

## **Leadership and Leverage: How White Women Can Use Their Privilege and Power to Protect Black Women Leaders in Middle and Senior Management Positions**

**Dr. Ershela L. Sims, WEPAN, Inc.**

Dr. Sims is the Executive Director of the Women in Engineering ProActive Network. Prior to joining WEPAN she served as Interim President of the SC Governor's School for Science and Mathematics. She was the first black person and first woman to lead SCGSSM. She began her career at GSSM as Vice President for the Accelerate Virtual Engineering Program and later became Senior Vice President for Virtual and Outreach Programs. Prior to GSSM, Dr. Sims was the Dean of Engineering and Technology at the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics. She has 25 years of experience as an industry engineer and K-20 researcher, educator, and administrator; she was also a DEI practitioner across all of those positions. Dr. Sims holds a BSE in BME from Duke University and PhD in BME from the UNC at Chapel Hill. She is a lifetime member of the National Society of Black Engineers as well as a member of several other professional associations including ASEE and BMES.

Dr. Sims serves her community through multiple boards including the Florence-Darlington Technical College Area Commission, Columbia College Board of Trustees, and Cypress Adventures Board of Trustees and as a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. Her accolades include the NSBE Dr. Janice A. Lumpkin Educator of the Year Golden Torch Award, National Science Teachers Association Vernier Technology Award and the NC School of Science and Mathematics Exceptional Contribution in Teaching through Scholarship and Keeper of the Dream awards.

**Stephani Page**

**Mrs. Serita W Acker, Clemson University**

Serita earned her bachelor's degree from Lander University and a Master of Education in Human Resources and Development from Clemson University. Before becoming the PEER/WISE director in August 2015, Serita Acker was the Director of the Women in Science and Engineering program. Additionally, she has over 25 years of experience in higher education, student support services, mentoring, and DEI programs. She is a certified Global Career Development Facilitator and Life Coach. Serita Acker sees the PEER/WISE's primary role as providing student success programs and services that can equip students with the resources they need to excel at Clemson University and achieve their educational goals to prepare for success after graduation.

Serita is also a graduate of the Riley Institute for Diversity Leaders and Upstate Class of 2011 and is also a Qualified Administrator (QA) for the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), the premier cross-cultural assessment of intercultural competence, and National Coalition Building Institute (NCBI) Facilitator.

She has won several State and National Awards: the Thomas Green Clemson Award, Woman of Distinction by the Girl Scouts of Mountains to Midlands, the James E. Bostic Diversity and Inclusive Excellence Award in 2017 as a diversity champion at Clemson University, Clemson University Woman of the Year, Martin Luther King Jr. Award, Clemson University Board of Trustees Award, Women in Engineering Pro-Active Network Distinguished Service Award, Career Communications Magazine College-Level Promotion of Education Award, National Association of Multicultural Engineering Advocates Award, Upstate Diversity Award, Calder D. Elhmann Outstanding, Individual. In December 2021, she received the College of Engineering and Computing and Applied Sciences Exceptional Staff Award and the WEPAN University Change-Agent Award in 2022.

One of the highlights of her career was graduating from the Presidents Leadership Institute at Clemson University in 2020.

Mrs. Acker was also featured on the cover of Insight into Diversity, a National magazine, September edition, for her work at Clemson University.

PEER and WISE received the 2018 and 2021 Inspiring Program in STEM Awards under her leadership from Insight into Diversity Magazine. According to the magazine *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*, the program marked a victory in 2018 when Clemson became the nation's 13th-highest producer of African-American undergraduates receiving baccalaureate degrees. When historically black colleges and universities are excluded, Clemson ranked eighth among predominantly white institutions.

The ranking is a crucial benchmark because African Americans remain underrepresented in engineering, an in-demand field with high earning potential. While African Americans make up 13 percent of the population, they hold about 4 percent of engineering degrees, according to the National Society of Black Engineers.

