

# Philadelphia Women's Empowerment Initiative

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## END THE DISCRIMINATION: GIRLS INTERESTED IN MATH, SCIENCE ARE DISCOURAGED AT EVERY TURN



I normally use this space to share insights "From the President" about what is happening in the city in general and with the Women's Empowerment Initiative, in particular. I will yield my usual format this time, though, to call attention to a long fought battle to end discrimination for girls interested in math and science.

*This article originally appeared as an op-ed in USA Today on 10/12/07. I hope it will inspire you to hold high the banner in defense of and for the encouragement of our young sisters.*

One of the most enduring stereotypes about the sexes is that men's mental abilities are better suited than women's for science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). As a math major whose first job offer was teaching physics and chemistry, I find this theory archaic and easy to dispel. More compelling is the matter of why the myth lives on, how it derails girls and young women, and what we can do to offset its impact.

We could soon elect the first woman president in the USA, yet our society still clings to traditional gender roles. Even arguably intelligent people rely on out-

dated beliefs and assumptions to excuse discriminatory attitudes and practices. In 2005, the then-president of Harvard University, Lawrence Summers, suggested that women's "intrinsic aptitude" held them back in science and math. Women quickly pronounced this line of thinking obsolete and offensive, including the female presidents of MIT (a neuroscientist) and Princeton (a molecular biologist).

Unfortunately, there are countless more Lawrence Summers out there, and many of them are in positions of authority, shaping the pathways of education and career for girls and women in spite of the mandates of Title IX, the federal law that requires equal educational opportunities.

In fact, studies tell us that girls interested in STEM are discouraged and discounted at every turn. According to a recent National Science Foundation study, 66% of girls and 68% of boys reported liking science in fourth grade. By eighth grade, twice as many boys as girls expressed interest in STEM careers.

Throughout high school and college, women continue to filter out of these disci-



**Wanda Tanner-McNeill  
WEI Board President**

*"We stood in the sunshine of her being. Through her inexhaustible giving, we learned to give. Through her faith, we learned the confidence of knowing that peace on Earth is inevitable . . . We saw a genuine commitment in her life to making a difference. That commitment, that passion we must all find within ourselves."*

- Yolanda King  
(Speaking of her Mother,  
Mrs. Coretta Scott King.)

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- End the Discrimination: Girls Interested in Math, Science are Discouraged at Every Turn **1, 3**
- Nutter Wins on Work Ethic, Commitment to Family and Shared Responsibility **2**
- A Snapshot of the Sub-prime Market **2**
- HR 3915: Mortgage Reform and Anti-Predatory Lending Act of 2007. **2**
- In Memoriam: Passing of an Empowered Woman of Faith and Fortitude **3**
- November is Nat'l. Adoption Month: You Can Make a Difference! **3**
- Think Before You Buy: Child "Slave" Labor in India **4**
- "Black Friday" as a Gender Issue: Female Shoppers, Beware! **4**

### **The Zeal of the Lord of Hosts**

*His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. - Isaiah 9:7*

(Continued from page 3)

# Philadelphia Women's Empowerment Initiative

## NUTTER WINS ON WORK ETHIC, COMMITMENT TO FAMILY & SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

The day after his landslide election, Mayor-elect Michael Nutter put out a needed and welcomed plea to those who want Philadelphia to finally reach its real potential. Nutter invoked John F. Kennedy's call for the best and brightest to help him lead the way. But rather than ask residents what they can do for the city, Nutter sprinkled his message with some in-your-face Philly attitude. "We need to get over ourselves," Nutter said several times during a breakfast speech to several hundred community leaders. *Get over ourselves?*

Nutter's blunt wording was in reference to the city's legendary inferiority complex. "We need to get over ourselves at a certain level and stop being so envious of other places," he said. "We are not Boston. We are not New York. We are not D.C. We are not Chicago. We are not San Francisco, Atlanta, Orlando or anything else. We are Philadelphia and we need to be proud of it." Beneath Nutter's mildly scolding tone, his message is hopeful. This city faces many challenges, but it also has many opportunities. Nutter has asked for everyone's help. The time is now for citizens to heed his call. He wants adults to volunteer for after-school programs. And businesses to double their number of summer jobs - to give young people hope, purpose and to keep them off the streets. "This is a shared responsibility," he said. Nutter said making Philadelphia great isn't just the mayor's job.

As a side note, the picture of the victor shown in this article includes his daughter Olivia, the star of one of the most poignant ads of any candidate in the campaign -- winning hearts and votes by his personal commitment to the Philadelphia public school system.

