



**DENVER LANDMARK PRESERVATION COMMISSION  
INDIVIDUAL STRUCTURE LANDMARK DESIGNATION  
APPLICATION**

04.08.2026

This form is for use in nominating individual structures and districts in the City and County of Denver. To qualify as a Landmark, a property must be at least 30 years old, retain its historic integrity and meet at least three significance criteria. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." When filling out this application, please refer to the Customer Guide for Individual Landmark Applications, available at [www.denvergov.org/landmark](http://www.denvergov.org/landmark). Questions about the application or designation process can be directed to Denver Landmark Preservation staff at [landmark@denvergov.org](mailto:landmark@denvergov.org) or (303) 865-2709.

**Property Address:** 2329 N GAYLORD ST DENVER CO 80205

The following are required for the application to be considered complete:

- Property Information
- Applicant Information and Signatures
- Criteria for Significance
- Statement of Significance
- Period of Significance
- Property Description
- Statement of Integrity
- Historic Context
- Bibliography
- Boundary Map
- Photographs
- Application Fee



## 1. Property Information

### Name of Property

Historic Name: The Honorables Wellington E. Webb and Wilma J. Webb House

Proposed Name: The Honorables Wellington E. Webb and Wilma J. Webb House

### Location

Address: 2329 N GAYLORD ST DENVER CO 80205

Legal Description: Lot 23 and the north half of Lot 22, except the rear eight feet to the City, Block 18, McCullough's Addition to Denver, City and County of Denver, State of Colorado.

### Resources:

For an individual property designation, please list the number contributing or non-contributing primary and accessory structures.

### Primary Structures

# Contributing	<u>1</u>
# Non-contributing	<u>0</u>

### Accessory Structures

# Contributing	<u>0</u>
# Non-contributing	<u>0</u>

### Contributing and Non-contributing Resources

The property proposed for designation contains a single structure, a brick Foursquare residence. There are no accessory structures.

### General Property Data

Date of construction: 1902

Architect (if known): Unknown

Builder (if known): Nils Andrew Isakson

Original Use: Domestic single dwelling

Current Use: Domestic single dwelling



## 2. Owner/Applicant Information

An application for designation may be submitted by:

- Owner(s) of the property or properties, or
- Member(s) of City Council, or
- Manager of Community Planning and Development, or
- Three residents of Denver, if they are not owners of the property or properties

### Owner Information

Name: Wellington & Wilma Webb

Address: 2329 N GAYLORD ST DENVER CO 80205

Phone: (303) 893-9322

Email: wew@webbgroupintl.com

### Primary Applicant (if not owner)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

### Prepared by

Name: Historic Denver, Inc. / History Colorado

Address: 1420 Ogden St. Ste. 202 Denver, CO 80218 / 1200 Broadway Denver, CO 80203

Phone: (303) 534-5288 / (720) 262-1042

Email: [jay@historicdenver.org](mailto:jay@historicdenver.org)



Owner Applicant:

I / We, the undersigned, acting as owner(s) of the property described in this application for landmark designation do, hereby, give my consent to the designation of this structure as a structure for preservation.

I understand that this designation transfers with the title of the property should the property be sold, or if legal or beneficial title is otherwise transferred.

Owner(s): Wellington Webb & Wilma Web      Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
(please print)

Owner(s) Signature(s): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

For individual designations, if the owner does not support the designation, the applicants must conduct outreach to the owner. Describe below the efforts to contact the owner to discuss designation and other possible preservation alternatives. Please provide dates and details of any communications or meetings with the property owner, or the property owner's representatives below.

Other Applicant(s):

Applicant Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
(please print)

Applicant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Applicant Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Applicant Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
(please print)

Applicant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Applicant Address: \_\_\_\_\_

### 3. Significance

#### Criteria for Significance

To qualify as a Landmark, a property must be at least 30 years old, retain its historic integrity and meet at least three significance criteria. Check the applicable criteria from the following list.

- A. It has a direct association with a significant historic event or with the historical development of the city, state, or nation;
- B. It has direct and substantial association with a recognized person or group of persons who had influence on society;
- C. It embodies the distinctive visible characteristics of an architectural style or type;
- D. It is a significant example of the work of a recognized architect or master builder;
- E. It contains elements of design, engineering, materials, craftsmanship, or artistic merit which represent a significant innovation or technical achievement;
- F. It represents an established and familiar feature of the neighborhood, community or contemporary city, due to its prominent location or physical characteristics;
- G. It promotes understanding and appreciation of the urban environment by means of distinctive physical characteristics or rarity;
- H. It represents an era of culture or heritage that allows an understanding of how the site was used by past generations;
- I. It is a physical attribute of a neighborhood, community, or the city that is a source of pride or cultural understanding;
- J. It is associated with social movements, institutions, or patterns of growth or change that contributed significantly to the culture of the neighborhood, community, city, state, or nation.

#### Statement of Significance

The Webb House is significant under **Criterion B** for its direct association with Wellington E. Webb and Wilma J. Webb, two influential leaders whose decades of public service shaped the political and civic life of Denver and the State of Colorado. The house served as their residence during pivotal years in their careers. Under **Criterion C**, the property is significant as a well-preserved example of a Foursquare residence with Classical Revival detailing that reflects early twentieth-century residential development in the Whittier neighborhood and the broader expansion of Northeast Denver. Under **Criterion J**, the property is significant for the role the residence played as a center of civic leadership. It reflects expanding African American political representation and increased access to homeownership in northeast Denver following earlier patterns of segregation and disinvestment.

## **Criterion B: Recognized Persons with Influence on Society**

The Wellington E. and Wilma J. Webb House at 2329 N. Gaylord Street is significant under Criterion B for its direct and substantial association with the Honorable Wellington E. Webb and the Honorable Wilma J. Webb, two individuals whose leadership significantly influenced the civic, political, and cultural development of Denver, the State of Colorado, and African American history in Colorado. Wellington E. and Wilma J. Webb purchased their home in 1971, a crucial time in their early political careers. In the decades that followed, the house remained an integral site for their political decision-making, elections, and the development of the work that would ultimately shape their long-term impact in Colorado public life.

From this residence, Wellington E. Webb advanced a distinguished career in public service that culminated in his election in 1991 as Denver's first African American mayor. His three terms as mayor marked a transformative period in the city's history and reflected the maturation of decades of civil rights advocacy and political organizing in northeast Denver. Prior to his mayoralty, Webb served in the Colorado House of Representatives and Colorado State Senate and held key leadership roles including Executive Director of the Colorado Department of Regulatory Agencies and Denver City Auditor. Together, these roles established him as one of Colorado's most influential public servants and positioned Denver as a national example of expanded political representation and coalition-based civic leadership.

Wilma J. Webb's career represents an equally significant legacy of public service and civil rights leadership at both the state and community levels. Serving six terms in the Colorado House of Representatives, she emerged as a major force in state politics whose legislative work was anchored in the advancement of civil rights, education, and cultural recognition. She championed the effort to establish a Colorado state holiday honoring Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., securing statewide recognition of King's legacy and helping institutionalize civil rights commemoration within Colorado's public life. Her influence extended beyond the legislature through her leadership as Chairperson of the Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday Commission, where she helped create Denver's annual "Marade"—a combined march and parade that transformed the city's commemoration of King's legacy into a lasting civic tradition that blends celebration with activism and community engagement.

Both separately and together, Wellington and Wilma Webb—described as the "kids from Williams Street"—rose from northeast Denver to positions of statewide and national civic influence, blending pragmatism with moral purpose in ways that reshaped Colorado's political leadership. Their partnership in public service extended beyond elected office into efforts to preserve and promote African American history and cultural memory in Denver. Through their deep commitment to the study and teaching of Black history, they played a leading role in the creation of the Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library, a nationally significant institution and the only African American research library of its kind between Detroit, Michigan,

and Oakland, California. The establishment of the library reflects their enduring commitment to ensuring that African American history in Denver and the Rocky Mountain region would be preserved, studied, and publicly recognized.

The Webb House is therefore significant as the longtime residence of two individuals whose combined leadership helped reshape the political landscape of Denver and Colorado while advancing recognition of African American history and civil rights in the state. As the place where key decisions were made during the formative and most influential years of their careers, the property retains a direct and meaningful association with the lives and public service of Wellington E. and Wilma J. Webb and stands as a physical representation of their lasting contributions to Colorado and to the broader national civic landscape.

### **Criterion C: Embodies the Distinctive Visible Characteristics of an Architectural Style or Type**

The Webb House exemplifies the distinctive characteristics of a Foursquare residence with Classical Revival details and is a strong representation of early twentieth-century residential development in Northeast Denver. The house displays the hallmark features of the Foursquare type, including a square plan, two-story height, spacious front porch, hipped roof, central dormer, and broad overhanging eaves.<sup>1</sup> Its Classical Revival details, including modillions, doric square columns, and a classical frieze at the center of the second-floor façade, elevate the design and distinguish the property as an architecturally refined example of the type.<sup>2</sup>

In her book *A Field Guide to American Houses*, Virginia McAlester explains the Foursquare form grew out of the simple hipped-roof pyramidal boxes that were common as American folk houses in the pre-railroad period.<sup>3</sup> With the expansion of rail transportation in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, building materials became more accessible and affordable, making it possible to construct larger two-story houses with more complex roof framing. In the early twentieth century, the Foursquare had become a common urban residential form, with details from Classical Revival, Neoclassical, Folk Victorian, Prairie, or Craftsman styles often added to elevate the design.<sup>4</sup>

The Webb House is located in Whittier, a neighborhood that began developing as early as 1868 and experienced accelerated growth in the early twentieth century with the expansion of

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<sup>1</sup> Sarah J. Pearce, Merrill A. Wilson, Mary Therese Anstey, et al., *Colorado's Historic Architecture & Engineering Guide* (Denver: Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, Colorado Historical Society, 2008), 115, <https://www.historycolorado.org/colorados-historic-architecture-engineering-guide>.

<sup>2</sup> Pearce et al., *Colorado's Historic Architecture*, 23.

