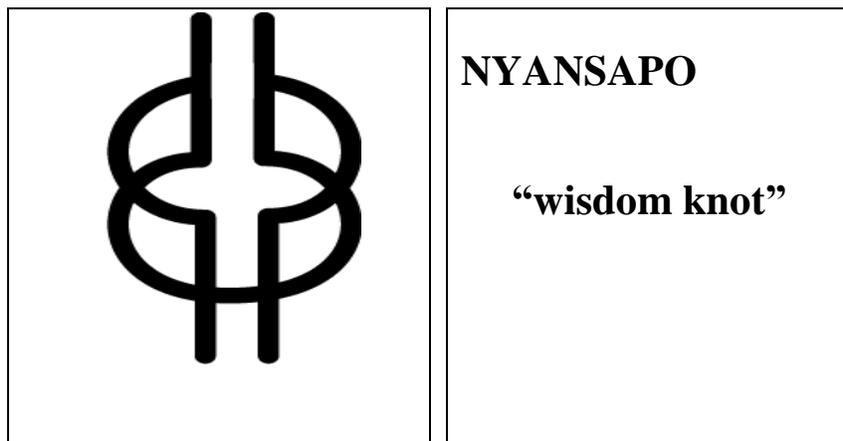




WOMEN'S DAY (March is Women's History Month)

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I. The History/Historical Documents Section

As a response to the need for presence of women's leadership in the Black church, in 1907 Nannie Helen Burroughs instituted *Women's Day*. Although it was said to be a day for women's missionary work, her initiative included raising women and offering this day as an opportunity for women to learn to speak for themselves.¹ Today we celebrate and honor women whose presence, voice, and most importantly their wisdom built confidence, hope, and courage for all who dared to see and listen.

Wise women build through their commitment to God, to themselves, to their families, churches, communities, and the world. The valued NYANSAPO, or "wisdom knot," is an Akan symbol of wisdom, ingenuity, intelligence, and patience. The symbol conveys the idea that "a wise person has the capacity to choose the best means to attain a goal. Being wise implies broad knowledge, learning and experience, and the ability to apply such faculties to practical ends."² Mary McLeod Bethune, through her formation of the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW), embodies the wisdom knot as she brought organizations together to capitalize on the capacity of 28 national women leaders harnessing the collective power that would affect change for women of African descent locally and nationally.

This idea of harnessing collective power as a means of building is a biblical concept. The Hebrew translates Proverbs 14:1(our Scripture for today) as, "The wisdom of women builds her house, but the foolish tears it down with her own hands." Bethune's vision was for the NCNW to "function as a clearinghouse, facilitating networking and coalition-building, and advocating the use of collective power on issues affecting women, their families and communities."³ As seen in its legacy, the collective wisdom of women's words, witness, and worship has built and continues to build strong families, churches, and communities. The collective wisdom of mothers, whether birth or spiritual mothers, sisters, aunts, or grandmothers is imperative to promote development of the next generation of women leaders. Participating in the collective wisdom of women to enact change, Dorothy Height remarks, "As I reflect on the hope and challenges facing women in the 21st century, I am also reminded of the protracted struggles of African-American women who joined together as SISTERS in 1935 in response to Mrs. Bethune's call. It was an opportunity to deal creatively with the fact that Black women stood outside of America's mainstream of opportunity, influence and power."⁴ Height's image of collective wisdom offers hope in what lies ahead for women of African descent as we join our gifts, capacities, and resources, forming a wisdom knot in an effort to strengthen our homes, families, churches, communities, and the world.

Let us intentionally and consciously build our house and not tear down the very thing we are trying to build. We are intentional as we adhere to Bethune's legacy of responsibility to our people. Bethune leaves us with these words, "The world around us really belongs to our youth, for youth will take over its future management. Our children must never lose their zeal for building a better world. They must not be discouraged from aspiring toward greatness, for they are the leaders of tomorrow. Nor must they forget that the masses of our people are still

underprivileged, ill-housed, impoverished and victimized by discrimination. We have powerful potential in our youth, and we must have the courage to change old ideas and practices so that we may direct their power toward good ends.”⁵

