

**The  
BLACK  
C o M M e n t a t o r**  
Commentary, analysis and investigations  
on issues affecting African Americans  
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**International Women's Day and Black America**  
**The African World**  
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International Women's Day (March 8th) just passed. Introducing "Women's History Month", IWD came into being in the early 20th century as a result of the struggles of women workers in New York. Women around the world commemorate that day as a day of struggle and recognition of women's on-going efforts toward achieving freedom and dignity.

Yet in Black America, for the most part with the exception of the Black Left, little attention is paid to International Women's Day. This has always struck me as odd since Black America is not just made up of men. I suppose that it should not be odd in part because, as African Americans, we are so focused on issues of race that we often subordinate or ignore issues facing women, or issues of gender generally.

It should also not surprise me because of the way that "women" are often defined in this society. Take, for instance, our recent presidential campaign. Whether in the Hillary Clinton campaign or later with Sarah Palin, the term "women" came to represent a description of white women. It was not an all-inclusive term to describe women of different colors. When it came to a candidate speaking to issues facing women, the assumption was that it would be a white woman for the most part speaking to the issues of white women.

In reaction to that there seems to be a tendency within Black America to act as if raising anything about male supremacy or the inequality of women is somehow subordinating the struggle for Black Freedom. In fact, I have gotten into countless discussions with other Black folks where, when the issue of the rights of women arises, someone will inevitably say that such issues are only or mainly the concerns of white women and that they are of little concern to Black America.

While views such as those cited are patently untrue, what is nevertheless intriguing is that there is often a reluctance to discuss this or debate this publicly. An example of this came up at the time of the 1995 Million Man March. While there were those who supported the views of Amiri Baraka [who said, who goes to war and leaves half their

army at home] and Julianne Malveaux, who both were critical of the march for being all-male and focusing rather exclusively on the Black male rather than the partnership between Black men and women, this was not an easy discussion, and in fact it was a discussion that was suppressed at the time.

Black America focuses a great deal of attention on the plight of the Black male, but as a people we spend precious little time on the issues facing Black women. We may mention, in passing, the high HIV/AIDS rate among Black women, but when we speak of HIV/AIDS, we tend to think about Black men. We correctly focus on the loss of manufacturing jobs - a fact that is destroying Black America's living standard - many of which are held by Black men, but we tend to spend little time on under-employment among Black women, not to mention unequal salaries and job opportunities. There is little attention focused on matters of daycare, though we will regularly hear challenges to Black men to be better fathers. And we seem to be embarrassed to have public discussions regarding sex and sexuality, not to mention discussions regarding rape and partner abuse.

I am hoping for a rethinking of International Women's Day within Black America. While we certainly need renewed attention to Black women historical figures, we especially need attention paid to the centrality of women in Black America and the challenges that they face (challenges often brought about by Black men, I might add).


It may be too late to do this for IWD 2009, but then again, March 2009 is not over yet.


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