State of Black Women in Michigan

Voices from the Movement
“Black women in America have learned to find humor in heartache, to see beauty in the midst of desperation and horror. They have been both, caregivers and breadwinners, showing incredible strength and resilience, unflinching loyalty, boundless love and affection. They have risen above centuries of oppression so that, today, after years of dealing with society’s racist and sexist misconceptions, with its brutal hostilities and unthinkable mistreatment, not only are they supporting families, they’re leading corporations, major media organizations, the military, our state and federal governments.” - Charissa Jones and Kumea Shorter-Gooden, “Shifting: The Double Lives of Black Women in America”

The dichotomy of being a Black woman in America at this particular moment can be best expressed in the 3 word phrases that have been splattered across social media in recent years. “Black Lives Matter” expresses our frustration with being stereotyped, brutalized and killed by the ones sworn to protect us. For the first time the world is learning about the struggle we go through to raise our children in a racist society. “Black Girl Magic” — from Serena to Viola to Michelle to Loretta — as a people, the sun is on our face. Through these women the world is seeing how we have the ability to persevere, be brilliant, and awe-inspiring. “Say Her Name” has been our cry as we work to bring attention to how we are still dying with little to no attention payed to the violence against us. From the disproportionate rate of violence against black women in the LGBT community to chronic illnesses, discrimination and racism is costing us our lives. But in public and private life “Black Women Lead”. Black women are powerful and the roles we play in our communities and rooms of power are paving the way for us to be the change makers that can lift up the most marginalized communities in this country.

Today we turn our attention inward, looking at how Black women are fairing in our state. Much can be deciphered from stats and facts but it’s the stories, the lived experiences that will bring about the will to make change. I welcome you to be a part of the start of the conversation about the state of Black women in Michigan.

Danielle Atkinson, Co-Convenor, Detroit Black Women’s Roundtable
Director, Mothering Justice
Our Vigilance is Needed
By County Commissioner Stephanie Moore

As Michigan continues to make its way out of the worst economy the state has seen in decades, the issues that particularly affect Black women remain consistent with national issues. With a more conservative legislature and state leadership, Michigan will continue to debate the following issues in order to continue to stem the amount of dollars flowing out of the state and hitting the tax payers.

Women’s Health

Specifically, recent legislative burdens related to women accessing female related healthcare continues to be debated. Most women of color in Michigan use non-traditional health clinics, such as Planned Parenthood, for women’s health including cancer screenings, after miscarriage care, etc. HB4145, if passed, will prohibit Michigan from giving funds to any organization that either provides abortions or even refers women to places that do, even if the referral is for something other than an abortion. HB4146 would require an abortion performed after 19 weeks to only be done in hospitals that has a neonatal unit (in Kalamazoo County/Southwest Michigan, there would only be two hospitals with NICU’s. Neither of those hospitals perform elective abortions unless there are medical reasons). For all Michigan women, these two legislative bills would create an increased burden to access care. Especially for poor women, who, in Michigan, are also more than likely to be women of color or more specifically, Black.

Mergers of Department of Human Services and Department of Community Health

The impact on communities of color still has not yet been fully projected regarding the merging of the two largest social service departments in the state. The lack of projections causes a sense of nervousness among not only individuals who access services through DHS and DCH but those who provide services and work collaboratively with these two departments. The impact could be positive for Black women who also are typically head of households in Michigan. However, the impact could be negative in that it would impede the navigation of one large department that is meant to service a plethora of needs. Black women in Michigan would have to keep an eye out for this.

Drug Screening of Welfare Recipients

Other states haven’t proven that to drug screen welfare-recipients is not only fruitless but also creates an additional cost burden to the state. Black head of households will also have to keep an eye out for unintentional consequences including unfair testing, inequitable treatment of families, and other implications that would cause a negative impact on Black families who are already struggling in this Michigan economy.

Common Core Testing for Michigan Children

The anticipation of this type of testing can be a good or bad idea for Michigan children, especially children of color who most reside in areas of the state with also the lowest performing schools.

National issues including equal pay for equal work, the impending Supreme Court’s ruling on the ACA, and others will continue to catch the eyes of Black women across this nation.
Caring for ALL of Our Children
By Phyllis Jacob

Special Education is treated poorly in the state of Michigan. Children with special needs are not given the attention and resources that is needed to make them feel welcomed in the classroom. I feel special needs children in Michigan are left out in the cold when it comes to accommodating their needs. Most of the children and their parents are left to figure out the issues on their own or with the help of private professionals, assuming the families even have the means to financially support these avenues (which can drain a family’s income). Aside from private entities, when the issues of special needs are finally addressed, school staff lacks the necessary knowledge to accommodate the ones who need it most. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability requiring accommodations for these exceptional students. This law applies to all public elementary and secondary schools among other entities. The Rehabilitation Act address a wide-range of issues, such as ADHD and learning disabilities, however, it does not specifically list disabilities by name.

Having a disability does not automatically qualify a student for a 504 plan. Testing must be done in order for a disability to be recognized by the school so that a child may qualify for the 504 plan. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (or IDEA) requires that public schools create an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for every child receiving special education. This is what the IDEA looks like:

- A statement of your child’s present level of performance — a measure of how your child is doing in school
- Your child’s educational goals
- Special education supports and services that the school will provide to help your child reach his/her goals
- Modifications and accommodations the school will provide to help your child progress
- Accommodations your child will be allowed when taking standardized tests
- How and when the school will measure your child’s progress toward annual goals, and
- Transition planning that prepare teens for post secondary education.

The steps in place sound good, but it is really not that simple.

First, parents are not often privy to these IEP accommodations. Children with high disciplinary issues are often children who may need special needs in the classroom. The child may receive
several suspensions which limits the child’s access to school. Additionally, the school does not offer the IEP plan at onset of the behavioral challenges in the classroom. If they did, it would save the child and their parents a lot of stress in the process. The school leads parents to believe that their child is being disruptive because they are terrible children or that you are a terrible parent for allowing them to behave a certain way. Due to this stigmatization, many parents experience horrible treatment before these accommodations are even mentioned. In my experience, I found this was done to limit the extra effort/experience that is required to educate the child. My family experienced this very issue when my child was in elementary school. I found that the educators in charge lacked knowledge and experience when dealing with special needs children. Our daughter had ADHD and I felt the personal opinions of the educators leading the discussions lacked knowledge on the subject of ADHD. During my child’s IEP plan meeting, I was once asked by a teacher, “Does that mean she can’t eat sugar, or food with red food coloring in it?” That kind of misinformation led to me changing my child’s school.

For us the solution came with picking a school with small classroom sizes, educators experienced with children with ADHD, and the willingness to allow my child to test alone in the classroom to keep her anxiety level under control. The only drawback of this school was it was extremely expensive—depleting my families savings. I would not change the outcome of my child’s life for the world. I believe had we kept her in her prior school system, she would not have had the educational opportunities that were afforded to her in her new system.

