

Mammies, Matriarchs and the Michelle Obama Effect: Black Women and the Salience of Race and Gender in the Contemporary Workplace©.

Natasha Martin
Seattle University School of Law

This project pursues the historical caricature of black women in the context of work and theorizes on their plight in modern American work environments. This project focuses on notions of belonging by drawing some parallels between black female workers in the eras of slavery and Jim Crow, and more contemporary workplace settings including the role of Michelle Obama as the first African-American First Lady in the White House. Further, the author considers the impact of Michelle Obama on the inclusion and acceptance of black women in major leadership roles and conceptions of black women in the contemporary workplace more broadly.

Using the theoretical framework established in the performance identity literature and interdisciplinary sources, this presentation addresses not only the regulation of appearance in the modern workplace at the intersection, but also racial molding in the context of professional expectations and the perception of a worker's worth in contemporary American society. Accordingly, the author engages the challenges facing woman of color, particularly African-American women, who strive for authenticity while simultaneously negotiating being ethnic and racial minorities, and female in a society that is hostile to their multidimensionality. Overall, the project seeks to understand the nature of progress and remaining challenges toward inclusive excellence for black females in the wake of the 50th anniversary of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.