

# CARIBBEAN PERSPECTIVES

A Leadership Research Publication of the Eastern Caribbean Center, University of the Virgin Islands  
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## Female Leadership in the 20th and 21st Century Caribbean



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# Caribbean Perspectives

A Leadership Research Publication of the Eastern Caribbean Center, University of the Virgin Islands

The Eastern Caribbean Center (ECC) is a resource organization that conducts research and associated training, technology transfer and information dissemination, responsive to development issues in an evolving U.S. Virgin Islands and applicable to small island communities. It conducts and sponsors research in the U.S. Virgin Islands and the rest of the Eastern Caribbean and disseminates information to enhance the contribution of scientific inquiry to human well-being in the Caribbean region.

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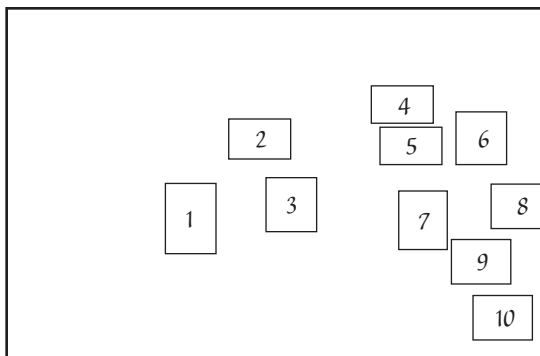
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Cover map: Central America and The Caribbean, CIA, reliefweb.int, June 1, 2002.



Key (for source information on individual photos, see captions inside the magazine):

(1) Portia Simpson-Miller, Prime Minister of Jamaica, 2006–2007, 2012–2016; (2) Michèle Pierre-Louis, Prime Minister of Haiti, 2008–2009; (3) Claudette Werleigh, Prime Minister of Haiti, 1995–1996; (4) Donna Christian-Christiansen, U.S. Virgin Islands Delegate to the U.S. House of Representatives, 1995–2014; Stacey Plaskett, USVI Delegate to the U.S. House of Representatives, 2014–Present; (6) Dee-Ann Kentish-Rogers, Minister of Social Development and Education, Anguilla, June 2020–Present; (7) Dame Constance Mitcham, first woman elected to parliament in St. Kitts and Nevis, 1984–1995; (8) Dame Eugenia Charles, Prime Minister of Dominica, 1980–1995; (9) Mia Amor Mottley, Prime Minister of Barbados, 2018–Present; (10) Kamla Persad-Bissessar, Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, 2010–2015.

## The Influence and Impact of Women in Leadership Roles

Jacinth L Henry-Martin

In 2018 I was invited to address a topic at a regional conference relating to the value of women in politics and chose to engage with my audience on an interesting question that continues to intrigue me. We could all agree that women, and particularly Caribbean women, have dutifully exercised our franchise through post-colonial elections and just as responsibly voted in periodic polls since Caribbean states started moving towards self-governance and full sovereignty in the 1960s. As we pondered on the fact that most of those early polls featured full slates of males, and that there did occasion the rarity of one or two women among the candidates, the audience remained blissfully content that these truths were neither fallacious nor entirely discomfiting for that era. We were of one accord that the male candidates were often catapulted to victory thanks to the strategic thinking and canvassing by valiant females who were ardently fearless in advocating the attributes of these males to the prospective voter, however indiscernible or questionable these traits to the more independent minded. We delved into our mutually held view that females have always been innately better suited to be leaders and influencers across the gamut of endeavors, and that with their broader awareness and preparation today, there was merit and value in all that they bring to the table. And then the awkward pause choked the mirth out of the room to reveal the unspoken truth when I asked whether anyone believed, either in those past years, or even in today's world, that there was even the most remote chance that our countries would ever vote for a full slate of women candidates. Anyone? Any country? Anyone at all? No one? Point made!

I find the topic on which I have been invited to present equal parts inspiring, having been afforded the vantage point of appreciating the broad spectrum of challenges and opportunities with which women in positions of leadership continue to engage ourselves, and yet frustrating that this case still has to be made. I choose to say with which we 'engage', because in democracies (and I do qualify that this applies to democracies) men and women, when confronted by challenges are free

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to make choices, but as we can well appreciate, not everyone responds by engaging. Perhaps, it is because of the way we have been socialized, or due to the insidious osmosis of ideas which stipulate that the gospel of political leadership is written indelibly in stone by testosterone powered hands. Today's women must not just politely beg to differ, or to pivot to more societally acceptable gender norms of yesterday. We must insist on clearing the polluted air around this subject!

Confining my treatment of the theme to what ought to obtain in a democracy, I use the definition of democracy sourced from [www.oxfordreference.com](http://www.oxfordreference.com), *a political system that allows the citizens to participate in political decision-making, or to elect representatives to government bodies*. I also relate to the definition of democracy as *the practice or principle of social equality; control of an organization or group by the majority of its members*. Leadership, on the other hand, is *the state of being in a position of command or influence; pioneering or trailblazing, setting standards and abiding by them*. According to [www.Forbes.com](http://www.Forbes.com), leadership is *the art of motivating a group of people to act toward achieving a common goal; a process of social influence, which maximizes the efforts of others, towards the achievement of a goal*.

Clearly, both the strength of the democratic principles and the quality of governance of any country or region may be impacted by several factors. A thriving democracy in which good governance prevails encourages and promotes equality and gender equity, the active participation of citizens in political and civic life, a system of checks and balances in free and fair elections, application of the rule of law in equal measure to all, respect for human rights and democratic institutions, accountability to citizens, freedom and freedom of expression.

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The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) underscores the essentiality of equality among women and men in regard to access and opportunities in political and public life, including the right to vote and to stand for election.

I am under no illusion when it comes to the real issues which challenge women's participation in politics. Indeed, I am reminded of the state of play when, eager and fresh faced, I stepped into the political arena in early 2000 to run against the then Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, a male with nigh two decades of seasoned experience under his belt, and who had theretofore rested comfortably in an unshakeable stronghold that had never before been lost to his political party. Notwithstanding the persistence of social stereotypes in assigned responsibilities at work and the discriminatory imbalances faced between output and income among women and men, even in the face of family responsibilities and the unequal yolk of the nurturing role played by women; despite the potential for hostility, demonization and mud-slinging; one thing was as clear to me then as it remains today: democracy is never optimally energized, nor afforded its best chances to thrive at its fullest potential if women are not active contributors to the discourse on the issues; are not part of the decision making processes at the highest level; are not mainstreamed into positions of authority and influence across the gamut of opportunities for establishing protocols and mandates, enacting precedent-setting legislation, setting political agendas, defining social, economic and development priorities, including in government, in civil society and in regional and international organizations, and in the boardrooms of corporate mega citizens.

According to a PEW Research Center article dated January 14, 2015 on social and demographic trends, a survey on the theme of *Women in Leadership*, conducted online among 1,835 randomly selected adults in November 2014 revealed that when it comes to characteristics that apply specifically to political and business leadership, most Americans did not distinguish between the

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leadership capabilities of men and women. Among those who did draw distinctions, women were perceived to have a clear advantage over men in some key areas: 34% of those surveyed thought that female politicians are better at working out compromises. In other words, and admittedly this is my take, 34% were of the view that women would be more analytical than their male counterparts in deciphering the pros and cons of working towards consensus, so that rather than allowing a situation to result in a stalemate, there would be a productive engagement that would lead to a real-life solution to the benefit of constituents. Although by a narrower margin, it was also believed that when it comes to working to improve the quality of life for Americans, when it came to standing up for what they believe in despite political pressure, it was felt that there was no difference between men and women. Again, drawing parallels with the situation in the Caribbean, I would want to assume that the same holds true in our political realities. When it comes to issues impacting the quality of life, issues which speak to how our families and fellow citizens are affected by social and other challenges, women would be the most unstinting in demanding and pursuing solutions. The survey found significant advantage by women over men on honesty and ethics, providing fair pay and benefits, and offering mentorship to young employees. Men had an edge when it came to willingness to take risks and negotiating profitable deals. But my female Caribbean perspective insists: far be it from me to be a judgmental male basher, because that I am not, but truth be told, Caribbean women do tend to hold ourselves to higher ethical standards in principled defense of our name in Caribbean societies, particularly so since a moral or ethical transgression of any degree is viewed as resolutely unpardonable when committed by a female, even if it would be considered positively something to be anticipated, rationalized away (nay, even applauded) when committed by a male.

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In closing out the survey results on the benefits to democratic governance of women in political leadership, it behooves me to provide the context that this survey was undertaken in the United States of America in which the 2016 elections pitted an articulate, experienced, qualified, dynamic female with proven, battle-worn mettle against a male. Despite what we witnessed for ourselves as we followed that eventful campaign, notwithstanding the obvious leadership qualities of the female, the results of those elections are seared into our psyches with all too constant flashbacks as we continue to endure its aftermath. It is therefore not surprising that, four in ten Americans point to a double standard for women seeking to climb to the highest levels of either politics or business, where they must do more than their male counterparts to prove themselves. As the USA marches towards the inevitable 2020 elections, the reality portends no easy path forward. Despite the many multifaceted women of distinction across ethnicities and backgrounds who vied to be the Democratic Party's standard bearer, it soon became patently clear that the electorate and corporate America are just not ready to put more women at the helm of nation building, to be accorded in this case, the title of *the most powerful human on the planet*.

This has some correlation to the fight women political leaders in the Caribbean face, though not quite as world-stage melodramatic. Like Hillary Clinton who rallied, albeit unsuccessfully, to lead the most powerful nation on earth, women across the globe, women in the Caribbean, must not be deterred. Someone has to pave the way, challenge the bias in the status quo, break through. Tenacity and persistence must catalyze the change to which we aspire. For each one who steps a little further into the domain heretofore reserved for men, dozens must try again, and then scores, and then hundreds, as we chip away relentlessly while exemplifying the remarkable leadership characteristics highlighted by members of the US electorate in the aforementioned survey.

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Recognizing the critical complementary role which women play in systematizing balanced responses by government, several countries continue to explore measures that may increase women's participation at all levels of decision making, from the local to the national. Such steps include the crafting of legal and institutional frameworks to promote women's political participation, including proportional representation and formal or informal gender quotas at the party or parliamentary level, via election or appointment. In other instances, mechanisms and strategies seek to promote women's political participation, and to synergize collaborative agendas and linkages towards that end, including the strengthening of partnerships with civil society and the media. What then are some of the concrete deliverables of women's civic, corporate, social and political leadership for strengthening democracy and enhancing the quality of governance in the environment in which we exist?

In correlating decision-making processes in government with those in business, I gleaned the following from *Wall Street Insanity*, an online source which bills itself as a top personal finance and business website in America, and which listed among the attributes of women business leaders, a greater inclination for being change champions; a propensity for building meaningful, strategic relationships; results orientation; better communication skills; a keener commitment to integrity in office or in business.

As if to bear out the useful value-added of women in leadership, several scholarly articles, including by National Geographic on the role of women in governance in Rwanda in spearheading the laudable successes achieved as elected members of parliament, solidify the argument for the impact of women at the decision-making table. In the aftermath of the genocide, Rwanda's population was comprised of 70 percent women, the result of violence waged primarily by men upon men, decimating their numbers. Civic leaders and a significant percentage of the judiciary



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were wiped out, resulting in a power vacuum in the absence of the traditional male power brokers. Prior to 1994, women held between 10 and 15 percent of seats in Parliament. Engaging politically and proactively out of the need to rebuild, women stepped up as leaders in every sphere, including politics. In the post-genocide reconstruction that benefitted from their contribution, the percentage of women in politics rose to 49% in the Lower House by 2003. With women at the helm from the late 1990s, the impact of female leaders continued to bear fruit, not just for women, but in terms of far-reaching implications for all. The female empowered Rwandan government passed groundbreaking legislation which addressed real societal issues, giving women the right to own and inherit land, to open a bank account without the authorization of a male figure, and afforded special rights and protections to children. In other words, the majority female government was incisive, hands-on, responsive and results oriented, and became a valiant champion of positive change. Such demonstrated leadership dramatizes the stakes and the outcome arising from the confluence of the ideas and ideals of conscientious, magnanimous women who recognized the systemic weaknesses in a country that was at a crossroads, and seized upon the momentum and the mandate to legislate for the betterment of the entire society, in the process providing a teachable moment for men and women, and even more impactfully, representing a sphere of enlightenment and inspiration for boys and girls.

The country's new constitution (2003) included a quota system for women at all levels of government, by which 30 percent of all representatives, including those in parliament, had to be women. It prescribed for 30% 'reserved seats' in which only women could vie. Intuitively, women who were successful in those elections, having gained prominence and delivering in outstanding fashion on the opportunity to serve effectively, graciously stepped out of their reserved quota assignments and contested seats in the regular political arena dominated by men, in the process,

vacating space in the prescribed 30% for even more women to be elected per the mandate of the approved minimum quota. Such tactical exemplification of women as strategic thinkers and team players!

