

"African-American Women: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow"

PREFACE

Ms. Jacqueline Hodge, an Instructional Systems Specialist at the U.S. Armor School at Fort Knox, Kentucky, served as a participant in the Topical Research Intern Program at the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI) in March 1995. She conducted extensive research on African-American women and prepared this report. The Institute thanks Ms. Hodge for her contributions to the research efforts of DEOMI.

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The opinions expressed in this report are those of the author and should not be construed to represent the official position of DEOMI, the military services, or the Department of Defense.

Introduction

Over the last 130 years, African-American women have gradually freed themselves from serving Euro-Americans as slaves and domestic servants, and now they hold jobs and positions in all areas of public and private organizations. These women have been instrumental in holding their families together through times of constant struggle. They have used volunteer organizations to fight for rights and obtain justice in a racist and sexist society.

Through African-American women, we can all find inspiration, direction, strength, and bravery. According to Amott and Matthaei in their book *Race, Gender and Work*, "More than any other group of women, they have refused to allow themselves to be [divided] into false categories of 'women' or 'Blacks' demanding that Black men confront their sexism and forcing feminists of all races to confront the racism which divides women." (RGW 190-191)

Through all of this the African-American woman has endured the negative cultural perceptions of Mammy and Jezebel. The cultural perception of Mammy is an affectionate image; on the other hand, Jezebel is negative. Although we do not speak these words today, the perceptions are present and are accepted by African-Americans and Euro-Americans, alike. It is evident in the personification of the African-American mother. We could ask any of her children, sons or daughters, of the 60's, 70's, and 80's, and we will

find the African-American mother portrayed as a person to emulate for her strength, loyalty, and deeply religious and morally upright behavior. Nothing could be worse than to speak ill of the African-American mother; these are easily fighting words.

Yet, in the 1990s, the image of the African-American woman includes a portrayal of her as sexually uninhibited and uncaring about anything except herself, having baby after baby. This image appears throughout the media, on television, in the music, and in the movies of the 90's. Euro-Americans and African-Americans both accept this image.

During the last 60 to 70 years, the cultural image of Black women in America has grown to include that of a domineering type who rules the family, including her husband, and who must step aside and allow the Black male to obtain his place in society. Again, almost everyone accepts this image. Sociologists contend that this cultural image of the African-American woman is the primary deterrent to Black progress. From slavery to the present, the African-American woman has made, and continues to make, positive, significant contributions to America. (17:10-11)

The African-American woman's impact is apparent when we look at her achievements in economics and education. Many African-American women have united in volunteer organizations to assist in the struggle and the survival of their children, their people, and their country. The health of the African-American woman is greatly affected by her constant struggle. She has participated in the military, officially and unofficially, from Colonial times. The African-American woman has had many firsts as she has paved the way for others, her sisters, brothers, and Euro-American women.

Historical Perspective

Africa

Anthropologists and historians tell us that most African societies were (and still are) male dominated. We should not assume from this that the role of the female was unimportant. The historic deeds of African-American women in the preslavery period of Africa include participating in the economic and political organization of the tribes. According to Robert Staples in his book, *Black Woman In America*, " In West Africa, the ancestral home of most Afro-Americans, women of the Ashanti tribe were reputed to have founded small states such as Mampong, Wenchi, and Juaben. Among the peoples of Niger and Chad, women reputedly founded cities, led migrations, and conquered kingdoms. There are also accounts of the courage of female legions who fought in armies of Monomotapa." (17:11)

Women have always played an important role in the traditional society systems of Africa. African women had an ample number of opportunities to participate in their society; African-American women had to etch their roles out of a racist and sexist society. All of this caused them to assume the responsibility for the survival of their race. Before we can understand the contemporary African-American woman, we must take a look at the past from which she etched her role. (17:11)

Slavery

African-American women were bought and sold during the days of slavery, with or without their families. Slaveowners are said to have frowned upon this practice, and defenders of slavery denied that it happened at all. But it happened!

History tells us that the selling and buying of slaves occurred most often when the master died or during times when he was financially stressed. Below is an example of an actual bill of sale and an authentic letter seeking to purchase a Negro slave girl.

BILL OF SALE OF ABRAHAM VAN VLEEK

Abm. Van Vleek purchased at Vandue of Barent Ban Dupail October 28:1811--

1 Faning Mill \$17.25
1 Red face Cow 13.25
1 Yearling Calf 4.25
1 Plough 1.6
1 Wench Nam. Eve & Child 156.00
8 Fancy Chairs 9.25
One Looking Glass. Ten Table
Six Silver Table Spoons. Six
So. Tea Spoons 10 China tea
Saucers. 11 Wo Cups 1 Tea 35.12 1/2
Post. Sugar and Milk Cups.
3 Plates Dish and tea Bord \$236.18 1/2

The Above Interest from the Date

Rcvd. December 26th 1811 of Abraham I. Van Vleek the amount of the within amount in full-----Brant I. Goes (illeg.) (8:7)

In contrast to the beliefs of many, slaves did not live on large plantations. Most lived on small, family-operated farms where they had constant and intimate contact with their masters. Others lived in city households and worked as servants, artisans, small tradesmen. (8:14)

MRS. BLANKENSHIP WISHES TO BUY A SLAVE GIRL

Nottoway Co. House March 29/63

Mr. E.H. Stokes

I am anxious to buy a small healthy negro girl--ten or twelve years old, and would like to know if you could let me have one--I will pay you cash in State money--and you allowing the per centage on it--I will take her on trial of a few weeks--please let me hear from you as soon as possible (I would like a dark Mulatto)-- describing the girl and stating the price--Address Mrs. B. L. Blankenship care A, D, Fargua--Nottoway Co. House Va.

