

IN PROFILE

SENATOR
WYNONA M. LIPMAN

STEPHANIE R. SIMS

VOTE FOR PROGRESS



WYNONA

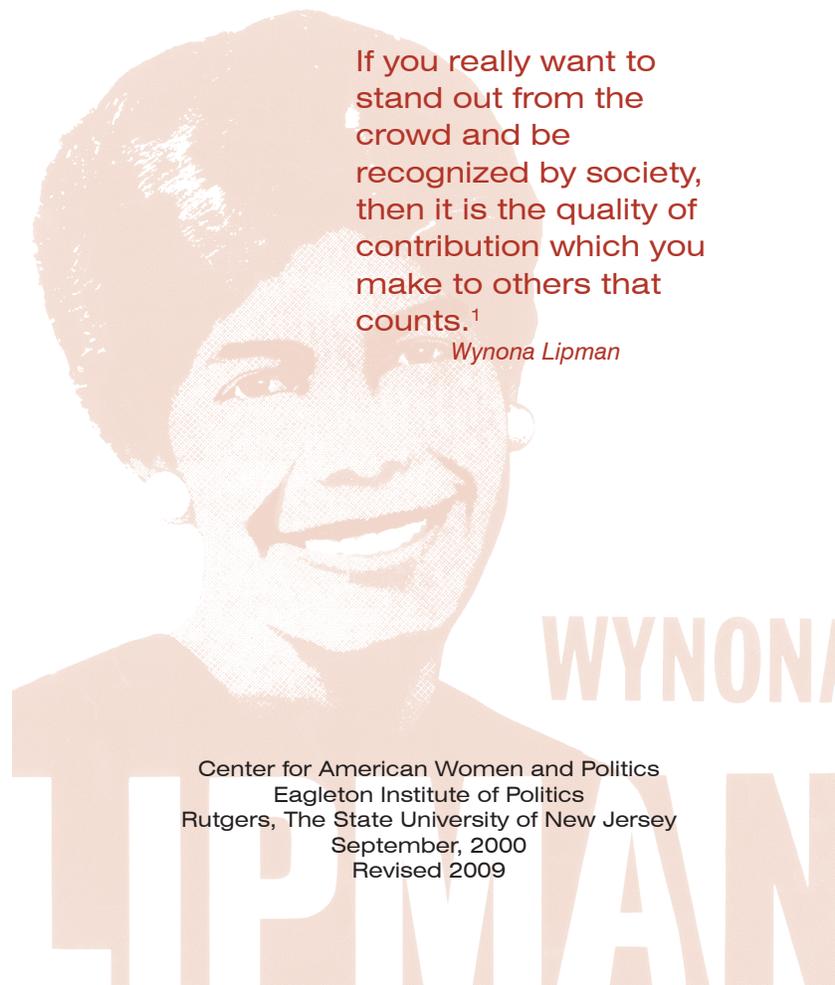
CAWP
Center for American Women and Politics

LIPMAN

IN PROFILE
S E N A T O R
WYNONA M. LIPMAN
STEPHANIE R. SIMS

If you really want to stand out from the crowd and be recognized by society, then it is the quality of contribution which you make to others that counts.¹

Wynona Lipman



Center for American Women and Politics
Eagleton Institute of Politics
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
September, 2000
Revised 2009

Senator Wynona Lipman Chair in Women's Political Leadership

In January 2000, New Jersey Governor Christine Todd Whitman signed legislation creating the Senator Wynona Lipman Chair in Women's Political Leadership at CAWP. Sponsored by the legislative leaders in both parties, the legislation passed without opposition. The Legislature has generously continued its support for the Lipman Chair, which is intended to celebrate Senator Lipman, remind people of her achievements, and encourage others to follow in the footsteps of this path-breaking African American woman leader. An advisory committee, including members of Senator Lipman's family, members of the New Jersey legislature, and former members of the Senator's staff, has worked with CAWP to make the chair a success. CAWP is grateful to the Governor, the legislature, and advisory committee members for their commitment to honoring Senator Lipman's memory and advancing women's leadership.

