Twentieth Century Frontierswoman

A Rhetorical Biography of Almena Davis Lomax, Journalist

Chandra Snell Clark

This rhetorical biography illustrates the manner in which African American woman newspaper publisher and journalist Almena Davis Lomax sought to persuade her readers of her civil rights vision—through her *Los Angeles Tribune* editorials, columns, and other writings—from the 1940s through the mid-1970s, a period that witnessed phenomenal change in the area of civil rights for African Americans and other oppressed groups in the United States.

While African American women journalists' contributions to the United States' long civil rights struggle via their writings and speeches—particularly those of the late nineteenth, early twentieth century and late twentieth century—have received greater attention in recent years, there is yet much to glean from the Black women journalists who built upon the path set by journalist-activist foremothers such as Mara W. Stewart, Mary Ann Shadd Cary, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Anna Julia Cooper and others—African American women journalists of the mid-twentieth century. This project contributes to the larger discourse on race, rhetoric and media by recovering the work of a little-known African American newspaper publisher and journalist of this era, thus adding to the body of knowledge concerning an often-overlooked group for not only journalism, media, communication, history, African American studies and women's studies scholars, but also for any reader with an interest in these areas.

Chandra Snell Clark is Associate Professor of Speech at Florida A&M University in Tallahassee. A former journalist and public affairs specialist, she earned her Ph.D. in communication from Florida State University. Her work has appeared in *Political Pioneer of the Press: Ida B. Wells-Barnett and Her Transnational Crusade for Social Justice; The Griot: The Journal of African American Studies; American Journalism;* and other publications. She has performed her original, award-winning dramatic monologue, "Through Voice and Pen: Ida B. Wells-Barnett and the First Amendment," at colleges, festivals, and conferences throughout the country.

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Studies in Communication, Culture, Race, and Religion

Cover image: Almena at work, circa 1940s. Reproduced courtesy of the Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, and the Lomax family.

ADVANCE PRAISE FOR

Twentieth Century Frontierswoman

"In *Twentieth Century Frontierswoman: A Rhetorical Biography of Almena Davis Lomax* Chandra Snell Clark recovers a lesser-known, but incredibly significant voice of the twentieth-century freedom struggle from the footnotes of U.S. history and in so doing contributes to the persistent intervention of the 'great men paradigm.' Embracing the 'passionate attachments' of an 'Afrafeminist lens,' Clark illuminates how Lomax utilized 'personal journalism' in her *Los Angeles Tribune* editorials and columns to advocate for human rights in a similar vein as had her predecessors Ida B. Wells-Barnett and Mary Ann Shadd-Cary and in so doing served as a cultural interpreter and spiritual guide for her generation and beyond. This monograph should be on the reading list of anyone interested in the long history of U.S. freedom struggle and to those committed to the ongoing global social justice crusade."

—Lori Amber Roessner, Professor and Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, School of Journalism and Electronic Media, University of Tennessee Knoxville; Co-editor, *Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Political Pioneer of the Press: Her Voice, Her Pen, and Her Transnational Crusade for Social Justice,* and Author, *Inventing Baseball Heroes: Ty Cobb, Christy Mathewson and the Sporting Press in America*

"The remarkable life of Almena Davis Lomax [1915–2011] is beckoned into the light in *Twentieth Century Frontierswoman* by Chandra Snell Clark. A child at the start of the Great Black Migration, Almena moves west and then as a young adult she hones her journalism craft at Charlotta Bass' *California Eagle*. Almena Davis soon created the *Los Angeles Tribune*, a brassy Black weekly that was published from 1941 to 1960. As Almena Davis Lomax, her political views evolved, and were contradictory too, which is OK because her story and contributions to American journalism history deserve to be known."

—Wayne Dawkins, Chair, Department of Multimedia Journalism, and Professor of Professional Practice, Morgan State University, School of Global Journalism and Communication; Author of *Black Journalists: The NABJ Story* and *City Son: Andrew W. Cooper's Impact on Modern-Day Brooklyn*

"Chandra Snell Clark's book, *Twentieth Century Frontierswoman: A Rhetorical Biography of Almena Davis Lomax, Journalist* is recommended reading for those interested in pioneers in journalism, Black history and gender studies. Pick up the book and you'll expand your knowledge about diversity and justice."

