Introduction

Looking to the Motherline

> A nation is not conquered until the hearts of its women are on the ground.
>
> —Lakota proverb, Mary Crow Dog, *Lakota Woman*

THE VALUE OF THE MOTHERLINE and its wisdom are inestimable. According to Edelman (1994) and Lowinsky (1992), "without knowledge of her own experiences and their relationship to her mothers," a daughter is snipped from the female cord that connects the generations of women in her family, the feminine line of descent known as the "Motherline." A woman achieves her psychic connection to generations of feminine wisdom through hearing her mother's and her grandmother's narratives about women's physical, psychological, and historical changes—bleeding, birthing, suckling, aging, and dying. According to Lowinsky: "When a woman today comes to understand her life story as a story from the Motherline, she gains female authority in a number of ways that help her . . . [reclaim] her female perspective, from which to consider how men are similar and how they are different" (Lowinsky, 1992, p. 13).

Lowinsky theorizes the ways women gain "female authority" when they understand their life stories in the context of the Motherline: the reclamation of our carnal body knowledge, particularly its "blood mysteries and their power"; the attainment of a life cycle perspective that

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creates a compassionate gaze at our current situation and the discovery of our female roots and their parallel struggles; and development into connection with the archetypal mother and the accompanying ancient world view and its wisdom. From this world view, a woman learns that the body and soul are unified, that all of life is interrelated, and from this way of knowing women soften into the perspective that life changes, babies grow, people age and die, there is a cycle to all of life. Finally, Lowinsky tells us that the Motherline gives women grounding as they come to terms with the new options now open to us as women.

In other words, Motherline stories ground women in a gender, a family, and a feminine history. By centering this investigation on the transmission of leadership knowledge through the Motherline, we help to define the contours of black womanist knowledge. In this way we counter the dominant culture's pattern of imprinting its values, experiences, and interpretations of maternal strivings on the symbiosis of the African American mother-daughter dyad. Our efforts support the naming of our own reality(ies) and refute external sources of labeling and constructing what constitutes leadership for us. In naming our own ways of passing on leadership we engage in the African American tradition of resistance, empowerment, and what Parker (2005, pp. 130–32) describes as transformation that dislodges, disrupts, and diverges from societal conceptions of "female only" leadership.

STEPPING UP TO THE COUNTERNARRATIVE: LOOSENING THE UNTOLD STORY

> There is no agony like bearing an untold story inside you.
> —Zora Neale Hurston

The value of story in women's lives is a cultural anchor.[1] Scholars such as Johnetta Betsch Cole and Beverly Guy-Sheftall (2003) suggest that the stories women tell bring us into the deep structure of the culture and the texture and quality of daily life. They also widen the circle of knowledge, spur change, and aid other women in reframing the contours and rough edges of their lives. In this anthology, we choose to have black women tell us stories about the Motherline as a means of

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entering this cultural realm. Bettina Aptheker's explanation of the central role of story in women's lives helps us see why story as the medium for learning about women's lives is so crucial. She writes: "Women use stories in their everyday lives, and especially as a way of doing emotional work . . . [S]ome have been stitched into quilts or planted in gardens or painted or sculpted or written in letters and journals . . . [W]omen's stories evoke distinct meanings, distinct special and temporal arrangements. They have been crafted out of the artifacts of daily life, beckoning us to see" (Aptheker, 1989, pp. 44–45).

In the case of this book, the importance of stories is contradictory. On the one hand, there is a need to hear women speak in their own voices so that we are invited into the ways women use language and experience to shape meanings on their own terms. On the other hand, particularly when one looks at two vast subjects such as motherwork and leadership, there is the risk of revealing a system of knowledge designed to preserve black women's lives and role in liberating the race. For this reason, such a tradition was intentionally kept "close to the vest" and behind the veil of black women's double consciousness. Double consciousness, first conceptualized by W. E. B. DuBois in *The Souls of Black Folks* is the ability of marginalized groups to sustain a consciousness of both how they perceive themselves and how the dominant group perceives them. For black women, it was imperative that they know and understand the dominant white cultural group, rather than "be known" by dominant others. Just as it behooves the oppressed to cultivate stratagems unknown to the power elite, open access to black women's leadership knowledge would undermine their capabilities for maintaining inviolable boundaries of spirit and pragmatic boundaries of action so necessary to personal and social uplift.