In 2008, 56% of those elected to the House of Deputies in Rwanda were women. As of 2019, [www.unwomen.org](http://www.unwomen.org) cites the percentage of females in the national legislature of Rwanda as 61.3 %. In contrast, the global ratio of women to men in national parliaments continues to take tentative baby steps in the right direction, with women remaining gravely underrepresented. According to the World Bank, the global average of women in national assemblies as of April 1, 2019, hovers around 24%, despite the implementation of some type of quota system for female participation in governing bodies across more than 75 countries. According to Rosamond Hutt, writing in an article of December 17, 2019 for the World Economic Forum, Rwanda was 9<sup>th</sup> among countries ranked for the narrowing of the gender gap, while the USA was 53<sup>rd</sup>. Broken down by region, the data reveals that Europe was most successful, followed by North America, Latin America and the Caribbean, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and the Middle East and North Africa. Rwanda as a case in point need not suggest that such success stories can only arise from the embers of catastrophic tragedies remotely comparable to genocides. The benefit of hard lessons from the experience of others must not be lost on us; we can then begin to appreciate that the socialization of our junior and senior males and females, and the dismantling of toxic constructs that influence our thinking must also be addressed if we are to reap the attendant gains of gender balance in civic and political leadership.

As women would in the search for solutions, female empowered legislatures, as evidenced in Rwanda, will be active, adroit, and objective driven. With sisters on board, I foresee significant and impactful legislation, including laws aimed at preventing and punishing gender-based

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violence, strengthening citizen security and preserving law and order, protecting the family and key social services, and tackling disparities in the labor force. Such efforts towards societal balance, fairness, equity, and equality work towards the systematization of fundamental elements which cumulatively strengthen our democracies. More importantly, the value to our youth and particularly to young females of seeing their articulate, assertive, efficient, zealous mothers and sisters in positions of influence would be incalculable, and itself engender a self-enriching process of affirmative osmosis in just the right dosage for the impressionable minds of tomorrow's trailblazers.

Rwanda is not, by any stretch, a country without its social and cultural issues. Yet, it is an example of women leaders demonstrating that they can handle with efficiency and with exemplary results the mantle of political leadership. It offers up irrefutable evidence that women are possessed of the heart and the hands to dexterously manage their personal and professional responsibilities, and to produce results which improve the lives of all of their compatriots. While there is still a lot of work to be done, as there always is in fledgling democracies, the outcome in Rwanda brings to the fore the significant causal relationship between women in decision making positions and the pace of establishing and strengthening democracy, and the ensuing enhancements to the quality of governance and leadership. This is but one example of the influence and the impact of women exemplifying leadership that speaks for itself, and which ought to symbolize a clarion call for such a template to be emulated with appropriate modifications as may be warranted in domestic realities.

In recent elections in the Caribbean, the rise to prominence of women in the political arena continues its slow drip. In Barbados, the Honorable Mia Amor Mottley's trajectory is indisputably impressive, from her earliest election in Barbados as one of the youngest parliamentarians in the

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British Commonwealth, through to her ascent to Leader of the Opposition Barbados Labour Party, and with an overwhelming mandate of victory in all seats contested in 2018 becoming the Prime Minister of Barbados, the first female to occupy the helm of her country and of any of its political parties. At the end of June, 2020, Prime Minister Mottley completed a successful six-month chairmanship of CARICOM.

I was honored to serve as colleague Minister of Culture and Youth Affairs along with then Minister Mottley after my election as the first female parliamentarian on a Labour Party ticket in the Federal elections of St Kitts and Nevis of 2000. I am eternally proud of my contribution, of the mentorship of youth which this afforded me, and of the many firsts accomplished during my tenure, among them the first and resoundingly successful Caribbean Festival of Arts (CARIFESTA) hosted by an OECS country (2000), the first time selection of St Kitts and Nevis as host of World Cup Cricket (2004) under my Sports Minister portfolio, and the formal recognition and revitalization of the Arts, including the rich, unique folklore and street theatre of my Federation. My truth is that leadership has more to do with action than with authority, and as an artist myself, I remain eternally grateful that my passion for the Arts and the grounding which that provides served to catalyze the natural flow of my own political participation, and continues to positively color the legacy of leadership I was honored to provide in the Arts, in parliament, in diplomacy, and in my ongoing everyday interactions.

In June of this year, Dee-Ann Kentish Rogers who had only a couple months before turned 27 unseated the incumbent septuagenarian Premier of Anguilla to be elected to government. Her remarkable victory at the polls, was a stunning achievement for anyone contesting the seat held by a sitting Premier, and even more so for a conscientious Caribbean female who fittingly and accurately qualifies as the embodiment of 'youth'. A lawyer, model, and athlete, she is no stranger

to achieving firsts, as the first black Miss Universe Great Britain and its representative in the 2018 international pageant. As a youth, a female, and a leader, she is well positioned to inspire and to influence her contemporaries and elders alike, and as Minister of Social Development and Education, she has the arsenal and the mandate to effect transformative agendas that will redound to the benefit of her people.

The online magazine geared towards advising aspirants on career choices, [www.learnhowtobecome.org](http://www.learnhowtobecome.org) provides some basis for optimism, however lethargic the pace, that indicators are slowly inching upwards as women stubbornly refuse to be confined to yesteryear and gingerly step out of former traditional roles to occupy seats in politics, diplomacy, construction, corporate leadership, and within the executive management echelons of industrial and productive sectors, as well as in engineering, sports, architecture, telecommunications, science and advanced medicine.

It cannot be overemphasized that our states are best positioned to effect policies and practices based on the rich complementarity afforded by both sexes, only when there is appropriate balance in perspectives and the treatment of issues affecting the demographical representations in our populations. Even with quotas, mindsets must change. Not only must men begin to appreciate the ideal of balance with women for strengthened democracies and the potential of joint forces in realizing set goals in leadership, women ourselves must accept at least 50% of the blame for the status quo and be proactive about effecting real change. We are perhaps as complicit in slowing the process of change as are men, in the way we demoralize our tenacious sisters who are willing to step out and step up, and in the stereotypical attitudes we accept in politics, and the ease with which we accept and condone less than optimal results in male dominated spheres.

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Education is fundamental! Edification of the minds of adults and children alike is a start, with age appropriate curricula which teach the rights and responsibilities of all citizens, including active citizen participation by men and by women at all levels. I would love to see that initiated in my very own St Kitts and Nevis, and most definitely in the broader Caribbean. The mandatory addition of civics to the curriculum across all schools, with certified participation required for graduation, would be a step in the right direction. If we are preparing future generations to be leaders then we have to inculcate through active pedagogy, practice, repetition, and reinforcement, the core values of leadership and the fundamentals of the constitution by which we are governed. We must prepare them to lead by making them fully aware of their own capacity as boys and girls to contribute to the development of their nations, their region, and their world. We must expect it of them, we must teach them to demand it of themselves. The curriculum must impress both boys and girls that society stands to reap the most prized social rewards when males and females have a voice, and that the formula for the realization of the goals of progressive societies is rooted in the ideals of open minded, pragmatic, participatory, and fully contributing members of society. This can only be achieved when we stir in them the noble ideal of equity as part and parcel of equality!

In checking the box for the impact of women's leadership on democracy and the quality of governance, we can be assured of deliverables including: diversity and a balanced appreciation of the issues, including gender perspectives; responsive, innovative action on complex social and other issues; giving voice to others, creating pathways to constructive civic participation through citizen empowerment; contributing to the broadening of the pool of ideas which men and women represent in society; efficient use of human capital in strengthening the public sector and national institutions as a catalyst for strengthening democracy; role model effect, generating increased

aspirations among girls, and greater educational opportunities. What is there not to cherish then in such a wish-list?

The World Bank's feature story of June 8, 2020, *The Global Economic Outlook During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Changed World*, predicts that the COVID-19 pandemic will plunge most countries into recession in 2020, with the largest per capita income contraction globally since 1870. Not only will the post COVID-19 world be a very different place, but we are going to endure the ramifications of the pandemic for many years to come. The United Nations Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, in July of this year, warned about the looming economic fallout and the ripple effects it is poised to occasion on poverty and wealth inequality. In a time such as this when we are steeling to feel the impact on food security, employment, tourism, and all economic indicators, our countries will require leadership that is even-handed, visionary, steady, and honest. Everyone will feel the effects of this pandemic, but the experts agree that it will disproportionately hit vulnerable groups, including women. Without making any deductions about what the current global leadership strategies on COVID-19 suggest, it is factual to cite that the countries worst affected by the pandemic are the USA, Brazil, Russia, Spain, the United Kingdom, Italy, France and India, coincidentally all headed by males. Conversely, the leaders of the countries which happened to have managed the pandemic with aplomb and remarkable success to date are all headed by females: Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen of Denmark, Prime Minister Erna Solberg of Norway, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern of New Zealand, Prime Minister Katrin Jakobsdóttir of Iceland, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and President Tsai Ing-Wen of Taiwan (*The Daily Hunt, article of April 17, 2020*). The suggestion has been posited that this is due to their innate strengths and their willingness to cast aside egos and to lean upon proven community based programs, and to employ the much honed creativity, collaboration, interactive teamwork,

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cooperation and communication that women have practiced as part and parcel of our everyday existence. These female leaders could not have achieved such successes on their own, and in the end, lives were saved through their exemplification of true leadership in getting the job done by acting pre-emptively and comprehensively, accepting advice and graciously deferring to the experts, and by resourcefully employing the most efficient means to protect their citizens. The impact of contrasting leadership styles that have produced dramatic results at the other end of the spectrum is also making headlines across the globe.

Dame Mary Eugenia Charles (born May 15, 1919 in Dominica), was the granddaughter of slaves who grew up to become a lawyer and politician. She was her country's first female lawyer and the first female Prime Minister in the Caribbean. As global citizens who are proud to be the sons and daughters of Caribbean countries in which our own leaders look like us for the most part, and who believe in the promise of a region which teaches that a good education can truly propel us to the realization of our goals wherever our determination, genius, and humility take us in the world. We all aspire to live in strong democracies that flourish under the leadership of the best among us, those whose ideals are rooted in fairness, who embrace the transformative value of technology, a sound education, moral principles, respect for law and order, and who stridently honor the social contract forged with the electorate. This would be far from a pipedream when citizens recognize and respect the contribution which each individual, male and female, must invest in his or her country. At least 50% of this responsibility falls to women as equal and competent partners for the realization of any such objective.

Madelaine Albright, a world-renowned American politician and diplomat, the first woman to serve as the United States Secretary of State (1997 to 2001), was nominated by President Bill Clinton, and confirmed by a US Senate vote of 99-0. Standing at a supremely confident 4ft 10 inches in



height, she has never failed to exemplify the attributes of a valiant, visionary female, manifesting in real time that gender and size are no obstacles to awe-inspiring leadership. I close by quoting Secretary Albright, who in her wisdom shared this invaluable thought with the world: *Development without democracy is improbable. Democracy without women is impossible.* To me, this means that our voices must permeate every discussion, must be the source of reason and rational thinking. The cause must never be overshadowed by the ego; it must be about the holistic approach to addressing all issues. We will not accept being confined to traditional roles, and we are as adamant as our male counterparts that we too can head large, male dominated spheres such as those that address infrastructural development, national security, foreign affairs, and finance. We would have no difficulty contributing across the board to any discussion on the equally important issues of healthcare and the wellbeing of the family, the cost of living, and cultural and social development, but we are capable of handling ourselves in any situation.

The selection of Kamala Harris as the Vice Presidential nominee on the 2020 Democratic Party ticket in the imminent US elections, already deemed to be the most consequential in history, underscores the urgency of the moment and the myriad prisms through which its outcome will be forever analyzed and assessed in the annals of time. Senator Harris is the first female of African and of Indian descent to stand for a major political party as its Vice-Presidential running mate, the first woman of color who has, characteristically for such phenoms, blazed other significant trails of firsts in American politics. She is no stranger to leadership, as a woman, as an advocate, a lawyer, the stalwart 32nd Attorney General of the State of California, and as one of the many democratic party 2020 candidates for the presidency of the United States of America who stood tall among the vast and distinguished field with a message that resonated loudly across the

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spectrum of race and social class. While the final outcome of these elections is yet to reveal itself, her nomination will prove to be the fount of repercussive waves that will become more of a process than an event; indeed such repercussions have already planted the seeds of ‘can do’ in the minds of many young girls fired up with ambition, hope, and potential. Whatever the outcome, Senator Harris has opened yet another door through which many other sisters, including those of color, have begun to envision themselves stepping without a hint of trepidation, determined to effect transformative and positive change.