Unfortunately, these same horror stories are still going on today. Parents feel like they are left in the dark concerning their child’s education. In many areas where the majority of the students are African American, there is a lack of information as well as resources for our children in schools. What will it take to change our public school system that educates a majority of our children? I believe smaller classroom sizes and the ability to customize a curriculum is what is needed along with educating our educators with the proper tools to use on our ever-changing society.

**Race, Gender and Education in Michigan by the Numbers**

Black, Latino, and Native American students have less access to advanced math and science courses and are more likely to be taught by first-year instructors than white students [3-4% vs. 1% respectively]

Black students account for 18% of the country’s pre-K enrollment, 48% with multiple out of school suspensions.

Black students were expelled at three times the rate of white students.
Black girls were suspended at higher rates than all other girls and most boys.

A quarter of the schools with the highest percentage of Black and Latino students did not offer Algebra II and a third of those schools did not offer chemistry.

Black and Latino students accounted for 40% of enrollment at schools with gifted programs, but only represented 26% of students in such programs.

Black students were more than three times as likely to attend schools where fewer than 60% of teachers meet all state certification and licensure requirements.

SOURCE:
A Community Under Attack
By Sommer Foster

We now have marriage equality in all 50 states. The Governor of Michigan has called for the expansion of the Elliott Larsen Civil Rights Act to include protections for Michiganders on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. The Michigan Competitive Workforce Coalition has formed which is a collaborative of Businesses and Chambers’ of Commerce dedicated to lobbying for the modernization of our civil rights law and we have 40 municipalities with a local non-discrimination ordinance protecting LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer) Michiganders.

Many people would think that things for the LGBTQ communities are moving in the right direction, but too many people are still being left behind. Michigan is one of 28 states that does not protect its LGBTQ citizens in employment, housing, or public accommodation. The LGBTQ community, particularly LGBTQ women of color, face economic challenges as well as fewer opportunities. In fact, LGBTQ women of color bear the brunt of the disparities experienced by gender, race, sexual orientation, and gender identity.

The lack of civil rights protections results in high rates of unemployment or underemployment, lower rates of pay, higher rates of poverty, and greater likelihood of being uninsured.

Not only do LGBTQ Michiganders face the violence of poverty, they are at great risk for physical and mental violence as well. According to the 2014 New York City Anti Violence Project Report[1], “2014 was a brutal and vicious year for LGBTQ Michiganders, reflecting the national trends for LGBTQ people. It is a stark reminder that though marriage equality is quickly winning the hearts and minds of mainstream Americans, the majority of LGBTQ people are simply not safe. Transgender women, especially transgender women of color, are disproportionately impacted by the most heinous acts of violence. Transgender people, especially transgender youth, are disproportionately at risk of committing suicide.”

The discrimination faced by youth who identify as LGBTQ often lack family support and that puts them at a disadvantage compared to their peers. According to the American Psychological Association[2], it is estimated that one-third of LGBTQ students will drop out of high school. The main cause of dropout among LGBT high school students is often the hostile school climate created by continual bullying and harassment from peers. A national survey data found that LGBTQ students fared worse on many measures of academic achievement and school engagement than their peers. According to the Ruth Ellis Center[3], “It is estimated that up to 40% of all runaway and homeless youth in the United States identify as LGBTQ.”
Disproportionately affected, most often due to family rejection, these youth are at much greater risk of suicide.”

According to The National Transgender Discrimination Survey (NTDS)[4] Black transgender people are more than eight times as likely than the general U.S. population, and more than four times as likely than the general Black population to live in extreme poverty. For transgender people, poverty translates not only into higher risk for physical violence, but it also means that many transgender people are forced into underground economies for survival, which place them at heightened risk for violence and sexual assault.

When LGBTQ communities of color experience violence, it often goes unreported due to the fear of re-victimization by police. They tend to avoid interaction with law enforcement for fear of being harassed, intimidated, or charged with an offense, even if they have been victims of physical or sexual assault.

We are seeing more reports of transgender women being killed than we did in 2014. At the time of this report, at least 19 transgender women[5] have been murdered in the United States during 2015:

- Papi Edwards, 20, of Louisville, Ky. was fatally shot on January 9.1
- Lamia Beard, 30, of Norfolk, Va. was fatally shot on January 17.
- Ty Underwood, 24, of Tyler, Texas was fatally shot on January 26.
- Yazmin Vash Payne, 33, of Los Angeles, Calif. was fatally stabbed on January 31.
- Taja Gabrielle DeJesus, 33, of San Francisco, Calif. was fatally stabbed on February 1.
- Penny Proud, 21, of New Orleans, La. was fatally shot on February 10.
- Kristina Gomez Reinwald (aka Kristina Grant Infiniti), 46, of Miami, Fla. was fatally stabbed on February 15.
- Keyshia Blige, 33, of Aurora, Ill. was fatally shot in March.
- London Chanel, 21, of Philadelphia, Pa. was fatally stabbed on May 18.
- Mercedes Williamson, 17, of George County, Ala. was found dead after being stabbed on June 2.
- Jasmine Collins, 32, of Kansas City, Mo. was fatally stabbed on June 23.
- Ashton O’Hara, 25, of Detroit, was found dead on July 14.
- India Clarke, 25, of Tampa, Fla. was fatally beaten on July 21.
· K.C. Haggard, 66, of Fresno, Calif. was fatally stabbed on July 23.

· Shade Schuler, 22, of Dallas, Texas was found dead on July 29.

· Amber Monroe, 20, of Detroit, Mich. was fatally shot on August 8.

· Kandis Capri, 35, of Phoenix, Ariz. was fatally shot on August 11.

· Elisha Walker, 20, of Salisbury, N.C. was reported missing by her family last fall and her body was found August 13.

· Tamara Dominguez, 36, of Kansas City, Mo. was killed when she was hit by a car and run over repeatedly on August 15.

Seventeen of these women were transgender women of color. Their deaths were gruesome – involving gunshots, burning, strangulation, and beating – and most have gone unsolved. In the majority of these cases, media reports mis-gendered the victims and used their birth names. The media also further stigmatized some of these women by highlighting arrest records and using mug shots instead of personal photos.

Two of these murders took place in the City of Detroit. Michigan is one of 18 states that does not include sexual orientation in its hate crimes law and one of 22 states without gender identity protections. At the time these murders were reported, there was another report of a transgender woman of color that was shot in a drive-by shooting. Her injuries were not fatal, and she is recovering.[6]

According to the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (NCAVP) 2013 report on hate violence against lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer and HIV-affected (LGBTQH) communities, 72% of the victims of LGBTQ or HIV-motivated hate violence homicides in 2013 were transgender women, and 67% were transgender women of color. When compared to their non-transgender LGBQH peers, the report found that transgender people of color were 6 times more likely to experience physical violence from the police, 1.5 times more likely to experience discrimination, 1.5 times more likely to face sexual violence, and 1.8 times more likely to experience bias-based violence in shelters.

