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Opinion

Shirley Chisholm and the Fight for Equal Rights for All Women

With a woman heading the ticket of the Democratic Party, it may be challenging for us to remember that women have had the right to vote for less than a century (and Black folks less that). But the 19th Amendment that gave women the right to vote was ratified on August 18, 1920, just 96 years ago. At Congresswoman Bella Abzug's (D-N.Y.) insistence Congress designated August 26 as Women's Equality Day in 1971. The first part of the joint resolution of Congress reads, "Whereas the women of the United States have been treated as second class citizens and have not been entitled to the full rights and privileges, public or private, legal or intentional, which are available to male citizens." Reading the words reminds me how far women have come, how far we still have to go, and how little the status of women of color is included when we speak of the status of women.

How far have we come? Few would have predicted that an African American would win an election and effectively lead the United States for eight years, few would have predicted that a woman would have more than a fighting chance of winning the United States presidency. And yet the



Julianne Malveaux
NNPA
Columnist

very campaign that signals progress is also one that illustrates how much more work needs to be done before women's equality is attained. Too much of the rhetoric around Secretary Clinton's candidacy is downright sexist. She should be judged by her po-

“The very campaign that signals progress is also one that illustrates how much more work needs to be done before women's equality is attained

sitions and there should be absolutely no talk about her looks, hairstyle, attire, or tone of voice. No man could stand the kind of scrutiny that she has had to endure. No man has ever been subject to such scrutiny.

The continuing saga of sexual harassment at Fox News is another example of the distance we must travel to reach women's equality. The company's former CEO, Roger Ailes, is accused of multiple counts of sexual harassment, and this

is a clear case of where there's smoke, there's fire. One wonders how many other companies have similarly hostile work environments and how often women, simply attempting to earn a living, are placed in the position of having to manage unflattering comments, downright harassment, coerced sex, and even rape. There are documented cases of women being raped in the military then being discharged because they can't work with their rapists. And let's not get started on some of what happens on some cam-

run for president has been all but ignored in much of the media frenzy about candidate Hillary Clinton. However, it does not surprise me given the many ways African American women's contributions are sidelined, marginalized or simply ignored. African American women earn less than their White counterparts do, but head more households and have more economic responsibility. African American women are far less likely than their White counterparts to be found in the "C" suite in corporate leadership, and far more likely to be further down the ladder in every aspect of life in our nation. While people say they saw the glass ceiling shatter with Hillary Clinton's nomination,

others saw the millions standing at the sticky floor with few opportunities to climb up to that glass ceiling. Those standing on the sticky floor are disproportionately women of color, especially those who earn low wages and have fewer opportunities than others. Maybe Hillary Clinton will bridge the gap when she pursues a progressive economic agenda that includes fair and equal pay, affordable childcare, and other benefits for working women.

Can We Rebuild Black Wall Street?

There are [Blacks] who are willing to worship the pyramids of 4,000 years ago, but will not build pyramids in the present so their children may see what they left behind as well. We have a leadership who rallies the people to look at past glories, but leave their children neglected, who will make great analytical and oratorical dissertations on the inadequacies of Eurocentric education and yet will not contribute one penny of their money or their time to the construction of their own schools." — Dr. Amos Wilson, Afrikan Centered Consciousness versus the New World Order.

Montoya Smith, host of the Atlanta talk show, "Mental Dialogue," asked, "Can we rebuild 'Black Wall Street?'"

"No, really," he added, recognizing the depth of his question and assuring folks he was not kidding or just being rhetorical.

So, what was Black Wall Street? Most of what I have learned about it was obtained from a book by John Sibley Butler titled, "Entrepreneurship and Self-Help Among Black Americans, A Reconsideration of Race and Economics," which contains an exhaustive section on Tulsa, Oklahoma's history and a de-



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Columnist

tailed account of what took place in its Greenwood District. Some of the information below comes from Dr. Butler's book. I also learned from face to face conversations with six

“I know that one dollar spent here has the multiplier effect of three dollars, as our businesses support one another”

of the survivors of the Tulsa Riot.

Black Wall Street was burned to the ground in 1921 by a White mob. The Greenwood District, located in the northern section of Tulsa, Oklahoma, was once called "Negro Wall Street," and "Little Africa." It was home to hundreds of Black owned businesses and sat on valuable land desired by White oil speculators, who even tried to buy parcels of that land from Blacks for ten cents on the dollar immediately following the Tulsa riot. Fortunately and wisely, Blacks refused to sell.

Despite hundreds of Black lives lost in the riot and all of Greenwood's businesses destroyed, the story of that economic enclave during the ensuing seventeen years was one of triumph over tragedy. By 1923, as a result of Blacks pooling their money to capitalize new enterprises, the Black business district was even larger than before, and Greenwood was completely restored by Black people by 1938. Ultimately, urban re-

is based on the fact that we have done it before under far worse circumstances than we are under today. But as I listened to the other guest on Montoya's show, Mr. Jay West, entrepreneur and president of the Lithonia Small Business and Merchants Association located on the outskirts of Atlanta, Georgia, I became even more convinced.

Immediately impressed by Mr. West and the work his group is doing in a city that is approximately 85 percent Black, I sought him out to learn more. Jay West understands and promotes local business support. "I do 95 percent of my shopping right here in Lithonia," West said, "because I know that one dollar spent here has the multiplier effect of three dollars, as our businesses support one another."

West is absolutely correct, and the Lithonia merchants association will benefit collectively and individually from circulating their dollars. They will grow their businesses and create more jobs. This nascent organization can be the model from which new Black Wall Streets can be built across this nation.

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My answer to that question