

## WHY WOMEN OF COLOR?

YWCA is on a mission to eliminate racism, empower women, stand up for social justice, help families, and strengthen communities. We are one of the oldest and largest women's organizations in the nation, serving over 2 million women, girls, and their families every year. YWCA has been at the forefront of the most pressing social movements for more than 150 years — from voting rights to civil rights, from affordable housing to pay equity, from violence prevention to health care reform.

Standing up for women and girls of color is our legacy.

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### YWCA HISTORY

Shortly after YWCA's founding in 1858, leaders of YWCA began to develop an understanding of the increased barriers to gender equality and varying needs that women of color and immigrant women were experiencing. We didn't have a common lexicon to describe the work we doing just yet, but this work may have been some of our first attempts at an intersectional<sup>1</sup> approach—though certainly not our last.

- In 1889, the first Black YWCA branch to serve women of color opened in Ohio, followed quickly in Oklahoma by the first YWCA for American Indian women in 1890.
- By 1910, there were fifty-seven branches opened to assist newly arrived immigrant women across the country.
- In 1916, the first association serving Chinese American women opened, and
- By 1927, YWCAs across the country were encouraging chapters to speak out against lynching and racial segregation.
- In 1936, the YWCA organized the first interracial student conference in North Carolina, south of the Mason-Dixon line, and
- In 1942, The YWCA began providing services to Japanese American women and their families who were incarcerated in WWII detention camps.



YWCA knew that we must address issues of racism and discrimination within our own organization just as we advocated for social justice and policy change in larger society. In 1946, YWCA began working for integration throughout the entire organization, adopting an "interracial charter" which established that "wherever there is injustice on the basis of race, whether in the community, the nation, or the world, our protest must be clear and our labor for its removal, vigorous and steady." That work culminated in the addition of the "elimination of racism" to our mission statement in 1970.

## THE ONE IMPERATIVE

YWCA's Interracial Charter, adopted at the National Convention in 1946, ensured a commitment to fighting racial injustice, "whether in the community, the nation or the world." Two decades later, under the leadership of Helen Claytor, the first African American woman to head the YWCA's national board of directors and Dorothy Height, the National Director of YWCA's Center for Racial Justice, the 1970 Convention adopted as the YWCA's One Imperative "the elimination of racism wherever it exists, and by any means necessary<sup>iii</sup>." Following the Convention, YWCA sponsored a series of workshops, institutes, consultations and meetings as part of its One Imperative.

Today, more than 160,000 individuals participate annually in YWCA racial justice programs and services that increase awareness, build coalitions, and transform local and national inequities in areas such as employment, housing, and voting rights. YWCA's approach to racial justice goes beyond changing hearts and minds. We strive to transform communities, systems, and public policies. Most recently, we have been focused on addressing racial profiling and police violence as they impact women and girls of color. Past issue priorities have included hate crimes, immigration reform, voting rights, and fair housing.

YWCA has been and continues to be a multi-issue organization because the lives of women and girls are complex, and exist across many categories of personal, social, and cultural identity. As we pursue our mission in the 21st century, we will continue to address multiple issues.

## THEORY OF CHANGE: A CONTINUUM OF RESPONSE

Historically, our Christian roots connected us and drove our work during very difficult times. Religious tradition inspired our concern for our neighbor, our desire for equality, and our commitment to charity. Today, our volunteers, staff, and board members come from all walks of life and religious backgrounds, lessening our dependence on a shared religious doctrine. So what connects us now? Our shared commitment is to **social justice**, which binds us together today. The story of YWCA has always been a story of women working across lines of difference, united in one vision. Our foundational beliefs and historical practices make clear that we are inherently a **social justice** organization.

YWCA believes that **social justice** requires us to transform unjust practices and policies. At our core, YWCA is a multi-issue, and multiracial organization working to address both immediate needs and the root causes of that need. Early on, the women of YWCA began introducing advocacy into the organizational agenda. We provided safe affordable housing for young women, while also advocating for fair wages. Today, we engage in advocacy to increase affordable childcare, to end gender based violence, and to expand access to health services all while meeting the needs of the people who depend on us for direct services. Because YWCA is often the first to bear witness to the needs of our diverse communities, we are uniquely positioned to focus our advocacy efforts to help local, state and federal governments shape effective public policy and legislation on gender equality and racial justice issues. All of this leads to our *theory of change*. As described in our Persimmon Paper: Our Collective Power,