The average life expectancy of Black transgender women is 35 years old. Violence and suicide is considered the norm when it comes to the lives of transgender women, especially trans women of color. The constant feeling of fear, risk, and violence has led many transgender women to consider self-harm. According to the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force and the National Center for Transgender Equality’s Report of the Transgender Discrimination Survey, 41% of respondents reported attempting suicide compared to 1.6% of the general population[7].

LGBTQ women of color are experiencing a state of emergency. They are facing poverty, hate, violence, and excessive levels of fear. Since LGBTQ women of color hold multiple marginalized
identities, they even more likely to experience multiple forms of violence. If we are to work to eradicate all types of violence in the LGBTQ communities, we must always consider how race, gender, sexuality and class are interconnected, and we must fight for the dignity of all women.

3 http://www.ruthelliscenter.org/about-ruth-eliss-center
5 http://hrc-assets.s3-website-us-east-1.amazonaws.com/files/assets/resources/HRC-6AntiTransgenderViolence-0519.pdf
We Are Not Here to Swap Recipes and the Women’s Place is in Her Union
By Millie Hall

If African American women had full equality in the workplace, then entities like Human Rights Commission, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), Affirmative Action, the Civil Rights Commission would not be part of our vocabulary and ongoing dialogue.

In organized labor, collective bargaining is the most powerful tool to fairness equity, racial justice, and gender equality. In March 1974 in Chicago, a group of over 3,000 women labor union leaders across rank and file founded the Coalition of Labor Union Women (fondly referred to as CLUW). At that time the organization felt it was necessary to bring women in labor unions together to protect women’s rights and to address all their needs—such as political action, discrimination and affirmative action, and solidifying their voice—especially for minority women. CLUW leadership decided the best and most effective way for women to fight for, gain, and protect our rights was through collective bargaining. We all recall that unions, through collective bargaining, raised salaries, improved working conditions, gave us the grievance procedure, provided us the 40-hour work week, created overtime provisions, and generated vacation pay and avenues for gender equity and racial justice in our pay check.

We’re also aware that the women’s movement has not resolved the many on-the-job experiences for African American women, even in the workplace that is bound by a collective bargaining agreement. African American women that are equally qualified, follow the same or similar trajectory in education, who possess the same skills and ability, and work side-by-side preforming the same job abiding by the same work rules are not always treated equally—simply because of the color of their skin, their job classification, wage, and promotional opportunity.

Often, invisible road blocks and secret forms of discrimination exist within collective bargaining agreements with gray areas and vague contract language that allow employers to legitimately exclude and prevent African American women from promotional opportunities.

Recent defeats to campaigns to save affirmative action and prevent the enactment of “right-to-work” legislation in Michigan have paralyzed fairness, equal opportunities and collective bargaining rights—specifically for women of color.

While wage inequality affects all women, it is especially pronounced for women of color. African American women working full-time, year-round make an average of a mere 64 cents for
every dollar their white male peers earn. Caucasian women make an average of 78 cents on the
dollar earned by their male counterparts. Hispanic and American Indian women gross even less.
Statistics also indicated that a black women with a bachelor’s degree, on average, earns $10,000
less than a white male with an associate degree.

We are currently in the “Fight for 15” campaign - the “D15” movement is Michigan. This
movement has brought attention to how many young African American women who are working
in the restaurant and health care industries are trying to form a union. Most of these workers, a
majority single mothers, are not earning much above minimum wage. These non-union
employees are working in poor condition with health and safety issues. They are having to make
insane choices about weather to pay the rent or buy food to feed their families.

Income makes the difference in determining a person’s quality of like. Unless we are united in
this battle we can never really accomplish the change our community needs. In the words of
Maya Angelou, “You may shoot me with your words; you may cut me with your eyes; you may
kill me with your hatefulness; but still, like air, I’ll rise!” This in part is the message that
exemplifies what Black women have experienced for decades—but no matter what, we still rise.

Contract negotiations are an important tool in the fight for women’s rights. As long as there are
injustices our fight for collective bargaining must continue.

**My Entrepreneurship**

By Karisha Fenton

"The miracle isn't that I finished. The miracle is that I had the courage to start." John Bingham

The quote by John Bingham is intended to describe the spirit of runner embarking on marathon.
In many ways it also a great way to explain the spirit of an entrepreneur. Deciding to risk time,
talent, and treasure on manifesting a business idea can be very scary. Bearing the responsibility
of making every decision and ultimately reaping the consequences of those decisions is never
something to take lightly. It requires more than simply having a great business idea. It requires
the fortitude of a marathon runner. It requires courage.

A self-proclaimed “serial entrepreneur”, I’ve never had a problem coming up with business
ideas. From founding a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting self-determination for
women, to running an independent consulting business, to operating an ethnic beauty supply
store, to my most recent business venture: a high-growth Internet business designed to connect
mothers, great ideas have always seemed to naturally come to me. However, as I embark on my
fourth business venture, I am taking time to reflect on what I’ve learned and what it will take to
move this great idea to a successful and sustainable business. I have experienced many of the
challenges minorities and women face when starting small businesses, and it is my belief that
these challenges must be addressed from both, a systematic and community perspective, if we are ever to achieve real growth in this area.

One of the major challenges I faced as a Black woman business-owner was the lack of investment resources. In my current entrepreneurial field of high-growth technology, it is standard to expect that family and friends provide anywhere from $25,000 to $500,000 of a business’ initial investment capital. Angel investors enter at the point and venture capitalists enter at a much higher dollar amount. I (and many business-owners like me) do not have family and friends who can contribute financially at any amount, let alone $500K. As a matter of fact, many Black women who are successful in their chosen professions are the same people reaching back to help family members in need. We aren’t starting with trust funds, life insurance payouts, or financial backing to get us started. If we want to start a business, we must pay for it ourselves. This takes diligence in saving and time to accumulate sufficient funds to begin. We cannot quit jobs or careers that provide our primary source of income, while we attempt to start our own businesses. We must do both — simultaneously. When you have to earn your investment money, the time you spend working for someone else is the time other business-owners are using to take their business ideas to market. This would be akin to running a race, giving your opponents a five-to-ten year head start.

The good news is that there are definite ways we can minimize challenges, thus encouraging Black women to become entrepreneurs. First, we must provide non-traditional avenues for investment. While loans can be important, often times it is not feasible to take on additional debt to get a small business off the ground. Keeping in mind that the business-owner must pay for overhead costs and hopefully turn a profit, adding a loan payment may hinder her ability to keep the business afloat. Instead, small grants or in-kind donations of office or retail space, technology and equipment can go a long way. In-kind subject matter expertise is also an invaluable asset to the new business owner. Providing mentoring, filing paperwork or providing connections to legal, operations and technology resources can assist in closing knowledge gaps. Finally, the most important support is often volunteer support. Volunteers do pro bono work and promote the business online and through word-of-mouth. They use their expertise to help grow the business. Volunteers are what I call the guardian angels of economics. They simply help the owner achieve her goals, by donating their time and expertise.

