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[Contents of Issue Menu](#)

Click Here

[Home](#)

**Women's History Month
The Call for a President's Council for Women and Girls of Color
Women of Color
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VICTORY: White House Council on Women and Girls announced

Forwarded by [Women Count](#) and the [Campaign for Gender Equality](#)

On March 11, 2009 President Obama established the [White House Council on Women and Girls](#) and will name his senior advisor Valerie Jarrett to chair it. Tina Tchen, director of the White House Office of Public Liaison, will serve as executive director.

The White House Council on Women and Girls will be charged with providing a coordinated federal response to the challenges confronting women and girls and to ensure that all Cabinet and Cabinet-level agencies consider how their policies and programs impact women and families. The White House said "the Council will be comprised of the heads (or their senior-level designees) of: the Cabinet agencies, certain other non-Cabinet agencies, and other Executive branch departments, agencies."

Campaign for Gender Equality has been working to create a national dialog about the issues that disproportionately effect women and girls. We applaud President Obama and hope that the White House Council on Women and Girls will bring public attention to issues long overlooked and/or misunderstood.

The White House Council on Women and Girls will be asking each government agency to analyze their current status and ensure that they are focused internally and externally on women.

The reason Campaign for Gender Equality joined the call for a Presidential

Commission on Women was to bring attention, to delve deeply in the problems facing all women, to come up with solutions to the problems, and then put those solutions into public policy. This can be done through the Women's Council if women's organizations are kept informed and have a say in what is happening within the Women's Council. The Council's staff and the public's input will be the key to its success.

In President Obama's first 50 days he has signed the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, over-turned the Global Gag Rule, and is today taking a major step to establish a White House Council on Women and Girls. This is all long overdue, but there is so much more to do to achieve true gender equality in this country.

I wish I could be happy about the news that President Obama has appointed a President's Council on Women and Girls, but I am not. Despite all that has been said to the Obama Campaign, Transition Team and Administration and to all the overwhelmingly white women's organizations about the need to include the intersection of racism and sexism as experienced only by women of color, none of those proclaiming this victory include the words "women of color" and the racism/sexism intersection as an issue to address.

Each time the issue has been raised, there have been photos of women of color on websites that do not mention us at all. When this is questioned, if we get any response, we are told to consider ourselves included even though we are unmentioned and even though there is outright refusal to include us in the way we want to be included with our number one issue up front.

I am tired of the appointments of cronies, whether women of color or white, whether Democratic or Republican, to positions of influence as if they represent the women of color at the bottom of this society, as if they know about, understand and really care about our lives. Women of color are the ones overwhelmingly losing our homes to foreclosure, including many senior women of color who took the predatory mortgages while trying to survive by finding a funding source for needed medicine. We are the ones disproportionately losing jobs and in the lowest paying jobs—even when there is no recession or depression. We are the ones who have been committing suicide at the highest rates of all groups and, whose suicide rates are worsening and are still rising rapidly as we despair. We are the ones most often treated late in the course of a disease. We are the ones with education who are among the first driven out of companies and educational institutions where our ideas are stolen and we are punished for speaking out against our oppression. They are the ones from families with money or the wives or daughters of the powerful. We are happy for their successes and progress but their experiences are not the way most of us live, even poor white women don't live like them. They are not us, are not sympathetic toward us, nor respectful of us. There is no evident intention of including us.

Yes, there will be some included in the new Women's Council who have been activists in the past and who deserve our thanks for their contributions to various movements. Sadly, none of those efforts have ever moved the masses of women of color from the socio-economic bottom of this society. The women at the bottom do not know these women "leaders" because they are not our advocates. Our advocates are subject to endless assaults aimed at weakening their influence in our communities and in society at large. We are only popular during efforts to get something like our votes.

There will be those who will say, "Give Ms. Jarrett a chance in her new role steering the President's Council on Women and Girls." After nearly 2 years of supporting the

candidacy of Barack Obama, even organizing a women of color conference to work on creating a national agenda of women of color, derived from us, we were unable to get a response of any kind from Valerie Jarrett and other women associated with the candidate (with the exception of his sister for a brief period), now president. We, women of color and white women, wrote her and other women, especially women and men of color, in the candidate's inner circle and could not get any response at all. So, I found it amazing that President Obama, during his speech to the Joint Session of Congress, pointed to a girl of color in the balcony who, he said, had written him about her aspirations and that as a result she was brought to the session where he applauded her goals and efforts. (I have since read that actually Valerie Jarrett made a connection to the child in South Carolina and suggested using her the way it was done.) This is a clear example of a misrepresentation presented as if there is a responsive-ness to women and girls of color that is not factual. Every day, it becomes clearer that women of color have no status or priority at present, despite have the greatest needs in the country. We have been so marginalized and have become so invisible that those in power do not even feel the need to explain or apologize for the treatment we are enduring.