We advocate a selective relinquishing of our former vigilance in favor of a deliberate unveiling in our own time and space, with our own methods, and in our own voice.

> Black women need to articulate and claim this knowledge to create a strong imprint of the collective knowledge that structures our cultural context. We need to be able to name, legitimize and hold up our own paradigms of cultural meaning in the light of day. Perhaps this is why Patricia Bell Scott (1994)

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> says that Black women write "about" and "for" their lives . . . and says that "personal writing is/has always been a dangerous activity because it: "Allows us the freedom to defy culturally imposed negative identities . . . and has offered avenues for resistance and recreation." (pp. 17–18)

In addition, there is much historical precedent for black women intellectuals—particularly those we now frame as black feminist intellectuals—to give voice to social issues, particularly those pertinent to black life and culture, and to the isms arising from the social hierarchies of power (Cole and Guy-Sheftall, 2003; Guy-Sheftall, 1995). Black women intellectuals from the 1800s to the present gave voice to some of the most highly contested issues of their time and used the power of the pen, including personal narrative, to take on and engage in psychosocial resistance and to effect change. Given the geophysical dispersion we are now subject to in the aftermath of urban migration, integration, urban renewal, gentrification, and the many other sources and forms of displacement we have been subjected to (e.g., Hurricane Katrina, mass corporate lay-offs, predatory lending), we now need to create sites for telling the stories that keep the fabric of African American culture whole.

In the case of mother-daughter leadership transmission, black women need to reconnect to the Motherline and seek the stories of leadership and then tell these stories to clarify and empower ourselves with common knowledge of our own leadership narrative and how knowledge of leadership was handed down to us. To affirm this knowledge dismantles the limits that patriarchy would place on us. To not have these stories consciously available to us structures a subtle form of subjugation that leaves us no tools for our own defense or for our own redefinition. We need the shared knowledge that we have participated in the human project of leadership. We need the language for structuring the meaning of our own leadership capacities, skills, and approaches. We need the imagination of the sheroes that have gone before us, including both those epic historical figures and those close to home in the bodies of our own mothers and othermothers. This work seeks to recast the privileged notion of leadership (Komives and Wagner

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et al., 2009, McKenzie, 2001) as one that resides in our own lived experience and as one that emanates from our own Motherline herstories.

Ain't I a Leader? Barriers to Laying Claim to Leadership

In constantly meeting the demands for survival and fending off the noxious stimuli of discrimination it is altogether possible for black women to not be cognizant of their own performance as leaders.[2] As a case in point, many of the women writers who submitted works to be considered for this anthology, including those whose works were selected—did not see themselves as leaders. Many of the women called us by phone, some more than once, to share their ideas for the paper they would like to write. Following the majority of these phone calls or queries was the refrain: "So is my idea related to leadership?"

After we reassured potential contributors that their ideas were exactly the kind of narrative we hoped to receive, we found that there was still another level of uncertainty to address. Many of the women would then share with us their doubts about the terminology of leadership itself. Commonly we heard them say things such as: "I know I've achieved a number of things in my life, and I know that my othermothers prepared me well to achieve those things, but I never actually think of myself as a leader." When we explored this conundrum further with them by pointing to some of the things they currently were doing or had done and asking whether they felt this was leadership, they would laughingly affirm that indeed it was! Some would even discover the incongruence between their willingness to use the labels of *leader* and *leadership* when speaking of their mothers and othermothers or their colleagues—but not themselves.