<sup>3</sup> Virginia Savage McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses: The Definitive Guide to Identifying and Understanding America's Domestic Architecture*, rev. and expanded ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015), 146.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

streetcar service.<sup>5</sup> Although nearby Five Points and Curtis Park developed earlier due to their proximity to Denver's central core, Whittier evolved as part of the city's outward residential expansion.<sup>6</sup> Most buildings in the area were constructed between 1870 and 1930 by individual owners and small developers, resulting in a neighborhood character defined by incremental development and a relatively modest scale of architecture.

Permit records indicate that a permit for the construction of a brick residence at 2329 Gaylord Street was issued in 1902 to N.A. Isakson and S.B. Johnson (the property owners); no architect or builder was identified in the permit documentation. Census records help clarify this gap, identifying Nils Andrew Isakson as a carpenter by trade and suggesting that he likely served as both owner and builder of the house. Additional newspaper notices and permit records indicate that Isakson was engaged in small-scale residential development in Denver during the early twentieth century. For example, he pulled a permit in 1907 for the construction of a brick residence on Humboldt Street between 8th and 9th Streets and sold a residence at 817 Humboldt the following year, demonstrating a pattern consistent with speculative construction activity. Born in Sweden in 1855, Isakson immigrated to the United States in the 1880s and represents the important role that immigrant craftsmen and small-scale builders played in shaping Denver's early residential neighborhoods through incremental speculative development and construction.

The Webb House was constructed during a period of rapid residential development along the Gaylord Street corridor and surrounding blocks, and the presence of similarly scaled and stylistically related houses reflects coordinated neighborhood growth during this period. The Webb House is particularly significant as a well-preserved example of a Foursquare residence with Classical Revival details, with more decorative detailing than many of the nearby Foursquares. This is especially notable in Northeast Denver, where houses of this period were typically built by individuals and small developers and were often more restrained in their detailing following the Panic of 1893.<sup>7</sup>

The Webb House is significant under Criterion C as an intact example of a residential building type that illustrates broader patterns of Denver's early twentieth-century neighborhood development. It reflects a period in which areas beyond the urban core were increasingly developed for middle-class residents who sought larger, more comfortable homes while remaining connected to the city through improved transportation. Although the 1980 rear addition on the west elevation is not original, it is subordinate to the primary resource and does not alter the building's essential form, massing, or stylistic expression; therefore, the addition does not impair the property's integrity. The property's Foursquare form and Classical Revival

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<sup>5</sup> Mead Hunt, Inc., Discover Denver Phase 5 Northeast Denver Historic Context: *Historic Context on the Five Points, Whittier, Clayton, and Skyland Neighborhoods, Denver, Colorado* (prepared for Historic Denver, Inc., January 2025), 3.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>7</sup> Mead Hunt, *NE Denver Historic Context*, 7.



details together embody the architectural and social trends that shaped Whittier and the surrounding Northeast Denver neighborhoods during this period.

**Criterion J: Associated with Social Movements, Institutions, and Patterns of Growth/Change that Contributed Significantly to the Culture of the Neighborhood, Community, City, and State**

The Webb House is significant under Criterion J for its association with social movements and patterns of civic and political change that shaped Denver's African American community and the evolution of the Whittier neighborhood. More than a private residence, the house functioned as a center of political strategy, coalition-building, and community leadership during a pivotal period when African American political representation in Denver expanded significantly.

Beginning with the Webbs' purchase of the home in 1971, the property was a place where the couple made political decisions, formed alliances, and established a legacy of community leadership. From this home, the Webbs helped advance long-standing community efforts for fair representation, educational opportunity, and equitable access to public resources—continuing work rooted in earlier civil rights activism in northeast Denver. Their presence in Whittier itself reflected the hard-won gains of the civil rights movement, as African American families increasingly secured homeownership opportunities in neighborhoods beyond the historic Five Points core.

The house also functioned as an informal gathering place connected to broader state and national political networks. During Wellington Webb's tenure in the Colorado House of Representatives and Wilma Webb's legislative service and civic leadership, the residence hosted political allies and visiting figures connected to major campaigns and national public life. For example, Wilma Webb hosted Jimmy Carter's aunt, Sissy Dolvin, at the Gaylord Street home during the Carter presidential debates, reflecting the couple's growing role in national political circles. Such interactions illustrate how the property served as a local node within wider civil rights-era political realignments that increased African American participation in governance at municipal, state, and national levels.

Located at the eastern edge of Whittier near the historic boundary of "Struggle Hill," the property also represents the neighborhood's transition during the late twentieth century from an area shaped by racial restriction and disinvestment to one increasingly defined by African American political leadership and middle-class stability. As the long-term residence of Denver's first African American mayor and a prominent state legislator and First Lady of Denver, the house symbolizes the maturation of political power emerging from northeast Denver's African American community and the neighborhood's role as a center of civic leadership.

## Period of Significance

Period of Significance: 1902; 1971-2003

The year 1902 marks the construction of the Webb House and establishes the beginning of its significance under Criterion C for architecture. As a well-preserved example of a Foursquare residence with Classical Revival detailing, the house reflects the residential development patterns and architectural character of northeast Denver in the early twentieth century.

The second period, 1971–2003, corresponds to the years of ownership and occupancy by Wellington E. Webb and Wilma J. Webb and defines the span of the property's significance under Criteria B and J. Beginning with their purchase of the house in 1971, the property served as an important base for their public service careers and civic leadership. During this time, the Webbs used the residence as a place of political organizing, community engagement, and decision-making that supported their expanding influence in local and state government. The period concludes in 2003, when Wellington Webb completed his third term as Mayor of Denver, marking the culmination of his mayoral tenure and a logical endpoint for the property's strongest association with his executive leadership and the couple's highest level of public impact.

## 4. Property Description

Briefly describe the property's setting, architectural and character-defining features. Provide a list of any site features or major alterations and their estimated date of construction.

The Webb House is an American Foursquare-style residence in the Whittier Neighborhood. The two-story home, with a basement and partial attic, is positioned at the top of a slightly sloped grassy area. A short flight of stairs leads to the home. On the northeast corner of the property is a flagpole. The house is constructed of red pressed brick. At the base of the home, on the west-facing façade, are stone planters that sit on opposite sides of the entrance. The house sits between two four-square architectural style homes. West of the home is Saint Ignatius Loyola Catholic Church, a parking lot, and the French-American School.

The Webb House features classic hallmarks of an American Foursquare-style home with Classical Revival details. The two-story, hipped roof with a central dormer and broad overhanging eaves are all characteristics of an American Foursquare style home. Classical Revival details include square doric columns supporting the porch overhang, modillions along the eaves, and a classical frieze in the center of the second-floor façade.

The **east elevation**, the façade, has six windows. The first floor has one single-hung window and a picture window. The hipped roof porch is supported by five doric columns. The porch sits behind stone planters. The overhanging eaves of the hipped porch roof feature thirteen classical decorative brackets, and dentils. The second floor features two cottage style windows. Between the windows is a classical frieze. The dormer addition has two windows with diamond designs. There is one chimney.

The **north elevation** features seven windows, and a door. There is a picture window on the first floor that is enclosed in an exterior window casing. The second and third windows on the first floor are recessed picture windows with semi-arches. There are brick arches above the windows and windowsills at the base. The recessed door on the first floor has a brick arch above its header. Another smaller picture window sits toward the southeast corner of the house. There is one recessed picture window between the first and second floors. This window also has a brick arch above it and a windowsill below. On the second floor, there are two windows. One is a single-hung recessed window. The other is a recessed picture window. The overhanging eaves of the roof feature classical modillions.

The **west elevation** features an addition constructed in 1980.

The **south elevation** has six windows. The windows on the first floor are both single-hung recessed windows. Bricked arches rest above the windows and windowsills sit below. On the second floor there are four windows. Three of the windows are recessed single-hung windows and the fourth is a picture window. The overhanging eaves of the roof feature classical modillions.

## 5. Integrity

Describe the structure's integrity, using the seven qualities that define integrity: location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association.

### Location

[Location is the place where the historic property was constructed or the place where the historic event occurred. What is the resource's location? Is this the original location? If not, where was the original location, where is the present location, and why was it relocated?]

The Webb House retains excellent integrity of location as it has not moved since it was built in 1902.

### Setting

[Setting is the physical environment of a historic property. Please describe the area around the resource. Is the setting the same as the period of significance? How has it changed?]

The Webb House maintains excellent integrity of setting. The Whittier neighborhood has remained a residential area since the late 19th century. West of the home of Wellington E. Webb and Wilma J. Webb is Saint Ignatius Loyola Catholic Church, which was built in 1924. To the north and south of the house are two residential buildings, both American Foursquare-style, that were built the same year.



## Design

[Design is the combination of elements that create the form, plan, space, structure and style of a property. What are the character defining features of the resource? Have any of those features changed over time?]

An addition was added to the rear of the home in 1980, during the period of significance. This addition is not readily visible and does not impact any of the character-defining features of the Foursquare residence.

## Materials

[Materials are the physical elements that were combined or deposited during a particular period of time in a particular pattern or configuration to form a historic property. What are the materials used for the construction of the resource? Are these the same materials that existed in the original form of the resource?]

Overall, the Webb House maintains good integrity of materials with minimal alterations. Bulletproof glass was installed in the windows on the façade at some point.

## Workmanship

[Workmanship is the physical evidence of the crafts of a particular culture or people during any given period in history or prehistory. How was the resources and materials crafted? Is this maintained?]

The Webb House offers excellent integrity of workmanship. The home features elements of a standard four-square residential building such as a hipped roof with a central dormer, deep overhanging eaves, and porch with doric columns.

## Association

[Association is the direct link between an important historic event or person and a historic property.]

The Webb House maintains excellent integrity of association. Wellington E. and Wilma J. Webb lived in the home when both were first elected to the Colorado State legislature in 1972 and 1980, respectively. In addition, the Webb House remained their primary residence throughout Wellington's years as mayor of Denver and Wilma's years as First Lady of Denver. They live at the residence at the time of this nomination (2026).

## Feeling

[Feeling is a property's expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a particular period of time.]

The Webb House maintains good integrity of feeling. There have been very few changes to the this block since the house was purchased in 1971. Though the Webbs built the addition to the home in 1980, the extension does not undermine the original aesthetic of the home. The Webbs have continued to call the residence home, which maintains a strong connection to them and their legacy.

