

Black Women and Girls Matter

**Voices of Resilience, Resistance, and
Resolve**

Rev. Dr. Melinda Contreras-Byrd, Editor

Black Women and Girls Matter: Voices of Resilience,
Resistance, and Resolve

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AMANDLA!!!

(South African word for power used as the slogan during the struggle to dismantle apartheid)

THE WRITING COLLECTIVE

February 2020

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A Call to Solidarity/Protecting, Educating And Empowering Black Females 2019

A recent television series special entitled, “Surviving R Kelly” sparked a wave of unrest and social media discussion - especially in Black communities. The alleged atrocities suffered at the hands of this famous Black entertainer were more than plausible, and viewers were outraged by both the nature and depth of the abuse that they saw, as well as by the length of time these alleged abuses had been allowed to continue unchallenged and unpunished even by U.S. courts.

Could these allegations be true? Could crimes so heinous be allowed, abetted, and the perpetrator remain unaccountable and protected? Would they be believed if they told their story? What went wrong with whatever systems that should have been active to protect these young Black girls?

What do we as a community do in the face of the destructive evil that attacks young Black girls, and all females?

The writers of this curriculum have come together to represent a segment of the Black community. We have come together to offer what we can—as our gift—to aide in the protection, education and empowering of Black females.

We are academic administrators. We are teachers and professors. We are attorneys, clergy and heads of social justice and Black women’s organizations. We are

psychologists, church workers, and women involved in many forms of social service.

And it is our determination to offer up the knowledge that we have struggled to attain as one action that can serve to address the needs of Black females.

We are united in our love and concern for the welfare of our sisters.

We are the voices of Black women from the multi-denominational Black Church...and we are listening, hearing, angry and determined.

In the words of the 1955 women's day in South Africa, "Now you have touched the women, you have struck a rock, you have dislodged a boulder, you will be crushed".

In unity,

Rev. Dr. Melinda Contreras-Byrd, Editor

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1. The Legacy of Silence: How Black Churches Can Heal Historical Trauma

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The legacy of slavery has impacted much of the future for Black people in the United States. Genocide, extreme brutality, and rape are just a few of the atrocities experienced by Africans who were enslaved in this country. These experiences have resulted in cumulative emotional and psychological wounds that have been carried across generations. Researchers and practitioners call this concept, “historical trauma”. Historical trauma is understood through these four components: (1) mass trauma is deliberately and systematically inflicted upon a target population by a subjugating, dominant population; (2) trauma is not limited to a single catastrophic event, but continues over an extended period of time; (3) traumatic events reverberate throughout the population, creating a universal experience of trauma; and (4) the magnitude of the trauma experience derails the

population from its natural, projected historical course resulting in a legacy of physical, psychological, social and economic disparities that persists across generations.[1],[2].

Historical trauma theory provides a lens through which to understand how the effects of the traumas inflicted on groups of people because of their race and ethnicity play out generations later. The very same atrocities that befell the ancestors are then reproduced among their descendants. In this way the persistent cycle of trauma destroys families and communities and threatens the vibrancy of entire cultures. As a result, many people in these same communities' experience higher rates of mental and physical illness, substance abuse, and erosion of family and community structures.

Rape and sexual abuse were pervasive during slavery; White slave owners and overseers used rape and sexual abuse as a form of control. As a result, many women and girls became pregnant. According to the literature, between 30-40% of descendants of enslaved Africans can trace their lineage to European men. This statistic is one of many that magnify the extent to which rape and sexual abuse occurred among Black women and girls during slavery. These numbers do not speak to the fact that during slavery many females were forced to be breeders and have a child each of their childbearing years. These numbers do not speak to the rape and sexual abuse of Black women and girls by Black men, often by force of slave owners. These numbers do not speak to all of the women and girls who did not get pregnant. The statistic listed above is just a slice of the profound impact rape and sexual abuse had on Black women and girls.

Techniques to survive this historical trauma have been passed down through generations, and contemporary generations have adopted them as their own. As a survival technique, many Black females stayed silent about the identity of their abuser, particularly if he was White. In the autobiography, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, the author discusses the serious consequences of women and girls not being silent about their pain and suffering and the identity of their abuser. Mothers found that if they were vocal about either, they were at serious risk of being separated from their children. Thus, it became safer to stay silent in the face of abuse in order to keep the children safe and to keep families together in a system that had no regard for Black families.

Historically, the Black Church served as the primary resource for healing and restoration for many in our community. For generations, Black people found refuge from the atrocities of slavery and racism in the church. It is where many of us learned how to forgive and be resilient and strong enough to survive these traumas. Unfortunately, we also learned that survival meant hiding the realities of what we had endured. We learned that silence about what happened was the primary way to make sense of these experiences. Silence contributed both to continuing the trauma and the adaptation to the trauma.

Silence remains a behavior that hinders our ability to address the sexual abuse of women and girls in our community. As a faith community, we must break the silence and the institutions that support this silence. We must also

educate ourselves to understand our history so that we can bring awareness to addressing the resulting trauma. Our faith community can take the lead in moving this pertinent healing work forward. There are opportunities and areas of growth for us when addressing this issue.

External advocacy

We must ask ourselves, “Are there systems in place that promote this silence? If so, what are those institutions and systems and how do we dismantle the practices that keep silence etched into the various systems?” We must also ask ourselves, “Is remaining silent after abuse as useful an adaptation for Black women and girls today as it was during slavery?” We must also ask ourselves a very difficult question, “In what ways do our systems, which are legally charged to protect children from maltreatment and treat them as sacred, also perpetuate practices that demonstrate disregard for Black familial bonds?”

Black churches must be the advocates and voices for women and girls who have been forced to remain silent in order to survive, as well as for those who have been silenced due to cultural messages that reinforce the belief that Black girls’ and women’s lives do not matter. This advocacy starts by connecting with agencies in our communities whose stated goals are to heal and protect our women and girls. Most cities have local advocacy centers for women and girls who have been victimized. Opening communication with local agencies may bridge the gap between the community and the church and provide an avenue for working directly with these

agencies to create change. Highlighting some of the statistics cited in this paper may start the conversation. Also, starting with one agency and growing your network from there may prove less daunting **than** contacting multiple agencies at once. Keep in mind, we must have people who look like us working with these agencies to dismantle the systems that maintain the abuse. Most states have child abuse and rape crisis institutions; an internet search for local advocacy or crisis centers should be helpful in locating these agencies. You may contact them directly and ask for written materials that you can pass out at churches. Finally, contacting your local politicians, State Representative, Governor's office, city councilman/woman, alderman/woman, and so on, may help bring more awareness to the need for change on an institutional level.

Internal advocacy

One opportunity for us as a faith community is to provide a safe space for survivors. A second opportunity is to spearhead healing, silence-breaking dialogues in these safe spaces. However, it may prove harder for community members to resolve these issues, if the abuse was perpetrated by another member of the church. For this reason, church leaders must discuss and develop a plan for how to address this possibility, particularly when mandated reporting to law enforcement is in order.

Given the hierarchy of most faith-based communities, church leadership must be at the forefront of this effort to heal by providing a sanctuary for survivors, offering education and

resources for members, and creating an environment of advocacy and healing. Leaders must provide a context from which to understand historical trauma and how the current state of our women and girls demonstrates that this cycle is being perpetuated. Furthermore, church leaders must publicly support a culture of advocacy and teach their members to do so as well. Some ways to create this change are: 1. by choosing members to start survivor or advocacy groups to provide support and education; 2. sending clear messages that speaking out against any forms of abuse is a welcomed practice; 3. having the church congregation get involved in community movements to end the silencing of girls/women; and 4. educating the congregation on sexual abuse, and bringing in individuals from local advocacy and crisis centers to educate on sexual abuse and how to report sexual abuse.

Additionally, churches can create a special committee to provide information that is easily accessible to the members, such as pamphlets, flyers, and phone numbers that can be placed in bathroom stalls or other places frequented by women and girls. Finally, churches can work to build relationships with local crisis and advocacy agencies specializing in addressing the needs of sexual abuse and trauma survivors. These organizations may then agree to provide the church with information and free or low cost needed services such as individual and group counseling and/or education workshops.

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2. The Power of Voice

Bishop Anne Henning Byfield

The Rt. Rev. Henning Byfield is a preacher, a poet, an author and serves as the Presiding Prelate of the 16th District African Methodist Episcopal Church. Her work in health advocacy, and social justice earned her the Indiana 47th Drum Major for Justice award and an honorary Doctor of Divinity Degree from R.R. Wright School of Religion in Johannesburg, South Africa.

The discussion of the sexual assaults continues as it relates to Robert Kelly and other “alleged” abusers. While a critical assessment of the personalities that perpetuate violence against women and children is necessary, it is also important that we empower the abused and potentially abused to understand the power of their voices. We must empower our daughters, sisters, mothers, nieces, friends, our sons and brothers.

Our daughters, in particular, are victims of unending physical, sexual, mental and emotional battering. They are living in a society that allows the assaulter to blame the abused for the violence against them while muting their voices to resist or report. There must be a vigorous concerted effort to teach our young to fight at all levels which includes preparation, proactive and reactive measures.

Even though we are creating a safer environment, we must know how to say NO in the environment in which we live. Disempowering our ability to speak must not be one of our options. The power to speak is innate in our creation; we must use it and use it well. Giving authority to our voices is a measured and important step to confronting the abuser.

STOP THE CULTURE OF SILENCE: SPEAK

Your Life is Valuable. Actually, for you, it is more valuable than his because it is your life.

Know that it is not your job to protect abusers. It is not your responsibility to understand his station in life, his personal problems. It does not matter if he is a relative, person in authority, entertainer, or a child. If he touches you, makes inappropriate statements or gestures, violates your space, or makes you uncomfortable, speak. Speak to him. Speak to your parents. Tell a teacher, the police and anyone else who can empower you. Know that keeping silent hurts you, releases him from accountability, and may endanger others in the future. No matter what, determine to keep speaking until you are heard!

PROTECT YOUR SPACE: ALL OF IT

Know that you are not the one responsible for what the abuser does and how he enters your space. You can however take steps to protect your personal space as much as you are able. You do not have to be hugged, touched, or kissed if you don't want to be. No one has a right to put their hand on your

leg, face, or any part of your body without your permission. A person who doesn't respect your space is one who needs not be in it! And this doesn't only refer to your physical space, but it also means your emotional space as well. Emotional space means that there are ways that people try to have control over you without touching you. For instance, when a person, "calls you out of your name", tries to manipulate you or force you to do something you do not want to do. This person is invading your emotional space and is therefore someone who should not be allowed in your space, physically or emotionally. People who seek to harm you will invade your physical and/or emotional space. They may begin by what looks like innocent touching without permission or giving of gifts or compliments. Even if the compliment appears genuine, that still must not stop you from protecting your space.

Only you can determine your personal space. Many parents teach their children that their personal space is, "Your arm's length on either side of you, in front and in back of you. That is your personal space." No one gets that close to you without permission. Hold your arms out and make it clear. Trust your instinct. Listen to your own inner voice. As soon as you feel uncomfortable, speak, and then avoid that person if possible. Speak, tell your parents or someone in authority whom you trust.

HAVE A PLAN FOR WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS

Despite all of the attempts to speak and protect your space, someone stronger and older may physically force

themselves on you. It could happen anywhere: You may be alone, on a date, walking home, at school, in your bedroom, or at even at church. Before you can fight, or scream, you may face a situation where you encounter the worst of your worst fears. For that reason, it is important that you create a survival plan *before* you are assaulted. Learn ways to protect yourself in the midst of an assault. Remember his name, what he said, the location of the abuse, what he is wearing, and as much about the facts as you can.

After an attack, you will feel hurt, confused, angry, sad, depressed and alone, yet it is important that you try to remember as much as you can.

Please remember that you are **not** responsible for what happened to you. It is not your fault. You didn't want it or encourage it!

Go back to the first step. Speak. It will likely be very hard but tell someone immediately.

Abusers will try to protect themselves by telling those they abuse, that they must be silent, and that no one will believe them. They will say that it was your fault, and bad things will happen to you or your family if you tell anyone. Other people may also urge you to be silent so that others won't think negative things about you. You may be told to be silent so that you don't get the abuser in trouble and/or become the person responsible for sending him to jail. You may even be told that you will get over it, that it happens to many people, and that this time it was "your turn."