Reed, and answered April 1/63. (8:8)

The condition of African-American women during slavery was definitely more difficult and restricted than that of men. Their work and responsibilities were the same, but they carried the additional burden of bearing and rearing the children. Their masters punished them regardless of their condition: pregnant, sick, or new mothers. (8:15)

Additionally, the slaveowners used the Black woman's love for her children to prevent her attempts to escape. Females had fewer chances to escape than men and had to endure the day-to-day sexual abuse by White men. (8:15) Their daily lives were a constant struggle for survival.

Abbie Linsay, an ex-slave from Louisiana, said, "They worked, in a manner of speaking, from can to can't, from the time they could see until the time they couldn't." (8:15) Out of

this daily struggle for existence and the day-to-day struggle for resistance, African-American women such as Sojourner Truth were born to carry the struggle from the farm and the plantation of the South to cities of the North. She believed that everyone needed to see and hear of the atrocities of slavery and their impact on Black women. (8:15)

Sojourner Truth forced her way into an Akron, Ohio, Women's Rights convention in 1851 to make a speech about the image of Black women as it related to racism and sexism. Her comments were not well received by the Euro-American men and women, because she was not invited. Before the end of her speech, she had the Euro-American women agreeing with her.

Dat man ober dar say dat woman needs to be lifted ober ditches, and to have de best place every whar. Nobody eber helped me into carriages, or ober mud puddles, or gives me any best place and ar'n't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have plowed, and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me--and ar'n't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man (when I could get it), and bear de lash as well--and ar'n't I a woman? I have borne thirteen chilern and seen em mos' all sold off into slavery, and when I cried out with a mother's grief, none but Jesus heard--and ar'n't I a woman? (23:14)

Sojourner Truth made the point that her life and the lives of most African-American women were so different from that of most nineteenth century Euro-American women. Although motherhood was accepted as a symbol of identification of womanhood for Euro-American women, it gave African-American women few rights. They were not even allowed to keep their children because they were often sold away from them. (12:268)

Sojourner Truth stated that the Black woman was also denied the safety of the "pedestal," questionable as it was. (AIWA p 15) She, like most Black women of the time, plowed, planted, and hoed, did as much work as a man, endured the brutal punishment of the slaveholder and the overseers, and fulfilled her ordained role of motherhood. (23:15)

Although many Euro-American women worked on farms, they never had to endure the hardships or the extremely harsh labor of the African-American slave.

If we judged all women by the life experiences of Sojourner Truth, all of the theories of inequality based on the assumption that women were weaker than men, physically and mentally, would be immediately set aside as a farce. It seems evident that more than any other group of American women, Black women, particularly slaves, proved daily that sexual discrimination based on such assumptions was not justified. (23:15)

For the African-American woman, sexism was only one problem. She had three problems: she was Black, a slave, and a female. (23:15)

Jezebel and Mammy

As an additional controlling factor or as an explanation of the treatment of African-American women, the Euro-American male found it necessary to formulate two stereotypical identities. The African-American woman was portrayed as either a Jezebel or a Mammy. Jezebel thought only of fleshly matters; Mammy was the asexual woman. Jezebel was carnal; Mammy was maternal. Jezebel was a slut at heart; Mammy was deeply religious. (23:46) Both served as a rationale for holding the Black woman in slavery.

The Jezebel was a female governed completely by her libido. In every way her sexuality controlled her being, mentally and physically. Prudishness and domesticity were not words she understood or cared to understand. (23:29)

In contrast, the Mammy, according to Debra White in *Ar'n't I A Woman*, was "the woman who could do anything, and do it better than anyone else." She was chaste, deeply religious, and authoritarian; Euro-Americans couldn't have a more efficient house servant. She was said to be happy with the life she led. Some people still believe that today. (23:47)

The Jezebel and Mammy stereotypes began at different historical periods and applied to women of different ages. Because African-Americans were thought by Euro-Americans to represent a distinct species, Euro-Americans felt justified in attributing excessive sexuality to them. (12:269)

For the Euro-American, sexuality has always been an issue with both the African-American male and the African-American female. Euro-Americans condoned the lynching of the African-American male because he was primitive and sexually aggressive and the delicate Euro-American woman needed protection from him. (12:271)

Also, these same images of the provocative African-American woman as sexually aggressive allowed the rape and exploitation of the enslaved women to be acceptable. She initiated the acts, and they [Euro-American males] had no control of their actions. Rape and exploitation were only "natural" responses to these women. Angela Davis argues that "rape was not simply an expression of lust of Euro-American men..., but an instrument of control, utilized to discipline the labor force and to keep African-American men and women in line." (12:269) The image of the Jezebel served to excuse miscegenation and sexual assault. The Euro-American male could take certain privileges without feelings of guilt. (12:269) This image of the African-American female allowed him to remain an upstanding citizen and a righteous Christian.