Consistent with the Senator's legacy, CAWP uses the generous support provided by the state legislature to:

- inspire a broad public audience by presenting public programs featuring practitioners, scholars or journalists who address topics related to Senator Lipman's values and priorities;
- educate college women from Essex County at CAWP's NEW Leadership™ New Jersey program about how and why they should become engaged in the political process and take on leadership roles;
- train Essex County women considering running for office or working on campaigns in New Jersey at CAWP's Ready to Run™ program.

Among the holders of the Lipman Chair have been:

Shirley Chisholm, Former Congresswoman (2000)

Alexis Herman, Former U.S. Secretary of Labor (2001-2002)

Patricia Williams, Professor (2002-2003)

Carol Moseley Braun, Former U.S. Ambassador (2004)

Donna Brazile, Political Commentator (2005)

Eleanor Holmes Norton, Congresswoman (2006)

Gwen Ifill, PBS Journalist (2007)

Michele Norris, NPR Journalist (2008)

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City of Newark

Senator Loretta Weinberg

Foreword

Since its creation in 1971, the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) has worked to illuminate the distinctive contributions of women officeholders. In addition to conducting the first national surveys of elected women in municipal, county, state, and federal offices, CAWP has traced women's paths to political power, documented their legislative priorities, and analyzed their impact on public policy.

Moving from such systematic studies to the particular, CAWP is delighted to present a political profile of Senator Wynona Lipman, the first African American woman to serve in the New Jersey Senate. Commissioned for the inauguration of the Senator Wynona Lipman Chair in Women's Political Leadership, this brief biography documents the extraordinary accomplishments of a woman who entered political life to create change. "To give voice to the voiceless" and to promote legislation designed to meet needs too long neglected, Wynona Lipman decided to move beyond community activism and run for elective office. During a political career that spanned three decades, she proved herself a talented legislator, securing passage of more than 145 bills championing the interests of people of color, women, inner-city residents, children and families, and small business owners.

Senator Lipman's political legacy is far richer than any enumeration of her legislative accomplishments can convey. She was one of the rare political candidates who won a state Senate seat by defeating an incumbent. She was a legislator whose political acumen enabled her to win reelection after her district was drastically altered by redistricting. She was a woman of color who often found herself the only African American and the only woman in a chamber of seasoned legislators; yet she built the voting coalitions necessary to fulfill her legislative agenda. She was a political sage who advised young people: "If you want to create change, don't just get to know important people, *become* important people." The Center for American Women and Politics is deeply honored to have been entrusted by the state legislature with the responsibility of preserving Senator Lipman's legacy and introducing future generations to her important achievements.

About the Center for American Women and Politics

The Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP), a unit of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, is nationally recognized as the leading source of scholarly research and current data about American women's political participation. Its mission is to promote greater knowledge and understanding about women's participation in politics and government and to enhance women's influence and leadership in public life. CAWP's education and outreach programs translate research findings into action, addressing women's underrepresentation in political leadership with effective, imaginative programs that serve a variety of audiences.

www.cawp.rutgers.edu

About the Eagleton Institute of Politics

The Eagleton Institute of Politics explores state and national politics through research, education, and public service, linking the study of politics with its day-to-day practice. The Institute focuses attention on how contemporary political systems work, how they change, and how they might work better. Eagleton's faculty, centers and programs specialize in the study of: state legislatures and the state executive; public opinion polling and survey research; women's political participation; minority and immigrant political behavior; campaigns, elections and political parties; ethics; youth civic engagement and political participation; climate change, social policy and politics; and New Jersey politics.

www.eagleton.rutgers.edu

Wynona quietly challenged the way people thought...about female politicians.²

Christy Davis

Born in LaGrange, Georgia, a once-sleepy town seventy miles southwest of Atlanta, Wynona Lipman did not seem destined for a life in politics. In fact, few if any Georgians or New Jerseyans would have believed in 1923, the year of her birth, that an African American woman would be elected to serve as a state senator. As late as 1930, Troup County, of which LaGrange was a part, was still dominated by tenancy and sharecropping.³ While no one may have foreseen electoral office in the life plan of Wynona Lipman, born Evelyn Wynona Moore, her family and community had high expectations for her - namely, that she would receive an education and in some way help her race.

