverse pool of Councilors. Within the "unofficial" system of neighborhood political organizing, hierarchies and gatekeepers determined who would run and when, who would receive support, and who would be actively campaigned against. Gatekeepers were black and white, men and women. Neighborhood political "machines" that developed in predominantly Irish neighborhoods in 19th-century Boston continue to influence municipal politics in the 21st century. Early-20th-century legends include Martin "the Mahatma" Lomasney (West End) and John "Honey Fitz" Fitzgerald (North End).²¹ In the 1930s and 1940s, Edna Black was a significant player in determining how African-Americans in Roxbury would vote, as Mildred Harris experienced. At the same time, Silas F. "Shag" Taylor was Mayor James Michael Curley's machine leader in the black community and boss of Ward 3 in the 1930s and 1940s.²² "Curley had black henchmen the same as he had Irish, Jewish, and Italian henchmen," explained first black City Councilor Tom Atkins. "Shag Taylor would get your street cleaned, fix a pothole, get a vacant lot cleared...whatever. Nobody had any question he was the premier man...he was the machine's man, and his power came from the machine."²³

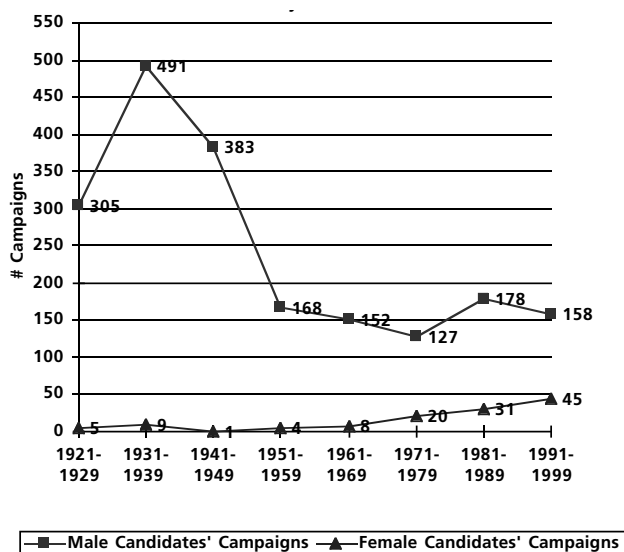
Harris, Yancey, and Black epitomized three ways in which women participated in municipal politics. Their experiences reflect the evolving process of gendering a traditionally male sphere. With four of the nine women City Councilors having made a run for mayor, that barrier is the last to break in city politics.

Women and the Boston City Council, 1920s–1950s: The “First” and “Only”

Women in Boston began running for the City Council as soon as they gained the right to vote. Nine women ran for City Council before Mildred Gleason Harris’s 1937 campaign (see Appendix A) and a total of 19 ran between 1920 and 1959. (During the same period, however, there were a total of 1,347 male candidates; see Figure 2.) In 1921, former school-teacher and political wife Grace D. Chipman was the first woman to run for a seat on the Council. She was one of many candidates nominated in that year by the League of Women Voters, who lobbied to place a certain class of Bostonians in municipal office, including women.²⁴ In addition to Chipman, the LWV also backed prominent political activist Florence Luscomb in her unsuccessful run in 1922. An MIT graduate and lawyer, Luscomb was a key figure in the Massachusetts suffrage movement and was also an employee of the Boston League of Women Voters. “She helped organize and was president of a Boston local of the United Office and Professional Workers of America... Beginning in the 1920s, she served on the board of civil rights, civil liberties, and other liberal organizations, including the NAACP and the Massachusetts Civil Liberties Union.”²⁵

FIGURE 2

**BOSTON CITY COUNCIL CAMPAIGNS,
1921-1999, BY SEX**



As a primary locus of access to formal political action, the LWV was composed mainly of upper/middle-class Protestant women who backed men and women candidates who supported their reformist agenda. A key concern of the League in the 1920s was to diminish the hold Irish Democrats had on municipal politics. Perceptions of corruption, a ward system that dominated elections, and Irish Catholic culture in itself contributed to League members’ activism. While the LWV identified and supported candidates representing its interests, the city’s labor unions also produced women candidates. Among them, telephone operator and union president Annie E. Molloy ran unsuccessfully for the Council in 1922.²⁶

Candidates of the 1920s and 1930s were characterized by several factors. First, while some ran with what would now be called a feminist consciousness, i.e., “as women,” others ran with the same motivations as their male counterparts. For example, an important difference between Chipman and Harris is that the former ran specifically to represent women, while Harris ran as part of a family/neighborhood political machine without the stated intention of primarily serving women’s causes.²⁷ Second, women candidates came from both working- and middle-class backgrounds, with strong organizational support (unions, the LWV, or neighborhood machines, as in Harris’s case). Other women served as government employees or appointees to civic commissions and committees. Charlestown resident and 1927 candidate Carrie Sheehan, for example, was an assistant elections commissioner. Eleanor Creed L’Ecuyer, who ran in 1931, was the first woman officer to retire from the Coast Guard. Finally, beginning a trend that would continue throughout the 20th century, some women who ran for City Council also set their sights on state-level office. After her failed City Council run in 1925, Nellie McNulty was the first woman to run for the state legislature. She did not win either of her two bids for office.²⁸

The 1930s brought important changes in women’s participation in electoral politics. According to historian Sarah Deutsch, “what was new in the 1930s was the candidacy of women for City Council from Irish political families. Previous women candi-

dates had had connections to the labor movement or to women's political and philanthropic groups. These new women, while candidates in their own right, had kinship connections to male-dominated machines. It at least got them press attention, and ultimately it would bring victory."²⁹ In addition, what the 1930s changes reflected was increasing voter-registration rates among women from Irish Catholic-dominated neighborhoods. During the 1920s, women's voter registration was very high in Republican "old stock" neighborhoods but not in working-class neighborhoods.³⁰

Harris won her seat in a special election after the unexpected death of her brother, Councilor Richard Gleason, in a heated campaign that pitted her against nearly a dozen men from Roxbury's Ward 9, including two popular African-American men.³¹ In 1937, a total of 102 people ran for the Boston City Council: 100 men and two women, Mildred Gleason Harris and Lena Clark.³² The barrier Harris broke proved to be resilient, however: she served just one term and lost her reelection bid in 1939. This turn of events should, nevertheless, not be read as a gendered rejection. The story is actually much more complex than that. By the 1930s, Harris's district in Roxbury had an increasing population of African-Americans. According to Sarah Deutsch, when Harris's brother ran for City Council in 1935, his campaign sparked a race riot between his supporters and supporters of his archrival, African-American Ernest Cooke. Cooke lost, and then lost again to Harris in 1937. Harris was a member of the local Irish machine and won because of that rather than as a woman backed by women's organizations. Harris had the backing of black residents because of assurances she made to the unofficial "boss" of the ward: black businesswoman Edna Black. Black chose to back Harris instead of her African-American male opponent, Cooke. However, when Harris came up for reelection in 1939, Black withdrew the support of her organization because she believed that Harris had not delivered to her African-American constituents. Without Black's powerful support and the neighborhood's African-American vote, Harris lost.³³

Several patterns of women's access to City

Council office are evident upon surveying election statistics from 1920 to the end of the century. A review of American cities reveals that a handful of cities elected women to their City Councils between 1921 and 1926, including Cincinnati, Seattle, and Berkeley, California. However the 1930s saw a significant increase in women's access to elected office. Among cities to do so were Boston, Worcester, New York, Baltimore, Knoxville, and Denver.³⁴ Many of the early women City Councilors shared one particular characteristic: many were appointed to fill out terms of their deceased spouses. In Baltimore, for example, the first woman councilor, Ella Bailey, was appointed in 1937 to replace her husband, and was later elected in 1943. The first four Baltimore women City Councilors replaced spouses, and it was not until 1967 that a woman was elected who had not first been appointed.³⁵ In this, however, Boston differed. While Mildred Harris partly rode a sentimental wave into office to fill her popular brother's seat, no women councilors replaced spouses.

As in most cities, very few women ran for municipal offices in Boston in the 1940s and 1950s. Only one woman ran for City Council in the 1940s and three ran in 1951, for a total of four women candidates in the 1950s. (See Figure 2 and Appendix A.) Among the latter, candidate Kathleen Ryan Dacey went on to be the first woman in Boston elected to the school committee. (A member of the Massachusetts Bar Association since 1945, Dacey later became a U.S. administrative law judge.³⁶)

The longest lapse in female candidates for the Council occurred between Marie P. Greene's unsuccessful campaign in 1953 and the candidacies of Katherine "Kitty" Craven, Sybil Holmes, and Alice Lyons in 1961. In the early 1940s, Sybil Holmes was elected to the State Senate and was the only woman to serve during this period.³⁷ The residents of the City of Boston failed to produce women candidates and did not elect another woman councilor until Craven won on her second try in 1963.³⁸

The 1920s to the 1950s was, in sum, a period of "firsts"—the first women to run and the first to win. Women ran but, due to a difficult political climate and other obstacles, they met with very limited

success. They made up less than one-tenth of one percent of all candidates during that period. At the same time, conditions were beginning to change; the number of male candidates for the City Council declined precipitously in the 1950s due to the structural changes discussed earlier. While not leveling the political playing field, this decline certainly reduced the gender gap between male and female campaigns, giving women candidates a greater likelihood of success if they ran. Furthermore, the end of the 1950s marked the beginning of the heightened activism of the 1960s and the women's movement of the 1970s. By the 1970s, women made up about 10 percent of all candidates and, by the 1990s, 22 percent of all candidates for the Boston City Council were women. We turn now to examine what the shift from the 1950s to the 1960s and 1970s meant for women in Boston politics.

Women as “Neighborhood Protectors,” 1960s–1970s

Across the country, the number of women seeking municipal office soared. Many major U.S. cities did not elect their first women City Councilors and mayors until the 1970s, including Austin, Chicago, Dallas, Denver, Philadelphia, and Tucson. During that decade, cities in all of the New England states experienced a significant increase in the number of women running for and holding municipal office.³⁹ The combination of increased numbers of female college graduates and women entering business and the professions created opportunities and desire for service in public office. In Boston, however, only five women ran in the 1960s, and the two who were elected sought office not because of a rise in feminist consciousness but because of two critical issues: urban renewal and school desegregation.

In the 1960s, with serious urban issues galvanizing activists and voters in Boston’s working-class neighborhoods, women broke the barrier of municipal elective office in Boston. Katherine (Kitty) Craven was the first female candidate to win election—26 years after Mildred Harris was ushered with such fanfare into the Boston City Council Chamber. Her success signified the beginning of a change in Boston political culture, one in which a greater number of women sought municipal and state office than ever before and established a nearly constant female presence in municipal offices. Two more women won election in the 1960s and 1970s: Louise Day Hicks (first elected in 1969) and Rosemarie Sansone in 1977. Each of these also achieved what eluded Mildred Harris: reelection. Craven served two terms; Hicks—the controversial and polarizing foe of busing to achieve school desegregation—ran twice for mayor of the City of Boston, ran for and served in the U.S. Congress in 1972–1973, and then was elected and reelected to the Boston City Council (1973 and 1975). Sansone was first elected in 1977 and reelected in 1979.

One might attribute the success of these three women to the influence of the women’s liberation movement. It is true that the number of women candidates in Boston more than doubled, from eight in the 1960s to 20 in the 1970s (see Figure 2). It is more likely, nevertheless, that weighty urban issues were the primary motivating force. The majority of women City Council candidates from this era have consistently

denied running “as women” or as feminists. Instead, they describe their motivation as driven by the desire to protect or to effect change in their neighborhoods. The two most compelling issues of the late 20th century—urban renewal and school desegregation—are what drove women like Craven and Hicks into city leadership positions in the 1960s and 1970s.

Urban Renewal and the Election of Kitty Craven

Cultural changes manifest themselves in specific ways for women engaged in economic and social struggles. “Women’s political participation has both been affected by and caused by cultural change,” emphasizes Margaret Conway.⁴⁰ Changes in gender roles, women’s increased access to higher education, and increased opportunities in occupations such as business and the law stimulated women’s participation in politics. In addition, Boston’s political culture frequently galvanizes neighborhood activists over ongoing struggles between “neighborhood” interests and “downtown” interests regarding development, resources, and economic issues. “The principal cleavage in Boston politics is an economic cleavage, big business versus the neighborhoods, although race is foremost on people’s minds. Female leaders came out of working-class Boston. They were pioneers and set the tone,” said a former City Council candidate.

According to historian Thomas O’Connor, “By the late 1960s and early 1970s, most members of the City Council had established themselves as protectors of the neighborhoods against the unwarranted intrusions of the mayor, his urban planners, and his real estate developers.”⁴¹ The principal event that heightened class conflicts in Boston during the last forty years, and that catapulted at least one woman into elected municipal office, was that of urban renewal. When Craven of Hyde Park won a seat on the City Council, her stance on urban renewal solidified a powerful voting bloc on the City Council.⁴²

Kitty Craven was a member of one old Boston political family (the Kanes) and married into another; John Craven had been one of Mildred Harris’s competitors in the late 1930s. In addition, Craven’s hus-

band was a state representative between 1932 and 1940, then administrative assistant to Craven when she served on the City Council. (He was also a friend of Louise Day Hicks.) Kitty's husband was a cousin of Joseph Timilty, state senator from Hyde Park.⁴³ Craven ran on a staunch anti-urban renewal campaign to protect her native Charlestown from the West End's fate due to 1950s-style urban redevelopment. Charlestown was lucky and escaped the wrecking crews; much of the South End, in comparison, fell to the fate of the West End.⁴⁴ Craven's legacy includes a reputation for spirited and occasionally volatile debates in Council chambers. She served two terms and lost her third bid for office, in 1967.

Craven's daughter, City Council candidate Maureen Craven Slade, recalled that her mother also ran because she had been involved in her community: anyone who had problems went to her mother for assistance. She also attributed Craven's success at the polls to her mother's extensive political connections via the Kanes, Timiltys, and the larger Craven clan.⁴⁵ In the 1990s, the Craven name was still synonymous with the neighborhood's generations-old machine-style politics. Craven's daughter, Maureen Craven Slade, ran unsuccessfully for office in 1981, while her son, John Craven, a judge, was elected to the School Committee.

School Desegregation and the Political Career of Louise Day Hicks

Through most of the 1960s and 1970s in Boston, divisions by race and class merged to create a particularly antagonistic political culture that energized South Boston native Louise Day Hicks and several other female school committee candidates into campaigns for the Boston City Council. Boston desegregation historian Ronald P. Formisano points to a clash between "women's libbers" and opponents of desegregation running for office. The women's liberation movement was primarily a middle-class movement, while Boston's women activists in the 1960s and 1970s were solidly entrenched in working-class neighborhood politics and issues. According to Formisano, that women dominated the anti-busing movement was a reflection of "working-class culture. Women and children ... define neighborhoods," and political activism around school issues was perceived as a natural manifestation of mothers' domain.⁴⁶ Nationwide studies show that "female City Council members are more likely than

men to list issue concerns as a reason to run for office."⁴⁷

The year 1967 was, in some ways, a watershed year for women in Boston politics—albeit one that also shepherded in years of notoriety for Boston as a city rife with racial tensions. A former School Committee Chair and ardent foe of school busing, Louise Day Hicks ran for mayor of Boston—the first time a woman had ever aimed for that office.⁴⁸ Hicks was the top vote-getter in the primary election with "just over 28 percent of the votes cast."⁴⁹ Although Hicks won the 1967 primary, her opponent, Kevin H. White, won the mayoral race by a margin of 12,000 votes. Undaunted, Hicks ran for and won a City Council seat in 1969, 1973, and in 1975. She lost a second mayoral bid in 1971 but, in 1972, won a seat in the U.S. Congress. In 1974, Hicks lost her Congressional seat but regained a seat on the City Council the following year. In 1976, she was elected by her colleagues to be the first woman president of the Council. She lost her bid for reelection in 1977, but won for the final time in 1979.