*The earliest work of the YWCA involved providing services for young single women who flocked to urban centers to work and live on their own away from their families. These services included affordable lodging, employment bureaus and job training. However, it was not long into our organizational journey, 1911 according to the quote below, that the YWCA USA realized that to best serve women and girls we had to commit ourselves to providing a continuum of response to their needs. Our continuum of response includes direct services, issue education, and public policy advocacy.*

*It is a unique aspect of our organization that we combine direct services, programming and advocacy in order to generate institutional change. In many instances, YWCA associations provide a direct service or program, such as affordable day care, in order to remove barriers encountered by community stakeholders, such as women with children who need to seek and secure employment. In this way, the association treats both “symptoms” and “root” causes of a social problem<sup>iv</sup>.*

As we pursue our mission work, YWCA’s theory of change informs the development and implementation of the Mission Impact Framework. Our theory of change was influenced by the history of the YWCA, and the practices and principles that guide our work as a network into the future. Included in our theory of change, are five foundational beliefs about creating change that sticks:

- Social justice requires us to transform unjust practices and policies.
- Democratic practice and plurality are fundamental to the YWCA association model.
- Women working together across lines of difference can transform and improve life for all women.

- Social problems should be addressed on multiple levels.
- All women cannot be empowered if we do not address the issues of race and racism.

To further expand on the idea that social problems should be addressed on multiple levels, YWCA has historically and contemporarily believed that our work must be done through a **continuum of response**. YWCA's continuum of response to effect lasting change includes providing direct services, issue education, and public policy advocacy. Foundational to our theory of change is the understanding that all women cannot be empowered if we do not address the issues of race and racism. This belief underscores our past, present and future work addressing the unique needs and experiences of women of color and their families and communities.

## WHY WOMEN AND GIRLS OF COLOR? WHY NOW?

At the core of YWCA's work is the recognition that not all women, or all people, are treated equally. The common thread that unites YWCAs across the country is a commitment to racial justice and civil rights. Through our **continuum of response**, YWCA ensures that our programmatic, educational and advocacy work combines to fight discriminatory practices and expose and dismantle patterns of historic inequality in legislation, institutions and systems. Over 85 percent of YWCAs offer distinct racial justice programs to increase awareness of oppression and privilege, break down stereotypes and communication barriers, uncover disparities, and advocate for policy change to reduce the instances and impacts of injustice. YWCA's mission "eliminating racism, empowering women" points to the fact that gender, race and economic equality are social issues that are interconnected and must be addressed in concert.

Women and girls of color experience overlapping injustices due to their race, gender, and many times, socioeconomic backgrounds. Girls of color in particular are often overlooked when policymakers address issues of gender and racial inequality. Despite the gains women of color have made in all arenas of public and private life, the numbers are stark—the wage gap still exists, women of color are far underrepresented in corporate, governmental and non-profit leadership roles, and women and girls of color experience more frequent and deadlier gender-based violence. The role of women, and particularly women and girls of color in leading and shaping change is becoming more pressing, as demographic trends point towards women of color becoming the majority among all women in the United States by 2050. Here are some key statistics that give shape to the problem:

**Despite making up half of the population and half of the workforce, women, and particularly women of color, are underrepresented in leadership across fields.**

- The wage gap still exists. Asian women working full time make **90 cents** for every dollar paid to their White male counterparts. White women working full time make **76 cents** for every dollar paid to their White male counterparts. African American women working full time make **62 cents** for every dollar paid to their White male counterparts. Native Hawaiian women working full time earn **60 cents** for every dollar earned by their White male counterparts. Native American and Alaska Native women working full time make **58 cents** for every dollar paid to their White male counterparts. And Latinas bear the burden of the largest gap, making **54 cents** for every dollar paid to their White male counterparts<sup>v</sup>.
- While women make up the majority (Over 75 percent) of all workers in the non-profit sector, women comprise just 45 percent of all CEO and executive director positions. When examining the largest organizations with budgets in excess of \$25 million, women represent only 21 percent of leaders. Only seven percent of nonprofit chief executives and 18 percent of nonprofit employees are people of color.
- Although women make up more than 75 percent of the nation's educational workforce in primary and secondary schools, the lack of women in leadership and the wage gap persists. Women are far less likely to be seen in city-wide education offices, and less likely to take on the role of superintendent. Three-quarters of public school teachers are women, yet their presence at the superintendent level is much lower<sup>vi</sup>. In 2014, White women made up 18 percent of superintendents, Black women made up 1 percent, and women of other races and ethnicities together made up about 1 percent<sup>vii</sup>.
- But women of color *want* to lead. African American women are the fastest growing group of entrepreneurs in the USA and Latinas were not far behind, with the rate of entrepreneurship growing at rates of 133.3 percent and 191.4 percent respectively from 1997 to 2007<sup>viii</sup>.
- From 2007 through 2016, nearly eight out of every 10 (79 percent) of net new women-owned firms launched during the past nine years have been founded by a woman of color.
- Black women are much more likely than White women (22 percent vs. 8 percent) to aspire to a position of power, and yet are more likely than White women to feel stalled in their careers<sup>ix</sup>.
- While the rate of women of color owned businesses has grown exponentially, women of color are less likely to get seed funding due to a lack of access to networks and generational wealth. From 2011 to 2013 only 2.7 percent of the companies receiving venture capital funding during this period, had a woman CEO<sup>x</sup>.

