

Black Women in Correctional Employment

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The record and extent of female employment is now of sufficient duration and diversity to merit specific inquiry on black women who work in corrections.* A portrayal of their experience can be useful. It can provide a support system for women and an educational resource for all employees. Although this paper focuses primarily on the black woman as uniformed correctional officer and supervisor, there is another whole story to be told of women who are not uniformed employees. Black women in direct inmate contact positions—counselors, paralegals, attorneys, law librarians, food service workers, clerical and support staff, medical and mental health personnel, educators, chaplains, volunteers, inmate grievance officers, ombudspersons, hearing officers—have a major impact on the quality of institutional life. In many cases, these categories of employees functioned in positions of direct inmate contact long before women gained full status under Title VII as uniformed correctional officers.

Despite irrational fears held by some concerning the reasons that attract women to correctional employment, it has become apparent that occupational choice factors for women are the same as those for men (Lundman 1984; Zimmer 1986; Maghan 1988; Gilbert 1990). Although these reasons may be the same, the adjustment and survival issues for women have been distinct and difficult, particularly for black women, who are equally inspiring in their determination to succeed.

Pike (1985) highlights the dynamic of being both black and a woman in the law enforcement environment. Both groups are seen to have been recruited to serve "people like themselves." Pike, therefore, views race, like gender, as a visible characteristic and prejudice as a dimension of organizational life.

* We have adhered to the term *black female* to meet the editorial theme of this chapter. However, the current terminology in use by and with Americans of African descent is *African-American*.

However, she points out that black men do not challenge the "quintessential officer role in the same way women do."

One can be black, yet be strong, streetwise, and masculine. The symmetry or dependency of what women are like in contrast to macho officers means that it is far less likely that women successfully meet the ideal type . . . Blacks [males] and women are also different with respect to organizational adaptation.

Since separate but equal was declared unconstitutional, no organizational (facility, uniform, or program) changes are necessary to incorporate blacks [males]. Sex norms (co-ed locker rooms?) present a very different type of barrier, which at least directs organizations to different strategies of adaptation.

Pike further observes (with respect to black roles) that prejudice against blacks has different consequences than prejudice against women. She, like Zimmer (1986) and Maghan (1988), feels that the further understanding of female recruit officers and their retention will provide guidance on the total impact of both race and sex.

Sociologists and others have written extensively of the matriarchal role of the black woman within the African-American cultural and familial milieu (Bianchi and Spain 1986). The transference of this dynamic within the essential interactive officer-inmate and inmate-inmate context of correctional work—especially in a highly distilled environment of predominantly young, minority male inmates—merits further research. Black female entry-level employees generally carry higher levels of educational achievement, but the relationship of this factor to their choice and attitudes toward correctional work remain untapped.

Pervasive invidious distinctions based on gender, which have prescribed specific kinds of employment roles for women, may legitimately affect black women's perceptions of their roles in the correctional work force. These women may come to the correctional officer role anticipating that the expectations of the department may be circumscribed by race or gender and defined accordingly. Hence, their perceptions of their roles within the corrections department are likely to reflect some of the sexual discrimination they have internalized and expect.

Facilities and Policy Improvements

The integration of female correctional officers into the national correctional work force has had a positive humanizing effect. The presence of women in the work force has initiated changes in every aspect of correctional operations: physical plant, personnel, and programs. Correctional architecture now must accommodate a mixed-gender work force. New mixed-gender physical plant features include showers and toilet facilities constructed with waist-level security bands, open dorms, and, in New York City, a newly constructed nursery for infants under the age of one.

The New York City Department of Correction has recently opened the Rose M. Singer Correctional Center, a unisex jail where male officers guard female inmates. The same concerns regarding privacy rights of female inmates surfaced in the deployment of male officers in this facility. This situation was resolved by determining that the privacy rights of female inmates could be protected, without discriminating against male correctional officers, by permitting female inmates to cover cell windows for fifteen minute intervals and by issuing suitable nighttime garments (621 Fed. 1210 U.S. Court of Appeals, May 8, 1990). These programmatic and architectural adjustments clearly illustrate the positive effect of a mixed-gender work force on the policy and operational standards of the department. These adjustments were made readily adaptable out of the long-time experience of having female correctional officers assigned to male jails.