Unlike most Blacks in Troup County, Evelyn Wynona Moore, the second child and first daughter of John Wesley Moore, Sr. and Annabelle Torian Moore, was born into a relatively privileged family. John Moore, Sr. and Annabelle Torian met and married while students at Clark College in Atlanta, Georgia.⁴ After leaving Atlanta, the Moores returned to Troup County, John's home, where he made his living as the owner of a pharmacy and a bricklayer. At a time when most African Americans in the South, male and female, eked out a living tilling land on plots or large farms owned by someone else, John Moore, Sr. was a landowner and entrepreneur.



The Moore Family
Left to right: Linda Moore Wallace (John Moore Sr.'s sister), Eloise, John Moore Sr., Wynona.
Seated: Donald

When asked about her childhood by the *New Jersey Reporter*, Wynona Lipman recalled that although her mother was educated to be a teacher, she did not work outside of the home. While the Moore children attended school in La Grange's public school system, their mother also taught them at home.⁵ Perhaps because of the influence of their parents, all of the Moore children went on to higher education and became professionals. The oldest son, John Jr., attended Talladega College in Alabama and Meharry Medical School in Tennessee and eventually practiced medicine in Detroit. The younger sister, Eloise, also attended Talladega and became a teacher. The youngest brother, Donald, matriculated at Morehouse College and later

Acknowledgements

It is no exaggeration to say that without the continuing assistance of Kathleen Crotty, this project would not have been possible. Special thanks are due her for all of her many contributions, but particularly for providing such generous access to Senator Lipman's papers. I would also like to thank Karyne Lipman, Matthew Lipman, Saundra DeGeneste, and Christy Davis for sharing their memories of Senator Lipman with me. Thanks also to Tiffany Gill, Kathy Kleeman, Janice Mereba, Aminah Pilgram, Charles Wright, Debbie Walsh, and Mary Hawkesworth for their helpful comments on the manuscript.

S. R. S.

Meharry Medical School and practiced medicine in Durham, North Carolina.

Following in the footsteps of her older brother, Wynona went to Talladega College after finishing high school at the age of sixteen. More than forty years later, Senator Lipman remembered how her experience at Talladega helped prepare her for a life as a public servant. Having attended what was in the 1930s and '40s one of the finest African American colleges, Lipman reflected on some of the benefits of Black college life:

*I was able to meet other students on a level playing field. We had a common set of cultural ideals and some of the best black and white minds in the country for our teachers. Most of all, we made no attempt to evaluate each other by skin color. Talladega College tried to instill a certain mindset in its students, promote a certain ego confidence among its students.*⁶

The education that Lipman received, both at home and at Talladega, helped to make her a lifelong learner and instilled in her a desire to serve others. In 1940, at a time when fewer than two thousand African Americans in the state of Georgia received high school diplomas, Wynona Lipman was a college graduate who sought to extend her education beyond the attainment of a bachelor's degree.⁷

A French major while at Talladega, Lipman decided to pursue graduate studies in French at Atlanta University. After completing her master's degree, she accepted a job teaching French at Morehouse College, an all-male, African American institution. Morehouse was and continues to be widely known for training Black male leaders, as well as for the commitment of its instructors who, at the time of her tenure, were mostly male.⁸ She flourished while at Morehouse, serving as a tutor to Martin Luther King, Jr. and subsequently receiving a Rockefeller grant that enabled her to pursue her Ph.D. at Columbia University. While a student at Columbia, she received a Fulbright Fellowship to study at the Sorbonne in Paris.