Hicks, a lawyer, got her start in political office, having served three terms on the Boston School Committee during the turbulent era of school desegregation and busing. Her anti-busing crusade began in 1963 when she was first elected to the School Committee, during which time "she contested the demands of the local NAACP for better schools for blacks."⁵⁰ Founder and president of the anti-busing Restore Our Alienated Rights (ROAR) committee, Hicks was one of the most notorious political figures in Boston's contemporary history, and perhaps the most powerful woman in the history of Boston's elected officials. Devoted to preserving neighborhood self-governance in the education of children, she galvanized white Bostonians behind the cause and consequently became a polarizing figure in municipal politics.⁵¹ Her popularity soared in the 1960s among white Bostonians; in her 1963 run for reelection to the School Committee, she received a record 74 percent of the vote.⁵² But she inflamed racial discord in the city and left a troubling legacy to subsequent generations of Bostonians.

O'Connor describes Louise Day Hicks's ascendancy in Boston politics as an artifact not only of a political culture that promoted segregation—she was a vehement foe of busing black and white students to

integrate Boston schools—but also of a political culture that embodied class divides. He explains:

These problems of racial tensions, neighborhood discontent, and serious economic setbacks provided the background for the mayoral elections of 1967. Louise Day Hicks presented herself as an outspoken champion of local autonomy and neighborhood schools.... Louise Day Hicks became the unquestioned spokesperson of those who felt that the time had come for the "little people"—the white, tax-paying, working-class residents of the neighborhoods—to stand up for their rights and defend their neighborhood schools from the social experiments of black "outsiders," their Ivy League supporters from the suburbs, and the downtown developers who had already done so much to destroy the old neighborhoods of Boston.⁵³

African-American Women and Boston Municipal Politics, 1960s–1970s

School desegregation achieved by busing children to schools outside racially segregated neighborhoods dominated city politics from the mid-1960s through the 1970s. This issue attracted many women—black as well as white—to run for the City Council and School Committee. During the 1970s, black women began mounting campaigns. "In the 1970s, when the school busing issue crystallized racial differences," wrote Toni-Michelle Travis, "blacks began to develop all-black community organizations to promote political mobilization and black candidates for municipal and state office."⁵⁴ The year 1973 was a turning point for Boston's African-American women in terms of their decisions to join the electoral system. Beginning in that year, there was a steady increase in the number of women running for City Council and the advent of African-American women candidates.

It was not until another school crisis created by cultural conflicts, this time beginning with the demands of the African-American community for greater participation in the school system, that women again began to serve on the Boston School Committee in numbers. Encouraged by the women's movement, other women followed until by the late 1980s, they held close to a majority of School Committee positions and represented both the African-American and Irish-American communities.⁵⁵

The first black women candidates for the City Council were Lena Saunders (1973), Jacqueline Y. LeBeau (1975), Jeannette Tracy (1979), and Barbara Ware (1979). Saunders served in many capacities during her career. She was a founding member of the Boston Model City program and a representative to the Model Neighborhood Board. She co-directed the

Women's Political Caucus and founded the "My Friend the Policeman Program" for elementary and middle school children.⁵⁶

Jeannette Tracy, who ran citywide in 1979 as a Socialist Workers Party candidate to support school desegregation, recalled that "Boston was insulated back then...everything was a neighborhood, you had all these little neighborhood enclaves...Boston was one of the most racist cities...the school system was just abysmal. They literally had two school systems, a black and a white school system."⁵⁷ In the 1970s, some people referred to Boston as "the Little Rock of the North."⁵⁸ Despite these efforts in the decade between 1971 and 1981, African-American women failed to win election to either the Council or School Committee. (However, in 1981 when she was an aide to Republican State Senator Williams, Barbara Ware was appointed to the Boston Election Commission by Mayor Kevin H. White.⁵⁹)

Reshaping the Political System: The Campaigns of Rosemarie Sansone

Longtime political families involved in the school desegregation conflict included two that produced women City Councilors. Then School Committee Chair James Hennigan, Jr. (father of City Councilor Maura) was a principal in the 1974 landmark anti-busing case *Morgan v. Hennigan* that sparked three years of conflict in Boston.⁶⁰ In addition, John Craven served on the School Committee in 1971 and ran for City Council in that year.⁶¹

Not only did the issues of the 1960s open doors for women in Boston politics, but the era instilled in younger women and men a sense of duty regarding civic participation. Rosemarie Sansone, who served on the City Council in the late 1970s, credited her interest in participating in politics to the era in which she was raised. "I'm a 60's child," she said. "I came out of a place where people thought they wanted to make a contribution. They wanted to do more. They were asking a lot of questions."⁶² Boston Globe columnist Alan Lupo echoed Sansone's perception of 1960s political culture: "As we get further away from the 60's, there's less interest in grass-roots politics."⁶³ Sansone says,

I had a very unique experience because the so-called woman City Councilor who I replaced ...was Louise Day Hicks, so that was pretty much an achievement in itself because the Boston voters were used to having at least one woman on the City Council. Before

Hicks it was Kitty Craven from Jamaica Plain. They were very different kinds of women in their persona, in their appeal, in their philosophy, so to sort of knock off the old regime of what had been the more conservative female bastion on the Council was an accomplishment.⁶⁴

Boston politics during the 1960s and 1970s was characterized by intense neighborhood issues that generated candidates for the Council from among women as well as African-Americans. However, the structure of the Council was perceived to be an impediment to achieving representation that would reflect the city's growing racial diversity. Between 1951 and 1983, all Councilors held at-large and not district-based seats. Some residents believed this structure made it difficult for women and minorities to win due to money, the lack of a citywide reputation, and widespread support via an organized citywide campaign. Rosemarie Sansone changed that.

In 1951, Bostonians had voted to change the structure of city governance from a ward-based system of 22 wards to a nine-seat council of members elected at large (which, as seen in Figure 2 above, sharply decreased the number of male candidates). The goal of the at-large system was to break the stronghold of ward- or neighborhood-based politics that served as a feeder system for a select group of Bostonians. This system operated until two-term City Councilor Sansone spearheaded a successful campaign in 1981 to reform, by ballot initiative, the structure of the City Council. Instead of running for a third term on the City Council, she chose to use her advertising and political-organizing background to help change the Boston City Council to a body of 13 members who would be elected in a mixed district/citywide system.⁶⁵

Sansone's goal was to improve access to electoral politics for more Bostonians, including women and minorities. Her Committee for Change used grassroots action to achieve that goal. Among key access issues was that of fundraising. At-large campaigns required significant funds, resources unattainable by many potential candidates.⁶⁶ "So that's how I went out," she explained, "I felt my greatest accomplishment for the City Council was when I ...organized this committee called the Committee for Change."⁶⁷ Her hope was that "more people would have access that didn't have access to running for a municipal seat than did before...It should (also) theoretically bring out people who know something about the area they have lived in all their lives, to be credible candidates. I think it's

easier for some people to run in the district than it is for people to run at large. If they already have an organization and have been active in the community, it's reasonable to run in a smaller area and to raise less money."⁶⁸

The campaign was successful, and the changes went into effect in 1983. However, these changes did nothing to strengthen the political power of the Council; the strong mayor/weak council system still predominated. In the same year, former City Councilor Mayor Raymond L. Flynn successfully passed a major reform to the Boston School Committee. No longer would Boston residents elect representatives to serve on the Committee; after 1983, all members would be mayoral appointees. This further enhanced the power of the mayor and diminished the power of residents (especially women, who had fared significantly better in the electoral system). In 1992, the *Boston Globe* reported that "while the appointed committee has provided opportunities for Hispanic and Asian policymakers, women have not fared as well....While half the elected school committee members were women, Flynn appointed only one woman to the seven-member body."⁶⁹ In addition, on the twentieth anniversary of the council change, former City Councilor John Nucci reflected that "it was supposed to make it easier for the average citizen to become a feasible candidate....That simply has not happened." The *Globe* found that only "three district councilors have been defeated for reelection since the system was adopted."⁷⁰

A third change affecting political access and representation went into effect in 1983. Few decisions have had greater significance for minority communities as the one to create two new districts—District 7 in Roxbury and District 4 in Dorchester—that would guarantee minority representation on the Council.⁷¹ District 7, the Roxbury-Upham's Corner district, comprised what was then the neighborhood with the greatest concentration of African-Americans.⁷² Since the 1980s, "only two black members have been elected citywide, and four others have represented the two predominantly black district seats created 20 years ago."⁷³ None, however, have been women.

The political climate in Boston was, nevertheless, changing.

Women and the City Council, 1980s–1990s: As Good As It Gets

While the 1970s saw a significant increase in the number of women running for Council seats, and that number continued to rise in the 1980s, the 1983 structural changes to the Council triggered additional interest on the part of women in Boston to run for office. There was a surge in the number of women candidates: more women ran first-time candidacies for Boston City Council in the 1980s than in the previous six decades combined. In 1983 alone, thirteen women ran. Despite this surge, however, only two women won their City Council races: district councilor Maura Hennigan and citywide councilor Rosaria Salerno. In addition, of the four women who ran in 1985, one was an incumbent Councilor, two had run previously with no success, and there was one newcomer. "As far as political office is concerned," wrote *Globe* reporter Robert L. Turner, "the cradle of liberty rocks only boys."⁷⁴

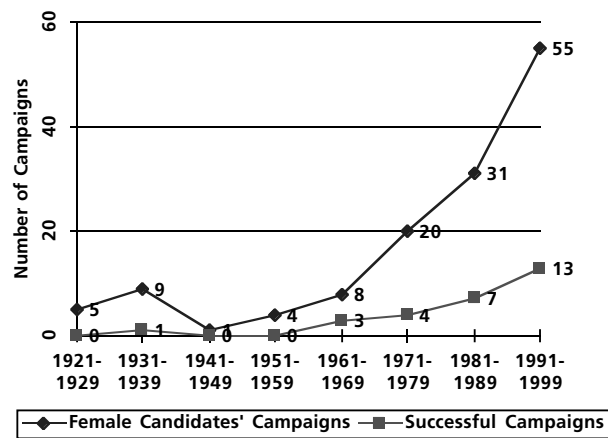
Women finally achieved significant gains in the 1990s. Women were candidates in 55 election campaigns in the 1990s (see Figure 3) and of a near-record number of 11 female candidates, nine appeared on the scene for the first time.⁷⁵ Even more important, five women won: Hennigan and Salerno were reelected and were joined by citywide councilor Peggy Davis-Mullen and district councilors Diane Modica and Maureen Feeney. Four of those women won their campaigns at the same time, resulting in the fact that, for four years, Maura Hennigan, Maureen Feeney, Peggy Davis-Mullen, and Diane Modica sat on the Council together. Furthermore, a record number of women of color ran for the Boston City Council and a Latina, Diana Lam, launched a (brief and ill-fated) campaign for mayor.

Although structural changes discussed above may explain at least part of the rise in the number of women candidates in Boston, one cannot ignore the dramatic changes that were taking place nationally. In 1984, for example, Democratic presidential candidate Walter Mondale chose Geraldine Ferraro as his running mate, a move that was expected to herald a new era in women's access to political office.⁷⁶ And, after the Clarence Thomas–Anita Hill confrontation on Capitol Hill, an unprecedented number of women won elections nationwide in 1992, resulting in what the media called "The Year of the Woman." As Tip

O'Neill said, however, "All politics is local," and women's battle for power in Boston was waged at the local level.

FIGURE 3

WOMAN'S CITY COUNCIL CAMPAIGNS: 1921-1999, BY OUTCOME



1980s: Overcoming the Odds

As the 1980s dawned, Boston's City Council struggled against a negative reputation that journalists traced back to the early 1960s. Analysts pointed out that the Council had long ago relinquished its power to the mayor's office, and had developed a serious image problem, embodied by reporters who referred to it as "The City Clowncil."⁷⁸ The Council's reputation generated "little enthusiasm for elections" through the early years of the 1980s.⁷⁹ Contemporary commentators believed this was "off-putting" to potential women candidates. However, the sense statewide was of a continued dearth of women in the pipeline for political office. Despite the women's liberation movement of the 1970s and increasing numbers of women in traditionally male-dominated professions, a survey of women who ran for municipal office in the Commonwealth determined that "it is primarily women with free time and family financial resources who are able to commit themselves to seeking local political office." Fully 80 percent of women elected municipal officials in that year were married, and half were not employed out-

side the home.⁸⁰ *Boston Globe* reporter Maria Karagianis found that when female politicians are interviewed about why there are so few female politicians, the same themes emerge again and again—a lack of time, money, and opportunity. Women who run for political office say that they never have enough money. They say that most women are not connected to the wealthy, powerful circles that generate campaign funds, and that because most women are challengers rather than incumbents (who win 90 percent of all elections), many female candidates are political unknowns. This, women say, makes it difficult for them to raise money.⁸¹

Despite traditional cultural barriers and fundraising issues, the success of women candidates for City Council continued to be largely a factor of family history and generational grassroots support. “When I was first elected, I was viewed as the ‘woman’s seat,’” recalled Maura Hennigan in 1997.⁸² No stranger to local politics, Hennigan came from a well-established Boston political family; her father, James W. Hennigan, Jr., served in the State Senate, the State House, and the Boston School Committee. Local politics was a family tradition going back to the first decade of the 20th century; she recalls collecting nomination papers for her grandfather as well as for her father, and holding signs during campaign seasons.⁸³ “When I was seven or eight, I remember collecting signatures for my father in Georgetown,” a housing development for the elderly in Hyde Park.⁸⁴

Her initial professional foray into politics came with election to the Democratic State Committee. A teacher in the Boston public school system, she first thought of running for City Council in 1979. In 1981 when three seats on the then at-large City Council opened up, she decided to run. At the age of 29, she won a seat, largely with the support of “heavily Irish and middle-class areas in the [city’s] southern wards.”⁸⁵ She has represented Jamaica Plain, West Roxbury, and parts of Mission Hill and Roslindale on the Council since 1981.

However, while Hennigan came out of the Boston Irish tradition, Rosaria Salerno, a newcomer to Boston with no family connections, was the only other woman to win a slot on the Council in the 1980s. Salerno was a former nun who worked for

the Archdiocese of Boston in several Massachusetts college chaplain’s offices prior to running for office.⁸⁶ Not only was she something of an anomaly for that fact, but she was also an Italian-American in a city in which Irish-Americans still dominated municipal politics.⁸⁷ “I didn’t have all those family connections or parish connections that other people had.... I think the social and cultural piece in Boston weighs very, very heavily, and to break through that takes a whole lot, which is why I was something of a phenomenon the year that I won.”⁸⁸ The Boston political scene was a tough nut to crack. “It’s very neighborhood oriented and there have been very prominent players in various neighborhoods,” she recalled in 1997. “They really have strong footholds. The ethnic piece plays very, very heavily and many of the neighborhoods are Irish.”⁸⁹

A ward committee member and Fenway neighborhood activist, Salerno had no desire to hold public office. “I can’t stand politics.... I mean, there’s an enormous gulf between good government and politics and I think in this state politics plays a much too heavy-handed role. I never wanted to be a politician.... I was an activist but I never saw myself seeking office.”⁹⁰

Her father and younger sister were active in politics in her native Chicago during the 1950s, as a result of their experience when their West Side neighborhood was redeveloped in an urban renewal project.⁹¹ It took many years of cajoling by Boston friends for her to decide to enter the arena. Salerno entered Boston grassroots politics campaigning against urban renewal in the Fenway neighborhood in the 1970s. With little name recognition but experience as a member of her ward committee in District 8, Salerno first ran for the City Council in 1987 and served for six years.

As the 1980s came to a close, Hennigan maintained her place on the Council, while Salerno opted to leave that body in order to run for mayor. “I knew I did not want to be a City Councilor all my life,” she recalled. “I chose to run for mayor as [Mayor Raymond] Flynn was leaving” in 1993. She was not the first woman councilor to seek the mayor’s office, nor would she be the last. Louise Day Hicks had made a run for it in the 1970s, and Peggy Davis-Mullen ran in the 1990s; Maura Hennigan recently entered the 2005 race. Salerno lost her race to former Council President Thomas Menino in 1993.⁹²

“I grew up with my mother telling me every day that there is nothing better than to be an Irish Catholic Democrat in Boston,” Feeney recalled. “That’s it. That’s as good as it gets.”⁷⁷

She did not retire from public office, however, considering a race for Secretary of State in 1994, then running for City Clerk the following year. In 1995, she was the first woman and the first Italian-American elected Boston City Clerk.⁹³

Although Boston failed to elect a woman mayor in 1993, that season's elections did make history, producing a record number of women City Councilors.