This is 2020. Women are tired of leading from behind, of sacrificing our expertise, our skillsets, and often our truth in campaigning, coordinating, and negotiating to win elections for what is often a full slate of men. Having tasted what it feels like to come out of the darkness to lend our light to the building of our nations, we are all game! If you look beyond the initial fear of the unknown, or even the known elements of the fiercely competitive realms in which leaders valiantly pursue their goals, we must agree that women are capable, civic minded, multifaceted, willing, and zealous. In my poem ‘Don’t call me ‘just a woman’, I write:

*As the new age ebbs and flows I have plans great things to do, I’ve been there, and I’ve done it all, and world, I am ready now for you. Educated, confident, empowered, and boldly facing the 21st century, I am ready for you world... And world, are you ready now for me? Call me your equal, ambitious, competent, call me the equal of a man. But don’t you ever, ever, ever call me ‘just a woman’.*

From my vantage point, the days in which women were content only to speak demurely and carry a lipstick are well behind us. I therefore beg to paraphrase, ever so slightly, the quote attributed to

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Geraldine Ferraro, the first female vice-presidential nominee of a major American political party, that *some leaders are born women*. We have come a long way since 1984 when such a train of thought could be considered anecdotal or aspirational. It is quite probably as true now as it ever has been, that *most women are born leaders*. We are ready to take on our leadership roles. We have helped with it, we have planned for it, we have aspired to it, we have most laboriously worked for it, and we deserve it. We just need now to **BE** it.

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## **Caribbean Women of Consequence: New Leadership for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

*“They would make fine servants ... With fifty men we could subjugate them all and make them do whatever we want.”* Christopher Columbus

The Indigenous People of the Caribbean discovered a new set of conquerors in 1492. Little did they know what was about to befall them. The conquest of Indigenous Caribbean civilization and subsequent creation of colonial societies in which African women were oppressed fostered a socio-economic and cultural deficit in the Caribbean Basin. Colonialism brought patriarchy, sexism, and racism. Today we must affirm that despite this colonial experience, Caribbean women leaders have emerged to overcome the moribund ideas of chauvinism and colonialism, and the achievements of great women have stood the test of time.

Clearly, the emergence of women leaders must be placed in the context of the region we inhabit. The Caribbean Basin is the smallest sub region of the Western Hemisphere and a unique microcosm of human geography tied to insular cultures. To the outside world, the Caribbean connotes a blissful tropical paradise with easy going Islanders, stunning beaches and flora, and sensual music and sounds. Yet it has been a cultural superpower with its People playing socio-political and cultural roles far disproportionate to the sizes of our home societies.

One area of greatness has been the significant roles of women leaders in politics. Several women leaders pioneered in transforming Faith, Civil Rights, Culture, and Politics. Their impacts were on the grand scale, regional and/or Greater Virgin Islands. Two modern female leaders deserve extra review-- Ruby Rouse and Mia Mottley. They were cut from the fine cloth of political trendsetting, eloquence, and firm principles. Ruby Rouse lives in the Pantheon of our US Virgin Islands heroes and Mia Mottley currently serves as Barbados' first female Prime

Minister. They represent a model of leadership that we expect to see in its full expression in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. We must ponder - Which tradition(s) have these giants transcended?

### **Pre-colonial Female Leaders**

Caribbean societies had Taino women leaders or female *caciques* in the pre-colonial period. They belonged to the *nitaino* class and exhibited an early matriarchal tradition. In addition to male leaders, female caciques led various Taino societies in Hispaniola and Puerto Rico<sup>1</sup>. Spanish colonizers observed this tradition and in no time repressed and contained Taino political leadership during *la conquista*. In the Greater Antilles, the Taino culture became transformed into the new foundation that Gonzalez (1993) called the “four-storeyed country.”<sup>2</sup> Spanish colonizers altered the Taino culture and introduced African slavery. Through racial intermarriage and other intimate social contact, Spanish colonialism led to mixing or *mestisaje*. An African-mestizo foundation emerged in the first set of European colonies of the Caribbean. This new “creole” culture was the foundation of the Hispanic Caribbean.<sup>3</sup> Brurkholder and Johnson (1998) indicated that Spanish colonialism encouraged many young single men to settle throughout the Spanish world empire.<sup>4</sup> In the Americas, they cohabited with both Indigenous and African women, and in many cases, these non-matrimonial relationships were temporary. The Indigenous and African women who gave birth to children of mixed ancestry were left to raise these children on their terms. This changed the matriarchal tendencies by imposing single parenthood based on colonial realities. Two societal trends emerged-- the oppressed sought to maintain their traditional matriarchal tendencies regardless of the stability of male partners and overcome all socio economic disparities imposed by society.<sup>5</sup>

This early societal foundation provided both a continuation of Indigenous culture with newer European and African contributions. Van der Dijs (2011) discussed how this

amalgamation occurred in the ABC Islands particularly Curacao, where the Indigenous People married the Africans to seek refuge and prevent extinction (p. 31).<sup>6</sup> The European contributions were mainly tied to superordinate class domination and conquest. African contribution to Caribbean society emanated from the culture of resistance against European domination. We must note that the African influence grew over time. As Indigenous female leaders waned, African women became more relevant. It must be noted that the matriarchal tendencies of this early phase remained within the new culture.

Other European colonizers followed suit to create their own version of classic colonies and the African imprint became indelible. We must look to the pre-colonial African traditions of female empowerment or women leaders as another reference point to how the Caribbean Basin has created its own matriarchal traditions of the modern era. We must ask, where did we get our cultural reverence of matriarchs and queen mothers?

### **Matriarchal Power and Queen Mothers**

In the earlier Danish West Indies/DWI, the foundation or first storey of our modern USVI society was influenced by African culture directly tied to West Africa. Many Africans in the DWI originated from Gold Coast and there Queen Mothers played a major role in traditional Akan societies. In fact, many Caribbean societies have had strong West African socio-cultural heritage and the experience of the DWI paralleled that of the rest of the region. The important role of mothers in the Caribbean family was enriched by the African concept of “queen mother.”<sup>7</sup> Even before the rise of these Queen Mothers in precolonial Gold Coast/Ghana, Diop (1986) indicated that the Sudanic model of statecraft originated in Nilotic Civilization and had migrated westward to ancient Ghana.<sup>8</sup> This West Sudanic model was hybrid with features of patriarchy and matriarchy. As in Ancient Nilotic political systems, Queen Mothers existed as centers of

matrilineal descent, social power, and political counsel. In fact, at one period of Nilotic Civilization in the Kushite Civilization a set of female leaders or *Kandakes* were absolute rulers. Unlike Ancient Egypt, these Queen Mothers had risen to be independent absolute leaders 170 BCE to 314 CE.<sup>9</sup>

This Queen Mother model migrated west after the collapse of Kush. In West Africa, the Sudanic Civilization continued this tradition but matriarchy was under siege when Arab Islamic influences intensified after the 8<sup>th</sup> century. Diop examined the steady erosion of the West Sudanic model which provided some representative democracy for various classes and social strata before Islamization deepened. With this outside influence patriarchy gnawed away at women empowerment.<sup>10</sup>

However, traditional African societies upheld female leaders during most of the precolonial era. This tradition migrated to the Caribbean even if it was repressed due to **chattel slavery**. African resistance to slavery was intrinsically tied to struggles against the distortion and deprivations tied to slave family life. The powerful Caribbean matriarch grew out of the struggles against the socio-political and economic deprivations of colonial society. As noted above this repressed tendency to foster matriarch in Indigenous and pre-colonial African culture re-emerged during the long struggle to redeem Caribbean family life and culture.

### **Female Leadership Arise**

As Jung has posited the experience of a people may lay dormant or they have collective unconsciousness. When conditions allow archetypes are restored in a new form.<sup>11</sup> Caribbean matriarchy persists in the dominant African Caribbean traditional family. Some may classify many families to be *machista*-matriarchal which means many families have both patriarchal and

matriarchal features. In the more progressive version of this familial model, mothers are respected by partners and children, and are the dominant force in internal family life. Throughout the Eastern Caribbean, it is axiomatic that matriarchal prominence is revered. Nonetheless, although unquestionably dominant in family life, Caribbean women political leaders and captains of industry have lagged behind. Without doubt Caribbean women have been at the forefront of every progressive struggle in the western hemisphere. Where there may be a dispute is how the varying political cultures fostered female leadership. In the Virgin Islands of the United States, this question has been partially answered.

In the DWI era, a number of female leaders rose to lead major insurrections and protests. Queen Breffu in the 1733 Revolt on St. John; the Fire Burn Queens (Mary Thomas, Axeline Salomon, Mathilda McBean, and Susana Abramsen) in the Contract Workers Insurrection of 1878 on St. Croix; and Queen Coziah for the Coal Carriers Strike in 1892 on St. Thomas. These three major events demonstrate women leadership in the most important eras of our colonial past. Hall (1992) explained that during the 1848 Uprising in St. Croix, the Danes colonial authorities observed that the female insurrectionists were no less courageous, bold, or committed than the males. In that insurrection, leadership was attributed to men, i.e. John Gottlieb (General Budhoe), Martin King, and Robert Moses. Hall indicated that the decisive tactic was the threat to completely incinerate the town of Frederiksted. At a strategically located position beyond cannon fire, a large group of enslaved African women “with trash and dry cane leaves which, at the first volley from the fort they would have lit and thrown through windows and doors.” (Hall p. 220). The organizers of the Uprising knew that the lack guns and ammunition could be adjusted with strategic fires or scorched earth tactic.<sup>12</sup>



In the 1878 Fire Burn, the organizers utilized this incendiary approach with women leaders on a grand scale. The female leaders and insurrectionists were noted as being the most aggressive. They were not put to death due to Danish socio-cultural norms at the latter 1800's, but their notoriety was widespread.<sup>13</sup> Queen Coziah's stance on labor issues set the stage for subsequent labor organizations. During the September 12, 1892 protest by female coal carriers, they refused to load coal onto the steam ships and marched through the commercial area in Charlotte Amalie. They opposed the continued payment of worthless Mexican silver dollars. Despite the deployment of the colonial military and police to suppress them, the strikers won a landmark victory to get dollar for dollar which was their required compensation. The fairer as a weaker person is a myth for Caribbean women.

### **Heroic Women Leadership**

Every Caribbean society has its local Pantheon of female leaders and matriarchs. They are s/heroes to our People. One type of heroic leader is the modern incarnation of Queen Mothers. They have added to the earlier female caciques by upholding the best traditions of Caribbean society and culture. Amazingly, all of Caribbean women leaders have a few common traits. They are excellent communicators who can reach the masses. They have had the uncanny ability to know which practical societal ills must be addressed immediately. They were unafraid of patriarchal men, backward politics, and difficult political conditions. They were voices of modern Caribbean society, and they were able to speak to a global audience eloquently without a stutter or stumble. They were able to speak in the vernacular dialect of the masses. Not all women leaders were considered fiery queens per se but a brief overview of pioneering leaders who may not be well known today deserve our respect.

## **Rebecca Protten**

In the Caribbean, the Moravian church became a major force in ameliorating slavery. Rebecca Protten was one of its most important leaders exhibiting the qualities of steadfast servant leadership, courage, and skills at the height of chattel slavery in the Caribbean Basin. She was born in Antigua and raised in St. Thomas, USVI.

A pioneering Faith Leader of the Moravian Church, Rebecca Protten was born a slave and brought to St. Thomas at an early age. She was liberated by twelve years and quickly grew to be a Christian missionary. She joined the new Moravian Church which had selected the DWI as its first mission in the region. She quickly rose to a leading role due to her devotion to spreading Moravian beliefs, which were the most progressive of Christian theology with regards to gender and race at the time.

Ms. Protten moved to Herrnhut-Saxony, Germany where she became a deaconess after her marriage to another liberated African. With her husband they moved to Christianborg in what is now Ghana to spread Moravian beliefs and to educate Africans. Ms. Protten was one of first ordained African Caribbean women in Western Christianity and her work to spread Moravian beliefs were influenced by her desire to uplift Africans. Faith leadership has been tied to social justice and in Caribbean, some leaders cut their teeth in progressive Christian Churches.

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## **Elizabeth Anna Hendrickson**

Faith played a role in Elizabeth Anna Hendrickson development into a pioneering woman leader. She was born in St. Croix. A Civil Rights leader and political activist, Ms. Hendrickson was raised in St. Croix until 11 years old when she was sent to New York to stay with her aunt.

She was well educated and joined the Quakers, a progressive Christian denomination. Ms. Hendrickson became a prominent member of the Harlem Renaissance movement. She was a well-known street corner speaker and was involved in the struggles of the Harlem Tenants League in the 1920s. She helped to establish benevolent organizations, several groups in New York including the American West Indians Ladies Aid Society/AWLAS, and the Virgin Islands Catholic Relief Organization to assist Virgin Islanders at home and in Harlem. She also aided Rothschild Francis in establishing his paper, *The Emancipator*.