Additionally, the role of the Mammy, the servile, loyal, obedient woman who nurtures and protects the Euro-American family, was prevalent during slavery. These virtues of motherhood emerged only to care for the elite Euro-American children, and this stereotype applied to older women and personified the ideal slave. The image of Mammy appeared in the latter days of slavery when Southerners sought to justify its existence. The Mammy image continued and continues to endorse, rationalize, and justify slavery. (12:269)

Free African-American Women Before Abolition

According to the first U.S. Census in 1790, 60,000 or 8 percent of all African-Americans were free. (1:149) Over half of them lived in the South; some of their ancestors had never been slaves. Others obtained their freedom by state law or from former masters or other African-Americans who purchased them. Some purchased their own freedom or escaped to freedom. (1:149) Athelia Browning saved money to purchase her own freedom, and over the next 18 years, saved enough money to free 15 of her family members. Harriet Tubman helped over 300 African-Americans escape slavery through the Underground Railroad. (1:149)

The War of Independence with Britain increased support for the ideals of liberty and equality, and northern states began to abolish slavery. Massachusetts ended slavery as a result of court decisions. In 1781, Elizabeth Freeman defended herself in a Massachusetts court based on the new Bill of Rights, which provided freedom and equality from birth. She had left her master after his mistress struck her. The court declared that she was free, and ordered her former master to pay her 30 shillings in damages. By 1810, more than two-thirds of the African-Americans outside the South were free. (RG W p149)

Free African-American women found jobs as servants, laundresses, or seamstresses. With many of these occupations, married and single women could work at home, take care of their children, and avoid direct White supervision. (1:150)

African-American women protected themselves against poverty by pooling their resources in mutual-aid and benevolent associations. In Philadelphia in 1838, two-thirds of the Black benevolent societies were exclusively female, including the Sisterly Union and the Daughters of Absalom. Each member would pay her dues; if she fell ill, she would receive aid, and if she died she would receive a decent burial and her children would be cared for. (1:150) According to Amott and Matthaei in *Race, Gender & Work*, mutual-aid societies were so successful the first African-American newspaper, *Freedom's Journal*, noted that "there were only 43 African-American women paupers in New York City in 1829, compared to 462 white women paupers."

Single-mother families were as common among free Blacks as among slaves. In 1820, single-mother families made up 58 percent of all free Black households in Petersburg, Virginia, and 57 percent of the free Black population were children under 14. In Charleston, South Carolina, in the 1850s, 61 percent of all free Black family units were single-mother families. The reason for many of the female-headed households was because there were more free women than men in these cities. In Petersburg in 1820, there were 65 men to every 100 women, and in Charleston, the ratio was 73 to 100. Additionally, there were laws prohibiting free Black women from marrying slaves or free Whites, and there was a willingness of free single Black women to have children on their own. (1:151-152)

Emancipation

Because painfully little about the African-American women's history after slavery is known, we can only guess that they coped as they had in slavery by falling back upon their families, the Black female community, and the positive female identity that family and community helped to forge. (23:163)

The African-American woman continued to be a victim 75 years after emancipation. She has marked the time with a continuous uphill struggle for literacy and jobs for herself, her family, and her people. Discrimination and terrorism were constant opponents in her desperate solitary struggle; therefore, Black women had few opportunities to assume roles other than those they had assumed during slavery.

They continued with field work and domestic service. Although many African-American women retired from field work after slavery, some women remained in the cotton and tobacco fields throughout the 1950s.

Field work remained the basis for the economic survival of African-Americans for 75 years after slavery. This perhaps continued to make motherhood an important rite of passage because children were equally important as a source of labor in an agriculturally based environment. In any case, a culture-based condemnation of "illegitimacy" never developed, suggesting the continued importance of children and by implication the continued importance of motherhood. (23:164) Additionally, this culture-based condemnation never emerged because African-American women were raped and sexually exploited. Therefore, other African-Americans would not condemn them for their "illegitimate" children.

It was difficult for African-American women to assume roles other than those held in slavery, and it became equally difficult for them to escape the myths of Black womanhood. African-American women continued to be perceived by Euro-Americans as individuals who desired promiscuous relationships, and this perception left them vulnerable to sexual crimes. (23:164) As Zinn and Dill remind us in *Women of Color In U.S. Society*, "the most graphic demonstration of the persistence of the 'hot woman' image is that through two-thirds of this century no Euro-American man was convicted of raping an African-American woman." (12:271) This stereotype continues to exist.

The myth of the "bad" Black woman continued after slavery, and was reinforced by the following practices: laws prohibited marriage between the races; Black women were always called by their first names, never Miss or Mrs.; Blacks and Whites were not allowed to socialize; Black women weren't allowed to try on clothes in the store before buying them; Black males and females had to use the same toilet facilities; and Black women were treated differently in courts in rape cases, child abuse and sex crimes. (8:164) Even when a Black woman was raped by a Black man, she had little opportunity for justice. The police consistently reported the crime as "unfounded," and in the relatively few cases that reached the courts, White juries failed to believe the testimony of Black females. The thirteenth amendment freed no Black woman from the image of Jezebel. (23:165)

A COLORED WOMAN, HOWEVER RESPECTABLE, IS LOWER THAN THE WHITE PROSTITUTE written anonymously.

I am a colored woman, wife and mother...