The 1990s: The "Kelly Girls"

Who were the four women the press nicknamed the "Kelly Girls," after their colleague and ally Council President James Kelly? Maura Hennigan and Maureen Feeney both had family roots in neighborhoods and city politics. Feeney had worked for her District predecessor, Jim Burne, who encouraged her to run for his seat when he retired. "I never saw myself taking that role on, probably because I was a woman," she recalled in 1997. "This was a big step up and I was the first woman to ever represent Dorchester in a district seat."⁹⁴

Diane Modica (East Boston) had worked for Sansone on the Committee for Change, and at Massport, and had already run unsuccessfully for Council in 1983. Between 1983 and 1993, she refrained from seeking office and worked on campaigns for Mayor (and former Council President) Raymond Flynn and gubernatorial candidate John Silber. Flynn appointed her to the Boston Licensing Commission on the condition that she not compete again against her 1983 rival Robert Travaglini.⁹⁵ Peggy Davis-Mullen (South Boston) grew up experiencing her mother's and grandmother's activism in state and local Democratic Party campaigns. She began her political career as a School Committee member from 1987–1991. Subsequently, with three Council terms under her belt, she tried for mayor. Two of the new members, Feeney and Davis-Mullen, were working mothers, while Modica was a practicing attorney and Hennigan was a longtime Councilor. "It is a great day for women and for working mothers," Davis-

Mullen told *The Boston Herald* after the election.⁹⁶

Until 1993, the largest number of women serving concurrently on the Council had been two. The chemistry and shared circumstances the four women experienced led to their development as a formidable voting bloc. This united effort afforded women municipal politicians in Boston unprecedented clout. "(Maura A.) Hennigan, a City Councilor for 16 years and chairwoman of the Ways and Means Committee, says it was not until the other three women joined her that she possessed real power," reported the *Globe*.⁹⁷ "It was so exciting to be a part of that," recalled Feeney. The four Councilors held regular breakfasts at the Four Seasons Hotel with women from the Governor's Council and in the business community to create an agenda for women.

In the Council chambers they allied with President Jim Kelly. "He empowered us and allowed us to really be players, and take powerful roles.... We had an automatic five votes and we were a force to

be reckoned with."⁹⁸ Among his first acts as Council President, Kelly appointed Hennigan as the first chairwoman of the Ways and Means Committee, which afforded her "a pivotal oversight role as the Menino administration prepare[d] its sweeping overhaul" of city government. Davis-Mullen became chair of the Education Committee; Feeney was appointed to head Government Operations, and Modica became head of the Transportation Committee.⁹⁹ For former School Committee member Davis-Mullen, the committee appointment allowed her to continue to advocate for public schools, while Modica's appointment gave her "the perfect political platform to protect her Charlestown, Eastie and North End constituents from the headaches wrought by the

Central Artery and Third Harbor Tunnel projects and the expansion of Logan International Airport."¹⁰⁰

During their first year together, they established

The Boston City Council underwent a historic political facelift last night as conservative candidates gained a majority bloc on the 13-member body for the first time in recent memory. Vacancies caused by retirements and mayoral ambitions opened up five...seats, making way for conservative Councilors-elect Richard Iannella, Peggy Davis-Mullen, Diane Modica, Maureen Feeney and Daniel Conley....Yesterday's vote also wrought a generational and gender shift on the council, creating a body of 11 members under 50 years old, including three new female members, to bring the number of women on the council to four.

—Ed Cafasso, "Council's New Face Has Conservative Complexion," *The Boston Herald*, Nov. 3, 1993

an agenda of issues including daycare, elder care, and education, issues they were quick to identify as city-wide concerns and not “women’s issues.” They also fought the “sorority girls” label.¹⁰¹ “We bring a perspective as women based on the roles we’ve played as women,” explained Modica. “I think many women find themselves in caretaker roles. It’s those everyday needs in our families that we have experience with that force us to look at issues differently.”¹⁰² Davis-Mullen’s South Boston neighborhood had “the highest concentration of single women heading households of any neighborhood in the country,” according to a 1994 *U.S. News & World Report* study.

Prior to the 1997 election, *The Boston Globe* summarized their impact in a 1997 review:

“By any measure, the four women on the City Council have become a force to be reckoned with, some say the force....The dominance of these women at the City Council is an unprecedented situation,” says ... a Democratic political consultant. “These women took up issues of schools, health care, breast cancer. I’m not sure the City Council would have addressed these things as quickly without them.”¹⁰³

While the women’s bloc on the Council achieved a number of policy successes, some believed that it elicited resentment and opposition. “Whenever you get a situation when a third or more of a group is of the same type, you have a critical mass, and you can start to influence decisions,” recalled former district Councilor Diane Modica. “The four women on the Council made a pact to stick together. We all knew we might get co-opted in one way or another. We didn’t want to get picked off...(but) the men on the Council were getting increasingly aggravated that we were sticking together.”¹⁰⁴ At the end of their first year, the women councilors took a stand against the mayor to protect their seats. “If he hurts one of us, he hurts all of us,” said Davis-Mullen.¹⁰⁵ As time passed, each of the women became outspoken regarding mayoral policy issues.

The year 1997 proved to be a significant election year for women municipal politicians. The coalition of four, already beginning to fray as a result of political choices being made within the group, lost one member when two-term district councilor Diane Modica lost her seat to a male politician with the “distinction of being the first (Bostonian) political newcomer in recent memory to knock off an incumbent district councilor who was not embroiled in a scandal.”¹⁰⁶

The story of Modica’s defeat has become leg-

endary. Political insiders and the press interpreted her loss as the result of the efforts of a network of powerful male politicians who resented both her 1983 bid for a City Council seat and her strong stands against several of Mayor Menino’s policy positions while she served as a Councilor.¹⁰⁷ For example, in the mid-1990s, Modica worked with the other women councilors to delay an affirmative vote on the mayor’s proposed city budget in 1996 in order to pressure his administration to fund more capital improvements in aging public school buildings.¹⁰⁸ As Councilors Davis-Mullen and Feeney recalled, Councilor Modica in particular took much “political heat” for her stand on the budget and school improvements. “Everyone was against her; I mean everyone—every single elected official tried to break her,” recalled Feeney in 1997. “They weren’t even discreet; they were blatant.”¹⁰⁹ Modica’s campaign history included vandalism, death threats, and, twice, according to the press and fellow Councilors, the abduction of her elderly father, who had Alzheimer’s disease.¹¹⁰

Women’s presence on the City Council declined after the 1997 elections. With Modica’s defeat, women would fail to recoup that loss. The other three “Kelly Girls” retained their seats until the 2001 election, when Peggy Davis-Mullen stepped off to run for mayor. Since then, incumbents Hennigan and Feeney have maintained their seats, but no other women have been elected to join them since.

An unprecedented 12 women ran for City Council seats in 1999. Half of the candidates were newcomers. In that year, more than in previous years, issues of race and ethnicity dominated media coverage. With three-term Councilor Gareth Saunders choosing not to run again, District 7 (Roxbury-South End) became a contested territory. Twelve candidates, including Althea Garrison and Thelma Barros, vied for the seat in a district whose voter turnout has traditionally been among the lowest in the city. Neighborhood voter advocate Kevin Peterson explained that “people look towards churches or social service agencies to get their needs met, and rely less and less often on elected officials.” Some voters believed that officials of color were largely unsuccessful in City Hall, their voices often stifled. In addition, “Roxbury’s mostly Black and Hispanic residents are reluctant to vote because they feel alienated from the process,” found *Globe* reporter Yvonne Abraham.¹¹¹

While candidates debated the value of changing from a two-year term to a four-year term, the media focused on demographics. All the candidates worked the “ethnic vote,” printing literature in languages other than English, and sponsoring and attending ethnic social events. It was of note that no Italian-American was running for an at-large seat, although Suzanne Iannella of a prominent Italian-American political family was on the ballot for the second time. Neither did an African-American candidate run city-wide. Mike Ross won his bid for the District 8 seat and became the first Jewish City Councilor in four decades.¹¹² The sentimental story of the season was the failure of 28-year veteran Councilor and legend Albert L. “Dapper” O’Neil. It was a moment of torch-passing, proclaimed the *Herald*. “Dapper”’s brand of constituent service, which reflected the “old values” of the Council, would endure. “The best parts of an era didn’t die with Dap’s defeat. O’Neil worked hard for constituents but never changed with a changing city. But as long as Hennigans of this town adapt and help their people, too, the old values will endure.”¹¹³ At the end of the day, Hennigan, Feeney, and Davis-Mullen retained their seats, and Davis-Mullen’s win was characterized as “another near-death political experience.”¹¹⁴

Women of Color Candidates in the 1980s and 1990s

Black women also made multiple tries for the City Council during the 1980s and 1990s. It was in 1981 that Althea Garrison began to make her mark as the most persistent African-American woman candidate in the history of Boston. She has run for the City Council at least ten times since 1981 (see Table 2)—and won a seat on the State Legislature when she challenged Nelson Merced’s signatures and forced him into a sticker campaign, unseating him as the two-term representative for the 5th Suffolk District. She held the seat for just one term, losing to Charlotte Golar Richie in 1994 (who was then succeeded by the current incumbent, Marie St. Fleur).¹¹⁵ For a number of reasons beyond the scope of this report, Althea Garrison remains a controversial figure in African-American women’s politics in Boston, limiting her support from either women or the African-American community.

A relatively large number of women of color other than Garrison ran for the City Council in the 1980s and 1990s. These included Willie Mae Allen in 1983 and 1985, Natalie Carithers and Hattie Dudley in

1991, Vikki Middleton in 1995, 1997, and 1999, Carmen Torres in 1999, and Jacquelyne Payne-Thompson in 2003.¹¹⁶ Another first for women of color was the decision of Diana Lam to run for mayor in 1991. Diana Lam, a Latina-Asian woman, was in her early forties and came to the United States from Peru as a college student. She began her work with the Latino community as a bilingual classroom teacher and over the years became influential in bilingual education in Boston. She eventually became a zone superintendent in the Boston school system and then was selected to become superintendent of schools in Chelsea. In the summer of 1991, Lam quit that position to run for mayor of Boston. Lam’s candidacy focused on forging a more progressive, inclusive vision of Boston city politics.¹¹⁷ Her campaign lasted only three days because of extensive news coverage of her family’s failure to submit recent IRS tax returns until shortly before she declared she was running for office. As the campaign faltered under this scrutiny, Lam withdrew from the race. Her candidacy marks, however, the first effort by a Latina to run for the office of mayor of Boston.

Lam’s short-lived campaign highlights the problematic role of the media coverage of minority candidates in Boston.¹¹⁸ Even before her financial difficulties were exposed, the *Globe* downplayed her candidacy—the announcement that she was challenging Mayor Flynn, for example, appeared “below the fold.” This news coverage overshadowed her campaign platform, and she withdrew. It was only after her withdrawal that the *Globe* began praising her appeal to many dissatisfied constituencies in the city and indicated that she would have posed a potentially strong challenge to Flynn.

Women's Campaigns at the Turn of the 21st Century, 2001-2004

In 2001, the smallest number of women ran for City Council than in any year since 1989. Two of the candidates were incumbents Hennigan and Feeney, joined by three-time candidate Vikki Middleton, and newcomers Phyllis Yetman Igoe and Elaine Rigas.

In her examination of the potential causes for the dearth of female candidates, *Globe* reporter Sarah Schweitzer found that many Bostonians perceived the Council to be "an ineffectual body that no longer acts as a springboard to higher office." In addition, it was linked with "an old boys' network in City Hall that cultivates male candidates, leaving a farm team devoid of women." Others noted that the mayor's strong gatekeeping role served as an obstacle to women candidates. According to the mayor's director of intergovernmental relations, Howard Leibowitz, "The real issue is how to get more good women to run for those offices. It's not the mayor's job to go out and find female candidates—that's a job for the women's groups and neighborhood civic associations."¹¹⁹ There was no love lost between the mayor and the Council by the 2001 elections. By all accounts, "2000 was poisonous," with major disputes over developments of Fenway Park and the South Boston waterfront decimating relations between the City's two governing bodies.

The major changes for women in the Council were initiated by women councilors in that year. Davis-Mullen took herself out by choosing to run for mayor. Hennigan decided to give up the District 6 seat that she had held for 18 years to run at large. Had Davis-Mullen not bowed out of the Council, Hennigan's move could have threatened her colleague in the at-large arena. Only one of the candidates vying for the District 6 seat was a woman: Elaine Rigas, a Republican and daughter of Greek immigrants from

Jamaica Plain, was among the four women candidates. Hennigan's victory was perceived as a blow to the mayor, who had sought to see friendly candidates win seats.¹²⁰

With the election over, only two women were left on the City Council. Peggy Davis-Mullen found herself on the outside of municipal politics since her first run for the Council in 1991 and previous tenure on the Boston School Committee.

While Hennigan and Feeney remained a constant on the City Council after the 2003 election, the year saw some significant changes. Eight women ran in 2003, among them the two perennial incumbents, Hennigan and Feeney, as well as veterans Althea Garrison and Phyllis Yetman Igoe. Newcomer Patricia H. White, the 33-year-old daughter of former mayor Kevin H. White, came in third in the preliminaries and was

expected to make a strong showing in the final election. Endorsed by the *Globe*, White ran on issues including improved access to housing and a focus on diminishing the trend that has seen middle-class residents abandon the city for the suburbs. She failed to win an at-large seat but was expected to run again.

There were three characteristics of the 2003 City Council season. First, the media declared the campaign of 2003 as a continuation of "a youth movement that has ushered into office six 30-something candidates since 1997."¹²¹ Of the 12 newcomers in the 2003 preliminary race, five were under 35. It was a season in which some called for new faces that would bring "greater independence" to the Council and limit the mayor's power. *The Boston Herald* described the new Council as "a new generation—smarter, more focused, more ambitious and less inclined to use the Council as a debating society for

There were four, then there were three. Now there could be just one. With only a handful of women vying for seats on the Boston City Council, the 13-member body is poised to have the fewest female members in nearly a decade. That is particularly striking given that just seven years ago, the council was heralded as a beacon of gender progressiveness when it seated four women for the first time. The four often worked together to pursue issues of concern to women. "It's a disappointment," said Diana Modica, once among the foursome.... "We may have a female governor but it's still tough in Boston."

—Sarah Schweitzer, "Council Losing Female Members and Its Ability to Draw More," *The Boston Globe*, Oct. 7, 2001

issues of marginal importance.”¹²² Despite the celebration of youth and new blood, however, it was Hennigan’s that was the most independent voice on the Council.

Second, it was the most expensive Council election in the history of Boston. The top four candidates spent upward of \$550,000. According to analysts, the reason was that candidates were faced with the increasing difficulty of finding volunteers and instead hired “professional consultants to handle the media, organize phone banks, or target specific groups of voters.”¹²³ This development was evidence that the 1983 structural changes championed by Rosemarie Sansone had failed in protecting potential candidates from monetary obstacles. It has been increasingly difficult for average citizens to mount campaigns due to this trend. Finally, voter participation in this election, a nonmayoral campaign year, was dismal: just 13.6 percent of voters went to the polls for the preliminary election.

The year was notable, too, for the deaths of two women with Council connections. Lena Saunders, called “a very sensible militant” who “was courted by political figures trying to deal with racial discrimination and seeking to establish closer ties with Boston’s Black community,” passed away during the summer. She ran for the Council in 1973 and was an active voice in the desegregation and busing battle. Two weeks before the final election, fellow 1970s activist and Council legend Louise Day Hicks died.

Looking Ahead: The 2005 Election Season

Women are facing the 2005 election cycle with uncertain prospects. On the one hand, they currently hold a number of elected and appointed offices. These include a continued strong presence of women in the state legislature as well as Andrea Cabral's stunning victory to become the first elected female Sheriff for Suffolk County. The success of women of color from Boston at the state level is particularly striking: four of the six Boston women in the state legislature are African-American and they also outnumber their African-American male colleagues. Their strength may also hint at a future in which increased minority power will occur simultaneously with increased power by women in a city that is now majority-minority. As this report went to press, Linda Dorcena-Forry prevailed in her bid for the seat vacated by former Speaker Thomas Finneran; in sheer numbers alone, African-American women in the House of Representatives have become a major force in Boston politics.