Reject what they are telling you and guard your spirit from their feeble attempts to help. You may go through all of the above. You may feel awful, dirty, and responsible but please remember that it is not your fault, and you do not have to carry this by yourself.

Specific Course of Action

Practice your voice. Stand in front of a mirror and practice saying “no.” Learn to be comfortable saying no. Trust your instincts, and discernment and say, “no”, even when you are not sure.

Define and develop your voice through journals. Write your thoughts and your feelings. Ask yourself, “how do I feel about saying no? How will I say no in the future?”

Encourage your voice by reading.

Learn about Women who used their voice

Mari Evans: Writer, Poem, Advocate

Malala Yousafzai, Nobel Peace Prize winner

Serena Williams: Sports Advocate

Daniela Contreras. Survivor

Emily Waters, Survivor

Jarena Lee: Preacher and a Legacy

Maxine Waters: Congresswoman

Anne Henning Byfield Survivor, AME Bishop

Celebrate your life and creation by using your voice to thank God for you.

YOU ARE OUR DAUGHTERS

*You are our daughters.
Resolute and respected,
living out the legacy
of the ancestors before you.*

*You are our daughters.
Bold and beautiful,
bragging of the creator's imagination
every time you enter the room.*

*You are our daughters.
Tall and talented,
gifted and graceful,
declaring
you shall live
when the truth is spoken to you.*

*Rise my daughters rise
in the image of your womanness.*

*Stand my daughters stand
in the strength of your mothers and sisters.*

Shake off the lies and loathing of your essence.

*Shout the glory of your
purpose,
potential
and liberation.*

You are our daughters.

*Annehenningbyfield2002 published 2007 The Essence of
My Existence*

3. Lessons for Black Girls: You Are Not the Maid, the Mammy, or the Mistress

Rev. Regina D. Langley, PhD

Dr Langley is an independent scholar and Ordained Elder in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Her first video/photographic documentary, “*Touching Color: Black Women’s Every Day*” will be released in Fall 2020. She currently serves as the Program Manager at The Drumthwacket Foundation.

As a little girl, like most Black girls, my mom and I met at the kitchen sink every other Saturday morning for my hair care ritual. After washing and conditioning my hair, my mom would plait my hair so that it could air dry. Later in the evening, she would press my hair. Not being tender headed, there were few, if any tears, but when the time came for pressing there was always a level of anxiety. Hot combs and the probability of burnt ears would bring any young Black girl concern. My mom and I made it through those early hair care years without too many horror hair stories. But, in between the plaiting and hair drying, my mom added another dimension to our Saturday morning ritual. She would give me a full-fledged facial – cleanser, mask, toner, and moisturizer. After my mom had completely applied my mask, she would instruct me, “Be still, don’t talk or move, or you’re going to crack your skin.”

Not wanting to “crack my skin,” I would lay still, and, in silence, for 15 minutes waiting for my mask to dry. Maybe some of you are giving my mom the side-eye for giving a six-year old a facial. But, to my mom’s credit, unbeknownst to me at the time, this activity taught me the importance of skin and self-care. But, most importantly, it taught me stillness, quiet, and resolve, things I have come to value over the course of my life.

Research shows that by the time most Black girls are six years of age or younger, they have already been taught lessons of their expected place in the world by the spaces where they spend most of their time – with family, in their community, by attending church, and in the classroom. Whether these lessons are implicit or explicit, Black girls learn significance related to relationships, social and gender roles, and value from the interactions they have with people around them. These interactions *can* encourage Black girls to assume the characteristic roles of being the Maid, Mammy, or Mistress.

Historically, the Maid, Mammy, and Mistress served the political, social, economic, and sexual interests of mainstream white America. The MAID was hired to clean, cook, wash and iron, care for the children, and maintain the house while the (white) woman of the house enjoyed a life of leisure; the MAMMY, the nurturing and protective, self-sacrificing, weary but never bitter woman, often seen as interchangeable with the MAID, was to make sure everyone was comfortable and happy, habitually putting everyone else’s well-being and happiness above her own; and, the MISTRESS was strictly

for the sexual pleasure of white men.¹ The MAID, MAMMY, and MISTRESS casting offered scripts for how Black women *and* girls were to function in gendered and societal roles.

The MAID trope taught Black women that they were responsible for cleaning up behind everyone; the MAMMY trope taught Black women that they were responsible for everyone else's happiness and making sure everyone else was comfortable; and, the MISTRESS trope taught Black women that their only value was in being available for the sexual pleasure of men. All these tropes are nuanced, complexed, and rigid because many of the people attempting to place Black women and girls in these roles would consider themselves friends, concerned and caring family members, allies, and supportive pastors, teachers, and mentors.

In Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937), writer and cultural anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston states, "De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see." Invoking the image of the animal that carries impossible weight, is worked to death, and saddled with back breaking loads of heft, Black women are expected to carry it all and to keep it moving, never stopping for rest or relaxation, less they are beaten with strokes of insult and violence. The expectation is that Black

¹ I understand the problems with identifying Black women as the "mistress" to white men, particularly during slavery and beyond. For the purpose of this essay, I will use mistress as a way of describing how Black girls are conditioned to assume roles in relationships. See/read <https://www.aaihs.org/on-the-use-of-slave-mistress/>.

women are to carry the load and weight that white men, white women and black men refuse to carry and to do the work no one wants to do, never expecting thanks or praise for doing it. The latent list of chores and expectations of Black women is preposterous – cleaning, cooking, ironing, washing, caring for the children, maintaining the house, making sure that everyone else is happy even if they are unhappy; and being available for the sexual pleasure of every man around them – REGARDLESS. If Black women are tired, weary, overworked, underpaid, sick, “sick and tired of being sick and tired,” it does not matter as long as they are available to the needs and wants of everyone other than themselves. Their needs and wants do not matter.

Using something as ordinary as a facial, my mom taught me self-value and self-love. She taught me that I mattered. By caring for my skin, my mom wanted me to acknowledge that *my* Black skin was worthy of care. By insisting that I remain still and silent for fifteen minutes, during the mask drying process, my mom taught me to pause, to slow down. Over the years, when peppered with the cares and concerns of my life, I have gone back to this lesson time and time again. Pausing has been a way for me to question when I do not believe someone has my best interest at heart. Pausing makes me interrogate a person’s words against their actions. Pausing encourages me to examine what I really want and deserve.

During much of my childhood and adolescence I was bullied and made fun of for *being* everything that my peers believed they were not. I was criticized by my peers for being

smart and a voracious reader, often insulting me with “you think you know everything.” These attacks caused me great harm and taught me to doubt everything I knew to be true about myself. I began to question those early lessons my mom taught me and my place in the world, causing my self-value and self-love to unravel.

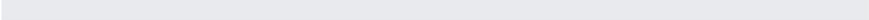
When the essence of who you are is constantly disputed and devalued, it becomes easy for others to define you and assign you to roles of existence that were never meant for you. Once consigned to the role, it is difficult to disentangle from its characteristics. For example, when Black women (girls) are taught assertiveness and confidence instead of being seen as poised and self-possessed, they are defined as the “Angry Black Woman.” In an effort not to perform the assigned role and assume the character attributed to them, Black women and girls are frequently negotiating between *being* and *doing*.

Black girls need women, intergenerational women, in their lives who are familiar with all the traps that can easily ensnare them. Other aunts, play mothers, and big sisters have always been a part of the community. We must encourage Black girls to identify these women in their families, communities, churches, and schools who can assist them with navigating the uncertainties and challenges they will face as young women and girls. These women are not a substitute for biological mothers, but sometimes having another woman in your life makes a world of difference as well offers another perspective.

Black girls, who will ultimately become productive and confident women need concrete and material lessons of self-love and self-value at an early age, less they fall prey to predators and persons who will exploit their innocence and inexperience. Merely, presenting examples of how Black girls are to exist in the world is not enough. Subtle messages will not prevent Black girls from assuming the MAID, MAMMY, or MISTRESS roles. As a way of offering LESSONS FOR BLACK GIRLS, here is a list of suggestions that can be used to assist Black girls with being informed and conversant regarding matters of their lives:

- Teach Black girls that they are NOT responsible for everyone else's well-being, happiness, and comfort.
- Teach Black girls that saying NO is necessary and important.
- Teach Black girls NOT to keep secrets when they feel they have been violated.
- Teach Black girls that sex is healthy – we all are here because someone had sex. Have informed, open, and honest conversations about the parts and function of the body. Simply telling Black girls to “keep their dresses down and legs closed” is not a lesson in sex education.
- Teach Black girls that they deserve to be seen *and* heard. Their presence and voices matter.
- Teach Black girls that their value is not in being someone's secret or seconds.
- Teach Black girls that it is okay to ask questions and to ask for help.
- Teach Black girls to seek out and listen to sound advice from knowledgeable women
- Teach Black girls to acknowledge and validate their feelings when they are not treated well.

- Offer Black girls' access to language and experiences through books, articles, and travel.
- Most importantly, teach Black girls that **THEY ARE ENOUGH!**



4. Prepare, Protect, Defend and Love our Black Girls

Rev. Kimberly Detherage, Esq.

Rev. Kimberly L. Detherage, Esq. Serves as Pastor of St. Mark African Methodist Episcopal Church, President of the Corona East Elmhurst Clergy Association and is engaged in the General Practice of Law.

Many years ago, my investigator brought to my law office a copy of the infamous and now widely viewed video tape of R. Kelly. As the office of attorneys watched the tape it was clear to everyone that the black male urinating on the naked young girl was R. Kelly, and she was clearly under-aged and uncomfortable with what was happening to her. It was the first time I had heard of the term, “Golden Showers.” Right then, I decided that R Kelly and his music would not be a part of me, or my church’s youth group music mix. No matter how much in his hit song, R. Kelly believed he could fly, no matter how many times his music hit the charts, his music would **not** be played in my house, at the church, nor in my presence. And if I could help it, by any youth, no matter how many times the youth tried to tell me to “separate the music from the man.” They would say to me, “Oh Rev. Kim don’t be so hard.” I wanted them to understand that his lifestyle was abusive and unacceptable. The man and his music were one.

As a criminal defense attorney, a minister to youth and young adults and now a pastor, I have witnessed a lot of things, listened to a lot of life stories (painful at times), found myself in a lot of unexpected places and defended a lot of teenagers and young adults.

I have seen young Black girls engaged in prostitution with their pimps sitting close by in the audience at court. I have witnessed judges setting fines, that served to promote the very crime for which the girl was arrested. I have seen young girls clad in sleeveless tops, standing before the judge on a felony charge, holding their child; while adorned with a tattoo that read, “bitch” and another of a penis with Betty Boop. While on my way into the sanctuary to participate in a funeral, a fourteen-year old girl who still played with her dolls, asked to speak with me. Distress, she informed me that she was pregnant, (it was her first time having sexual relations and it was unclear whether it was consensual-at the very least it was statutory rape). The guy and her mother wanted her to have an abortion. I believed it was important for the church not to outright condemn, but to affirm whatever decision her mother made to ensure the best for her child’s future.

I have seen young girls arrested for hanging out with the wrong crowd and committing serious crimes because they wanted to belong and be accepted. I have seen young girls pregnant by mother’s boyfriends, abused by uncles, taking risks with their bodies because someone has told them how much they loved them and showered them with jewelry, the latest sneakers, and clothing. I have talked to young Black girls who believe they are ugly because they have been

listening to society's (and even their own family's) definition of beauty. I have had to go up to a 50 plus year-old man eyeing a young girl and whisper in his ear, "she's only twelve".

Teenagers are being paid to bring other teenagers into sex trafficking, with the promise of larger amounts of money than they have ever seen before. I have heard sermons on Sunday mornings victimizing and blaming women, describing Black women as enticers, and Jezebel's: "you know how you women are, sexy negligees, sweet talk, trying to get the man in trouble..."

R. Kelly is not new. He is a prominent figure who has been allowed to get away with exploiting young women just as many men in society have been getting away with it for a long, long time. Some of us women have been complicit and participating. We have all heard the story of Adam and Eve and how Eve enticed Adam, and woman is therefore to blame for all of humankind's condition. From time immemorial. Black women have been seen as less than. We are at the bottom of the totem pole or so society wants us to believe. In reality, we are brilliant, beautiful, creative, talented, and resourceful.