Answers to why black women pull back from owning their influence and accomplishments as leadership can be directly tied to early patterns of socialization and the large looming social forces. We have observed the following barriers to black women laying claim to their own leadership identities:

Gendered Projections. Women leaders are commonly perceived as harsh, masculine, seemingly alienated from and possibly

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compromised in the appropriate performance of their gender roles. Society also views women leaders as puppets easily coopted by male power, as sexual objects susceptible to various "casting couch" dynamics, or conversely wielding power as women in ways that are officious or narcissistic. Summarily there is a belief that both women and black women leaders will be rendered impotent because of the systemic forces of racism (Wilson, 2007).

Cultural and Racial Projections. To the extent that systemic racism has created an imbalance in the male-female relational dyad causing females to assume leadership in the areas of family care taking, child discipline, and economic support, stepping up to the leadership challenge places black women at risk for being perceived as usurping black male power and fulfilling the stereotypical "matriarch" function in which men of the race are prevented from taking a leadership role in family, community, and nation.

Negative Perceptions of Leadership. To lead with unabashed passion, spoken clarity of one's leadership and its raison d'etre in response to needed change or the building of equity imperils the actor with labels of *militant* or conversely of *bleeding heart liberal*. In addition, there are numerous negative projections reserved for women who are perceived as "uppity," and out of "their place."

Socialization to Deny or Downplay One's Contribution. As a matter of home training and tutelage in humility, black women modestly accept thanks and praise or shrink at acknowledgment of our leadership accomplishments. Earnest self appreciation of one's leadership capacity is often mired in a conflictual state of emotions about whether we are deserving of the leadership role. Moreover, our communal upbringing teaches us that everyone's contribution is necessary to the success of a venture; thus it is unfair to emphasize the organizer to the exclusion of the group, village, community, or team. Consequently, black women readily demonstrate leadership abilities behind the scenes, without becoming the public face of leadership (Smooth and Tucker, 1999; Gilkes, 2001).

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> Contradictions between Terminology and Action. Such contradictions can include verified daily leadership that is seldom acknowledged or described as such. We call our works "helping," "serving," "nurturing," "ministering to," "stepping up," or "assuming duty and responsibility." In the most immediate sense, *leaders* and *leadership* are white male and institutionally inscribed terms referring to an individual or body of supreme power. The actual term of 'leader' is typically reserved for those in authority, the president of the company, upper management, team captains, or one's superior.

Vocalization of the words *I am a leader* eludes a good many African American women in particular and women in general. In order for black women to lay claim to leadership in its most generic terms, there are a series of questions they must ask of themselves. These questions guide personal reflections about what constitutes leadership and how to craft a personal style of leading that integrates cultural and bicultural orientations. In this anthology, each writer had to confront and explore questions of personal and cultural relevance such as the following:

1. What is leadership? How do I know when I am leading, and what are the many ways to be a leader?
2. Where can I find the keys to understanding my own distinct leadership potential, and how can I identify what my particular leadership style consists of?
3. How do I resolve the dilemmas of bringing something different to the mainstream in terms of how I lead versus conforming to mainstream leadership methods?
4. How do I take what I know to be culturally validated styles of leadership and parlay them into a mainstream leadership role of value and worth, or how do I take my skills validated in the mainstream and utilize them to support and develop my own community?

The exploration into matrilineal leadership is itself a key inroad into the morass of laying claim to one's self as leader. Typically this is a process that can only deepen after sufficient experience with the

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perception of one's self as leadership contender results in some bitter-sweet encounters with victories and defeats that culminate in gazing inward and raising compelling questions about the consequences and outcomes of one's leadership. Ultimately, the laws of diminishing returns force a reckoning with self and a desire to understand those factors that most influence the ability to lead without compromising what is core to one's identity. While leadership experiences can result in achievement and even accolades, the need to feel comfortable about the leadership process, its effects on others, and the authenticity of self one brings to leadership performance commonly grows in importance. Conversely, experiences of failure, inadequacy, self-compromise, or self-other alienation may also raise questions that return a woman's attention to earlier experiences of culturally based leadership development and its cultural wisdom.

