



"I Beg to Differ"
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Girls Movement Redefines Women's Roles in Society, Part II

by Akilah A. Jeffery

All around Black girls are competing expectations of the types of women they will become. That's why G.U.R.L.S. Rock is a positive resource for girls. The project was founded by attorney S. Raye Mitchell, a Harvard Law School graduate with an MBA from USC who received a Jefferson Award for her work with girls.

Mitchell recognizes that many Black girls rely "solely on the messages that are delivered through the media... That's a distorted reality of who we are as Black women and who they can be." Stereotypes distorted reality when the Rutgers women's basketball team were called "nappy headed ho's."

"Here you have these girls that are doing everything society says they're supposed to be doing... They weren't doing anything reminiscent of any stereotype and yet they were still forced back into that model," Mitchell says.

"When the woman of color does break out of that, then the negative stereotypes are, 'Well, she's professional. Then, she can't have a man. If she's professional she's going to be the angry Black woman... They keep juxtaposing limitations with these positives... The purpose of New Reality Foundation is to say not only do you [strip away] those limited views of who you are... you get to own the picture of yourself ... showing that you're not who they want you to believe you are."

Sadly, many girls of color are not being correctly prepared for leadership. "We don't drive them to the hardcore sciences... We just don't expose them to greatness at an early enough stage in their lives where we can nurture that," Mitchell says whose project begins to work with girls at the age of 8 years old.

"Basic things like outsourcing, boundaries and borders are morphing. If they want to go to top schools, they need to have an international experience. If they want to move to corporate leadership, they have to have an international presence... In other countries it is not uncommon for children aged 2, 3 or 4 to have multiple language skills."

"I tell girls that there is a great big world out there for them... I rather their peer pressure propel them towards excellence... My ego does not require me to be the smartest kid on the block, but I do want to be on the block with the smartest kids."

The ideal next step for G.U.R.L.S. Rock is to hold a global leadership summit in Washington, D.C. in 2012 with a collection of grassroots organizations to help girls of color become active participants in their own destinies. Mitchell plans to hold similar summits around the country, offering high impact programs that meet on the needs of self development, self nurturing, and technological and leadership skills, utilizing state of the art resources.

It is an ambitious plan but Mitchell is ready for the challenge. "Somehow, one way or another, God provides," she says. "He wouldn't give me the drive with no way to get there. The passion and enthusiasm are contagious."

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