

Unique Black Women

By Lois Yvonne Whaley

All civilizations have recorded the virtues of women in songs and poems. The principal theme balances their gentle strength against the aggressive nature of man, the warrior/provider. Even the language reinforces the vision of women as a source of benign strength, comfort and wisdom with such words as "motherhood," "mother tongue," and "mother wit."

But women have made contributions far beyond those associated with the word "mother." From the lofty heights upon which the poet has placed them, women have seen their world with eyes of realism, and found their assigned role as a passive individual, wanting.

No where is this more evident than the world of Black women.

"AFRICA"

In addition to their traditional position as homemaker, African women were held in high regard, and their wisdom was often used in matters of state. As advisers to chief or king, they often helped to determine the course of action to be taken.

Some became rulers in their own right, using their abilities to lead their countries to greater achievements.

One such woman was **Queen Hatshepsut**. Born about 1500 B.C. to Thutmos I, who was the conqueror of the (then) known world, she became a member of her father's council and was included in the decision-making. She traveled with him throughout Egypt, and became totally familiar with the vast empire.

When Thutmos became paralyzed, he named his daughter chief adviser. So ably did she carry out her duties that her father then "promoted" Hatshepsut to co-ruler. Eventually, by royal decree, he gave her total powers and demanded of his people that they abide by her orders.

Up until this time, Egypt had been ruled by men only, and this move by Thutmos caused a great deal of unrest. To compromise, Hatshepsut married her half-brother, Thutmos II. This common practice among Egyptian pharaohs allowed them to retain the "purity" of the blood-line, and maintain power. The two ruled as co-regents for a time. The sickly boy-pharaoh died and was replaced on the throne by Thutmos III, another half-brother to Hatshepsut.

Again, the Queen became a co-ruler. This time, however the pharaoh became a strong ruler; and with the aid of the ages-old prejudice against women rulers, Hatshepsut was demoted to Royal Wife.

Court intrigue worked as well for Hatshepsut as it did for Thut-

mos, and she again became the sole ruler.

Then, a most amazing change occurred. Prejudice against female pharaohs was erased when Hatshepsut declared herself a male of virgin birth: the son of the Great God, Amen. All court portraits and sculpture depict her with a beard and a man's chest. During her reign, Egypt acquired great wealth and industry. As a reminder of her greatness, Hatshepsut had monuments and buildings erected that glorified "His Majesty, Himself," and an elaborate tomb built in the Valley of Kings.

After her death, her successor, Thutmos III, obliterated her name from all areas throughout Egypt.

Because it was considered sacrilegious to desecrate or disturb the tomb of king or Pharaoh, Hatshepsut had the last word. She is the only royal female buried in the Valley of the Kings.

Makeda, Queen of Sheba, about 960 B.C. ruled Ethiopia (then called Sheba) during the time that King Solomon ruled Judea (Jerusalem). Anxious to build a temple to glorify his God, Solomon sought goods from far and wide. One of the merchants whose wares he purchased was Tamrin from Ethiopia. When Tamrin returned to his homeland, he told Queen Makeda of Solomon's gentle wisdom and justice. So impressed by Tamrin's information was the Queen, that she became anxious to learn from the wise man of Jerusalem.

Makeda set out from her country with lavish gifts for Solomon. (One, 120 "talents" of gold, would be worth millions today.) Upon her arrival, Solomon feted her, and she learned much from him.

Although Makeda was charmed by Solomon, she resisted him because of a law that Ethiopian queens must remain pure while they ruled. Solomon resorted to trickery to make Makeda yield. Inviting her to a sumptuous meal at his apartment, she consented provided he would continue to respect her. He agreed to do so, as long as she would not steal his greatest treasure. Why should she, the richest queen in the world, want to steal. She agreed to the meal.

As dinner progressed, Makeda grew more thirsty. Finally, she could no longer contain herself. Makeda excused herself, found a fountain, and drank mightily. Solomon followed the queen and accused her of renegeing on the promise made. Water, in the desert countries, was indeed the greatest treasure to be found.

On this union was born a son, Menelik I, who helped to spread the religion of Judaism to Ethiopia, and the beginning of an unbroken lineage for almost 3000 years.