The capacity of correctional agencies to accommodate these changes is commendable and clearly shows the integration of legal and social issues affecting both employees and inmates. The impact of these changes is further substantiated in the gender-free language of operational procedures, training course content, public information bulletins, and inmate rule books. As in the case of the nation's police departments—where the occupational titles of “patrolman” and “policeman” are changing to “police officer”—within correctional agencies there is to be *no* gender distinction. This situation is further secured through interpersonal communication skills for staff in their interaction with each other and inmates. Finally, the more precise body of recent sexual harassment and human rights law has further secured these interactions on a civil and equal basis: no distinction in terms of gender is tolerated.

When one views these changes from a positive perspective, the enormous and continuous changes in the structural, social,

and interactive aspects of the entry and influence of the black woman in correctional employment offers possibilities for enhancing and achieving a more effective and humane correctional environment.

A vivid illustration of these changes from a new generation employee is found in the valedictorian speech of Phyllis Spence, a black probationary correctional officer, at her Correction Academy graduation ceremony in May 1990. This speech was published in *New York Newsday*, a daily newspaper with readership in the five boroughs of the City.

Before joining the department, I believed that the different law enforcement agencies were viewed as separate but equal. I now see that the Department of Correction is considered a lower class of law enforcement than the others. And it is upsetting but not surprising that the group receiving the least respect is the one comprised largely of African-Americans and Hispanics.

Thus, correction officers have a special obligation not to forget that society is still full of racism, and that it affects them as well as the inmates under their control. As C.O.s we can afford to send our children to better schools if we so choose, but we must not forget our brothers and sisters who cannot, and we must fight for their children also, if we do so only out of the fear that a deprived child may harm our own.

Our country must overcome its racism and take responsibility for all its children. We must see to it that every single child, regardless of race, color, creed, or socioeconomic status, receives an equal opportunity not just to survive, but to thrive. Then and only then will the demand for "institutions of confinement" decline, and the quality of our lives take a turn for the better.

The Past is Prologue

There are marked parallels in the emergent mixed-gender work force of police and correctional services. Both have rich occupational histories of early female pioneers in their respective fields. Several remarkable female wardens and commissioners actually supervised and administered the exclusively male prison systems in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Feinman 1980; Breed 1980). However, the presence of women

as line workers and first-line supervisors in adult male correctional facilities was virtually nonexistent. Prior to the promulgation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act in the 1970s, most female line employees in police and correctional agencies were restricted to the women's bureau and exclusively handled juvenile and female adult inmates. Further, the employment of these women was usually racially segregated (Moeller and Travisono 1983).

These early examples of female employment, though narrowly contrived and controlled, laid the groundwork for establishing the bona fide occupational qualification of women to serve as correctional officers and supervisors. However, the application of the impact of these historic female roles in relation to the modern-day work force is limited. It is not until the mandated and deliberate Title VII staging of a minority and mixed-gender work force in the late 1960s and 1970s, with women entering as full-fledged correctional officers, that distinct organizational and cultural changes can be discerned. It is here that black women in correctional employment were recognized as a modern-day pioneer group in the increasingly diverse American correctional work force.

When women began entering the correctional work force through Title VII protections, the primary concern was how to guarantee staff safety and inmates' privacy while ensuring women officers' right to full employment. From the beginning, correctional administrators were primarily concerned about women's ability to guard male inmates. Ironically, this was not a concern of the inmates. Lynn Zimmer (1986) conducted an extensive survey of female correctional officers in the New York State Department of Correctional Services. Her work is an in-depth study of the emergent mixed-gender work force in a state prison system. Zimmer writes:

The members of the prison community who reacted most favorably to the hiring of female guards were the inmates whom women were required to control. Although they had to accommodate women's presence by making some adjustments in their own behavior—most notably, taking precautions to protect their own privacy—most inmates did not consider these adjustments difficult or unreasonable.

These concerns, initially perceived as intractable, were eventually declared by the courts as the responsibility of corrections officials to resolve by devising operational plans to

protect inmate privacy while maximizing equal opportunities for women (*Bowling v. Enomoto; Forts v. Ward*). Subsequent statistical evidence verifies that fears concerning safety of female officers were unfounded. The number of women assaulted in the line of duty has not been disproportionate to the number of men. Most of the assaults or line-of-duty deaths have occurred out of general inmate violence situations and were not gender-based.