The southerners say we negroes are a happy, laughing set of people, with no thought of tomorrow, How mistaken they are!...There is a feeling of unrest, insecurity, almost panic among the best class of negroes in the South. In our homes, in our churches, wherever two or three are gathered together, there is a discussion of what is best to do. Must we remain in the South or go elsewhere: Where can we go to feel that security which other people feel? Is it best to go in great numbers or in several families? These and many other things are discussed over and over.... A colored woman, however respectable, is lower than a white prostitute. The Southern white woman will declare that no negro women are virtuous, yet she places her innocent children in their care....No amount of discussion will alter a fact, and it is a fact that a very great number of negro women are depraved. It is also a fact that...Christian men and women of the South sold wives away from their husbands and then compelled them to live with other men. Fathers sold their own children. Beautiful girls brought large sums to their owners when sold, especially for mistresses to fathers and brothers of these same women who now marvel that the negro is not chaste. The negro woman's immorality shows more plainly than her white sister's because she is poor and ignorant....(8:166-167)

Nor did the thirteenth amendment free Black women from the image of the Mammy. The last generation of the Old South provided the nation with its false perception of plantation slavery before the Civil War. In many pictures, Mammy was behind every orange blossom, mint julep, delinquent white child, and gracious Southern lady. D. W. Griffith immortalized her [Mammy] in his popular antiblack film, *Birth of a Nation*, and eight years after its debut, the Daughters of the American Confederacy petitioned Congress to erect a granite monument in Mammy's likeness in Washington so that all Americans could pay tribute to her. This petition did not go far but Hollywood film producers and New York advertising agencies built their own monuments with their films, their pancake boxes, and their syrup bottles. There continued to be a relationship between the image of the African-American woman and the type of jobs she held. (23:165)

Finally, the third image of the African-American woman emerged 100 years after the emancipation: Sapphire, a controlling, authoritative Black woman who consumes her men, a combination of Jezebel and Mammy. Debra White in *Ar'n't I A Woman* says Jezebel took away a man's will to resist her temptations, but Sapphire took away his role as a man. Sapphire is tough, efficient, and tireless like Mammy, but without compassion and understanding. "Mammy operated within the boundaries prescribed for women, [but]

Sapphire is firmly anchored in a man's world." (23:166) E. Franklin Frazier and Daniel Moynihan, authors of a report on American sex-role mores, interpreted the African-American woman inaccurately. They could not believe that African-American women could play significant roles in Black families without "dominating men and male-female sexual activities." Out of their reports grew Sapphire. (23:166)

Economic Status

Proportionately, a greater number of African-American women are in the work place than Euro-American women.(23:163) Sometimes African-American women worked to supplement the family's income and sometimes theirs was the only family income. Quite often, though, they worked when there were adequate finances or when the White woman with the same family income would have retired from the work force. Because of the type of jobs they held, African-American women managed work and children; they worked as sharecroppers, domestics, and laundresses. By 1890, for example, 39.7 percent of non-White women were in the labor force, compared with 16.3 percent of Euro-American women. The difference in numbers of working married women is more revealing: 22.5 percent of married African-American women worked outside the home by 1890, compared to only 2.5 percent of married Euro-American women. (12:271)

After the Civil War, about 4 percent of employed African-American women who lived in cities worked as skilled laborers or in professions, mostly as seamstresses or teachers. In 1880, the first African-American woman became a lawyer; the first female physicians to practice in the South were Black. By 1900, there were 160 Black female physicians, seven dentists, ten lawyers, 164 ministers, assorted journalists, writers, artists, 1,185 musicians and teachers of music, and 13,525 school instructors. (1:157)

However, most Euro-Americans continued to accept African-American women in jobs that related only to domestic service or agriculture. In 1900, 44 percent of African-American women workers held jobs as maids, and another 44 percent worked in the fields. Only 5 percent held jobs in higher-paid occupations; approximately 3 percent in manufacturing, 1 percent in professions (mostly teachers), and an extremely small number in sales, managerial, and clerical work. (1:157)

In the 1920s, because Blacks were segregated into crowded ghettos, there was some growth in African-American businesses. Some African-American women became successful businesswomen, like Madame C.J. Walker, self-made millionaire who was the inventor and distributor of hair-straightening products, and Mrs. Annie M. Tumbo Malone, manufacturer of "The Wonderful Hair Grower." The more common businesses were those of the seamstresses and hairdressers, who ran businesses from their homes. (1:169)

Today African-American women are employed in almost every job category. However the gains are unevenly distributed. As of 1980 an increasing share of African-American women was holding managerial and professional jobs, 12 percent were unemployed, 32

percent worked at the bottom of the labor market hierarchy, and almost one-third of all Blacks continued to live in poverty. (1:186)

In the 1990 U. S. Commission of Civil Rights Staff Report about the economic status of African-American women, the following facts surfaced: "Black women are 3 times more likely to have family incomes of less than \$10,000 and 7 times less likely to have family incomes over \$60,000." When we compare married women, married African-American women earn 12 percent more than married Euro-American women, but single African-American women earn substantially less than their Euro-American counterparts. (19:96) Considering only unmarried women, African-Americans are much more likely to earn under \$10,000 a year, than Euro-American unmarried women, who are considerably more likely to earn an annual income over \$20,000. (19:96)

Education

Because African-Americans were denied an education during the days of slavery, obtaining an education became the focal point for African-Americans after the emancipation. African-Americans often had to operate under the guise of complete ignorance to avoid the auction block, especially if they had learned to read and write. During Reconstruction, the federal government helped Blacks to establish freedmen's schools and to integrate White schools. However, when southern Whites regained power, they reseggregated the schools and refused to provide Blacks with more than a minimum of education. In 1910, the average Black school operated only four months a year, and no Black school in the South offered courses above seventh-grade level.