Lipman's two years in Paris (1950 and '51) were marked by both excitement and hardship. On her way to study at the Sorbonne, she met another young Columbia University graduate student who was also going abroad to do research for his dissertation. Matthew Lipman, a New Jersey native and a former serviceman pursuing a Ph.D. in philosophy, was traveling to France on the same ship as Wynona. He later remembered their years in Paris as intellectually and socially stimulating. Wynona was living in a house for American students and shared friendships as well as living

space with the well-known singers Leontyne Price and Mattie Wilda Dobbs.

Unfortunately, while in Paris, Wynona also experienced great loss. Her father died Christmas day of 1951, and she briefly returned home to bid him goodbye. Following John Moore, Sr.'s death, Wynona Moore returned to Paris and married Matthew Lipman in a small civil service. Wynona Moore had crossed not only the ocean to marry Matthew Lipman, but racial and religious divides as well. At the time of Wynona's marriage to Matthew, who was both white and Jewish, laws against interracial marriage and miscegenation were still in effect in her home state of Georgia as well as in fifteen other states. The couple could not have lived legally in Georgia until 1967, when the Supreme Court deemed anti-miscegenation and interracial marriage laws unconstitutional.⁹

When their fellowships in Paris ended, the couple returned stateside and, although now married, lived apart. Wynona returned to her position as a French professor at Morehouse, and Matthew, who had no desire to move away from New York City after attending school there, returned to look for a job. The two lived separately for three years. When Matthew Lipman found permanent work teaching at Columbia, Wynona joined him to teach at Elizabeth Irwin High School, a private school in Greenwich Village.¹⁰

Although Matthew Lipman described himself as a New Yorker at heart, Wynona was not. After living in the Village for a few years, she wanted to move out of the city. The couple chose Montclair, New Jersey, with its quaint downtown and quiet, tree-lined streets, as a place to settle. As would become her trademark in politics, Lipman worked relentlessly as a teacher at Elizabeth Irwin until health problems forced her to stop teaching temporarily.

Soon after the couple's move to Montclair, Wynona Lipman began looking for a professorship or teaching position at the secondary level. Although she had received her Ph.D. in French literature in 1952, she was unable to find employment at a college or university or even a position as a French teacher in a secondary school. Marking the racial politics of the period, Matthew Lipman recounted that prospective employers suggested that without an authentic French accent, she was "trying to swim upstream."¹¹

Lipman's lack of an authentic French accent was not the only factor working against her. In the late 1950s and early '60s, African American faculty at predominantly white colleges and universities were a rarity. Aside from the occasional appointment as a visiting professor, even the

most well known and widely published Black scholars were unable to find positions in white institutions. Black professors at white colleges did not become more than an anomaly until students of color began demanding a more diverse faculty in the late 1960s and early '70s.¹² Lipman's distance from the



Matthew and Wynona Lipman with Karyne (on Matthew's lap) and Will

Black colleges of the South that hired African American scholars, coupled with racial discrimination in northern universities, precluded her finding a full-time professorship in the 1950s.

Later, after the birth of her children, Karyne and William, Lipman worked part-time as a teacher at Montclair High School. For a number of years, the future

state senator devoted her energy to raising her children while working part time as a teacher at Montclair High School in New Jersey.

While Lipman was engaged in the full-time responsibility of raising children, she never lost her desire to help others. She began to pursue another avenue, in addition to teaching, through which she might help people, participating in politics at the grassroots level. After moving from Greenwich Village to Montclair, she got involved with the PTA and NAACP, becoming one of the town's first African American PTA presidents.¹³ Lipman recounted that she got involved in politics because, when she wanted action from the town fathers in Montclair, she was told that she had to "know important people."¹⁴ She decided that in order to create change, she should "become important people." Lipman came to the attention of the Democratic party in Montclair through her activities with the PTA. When the city began dumping dirty snow on a school playground in Montclair, Lipman, along with other parents, complained to the town's leaders. When nothing was done, they formed a human "mother" chain around the playground to prevent more snow from being dumped. Lipman eventually served as spokesperson for the group because she found that "most people are afraid to express themselves or lack confidence to speak out."¹⁵

Not long after the playground incident, at the urging of local Democratic party leaders, Lipman became a Democratic town chairperson. Interestingly, Matthew Lipman recalled that prior to the incident between Wynona Lipman and the Department of Street Cleaning, she had no thoughts of

entering politics.¹⁶ Nevertheless, once she entered politics, she never looked back. After working very hard, first as a Democratic committeeperson and later as a town chairman, she ran for Essex County freeholder in 1968 and won.