If we are going to see a rise in Black woman-owned businesses, we have to ask ourselves how we can support these women and ensure the success of those who will undoubtedly reach back and help our communities. The landscape is ripe to produce hundreds if not thousands of new entrepreneurs and micro-enterprise owners. The outcome depends on how well we are able to address the known and unknown challenges.

The Plight of African American Women in Michigan’s Restaurant Industry
By Alicia Renee Farris
According to the Michigan Restaurant Association’s (MRA), Michigan restaurants are projected to generate almost $14 billion dollars in sales for the 2015 calendar year. These more than 16000 eating and drinking places account for 415,500 Michigan jobs (or 10% of Michigan’s workforce). Recent data gathered by Restaurant Opportunities Centers United’s (ROC-United) Research Department indicates that African American women occupy only 9.1% (or 37810) of Michigan restaurant positions. Conversely, White Women are reported to occupy 81.2% (337386) of these restaurant positions. Even more astonishing is the fact that the positions held by African American women are some of the lowest paying jobs in the industry - with very few, if any, fringe benefits (such as earned sick time or medical insurance) and even less opportunity for career advancement.

In October 2014, ROC United, in conjunction with its local affiliate, Restaurant Opportunities Center of Michigan (ROC-MI), released a report entitled, “The Great Service Divide: Occupational Segregation & Inequality in Metro Detroit”. This report detailed the findings of research conducted in 2013 on 88 fine dining establishments throughout Metro Detroit. The research revealed that people of color, especially women of color, in Michigan’s restaurant industry face: “a glass ceiling, a low floor, or a locked door”. **Forty three percent (43%) of all African American women currently working in Michigan’s restaurant industry live and perhaps are also raising children in poverty.**

While there are livable wages available in bartending and serving (which the aforementioned Great Service Divide Report refers to as “Tier I Front of the House Positions), in Michigan 63% of workers of color in these positions earn below twice the poverty level. Data specific to African American women in Michigan indicates that 78.6% of those who are bartenders and 32.3% of those identifying as servers still live in poverty. In terms of actual earnings, in 2014 these positions yielded the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Median Hourly Wage</th>
<th>Median Annual Wage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bartender</td>
<td>$8.84</td>
<td>$18,387</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Server</td>
<td>$8.77</td>
<td>$18,242</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additionally, the Great Service Divide report cited ‘36% of African American or Black Tier I Front of the House workers in Michigan and 52% of those in Detroit were unemployed compared to 10% and 18% of White workers respectively.’ African American women, and other women of color, are underrepresented in coveted fine-dining front of the house positions such as maître d’ and manager. Because of race and gender discrimination in the restaurant industry, it can be concluded that African American Women face an even greater risk for unemployment in these front of the house positions as well as the likelihood of being a “tipped” or subminimum wage earner.
Finally, race and gender discrimination lead to hostile working environments. Despite the difficulty in defining sexual harassment conduct, charges are becoming more prevalent in this industry. Women, especially those relying on tips to supplement their low wages, are reporting high incidents of inappropriate touching, gestures, language, and other conduct from restaurant management, co-workers, and customers. **The restaurant industry has become the single largest source of sexual harassment cases in the United States.** ROC has now coined the term “glass floor” to define “the system that leaves women and all workers in a state of insecurity because of the intersection of economic precariousness and a sexualized work atmosphere”. Indeed African American women in Michigan are facing some horrific challenges in the restaurant industry and hence the need for significant policy reform that will put an end to race and gender discrimination in this industry. These policy reform efforts should result in: 1.) the elimination of the tipped subminimum wage; 2.) the implementation of one fair wage that allows workers to support themselves and their families; 3.) increased opportunities for career advancement in the industry, and 4.) improved working conditions for all workers (e.g. earned sick time).

Sources:
Michigan Restaurant Association (September, 2015) [www.michiganrestaurant.org](http://www.michiganrestaurant.org)
ROC-United “Great Service Divide: Occupational Segregation & Inequality in Metro Detroit” (October 22, 2014)
ROC –United “The Glass Floor: Sexual Harassment in the Restaurant Industry” (October 7, 2014)

**Informal Economics: Black Beauty & Survival**
By Danielle Dunn

You know the ladies “selling dinners” at the Social Club on Saturday nights, or the mother who braids all the little girls’ hair for the other mothers in the neighborhood? The sister who runs a consignment shop online; the next door neighbor with a yoga studio in her basement and those who sew and bake and braid and cook and clean to provide for themselves and their family? Those that participate in this type of informal economy don’t always turn in a W-2, fill out a 1099 or participate in a formal interview process. Life experience, survival, creativity, tradition and culture are all acceptable forms of “Professional Experience”.
The other side of the informal economy function within the context of the formal economy; jobs often pieced together to make full-time work. No health insurance, or paid time off—but a means to pay the bills. This seems like an incomplete thought. In the expanded conceptual framework the informal economy is seen as comprised of informal employment (without secure contracts, worker benefits, or social protection) both inside and outside informal enterprises [1]Off the books. Side hustle. Under the table. Hidden Enterprise. “Scratching and Surviving.” Call it what you want, but black women participating in the informal economy is nothing new. It’s as American as racial and gender inequality.

One such example of informal economy is Crowned Curl Company; the result of entrepreneurial and creative DNA coupled with the loss of a $70,000 a year job. Founder, Ashley Littles worked in the beauty and salon industry as a stylist assistant for 16 years in various capacities, but committed her efforts to pursuing higher education, receiving a Bachelors degree from Michigan State University and currently pursuing a Masters degree. “I finally had my dream job, $70,000 a year, able to work from home doing something I really loved to do,” says Littles. Yet, within 2 months that dream was deferred.

The wife and mother of three has worked formally since the age of 13, and always maintained an informal economic agenda. Blacks being systemically excluded and discriminated against within the formal economy (i.e. Wage disparity, higher levels and duration of unemployment) factored into why Littles maintained a side hustle for so long and desires to ultimately work for herself. She also believes that the number of women who participate in the informal economy is innumerable. “Even if you work at McDonalds there is no way you can survive. If you don’t have safe housing, there is no way you can care for your family working these jobs. I am aware of my privilege; for every “me” there are probably 10 women tricking or dealing with someone who’s knocking them upside their head so they can survive. “

What makes Crowned Curl Company so unique is the focus on Black women’s hair care in the context of empowerment and education. “My clientele consists of Black women and girls that are seeking protective styling /accessories for their hair (natural or not) and are interested in learning about healthy hair and Afro- hair culture. I must add that most of my clients are decidedly advocates for maintaining and promoting a healthy beauty standard for Black women and girls. Its kind of empowerment if it helps a woman research about her natural hair, buy some products for her natural hair and release the European standard and embrace their hair,” says Littles.

