

# Celebrating Women's History Month

## Good and Bad Times for Black Women

Report delves into economic, societal ups and downs

(AP) -- This is a triumphant time for black women: Condoleezza Rice in the global diplomatic spotlight, Michelle Obama captivating campaign crowds as a potential first lady, billionaire Oprah Winfrey playing political kingmaker.

It's also a traumatic time: Rutgers University basketball players disparaged by radio host Don Imus, a black woman kidnapped and tortured by whites in West Virginia, the home-owning dreams of black women disproportionately dashed by foreclosures.

That remarkable mix is the focus

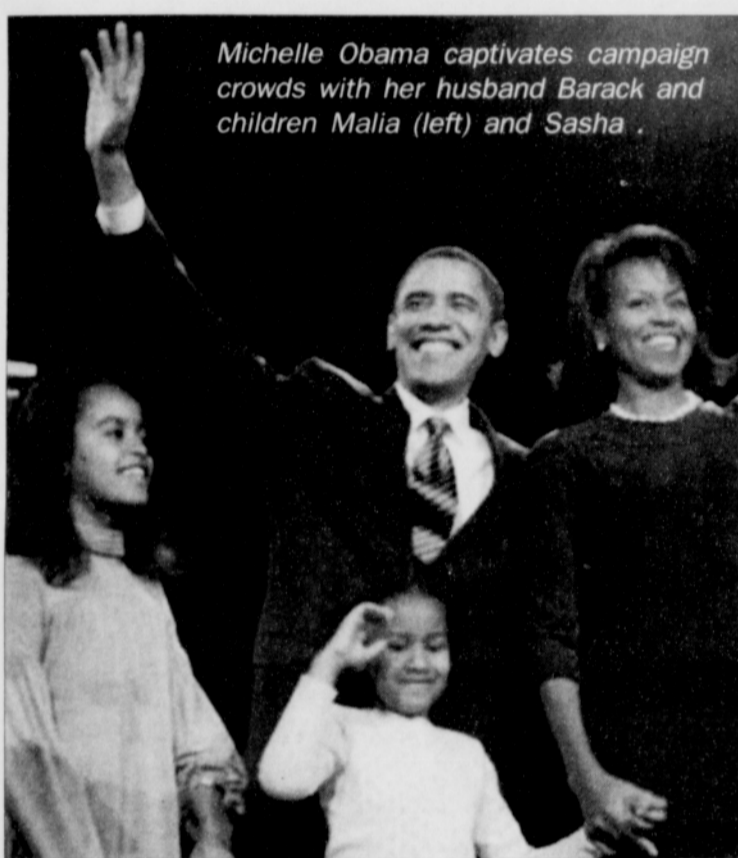
of this year's State of Black America report, issued by the National Urban League. It features essays looking at the array of challenges faced by African-American women: economic, social, psychological and medical.

"The one thing that is certain is the need to hear and amplify the voices of black women," longtime civil rights activist Dorothy Height writes in the foreword. "Too often, our needs, concerns, struggles, and triumphs are diminished and subordinated to what is believed to be the more pressing concerns of oth-

ers." Julianne Malveaux, the president of Bennett College for Women in Greensboro, N.C., contends in the report's opening essay that the image of black women in popular culture has barely improved in the year since the Imus incident.

White men continue to dominate on TV's Sunday morning news shows, she writes, while "the gyrating, undulating image of African-American women in rap music videos and, by extension, on cable television is as prevalent as ever."

The report delves deeply into economics, noting that black women are more likely than white or Hispanic women to be running a household and raising children on their own. According to Malveaux, black women hold more jobs nationwide than black men, yet — despite their breadwinner roles — earn less on average, \$566 a week compared to \$629 for black men.



Michelle Obama captivates campaign crowds with her husband Barack and children Malia (left) and Sasha.



Condoleezza Rice achieves the highest levels of power in the Bush administration.



Members of the Rutgers women's basketball team hold a news conference on campus in Piscataway, N.J., to react to derogatory remarks directed at their team made on air by radio personality Don Imus.

In an essay about the home loan crisis, Andrea Harris, president of the North Carolina Institute for Minority Economic Development, suggests that black women have suffered disproportionately. Assessing recent federal data on subprime loans, which are a main culprit in the foreclosure epidemic, Harris says black women received far more of these loans in 2006 than white men.

"It is easy to imagine the devastation that is headed toward African-American women and their communities," Harris writes.

An essay by Dr. Doris Browne, a public health expert, details the above-average rates of cancer, diabetes and heart disease among black women.

On an upbeat note, former Labor Secretary Alexis Herman notes in her essay that black women are making huge strides as entrepre-

neurs. The number of businesses owned by them increased by 147 percent between 1997 and 2006, compared to an overall business growth rate of 24 percent, she wrote.

Another of the essayists, Melanie Campbell of the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation, said in an interview that disparities in health care and economics are the paramount issues for black women as the election campaign unfolds.

Exit polling shows that black women have become a larger force within the Democratic electorate compared to 2004, and Campbell said their expectations for policy changes also are rising.

"We want to go beyond being thought about," she said. "We want action."

The president of the Urban League, a 98-year-old black empowerment organization, hailed women

as "the backbone of the black family" — constantly surmounting obstacles. Marc Morial called for expansion of programs that would assist black women in starting businesses, protect more of them from predatory lending schemes, and provide more of them with affordable, high-quality child care.

"When black women hurt, the American family suffers," Morial wrote. "But by uplifting black women, especially those struggling hardest to keep their families together and their dreams on track, we lift up every American community."

A year ago, the Urban League focused its State of Black America report on the difficulties facing many young black men, including their high rates of crime and imprisonment. This year's theme was welcomed by black women who believe their particular concerns often are overlooked.

## Reflecting on Civil Rights and Remarkable Firsts

Focus on women draws support

Alpha Kappa Alpha's international president, Barbara A. McKinzie urged the sorority's 200,000 members to celebrate women during the March, which is designated as Women's History

Month. She issued the call to members — and everyone — to participate in events praising women and to reflect on their greatness while the spotlight is focused on women this

month. "Since 1908 when Alpha Kappa Alpha was founded, its members have made an impact during the Suffragette movement, during the civil rights era and throughout history," McKinzie said. "Alpha Kappa Alpha women have been in



Barbara A. McKinzie the forefront of effecting change as trailblazers, champions and history makers."

She noted how AKA women have recorded many firsts in their 100-year history including:

--Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, president of Liberia and the first female to serve as head of an Africa nation.

--Phylicia Rashad -- the first African-American woman to win a Best Actress Tony Award for a dramatic leading role.

--Dr. Mae Jemison, the first woman of color to be launched into space.

Other remarkable members of her group include the late Coretta Scott King; Peggy Quince, a member of the Florida Supreme Court; vocalist and musician Alicia Keys; ac-

tress Jada Pinkett Smith, U.S. Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee; poet Maya Angelou and many more.

McKinzie spoke with pride in stating that Alpha Kappa Alpha is celebrating its Centennial this year. She said it is on the strength of its illustrious "sisterhood" that the organization has flourished.

"Alpha Kappa Alpha members have been in the forefront of creating history since the beginning of time," she said. "During this month set aside to rejoice in our accomplishments, I urge everyone to join me in celebrating the triumphs, achievements and excellence of women."

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