New Jersey politics has historically been dominated by county party politics. Freeholders, a title unique to the state of New Jersey, govern counties.¹⁷ After her second year as a freeholder, Lipman was chosen to be director of the Essex County Freeholder Board. She was not afraid to take a stand on important issues such as board organization, judicial activities, or prison reform. In fact, Lipman and others recounted that she was "kicked upstairs" to the Senate because the local Democratic party thought she would make less trouble there.¹⁸ Yet despite the local Democratic party's decision to try to "send her to Trenton," her election to the Senate did not come easily. In fact, on the day of the election, it looked as though she had lost. Matthew Lipman remembered election night in November of 1971:

...she worked like a dog... and on election night, [with] the initial results they posted... she lost. She didn't say anything, she just waited and they changed the figures and she won, she squeaked in.¹⁹

And squeak in she did, winning the election by only 63 votes.²⁰ In 1971, just a year shy of her fiftieth birthday, Wynona Lipman embarked on a new career path when she became New Jersey's first Black woman state senator.

Lipman entered New Jersey's Senate with high hopes despite the fact that her election was being challenged by the incumbent whom she had narrowly defeated. While her election was being challenged, New Jersey was undergoing a great deal of turmoil as it struggled to find a redistricting plan that would comply with the U.S. Supreme Court decision mandating "one man, one vote." District lines within the state were re-drawn to eliminate Lipman's district. To run for a seat in the 29th district at the next election, Lipman had to move from Montclair, where she had made her home for close to two decades, to Newark.

The Newark that Lipman found in 1973 was a far cry from the suburb of Montclair that she had left. It was neither a suburb nor yet the "Renaissance City." Newark was still trying to devise a recovery strategy after the 1967 riots that had devastated much of the city. In addition to trying to recover from the riots, the city was a center for new forms of political activity. In 1970, African Americans and Puerto Ricans, who constituted almost 65% of Newark's population, helped Kenneth Gibson become the city's first Black mayor. Gibson ran on the Black and Puerto Rican

Political Convention's "Community Choice" slate.²¹ Newark's politicians did not exactly welcome a suburban college professor moving in to take over one of their Senate seats. Sharpe James, the present mayor of Newark, recalled that many people viewed Lipman as a carpetbagger who had moved to Newark only to save her Senate seat.²² Despite the challenges, Lipman saw in Newark a great deal of promise. She acknowledged the negatives, including the fact that within a year of moving to the city she had been



State Senator
Wynona Lipman

"knocked down three times by youthful would-be muggers," but refused to be swayed by naysayers, remaining in Newark for the rest of her long political career.²³

Once Senator Lipman made her move to Newark and won her second election representing the 29th district, she was there to stay. She immediately took on and

maintained the schedule of a very active state senator. Her date book from 1972, the first year she spent in Trenton, reveals just how seriously she took her job. Her day often began when her children left for school and ended around 11:00 p.m. As one of three women in the Senate and the only African American woman, she was bombarded with speaking requests on topics ranging from welfare to the potential political power of New Jersey women. Judging from her calendar, she rarely turned down a request.²⁴