Women made up the majority of African-American teachers. Teaching was a form of social activism, and many of the late nineteenth-century national Black women leaders--such as Fannie Jackson Coppin, Lucy Laney, Charlotte Hawkins Brown, and Fannie Barrier Williams--began their career as southern elementary school teachers. African-American teachers struggled in segregated schools with below-subsistence salaries, and others founded separate private schools at elementary, secondary, and college level. By 1912, there were 14 Black women's colleges. The Nannie Helen Burroughs National Training School for Girls trained over 2,500 girls under the motto, "We specialize in the wholly impossible." (1:163) In the book *Race, Gender and Work*, Amott and Matthaei stated that in 1904 African-American women had raised over \$14 million to educate Black children and had educated over 25,000 Black teachers. (1:163)

Today, the majority of African-Americans have only an elementary school education or less. In 1990, 13.83 percent of African-American females and 17.01 percent of African-American males had no high school education in comparison to 9.57 and 10.30 percent of Euro-American males and females, respectively. (18:69) When we look at higher education we find a significantly greater number of Euro-Americans being conferred with degrees than African-Americans: From 1989 to 1990, 22,107 African-American women received Associate Degrees, compared to 214,228 Euro-American women; 37,798 African-American women and 469,527 Euro-American women received Bachelor's Degrees; 9,839 African-American women and 138,542 Euro-American women received

Master's Degrees; 612 African-American women and 10,691 Euro-American women received Doctorate degrees; and 1,739 African-American women and 22,382 Euro-American women received professional degrees. (7:131-143)

Volunteer Organizations

African-American women used volunteer organizations to uplift themselves, their children, and their race. African-American women were political activists before the days of slavery ended. Their efforts in the political arena included not only lifting themselves up but also securing rights and uplifting all members of their race. Activists ranged from Charlotte Forten, wealthy free Black woman, to Milla Granson, a slave who had learned to read and write from her owner's children and shared her knowledge with hundreds of slaves in her secret midnight school, to exslaves like Sojourner Truth, the most renowned abolitionist and women's rights activist. (1:152) Black women also formed groups because they were not allowed to participate in White-dominated groups. They formed the Colored Female Religious and Moral Society of Salem, Massachusetts, in 1818, to write and converse about the sufferings of their enslaved sisters; the Female Anti-Slavery Society of Salem was formed in 1832 "to promote the welfare of our color;" and the Colored Female Produce Society was formed as part of the Free Produce Movement to urge consumers to boycott the products of slave labor. (1:153) In the 1830s, large numbers of African-American women formed Black literary societies: Female Literary Association of Philadelphia and the Afri-American Female Intelligence Society. These societies provided educational services to include day and night schools, lectures, libraries, and reading rooms (1:154)

In the 1890s, a Black women's club movement was sparked by an anti-lynching campaign of Ida B. Wells, a columnist and co-owner of the Memphis newspaper, *Free Speech*. Wells began her campaign after her friend, Thomas Moss, was lynched for owning a grocery store that competed successfully with a White-owned store in the neighborhood.

In 1895, 36 clubs joined together to form the National Federation of Afro-American Women and at the same time efforts were being made to form the League of Colored Women in Washington, DC. (6:93) African-American women organized clubs throughout the country to work to improve the conditions of their race and gender. (1:163) Some of the clubs included the Women's Christian, Social and Literary Club of Peoria, Illinois; the Phillis Wheatley Home Association of Detroit, organized in 1897, a home for aged colored women; the Sojourner Truth Club of Montgomery, Alabama, furnished a reading room for colored people in the city; the Tuskegee Woman's Club begun by Mrs. Margaret Murray Washington (8:444,452-3).

In 1896, Black women's clubs federated into the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) under the leadership of Mary Church Terrell. Claiming as their motto, "Lifting as We Climb," and dedicating themselves to educating and aiding poor African-American girls and women, as well as politically mobilizing Black women of all classes. By 1915, 50,000 women in over 1,000 clubs participated in the NACW. (1:164) Mary Church

Terrell, one of the wealthiest and best educated Black women of the time, declared "Self-preservation demands that [Black Women] go among the lowly, illiterate and even the vicious, to whom they are bound by ties of race and sex...to reclaim them." (6: 97) The clubwomen of the past not only looked at ways of self improvement but they saw a need to improve the community as they themselves improved. African-American women have always looked for ways to help themselves as individuals and within a group. (4:295)

According to Fannie Barrier Williams, a lecturer and clubwoman, the reasons for developing these women's clubs were "simple and direct." They were organized by women concerned with "how to help and protect some defenseless and tempted young woman; how to aid some poor boy to complete a much-coveted education; how to lengthen the short school term in some impoverished school district; how to instruct deficient mothers in the difficulties of child training." (6:98) In the 1900s, African-American women formed sororities to assist young women attending college, to give them a platform to provide service to the community, to provide them a sense of enlightenment and moral values. These began with Alpha Kappa Alpha in 1908, Delta Sigma Theta in 1913, and Zeta Phi Beta in 1920. (5:17-18) These organizations continue to be a springboard for networking and political and social activism for African-American women, both as collegians and as graduates.