AWLAS was called the Danish West Indians Ladies Aid Society when it was established in Harlem in 1915 to serve Danish West Indian immigrant women. This was the only organization organized specifically for Danish West Indian/US Virgin Islands women. Ms. Hendrickson served as president of the Society in 1924 and 1930.

Similar to Hubert Harrison, Hendrickson was a well-known street corner speaker who used her oratory skills to educate and inform the larger public in Harlem. It was a Black metropolis, and African Caribbean people were part of a larger Pan-African demographic group. Of the Caribbean immigrants, the Virgin Islander knew more about the United States and its discrimination against African Americans/Black People due to the Territorial status of the Virgin Islands. With Ashley L. Totten she formed the Virgin Islands Protective Association to transform the living conditions of Virgin Islanders at home.

### **Edith Williams**

The struggles against racism, sexism, patriarchy, and colonialism intersected in the suffragist movement among African/Black women in the United States and the Virgin Islands of

the United States. Edith Williams was born in St Thomas and she pioneered in female athleticism, modern education, Civil Rights, and suffrage.

As an educator and education leader, Ms. Williams led in the development of modern K-12 schooling and encouraged school agriculture to provide “hot meals” or lunch for school age children. This was important to encourage learning and prevent drop outs.

In 1932, she was a founding member of the Suffragist League of the Virgin Islands. She served as the Secretary. With other courageous members, she sued the extant Territorial Government to implement the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment. Thus her advocacy for suffrage led to success:

“A landmark decision was handed down by Judge Albert Levitt, giving women the right to vote on St. Thomas. St. Croix women were franchised the following year. The women worked for enfranchisement through the courts. When the electoral board refused to allow 23 school teachers, all unmarried, to register on December 24, 1935, the teachers contacted Attorney Dr. Robert Clairborne and he filed a "writ of mandamus" that the women won on December 27, 1935.”<sup>15</sup>

This case had multiple achievements. In 1935, they won their case even before the Organic Act of 1936 granted universal voting rights to all men. This case played a role in empowering women to vote, serve in political parties, and lead in the Territorial political system.

### **Lucinda Millin**

The enfranchisement of Virgin Islands women was consummated with outstanding women leaders emerging. Lucinda Millin was born on St John and she too was a trendsetting educator. Like Edith Williams she introduced modern education. She even founded her own private school that developed the tradition of compassionate instruction, firm discipline, and solid education. Destitute parents who could not pay the required tuition never saw their children refused entry.

In 1954 Ms. Millin was the first female Senator elected based on the new unicameral legislature established by the Revised Organic Act of 1954. Serving five consecutive terms, Senator Millin was the champion of transforming elderly care and sought the creation of a modern facility for the aged. Although the Virgin Islands had created homes for abandoned, neglected, and orphaned children, there were none for the aged.<sup>16</sup> Her firm position in demanding modern facilities, health care, and social support for the elderly, especially those neglected by family was respected. The Government of the virgin Islands later built a modern facility for the elderly and named it in her honor. Other elderly facilities reflect the legacy of her work- Queen Louise Home for the Aged and the Herbert Grigg Home in St. Croix. Even more, her very presence as an active legislator inspired other women to seek elective office.

### **Ruby Margaret Rouss**

The woman leader for whom many Virgin Islanders revere was at par a female cacique and queen mother. Born in St. Croix, this pioneering Political Leader, Senator Ruby Rouss' adult life was marked by a series of breakthroughs. She was the first Virgin Islander in the Women's Army Corps (WAC), first African American woman to serve on General Eisenhower's staff, and first African American woman assigned as a permanent staff of Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe. After a 20-year military career, she retired from military service and became the first female parole officer in St. Croix. In 1973, she was elected as one of the first women to serve in the Virgin Islands Legislature in the St. Croix District. In 1981, Rouss served as the first female President of the Virgin Islands Legislature becoming the first African American woman to lead a legislature under the American Flag.<sup>17</sup>

She sought a gubernatorial role in the 1982 General Election but was unsuccessful. She was elected to serve a second presidency of the Legislature in 1987. Her bid for the Chief Executive spot inspired other women to seek it also. Her combative style of campaigning and firm, no nonsense approach to public policy was legendary. <sup>18</sup>

### **Mia Mottley**

As revered as Senator Rouss has been in the Virgin Islands, Mia Mottley is a living example of strong female leadership in the modern Caribbean. She was born in Barbados and is very much alive today. An attorney by training, Mia Mottley was the first female Attorney General of Barbados. She was first elected in 1994 and rose to become the Leader of the Opposition (Barbados Labor Party) in two periods: 2008-2010 and 2013-2018.

Due to her adroit manner of explaining complex financial and economic issues to the Bajan/Barbadian masses, she led her Party to a historic sweep of the Barbados Assembly winning all 30 seats with a 72% victory in the general election of 2018. Mottley is the first female Prime Minister in Barbados' history. Her forceful style of presentation and acute understanding of global issues have led to her receiving global praise. Already she has been honored with The Elder of the Order of the Golden Heart – EGH, of Kenya (2019) and The Order of Roraima – OR of Guyana (2020). She is a force to reckon with in Caricom.

In July 2020, Prime Minister Mottley has taken up the mantle of advocating for reparations for the region. This 21<sup>st</sup> century struggle continues the decolonization of the Caribbean Basin as chattel slavery and colonialism were common experiences for the entire Basin. As the Covid-19 pandemic renders most Caribbean economies death blows, Prime

Minister Mottley has insisted that the reparations movement takes on a greater urgency as it addresses the fundamental lack of capital in the region. The Caribbean reparations movement encourages strong leaders to present the logic of creating a new Caribbean Marshall Plan as Prime Minister Mottley has called it.<sup>19</sup> It is truly historic that a modern embodiment of an ancient archetype –the queen mother--is propelling the region to find new paths towards development.

## **Conclusion**

### **New Millennium Women Leaders**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has begun with women leaders in the forefront for socio-economic and political transformation. Mottley reminds us of the transition underway. The 20<sup>th</sup> Century was filled with political struggles against classic colonialism, underdevelopment, legal segregation, and overt sexism. If Kwame Nkrumah was famous for his adage, “seek ye first the political kingdom”, then women leaders have been Queens. In the USVI, female voters, campaign workers, and advisors are essential for all elected positions. Locally, women have won elected offices such Senate, Delegate to Congress, Board of Education, and Board of Election. USVI women occupy positions of leadership in every department, agency, board, and commission in the modern USVI government. Only the gubernatorial arena has been elusive, but time is on the side of the modern queens. Here, there is hope since the 2002 General Elections, women have vied for both governor and lieutenant governor positions in the USVI political system. The competing teams varied from the well organized and strong to the modest. Indeed, strong, ambitious women have offered themselves to serve in the most powerful positions in the USVI

Government in fourteen gubernatorial teams in five consecutive general elections in the new millennium. A listing of these gubernatorial teams is illustrative.

General Election 2002 Gubernatorial Teams with Women Members

**Alicia Chucky Hansen** Governor

Eddie Donaghue Lt Governor

Gerard Luz James Governor

**Maryleen Thomas** Lt Governor

Wayne Chinnery Governor

**Mary Ann Pichard Samuel** Lt Governor

**Cora Christian** Governor

George Hodge Lt. Governor

General Election 2006 Gubernatorial Teams with Women members

Edgar Ross Governor

**Lorraine Berry** Lt Governor

Adlah Foncie Donastorg Governor

**Cora Christian** Lt Governor

General Election 2010 Gubernatorial Teams with Women members

Jimmy O Bryan Governor

**Pamela Richards** Lt Governor



General Election 2014 Gubernatorial Teams with Women members

**Soraya Diase** Governor

John Canegata Lt governor

**Mona Barnes** Governor

**Wendy Coram** Lt Governor

**Donna Christiansen** Governor

Basil Ottley Jr Lt governor

General Election 2018 Gubernatorial Teams with Women members

Adlah Foncie Donastorg Governor

**Alicia Chucky Hansen** Lt Governor

**Janette Millin Young** Governor

Edgar Bengoa Lt governor

Angel Dawson governor

**Marise James** Lt Governor

**Soraya Diase** Governor

Dwight Nicholson Lt Governor

Even though the Delegate to Congress is the not the most powerful position in our Territorial system, it must be noted that since 1996, this Congressional Office has been won by an African Caribbean woman-- Dr. Donna Christiansen (1996 - 20014) and Attorney Stacy Plaskett (2014 - Present ). Delegate to Congress Plaskett is so popular that she is running unopposed. In the Legislature, the four women Senators were the most impressive in the 2018 General Election and have proven themselves to be worthy rivals and/or potential strong female allies although comprising less than one third to the Legislative body. Nonetheless, the new millennium augurs great opportunity for strong women in the Virgin Islands of the United States.

If a new explorer/conqueror stumbled onto our Caribbean shores today or in the new millennium, they would not muse that a handful of armed men could subdue us. They would be astonished that we are willing and able to tackle the challenges of the modern world. They would be compelled to say the region is led by women of consequence who do not shirk from making wise decisions. We must do no less.

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<sup>1</sup> For an excellent examination of Taino Civilization which reached its apogee in Hispaniola and Puerto Rico, see Irving Rouse *The Tainos: The Rise and Decline of the People who greeted Columbus*.

<sup>2</sup> See Jose Luis Gonzalez Puerto Rico: *The Four Storeyed Country*. Markus Weiner.

<sup>3</sup> See Mark Burkholder and Layman Johnson *Colonial Latin America* pp. 202-209.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Caribbean family life has been examined by a number of scholars. However, this paper will only point to the seminal work of Michael Garfield Smith *West Indian Family* as useful insights to how the various family structures of the working class or “lower class” in some Caricom Caribbean societies persist. MG Smith makes no overarching theoretical constructs but his findings show that non-matrimonial relationships remain quite common in the region.

<sup>6</sup> See Natasha Maritza van der DijsT (2011) *The Nature of Ethnic Identity among the People of Curacao*. Drukkerij De Curacaosche Courant NV.

<sup>7</sup> In Virgin Islands Creole or dialect, we call god mothers or matriarchs “nana” or Nen”. This term echoes the title given to men in Akan speaking societies as an honor to suggest social rank and authority. In the St. Thomas and St John District, it connotes matriarchal prestige.

<sup>8</sup> See Cheik Anta Diop *Precolonial Black Africa*

<sup>9</sup> For more details see Joshua Mark, “The Candaces of Meroe” in *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History* (2018). It must be noted that these Candaces pioneered African Women leadership, The listing is impressive: The queens making up the Candaces of Meroe were the following:

- **Shanakdakhete** (r. c. 170 BCE)
- **Amanirenas** (r. c. 40-10 BCE)
- **Amanishakheto** (r. c. 10 BCE–1 CE)
- **Amanitore** (r. c. 1-c. 25 CE)
- **Amantitere** (r. c. 25-c. 41 CE)
- **Amanikhatashan** (r. . 62-c. 85 CE)
- **Maleqorobar** (r. c. 266-c. 283 CE)
- **Lahideamani** (r. c. 306-c. 314 CE)

<sup>10</sup> Diop showed that the constitution of the Mossi state revealed a monarchical system that allowed the various socio economic groups to have power and influence at the highest level. As Arab Islamic culture spread in ancient Ghana, Mali, and Songhai, patriarchy took on a greater role.

<sup>11</sup> Jung’s concepts on collective trauma and how it is transmitted to descendants is useful here. For greater details see Carl G Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.

<sup>12</sup> The July 3-6, 1848 Insurrection is unique. It was successful in the sense that the goal of emancipation of all enslaved Africans was immediately proclaimed on July 3, 1848, with the use of violence. However, the Africans were prepared to fight. The bloodshed occurred after the Emancipation Proclamation by the Danish authorities using armed forces to repress the now newly liberated. Some of them had started to loot, plunder, and attack selected Whites. For an excellent account see Hall *Slave Society* pp. 199-220.

<sup>13</sup> An insightful analysis of the incarceration of these queens has occurred. See La Vaughn Belle, Tami Navarro, Hadiya Sewer and Tiphany Yanique, “Ancestral Queendom: Reflections of the Prison Records of the Rebel Queens of the Fire Burn of St. Croix, US Virgin Islands (formerly the Danish West Indies) February 2020. In NTiK

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<sup>14</sup> For an excellent examination of the life and work of Rebecca Proppen see Jon F Sensbach, *Rebecca's Revival* (2006).

<sup>15</sup> This important achievement was researched by Ms. Nancy Greaux Rabess. She extracted it from a *Daile News* article in 1980. She posted it on the French Heritage Museum's Face book page on September r 7, 2016. See <https://www.facebook.com/258176087713909/posts/mrs-edith-williams-the-first-stthomas-woman-who-attempted-to-register-to-vote-in/553822488149266/>

<sup>16</sup> The Danish Government led by Crown Princess Louise had created the first homes for orphaned, abused, and neglected children in 1904. The Danish Lutheran Church administered these homes. In the US Territorial era., the US Lutheran Church continued the program and the VI government assisted. See <https://lssvi.org/who-we-are/history>.