Regardless of whether the external stimulus is one of relative success or failure, women find themselves returning to unlock the wisdom of the Motherline by reflecting on questions of interpersonal (and particularly matrilineal) relevance such as the following:

1. Who were my leadership role models?
2. What tools did they give me to make my ascent as a leader?
3. How am I similar to and how am I different from my leadership role model(s)?
4. What did they teach me that seemed to be strategically aimed to combat patriarchal oppression?

For black women the teaching and demonstration of leadership begins in one's family and society of origin and is part and parcel of the socialization process. According to scholars who have examined black women's lives in the context of African cultural mores that survived the middle passage, enslavement, the Jim Crow era, and the morphing of these forms of institutionalized oppression into the modern day versions of the interlocking oppressions of race, class, and gender, black women are the recipients of a very particular and acute socialization process. Overall, leadership is a complex and prismatic issue for African American women. Therefore, it is not always easy to know how to view

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black women's leadership or where to look for this fine-tuned integration of dual socialization and its application.

THE MOTHERLINE AND THE VALUE OF OUR EPIC STORIES

In *Africana,* Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates (1997; 2003) suggest that the traditions of African and African American female leadership are Janus-faced. They at once "look forward to the women's new goals and backward to the status and roles that women leaders have played in the past" (p. 738). Culturally, the expression of African American female leadership and that of the women of the African Diaspora are called "black feminism" and "Womanism" (Walker, 1983). In the Americas, the template for black feminism emerged from the lived experiences of the free traditional African woman and the enslaved black woman. Scholar Patricia Hill Collins (in *Africana,* pp. 742–45) portends that "black feminism is a means of human empowerment rather than an end in and of itself. It encompasses a comprehensive, anti-sexist, anti-racist and anti-elitist perspective of social change."

Historically, black feminism has progressed across three distinct phases. The first phase was laying the foundation 1800–1920. This phase was characterized by a conceptualization of liberty, freedom, dignity, and voice. The second phase, working for change 1920–1960, was exemplified by communalism and the development of collective movements, voice, and self-help organizations. The third and current phase is contemporary black feminism, 1960 to the present. This latter phase reflects the diversification of the African American female and her communal experiences, life styles, issues, and concerns. Notably the evolutionary path of black feminism intersects with what Bogardus (1981) calls the seven epochs of racism: captivity and slavery; miscegenation; liberation and independence; Reconstruction, Jim Crow; civil rights and modern racism. At each juncture, the substance of black feminism has been strategically framed to respond to the expressions of racial injustice, social trends, and key challenges to survival.

Since its inception in the nineteenth century, black feminism/ womanism has held a consistency in its themes and philosophical

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outlook. Structurally, black feminism and black female leadership are undergirded by four basic pillars: (1) the legacy of struggle; (2) the search for voice and the refusal to be silenced; (3) the impossibility of separating intellectual inquiry from political activism; and (4) the direct application of empowerment to everyday life. Resting on these four pillars are common experiences of race, gender, and economic discrimination that force attention to the necessities of forging and sustaining various forms of leadership and resistance.

The legacy of struggle is the core impetus for black female leadership and feminism. This energetic struggle has been aimed at eliminating and transcending racial and social oppression by transforming societal relations and controls. Voice is a tool aimed at striking down the mythology of demeaning stereotypes and reinventing black women through acts of individual and collective self-expression. Historically, black women have been subject to such objectifying labels as *breeders, wet nurse mammies, aunties, conjurers,* and *jezebels*. These depictions provide the most common symbols of our objectification and commodification and have been put in place as mechanisms of social control, domination, and justification of the negative. Black women challenge the dominant authorities and their accompanying projections by asserting the power to speak and name themselves. Moreover, this reclamation of identity on our own terms delimits the authority system's efforts to quash visibility. As black women's lives require complex negotiations and the mediation of contradictions, the capacity for leadership has been shown in our ability to create strategies for survival and advancement that include self-authentication, through unending self-invention and reinvention.