## 6. Historic Context / Historical Narrative

Describe the history of the structure, including events, activities and associations that relate the structure to its historic, architectural, geographic, or cultural significance.

### Wellington E. Webb<sup>8</sup>

#### Early Years

Wellington E. Webb was born on February 17, 1941, to Mardina Webb Devereaux and Wellington Marion Webb in Chicago. As a child, Wellington often found himself going back and forth between the city and Mississippi, a route that both connected him to family and the harrowing racial history of the state. In his autobiography, “The Man, the Mayor and the Making of Denver,” Wellington recalled the story of Emmitt Till, a young Black boy from Chicago who, like him, was born in 1941 and who often traveled to visit family in Mississippi. In 1955, Till was abducted and murdered by white supremacists while visiting Mississippi. “I thought it could have easily been me,” Wellington wrote.<sup>9</sup>

Wellington eventually made his way to Denver to live with his grandmother, Helen Williams Gamble. “Grandmother Helen,” Wellington writes, was a formative figure in his life. “My work ethic came from my Grandmother Helen, who was a proud southern woman and whose pillars were dignity, pride, and good character,” he wrote.<sup>10</sup> His first stay in Denver was brief – a temporary stay before he moved to Gary, Indiana. But the climate in Indiana exacerbated his asthma. When it was clear that he couldn’t live in Gary, the decision was made, in 1954, for him to permanently live in Denver with his grandmother. “Denver’s climate gave me back my childhood,” he wrote.<sup>11</sup>

After Wellington graduated from Manual High School, he returned to Gary, Indiana going to work at his aunt’s filling station. He continued visiting Denver periodically until it became clear that he needed to go college.<sup>12</sup> He continued visiting Denver periodically until it became clear that he wanted to do more with his life than pump gas. “I wanted to be somebody,” he wrote about his decision to go to college.<sup>13</sup> He would get the

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<sup>8</sup> With a few exceptions, the following information was collected from Wellington E. Webb. This section contains a combination of personal memories as well as notes from his autobiography. Any information that was not provided by him has been cited accordingly.

<sup>9</sup> Wellington Webb. 2007. *The Man, the Mayor, and the Making of Modern Denver*. Fulcrum Publishing: Wheatridge, CO, 30.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>12</sup> Wellington Webb. 2007. *The Man, the Mayor, and the Making of Modern Denver*. Fulcrum Publishing: Wheatridge, CO, 68.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.



opportunity to attend Northeastern College in Sterling, Colorado after receiving a basketball scholarship.

Wellington continued his studies at Colorado State College, now known as the University of Northern Colorado, in Greeley and graduated with a degree in sociology in 1964. For work, Wellington signed up for substitute teaching jobs in the Adams County School District and a part-time manual job working for a Frito-Lay factory.<sup>14</sup>

Wellington also took on a position with Neighborhood Youth Training, a program built through the Model Cities initiative, in Denver. There, Wellington would learn how to work with and support community members. After establishing connections with community activists and local labor leaders, Wellington found work as a counselor, serving economically disadvantaged communities with the Job Opportunities Center.<sup>15</sup> There, he and other staff members guided individuals through job interview preparations and connected them with available resources, ensuring they had the support they needed to move forward.<sup>16</sup> In the evenings, Wellington also worked with the National Opportunity Industrialized Center's Denver office teaching Black history. The program gave Wellington first-hand experience with working with community activists, teaching Black history classes and learning how to work with the government. Teaching Black history deepened his commitment to public service and drew him toward working in politics.

Yet, Wellington still had a desire to be a teacher with the Denver Public Schools. He received a chance when his grandmother Helen, who at the time was a Democratic district committeewoman active in community affairs in northeast Denver, connected Wellington to then-Denver Mayor Thomas Currigan. Helen encouraged him to go to Mayor Currigan's office to establish a professional connection with him. Wellington was initially hesitant about the meeting. "I told her I didn't want to ask for the mayor's help, and then questioned whether she could even get him to see me," Wellington writes.<sup>17</sup> His grandmother Helen, a formidable force in Denver politics, replied, "I'm a committeeman, he'll take my call."<sup>18</sup> That conversation set him on a new path. He was soon offered a teaching position at Smiley Junior High School in the Denver Public School district.

However, the job at Smiley Junior High School "just didn't feel right," Wellington recalled. He declined the offer, choosing instead to take a teaching position at the Colorado Mental

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>15</sup> Wellington Webb. 2007. *The Man, the Mayor, and the Making of Modern Denver*. Fulcrum Publishing: Wheatridge, CO, 82.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 2007.

<sup>17</sup> Wellington Webb. 2007. *The Man, the Mayor, and the Making of Modern Denver*. Fulcrum Publishing: Wheatridge, CO, 87.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

Health Institute at Fort Logan in 1966. When asked why he took the position at Fort Logan, Wellington noted, “they [Fort Logan] wanted me. Denver Public Schools did not.”

### Wellington’s Political Career

The year 1968 marked a turning point for Wellington, prompting his departure from Fort Logan in 1969. During this time, Wellington began dating Wilma J. Gerdine, a fellow classmate at Manual High School who he knew only by name. With their involvement in different school activities, Wellington and Wilma had been “opposites” at Manuel.<sup>19</sup> “But as young adults,” Wellington wrote, “we discovered we enjoyed each other, we had a lot in common, and we had several mutual friends.”<sup>20</sup>

In 1971, Wellington and Wilma’s future plans began to take shape. In August, Wellington earned a master’s degree in sociology from the University of Northern Colorado. That same year, Wellington and Wilma married, combining two families that included four children. Wellington and Wilma combined their resources to purchase a home at 2329 Gaylord Street in the Whittier Neighborhood. Wilma found the four-bedroom, four-square architectural style home built in 1902 through a newspaper advertisement.<sup>21</sup> The house would not only serve as the family’s home but also, the launching pad for Wellington’s political career, and his engagement with civic and cultural figures in Denver and throughout the country such as activist Stokely Carmichael, Congressman Charlie Rangel, and Coretta Scott King.

A few months after they purchased the home, Wellington announced his candidacy for the Colorado House of Representatives for District Eight.<sup>22</sup> This, however, wasn’t the first time Wellington had run for office. Years before he began his campaign for a seat in the Colorado House of Representatives, Wellington saw an opportunity to become more involved in civic issues in Denver through running for a seat in his geographical district through the Residential Participation Denver, Incorporated program.<sup>23</sup> This program encouraged Denver residents to become actively engaged in city issues.

Wellington ran his campaign for the Colorado House of Representatives defined by grassroots engagement and reform (Figure 1). He was elected to the House in 1972. Over the course of three terms, he gravitated toward health policy, choosing the Health Committee as his legislative focus. His commitment extended beyond the statehouse –

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Wellington Webb. 2007. *The Man, the Mayor, and the Making of Modern Denver*. Fulcrum Publishing: Wheatridge, CO, 101; Interview with Wellington E. Webb and Wilma J. Webb, March 10, 2025.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.



early in his tenure, he used his own money to establish a community office in his district. There, two days a week, he met directly with constituents in his district.<sup>24</sup>

His legislative record also reflected a concern for equity and access. He introduced bills aimed at eliminating IQ tests in schools, recognizing their limitations and biases, and pushed for mandatory accident insurance coverage to ensure students would not be financially burdened by medical expenses.<sup>25</sup> Wellington also championed legislation that expanded the social safety net, creating a state program to support those who were most vulnerable such as House Bill 1405, which provided additional funding for welfare programs in Denver.<sup>26</sup> Wellington was the first legislator in Colorado to introduce a bill to recognize the birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr. He attempted to pass the legislation three times. On the third time, though the measure left the House of Representatives, it failed in the Senate. Wellington served in the House of Representatives until 1977.

Wellington began his work in national politics in 1976 when Jimmy Carter ran for president. Wellington became the Colorado Carter-Mondale campaign manager while his brother, Joe Webb, and Wilma Webb ran his Colorado legislative re-election campaign. Wilma also developed a close relationship with the Carter family, hosting Jimmy Carter's Aunt Sissy Dolvin at their Denver home during the presidential debates.<sup>27</sup>

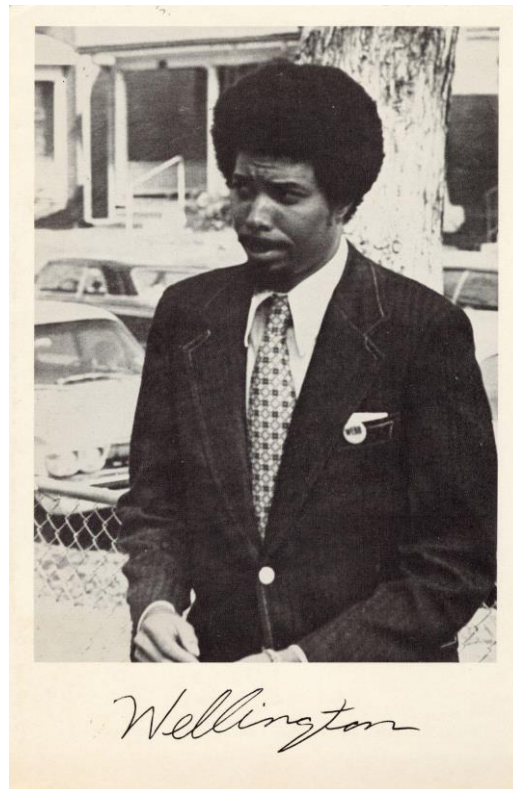
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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 383.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Wellington E. Webb and Wilma J. Webb, March 10, 2025.



**Figure 1. Political advertisement for Wellington Webb's re-election for State Representative for District 8 campaign, Date unknown, Courtesy of the Denver Public Library.**

He went on to serve for President Jimmy Carter as regional director of the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (known today as the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services).<sup>28</sup> When President Carter did not win reelection in 1980, Wellington found a new platform for governance, joining Governor Richard Lamm's administration as Executive Director of the Colorado Department of Regulatory Agencies. In 1987, Wellington entered municipal government when he was elected as the city Auditor for Denver.