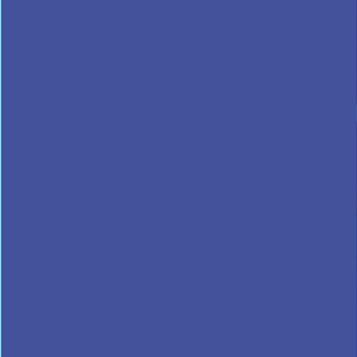
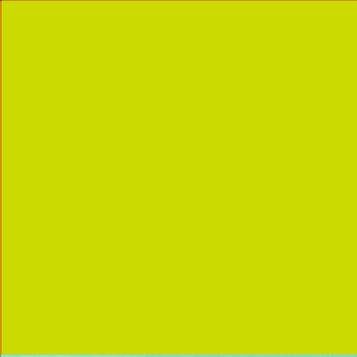
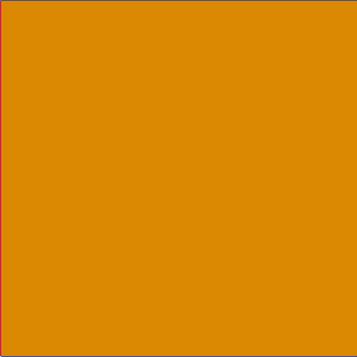
She also served as MentorLinks Consultant for the American Association of Community Colleges in Washington, DC and sat on many state and national boards to help promote STEM. She serves as the National Society of Black Engineers Student Chapter and CU Black Graduate Student Association campus adviser at Clemson University. She also serves as the campus Principal Investigator for the Louis Stokes (LSCAMP) funding to encourage more underserved students to pursue Ph.D.s in STEM.

Recently, under Serita's Leadership, PEER and WISE are now Implementation Partners for GE's Next Engineers Program, a \$5 million investment to diversify the Engineering pipeline in Greenville and Upstate.

In her spare time, she enjoys reading and, traveling and family. Her greatest joy is promoting education and inspiring people to reach their goals.

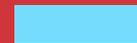
**Mrs. Beth Anne Johnson, WEPAN, Lamar Creative Co., Clemson University**

Beth Anne Johnson is founder of Lamar Creative Co. LLC, a company that provides services in professional coaching, consulting, and creative services through equity frameworks and retention practices. Johnson knows companies and leaders can accelerate their success through creative innovation and strategic thinking. She is the Community and Engagement Manager for the Programs of Educational Enrichment and Retention (PEER) and Women In Science and Engineering (WISE) at Clemson University, where she connects alumni and industry professionals seeking to work with the best talents and students the state has to offer. Johnson was recently named the 2022 winner of the WEPAN Women in Engineering Champion Award for her volunteer contributions to STEM education at the primary, secondary, and collegiate levels for her work at Clemson. The WISE program was named winner of the Women in Engineering Program Award for an outstanding woman in an engineering program that serves as a model for other institutions. Johnson's path to STEM equity work is a fascinating one. With undergraduate degrees in English and the performing arts, she completed her graduate research as a leisure scientist in parks, recreation, and tourism management at Clemson University. "You can tell who's equitable and free by who can pursue leisure, so I started with a social justice mindset. It was interesting to see that the statistics for woman-identifying athletes in male-dominated sports are like those for first-year incoming engineering and computer science students." In addition to owning her own business and her role at Clemson, Johnson serves as the past president of the WEPAN Board of Directors. She is honored to serve the WEPAN community alongside the executive leadership team. Together they will ensure WEPAN continues growing, and create a strategic plan, mapping out goals and objectives for three, five, and ten years into the future. Johnson is a writer, adventurer, and family woman outside of work. Together with her partner, Adam, they raise two children. They spend their days rock climbing, eating good food, and continuously seeking joy as a family.



# Leadership & Leverage:

how white women in senior & middle management can use their privilege & power to protect Black women leaders



**Dr. Ershela Sims, Dr. Stephani Page, Rev. Serita Ades, Mrs. Beth Anne Johnson**

**February 2023**



**Today's objective:**  
**To equip white women in senior and middle management with more effective tools, steps and knowledge in order to better protect Black joy, Black liberation, and the experiences of our Black women leaders.**

# Meet the presenters



**Dr. Ershela  
Sims**

**Executive Director  
WERAN**



**Dr. Stephani  
Page**

**Director of Strategic  
Initiatives  
WERAN**



**Rev. Serita  
Acker**

**Executive Director  
PEER WISE  
Clemson University**



**Beth Anne  
Johnson**

**Past President  
WERAN Board of  
Directors**



# Pause

**You are the subject matter expert of your life and lived experiences.**

**Today's presentation will discuss history and current events that include information on Black violence.**

**You are empowered to pause, leave, and re-regulate at anytime during this presentation, according to your own personal needs.**