—Dorothy Bland, Professor, Mayborn School of Journalism, University of North Texas

"Chandra Snell Clark's meticulously researched and gracefully written rhetorical biography about the courageous Almena Davis Lomax, makes a major contribution to journalism, Black and media history, society, and conversations about race. By providing critical information,

analysis, and insights into the career and work of this largely unheralded publisher and editor of the *Los Angeles Tribune*, Clark elevates and highlights that Lomax, much like the brave and tenacious Black women pioneering journalists who were her predecessors, challenged the status quo and used her weekly newspaper to advocate for, protest, and champion causes."

—Jinx Broussard, Bart R. Swanson Endowed Memorial Professor, Manship School of Mass Communication, Louisiana State University; Author, *African American Foreign Correspondents: A History* and *Giving a Voice to the Voiceless: Four Pioneering Black Women Journalists*

Twentieth Century Frontierswoman

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Andre E. Johnson
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Chandra Snell Clark

Twentieth Century Frontierswoman

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PETER LANG
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This publication has been peer reviewed.

This book is dedicated to my late father, E. Dean Snell, my mother, Mary M. Snell, my son, Corey Clark, and to my dear friends Dr. Gale Workman, Dr. Jacqueline McMillan, Dr. Gambhir Shrestha, and Dr. Titus Brown.

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PREFACE: "PASSIONATE ATTACHMENTS" AS CREATIVE MOTIVATION

It is essential for me as a researcher to identify my own standpoint and passions in undertaking this project, as they are its catalyst (Royster, 2000).

As an African American woman who has worked as a newspaper journalist, I am interested in other African American women of this professional and personal background. Particularly, I have long held an interest in those African American women journalists who have come before me, such as Ida B. Wells-Barnett. In fact, I was so interested in this particular journalist, even after leaving newspaper journalism in 1999, that I researched, wrote and performed an original dramatic monologue, "Through Voice and Pen: Ida B. Wells-Barnett and the First Amendment," as an entry in the 2003 Women in Communications Edith Wortman public speaking competition, placing second nationally. I initially planned on Wells-Barnett as a dissertation topic, but later discarded it when no one seemed particularly excited about it—I wanted people to be interested in my topic, and it seemed that, although those who had heard of Wells-Barnett respected her accomplishments, she did not seem to arouse curiosity. So, by a series of serendipitous and highly unlikely coincidences, I decided on the communication practices of African American women in the sacred harp/shape note singing tradition as my topic. However, as time went by, I found my enthusiasm for this topic waning. I was told,

though, that this was a normal occurrence in the dissertation process, so it did not overly concern me. I continued working on completing my Ph.D. coursework persistently, although very slowly, while also working full time and managing family responsibilities.

Then one day during the spring of 2011, while at my hair salon, I found myself flipping through a recent issue of *Jet* magazine (still then in print), which I did not normally read, when I came across a short obituary of Almena Davis Lomax. My interest was piqued, as the obituary stated she had been publisher of the *Los Angeles Tribune*, a Black weekly, and the only Black woman newspaper publisher in that city I had heard of up until then was Charlotta A. Bass of the *California Eagle*. Out of curiosity, I Googled Lomax later that same day, pulling up other Lomax obituaries published in the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the Associated Press and other major media outlets. Clearly, Ms. Lomax had been no ordinary journalist, but why had I not heard of her before?

Shortly thereafter, I met with a research librarian at Florida State University, my doctoral institution. After several specialized academic searches, we came up with virtually nothing on Ms. Lomax. Intrigued as to why this obviously notable journalist had not been the subject of any major scholarly treatment, I dared to think that she might make an interesting doctoral research topic—one that might possibly even manage to sustain my interest for the duration of the project—unlike my current topic. I told the research librarian how much I would like to study Ms. Lomax right then, but that I already had a dissertation topic, which I had completed substantial work toward. She suggested that I might be able to work on the Lomax project if and when I needed a break from my dissertation. "Think of this project as an affair, and of your dissertation as a marriage," she advised. Although I deflated at the thought of my dissertation topic, I agreed that this was a sensible course of action.

