

Boston University School of Theology

# ANNA HOWARD

# SHAW CENTER

Volume 32 • Issue 12 • Spring 2016

## Power . Privilege . Prophetic Witness



INSIDE THIS ISSUE	
Women in the World: Power, Privilege and Prophetic Witness <i>By Kaci Norman &amp; Ylisse Bess Washington</i>	2-4
When Daughters Prophecy: The Difficulties of Being a Black Female Preacher in 21 <sup>st</sup> Century America <i>By Kaiya Jennings STM '16</i>	5
Choose to Stand with the Powerless <i>By Dr. Nimi Wariboko</i> Walter G. Muelder Profes- sor of Social Ethics	6
Nine simple words, one simple phrase <i>By Gina Physis GRS '15</i>	7
MARCH 2015—MARCH 2016 DONORS LIST	8
Transitions: Farewell to Kaci and Welcome of New Staff	9



# Power. Privilege. Prophetic Witness.



WOMEN IN THE WORLD-APRIL 13, 2016

ANNA HOWARD SHAW CENTER

The 2016 Women in the World conference explored experiences of women's ministries in the church and society. It served as a place to ask questions of current issues, create networks of support, and be inspired by challenging new ideas and group discussion. This year's conference focused on the theme: Power, Privilege, and Prophetic Witness. In light of troubling current events and a largely under acknowledged history of racism in the United States, this year's conference concerned itself with lifting up the voices of African American women. It explored the unique challenges and struggles

of African American women, as well as the ways in which they found strength and pushed the boundaries of inherited narratives. Further, this conference explored theological, ministerial, and sociological responses to this crisis, and put it in conversation with other rhetorics of fear that currently exist.

The conference consisted of two panels and a workshop. Panel One began with Rev. Dr. Traci C. West, Professor of Ethics and African American Studies at Drew University Theological School, and her analysis of Racism and Christianity and violence against women. She considered intimate violence against women as perpetuated by cultural factors, especially in Christian contexts and in racist structures.

Rev. Dr. West is concerned with racism's role in violence and uses the local church as a case study for exploring the role of racism in violence within Christian communities by providing a personal example as a minister addressing domestic violence in an interracial couple's relationship and the difficulty in of calling police who often function as the state enforcer of racism. Rev. Dr. Laurel Scott of United Methodist Church



Women in the World 2016



Ylisse B.W., Rev. Dr. Traci C. West, Rev. Dr. Laurel E. Scott, Dr. Hee An Choi

*Continued on page 3...*



**Rev. Mariama White-Hammond, Rev. Dr. LaTrelle Miller Easterling, Rev. Dr. Gloria White-Hammond**

of Port Washington and Ylisse Bess Washington, Boston University Master of Divinity student, responded to Rev. Dr. West's points from their contexts.

In responding to Dr. West, Laurel Scott focused on the role of racism in violence against women, especially through anti-immigration attitudes and policies; and the racist preservation of white women's shame. She discussed how predatory racism continues to exist in insipid undercurrents that derive their roots from slavery, colonialism, and Jim Crow laws. This same kind of racism continues to exist in US immigration policies, where only people with certain credentials are allowed to enter for the sake of development of the US economy. For others, particularly those who do not possess educational credentials, are barred from entering under any conditions. Scott suggested that the prophetic and healing role of the church provides the foundation for a change in attitudes towards the treatment of all people who suffer violence.



Ylisse Bess Washington responded to Rev. Dr. West's question of how to shake the tolerance of intimate violence against women out of our society. Bess Washington claimed that we need to consider women's bodies as sacred texts and as much as we study the bible or other sacred texts we ought

to study women in order to understand their thoughts and how their bodies function in society.

During the workshop, Mariama White-Hammond, a second-year MDiv student and community organizer, walked participants through exercises that explored how pieces of our identities become important to us, and to strip them away only to the bare essentials leaves us feeling fragmented and disconnected from ourselves and our communities. Looking at the whole of a person, instead, offers a way to fully engage a person's history and story and how these interact with a community's history and story.



**Women in the World 2016**

*Continued on page 4...*



## Power. Privilege. Prophetic Witness Continued...

Then, Mariama led participants through an exercise that sought to examine our own knowledge of those who have died due to police brutality, and the nuances of how the media and our communities shape the information fed to us about the victims. All of this amounted to many questions and discussions about our own identities in light of the current situation of black people in the United States.