The birth of a mutual awareness and interest in the conditions of confinement, and thus the conditions of work, creates a groundwork for building a mixed-gender work force that better serves both the keeper and the kept. Maghan (1981) states:

Prisoners' rights and the officers' working environment are inseparably linked. Improvement in one affects the other. In getting both to see their community of interest lies the promise of adding meaning to attempts to reduce the tension, confusion, and danger they mutually face.

From this bridge of mutuality of interests, correctional officers of both genders, all races and ethnic groups, veterans and neophytes, can collaborate to achieve the common mission: safe and secure correctional facilities. Gradually, correctional agencies have discovered that the mutuality of occupational choice factors can provide a platform of commonality of interests. These interests can be deployed into strategies and training sessions to bridge perceived differences between male and female officers. Creative ventures for managing the mixed-gender work environment can serve to heighten the opportunities for all officers.

Jacqueline Pitts, a black assistant deputy warden, designed the NYC Department of Correction's mandatory in-service course for all incumbent correction officers, "Reduce Violence, Promote Safety" (RVPS). One segment of this course specifically addresses the role of black women (and other ethnicities), using interactive dialogue with all the class participants. In this segment of the course, black female officers are asked to voice their feelings of role obfuscation as well as front-line performance and successes. The pros and cons of these situations are then listed and discussed by the class. At the end of the discussion, all participants have a better understanding of their common struggles and desires for enhanced working associations. For example, to promote bet-

ter quality of worklife, women have stated that they are equal to men, yet they are infrequently selected to don protective equipment in order to use physical force during inmate disturbances. Supervisors and officers, both male and female, discuss this issue, and at the conclusion of the class all participants are more aware of such inconsistencies. The desire of black women to be recognized on par with other officers leads to an awareness to ensure that women officers of all ethnicities are utilized in emergency preparedness training and intervention at the line and first-line supervisory level.

This similarity of concern over occupational identity and vision affirms a basic principle of human relations: everyone, regardless of race or gender, wants what everyone else wants—to be heard and to make a difference. If the most important factors in the decision of black women to become correctional officers are the same as those of women and men of all races, then the foundation for further alliances is evident.

New York Profile

The New York City Department of Correction serves as a pilot bellwether for this discussion. The department has a rich and long tradition of employing black women. Statistics from the NYC Department of Correction well substantiate a marked and continued growth of women, especially black women, into the work force. For example, in 1984 LaSalle reported that of the 6,039 correctional officers in New York City, only 921 (18 percent) were women. (LaSalle did not provide statistics on black female representation in the uniformed ranks.) In September 1990, the official department census placed the total correctional officer work force at 11,537. Of this number, 3,394 were women, and 2,851 (24.7 percent) were black women. (Additionally, black women comprise 31 percent of the civilian work force in the department.)

As of January 1991, the department has one black woman warden, three deputy wardens, and nine assistant deputy wardens, as well as one hundred captains as first-line supervisors. The September 1990 equal employment report for the agency documented a continued marked increase in the employment of all women: 2,851 black officers, 349 Hispanic officers, 189 white officers, and six Asian officers, for a combined total of 3,394 female officers, or 29.4 percent of the department's uniformed work force.

A Profile of Black Women in Correctional Employment

The McLeish-Blackwell (1990) profile of the black female correctional officer reaffirms the mutuality of these occupational choice factors. (See Table 1.) This survey was also administered to supervisory and civilian personnel, male and female, with similar results.

The McLeish-Blackwell profile is consistent with the general profile of women entering law enforcement. Table 2 profiles the most important factors in the decision to become a police officer.

Similar occupational choice factors between women and men are emerging in other traditionally male-dominated trades and craft skill occupations. For example, there is an extensive movement of black women entering the construction and transportation industries in both New York City and nationally. As Table 1 indicates, women choose correctional employment for financial security. Career advancement is realized more in the Correction Department than in the New York City Police Department. This phenomenon can be attributed to the size of both agencies, but perhaps more directly to the variety of posts available in the correctional environment. This pattern of more rapid career advancement in the corrections field appears to hold in other regions of the country as well.

The significance of the McLeish-Blackwell profile is confirmed by the socioeconomic status of black women in American society. The percentage of black women who are the head of their households has historically been much higher than for any other racial/ethnic group surveyed (Clark 1963; Lerner 1973). In 1984, 44 percent of all black American families were headed by women, compared to only 23.2 percent of Hispanic families, and 13 percent of white families. Furthermore, the income for minorities is lower than the income for white women or men (LaSalle 1984). These factors reiterate that the black woman, as head of her family, will direct her energies to those areas where there is a solid equal employment ground, good benefits, and the opportunity to earn a pay comparable to that of her male counterparts.