<sup>17</sup> This information was cross referenced from Wikipaida which sometimes err on fact, it is accurate on Rouss. See [wikipedia.org/wiki/Ruby\\_M.\\_Rouss](https://wikipedia.org/wiki/Ruby_M._Rouss)

<sup>18</sup> As a child, I was always in awe when “Ruby” or Senator Rouss took the Senate floor and spoke. No male foe deterred her. In an infamous hearing at the height of fierce debates on the Senate floor, she got up and pointed to her ample bosom and said “these are my balls and I have the biggest”

<sup>19</sup> PM Mottley is not the first strong advocate for reparations. PM Gaston Browne (Antigua-Barbuda) and PM Ralph Gonsalves (St. Vincent –Grenadines) were strong proponents. Her inclusion as a leader of the Caricom brings new energy and ideas to resolving chronic underdevelopment. . For an excellent explanation of her views see <https://today.caricom.org/2020/07/14/barbados-prime-minister-calls-for-a-reparations-caribbean-marshall-plan/s>

## Inspiring a New Generation of Female Political Leadership across the Caribbean

By Dr. Mutryce A. Williams

Historically women have been underrepresented in politics (Giles, 2011). It is often said that women are the backbone of Caribbean society, yet they are visibly absent from the benches of parliament and at the highest level of regional political decision-making bodies. One glance at the current list of heads of government of member states of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) provides a depiction of female political leadership across the Caribbean archipelago. Of the 15 sitting heads of government of members states that comprise CARICOM, only one head of government is female, Barbados' Prime Minister Mia Amor Mottley.

A full representation of citizens starts with the full inclusion of citizens in government decision-making. With a population of approximately 16 million citizens in CARICOM, half of which are women, why aren't there more female heads of government seated at the table of governance in CARICOM? With a population of approximately 16 million citizens in CARICOM, half of which are female, can this be considered adequate representation? With a population of approximately 16 million citizens in CARICOM, half of which are female, are the issues and concerns of all sectors of CARICOM's membership being wholly addressed?

Although a representation of one is better than none, isn't it fair to argue as the former First Lady of the United States of America Michelle Obama has noted that no country, in this case, that no region, can truly flourish if it stifles the potential of its women and deprives itself of the contributions of half of its citizens. Women's participation in politics is a precondition to good governance. For politics and decision-making to be truly effective women must be at the table. Everyone benefits when women are in power. You simply can't have one half of the

population making decisions that will affect all of the population. Decision-making must be thorough and inclusive to bring about substantive change in society. It has been often said that women and girls constitute half of the world's population and therefore half of its potential. Are we maximizing our full potential in the Caribbean, if only one head of government within CARICOM is female?

It is pertinent to note that Prime Minister Mottley currently serves as the Chair of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). It may be argued that this in and of itself, is a great stride in gender equality and parity for women across the region. It may be a great stride, however, is it enough? It may be a great stride, however, is it equality or parity at one of the highest levels of regional political decision-making? Although Prime Minister Mottley holds chairmanship for this regional body whose mandate is to promote and support a unified Caribbean Community, that is inclusive, resilient, competitive; sharing in economic, social, and cultural prosperity, CARICOM chairmanship is rotational. Prime Minister Mottley's six-month CARICOM Chairmanship ends in June 2020.

CARICOM's mandate speaks to inclusivity, this is absent in the composition of its heads of government. Is CARICOM's mandate being met, that is when the representation does not reflect the populace that it serves? There is no inclusivity if only one head of government is female, whilst 14 are male. How is CARICOM addressing the issue of inclusivity if only one of its decision-makers is a female? One may argue that this body of Small Island Developing States has more urgent issues to contend with, such as trying to achieve economic, political, social, and cultural stability. The question is, how can these objectives be achieved when one half of the populace is missing from the decision-making table when the full human resource of the Caribbean populace remains untapped?

## **Gender Equality and Parity is Important to Decision-Making in the Caribbean**

It is critical to have gender equality and gender parity at all levels of decision making in the Caribbean, particularly at the highest levels of regional decision-making. It was former UN Secretary-General Kofi Anan who said that gender equality is more than a goal in itself. It is a precondition for meeting the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development, and building good governance. Does the Caribbean archipelago meet this standard? If we are looking at the composition of the leadership of CARICOM member states, it does not.

Electing more women not only leads to gender equality but it strengthens the democratic process. Studies have shown that gender equality builds and strengthens communities. According to Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, when women engage in the political process societies thrive and grow. Studies have shown that if equality is advanced at all levels of decision-making that it will be better for business, for public policy, for men, for women, for children, for the family, and the overall welfare of society.

Evidence-based research shows that women tend to promote women and children's rights legislation. Women tend to focus on and sponsor health, community, education, labor-force participation, paid leave, and environmental policy-based initiatives. Incorporating women in decision-making is therefore not a choice but rather a necessity, as men and women bring different leadership attributes to the decision-making table. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe opined that with women at the table you will have higher quality decisions compared with those of only men. Women will bring different perspectives and lived experiences to the table. They will be able to inform on issues that are important to the underrepresented in parliament.

Historically, female legislators tend to use their power to enact poverty-reducing strategies as opposed to using it to control others or the political process. Women in government tend to lead more democratically as opposed to autocratically. They are more effective at building coalitions and consensus. We must question and deem it problematic that there is only one female head of government at CARICOM's table? We must question and challenge the structural, societal, political, economic, and cultural mechanisms and constraints that have and continues to prevent women from aspiring to the highest office in their respective countries. We must question and challenge the constructs that prevent Caribbean women from seeking elected office.

### **Caribbean women have been instrumental in nation-building**

Caribbean women have been instrumental in the social, political, economic, and cultural history and transformation of the region. They have worked behind the scenes to build a better Caribbean. They have worked earnestly and vociferously on political campaigns to get men elected. Their strength, influence, and prowess are touted the world over, yet they do not get adequate and fair representation in parliament. They are not encouraged and supported in seeking elected office. They are not comfortable aspiring for positions of power, influence, and national political decision-making. As a result, there appears to be a level of complacency as it relates to the status quo.

### **Caribbean Female Political Leadership**

Notwithstanding, the region has seen its share of formidable female heads of government since the 1980 election of Dame Mary Eugenia Charles of Dominica. Dame Charles lead the ship of state in Dominica from 1980 to 1995. She was Dominica's first and only female prime



minister, as well as the nation's longest-serving prime minister. She was nicknamed the Caribbean's Iron Lady. Dame Charles blazed the trail for other female Caribbean leaders such as Claudette Werleigh who served as Prime Minister to Haiti from 1995 to 1996. The region has seen the ascension of Janet Jagan who served as President of Guyana from 1997 to 1999. Michèle Pierre-Louis served as Haiti's Prime Minister from 2008 to 2009. Portia Simpson-Miller led Jamaica from 2006 to 2007 and 2012 to 2016. Kamla Persad-Bissessar led Trinidad and Tobago from 2010 to 2015. The island of Barbados is currently led by Prime Minister Mia Amor Mottley who was elected to office in 2018. This is evidence that Caribbean female political leadership is attainable.

However, in 2020, shouldn't we be seeing more female political leaders serving as heads of government? The question still looms as to why there is currently only one female head of government in CARICOM. Before we can address this question, we need to take a look at the political structures or forces that exist in the respective CARICOM countries, countries I must note where the composition of parliament reflects that of CARICOM. Across the Caribbean region, women do not hold more than 30 percent of elected positions. Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago may be considered the exception. In these two countries over 30% of elected positions are held by women. The low numbers of women who hold political offices across the region need to be urgently addressed.

### **Change of Attitude to Women and Girls in Political Leadership Positions**

Societal norms and expectations are barriers to women entering political office. Politics is still traditionally viewed as a man's domain. If we are to realize real change in the Caribbean we must change our attitudes toward the role of girls and women when it comes to decision-making and holding offices of power and influence. There is the perception that women are not tough

enough to be political leaders. There must be the sentiment that women can be as driven as, as strong as, successful as, socially conscious as and intellectually brilliant as men. Women can be visionaries. We must acknowledge that women possess the mettle and fortitude to make great leaders of state. We must acknowledge that women can be servant leaders.

Gender roles and associated expectations limit a woman's entry into office. From an early age, girls and women are taught to think that they are not as good as men. Globally women are wired to find validation through men, not to stand on their laurels no matter how accomplished or educated they are, the Caribbean region is no exception. Across the region, a young woman is more likely to aspire to be the wife of a politician rather than a politician. We have seen progress in this area where the spouses of the prime ministers of Jamaica, Dominica, and Antigua and Barbuda are parliamentarians. The hope is that this trend inspires a younger generation of women to aspire to elected office. The hope is that this will assist in transforming social norms and attitudes to women in politics.

Young women and girls must be taught to seek leadership opportunities and skills. They must be taught that seeking positions of power is a good thing. They must not associate the word ambition as being abhorrent. They must be encouraged to find their voice and use it not only to assist others in office but in propelling themselves to leadership. Young women ought to be taught the importance not just of academic excellence which may translate into a job, but that nothing is beyond her reach even elected office. She must be taught the importance of service and making a difference with the understanding that service and making a substantial difference can be achieved through elected office.

She must be taught that although there may be barriers to entry that these barriers are not impenetrable and that with perseverance she can go on to hold the highest office in the land. The

focus should be on inspiring and motivating young women. Caribbean young women need to be taught to aspire for real power. Teach them that no task is too big or too small for them to take on. Young women must be taught that there is no one path to success, that they can cut new paths and swim in uncharted waters to leadership. Political leadership is an area that they ought to take into serious consideration. This is where real or tangible change begins. They must be taught that leadership just like power and ambition are noble and noteworthy.

There is a quote by author and feminist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie which states that young girls are to forget about likeability. We have to encourage them to not aspire for likeability but rather to aspire to make a difference. We have to teach girls not to shrink themselves. We have to teach the importance of having a voice and using this voice to effect change in their respective nations and the region. This goes back to encouraging the young girl to speak her mind. This goes back to encouraging her to articulate her vision for her country and the Caribbean.

Young women need others to share lessons and wisdom with them. They need those who have held positions of political leadership to provide knowledge and illumination on how to navigate what may be considered a sometimes perilous and circuitous journey of politics. Caribbean young women need to know that they belong in the rooms where decisions are made. They need to know that they deserve a seat at the table. They need to know that they can be instrumental in creating better lives for themselves and others. This can be achieved through active involvement in politics. This can be achieved by holding an elected political office.

The sole aim of the Caribbean young woman shouldn't be serving as a wife, complement, or an integral part of the party-political machinery, but more importantly, the aim should be seeking and holding elected office.

We need to encourage Caribbean young girls and women to view themselves as viable political candidates. Women are the heart, soul, and bedrock of the political machinery. They are often referred to as the water carrier of political parties. They fire up the electoral base. They are the ones seen cheering at political rallies. They are the ones who serve as secretaries to political parties and organizations. They are the ones who go door to door campaigning with the candidates. They are the ones who do all of the leg work and keep the wheels of the political machinery or these political parties going. Caribbean women need to make a concerted effort to move the needle towards female political leadership. They need to get the political parties to recognize their worth and put them forward as candidates for elections.

Historically women turn out to the polls in numbers to exercise their franchise, but what do they vote mostly on in the Caribbean? Do they vote on issues? No, they don't. They vote based on political socialization or party allegiance. I think getting women to see that a woman who holds political office may, and I note may as this is not always the case, may champion the cause or rights of women. A female political candidate may put policies in place that would make society less patriarchal and more equitable for Caribbean women. Studies have shown this to be true. Inspiring and motivating Caribbean young women to seek political office is changing the current political, social, cultural, and economic environment in the Caribbean.

### **Making the Political Environment More Conducive to Female Political Leadership**

Seeking political office comes with much scrutiny. The lives of candidates are put under a microscopic lens, dissected, analyzed, and scrutinized. Many young women do not wish to have their lives, past or the lives of their loved ones put under scrutiny, hence they do not volunteer themselves for positions of political leadership. We hear the old adage, that to enter politics, one must have a 'broad back,' or be able to take the 'heat in the kitchen,' as this goes

along with the territory. The political climate in the Caribbean may be described as harsh, caustic even, and research has shown that the lives of female political candidates are often more harshly scrutinized than that of their male counterparts. They are aware that their mistakes or failures may be criticized and not excused. Many women do not wish to seek elections because of these reasons.

I must note that although women are aware that there would be scrutiny, a particular fear comes from the scrutiny that may be meted out by their gender. Some women still do not support a woman's aspiration to political office. A change in this mindset requires women to support women. It requires women to rally around women. It requires women bringing the same political vigor to the nomination, campaigns, and providing the assistance necessary to aid in the facilitation of election of other women.

