

Pauli Murray, "The Negro Woman in the Quest for Equality," November 1963, excerpts.

Pauli Murray was a veteran of the civil rights movement. In this November 14, 1963 speech to the National Council of Negro Women in Washington, DC, she condemned the omission of female activists from the August 1963 March on Washington. She highlighted the dual oppressions of race and gender, particularly as they applied to the black woman's right to equal employment opportunities, comparing Jim Crow and Jane Crow. Murray went on to become a founding member of NOW in 1966.

Negro women, historically, have carried the dual burden of Jim Crow and Jane Crow. They have not always carried it graciously but they have carried it effectively... In the course of their climb, Negro women have had to fight against the stereotypes of "female dominance" on the one hand and loose morals on the other hand, both growing out of the roles forced upon them during the slavery experience and its aftermath. But out of their struggle for human dignity, they also developed a tradition of independence and self-reliance...

In the human rights battle, America has seen the image of the Negro evolving through many women... Not only have women whose names are well known given this great human effort its peculiar vitality but women in the many communities whose names will never be known have revealed the courage and strength of the Negro woman. These are the mothers who have stood in school yards with their children, many times alone. These are the images which have touched America's heart. Painful as these experiences have been, one cannot help asking: would the Negro struggle have come this far without the indomitable determination of its women?

Recent disquieting events have made imperative an assessment of the role of the Negro woman in the quest for equality. The civil rights revolt, like many social upheavals, has released powerful pent-up emotions, cross currents, rivalries and hostilities... There is much jockeying for position as ambitious men push and elbow that way to leadership roles...

What emerges most clearly from events of the past several months is the tendency to assign women to a secondary, ornamental or "honoree" role instead of the partnership role in the civil rights movement which they have earned by their courage, intelligence, and dedication. It was bitterly humiliating for Negro women on August 28 to see themselves accorded little more than token recognition in the historic March on Washington. Not a single woman was invited to make one of the major speeches or to be part of the delegation of leaders who went to the White House. This omission was deliberate. Representations for recognition of women were made to the policy-making body sufficiently in advance of the August 28 arrangements to have permitted the necessary adjustments of the program. What the Negro women leaders were told is revealing: that no representation was given to them because they would not be able to agree on a delegate. How familiar was this excuse! It is a typical response from an entrenched power group...

I have touched only briefly upon some of the important issues and problem areas which Negro women need to examine in their quest for equality.... How these issues are resolved may very

well determine the outcome of the integration effort. One thing is crystal clear. The Negro woman can no longer postpone or subordinate the fight against discrimination because of sex to the civil rights struggle but must carry on both fights simultaneously. She must insist upon a partnership role in the integration movement. For, as Mr. Justice William O. Douglas, speaking for the United States Supreme Court, has declared, "The two sexes are not fungible; a community made up exclusively of one is different from a community composed of both; the subtle interplay of influence of one on the other is among the imponderables." Clearly, therefore, the full participation and leadership of Negro women is necessary to the success of the civil rights revolution.

Moreover, Negro women should seek to communicate and cooperate with white women wherever possible. Their common problems and interests as women provide a bridge to span initial self-consciousness. Many white women today are earnestly seeking to make common cause with Negro women and are holding out their hands. All too often they find themselves rebuffed. Integration, however, is a two-way effort and Negro women must be courageous enough to grasp the hand whenever it is held out.

The path ahead will not be easy; the challenges to meet new standards of achievement in the search for equality will be many and bewildering. For a time, even, the casualties of integration may be great. But as Negro women in the United States enter their second century of emancipation from chattel slavery, let them be proud of their heritage and resolute in their determination to pass the best of it along to their children. As Lorraine Hansberry, the gifted playwright, has said, "For above all, in behalf of an ailing world which sorely needs our defiance, may we, as Negroes or women, never accept the notion of — 'our place.'"

Source: Pauli Murray, "The Negro Woman in the Quest for Equality," speech to the National Council of Negro Women Convention, Washington, D.C., 14 November 1963, Box 128, Folder 2323, Pauli Murray Papers, 1827-1985, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College. Reprinted from *The Acorn* (June 1964).