In the black feminist/womanist posture, African American women of all strata strive for a measure of self-acceptance and appreciation such as that articulated by Alice Walker when she described womanists as intentional leaders, who love "[the] self. *Regardless*" (p. xii).[3] Known for self-expressiveness, they have scripted their own ways of "being in the world" in both their public and private personas. For example, Madame C. J. Walker's founding of a national corporation that grew into a multi-billion-dollar international industry fueled primarily by a consumer base of black women illustrates the strength of black women's beauty ethic. The formation of this self-styled beauty ethic is indicative of self-

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regard, psychological uplift, and a supportive, pro-black community—despite the context of oppression and neocolonization. In writing their own script, black women have built a lattice of self-identification and unity that casts off the shackles of internalized oppression, self-hatred, and self-sabotage (Bundles, 2001). In either refusing to look or act like the oppressor or in claiming self-authentication even when appearing to conform to mainstream standards of beauty, black women consciously choose resistance over patriarchal authority.

Having reckoned with the concrete experience of oppression black women have devised effective strategies for action out of their struggle for personal and collective liberation. In this book, we define leadership as *the desire, ability and efforts to influence the world around us, based upon an ethic of care for self and other and fueled by a vision that one sustains over time.* The actions of black women historically demonstrate leadership as we have just defined it. This leadership is characterized by the assertion of free will choices to empower ourselves across a range of oppressive situations. History records countless ordinary and historic black women who have seized the reins of leadership. Their works have been integral to the creation of adages that transmit core values and that apply these values to daily life. Some of the most commonly heard and inspiring "old folks'" sayings to this effect include "each one teach one" or "each one reach one"; "every tub must stand on its own bottom"; "making a way out of no way;" "lift as we climb"; "service is the rent we pay for being on this earth"; and, "speaking life into it (it being our own or another's reality or experience)." These adages prescribe ways to lead and to empower self and the communal network.

Although feminism can be used to frame black women's proclivity to empower self and others and to "uplift" people, families, and communities, black women as a group have perceived the doctrines of feminism as lacking in breadth. Accepting actions that liberate only on the basis of gender when an entire community ails is tantamount to sacrilege in the Africentric world view. Thus, whether black women have rejected feminism outright or worked to redefine its parameters, they have challenged and critiqued it for placing conditions on liberation or for failing to reach across the lines of race and class to include the presence, voice, and influence of poor women or people of color (hooks, 2000; Jones Royster, 2000).

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Characterizing this view is one of the earliest black feminists, Sojourner Truth, who challenged the tendency for feminists of her day to act in moderation even on their own behalf. Of this she says: "Sisters, I aren't clear what you be after. If women want any rights more than they got, why don't they just take them and not be talking about it?" (Ortiz, 1974, p. 81). History provides ample evidence of the ongoing urging by black feminists to their white sisters to expand the inclusiveness of feminism and to confront woman-to-woman racism and classism within the movement itself (Hine, 1994). To bridge the chasm in worldviews, black womanists have opted to widen the movement and make it more accessible to more women by promoting social and economic equality for all.[4]

