

**Progressive Democrats of Benicia  
Black History Month program, Feb. 11, 2019**

**Presentation by Gethsemane Moss**

During my doctoral research I studied the history of the negative labeling and experiences of black women. It was during my research and review of literature that things began to make sense based on my own experiences, particularly as a young person and as a working professional. I learned that black women face a great deal of scrutiny in work settings and are constantly put in positions of having to navigate systems while considering their race and gender in order to combat stereotypes. It has helped me to put things in perspective as I continue moving forward in my life.

**This Black Woman by Gethsemane Moss**

When you look at me, what do you see?

Black, Mammy, Jezebel, Sapphire, angry, uneducated, welfare?

The many lies that have been told about me, yet you never took the time to really see me.

Everyone has a story.

I am mother, a daughter, a wife, a girlfriend, a writer, an actress, a playwright a scholar, a sister, a friend!

I am not only these things for 28 or 29 days out of the year, I am these things 24 7 365!

I am many things inside of this shell that some eyes fail to see,

Not because they are biologically unable, but because sometimes it's easier to believe lies than accept the truth;

I don't want anything from you.

You seeing me for who I truly am and the talents I possess will not take anything away from you like your house, your car, your education, your calling on your life, your position, your bank account your man or woman;

I bring it! I bring knowledge, wisdom, perspective and talent.

I am not only these things for 28 or 29 days, out of the year

I am these things 24 7 365!

The negative labels of History said we were Mammy's who wanted to take care of other people's kids and put the needs of others before ourselves;

The negative labels of History said we were Jezebels who only wanted to sex you, and we were just unlovable women;

The negative labels of History said we were Sapphires, strong ball busting women or just angry black women ready to destroy anything that moved in our paths;

History also labeled us as welfare queens who wanted to stay home, have babies and let the government hand down a substandard living because we just wanted to have sex and make babies.

I stand before you to say it's not true.

Negative untruths made to appear real did not tell you the detailed stories about the rape, mutilation, brain washing, punishment, and killings all for fun while everyone gathered around to enjoy the entertainment of it all,  
And how the lives of the women and men before me were deemed less than an unworthy, all because of their outer appearances;  
But I suppose it's easier to spread the lies than to face the ugly truth of how folks got to where they are....

Surely, we can find these behaviors in some but those shells come in many shades; black, brown or white and so forth;

Let's move beyond the shell.

We miss opportunities because we can't move passed what the eye can see;  
Lives are lost every day because we only see the stereotypes and all of the negative images that we have been conditioned to believe.

Do you have to showcase your credentials because others will assume you are inept because of the color of your skin?

Do or did you have to have conversations with your kids as early as six years of age about the color of their skin in order to help them understand that their presence may pose as a threat for some?

Do you know what it is like to walk into a professional setting when you are always the only one who looks like you and be tasked with having to insert yourself so that others might see your value and consider your ideas?

Do you consider your skin color and your gender when engaging with others?

Do you know what it is like to have to entrust your kids into an educational system that will not include all of the truths about their history?

Do you know what it is like to be forced to live in a certain neighborhood because of the color of your skin?

Have you ever been silenced and overlooked?

This is not what I only think about 28 or 29 days out of the year, this is my life 24 7 365!

When I enter into a room I have assessed threats and opportunities;

My conversations with you tell me about you in more ways than what is expressed by your words because I have had a great deal of practice with making environmental assessments!

Don't misunderstand. I love my life and I would not trade it for anything.

If I had to come back I would still come back as this black woman and the mother of my two amazing kids!

I sound like this because that is how God made me!

I move like this because that is how God created me!

The good news is that I am full of accomplishments and love despite being ignored, overlooked, overly scrutinized and being set up in systems intended for me to fail!

I know my value and my worth and I will continue to move forward,  
Build relationships, spread knowledge that will build bridges of opportunities;  
This is how I was created!  
Knock me down 53 times and I will get up 54

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**I want to leave you with a quote from Angela Davis:**

*Black Women have had to develop a larger vision of our society than perhaps any other group. They have had to understand white men, white women, and black men. And they have had to understand themselves. When black women win victories, it is a boost for virtually every segment of society. Angela Davis*