[Sources include: Daily News (philly.com) and Philadelphia Inquirer post-election coverage.]



Newly elected Mayor Nutter with daughter Olivia.

## A SNAPSHOT OF THE SUBPRIME MARKET AND A FEW SHOCKING STATISTICS

Subprime mortgages are high-cost home loans intended for people with weak or blemished credit histories. Higher interest rates make sense for higher-risk loans to a point, but the subprime market has been rife with problems that are rare in the mainstream prime market: excessive fees, high penalties for refinancing, refinances that provide no real benefit to homeowners, and steering families into more expensive loans when they qualify for a better rate.

In recent years, subprime lenders and brokers flooded the growing subprime market with dangerous mortgages that come with "exploding" adjustable interest rates. The result is a massive epidemic of foreclosures that is harming families, entire residential communities, not to mention the availability of credit at home and abroad.

Percentage increase in subprime loans from 2003 to 2006:	292%
Proportion of 2006 home-purchase loans to African American families that were subprime:	52.44%
Proportion of 2006 home Loans to Hispanic and Latino families that were subprime:	40.66%

[Source: Center for Responsible Lending, [www.responsiblelending.org](http://www.responsiblelending.org)]



## HR 3915: MORTGAGE REFORM AND ANTI-PREDATORY LENDING ACT OF 2007 – AN OPPORTUNITY FOR ADVOCACY.



Honorable Chaka Fattah  
PA 2nd District

Congressional members Brad Miller (D-NC), Mel Watt (D-NC), and Barney Frank (D-MA, chair of the House Financial Services Committee) have introduced the "Mortgage Reform and Anti-Predatory Lending Act of 2007" on October 22, 2007. The proposed legislation addresses many abusive lending practices that contributed to today's foreclosure crisis, including reckless underwriting practices, subprime prepayment penalties, and yield-spread premiums. However, it is critical that the details of remedy and enforcement provisions are strengthened in order to ensure protections are meaningful and that industry participants, including the secondary market, take their responsibility to police the market seriously and do not encourage originators to make abusive loans in the future.

You can take action on this legislation by going to this website: <http://ga3.org/campaign/SupportHR3915>. You will be asked to fill in a few items of data; your letter will then automatically be addressed to your appropriate congressional representative.



### **IN MEMORIAM: PASSING OF AN EMPOWERED WOMAN OF FAITH AND FORTITUDE**

The National Council of Women's Organizations is deeply saddened by the passing of Mal Johnson on Sunday, October 28. Ms. Johnson served on NCWO's Executive Committee and chaired its Global Issues Task Force, where she was an exceptionally effective liaison for women's rights to embassies from around the world. Ms. Johnson also edited NCWO's recent publication, *50 Ways to Improve Women's Lives: The Essential Women's Guide to Achieving Equality, Health and Success*.

Mal Johnson began her career as a television reporter at the former WKBS in Philadelphia. The first female reporter hired by Cox Radio and Television News, she moved to Washington and traveled the world over the course of her 27 years there. As Cox's White House correspondent, Ms. Johnson covered five presidents as well as Capitol Hill, the State Department, and various Federal agencies. In 1980, she was promoted to Senior Washington Correspondent and assigned additional duties as National Director of Community Affairs.

In addition to her leadership role at the National Council, Ms. Johnson served on many boards, including the International Association of Women in Radio & Television and the Communications Consortium Media Center. She was a founding member of the Philadelphia Association of Black Journalists, the National Association of Black Journalists, and the National Broadcast Association for Community Affairs. She is the former National Chair of the American Women in Radio and Television Foundation. Inducted into the Journalists Hall of Fame in 2000, a television documentary of her life is in the archives of the History Makers of America. Upon her retirement, Ms. Johnson established a consulting firm, Medialinx International, and pursued a career as a volunteer leader for women's rights, especially for women of color and international women.

NCWO Chair Susan Scanlan noted that, "The National Council of Women's Organizations—and the world—has lost an important piece of our history. Even as an octogenarian and challenged by illness, Mal never retired from the fight for feminism and fairness. She was a dignified and forceful leader who inspired so many young women, especially women of color. For that reason, we are pleased to announce the creation of the Mal Johnson Sistership Program to provide a paid fellowship, or "sistership," for young women of color at NCWO. How proud and delighted Mal would be to hand a deserving young woman the opportunity to participate in public policymaking at its source!"

