

## LESSONS FROM OUR DIVERSE AMERICAN LANDSCAPE

*As we continue to make headway on our book (look for more info soon!) one theme we are excited to explore is how work-family issues are both similar and different for different sub-groups. This month's newsletter and Thursday webinar puts a spotlight on what we are learning.*

***We are diverse by the type of work we do...*** What do low-wage workers and salaried professionals have in common? Today's newsletter includes one of the best op-ed pieces ever written on the topic, explaining how women at the top and bottom of the labor market face similar challenges for very different reasons.

***We are diverse by race, nationality and family structure ...*** There is so much to learn from our shared experiences as parents and caregivers AND from the differences we bring to these experiences due to our diverse backgrounds and families of origin. Read on to get a sneak peak of how a greater understanding of this diversity will help us promote work-life integration for all.

***Let's celebrate our diversity - join our Thursdays with ThirdPath webinar ...*** Next week we will have a ground breaking webinar when we speak with Riché J. Daniel Barnes, author of the scholarly and innovative book - Raising the Race: Black Career Women Redefine Marriage, Motherhood, and Community. [Register now](#) to join us, including our live Q&A with this insightful researcher.

Thanks for being part of the growing, vibrant, inspiring ThirdPath community!  
/Jessica and the ThirdPath team

***PS - Are you a work-life coach, career counselor or couples' therapist? Join us April 30th for an amazing day of learning. [Check out our website](#) to learn more about this spring's Integrated Life Advocate Forum.***

**Riché J. Daniel Barnes - author of *Raising the Race: Black Career Women Redefine Marriage, Motherhood, and Community*.**

We created an excerpt from an [interview with Riché and Mark Anthony Neal](#), from Neal's YouTube series *Left of Black*.



***What lead you to this research?***

When doing research for my dissertation, I had also recently gotten married and had a child. At one point I was taking my daughter to story time at the local library and I kept on running into African American women who looked a lot like me. They had a professional vibe, but here they were at story time in the middle of the day. At that moment in time, there had been a lot of press about white women opting out of work. I knew by interviewing professional African American women, we could broaden this narrative.

***Historically, black women never had the choice not to work, they've always combined work and family, including doing the "second shift"***

Yes, and the other things that come through in this book is the "third shift." A lot of the women talked about not just having responsibilities to their children, to their husbands, and to their extended families, they also felt responsibilities for their community. That's how I got to the title, *Raising the Race*. It's not just how you raise your own family; it's about how you contribute to the entire race.

***Talk about the conversations these women faced with their mothers and their fore-mothers***

Their grandmothers and mothers were pushing them to do great things, setting a path for them to go to college and graduate school... One mother talked about how she not only felt a sense of responsibility to her mother and grandmother, but to her community. At first, when she decided to change her relationship to work and create more time for family, her mother was supportive. But then, after a while it became "OK, you've been home too long, it's time to go back to work." The idea of being "taken care of by her husband" was very foreign from the previous generations' experiences.

***We raise black women to be independent, but then they have to learn how to become wives***

Yes, all of them had been raised to be career women. They had been identified as smart, high achievers who would go off and blaze paths... But many of them also talked about how they had to learn how to be in relationship with a man. Some were grounded in the church, so it was about the man being the head of the household. But many would also say, "I just didn't know how to talk to him."

In one section of the book, "Too much I, not enough we", the women describe trying to find the right balance between investing in their relationships with their partner and focusing on career. One woman, who was taking a break from work, explained her decision as an opportunity to make her family unit healthy and sustainable.

***Is there a benefit to marriage for these women?***

From the point of view of the women I interviewed, my response is yes. In the time span that I interviewed these families, only 2 have ended in divorce. These women saw having an intact family as important to the community. Family life and marriage are devalued. The majority of black children are being raised in single-parent households. So, these women saw what they were doing -- by staying together -- as "raising the race."

As a scholar, I think there are some risks for black women putting more of an emphasis on their families than on their careers and ambitions. It means there is less push back on policies that would make it possible for all women to continue to work and take care of their families. And there is still the expectation that these women are going to take care of their children, their aging loved ones AND their community. And all of this is happening at a moment in time when everyone is seeing government supports being taken away from them.

## Worth Repeating ...

In September 2012 Susan Lambert wrote an op-ed piece explaining how women at the top and the bottom of the labor market face similar challenges for very different reasons.

**Low-wage workers need to be available at all hours or risk not having work. Salaried professionals must remain electronically tethered to their jobs day and night to prove their value. Both groups lose earnings if they interrupt their careers to care for family members. Read on for a brief excerpt of this timeless article.**

### **Long and relentless or scarce and unpredictable**

Professional women [and men] at law firms, in academia and in the media complain about the punishing hours - and unceasing streams of e-mail - that make it difficult to make time for their families. At the other extreme, many women [and men] in retail, restaurant and health care jobs are underemployed; they're looking for more hours of work (and ideally, regular hours) to support their families. But both problems share a root cause: the incentives that guide businesses' employment practices.

Rather than being long and relentless, work hours in hourly jobs, especially low-level ones, are often scarce, fluctuating and unpredictable. Sales associates and restaurant servers might be scheduled for 7 hours one week and 32 the next ... Schedules are often posted just a few days in advance...

The lack of stability is especially hard on parents. Unpredictable work schedules leave them scrambling to arrange childcare and reluctant to volunteer for school events or to schedule doctor appointments. They make it tough to establish the household routines that experts tell us are essential for healthy child development, like bedtime rituals, homework monitoring and family mealtimes. Unstable hours also result in unstable earnings, a nightmare for parents on tight budgets ...

### **The different pressures on salaried and hourly workers arise from companies' trying to maximize productivity.**

Professional positions come with fixed costs (yearly salaries and benefits like health insurance) that are incurred regardless of how many hours the employee works. Employers have an incentive to have those individuals work as much as possible. One person is often doing the work of two...

In contrast, employers tend to keep head counts high for low-level hourly jobs so that they have a large pool of workers who can be scheduled for short shifts at times of peak demand...

### **Although over- and under-employment create different challenges for workers, the trade-offs are strikingly similar.**

"Availability" is now a major form of human capital, in both high-powered salaried positions and low-level hourly jobs. Low-wage workers need to be available at all hours or risk not having work. Professionals are expected to remain electronically tethered to their jobs day and night or risk forgoing coveted opportunities. Both groups of workers lose earnings if they interrupt their careers to care for family members... ([Read more](#))

**What to learn more?** [Listen](#) to our Thursdays with ThirdPath webinar where we explored how class and race influence how families balance work and caregiving.