Senator Lipman did not make her mark only by fulfilling speaking engagements or attending receptions and bill-passing celebrations. She made her most significant mark through the legislation she passed and with the work she did with community groups. Upon her election to the Senate, Lipman had a clear agenda for the changes she hoped to make. Understanding the importance of economics to her constituents, during her first term she requested and was put on the Appropriations Committee. She requested this appointment because, she explained, "it seemed to me... this would be the place to learn about how we manage the money the state gets... Money is the problem of the inner city."²⁵ The senator served on the Appropriations Committee throughout her career. Senator Lipman did important work as a part of the Appropriations Committee, but was best known for her ability to combine economic and social issues through her work on behalf of small businesses, minorities, women, children, and families. After a referendum proposing a state Equal Rights Amendment failed in New Jersey, an assemblywoman sponsored a bill that would establish a

study of sex discrimination in the statutes. When the bill was defeated in the Assembly, Lipman worked to have it reintroduced in the Senate and to ensure its passage. In July 1978, the legislation to create the Commission on Sex Discrimination in the Statutes was signed into law by Governor Brendan Byrne. Lipman served as chair of the Commission, charged with reviewing and proposing methods aimed at modernizing the statutes of New Jersey that contained sex-based classifications. Under Lipman's leadership, the Commission not only uncovered and detailed discrimination in New Jersey's laws, but also helped initiate legislation to begin eliminating inequity.

The Commission on Sex Discrimination in the Statutes took on a number of wide-ranging issues including employment discrimination, marriage laws, child support, the rights of children, sexual assault and domestic violence. One of the most important of the many laws sponsored by Senator Lipman was the 1981 Domestic Violence Act. It was especially significant to New Jersey since it brought the state in line with the 47 other states that had already implemented such legislation. Among other things, the law mandated training on domestic violence for all law enforcement officers, included harassment as a form of domestic violence, and required the state to begin keeping statistical records of incidents of domestic violence in the state.²⁶ Kathleen Crotty, chief of staff for the New Jersey Senate Democrats, recalled that after the bill's passage in 1981, state police were slow to begin collecting data on domestic violence since they were reluctant to view domestic violence as a "crime." Senator Lipman, well known among Democratic party staffers for following up on her legislation, arranged for a meeting with an official from the state police to find why police were not following through on the portion of the law that required them to compile statistics. Admiring the Senator's tenacity, Crotty recollected that at the meeting, Lipman maintained her normal demure deportment, but stared the officer down, insisting that the letter of the law be followed. Once the state police began gathering statistics on domestic violence, they found that it was a useful way both to assess the problem and to identify solutions to aid its victims. Senator Lipman sponsored a number of other bills throughout her time in the Senate that amended the initial Domestic Violence Act, including the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act of 1990 that afforded protection to the elderly and disabled as possible victims of domestic violence.

As evidenced by the numerous service awards she received from groups as varied as the New Jersey Builders Association, New Jersey Coalition of Battered Women, and Share NJ (to name a few), Lipman viewed her constituency very broadly. Her former legislative aide, Christy Davis,

recalled that Lipman was less concerned about big business and instead retained “her focus on those with the least access to the political system.” Lipman expressed at many different times and in many different ways her desire to represent the voiceless, not just of Newark, but also of the entire state. In addition to her monumental work on domestic violence, she sponsored a number of bills designed to benefit and safeguard the rights and lives of children. For instance, in 1994, Lipman fought to ensure that “a child’s life [would not] be left up to a zip code” by pushing for legislation that would force landlords in urban areas to put up window guards in apartment buildings.²⁷

Christy Davis characterized her former boss and mentor as someone who always saw the big picture. Lipman’s body of legislation reveals that she believed that the law could act as more than a band-aid for society’s ills if it was implemented and enforced correctly. Much of her legislation dealt with prevention - prevention of domestic violence, licensing of child care centers, sexual assault prevention programs at public schools, and mentoring programs for at-risk youth. Lipman’s legislative record includes passage of more than 145 laws that she had introduced to promote the interests of New Jersey’s women, youth, families, and the poor. Lipman played a significant role, not only in building an infrastructure that would aid women, children, and families in New Jersey, but in addressing the economic issues facing its residents.

After divorcing in 1974, Lipman began doing triple duty as a single mother of two, politician, and educator. Like most other state senators, Lipman had a second career. She used her political expertise and educational background to attain a position at Essex County College in 1974, teaching in the business education and political science departments. There she tied her legislative interests in social services, women, and children to economic realities through her work with small businesses.

