Boggs' work ultimately led to profound impacts on urban agriculture in Detroit in the form of community gardens.

Boggs' 70 years of political involvement encompass some of the major U.S. social movements of the past hundred years.

Grace Lee Boggs (1915-2015)
Boggs' work in urban agriculture originated by unique means. She was born in Providence, R.I. in 1915 to parents originating in Qing dynasty China. She attended and studied at Barnard College, NY, on a scholarship and earned her Ph.D. in philosophy from Bryn Mawr College, PA in 1940.

However, she struggled to find work in PA after finishing school, even facing direct racism “...even department stores would say, ‘we don’t hire Orientals!’”
Living in inhumane conditions in a Chicago slum inspired Boggs to become a tenant organizer. Her marriage to James Boggs, an Africa-American auto worker and political activist, in 1953 and her move to Detroit “transformed her political philosophies into life as an activist.”

She and John joined local protests against poor housing conditions, and she eventually left her career in academia to focus on social activism and connecting with the black community.
Boggs became a distinguished figure in Detroit’s Black Power movement, playing an active role in redeveloping Detroit’s infrastructure. She aided in access to education and resources within the inner city by installing community gardens, community centers and schools. These dedicated schools taught community collaboration and gardening skills to all ages.
Boggs founded the *Detroit Summer* Project, a multicultural intergenerational youth program named after the 1964 Mississippi Summer Project.

The project started by volunteers installing community gardens which Boggs stated “[helped] reconnect young people with the Earth and with the community.”

Shortly after she started the James and Grace Lee Boggs Center to Nurture Community Leadership, which still offers opportunities for people to engage in community building events and to learn urban agriculture that enhances food security today.
EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES: A LEGACY

By giving communities the ability to collaborate with each other to achieve better food and housing security, Boggs gave the community more power and less dependence.

Grace Lee Boggs passed away on October 15th, 2015 leaving her enduring legacy.
Grace Lee Boggs was a pillar in the Detroit community, and in a way an urban ecologist whose beginnings were driven by necessity. Her selfless devotion to Detroit’s urban agriculture, and community as a whole will have a lasting impact for generations to come.
Untold Stories detail the hidden chapters & contributions by underrepresented groups in natural resources history.

Stories are compiled by WCNR Students on behalf of WCNR Office of Diversity and Inclusion.