Having suffered trauma myself as a child, I grew up reading the Bible, while struggling with value and self-worth. On one hand I felt used and abused and on the other hand I understood that my purpose was not to be used or taken advantage of. I was valuable, worthy and a child of God.

In Genesis 1: 31, the Bible tells us that when God had finished all that God created, God looked around and said, “It is good.” “It is good,” includes Black girls. It is good says, “we are God’s creation, made in God’s image”. God did not make any junk. Psalm 139 informs us, “We are fearfully and wonderfully made by God.... great is God’s works.”

The core value of who we are in God contradicts the lived experiences of Black women and girls in our society. How do we take those experiences and tell our stories with a boldness that creates a new paradigm? In this patriarchal, racist, sexist society in which we live, how do we protect our young girls from the ravages of domestic violence, sexual abuse, exploitation, “adultification” and objectification and assist them in navigating the world around them. How do we help young girls to navigate the stages of their development so as to be able to affirm who they are, explore and test their independence without becoming victims in the process?

How should the church respond to all of these questions? If we are to learn anything from R. Kelly, we need to understand that our young Black girls need to be aware of the trap that is being set for them. The church must invest in and love our young girls. We must stress their intelligence, gifts, talents, creativity and the love that God and we have for them. We must not judge. We must listen. We must affirm. We must instruct. We must train. We must guide. But, most of all we must Prepare, Protect, Defend and Love our young girls.

PREPARE --What resources and skills are needed?

a) Assessment of our youth: Environment, background, educational level, self- image etc.

Adults such as principals, guidance counselors, teachers, ministers, Sunday school teachers, neighbors need to pay more attention to what's going on with our youth and how they perceive themselves, the type of environment they are living in, academic performance, any visible issues within the family to then assist, guide, refer, provide opportunities and mentor the young girl to enable the young girl to grow with the necessary support systems early.

- a) Programs for our young girls that enhance their social, physical, educational and spiritual development. For example: Rites of Passage programs (12-18 years old); Mentoring programs or Mentors, teen groups that allow for open and real discussion on a variety of issues. Stay current with what is happening and be current with our young black girls.
- b) Create a list of referrals as a resource for young girls and their family and partnership with community agencies, schools, churches and libraries.
- c) Teach and model for congregations how to support our youth and young adult girls. Teach and preach biblical texts that deal with life issues: domestic violence, abuse, exploitation, unhealthy and positive

relationships. Work out what the possible outcomes could have been and not what is depicted in the bible. Deconstruct and reconstruct the text with real life.

- d) Train and teach young boys on the value of our girls and women. Use social media to address current issues and seek responses to keep in touch with what is going on in our young girls' lives.

PROTECT -Provide safe space and an open-door policy.

- a) There is a saying that a parent has a child 10% of the time and the world has the child 90% of the time. We have to close the gap between the world and the parent/church. The church doors cannot be closed; they must swing wide open for our youth for training, social and academic programs, counseling and a place to hang out.
- b) The church has to be a place of safe space. The church has to be a place where girls and boys can tell their stories and not be judged or ostracized.
- c) Stop and Listen. Speak up and don't keep silent.

DEFEND –advocate

- a) Identify the issue and try and work through the issue, but look at the big picture, the environment in which

the young girls live. (wholistic approach to the situation)

- b) Advocate and show up to school, suspension hearings, the courts, in the home, on the street.
- c) No matter what is happening defend and support our young girls. Believe in them.
- d) Don't Settle. Don't blame. Attack/ reveal the strongholds that engender complicity in one's victimization.

LOVE - Affirm, Support, Uplift, Love and Embrace our Youth

- a) Love each girl unconditionally. Each girl is unique.
- b) Invest in our youth. Commit to volunteering time, talent and resources.
- c) While we love, we keep it real. Be honest and compassionate. Explain/model/teach. Affirm and encourage the use of gifts and talents and participation in activities that engender growth and discovery.

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5. Empowering our Girls: Calling for the “Big Mamas”

Reverend Dr. Faye Banks Taylor

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The atrocities revealed in the documentary, *Surviving R Kelly*, were both an eye-opener and a wake-up call. Our Black girls, with stars in their eyes, are drawn into webs of deception by surface charm and bountiful resources. They are easily lured by glam and glitter and shape their image to match detrimental expectations. As Black women, we have a responsibility to build up and engender power in our girls. As Black women of a certain age, we have much to impart because we have lived and learned.

- ❖ Empowered girls are those nurtured and guided into positive self-image, self-esteem and worth;
- ❖ Empowered girls are introduced to their unique qualities, which make them special;
- ❖ Empowered girls are nurtured by loving, caring “Big Mamas” who are committed to shaping and molding productive, strong girls who think for themselves, make informed choices and good decisions.

We are calling for the “Big Mamas!”

I can say, now, I was blessed to grow up in a multi-generational household surrounded by strong, God-fearing women. There were men in the house, but they were not the “head” of the house. My grandmother and her sisters shared that distinction, along with my mother. They had lived, loved, been hurt, been happy and now had earned wisdom about this thing called living, which they felt obliged to share with me and my sister.

Although, as a child, I did not view my living situation with favor, looking back, I now know the distinctive blessing that it was. Every day I received or overheard wise utterances from the mouths of women who had lived long lives, with intermittent joy and sadness, hardship and happy times, increase and loss. It was the household where my great-grandparents lived before us. The environment was rich and almost palpable.

Those women in that household were “Big Mamas,” generally understood as a term of endearment for “grandmothers” or any older women who fulfill the role of nurturer. Having raised children of their own, often with the assistance of their “Big Mamas,” they passed on their experience gained through reflection on lessons learned through successes and failures. They were the sages of their era, wise and willing to share, especially with girls.

My heart breaks when I think about the lack of “Big Mamas” today who shield, protect, impart, pour-in-to, guide,

gently chastise and empower our girls. In times bygone, these were women who led with love, whose presence was always sought, from whom a hug was always desired and needed. Their thoughts were welcomed. There are still some “Big Mamas” around; however, the times have so changed that aging has become unfashionable among some women. Retarding the aging process has become its own pre-occupation. Less welcome is the tag “Big Mama.” More delicate identifiers are preferred. Yet, the time is now and there is an urgency to expose our girls to the wisdom of the ages. The soothing voices of those who know must speak.

The predators of this world, profiled and showcased in the documentary *Surviving R Kelly*, would have far less influence on our girls if they were empowered to believe and deeply know their value and worth. This empowerment begins with affirmations, consistent and regular, pointing out value and helping to create a value-system based on prudence and good judgement. Empowered girls who sit at the feet of “Big Mamas” recognize genuine, appropriate, affirming words and detect empty, flattery from the slick and the slimy. Empowered girls benefit from spending time in the presence of “Big Mamas” and observing behavior and listening to voices sharing stories that ground and stabilize. “Big Mamas” provide feelings of security and are the safety net for the pitfalls that accompany living.

There is a clarion call for “Big Mamas.” They are out there in neighborhoods, communities, apartment buildings, nursing homes, the “projects,” churches, schools, college

campuses, the urban centers, the suburbs. Call a solemn assembly. The requirements are:

- ❖ A committed heart;
- ❖ Loving arms ready to embrace;
- ❖ An understanding of the lifesaving need to take back our girls;
- ❖ A willingness to share lived experiences; and
- ❖ Time, time and time.

New Testament scripture Titus 2:3-4a shares, in part: “Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior... they are to teach what is good, and so train the young women...” (NIV) The context is different; however, the intent is similar. Mature women are to pass on to their younger counter-parts wisdom that will serve them well.

Calling for “Big Mamas” to take up the mantel. It is mentoring and more. It is love in action. All of those earlier mentioned “Big Mamas” in my life are gone now. I am now “Big Mama.”

6. Holding on To Me

Rev. Dr. A'Shellarien Lang

Rev Dr. A'Shellarien Lang is an author, A.M.E. pastor and military and hospice Chaplain who holds the distinction of currently serving as the first African American female Chaplain in the 245-year history of the Delaware Army National Guard. She is the CEO of Desakajo's Flo which includes Desakajo Publishing and Desakajo Records.

What does it mean to be a woman in a world that protects men and makes women the cause of the sexual harms that come to them? How does it feel being a female in a society that says your womb makes you less than? How do we live, move, and have our being in male dominated and centered Communities of Faith that have laid the foundation for and reinforce spiritually driven sexism and misogyny? These questions and many more have saturated the hearts and minds of women and girls from all walks of life. We have watched the dismissal that comes when women speak up and say #metoo. We have felt the pain of witnessing a sister get blamed for what has happened to her. Here we are in 2019 watching a 20-year-old story unfold as R. Kelly continues to face accusations of sexual misconduct and abuse of girls. What is the response from Communities of Faith to what has happened to these impressionable girls? Where is the outrage

from women of color who have watched this unfold in the lives of our young sisters? My response to the Surviving R. Kelly Documentary is, “heal the spiritual injury of girls and women and help them move to a place of spiritual awakening where they are empowered to stand up for themselves and each other”. In the following pages, I will share the fullness of my response.

The current male centered biblical presentation of womanhood has altered self-perception, self-assurance, and self-confidence in many women to the point where they have been subjected to spiritual injury. Chaplain Doll (2017) defines spiritual injury as a conflict we face between what one believes to be true of God and what the Scriptures teach to be true of God. What one believes is true of God, is going against what one is experiencing, thus causing a conflict between one’s beliefs and one’s reality. Spiritual injuries are personal injuries and are unique to each person based upon their understanding of God, the Scripture, religious doctrine, and traditions. I believe the spiritual injury that some women have has been masked by compliance, minimization of self, and hiding. Unfortunately, women wrestle with what to do with embracing a presentation of God that says femaleness is less than.

Every woman finds herself along a spectrum of spiritual awakening in her journey out of her spiritual injury. Some women choose to stay in the quietness of their compliance and never challenge the exclusively male presentation of God. Some women minimize their femaleness in an effort to embrace the maleness that can never be fully their own. Some women hide their disgust with the exclusively male presentation of God to protect themselves. A good example

of all three is when women use male language to describe their God-given journey such as “spirit man”. The spirit of God is gender neutral until it rests in a host. The gender of the host matters. I believe the biblical declaration of *They* who created the heavens and the earth, all living things including humankind. *They* are the fullness of female and male in one. When the spirit rests in a man it is male. When the spirit rests in a woman it is female. The spiritual injury comes when women are demonized for celebrating the Divine female image of God. Heaven forbid that we would use *She* for God. For more reasons than this article can explain, the maleness of God is held as sacred and anything contrary to that is seen as heresy, contrary to God. Spiritual injury has hindered the authentic spiritual growth of women of faith and stunted the growth of girls who are trying to feel their way.

Who we are created to be and who we are acculturated to be are very different sides of the same coin. Our reflected image should be a female expression of the Divine instead we have been forced to superimpose a male expression of the Divine. What we are fed annihilates the glory in which we were created to be. According to the biblical text, women were created to make the not good, good. (Genesis 2:15-25) Our very existence should make every woman proud to be female. Instead we are shamed, dismissed, and degraded by the very institution that should celebrate us. Unfortunately, we do not feel empowered to stand in the fullness of who we are as women. Instead, we shrink back into silence and partial fullness in an effort to protect ourselves, our daughters and granddaughters from what we saw our sister ancestors go through. We have suffered from spiritual trauma that has put gaps in our journey. Gaps are chasms in life where healing

from life's trauma should be. The chasms do not allow us to grow. It is only when we embrace a need for spiritual awakening that we will be able to bridge the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual gaps that present themselves. Cognitive dissonance occurs as a result of the intellectual gap, emotional detachment occurs as a result of the emotional gap, and internal disconnection for external engagement occurs as a result of the spiritual gap.