[Source: National Council of Women's Organizations, Kimberly Otis, Executive Director, 10/30/07, Washington. DC]



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*(Continued from page 1)*

plines, although the reasons are more related to acceptance than aptitude. A study by the National Academy of Sciences, the National Academy of Engineering and the Institute of Medicine found that "women are very likely to face discrimination in every field of science and engineering."

We've known this for decades. In 1972, Title IX was adopted, mandating equal opportunities for women in education. Full enforcement of Title IX is the key to breaking down the barriers that girls and women face. The remedy for discrimination is already in place; we just need the confidence and courage to demand its application.





## THINK (AND DO YOUR HOMEWORK) BEFORE YOU BUY

Child workers, some as young as 10, have been found working in a textile factory in conditions close to slavery to produce clothes that appear destined for Gap Kids, one of the most successful arms of the high street giant. Speaking to The Observer, the children described long hours of unwaged work, as well as threats and beatings.

Gap said it was unaware that clothing intended for the Christmas market had been improperly subcontracted to a sweatshop using child labor. It announced it had withdrawn the garments involved while it investigated breaches of the ethical code imposed by it three years ago.

The discovery of the children working in filthy conditions in the Shahpur Jat area of Delhi has renewed concerns about the outsourcing by large retail chains of their garment production to India, recognized by the United Nations as the world's capital for child labor. According to one estimate, more than 20 per cent of India's economy is dependent on children, the equivalent of 55 million youngsters under 14.

Gap said in a statement from its headquarters in San Francisco: 'We firmly believe that under no circumstances is it acceptable for children to produce or work on garments. These allegations are deeply upsetting and we take this situation very seriously. All of our suppliers and their subcontractors are required to guarantee that they will not use child labor to produce garments. In this situation, it's clear one of our vendors violated this agreement and a full investigation is under way.'

Professor Sheotaj Singh, co-founder of the DSV, or Dayanand Shilpa Vidyalyaya, a Delhi-based rehabilitation centre and school for rescued child workers, said he believed that as long as cut-price embroidered goods were sold in stores across Britain, America, continental Europe and elsewhere in the West, there would be a problem with unscrupulous subcontractors using children.

'It is obvious what the attraction is here for Western conglomerates,' he told The Observer. 'The key thing India has to offer the global economy is some of the world's cheapest labor, and this is the saddest thing of all the horrors that arise from Delhi's 15,000 inadequately regulated garment factories, some of which are among the worst sweatshops ever to taint the human conscience.'

'Consumers in the West should not only be demanding answers from retailers as to how goods are produced but looking deep within themselves at how they spend their money.'

Credit: Dan McDougall, "INDIAN 'SLAVE' CHILDREN FOUND MAKING LOW-COST CLOTHES DESTINED FOR GAP"  
- The Observer, New Delhi, Sunday October 28, 2007

## "BLACK FRIDAY" AS A GENDER ISSUE: FEMALE SHOPPERS, BEWARE!

Black Friday, that notorious day after Thanksgiving known as the biggest shopping day of the year and a prelude to a huge "debt hangover." Many would say that women are "born shoppers" and therefore fall prey more often to the overabundance of advertising targeting the holiday shopper. But, methodical research tells us that when it comes to overspending our society has achieved a rare gender balance; both sexes do it to pretty much to the same extent.

Instead, overspending during the holidays is a women's issue in particular for a very simple reason: we can afford it less. That's because we continue to earn less -- 75 cents to the dollar on average -- and we are also less likely to have other financial safeguards such as jobs with good health care and pension benefits. Much more often than men, women are using consumer credit to pay for life's necessities.

Advertisers target women for a simple reason: We do about 85 percent of all consumer spending. The constant buzz of advertising is, as the economist John Kenneth Galbraith once put it, "relentless propaganda on behalf of goods."

The dominant media doesn't want to focus on the systemic reasons for women's financial problems. Instead they focus, as usual, on self-improvement, running endless how-to articles about ending impulse spending, making a list and sticking to it, cutting back on your make-up routine, finding a less expensive hair salon, and don't forget the \$64,000 question: Do your finances need a makeover?

This individualist focus misses a deeper point: there is no social policy working to protect people from the aggressive influence of marketing; that not enough is being done to make sure women have more workplace equity. So with that in mind, maybe the best approach to the day after Thanksgiving this year -- rather than rushing around the mall -- is to join anti-consumer, pro-environment activists in Buy Nothing Day.

[Partial content credit: Susan Feiner, "Consider a Boycott of Holiday Shopping" in Women's eNews]

The biggest retail day of the year is this month, and it's time to resist the "buy" buttons that advertisers are trying to push and to join a consuming boycott.