#### Wellington E. Webb, Mayor of Denver

In December 1990, Wilma, Wellington, and a number of their advisors met in the Webb's living room to discuss Wellington's potential run for Mayor of Denver. Two members of the group recommended that because he was, at the time, polling at 7%, he should not run. However, Wilma was not convinced. "If you don't run, you can't win," Wilma recalled telling Wellington.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> This department became the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Wellington E. Webb and Wilma J. Webb, March 10, 2025.



Wellington announced his candidacy for Denver mayor in 1991. The win was considered a long shot but Wellington saw the skepticism as an opportunity. “When no one expects you to win, it’s the most excited,” Wellington said.<sup>30</sup> For his campaign, he and Wilma crafted what became known as “The Sneaker Campaign,” a grassroots strategy built on connecting directly with constituents. He took to the streets – walking 300 miles across Denver’s neighborhoods to talk about issues concerning communities. This effort was successful. Defeating former District Attorney Norm Early, Wellington was elected in 1991. Wellington was the first Black mayor in Denver’s history. By his side, Wilma became the city’s first Black First Lady. In Wellington’s inaugural address, Wellington offered a message of unity.

As I walked along our streets, rested in your homes, and talked about your concerns, I discovered that whether we’re young or old, brown, white, black, red, or yellow; married, single, straight, gay or lesbian; abled or physically challenged – we all have the same basic needs – to live lives of quality and meaning.<sup>31</sup>

As mayor, Wellington’s tenure was defined by growth and reform. He focused on several issues, including more parks and open space, public safety, economic development, as well as child welfare. He played a key role in shaping Denver’s economic future, including finishing 85 percent of the new Denver International Airport and revitalizing downtown Denver with new housing; new restaurants; the opening of Coors Field; and locking in the Denver Nuggets and Colorado Avalanche to a 25-year commitment at its new arena.<sup>32</sup>

Among the many signature moments of his administration, Denver hosted Pope John Paul II for World Youth Day in 1993. His visit was the culmination of over a year of planning by the mayor’s staff. More than 200,000 visitors from across the state, nation, and world attended the events in Denver and the surrounding areas.<sup>33</sup>

Healthcare was also a primary focus of Wellington’s administration. During his tenure, he worked with the city to create the Denver Health Medical Authority in 1997. Recalling his efforts toward improving healthcare options in the city, Wellington later noted that “I don’t think there’s

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<sup>30</sup> Interview with Wellington E. Webb and Wilma J. Webb, March 10, 2025

<sup>31</sup> History Colorado, Facebook, February 21, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/HistoryColorado/posts/wellington-webb-became-denvers-first-african-american-mayor-in-1991-webbs-signat/10155922803461285/>.

<sup>32</sup> Ruby Jones, “The Righteous Walk of Wilma J. Webb: Celebrating the Legacy of Denver’s Forever First Lady,” *Denver Urban Spectrum*, March 2024, 7.; Personal communication with Wellington Webb, April 22, 2025.

<sup>33</sup> Personal communication with Wellington Webb, April 22, 2025.; “Meet Our Team,” Webb Group International, <https://webbgroupintl.com/team-profile.php?id=WEW>.

anything more important than providing of the health care of our citizens and residents and cities and state for where we live for a place we can go to get health care.”<sup>34</sup>

Throughout his tenure, Mayor Webb frequently collaborated with state and national leaders. In 1997, he received France’s Legion of Merit for co-hosting the Summit of the Eight – a worldwide economic summit held in Denver - along with Governor Roy Romer and President Bill Clinton.<sup>35</sup> Mayor Webb also extended his civic reach to the global stage, turning the city into a crossroads of international diplomacy. He hosted a procession of global leaders visiting the city, including Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko of Japan, Premier Zhu Rongji of China, President Jerry John Rawlings of Ghana, and President Joachim Chissano of Mozambique.<sup>36</sup>



**Figure 2. Exterior photograph of Wellington Webb and Wilma Webb at the Webb for Mayor Parade, March 1999, Courtesy of the Denver Public Library.**

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<sup>34</sup> Jennifer McRae, “Denver Health honors former Denver Mayor Wellington Webb,” *CBS News*, February 15, 2024, <https://www.cbsnews.com/colorado/news/denver-health-honors-former-denver-mayor-wellington-webb/>.

<sup>35</sup> Personal communication with Wellington Webb, April 21, 2025.

<sup>36</sup> Meet Our Team,” Webb Group International, <https://webbgroupintl.com/team-profile.php?id=WEW>.



During his administration, Mayor Webb also promoted the arts not as an afterthought, but as a vital aspect of civic life. He understood that a city's identity was not just built through policy and infrastructure but also shaped by culture.

Wellington was re-elected mayor twice, serving in the position until 2003 (Figure 2).

### **Wilma Jean Gerdine Webb<sup>37</sup>**

#### Wilma Jean Gerdine Webb's Early Life

Wilma Jean Gerdine Webb was born to Frank Wendell Gerdine and Faye Elizabeth Wyatt Gerdine on May 17, 1943, in Denver, Colorado. The Gerdine family migrated from The South, her father a veteran Tuskegee man, who was born in West Point, Mississippi, and her mother, a nurse's assistant, born in Ft. Worth, Texas, and raised in McGregor, Texas.

Their family was warmly received in Denver's Black community, joining the New Hope Baptist Church located in the Five Points neighborhood (Figure 3). Wilma's faith and the New Hope Baptist Church would remain central figures in her life from childhood to today. Wilma was an excellent student of the Denver Public Schools' Whittier Elementary School, Cole Jr. High School, and Manual High School where she graduated with her Class of 1961. Although Wilma and her husband, Wellington E. Webb, who is Denver's 42nd Mayor, were both former students of Manual High School, Wellington graduated with his Class of 1958, and they knew of each other, their courtship and marriage did not occur until years later.

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<sup>37</sup> With a few exceptions, the following information was collected from Wilma J. Webb. This section represents her personal memories and experiences as she recollects them. Any information that was not provided by her has been cited accordingly.



**Figure 3. View of the New Hope Baptist Church, the Gerdine family’s church, on the corner of 22nd (Twenty-second) and Ogden Street in the Five Points neighborhood in Denver, Date unknown, Courtesy of the Denver Public Library.**

For Wilma, the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy in 1963, Malcolm X in 1965, and both Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as well as U.S. Presidential Candidate Robert F. Kennedy in 1968, were more than national tragedies - they were compelling moments for her getting involved in politics. Wilma's activism and advocacy began in the Denver Public School District where she addressed systemic inequities of racial discrimination aimed at Black students. As concerned parents organized around the need for equal education and addressing other matters which violated civil rights for people of color, she participated in an organization – the Committee on Greater Opportunity – whose purpose was to provide for access to a better life for all people. Alongside fellow advocates, she participated in school board meetings, lending her voice to the efforts of Rachel B. Noel, the first Black member of the Denver Public School Board of Education.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Ruby Jones, “The Righteous Walk of Wilma J. Webb: Celebrating the Legacy of Denver’s Forever First Lady,” *Denver Urban Spectrum*, March 2024, 4. ; Noel was the first Black person to serve on Denver’s

## Wilma's Political Career

In 1973, Wilma was elected as a Democratic Committeewoman, an office that marked the beginning of her deeper involvement in party leadership.<sup>39</sup> She later served as the state party's elected secretary while simultaneously producing the Democratic state newsletter. She was also an elected delegate several times for multiple state and national conventions, and she chaired Presidential election campaigns, solidifying her presence and effectiveness in local, statewide, and national political circles.<sup>40</sup>

When State Representative King M. Trimble vacated the District 8 seat in the Colorado House of Representatives in 1980, Wilma was strongly persuaded to run for public office, and she did. Running in the election for State Representative that April, and November, she won overwhelmingly, marking the start of a political career shaped by a deep commitment to serve a constituency who often experienced a largely ignored voice in the political world. State Representative Wilma J. Webb served six terms in the Colorado House of Representatives, from 1980 to 1993. She was the first woman and first African American woman to serve House District 8 as State Representative, as well as the first Black woman and woman of color to serve from the House of Representatives on the Joint Budget Committee (JBC), the powerful committee of six members from both the House and the Senate who write and decide the state's budget.<sup>41</sup>

While in the House of Representatives, Representative Wilma J. Webb sponsored forty-four significant bills, eleven of which passed in a Republican-controlled state legislature.<sup>42</sup> Legislation that passed included comprehensive anti-drug abuse programming, subpoena power for the Colorado Civil Rights Division, care for elderly citizens, and the improvement of living conditions for troubled youth.<sup>43</sup> She also carried bills to significantly enhance opportunities

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Board of Education.; Rachel Noel was the first African American woman elected to public office in Colorado and the first African American elected to the seven-member school board of the Denver Public Schools. See "Rachel Bassett Noel," *Colorado Women's Hall of Fame*, <https://www.cogreatwomen.org/project/rachel-bassette-noel/>.

<sup>39</sup> Ruby Jones, "The Righteous Walk of Wilma J. Webb: Celebrating the Legacy of Denver's Forever First Lady," *Denver Urban Spectrum*, February 28, 2024, <https://www.denverurbanspectrum.com/2024/02/28/the-righteous-walk-of-wilma-j-webb/>.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> "Honorable Wilma J. Webb biography," *Denver Public Library*, 2002, <https://digital.denverlibrary.org/nodes/view/1140436>; Ruby Jones, "The Righteous Walk of Wilma J. Webb: Celebrating the Legacy of Denver's Forever First Lady," *Denver Urban Spectrum*, March 2024, 5.

<sup>42</sup> "Wilma Webb Papers," Denver Public Library, <https://archives.denverlibrary.org/repositories/2/resources/7914>

<sup>43</sup> "The Honorable Wellington E. Webb & Honorable Wilma J. Webb Human Investment Scholarship," n=Northeastern Junior College, <https://www.njc.edu/scholarships/honorable-wellington-e-webb-honorable-wilma-j-webb-human-investment-scholarship>

for businesses. She championed legislation that expanded access to quality education, ensuring that students across Colorado would have greater opportunities to succeed. She sponsored bills to make education mandatory from kindergarten through 12th grade and led efforts and carried bills to establish compulsory full-day kindergarten, recognizing that early education was not just a benefit, but a necessity.<sup>44</sup> While she was a Colorado State Representative, she also was a certificated student of the John F. Kennedy School of Government Seminarium on Governance at Harvard University.

