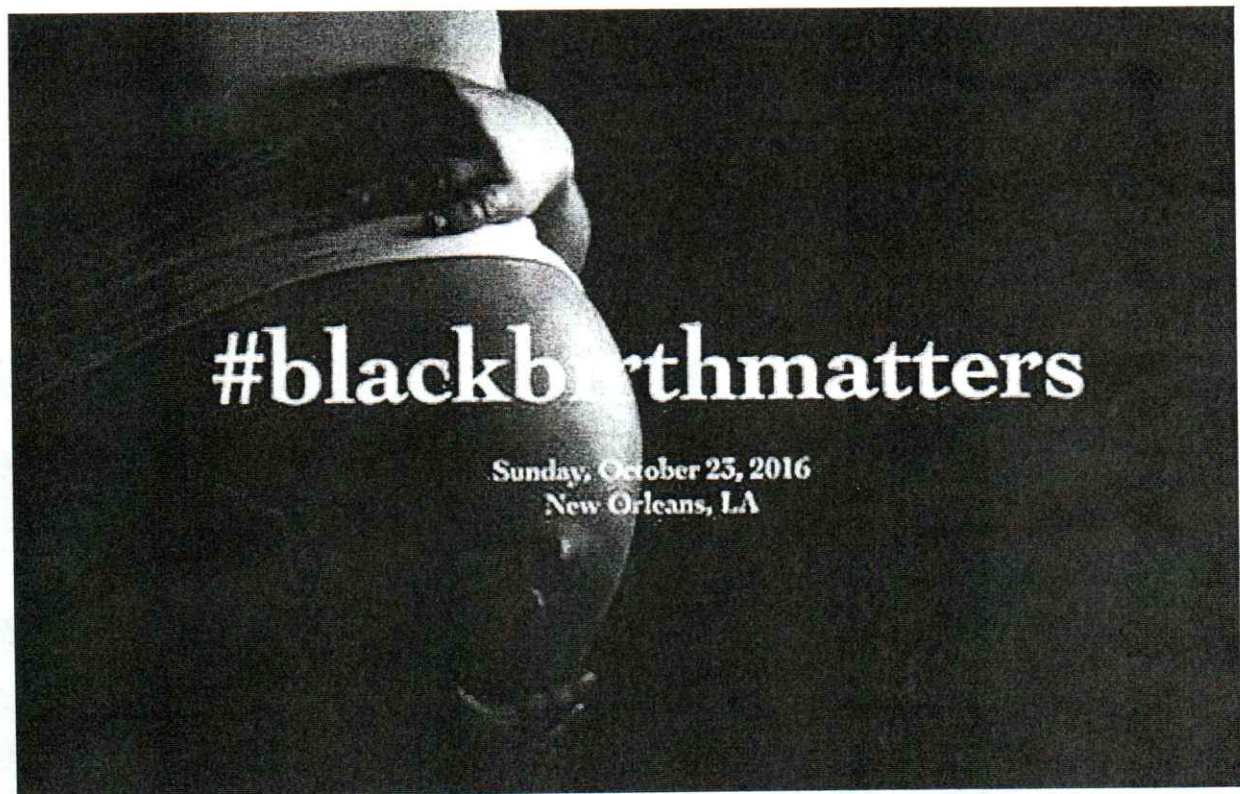


Why Black Birth Matters

October 13, 2016 | Jamilla H. Webb, BSN RN Birth Doula



Transcending the Legacy of Violence and Abuse

The founders of the "New World" created a global economy and the greater portion of today's African Diaspora as we know it by understanding the premise that Black birth and Black bodies matter. Many Blacks born in America are the descendants of enslaved Africans who endured generations of violence and abuse. Since the abolishment of chattel slavery, Blacks have triumphed over innumerable challenges making notable accomplishments in and contributions to American politics, entertainment, education and athletics. Yet, despite these great strives, the legacy of violence and abuse continues to plague us daily. It is because of this we state that "Black Birth Matters." As Women of Color, we can use this statement as an affirmation to claim the holistic and inestimable value of our lives and take ownership of our humanity. Our humanity transcends the abuse of forced labor for the sake of the creation and exchange of currency. Our humanity transcends the violent usage of our bodies for sexual exploitation, medical experimentation and breeding.