Later, I happened to mention my find to my mother, who said, "I haven't seen you this excited about anything in a long time." I then allowed myself to seriously consider the possibility of changing my topic—I might have to complete additional course work, which would result in my taking even longer to finish the degree. But then I reasoned that it was already taking me a long time, anyway—what would a few more months, or maybe even another year, really matter, in the long run?

I talked with my then-dissertation chairman about it, and he said I probably would not need to complete any more coursework, but that I might want to

tweak my committee composition if I changed topics. He seemed as enthused about the possible change as I, which encouraged me to talk with a new potential chairman, who soon agreed to assume this role in my revised committee.

All this took place in May 2011. The next month, I happened to again be at the hair salon when the professor whom I had been considering asking to be my outside committee member just happened to be there as well. Although I already knew of her, of course, I did not know her personally. I took it as a sign—I mustered up my courage, knowing she did not know me from Adam, introduced myself, and asked if I could meet her for coffee to talk about my project. Shortly thereafter, she, too, agreed to serve on my new committee. Changing my dissertation topic has proven to be one of the best decisions I have ever made.

Examining Lomax's work is indeed a "passionate attachment" (Royster, p. 280) from my standpoint as an "embodied" African American woman writer and former journalist. From within Royster's Afrafeminist framework, I perceive my "commitment to social responsibility" as the goal of, while acknowledging any potential bias I may have as the researcher, revealing my subject on her own terms, allowing her work to speak for itself. I perceive that her work is valuable and should "count as knowledge." As Royster contends, the reader should rightly consider my "passionate attachments" and commitment to social responsibility as my creative motivation in pursuing this project.

Afrafeminist ideology may thus be a useful theoretical orientation from which to examine Lomax's work in that she fits the criteria of "elite" status Royster articulates: She was a professional journalist; the Lomaxes were well known and respected in the Los Angeles African American community—particularly because of their ownership of the Dunbar Hotel, which was owned by Lomax's father-in-law, Lucius Lomax, Sr.; Lomax was known for her outspokenness and fearlessness in promoting African American interests in her *Los Angeles Tribune* writings, as well as in her other civil rights activism; and, due to her family and personal positions, she had, perhaps, unusual access to Los Angeles's White power structure, as well as to the upper echelons of African American society, of which she was part. Finally, because she was not (initially) her family's sole means of financial support, she was able to devote the time she deemed necessary to disseminate her views regarding the advancement of African Americans via her writings and other forms of advocacy. Also, by disclosing my passionate attachments and commitment to social responsibility regarding this project, as suggested by Royster, I give the reader the information they need to properly assess this project.

Further, with Afrafeminist ideology, Royster suggests that:

> We can see how these women [African American women writers] with their unique voices, visions, experiences, and relationships have operated with agency and authority; defined their roles in public space; and participated in this space consistently over time with social and political consequence. Using this type of approach, with a group that by other lenses has been perceived as inconsequential, we have a provocative springboard from which to question what "public" means, what "advocacy" and "activism" mean, what rhetorical prowess means. (Royster, 2000, p. 284)

INTRODUCTION

> If somebody called me the N word, if someone didn't treat me right, I had a muck-racking, hell-raising journalist mother who would give them . . . I mean, they didn't do that. She is writing, all by herself, a 20-page tabloid weekly, the *Tribune*. That was a trouble-making paper. We fought against capital punishment. Throughout the '50s, when people were blacklisted, and couldn't write for some newspapers, they came to write for us. When the bus boycott hit, she went to Montgomery, and that changed her life. She decided, "This is the story of my life. I'm going to convince my husband and family to move south." (Greenfield-Sanders, Michael Lomax interview, *The Black List,* Volume 3, HBO, 2009)

