

Standing on Their Shoulders



I was sitting with Jack Hardy helping him prepare to share the story of his parents with East Middle School students during their annual Black History Month program. As he shared the presentation, I found myself thinking about how celebrating Black History month compels me to pay deep attention to the fact that I am able to be a successful African American leader in Auburn New York because of those who came before me. Charles and Eleanor Hardy, along with many others paved the way for my leadership. I stand on their shoulders and bear the responsibility for honoring them by being the best leader I can be.

Auburn's African American Community is small and mighty. It is full of amazing leaders who devote themselves to ensuring that this aspect of our community's leadership legacy is honored and passed on to future generations. It is easy for this leadership to go unnoticed. Since it is Black History Month, I want to pay tribute to a few established Auburn African American leaders whose shoulders I stand upon each day. I will also "shout out" a few emerging African American leaders I encourage you to watch because they will be part of the next generation of Auburnians to take our community to the next level.

I pay tribute to Harriet Tubman, Gloria Richardson Griffin, Florence Ray, Sis Flowers, Ann McLeod and the Church Mothers of all the African American churches in our city. These women are bold, committed, and courageous and they inspire me to be bold, committed and courageous in the pursuit of my profession and purpose.

I pay tribute to William Jackson, Merritt Fletcher Sr., George Winslow, Richard Ray, John McLeod Sr., and Elder Willie Murray for being men of honor, along with many other elder gentlemen in our community who believe in me. Their lives remind me time and again what it means to stand for what is just and right. Their lives give me the courage to lead with an activist heart even if it means standing alone at times.

I "shout out" Pastor Robert Wilson, Marcus Wilson, Monique Wright Williams and the BTW team - Demetrius Murphy, Shakina Bowman, Rob Barnes, Sean and Keisha Boothman, The BTW Sisterhood Club Alumnae, The men of Change International, Tony Borges and all my other younger brothers and sisters who each day live in the tension between the "Civil Rights generation and the Hip-Hop generation". These amazing emerging leaders are carving out their place in our community by being community and religious leaders, corporate professionals, entrepreneurs, and activists. Keep on keeping on knowing that even though our strategies collide at times, I support you and look forward to your participation in taking our community to the next level.

Black History Month is the time I focus on models of leadership in my race and culture. I encourage all leaders to find examples of great leadership in the lives of people in their own races and cultures, too. We all need to pay tribute to those whose shoulders we stand upon and "shout out" our emerging leaders. However, in the midst of these celebrations I hope we never lose sight of the fact that my leadership history is your leadership history, and your leadership history is mine too. Auburn, New York is truly great because leaders of all races, cultures, ethnicities, religions, genders, and lifestyles contribute to the success of our corner of the universe. I firmly believe our strength lies in our diversity and together we can accomplish great things.