The intellectual gap that women experience stems from their learned ability to behave in ways that their intellect is against. A woman who thinks that God is beyond the male gender and continues to use male language to conform to the norm embodies an intellectual gap. Cognitive dissonance theory by Festinger (1957) says that people feel an uncomfortable feeling, or dissonance, when their attitudes conflict with their behaviors. People experience both negative affect and psychological discomfort when their behaviors are different from the attitudes they hold. If I believe God is inclusive of female and male yet I fear using female language, in my mind I must tell myself that *She* is a figment of my imagination. According to Festinger, I am uncomfortable, have a negative effect, and psychological discomfort because my thought process and my behavior do not line up. Aronson's (1969) new aspect of cognitive dissonance theory states that dissonance occurs when a behavior is inconsistent with a person's sense of self and the behavior is important to the self. To reduce dissonance, people try to justify themselves to maintain a good and stable self-concept. The intellectual gap that women experience is a major factor in their spiritual journey.

The emotional gap that exists in many women stems from their heart being broken by the constant disappointment they experience as they attempt to hold on to hope that things will change. Many women sit in the quietness of their hearts waiting for their opportunity to be presented and received in the fullness of being created in the image and likeness of God. It never ceases to amaze me that we can see marginalization clearly through racial discrimination, yet we minimize the same thing when it comes to gender discrimination. On an emotional level, women go through a process of separating their emotional response to being minimized and marginalized because they have a womb. The emotional detachment that occurs in our emotional gap is real. It is very hard to authentically have good feelings when what you are presented breaks your heart. How can I really love a man who sees me as less than and treats me as such? How can I be emotionally attached to a God that is presented to me as my Creator yet also the One who sees me as less than? Emotional detachment refers to an inability to connect with others on an emotional level, as well as a means of coping with anxiety by avoiding certain situations that trigger it; it is often described as "emotional numbing" or dissociation. I often wonder why there is such a disconnection in the church when it comes to emotions. So often we are taught that our emotions are out of control and therefore should never be trusted. The tragedy is that we miss our healing on many levels when we deny the very nature of who we are. Jeremiah 8: 21-22 (KJV) God says, "For the hurt of the daughter of my people I am hurt. I am mourning; Astonishment has taken hold of me. *Is there* no balm in Gilead, *Is there* no physician there? Why then is there no recovery for the health of the daughter

of my people?” As we look at this text, we see that God shares God’s emotions. So, what does that mean for us? We are created in the image and likeness of God and if God experiences and talks about emotions then so should we.

The spiritual gap that exacerbates a woman’s journey to spiritual awakening serves as the deciding factor in her movement toward God or away from God. Unfortunately, many women experience an internal disconnection from who they believe God is to engage externally with the lie of who God is presented to be. Women have wrestled to find their reflection within the partial fullness of God (exclusive maleness). They have had to disengage from their internal truth of their Divinely appointed reflection of the female fullness of *They* to externally engage in a world that eliminates their Divine female reflection and forces them to transpose the Divine reflection of maleness as their own. The movement from rejecting the Divine reflection of the fullness of femaleness to transposing the Divine reflection of partialness of maleness has not worked. The Bible says in Romans 12:2, “do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” The transformation of a woman’s mind, heart, and spirit is hindered by male language, imagery, doctrine, and dogma that tells her she is less than. It is hard to hold on to a truth internally when externally it is being ripped out of your spirit. The spiritual injury must be healed.

How do we move from spiritual injury to spiritual awakening? The Surviving R. Kelly Documentary has opened the wounds of many young women who were on the receiving end of sexual abuse. Where were the cries of the women who

knew this was happening over the last two decades? Where was the righteous indignation of women as they watched this man get away with everything? The sad truth is that survivors and the women who knew were both subject to the same disempowering spirit. The spiritual disenfranchisement of women did not allow survivors to feel empowered to seek help and it did not allow the women who knew to speak up on behalf of the survivors. How did we shift from that place of silence to this place of #metoo? Our shift from an internal dysfunctional voice to an empowering internal voice has brought us from spiritual injury to spiritual awakening. We heal as we talk about the emotional, intellectual, and spiritual gaps in our spiritual journey. The documentary caused hurt, yet it also precipitated healing as the truth continues to evolve. Change is here. The lie that we have been told about who we are and who we are to God has caused our brokenness. It is time for us to speak our truth and shift from brokenness to wholeness.

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7. I Don't See Nothing Wrong with A Little Bump and Grind; The Conflation of Sex and Violence

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Twenty-five years ago, R. Kelly released his hit single "*Bump and Grind*" from his *12 Play* album. The song's 'hook' repeatedly states "I don't see nothing wrong with a little bump and grind." Recently, we have become privy to the countless indications that something is very wrong in the life and relationships of Mr. Kelly.

Our ability to see the wrongs was accomplished, in large part, by Dream Hampton's Lifetime docuseries "Surviving R. Kelly." This important docuseries, along with recent media

interviews with R. Kelly's ex-wife, Dria Kelly, have left many to conclude that R. Kelly is, simply, a monster. Though his actions can be described as monstrous, that conclusion oversimplifies what is unfolding, absolves harm-doers from accountability to stop their behavior and absolves society of our responsibility to ensure the safety of black girls and women from those who commit sexual and relationship violence.

R. Kelly, like most people who prey on those with less power, was strategic in choosing whom to victimize. Not coincidentally, he selects those who are often considered to be the most vulnerable, disposable to society and those that society is most willing to demonize and blame. Jim DeRogatis, the writer for the Chicago Sun-Times who initially broke the story has said "Nobody matters less to our society than young black women. Nobody."

This is not to say the girls R. Kelly preyed on were throwaways who didn't have families who loved and cared about them. Clearly, many of them did. This is also not to say that girls from prestigious, schools and families in the Chicago area are not vulnerable to sexual predators. They are as well.

The point is to see how race, class, gender, sexuality and power intersected to provide an adult man access to these teenage girls, with little forethought and effort to keep them safe. At the same time, the circumstances deployed many racist, sexist, and overused tropes to suggest the girls' victimization was their own fault for being 'fast,' 'gold-digging' and acting "grown."

By all accounts, R. Kelly is a master manipulator. He manipulated the girls, their families, his employees and the people around him who helped to facilitate his crimes. But R.

Kelly also manipulated many of us through the presentation of himself as a man who's broken and in need of help. In one interview, Kelly's ex-wife Dria recounted his appeal to her to help him learn to read so he could read the Bible (it's well-known that R. Kelly is functionally illiterate). In the Gayle King interview, in a moment of Freudian clarity, after realizing his ranting and raving wasn't having the intended effect, Kelly proclaims "I need help." Perhaps, most hypnotic, R. Kelly manipulates us all by extension through his musical gift.

R. Kelly presents both a hypersexual version of himself to the world and a version that had us "stepping in the name of love" and "believing we can fly." His music has permeated much of black life. In a January 22, 2019 interview with the *New Yorker*, Dream Hampton described R. Kelly as "a beloved songwriter and singer, who made music for black people... But he is also a man who has had an open secret. We've known who this man is for a very long time, in terms of him being a predator."

When considering the "we" who have known about R. Kelly for a long time, it comes with the realization that in particular, the "we" who are part of the Black, Christian Church have bought into a narrative of Christianity that provided a perfect and convenient cover for an "imperfect" man.

In her January 9th article, ***Supporting R. Kelly: When Gospel and Black Church Get It Wrong***, Candace Benbow provides multiple examples of Gospel artists and secular artists who sing gospel music, and have publicly defended choosing to record with R. Kelly. They typically deployed Christian narratives that God uses those who are imperfect, flawed, and troubled in special ways. Touted, mostly by male preachers, these narratives have allowed the larger Church to

overlook the experiences of the women in those stories, by forgiving the behavior of said men and to feel good about operating in forgiveness.

Dream Hampton goes on to say in the New Yorker article, “There’s this love that he has from black folks that is both a currency and a protection. And there’s this very convenient way that we’ve talked about him being found not guilty, as if he’s innocent.” When we use this logic, coupled with the theology that “no sin is greater than another, a manipulative, serial abuser, who preys on underage girls and does unspeakable sexual acts to them for his and others’ entertainment, is able to instigate Black People, including some women inside and outside of churches, to advocate forgiveness.

Many who identify as feminists/womanists find ourselves embracing a narrative of sexual freedom in which we consciously pushback against respectability politics (when Black Women police the behavior of ourselves and our sisters to ensure those outside of the Black Community don’t get the wrong idea about who we are ‘as a people’).

But we can reclaim our sexuality and create communities of care WHILE holding sexual predators in our communities accountable for their harmful actions. This requires us, however, to not be willing to look the other way and not to prioritize the souls of predators over the bodies of our Black girls and women.

We can begin the task by being real and honest and by holding that as a requirement for anyone having access to our spaces and to our children. We need honesty about the impact of internalized racism and sexism on OURSELVES and others in our community and how that shapes who we

have been socialized to perceive as believable as well as who is disposable. Chance the Rapper stated in the docuseries, “I didn’t value the accusers’ stories because they were Black Women. ... I made a mistake.” Many of us have made the same mistake.

Intellectually, we may know that there is a disregard and devaluation of Black girls and women’s bodies. And yet, far too often that “knowing” fails to translate into an ethic of care for Black girls that says, “We believe you” and “It is/was not your fault.” Whether we/they are being harassed, raped, physically abused, stalked or violated in any way, Black girls and women need to know that we see them and believe them and that we do not blame them for their victimization and that we know the difference between consensual sex and sexual violence.

That has to be our baseline before we ask questions that signal to victims that we don’t believe them or care about them, and that they are compliant in their own victimization and thus, we won’t hold perpetrators accountable for harming them. Concurrently, we mustn’t signal to perpetrators that they may continue hurting OUR children because we won’t hold them accountable.

Lastly, we want to caution against using the R. Kelly case as a yardstick by which to identify and measure harm-doers. R. Kelly is accused of being a serial predator, domestic abuser, rapist, kidnapper and prisoner. Fortunately, few people will ever come into contact with someone as dangerous and predatory as R. Kelly. However, we can have impact in situations that occur in our communities, and in our own families. And we must be intentional with our messages that sex and sexual violence are not the same and that if the

bump and grind are not consensual and legal, then something is, indeed, wrong.

The secret of our success is that
we never, never give up.

Wilma Mankiller

Native American leader and activist

8. The Secret: Why Survivors of Sexual Abuse Don't Tell Their Truth

Rev. Kim Mayner

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She is also a licensed associate and nationally certified counselor.

Introduction

In recent years the news has been filled with the sensational revelations of alleged sexual abuses committed by household names Bill Cosby, Harvey Weinstein, Charlie Rose and Matt Lauer as well as the ongoing scandal of abuses committed by nuns and priests of the Catholic Church. Documentaries featuring survivors who've made accusations about singers R. Kelly and the late Michael Jackson have vividly brought to light horrifying stories of abuse and the years-long trauma experienced by survivors.

In the midst of this awakening inarguably the question asked most frequently in barber shops, beauty parlors, office water coolers, houses of worship or other places where people gather is "Why did they wait so long?" "They" are the survivors of rape, molestation and other sexual assaults. And when the question is asked, it is asked with genuine curiosity, but also often with some level of unspoken skepticism about the honesty of the survivor. Some don't hide their doubt, but straight out call the survivors liars. But as I once heard

someone say, people often express opinions about things of which they know nothing about. Perhaps you have been among those who have engaged in those discussions. After all, it's easier to comment and make uninformed judgments when it's about the lives of celebrities or other people with whom you have no relationship. But whether you know it or not, someone in your very own family or sphere of friends, co-workers or church members may just be a survivor. So, before you speak again out of ignorance, which simply means a lack of knowledge about a subject, let's get schooled.

Some survivors immediately share their truth while others hold their secret all the way to the grave. But why not tell? Why not share your truth with a family member, a friend, a mental health professional or law enforcement? Their reasons vary. The purpose of this lesson is to educate readers about some of the possible reasons for a survivor's silence. Hopefully after you're finished reading, you'll have a better understanding of their plight and develop greater empathy about their reasons for keeping their assault a secret. Please note that I choose to refer to those who have endured the trauma of sexual assault as survivors instead of victims. It is my desire to both encourage their empowerment and instill belief in their ability to regain their lives.