Crowned Curl Company also speaks to Littles desire for her daughters to see her aggressively pursuing her dreams. “I’ve witnessed dreams die in my family. They never caught their footing to try another day. I’m aware I have a privilege and want to educate other women, and that speaks to your hair too. If I had to stop selling wigs to go around the world and encourage women, I would. That’s why I named it Crowned. Every black woman, even if she’s dirty, on the street, she is still a queen! Even if you trifle it away, God will never change the way he sees you.
Micro Entrepreneurship
By Tameka Ramsey

Small business has been the backbone of this country since its foundation. At a time when ships were the only source of transportation to and from the once British Colonies, the only way to eat, live and survive was to produce the products and/or services on a local level. This idea of starting a business to provide for a captive audience is what created the vision of what is now the “American Dream”. As Thomas Jefferson, the third president of the United States, put it, a nation of farmers and small businesspeople would avoid dependence, which "begets subservience and venality, suffocates the germ of virtue, and prepares fit tools for the designs of ambition."

While this is a good lesson in American small business history; this narrative does not address the history of small businesses in the African-American community. As slaves, any products, services or talents that African-Americans had were given to their owners to do as they saw fit. No income, branding or legacy was given to the men and women who, if they were white, could have been self made, independent entrepreneurs, with a legacy (wealth, skills and talents) to pass down to their families for generations to come.

During the Civil War, black women demonstrated their capability to be businesswoman; although their numbers were small: in 1850, 438 of a total of 48,888 free African American females were property owners. Statistics also show that by 1860 another 2,000 free black women in the South possessed property. This picture demonstrates that African-American women who worked for themselves achieved more wealth than those who worked for others.

Fast forward to the twentieth century and although the growth of small business among African-American women is increasing, its looks different, and that is why I would like to introduce MICRO SMALL BUSINESS. The official definition of a micro business is an organization with less than five employees, small enough to require little capital ($35,000 or less) to get started. The unofficial definition is ...people who refer to themselves as soloists, independents, consultants, craftsmen, artists, musicians, freelancers, free agents, and self-employed people. The majority of these companies are one-person enterprises ...operate out of their homes; and many ...have part-time help from a family member or friends.

The issue is not that African-American women are not starting new businesses every day, it’s that because it does not fit into the definition of the traditional small business, we discredit ourselves, all the work that has to be done and the contribution it makes economically and socially.
Historically, Black women have been one of the most marginalized groups in the United States. We are often left to lead, as one of my comrades would say, “a life of quiet desperation.” If we are vocal about our conditions, we are “angry Black women.” If we are silent about our conditions, we are “lazy Black women.” If we utilize the limited resources afforded to us as a result of our conditions, which are symptoms of white supremacist policies resulting in institutionalized racism, then we are “Black women looking for a handout.” The Black woman is a punching bag for the dominate culture - governed by capitalism, racism, materialism and militarism.

The water shutoffs in Detroit are a form of violence rooted in racism and sexism. The city is over 80% Black with households led predominately by Black women.

Black women are on the receiving end of tens of thousands of water shutoffs, tens of thousands of tax foreclosures, the commodification of our bodies, and the dehumanization of our image by media, movies, television and the music industry.

Our exposure is compounded by the fact that Detroit as a city has suffered under propaganda assault for over half a century. White flight out of the city, and the subsequent leveling of prosperous Black neighborhoods by racist government officials, provided the corporate owned media an opportunity to manipulate the narrative away from the Black prosperity and self-determination it was witnessing in neighborhoods like Paradise Valley/Black Bottom, and misdirect it towards the labeling of Blacks as perpetrators of most of the blight you see around the city today. The fact that neighborhoods were leveled for expressways is of no consequence to those who like to tell the whitened version of the Detroit comeback story.

Recently, Black residents have complained of having their community gardens "accidentally" leveled by the city, some on multiple occasions, while many young whites are receiving stipends to move into the Detroit and grow gardens, while being hailed in the media as saviors.

Detroit, one of the last major Black meccas in the United States is rapidly being gentrified. The “less desirable” aka Black residents (which means predominately Black women led households) are being expeditiously marginalized and displaced. The water shutoff tragedy is directly connected to this displacement and linked to the tax foreclosure crisis - which too many capitalists are seeing as an opportunity to "buy cheap property," with total disregard for the families being evicted. This is creating antagonistic interactions all over the city, with mothers...
rushing to remove their belongings and their children, in the face of tax property purchasers, who often lack patience and humanity for the families they are making homeless.

Also, while many in the city are applauding the rapid removal of blight, the fact that foreclosures are 80% responsible for that blight, is information lost on many. To ignore this phenomenon, is to turn a blind eye to the black eye being waged upon Black families - Black mothers and children. Although it cannot be argued that there are indeed structures that need to be removed, we must also struggle against the cause of those blighted out structures.

We cannot be silent while Black mothers are forced to hide their children from being taken away, are unable to bathe their children, or properly nourish their children, because they do not have access to clean, affordable water. We cannot be silent while children are ashamed to go to school because they do not have clean clothing or clean bodies, because their water has been shut off. We cannot be silent while entire communities risk the threat of illness, disease and contamination because families are unable to sanitize their homes or take their medications. We cannot be silent while Black mothers are forced to run from house to house seeking water to make baby food for their infants. We cannot be silent while homes are being ripped from underneath Black mothers and children by the thousands - blighting entire neighborhoods, making it unsafe for their children to walk to school.

It is no longer an option to say, "That was then, this is now. Racism is in the past." The impact of racist policies and its symptom - internalized oppression must be struggled against. We must become neighbors again. We have a responsibility to not only work to dismantle our rugged, individualism which would have us remain silent in the face of such oppression and adversity, but we have a responsibility to struggle against the policies and structures that have divided and seek to conquer us.

Together we will win. Divided we will be spectators and contributors to the genocide of our people.

It is our time to build a new world together. One of sisterhood rooted in the woman's way of knowing, a society that honors and nurtures our humanity and our need for interdependence.
Finding Justice in the Justice System
Dr. Amanda Alexander

Michigan’s prison population has exploded over the past three decades, with devastating consequences for families, communities, and local economies. Each year Michigan taxpayers spend $2 billion on corrections—more than we spend on higher education. And the system we have built is shot through with racial disparities. Black people make up 14% of Michigan’s population but a staggering 49% of our incarcerated population. Women continue to be the fastest growing prison population in the U.S., and the majority of women who enter prison are mothers.

These statistics tell us much, but they cannot show us the toll that our prison system takes on people and their families. A single arrest can trigger all sorts of consequences for a family—it might cause a mother to lose her job or housing, or land children in foster care. Mothers who go to prison are at particularly high risk of having their children enter foster care as most are primary caretakers of their children before arrest, many as single parents. For some, this separation will be permanent. Under federal law, states must file a petition to terminate parental rights if a child has been in foster care for 15 of the past 22 months—a time frame that is shorter than the average prison sentence.