II. Autobiographical or Biographical Stories/Personal Testimonies

Civil rights activist Septima Poinsette Clark once said, “To me social justice is not a matter of money, but of will, not a problem for the economist as much as the task for the patriot; to me its accomplishment requires leadership and community action rather than monetary investment.”⁶

There were a number of Black women who responded to the cry for social justice, each offering their leadership and using their influence to call the community to action during the civil rights movement. The following are images of what Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, in her book *If It Wasn't for the Women*, calls “community mothers.” Gilkes notes, “Mothers in community work have carried on the roles of elders in traditional West African societies where accumulated wisdom is power. Community mothers were living links to the heroes and heroines of earlier eras and are guardians of community political traditions.”⁷ The following were community mothers and wise women who built their house, families, churches, communities, and the world by their words, through their witness, and in their worship.



Septima Poinsette Clark (1898–1987)

Often called the “*Grandmother or Queen Mother*” of American civil rights, Mrs. Clark was an educator and civil rights activist. Her own experience of racial discrimination, due to her inability to teach in public schools as a Black woman, fueled her pursuit of equality as she established literacy and citizenship schools, which also aided in voting rights for African Americans.⁸ The citizenship schools were transferred under the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Clark became its Director of Education and

teaching. Dr. Marcia Riggs notes, “In the decade that preceded the civil rights movement, she taught at the Highlander Folk School, which was an incubator and training center for social change and civil disobedience. Clark’s workshops prepared the peaceful warriors who would form the ranks of the protestors of the sixties. One famous student, Rosa Parks stepped into history when she put her lesson in civil disobedience into use on a segregated bus.”⁹ Clark received the Living Legacy Award in 1979 from U.S. President Jimmy Carter and the Drum Major for Justice Award from the SCLC.



Dorothy Height (1912–2010)

Named by the Washington Post as a founding matriarch of the U.S. civil rights movement,¹⁰ Mrs. Height was affectionately called the “*Godmother*” of civil rights. Height was a civil rights and women’s rights activist focused primarily on improving the circumstances of and opportunities for African American women. For 40 years, she served as president of the National Council of Negro Women, Inc. (NCNW), leading them through the civil rights movement and building the organization’s capacity in the area of funding, thus being able to undertake major projects such as establishing a national headquarters building for NCNW. She worked for the YMCA, fighting for better working conditions for black domestic workers.

She also served as president of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. from 1946 to 1957. Later, in the 1990s, she drew young people into her cause in the war against drugs, illiteracy, and unemployment. The numerous honors bestowed upon her include the Presidential Medal of Freedom (1994) and the Congressional Gold Medal (2004).¹¹

Click this link to see a tribute to Mrs. Dorothy Height.

YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7sCEZqPRB2o&NR=1>



Rosa Parks (1913–2005)

Rosa Parks, “*Mother*” of the civil rights movement, was born on February 4, 1913, in Tuskegee, Alabama. She began her involvement in the civil rights movement through the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and participated in the Highlander Folk School, receiving training from Septima Clark. Her refusal to surrender her seat to a white passenger on a Montgomery, Alabama, bus spurred a citywide boycott. The city of Montgomery had no choice but to lift the law requiring segregation on public buses. In 1987, along with Elaine Eason Steele, a longtime friend, she founded the Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self-Development. The Institute runs the “*Pathways to Freedom*” bus tours, introducing young

people to important civil rights and Underground Railroad sites throughout the country. Rosa Parks received many awards including NAACP’s highest award, Spingarn Medal, the Martin Luther King, Jr. Award, the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Bill Clinton, and the Congressional Gold Medal, the highest award given by the U.S. legislative branch.¹²



Rev. Dr. Jacquelyn Grant (1948–)

Dr. Grant is a *Community Mother* well known for her commitment to building stronger communities and churches as she develops black

women for inclusion in the life and work of the church and larger society. As a conduit of development, Grant founded the Center for Black Women in Church and Society at the Interdenominational Theological Center (Atlanta, GA) in 1981. There she continues to serve as director and professor, also mentoring numerous Black women through one of her initiatives, Black Women in Ministerial Leadership Program. Through her wisdom, cohorts of women are learning to harness their collective wisdom to build stronger families, communities, and churches that will influence future generations. Grant has written or edited several books, including White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response and Perspectives on Womanist Theology. In 1986, Grant received the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Ministry Award.

