

PROFILE OF RESISTANCE

Grace Lee Boggs

Chinese American civil rights activist, feminist, author, speaker

“You don't choose the times you live in, but you do choose who you want to be, and you do choose how you want to think.”

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FIGURE 1 COURTESY OF BLACK PERSPECTIVES

Background Information

Born: June 27, 1915; Died October 5, 2015

Grace Lee Boggs was born in Providence, Rhode Island, on June 27, 1915. Her parents were Chinese immigrants. As a child, her family moved to New York and settled into a primarily white neighborhood. Although her father owned two popular restaurants in the city, as Chinese Americans, the Boggs family dealt with anti-Asian bias. Undeterred, Grace finished high school early and entered Barnard College at 16. She earned a Ph.D. in philosophy from Bryn Mawr College

in 1940.ⁱ After graduation Grace moved to Illinois. Her community involvement began out of a necessity in human rights, housing.

Resistance

Despite earning several degrees, gender bias kept Grace at a low-paying job. She also faced limited housing options. Many apartment complexes and homeowners would not rent living spaces to Asians. In Chicago, she settled in the predominantly Black south side neighborhood. Grace resisted the unfair treatment by joining a local movement for tenants' rights. The multi-racial group protested for better housing conditions for its residents. Grace moved to Detroit in the 1950s and became editor of a newspaper that supported worker rights. She became a well-known ally in Black freedom movements throughout the city.ⁱⁱ Grace saw discrimination against Asians and African Americans as a deeply rooted public issue. Much of Boggs's work involved labor and civil rights, feminism, Black Power, Asian American rights, and the environment. During the 1960s, Grace was a coordinator for the all-Black Michigan Freedom Now party. The organization worked to ensure more black candidates got into political office. As a grassroots organizer, Grace maintained roles in the March for Freedom in Detroit and the Grassroots Leadership Conference.ⁱⁱⁱ In 1970, she co-founded the Asian Political Alliance in Detroit to protest the Vietnam War. She also founded food cooperatives and organized unemployed workers and fought against utility shut-offs to poor residents. In 1992, she co-founded Detroit Summer. The multi-racial organization promotes youth and local leaders to serve as changemakers.

Achievements

For her commitment to community and social action, the National Women's Hall of Fame, and Michigan Women's Hall of Fame inducted Grace Lee Boggs.^{iv} She holds honorary doctorates from the University of Michigan, and Wayne State University.^v San Francisco declared March 3, 2012, Grace Lee Boggs Day.

Essential Questions

1. How did bias impact Grace’s professional and private life?
2. In what ways did Grace show a commitment to changing the neighborhoods she lived in?
3. Although she was not an African American, Grace Lee Boggs was a supporter of many Black-led organizations. How can you support causes that may not directly affect you?
4. ***“You don’t choose the times you live in, but you do choose who you want to be, and you do choose how you want to think.”***
 - a. What does this quote mean to you?
 - b. Why is it important to choose to think for yourself?

ⁱ <https://radicaldiscipleship.net/2018/01/02/grace-lee-boggs/>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2015/06/27/417175523/grace-lee-boggs-activist-and-american-revolutionary-turns-100>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://exhibits.stanford.edu/riseup/feature/grace-lee-boggs>

^{iv} <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2015/06/30/100-years-action-celebrating-grace-lee-boggs>

^v <https://www.boggsschool.org/grace-and-jimmy>