

By James Walker

March 27, 2021

This column first appeared in Hearst Connecticut newspapers.

Women? The weaker sex is proving to be mighty

I think when you are a man who was raised by a single mother, you probably look at women a lot differently than a man who was raised in a traditional family.

That is certainly the case with me as the month to celebrate women comes to a close.

My compass in life was a woman, so I have always viewed women as strong, capable and compassionate beings, while I viewed men as lords and masters whose dominance was sustainable through their physicality, not because they were smarter.

So, I have never considered women the weaker sex in terms of their mental fortitude, leadership abilities or determination to get things done.

And I have my mother to thank for that.

I witnessed her struggle, against impossible odds, to raise a family during an era when women were considered second thoughts and still were being judged by whether they had child-bearing hips.

I saw her strengths, her weaknesses, her victories and her failings as she single-handedly juggled life everyday with decisions to keep her family afloat.

And despite being poor and uneducated, she succeeded on sheer will — and I guess that is why I have an appreciation for what women are capable of that maybe other men do not.

But this isn't a column knocking men, rather a celebration of women from all walks of life who are emerging from the shadows where for so long they stood dutifully as background complements to become a national force in everything from business to politics to a commanding voice on social issues.

And I have a lot of women from whom I can pick and choose, at both the national and local levels.

Already, newly elected women in Congress are shifting political priorities as issues such as housing, gender equality, paid leave, affordable child care and universal pre-K as well as universal child care are taking center stage.

And donations are pouring into their campaigns and efforts to make things better for all people.

Here in Connecticut, the legislature now includes 61 women of different backgrounds and I expect their growing influence will drill a hole in some of the social and financial issues that plague us.

But while I can point out what a difference women of all races are making on various issues in Connecticut and on a national scale, I am going to take this opportunity to highlight the Black women in our region who have helmed three specific issues that will make a difference in Black communities.

Because it is the little things that make a difference.

I recently attended a candlelight vigil outside the New Haven Correctional Center hosted by Barbara Fair and Stop Solitary CT, where masks and T-shirts emblazoned with a bright red hand urged the judicial system to stop solitary confinement.

For decades, Fair has advocated to improve prison conditions and bring awareness to the impact incarceration has on children and families, and demand accountability for state violence as it relates to police departments and correctional facilities in Connecticut.

“We’re working to end solitary confinement in Connecticut by all the ways they describe it,” she said during a recent appearance on my podcast. “And that is going to include about four or five prisons where people on a regular basis — not for punishment — but on a regular basis are in their cells 22-23 hours a day, so we are planning to end that. ... One of our other demands was to shut down Northern. ... It was meant to break a person’s spirit.”

The Northern Correctional Institution, the state’s controversial Supermax prison, will close in July.

Whatever the reasons, there is no doubt that Fair and her organization’s tireless efforts — which now include dramatic billboards depicting men in solitary confinement erected on Connecticut’s highways — played a major part.

Another issue important to Blacks was taken up by state Sen. Robyn Porter, D-New Haven, and her push to get the Crown Act, which prevents workplace discrimination against natural hairstyles, passed through the legislature.

It may seem like a small thing, but thousands of Black people faced job and housing discrimination based on their hairstyle.

“I feel like this is our moment,” Porter said during a ceremonial bill signing on the state Capitol steps. “This is our season. And we are finally going to get

everything that we deserve. And the ‘Crown Act’ is just the beginning, my people.”

And with gun violence a major issue in Black communities, Kimberly Washington has rallied mothers from around New Haven and Fairfield counties to “demand action” through her organization, Mothers Demand Action.

“We all have to take a stand because these are our children,” she told listeners of my podcast. “We all need to stand up, even when you don’t want to stand, you still need to stand. I tell mothers who don’t want to come out that I will stand for them. I am going to be a voice for them. I am going to keep standing and pushing forth and hoping and praying that one day, this gun violence will end.”

It is hard to know whom to cite in a month that celebrates women of all colors because there are so many worthy of mention, like advocate Allie Perry, state Sen. Marilyn Moore, D-22, publisher Norma Rodriguez and Themis Klarides, the former state GOP House minority leader who could run for governor in 2022, and all the women who lead the charge against domestic violence, to name a few.

So, yes, there are many ways and from many perspectives that I can write about how far all women have come in my lifetime.

But I guess to sum it up, women grew weary of baking, stewing, searing and simmering in the kitchen and are making it clear, they have come a long way.

And here's hoping, there is no stopping them now.

Women? The weaker sex is proving to be mighty.