While African American women journalists' contributions to America's long civil rights struggle via their writings and speeches, particularly those of the nineteenth century, early twentieth century, and late twentieth century, have received greater attention in recent years (Bay, 2010; Broussard, 2002, 2004, 2006; Davis, 2012; Gaines, 1994; Giddings, 2009; Gilliam, 2019; Guy-Sheftall, 1995; Hunter-Gault, 1992, 2012; Lloyd, 2020; Logan, 1995, 1999; Nelson, 1997, 1993; Reynolds, 1998; Rhodes, 1992, 1998; Richardson, 1987; Royster, 1997, 2000; Schecter, 2001; Streitmatter, 1994; Roessner and Rightler-McDaniels, 2018; Walker, 1992), there is yet much to glean from other Black women journalists who also built upon the path set by journalist-activist foremothers such as Maria W. Stewart, Mary Ann Shadd Cary, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Anna Julia

Cooper, and others—African American women newspaper publishers/editors of the mid-twentieth century. Marzolf (1977), in *Up from the Footnote: A History of Women Journalists*, states:

> Black women journalists could often be found in the 1950's and 1960's as society and religion reporters on the black weekly newspapers in the nation's urban areas and on religious and children's publications. Few were on the established press and few were national or foreign correspondents. (Marzolf, 1977, p. 90)

Marzolf's contention here is certainly true. Black women newspaper publishers/editors were relatively rare during this period, and fewer works have been devoted to them. Previously, Afro American women newspaper publishers/editors of the nineteenth century, such as Mary Ann Shadd Cary and Ida B. Wells-Barnett, had likely experienced more independence and freedom in disseminating their viewpoints regarding full citizenship for African Americans than those not owning their own newspapers; the same may be assumed of their journalistic descendants during the mid-twentieth century. Shadd Cary advocated for the abolition of slavery and Black emigration to Canada in the *Provincial Freeman* (Rhodes, 1992, 1998); and Wells-Barnett called for the elimination of lynching in the *Memphis Free Speech* (Bay, 2009; Duster, 1970; Giddings, 2008; Royster, 1997; Schecter, 2001). This struggle for full citizenship for Black Americans continued well into the twentieth century and flowered during the modern Civil Rights Movement. Like those before them, later Black women newspaper owners and journalists also expressed their views within the pages of their publications. Thus, the civil rights rhetoric of African American women newspaper publishers/editors of the 1940s and 1950s may warrant further illumination.

Almena Davis Lomax (1915–2011)—African American newspaper publisher, editor, writer, wife, mother, provocateur, and activist—had a journalism career which encompassed many of the major historical events of the twentieth century: The Great Migration, World War II, and the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, among others. The reflowering of rhetorical biography in recent years has witnessed a plethora of significant contributions, many of them centering the voices of those not traditionally studied under the older "great men" paradigm. Among these works are Richardson (1987); Fitch and Mandziuk (1997); Walker (1992); Logan (1995, 1999); Peterson (1995); a 1996 special issue of the *Journal of Black Studies* highlighting the rhetoric of women of the Civil Rights Movement; Royster (1997); Jenson and Hammerback (2000); DeLaure (2008); Marshall and Mayhead (2008); Brooks (2011); and

Houck and Brooks (2011). An examination of Lomax's stance, via a rhetorical biography, regarding the status and advancement of African Americans, and other issues, as expressed in her writings, may help contribute to the relatively few rhetorical and biographical works on African American women journalists of the World War II and Civil Rights eras. The purpose of this project is to identify how Almena Davis Lomax attempted to persuade her *Los Angeles Tribune* readers to accept her vision of a better United States through her editorials. With this project, I propose to build upon the rhetorical and civil rights legacies of Afro American women journalists of the nineteenth century by recovering and analyzing the work of one of their lesser-known journalistic descendants, one who, through her writings and actions, endeavored to hold America accountable to its ideals during a pivotal historical moment.

Operational Definitions

In this project, I use the terms "Black," Afro American, and "African American" interchangeably, in rough accordance with the terms most used to refer to people of African descent during the time period under discussion. Although scholars differ as to what years constitute the Civil Rights era, in this project, I broadly define it as the years from 1954—the year of Brown vs. Board of Education—through 1975—the end of the Vietnam War—a period which included not only Black Americans' struggle for full equality, but also that of Native Americans, Asian Americans, Latino Americans, White women, college students, LGBTQ people, and other historically marginalized groups. Also, in this project, I define "mid-twentieth century" as the decades of the 1940s through the 1960s, which largely correspond with the Civil Rights era.