One black woman with over fifteen years in the department comments: "I had to support my two children. We worked hard. All I was concerned about at that time (1975) was making enough to support my children and myself."

Table 1
Most Important Factor In Decision To Become a
Correctional Officer (Black Female)

N = 43 Responses	No. of Responses	Percentage
Salary	17	39.5
Benefits	7	16
Selected from other Civil Service listing	5	11.6
Needed a job	4	9
Better opportunity	3	7
Liked CJS/Law enforcement	3	7
Helping others	2	4.7
Advancement	1	2
Family tradition/ Civil Service	1	2
Challenging	1	2
Security	1	2
Change from typical office job	1	2
Other	1	2

Table 2
Most Important Factors In Decision To Become a Police Officer By Female and Male NYPD Recruit Officers

	Female	Male	P-Level
Ability to help people	2.92 (1)	2.90 (1)	n.s.
Ability to work directly with people	2.86 (2)	2.76 (2)	.001
Challenge of police work	2.76 (3)	2.76 (3)	n.s.
Chance to experience working in the community	2.74 (4)	2.62 (4)	.001
Pay as a police officer	2.47 (5)	2.47 (6)	n.s.
Excitement of police work	2.43 (6)	2.54 (5)	.01
It just seemed like a good job opportunity	2.42 (7)	2.32 (9)	.02
Have always wanted to be a police officer	2.28 (8)	2.45 (7)	.001
Chance to work outdoors	2.21 (9)	2.35 (8)	.01
Freedom of the job	1.91 (10)	1.89 (10)	n.s.
Recruitment info from police department	1.85 (11)	1.78 (11)	n.s.
Influence of friends or relatives who are police officers	1.72 (12)	1.73 (12)	n.s.
Influence of friends or relatives who are not police officers	1.57 (13)	1.55 (14)	n.s.
Wearing a uniform	1.55 (14)	1.70 (13)	.001
Carrying a gun	1.47 (15)	1.42 (15)	n.s.
We've always had a police officer in the family	1.26 (16)	1.29 (16)	n.s.

Today, as was the case in 1975, the Department of Correction provides the potential for realizing desired familial economic benefits. The entry salary for a correctional officer in New York City is approximately \$26,000, in addition to the full benefits of a twenty-year retirement package, unlimited sick leave, uniform allowance, and excellent access to upward mobility for those who prepare themselves for promotional exams. For the black woman who meets the age and educational requirement of G.E.D. or high school graduate, this salary, benefits, and occupational career path represent an exceptional opportunity for economic security. Many of the black women surveyed reported leaving other employment to accept the position of correctional officer because of these benefits.

Nonetheless, unique circumstances still exist. Often in a single parent family situation, the black woman is confronted with organizing her personal life and family responsibilities around the requirements of shift work, rotating wheel assignments, and traveling to the various facilities of the department. These may not be unique problems, but they illustrate that the adjustment to the work culture and organization of correctional employment is particularly acute for the black woman in her family role. This situation is vividly portrayed in this study: Forty-six percent of the women surveyed were not married, and 43 percent were the main wage earner in their households.

Again, a poignant profile of their adjustment to the work schedule of correctional service is offered by the following comments of the officers surveyed in November 1990 in response to the question, "Were there unique circumstances with which the African-American female had to cope?":

- Starting this job at the age of twenty-one, the entire department is an experience.
- I am a single mother. The time spent away from my son was difficult, although I am fortunate enough to have a supportive family.
- Having to be separated from my child and family for long hours, and "wheeling" are terrible for raising a child.
- One has to experience this job: for me, taking orders from people that have a cold behavior was tough.
- The stressful situations, sensory deprivation, mandatory overtime, excessive dealing with a

criminal subculture, [and] . . . the paramilitary setting are unique.

- Having to notify [an] inmate/officer of the death of a loved one . . . [is] very difficult.
- Seeing an inmate denied the right to go to his mother's or a close relative's funeral home "viewing" was difficult to deal with.
- At times, I felt that I was in danger from inmates that I supervised. I never felt that way before, I never felt danger before.
- Spouse difficulties became job related: seeing me in uniform [was] a threat at first [and] hard to understand.