The merits and voracity of black womanism and leadership are without question. They are transgenerational phenomena and a survivor's legacy, despite the mainstream societal insistence on black female invisibility and subjugation. To counter stereotypes, the voices of black women leaders tell true, heal, sing, decree, lament, testify, admonish, scream, and thunder as an expression of power, presence, and connection. At no time since coming to the North American continent have women of the African Diaspora been effectively and permanently silenced. Our legacy of leadership stems through time to the "Great Black Mother" and the culture of allomothers. Some out of many mother figures include the great queens of Africa such as Nzingha, Nefertiti, Sheba, Hatshepsut, Cleopatra, and the Kandake queens of Meroe; Abla Pokou, founder of the Baule nation in West Africa; Kahia la Kahina and Karsifa, warrior queens who resisted Arab conquest, Ashanti matrilineage queens; and the women of the West African marketplace. We can also name women farmers, business women, weavers, artisans, and musicians; women's Mystery School leaders (Neale Hurston, 1938);[5] and the survivors of the middle passage. On the American shores, the legacy is carried on by such women as Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells, Angelina Weld Grimke, Charlotte Forten Grimke, Maggie Lena Walker, Margaret Murray Washington, Mary Church Terrell, Fannie Burroughs, Anna Julia Cooper. Even more recent figures include Zora Neale Hurston, Amy Jacques Garvey, Mary McLeod Bethune, Florynce Kennedy, Rosa Parks, Fannie Lou

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Hammer, Ella J. Baker, Septima Clark, and Dorothy Height to name a few of those who have garnered some degree of public recognition.

Some of the exemplars of the contemporary black feminist movement include Pauli Murray, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, June Jordan, Audre Lorde, Sonia Sanchez, Ntozake Shange, Angela Davis, bell hooks, Barbara Smith, Michelle Wallace, Deborah King, Shirley Chisolm, Eleanor Holmes Norton, Barbara Jordan, Kelley Brown Douglas, Beverly Guy-Sheftall, Bonnie Thornton Dill, Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, Delores Williams, Patricia Williams, Patricia Hill Collins, and countless more both known and unknown.

Further recessed from public consciousness are the "different other voices" of black women scholar-leaders who bring the leadership contributions and concerns of black women to the foreground. The works these scholars produced include Gloria T. Hull and Patricia Bell Scott, *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Brave: Black Women's Studies* (1982); Nellie McKay, *Colored Woman in a White World (African-American Women Writers, 1910–1940)* (with Mary Church Terrell (1996); Darlene Clark Hine, *Hine Sight: Black Women and the Re-Construction of American History* (1994); Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter* (1984); Dorothy Sterling, *We Are Your Sisters* (1984), Nell Irvin Painter *Sojourner Truth: A Life, a Symbol* (1996); Beverly Guy-Sheftall, *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought* (1995); Jacqueline Jones Royster, *Traces of a Stream: Literacy and Social Change among African American Women* (2000); Valerie Lee, *Granny Midwives and Black Women Writers* (1996), Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, *If It Wasn't for the Women: Black Women's Experience and Womanist Culture in Church and Community* (2001); Trudier Harris, *Saints, Sinners, Saviors: Strong Black Women in African American Literature* (2001); *Beverly Guy Sheftall, African American Women: The Legacy of Black Feminism* (2003); Kristin Waters and Carol Conway, *Black Women's Intellectual Traditions: Speaking Their Minds* (2007); and Dutchess Harris, *Black Feminist Politics: From Kennedy to Clinton* (2009).

Yet the voices of black women scholars from the behavioral and organizational sciences sectors were also needed to reflect the psychosocial, organizational and systemic pressures arrayed against black women who engage in leadership assertion. Recent examples include Ella Bell

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and Stella Nkomo, *Our Separate Ways: Black and White Women and the Struggle for Professional Identity* (2001), Trevy McDonald and T. Ford-Ahmed, *Nature of a Sistuh: Black Women's Lived Experiences in Contemporary Culture* (1999); Kimberly Springer, *Still Lifting Still Climbing: Contemporary African American Women's Activism* (1999); Cydney Shields and Leslie Shields, *Work Sister, Work* (1993); Patricia Reid-Merritt, *Sister Power* (1996); Belinda Robnett *How Long? How Long? African-American Women and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (1997); Leslie Jackson and Beverly Greene, *Psychotherapy with African American Women* (2000); Charisse Jones and Kumea Shorter-Gooden, *Shifting: The Double Lives of Black Women in America* (2003); Reverend Vashti M. McKenzie, *Not without a Struggle: Leadership Development for African American Women in Ministry* (1996); Syenia Rose, *Rise Up: A Call to Leadership* (2004); and Patricia Parker, *Race, Gender, and Leadership: Re-Envisioning Organizational Leadership from the Perspectives of African American Women Executives* (2005). Each of these books offers insights into the leadership dilemmas of black women in organizational settings or helps us to see the great psychospiritual challenges that black female leaders face in their lives and in society.