Almost as important as her teaching and legislative work were the Saturday Seminar classes that Lipman developed at the college. Held once a month, the seminars helped minorities and women who were small business owners to connect with New Jersey and New York state agencies as well as major contractors. The seminars brought Lipman’s work full circle, linking her work in the Senate to her interest in making life better for those without social, political, and economic connections. In addition to bringing small business owners into contact with government officials and contractors whom they otherwise would not have met, the Saturday Seminars taught the entrepreneurs how to go after and keep major contracts.

Even after the devastating loss of her son William to cancer in 1984, Lipman continued to meet the needs of her constituents while introducing legislation in Trenton. She also strengthened her commitment to the arts, in which her son had been very interested, contributing money in his name to Newark’s School for the Arts.

Although her family tried to convince her to consider retiring from politics after her last election win, Lipman had no plans to leave the Senate. Even during the illness preceding her death, Lipman’s niece remembered that she always planned to return to her Senate seat in Trenton. Unfortunately, she was unable to fulfill this plan. Lipman died May 9, 1999 after a battle with cancer.

Wynona Lipman left an important legacy to the state of New Jersey. She came into politics just as the nation was beginning to slowly crack open the door to political participation for all Americans. Lipman came through that door and opened it wider for women and people of color who followed in her footsteps, as well as for those who are to come. In the words of Christy Davis, the significance of Wynona Lipman is that she “forced folks out of a box [and] thereby created opportunities for generations beyond that moment.”²⁸ Lipman changed the public perception of who could serve in politics and who could lead. Through her elective offices, Lipman helped African American and Latino youth, as well as girls of all colors, to view themselves as possible politicians. Indeed through her senatorial work as well as through her work with New Jersey small business owners and community groups, Lipman changed state laws, transformed customary practices, and broadened the horizons for those who knew her and for generations to come.

Endnotes

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- ² Interview with Christy Davis, August 22, 2000.
- ³ *The Atlas of Georgia* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia, 1986).
- ⁴ Interview with Sandra DeGeneste, July 19, 2000.
- ⁵ Alice Chasan, "The Iron Magnolia," *The New Jersey Reporter* (July-August 1988): 16.
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- ⁷ For information on the history of Black education, see James Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1988), 236.
- ⁸ Addie Butler, *The Distinctive Black College: Talladega, Tuskegee, and Morehouse* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1977).
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- ¹⁰ Interview with Matthew Lipman, July 17, 2000. Tape in author's possession.
- ¹¹ Interview with Matthew Lipman.
- ¹² Walter Allen, Edgar Epps, and Nesha Haniff, eds. *College in Black and White* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991), 178-181.
- ¹³ Joan Babbage, "'So much to do': Dr. Lipman makes history," *Star Ledger* (December 30, 1973) and Adrian Heffern, "Women Make Their Mark in Trenton," *Asbury Park Press* (February 20, 1972): B1.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Interview with Matthew Lipman. See also Lawrence Hall, "The political arena suits Sen. Lipman." *Star Ledger* (July 9, 1972), 3.
- ¹⁶ Interview with Matthew Lipman.
- ¹⁷ Barbara Salmore and Stephen Salmore, *New Jersey Politics and Government*, 2nd ed. (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 213.
- ¹⁸ Alice Chasan, "Iron Magnolia," 16 and interview with Matthew Lipman.
- ¹⁹ Interview with Matthew Lipman.
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- ²² NJN Television, "Another View," Show 1321, March 28, 2000.
- ²³ Babbage, *ibid.*
- ²⁴ Lipman Papers, Box 1.
- ²⁵ Linda Lamendola, "Mrs. Lipman's glad to be on appropriations panel," *Star Ledger* (January 12, 1972).
- ²⁶ Memo, Dantzler to Crotty, Wynona Lipman Papers, Box 4.
- ²⁷ Interview with Christy Davis.
- ²⁸ Ibid.

Center for American Women and Politics
Eagleton Institute of Politics
191 Ryders Lane
New Brunswick, NJ 08901
(732) 932-9384
www.cawp.rutgers.edu