# Breakout questions



1

**What did you learn about yourself during the 2016 election?**

2

**What did you learn about yourself during the COVID-19 pandemic?**

3

**What brings you here, to this room, today?**



# My Results

**2016**

- **Recipient of Privilege**

**2020**

- **I'm neurodivergent**

**Today**

- **I believe in equity**

# Step One: Reflect



**Build in self reflection into your daily leadership practice.**

**Ask yourself, 'what' and 'how' questions.**

**Go for better:**

**The dichotomy of right and wrong are not the only solutions, there is also better:**

**Be on the lookout for new data.**



# New Data



**Instagram reel**  
**CoNECD February 2023**



# This Step in Action

# Step Two: Name It



## **Name your privileges and paradigms.**

**White privilege and gender privilege is what brings us here today but the experience of privilege is vast.**

**Privilege is also:**

**Disability Theory**

**Queer Theory**

**Socioeconomic Theory**

**Privilege can be found in our  
religion, culture, experiences and more.**



# Homework for later...



**This is a BuzzFeed quiz, think of this as a tool to reflect and think about privilege.**

**Do not focus on the validity of the quiz.**



# How does social science research begin?

**Name your  
paradigm**

**Research  
practices**

**Future  
research**

# Mantra for white women in the room

**My privileges increase the likelihood that I will get a seat at the table first. I will use this power to deconstruct the current table, build a better one, bring a folding chair or better yet, appoint the appropriate person to take my place.**



# Step Three: Leverage Your Anger



**Know the stereotypes Black women experience.**

**Know and name harmful gender Stereotype: Angry Black woman.**

**Code Switching from hair styles, African American Vernacular and more. Wearing a 'mask' for self-preservation.**

**Do not cry and center your experiences, white women tears have been oppressive tool throughout history, especially Emmett Till and white feminism**

# What stands out?

**“They are being seen  
for their color first...”**

**- Jordan Peele**

**“...I’ve been to  
that party.”**

**- Daniel Kaluuya**



**‘All Black folk enter a board room with a mask as a tool for self preservation. A Black woman however; first enters the room as Black and then a woman. She is Black first and her gender second.’**

**-Kendra Johnson, personal conversation, 2019**



# This Step in Action

# Step Three: Believe Black Women



## Believe Black women

**Burn the white flag**

**Black women are the subject matter experts of their lived experiences.**



# Believe their experiences to honor the intersections of their identity.

**We can answer, 'what is diversity' with what is explored in critical ethnography**

**Today is exploration of the intersection of Critical Race Theory and Feminist Theory. Black women can also experience the intersections of**

- **Disability theory**
- **Queer theory**
- **Socioeconomic theory**



# A lesson in empathy





# This Step in Action



# Step Four: Build Better



**Create workplace values that protect.**



# This Step in Action



# Step Five: Know Your Why



**Equity is as essential as air:**

It is lonely to be a woman in STEM.

It is even more lonely as a Black woman in STEM.

**US Citizens with STEM PhD's in 2016**

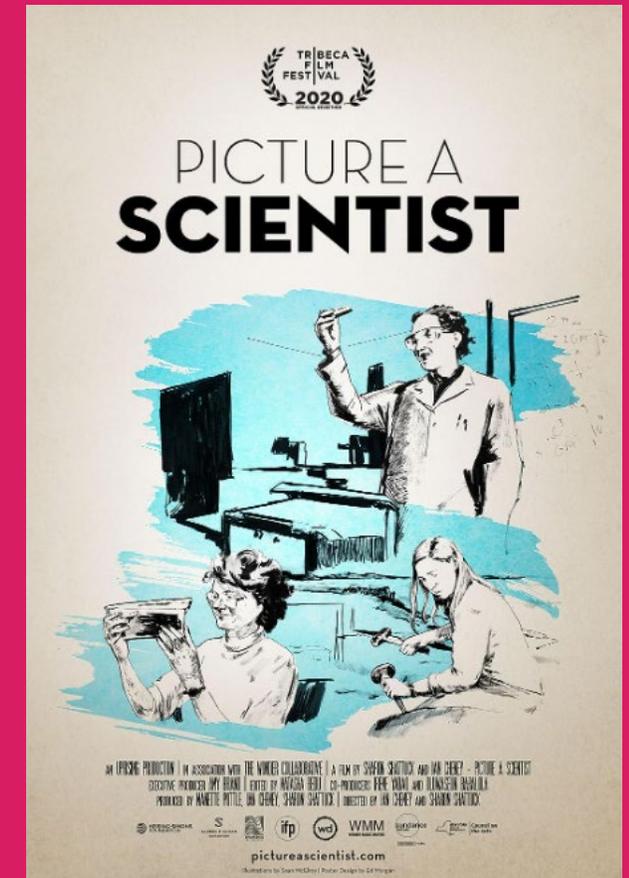
- white men 47.9%
- white women 25.7%
- Black women 2.2%