Another Ethiopian queen, Candace, was a ruler who remained true to her country's decree that the female ruler must remain chaste. Her army of Amazons was feared throughout Eastern Africa and none dared to attack this formidable general. Even Alexander the Great in 332 B.C., refused to risk his reputation as conqueror of the world by attempting to annex Ethiopia as part of his empire.

Centuries later, another queen would emerge in the Near East, who was so admired by Catherine the Great of Russia, that she nicknamed her capital "The Palmyra of the North." This earlier queen was **Queen Zenobia**.

Her country, Palmyra, was said to have been founded by Solomon hundreds of years before. Because it was in the trade route between the East and the West, Palmyra was one of the Near East's richest countries. Rome, of course, was aware of this and sent a group of "advisers" to King Odenathus of Palmyra, thus adding this jewel to the Roman crown. Upon her husband's death, Zenobia ascended the throne, severed relations with Rome and ruled in her own right. As a ruler, she was strict but just.

Like Candace, Zenobia led her armies into battle, often marching for miles on foot in front of her infantry, or leading the calvary on horseback. Meals were taken with her officers, and the royal pomp and circumstance was often omitted in favor of the camaraderie she felt was necessary to maintain unity.

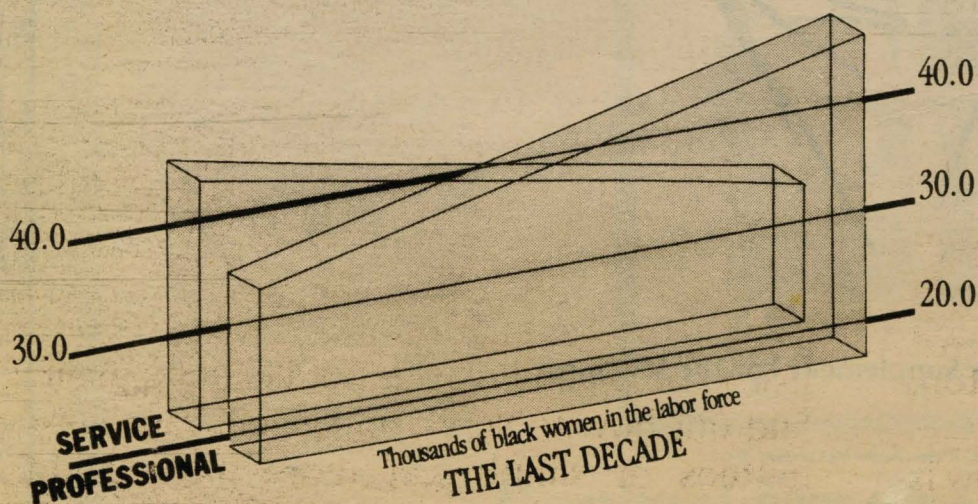
When Zenobia conquered Egypt, Rome became frightened and sent its greatest general, Aurelian, to subdue the queen's momentum. Riding at the head of her armored calvary, she attacked Aurelian's forces, but the skillful general managed to "hit and run" until Zenobia's armies were exhausted. When he attacked her troops in full force, she escaped momentarily, but she was captured by Roman soldiers as she tried to flee to Syria for asylum.

Queen Zenobia, who claimed to be a descendant of Cleopatra, was taken prisoner to Rome, where she died in 272 A.D.

The desire to keep foreigners from ruling her land became an obsession with another, and perhaps the greatest of all Black queens, Nzinga of Angola. Born in 1583, she dedicated her life to maintaining control of her country. A fierce abolitionist, Nzinga resisted attempts by the Portuguese to enslave her subjects. Leading her Amazon warriors in battle after battle, she stayed on the offensive both militarily and diplomatically. Her country became a haven for refugees from other African countries that

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Black Women Are Career Women.



That's always been true. Unlike other working women who swelled the labor force during the sixties and seventies, black women have represented half of the labor force since the turn of the century.

What has changed is where they work, what they do, and how much they earn. Upward mobility has become a reality to the three million black women professionals who are programming computers, managing business, directing agencies, holding public office, and practicing law and medicine.

We salute black women on the move up.

Washington State Employment Security

John Spellman, Governor

Norward J. Brooks, Commissioner