Today there are numerous organizations that Black women use to uplift themselves and their community. Most African-American women manage their families, their jobs, and their community involvement. Many are involved in the community through their churches, and they use the church as their source of community, political, and economic activism. African-American women continue in their determination to achieve economic justice by targeting issues that affect the survival of their community such as reproductive rights, sterilization abuse, health issues, welfare reform, union organizing, housing, education, and police brutality. (1:190)

Health

Black women's health has constituted one area of creative and successful organizing. African-American women's location at the center of race, class, and gender oppression has exposed them to greater health problems because of dangerous working conditions and lack of access to health care. In 1983, Byllye Avery founded the National Black Women's Health Network. (1:190) Some alarming facts related to the health of African-American women include the following:

- The death rate from heart disease is 68 percent higher for African-American women than for Euro-American women. (9:2)
- Cervical cancer rate among African-American women is roughly twice that of Euro-American women. (9:2)
- African-American women are 86 percent more likely to die from strokes than Euro-American women. (9:2)

- African-American women are 15 times more likely to have AIDS than Euro-American women. Additionally, AIDS has become the second leading cause of death among African-American women age 25 to 44. (11:1)
- The mortality rate of African-American women with breast cancer is higher than that of Euro-American women who were diagnosed at the same time. (3:5)

Military Participation

Revolutionary War

African-American women played major support roles during the Colonial period by providing help to the militia. Their assistance included roles such as moving into the "big house" to support the slaveowner's wife when he went away to serve in the militia, taking care of wounds, and working alongside the men in building forts for safety from both the Indians and the British.

African-American females also played a major role as spies during the Revolutionary War. They kept Colonial authorities informed on the British. With the promise of freedom from slavery as a motivating factor, the African-American woman found innovative ways to assist. According to Lucy Terry's written accounts of the war, Black women disguised themselves as men and fought side by side with them against the British, and kept the homes so that White women could go near their husbands during engagements. Phillis Wheatley, a very literate Black woman, used her writing ability to praise and express appreciation for General George Washington during the Revolutionary War. He showed his appreciation by inviting her to visit him at his headquarters in February of 1776. (22:137)

War of 1812

The War of 1812 was basically a naval war. Female assistance was limited to making bandages and tending the sick and wounded sailors. Additionally, Black women were able to take care of the farms so that the White men could leave their homes and families and go off to war knowing things would run smoothly. (22:137)

Civil War

Harriet Tubman became an inspiration to all who loved and valued freedom. She served as a Union spy, an unpaid soldier, a volunteer nurse, and a freedom fighter. She loved freedom so much that she left her husband and brother behind when they chose not to run the risk of escaping from freedom. During the war, she earned the name "General" Tubman from the soldiers in the field.

Another former slave, Susan King Taylor, became famous for her volunteer service during the Civil War. She escaped from slavery at the age of 12 and was teaching freedmen by the time she was 16. During the war, Taylor met Clara Barton, founder of

the American Red Cross, who inspired her. Taylor volunteered as a nurse and launderer for Black Civil War troops as she traveled with her husband's unit, the 33rd United States Colored Troops. She formed the Boston Branch of the Women's Relief Corps after the war. Her memoirs, published in 1902, became the only written record of Black volunteer nurses in the Civil War. (22:138)

Spanish-American War

Black American females again played the role of nurses. During this war, over 75 percent of all deaths resulted from typhoid and yellow fever. Many Black female volunteer nurses were told that they were immune to the diseases because their skin was darker and thicker. Because of this, many of them exposed themselves to the diseases and became casualties when they returned home. Because of segregated living areas, the Whites never knew the high rate of casualties that these women suffered. The Army was so pleased with the 32 contract Black nurses, however, that many congressmen tried but failed to create a permanent corps of Army nurses. (22:139)

World War I

For the first time in military history, the African-American females had an official organization where they found leadership and direction to use their abilities. The National Association of Colored Graduate Nurses had been founded in 1909. In 1917, the co-founder of the Red Cross urged Black nurses to enroll in the American Red Cross, although they were not accepted until two months before the war ended in November 1918. African-American females continued to serve by making bandages, taking over jobs that men held so they could be soldiers, working in hospitals and troop centers, and serving in other relief organizations as they had in previous wars. Many served in Hostess Houses operated by the Young Women's Christian Association, where they wrote letters home for illiterate soldiers and read incoming mail to them. (22:139)

World War II

It was not until World War II (1942) that women were officially allowed to serve in great numbers in the armed forces. The Army had the Women's Army Corps (WAC); the Navy had Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES); and the Coast Guard had the SPARS. The majority of African-American women served in the WAC. They remained in segregated units, as did the African-American men. Although the Navy intended to increase the number of African-Americans to 10 percent, there were still less than 50 Black WAVES by 1945. The U.S. Coast Guard had even less in the SPARS. Out of the highest number of women in the military during this period (271,000), only 4,000 were African-American women, simply because there just weren't any opportunities for them. (10:262) African-American women continued to serve from the Korean Conflict through Viet Nam to Operation Desert Storm.

