



# herstories

*Leading with the  
Lessons of the Lives of  
Black Women Activists*

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# Preface

The genesis of this book began in my first teaching position at the University of Houston (UH) in 1996. As a newly minted Ph.D. from The Pennsylvania State University (and the 5<sup>th</sup> ranked Educational Administration program in the country), I was once again in front of a group of students as the “teacher.” (Just as an aside, I never had in my mind to enter the field of education until my mother gave me the “you need to have a teaching certificate to fall back on” speech in 1984 at the beginning of my sophomore at Winthrop College. Needless to say, she was and still is right and it’s been almost 25 years of being an educator.) Here I was 31 years old with students who ranged in age from 20 to 50, and my previous teaching experience was with high school English students in my home state of South Carolina at Cainhoy High School and Brookland-Cayce High School. This was a new experience and a new chapter in my life-teaching Educational Leadership, Organizational Behavior, and Multicultural Issues in Education; I had undergraduates, masters, and doctoral students in my three years at UH. (Additionally I worked with high school students in a summer program, and I taught students at Houston Community College.) My teaching assignments led to the development of a research agenda that is still alive and well now some 14 years later, post tenure and post promotion to Full Professor.

As I was teaching at the university level in those first years, I found there was nothing in the literature of educational leadership to connect me as a Black woman to who I was a leader and an educator. Thank God for the opportunity to meet, work with, and seek advice from two of the “firsts” in Educational Administration, Dr. Barbara Jackson at Fordham University and Dr. Flora Ida Ortiz at University of California-Riverside. All of the theories, concepts, examples, and stories were that of White males and

occasionally White females. At UH, I had students from diverse populations and wanted them to be able to see themselves and their potential to be within the context of what I was teaching. I also wanted to tell the balanced story to those who were of the majority population, and I wanted to challenge their stereotypes and suppositions about the “other.” The resistance to the “diverse” perspective and experience was so palpable in one course that I actually had two students (one White male and one Black female) almost come to blows when I used the “Who Should Be Hired?” decision-making exercise (Saldana, Norwood, & Alston, 2003) in an Introduction to School Administration course.

So, just as I had done with my dissertation on Black female superintendents, I began to search across the disciplines for supplemental teaching materials and information that would help to expand the field beyond the sea of Whiteness that was purported as the only truth. I was disappointed to find very little information, just as I had been with my dissertation. Thus, my frustration led to a *what if* moment. What if I wrote a book about Black women leaders that would not only add to the literature, but also speak to students, professors, and others on a personal level?

With that began the inquiry and the research for what would eventually become this book: *Herstories: Leading with the Lessons of the Lives of Black Women Activists*. The gestational process for this birth had periods of dormancy, but like the women who are presented in this text it needed time and its own refining period before it could be actualized.

I am a true believer in “things happen for a reason and when they’re supposed to happen.” So, it is no accident that this book is birthed at this point for this final iteration that has been produced. My time in academia has afforded me the opportunity to work with and mentor some of the best people and students that I could have ever asked for. I have co-presented and co-published with some outstanding students (i.e., those who could deal with the pressure of working with me and my expectations). One such student, Dr. Patrice McClellan, “my daughter,” understood my drive to produce a work such as this. I met Patrice at Bowling Green State University in 2003. I remember her coming to my office to inquire

about the Doctoral Program in Leadership Studies. I know that I can be intimidating (not on purpose) due to my expectations and my deep desire to provide high quality doctoral education. She weathered the storm through the application process, the coursework, and allowed me the opportunity to chair her dissertation. Her work on *Critical Servant Leadership* is a significant addition to the field of leadership and a unit of analysis for this text. Thus, I asked her to be the co-author. She will do great things in academia and I'm already proud of her.

This has been a spectacular journey and definitely worth the blood, sweat, and tears that have made this text what it is.

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## References

Saldana, D.C., Norwood, P.M., & Alston, J.A. (2003). Investigating teachers' unconscious person perceptions and stereotyping of culturally diverse individuals. *Educators for Urban Minorities*, 2, 57-73.