Almena Davis Lomax

Born to Southern parents in Galveston, Texas, in 1915, Hallie Almena Davis emigrated with her family from Texas to Chicago at age 2 (CBS Los Angeles, April 1, 2011). It was in Chicago that her interest in journalism ignited, when the basement of the Davis home was used as a distribution center for a White paper, the *Evening American;* Lomax and her brother, Clifford, helped deliver that paper, and subsequently the Black-owned *Chicago Defender* (Mandel, 2017, p. 62). After her father's commitment to a mental institution while she was still a child, the Davis family, minus its head, relocated once more

to Los Angeles during the 1920s, where Davis graduated from Jordan High School in 1933, and where she edited the school newspaper (California State University—Fullerton Oral History, 1966, Tape 1). While Davis was still high school, the school's coach was instrumental in Davis landing a $10 per month gig as a league correspondent with the *Los Angeles Times*, calling in sports scores to the paper (Mandel, 2017, p. 65). Following graduation, Davis attended Los Angeles City College, where she studied English, but also took journalism classes and became enamored with the field (Fullerton Oral History, 1966, Tape 1). Leaving college before graduating, Davis applied for jobs at several area White dailies and was turned down, yet White classmates were hired (Tape 1). A friend then introduced her to Charlotta A. Bass, radical activist editor of the black weekly *California Eagle*. Davis began working at the paper in 1938 (*L.A. Watts Times*, March 31, 2011). For $10 a week, "I flunkied," Davis said, learning the business by doing a variety of odd jobs for Bass, in addition to writing, proofreading, and selling ads and subscriptions (Tape 1). But, "I always intended to write" (Mandel, 2017, p. 66). Following her initial apprenticeship, Davis was promoted to reporter, a position she held until 1941 (p. 66). While a reporter, Davis, much as would her later contemporary Mildred Brown (discussed later), engaged in her own campaign of racial uplift, largely in response to the Southern Black migrants who were flocking to Los Angeles at the time:

> Her column, "Mena Muses," which consisted of contrived letters written in exaggerated southern black [sic] dialect, often followed by her response in flowery Standard English, conveyed her and the *Eagle's* hostility toward the arrival of black migrants to California in the Great Migration and a desire to protect Los Angeles from transforming into another South. (p. 66)

Though Davis and Bass initially held similar views, largely reflecting an African American middle-class ethos, they both came to later embrace a more pro-working-class stance; however, Davis soon began to chafe under the more conservative Bass, and, while still in her early 20s, would strike out on her own (p. 69). But, while still at the *Eagle*, Davis began hosting a show for Gold Furniture on radio station KTFJ as the station's first African American reporter (Tape 1). Though still longing to write, the extra income helped her to support her family, including helping pay for her sister, Gwendolyn's, college education (p. 70). The twice-weekly radio show grew in popularity, until Bass finally issued Davis an ultimatum to either quit the radio station or the *Eagle*; Davis chose to leave the *Eagle* (1966, Tape 1).

Following her *Eagle* stint, Davis, after turning down a position in advertising sales with another Black paper, the *Los Angeles Sentinel,* took a position with the religion-oriented *Inter-Faith Churchman* (p. 70). In July 1941, Davis purchased *The Interfaith Churchman*, a weekly newsletter, with $100 borrowed from her future father-in-law, prominent Los Angeles businessman and Dunbar Hotel owner Lucius Lomax, Sr. (Tape 1). Converting the paper from religious to general news, Davis renamed it the *Los Angeles Tribune* (Tape 2). She married co-publisher Lucius Lomax. Jr., and practiced what she calls "personal journalism," often causing controversy with readers and advertisers alike with her political views (Tape 2). Lomax notes, "The *Tribune* was a highly personal organ . . . the last of personal journalism around L. A." (Tape 1). The Lomaxes eventually had six children.