With this panoply of divergent voices, it is eminently possible to bring forward a comprehensive exploration of human leadership across differences. However, to arrive at an appreciation of the intergenerational nature of black women's leadership, we need to honor the matrilineage process. Sensitizing readers to the viability of black women's leadership as a service and a gift prompts myriad questions about the genesis, conception, mode of operation, and relational intricacies involved in the apprenticing of women to traditions of empowerment and social change.

The next three sections illustrate the vast scope and dimension of matrilineal transmission of leadership. The section titles are part 1. "Motherline Roots and Significance"; part 2. "The Foundations of Mother-Daughter Tutelage"; part 3. "Visions of the Motherline: Templates for Daughters"; part 4. "Tensions along the Motherline: Translating Mother Templates to Daughter Actions." We end with a chapter entitled "Conclusions: Becoming the Motherline."

These mother-daughter narratives are written on the insides of trees.[6] They claim a place at the core of leadership knowledge. Through their daughters, the elders' intentional ideas about leadership are real-

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ized. The role of the daughters in the following chapters is to show us this space of powerful motherwork.[7] Daughters write motherpower in the pages of their reflections. Through them we learn not only how their mothers pushed the edges toward a more just world, but how their mothers influenced the daughters' life chances and prepared daughters to step into the struggle of dismantling systems of oppression.

The writings here by scholarly black women stoke our understanding of what black leadership means. Their writings burn an imprint across the twentieth century, a time in world history rife with totalitarianism and aggression. The authors are notable scholars, practitioners, and educators, Their collective voices combine a grand diversity of storyline time, place, and setting with a common focus along the continuum of black matrilineal leadership.

In studying this legacy of leadership, it became apparent to us that African American mothers of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries moved with a clear awareness of the objectification of black womankind. And knowing this, they intentionally fed their daughters the tactical nourishment necessary to outwit oppressive forces. This Brer' Rabbit ingenuity grown out of the soil of U.S. oppression, passed from hand to hand in subtle yet explicit teachings, was designed to preserve life. At the same time, the mothers also gave their daughters permission to step beyond guile if need be. These mothers ignored the rules of the master's house that linked proper womanhood with submission. Instead they taught that all humans have access to a force that defies internal defeat of the spirit. The ultimate resistance to being "broken" is seen time and again in women's refusal to accept the status quo, in the forced breaking of exclusionary barriers, and in the continuance of their will to live. Rather than whistling in the wind, hoping for deliverance, black women have created and passed on their own brand of activism, charged with the fires of hope and "belief in self greater than anyone's disbelief." For this book, these scholars show us how they were taught, what they were taught, and how they now leave their leadership imprint on the world.

The common theme among the writings is that of resistance to social, race, class, and gender oppression. They show us that resistance is a mechanism for refusing the social death served up by oppression. Social death occurs when oppression from without takes root within the

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psyche and erodes the capacity to relate, care, or believe that one's actions contribute to the humanity of self and other. Resisting, however, consists of countless ways for women to summon presence, clarify voice, and discern a path of action to restore human vitality. Within this anthology, the theme of resistance is carved deep by the rendering of daughter-scholars' expressions of the mothering they received. They show us "a line of cutting women"[8] who bring a creative tension through tenderness. They confirm their daughters' strengths while urging daughters' self critique. They provide the safe spaces of communal connection at the same time that they prepare daughters for the tough trials of isolation. And they model woman-bonding in a way that rejects the sacrifice of one's own selfhood as the price of having sister-friends. The contributors to this book show us mothers who commune, encircle, challenge, and correct. They confirm that a wide swath of experiences comprises what it means to mother someone to leadership. But in the wake of their tellings, we see a collective mural of mothers who have envisioned human solidarity in the cultivation of whole daughters, emotionally well and able to join the venture of world making.