Surviving Trauma

Before exploring the reasons for maintaining silence it might be helpful first to understand some of the aftereffects frequently experienced by survivors of assault. The experience of sexual abuse and assault is trauma to the body and mind. No doubt you are familiar with the term Post-

Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD), a diagnosis frequently made in the cases of soldiers returning from war. Individuals who have been sexually assaulted may also experience PTSD. Some of those symptoms include anxiety, depression, sadness, flashbacks, hypervigilance, that is being in a state of extreme vigilance about one's surroundings even when there is no danger present because you don't ever feel safe (APA, 2013; Levine, P. 1997). Additional symptoms experienced by some survivors include a sense of helplessness, difficulty concentrating, insomnia, nightmares and dissociation which can play out as feeling disconnected from your body or from your surroundings (Levine, P. 1997). Self-hatred about their own bodies, difficulty trusting others and maintaining relationships have also been identified as aftereffects of sexual trauma (Bryant-Davis, T. 2005).

Keeping Secrets

With a clearer understanding of what survivors may grapple with not just immediately after the encounter, but for years afterwards, if gone untreated, let us highlight and consider some of the factors influencing a decision whether or not to disclose sexual assault:

- **The Age Factor:** Depending upon the age of a child, they may be too young to cognitively understand what has happened to them. Generally speaking, the innocence of young children and tendency to speak without thinking may result in them disclosing Child Sexual Assault (CSA), by happenstance (Goodman-Brown T.B. et al. 2003). On the other hand, unaware that what has happened to them is wrong young children may not share it with adults at all. Hesitation

to reveal their abuse because of their fear about the consequences are more frequent among older children (Campis, Hebden-Curtis, et al in Tasjian.S.M et al 2016). It is not uncommon for abusers to discourage the child and/or threaten to harm them or family members if they reveal the abuse (Sauzier, Summit, Burgess & Holmstrom in Goodman, T.B. et al. 2003). A child's perception about whether or not they will be believed by their family, shame and some level of belief that they are at fault for their own abuse can also motivate children to remain silent.

- **The Perpetrator:** The identity of the abuser also factors into the likelihood of children disclosing. When the abuser is a blood relation parent, the child is less likely to disclose perhaps out of a belief that they themselves bear some responsibility for the abuse or out of fear that they might be responsible for the break-up of the family or other negative consequences (Goodman-Brown, T.B. et al 2003). However, those who are abused by someone within the family take longer to reveal than those who were abused by someone outside of their family (Goodman-Brown, T.B. et al 2003).

Though children are more apt to tell when the perpetrator is a non-family member, the process of grooming them for victimization whether family or not strongly impacts divulgement. A study found that one-way abusers infiltrate the lives of children is by filling in the gap left by circumstances such as a lack of parental support (Berliner & Conte in Paine, M.L.& D.J. Hansen, 2002). A child deeply in need of attention is more likely to be vulnerable to being drawn into a web of deception colored by kind words, professed affection and gifts (Stone, R. 2004). Once the bond has been formed the

abuser subtly begins to transform the relationship into one that is sexual (Stone, R. 2004). With the “relationship” formed the child is less likely to disclose to others what is being done by this person who has shown interest in them. But this is just one way of grooming and by all means do not make the mistake of thinking that abuse only happens to emotionally needy children.

- **Gender:** It appears that boys are less likely to divulge having been sexually abused disclosing abuse (Goodman-Brown, T.D. et al. 2003). Considering the long-held negative connotations about homosexuality in our society, this may contribute to their fear of being labeled as such were the abuse revealed (Finkelhor in Goodman-Brown, T.B. et al. 2003). We might also consider that societal pressure for males not to be seen as victims may factor into a boy’s silence. This certainly bears out among adult men. Only one quarter of men who have been sexually assaulted report to the police according to the National Crime Victimization Survey (Jackson, M., Valentin, S.; Woodward, E., Pantalone, D. 2016). The data includes men of all sexual orientations. It is thought that the non-disclosure of men is based largely on the belief that pervading beliefs and attitudes that men can’t be raped (Jackson, M. et al 2017).
- **“Maybe it was my fault”:** Survivors of CSA frequently believe it was their fault due to the complicated aforementioned “groomed” nature of their relationship with the abuser. However, the stigma and shame of being sexually abused also weighs heavily on adults. For women, guilt about being under the

influence of drugs or alcohol or at the time of the assault may add to the fear that they will be accused of having brought the assault on themselves because of what they were wearing or if they were under the influence of drugs or alcohol at the time of the assault.

- **Jezebel and the Matriarch Live!:** The history of African American women in this country is fraught with disrespect, sexual assault and other physical abuses from the slave ship to the slave cabin, Jim Crow and beyond. For many years their sexual victimization was without benefit of protection from the law. (Donovan & Williams, 2002 p.96-97 and Roberts, 197; White, D.G., 1985). Though that is no longer the case, racial stereotypes about the sexuality of Black women still influence whether or not they will be believed and/or receive justice in the courts (Donovan, R. & Williams M., 2002).

Two prominent stereotypes that continue to oppress Black women are the Jezebel and the Matriarch (Collins in Donovan, R.). Drawing on the Biblical character, Jezebel this stereotype gives the false perception that Black women are deceptive, sexually loose and seeking to trap men. This image was used to justify raping enslaved women (Collins in Donovan, R.) Sadly this stereotype continues to haunt Black women whose bodies continue to be devalued and criticized —think Michelle Obama and Serena Williams. This is doubly so when it comes to survivors of sexual assault and it influences their decision to divulge their truth. The label Jezebel while perhaps not used as frequently, except by the old saints of the church lives on in “ho” and other disparaging labels and images of Black women in popular music, videos and magazines (Collins in Donovan, R.) Whether we admit it or not these harmful images bear down on all women of color and doubly so for survivors of sexual assault contemplating whether to divulge their truth

(Donovan, R). The mindset for some being, 'Who will believe us when they already think we're sluts?'

The castrating image of the Matriarch stems from conclusions made about Black women in Daniel P. Moynihan's 1965 government report about the Black family. The report said in essence that the legacy of slavery was the destruction of the Black family (Moynihan in Donovan, R.). The weight of poverty and all of the problems faced by Black youth were therefore as a result of Black women ruling the roost instead of allowing their men to take their rightful place as head of household (Donovan, R.). The image of the Strong Black Woman is an offshoot of the Matriarch fosters the idea that Black women can handle it all without help of anyone (Donovan, R.). This is harmful in that it puts unimaginable pressure on Black women to bear all of life's challenges. This stereotype fosters the wrong idea that a survivor of rape can handle it better because, well, they are a Strong Black Woman (Donovan, R.).

For some women, silence about their rape has served as some level of protection, but not necessarily for themselves. When the perpetrator is a Black man, some Black women fear they will be held responsible by the community for bringing down another Black man (Pierce-Baker 1998). So rather than speak, they keep the secret.

Is it fair to be expected to carry the inhumane burden of keeping up a strong front, in spite of our pain?

Conclusion

This is just the tip of the iceberg in responding to the question, "Why did they wait so long?" But hopefully it gives you some food for thought and discussion. First, when one considers the trauma itself with the loss of control and

invasion of the body. Secondly think about the aftereffects experienced by some survivors, the anxiety, the flashbacks, the depression or never feeling safe. Then imagine trying to function and come to terms with the mental anguish and fragile pieces of your life torn apart as you attempt to navigate through life. With trepidation, shame, blame and the fear of disbelief survivors keep their secret. But hopefully many more will come to understand and have empathy for the survivor. Hopefully many more will not only empathize but support and encourage them to share their stories with a supportive therapist, friend and family member so that the healing may begin.

What can we do to assist? Support them with words of comfort, not judgment, if they want to talk, be a good listener and convey that you believe them and believe in them. Continue to educate yourself with the list of recommended books that follows. Most importantly let them know that they *are* a survivor!

Recommended Bibliography

The Body Keeps the Score, Free Audiobook. Written by Bessel Van der Kolk, Narrated by Sean Pratt. www.audible.com/

Bryant-Davis, T. (2005). *Thriving in the wake of trauma*, Westport: Praeger

Stone, R.D. (2004). *No secrets, no lies*, New York: Broadway

Pierce-Baker, C. (1998). *Surviving the silence: Black women's stories of rape*, New York: W.W.

Norton.

Bryant-David, T, ed. (2011) *Surviving Sexual Violence: A Guide to Recovery and Empowerment*,

Lanham: Rowan & Littlefield.

Levine, P. & Frederick, A. (1997). *Waking the tiger: Healing trauma*. Berkley: North Atlantic

I believe we are here on the planet Earth to live, grow up and do what we can do to make this world a better place for all people to enjoy freedom.

Rosa Parks

African American civil rights activist

I would like to be known as
An intelligent woman,
a courageous woman,
a loving woman,
a woman who teaches by being.

Maya Angelou

African American poet

- **These and other quotes can be purchased as bookmarks, buttons, t-shirts etc. from “Positive Promotions” at**

Positivepromotions.com or by phone at (540) 632-2136

9. Family Cultures That Protect & Empower Black Girls.

Melinda Contreras-Byrd MDiv., PsyD.

Licensed psychologist, Itinerant elder in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and Adjunct Professor at the New Brunswick Theological Seminary.

Raising children is probably the most difficult job that anyone will have in their lifetime. There is so much to know, and so much to learn, and there is no beforehand training that prepares you for how to raise your children. In fact –no one can really tell you *how* to raise your children because you, your family and your children are not like anyone else. Each person is unique. We carry the good we learned in our own families—along with the bad we learn in our families; in addition to the good and bad we create ourselves. And all of this goes along with us into the families that we create ourselves.

While there is no cookbook recipe for how to raise your children—there are a few tried and true ways *not* to--here are 5 of them:

Get rid of taboos (1). Because of the history of Black people in the U.S. we have learned to be distrustful and resentful of outsiders in our lives. We are aware of the Tuskegee Experiment, and the data on how Black and Latinx people systematically receive a poorer quality of care and

service in hospitals and doctor's offices. Data evidences that we have also received a poorer quality of education in public school systems and continue to struggle against a variety of forms of racism in higher education. ** These truths have taught us that it is foolhardy NOT to be cautious, if not downright *suspicious* of those outside of our families and communities.

Many of us have been taught and then go on to teach our children, not to, "put our business in the street", and to, "stay out of grown folks' business". As a result, we exclude our children from important topics, and make it difficult for them to talk about their true fears and hurts.

The adults in our lives have often been silent when someone dies or goes into rehab, prison or a mental health facility. We teach our children what our families have taught us – "that some things that are not to be talked about". Some things are taboo. And among our greatest taboos are death, sex, and mental health.

We must rid our families of, "the silence". Why? Because when our girls are going through the experience of seeing their bodies beginning to mature—or if they are being molested or raped, they are left without the opportunity for support and accurate information if they have been taught to keep silent about these topics. We have taught them that these are "grown folks" topics and they are not allowed to acknowledge or even talk about them to us or anyone else. Although many of us never had a "sex talk" with our mothers--if you are a mother—sit your daughter down (around age 9) and explain her body to her. Don't worry about if you will know

all the answers. What you don't know you can look up! Yes, there will likely be some embarrassment and tension, but you have now created a new freedom for her. Your talk has given her permission to talk about issues that deal with sex and sexuality.

Explain to her about "good and bad touch". Announce that from now on there's going to be scheduled "Mama talks". And then from time to time *announce* a "Mama talk" and check in with her. As she gets older the topics can become more difficult and specific.

You're her mother—it's your *job* to be "nosey" when she is young, ignorant of the ways of the world and still under your roof. Don't allow her education about these things to be learned only from her friends, or in health class. Don't set things up so that her friends are the only ones with whom she has freedom to ask questions. (Lord knows they usually have little idea of what they are talking about. You know as well as I do all the laughably incorrect information we and our girlfriends were told and believed!

Healing and affirming word. (2). Be mindful of hurtful words, jokes and nicknames. It's amazing how many adults still suffer from things that were said to them as children—especially if they became things that were said often. In our heart of hearts, we all believe what my grandma used to say, "many a serious thing is said in a joke". Although we are embarrassed and try to play it off, we are often hurt by jokes people make about us, and the negative ways that they characterize us". "Hey big mamma!" "Dizzy Darlene" "rags" "lips" "fast". We are also hurt by negative characterizations that our friends and family make about us on an ongoing

basis. We are hurt by their expectations that we cannot be trusted to make sound decisions, that we can be counted upon to always do things incorrectly, that it is our nature to behave selfishly with food because we are overweight, that we have poor taste, or are not as intelligent as others.