### **Access to Education Alone Will Not Address Gender Inequalities**

Education is often promoted as a great equalizer. This is not accurate as it relates to leadership and in this case political leadership. Access to education alone will not address the gender inequalities in women or girls entering the political arena. At an early age, young women are taught to strive for excellence. They are encouraged to take advantage of academic opportunities. They follow the saying that education is the key, but what is not sold to young women is that education is only one part of the key. Statistics have shown that females outperform males in academics in the Caribbean region, yet this does not automatically translate to economic gains or political leadership. The heads of governments seated at CARICOM'S table is an example. The benches of our regional parliaments serve as an indicator. A study of six Caribbean countries noted that women account for a relatively high proportion of managers. In Barbados, the figure was 49%, Guyana 36%, Grenada 35%, St. Lucia 54%, and Trinidad and

Tobago 45%. Women tend to be more highly educated than men in these six countries but this does not translate to the parliament where legislation is being made, legislation that will affect all of the population.

### **Inspiring young Caribbean women to aspire to positions of political leadership**

Caribbean young women and girls must know that ascending to the highest office in the land is not only admirable but attainable. They are taught to hide their ambition. Based on social norms, ambition and aspirations are unbecoming of a woman. The prevailing attitude is that a young woman ought to know her place. Issues of governance and political leadership have been traditionally dominated by men. In 2020, with there being so many advancements in society, women populating the corridors of parliament should be commonplace in the region.

Political socialization in the Caribbean begins early. There is undoubtedly room for improvement in the areas of political education and political leadership exposure for young women in the region. From an early age, young women are encouraged to be helpers and not leaders. This narrative must be reframed. The dialogue should be that women are instrumental to nation and region-building. This can be better achieved by seeking and holding elected office.

Teach young women who consider careers in business, law, civil rights, and health care that their calling and fulfillment may be found in politics. Cultivate the dreams of these young women. Teach young women and girls to be determined and unafraid. Groom them for leadership. Encourage them to seek opportunities to lead within political parties. Encourage female leaders and politicians to pass on what they have learned to the younger generation. Effectively utilize resources from non-governmental organizations such as the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Caribbean Institute for Women in Leadership (CIWiL). Within

the constructs of political parties form an arm dedicated to grooming young female leaders, strengthen this capacity. Create a mentorship program within political parties that guides aspiring female leaders.

Although we have seen female political leaders in the Caribbean, their rise to power seemed somehow organic, rather than making an outright declaration to serve as head of government. Successful Caribbean women politicians have historically accessed the political sphere through family networks, informal connections, civic groups, unions, and women's organizations. Prime Minister Mia Mottley of Barbados has a long family history in politics. The Honourable Melissa Poponne Skerrit of Dominica, Honourable Maria-Bird Browne of Antigua and Barbuda and Honourable Juliette Holness of Jamaica have spouses who are the leader of political parties and heads of government in their respective countries.

We need to inspire and motivate young women and girls to become leaders in the Caribbean. Change cannot happen without the younger generation. Tell young women and girls that they ought to advocate on all fronts and not get comfortable with men leading the country. Caribbean women are capable of leading. Equal representation is a necessity for good governance. To realize change, Caribbean young women must be taught that they can change their country, the region, and the world through progressive politics. Our young women and girls ought to be encouraged to aspire for gender equality and parity at the decision-making tables in their respective countries and the region.

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### Brief Biography

Mutryce A. Williams, a native of St. Kitts and Nevis, is an International Relations and National Security Specialist who holds a doctorate in Public Policy Administration. She is also a political adviser, an educator, former diplomat who served on the UNESCO Executive Board in Paris France, an award-winning women's rights advocate, a recognized poet, and CariScholar mentor.





## **The Case for More Women Leaders in the Caribbean**

By Talibah V. O. Byron

*"It is impossible to realize our goals while discriminating against half the human race... As study after study has taught us, there is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women."*

– Kofi Annan, former United Nations Secretary General.<sup>1</sup>

### **From Whence We Came**

Despite the significant strides more recently made by women to ascend to leadership roles across the English-speaking Caribbean region, it is of vital importance to remember the tremendous obstacles which had, and still have, to be overcome.

Historically, women in the Caribbean enjoyed zero representation in the fields of either politics or business and commerce, up until the last few decades. And even then, women representatives still remained few and far between.

There are deep-rooted reasons for the exclusion of women from Caribbean leadership. The subjugation of Caribbean women cannot be divorced from the era of colonialism and the institution of African enslavement in Caribbean territories, all of which had as its foundation the myth of the supremacy of the white male. Not only was whiteness systematically reinforced as superior, but manhood was as well. Even after the abolition of slavery in the Caribbean, the

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<sup>1</sup> Keynote Address to the Annual Gala Event of the International Women's Health Coalition, New York, 15<sup>th</sup> January 2004.

repression of women persisted. Just as the end of slavery did not result in a sudden realization of the equality of races, so too it did not suddenly place women on an equal footing with men. The full dignity of women remained disregarded on a societal level, and Caribbean women continued to suffer from discrimination and oppression on the basis of their sex.

Catherine McKenzie, an early women's rights activist in the Caribbean, advocated in the year 1901 that women deserved equal rights and equal access to education. She declared that:

*“The rights accorded to women have left much to be desired. Just why woman has been denied all the rights which are accorded to man is one of the unexplained relations of life, except that it is man alone who has made the laws denying her such rights.”<sup>2</sup>*

In St. Kitts and Nevis, for example, women could not inherit or own property on the same terms as men could.<sup>3</sup> Women could not open a bank account or apply for a loan in their own name. Women were legally prohibited from serving on juries.<sup>4</sup> It was completely unheard of to see women enter certain professions such as law and medicine, never mind to see women aspire to attain tertiary education at all. Universal adult suffrage afforded all women the right to vote only in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>5</sup> Married women were considered the property of their husbands; and, until the year 1991, a husband could not

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<sup>2</sup> The Advocate, 10/8/1901, cited in Reddock, Rhoda, “Diversity, Difference and Caribbean Feminism: The Challenge of Anti-Racism”, Issue 1: April 2007, Caribbean Review of Gender Studies.

<sup>3</sup> Until 1922 when the Law of Property Act was amended.

<sup>4</sup> Until 1966 when the Jury Act was amended.

<sup>5</sup> In the year 1952 in the colony of St. Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla.

be convicted of raping his wife since he was legally deemed to be in control of her body.<sup>6</sup>

Clearly, the discrimination and abuse suffered by women was distinctly institutionalised, and to a far-reaching degree.

Women were not respected as autonomous beings capable of independence of thought and ambition. Far less were they respected as being valuable and necessary contributors to the nation-building process in equal proportion to their male counterparts, or at all.

### **The Movement for Caribbean Women's Rights**

It was left to women to rise up and summon the courage to agitate for the recognition of their own equality. As people generally across the Caribbean fought against oppression by powerful colonial administrations which were still in place, women also began to advocate for freedom from oppression based on race and class, as well as sex. To this end women participated in protests and riots, with some joining or even establishing their own organisations and movements to fight for change.<sup>7</sup>

A Caribbean Women's Conference organised in Trinidad in the year 1956 sought to establish a Caribbean Women's Association. Some of the aims of

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<sup>6</sup> Being married to one's victim was a defence to a rape charge until this was overturned in the case of *R v R* [1991] UKHL 12.

<sup>7</sup> Reddock, Rhoda, "History of the Women's Movement in the Caribbean (Part 1)", Feature Address to the HIVOS/UNIFEM Meeting of Women's Organizations, Grenada, 1<sup>st</sup> December 1998.

the Association were to encourage women's active participation in all aspects of social, economic and political life in the Caribbean and to strive for the removal of the disabilities affecting women, whether legal, economic or social.

The year 1985 saw the birth of CAFRA, the Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action. This organisation adopted as its focus the strengthening of the women's rights movement in the entire Caribbean and the diaspora, as opposed to the English-speaking Caribbean only.

### **Slow Rise of Women in Leadership**

Through determination and hard work, the rise of women in leadership roles slowly began to gain visibility.

In 1980, Dame Eugenia Charles became the first female Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Dominica. She would go on to serve her country as Prime Minister for three terms. Prior to that, she made history as the first female lawyer to be admitted to practise in Dominica.

Four years later, in 1984, St. Kitts and Nevis elected its first female parliamentarian in the person of Dame Constance Mitcham. Also in 1984, St. Kitts and Nevis became the second Caribbean country after Jamaica to establish a Ministry of Women's Affairs. Dame Constance became the first female Minister of Women's Affairs in the Caribbean (in Jamaica, the Minister of Women's Affairs was, notably, a man). In her new role, Dame Constance brought about tremendous advances for the rights of women and children in

St. Kitts and Nevis. Thanks in part to her skilled advocacy, St. Kitts and Nevis repealed various misogynistic, oppressive pieces of legislation that had been in place for many years before.

For example, the government repealed a law which required women to be dismissed from their jobs in the Civil Service if they became pregnant before marriage. The new Protection of Employment Act<sup>8</sup> also included a provision to protect all women from being fired from private sector employment when they became pregnant. There had been no penalty under the law for the men who got those women pregnant.

In addition, maternity leave in St. Kitts and Nevis was significantly increased from two weeks to thirteen weeks during Dame Constance Mitcham's tenure. Further, the passage of the Status of Children Act abolished the distinction between children born in and out of wedlock, enabling all children the right to have their fathers' names included on their birth certificates, and enabling all children to have the same rights of inheritance from their fathers who died intestate.

Moreover, upon the attainment of Independence for St. Kitts and Nevis in 1983, the new Constitution enshrined the right to freedom from discrimination on the grounds of sex. It is noteworthy that Dame Constance Mitcham, a lawyer by profession, was one of the drafters of the Constitution and was a

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<sup>8</sup> Passed in 1986 in St. Kitts and Nevis.

member of the official delegation that travelled to Great Britain for the Constitutional Conference on St. Kitts & Nevis' Independence in 1982.

Other Caribbean nations have also seen women rise to take up political leadership positions, as members of Government and as Heads of Government. In addition to Dominica, there have been female Heads of Government in Guyana, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Barbados.

However, while individual women have enjoyed periods of political success in their careers, the rates of women representation on a whole are still well below equity.

Although there has been progress from the days when Governments were all run by men, as of November 2018, 88% of Government ministers in the English-speaking Caribbean were still male<sup>9</sup>.

In the business world, there has also been some progress, though there is still a way more to go.

According to the International Labour Organisation, Latin America and the Caribbean is now the region with the second highest rate of female entrepreneurship in the world. Jamaica has been ranked as having the highest percentage of female managers in the world with 59.3% of all

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<sup>9</sup> UN Women, "Women in Political Leadership in the Caribbean", UN Women Multi-Country Office – Caribbean, Hastings, Barbados, November 2018.

managerial positions being held by women.<sup>10</sup> And in every Caribbean country where the data is available, there are now more female university graduates than male.

However, at the higher levels of business and commerce, men still dominate heavily. A staggering 95.6% of CEOs in Latin America and the Caribbean are men. And despite the many female entrepreneurs and managers in the Caribbean today, most of them are employed in small and medium-sized enterprises, in lower and mid-tier positions, and in support functions such as human resources or administrative departments, rather than in the strategic decision-making positions which lead to promotion to chief executorship and/or board membership.<sup>11</sup>

Only four of the twelve Caribbean nations surveyed by The Commonwealth had state-owned enterprises with boards comprising of more than 30% female representation. Those four nations were Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Belize, and Dominica. In terms of private sector companies, there were ten countries which had at least 10% women on private sector boards; and only two countries, Barbados and Dominica, had more than 30% female representation.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> "Women in Business and Management: Gaining Momentum in Latin America and the Caribbean", International Labour Organisation, ILO Bureau for Employers' Activities (ACT/EMP), May 2017.

<sup>11</sup> World Bank, "The time is now for gender equality in the Caribbean", 7<sup>th</sup> March 2018.

<sup>12</sup> The Commonwealth, "Women on Boards across the Commonwealth", 2015.

## **Why Women being in Leadership Matters**

But why does it matter whether or not women are able to ascend to positions of power and leadership? Is it just for cosmetic or aesthetic appeal? Does it amount to anything more than window-dressing, done merely to appease some vocal segment of society that wishes to see it?

The facts are that women in leadership roles actually create positive impact and effect meaningful change. When women are placed in leadership, there is marked economic progress, there is stability as well as improvement in governance processes both in the public and private sectors, and there is ethical propriety from the top down.

The International Labour Organisation surveyed 12,940 enterprises across 70 countries worldwide; 32.7% of those enterprises were in the Latin America and Caribbean region. Nearly 75% of all companies that tracked gender diversity in management saw their profitability increase when women were in leadership roles.<sup>13</sup>

The business benefits of greater female participation in leadership include “improved financial performance and shareholder value, increased customer and employee satisfaction, rising investor confidence, and greater market knowledge and reputation.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> International Labour Organisation, “Women in Business and Management: The business case for change”, ILO Bureau for Employers’ Activities (ACT/EMP), May 2019.