In one of her most challenging yet victorious battles in the Colorado legislature, Wilma successfully carried legislation to establish Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day in Colorado. This holiday celebrates the birthday of Dr. King, born January 15, 1929. Webb's relationship with the King family went back to her youth, when Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. came to speak at New Hope Baptist Church. She connected with Mrs. Coretta Scott King a short time later when Mrs. King also came to speak at New Hope. Because of the worldwide humanitarian stature of the Kings and the friendship Wilma built with the King family, she felt compelled to recognize King's legacy and the contributions of African Americans to America. Navigating resistance among some elected officials – brought on by racism and misconceptions about Dr. King's life – Wilma approached the legislation with a deep sense of our nation's need to express a debt of gratitude to Dr. King and all people who had been subjugated to lives which did not afford them equal opportunity to succeed in their God--given potentials. As a humble minister, Dr. King changed the direction of the United States to one of living up to its creed of freedom, justice, and equality, therefore, worthy of a national holiday. Perseveringly, she came to political confrontation with the then-Speaker of the House – who was an opponent of celebrating King's legacy – setting the stage for one of the most defining battles of her service. After Wilma's bill to celebrate Dr. King with an official holiday passed the legislature – in opposition to her and her legislation – the Speaker of the House revengefully and punitively disallowed Wilma to be reappointed to serve on the JBC. This led to a legal battle over her reappointment wherein the Judge ruled in her favor to serve on the JBC. Despite these obstacles and other regressive actions perpetrated on her by the Speaker and the opposition, Wilma carried four different bills for four different years where her fourth bill - HB-1201 - passed with strong support in 1984 and was joyfully signed into law by Governor Richard D. Lamm on April 4th of 1984.

The Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Colorado Holiday Commission, who at the advocacy and sponsorship of Wilma Webb, Mrs. Coretta Scott King requested Governor Lamm to establish the largest commission which had ever been created in Colorado (Figure 4). Wilma was the first person to serve as Chairwoman and President of the Commission – a position she would hold for 18 years, for which she is now and forevermore President Emerita. As the Commission considered how they would appropriately reflect upon Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s legacy, Wilma created an inaugural celebration of six days. The Commission decided that

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<sup>44</sup> Ruby Jones, "The Righteous Walk of Wilma J. Webb: Celebrating the Legacy of Denver's Forever First Lady," *Denver Urban Spectrum*, February 28, 2024.  
<https://www.denverurbanspectrum.com/2024/02/28/the-righteous-walk-of-wilma-j-webb/>.

the holiday should be celebrated with a march and a parade which would honor the end of slavery and acknowledge those who fought for civil rights as well as would forever march for peace, freedom, justice, and love. By adoption of the Commission, the first "Marade" – a term coined by Wilma, reflecting both a march and a parade – was celebrated on the Inaugural Holiday in January 1986.<sup>45</sup> That "Marade" drew a crowd of some 15,000 people. The Marade – as well as Colorado's overall celebrations throughout the years – grew to be one of the largest collective celebrations of Dr. King's life in the nation.



**Figure 4. Coretta Scott King and Wilma J. Webb, Date unknown, *Courtesy of the Denver Public Library.***

#### Wilma J. Webb, First Lady of Denver

Drawing from her elected official experience, public advocacy for the betterment of all people, and inspiration from Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis' active role in John F. Kennedy's presidency, Wilma, as the first woman to provide an active role as First Lady for the City of Denver, viewed her position as First Lady of Denver not as a ceremonial title, but as a platform for meaningful improvements and love for the City of Denver (Figure 5). Wilma embraced the opportunity to

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<sup>45</sup> Ruby Jones, "The Righteous Walk of Wilma J. Webb: Celebrating the Legacy of Denver's Forever First Lady," *Denver Urban Spectrum*, March 2024, 6.

design what a First Lady of a major city could be. Wilma was an ardent supporter of the arts – serving as Chairperson of the Mayor's Commission on Art, Culture and Film. As part of this commission, members served to connect art, both visual and performing, to the community such as by providing performances from the Colorado Symphony Orchestra free to the public and supporting venues for all art to be accessible, appreciated, positively provocative, and enjoyed. Her leadership and promotion of the Arts led to her founding and the development of the Denver Art, Culture, and Film Foundation in 1994.



**Figure 5. Portrait of the Honorable Wilma J. Webb, Date unknown, *Courtesy of the Webb Family.***

As First Lady of Denver and Chairwoman of the Commission on Art, Culture, and Film, she led, along with Mayor Webb, the effort to raise \$1.2 million for the installation of a Dr. Martin Luther



King Jr. sculpture in City Park, a project that came to fruition in 2002.<sup>46</sup> She also raised funds for other notable pieces of art for the City and County of Denver. Beyond the arts, Wilma welcomed and hosted national and international dignitaries in her position as First Lady of Denver. In addition, she devoted her time to combating drug abuse and advocating for youth and family issues.<sup>47</sup>

From 1997 to 2000, Wilma served as the Region VIII Chief Administrator for the U.S. Department of Labor – an appointment made by President William J. Clinton. She served in the position for three years – enforcing federal statutes that govern workplace activities including 18 varied Labor Department agencies covering pension rights, health benefits, safety, and job training in Colorado, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming. She was the first woman to serve in that position.

Closer to home, both Wellington and Wilma were instrumental in the creation of the Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library in the Five Points neighborhood – an idea first envisioned by Wilma. In 1999, the couple proposed the creation of a library dedicated to preserving the history of African Americans who had shaped Colorado and the West. Over the next three years, library staff assembled an extensive collection of personal and professional papers, publications, photographs, artworks, and other memorabilia, ensuring that the contributions of African Americans would not be forgotten. When the library opened on April 26, 2003, it was the only African American research library between Atlanta and Los Angeles.<sup>48</sup> As a tribute to Wilma, visitors today can explore a vast collection of archives housed in the Wilma J. Webb Archives Research and Reading Room, a lasting testament to her commitment and service to the nation on history which includes documentation and exhibition on the lives and contributions of Black people.<sup>49</sup>

## Post-Mayor and First Lady Service

Though Wellington and Wilma stepped away from their duties as Denver's Mayor and First Lady after Wellington's third term, they both would remain engaged in public service. In 2003, Wellington founded Webb Group International, leveraging his years of experience to advise cities and businesses on governance and development. Six years later, in the wake of the

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<sup>46</sup> Wellington Webb. 2007. *The Man, the Mayor, and the Making of Modern Denver*. Fulcrum Publishing: Wheatridge, CO, 342.

<sup>47</sup> "Honorable Wilma J. Webb biography," *Denver Public Library*, 2002, <https://digital.denverlibrary.org/nodes/view/1140436>

<sup>48</sup> Wellington Webb. 2007. *The Man, the Mayor, and the Making of Modern Denver*. Fulcrum Publishing: Wheatridge, CO, 344.

<sup>49</sup> "About the Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library," *Denver Public Library*, <https://history.denverlibrary.org/about-blair-caldwell-african-american-research-library>.



historic inauguration of President Barack H. Obama, Wellington took on a new diplomatic role, serving as a representative to the 64th Assembly of the United Nations - a move that further cemented his presence on the global stage.

Wilma was appointed to the Colorado Women's Vote Centennial Commission by Governor Jared Polis in 2019. The commission's objective to educate communities on the rich history of women's suffrage in the state served to enlighten the nation on the contributions and assets that women contribute to people everywhere. That same year, Wilma founded The OM 42 Foundation, LLC, a non-profit organization. Today, Wilma continues to engage communities through her philanthropic work and political experience and contributions to worthy causes that enhance the lives of all people.

In 2022, a tribute to Wellington's decades of service and dedication to the city took shape in the form of a statue, "The Walk of Wellington Webb," unveiled at the municipal building that bears his name.<sup>50</sup> Wellington is the only mayor in U.S. history to serve as president of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, the National Conference of Democratic Mayors and the National Conference of Mayors.<sup>51</sup> He is the recipient of four Honorary Doctorate Degrees from the University of Colorado at Denver, Metropolitan State College, University of Northern Colorado, and the American Baptist Seminary in Berkeley, California.<sup>52</sup> In 2024, he was honored for his work with Denver Health with a commemorative portrait in the hospital. Among his affiliations, Wellington is a Thirty-Third Degree Mason, a life member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, a member of Delta Eta Boulé fraternity and a lifetime member of Zion Baptist Church.

Wilma's awards include the National Humanitarian Award, the National Human Rights Award, the National Education Association Carter G. Woodson Award for Human and Civil Rights, the Arc's Legislator of the Year Award, and the Colorado Banking Association's Political Award. She was inducted into the Colorado Women's Hall of Fame, and the Blacks in Colorado Hall of Fame as well as the Denver and Colorado Tourism Hall of Fame for her leadership and contributions as a stateswoman. In 2022, she was awarded the Colorado Governor's Citizenship Medal.

Wilma is also an Honorary Member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated. In 2024, Wilma Webb was honored with the ATHENA Leadership Award for her leadership in Colorado. In her address to the organization, she stated, "we all could cite times when we know that we haven't

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<sup>50</sup> John Daley, "Wellington Webb, Denver's first African-American mayor, honored with a statue," *Denverite*, April 6, 2022, <https://denverite.com/2022/04/06/wellington-webb-denvers-first-african-american-mayor-honored-with-a-statue/>

<sup>51</sup> "The Honorable Wellington E. Webb & Honorable Wilma J. Webb Human Investment Scholarship," n=Northeastern Junior College, <https://www.njc.edu/scholarships/honorable-wellington-e-webb-honorable-wilma-j-webb-human-investment-scholarship>

<sup>52</sup> "Meet Our Team," Webb Group International, <https://webbgroupintl.com/team-profile.php?id=WEW>.

been treated fairly,” she said, “but we must continue to rise above.”<sup>53</sup> In May 2025, she received an Honorary Doctoral Degree of Humane Letters from the University of Colorado for her distinctive service in the Colorado House of Representatives and as First Lady of Denver.