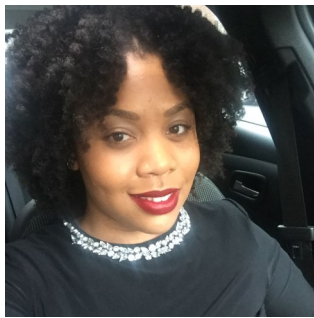
The second panel consisted of Rev. Dr. Gloria White-Hammond, Co-Pastor of Bethel AME Church in Jamaica Plain and visiting scholar at Harvard Divinity School, Rev. La'Trelle Miller-Easterling, the district superintendent for Metro Hope Boston district of the United Methodist Church, and Mariama White-Hammond. Gloria White-Hammond began by describing her own journey of getting involved with work to prevent domestic abuse. While she herself is a survivor of it, it took a trip to Sudan, a place she considered very dangerous, to understand the implications of abuse in her own neighborhoods. She, along with a network of churches, have sought to collaborate on the issue together to “Shatter the Silence” around sexual abuse.

In response, La'Trelle Miller-Easterling discussed the church's responsibility to speak up about sexual abuse and urged us all to remember the broader implications for remaining silent. She also discussed shifting the perspective from which scripture is interpreted from a male perspective to reading the scriptures through the particular experiences of women, women begin to testify to their healing, wholeness and liberation where they have found it so that the full story is told.

Finally, Mariama talked about community organizing and being present with kids. Her particular work gave her insights into how hope can be built within a community when working to challenge such large and violent systems. By using the platforms we have and reinterpreting scripture,

Throughout the day, we had questions from audience members ranging from how to implement systemic change in our own families to reclaiming the voice of God in communities that regularly witness violence. Ultimately, we have to continue to ask ourselves how we are participating in these systems of injustice and in what ways we are rejecting them with our own moments of hope and action, and choices to identify with power of different kind rather than the power that comes with privilege. While there was much to process, being in conversation together was one small part of our prophetic witness. ■





## When Daughters Prophesy: The Difficulties of Being a Black Female Preacher in 21<sup>st</sup> Century America

In the Book of Acts, there in the second chapter lies the notorious narrative that recounts the infamous day that gave birth to the early Christian church, Pentecost. On this day the bible states a large group of people assembled themselves in a house in Jerusalem. Suddenly a vociferous sound came from heaven and tongues of fire descended upon each of them, allowing them to speak in other languages. They were empowered and impregnated by the Holy Spirit. Those devout Jews who resided in the land saw the crowd and became perplexed to hear the miracles of God being articulated by persons who were not their native kin. Some were astounded, while others were appalled, saying that these individuals were, “filled with new wine.” Once the disciple Peter overheard them explaining this unusual event as an act of intoxication, he reminded them of the words given by God to the prophet Joel, “I will pour out my spirit on all flesh and your sons and daughters shall prophesy.”

This pericope provides proof to the world that the Holy Spirit is not a discriminatory presence. The spirit of the living God does not perpetuate biases about who can and cannot be appropriated as a vessel for the glorification of the divine. Social categories such as sex and gender are not deciding factors, for there is no preference nor is there precedence when it comes to those who labor for the kingdom. Throughout the years the majority of those within the Christian tradition have thoroughly respected the portion of this biblical passage that speaks to the sons becoming the future voices of prophesy but many often choose to ignore the fact that daughters were also authorized to do the same. There are still countless persons who even in a contemporary ministerial milieu have a hard time accepting the fact that women are being selected to declare the gospel message, just as equally as their male counterparts. Like the Jews on the day of Pentecost who thought the individuals who began speaking in tongues were both temporarily befuddled and inebriated, a hybrid form of this contorted temperament has crossed over into today’s time. There are people in modern day society who chose to view women who believe their calling is to preach as deranged and demented, recanting those memorable words from Acts 2, “They must be filled with new wine.”

So in 21<sup>st</sup> century America how is it that the daughters of the land are continuing to prophesy in a space where their voices are not always welcomed? Also how are preachers, black female preachers in particular, finding the strength to proclaim the good news while dealing with an array of problems that are

associated with gender adversity in ministry? The answers to such complex questions are not easy to conclude. If one could be given, the assumption would be that African American clergywomen have tackled issues such as these and continue to do so solely because of their reliance on the power of the Holy Spirit and the commitment they have to the call of God that has been placed upon their lives.