Because women stand to lose custody of their children and for a range of other reasons, incarceration is a reproductive justice issue. Health care for pregnant women in jail or prison is woefully inadequate. Women who give birth while incarcerated may be shackled before or after labor. And they will be separated from their newborns in as little as 24 hours. Unlike some states, Michigan does not allow incarcerated women to pump breast milk for delivery to their babies. Michigan would do well to join the ranks of states that have established health care standards for incarcerated pregnant women, banned shackling, and instituted programs that allow women to send breast milk to their babies.

When women are incarcerated, their families face enormous financial burdens. In September 2015, the Ella Baker Center, Michigan Council on Crime and Delinquency, MLaw Prison & Family Justice Project, and 20 other organizations released Who Pays?: The True Cost of Incarceration on Families, a report detailing the economic impact of incarceration on families in Michigan and across the country. The report found that nearly 2 in 3 families with an incarcerated member were unable to meet their family’s basic needs. Each day, these families face the stress of difficult choices. How many collect phone calls can they afford to accept from prison? Can they afford gas money to drive across state for a prison visit? What bill will have to go unpaid? These burdens are not distributed equally across Michigan—Detroit families bear the brunt of financial and emotional costs. Each year, 35% of people released from prisons statewide return to Wayne County; 85% of these to Detroit.
Against significant odds, incarcerated women in Michigan have demonstrated powerful leadership and advocacy. They have self-organized, designed parenting classes and other programs, produced art, published writing, and won legal victories. Several years ago, incarcerated women in Michigan who had experienced sexual misconduct by guards won a historic class action settlement—a powerful human rights victory. More recently, some incarcerated women have explored how they can use restorative justice practices to promote healing and strengthen relationships.

The past year has brought several new and promising criminal justice initiatives in Michigan. The Michigan Indigent Defense Commission—born from years of advocacy—has begun its work to improve criminal defense standards for low-income Michiganders. These changes cannot come soon enough. The Family Participation Program is training family members to advocate for their loved ones inside Michigan prisons. Through a new Family Advisory Board, family members are weighing in on Department of Corrections policies and practices.

What next? We must take our cues from current and formerly incarcerated people and their loved ones, and support their ongoing advocacy efforts. We must build on the growing momentum to reduce Michigan’s prison population, and push it several steps further to fundamentally rethink our approach to justice. And we must build upon successful examples—from Michigan and elsewhere—of re-entry supports, alternatives to incarceration, and justice reinvestment strategies that do better by families and restore opportunity. Together we can build justice institutions that transform communities for the better, and that help women and families thrive.
HEALTH

The State of Black Maternal and Child Health in Michigan
By Ebony Reddock, PhD, MPH

Maternal and infant mortality is a tragedy no matter how and where it manifests. But it is especially tragic when one population—namely Blacks—is more vulnerable, often due to preventable causes rooted in structural disadvantage. Michigan has higher than average maternal and infant mortality rates than other states in the U.S. In 2010, for every 1000 births, approximately 8 babies did not make it past their first birthday. However, given Michigan’s already higher maternal and infant mortality rates, Black mothers and infants carry a disproportionate burden.

Pregnancy-related mortality (death directly attributed to pregnancy and delivery complications) for Black mothers is three times higher than for White mothers (Black mothers 50.8 and White mothers 16.6). This gap is the third highest in the nation. As for infants, the Black mortality rate in 2010 was approximately 19 deaths per 1,000 live births, twice as high as the approximately 9 deaths/1,000 live births among White mothers. While these gaps have been steadily closing since the 1970s, they still remain. This is not strictly a Detroit phenomenon. In Detroit, the infant mortality rate for Black babies between 2011-2013 was 14.8 births per 1000. However, we also observe high rates in Saginaw (15.8/1,000), Taylor (18.7/1,000), and Muskegon (18.1/1,000). Much of Michigan is rural, and Blacks living in these areas also carry higher than average burdens in infant and maternal mortality. For example, the Black infant mortality rate for Barry and Eaton counties is 22.7/1,000.

What explains these persistent disparities? Part of the answer lies in understanding the causes of mortality. According to MDHHS’s 2014 Health Equity report, premature birth and poor maternal health contributed to 50% of Black infant deaths in Michigan. What do we mean by “poor” maternal health? Black adults in Michigan are more likely to be obese, engage in less physical activity and have chronic health issues such as diabetes and high blood pressure. This is not to blame the victim in explaining the proximal and distal causes of Black maternal and infant mortality. Black adults are also more likely to have no health care coverage or a personal health care provider, suggesting that Black adults are not receiving the medical care necessary.
for adequate health. This includes prenatal and postnatal care. For example, recent Year-3 results from MDHHS’s Medicaid Health Equity Project show that Black mothers’ participation in postpartum care in 13% lower than that of White mothers enrolled in Medicaid. But these disparities are not solely a function of socioeconomic disadvantage, although it is true that Blacks are more likely to live in poverty and/or have lower levels of educational attainment. For example, infant mortality is higher among Black mothers who attended college than White mothers who did not complete high school. The disparity between the most-educated Black and White mothers is wider than the disparity between the least-educated Black and White mothers.

What does this mean and how do we fix it? The answers to these questions are being answered and implemented by multiple state organizations. For example, PRIME (Practices to Reduce Infant Mortality through Equity) is a MDHHS effort to enhance state health organizations to reduce racial infant disparities, particularly through addressing structural racism in healthcare settings. WIN (Women-Inspired Neighborhood) Network is a partnership of metro-Detroit based organizations to reduce infant mortality by supporting women’s self-care before, during and after pregnancy. As these organizations and others attest, Black maternal and infant mortality is not just a “Black” problem, but a state problem.

____________________________

RWJF (2015) County Health Rankings, Infant Mortality

MDHHS (2014) Health Equity Report

**Chronically Sick**

By Kelly Garrett

Being a mother of a child that has a chronic illness has many battles. Those battles include finding appropriate methods of treatment, misinformation among hospital staff, and the lack of support. My son has an illness that predominately affects black people, sickle cell anemia. Sickle cell anemia is a genetically inherited blood disorder. Normal red blood cells that carry oxygen are round and flexible. People with sickle cell anemia have blood cells that are shaped in the
form of a sickle. The sickle cells are hard and sticky, making it difficult to carry oxygen to various parts of the blood. When a person produces too many sickle cells, the individual will have what is known to most as a “crisis”.

My son has fewer crises than most sickle cell patients. But when he does it is a heart-wrenching, stressful time as a mother. One never wants to see their child in pain and one definitely does not want to see their child suffer from a disease that you know there is no known cure. The only way to reduce the pain associated with sickle cell is through pain medication, blood transfusions, and if necessary, bone marrow transplants. Each of these options come with their own drawback.

Historically, sickle cell patients (referred to as “sicklers”) were viewed as junkies looking for a fix from an emergency room standpoint. Their pain is unexplained. It can come as quickly as it can go away. And if a physician or nurse does not know anything about sickle cell, it makes it very difficult to explain while experiencing a crisis. In my situation, it’s the opposite. The hospital staff immediately wants to give my son the heaviest of pain medication at the onset of the crisis. Because I am his advocate, I have to insist on a “step-up” method. We start with lower doses of medication to make him comfortable and do relaxation techniques to work through the crisis. Not every sickler has an advocate to speak on their behalf.