Desert Storm

African-American women served with distinction during Operation Desert Storm, as officers, noncommissioned officers, and enlisted soldiers. Of the 35,000 females who went to Desert Storm, an estimated 40 percent of them were African-Americans. According to SSG Betty Brown of the Washington, DC, Army National Guard, all of these women endured the heat and the primitive conditions: no electricity, no running water, no bathrooms, and the sanitation details (cleaning the 10 gallon trash cans that served as toilets). (15:106)

An African-American woman, LT Phoebe Jeter, who headed an all-male platoon, ordered 13 Patriots fired (anti-missile missiles), destroying at least two Scuds (Iraqi surface-to-surface missiles). (15:100) Another African-American woman, CPT Cynthia Mosely, commanded Alpha Company, 24th Support Battalion Forward, 24th Infantry Division (Mechanized), a 100-person unit that supplied everything from fuel to water to ammunition. Her unit resupplied fuel for all of the forward brigades because it was closest to the front lines. (15:101)

These women who served in the military since pre-colonial days have paved the way for new recruits and current active duty females to follow. When we look at the statistical data of African-American women entering the military, we find that Black women in FY 1993 comprised 33 percent of Army female recruits, 22 percent of Navy female recruits, 17 percent of Marine Corps female recruits and 18 percent of Air Force female recruits. (21:2-10) Today the statistics tell us that 30.3 percent of the military is African-American women; approximately 33.6 percent serve as enlisted, and 13.1 percent serve as commissioned and warrant officers. (20)

The following African-American females have attained the rank of general officer: currently on active duty, **BG Marcelite Jordan-Harris**, Director Maintenance, Headquarters United States Air Force/LG, and retired from the U.S. Army **BG Clara L. Adams-Ender** and **BG Sherian G. Cadoria**. (22:176-187)

Military Firsts

- March 8, 1945, **Phyllis Mae Daily**, the first Black nurse was sworn into the Navy Nurse Corps in New York City. (13:864)
- February 12, 1948, the first Black nurse joined the Regular Army Nurse Corps. (13:865)
- In July 1974, **Reverend Alice Henderson** was commissioned as a chaplain, becoming the first female chaplain, Black or White. (13:867)
- Also in July 1974, five Black women out of a group of 15 women became cadets at the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy. (13:867)
- In May 1975, **Lieutenant Donna P. Davis** became the first Black woman doctor in the Naval Medical Corps. (13:867)

- In November 1979, **Second Lieutenant Marcella A. Hayes** is the fifty-fifth woman out of 48,000 officers to graduate from the Army Aviation School in Ft Rucker, Alabama. She became the first Black woman pilot in the U.S. armed forces. (13:869)
- In September 1979, **Hazel Winifred Johnson** became the first Black woman promoted to the rank and position of Brigadier General, Chief of the Army Nurse Corps (22:167).
- In December 1980, **Ensign Brenda Robinson** became the first Black female aviator in the U.S. Navy assigned to the Fleet Logistics Squadron Forty in Norfolk, Virginia. (13:869)
- On May 18, 1983, **Angela Dennis** of Arkansas became one of the first two Black women to graduate from the United States Coast Guard Academy in New London, Connecticut. (13:870)

African-American Women Contributors and Contributions as Firsts

1862

- **Mary Patterson** became the first Black woman in the United States to earn a Master of Arts degree. She received her degree from Oberlin College. (13:1425)

1867

- **Madame C.J. Walker** was born Sarah Breedlove in Delta, Louisiana. She became the first Black woman millionaire. (14:4)

1872

- The first Black woman lawyer, **Charlotte E. Roy**, received her degree from Howard University School of Law in Washington, DC. (13:1425)

1873

- **Susan McKinney**, believed to be the first Black woman to enter the medical profession formally, was certified as a physician. (Records at the medical college of New York indicate that **Dr. Rebecca Cole** was the first Black woman physician in the United States, having practiced from 1872 to 1881.) (13:1425)

1879

- In Boston, **Mary E. Mattoney** was the first Black woman to receive a diploma in nursing from New England Hospital for Women and Children. (13:1425)

1903

- **Lena Walker** became the first Black woman bank president. Miss Walker was the founder and the chief executive of the Saint Luke Penny Savings Bank in Richmond, Virginia. (13:1425)

1908

- **Alpha Kappa Alpha**, the first Black sorority started at Howard University in Washington, DC. (13:1425)

1926

- **Violette M. Anderson** of Chicago became the first Black woman lawyer to practice before the U.S. Supreme Court. (13:1426)

1931

- **Estele Massey Osborne** became the first Black recipient in the United States of a master's degree in nursing education. She was a 1931 graduate of Columbia's Teacher's College. (13:1426)

1935

- **Mrs. Gertrude Elise Ayer**, the first Black woman to serve as a school principal in the New York City public school system, was appointed to her post at P.S. 24. (13:1426)

1938

- **Crystal Bird Fauset** became the first Black woman elected to a state legislature in the United States. She was named to the Pennsylvania House of Representatives on November 8, 1938. (13:1426)

1939

- First Black woman to become a judge, **Jane Matilda Bolin**, was appointed to the Court of Domestic Relations by Mayor Fiorello La Guardia of New York City. (13:1426)

1940

- First Black person to win an Oscar from the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences was **Hattie McDaniel** as best supporting actress for her performance in *Gone with the Wind*. (13:1426)

1950

- **Gwendolyn Brooks** won the Pulitzer Prize for her volume of poetry. She was the first Black woman to win the award and also the first Black woman elected to the National Institute of Arts and Letters. (13:1428)

1951

- **Janet Collins** was the first Black person to dance for the Metropolitan Opera in New York. Miss Collins made her debut in *Aida*. (13:1429)