“I will pour out my spirit on all flesh and your sons and daughters shall prophesy.” Indeed it is true, women have been carrying and declaring the word for centuries but yet and still are being ostracized from pulpits and positions simply because of their physiological composition. They also have even been ridiculed, violated and abused by the misuse of scripture from both their male and female peers. While standing on the shoulders of the foremothers of the faith like Jarena Lee and Amanda Smith, black female preachers in this country have a rich narrative that has never been silenced despite the many naysayers; for they continue to rely on the power of God’s Holy Spirit. Yes, countless stories can still be told about how women in ministry have been scrutinized, undervalued and oversexualized but that has not stopped them from tapping into the divine source that continues to compel and empower them. Regardless of the social stigmas and stereotypes that they may face, this group of female proclaimers continues to exceed and excel within the Christian tradition. It is not a new phenomenon that women have been entrusted by the Holy Spirit to spread the gospel compassionately and faithfully.

It was because of women that the word was carried to the disciples about Jesus’s resurrection but the bible states that the disciples did not believe them. Despite their unbelief, the women were still committed to do what God called them to do and that was to declare the victorious word. This is also true for the black female preacher here in 21<sup>st</sup> century America. During times of hardship, despair and uncertainty, the melodious voices of women are continuing to proclaim the victory that is interwoven with the gospel regardless of the skepticism of others because they are dedicated to their calling to preach. Black women as Cicely Tyson once said, “Continue to hold on to the last rung” on the ladder of social hierarchy, this is also a realistic depiction of women who are involved in ministry.

In closing, in order for the black female preacher to progress in making strides in ministry and areas of spiritual leadership they must continue to be committed to the call, rely on the Holy Spirit but they also need the support of others inside the church. This means that those persons, especially men, must be willing to stand in solidarity with their female co-laborers of the faith to help promote a healthier societal understanding of women and ministry. The black female preacher has a voice that will forever resonate in the hearts of those who may hear their messages, for God has called daughters to prophesy.

By: Kaiya M. Jennings



## Choose to Stand with the Powerless

So this is March. Black history month is over, and what have you done? Another year is over and you look forward to the next. What did you do to fight racism, oppression, and other forms of social injustice? Black history month is over, but racism is not over. Blacks are still dying in the streets. They are still poor and many of them are getting poorer. Black lives still do not matter! I am a tenured professor here with an endowed chair but my life, my black life, does not matter. So this is March. Black history month is over, and what have you done?

We have done nothing. We are waiting. We are gathered in an elite university and waiting for fate, providence to bring the struggle for justice to us. We are doing what people with privilege who have some heart for social justice have always done. We sit in our places of power, pleasure, and treasure and wait for the struggle to come to us rather than taking the fight to the sites of social injustice.

We are waiting for the struggle to choose us, to awaken us, to sweep us off our feet, rather than choosing the struggle, rather than reawakening America to its moral consciousness. We are waiting instead of sweeping away the fetters of oppressions that hold black people down. We are waiting for, but not awaiting, the end of racism.

There was a man who did not wait for the struggle for liberation to nicely come to him, to choose him at his place of power, pleasure, and treasure. He did not wait for the right time to enter into the struggle. He chose the struggle and only then did God, time, and the struggle retroactively choose him. This man is Moses whom the writer of the book of Hebrews (11: 23-28) presents before us today. Moses did something to effect the liberation of the enslaved Hebrews in Egypt.

Hebrews 11 tells us that Moses took certain actions to jump into the struggle. These actions represent seven qualities, which are characteristic of militants for social justice. First, though Moses was Pharaoh's grandson, he *refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter (vs. 24). This was deliberate as he rejected the power and oppressive machinery of the Egyptian empire to stand with the powerless Hebrew slaves.*

Second, he *chose to suffer the affliction and pain of the slaves and thus rejected the passing pleasures of power (vs. 25). The person who chooses to stand with the powerless must be prepared to forgo certain pleasures in addition to suffering the punishments that the hegemonic powers must of necessity inflict on him or her. Often those of us who fight for social justice are not willing to give up our pleasures and privileges to effect change.*

Third, the bible says Moses *esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt (vs. 26). The militant for social justice must esteem her work with the op-*

*pressed more than the treasures of the American empire. God knows, America has enough treasures (financial security, fame, power, privilege, technology, and so on) to tempt even the most determined militant. America has enough treasures to quench the fire in the bellies and silent the voices of generations of militants.*

These three qualities of the militant for social justice as reflected in the story of Moses show that the American empire will offer us three kinds of temptations to draw us away from the struggle for social justice: power, pleasures, and gold. In this regard, let us look at how Moses overcame these powerful temptations. His *refusal of power was based on a deliberate choice, which was grounded on proper evaluation (esteeming). If your evaluation is wrong you cannot make the proper choice that will culminate in saying "No" to the machinery and assemblage of social injustice.*