The Price of Progress

James Marion Sims, an American Physician who practiced in the 19th Century is deemed the "Father of modern gynecology." While several of his techniques and practices revolutionized women's care, Black women and infants were the collateral damage of his discoveries. Three of his most famous subjects, Anarcha, Lucy and Betsey are recognized as the "Mother's of modern gynecology." These women and many others were forced to endure painful procedures without anesthesia, suffered from irreparable wounds due to experimentation and had infants who were subjected to similar treatment. This is an

example of birth violence. A woman's transition to motherhood is one of the most sacred times in her life. However, because of the disregard and over-sexualization of our bodies, Black women often experience shame and not celebration when it comes to pregnancy. A culture of fear, silence, and mistrust for medical authority has been deep seated among African Americans for hundreds of years. Remnants of these feelings reside within many of us today and are reinforced during negative encounters in healthcare settings. The shadows of inadequate care and poor outcomes remain a reality for many African Americans

On the Cusp of Crisis

Despite advances in medical innovation, technology and civil rights (all of which required a hefty investment of time, resources and sometimes human lives) Black women and infants continue to have the most deplorable health outcomes in the United States. According to the CDC, during the 2011-12 year for every 100,000 births, 41 Black women died (approximately 4 times the rate of White women). The United States is one of only 13 countries in the world where the maternal mortality rate (MMR) is now worse than it was 15 years ago. When we couple this national standing with issues that overwhelmingly affect Black women such as poverty, decreased access to care, racial discrimination, and the presence of chronic illness, statistically we live at the intersection of a major crisis. Our lives and the lives of our children are at stake.



(from L to R: Ashley Hill, Latona Giwa (Birthmark Doula Collective's Co-founder), Queen Hope Parker, Jamilla H. Webb (all Birthmark Doulas of Color) December 2015

Shifting Toward Solutions

It is fruitless to expound on problems without also investing time in exploring plausible solutions. On the macro level there needs to be a shift in national and state policies, implementation of improved maternal child health practices, and increased access to quality affordable health insurance. Many of us invest our time and ballots to support local, state and national politicians to affect policy. While policy change is very necessary, I encourage all of my sisters to assess what shift they can create and control in their daily lives on the micro level. As a Black woman, I have lived through pain and fear that many of my sisters experience. Self-care and maintaining a loving environment and inner circle have become not only my daily practice but also my lifeline. I believe that Black women are the answer to each other's problems. Sharing

my experiences with other women and being connected to sources that are invested in my wellbeing has been life changing for me.

Social media and the internet are two of the primary tools I use to connect to such resources. In a cyber world full of bullying and non-affirming images and information, I choose to carefully curate a safe space that celebrates and supports Black women, Black mothers, and Black families. Throughout our history in this country, we have always found a way to support each other despite mainstream exclusion. From the legacy of Black granny midwives to the present day sisters who founded Black Lives Matter, Black women remain on the frontlines of resistance against forces that attempt to diminish our humanity. We will continue to affirm our existence. By being intentional about supporting each other and creating solutions, we can be empowered to create better birth outcomes for ourselves and our children.



Jamilla visiting one of her NFP (Nurse Family Partnership) clients and her newborn at Ochsner Westbank Hospital Summer 2016.

Black Birth Matters

Inspired by both the #BlackLivesMatter movement and Midwife Ina May Gaskin's "Birth Matters" mantra Birthmark Doula Collective will host a day-long conference - a series of workshops, films, panels, discussions, art, and healing on issues at the intersection of birth and social justice and will focus on issues such as birth violence, reclaiming spirituality in birth, birth in/justice, the birth/abortion divide, and midwifery and doula care. As part of Birthmark's commitment to birth justice and equitable access for all families, all monies raised during this event will be used to provide doula services free of charge to low income families of color. We invite you to join us in this movement to support and celebrate Black mothers, children and families.

Join Birthmark Doula Collective on Sunday October 23rd in New Orleans for their
Black Birth Matters Conference!