

Minority Faculty Experiences

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Much of the advice I would give to minority women historians is not different from that I would give to anyone entering the profession, but I think there are some circumstances that minority women should be especially aware of and ready to encounter. Below, I have begun with the more general advice.

- There are many kinds of careers to have; choose the one you want. Define your career goals in research and in teaching in relation to your life goals. Don't let others dictate the kind of career or relation to your work that you should have. I recognize that this is difficult, but I think it is primary. It is customary in our profession for many people to assume and impose a particular career path on others, as if there is only one desirable way to be a historian. Make conscious decisions about your own desired path.
- Be prepared and willing to live with the consequences of those decisions. Having decided on the career and life you want, be hard-nosed with yourself about how to get that, and the consequences of doing so. Struggle hard to change the world and the academy, but understand that realistically you are going to live and work in the one we have. Can you live and be happy with the consequences—personal and professional—of pursuing the life and career you want. Or will you constantly be regretting something. If so, then maybe you need to rethink.
- Cultivate professional networks and perspectives outside your department and field:
 - within your institution
 - within the profession more broadly
 - outside the profession
 - preferably with someone who does not know and has no connection to the people involved
 - definitely with some people whose critique you will respect and who will be willing to tell you what you need to hear even when it won't be to your liking
 - with different people with different expertise or ability to advise on the range of professional issues you will encounter—career advancement, getting funded, work/life balance, teaching skills and curriculum development, enhancing professional visibility, understanding academic institutional structures and politics, advocacy, and resolving inequities
- Have a life now. You won't get one later.
- Learn to distinguish offering assistance to students of color from being a patsy. And be able to live with the consequences of enforcing that distinction.
- Be careful about your sense of obligation. Learn to honor it whether others share it or not, but also know when it is too much so as to avoid a building resentment of what you imagine you have given or given up out of “obligation.”

- Be prepared to have your authority challenged in the classroom and your students demonstrate a lack of respect in ways they would not imagine themselves empowered to do in others' classrooms.
 - Find a balance between approachability and authority.
 - Be prepared to insist upon your authority even if it means students, and maybe your colleagues as well, come to see you as “a bad ass.”
 - Be very prepared for colleagues in your department, even those with whom you are friends and feel yourself otherwise supported, not to believe you and not to support you or back you up. Especially in a situation where your colleagues and good friends in the department gain some of their own sense of self-worth and professional respect from their relationships with these students, it will be hard for them to acknowledge that the students they love working with can also be the same students who are making your life miserable or even threatening it.
 - Don't be afraid to call the authorities -- campus security, police, or whomever -- when needed.
 - Create your own race-crisis hotline. I do not jest. Depending on your circumstance this may mean someone who checks on you immediately after each class to make sure that you are physically and mentally safe, or it may mean people you can call to say, “can you believe?” or “is this really what I think it is?” They should be people who will tell you when you're just being paranoid but who also know racism when they see it in even the most subtle forms and, even though they usually can't solve the problem, can help you maintain your sanity just by reassuring you that you aren't the one who is crazy.
- Balance protecting your time and being a good colleague/doing your share.
- Think hard about the fact that people of color are the least likely to admit to themselves and to others when they suffer from depression and need to seek help. Think about the stress that you may be under, and don't feel the need to prove you are “strong” and “can handle it on my own.”
- Create the life and career you want; don't let others create it for you. And then be happy in the life and career you have created even if no one else is.

Resources:

And sometimes because the resource that you most need is to laugh out loud at the absurdity of it all, bookmark this site or buy this book and keep it close at hand:

- Damali Ayo, conceptual artist, *How To Rent A Negro* (Lawrence Hill Books, 2005), and <http://rent-a-negro.com/>

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