In municipal politics, women have also increased their presence and influence by mayoral appointments. In fact, 2004 was a veritable "Year of the Women": In February of that year, Mayor Menino appointed Kathleen O'Toole as the first female commissioner of the Boston Police Department. According to a *Globe* report, "Out of 18,000 police departments in the United States [and Boston is the oldest police force in the country], 200—slightly more than one percent—have women chiefs."¹²⁴ A month later, Republican Governor Mitt Romney selected Kathleen

Dennehy to be commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Correction. When Andrea Cabral experienced her decisive victory later in the year, women achieved the distinction of becoming a cohort responsible for a part of government that has historically been the domain of men, i.e., law enforcement. (Female district attorneys also represent three of the Commonwealth's 11 counties.¹²⁵) Under Mayor Menino's administration, women have also risen to city clerk, the city's chief financial officer, and heads of the Boston Housing Authority, environmental services, the housing department, and human services.¹²⁶ While these do indeed represent gains on one level, they do not solve the problem of limited elected presence on the governing body of the City of Boston.

The 2005 municipal election season is beginning to heat up: Maura Hennigan recently declared her candidacy for Mayor and Maureen Feeney, newcomer Susan Passoni, and Patricia White are expected to run again for an at-large seat. The fact that White is due to have a baby in July guarantees that gender will play a significant role in the media's coverage of this year's race.¹²⁷ The deadline for election papers is May—who else plans to run and whether women gain ground in 2005 remains to be seen.

Women's Municipal Representation in Boston: A National Comparison

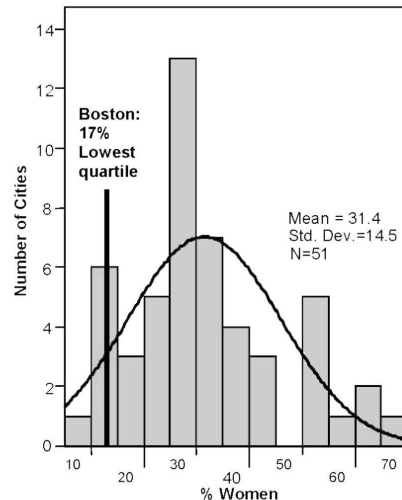
Why is it so tough for women in Boston politics? Before we discuss our analysis of the factors at play in explaining low levels of female participation and success in Boston municipal politics, it is important to locate the city within a broader, national context. How women's representation in the City of Boston compares to other cities in the United States is important because, if women's municipal representation were as low elsewhere as in Boston, then the question would be somewhat moot. But if women fare better elsewhere, then the question is indeed critical.

Boston in fact ranks low in a national comparison. On average, women make up 31.4 percent of members on municipal governing bodies for the capital cities of all 50 states. Boston, at 16.7 percent women, ranks 43rd out of the 50 states (plus Washington, D.C.) and is in the lowest quartile (see Figure 4). Vermont and Iowa also share the mean of 16.7 percent women. State capitals with a lower percent of women on the governing bodies include, however, only: Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Dover, Delaware; Springfield, Illinois; Jefferson City, Missouri; Cheyenne, Wyoming; Juneau, Alaska; and Salem, Oregon.

Historically, the largest proportion of women elected to city councils is found in Western states, where, in 2003, they held 32 percent of seats. Western states have a tradition of greater political access for women; women achieved suffrage in those states long before Eastern states gave women the vote. In the nation's other regions (including the Northeast), women hold 25 to 29 percent of City Council positions. James H. Svava, working for the National League of Cities, found no significant change in the South and Midwest since 1989¹²⁸; however, his 2003 survey shows a substantial increase in the Northeast, where the percentage of women increased from 17 percent in 1989. Svava found that "representation of women on America's City Councils increased in all three city size categories between 1989 and 2001, although there was no more gender diversity among Council members than in 1979."¹²⁹

FIGURE 4

BOSTON COMPARED TO OTHER OTHER STATE CAPITALS, BY PERCENT WOMEN ON GOVERNING BODIES, 2004



In 2001, 36 percent of American city councilors in large cities (cities with populations exceeding 200,000) were women,¹³⁰ representing an increase from 1991, when only 20 percent of all city councilors nationwide were women.¹³¹ Research also shows that in a municipal government system in which there is a mayor and a city council (as in Boston), women nationwide constituted 27 percent of city councilors in 2001; but this is only two percentage points lower than in cities with council-town manager forms of government.¹³² In addition, 2001 data shows that women are evenly elected to at-large and district seats.¹³³ Composition of city councils varies from state to state and locality to locality. However, Darcy, Welch, and Clark report

that “no particular demographic or political characteristics of cities seem to bar women from office. Women do about the same in all types of cities....The election of women to office is (also) not related to the equitability of representation of ethnic minorities. Indeed, the ratio of male to female representation is about the same for blacks, Anglos, and Hispanics....”¹³⁴ The presence of women in local government appears to be evident in all types of cities, not just the larger, more cosmopolitan ones.¹³⁵

A majority presence—where a mayor and the city council members are all women, such as in Berkeley, California, in 2004—is a rare phenomenon.¹³⁶ In 2003, when 20 percent of Massachusetts city/town councils and selectboard members were women, 38 percent of the state’s communities had no women on elected office above the level of school committee¹³⁷ and no city in the Commonwealth has a majority of women members. Finally, although Boston ranks 43rd out of 51 state capitals for female representation on city councils, the representation of Massachusetts women on city/town councils statewide positions the Commonwealth 20th. This indicates that Massachusetts women fare better in elected offices in cities other than Boston.

“As Tough As It Gets”: Explaining Women’s Low Representation

Having established that Boston is indeed located on the low end of women’s representation nationally, the question to be answered is: What explains why it has been so tough for women to gain a substantial foothold on the Boston City Council? The answer is complex and lies in a number of factors: (1) the low number of women candidates; (2) gender issues related to political ambition and power relations; (3) the fact that women—especially women of color—aim instead for the State House or other elected opportunities; (4) structural constraints that are hard to overcome, including incumbents and gatekeepers; and (5) resource limitations, including difficulties raising money and gaining party support.

Limited Pool of First-Time Candidates

The perennial issue each campaign season is how to recruit women to run for office. There are a variety of possible explanations for the limited pool of first-

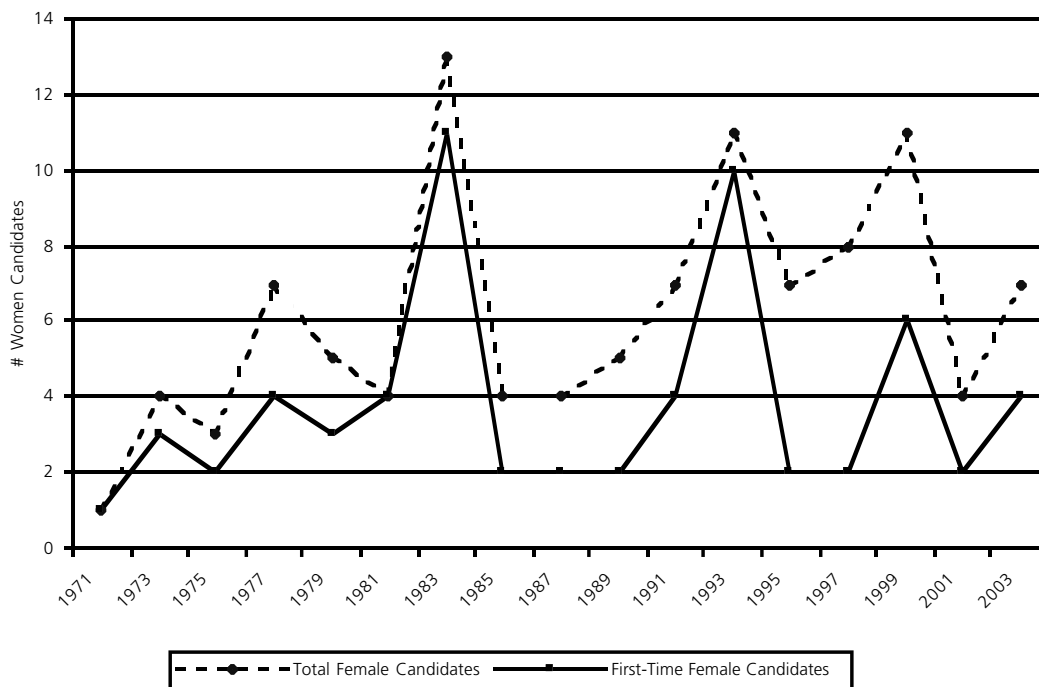
time candidates, including (1) few women in the pipeline; (2) lower levels of political ambition; (3) the need to balance traditional gender roles with the demands of an election campaign; and (4) the greater tendency of women of color to run successfully (and for a range of reasons) for elected offices other than the City Council.

The number of women elected to the City Council exhibited steady growth from the early 1980s until 1999. The number of first-time women’s City Council campaigns has been inconsistent, although there have never been fewer than two, and there has always been a woman in the running since 1973 (see Figure 5). In the 1970s, 20 women ran campaigns, 13 of which were first-time campaigns.

In the 1980s, there were 21 new campaigns for a total of 30. The 1990s saw 24 new women candidates run for Council in a total field of 55 women’s campaigns. Added to 2000s numbers, the percentage of newcomers has been dropping (from 65 per-

FIGURE 5

WOMAN’S CITY COUNCIL CANDIDATES, 1971-2003, FIRST -TIME COMPARED TO ALL WOMAN CANDIDATES



cent in the 1970s and a high of 70 percent in the 1980s to 57 percent between 1991 and 2003).

Gender and Political Ambition

Women have historically participated in the political arenas and have had success working through aspects of the system that were open to them. Historians have documented and tracked women's political activities at a national level, including women's activism in the suffrage movement, 19th-century abolitionism and temperance campaigns, and Progressive-era urban reform campaigns. Women who desired elective office, however, receive less attention. Although this study has attempted to fill in that history as it pertains to Boston, there remains the question of motivation. Many female candidates in Boston were issue-driven in their decision to run for City Council. How does this characteristic compare to their male counterparts? Is the dominant model of male political ambition a useful tool for understanding women elected municipal officials? We argue that women's ambitions were shaped by a gender-specific history and set of cultural circumstances that necessitate a model different from that of men's political ambitions.¹³⁸

The literature on women's motivations for elected office reports that women mount campaigns because they desire to "serve" or to "make a difference." This ostensibly selfless or altruistic motivation for elected office provides a contrast with the thesis that men pursue office more often than women because of sheer ambition. Women's political ambitions need to be understood within two contexts, however: first, in comparison to men's political ambitions, and second, within the context of women's ambitions. In the United States, researchers looking at women in municipal politics have recognized traditional political culture's role in promoting or hindering women's participation. Political scientist Debra Stewart connects ambition to political culture: "Ambition ties into political culture. Clearly, the individualistic culture, with its stress on personal achievement, might give broader scope to ambitious people—male or female—while a traditional political culture may define political ambition itself as a male trait."¹³⁹

Many scholars understand the traditional conceptualization of "ambition" as a male construct that inadequately explains women's motivations for political office. Ambition, as commonly defined, is a desire for success and the achievement of power, success,

and/or wealth. "Willingness to engage in this political competition requires a driving ambition for personal advancement that disregards or discounts other social responsibilities and personal relationships. Women, with their more balanced system of values and priorities, are at a distinct disadvantage in this competition."¹⁴⁰

A study of local male elected officials in Arizona made it possible for researchers Burt-Way and Kelly to construct "a model of political ambition, which predicts that women who deviate from the male model cannot be ambitious or successful." For the researchers, this created a dilemma. "We know that women are ambitious and do hold political office. Some set of circumstances must exist that explains their ambition, and we suggest it is their attitudes and beliefs about the political and electoral system that sustains their ambition."¹⁴¹ Recent research indicates that "state and local female officeholders surveyed in 1981 were just as ambitious as male officials holding comparable office in defiance of typical gender stereotypes."¹⁴² However, researchers argue that the prevailing political system "is highly individualized and competitive, emphasizing characteristics that are fundamentally inconsistent with women's status and role orientations."¹⁴³ In fact, a 1997 poll of Massachusetts residents found that just 8 percent of women said they had considered running for political office compared to 18 percent of men.¹⁴⁴

National research data as well as accounts by Boston's women candidates for municipal office and neighborhood activists concur that women tend to perceive political participation as a public service, a desire to improve the quality of life of the people in their communities. Women's motivation for both municipal-level and higher-level elected offices stems from other important factors beyond ambition.¹⁴⁵ "Women serve in local office because they want change in both the political process and in the content of public policy," determined Sherman and Rohrbach, who studied elected municipal officeholders in Massachusetts in 1996.

Women commented on problems with the political process indicating that they want to make changes reflective of a "different way of doing things." Dissatisfied with many of the practices they have encountered as elected officials, they expressed the desire that government become more open, more responsive and more civil. As their numbers have increased, women local officials have sought a more active voice in changing the content of public policy to attend to issues of particular concern to women. These findings support studies confirming women's

*propensity to run for office because they desire significant change ... because "they care"... and because they seek to make a difference for women's lives in shaping the policy agenda*¹⁴⁶

Personal ambition, individual success, and accumulation of power are not attitudes expressed by women interviewed for this study or in national data. Every woman interviewed for this study indicated that she ran for office to serve, or to help, or to make things better. No informant spoke of ambition as it is traditionally understood and defined as being a motivating factor in her bid for public office. Rather, as City Councilor, School Committee member, and mayoral candidate Peggy Davis-Mullen explained, "I come from a generation and a family that really respected the job and saw it as public service."¹⁴⁷

Stereotypes of men's and women's behavior include notions that men are stronger and more decisive leaders, and that women are "softer," inclined to connect with constituents and issues on a personal level. Women city councilors and candidates interviewed for this study uniformly expressed their sense of this ability and interest in connecting, but added that they bring a different attitude toward political work to the Council. They believe that women's tendency to seek compromises in order to best serve both the issue and the people involved differentiates them from men's modes of action. "Women bring something different to politics," said Maureen Feeney in 1997. "We are willing to concede on issues to bring something to fruition. We want to make something happen, whereas for many of the men it's a game. It's just another game....I think with women, we tend to be much more conciliatory and come to a consensus."¹⁴⁸ Said one informant,

*There are people who run for ego and ambition, and there are people who run because they have an agenda they want to advance. And my experience is that men fall into the first category, and women fall into the second category. Women run because they are concerned about issues of education or whatever, and it's a call to service much more than ego; in fact, the ego part of it makes a lot of women uncomfortable...(so) it helps to have someone say, gee, have you ever thought about running for office? Or, would you please run. And if women had that, they would feel invited to it. Most men don't get invited to run; most men say "I want this" and go for it. Men don't seem to need permission the way a lot of women do; women don't give themselves permission to go for what they want.*¹⁴⁹

Women who have run for municipal office in Boston have been motivated by factors and experiences other than (or in addition to) male-defined ambition. Their desire to serve, their family histories,

and a tradition of political participation were among characteristics described by candidates and elected officials. The question of gender issues as a motivating force was inconsistent.