III. Poetry and Proverbs

May the following poem be our prayer, as we seek to build stronger families, churches, and communities that influence the world.

Heart Prints

Author unknown

Whatever our hands touch,
We leave fingerprints!
On walls, on furniture
On doorknobs, dishes, books.
There's no escape.
As we touch, we leave our identity.

Wherever I go today
Help me leave heart prints!
Heart prints of compassion
Of understanding and love.

Heart prints of kindness
And genuine concern.
May my heart touch a lonely neighbor
Or a runaway daughter
Or an anxious mother
Or perhaps an aged grandfather.

Send me out today,
To leave heart prints.
And if someone should say,
"I felt your touch,"

May they also sense the love
that is deep within my heart.

Maya Angelou's poem "Still I Rise" reminds women of both their God-given ability and their ancestral legacy of rising above obstacles that might hinder their destiny and the destinies of those to soon follow.

Still I Rise

by Maya Angelou

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may tread me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops.
Weakened by my soulful cries.

Does my haughtiness offend you?
Don't you take it awful hard
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines
Diggin' in my own back yard.

You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?
Does it come as a surprise
That I dance like I've got diamonds
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise
Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.
Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise
I rise
I rise.

Hear Ms. Angelou read the poem by clicking the following link.

YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N_xCbYynW3c&feature=related

An African proverb states, "Wisdom does not come overnight." I am sure many would agree with this proverb, for wisdom is birthed through struggle, yet emerges as something admirable and worthy of our attention. The following image can be used for a bulletin cover as it represents the ability to rise amidst the hard circumstances of life. It also reminds us that someone is always watching and learning from how you choose to rise.



IV. Songs That Speak to the Moment

The wisdom to which Proverbs 14:1 refers is derived from a natural or divine source. The hymns “’Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus” and “Sweet Hour of Prayer” remind us of the strength and agility that results from the wisdom of turning to Jesus as our community mothers have taught us. When we understand our need both to spend time in prayer and the need to trust in Jesus, then we can be sustained as we take risks that propel us forward into our destiny as daughters of the Most High God. “My Redeemer Lives” provides the reason for our anchoring and living hope as we, together, seek victory in building strong families, communities, and churches.

’Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus¹³

’Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus
Just to take Him at His Word;
Just to rest upon His promise,
And to know, “Thus saith the Lord!”

Refrain:

Jesus, Jesus, how I trust Him!
How I’ve proved Him o’er and o’er;
Jesus, Jesus, precious Jesus!
Oh, for grace to trust Him more!

Oh, how sweet to trust in Jesus,
Just to trust His cleansing blood;
And in simple faith to plunge me
’Neath the healing, cleansing flood!

Yes, ’tis sweet to trust in Jesus,
Just from sin and self to cease;
Just from Jesus simply taking
Life and rest, and joy and peace.

I’m so glad I learned to trust Thee,
Precious Jesus, Savior, Friend;
And I know that Thou art with me,
Wilt be with me to the end.

Sweet Hour of Prayer¹⁴

Sweet hour of prayer! sweet hour of prayer!
That calls me from a world of care,
And bids me at my Father’s throne
Make all my wants and wishes known.

In seasons of distress and grief,
My soul has often found relief,
And oft escaped the tempter's snare,
By thy return, sweet hour of prayer!

Sweet hour of prayer! sweet hour of prayer!
The joys I feel, the bliss I share,
Of those whose anxious spirits burn
With strong desires for thy return!
With such I hasten to the place
Where God my Savior shows His face,
And gladly take my station there,
And wait for thee, sweet hour of prayer!

Sweet hour of prayer! sweet hour of prayer!
Thy wings shall my petition bear
To Him whose truth and faithfulness
Engage the waiting soul to bless.
And since He bids me seek His face,
Believe His Word and trust His grace,
I'll cast on Him my every care,
And wait for thee, sweet hour of prayer!

Sweet hour of prayer! sweet hour of prayer!
May I thy consolation share,
Till, from Mount Pisgah's lofty height,
I view my home and take my flight.
This robe of flesh I'll drop, and rise
To seize the everlasting prize,
And shout, while passing through the air,
"Farewell, farewell, sweet hour of prayer!"