<sup>14</sup> International Finance Corporation, “Corporate Governance: Women on Boards and in Business Leadership”, World Bank Group, May 2018.



In the political realm, there is mounting evidence that when women are placed in leadership roles within decision-making processes, those processes improve. Women tend to work across party lines more than men and are more likely to gain bilateral support for difficult causes, as they focus on cooperation and collaboration, rather than on competition as men are inclined to do. And – as illustrated by the St. Kitts and Nevis example of Dame Constance Mitcham – women placed in political leadership roles work to champion causes related to gender equality.<sup>15</sup> Simply put, women’s rights improve when women are afforded the opportunity to lead in decision-making.

The economies of Caribbean countries also stand to gain tremendously on a macro level from the rise of women. As noted by Christine Lagarde, a pioneer for women in her own right as the first female head of the International Monetary Fund:

*“In some countries, per capita incomes lag significantly because women are denied equal opportunity... Women are more likely to spend their resources on health and education, investing up to 90% of their earnings in this way compared with just 30-40% for men. This spending creates a powerful ripple effect throughout society and across generations.”<sup>16</sup>*

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<sup>15</sup> UN Women. ‘In Brief: Women’s Leadership and Political Participation’, accessed on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2019 at <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures>.

<sup>16</sup> Lagarde, Christine, “The 3 L’s of women empowerment”, UN Women, 31<sup>st</sup> August 2014, accessed on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2019 at <https://beijing20.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2014/8/oped-christine-lagarde>.

Aside from sheer statistics and financial metrics, there is also a strong moral argument to be made in favour of women in leadership roles. Even if there were to be no difference in productivity or in profit, there is undeniable intrinsic value in ensuring that a society is governed by leaders in proportion to its composition. Greater inclusiveness equals a stronger and truer democracy. If women are half the population, then the leadership should reflect those demographics, even if the results would be no better. Representation by the people and for the people, in the fullest sense, is good in and of itself. Indeed, for these moral reasons, the United Nations has recognised gender equality as a fundamental human right.

Both the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights (UNDHR) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) have been ratified by countries across the Caribbean. These two international treaties recognize the inherent dignity of all women and call for the establishment and enforcement of the rights of women on an equal basis with men. CEDAW goes further and condemns all forms of discrimination against women and recognizes the equal rights of women to participate in the political and public life of society.

There is therefore not only a strong business case and good governance argument to be made in favour of encouraging more women in leadership roles; there is also an overwhelming moral imperative to ensure it.

## **Increasing Representation of Women**

How do we go about increasing female participation in leadership roles?

On the commercial end, it has been proven not to be sufficient to merely appoint one or two women to a board or to mid-tier managerial positions in order to achieve equity. At least 30% of representation in an organisation must be female in order to attain the level which is considered the critical mass required to effect real change. To have less than this figure has been described as mere tokenism, that is, only giving the appearance of endorsing inclusion while not being truly inclusive or striving for equity. At critical mass, meaningful and positive growth begins to be noted.<sup>17</sup> Of course, to attain real gender balance, however, 50% and not 30% ought to be the real goal.

The *Women, Business and the Law 2019: A Decade of Reform*<sup>18</sup> published by the World Bank Group recommends and tracks the abolition of laws around the world which work against the advancement of women in the business and commerce arena. It explores how the career decisions that women make are directed influenced by the laws of the land.

Many laws and regulations around the world, and in the Caribbean region, still continue to discriminate against women, preventing them either from entering the workforce or moving up the ranks. At this time, the global average score is 74.71, which indicates that on average a country provides women with only

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<sup>17</sup> International Labour Organisation, "Women in Business and Management: The business case for change", ILO Bureau for Employers' Activities (ACT/EMP), May 2019.

<sup>18</sup> World Bank Group, Washington DC, 2019.

75% of the rights of men in the eight areas that are measured. For St. Kitts and Nevis, the score is 68.13, somewhat below the global average.

As the Report demonstrates, when there is greater equality of opportunity for women, more women tend to work and are paid better. Where this occurs, the opportunity for more women to rise up to leadership steadily increases. It is therefore crucial that legal frameworks are continually reviewed to eliminate all forms of discriminatory measures that are designed to keep women on an unequal footing with men in the business world.

With respect to systems of governance, the Commonwealth (Latimer House) Principles outline commitments which countries have made. The Principles recognise that “redress of gender imbalance is essential to accomplish full and equal rights in society and to achieve true human rights.” Principle IV on ‘Women in Parliament’ calls for countries to improve the numbers of women members in parliament and sets guidelines to be followed in order to accomplish this, such as undertaking proactive searches for potential candidates and encouraging men to work in partnership with women to address constraints on women entering parliament.<sup>19</sup>

Three years earlier, in 1995, countries around the world came together to adopt the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women. In addition to identifying twelve key areas where urgent action was required to ensure equal opportunity for

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<sup>19</sup> Commonwealth (Latimer House) Principles, London, 1998.

women, it highlighted concrete plans which countries should implement to bring about needed change.

The Kingstown Way Forward emerged in February 2004 out of the Fourth Caribbean Ministerial Conference on Women held in Kingstown, St. Vincent and the Grenadines. At that Conference, Caribbean countries reviewed and assessed their achievements in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action. The Kingstown Way Forward allowed countries to reaffirm their commitments to accelerate the pace of implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and outlined various recommendations aimed at strengthening the process toward the attainment of gender equality, social justice and development.

The United Nations further, in September 2015, adopted the Sustainable Development Goals. Gender equality and women's empowerment are described as critical catalysts for attaining the said Goals. Goal 5, however, speaks directly to the empowerment of women and girls. Target 5.5 requires that countries ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making.

In order to achieve more women participants in the various spheres of leadership, these vital documents should be continuously adhered to.

In some countries, great steps have been taken to encourage broader female representation in leadership in pursuit of the Beijing Platform for Action and other commitments. By way of example, the Trinidad and Tobago Institute for

Women in Leadership (TTIWIL) has as its primary mission the advancement of women's leadership for social change by empowering women to lead in public positions as well as in the private sector. One of its aims is for Trinidad and Tobago to attain 50/50 gender parity in government.

*“Train, Run, Win and Lead”* was the brainchild of TTIWiL. A rigorous eight-module training course, the initiative allowed women to sharpen their knowledge of the workings of government and gain skills in communication, leadership and gender-responsive policy making and budgeting. Half of all the female candidates who underwent the training went on to win seats in the 2014 local election, which were previously held by men.<sup>20</sup>

Legislation which requires gender parity has also had tremendous results. In Senegal, the number of female parliamentarians increased from 33 to 64 in 2012 after a gender parity law was brought into force in the year 2010. The law required that political parties submit a list of candidates with 50% female and 50% male as closely as this was possible.

However, just passing the law alone did not bring about this change in Senegal. A large-scale education and awareness campaign was undertaken to sensitize voters to the many advantages of greater female representation in parliament. There was also intensive training of female candidates in order to

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<sup>20</sup> UN Women, “Trinidadian women gain ground at the ballot box”, 27<sup>th</sup> June 2014, accessed on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2019 at <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2014/6/trinidad-and-tobago>.

build their capacity and better equip them to lead.<sup>21</sup> This ensured that more women entering Parliament was not for window-dressing; but rather, that the women who attained leadership positions were genuinely qualified to go forward and lead. With 64 out of 150 seats being held by women, Senegal came close to achieving gender parity with 44.6% female representation.

## **Conclusion**

Women have indeed come a long way in the fight for their rights in the Caribbean. As has been shown, however, there is still quite a way to go. With more determination and societal will, it is well within our grasp to achieve the goal of producing more women leaders in the Caribbean.

As society continues to strive toward gender equality, it is critical to bear in mind that while more women in leadership is the goal, resources must be channelled toward education, training and awareness in order to ensure that our female leaders are equipped with the tools required to maximise their full potential.

When women are finally fully engaged in decision-making and meaningfully empowered with equal opportunity, it will only redound to the lasting benefit of the entire Caribbean region.

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<sup>21</sup> UN Women, "Following elections, proportion of Senegal's female parliamentarians almost double", 12 July 2012, accessed on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2019 at <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2012/7/following-elections-proportion-of-senegal-s-female-parliamentarians-almost-doubles>.

# **Biblical Female Leaders: Trailblazers for 21<sup>st</sup>. Century Women**

**By Valerie Knowles Combie**

“Gender equality is more than a goal in itself. It is a precondition for meeting the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development, and building good governance.”

Kofi Annan

## **Introduction: Toward a Definition of *Leadership***

To more clearly understand and grapple with this topic on Biblical female leaders, it is imperative that a definition be posited to establish a framework through which this article may be viewed. A cursory look at a working definition of *leadership* presents approximately 100 different definitions, and those by no means exhaust the topic. The definitions vary significantly, based on the authors’ experiences and perspectives, but there are some words that recur, such as the following: “Relationship between leaders and followers,” “process,” “influence,” “motivation,” “vision,” “destiny,” “goals,” “communication,” “team work,” “values.” When these words are combined in the cauldron, what emerges could very well be the collective representation of all submissions. *Leadership*, therefore, may be defined as a relationship among individuals who embrace similar goals, values, and visions, and who choose to follow someone identified as a leader. The leader, therefore, uses his/her influence to motivate the followers to engage in team work to attain their common destiny. The leader communicates the values and vision of the organization through empathy and a sense of commitment to the process while coaching, delegating, encouraging, and supporting the followers. In essence, a leader needs committed followers who trust him/her, believe in the mission, embrace the vision, and are empowered to complete the assignment.

## **Types of Leadership Styles**

It is very important to note that because each leader is different, the style he/she espouses will be different. These styles are determined by the character and personality of the leader and the manner in which he/she uses the power inherent in the leadership role. There is a plethora of leadership styles as there are definitions. These styles range from the autocratic to the visionary with many styles in between. I have chosen to identify only a few of those styles, which resonate with the principles embodied in the female leaders who will be discussed later. Some of the styles also contrast significantly with the leaders’ winsome leadership styles:

Autocratic leadership

Democratic leadership

Laissez-faire leadership

Servant leadership



## Transformational leadership

These best of these leadership styles adequately portray the focus and passion of the Biblical female leaders who are the focus of this article. These styles characterize and distinguish between the motivating forces of leaders, separating the good leaders from the bad ones. Some leaders are self-centered; they ignore the potential in their followers by failing to seek their input. Consequently, they assume complete control and make all the rules. Their followers are more automatons who react to the autocratic leader. This leadership style does not allow the followers to grow or to use their initiative. On the other end of the spectrum is the laissez-faire leadership style where leadership is minimal and followers are left to their own devices.

The democratic leader, on the other hand, involves all members of the team in the decision-making process. Communication flows both ways and the members' creativity is acknowledged and harnessed for productivity. The democratic leader provides the environment for growth, intelligence, and honesty. This type of leadership style contributes to transformational leadership where followers' commitment is displayed in their desire for change and progress. Through the leader's trust, they are empowered to undertake great feats, which result in maximum performance and personal satisfaction.

There is yet another leadership style that, on the surface, appears paradoxical: servant leadership. By its appellation, servants are not leaders; they serve. How then can this be acknowledged as a style to be emulated? The greatest servant leader of all times, Jesus Christ, responded to that question when He said: "But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant" (Matthew 23:11). The servant leader demonstrates characteristics of caring, other-centeredness, empathy, and consideration for others. This is the leadership style demonstrated by the female leaders I have identified in this article.

### **Female Biblical Leaders**

Each story is usually told from the writer's perspective. Is there any wonder that the portrayal of women in the Bible is so arbitrary? The sixty-six books of the Bible were written by approximately forty men, inspired by the Holy Spirit. It must be understood that while the Holy Spirit inspired their thoughts, the words were culturally motivated. Those men were acculturated in a primarily male-dominated era, where the patriarchal culture dominated to the extent that women were relegated to the background. Men were the protagonists; they were the leaders. On the other hand, women were regarded as property (Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21; Judges 5:30). Sexual relationships, however initiated or consummated, were to the males' advantage (Deuteronomy 22:28-29; Leviticus 27; 1-8). Women were spoils of war (Numbers 31:32-35; Deuteronomy 20: 14; Deuteronomy 21: 10-15; Judges 5:30; Judges 21: 11-23). Adultery laws were more punitive to women. Based on those uncomplimentary statistics about Biblical women, it must have been almost impossible for female leaders to emerge. An examination of the *Holy Bible* shows that women were not identified in similar roles as men. Women were traditionally identified as daughters, sisters, wives, mothers, aunts, and caregivers. Their outstanding quality was virtue, as is espoused in Proverbs 31: 10-31: "Who can find a virtuous woman, for her price is far above rubies?"