Many candidates claimed, for example, not to have "played the gender card" when running, and did not run as women or as feminists, but as candidates representing a constituency. "I never ran in my campaign dialogue that I would be looking at things differently because I was a woman," Rosemarie Sansone recalled. "I never used the 'female card' because I ran so hard and so energetically that I never considered myself a woman running for that office."¹⁵⁰ Maura Hennigan stated, "I don't put my candidacy forward as a woman. I would not want anyone to vote for me for that reason alone."¹⁵¹ However, Jeannette Tracy, an African-American woman who ran for the Council in 1979 as a member of the national Socialist Workers Party, ran on a feminist platform. While the national platform included prominent women's issues such as women's right to choose, and educational and occupational opportunities, local interests were free childcare and rent subsidies. "Dapper O'Neil and Louise Day Hicks just didn't want to talk about that stuff," Tracy recalled.¹⁵²

During the 1993 City Council race, Councilor-at-Large Rosaria Salerno spoke often about the need for women's representation on the Council and for solidarity among women councilors to elect a woman Council president. In that year, Councilor Maura Hennigan was joined by newly elected Councilors Diane Modica (East Boston), Maureen Feeney (Dorchester), and Peggy Davis-Mullen (South Boston). According to *The Boston Globe*, "[D]espite Salerno's urging, the three stayed studiously neutral. None campaigned as feminist candidates, and Feeney and Davis-Mullen, in particular, are viewed as far more socially conservative than Salerno, who has been one of the most liberal council members." Feeney told the *Globe*, "This is not going to be a sorority. We need as women to be very careful not to project ourselves as a girls' club."¹⁵³

Gender, did however, play a role during the campaign process. Many candidates recalled expectations raised by reporters and their male opponents regarding their abilities as women and as mothers. Women candidates have had to convince voters that they can do the job, and overcome cultural biases against women in public office. To Rosaria Salerno,

sexist media coverage combined with traditional machine politics contributed to her defeat for the mayor's seat in 1993. A Dorchester activist and worker on a rival's campaign recalled, "Salerno was repeatedly questioned about her 'toughness' while men were not."¹⁵⁴ "A woman has to prove she has integrity, a woman has to prove she's smart, a woman has to prove she's tough," Salerno told *The Boston Globe* in 1993. "No one ever asks a man if he's 'tough enough' to be mayor. Toughness isn't about being mean or talking loud. It's about leadership."¹⁵⁵ In the same year, Maureen Feeney recalls, "When I first ran, people said 'I'm never going to vote for a woman.' A lot of people were Irish, but then other people said, 'Well, for the first time in my life I'm going to vote for a woman.... I think [in the neighborhoods] where there is a real passion for politics you will find people more willing to vote for a woman. And I can see a dramatic difference in the twelve years I've been on the Council."¹⁵⁶

State Senator Marian Walsh of West Roxbury offered a unique perspective on a structure lacking in Boston's municipal system, to women's detriment: elected commissions. "In Boston, there are few elected commissions. So there are fewer places where women can practice running for office," she said. "Other towns have elected conservation committees; elected library boards; elected town meetings. Here, the mayor appoints everything."¹⁵⁷

Women's sexual orientation, moral character, and commitment as wives and mothers were also common targets during city elections. During a previous campaign, Salerno, a single woman and former nun, "was forced to answer questions about her sexual orientation.... A flyer, sent anonymously to some of the city's conservative neighborhoods, tried to tie her to a gay rights march, [and] she said publicly then that she is not gay."¹⁵⁸

The decision not to run, or the disinterest in being an elected official, stems from many sources, both positive and negative. Satisfaction with non-elective participation; the ability to control schedules or hours worked to accommodate jobs and families; a distaste for the culture of city politics; the stresses of fundraising; and a reluctance to submit to potentially degrading and invasive media scrutiny are many issues cited

by informants for this study and by women who have participated in state- and nationwide surveys. For women, "the initial decision to run is often among the most formidable barriers to entering the political arena," explained Fox and Lawless. "Women and men, regardless of occupational status, continue to view their family responsibilities differently.... The potential force of traditional family structures and attitudes about gender-based roles that often accompany traditional socialization" must be considered when comparing men's and women's perceived sense of access and eligibility.¹⁵⁹

The public eye is an important consideration for many women, as well as men. Through a gendered lens, however, traditional expectations of women as mothers feeds media scrutiny and public perceptions of one's character based on a woman's decision to choose public life. "I hesitated mostly because of my daughter... and I wondered a lot about how campaigning... would impact her," said one candidate. "So that was the thing that gave me biggest pause. And especially now that there is so much intrusive media scrutiny. That's very invasive."¹⁶⁰ For Peggy-Davis Mullen, "what's different for women—I have three young ones—I feel you have to work harder because there are still those people who say 'who's taking care of your kids?'"¹⁶¹

Women of Color: The State House Route to Power

In addition to the recent drop in women's representation, Boston's municipal politics is also marked by the inability of women of color to win City Council seats—thus far. No woman of color has ever been elected to the Boston City Council, although at least eleven African-American women have run for the council between 1973 and 1997.¹⁶² This compares unfavorably to the national picture, where over 16 percent of municipal officials at the city council/mayor level are either African-American or Hispanic—especially since Boston is now a "majority-minority city. The lack of women city councilors of color is particularly striking since, in 2001, a higher percentage of African-American city councilors nationwide are female compared to the percentage

of white city council members.”¹⁶³ The situation has been so dire that, in 1995, black activists urged State Senator Dianne Wilkerson to run for an at-large seat on the City Council. *The Boston Globe* reported that “such is the paucity of candidates that activists were pressing their incumbent state senator to hold two political jobs.”¹⁶⁴

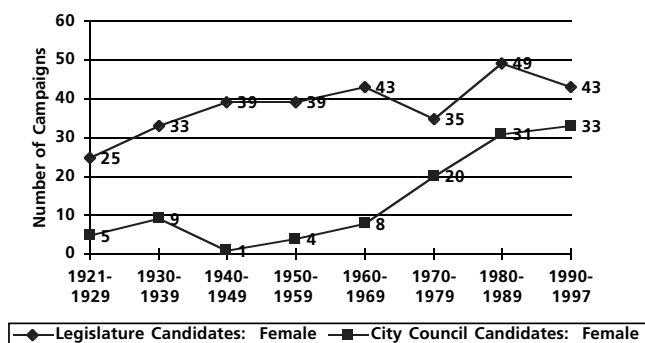
Of course, the Boston School Committee is equally bereft of a history of African-American women members. Irene O’Banyoun Robinson of Roxbury was the first black candidate for School Committee, running against Louise Day Hicks in 1961. After her loss, she became the first black president of the Boston Home and School Association. In 1983, Grace Romero was the first black (and Latina) to be elected to the School Committee.

In 2004, women comprised 24.5 percent of Massachusetts state legislators, which positions Massachusetts as 20th in the nation in female representation.¹⁶⁵ In Massachusetts, as is the pattern nationwide, female representation at the state level has been in a steady decline since 1999. This follows a parallel in the Boston City Council, where the number of women members peaked in 1997.

Boston women’s preference to run for the state legislature rather than the City Council (see Figure 6)—especially the preference of women of color—defies the “desirability” hypothesis regarding women in politics. Darcy, Welch, and Clark, for example “noted that the higher the level of the office and the more power the office has, the less likely a woman is to be elected, at least in most Western nations. In addition, Elizabeth Vallance found that ‘Where power is, women are not’...In general, desirable offices are those with more ‘perks,’ permanence, and power....Being more desirable might indicate that male candidates will be more inclined to run for and win them.”¹⁶⁶ In Boston, however, more women run for and win state legislature seats, which arguably confer more power on the occupants than do City Council seats (and since districts for City Council seats are larger than districts for a state representative or state senate seat in Boston).

FIGURE 6

WOMAN CANDIDATES FOR STATE LEGISLATURE & CITY COUNCIL, 1921-1997



In 2004, of the 22 Boston delegates to the state legislature, six (27.3 percent) were women and, although a woman of color has never served on the Boston City Council, four (66.7 percent) of the women state legislators were women of color. The only African-American state senator is a woman: Dianne Wilkerson was first elected in 1993. Gloria L. Fox and Shirley Owens-Hicks were elected to the Massachusetts House of Representatives in 1985 and 1987 and Marie St. Fleur has served since 1999. These four Boston women are the only African-American women in the Massachusetts legislature. One Latina serves: Cheryl A. Rivera, who represents a Hampden County district in Western Massachusetts. (Linda Dorcena-Forrey was elected in a special election on March 22, 2005, to the seat vacated by Speaker Thomas Finneran. She will add another woman—and another woman of color—to the Boston delegation at the State House.

The fact that more black women from Boston serve in the State House than on the City Council mirrors the trend for women in Boston generally. Black women interviewed for this project shared a number of issues regarding their choice to seek state-level office rather than municipal office. African-American female legislators offered their insights. “It wasn’t about looking at a position and saying I want that position; it was more about look-

ing at a position where I thought someone was needed. I thought that ... (and) I did run against a 14-year incumbent. But I thought that there needed to be a change at that level, and I didn't necessarily view the City Council position as one that needed a new person at the time." Another legislator perceived the opportunity to effect policy changes as a more important and fulfilling political opportunity. "I wanted to get closer to the beginning of the food chain where they are making laws instead of being in a position of always having to try to interpret [the] law in a way that was best for my [mostly low-income] clients." ¹⁶⁷

To put Boston in a nationwide context, the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies surveyed black elected officials in 2001 and reported that women comprised 35 percent of all black elected officials in the U.S. This is a significant increase from 11 percent in 1970. In 2001, 194 black women served in state legislatures.¹⁶⁸ In that year, black women were 48 percent of black elected officials in Massachusetts, and 35 percent of black municipal elected officials.¹⁶⁹

In 2004, African-American incumbents Marie St. Fleur, Shirley Owens-Hicks, and Gloria Fox ran unopposed. Since 1970, the number of African-American women elected officials nationwide has increased "twenty-fold," a steady increase that contrasts with a steady decline in the number of African-American male elected officials. "The growth of women BEO's has outstripped males by 5:1." ¹⁷⁰ Joint Center president Eddie N. Williams could not account for the change in elected official demographics. "It's still not clear whether fewer black men are running or whether black women are replacing them in these elections. What is clear, though, is that black women are coming into their own on the political stage." ¹⁷¹

Despite changes to the composition of the Council, women and minorities have continued to face a variety of obstacles. Informants report that the formal structure (such as the municipal system, incumbency issues, voter-participation trends) of Boston's electoral system neither deters nor facilitates women's participation in municipal politics. Research

by Bullock and MacManus supports this conclusion: "There is little evidence that structural features influence the incidence of councilwomen, and this finding is not restricted to a single region...women are not disadvantaged by council size, longer terms or competing when more incumbents were reelected....The failure of structural features to explain variation in the incidence of councilwomen points to the likely significance of another factor—candidacy rates among women."¹⁷² Indeed, the number of women's City Council campaigns in Boston did not increase significantly—and they did not decrease—after three major overhauls of Boston's electoral structure in the last twenty years.

There are also, of course, informal obstacles, including "gatekeepers": individuals (including the mayor and other elected officials) who attempt to control who has access to office and old-style neighborhood political hierarchies which serve as pipelines for male candidates. These informal obstacles will be discussed later.

Incumbency, Attrition, and the At-Large/District Race Dilemma

In addition to the power and influence afforded—or not afforded—to women who win City Council seats, informants agreed that incumbency reduces women's representation in Boston.

"Incumbency is widely recognized as a powerful 'structure' in explaining municipal electoral outcomes, particularly in nonpartisan settings and where turnover is low."¹⁷³ High incumbency rates impede the entry of women and minorities into public office because the initial pool of incumbents is predominantly male."¹⁷⁴

Contrary to the reports of women candidates and elected officials in Boston's municipal

system—and to much research on women in municipal politics—MacManus and Bullock found that: "Incumbents can block the election of new aspirants to public office since for the most public positions, incumbency is an asset. We find no relationship, however, between the proportion of seats

Whether you're a man or a woman, Boston city politics is as tough as it gets anywhere; this is "Politics 101." It is very aggressive; there are a lot of people who do not play by the rules. I say to people, you're in the big leagues, and you can't be meek and you can't be afraid of a very aggressive business.

—Peggy Davis-Mullen, 1997

filled by incumbents in the last election and the percentage of females on the council nationwide...or any region.”¹⁷⁵

Women have generally been able to use their incumbent status to keep winning City Council races in Boston. Maura Hennigan is the longest-serving member of the Council, along with Maureen Feeney. Between 1981 and 1989, 22.5 percent of women candidates won their races for City Council seats. Between 1991 and 1999, in contrast, 39.3 percent of women candidates won their City Council races (see Figure 1 above).

However, several women in Boston explicitly made decisions about whether to run for a district seat or a citywide seat on the council because they felt it was impossible to beat incumbents. Strong male incumbents in Boston’s “minority” districts may also have blocked black and Hispanic female candidates from running more often, and from winning. A longtime district City Councilor theorized:

I think on the city level, it’s more of a money issue, and it’s difficult to beat an incumbent....I think it’s just harder for minority women as a whole to break through the entrenched political establishment, which is what it is. It’s tough to beat an incumbent, and unless you have a lot of money, and in a lot of instances, minority women do not have the financial resources—as many women do not, but particularly minority women—it is tough to beat an incumbent.

Historically, the “exit” experiences of women City Councilors are split fairly evenly. Harris, Craven, and Modica lost reelection bids. Hicks lost once, and then was elected the following campaign cycle, after which she chose not to run for the City Council again. Sansone, Salerno, and Davis-Mullen left the Council to run for mayor, as is anticipated will Hennigan in 2005. In the meantime, Maureen Feeney continues to serve and run as a strong incumbent. The trend since the 1970s (Modica notwithstanding) is that women councilors have chosen when and how to leave the City Council.

Without a larger pool of women running first-time campaigns, however, the total number of women city councilors will drop if female incumbents lose their races. Although women incumbents tend to do as well as men incumbents, the case of Diane Modica

I wanted to say to my sisters out there, it’s all right to run; it’s O.K. to run. If you are elected, that’s great because that’s the reason you are running, because you want to be elected. But if you do not become elected, you’re still sending a message that “I Am Here.” I do exist, and I do wish to have a voice. And that a woman of color really needs to stand up and start to fight for the things that they believe in.

—Willie Mae Allen,
City Council Candidate 1983, 1985

underscores their vulnerability when faced with powerful external opposition.

Furthermore, women incumbents do not tend to be replaced by other women councilors. This is what happened in 1997, when two-term district councilor Diane Modica lost her seat to loyal Menino supporter Paul Scapicchio.

The city’s political culture often determines who has access to municipal politics. Traditionally, there has been

an expectation or understanding that men work within a hierarchical system. In this system, seasoned or more tenured politicians determine who will run next and against whom. Prevailing wisdom dictates that women, African-Americans, and Italian-Americans should not run against one another, particularly in a race against an incumbent. This perpetuates notions of there being “minority seats” and that a candidate of color will have a limited support base outside of those seats: that white Bostonians, in other words, will not vote for black or Latino candidates. For this reason, the change to a district system was expected to be beneficial for minority communities since the ability to succeed in an at-large campaign is impeded by their reputations outside of their neighborhoods. Even for a strong incumbent like Maura Hennigan, her decision to move from a district representative to an at-large position was seen as potential political suicide. Her district seat was a sure thing, so why take the chance of a citywide campaign loss? Even Felix Arroyo had to run numerous citywide campaigns—and build on a strong coalition of progressive (and women) supporters—before he finally won in 2003, foiling plans by Patricia White to follow her father into municipal office.¹⁷⁶

Women need support in order to oppose the behind-the-scenes hierarchy that blocks many potential candidates—male, female, and minority. Peggy Davis-Mullen was firm in pointing to this factor, explaining the opposition she faced when she first ran for elected office in 1991. “If you look at the history of South Boston—I think Louise Day Hicks was the only other woman elected...so, as a 26-

year-old woman coming into this business, it was hard," she recalled. "When, how it usually goes, whether it's Southie or Eastie [East Boston] or anywhere else, people are in line for these jobs. It's supposed to go to either this guy's son or this person's protégé. So I know, in my case, there was this feeling, 'Who the hell does she think she is'—jumping ahead of the line and getting involved in what's 'inside baseball'?"¹⁷⁷

In Dorchester, male politicians told *Boston Globe* reporter Martin Nolan that they would not have considered running out of turn. "It's a rich tradition and we work very well together," said former mayoral candidate James T. Brett.¹⁷⁸ Former City Councilor Diane Modica interpreted the scenario differently. "There are entrenched political bases that are difficult to shake up," she told *The Boston Globe*.¹⁷⁹ When Natalie Carithers ran in 1991, "one individual told me that I had no right to run, that that area was his area and I was no one and had no right to run."¹⁸⁰ Vikki Middleton faced similar criticism as a black woman running against incumbent black City Councilor Charles Yancey. "You're supposed to ask if you can run," she recalled. Although a prominent African-American politician made it clear that she disapproved of the idea that Middleton was running against another African-American, Middleton persevered, albeit unsuccessfully.¹⁸¹ "It's very simple," said one City Council candidate. "People with money and 'good ole boys' dominate." And who are the 'good ole boys' in Boston? "A line of Irish men sort of running the show."

