

From the PES' Ending Racism Task Force

## ***WOMEN HOLD UP HALF THE SKY***

by Erik Younge

March is National Women's History Month. We do not really need a special month to honor the women in our lives; everyday is women's day. But it helps to focus our attention on the many women, known and unknown, who have sacrificed so much, who have shared and continue to share their integral, essential minds, bodies; their wisdom, talent, their creativity, their compassion and their love for our world.

It took me too long to understand and appreciate my mother Rose and her sacrifices and courage and determination to raise 7 children. Her notion of "family" included "immediate family" and "expanded family", which meant taking in other children when their parents couldn't cope with them for various reasons. We were not allowed to see these children as step-children, foster children, etc. To Rose, they were blessed children who deserved the best we could offer. I was raised to see them all as my sisters and brothers.

More than 50 years ago, Chinese leader Mao Zedong pronounced that famous quote that "women hold up half the sky". Zhang Yue, host of a popular Chinese talk show *-Half The Sky-* recalls how her mother worked "all day and into the night....Women labored outside the home, just like men, but when they got home they had to do everything else....women discovered that equality meant a double burden."

In this country, women have had to fight for equality against the patriarchy of domination, fight for control over their bodies, minds, desires.

African-American women also had the burden of not only the fight against sexism, but the added fight against racism and white supremacy. They have always been on the front lines. Black Women have had to keep the family together, against inconceivable violence, discrimination, and then told to take the back seat, while the men took center stage and held up the trophy.

Karen Attiah is the *Washington Post* editor of Global Opinions. In a recent article, she states, "Black women helped send white men into space. And won back-to-back tennis titles. And changed the makeup industry. We have even made our way into the White House. But lately it seems those in power would rather have Black women around the world sit down and shut up, especially about the racism, sexism and white supremacy that threatens our daily lives."

In January of this year, members of the ERTF (Ending Racism Task Force), a committee of the Philadelphia Ethical Society, hosted a discussion about the mostly unheralded women that spearheaded the US Civil Rights Movement of the 1950's and 1960's. Their contributions and struggles are seldom discussed and acknowledged. It cited mostly Black women, but included women of all classes and races and colors who participate and lead the fight for freedom and equality.

Today, in this “dark winter of our discontent”, women in general, and Black Women in particular, are leading the struggle for full equality. The Immigration Struggle is lead mainly by women. The Black Lives Matter (BLM) struggle against the wanton murder of young, unarmed Black people was started by 3 young Black Women. The #MeToo movement against sexual assault of women was started in 2006 by local activist Tarana Burke, an African-American woman who faced considerable abuse and adversity. And I want to remember Anita Hill, who 26 years ago reluctantly challenged powerful men, black and white, and found her charges marginalized. It must seem like bittersweet vindication for her now.

On another personal note, I have a very selfish reason in this global fight against racism/sexism/classism/etc.– My three daughters and two granddaughters (they have promised a grandson next time.lol). I get angry when my daughters- Erika, Deirdre, Malika- reluctantly relate to me how, despite their wisdom, beauty, brilliance, and their genius, they still have to prove themselves to others, to men who refuse to see their shining lights, men who refuse to see their individual inherent worth - simply due to their gender. It just isn't fair or right. It must end if our future, our world is to survive and progress.

Women hold up half the sky. Racism, sexism, white supremacy is an unnecessary added burden that we all take apart and end. “And for the movement that gives us hope, and the families in whose name we serve, we will not stop pushing for a world in which we can raise our children in peace and with dignity.” – Patrisse Khan-Cullors & Asha Bandele, founders of Black Lives Matter.