Lomax describes the 19 years that she and her husband published the *Tribune* as busy ones, during which they converted to a weekly newspaper that eventually became a 24-page, five-column tabloid. Although estimating that she did the work of four people, writing 33,000 words a week, Lomax says that making money was never her motivation (Tape 2). The *Tribune* owned its own printing press, and also printed other publications (Tape 2). Eschewing "objective" journalism in the advocacy tradition of the Black press, Lomax led two political campaigns; initiated boycotts against the movies *Porgy and Bess* and *Imitation of Life* for their portrayals of African Americans; supported clemency for African American death row prisoner Wesley Robert Wells; and was, herself, at times the subject of stories in her own newspaper (Hamm, 2000; *New York Times*, April 9, 2011). In 1946, she won the Wendell L. Willkie Award for African American Journalism, sponsored by the *Washington Post*, for a column debunking the myth of African American male sexual prowess, and was a delegate to the Democratic National Convention in 1952 (*New York Times*, April 9, 2011). At its peak, the paper, which featured political commentary, news, and reviews, had a circulation of 25,000 (Elaine Woo, *Los Angeles Times*, April 1, 2011). Counting Lomax as one of the "impish souls" gracing the editorial rooms of the African American press, writer Langston Hughes called her "the female Philip Wylie of Negro journalism" (Hughes, 1957).

An early proponent of what would now be called diversity, the paper employed several Japanese American writers in an attempt to forge stronger ties with the local Japanese community—among them were Hisaye Yamamoto and Wakako Yamauchi, who had both been in internment camps, and who both later achieved literary acclaim; in fact, the *Tribune* was the only Los

Angeles newspaper to officially oppose Executive Order 9066, thus formally defending the rights of Japanese Americans (G. Robinson, *Nichi Bei*, February 4, 2011).

Lomax became the first African American writer to be accredited by the Motion Picture Association and went on to arrange a deal with Stanley Mosk, a future California State Supreme Court justice and 1958 California gubernatorial candidate Edmund G. "Pat" Brown's campaign manager, to help deliver the liberal vote to Brown in exchange for increased minority representation in appointive state positions; a formal apology to the Japanese for their forced internment; a state Fair Employment Practices Commission; and a pardon for "red light bandit" Caryl Chessman. Gov. Brown delivered on all but the pardon; in 1960, Chessman was executed (Carolyn Jenkins, *Black Star News*, April 24, 2011). Lomax was also influential in the careers of Ralph Bunche and Tom Bradley, among others (*L.A. Watts Times*, March 31, 2011).

A visit to Montgomery, Alabama, in 1956 to cover the bus boycott would change her life. Having raised the money for the trip by soliciting *Tribune* subscribers, Lomax left her family in Los Angeles for a week and stayed with the family of Martin Luther King, Jr., while writing a profile of the civil rights leader for the *Tribune*. She wrote a series of articles about the boycott, as well as the King profile, "Mother's Day in Montgomery: Boycott Leader Serves His Congregation Toynbee, Langston Hughes, Emerson, and Jesus Christ, and Is Received in Complete Consanguinity" (*Los Angeles Tribune*, May 18, 1956). Returning to Los Angeles, Lomax was irrevocably changed—she had a fervent desire to return to the South permanently to better cover the movement. Lomax's husband did not agree with this idea, and they soon divorced; in 1960, the *Tribune* was also shut down (Michael Taylor, Pacific Media Workers Guild, April 8, 2011).

Lomax relocated with her children to Tuskegee, Alabama, near Montgomery, in 1961. While trying to re-establish her writing career, she was active in the civil rights movement, working with the freedom riders in nearby Montgomery by writing thank-you letters to donors, as well as press releases (Almena Lomax papers, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University Archives, Box 13, Item 41). However, soon becoming discouraged by the slow progress of her writing career and the region's impact on her children, Lomax moved the family back to Los Angeles after only six months (Almena Lomax Papers, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Box 13, Item 41). She stated, of the family's first Tuskegee stint, "When you all [her children] began to have a southern accent I thought . . . 'let's go'" (Almena Lomax Papers,

MARBL, Box 13, Item 41). Lomax also had become disillusioned by Southern racism, and the Civil Rights Movement's strategies of nonviolence (Mandel, 2017, p. 83). But she soon decided to give Tuskegee another try. Unable to get hired by the local newspapers, she established the *Tuskegee Tribune* in 1964 during her second Tuskegee sojourn, which later became, simply, *The Tribune*, modeled as a sort of literary magazine featuring Lomax's short stories, which other publishers were rejecting (Tape 2).