1958

- **Ruth Carol Taylor** became the first Black airline stewardess. Miss Taylor worked for Mohawk Airlines. (13:1429)
- **Gloria Davey** performed *Aida* at New York's Metropolitan Opera and became the first Black person to appear in song at this celebrated palace of music. (13:1429)

1978

- **Jill Brown** becomes the first Black commercial airline pilot. Texas International Airline hired her. (14:10)
- **Karen Farmer** becomes the first Black member of the Daughters of the American Revolution. It was the DAR that refused to allow Marian Anderson to perform in concert in Washington, DC, in 1939. (13:1431)

1979

- **Audrey Neal** the first woman, Black or White, to become a longshoreman on the eastern seaboard. Neal works at the Bayonne Military Ocean Terminal in New Jersey. (13:1432)

1981

- **Dr. Lenora Cole-Alexander** became the first Black person to head the U.S. Labor Department's Women's Bureau. (13:1432)
- **Dr. Ruth Love** became the first Black person to serve as superintendent of the Chicago school system. Before her appointment to this top post, Dr. Love held the same position in Oakland, California. (13:1432)

1981

- **Lillian Roberts** was named the first Black woman to head the New York State Labor Department. She was appointed commissioner of the department July 2, 1981. (13:1432)

1983

- Representing New York State, **Vanessa Williams**, became the first Black Miss America in the 62-year history of the Atlantic City pageant. The first runner-up was **Suzette Charles**, representing New Jersey, who was also Black and also the first Black Miss New Jersey.

1988

- **Oprah Winfrey** became the first Black woman to own her own television and film production company, Harpo Studios, a \$20 million film and television complex in Chicago. (14:51)

1989

- Episcopal **Reverend Barbara Harris**, a Black, became the first female bishop in the worldwide Anglican communion. The Anglican church decided in 1976 that women could be ordained as priests. (13:1432)

1992

- **Carol E. Moseley Braun** of Illinois became the nation's first Black woman senator. (16:84)
- **Eva Clayton** became the first Black woman representative from North Carolina in the twentieth century. (16:185)

1993

- **M. Joycelyn Elders** became the first Black and the first woman United States Surgeon General in August. (16:166)
- **Hazel O'Leary** became the first Black and the first woman Secretary of Energy. (16:167)

Conclusion

Debra White in *Ar'n't I A Woman* states,

History is supposed to give people a sense of identity, a feeling for who they were, who they are, and how far they have come. It should act as a springboard for the future. One hopes that it will do this for black women, who have been given more myth than history.

The myths have put black women in a position where they must, as Sojourner Truth did in 1858, prove their womanhood. Despite all that she has come through and accomplished, the American black woman is still waiting for an affirmative answer to the plaintive question asked over a century ago: *Ar'n't I a woman?* (23:166)

It has only been 130 years since the days of slavery. On the spectrum of time, this is so minute. The struggle through this time has been intense, giving African-American men and women a sense of intense pain that makes the time feel as if it was an eternity. It seems that only those who are in the struggle can see the sometimes hopelessness that the African-Americans feel as they journey toward the twenty-first century with many of the problems and issues of the past still in the forefront. Is it any wonder that the African-American mother, woman, girl, strives so arduously and diligently to find hope for the future of her children and the survival of her race. She strives to do this in conjunction with the African-American man, not by emasculating him through sexuality or dominance, as many would have him believe, but by working alongside him as a partner, as God has so ordained. No one has told them [African-Americans] of how well they worked together in the past. No one has told them of how the women who were the heads of single families pooled their money to take care of each other and their children. No one has told them that one of the keys is unity, and many African-Americans don't know that they can unite. No one has told them that historically unity helped to pull them through slavery, reconstruction, and the civil rights era. Unity can help to lift the African-American male and female up and carry them into the twenty-first century finding solutions to the problems of the present

In his book, *Principle-Centered Leadership*, Stephen Covey defines the seven habits of highly effective people. Through his eyes we can see that African-American women are highly effective people because they fit the following descriptions:

1. **Be Proactive -- Choose your response.** African-American women chose their response to racism and sexism. They chose to use their positions as house servants to stay informed of current events and to inform others of the daily news that they picked up from the slave owners' conversations. We can see them choosing to start schools when none was provided for them or their children.
2. **Begin with the end in mind -- Decide how you're going to use your time, talents, and tools.** Harriet Tubman used her time and talent to begin the Underground Railroad to free slaves.
3. **Put First Things First-- Use your willpower and initiative.** The single-mother families combined their finances to help themselves and their children, refusing to accept poverty and racism as a reason to fail.
4. **Think win/win -- abundance mentality.** African-American women knew that there was more than enough for them individually and collectively. They joined together to form organizations to help themselves, their race, and their gender.

5. Seek First to Understand, Then to be Understood -- They sought to understand the forces that oppressed. We especially see Sojourner Truth as she spoke at the Women's convention in Ohio seeking to understand the reasons for the racism and sexism she endured.

6. Synergize -- African-American women creatively joined together to form volunteer organizations to uplift their race as they climbed away from poverty and ignorance.

7. Sharpen the Saw --They continuously seek self-improvement through educating themselves and renewing themselves physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. (2:40-47)

African-American women have mastered Stephen Covey's principle-centered leadership. They continually learn, are service oriented, radiate positive energy, believe in other people, lead balanced lives, see life as an adventure, are synergistic, and exercise for self-renewal. (2:33) The African-American woman is a leader.

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