While more and more women of color are committing suicide in the economic crisis of the country which has fallen heaviest on us, government/political leaders discuss stimulus solutions aimed at creating primarily male occupations, just as occurred in the Roosevelt years when women "stayed home and didn't work." Businesses are cashing in on No Child Left Behind programs which do not meet the needs of children, pay tutors too little to live on even if it was sufficiently steady and reliable which it is not. Most of these "jobs" are held by women who are not paid for the increasing shift of administrative tasks to them along with the responsibility to come up with resources to supplement the scant materials they receive. Students don't even get to write in or mark test booklets. Tutors have to conduct tests verbally and record answers on blank sheets of paper. Gimmicks like "brain games" lure parents to register their children for tutoring services in which there is little educational value and less intellectual stimulation for the students. Administrations of many of these programs are limited to relatives so nosy outsiders are kept out. Even in the better programs, tutor earnings can be \$5 per child in groups in which the students come from multiple language backgrounds and grade levels, which minimizes the actual time and attention for each student. If this sounds exploitive, it is. In addition, there is no mechanism to point out conditions, problems and needs of individual students which an experienced teacher might suspect, such as hearing impairment, the need for glasses, dyslexia or even child abuse, nor to make recommendations which could help parents who may or may not speak English to participate in the education of their children.

There is little discussion anywhere—except the recent moving comments of Eric Holder about the work that will resume in the Justice Department to address discrimination—to offer hope of action on the intersection of racism and sexism before women of color are extinguished. We keep being told to trust some one or to wait. What's wrong with those who think we will survive, despite being last to get attention, just as we are last to get medical care. George Bush appointed women of color in his cabinet. They did nothing for the masses of grassroots/working class, exploited, marginalized, impoverished, oppressed women of color of this nation because they were too demonstrating that they are not us, while concurrently devising the "answers" for what we need or what is good enough for us.

With the groups which have promoted the President's Council on Women and Girls and have contacted me about it, not one, **NOT ONE**, is willing to address the intersection of racism and sexism and how it is exterminating women of color in the US and

elsewhere. As we are dying, so are the cultures and traditions which have been passed down through history through mothers and aunts and grandmothers and more. A horrible social homogenization is occurring which is not just, not equitable, not fair, not good. The current emphasis is a means of silencing those who speak out in support of freedom and justice as emphatically as possible and of persuading people, including women of color, that what matters is to be thin, pretty, dress fashionably and with the right man. Throughout history, there have been names for that. The lives of women of color—all of us, not just some of us--are as valuable as the lives of others.

We now call on President Obama to appoint a President's Council on Women and Girls of Color with the goal and vision of lifting us from the bottom of US society by directly and specifically addressing the intersection of racism and sexism which is only experienced by women of color and appointing leadership of this Council from those who reflect our experiences and our diversity, including our economic and cultural diversity inclusive of the leadership already existent and functioning in our communities and cultures, along with representation of the President's cabinet and government agencies.

Overwhelmingly, the laws remedying sex discrimination do not equitably or proportionally support women of color. The steady increase in the number of women in the legislatures has largely been limited to white, non-Hispanic women. Yet so many are in denial about this. The current administration's response is to keep us sidelined and unmentioned, much like the refusal to discuss a single payer health plan that most Americans, doctors and nurses advocate. :

in 2009, there are 20 women of color in Congress out of the total 525 members. This is **22% of the women** in Congress: **3.78% of Congress**. None are in the Senate which has only had 1 woman of color ever. 12 of the current members of Congress are Black; 6 are Latinas; 2 are Japanese Americans. No other Asian Americans groups have ever been there. No Pacific Island Americans nor Native American women of color. There is no evidence that I can find so far that women of color experience a positive, trickle down effect from legislation, policies, commissions and appointments in which we are not allowed to be identified or mentioned. To the contrary, as these and other studies show, the disparity is greater between women of color and white women. Between 75% and 95% of the opportunities go to white women--in those places where women of color get anything at all. In some places, women of color are completely unrepresented as in those state legislatures in which not a single woman of color is a member.

This situation documents that women of color are permanently excluded beyond token representation because there is no evidence of any real progress that would indicate any improvement in the next millennium. Hopefully, presenting the facts will help enlighten some.

Click [here](#) to read a 2009 fact sheet by the Center for American Women in Politics (CAWP) presents "Women of Color in Elective Office: Congress, State Wide, State Legislature."


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BlackCommentator.com Guest Commentator Suzanne Brooks is the founder and CEO of International Association for [Women of Color Day](#) and CEO of Justice 4 All Includes Women of Color. Click [here](#) to contact Ms. Brooks.

[Contents of Issue Menu](#)
Click Here

[Home](#)

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