

# San Franciscans Reflect on Women's History Month

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By Lee Hubbard

Women's history month has various meanings for Black women in San Francisco. This month highlights the progress and the various issues Black women face today in society in general and within the African American community. "For so long, our contributions were invisible and unrecognized," said the Reverend Staci Current, senior pastor at Jones United Methodist Church. "It is wonderful to be able to celebrate this month, what women have achieved."

As pastor of one of the largest Methodist Churches in San Francisco, Current has been a leader in speaking out against Black on Black violence in the Western Addition community. She believes that women taking on more active roles in business and political leadership should be the avenue taken by the black woman. "President Barack Obama has paved the way to make the possibility of a Black woman president a reality," continued Current. "The sky is the limit for Black women. There are no boundaries for any positions for Black women."

**This opinion is also echoed by Brigette R. LeBlanc, president of the San Francisco chapter of Black Woman Organized for Political Action, which advocates for Black women in politics. "Black women are doing a lot of great things politically," said LeBlanc. "But we need to make sure we plan for the future for the next generation. We need to mentor our younger women, so they will be prepared when the baton of leadership has to be passed."**

London Breed, executive director of the African American Art and Culture Complex in the Western Addition, was mentored in the African American community and she also mentors younger women. At the cultural complex, she helps to highlight Black women's issues with the various exhibits, plays and performances. "Women have come a long way and we are a part of all endeavors," said Breed. She cited women such as Ursula Burns, the CEO of Xerox and Kamala Harris, the current San Francisco District Attorney and leading Democratic candidate for the California Attorney General position, as role models for black women in business, politics and life.

"Black women have been the matriarchs in families and have historically held things together. Now we are setting the paths in business, politics and within the community," said Breed. "But we still have a lot of things to do, to demand the respect we deserve."

She acknowledged that economic gaps persist between black women and white men and even between black and white women, despite the growing clout of black women financially and, professionally. A national report by the Insight Center for Community Economic Development, titled "Lifting as We Climb: Women of Color, Wealth and America's Future," confirms Breed's point. The study showed that single, middle age white women have a median wealth of \$42,600, about 60 percent of single white men; the median wealth for single black women is only \$5. Married white women have a median wealth of \$167,500, but married black women have a median worth of \$31,500.

In assessing the study, experts noted that Black women are more likely to be found in careers that pay less and offer little or no health insurance or retirement plans. Also, over 40 percent of black women are single, making them the primary financial earners for their families. This news however has not deterred Sharen Hewitt, the executive director of the Community Leadership

Academy and Emergency Response Project, which deals with public policy for inner city families of color in San Francisco.

“Black women have to understand that even if they live in the lowest economic strata, they are still privileged and have the capacity to maximize and use the resources that they have,” said Hewitt. “Especially, when you look at Haiti, Chile, Darfur, we do not have it that bad. We have power and resources and we have the ability to be part of major transformative change in the 21st century.”

Change and the role of women in change was also the theme echoed by Dr. Julia Hare, head of the San Francisco based Black Think Tank, which deals with strengthening the Black Family, when talking about Women’s History Month.

“In order for things to change within the black community, within our families and schools, the Black woman has to do it,” said Dr. Hare. “Black women can’t sit around and wait for someone to help. If we don’t do it, no one else will. Black women have had to work for everything we have received.”