

# # I Too (Can and Will Do More)

*Sharing a discussion from the October 8, 2018 SWAG Meeting*

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## Introduction

My Aunt Maybell was a hardworking, proud woman. She used to say "I too" when she agreed with someone, when she was onboard with an idea or plan. For some reason, over the last five or so years I adopted the phrase myself when I agreed with friends, especially if they knew my aunt.

The #MeToo and Time's Up movements' stand against sexism and workplace sexual harassment, the increased interest in women's rights and political activism and my Aunt Maybell inspire me. My new mantra is *#I Too* (Can and Will Do More).

## Background

Traditionally, advertising slogans like Virginia Slims cigarette's "You've come a long way, baby," and song lyrics like those of Helen Reddy's "I Am Woman" ("I am woman, hear me roar") celebrated the achievements of women and their empowerment. There was and continues to be much to celebrate, but there is more to be done.

When I consider the challenges women have overcome, I remember that we stand on the shoulders of trailblazing women who came before us and those who carry the torch today. As an African-American female attorney and author, I am acutely aware of the historical significance of their personal sacrifice.

I realize that numerous men and women of all races and ethnicities have made sacrifices that enable me to have the rights and privileges I enjoy today. To whom much is given, much is expected. *#I Too* can and will do more.

I acknowledge that I now have choices and options that were unavailable to women in years past. For many women, those options and opportunities were only dreams and for others they were unimaginable. I am reminded of the fact that in 1873 the U.S. Supreme Court held that women could be statutorily denied the right to practice law by the states. *Bradwell v. Illinois*, 83 U.S. 130 (1873).

More recently, the #MeToo and Time's Up movements roared into the public discourse and psyche. In my previous article for the WLIB Newsletter, I neglected to give attribution to African American civil rights activist, Tarana Burke, who founded the #MeToo movement in 2006. It is important that we remember that fact and that she always receives recognition for being the trailblazer.

These two movements are emblematic of a transformational mindset in women as well as men about sexism and workplace sexual harassment, particularly. The good news is that today many women feel empowered. The bad news is that there is a long journey ahead, and so much more to do to ensure the empowerment of all women.

Further expansion of the sentiment and strategies fueling women's empowerment movements are found in the less publicized #WeToo campaign. This movement seeks to include all people regardless of gender and focuses on sexual misconduct.

#WeToo is also an article about the women's rights advocacy projects championed by women scholars at Rutgers University in New

Jersey. These "endeavors" include *Political Activism, Violence against Women, Reproductive and Health Care Rights, Sexual Harassment, Injustices in the Workplace, The Changing Status of African-American Women, Improving the Lives of Women Around the World and Influencing the Attitudes of Young Men and Women.*

We currently have the privilege of witnessing significant political activism by women. Its progress is documented and analyzed by the non-partisan Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP), at Rutgers University's Eagleton Institute of Politics. CAWP, considered by some to be America's foremost source of scholarly research and data on women's political participation, is also available to provide information and support to women seeking public office.

Ready to Run, launched by CAWP in 1998, is a nonpartisan campaign training program that offers tutorials in fundraising, media training and other skills for inexperienced political hopefuls. The Ready to Run program helped elevate New Jersey from 39th in the nation in the percentage of women governing via state legislatures to 14th place. Women now comprise 30 percent of the New Jersey State Legislature (up from 16.7 in 1998).

Notably, New Jersey is one of 27 states that has elected a woman to serve as governor. Thirty-nine women have served in that office. More than 45 women have served in the United States Senate.

We can do more. We can be more impactful.

## Call to Action

In my opinion, the achievements that women have amassed may be eradicated if we are not vigilant. I am mindful of the quotation, "Those who do not learn history are doomed to repeat it." If it is true and if history, driven by human nature, is ugly (I believe it is), then this quotation should serve as a guard rail for our personal and professional interactions.

I believe that we should be civil in our efforts to formulate public and private policies that are consistent with our country's constitutional and foundational tenets and otherwise. In the words of Former First Lady Michelle Obama, "I'd love if we as a country could get back to the place where we didn't demonize people who disagreed with us." Divergent viewpoints not only deserve to be heard, they deserve a respectful response, if a response is given.

In furtherance of the #MeToo and Time's Up movements, I can and will do more. I will mentor more young people, especially young women. I will educate people about legal definitions of sexual harassment, sexism, sexual assault and bystander intervention. I will initiate discussions with men and women to crystallize conduct that is appropriate and identify conduct that is inappropriate.

In support of political activism, I will encourage people of all ages to register to vote. I will learn more about divergent viewpoints. I will support candidates whose positions resonate with me.

Quite simply *#I Too* can and will do more. How about you? Can and will you do more? If you can and you will *#I Too*. 🌟