

BLACK WOMEN: ACKNOWLEDGING THEIR SELF-DETERMINATION AND POWER

Chicago 2021 Update – Facilitators: Sista Yaa Simpson and Minister Jacqueline Miller

As the foundation of the family, women are in a unique position to direct the trajectory of family and community development. The intersectional struggles of black women must be analyzed, acknowledged, addressed and respected inside the continuous struggle for Black liberation. We as a community must address the issues that our mothers, grandmothers, daughters and wives face in the struggle for justice and equality for the Black community; even as we deal with disrespect, abuse and misogyny inside the family and community structures.

Black women continue to be the glue that binds fragmented families together. Education and protection of black women must precede all other aspects of Black life because of this reality. “When you educate a woman, you educate a nation.” Our mothers are our first teachers, and as such her mental health, wealth and stability will affect her outcomes. What she is able to achieve for herself, her children and her community.

An educated, well informed woman becomes the primary advocate for the education, economic and social wellbeing of the Black family. In the absence of our husbands, sons, brothers, uncles, and fathers, (Racist welfare policy that was bent on removing Black men from the home, disparity in benefits based on race, school to prison pipeline and pervasive Black male genocide caused from lack of fathers in boys lives etc.) the Black woman has been left with the task of caring for, leading and navigating herself and her family while she herself is in survival mode in a very hostile system.

Contrary to the messages mainstream media likes to advocate, Black women need and want the strength, protection and presence of Black men in their lives and their family structures.

Black Women current actions to promote their own self determination and power

We as Black women do not have the privilege of living our lives as solely Black or solely women at any given point in time. Racism, Sexism, Patriarchy, Colorism, Homophobia, Violence and the absence of safety nets and security along with a constant bombardment of negative messages about who we are as society wages war on us and our bodies, is a constant challenge for Black women. The constant fight for us to be heard as leaders; our right to represent our communities; control over our bodies and access to reproductive rights; fair, equal and livable wages; access to affordable healthcare; support systems that help support our children; flexible work hours that allow us to care for sick children and other dependents; stability in our relationships and a lack of a good pool of candidates to become our life partners, take their toll on us as women.

Despite those aforementioned barriers, we are resilient! We will continue to promote our stance for self-determination, harness our assets for power and cultivate our strengths through intergenerational networks. The ME 2 movement shed light on what has been happening to Black Women since being

brought to these shores in bondage. The impact of domestic violence is not just from those we choose, but from white men who disrespected our bodies and treated us like property. Black women's marginalized status places them at increased risk for a wide range of traumatic experiences, including childhood physical and sexual abuse, community violence in the form of witnessing assaults or losing family members to homicide, and racial and sexual harassment in the workplace. Multiple traumatic experiences often compound the negative physical and psychological effects associated with partner violence (West, 2020). Black survivors of domestic violence frequently experience psychological distress in the form of depression, anxiety, stress, and somatic complaints. But again, despite these challenges, Black Women survivors are resilient! (West, 2020^{x1}).

Public Policy Recommendations

1. Advocate for local, state and federal policy development/Implementation and Evaluation that addresses:
 1. Gender Inequity
 2. Pay equity
 3. Paid Maternal leave and stronger support for the Family Medical Leave Act
 4. Affordable Child Care
 5. Affordable health care and support for research focused on Black women's health issues.
 6. Free birth control and feminine products for poor women.
 7. Stringent Regulations and Recourse for domestic violence and all forms of abuse
 8. Sexual harassment and equal opportunity in the workplace and the commons
 9. Equal opportunity to affordable housing and home ownership.
 10. Special set aside programs that support Black Women owned business and sheltered market government procurement.
 11. The eradication of the "School house to Prison Pipeline" and special intervention programs to address the increase in mass incarceration of Black girls and women.
 12. The decriminalization of women who are prostitutes and more programs to address why women become prostitutes in the first place.
 13. Opening of all job titles in the military to women, and additional resource allocation for female veterans
 14. Greater access to appropriate education that addresses the gender bias and the race bias.
 15. Support the Black Agenda
 16. Identify healthcare facilities, providers and organizations that provide health care to Black Women and rank them based on quality service and best practice outcomes.
 17. Benchmark Health Equity measures (several key health indices), as to determine health improvements especially for Black Women from year to year based on cities, counties and state.

What Individuals Can Do

- Understand the unique and rich history of the Black community's existence in this entire nation dating back before the United States was established.
- There is a need to consider the context and history of the violence in Black women's intimate relationship.
- Reduce unintended consequences and disparity of impact on Black women's experiences with domestic violence.
- Learn about the harms caused to Black women who have been arrested for their use of violence which were clearly acts of self-defense.
- Review police domestic violence policies and protocols and the language that is used for mandated trainings for officers and supervisors.

What the Community Can Do

- Identify solutions for addressing the plight of Black Women and Girls missing, kidnapping, and murdered without any police investigations.
- During Domestic Violence Month- refer to Awareness + Action = Social Change" as a call to communities to be an active part of ending gender-based violence
- Develop and/ or support local women specific support networks
- Create and /or support local block clubs to address and solve local challenges
- Create and/or support local organizations focused on providing resources for incarcerated and returning women to the community and their families
- Create Rites of Passage programs that celebrate all stages of a woman's life.
- Mentor young women and open doors for them.
- Adopt a young woman and mother and father her.
- Create leadership development programs for women.
- Have a Girls Scout program in your church
- Create technology spaces for girls, eg Black Girls Code
- Challenge your house of faith to take a more active role in community development by supporting economic ventures for its members, pooling resources to buy cheaper, farmers market etc
- Pursue strategic alliances with others working in your area of concern or interest
- Attend and create community forums on how best practices for navigation of health care access and insurance options. Learn more about the different insurance companies and their policies.
- Identify health insurance plans that are better as compared to others which are not very affordable or effective.
- Rank and publish a Community Report Card

What Leaders and Elected Officials Can Do

- Engage community input and support for innovative solutions/ideas
- Create and Maintain a solid community-based relationship predicated on mutual respect
- Support solutions presented that addresses specific challenges for black women
- Advocate for women at every opportunity; politically, socially, economically and personally

- Develop leadership pipeline and training for Black women
- Engage powerful Black women and develop a strong network of thought leaders regarding the Black community and the larger social structure
- Actively support Black women entrepreneurs and community leaders
- Funnel government resources and allocate funding for women owned and women led enterprises and education
- Address FQHC and other publicly funded health institutions by holding the system accountable and liable, with repercussions for improve quantity and service outcomes for Black Women in each political representative's constituent area. This should be done through process and impact evaluation methods.
- Challenge funding for poorly ranked health institutions.