While women's roles have changed significantly through the ages, there remains a vestige of the traditional perception of women's roles and their equal standing with men in the twenty-first century. Archeological findings, as well as the writings of early historians, portray women as active participants hunting, gathering, and engaging in work that is considered men's work. That seemed to have been the concept of owners of enslaved women who forced them to work as laboriously as the male slaves. With the advent of the Bible, written by men in the setting of a male-dominated culture, a patriarchal society, women were relegated to the second-class citizenry, which is comparable to invisibility. Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) may very adequately describe women's situation. While the book addresses many of the social and intellectual issues facing African Americans early in the twentieth century, as well as issues of individuality and personal identity, the concept of invisibility is very present. Women had no voice; they were ignored, subjected to the will of their male counterparts.

Biblical scholars claim that, according to the creation story of Genesis 1:26-2:3, Adam and Eve were created equal; they were "comparable" to each other (Genesis 2:18), and were given the charge to "[b]e fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it: have dominion over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Genesis 1:28). This attitude of equality, compatibility was evident, and this writer believes that it was God's manifest intent that men and women be considered equal and be treated equally. However, that status was of a short duration. Sin entered and distorted God's plan; consequently, women were required to be quiet and be heard through their husbands (I Timothy 2:11-15).

In His love and great wisdom, God chose to create human beings and endowed them with free will. He could have created automatons, robots that respond to His will, but He chose to give Adam and Eve the ability to think freely and make decisions. As a consequence, when they disobeyed God and ate of the forbidden tree, their roles were changed. In Genesis 3:16, God doled out Eve's punishment: "Your desire shall be for your husband. And he shall rule over you." That act of disobedience changed Eve's status from a "comparable helpmeet" to a subservient woman ruled by her husband. The consequence of her disobedience subjected women to male domination, which is perpetuated throughout the Old Testament. In spite of that situation, there seems to be an apparent contradiction in Biblical literature, where divergent portrayals of women are presented.

In her discussion of Biblical law, the former professor of Jewish Women Studies, Tikva Frymer-Kensky (2000) contends that there was a general assumption that a woman would be subjected to the "dominant male in her life, whether father or husband" (p. 101). The women, therefore, were regarded as daughters, sisters, wives, and mothers, denied rights to property or position, and inherited only when there was no male to seize both property and position. This denial of rights to possessions was extended to the British system, where primogeniture determined that the male succession would continue. Meyers (2013) explores this divergent portrayal as she explains the egalitarian concept when the women worked alongside the men; however, the emergence of politics and the monarchical construct elevated the religious life that was immersed in the Temple and the priestly roles. These automatically excluded women and relegated them to insignificance.

## **Miriam, First Female Leader**

Despite the traditional views of women, some outstanding leaders emerged and were apparently supported by their men. Women like Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, Ruth, Esther, Abigail, Rahab, and Tabitha spontaneously responded to the needs that existed in their communities and executed their roles with distinction. In Exodus 15, after the children of Israel saw God's miraculous manifestation of parting the Red Sea to create dry land for them to cross over into Canaan, the Promised Land, and the subsequent destruction of Pharaoh and his army, they burst into singing songs of praise and gratitude. Miriam led the women into singing with the timbrel and into dancing (Exodus 15: 20 & 21).

Her spontaneous act is one of the outstanding roles of a leader. *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (1978) claims that Miriam was the first woman in the Bible given the title of prophetess. That was primarily because of the role she assumed in the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. As a prophetess and a leader, Miriam "taught, admonished, and reprov'd" her people. On the occasion of the crossing of the Red Sea, however, she emerged as a leader who led the women in singing. She was "an inspired and talented singer and musician" (p. 573). A true leader is in touch with the community, sees the needs of the community, and responds to those needs. Miriam, therefore, assumed the leadership role by leading the Israelite women into expressing their praise to God. According to the Jewish policy, women were forbidden to speak in the Temple. Their husbands became their voices, but in the wilderness, Miriam asserted herself and led the women in praise to God. Unfortunately, her leadership ended in disgrace when she joined her brother Aaron in challenging Moses' leadership, blaming his Midian wife for his failure to consult with her and their brother Aaron (Numbers 12:1). A true leader should be open to diversity and inclusivity, a very important lesson God taught this prophetess and leader.

## **Deborah, the Prophet and the Judge**

Another distinguished female leader emerged a few centuries after Miriam. In a similar situation to Miriam's, Deborah responded to her community's need for liberation from the oppressive force of Jabin, King of Hazor. In Judges 4 and 5, Deborah, the prophet, was also a judge. Her responsibilities were both religious and political, judicial and militaristic. She, therefore, commissioned the army general, but he refused to lead his force without Deborah's presence. *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (1976) explains that Barak requested Deborah's assistance because he felt incapable to boost the morale of the people. He believed that Deborah's presence would show God's sanction of their undertaking (p. 330). As the prophetess and leader, Deborah rallied to the challenge and led her people to victory.

The fact that Barak depended on her is an excellent demonstration of his egalitarian regard for a woman. Under her leadership, the children of Israel overcame their enemies, and they lived in peace among their neighbors for forty years. As a judge, Deborah assumed an elevated role, which required her to interact with religious and political figures who would most surely be men.

## **Esther, the Queen and Liberator**

Miriam and Deborah emerged in similar situations, and then reverted to the background. Esther, however, rose to the position of queen who used her status to liberate the Jewish people from genocide instigated by Haman. *The Book of Esther* presents that story. Esther's rise to fame was the result of a risk she took. Having elicited the prayers of her people, she was determined to approach the king even if it resulted in her death—"If I perish, I perish" (Esther 3: 7). That act of bravery, commingled with her subtle diplomacy, resulted in her people's liberation and Haman's destruction. Esther's deep faith in God, her undeniable commitment to her people, and her unsurpassed bravery are hallmarks of good leaders. They acknowledge their dependence on God; they demonstrate a commitment to justice, and they take risks.

### **Tabitha/Dorcas, a Friend to the Poor**

Unlike her predecessors, Dorcas, the Greek version of her Aramaic name Tabitha, was a leader of distinction in her home in Joppa. Acts 9:36 says "This woman was full of good works and almsdeeds." She saw the great needs of the widows and orphans as well as those of the Greeks who had settled in their neighborhood, and she immediately addressed those needs. *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (1976) states that her good works were expressed in two ways: she gave her services, and she gave of her possessions (p. 242).

When she died, the widows and children displayed the garments she had made them as she attempted to meet their needs. Acts 9 tells the story of a great leader who sacrificed for others. Through their great regard for her, the people implored the apostle Peter to help her and he raised her back to life and presented her to them..

### **Roles of Leaders**

Sarathi (2005) identifies three roles of leaders as the following:

1. Envisioning
2. Aligning followers to their vision
3. Ensuring execution.

A leader envisions the future of the people or organization by creating a vision that will generate the impetus for future endeavors. Some of the most popular leaders in history have demonstrated that vision. Actually, the Holy Scriptures tell us "Where there is no vision the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18). Is it surprising that the most successful leaders are visionaries who project their plans into the future and with clear insights, they orchestrate that plan so clearly that the followers are mesmerized into that vision and claim it as their own?

This vision must be embraced by the followers who buy into it, which becomes their vision as well. Thus, they disseminate that vision to others who become partakers of that plan. Those who buy into the plan become the emissaries that promote it and convert others to the vision. So that they, too, become partakers of the plan.

The leader sees the vision to its execution by his/her influence to convince followers who have embraced the vision to act on it for its actualization. This is the model demonstrated by the female leaders discussed. Each woman persisted to the end of her assigned task, fulfilling her

wish for her people. The commitment of their followers was displayed in their desire for change and progress. Through the leaders' trust, the followers were empowered to undertake great feats, which resulted in maximum performance and personal satisfaction.

### **Differences between Male and Female Leaders**

In his multi-million bestseller *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* (1992), author John Gray emphasized a premise that had been debated for ages. The fact that men and women are different in more ways that some people want to admit, is a foregone conclusion. The emotional differences are as distinct as are their physical differences, and so are their leadership styles. This question is still being debated, especially since a 2006 study by Mann Hyunh (2008) claimed that there are no "significant differences in leadership styles between the sexes." The author, however, concedes that "the low p-values in the tests" done led him to accept the fact that "gender does play a role in leadership style" (Kuchynkova, 2018). The fact that women have a penchant for "delegating" and "coaching" must be considered when men tend to lean more toward "directing" and "supporting" (Kuchynkova, 2018). Therefore, female leaders are more often categorized as democratic leaders who apply coaching methods as they engage their team into transforming their work places. These leaders are more inclined to be servant leaders.

According to the *Harvard Business Review* (2016), there is a very small percentage of women in management roles among Fortune 500 Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) and other executives, despite the fact that empirical research demonstrates that women possess the requisite qualities for leadership (Garfinkle, 2019). It may appear that women's penchant for cooperation and team building among their followers are to their detriment. Their nurturing, caring, self-defacing characteristics do not contribute to their upward mobility.

### **Conclusion**

As has been shown, female leadership in the Bible occurred when male leadership failed or was absent. Both Miriam and Deborah were religious leaders. Miriam acted in a secondary role, where she supported her brothers Moses, the appointed deliverer of the children of Israel, and Aaron, his spokesman. Ultimately, she was responsible to Moses. Deborah, on the other hand, assumed the primary role at the request of the commanding officer, Barak. In Miriam's leadership, her spontaneity projected her to the forefront when Moses, Aaron, or other male leaders failed to assert themselves.

In Deborah's call to leadership, the male commander of the forces felt inadequate to undertake the mission, and he insisted on the prophetess and judge accompanying him. In answering the challenge, Deborah was used by God to deliver His people from their enemy.

Esther's accession to the Medo-Persian throne as the wife of King Ahasuerus (Xerxes) was serendipitous to some, but God-ordained to others. Her cousin and foster father, Mordecai, asked ". . . and who knows whether you are come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14). Her faith in God led her to elicit the prayers of her maids while she risked her life in approaching the king uninvited.

Tabitha (Dorcas) engaged in a different pursuit. She was not a prophetess, a judge, or a queen; she was a woman who saw a need in her community, and responded to that need. She helped the poor by clothing them and meeting their physical needs. In so doing, she created a cohort of people who loved her and were grateful for her kind deeds.

The Biblical portrayal of female leadership sends a very strong message that in God's plan, both male and female are essential to fulfilling His mission (Clifford, 2018). In his teachings on leadership, Peter Drucker, the Father of Modern Management, acknowledged the importance of leadership. He believed that the leader's character, positive role model, and motivation are instrumental in transforming people and organizations (Riggio, 2009). Miriam, Deborah, Esther, and Tabitha all succeeded as leaders because they embraced the potential of others. They realized that as leaders, their success depended on their followers' assistance. Drucker believed that as a leader, each person can make a difference, but the success of the mission depends highly on the assistance and expertise of others. In addressing leaders, he stated emphatically: “. . . Regardless of your own abilities, there are many important goals that you cannot attain without the help of others” (Cohen, 2009).

Female Biblical leaders emerged when they were needed. They have blazed the trail for female leaders through the centuries. The late Kofi Annan summarized it best in his quotation at the beginning of this article, which proves that female leaders should be accepted and expected to perform as effectively as male leaders. The term “female leaders,” while somewhat disconcerting, should help all to accept women as leaders, as men are and should not be an anachronism.

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parties. Encourage female leaders and politicians to pass on what they have learned to the younger generation. Effectively utilize resources from non-governmental organizations such as the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Caribbean Institute for Women in Leadership (CIWiL). Within the constructs of political parties form an arm dedicated to grooming young female leaders, strengthen this capacity. Create a mentorship program within political parties that guides aspiring female leaders.

Although we have seen female political leaders in the Caribbean, their rise to power seemed somehow organic, rather than making an outright declaration to serve as head of government. Successful Caribbean women politicians have historically accessed the political sphere through family networks, informal connections, civic groups, unions, and women’s organizations. Prime Minister Mia Mottley of Barbados has a long family history in politics. The Honourable Melissa Poponne Skerrit of Dominica, Honourable Maria-Bird Browne of Antigua and Barbuda and Honourable Juliette Holness of Jamaica have spouses who are the leader of political parties and heads of government in their respective countries.

We need to inspire and motivate young women and girls to become leaders in the Caribbean. Change cannot happen without the younger generation. Tell young women and girls that they ought to advocate on all fronts and not get comfortable with men leading the country. Caribbean women are capable of leading. Equal representation is a necessity for good governance. To realize change, Caribbean young women must be taught that they can change their country, the region, and the world through progressive politics. Our young women and girls ought to be encouraged to aspire for gender equality and parity at the decision-making tables in their respective countries and the region.

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*Answers to Crossword 2020,  
Women Leaders in the Caribbean,  
on page 21*