Here is something I know, it is *never* o.k. to tell children that they are unattractive, unintelligent, untrustworthy etc. Even when they seem to behave in this fashion, it is best to say, “I am concerned that you have begun to behave in an untrustworthy way” etc. Once you say that someone **is** a particular thing---it is often taken to mean that this is all that they are, and it cannot be changed.

And here is one last thing I know to be very destructive to children—profanity! Sure, some of us use a few words here and there—especially when we get mad. Some of us come from families where there are few words that are taken to be taboo—and we allow our children the same freedom at a certain age. But I can think of no times when cursing a child will make them feel loved, respected and cherished! In our society, the use of profane words *at* a person is most often a sign of anger and a desire to hurt, harm, threaten and/or demean. I have seen upset parents publicly curse their 3-year-old children who cower in front of them, until bystanders become still with outrage and disdain, and all conversation stops. In therapy adult clients often recall these childhood experiences.

Figuring out the right words and then determining to say them to your children is very important. Find out what things

say, “love” to your children. Not everyone feels love the same way. To some children, having a snack on hand after school means that you love them. For some children, showing up to see them sing, dance, speak or play a sport—means you love them.

For some children, only acting out the love isn’t enough. Some children *really* need to *hear* you say those words—and on a consistent basis. I would wager that all children want to hear these words at some point in their lifetime.

The gift of time (3). Celebrating their achievements, sitting down with them and talking about how they feel when bad things have happened are often actions that children take as expressions of love. For most people—when you make time for them—it’s a show of love.

Let them know when you are willing to make a sacrifice to spend time with them, i.e., “I am so tired, but I’m going to your school tonight because I don’t want to miss seeing you dance!” These are words that children remember when they are adults.

Let’s talk about violence (4). Violence must have no place in the home. Without a doubt—no violence of any kind will serve to teach love and build security. To build secure children who feel empowered to be themselves and share their feelings---families must NOT be places where children hear harsh criticism, name calling and belittling. Families must NOT be places where children see or physically experience hitting, punching, pushing, choking, or the throwing of objects as part of what goes on in their family life. When they see these things, it causes fear, anger and the idea

that this is normal behavior. Girls may then learn that it's o.k. for a guy to push her, slap her or belittle her. They may come to believe that this behavior is an expression of love. Many teen girls have told me this! This is not what we want our children to learn from their home life. What we want to teach is that they are precious and deserve to be heard, believed, and accepted for who they are. What we want them to know is that their thoughts and feelings matter as much as anyone else's do. And we must make sure that both we, and they know that abuse is not just physical. There is such a thing as, "emotional or psychological abuse". We were taught that, "sticks and stones will break my bones, but words can never hurt me". Well, unfortunately that's not true. Words **can** and **do** hurt quite a bit.

Words can wear down your resistance. Words can change and lower your opinion of yourself. Words can take away your joy, your peace, and your self-esteem. And words can take away your desire to keep living, if you allow them to. I think that what our parents were trying to teach us in that saying, was that words only have the power that we give to them. But if we listen to them, take them to heart and keep repeating them to ourselves as truth—they **can** hurt us a lot!

We must teach our girls that love doesn't deliberately cause you physical pain. We must tell our girls that a healthy relationship does not allow us to be ignored, silenced, controlled, or stalked. We must instruct our girls that they have a right to privacy and time without their boyfriend or partner, and without having to give account of themselves. We must try to make them understand that any type of abuse,

whether it is verbal or physical – must not be tolerated in a relationship. If it is overlooked once—it will likely show up again and again.

The church has not been clear enough on this matter, because church members have come away thinking that the teachings of Jesus on “turning the other cheek”, “forgiving 70X7” and showing the kind of love that “lays its life down for a friend” (The Bible--John 15:13) is an endorsement of victimization as “greater love...” and domestic violence against women. Please read my article entitled, “A living sacrifice” for a further Biblical way to view violence against women.

Be deliberate about honest praise (5). Make the decision that your daughter is going to know that she is beautiful, special and worthy of love. Praise her often—but truthfully. Children can tell when we are not being honest! Take the time to deliberately notice her. When you comb her hair—notice the beautiful qualities of her hair. Point them out to her. Show her how beautiful certain colors look next to her skin color. If you cannot see the beauty in these qualities, then start now to do some work on *yourself* so you can see your own beauty that she has inherited from you. Be her mirror. Do some investigation and thinking. Ask yourself, “What are her good qualities? Does she share? Does she try to be helpful? Is she creative, independent, verbal etc.? What would you miss if she were gone? Does she make you laugh or try to console you if she thinks that you are sad? “We all have both positive and negative qualities. One of the reasons that we love our mothers so much is that they are usually the

ones who see us best from the time we are born. Keep noticing and keeping track of your daughter's good qualities. (The world will keep track of her negative ones) Once you have done this—casually tell her about them from time to time—so that when she goes out into the world---she will have your voice of praise to balance the negative voices of the world.

Give her role models to grow from. Take her to the library and get books by and about Black girls and women. Get her dolls that look like her and praise the strong and beautiful women in your family so that she has something to feel secure and proud about.

BLACK DOLLS;

The American Doll series has a Black doll that is named Addie. Dr. McStuffin is a great children's character whose picture can be found on many items. There is now a Shuri Doll from the movie Black Panther, and a Katherine Johnson doll from the movie "Hidden Figures". Disney has a Princess Tiana doll from the movie, "The Princess and the Frog"; and an African American fairy named Iridessa.

Companies that specialize in Black dolls: "Black Like Me" made by Mater Mea.

Makedaa Dolls, Herstory Dolls.

GIRLS' BOOKS FOR BLACK PRIDE:

1. **Hair Like Mine**, by Latashia Perry
2. **Dream Big Little Leaders**, by Vashti Harris
3. **I am Enough** by Grace Byers
4. **I'm a Pretty Little Black Girl**, by Betty K. Bynum
5. **Note to Self: Affirmations to Young Queens**, by Autumn Hayes
6. **When God Made You**, by Matthew Paul Turner
7. **100 Things Every Black Girl Should Know: For Girls 10-100**, by Taura Stinson
8. **Understanding my Daughter's Brown Body: A Mom's Guide to Raising Body-confident Black Girls**, By Trenette Wilson

Books on Parenting Black Girls/Children

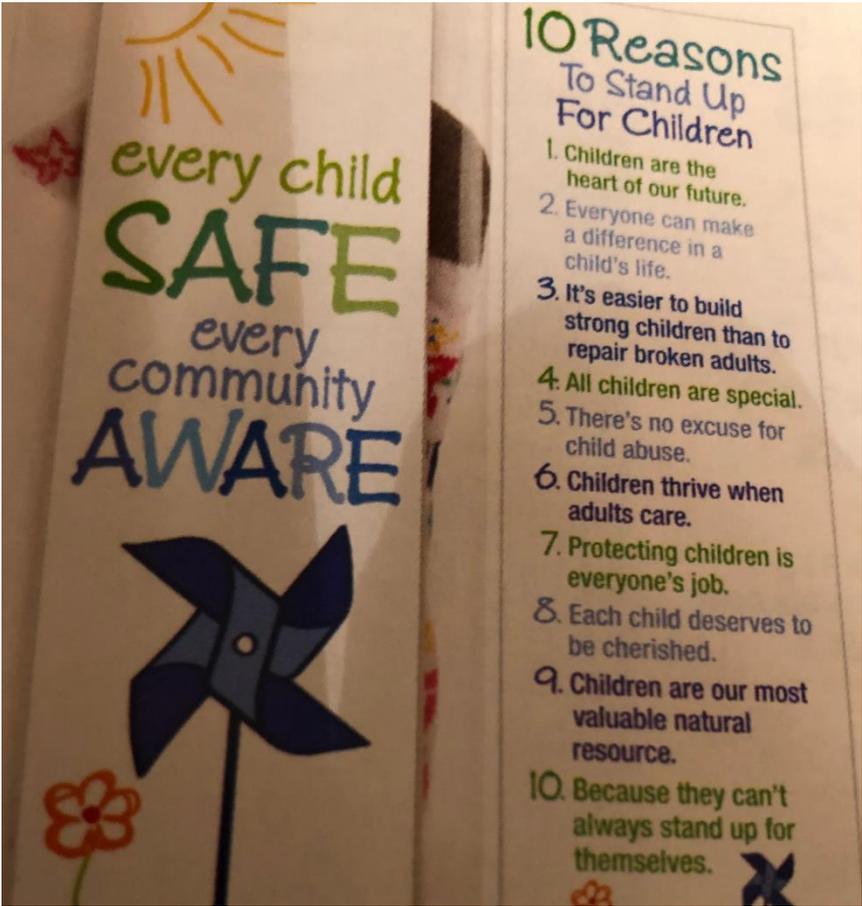
1. **Please don't Yell at We**, by Sabrina Carter.
 2. **Developing Positive Self-Images and Discipline in Black Children**, by Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu
 3. **Spare the Kids: Why Whipping Your Children Won't Save Black America**, By Dr. Stacey Patton
 4. **She Can't Hear What You Say, Because What You Do Is So Loud**, by Kim Brown-Taylor
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Books and articles About Abuse

Teach Your Kids These Warning Signs of Emotionally Abusive Relationships, by Annie Reneau on scarymommy.com

ONLINE ARTICLES

1. The Problem with “Good Touch, Bad Touch”, online at jennifersoldner.com
2. How to Protect Your Child From A Predator: Recognizing the Warning Signs, by Jessica Snyder and Melissa Bykofsky on: parents.com
3. 7 Ways You’re Hurting Your Daughter’s Future. (No author’s name cited.) June 28, 2012 Forbes.com



These are two sides of a bookmark. They and other quotes can be purchased as bookmarks, buttons, t-shirts etc. from "Positive Promotions" at: Positivepromotions.com or (540) 632-2136

10. Adding Precious: The Meaning of Our Daughters

Melinda Contreras-Byrd M.Div., PsyD.

Licensed psychologist, Itinerant elder in the African Methodist Episcopal Church and Adjunct Professor at the New Brunswick Theological Seminary.

I have worked with many children in my lifetime. I have seen parents who doted on their children to the point of setting no limits for them. I have watched children's interactions with parents who clearly adored them. I have seen mothers stare into the eyes of their newborns with pure unadulterated love and awe.

Children often bring out the best in us.

I have also seen parents who yanked and spanked and came just short of physically abusing their children in public spaces. I have stood on grocery store lines and heard exasperated parents berate and curse their toddlers. And I have seen mothers whose toddlers lagged far behind them in malls while their mothers or fathers were completely engrossed in phone conversations or window-shopping.

I have seen single mothers so overwhelmed with their own needs that they found themselves unable to meet or even care

about meeting their children's basic needs for food, shelter or safety. There are many reasons why some parents can love and nurture the children that they bring into the world, while others cannot.

No one trains us, teaches us or supervises us so that we can become good parents. The bottom line is that we all do the best that we can. And when our best isn't good enough—state agencies step in, in an effort to fill the gap. In reality children are a gift from God. It doesn't matter who they are or who gave birth to them—their very being makes them important gifts. If you are a parent it is extremely important that you recognize that your children are precious, and that they each have a part in the positive transformation of this world.

Take a good long look at your daughter and take note of what you love about her, and what about her is difficult for you. What are her strengths and weaknesses? When is she at her best and worst? What about her reminds you of yourself or her other parent? What role does she play in the story of your life?

Do you favor one child over another? Be honest with yourself. Your kids will tell you if you do. And if they tell you—don't deny it. Work on changing that behavior.

If your children have different fathers—does your behavior toward each child reflect how you feel about his or her father? If you come from a family that plays colorism—are you doing the same thing?

Can you be loving toward your daughter if she has anger problems?

Is your love conditional? Can you only love a daughter that fits a certain mold?

If she is very different from you, can you accept that, praise her differentness and let her be who she is? What if she does not feel comfortable in dresses or skirts? What if she tells you that she wants to be a boy, or that she is attracted to girls? Can you offer her the love of a parent that will make her feel wanted and precious? What if you are raising a family member's daughter? Is she allowed to feel anger, or resentment, or is she made to feel that she should always feel grateful for being taken in by you? Is she treated like the children you have birthed?

