

**"Service is the rent you pay for room on this earth."
~ Shirley Chisholm**

Equality of Access

The New York Urban League (NYUL) sees limitless potential in the community it serves, but also needs the support of the community to fulfill its mission and help them flourish. Arva Rice, President NYUL, explains, "the Urban League was started in 1910 to provide *equality of access*, because individuals didn't have opportunities for advancement in education, employment, housing and health care," she continues "and 99 years later we still feel like there's gaps in access, whether it's in fields of science technology engineering and math or if it's gaps and opportunities for moving into the C-suite and beyond."

While challenges are different, they still remain; and for women in the African-American community, the struggles are even greater. According to the Economic Policy Institute, while women earn an average of 80 cents for every dollar than men do the wage gap is much deeper for women of color earning only 67 cents on that same dollar. And when we look at the top of the ladder, the opportunities to reach those corner offices are doubly challenging for women of color. As of January 2018, there were only 27 female CEOs on the Fortune 500 list, no one of those women were African-American. The struggle continues and the NYUL asks for your support as the Urban League continues to break the 'black glass ceiling.'

The Next Generation of NYUL

Erika Beckles, was working in the Human Resource department in the media industry when a colleague invited her to a meeting of the Young Professionals group at the New York Urban League. "I was asked, if I wanted to meet other like-minded young professionals and broaden my network," Beckles recalls, "how could I say no to that?" What Erika Beckles found that day was more than a networking event, "more than just focusing on my career, I wanted to make a larger impact in my community and that's a big part of the Young Professionals mission."

While the group fosters networking and mentorship for the careers of the younger African American community in New York City, volunteerism is a core value of the association. Beckles, who now serves as the President of the Young Professionals, speaks proudly of the groups commitment to its neighbors, 'In this last year, we exceed over 16,000 community service hours for the five boroughs of this city,' she continues, "we partnered with local nonprofits on reading to kids, community clean-up projects, provided clothes and blankets to the homeless; the group finds their reward in lending a helping hand to others."

The Young Professional's Future

When Beckles thinks of the future of the Young Professionals, she wants to do much more for its members and the community, “We have a new initiative called Civil Rights 2.0 which is a campaign to strengthen the three branches of the NYUL tree: Education, Employment and Advocacy.

Beckles describes how she envisions the funds best serving the membership, “It’s our hope that with the money we raise, we can expand the development opportunities for our Young Professionals. In the areas of education, we would like to see more sponsored classes in the areas of Healthcare and Technology. As far as employment, we want to help our members learn how to better market themselves in person and through social media. And in the area of advocacy, we want to grow our Policy Unit so we can better help identify issues of concern for our community and help organize campaigns around those matters.”

Beckles adds, “The Civil Rights 2.0 initiative brings us back to our legacy, of access and opportunity, by bringing people of color into corporate environments, but also encouraging upward mobility in the governmental landscape.” Beckles sees the future of Black America not only in the boardroom but in the courtroom, the legislature, making the laws that affect the community.

Fighting for the Future

Currently, Erika Beckles works as the Senior Talent Acquisition Recruiter for the Disney ABC Television Group, and has felt the challenges of being a woman of color in a corporate world, “I’m usually the youngest in the room; and the only person of color and add to that I’m a female, sure, I definitely feel that I have to work three times as hard as my counterparts to prove that I’m equally prepared to execute the work.” In frustrating times, Beckles is grateful for her NYUL family, “Whenever I need encouragement or support, or just incredible role models, I can turn to my sisterhood within the Urban League and find not just a network of colleagues, but a true family.”

As Erika Beckles speaks about her journey with the NYUL she reflects on her personal hero Sojourner Truth. “She was one of those early activists who focused on being a women as well as being a person of color; she was a strong black feminist” she continues, “I remember reading one of her speeches, *Ain't I a Woman*, in the eighth grade and it spoke volumes to me, because I really didn't understand what gender equality meant but reading it made me feel as if this is something that I want to fight for my future.”

“At the New York Urban League, gender equality means equal pay, equal access and equal opportunity” according to the League’s President, Arva Rice. She adds, “And every single day, the NYUL provides those opportunities for women of color to gain skills,

knowledge and network in order to level the playing field for the this generation and beyond."

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