**Women of color and other marginalized populations experience disproportionate experiences of gender based violence, and increased barriers in seeking help.**

- Native Americans are victims of rape or sexual assault at more than double the rate of other racial groups<sup>xi</sup>.
- Black women experienced intimate partner violence at a rate 35 percent higher than that of White women, and about 22 times the rate of women of other races<sup>xii</sup>.
- In an ongoing study conducted by Black Women's Blueprint, 60 percent of Black girls will experience sexual abuse before the age of 18<sup>xiii</sup>.
- Statistics indicate that up to 55 percent of A/PI women have reported experiencing physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner<sup>xiv</sup>.
- 48 percent of Latinas in one study reported that their partner's violence against them had increased since they immigrated to the U.S.<sup>xv</sup>.

**Girls of color are disproportionately impacted by gendered violence, harsh school discipline and interactions with juvenile justice systems. Much of this stems from institutional racism, and implicit bias.**

- Black girls are suspended from school at higher rates (12 percent) than girls of any other race or ethnicity, and at higher rates than White boys (6 percent) and White girls (2 percent). American Indian/Alaska Native girls (7 percent) and Latinas (4 percent) are also suspended at rates that exceed those of White girls.<sup>xvi</sup> Suspension from school increases the likelihood of dropping out and having contact with the juvenile justice system, with long-term consequences for Black and Latina girls.<sup>xvii</sup>
- Girls who are suspended are more likely to drop out of school<sup>lxviii</sup>, sabotaging future earnings<sup>lxix</sup>.
- [Recent budget cuts](#) have also resulted in fewer school psychologists, social workers, and counselors who might otherwise provide support to girls struggling with trauma or other unmet needs before their behavior leads to punishable offenses: only two states (VT and WY) have counselor-to-student ratios that meet the recommended caseload standard set by the American Counseling Association.
- More than 90 percent of girls in juvenile justice systems self-disclose trauma.<sup>xx</sup> In fact, justice-involved girls are victimized by sexual violence at an earlier average age, and for a longer average duration, than other forms of abuse<sup>xxi</sup>.
- Girls of color are shuffled into juvenile facilities for non-violent status offense crimes at a rate four times that of boys<sup>xxii</sup>. They are overwhelmingly arrested for running away, substance abuse infractions and curfew violations<sup>xxiii</sup>. Crimes that represent what The National Child Traumatic Stress Network describes as coping mechanisms to deal with trauma and to keep



themselves safe from further danger of traumatic households, schools and communities<sup>xxiv</sup>. Native American girls are detained at a rate of 179 per 100,000, Black girls at a rate of 123 per 100,000, and Latinas at a rate of 47 per 100,000, while only 37 per 100,000 non-Hispanic White girls are confined for the same behaviors.<sup>xxv</sup>

**Women of color are a primary source of financial support for many families, yet lack access to things like affordable childcare, affordable housing, sick leave, and health insurance.**