If you have had to honestly answer some of these questions with a "no" –then please seek out a therapist who can help you change your feelings and your behavior.

Girls who grow up in environments where they are not nurtured or praised, learn to feel like outsiders, and believe that they are less than other girls. If you do not tell them that they are precious and beautiful ---they will go out in search of someone who will.

Predators are very good at being able to pick out the girls who are from homes where they are not made to feel special, wanted or able to be themselves. They will give them the attention that they so desperately seek, and the gifts that they believe mean that they are loved.

Too many of our girls have sold their minds and bodies in search of someone who would call them "precious".

If you have a daughter---do all that you can to make that person be you.

Here are some books that can help:

1. **Girl Time: A Mother-Daughter Activity Book for Sharing, Bonding.** Nuanprang Snitbbhan.
Shambhala Publishing, 2016 ISBN-10 1611803047
2. **Mothers and Daughters: A Self-Help & Best Practices Guide for African American Mothers,** Dr. Toni Sims-Muhammad, Vanguard Educational Services, 2014.
3. **Understanding My Daughter's Brown Body: A Mom's Guide to Raising Body-Comfort in Black Girls.** Trenette Wilson, Create Space Independent Publishing 2018 ISBN-10 1983601470



Life Lesson

Children are not
distractions from more
important work.

They are the
most important work.

C.S. Lewis

12.

11. “Project Possible”: A Black Church Response to Sex Trafficking

Teresa Jenkins

Teresa Jenkins is presently M.P.A., Chief of Practice Standards, Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families and second Vice President 1st District A.M.E Church Women’s Missionary Society, Project Possible Coordinator.

Project Possible is an initiative of the 1st Episcopal District Women’s Missionary Society of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) Project Possible was born out of a vision from the 1st District Episcopal Supervisor, Rev. Dr. Jessica Kendall Ingram’s response to gender inequities and other social ills facing 21st century women. Project Possible is now operating in each Annual Conference of the 1st Episcopal District of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Thusly, the New England Annual Conference Branch WMS began its research on the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) and created “Project Shatter” to combat the ills of sex trafficking. The New England Conference Branch Women’s Missionary Society Project Shatter’s Mission is to eradicate the sexual victimization of women and children by raising awareness through the use of social media, workshops, community forums, printed materials and collaboration with community partners.

We eradicate Sex Trafficking by:

- Bringing an awareness to our faith-based communities through community forums
- Decreasing the demand for commercial sex by education
- Training Civilian First Responders on how to identify victims and take action
- Ensuring laws are in place to punish men and women who exploit children for sex.
- Teaching parents and guardians how to keep kids safe from on-line predators and dangerous Apps.

1. **INSTAGRAM®**: Similar to Tumblr, but not quite as profane. Similar exposure potential exists.
2. **KIK MESSENGER**: Messaging app that allows quick exchange of photos and information.
3. **POKE**: Similar to Snapchat in that messages and images sent “self-destruct.”
4. **SNAPCHAT®**: Messages, photos and videos sent through Snapchat disappear from the originating device within 10 seconds after being sent.
5. **TINDER®**: Mainly used as a dating or anonymous hookup tool.
6. **TUMBLR®**: A photo sharing app that has taken on a decidedly adult following and exposes its users to content that is pornographic or violent.
7. **WHISPER**: This app’s purpose is to let people expose themselves to voyeurs, telling “secrets” and sharing images for others to view. It also shares its user’s physical location.
8. **YIK YAK**: Social media app similar to Facebook; however, more commonly used by cyber-bullies and for quick hookups.

Project Shatter recognizes that 100,000 – 300,000 American children are at risk of sex-trafficking. Thusly,

Project Shatter began an aggressive campaign to Interrupt, Educate and Prevent sex-trafficking from happening in our communities.

One out of every 5 girls, and 1 out of every 10 boys will be sexually victimized in the United States by the time they reach adulthood. Even more frightening is a trafficked minor is sold up to 20 times a day for sex. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children reports that at least 70% of women involved in prostitution were introduced to the commercial sex industry before the age of 18 years old. The International Labor Organization reported that 25 percent of human trafficking victims were children. The majority of victims — 24.9 million people — were held in forced labor. And 15.4 million were forced into marriage. An estimated 4.8 million people, mainly women and children, were trafficked in the commercial sex trade in 2016. The commercial sex trade is a multi-billion-dollar business which has surpassed the illegal drug trade.

The New England Conference Branch WMS expects to “Shatter” all aspects of sex trafficking by empowering girls and women to see themselves as fearfully and wonderfully made after surviving a life in the trade as sex traffickers are expert psychological manipulators. Sex traffickers use force, fraud and coercion to maintain their stable of victims who fund their lavish and ill-obtained lifestyles. The game of sex trafficking is fueled by the love of money and I Timothy 6:10 tells us that “for the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.

“Broken things can become blessed things when you let
God do the mending”

Project Shatter intends to restore the hope of victims by hosting community forums to educate the public by collaborating with experts in the field such as Special Victims Unit Detectives, Sex trafficking Task Forces, the FBI, survivors and agencies servicing victims of sex crimes. Thusly, we are on the cusp of making a huge impact on the commercial sex trafficking of women and girls in New England by bringing an awareness of this illicit act towards vulnerable women and girls. Since our initial meeting in July 2015 we have hit the ground running. Project Shatter has held 5 Community Forums in Rhode Island and Connecticut drawing multi-gendered persons of all ages. Our purpose is to Interrupt the buying process of sexual victimization and exploitation of people with a special emphasis on women and girls; Educate all people about the hazards of sex trafficking and to Prevent them from becoming victims of the sex trafficking trade.

It is our mission to warn the general public and faith-based communities about the warning signs of sex trafficking. Listed below are warning signs provided by Shared Hope International that a victim might be trafficked:

- Signs of physical abuse, such as burn marks, bruises or cuts
- Unexplained absences from class
- Less appropriately dressed than before
- Sexualized behavior
- Overly tired in class
- Withdrawn, depressed or distracted
- Brags about making or having lots of money
- Displays expensive clothes, accessories or shoes

- New tattoo (tattoos are often used by pimps as a way to brand victims. Tattoos of a name, symbol of money or barcode could indicate trafficking)
- Older boyfriend or new friends with a different lifestyle
- Talks about wild parties or invites other students to attend parties
- Shows signs of gang affiliation a preference for specific colors, notebook doodles of gang symbols

We encourage our congregations and the general public to report, if they suspect a young person is being trafficked to the National Human Trafficking Hotline number(s) listed below.

**Call the National Human Trafficking Resource Center
1-888-373-7888 or text Be Free (233733) to report sex
trafficking, forced labor, or to get help.**

Sources:

The Holy Bible, ESV

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The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children

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12. Black Women in Search of the Red Dress: Crafting Our Own Identities

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More than 6,000 years ago the ancient Egyptians raised this question, "In the day of vindication/the day of judgement, will you be able to say that my soul lifts itself up and my heart is found to be righteous on earth? Will you be given your heart which comes from your mother?" (Karenga, 1984).

This paper is dedicated to the long list of Black women whose lives exemplified an uncompromising righteous commitment to their communities, who were the final source of correctness, and who embodied the ancient Kemetic (Black Egyptian) moral principle of Maat. They were able to answer this critical and profound question of life itself in the affirmative. Perhaps, at no other time in the history of Black

women has it been more important to know who we are and what our collective purpose is.

The world is moving into the Age of Aquarius, the age of the woman, which will cover the next 2160 years. My concern is this, what kind of woman do we want to define us in the next 2100 years? What will be her character? Will she believe in equality? Will we Black women take the lead in defining womanhood and establish Maat in the world? Will we lead the way to a new world order based on justice and righteousness?

But what is Maat? In his book, *Maat: The Moral Ideal in Ancient Egypt*, (2006) author and leader Maulana Karenga explains that “Maat is rightness in the spiritual and moral sense in three realms: The Divine, the natural and the social. Maat is an interrelated order of rightness which requires and is the result of right relations with and right behavior towards the Divine, nature and other humans. As moral thought and practice, Maat is a way of rightness defined especially by the practice of the Seven Cardinal Virtues of truth, justice, propriety, harmony, balance, reciprocity and order.” (pp. 10-11).

This paper honors the memory, energy, and wisdom of ordinary Black women, who through their lives, their examples of truth and their rightness, tell us what we must do in this New Age in order to be able to answer, yes, my soul lifts itself up and my heart is found to be righteous on earth. As I reach back into our ancient history, I find that our ancestors are

telling us to return to our source and fetch our true selves. The power of our true, authentic selves is exemplified by the wearing of our *Red Dress*. Daring to wear our red Dress is following our ancestors' instructions. They tell us to be true to our values and beliefs, to work in harmony with our sisters and brothers, to never cease working for justice, to treat people right, to take care of the earth and to honor the Creator.

I give honor to the ancestors, those Black enslaved women who cared for and raised the masters' children, while also managing the lives of the masters' wives and indeed even the lives of their masters. These enslaved women took the scraps of food thrown out by the master and created the cuisine we call "soul food," "southern cooking," or in other words, "Africanized-African-American cuisine." These Black women also taught and modeled for their own children the loving and fair way to treat their brothers and sisters. Black mothers taught their own children how to care for the needy, be kind to others, work hard for justice and be empowered to be the change in a cruel world. They taught the important lesson of having right behavior towards the Divine, toward nature and toward other human beings. Through their lived experiences, these women, taught others what rightness looked like, what a **Maatian** person looked like. For these reasons I give honor to our ancestor-woman.

WOMEN WHO WORE THE RED DRESS

Many of us today know ordinary Black women who lived in such a way that their lives set a standard for their communities. With the passing of time, some of these ordinary women, have become extraordinary women in our history by staying true to themselves, to their values and beliefs, and moral principles. They wore the *Red Dress*. They fought hard to bring order, justice, truth, harmony, reciprocity and rightness into the world. Let us take a brief journey into the lives of a few of them.

Through her behavior, Harriet Tubman (1820-1913) told us that no one can do anything to a Black woman when her mind is made up. She was able to bring 300 enslaved Africans to freedom travelling only by the light of the moon and the North Star. She never lost a person and was known to pull a gun on those who gave up and thought that they were too tired to go on. She made nineteen trips to bring her people out of slavery. Her great strength to do what seemed impossible made her an infamous Black woman wanted dead or alive by the Confederates. Who was this woman? She was a Union nurse and scout in the Civil War. She bought property and became the one who sheltered family and friends. She established a home for the aged later in her life. Harriet Tubman was an ordinary once enslaved African woman who was only five feet tall, suffered the inhuman horror of slavery, but changed the

lives of many people! We know her today as “Black Moses.” She practiced right behavior towards the Divine, nature and other humans. Harriet was a Maatian woman who wore her “Red Dress”.

Sojourner Truth (1799-1883) was born into slavery about eighty miles north of New York City. She was the second youngest of thirteen children. Her parents named her Isabella. As a child, she had several owners and was freed with the New York emancipated law of 1827. Isabella left her family and children in the early 1830s and moved to New York City. There she preached at Methodist camp meetings as the only Black member. She was an eloquent speaker and a great believer in God. She changed her name in 1843 to Sojourner Truth so that everyone would know “My so journey on this earth is a movement on the truth.” As was an abolitionist in the late 1840s. When Frederick Douglass had become despondent over slavery, she challenged him with these words, “Frederick is God dead?” We remember Sojourner for her 1851 speech at the Women’s Rights Convention in Akron Ohio. In this famous speech she spoke these words:

“That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much

as a man - when I could get it - and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?"

She wore her "Red Dress" by living as a Black woman who committed her life to righting the scales of justice for women.

Anna Julia Cooper (1858-1964) was born in North Carolina, of the union between an enslaved Black woman and her master. Later in life she said that other than his involvement in her procreation, her father never did anything for her. In fact, he hired her out as a young child. It was in that house that she learned to read. She always wanted to be a teacher and began tutoring at a young age. In 1884 Anna Julia became the fourth Black woman in the United States to graduate from an accredited college. She wrote her classic book, *A Voice from the South by a Black Woman of the South* in 1892. She served as a high school principal, college professor, defender for the honor of Black women, a spokeswoman for her race and a Pan Africanist. In 1925, at the age of sixty-six, Anna Julia earned the doctorate degree from the famous Sorbonne., in France. In an interview she gave at the age of 100 she is quoted as having said, "It isn't what we say about ourselves, it's what our lives stand for". Another famous quote is, "Only the Black woman can say when and where I enter in the quiet, undisputed dignity of my

womanhood, without violence and without suing or special patronage, then and there, the whole race enters with me.” She was a Black woman on a mission for justice and truth. She wore her colors in her quiet, undisputed dignity.