Another important aspect of the city's political culture is that voter participation rates differ dramatically from neighborhood to neighborhood. South Boston and Dorchester have long been the city's most politically engaged neighborhoods. Dorchester, according to former Councilor Rosaria Salerno, "is one of the neighborhoods that just boils over with this stuff. I mean, they eat it, drink it, sleep it, breathe it."¹⁸² Gloria Fox, who won a State Representative seat in the mid-1980s and has served ever since, explained that there are eleven distinct neighborhoods in Boston. We were distinct and different even when I was a poverty warrior; we were working on very distinct and different neighborhood issues.... Unfortunately, every neighborhood is kept so damned busy with their distinct issues that sometimes it is nearly impossible to come together and talk about strategy for saving Boston totally."¹⁸³

Candidate Vikki Middleton found in her 1997 campaign that a lack of information about voting procedures was "a major impediment to political power." In Dorchester's District 4, for example, "the candidates say they have trouble coaxing people to the polls, and that they must often pause to inform residents of the role councilors play in a vast political landscape."¹⁸⁴

Boston districts have differentially supported female candidates for municipal office. (See Table 3.) For example, between 1920 and 1940, working-class and ethnic East Boston accounted for almost half of the eleven women candidates for City Council.¹⁸⁵ Historian Sarah Deutsch explained that the election of women to the City Council from working-class neighborhoods was unsurprising for many reasons. Among them, she found that for women from wealthy Brahmin neighborhoods "the vote had never been essential to the neighborhood women's access to power. They had only to go next door or perhaps just down the hall."¹⁸⁶ Thus, "It was no accident that the first woman elected to City Council hailed not from the Back Bay but from the South End, a district particularly hard hit by the Depression and indeed willing to elect a female machine heir rather than risk abandoning the patronage networks altogether."¹⁸⁷

TABLE 3
WOMEN CITY COUNCILORS BY DISTRICT*

District (Neighborhoods)	Women Candidates** 1983–2003	Women Elected 1937–2003
	(Number)	Total (Candidate Names)
1 (North End, East Boston, West End)	2	2 (Modica, Sansone)
2 (South Boston, Chinatown, South End)	0	1 (Hicks)
3 (Dorchester)	5	1 (Feeney)
4 (Dorchester, Mattapan)	1	0
5 (Hyde Park, Roslindale)	2	1 (Craven)
6 (West Roxbury, Jamaica Plain)	2	1 (Hennigan)
7 (Roxbury, South End, Fenway, Dorchester)	6	1 (Harris)
8 (Fenway, Back Bay, Beacon Hill, Mission Hill)	7	0
9 (Allston, Brighton)	7	0
At-Large	Morell White Garrison Payne-Thompson Igoe Garza	Davis-Mullen Salerno Hennigan Craven Hicks Sansone

*Boston had an at-large system from 1921–1922 and from 1951–1981; a ward system from 1925–1943. Since 1983, Boston has had a combined at-large and district system. Because of the changes in district/ward structure, district assignments for this table are based on where those elected lived. This applies particularly to pre-1983 candidates.

** “Women Candidates” refers to women who have run for the City Council. Although several women have run more than once, each was counted only once as a candidate for the purposes of this table.

Since 1983, only three districts in Boston have elected a woman to the City Council: Districts 1, 3, and 6, which comprise East Boston/West End, Dorchester, and West Roxbury/Jamaica Plain, respectively. One district, District 2, which comprises South Boston, Chinatown, and parts of the South End, has never had a woman candidate for City Council. It is also significant to note which neighborhoods have never elected a woman councilor. Current Districts 8 and 9, which comprise the wealthy Back Bay and Beacon Hill neighborhoods, the Fenway, Mission Hill, and Allston/Brighton, have never elected a woman to the City Council, although more than a dozen have run in just the last two decades.

However, while Districts 4, 8, and 9 have never elected a woman to the Council, they have produced more candidates than the other districts. Furthermore, although the change to a district/at-large system did not result in a woman of color being elected to the City Council, African-American men have held two safely “minority” seats on the Council since 1983. Although black women have run against male incumbents from their districts, they have not been able to win a City Council seat. Two black women who ran for district City Council seats in the 1990s—both with very little money and campaign structure—reported that they were told by an African-American elected official in Boston that they should not oppose the two incumbent male City Councilors. Some amount of networking with political power brokers is necessary to gain elected office in Boston—along with strategic campaigning and effective gathering of resources.

Not only are there trends by district and neighborhood, but Catholic Bostonians also tend to vote by parish. For example, John Nucci, Suffolk Clerk of Courts, has found that “Most voters in Dorchester will vote for the person who comes from their parish. If a candidate is from a voter-rich parish, that person is going to have an edge.”¹⁸⁸ City Councilor Maureen Feeney corroborated that statement, noting that much of her initial base of supporters came from the parish in which she grew up, St. Brendan’s, and her husband’s native St. Ann’s parish.¹⁸⁹ However, this trend is changing as a result of significant demographic changes. The dominance of Irish Catholic Bostonians who had long been the bastion of the neighborhoods is eroding as a result of suburban migrations and a post-1980s influx of Asian and Caribbean immi-

grants into the city. Feeney's district, for example, is now home to a growing Vietnamese community. "When I came into office," recalled Maureen Feeney, "the people who elected me were my mother's friends from the Guild and St. Brendan's, and Larry's family from St. Ann's and all the cousins, aunts, and uncles. So that was my base....Over the years that base has eroded. They've moved out, died off; they've gotten married and left, and now I have a base that's really my own. It's everybody."¹⁹⁰

Likewise, when Maura Hennigan gave up her District 6 seat to run citywide, political watchers expected that the district would produce a widely diverse group of candidates. By 2001, Jamaica Plain had become "one of the city's most diverse neighborhoods, with an increasingly active political base that seemed poised to rival the overwhelmingly white voting bloc of West Roxbury."¹⁹¹ According to the 2000 census, the once predominantly Irish neighborhood had changed to just 53 percent of the population there, while Latinos comprised 23 percent. In the other neighborhood in the district, West Roxbury, 89 percent of voters were white. Candidates' strategies for accommodating to demographic changes have included printing campaign literature in Spanish, hiring Spanish-speaking staff members, and, in one case, hosting a *Cinco de Mayo* celebration.¹⁹² Still, candidates have struggled with significant demographic changes that have transformed the city's political landscape. "The falloff in contested races—like the steep drop in municipal voter turnout—may be more a reflection of the overall decline in civic participation and changes in the city population than of any specific shortcomings in Boston's move to bring political representation to all neighborhoods."¹⁹³

The "Gatekeeper" Problem

The main story that emerged from interviews with candidates and elected officials in Boston is that, for decades, the mayor has performed a key gatekeeping role in determining who can and can-

not win a City Council seat. Due to the strong mayor/weak council structure of the Boston City Charter, the power of the executive branch of municipal government is very concentrated. According to historian Thomas O'Connor, the "strong mayor" system is a relic of a class-based political struggle between Boston's working-class political machine of the 1920s–1940s and "good government" reformers—who were largely middle-class professionals backed by wealthy funders.¹⁹⁴

The target of the reform of 1949 was James Michael Curley. When "Curley had returned from Danbury prison, his political critics organized to have the city adopt a new 'Plan E' form of government, which would introduce a strong council-city manager administration and a system of proportional representation. In part, this was a none-too-subtle attempt to strike a blow at Curley and his type of one-man rule; in part, it was a sincere effort to intro-

duce a more efficient and responsive system of representation."¹⁹⁵ With the backing of his extensive political network, Curley defeated the motion and retained the strong mayor/weak council system. Ironically, Boston's two most recent and extremely powerful mayors—Raymond Flynn and Thomas Menino—both came to the mayoral seat after years of service on the Boston City Council.

Today, the "strong mayor" system of Boston still dominates municipal government and influences the outcome of municipal

elections. Female and male politicians in Boston are advanced or thwarted by the mayor and influential people working for him in the administration, the neighborhoods, and the political parties—according to several informants. To the extent that women are "plugged" into the system, or win the mayor's favor, they can benefit from the organization of city government and its effects on the political system. For example, one (male) informant who ran twice for an at-large council seat believed the mayor provided crucial support for one of his opponents because she was more likely to support the administration's budget, policy, and development positions. "Coming out of 1985, I was a leading candidate but was perceived as un-electable by the establishment," he

Women need the financial backing that it takes to compete with the entrenched power structure in the neighborhood of men...women have unique skills and talents—women could pretty much take the whole show...but women sometimes lose the whole forest for the trees. They have to learn to say, "I'm gonna meet with him because he's a big money guy. Golf should also be required for women."

—Former City Councilor

said. But [my female opponent] could get elected....They were all looking for an alternative to me; they knew I couldn't be controlled and that I would have helped build coalitions to put pressure on the administration. By August, there was a perception that she was more viable and that the mayor and business groups thought she was more 'malleable,' was the word I heard."¹⁹⁶

To the extent that women want to reform the existing system, oppose the mayor's positions, or work with constituents who are outside the "power structure" of Boston's municipal system, female candidates are harmed by the strong-mayor structure. For example, three women City Councilors held on to their seats during the 1997 municipal elections in Boston: district councilors Maura A. Hennigan and Maureen Feeney, and citywide councilor Peggy Davis-Mullen. Two of these women echoed Diane Modica's analysis that some amount of backlash against women's increased influence in Boston politics is making it harder for women not only to maintain their elected positions, but also to take "hard" or "independent" stands regarding budget issues and other public policy matters.

Diane Modica worked with the other women councilors to delay an affirmative vote on the mayor's proposed city budget in 1996 in order to pressure his administration to fund more capital improvements in aging public school buildings.¹⁹⁷ According to a number of individuals interviewed for this study and news accounts from that period, the Menino "machine" mobilized to support her opponent in one of the dirtiest campaigns in the city's history. Modica lost her reelection campaign.

The Resource Problem: Money

All councilors and candidates interviewed for this study agreed that women need support in order to mount successful campaigns. They need to learn the nuts and bolts of fundraising, but they also need to learn how to approach potential donors (both individuals and businesses) in a gendered way. They also need to work with macro-business organizations such as "the Vault" in order to achieve citywide opportunities. When it comes to raising money, said one candidate, women just need to learn how to play golf.

Informants for this study emphasized that women candidates for municipal office need help fundraising, particularly since districts for City Council seats are larger than districts for a state representative or state

senate seat in Boston. Informants emphasized that individual women and women's organizations need to raise more money to support female candidates. However, given the opposition from broad elements of Boston's political system that several informants reported experiencing, it is not clear that more funds alone will help women capture additional City Council seats in Boston.

According to one informant who helped manage a successful citywide City Councilor's campaign, it takes approximately \$200,000 to run a citywide campaign well in Boston. Nearly every individual interviewed believed that it is harder for women candidates to raise funds. The women also expressed, however, that within this framework of constraint they faced no particular obstacles in obtaining campaign resources. Each outlined a slightly different fundraising strategy, depending on her background. For example, a woman who had no ties with labor unions said she sought staff that had worked with labor, as part of a successful strategy to build union backing.

Candidates and elected officials received volunteer help, money, and endorsements from a wide variety of players, including business groups, neighborhood organizations, special-interest organizations, and women's groups. Several women emphasized the resources they received from neighborhood groups and constituents. Many women said it is harder for females to obtain donations from "money groups"; therefore, two elected officials said they pay special attention to introducing themselves to business organizations and asking for their support.

A former City Councilor said she was actually approached by "the Vault" once her candidacy had achieved substantial recognition as a likely winner. "The Vault" is an informal group of businesspeople (known as the Boston Coordinating Committee during the Collins administration/urban renewal era) who are active in civic affairs in Boston. As an organization, Vault members participate in urban planning and development activities with the city administration and they select political candidates to support. "The committee came to a unique agreement with the administration—a 'memo of understanding'—that no downtown project would be undertaken by the city unless it had the approval of the Central Business District Committee."¹⁹⁸

Several informants reported that women do not give as freely as men, which they feel hinders women candidates' ability to achieve elected office.

A former City Councilor said, for example, “Women’s events are helpful, but not in a big way. Women in Boston are not big givers. Some women who do business in town are good givers—women who understand politics and who need access to City Council. But generally, women don’t understand that if we don’t get more women elected to local office, we won’t get more women into constitutional offices.”¹⁹⁹

Two former City Councilors were critical of what they view as a “litmus test” on social issues to which women’s organizations in Boston hold candidates before donating money. One informant said: “All these hotsty-totsy women out there making big bucks, they cannot keep holding women to these litmus tests, because that’s not how Boston’s neighborhood politics work. Being elected to office in Boston is about delivering basic services and helping neighborhoods develop plans to improve the quality of life.”²⁰⁰

Two exceptions to the general rule that women felt able to obtain funds and campaign support in a competitive way were the stories told by two African-American women who ran for district City Council races during this decade. One woman reported that she had no volunteers and no organization—that she was running because she could not “sit back anymore” and watch things going wrong in the city:

I didn’t have a committee, [she said.] I didn’t know a thing about running for office—not the slightest. What’s a committee? What does a committee do? Who raises money? I don’t know anything. All I know is, I don’t like the way things are running now, and I want them to change. That’s all I was concerned about. No volunteers. I had nothing, nothing, nothing. Did that stop me? No, not in the least. I made up my own little flyers. You know, little hand-made posters. Hey look, it didn’t make me any difference. All I wanted people to know was that, Yes, I am here. I have nothing now, but I want you to remember my name. So I kept talking at forums, talking at forums...

This particular candidate went on to become an active political party member at the ward and state levels, and she went to a national convention. She was encouraged to run for a state representative seat (which she chose not to do so as to focus on family and work), and she is now very knowledgeable about how the political “system” works in Boston. Her story highlights the training, technical assistance, and access to networks needed by many women who might desire municipal office in Boston. Another woman who has run for a district seat twice said that both her campaigns were funded primarily from her personal funds, and that she did not know how the political system worked before she ran.

Eligibility is determined by resources: time, money, support networks, political experience and relevant skills.” And Darcy and his colleagues report: “In a nonpartisan race, a candidate must build on other networks of friends, co-workers, and associates in civic, religious, and other organizations. Party organizations may help, but a partisan appeal to voters cannot readily be made. The success of a campaign depends on how well a candidate can mobilize support, first from close associates, then from a larger group of supporters, and finally from the voters. If a candidate cannot get money and volunteer time from a loyal cadre of friends, associates and like-minded people, attempts to reach the larger public will fail.”²⁰¹

The Resource Problem: Lack of Party Support

Almost all informants reported that political parties played no role in their decision to run for office, or in providing support for their campaigns—in large part, of course, because Boston’s electoral system is non-partisan. Several women reported, however, that the political parties in Boston provide more support for men and for white “insider” political players than for women or for people of color. A number of informants clearly felt that powerful male players in Boston party politics actively opposed their bids for City Council seats. These findings contradict Darcy and others, who concluded: “Political party leaders, traditionally thought to be important barriers to women seeking office, no longer appear to be so, at least at the local level.”²⁰²

On the other hand, many informants indicated that party activities provided important training grounds as they pursued their interest in Boston politics. Also, a larger percentage of female party activists in Boston report a desire for elected office than do women in the United States generally. A 1995 survey conducted by the Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy at the University of Massachusetts Boston indicates that 12.9 percent of female political party activists in Boston and a number of other Massachusetts cities and towns “desire to run for higher office.”²⁰³ The party context is an important one, then, when considering factors that have led to both increased women’s candidacies in Boston’s electoral politics and to a loss of momentum in Boston women’s efforts to win representative parity at the municipal level.