**Figure 6. Photograph of Wellington E. and Wilma J. Webb, Date Unknown, *Courtesy of The Denver Urban Spectrum.***

Reflecting on their decades of public service and elective office, Wilma observed, “We were not children or young people who dreamed about being in politics or being elected. We really got involved because we wanted to make a difference for people.”<sup>54</sup> In more than five decades of public service, Wellington E. Webb and Wilma J. Webb ascended through the ranks of Colorado

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<sup>53</sup> Anusha Roy, “Wilma Webb, a trailblazer in Denver and Colorado politics, honored with ATHENA Leadership Award,” *Denver 7 News*, December 10, 2024, <https://www.denver7.com/news/local-news/wilma-webb-a-trailblazer-in-denver-and-colorado-politics-honored-with-athena-leadership-award>

<sup>54</sup> Hannah Metzger, “Denver power couple Wilma, Wellington Webb honored with Governor’s Citizenship Medal,” *Denver Gazette*, March 30, 2022, [https://denvergazette.com/news/local/denver-power-couple-wilma-wellington-webb-honored-with-governor-s-citizenship-medal/article\\_956d2478-ac70-11ec-8986-1b5697e8507a.html](https://denvergazette.com/news/local/denver-power-couple-wilma-wellington-webb-honored-with-governor-s-citizenship-medal/article_956d2478-ac70-11ec-8986-1b5697e8507a.html).

politics to make a lasting difference in the lives of countless individuals as well as the civic landscape of Denver, the U.S, and the world (Figure 6).

In addition to their longstanding dedication to their civic lives, Wilma and Wellington are the proud parents of Keith, Stephanie, Allen, and Anthony, as well as grandparents, and great-grandparents.

## **The Political Lives of Black Coloradans**

### Suffrage Movement for Black Men

The story of Black politics in Colorado is a sweeping narrative of the struggle for civil rights, driven by the desire to gain access to education, housing, health, and economic opportunities. This story finds its origins in the fight for the right to vote. From 1865 to 1867, African Americans in the Colorado Territory waged a heavy campaign for equal suffrage for Black men. This quest began in 1864, when the territorial legislature amended its previous declaration in 1861 that all male persons who were twenty-one and older could vote.<sup>55</sup> Territorial Governor John Evans argued that since no Black men had voted before 1864, the provision did not matter – clearing the way for restricting suffrage from Black men.<sup>56</sup> In response, a small delegation of African American men made their way to the state constitutional convention in July 1864 to request that the amendment be repealed.

Their request was denied.

The first constitutional convention that year fell short of its goal to produce a workable document. This failure set the stage for a second convention in 1865, where eligible voters wrestled with the question of suffrage for Black men. The resulting constitution was approved by voters on September 5, 1865 but the electorate overwhelmingly rejected the idea of equal suffrage – voting against the measure 4,192 to 476.<sup>57</sup> Moved to action, Black businessmen Edward Sanderlin, Henry O. Wagoner and William J. Hardin led a campaign to delay Colorado's statehood prospects until the Territory's leaders guaranteed the right for Black men to vote. Their attempt to circumvent the Colorado Territory's Republican leadership was unsuccessful, however, due to a lack of influence and sympathy at the federal level.

The men turned to then-Territory Governor Alexander Cummings. Hardin, Wagoner, and J.G. Smith, another Black businessman, took a petition that noted the community's frustration with the voting restriction. Cummings, who was vehemently opposed to statehood for the territory,

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<sup>55</sup> E. H. Berwanger. 1975. Reconstruction on the Frontier: The Equal Rights Struggle in Colorado, 1865-1867. *Pacific Historical Review*, 44(3), 314.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 315.

capitalized on their concerns, forwarded their petition to Secretary of State William Seward.<sup>58</sup> Their petition failed to sway enough members of Congress, and in April 1866, they voted to admit the Territory. President Andrew Johnson, however, vetoed the bill, due to the Territory's small population.

However, the issue of Black suffrage was far from settled in Congress. The debate in the Colorado Territory provided Radical Republicans with a platform to keep the issue of voting restrictions in the national spotlight. By January 1867, it was clear that their efforts were not in vain. Congress voted to bar racial restrictions on voting rights among eligible voters in all territories, marking a pivotal shift in the nation's democratic landscape.<sup>59</sup> The law was signed by President Johnson on January 31. Though many white Coloradans remained opposed, the law permitted Black men to vote. Lawmakers in the Colorado territory had a choice: either eliminate the racial restrictions on voting or risk being in violation of federal law and jeopardize their opportunity for statehood. Black men in Colorado eventually cast their vote for the first time in April 1867 during the municipal elections in Denver and Central City.<sup>60</sup>

### Political Involvement After Statehood

Among the first Black men to become involved in Colorado politics was Barney Ford, a successful business owner. In 1872, Ford became the first Black man to serve on a federal grand jury. He was later selected by the Colorado Republican Party's Central Committee to run for a seat in the territorial House of Representatives. Though he was unsuccessful, Ford became the first African American to run for elected office in Colorado.<sup>61</sup>

The 1880s was a defining era for Black political organizing in Colorado. John T. Gunnell would go on to become the first Black man to sit in the state legislature in 1880.<sup>62</sup> Gunnell represented "District E" in Denver, which is now known as Arapahoe County. While in office, Gunnell faced fierce opposition and anti-Black racism. In 1881, the *Leadville Democrat* published commentary from *The South Arkansas Miner*, a newspaper in Maysville, Colorado that addressed Gunnell's status as a representative. "As to qualifications," the article reads, "he [Gunnell] hasn't the first one to entitle him to the place. He is illiterate, and practically uninformed...It was a mistake for Arapahoe to elect him."<sup>63</sup> Along with chairing the committee on federal regulations, Gunnell also served on the elections and apportionment as well as penitentiary committees. Of the number of

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 317.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 323.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Shirley Ann Wilson Moore. 2016. *Sweet Freedom's Plains: African Americans on the Overland Trails, 1841-1869*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 222.

<sup>62</sup> "Colored Pioneer Parses [sic] Away," *The Rocky Mountain News* (Daily), Volume 43, Number 178, June 27, 1902.

<sup>63</sup> "Renters Dots," *Leadville Democrat*, February 24, 1881.

bills he voted for, Gunnell voted for the passing of House Bill 60 in 1881, which would granted suffrage to women if passed.<sup>64</sup>

By 1883, the Colored Central Republican Club of Denver was in full swing.<sup>65</sup> In a statement released to *The Rocky Mountain News* in 1884, the Club noted its creation for “the purpose of consulting together and considering the means best calculated to insure the elevation of our race, and also support men for office who interest themselves in our elevation as citizens.”<sup>66</sup> The group’s efforts extended beyond endorsements, actively encouraging Black men to participate in the democratic process.

During this period, Black citizens were not just participants in politics but vocal advocates, shaping the dialogue and asserting their place in the civic life of the state. In a letter addressed to “the Colored Voters of Denver,” Henry O. Wagoner, H.C. Radcliff, W.H. Green, C.A. Redmond, Thomas J. Riley, R. Branford, Isaiah Mitchell, John T. Gunnell, and James Mackey challenged a law that regulated marriages between Black people, on the grounds, citing Judge Taney in the Dred Scott decision, that “they [Black people] are the wards of the state, so far below the whites in the scale of physical, moral, and intellectual development as to warrant their classification little higher than the brute creation.”<sup>67</sup> Defiant, the group affirmed that they rejected the premise of the supposed inferiority of Black people.

Black women in Denver played a significant role in organizing around voting rights and broader civil rights for Black people. For example, a *Rocky Mountain News* article from February 1885 highlighted the direct political action of the “Colored Ladies Legal Rights Association.”<sup>68</sup> The group was said to have contributed, in part, to the passage of a state civil rights bill that addressed discrimination in “places of public accommodation.”<sup>69</sup> In 1890, Elizabeth Piper Ensley, a political activist and reformer, became involved in the campaign for women’s suffrage in Colorado.

On November 7, 1893, Colorado became the first state in the U.S. to enfranchise women by popular referendum. In 1894, Einsley, commented on the “special part” African American women played in supporting African American men in the hopes of electing a representative to the state legislature “although a majority of those brothers voted against women’s

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<sup>64</sup> Jess Brovsky-Eaker. “John Gunnell’s Legislative Legacy.” Law Week Colorado. February 15, 2023, <https://www.lawweekcolorado.com/article/john-gunnells-legislative-legacy/>.

<sup>65</sup> Polly E. Bugros McLean. 2018. *Remembering Lucile: A Virginia Family’s Rise from Slavery and a Legacy Forged a Mile High*. Boulder, Colorado: University Press of Colorado, 114.

<sup>66</sup> “Routt Endorsed,” *The Rocky Mountain News* (Daily), Volume 25, August 19, 1884.

<sup>67</sup> “To the Colored Voters of Denver,” *The Rocky Mountain News* (Daily), Volume 29, April 3, 1887.

<sup>68</sup> Elizabeth Jameson and Susan H Armitage. 1997. *Writing the Range: Race, Class, and Culture in the Women’s West*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 374.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

enfranchisement.”<sup>70</sup> Among the candidates they supported was Joseph H. Stuart, a Black lawyer from Barbados.

Though often credited as the first, Stuart became the second Black man elected to the Colorado state legislature in 1894 – serving from 1895 to 1897.<sup>71</sup> Among his achievements in the state legislature was his sponsorship of a bill to strengthen civil rights laws. In 1895, Stuart sponsored legislation concerning equal public accommodations for Black people and the end of housing discrimination in the state.<sup>72</sup> Despite the passage of this bill, those accommodations would not be fully realized until 1965 with the passage of the Civil Rights Act.<sup>73</sup>

Throughout the state, Black communities demonstrated a deep commitment to political action. The Black vote in Colorado Springs was stratified in 1897.<sup>74</sup> Black Republicans criticized others in the community who voted for the Democrat ticket as “loungers, black legs, and town toughs,’ who had not earned a dollar by good hard work for the last four years.”<sup>75</sup> In the midst of this rupture, voters in the “quite large” Black community of Colorado Springs, instead, put forth the “Liberty Bell” ticket which endorsed a number of candidates in their local election.<sup>76</sup> In a letter from 1904 published in *The Colorado Daily Chieftain*, W.B. Townsend, J.D. Harkness, D.A. Jefferson, W. Hood, J.J. Jennings, and W.M. Rose addressed the “colored voters of Pueblo” and reminded them of their rights. “They will not submit to the attempt that is being made by the Democrats to prevent a part of their numbers from voting at Tuesday’s election,” the statement read.<sup>77</sup>

In 1908, Colorado passed a law that provided for the “full and equal enjoyment of...places of public accommodation and amusement.”<sup>78</sup> Similar to reactions to the previous civil rights law, businesses continued to discriminate against Black patrons. Black patrons continued to use segregated seating in prominent performance venues such as the Tabor Grand Opera House in

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<sup>70</sup> Noliwe Rooks, Victoria Pass, and Ayana Weekley. 2017. *Women’s Magazines in Print and New Media*. New York, NY: Routledge, 100.