For Moses, the process of refusal—choice—esteeming is powered by a vision of the *reward, eternal life, the glory of God (vs. 26). Moses had the control of his mind and desires to focus on the reward of liberation. In order to eliminate racism and enable black lives in all economic classes to not only matter but also flourish, we must keep our focus on the Dream.*

Hebrews 11:27 appears to recapitulate the three verses before it, recasting Moses's decision as not (only) rooted in giving up pleasures, but (also) in courage in the face of fear. The hegemonic group often drives us away from the path of social justice because of fear. But here the bible says by faith Moses forsook Egypt, *not fearing the wrath of Pharaoh. He forsook Egypt, knowing the consequences but not afraid. Often we let ourselves be surprised by the consequences of our decision to struggle against injustice. My brothers and sisters, are you willing to endure the negative consequences of your struggle for social justice?*

We are told Moses was able to endure the consequences of forsaking Egypt, the most powerful empire of his time, because he was "seeing Him who is invisible" (vs. 27). To do the impossible you must first *see the invisible. The state of human flourishing for black lives and the defeat of the oppressive machinery of power in this country appear unrealistic now, but we must see them in our minds' eyes. We cannot persevere in the struggle if we do not learn to gaze at the invisible. Martin Luther King saw the invisible mountaintop of freedom when he was in the dense darkness of the cave that was black life in the 1950/60s.*

Finally, verses 27 and 28 clearly state that Moses succeeded because he *kept the faith. If his faith had not taken him through the process of forsaking, refusal, choice, esteeming, and courage he could not have focused on the ultimate reward.*

*By faith he kept the Passover (vs. 28). If your faith has not taken you through the process of forsaking, refusal, choice, and estimation you cannot keep the Passover of today, that is, engage in the practices of freedom. The person who lives in faith must always be ready to refuse, choose, and esteem as praxis of freedom.*

**Continued on page 7...**

Walter G. Muelder Professor of Social Ethics  
By: Nimi Wariboko

Such persons must choose to side with the powerless, be on the side of liberation, emancipation, equality, and life-more-abundant. Together, we will succeed. Just as faith brought Moses to the state of the liberation of the Hebrew slaves, faith in the struggle and its priceless prize, in the American people and in the church, and in God Almighty will bring us to the place and time

where black lives will matter and flourish.

Let me end where I began. So this is March. Black history month is over, and what have you done? Another year is over and you look forward to the next. What did you do to fight racism, oppression, and other forms of social injustice? Black history month is over, but racism is not over. ■



## Nine simple words, one simple phrase

“Don’t ever let them put you in a box.”

This is advice that was given to me by one of my undergraduate professors, a woman of color who theorizes the complexities of identities.

At the time, this advice seemed important. Her advice seemed wise. For a reason I couldn’t understand, her advice resonated with me, but I did not fully understand the weight of this advice until years and years later. More specifically, I did not fully understand what this advice meant until people began to directly challenge the dimensionality of my identity as a Black woman.

“Are you Black first or are you a woman first?”

“If you identify as a Black woman, you know you can’t be a feminist, right?”

“You’re not “Black” Black, I can tell. What are you, really?”

These are all real things that real people have said to me on various occasions. In directing such questions and comments at me, I began to realize that these individuals were trying to put me in a hypothetical box in order to categorize me based on their understanding of how a Black woman should think, look, or behave. When my opinions, appearance, and behavior did not match up to these expectations or understandings, my identity was challenged or written off as inadequate.

The fact that anyone would challenge me about my own identity infuriated me, but instead of speaking up, my preferred response was eye-rolling or the silent treatment. It was in these moments that all the responses I’d prepared and rehearsed seemed worthless.

“There’s no point in arguing with this person,” I would think to myself, “it’s not my job to educate them.”

That said, there was something about allowing people to maintain these one-dimensional notions of Black women that left me frustrated and feeling like I needed to confront their attitudes.

At the point that I became comfortable with this, I chose to utilize the power and privilege I had to be able to express my truth.

To be clear, power and privilege manifest in many ways. While I don’t reap the benefits that racial or gendered privilege have yielded historically, I do reap the benefits of having a formal education and of knowing how to communicate my thoughts, feelings, and opinions. These are privileges and it is my power to use them for not only my own empowerment, but also the empowerment of others.

With this understanding, I began speaking my truth even when it was difficult and I made a habit of it. In doing so, I recognized that sharing my stories and using my voice gave me the ability to carve out space where Black women were never meant to be heard. Speaking my truth and helping others to do the same has helped me avoid feeling as though I’ve been put in a box.