Although Bledsoe and Herring found little evidence of party support for women candidates at the local level, several women informants said they wanted political parties in Massachusetts and Boston

to more actively recruit and support female municipal candidates. One black female political activist, Willie Mae Allen (who ran for a City Council seat twice in the 1980s), pushed the Democratic Party in Massachusetts to change its policies on recruiting party activists. Allen proposed an affirmative action amendment to the party's charter in 1977. The party adopted "Willie's Amendment," which mandates that bodies of party members elected at Democratic caucuses, special committees, conventions, statewide committees, and ward committees must represent the racial makeup of the Massachusetts electoral body as a whole. Therefore, if approximately 10 percent of registered voters in the state are minority, 10 percent of delegates must be minority. As powerful as the amendment might have been in involving more minorities in the Democratic Party structure, it has not helped to catapult minority women onto the Boston City Council.

Furthermore, Chapter 52 of the Massachusetts General Law mandates that "each [political party's] state committee shall consist of one man and one woman from each senatorial district, who shall be residents thereof, to be elected at the presidential primaries by plurality vote of the members of the party in the district...." It appears, however, that such leadership opportunities for women, which are built into the institutional structure of the Massachusetts party system, have not translated into many female City Council candidacies in Boston. Informants gave mixed reviews as to whether party activities provided an impetus for their bids for municipal office. In addition to Willie Mae Allen, other members of the Massachusetts Democratic Party have pursued alternative strategies to involve more "outside groups" such as women and minorities in electoral politics; these efforts have not been directed toward promoting women's municipal candidacies in Boston, however. For example, in the 1980s, the Women's Impact Network (WIN) was organized in order to aid women candidates, since the state Democratic Party "could not favor female candidates, especially in primary contests (of crucial importance in this one-party-dominated state)." ²⁰⁴

Perhaps if the Democratic and Republican parties organized in a focused way to promote women's City Council candidacies, gender equity might be achieved in Boston's municipal electoral system. One former City Council member presented a forceful case that political parties should do just that at the

municipal level in Massachusetts, particularly in Boston. She said,

I don't think the Democrats do enough—and not just the Democrats. There is not the appreciation for the challenge that running for municipal office presents, and therefore the help is not commensurate to the help they would give you if you were running for a State Rep seat, and I find that so shortsighted. This is the capital city; it's the largest city in the state....It's disappointing to me that women who have chosen to be the champions of women cannot get this piece—do not get the municipal piece. They just do not get it.

It is important that this informant, who strongly feels that organized recruitment and support of women candidates is needed in Boston, discussed not only a lack of support at the party level for women municipal candidates, but also a lack of support from "the champions of women." This comment refers to the fact that women candidates emerge from many realms besides political parties alone. Her comment also implies that those other realms—nonprofit organizations, the business community, and grassroots organizations—also need to more systematically promote women's municipal candidacies. The informant specifically suggested that organizations such as the Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy at the University of Massachusetts Boston provide more technical assistance and support for women municipal candidates.

A second informant emphasized greatly the need for a structured recruitment process for women candidates in Boston, although she did not recommend that the recruitment structure be linked to a political party, per se. She said:

So in a sense, I think it would be helpful to have structured ways to encourage women to run, but if you encourage them to run, you have to back them up; you have to have volunteers and money to help them. You don't just say, "Here, go run for office; walk the gangplank." You've got to be there with a safety net under them. Turn it into a diving board, where they can actually spring into office.

A third informant, who is currently a City Councilor, was also extremely critical of the parties' recruitment of, and support for, women activists and candidates in Boston. She also proposed a grassroots strategy for reaching out to, for involving, and for training women. She said:

No. I don't think the Democratic party is reaching out to women at all. I think we're doing a really lousy job at every level. One of my goals this year is to start organizing a grassroots group of

women...women need to empower themselves in this city. There are women's organizations at the Democratic city level and definitely at the corporate level, but not at the neighborhood grassroots level. And I want to see more of a variety of women [involved]; I want straight women and gay women; I want working women and women that stay at home; I want women from Roxbury and women from South Boston.

The female Republican City Council candidate in Boston reported that her party does not support women's candidacies at the municipal level due to sheer lack of organization rather than ideological stance. She said: "Because the Republicans tend not to run in Boston...they don't build the committee structure they should have to run a local election. In order to build that structure, you have to run candidates. If you don't have any candidates to run, you're not going to get very far." The point regarding women's political advancement, however, is that political parties could actively recruit women to be candidates for municipal office (and support their candidacies); this particular informant pointed out that in doing so, political parties could build their own strength.

Moving Forward: Motivating and Supporting Women Candidates

Thus far we have examined the reasons women have made so little progress in gaining power in Boston politics—specifically, in winning election to the Boston City Council. We have found that, while structure and incumbency matter, they are insufficient explanatory factors. Getting past (or building alliances with) gatekeepers plays a significant role—one that might change with a woman mayor. Gaining support in terms of fundraising and from the political parties is also an important dimension of solving the problem. And the need to confront the gender and racial barriers that work double-time to propel women of color into the State House rather than City Hall cannot be denied.

At the same time, the obstacle with the greatest prospects to be overcome continues to be the "recruitment problem"—getting more women to run. We would like to revisit the question with an eye on the lessons from women in Boston who have run. The desire to effect change drives some women to seek municipal office as elected officials and as mayoral appointees or employees of city government. Others, like Alice White Yancey, find grassroots political

activism to be an effective outlet. Indeed, despite the fact that less than 13 percent of the party activists in a study by the Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy's expressed ambition to be a candidate, the study also suggests that they perform roles and have backgrounds that could support ambitions to run for elected office.

Knowledge of city politics through membership in neighborhood civic organizations, ward committees, and party organizations give women access and a potential political base from which to mount campaigns. An additional source of campaign support and base development has been constructed through staff work on campaigns. According to the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University, women candidates bring more community experience to elected office than do their male counterparts. Previous work on campaigns and in other appointed or elective offices acted as important "feeder" opportunities for women and for people of color. Women tend to rise up through the political system through such venues, while men work in traditional party clubs or (as one researcher found) through local sports organizations to build a base of support and join a neighborhood political network.²⁰⁵ State Senator Dianne Wilkerson said in 1997,

I don't think it's a coincidence that the histories of all the women elected officials tend to be so similar. Where the guys are likely to come from anywhere, like from graduate school or the service, they come back and [say] "I should be the state senator." For the women, they almost to the person literally graduate into elected office after having either advocated and lobbied around issues about education, or childcare, or non-profit activity, as teacher, activities on school committees, public housing advocates. So they kind of cut their teeth in the communities before they ended up running for office.²⁰⁶

Darcy, Welch, and Clark (1994) speculate that the high level of support for women's candidacies from neighborhood organizations and single-issue groups stems from women's high participation rates in such organizations.

Recent evidence indicates that this (civic) activity, in particular, activity in women's organizations, also translates into a significant political base. A national study of women officeholders indicated that fully 40 percent belonged to a women's or feminist organization. The most common such organization is the League of Women Voters, but Business and Professional Women and the American Association of University Women are also powerful springboards into office. In the national survey, encouragement by

women's organizations was given as the most important reason for women to run. And compared to men in this sample, women were more likely to say that organizational support was important to their try for office.²⁰⁷

Since Mildred Harris's candidacy in the 1930s, most women City Councilors in Boston worked on campaigns for other candidates and City Councilors. Harris, Kitty Craven and Maureen Craven Slade, Maura Hennigan, Suzanne Iannella, and Patricia White all worked on family members' campaigns prior to their own candidacies. At the same time, the networks, familial and political, that Boston women participated in and developed mirror the prevailing male model of electoral politics.²⁰⁸

Former City Councilor Rosemarie Sansone began her political career shortly after graduating from Lexington High School in 1963. That year, she got a job working for then Lt. Governor Francis X. Bellotti. During her years in the State House, she also met State Treasurer Robert Crane. The two became her mentors. She worked on Kevin H. White's 1970 gubernatorial campaign, spent many years in advertising, and returned to politics in 1975 to run school committee chairwoman Kathleen Sullivan's reelection campaign. Shortly thereafter, Sansone took the lead of the campaign to pass the Equal Rights Amendment in Massachusetts.²⁰⁹ She served two terms on the City Council from 1978 to 1981, and despite the belief that she would be reelected she declined to run for a third term. "I think most people running back then had come out of a political system where they had been active in campaigns. They just didn't come out of nowhere....I think it was my role in campaigns that gave me the presence of mind to say, 'I want to be a candidate.'" ²¹⁰ South Carolina native Willie Mae Allen, who ran for the Council in 1983 and 1985, ran "because I had been an activist for many, many years in the political arena and I was concerned that there were no people of color running for that seat."²¹¹

City Councilor Diane Modica of East Boston worked on Sansone's campaign. Like Sansone, she entered politics as a teenager, working on city and state campaigns. She worked for Michael Dukakis in the 1970s and for President Jimmy Carter, then joined Sansone's Committee for Change campaign. Both Kitty Craven and her daughter, City Council candidate Maureen Craven Slade, grew up in politically active families in which campaigning was a part of the family culture.²¹³ Candidate Patricia White, daughter of Mayor Kevin H. White, campaigned for her father,

who returned the favor when she ran for a City Council seat in 2003. Councilor Maureen Feeney worked for her district predecessor, Jim Byrne. When he decided not to seek reelection, he encouraged her to run. Extensive work with his constituents gave her name recognition and a reputation that made it possible for her to become the first woman to represent Dorchester in a district seat.²¹³ State Senator Dianne Wilkerson described paths to and through a number of political opportunities:

So you get a Peggy Davis-Mullen who ran for school committee (as a concerned social worker) and then went from the school committee to the City Council. And Shirley Owens Hicks was a school committee-woman and then got elected to the state house of representatives. Gloria Fox (state representative) was a director of an anti-poverty agency. Doris Bunte was a public housing advocate and parlayed that into the State House of Representatives.²¹⁴

For some women candidates the decision to run came because of a specific personal issue and without a family or political network or prior experience in politics. In 1991, Natalie Carithers campaigned unsuccessfully to be a district councilor after she could not get a second mortgage on her house. Feeling that she was a victim of discriminatory banking, she called her city councilor and could not get help, so she ran for office on an anti-redlining platform—to speak out on the need for affordable housing. "I knew something was wrong and I wanted to get to the bottom of it." She said: "I knew I had no chance at winning this thing. I didn't go into it to win; I went in to make a point: that first of all, it can be done. Anybody can run. And second, that people wait too long." Carithers was also adamant that, beyond the lack of elected commissions in Boston, nothing in particular in Boston's system holds women back. "It's harder for women to do anything. It's a sexist world. But it should not be a barrier; rather, it should just be a hurdle."²¹⁵

Conclusion

Massachusetts, as blue a state as blue can be, still is far from a Garden of Eden for female politicians. Before Andrea Cabral scored her huge upset win for re-election as Sheriff of Suffolk County, she had been right where many of the women she addressed... underrated, underestimated and dismissed as serious politicians.

No more for Cabral. After crushing her challenger, Boston City Councilor Steve Murphy, last November, she now is being hailed as the symbol of the "New Boston," a coalition of multiethnic, "progressive" voters and advocates who lifted Cabral to victory and are being widely courted. Cabral, keynote speaker at the 34th annual meeting of the Massachusetts Women's Political Caucus, had this message for the bipartisan organization dedicated to putting more women into office: It's all about unity. About seizing the moment. And about the unique power of women. "My race (African-American) and my gender certainly played a role," Cabral said. And the power of the sisterhood played the biggest role of all. "It was the most interesting thing how many women turned out. Younger women brought their mothers," Cabral said. "Groups of nuns in their habits went to the polls. Some men told me, 'My girlfriend said if I didn't show up today and vote for you, they would...well, you can fill in the blank.'"
"Cabral Tops List of Inspiring Female Pols"

—Wayne Woodlief, *Boston Herald*, Jan. 30, 2005

In 1997, the coalition of women Councilors dissolved due to political aspirations on the part of one member, and the failure of another to win reelection. Since then, Maura Hennigan and Maureen Feeney have served alone, while maintaining their seats as strong incumbents who have risen to powerful positions on the Council. Feeney has also adapted to shifting demographics in her district.

The Council—and the City—is at another crossroads. Hennigan has already declared her intention to campaign for mayor in the 2005 election.²¹⁶ With the abdication of her at-large seat, a decision that could leave her without membership in any City elective office should her bid for mayor fail, that leaves Feeney, the incumbent as the best chance for continued female representation on the Council.²¹⁷ If no other women win in 2005, women's representation could shrink to just 8 percent.

To date, two women have announced their intentions to run: Susan Passoni and previous candidate Patricia White. Patricia White, daughter of former Mayor Kevin H. White and a member of a four-generation classic Boston political family, ran for an at-large Council seat in 2003. In what analysts called a "surprising defeat," she lost to four incumbents. Despite her network of supporters, if one looks at historical trends, it has been rare for an incumbent Councilor to lose an election, especially in a non-mayoral election year when voter turnout is typically light. She is expected to be a strong candidate in 2005.²¹⁸ Susan Passoni is a New York native with a background in finance who is likely to challenge Jim Kelly, District 2 Councilor. On the plus side, she is active in the South End community, with its "affluent, liberal voters." On the other hand, she is a newcomer with little experience in campaigning.^{CCXVI} But the 2005 race is only beginning to unfold.

Candidates who lost and councilors who won agree that attracting young women into municipal politics is the key to increasing elective representation. Youth centers, volunteer work on campaigns, and internships bring young women in reach of a pipeline, but that mechanism is not

fully developed. Barriers include intense media scrutiny and demanding work schedules that leave little time for family life. The public image of politicians has eroded to depressing levels and repels potential candidates. The escalating expense of mounting campaigns also limits access. But the issue isn't just about attracting *young* women, it is about attracting *any* women in the city.

What is the transitional process that moves from a reliance on potential candidates from political families and traditionally active neighborhoods to a diverse and inclusive pool of women representing newer populations? Patricia White's candidacy illustrates the traditional model, while Andrea Cabral's 2004 Suffolk County victory has been identified as signifying the transition. African-American women, women from Caribbean island nations, and Latina women have made forays into politics with increasing success—but not at the municipal level. Women of color have traditionally fared better at the state level, including Marie St. Fleur and Dianne Wilkerson. Most attribute that to the Council's reputation, others to the political culture that makes it difficult for any woman to be elected, let alone a woman of color. Women state officials also express greater interest in the kind of work carried out at the state level as opposed to municipal issues. Women candidates need support at a number of levels—cultural, professional, and economic. Oral history

Women need to empower themselves in this city. There are women's organizations at the democratic city committee level and definitely at the corporate level, but not at the neighborhood grassroots level. I want to see more of a variety of women—I want straight women and gay women. I want working women and women that stay at home. I want women from Roxbury and women from South Boston...I think that women can change the landscape in the city and the country, we just have to organize and be aggressive in doing that.

—Peggy Davis Mullen, 1997

interviews and media accounts corroborate the need for women and women's organizations to confront the traditional construction of municipal politics as a male, machine-style hierarchical (and often closed) system. However, that system has worked for—or has not impeded the ambitions of—many of the nine women who won their elections. Women in the political arena suggest that the Democratic State Committee and Ward Committees could provide training guidance in constituent development, agenda (or issue) development, fundraising, and campaign planning, as well as serve as mentoring bodies to recruit and nurture potential candidates.

In conclusion, to move forward and gain ground in Boston, women will need to avail themselves of lessons from the past. Rather than look to the structure of the political system, or even to rail about the problems of incumbency, they will need to identify, recruit, and support competitive women candidates. Women will also need to be able to build alliances with City Hall—or be more successful in challenging the gatekeepers. And, as Andrea Cabral's success shows, it's time for women of color to take their places in City Hall as well as the State House.