- More than four million African American families with children have a female head of household – most often a mother, grandmother or other relative who is her family’s only source of financial support.<sup>xxvi</sup> The same is true for nearly three million Latino/Hispanic families.<sup>xxvii</sup> Women are more likely to have unpaid caregiving responsibilities, and are the majority of those providing care for children as well as for elderly and disabled adult family members.<sup>xxviii</sup> When a child is sick, 39 percent of mothers say that they are solely responsible for staying home from work to care for them, compared with only 3 percent of fathers.<sup>xxix</sup> Moreover, 66 percent of caregivers are women, and women spend 50 percent more time on caregiving duties than men.<sup>xxx</sup>
- Workers in the lowest 25 percent of wage earners most often lose all income while on family or medical leave, as they are two to four times less likely than earners in the top 25 percent of wage earners to have access to any paid leave.<sup>xxxi</sup> Women are over-represented in the lowest wage occupations, comprising more than 60 percent of low-wage workers.<sup>xxxii</sup>
- Child care is particularly unaffordable for minimum-wage workers. The high cost of child care means that a full-time, full-year minimum-wage worker with one child would have to devote all of their earnings, forty hours per week from January to September, towards childcare. This has devastating impacts on women, and particularly women of color, as they are over-represented in the lowest wage occupations, comprising more than 60 percent of low-wage workers.<sup>xxxiii</sup>
- Women of color experience higher rates of maternal mortality and severe maternal morbidity. While women of color experience high rates of negative maternal health outcomes overall, the disparities are most pronounced among Black women. For instance, while Black women do not have a significantly higher risk of experiencing the medical conditions common to maternal death, they are two to three times as likely as White women to die from them.<sup>xxxiv</sup>
- Black women are less likely to receive preventative care and treatment for chronic health conditions, such as diabetes and chronic hypertension.<sup>xxxv</sup>
- Despite the achievement of historically low uninsured levels under the Affordable Care Act, women of color are still more likely than White women to lack health insurance,<sup>xxxvi</sup> which in turn limits their access to healthcare.

YWCA stands with women and girls of color as we advocate for policies that will level the historically and contemporarily unequal playing field that leads to disparity in economic, health and safety outcomes for women of color. We carry forward a long tradition of social action and advocacy to advance our critical mission – and you are a crucial part of this agenda. Together, let's continue to work towards eliminating racism, empowering women, and promoting peace, justice, freedom, and dignity for all.

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<sup>i</sup> Intersectionality, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, is a concept often used in critical social theories, including feminist and queer theory, to describe the ways in which oppressive institutions (racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, xenophobia, classism, etc.) are interconnected and impact the lives of those affected in ways that cannot be separated from another. See also: misogynoir.

<sup>ii</sup> For more information about our shared definition of *racism* and other forms of oppression, please see our Our Collective Power: A Persimmon Paper on The YWCA USA Mission to Eliminate Racism, 2015

<sup>iii</sup> "Step by Step:" Interracial Education in the Y.W.C.A. Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, MA, <http://www.smith.edu/libraries/libs/ssc/ywca2/case2.html>

<sup>iv</sup> Our Collective Power: A Persimmon Paper on The YWCA USA Mission to Eliminate Racism, 2015

<sup>v</sup> The American Association of University Women (AAUW), The Simple Truth about the Gender Pay Gap, Published Fall, 2016 Retrieved from <http://www.aauw.org/research/the-simple-truth-about-the-gender-pay-gap/>

<sup>vi</sup> Glass, T. Where Are All the Women Superintendents? The School Superintendents Association, 2015

<sup>vii</sup> The American Association of University Women (AAUW), The Simple Truth about the Gender Pay Gap, Published Fall, 2016 Retrieved from <http://www.aauw.org/research/the-simple-truth-about-the-gender-pay-gap/>

<sup>viii</sup> The Economic Impact of Women-Owned Businesses In the United States Women's Business Council Center for Women's Business Research October 2009

<sup>ix</sup> Black Women: Ready to Lead, Hewlett, S.A., Green, T., Center for Talent Innovation, 2015

<sup>x</sup> Diana Report Women Entrepreneurs 2014: Bridging the Gender Gap in Venture Capital Professors Candida G. Brush, Patricia G. Greene, Lakshmi Balachandra, and Amy E. Davis

<sup>xi</sup> A Bureau of Justice Statistics Statistical Profile, 1992-2002: American Indians and Crime (2004)

<sup>xii</sup> Women of Color Network Facts & Stats: Domestic Violence in Communities of Color – June 2006

<sup>xiii</sup> Black Women's Blueprint, 2016

<sup>xiv</sup> Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence

<sup>xv</sup> Women of Color Network Facts & Stats: Domestic Violence in Communities of Color – June 2006

<sup>xvi</sup> "Civil Rights Data Collection, Data Snapshot: School Discipline." U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights Issue Brief No. 1 (March 2014) at p. 3.

<sup>xvii</sup> Crenshaw, K.W., Ocen, P. and Nanda, J. Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Overpoliced and Underprotected. African American Policy Forum and Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies (2015) at p. 24. See also, Graves, F.G., Kaufmann, L.S., and Frohlich, L. "Unlocking Opportunity for African American Girls: A Call to Action for Educational Equity." NAACP Legal Defense & Education Fund, Inc., and National Women's Law Center (2014) Executive Summary at p. 2.