Blood transfusions increase the amount of normal red blood cells which will help ease the crisis. Unfortunately there are not of African American people donating blood. It is imperative to our children and our community that we take a vested interest in the need for donations. Someone’s life, like my son’s, depends on it.

I consider my son one of the lucky ones. He has an advocate to speak up on his behalf and I can circumvent many of the experimental things that hospitals and doctors want to do. I can research the medication and doctors to find out which is best for my child. What can be simple cold to one person could be hospitalization for my child. But my concern is what about the people that do not have an advocate? Who speaks out for those sicklers? What about the single mother that has other children that she has to take care of and she can only rely on hospitals and doctors to do the right thing.

Reproductive Justice: The Final Frontier for Women’s Equality
By: Desiree Cooper

There’s no denying that American women have gained major ground when it comes to being able to control their destinies by controlling reproduction. Roe v. Wade legalized abortion in 1973, and, while access is severely restricted in many states, it remains a constitutionally protected option for women. The Affordable Care Act requires access to women’s reproductive health care to be covered by insurance without a co-pay. That includes annual exams and birth control. And medical advances including long-acting, reversible contraception (like IUDs and
hormone implants), emergency contraception and medication abortion pills have further placed the power of reproduction in the hands of women.

Indeed, statistics show that progress has been astounding. Teen pregnancy rates are at a historic low, plummeting across all racial and ethnic lines in all states. According to a study by the Guttmacher Institute, a majority of women said that birth control use had allowed them to take better care of themselves or their families (63 percent), support themselves financially (56 percent), complete their education (51 percent), or keep or get a job (50 percent). Under Michigan’s Medicaid expansion plan, Healthy Michigan, more than 600,000 have gained access to health insurance, far exceeding expectations.[1]

Yet, these numbers fail to describe the reality of reproductive health in economically distressed communities and among people of color (POC). With all the gains of the past 100 years, teen pregnancy rates among African American teens is more than double that in white communities.[2] The rate of unintended pregnancies is three times higher in the black community compared to whites. There are 22 counties without a practicing OB/GYN (but every Michigan county has a veterinarian). [3] In 2011, 86% of Michigan counties had no abortion clinic; 36% of Michigan women lived in these counties. [4] According to Kids Count Michigan, the number of children living in poverty doubled from 8 percent in 2000 to 16 percent in 2008-12. And infant mortality is the number one killer of Detroit children, followed by violence. [5]

We now understand is that reproductive health (access to medical care) and reproductive rights (laws that guarantee patient access to procedures/treatment) do not paint the complete picture when it comes to the sexual health and welfare of POC women and their families. We must look toward a model of reproductive justice.

The term “reproductive justice” was coined in 2003 by the SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective. [6] It’s a movement that enables all people to have the social, political, and economic power necessary to make their own decisions about sexual health, reproduction and sexualities for their families and communities.

We can’t talk about reproductive justice, without talking about issues like the human violations in the foster care system, the right of women in prison to be mothers, the right to be free of sexual violence, human trafficking, the rights of undocumented women who give birth in the United States, LGBT parenting and adoption rights, and the right to raise a child in a safe environment. This is clearly much broader than the right to have an abortion, or having access to birth control. Reproductive justice is about the fundamental human rights of women and families.

Very broadly, the theory of reproductive justice endorses women’s human right to:
• Decide if and when she will have a baby and the conditions under which she will give birth
• Decide if she will not have a baby and her options for preventing or ending a pregnancy
• Parent the children she already has with the necessary social supports in safe environments and healthy communities, and without fear of violence from individuals or the government.

For the future of Michigan, it is critical that we turn our attention to the broader human rights issues that continue to be barriers to healthy sexuality, sexual health and strong families in communities of color.

4 http://www.guttmacher.org/datacenter/profiles/MI.jsp
5 http://www.detroitnews.com/article/20140130/LIFESTYLE03/301300005
6 http://sistersong.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=141&Itemid=81

The Intersection of Criminal Justice, Civil Rights, and Black Women
By Malkia Newman

As people of color, we’re all too familiar with racism in all of its forms. In addition, as women of color we are also faced with sexism.

The examples of racism and discrimination in this country abound:

• People of color are more likely to experience confrontational incidents with public and private law enforcement officers.

• The correctional system has become the new “mental health” facilities. Of everyone currently under the supervision of our penal system, over 50% of them can be diagnosed with a mental health condition or substance use disorder or both. People of color make up a disproportionate number of people in the correctional system and as such are faced with substandard care.
More African American women are incarcerated for non-violent offenses. Black females over the age of 18 were almost 5 times more likely to be imprisoned than white females. **http://www.drugwarfacts.org/cms/Race_and_Prison#sthash.OGJx2GiX.dpuf**

Buying power - African American women earn $.64 cents to every $1.00 earned by white males.

37% of African American women in Michigan live below the national poverty level.

Not only does the racism and discrimination that we experience on a regular basis affect our ability to prosper and develop like others, it’s been proven that it has an adverse effect on our physical and mental health as well.

In her article “The Culture of Mental Health Stigma in Communities of Color”, Dr. Ayorkor Gaba, PsyD, states the case very clearly as it relates to mental health.

“A disproportionately high burden of disability from mental disorders exists in communities of color. Research has shown that this higher burden does not arise from a greater prevalence or severity of illnesses in these communities, but stems from individuals in these communities being less likely to receive diagnosis and treatment for their mental illnesses, having less access to and availability of mental health services, receiving less care, and experiencing poorer quality of care. Even after controlling for factors such as health insurance and socioeconomic status, ethnic minority groups still have a higher unmet mental health need than non-Hispanic Whites.

There are a number of factors driving these statistics in our communities, including attitudes, lack of culturally and linguistically appropriate services, distrust, stigma, and more. In our society all racial groups report mental health stigma, but culturally bound stigma may have a differential impact on communities of color. Stigma has been described as a cluster of negative attitudes and beliefs that motivate the general public to fear, reject, avoid, and discriminate against people with mental illnesses (President’s New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, 2003). Stigma in the general public often leads to internalized stigma at the individual level. Several studies have shown that internalized stigma is an important mechanism decreasing the willingness to seek mental health treatment.”[1]

As noted previously, the jails and prisons have become the new mental facilities with very limited ability to meet the needs of those affected.

In Michigan almost 50% of inmates incarcerated are African Americans. Not only is the cost of human suffering staggering, the actual cost to house people in the prison system has skyrocketed as well.
“Michigan’s $2 billion per year corrections system consumes about 20 percent of the state’s general fund, exceeding by far the $1.4 billion amount spent on colleges and universities. Although estimates vary somewhat, best guess is that it costs taxpayers around $37,000 per year to incarcerate each inmate.”[2]

As African Americans it imperative that we have honest dialogue about mental health conditions and support those who have been diagnosed as they come forward seeking treatment. There can be no health without mental health.