APPENDIX A

Women Candidates for the Boston City Council, 1921–2003

ELECTED *

<u>Year</u>	<u>Candidate</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Candidate</u>
1921	Grace D. Chipman	1973	Debra Byrne Louise Day Hicks * Jill A. LeCompte Lena Saunders
1922	Florence H. Luscomb Annie E. Molloy		
1925	Nellie A. McNulty	1975	Louise Day Hicks * Jacqueline Y. LeBeau Reba Williams
1927	Carrie F. Sheehan		
1931	Eleanor C. L'Ecuyer	1977	Elizabeth Buckley Louise Day Hicks Norma Walsh Gramer Diane Jacobs Polly Jane Halfkenny Rosemarie Sansone * Celia M. Sniffin
1933	Catherine A. Robbins Lelia W.		
1935	Lena Clark		
1937	Lena Clark Mildred M. Harris R	1979	Louise Day Hicks Phyllis Igoe Rosemarie Sansone * Jeanette Tracy Barbara Ware
1939	Lena Clark Susan Donovan Mildred M. Harris		
1943	Elizabeth Ann Montgomery	1981	Pamela Gillman Maura Hennigan • Maureen Craven Slade Althea Garrison
1951	Kathleen Ryan Dacey Anita G. Flaherty Laura M. O'Brien	1983	Willie Mae Allen Eugenie Beal Constance Brown Jean Farrell Althea Garrison Debra Gelber Carol Nee Geyer Maura Hennigan • Elizabeth Betty Jones Jean Sullivan McKeigue Diane Modica Leslie F. Payne Helene Solomon*
1953	Marie P. Greene		
1961	Katherine Craven Sybil Holmes Alice Lyons		
1963	Katherine Craven •		
1965	Irene Burns Katherine Craven •		
1967	Katherine Craven	1985	Willie Mae Allen Althea Garrison Maura Hennigan • Leslie Payne Judy Porteus
1969	Louise Day Hicks •		
1971	Norma Walsh Gramer		

1987	Maria DiLibero Althea Garrison Maura Hennigan * Rosaria Salerno *	1997	Peggy Davis-Mullen * Maureen E. Feeney * Althea Garrison Maura Hennigan * Suzanne Iannella Vikki Middleton Diane Modica Pamela A. Smith
1989	Judith Bracken Althea Garrison Maura Hennigan * Marilyn A. Stacy Huynh Rosaria Salerno *	1999	Peggy Davis-Mullen * Thelma Barros Maureen Feeney * Althea Garrison Rosie Hanlon Maura A. Hennigan * Suzanne Iannella Lynda Jeanne McNally Vikki Middleton Andrea Morell Alana M. Murphy Carmen M. Torres
1991	Natalie E. Carithers Peggy Davis-Mullen Hattie Dudley Althea Garrison Maura Hennigan * Jill Klowden Rosaria Salerno *	2001	Maureen E. Feeney * Maura A. Hennigan * Phyllis Yetman Igoe Elaine Rigas
1993	Phyllis Bailey Rosina T. Bowman Peggy Davis-Mullen * Maria DiLibero Maureen Feeney * Maura Hennigan * Nancy Kavanaugh Karen L. MacNutt Diane Modica * Karen Ray Rita Walsh	2003	Maureen Feeney * Francesca E. Fordiani Althea Garrison Laura Garza Maura A. Hennigan * Phyllis Yetman Igoe Jacquelyne Payne-Thompson Patricia H. White
1995	Cathleen Campbell Peggy Davis-Mullen * Maureen Feeney * Althea Garrison Maura Hennigan * Vikki Middleton Diane Modica *		

APPENDIX B

List of Individuals Interviewed

Willie Mae Allen City Council Candidate

Natalie Carithers City Council Candidate

Peggy Davis-Mullen City Councilor

Maureen Feeney City Councilor

Gloria Fox State Representative

Maura Hennigan City Councilor

Michael Kane, Campaign Manager

Eleanor LeCain State Senate Candidate

Karen MacNutt City Council Candidate Attorney General Candidate

Vikki Middleton City Council Candidate

Diane Modica City Councilor

Shirley Owens-Hicks State Representative

Rosaria Salerno City Councilor

Rosemarie Sansone City Councilor

Jeannette Tracey City Council Candidate

Marian Walsh State Senator

Dianne Wilkerson State Senator

APPENDIX C

A Note on Data Sources and Research Methodology

Historically, women have tended to be difficult to research using public records. This study benefited from two factors: Historian Sarah Deutsch conducted extensive research into the lives of women in the public sphere during the first three decades of the 20th century. Using newspapers and organizational records, she constructed a valuable history of a previously known aspect of women's lives in Boston. With her work as a foundation and source for information on Mildred Harris and early candidates, we went back to her sources to obtain details of particular relevance to this study.

Subsequent research on post-1940 candidates and elected women officials focused on public records maintained by the Elections Department of the City of Boston, Boston newspapers, and oral histories with post-1980 candidates for municipal and state offices. We began the newspaper research by searching September-November issues in order to capture articles on preliminary and final campaigns and elections. This research was aided by database searches of *The Boston Globe* and *The Boston Herald*, both of which have made issues dating back to the early 1980s available for online searches. In 1998, doctoral candidate Karla Armenoff conducted research using City records in order to compile the table and charts through 1997. Karla also interviewed candidates and elected women Councilors and members of the State Legislature representing Boston districts. These interviews addressed key questions, including entry into the political arena, fundraising experiences, issues pertaining to conducting campaigns, candidates' perspectives of the process, and recommendations for drawing more women into the pipeline and constructing support networks in order to assist their campaigns and make them electable candidates. Karla also relied on research conducted and published by the Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy in the 1990s.

Notes

¹ Polly Welts Kaufman, *Boston Women and City School Politics, 1872–1905* (1994), p. 3.

² Kaufman, p. 34.

³ Historian Thomas O'Connor and others claim that women could vote for School Committee members as early as 1879. However, the Massachusetts Secretary of State's office cites state law St. 1881 c. 191 as the source. See www.sec.state.ma.us/mus/musexe/museum/timidx.htm.

⁴ Sarah Deutsch, *Women in the City: Gender, Space, and Power, 1870–1940*, (2000), p. 221.

⁵ Thomas O'Connor, *The Boston Irish: A Political History* (1995), pp. 172–3.

⁶ City of Boston. Municipal Register for 1914 (City of Boston, Statistics Dept., 1914), p. 11.

⁷ All lists, tabulations, and analysis of women candidates for the Boston City Council and other offices are based on research conducted by the authors. For a discussion of our research methods, please see Appendix C.

⁸ Please note: Gathering accurate information on the race/ethnicity of candidates is difficult. We apologize for errors of omission—or for misrepresenting someone who is not a person of color on this list.

⁹ Carol Hardy-Fanta, *Latina Politics, Latino Politics: Gender, Culture, and Political Participation in Boston* (1993), pp. 29, 30.

¹⁰ The Boston neighborhood of Roxbury changed from predominantly white in Gleason's day to predominantly black today.

¹¹ "Mrs. Harris Wins Council Race," *The Boston Globe*, March 31, 1937; "Woman Elected to City Council Here; Mrs. Harris First of Sex to Hold Seat," *Boston Herald*, March 31, 1937.

¹² On Boston's political history see: Ronald P. Formisano, *Boston Against Busing: Race, Class, and Ethnicity* (1991); Ronald P. Formisano and Constance K. Burns, *Boston 1700–1980: The Evolution of Urban Politics* (1984); Doris Kearns Goodwin, *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys: An American Saga* (1987); Steven P. Erie, *Rainbow's End: Irish-Americans and the Dilemma of Urban Machine Politics, 1840–1985* (1988); J. Joseph Huthmacher, *Massachusetts: People and Politics, 1919–1933* (1959); J. Anthony Lukas, *Common Ground: A Turbulent Decade in the Lives of Three American Families* (1985); Thomas H. O'Connor, *Bibles, Brahmins, and Bosses: A Short History of Boston*, 3rd ed. (1991); Thomas H. O'Connor, *The Boston Irish: A Political History* (1995); Dennis P. Ryan, *Beyond the Ballot Box: A Social History of the Boston Irish, 1845–1917* (1983); and John F. Stack, Jr., *International Conflict in an American City: Boston's Irish, Italians, and Jews, 1935–1944* (1979). For a history of blacks in Boston, see Jennings, Browning, Marshall and Tabb, Travis. For Latino political history, see Carol Hardy-Fanta and Jeffrey Gerson (eds.), *Latino Politics in Massachusetts* (2002). For an analysis of gender and Latino politics in Boston, see Hardy-Fanta (1993).

¹³ U.S. Census (2000).

¹⁴ Samuel P. Hays, "The Politics of Reform in Municipal Government in the Progressive Era," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, Vol. 28 (Oct. 1964), p. 159.

¹⁵ Stack, *International Conflict in an American City: Boston's Irish, Italians, and Jews, 1935–1944*, p. 32. In 1900, the Common Council, as it was then named, consisted of 75 representatives. In 1909, Progressives reduced the number to nine elected at large in order to break up ward-controlled representation. The council was then expanded to 22 wards and at-large positions were eliminated. In 1951, the council was reconstituted with 9 at-large members. In 1981, the present composition of 13 ward and at-large seats was implemented.

¹⁶ Geoffrey Blodgett, "Yankee Leadership in a Divided City, 1860–1910," in Formisano and Burns, eds., *Boston 1700–1980: The Evolution of Urban Politics*, pp. 105–6.

¹⁷ Peter Cowen, "Voter Pull Seen Key to Council Race," *The Boston Globe*, Sept. 21, 1981.

¹⁸ Alan Lupo, "Menino Seen as Wild Card in District Race," *The Boston Globe*, Apr. 20, 1997; Michael Jonas, "Modica Is Still a Regular in City Hall No Longer in Office," *The Boston Globe*, March 21, 1999; Michael Jonas, "Hennigan Victory for At-Large Seat a Blow to Menino," *The Boston Globe*, Nov. 7, 2001.

¹⁹ Stack, p. 33.

²⁰ City Council meeting minutes, 1939.

²¹ O'Connor, *The Boston Irish*, pp. 141–148. See also Chapter 10 in O'Connor, *Bibles, Brahmins, and Bosses: A Short History of Boston*, 3rd ed. (1991).

- ²² O'Connor, *Bibles, Brahmins, and Bosses*, pp. 214-215.
- ²³ Charles Kenney, "The Politics of Turmoil," *The Boston Globe*, April 19, 1987. See also Daniel Golden and Donald Lowery, "Boston and the Postwar Racial Strain/Blacks and Whites in Boston, 1954-1982," *The Boston Globe*, Sept. 27, 1982; Toni-Michelle C. Travis, "Boston: The Unfinished Agenda," *PS*, 19:3 (Summer 1986), pp. 610-617.
- ²⁴ The League of Women Voters was founded in 1920, an outgrowth of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA).
- ²⁵ Notable American Unitarians, "Florence Hope Luscomb: A Radical Foremother, 1887-1985." Retrieved from www.harvardsquare.org; www.mfh.org/specialprojects/shwlp/site/honorees/luscomb.html
- ²⁶ Sarah Deutsch, *Women in the City*. Molloy spearheaded a successful strike in 1913 and later worked for James Michael Curley, "Boston as a Woman's City," *OAH Newsletter* vol. 32 (Feb. 2004).
- ²⁷ Deutsch, p. 243.
- ²⁸ Other women to try for both city and state government included Susan W. Fitzgerald, who ran for the legislature between 1922 and 1938 and was the only woman elected during that period. Harris failed in her attempt to replace her brother in 1936.
- ²⁹ Deutsch, p. 259.
- ³⁰ Huthmacher, p. 44.
- ³¹ Deutsch, pp. 240, 270.
- ³² Clark ran unsuccessfully three times.
- ³³ Deutsch, p. 270.
- ³⁴ Survey of American capital cities and other large cities conducted July-December 2004.
- ³⁵ To date only 13 women have been elected to Baltimore's City Council. www.baltimorecitycouncil.com/history.htm
- ³⁶ Kay Longcope, "A New Consciousness on Campus/Bringing Politics to Emmanuel," *The Boston Globe*, Feb. 7, 1984.
- ³⁷ William P. Coughlin, "Edward Mullooney, 79; Was Lawyer/State Senator," *The Boston Globe*, June 6, 1983.
- ³⁸ Craven ran first in 1961, then ran for the state House of Representatives in 1962 and also lost. The majority of the 11 women who ran during that time were of Irish heritage. Two ran several campaigns in the 1940s for state legislature.
- ³⁹ Carol Hardy-Fanta, ed., *Women in New England Politics: A Profile and Action Handbook*. Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy at the John W. McCormack Graduate School of Policy Studies, October 26-27 (2003), p. 4.
- ⁴⁰ M. Margaret Conway, Gertrude A. Stevernagel, and David Ahearn, *Women and Political Participation: Cultural Change in the Political Arena* (1997), p. xi.
- ⁴¹ O'Connor, *The Boston Irish*, p. 236. On Irish political culture, see also Dennis P. Ryan, *Beyond the Ballot Box: A Social History of the Boston, Irish, 1845-1917* (1983).
- ⁴² O'Connor, *The Boston Irish*, p. 208.
- ⁴³ Maureen Craven Slade, interview with Kristen A. Petersen (2004).
- ⁴⁴ The renewal plan for the South End, ostensibly designed to eliminate urban blight and the effects of poverty to improve living conditions for the neighborhood's residents, instead destroyed the fabric of the black and Latino communities. Higher housing costs, among other changes, pushed blacks and Latinos out of the South End and into Roxbury. Thomas O'Connor, *The Boston Irish*, p. 241.
- ⁴⁵ Maureen Craven Slade, interview with Kristen A. Petersen (2004).
- ⁴⁶ Formisano, pp. 146-7.
- ⁴⁷ R. Darcy, Susan Welch, and Janet Clark, *Women, Elections and Representation*, 2nd ed. (1994). Melissa Deckman, "Women Running Locally: How Gender Affects School Board Elections," *eSymposium* January 2004 (*PS online, APSA's Journal of the Profession*), p. 5.
- ⁴⁸ Deutsch, p. 260.
- ⁴⁹ O'Connor, *The Boston Irish*, p. 260. O'Connor indicates that Hicks had historically been a powerful candidate in Boston, garnering sixty-three of every one hundred votes cast in the 1963 school committee elections, for example (p. 207).
- ⁵⁰ Formisano, p. 2.
- ⁵¹ Jose Martinez, Jennifer Rosinski, and Bob Clark, "Louise Day Hicks, Political Icon, Dies," *The Boston Herald*, Oct. 22, 2003. Mark Feeney, "Louise Day Hicks, Icon of Tumult, Dies," *The Boston Globe*, Oct. 22, 2003, p. A1.
- ⁵² Feeney, "Louise Day Hicks, Icon of Tumult, Dies," p. A1.

- ⁵³ O'Connor, *The Boston Irish*, p. 262.
- ⁵⁴ Toni-Michelle Travis, "Boston: The Unfinished Agenda," *PS* 19:3 (Summer 1986), p. 611 (pp. 610-17). See also Mel King, *Chain of Change* (1981).
- ⁵⁵ Kaufman, pp. xii-xiii.
- ⁵⁶ "Light Voter Turnout Seen for Primaries in Boston," *The Boston Globe*, Sept. 25, 1973. Obituary, *The Boston Globe*, June 20, 2003.
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- ⁶¹ Formisano, p. 51.
- ⁶² Rosemarie Sansone, interview with Karla Armenoff (1998).
- ⁶³ Alan Lupo, "A New-Fangled Old-Time Group," *The Boston Globe*, Jan. 3, 1988.
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- ⁷² Viola Osgood, "Boston's New Voting District 7: A Community of Contrasts," *The Boston Globe*, July 25, 1983.
- ⁷³ Brian C. Mooney, "Bay State's Minority Representation Lagging," *The Boston Globe*, Oct. 15, 2002.
- ⁷⁴ Robert L. Turner, "The All-Male State," *The Boston Globe*, Nov. 15, 1984. And Boston was not alone in seeing very limited gains for women: they made inroads into just one additional city (holding seats on 29 of the 39 cities in the Commonwealth). In cities such as New Bedford and Newton, boards had high losses; New Bedford lost two of its four women board members and Newton lost two of its seven women. More than half (53 percent) of the cities and towns in the state had no women at all on their governing bodies. *The Boston Globe*, Dec. 3, 1983.
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- ⁷⁷ Maureen Feeney, interview with Kristen A. Petersen (2004).
- ⁷⁸ John Powers, "The Boston City Council Is No Joke," *The Boston Globe Magazine*, June 1, 1980.
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- 195 Thomas O'Connor, *Building a New Boston: Politics and Urban Renewal, 1950–1970* (1993), pp. 28 – 29.
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- 198 O'Connor, p. 192
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- 200 Diane Modica, interview with Karla Armenoff (1997).
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- 202 Darcy et al. (1994), p. 43.
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