Ida Barnett Wells (1862-1931) was born in Holley Springs, Mississippi to parents who were enslaved. She was the oldest of eight children. When the Freedman Aid Society established Rust College after the Civil War, her parents sent her to school there. When she was sixteen, her parents and young brother died from yellow fever leaving her with the responsibility of caring for her sisters and brothers. Ida was able to care for her siblings by teaching school in Memphis, Tennessee. She also wrote articles for local and national Black newspapers. By the age of twenty-seven, she purchased the Memphis Free Speech Newspaper. In 1892, three Black successful businessmen and colleagues were lynched. Ida realized that lynching was a racist way of eliminating Black economic independence. She published her ideas in her newspaper which angered white people and they destroyed her newspaper office causing her to move to Chicago in 1893. Ida nearly singlehandedly called the world’s attention to the politics and economics of lynching, traveling all over the United States and Europe. Her voiced beliefs were critical of and in conflict with those Black male leaders who accommodated themselves to whites. Although a founding member of the NAACP, she withdrew her

membership because she advocated for more militantly race conscious leadership. She married, had four children and continued to work for justice. She was a furious **Maatian** woman.

Nannie Helen Burroughs (1879-1961) was born in a small town in Virginia. Her mother moved with her and her sister to Washington, D.C. so that they could receive an education. She went on to graduate from the famous M Street School. Nannie was an eloquent speaker and had become a national leader by the age of twenty-one after her 1900 speech at the National Baptist Convention entitled, "How the Sisters Are Hindered from Helping". She organized the Women's Convention Auxiliary, which became the largest Black women's organization with more than one million members. Nannie was a religious leader, an educator and civil rights activist. She championed women's rights. Her belief in racial purity and race pride predated Garvey as is evident in a 1904 article entitled "Not Color but Character." In it she said, "What every woman who bleaches and straightens out needs, is not her appearance changed, but her mind." The National Training School for Girls that she founded in 1909, required that all students take a Black history course. She said in 1917 that "The Negro must serve notice on the world that he/she is ready to die for justice. Nannie Burroughs was a practicing Maatian woman who proudly wore her Red Dress.

Mary McLeod Bethune (1875-1955), was born in Mayesville, South Carolina as the 15th of 17 children. Her parents were poor and were formally enslaved. At the age of 10, she started school at the one room school for Black children. Her teacher saw her academic potential and helped her to receive a boarding scholarship to Barber Scotia College in Concord, North Carolina at the age of thirteen. Mary graduated in 1894 and spent a year in Chicago studying at the Moody Bible Institute. In 1904, she opened the Daytona Educational and Industrial Institute with five little girls and \$1.50. It later grew to become what is presently Bethune Cookman College. Mary was also the 1935 founder of the National Council of Negro Women. With headquarters in Washington, DC it was the most powerful Black women's organization at the time. Mary also served as Assistant National Director of the National Youth Administration in 1936, was a member of President Roosevelt's unofficial "Black Cabinet", and had the distinction of having been the longest serving president (1936-1951) in the history of the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History. She was often known as "The First Lady of the Struggle".

She often expressed pride that pure African blood flowed in her veins and that her mother had come from a matriarchal society and was of royal African ancestry. Bethune believed that "Black women were to carry the steadying, uplifting and cleansing influence to the struggle." She understood what the

ancient Egyptian meant when they said that your essence, your soul, your Ba, comes from your mother.

Fannie Lou Hamer (1917-1977) was born in Mississippi, the youngest of twenty children born to her parents. She began working in the cotton fields at the age of six and continued in various positions as a sharecropper. She was well aware of the racism and violence against Black people. She became a member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, when they came to her community in 1962. Fannie Lou was under constant attack for her civil rights leaderships and was severely beaten in 1963 in a Mississippi jail for registering people to vote. This woman with a sixth-grade education challenged the white democratic delegation to the 1964 National Convention. A dynamic speaker and grassroots organizer, she refused to compromise when only two seats were offered to the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and the Black men were willing to accept those two seats. Fannie Lou took a stand voicing her objection, "We did not come here for two seats. You either seat all of us or none of us!" Her motto was, "I stand on the truth". She stood on the truth of Maat, the truth of justice. Fannie Lou Hamer was a righteous woman who wore her Red Dress.

Through these women we see that the lives of ordinary Black women can become extraordinary. But in order to do this, we must take time to consider who want to be. We must

ask ourselves what model of Black womanhood will our lives leave behind for our community? t These women answered in the affirmative on the day of vindication, “My soul lifts itself up before my heart and is found to have been righteous on earth.” Many of our ancestors were ordinary Black women who lived through slavery, poverty, and racism, yet assumed the sole responsibility of caring for their Black sisters and brothers, and raising children who had a sense of love, justice and spirituality. The burning question for us today is this “Are you building on the great legacy left by these ordinary Black women, who despite all still did extraordinary things? How do you see yourself in this New Age? Will our ancestors be proud of the example you will leave behind? Have you or will you bring our people any closer to freedom, any closer to justice, any closer to our true selves? Will you have the audacity to wear your Red Dress?

This generation and every generation to follow is offered a challenge by the thoughts and deeds of our past generations.

Franz Fanon, a West Indian psychiatrist, political philosopher and revolutionary, challenges us with these words, “Every generation must, out of relative obscurity, find its own mission, fulfil it or betray it.” Wilfred Carty, a Trinidadian historian says that “all you can do is work within your history as vitally as possible. It may not be an easy history, but you must fight, struggle and enjoy.”

Here again is the challenge, are you fighting as vitally as possible in the story that your history will tell? Or are you just trying to enjoy life, losing sight of the struggle for justice? Have you forgotten your ancestors? Do you know who you are? Are you following false copies of your womanhood? When we forget our ancestors, we lose our minds. We are lost without purpose without goals, without directions. We will do anything for anyone for no particular reason. We will let others, (quite often our oppressors), define us, write our history and trivialize it as well.

Many Black women have become confused. We don't know which way to turn. We are losing our life force. I shake the hands of Black women and can no longer feel their life force. Their hands are like tissue paper. Many have changed their hair—they don't realize that Black women are the original woman, and when the Creator placed us in Africa more than three million years ago, he/she did not make a mistake. Listen to and remember these words that Nannie Burroughs said in 1917, "What every woman who bleaches and straightens out needs is not her appearance changed, but her mind." Many Black women need our minds changed about our skin color. We don't like being black—we prefer white skin and blonde hair.

I ask you, if you are the original woman, how can the original, copy a copy? Out of our confusion, we have changed our noses, our eye color—yes, we have even changed our

minds. If you don't know who you are, you will copy anything and still feel bad about yourself because you don't look like the copy.

When we no longer feel Black, or act Black, we don't know what to call ourselves. We let other people discuss and decide what we call ourselves. We are embarrassed and reluctant to talk about our history of enslavement in America. (But we were the *enslaved* and not the *enslavers*.) We don't talk about the rape of our foremothers. In fact, we have bought into the false narrative of white America and blame Black women for their own rape. We have bought the stereotype that you "can't rape a Black woman." We must never let others define who we are or let anyone minimize the trauma of our oppression. Many of us are reluctant to raise questions about the psychological makeup of whites who enslaved, lynched and murdered our ancestors and continue to oppress us today. We would rather study the psyche of Blacks than the psyche of whites because it is safer. We fear that we end up jobless if we tell the truth about our experiences in white America.

The burning question becomes, "how did we get so far away from ourselves, so far away from our intended purposes?" I suggest that the first step, towards the alienation of self was the taking away of our *Red Dress*. This symbolic "Red Dress" is not only red but yellow, orange or any bright colors that speak to our beginnings in Africa—the sun

continent. It symbolizes the place where we freely wore our bright colors. It symbolizes a time when we had a way of behaving, a way of being ourselves. The bright colors of Africa symbolize our courage and our audacity. The *Red Dress* is our African-ness. And the sad truth is, that we lose our sense of self, strength and power when we lose the bright colors of Africa within us. As Cheikh Anta Diop, said in his book, *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa*, “no other people in the world have given the woman the centrality that exist in Africa. Africa is, after all, called the motherland and not the fatherland”.

Women in Africa are important; their opinions are important. Men from the earliest of time, going back to ancient Egypt more than 6,000 to 8,000 years, knew that nothing comes into existence without a woman. The culture centers around women, who are the givers of life, the carriers of the culture, the healers, who represent the moral standards of the culture. They are the image of ***Maat***. Women knew that a society must be balanced by both male and female energy. Today, we see many Black women who have gotten out of balance. They have been busy copying the behavior of other people whose culture has very little respect for women. They have started to define themselves as extensions of men rather than as co-equals. They feel that they cannot become somebody unless men tell them who they are, or unless they have “a man.” When you take that position, you will take anything from a man including physical and psychological

abuse. You will disrespect your sisters, and not trust them around “your man.” Your behavior will become aberrant and distorted.

My sisters, we have much work to do. We must reclaim our history, in a continuing process of reading, rereading, revising, and reconstructing. The past does not change, but the questions we ask to connect the past to the future do change. We must harness our history in the service of humanity. It is individuals, ordinary people, who make and change history. For you to become focused, you must become conscious of who you are, and committed to changing a society that is inherently racist, sexist, classist and ageist. This is a society that has little respect for the elders—those individuals who are so close to the ancestors.

THE WORK OF CLAIMING YOUR RED DRESS

Here are some of the things you can do in order to begin to work towards getting back to yourself and to the *Red Dress*:

1. **Decolonize Your Mind:** You must become aware of the constant effort of American society to keep you away from your African self and culture. Form the habit of paying attention to social media; to the images of Blacks on TV including the commercials; the music you listen to and videos you watch; the

news you read and the commodification of Black culture.

2. Deconstruct the White Recovery Project: Aaron D. Gresson III, a social theorist, sociologist and licensed clinical psychologist, in his book, *The Recovery of Race in America*, says white men in America are on a recovery project in which they claim that Blacks and other disenfranchised groups have turned the tide of oppression and now oppress privileged white men in all major areas of their lives (p163). According to him, white men have become the victims, and Black men the assailants.
3. Recover Our Voices: We must learn to talk to whites about racism; we must learn to talk among ourselves about class, sexism and skin color; we must begin to talk about relational contradictions—the presence of betrayal and abuse within the Black community.
4. Affirm our African culture: value our families and our children. Engage in and teach collective sharing and respect for our elders. Work towards balancing the divine principle of male and female.

5. Affirm ourselves: Live your life as vitally as possible. Love yourself and be honest about who you are.
6. Affirm Our African Sisterhood: Put aside petty jealousies. See all women as sisters first. Be respectful and truthful to our sisters. The most important relationship you will ever have is with a sister.
7. If it took you this long to get away from yourself, it will take you sometime to get back into your right mind—a little at a time. So, change your hair and wear it natural sometimes. Wear your bright colors on occasion. Buy at least one African outfit and wear it. Wear an African brooch on your suit jacket. Try a pair of African earrings. You might also try adding an African name to your European name.

Know that you are the original. Getting back to yourself is probably the most important thing you can do at the beginning of this New Age. In his book, *There's A River*, Vincent Harding tells us that our only real chance is to create new theory, to create new practice, to create new ideology, to create new hope, to create ourselves, building them all on the solid reality and particularities of our terrifying and glorious experiences in this land.”

How do you plan to spend the rest of your life? Can the ancestors count on you to continue the struggle toward

justice? Will you be a Harriet Tubman, a Sojourner Truth, an Anna Julie Cooper, an Ida B. Wells, a Nannie Helen Burroughs, a Mary McLeod Bethune, a Fannie Lou Hamer, or an ordinary Black woman who lives a righteous life, and knows through her mother and her mother's mother that women are the core of Black culture. Will you be the moral standards of the community? Will you answer in the affirmative "my soul lifts itself up before my heart and is found to be righteous on earth?"



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