<sup>xviii</sup> Christle, Chistine A., C. Michael Nelson, and Kristine Jolivette. "School Characteristics Related to the Use of Suspension." Education & Treatment of Children 27, no. 4 (2004): 509-521. ("According to the Civil Rights project (2000) suspension sends a 'push-out' message to students, and suspension is one of the top reasons for dropping out of school.").

<sup>xix</sup> Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, Priscilla Ocen and Jyoti Nanda, Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Over-policed and Under-Protected, 2015, African American Policy Forum, Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies Retrieved from [http://www.atlanticphilanthropies.org/app/uploads/2015/09/BlackGirlsMatter\\_Report.pdf](http://www.atlanticphilanthropies.org/app/uploads/2015/09/BlackGirlsMatter_Report.pdf)

<sup>xx</sup> Julian D. Ford, et al. (2007). Trauma Among Youth in the Juvenile Justice System: Critical Issues and New Direction. Retrieved 15 January 2017 from [http://www.ncmhjj.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/2007\\_Trauma-Among-Youth-in-the-Juvenile-Justice-System.pdf](http://www.ncmhjj.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/2007_Trauma-Among-Youth-in-the-Juvenile-Justice-System.pdf).



<sup>xxi</sup> Malika Saada Saar, Rebecca Epstein, Lindsay Rosenthal, Yasmin Vafa, Center for Poverty and Inequality | Georgetown University Law Center, *The Sexual Abuse to Prison Pipeline: the Girls' Story* [http://rights4girls.org/wp-content/uploads/r4g/2015/02/2015\\_COP\\_sexual-abuse\\_layout\\_web-1.pdf](http://rights4girls.org/wp-content/uploads/r4g/2015/02/2015_COP_sexual-abuse_layout_web-1.pdf)

<sup>xxii</sup> Coalition for Juvenile Justice, *Girls, Status Offenses and the Need for a Less Punitive Approach*, Washington, DC, 2013

<sup>xxiii</sup> Malika Saada Saar, Rebecca Epstein, Lindsay Rosenthal, Yasmin Vafa, Center for Poverty and Inequality | Georgetown University Law Center, *The Sexual Abuse to Prison Pipeline: the Girls' Story* [http://rights4girls.org/wp-content/uploads/r4g/2015/02/2015\\_COP\\_sexual-abuse\\_layout\\_web-1.pdf](http://rights4girls.org/wp-content/uploads/r4g/2015/02/2015_COP_sexual-abuse_layout_web-1.pdf)

<sup>xxiv</sup> The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, *Resilience and Child Traumatic Stress*, 2014

<sup>xxv</sup> "Fight for our Girls: Status Offenses." Center for the Study of Social Policy (2016) p. 3.

<sup>xxvi</sup> National Partnership for Women and Families. (September 2015). *Women of Color Need A Paid Sick Days Standard*. Retrieved 10 January 2017, from <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/research-library/work-family/psd/women-of-color-need-a-paid-sick-days-standard.pdf>.

<sup>xxvii</sup> *Id.*

<sup>xxviii</sup> Breadwinner Mothers, *supra* note i. See also, Institute for Women's Policy Research. *Status of Women in the States*. (2015). *Status of Women in the United States*. Retrieved 10 January 2017, from <http://statusofwomendata.org/explore-the-data/work-family/>.

<sup>xxix</sup> The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation. (2014). *Data Note: Balancing on Shaky Ground: Women, Work and Family Health*. Retrieved 10 January 2017, from <http://kff.org/womens-health-policy/issue-brief/data-note-balancing-on-shaky-ground-women-work-and-family-health/>

<sup>xxx</sup> Family Caregiver Alliance. (2003). *Women and Caregivers: Facts and Figures*. Retrieved 10 January 2017, from <https://www.caregiver.org/women-and-caregiving-facts-and-figures>.

<sup>xxxi</sup> CLASP. (February 2015). *Wages Lost, Jobs at Risk: The Serious Consequences of Lack of Paid Leave*. Retrieved 10 January 2017, from <http://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/publication-1/2015-02-03-FMLA-Anniversary-Brief.pdf>.

<sup>xxxii</sup> *Id.*

<sup>xxxiii</sup> *Id.*

<sup>xxxiv</sup> Maternal Mortality in the United States: A Human Rights Failure, *supra* note vi.

<sup>xxxv</sup> Black Mamas Matter, *supra* note ii.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Algernon Austin, Center for Global Policy Solutions, *Obamacare Reduces Racial Disparities in Health Coverage* 6-7, (Dec. 2015), <http://globalpolicysolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/ACA-and-Racial-Disparities.pdf>.