

THE EVOLUTION

It's About the Journey, Not the Destination

From Black Gyrl to Black Woman
Which begs the question: when did I evolve from
a Black Gyrl into a Black woman?

To answer that, I had to look back over my life.

I am a Black gyrl, born and raised in the inner city of Gary, Indiana. I was raised to be resilient, tough, resourceful, accommodating, loyal, and real. Positioned to fail, yet determined to succeed. I lived vicariously through the accomplishments of my heroes—my mother, Oprah Winfrey, Dr. Maya Angelou, and Melanie Hobson, while actively seeking mentors whose thoughts and actions aligned with who I was becoming. I studied them, absorbed their character, and acculturated traits like ambition, courage, flexibility, and honor—quietly building the woman I was always becoming.

Education, Corporate Entry, and the Cost of Naivety

The evolution from a Black GYRL to a whole-a** Black woman did not happen overnight. It unfolded over years—beginning with the naivety of becoming a first-generation college graduate and continuing through the daily reckoning of microaggressions in corporate America.

I entered corporate America with a bachelor's degree and a management role, not leadership. Managers manage people; leaders manage personalities. As I sharpened my leadership, I was repeatedly labeled too loud, too aggressive, too smart, too opinionated. And at that stage, that mattered deeply to me as a Black GYRL.

The Catalyst: When Microaggressions Met Opportunity

Corporate microaggressions became the catalyst for my transition from Black GYRL to Black Woman. I was tasked with growing a financial services branch in a hospital basement—with no windows, 2 existing employees, and a business dependent solely on internal customers. The challenge was clear: how do you transform an elite membership into a profitable, revenue-generating contributor without access, leverage, or margin for error?

With my hands tied and resources scarce, I bossed up. I created opportunities where none existed—embedding myself into the hospital's ecosystem, securing space in new-hire onboarding, developing marketing materials, attending hospital-sponsored events, and consistently promoting the financial services brand. My impact was undeniable, resulting in a dedicated internal email for financial services



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and expanded professional networks through financial literacy and work-life balance coaching.

After two years of sustained financial growth, I sat in a meeting about branch expansion—having navigated, largely alone, a system designed to fail me. The numbers told the story, yet my success was not the focus. There were no acknowledgments—only silence where recognition should have been. Instead, conversations centered on my management “successes” and perceived leadership “failures,” ignoring how I was turning limitations into leverage. In that moment, I knew transformation was required.

The Shift: Education, Humanity, and Power

I decided to pursue my MBA with a concentration in Strategic Human Resource Management. I came to understand that people—and our shared humanity—are the true capital of any successful business. That was when I realized I was no longer a Black GYRL—I had become a Black woman.

Navigating the workplace as an educated African American woman meant daily encounters with isolation, discrimination, disrespect, racialized trope-isms, and stalled advancement. Out of eight managers, none held advanced degrees. Five were non-Black men; one was a non-Black woman; and only two were Black women, including me. The same imbalance existed at the executive level. White men were routinely promoted, while I, and others like me, shouldered the invisible labor of innovation without recognition or protection.

Claiming Black Womanhood

And yes, I am still loud, assertive, smart, and opinionated. I take up space in rooms where I am cautiously invited, not to conform, but to add value. I bring my own chair. I listen closely to what is not being said. I build people up by centering strengths, not shortcomings. I cultivate relationships rooted in authenticity, not blind loyalty. I empower others by affirming the very qualities they were taught to minimize. I stopped shrinking to fit rooms never built for me. I stopped translating my brilliance to make others comfortable. I stopped asking for permission to lead, to speak, to exist fully. I claimed my voice, vision, and authority—not because they were finally recognized, but because I recognized them first.

This is when I went from Black gyrl to Black woman.

From Black GYRL

Gullible
Youthful
Resilient

Loquacious
To Black Woman

Graceful
Yare
Remarkable
Laudable

I am Dr. Deirdre Jones-Lowman. TS#5 of 52 of The Soultown Magazine. I want to thank you all for having SOUL! 🌿