The substance of these writings is intergenerational and arises from the residue of imperialism and conquest that has positioned American black women within a story of subjugation and the struggle for liberation. As such, their reflections honor a broad-loomed leadership tapestry woven by American women of African descent. They write about how they were taught to become leading women in their own lives, in their communities, and in the wider world.

We believe African American women, and all women, must examine their own capacity for leadership and acknowledge the tools passed on to them by their Motherline. There is power in women remembering, memorializing, chronicling, and archiving the leadership continuum that is at once Motherline heritage and future contribution. Historically these contributions span the realms of work, family, church, and community life as well as the specialized fields of entrepreneurship, management, business administration, education, law, agriculture and animal husbandry, the sciences, sports, and literature and the arts. As daughters who wrote the contributions to this anthology, we know our own allomothers personally. However, we also know the larger stream of our Motherline legacy from across the pages of history and the airwaves.

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Thus, our own mothers and allomothers join the long line of wise women folk, cultural sheroes, way showers, beacons, pillars, and legends. They are all our pioneers; trail blazers, innovators, divas, high priestesses, queens, pop culture icons, and sometimes fabulous firsts. We acknowledge the distinguished legacy of black woman leaders and their contributions of faith, talent, hard work, commitment, follow-through, and a brand of determination that "ain't gone let nobody turn [them] around."

NOTES

1. From the *Encarta Book of Quotes,* ed.Bill Swainson (2000) p. 457, which cites Zora Neale Hurston's *Dust Tracks in the Road* (1942). The phrase "Ain't I a Woman" invokes the famous speech that Sojourner Truth (1797–1883) delivered in 1851 at the Women's Convention (1851, Akron, Ohio), in which she calls into question the larger culture's denial of black women's feminine identity. We similarly call into question the framing of leadership in ways that keep black women from seeing themselves as having a viable leadership identity. See "Ain't I a Woman," *Feminist Frontiers* (p. 20), Laurel Richardson, Verta Taylor, Nancy Whittier (Eds.) (Boston: McGraw-Hill).

2. "Definition of a Womanist," in *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens* (1983).

3. Our overall argument does not negate the in-group tensions and struggles among black women in the quest for social change. These intragroup issues include classism, heterosexism, internalized oppression, and differences in political perspective and strategies for change. To read more on this subject we recommend Darlene Clark Hine (1994) and Paula Giddings (1984).

4. The Women's Mystery School leaders are those women of preliterate and tribal societies who possessed knowledge of the sacred feminine and who used ritual as a means to access this font of spiritual power. These leaders or priestesses were consulted for the purposes of helping women through cycles of birth, the passage from childhood to womanhood, marriage and maturity, aging and death. They carried with them advanced knowledge concerning the cycles of the moon, ritual manifestation, animal husbandry, herbalism, reincarnation, and healing. Through the ages and across cultures (Eastern, Western, American Indian, Caribbean) these women leaders have preserved a sense of communality, tradition, health, wholeness, and connection to the numinous and divine.

5. Gloria Anzaldúa speaks of the need to write as spilling [herself] "on the insides of trees." *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Press, 1999), p. 93.

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6. Hill Collins uses the term *motherwork* to refer to the ways that women in the community provided developmental, emotional, and practical support. These mothering activities were intentional and geared to ensure physical, cultural, and social survival of the community and particularly its youth and those in need. In this sense the mothering activities were political acts in themselves and also developed a political consciousness in others. See Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought,* ch. 9, "Black Women's Activism." New York: Routledge, 2000.

7. "A Line of Cutting Women" is the title of a book edited by Beverly McFarland, Margarita Donnelly, Micki Reaman, Teri Mae Rutledge, et al., Corvallis, Oregon, 1998.

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