My Redeemer Lives¹⁵

Who taught the sun where to stand in the morning
Who told the ocean you can only come this far?
Who showed the moon where to hide 'til evening
Whose words alone can catch a falling star?

Well I know my Redeemer lives
I know my Redeemer lives
Let all of creation testify
This life within me cries
I know my Redeemer lives

The very same God that spins things in orbit
He runs to the weary, the worn and the weak
And the same gentle hands that hold me when I'm broken
They conquered death to bring me victory

Now I know my Redeemer lives
I know my Redeemer lives
Let all creation testify
Let this life within me cry
I know my Redeemer, He lives

To take away my shame
And He lives forever I'll proclaim
That the payment for my sin
Was the precious life He gave
But now He's alive
And there's an empty grave.

And I know my Redeemer, He lives
I know my Redeemer lives
Let all creation testify
This life within me cries
I know my Redeemer lives

V. Making Women's Day a Memorable Learning Moment

a. In "Letter to My Daughter," Maya Angelou provides a book of events and lessons from her life as a resource to her thousands of daughters, Black and White, Jewish and Muslim, Asian, Spanish-speaking, Native American, fat and thin, pretty and plain, gay and straight, educated and unlettered. Consider creating your own book/letter for your daughters. As Angelou understood, your daughters do not have to be related to you by blood.

b. 2 Timothy 3:14-15 reads, "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing those from whom you learned, and that from childhood you have known the sacred Scriptures, which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." In light of this exhortation, we need to help our children develop a legacy of faith and wisdom. Create a book of wisdom (wisdom regarding money, dating, friendships, education, etc.) to give to your daughter, granddaughter, or a young lady in the church or community. Have a meal with them and express your reasons for desiring to impart wisdom, sharing your hopes for them and their future.

c. For personal reflection, create a collage of pictures and wise sayings of women who have poured into the individual lives of congregants over the years. Write key women a letter of appreciation, sharing how your life has been transformed as a result of their wisdom.

d. The NCNW, Inc. annually hosts a Black Family Reunion Celebration as a way of reinforcing traditional values of strengthening African American families. Online location:
<http://www.ncnw.org/events/reunion.htm>

e. First Lady Michelle Obama offers wisdom for building strong families and communities through her Let's Move Campaign against childhood obesity. Online location:
<http://www.letsmove.gov/>

VI. Audio Visual Aids

This video is in celebration of women of African descent and can be shared as a tribute to wise women who have chosen to build stronger homes, families, churches and communities.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9bXcvHsmVnk&feature=related>

Notes

1. Gilkes, Cheryl Townsend. If It Wasn't for the Women. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001. pp. 33, 147.

2. Willis, Bruce W. The Adinkra Dictionary: A Visual Primer on the Language of Adinkra. Pyramid Complex (1998).

3. For more information of the history of the National Council of Negro Women, please see <http://www.ncnw.org/about/history.htm>.

4. http://womenshistory.about.com/od/quotes/a/dorothy_height.htm accessed 20 September 2011

5. Riggs, Marcia Y., ed. Can I Get a Witness? Prophetic Religious Voices of African American Women: An Anthology. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997. p. 84.

6. Ibid., p. 158.

7. If It Wasn't for the Women. p. 66.

8. <http://www.biography.com/people/septima-poinsette-clark-38174> accessed 12 October 2011

9. Can I Get a Witness? p. 155.

10. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-yn/content/article/2010/04/20/AR2010042001287.html> accessed 5 October 2011
11. <http://www.biography.com/people/dorothy-height-40743> accessed 12 October 2011
12. <http://www.biography.com/people/rosa-parks-9433715> accessed 12 October 2011
13. "'Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus." Total Praise: Songs and Other Worship Resources for Every Generation. Chicago, IL: GIA Publications and Sunday School Publishing Board, 2011. #391.
14. "Sweet Hour of Prayer." Total Praise: Songs and Other Worship Resources for Every Generation. #463
15. Mullen, Nicole C. "My Redeemer Lives." Christianlyricsonline. Online location: <http://www.christianlyricsonline.com/artists/nicole-c-mullen/redeemer.html> accessed 25 October 2011.