Lomax reflects on her initial move from California to Alabama:

> At night, lying on my cot, borrowed from Tuskegee Institute until our furniture arrives, I grope back to the beginning through a maze where each turn is like a room where the mind might settle and say, "Here, It began here." But it did not begin anywhere except at the beginning, and somehow it seems necessary to work it out, both for myself and for those who might be interested in the phenomenon of a twentieth-century frontierswoman, a Negro woman whose "roots are not in the South," taking her children by modern-day covered wagon overland 2,600 miles into the Deep South.
>
> But who is to say that my "roots are not of the South"?
>
> Who is to say that those roots where not stirred six years ago, when I alighted from a plane in a field . . . at the old Montgomery airport? (Lomax, "Journey to the Beginning," *The Nation*, March 25, 1961)

Unhappy with the local school system, Lomax left Tuskegee for the second time in 1965; however, she and her children had briefly lived in other cities such as Mobile and Eufaula, Alabama; Atlanta, Georgia; and Scarsdale, New York, during the early and mid-1960s (Almena Lomax Papers, MARBL, Box 13, Item 41). Lomax's freelance work appeared in *Crisis*, *Frontier*, *Harper's Magazine*, *The Nation*, and other publications during this period, and she also founded *The Lomax Poll*, which was syndicated in numerous Black newspapers during this time, and established her own political party.

Soon following her permanent return to California, the *San Francisco Chronicle* hired Lomax as a copy editor, thus resulting in her being the first Black person to work on its city desk; however, her real desire remained reporting and writing. Shortly after her hiring by the *Chronicle*, she moved to the *San Francisco Examiner* as a reporter, covering the Hearst kidnapping and other prominent stories of the late 1960s and early 1970s (*Los Angeles Sentinel*, April 7, 2011). During this time, Lomax unsuccessfully applied for positions with mainstream newspapers. Still active politically, she was appointed by California Governor Ronald Reagan to the State Coordinating Council of Higher Education. After numerous unsuccessful job applications, she sued

the *Los Angeles Times* for employment discrimination in the early 1970s; the company settled the suit in 1976.

Shedding further light on her racial outlook, Lomax stated, in echoes of Zora Neale Hurston's assertion of not being "tragically colored" (1928, 1979), "I have no complexes . . . [I] took it for granted" [black equality] (Tape 3).

Although Lomax retired from daily journalism in 1976, she remained a prolific writer throughout her life, amassing a plethora of letters to the editor and correspondence with several prominent elected officials, including Attorney General Robert Kennedy, California Governor Ronald Reagan, and Presidents Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard Nixon. Lomax died March 25, 2011 at age 95.

Reflections on Lomax and the Tribune

In an interview for the documentary *The Black Press: Soldiers Without Swords* (Nelson, 1999), pioneering Black journalist Edna McKenzie spoke of her time at the *Los Angeles Tribune*:

> I was a general assignment reporter, had to run all over Los Angeles and do all kinds of stories about music, about murders, about any kind of news . . . It was exciting. I had to come back and . . . the editor . . . Almena Lomax, was a very, very hard taskmaster . . . I worked all day . . . but I loved it. (McKenzie, 1999)

Notably, son Michael Lomax states that filmmaker Stanley Nelson wanted to interview his mother for the *Soldiers Without Swords* documentary, "But she was so contrary and difficult" (M. Lomax, personal correspondence, July 3, 2012).

Journalist Glenda Wina, who worked at the *Tribune* from 1959 to 1960 as a summer intern, and later as a part-time general assignment reporter and columnist, said of Lomax, "Almena was a wonderful teacher . . . I was being taught [to write] by doing it . . . I would write it up, and she would take out that blue pencil" (African Americans in Entertainment and Media Oral History Transcript, Glenda Wina interview, Tape 2, Oral History Collection, University Library, University of California at Los Angeles Center for Oral History Research, Department of Special Collections, 2005).