Some of the most common mental health disorders among African Americans include:

- Major depression
- Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
- Suicide, among young African American men
- Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), because African Americans are more likely to be victims of violent crime

African Americans are also more likely to experience certain factors that increase the risk for developing a mental health condition:

- Homelessness. People experiencing homelessness are at a greater risk of developing a mental health condition. African Americans make up 40% of the homeless population.
- Exposure to violence increases the risk of developing a mental health condition such as depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder. African American children are more likely to be exposed to violence than other children.”[3]

It is important to note that there are treatments available that make mental health and substance use disorders manageable. With so much at stake for our communities and for the generations to come, we cannot afford not to advocate for greater access for all for all forms of healthcare. Our quality of life depends on it.


3“The time is now to reform prisons, save taxpayers money” by Phil Power http://bridgemi.com/2015/06/the-time-is-now-to-reform-prisons-save-taxpayers-money/
4 “African Americans – Mental Health” Factsheet from The National Alliance on Mental Illness. https://www.nami.org/Find-Support/Diverse-Communities/African-Americans#sthash.30JFRTWr.dpuf
Representation Matters
By Rebecca Thompson

Recently, I saw a picture of a little black girl with natural hair standing next to a poster for the movie Home, and the two were almost identical. The caption read “Representation Matters.” I immediately thought of my 7-year-old niece, Hillary, who might finally be able to see herself in that character, something that I’m not sure she’s experienced much. As a woman of color with natural hair, it also reminded me: “you can’t be what you can’t see.”

Growing up, it never occurred to me that there were no little black girls in the Disney films I watched. But that lack of representation wasn’t—and isn’t—just on TV or in movies. According to the Center for American Women in Politics, of the 104 women serving in the 114th US Congress, only 33 (31.7%) are women of color. State legislatures across the country are faring even worse—just 21.7% of members are women of color.

When I decided at 19 years old that someday I wanted to run for elected office, it was actually a young male state representative (who would later go on to become Detroit’s youngest mayor) who inspired me to run. I had never seen someone so young make such an impact. I rarely saw young women of color from my community in local politics. I decided then to dedicate my career to changing that.

When I ran for state representative last year in Michigan’s 1st state house district, I was told by many (including a prominent African-American woman in my political party) to “wait my turn” or that “so-and-so”—a maElect Her Group Photon—was going to win the seat. I quickly realized that I wasn’t just running to help change my community. I was also running to change the face of leadership in Lansing.

As a national trainer for Elect Her (a program of the American Association of University Women and Running Start) I have had the opportunity to help train young women around the world to run for student government and elected office. A few weeks ago, I led a session at the University of the West Indies at Mona, in Jamaica, and was reminded that the need for increased representation in political leadership isn’t unique to the United States. I came home feeling so inspired to continue this work that my twin sister and I have pledged to create a leadership program for at-risk girls in Detroit. We want to not only provide them with confidence building and life skills, but also inspire them and give them the tools to change their communities. I’ve always lived by the notion that you can either complain about a problem or do something about
it. I’m no longer waiting my turn to lead, and I couldn’t be more excited to help other young women do the same.

**Faith & Politics from a Woman’s Point of View**  
By Terra DeFoe

It has been said that Religion (Faith) and Politics are two topics that shouldn’t be discussed because the debate fosters deep thought, divergent opinions that may be questionable depending on the perspective but valuable at the same time. Faith, or belief in God(s) is a subject that provokes intense personal feelings and emotion, and is as diverse in its thought and practice as there are diversities of people in the world, who don’t always agree. There are many different religious groups, denominations, sects or faiths, with their own set of practices and beliefs. On the other hand, there is the Political Arena, which of course, comes with its various layers of ideology, beliefs and rhetoric. The introduction of the feminine perspective in Faith and Politics is an intriguing one since the prevailing structure of both ideologies favor a masculine perspective, but when the issue of being a black woman brings complications which mirror our racial struggles. Many women are breaking the barriers within each sphere to provide leadership and adding a new point of view to the mix. Any woman who has had the pleasure to serve in both spheres has a very valuable and unique perspective that carries a great weight of knowledge, understanding and responsibility due to the gaps that she is able to bridge and the need for her distinction.

Our current, faith and political atmosphere whether it is within the confines of the State of Michigan or within the borders of the United States is a turbulent and ever changing landscape due to the ebb and flow; push and pull; atmosphere within American Culture. As a woman of faith in politics, I have to ability to use my unique perspective within these realms to bring about balance and change, but being a black woman of faith in politics the image isn’t so unique. From the faith perspective, we believe in social progression, change and lending a helping hand to empower those that may have needs within the society and bridging the gap to help those in need obtain success and self-sufficiency. In faith we are “our brother’s keeper” and we strive to strengthen those that are less fortunate because we understand that the poor and needy for they will be with us always. The Political sphere is not necessarily concerned with certain aspects of Faith and Social Change but more so with the defense of more philosophical ideologies that have to do with how we run the governing entities to benefit those that exercise their voice, their money, their time, and their energy to influence the perspectives of those that are being governed and to appease a political ideology for the benefit of the stakeholders. Politics can be a “Dog eat Dog, “every man for themselves, conflict. For some black woman it is more of a matter of power and influence at someone else's expense rather good or bad. Both systems are attempting to effect change but we are often challenged to have productive dialogue with value and balance. As a woman of faith in politics, it is my responsibility to engage my community through educational strategies that will bring awareness. As a black woman of faith in politics, it is my responsibility to create opportunities through initiatives that will have a long term impact to those participating in the process. As a woman of faith in politics it is my responsibility to assist
those in need of services offered through our various levels of government. As a black woman of faith in politics, it is my responsibility to use my experiences to support those fighting in the struggle to bring about long-term change.

As a woman in faith and politics the reward for me is that I have the ability to answer the call to serve as an advocate on the behalf of those who look for government to be fair and just; and to champion the causes that empower the people and bring balance. As a black woman in faith and politics the reward for me is knowing the difference twice the two.
VOICES FROM THE MOVEMENT
CONTRIBUTORS

Dr. Amanda Alexander
Nikhol Atkins
Desiree Cooper
Dr. Terra A. DeFoe
Danielle Dunn
Dr. Alicia Farris
Karisha Fenton
Dr. Rita Fields
Sommer Foster
Kelly Garrett
Millie Hall
Tawanna Honeycomb Petty
Phyllis Jacob
Stephanie Moore
Malkia Newman
Tameka Ramsey
Ebony Reddock
Rebecca Thompson

Special thanks to:
Chanera Pierce, Tanith Rice-Harris, Phyllis Jacob and especially Tameka Ramsey for helping to make this report and event a success
State of Black Women in Michigan: Voices from the Field
was created and supported by


Organization funded by Ford Foundation and Moriah Fund