Don’t ever let them put you in a box. ■

By: Gina Physisic



Women in the World Workshop

# MARCH 2015—MARCH 2016 DONORS LIST

*Thank you for your continued support!*

Linda E. Bergh	Nizzi S. Digan	Susan W. Hassinger	Kevin M. Nelson	The United Methodist Church
Jacqueline B. Blue	James Dooley	Hwang Heo	HiRho Y. Park	Patricia J. Thompson
Carole R. Bohn	Amy D. Durfee West	David S. Jacobsen	Shirley H. Pearse	James G. and Mary Todd
Mary Lou G. Boice	Aida I. Fernandez	Kathryn J. Johnson	Karen L. Peters	Margaret S. Wiborg
Gail P. Bucher	Cheryl A. Gates	Hannah Ka	Lynn N. Rhodes	Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference of the United Methodist Church
Jo Ann Carlotto	Courtney T. Goto	Norma V. Leachon	Dorothy G. Rogers	Kee Boem So
Hee A. Choi	June C. Goudey	Alyssa E. Lodewick	Wonwha L. Ryu	
Dawn E. Clark	Tommietta M. Green Sheared	Deborah L. Luchenbill	Laurel Scott	
Katheryn P. Darr	Tallessyn Z. Grenfell-Lee	Thomas S. McKeown	Yun Jeong Seol	
Cristian De La Rosa		Jennifer L. Mihok	Wanda J. Stahl	



*Thank you!*



## Women in the World 2016





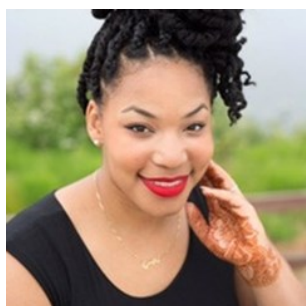
# Transitions

## Farewell Kaci Norman



After three wonderful years, I have to leave the Shaw Center. I have immensely enjoyed my time working with all the wonderful people here. Without the Shaw Center, my time at BUSTH would have been so incredibly different. The weekly lectures were enriching; the frequent foods nourishing (and budget saving); the events challenging to the often abstract work I was doing in classes. But most importantly, the relationships of the Shaw Center have sustained me and have helped to educate my full self. From peers who stopped in for a place to sleep or laugh to friends who needed someone to listen, the relationships I have formed at the Shaw Center have helped to make me a more caring person, aware of the many ways of being in the world, and acknowledging of the many layers to theological education. My co-workers sat patiently with me as we hashed out many details in the middle of already busy schedules. And the director, Dr. Choi Hee An, regularly encouraged me when I needed it most. Without her guidance and mentorship as well as all those precious moments of laughter, my time at the Shaw Center would have been merely a job, and not the place of personal growth and support system that it was. I cannot leave this place without much gratitude for all it has offered me. Thank you to all who made the Shaw Center what it has been for me; it is absolutely a place I will remember fondly and call home as I move to other positions and communities.

## New Staff: Ylisse B.W.



Ylisse B.W. is from Lakewood, WA and a graduate of Gonzaga University with a B.A. in Sociology and Religious Studies. She served an Ameri-corps year with City Year Chicago where she worked as a tutor and mentor to high school students in Chicago. She is currently in her second year as an MDiv student at BUSTH. Her interests include women's health and spiritual healthcare policy.



<http://www.neumc.org/missionu>



"Spirit Wind" Fair  
Trade Agent in NE  
Conference, UMC



Women in the World 2016

# ANNA HOWARD SHAW CENTER NEWSLETTER

*Volume 32, Issue 2, Spring 2016*

## MANAGING EDITOR

Rev. Dr. Choi Hee An

## STUDENT EDITORS:

Kaci Norman & Ylisse Bess Washington

## CONTRIBUTORS

Rev. Dr. Nimi Wariboko, Gina Phisic GRS '15, Kaiya Jennings STM '16

**Boston University is an equal opportunity,  
affirmative action institution.**

0609 974050

*Please send donations to:  
Boston University School of Theology  
Anna Howard Shaw Center  
745 Commonwealth Avenue  
Boston, Massachusetts 02215*

*Or online at: [www.bu.edu/shaw/donations/](http://www.bu.edu/shaw/donations/)*



Boston University School of Theology  
Anna Howard Shaw Center

745 Commonwealth Avenue  
Boston, Massachusetts 02215

617-353-3075

<http://www.bu.edu/shaw/>