Others cited "having to fight to protect coworkers"; being alienated "by a group for not agreeing with negative behaviors"; and "realizing that I am locked in with criminals" as unique situations they've encountered.

Many of the black women surveyed shared experiences of frustrated spouses or partners who did not understand why a woman would choose to be a correctional officer. The vestiges of wearing a uniform, carrying a gun, being an authority figure, and having economic dependence on the female partner are but a few of the common frustrations expressed by the male partners of black female correctional officers. However, this situation is not restricted to the male side of the relationship. Many of the black female officers surveyed shared a new sense of isolation and suffering related to assuming the role of a uniformed correctional officer. This isolation was expressed as a void that even friends on the job cannot fill. While this sense of occupational isolation is a common phenomenon of the correctional officer (especially the neophyte officer), it is also particularly difficult for the female officer and is often compounded for the black female officer as a minority within a minority.

Another situation shared by the black women officers of this study was a concern for the increasing incarceration rate of young African-American males. Many of the women cited situations where family members or members of the families of intimate friends or neighbors were incarcerated. There was a unanimous concern for the concomitant stress and emotional pain experienced by this situation in their lives on and off the job.

"African-American," vis-a-vis the term "black," is considered more appropriate and sensitive to the contemporary identity and vision of Americans of African descent. In this context, other scenarios of job identity and stress can occur.

As African-American women learn more about their heritage and become more self-confident, some choose to wear the traditional African dress and groom their hair in a manner that is not consistent with Western culture. Uniforms are the standard wear for security personnel in New York City and many other correctional facilities; therefore, that is consistent. Some African-American women, however, choose to wear their hair in "locks," a hairstyle indigenous to descendants of Africa. The hairstyle alone may cause the wearer to experience a certain aloofness at first and some discriminatory behavior from both acquaintances and persons in authority. In many instances, the aloofness and discriminatory acts emanate from other African-Americans. Individuals from other cultures are often more accepting of the African-American officer's expression of her identity. With more and more women opting to wear locks, coworkers and persons in authority must begin to accept these women for their abilities and capabilities and not deny them posts or positions based on a narrowly contrived, misinformed perception. This and similar situations will, of course, adjust over time as the mixed-gender, multicultural work force becomes more entrenched in the correctional environment.

The Black Woman as a Correctional Supervisor

The basic role of a supervisor in a criminal justice agency is to assume the responsibility of directing a work group's activities, to heighten the job satisfaction of subordinates, and optimize the effectiveness of the group (Weston 1979). Entering the supervisory ranks requires successful line performance in terms of attendance and disciplinary record and often the passing of a civil service exam. This selection process may affect women in the following manner:

1. Women, who are usually the last to be hired, have less time on the job and therefore may not be eligible through their seniority to be selected as provisional captains.
2. Those women who were not working in male facilities may have been limited in their knowledge of certain rules when working in a male facility.

3. In an effort to be a successful captain's candidate, the officer must make a concerted effort to acquire updated rules and regulations so that she may study them. There is a large proportion of single mothers or single heads of households. The stress of family responsibilities interferes with concerted study, resulting in low scores and thus placing the candidate at the bottom of the promotion list.
4. She may now have a steady post that she likes, earning needed overtime hours. Upon promotion she will have to start from the bottom again: "going on the wheel." This may disrupt personal and family life.
5. A woman in an abusive domestic situation may be so intimidated by her spouse that she does not take the promotion exam or accept promotion achieved. The spouse resents her earning a higher salary or carrying a higher prestige. This is a threat to his masculinity.

The question, "Are there any similarities or differences when one is supervised by persons of the opposite sex?" was asked of the black women supervisors surveyed. The majority answered that there was *no* difference. An informal poll of men and women within the department revealed that correctional officers respect supervisors who are able to make sound decisions, act fairly, show respect, and give sound direction to their subordinates. The supervisor should also support subordinates when necessary and generally set a good example for the assigned housing area. These people indicated that if the superior acted in such a manner, then that person—whether a man or a woman—would have their respect.

Of those who cited differences, the observations were that men tend to be "uneasy" working with women supervisors and often did not like a woman "telling them what to do." However, there were only a few who believed men perceived women as a threat, especially white men. One black woman with over five years as a first-line supervisor stated, "There is a preconceived idea from males as to how I *should* approach various situations or how I *will* respond; and, therefore, they are surprised by my take-charge attitude and performance."