<sup>71</sup> Jess Brovsky-Eaker, “The Lawyer-Turned-Legislator Who First Tackled Racial Discrimination in Colorado,” *Law Week Colorado*, June 18, 2021, <https://www.lawweekcolorado.com/article/the-lawyer-turned-legislator-who-first-tackled-racial-discrimination-in-colorado/>.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> “City Convention Names a Ticket for the Campaign,” *The Rocky Mountain News (Daily)*, Volume 38, Number 78, March 19, 1897.

<sup>75</sup> “Colored Voters Interested,” *The Colorado Daily Chieftain*, March 23, 1897.

<sup>76</sup> “Liberty Bell Ticket,” *The Rocky Mountain News (Daily)*, Volume 38, Number 79, March 20, 1897.

<sup>77</sup> “Colored Voters Advised By Prominent Citizens,” *The Colorado Daily Chieftain*, Volume LXVI, Number 10, November 6, 1904.

<sup>78</sup> Craig Levitt, “A Shelter from Harsh Times,” April 14, 2021, *History Colorado*, <https://www.historycolorado.org/2021/04/14/shelter-harsh-times>

Denver.<sup>79</sup> Meanwhile, Black individuals were also prohibited from using golf courses and tennis courts.<sup>80</sup>

The shadow of the Ku Klux Klan loomed over Denver's African American community during the 1920s. With at least 30,000 members from 1924 to 1926, its influence could be felt from the Colorado state legislature to the Denver mayor's office and police department.<sup>81</sup> In 1926, donning their unmistakable white hoods, Klansmen marched down Larimer Street. To keep Denver's African American community abreast of their activities, Joseph H.P. Westbrook, an African American physician and business owner in the Five Points Neighborhood infiltrated the organization. Westbrook was a stalwart of civil rights in Denver's African American community. For a period of time, the Denver branch of the NAACP was headquartered in the reception room of his medical practice — a space where activism intertwined with the care for the body.<sup>82</sup>

### Post-World War II Politics

By the 1950s, Colorado began to confront de facto segregation through a wave of local and statewide initiatives. In 1957, Denver took a pivotal step with the passage of a fair housing policy, expanding opportunities for the city's Black residents. Among the most significant milestones of the 20th century was *Keyes v. School District No. 1*, a landmark case that directly challenged de facto segregation in Denver Public Schools.

An early proponent of ending de facto segregation in Denver Public Schools was Rachel Noel. Noel was the first African American to hold public office in Colorado after she was elected to the Denver Board of Education in 1965. Facing racism in the Denver Public School system, she introduced Resolution 1520 to the Board, calling for the immediate end to de facto segregation in Denver.<sup>83</sup> The Denver School Board passed the "Noel Resolution" in January 1969, which proposed closing overpopulated schools in Black neighborhoods and bussing those students into integrated schools.<sup>84</sup> The Board rescinded the measure five months later when a new School Board administration took office.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> "Ku Klux Klan," *Colorado Encyclopedia*, <https://coloradoencyclopedia.org/article/ku-klux-klan-colorado>.

<sup>82</sup> Richard Edwards and Jacob K. Friefeld. 2023. *The First Migrants: How Black Homesteaders' Quest for Land and Freedom Heralded America's Great Migration*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 282.

<sup>83</sup> "Celebrating Colorado's Black Leaders and Their Impact on Education," *Colorado Youth for a Change*, February 15, 2021, <https://youthforachange.org/news/celebrating-colorados-black-leaders-and-their-impact-on-education/>.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

In 1970, the Colorado Supreme Court found that Denver public schools in the northeastern part of the city had engaged in policies and practices that led to racially segregated schools.<sup>86</sup> The case was appealed, eventually making its way to the Supreme Court of the United States. In *Keyes v. School District No. 1*, the majority of the Court upheld the lower court's decision in 1973. It was the first desegregation case decided for a school system outside of the American South. A year later, in 1974, Fairplay elected Ada Belle Evans as its mayor (Figure 7).

Born in a small rural community in Aiken County, South Carolina, Evans eventually made her way to Colorado when her husband, Ray, took up a job as a music teacher in Agate.<sup>87</sup> Evans was also an educator, becoming a substitute teacher in Denver and Commerce City.<sup>88</sup> In 1966, Ada and their children moved to Fairplay to join Ray, who had begun working as a music director and instructor at South Park High School in 1963.<sup>89</sup> There, Ada found a teaching position at the school. Her warm demeanor and widespread popularity in the community led a fellow teacher at the local elementary school to encourage her to run for mayor.<sup>90</sup> Evans took up the challenge. As a mayoral candidate, her campaign focused on improving the town's roads and expanding access to recreation facilities, promises that resonated with the community.<sup>91</sup> With her win in 1974, Evans made history as the first Black mayor in Colorado and the first woman to hold the office in Fairplay.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Cody White, "Keyes v. School District Number One, Denver, Colorado; Eliminating the 'Root and Branch' of School Segregation," *Rediscovering Black History*, July 31, 2018. <https://rediscovering-black-history.blogs.archives.gov/2018/07/31/keyes-v-school-district-number-one-denver-colorado-eliminating-the-root-and-branch-of-school-segregation/>

<sup>87</sup> Acoma Gaither, "Ada Belle Evans," *History Colorado*, December 6, 2024, <https://www.historycolorado.org/story/2024/12/06/ada-belle-evans#:~:text=An%20African%20American%20family%20landed,Fairplay%20in%20the%20late%201800s.&text=Ada%20Belle%20Evans%20became%20Colorado's,her%20into%20office%20in%201974.>

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*



**Figure 7. Portrait of Ada Belle Evans, Date unknown, *Courtesy of History Colorado.***

In the latter-half of the 20th century to the 21st century, a number of African American/Black individuals were elected to public office throughout Colorado. Please note that this list is not exhaustive.

- Omar Blair, the first Black president of the Denver School Board (1977), played a pivotal role in dismantling segregation in school busing during the 1970s
- John William Buckner, first Black state representative for the 40th district (2013 - 2015)
- Elvin Caldwell, three-term member of the Colorado legislature, first African American to serve on a city council west of the Mississippi River, and appointed by Mayor Webb to serve Denver's Manager of Safety in 1980
- Michael B. Hancock, Mayor of Denver (2011 - 2023)
- Yemi Mobolade, first Black mayor of Colorado Springs (2023 - Present)
- King M. Trimble, state representative (1977 - 1980), Denver city councilman (1980 - 1983)
- Penfield Tate III, state representative (1997 - 2000) and state senator (2000 - 2003)
- Gloria Travis Tanner, state representative (1985-1994), first Black woman to serve as a Colorado state senator (1994 - 2000)



The civil rights gains of the postwar decades created new possibilities for Black political leadership in Denver and across Colorado. Among those who came of age in this era and translated those possibilities into public service were Wellington E. and Wilma J. Webb. Wellington graduated from Manual High School and went on to earn degrees from Northeastern College and the University of Northern Colorado before entering politics. Elected to the Colorado House of Representatives in 1972, the same year the *Keyes v. School District No. 1* case was making its way through the courts, Wellington represented the Whittier neighborhood district where he and Wilma had purchased their home the previous year. Wilma, a native of northeast Denver and product of Whittier Elementary School, Cole Jr. High, and Manual High School, was herself elected to the Colorado House of Representatives in 1980, succeeding King M. Trimble in the same District 8 seat. Together, the Webbs embodied the political aspirations of a community that had fought for generations to secure its place in Denver's civic life.

It is within this long arc of Black political organizing in Colorado, from the fight for suffrage in the territorial era to the landmark civil rights victories of the mid-twentieth century, that the careers of Wellington E. and Wilma J. Webb must be understood. Rooted in northeast Denver's historically Black neighborhoods and educated at Manual High School, the Webbs emerged from the same community that had long fought for equal representation, fair housing, and educational opportunity. Their decades of public service, from the Colorado House of Representatives to the mayor's office and beyond, represent the culmination of generations of civic struggle in Denver's Black community. The home at 2329 N. Gaylord Street in the Whittier neighborhood was the place where that public life was anchored.

## **Five Points Neighborhood and Surrounding Areas**

### The Movement Toward Five Points and Northeast Denver Neighborhoods

The history of African Americans in Denver begins in the mid-19th century, as prospectors flocked to Colorado's gold mines, using the city as a crucial point for replenishing supplies. In the late 19th century, Denver emerged as a vital center for African American life, as Black residents sought new opportunities in the West. Despite the challenges of segregation and limited housing, African Americans established strong communities, notably in the Five Points Neighborhood, where a middle class of professionals and entrepreneurs thrived. African Americans in Denver built institutions such as churches, schools, and fraternal organizations, laying a foundation for civic engagement. African American women played a crucial role, advocating for civil rights and suffrage, shaping the city's history through resilience and leadership amidst systemic barriers.

