

**CLOSING
THE
LEADERSHIP
GAP**

**WHY WOMEN CAN AND MUST
HELP RUN THE WORLD**

MARIE C. WILSON

FOUNDER OF THE WHITE HOUSE PROJECT

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INTRODUCTION: IT'S ABOUT TIME

All of my adult life I have preached the virtues of power sharing between men and women. The arrangement seemed not only fair, but also obvious: Women populate half the democracy; we should occupy half the positions of leadership—both for gender equity and because women, a natural resource, should be mined for energy.

Now when I think of women in leadership, I think of it not only as the fair thing to do, but also as the *only* thing to do. In a few short years the world has become very unstable. Terrorists attacked us on our soil; in response we waged war against Afghanistan and Iraq. The formerly robust U.S. economy will soon sag under the biggest deficit in its history. Corporate greed has wiped out whole companies along with hundreds of thousands of jobs. Millions of Americans continue to live without adequate health care.

When I look at the issues we face, and when I think of the changes we need, I am as convinced as I have ever been that our

future depends on the leadership of women—not to replace men, but to transform our options alongside them.

INTRODUCTION: IT'S ABOUT TIME



I grew up in the 1940s and 1950s, when women were truly limited to a supporting role. I was Homecoming Queen and a class officer (but not the president). I was a cheerleader. I won beauty contests in my hometown of Atlanta. I married poor but with promise, then nearly went mad in the isolation of a small apartment with a baby. Through the years, while minding a growing family and the household chores, I finished my B.A. in philosophy and my master's degree in education.

My first professional job (I had been a church volunteer and had worked in the civil rights movement) was at Drake University as director of women's programs. To help women like me, I crafted economic development programs, job shares, and training for female "retreads" reentering the workforce after raising a family. These concepts are accepted today, but in the 1970s they were considered edgy.

I left Drake to make more money for our family of five children, several of whom were approaching college age. My experience as a social entrepreneur landed me an executive position in education and human resources with business entrepreneurs—men who were instrumental in creating the first cash machines in America. It seemed a natural fit, but it wasn't. This banking association reflected the more conservative banking community it served. My modest efforts to modernize their views of women were considered dangerous and revolutionary. They probably would have fired me if my division hadn't been making money.

If you strip away the particulars, I have led an American woman's life—running a complicated household, doing what I had to do to financially support the family, managing the home while

bringing in a paycheck, and suppressing screams as my ideas were trivialized in the workplace.

It only made me trust women all the more, which was why I couldn't resist the dare of a friend to apply for the job of executive director at the Ms. Foundation for Women in New York City. I doubted those easterners would consider hiring a midwestern woman with southern roots. I was wrong. So in the mid 1980s, I left both a newly won city council seat and the banking job to run the foundation (best known for a program we created in 1993, Take Our Daughters to Work). Finally, I had found my fit, and I helped build one of the largest women's foundations in America.

At the Ms. Foundation we are social entrepreneurs with a practical eye on today and a vision for tomorrow. We take on issues that directly affect women's lives—economic development, safety, and reproductive health, for instance—which is why we knew we had to have substantial numbers of women at the top in America to help women at all levels. We saw what happened when we *didn't*. Hence, the White House Project, whose mission is to advance women's leadership in every sector, up to and including the presidency, changing society from a system built on the labor of women to one led equally by their vision.

Never has this been more necessary than now, when so many issues are *our* issues: education, health and elder care, and violence in all forms. In the past these concerns have been marginalized because of their connection to women; today, they are on everyone's agenda. And though war may not be our traditional battleground, it is the arena where women are needed most, to make and maintain the peace.

Men *and* women must be in power to moderate the influence of masculinity on all of us. It is this power sharing that will provide a different voice at the table, giving women the opportunity to shape policy in line with our values and giving men any permission they