In general, the black women surveyed for this study stated, "As long as you work hard, are responsible, gain respect of your peers and supervisors (irrespective of gender or race), you will succeed." It is significant that among the assistant deputy wardens (the senior administrative rank surveyed for this study) the consensus held that there were *no* differences in

being supervised by women of different cultures or races. This response came from a group of men, of which 46 percent were white, 36 percent black, and 18 percent Hispanic. Nonetheless, a perception that each group was receiving better treatment than the other persisted. This perception clearly shows that the separation of values and identities is still a very real phenomenon in the work culture. It will require extensive training and work exposure to build more collegial and collaborative role fulfillment by both genders of all racial groups in the department.

The Black Female Officer and the Minority Inmate Population

Overshadowing the influx of black women in correctional employment is the proportion of the national inmate population that is increasingly nonwhite. The minority incarceration rate is higher than it has ever been since the invention of the penitentiary system (Christianson 1981). The United States Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Statistics reports that black men constituted 43 percent of the national jail inmate population in 1989, up from 38 percent in 1987. The presence and interaction of black women correctional officers with this increasingly minority inmate population represents important role model and human relations staff development resources. Therefore, the black female correctional officer stands at a significant position in the examination of the racial composition of the nation's inmate population. Scant research has been undertaken concerning aspects of their occupational choice, socialization into the correctional officer work culture, as well as eventual full integration into the correctional work force.

When the inmate population is comprised predominantly of African-American and other minority groups, the challenge confronting the black woman becomes heightened. Cultural and family role modeling may come into play in a way that could impede or enhance her role. Black women are equal employees who, when working in direct service situations, provide unique benefits that may be capitalized on through training forums and increased awareness. Jewelle Taylor Gibbs (1988) reports:

Young black males in contemporary American society have been miseducated by the educational system, mishandled by the criminal justice system, mislabeled by the mental health system, and mistreated by the social welfare system. All the major institutions of this

society have failed to respond appropriately and effectively to their multiple needs and problems.

Generally, female officers are less encumbered by the social restraints concerning expression of emotions imposed by sex role expectations; they may feel more comfortable with the expression and reception of feelings than some male staff. These and other attributes suggest the rich potential of further inquiry on the subject of the mixed-gender correctional work force.

Black Women and Upper Echelon Command

The record of black female incumbents in upper echelon management of the New York City Correction Department has always been exceptional. The first woman commissioner in New York City was Katherine Davis (1914-1915). Others were Burdette Lewis (1915-1917); Anna M. Kross (1954-1966); and Jacqueline Montgomery McMickens (1984-1986), the first black woman appointed commissioner. Commissioner McMickens appointed another black officer, Gloria Lee, as Chief of Department, the highest ranking uniformed post in the agency. McMickens and Lee are unique in that they rose through the ranks from correctional officers to the highest command positions of the agency.

The record of appointments to black women throughout the country in correctional employment during the past two decades has been noteworthy. Most agencies now have black women employed as upper echelon administrators, commissioners, directors, and legal counsel. The stories of modern day pioneers—such as Ruth Rushen, Helen Corrothers, and Jacqueline McMickens—can now be paralleled throughout the nation. Each had to experience the lonely spot at the top . . . a spot made more lonely by being the first black woman at the helm of major correctional agencies. Although they each experienced difficulties because of their unique standing, they survived and established powerful role models for the increasing contingency of black women in the correctional work force.

Commissioner Jacqueline McMickens, in a speech to the NYC Women In Correction organization in March 1990, proffered this advice:

Learn to negotiate. Correctional service is an incredible field for women. Women are having a difficult time (as others are) in learning the craft of career

ladder achievement. Nevertheless, networking is not only an upward spiral; in addition to those who are above you in rank, look always among your peers for mentors, because no one person knows everything. Learn all you can; go back to school and continue your education. The only competition is . . . yourself.

Black women must fully recognize their pivotal role in determining the quality of life for both the officer and the inmate. Their increasing number in the national correctional work force is significant. As Commissioner McMickens counseled, these women must learn to negotiate—with each other and with their male counterparts. Black women employees bring an array of new and unique cultural and human relations insights to the role of correctional officer. Agencies need to develop innovative ways to tap these talents in the interests of enhancing the custodial care of inmates and to more fully develop the job fulfillment of not only the black female officer but of all correctional employees.

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