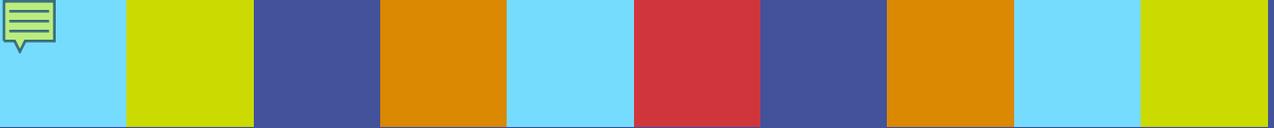
**Nobel Laureates in Science, 1901-2019**

- Men 616
- Women 19
- Women of Color 1

**Major research institutions**

- 7% of deans & fewer than 3% of provosts are women of color





# What's your data?



**7% of the undergraduate students in the College of Engineering Computing & Applied Sciences at Clemson University are Black women.**

My why...



**Meet Mary Wood of  
Chapin High School**

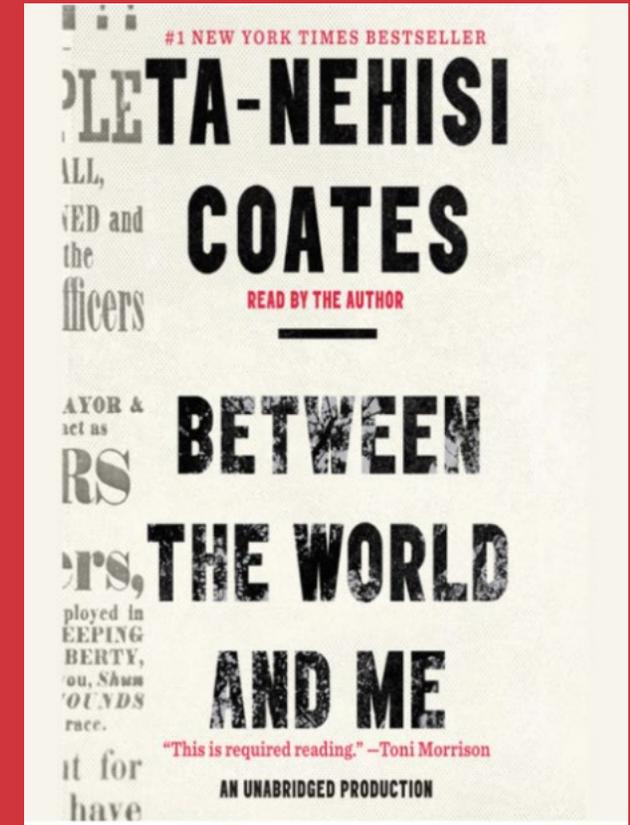
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# Education is under attack

