



# Race Work: The Rise of Civil Rights in the Urban West (Race and Ethnicity in the American West)

*Matthew C. Whitaker*

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Nearly sixty years ago, Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale descended upon the isolated, somewhat desolate, and entirely segregated city of Phoenix, Arizona, in search of freedom and opportunity—a move that would ultimately transform an entire city and, arguably, the nation. *Race Work* tells the story of this remarkable pair, two of the most influential black activists of the post–World War II American West, and through their story, supplies a missing chapter in the history of the civil rights movement, American race relations, African Americans, and the American West.

Matthew C. Whitaker explores the Ragsdales' family history and how their familial traditions of entrepreneurship, professionalism, activism, and “race work” helped form their activist identity and placed them in a position to help desegregate Phoenix. His work, the first sustained account of white supremacy and black resistance in Phoenix, also uses the lives of the Ragsdales to examine themes of domination, resistance, interracial coalition building, race, gender, and place against the backdrop of the civil rights and post–civil rights eras. An absorbing biography that provides insight into African Americans’ quest for freedom, *Race Work* reveals the lives of the Ragsdales as powerful symbols of black leadership who illuminate the problems and progress in African American history, American Western history, and American history during the post–World War II era.



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