Leo Branton, Jr., a former Los Angeles civil rights and entertainment attorney widely noted for serving on the legal defense team of Angela Y. Davis and for helping defend Los Angeles Communists during the "Red Trial" of

1952, among other notable trials, became acquainted with Lomax through his civil rights work (*Los Angeles Examiner*, 1952, February 1; L. Branton, personal communication, March 13, 2013). He described Lomax, who he said gave him an award during the 1950s for his civil rights work, as "A great writer . . .. She printed everything" (Branton, 2013). Of Lomax's political views, Branton stated "She became quite reactionary and quite conservative" toward the end of her career (2013). "I don't know why . . .. She was mercurial. She changed her approach throughout her life" (2013). Interviewed by the *Los Angeles Times* upon her death, he said "She was a terrific writer . . . the only one of all the black [sic] newspapers at the time who really was fearless about exposing things as they were. She didn't soft-pedal anything" (E. Woo, *Los Angeles Times*, April 1, 2011).

Like Branton, Michael Lomax states that his mother's political views evolved throughout her life, moving from decidedly radical during the *Tribune's* early years to a more conservative stance at middle age (M. Lomax, personal correspondence, July 3, 2012). "In the '30s and '40s, mother was progressively left wing," with many Communist or Communist sympathizers as friends or associates (July 3, 2012). However, her outlook appeared to change during the late Civil Rights era. "The [Black] Panther period alienated her . . . I think she found the radical politics of the late '60s pretty hard to stomach," Michael Lomax notes. "She would castigate me for having a beard and looking like a Panther" (July 3, 2012). Also regarding Lomax's later political views, Mandel (2017) notes:

> Her positions on civil rights strategy, political participation, women's liberation, and social class distinctions form a counter-point to such better-known figures as Martin Luther King, Jr., and Charlotta Spears Bass. Those positions, and her perseverance in promoting them in print, broaden the historical understanding of the civil rights movement and other major issues of the twentieth century. (p. 61)

Of his mother's life and career, Michael Lomax further notes, "She was challenging as hell . . . She broke a lot of rules . . . as a parent, as a woman, as a journalist" (July 3, 2012). "She pissed off everybody in Los Angeles . . . She just told it the way she saw it" (July 3, 2012). Comparing her to conservative Black journalist George S. Schuyler, Michael Lomax states his mother was "full of contradictions . . . She was iconoclastic, satirical, ironic" (July 3, 2012).

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A RICH CONTEXT: THE BLACK PRESS, BLACK WOMEN JOURNALISTS, BLACK CALIFORNIANS, AND BLACK LOS ANGELENOS

The Black Press

Since I. Garland Penn's (1891) *The Afro-American Press and Its Editors*, the first published history of the Afro American press, this subject has captured scholarly interest. Pivotal early general works on this history include Detweiler's *The Negro Press in the United States* (1922); Gore and Gore's *Negro Journalism: An Essay on the History and Present Conditions of the Negro Press* (1922 and 2010); Gordon's *The Negro Press* (1928); Dann's *The Black Press, 1827–1890: The Quest for National Unity* (1971); La Brie's *Perspectives of the Black Press* (1974); Bullock's *The African-American Periodical Press, 1838–1909* (1981); Daniel's *Black Journals of the United States* (1982); and Senna's *The Black Press and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (1993). Recent years have witnessed a plethora of contributions in this area, including Wolseley's *The Black Press, U.S.A.* (1971), which had a second edition published in 1990; Hutton's *The Early Black Press in America: 1827–1860* (1993); Newman and Lapansky's *Pamphlets of Protest: An Anthology of Early African-American Protest Literature, 1790–1860* (2000); Suggs's histories of the Black press in the South (1983) and Midwest (1996); Vogel's *The Black Press: New Literary and Historical Essays* (2001); and Washburn's *The African American Press: Voices of Freedom* (2007).