The first major push of African Americans toward the Five Points Neighborhood occurred in 1883, prompted by housing shortages within areas traditionally occupied by Denver's African American population. The name "Five Points" was adopted in 1881 to represent

the intersection of Welton Street, Twenty-seventh Street, Washington Street, and East Twenty-sixth Avenue – a series of names that were too long to list on streetcar signs. This neighborhood grew out of efforts to prepare for the inevitable expansion of Denver’s railroad system.<sup>93</sup> Francis M. Case and Frederick J. Ebert, two prominent Denver residents, filed the plat of Case and Ebert’s Addition in 1868.<sup>94</sup> This plat included land south of the South Platte River and the northeast of the area that would eventually become the Five Points Neighborhood.<sup>95</sup> Other developers followed, purchasing additional plats that would make up the Five Points Neighborhood in the late 1860s and throughout the 1870s.<sup>96</sup> In its early years, Five Points’ Curtis Park section – the city’s first public park – was mostly populated by German immigrants and a number of Jewish families.<sup>97</sup> Curtis Park, with its designation as a public park, became a highly desirable location for homeowners.

As African American residents began to move toward Five Points, many of the area’s white residents responded by selling their properties, with some relocating to Capitol Hill.<sup>98</sup> Close to the railroads, manufacturers, and other services, the area became a lifeline for the working class. Others would make their way to the northeast section of the city as well as the Whittier and Cole neighborhoods in the late 19th century.<sup>99</sup>

Denver’s African American middle-class boasted a diverse array of professionals, including musicians, doctors, lawyers, dressmakers, caterers, and storekeepers, among others.<sup>100</sup> During this time period, Dr. Justina Ford, the first Black woman to receive her medical license in Colorado, served patients at her home in the Five Points area. Also of note were Mary E. Phelps and Mrs. L.K. Daniels, who ran the Bonita Silver and Gold mining Company, founded in 1896.<sup>101</sup> By 1904, more affluent African Americans of Denver’s Black community began moving away from the crowded areas near downtown and the railroad to the Five Points intersection.<sup>102</sup>

All eyes turned toward the Five Points Neighborhood, and the social, cultural, and economic aspirations held by Denver’s African American community. “Our people are settling around Five

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<sup>93</sup> Tom and Laurie Simmons, “Denver Neighborhood History Project, 1993-94: Five Points Neighborhood,” *Denver Public Library*, 1995, 19.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>98</sup> Damion Pechota, *Denver Fire House No. 3 National Register of Historic Places Nomination*, 2024, 11.

<sup>99</sup> Tom and Laurie Simmons. *The Instant City*, 16.

<sup>100</sup> Taylor Quintard. 1998. *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528- 1990*. New York: W.W. Norton, 203.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

<sup>102</sup> Damion Pechota, *Denver Fire House No. 3 National Register of Historic Places Nomination*, 2024, 11.

Points very rapidly,” claimed Joseph D.D. Rivers, editor of *The Colorado Statesman*, in 1909. “In a few years this will be an aristocratic colored neighborhood,” he wrote. A listing in *The Statesman* – an African American newspaper in Denver – from “Mrs. Epperson” in 1912 advertising a room for rent at 2607 Glenarm Place, shows a glimpse of the shift in racial demographics in the Five Points Neighborhood.<sup>103</sup> This shift was marked by the gradual migration of African Americans into the once predominantly white neighborhood.

The Great Migration of 1916-1919, denoted by the incremental movement of African Americans from rural parts of the South to Northern and Western areas, increased the numbers of African Americans in Denver.<sup>104</sup> Denver’s African Americans continued to move toward Five Points and the adjacent Whittier neighborhood.<sup>105</sup> These neighborhoods housed more than 90 percent of Denver’s African American population.<sup>106</sup> As one of the few residential neighborhoods available to Black people, Five Points faced severe overcrowding. City projects, such as the expansion of Broadway into Blake Street exacerbated the problem through displacing many low-income individuals and families and pushing them in the Five Points Neighborhood.<sup>107</sup>

The history of Five Points cannot be fully understood in isolation from the adjacent Whittier and surrounding neighborhood, which share deep historical, cultural, and institutional ties with Five Points. By the 1920s, 90 percent of Denver’s Black population was concentrated in Five Points and western Whittier, confined by discriminatory housing practices including restrictive covenants and redlining. The informal “race line” that initially ran along Downing Street was pushed block by block eastward through Whittier over subsequent decades, first to Race Street and eventually to York Street, as Black residents fought against the barriers that limited where they could live. The area east of York Street became known as “Struggle Hill” — a name that captured both the resistance Black residents faced and their determination to claim space in the city. By the late 1940s, Whittier had shifted to a majority Black neighborhood, even as middle-class Black families continued to push the boundaries of segregation eastward into Skyland, Park Hill, and beyond.<sup>108</sup>

During the 1920s, Black businesses in Five Points and the surrounding neighborhoods, such as Whittier, began to grow.<sup>109</sup> Jazz and blues clubs along Welton Street and throughout the neighborhood, Rice’s Tap Room, the Casino Cabaret, the Ex-Serviceman’s Club, and the Rossonian Lounge, helped build the reputation of Five Points as an entertainment district

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<sup>103</sup> “City News,” *The Statesman*, Volume 23, June 15, 1912.

<sup>104</sup> Shawn M. Snow, *Denver’s City Park and Whittier Neighborhoods*, 7.

<sup>105</sup> “Five Points-Whittier Neighborhood History.” Denver Public Library.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Damion Pechota, *Denver Fire House No. 3 National Register of Historic Places Nomination*, 2024, 12.

<sup>108</sup> Mead Hunt, NE Denver Historic Context, 15-17.

<sup>109</sup> Tom Simmons and Laurie Simmons, “Denver Neighborhood History Project, 1993-94: Five Points Neighborhood,” *The Denver Public Library*, 38.

throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Five Points would continue to be a vibrant hub for Black-owned businesses like Mallard's Grocery and Confectionary, Melvina's Beauty Shop, The House of Beauty, and Rhythm Records and Sporting Goods for most of the 20th century.<sup>111</sup>

After years of significant growth, African American movement into Denver stalled in the 1930s. The Five Points Neighborhood buckled under the weight of the Great Depression. Five Points neighborhood businessman Ben Hooper took to the streets to deliver food, convincing sponsors of rabbit hunts on Colorado's eastern plains to donate game for the needy.<sup>112</sup>

The neighborhood's population steadily declined over time. The 1940 census recorded 24,647 residents in the neighborhood.<sup>113</sup> That number decreased to 8,065 residents by 1990, reflecting the area's shifting landscape.<sup>114</sup> The decrease can be attributed to a number of factors. In 1957, Denver passed a fair housing policy that lifted restrictive policies on where Black residents could live.<sup>115</sup> The policy allowed Denver's Black residents to move to sections of the city outside of the Five Points area.<sup>116</sup> In addition, housing developments like those in Montbello provided integrated, and affordable housing.<sup>117</sup>

Even as neighborhoods like Montbello began to offer new housing opportunities for Black residents, Five Points, along with adjacent neighborhoods, remains an epicenter of African American life in Denver. It anchors traditions like the Juneteenth and Five Points Jazz Festivals – celebrations that pulse with the rich history and enduring resilience of Denver's African American community.

The Five Points Neighborhood and surrounding areas further solidified their African American legacy with the construction of the Blair-Caldwell Library. The library was named after Omar Blair and Elvin Caldwell – the first African American President of the Denver Public School Board and first African American Councilman in District 8, respectively. The dream for a library devoted to recognizing and celebrating African American history took shape over several years. Denver Public Library established a small, one-room branch library in the Five Points Neighborhood in the early 1980s. This library was limited in its holdings, stocked with nonfiction

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<sup>110</sup> Damion Pechota, *Denver Fire House No. 3 National Register of Historic Places Nomination*, 2024, 11.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>112</sup> Tom Simmons and Laurie Simmons, "Tops Down and Bottoms Up Intervention—The Great Depression, Federal Relief Programs, and World War II, 1930-45," *Discover Denver*, 3. <https://www.discoverdenver.co/sites/discoverdenver.co/files/document/pdf/Tops%20Down%20and%20Bottoms%20Up%20Intervention%201930-1945.pdf>.

<sup>113</sup> Damion Pechota, *Denver Fire House No. 3 National Register of Historic Places Nomination*, 2024, 12.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

paperbacks and magazines.<sup>118</sup> Local African American residents dreamed of a larger branch library that reflected the rich history of the neighborhoods.<sup>119</sup> That dream became a reality 17 years later when Wellington and Wilma Webb put together plans to give the area a “modern, updated and interactive facility that captured the unique history of the neighborhood.”<sup>120</sup> In 2002, developers broke ground for the new library, opening its doors in April 2003. Central to its mission, the Blair-Caldwell Library sought “to serve as an educational and cultural resource for the people of Denver, Colorado and the world, focusing on the history, literature, art, music, religion and politics of African Americans in Colorado and throughout the Rocky Mountain West.”<sup>121</sup>

Like Five Points, Whittier experienced the dual pressures of mid-century disinvestment and later gentrification, trends that continue to shape both neighborhoods today. It was in this context, at the eastern edge of Whittier, on the boundary of what had once been “Struggle Hill,” that Wellington E. and Wilma J. Webb made their home at 2329 N. Gaylord Street in 1971, a choice that was itself a reflection of the hard-won gains of the civil rights movement.<sup>122</sup>

## 7. Additional Information

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<sup>118</sup> “A Brief History of the Blair-Caldwell Library.” 2016. <https://history.denverlibrary.org/news/african-american-research-library/brief-history-blair-caldwell-library>

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### Designation Boundary

Include an aerial image showing the proposed boundary of the designation

The resource is identified in the Denver assessor records as: L 23 & N 1/2 OF L 22 EXC REAR 8FT TO CITY BLK 18 MCCULLOUGH SADD



Denver Assessor's Office map of resource.

## Photographs

Attach at least four digital photographs showing the views of the property from the public right of way and any important features or details. If available, include historic photographs of the structure.



Photo 1. East-facing façade.



Photo 2. Northeast corner, North elevation.



Photo 3. Southeast corner, South elevation.



Photo 4. West elevation.



Photo 5. East elevation doric square post detail.



Photo 6. East elevation classical frieze detail.



Photo 7. East elevation dentils and modillion details.



Photo 8. Overview showing east façade and adjacent residences.

#### Application Fee

Find the correct fee from the below table. (Make check payable to Denver Manager of Finance).

- Application for designation of a structure for preservation (owner applicant) – \$250
- Application for designation of a structure for preservation (non-owner applicant) – \$875