**ACLU SC Interview**



CoNECD Conference





**Dum spiro spero.**

**While I breathe I hope.**

# Further stewardship



**Know about the  
Divine 9**



**'Thank you for  
correcting me.'**



**Watch the Hair Tales  
or the work of Ava  
DuVernay. Read Black  
authors, especially  
banned books.**

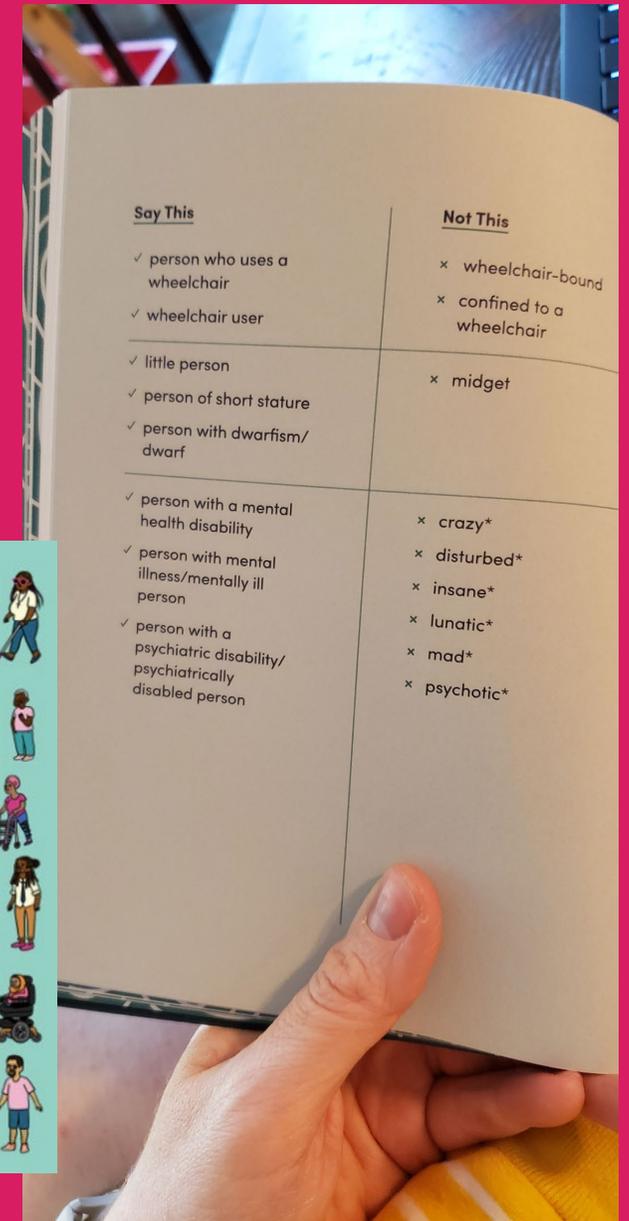
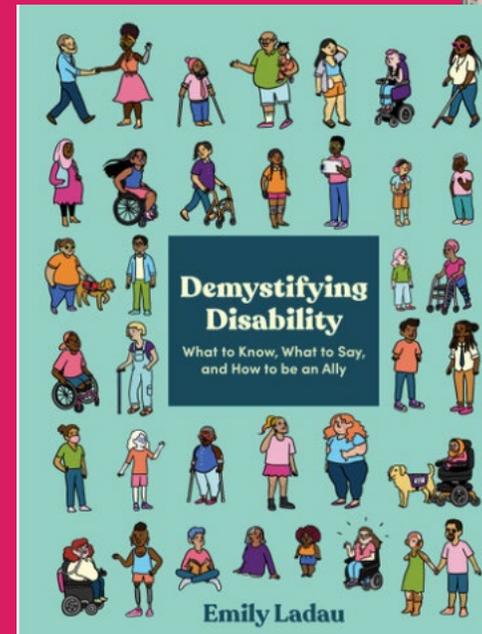


**Support Black  
businesses & read Black  
authors.**

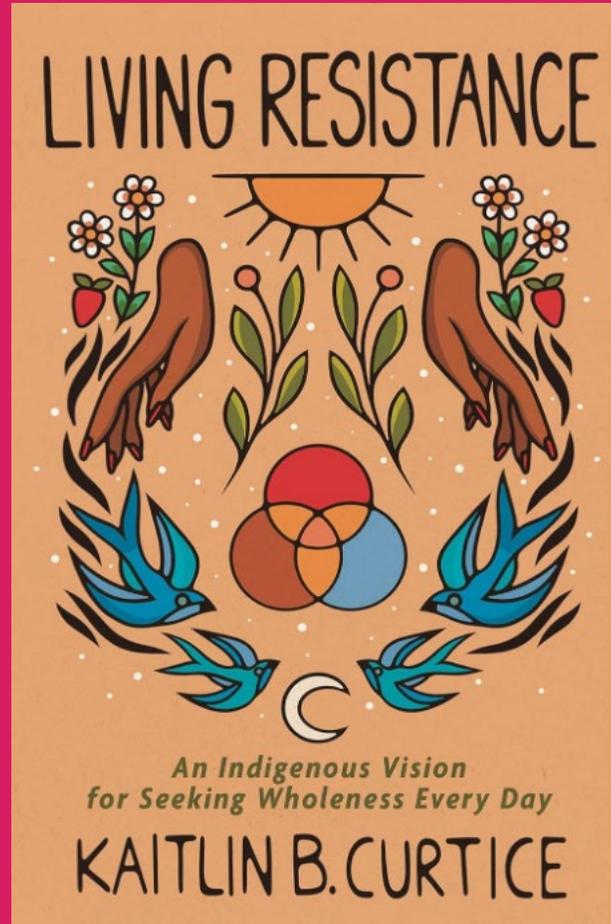


The storms coming...

# Protecting Black women leaders & DEI Programs



I am always arriving...



**And I would rather arrive and be corrected than never arrive at all.**

# Thank you

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