



Exploring Black Strategic Mothering: Insights from Dr. Riché J. Daniel Barnes



Dr. Riché J. Daniel Barnes photo with her family and Cecelela Tomi.

by Shaniele Brown,
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On Monday, March 18, 2024, Rutgers University-Camden hosted a discussion on Black Strategic Mothering and the School “Choice” Market, organized by The Blackademics Faculty Group and Gender Studies.

Dr. Keith Green, Professor of English and Communications and Director of Africana Studies--mentioned that Blackademics is an informal affinity group comprising faculty members from across the campus. He stated, “We share successes and setbacks, we collaborate and research projects, write together and equally welcome colleagues, and unfortunately, sometimes we say bye to colleagues who leave for greener pastures.”

Dr. Riché J. Daniel Barnes, an esteemed sociocultural anthropologist and associate professor of Anthropology in the African American Studies program at the University of Florida, took center stage as the keynote speaker. Her area of expertise focuses on black feminist theories, work, and family policy. Her acclaimed book, “Raising the Race: Black Career Women Redefine Marriage, Motherhood, and Community,” published in Rutgers University Press in 2015, received the distinguished book award from the American Sociological Association in 2017. Dr. Barnes' current focus on Black Strategic Mothering explores how black mothers navigate the complexities of school choice and its impact on perinatal health outcomes.

“It is a framework that recognizes the strategies that black mothers have employed for centuries,” Dr. Barnes said.

During the discussion, Dr. Barnes introduced a “sense of precarity.” According to her research, Black Women’s strategies have historically been in response to their sense of precarity—a condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic support. She also discussed how having school choice is wonderful for everyone while cautioning against its unintended consequences, particularly its negative impact on Black and Latino communities.

“Instead of greater options, there are greater options for failure; an artificial marketplace where families compete or leave their child’s future to luck... negatively impacting Black and Latino communities. What we’ve done with the school choice marketplace is made it a marketplace,” Dr. Barnes elaborated.

Dr. Barnes further elaborated on policies enacted in the early 2000s that rearranged public schools, specifically urban and rural schools. She highlighted the impact of Market-Based Urban and Rural Education Reform, citing key initiatives:

- No Child Left Behind Act of 2021 (NCLB)
- School Improvement Grants of 2009 (SIG)
- Race to the Top Fund of 2009
- Hope VI (1993)

Moreover, Dr. Barnes discussed the differences in choice. She distinguished between Universal Choice, where individuals have the freedom to make their own decisions, and Constrained Choice, where choices appear equitable because there are many; “however, historically engrained impediments reinscribe inequities.”

“Choice is so important to the American experience,” Dr. Barnes emphasized.

As the discussion neared its end, Dr. Barnes shared insights into her upcoming projects and objectives. Notably, when she authored her book, it was a part of her dissertation work. She directed her research on professional working women with children six years of age and younger. Her main goal was to understand “How were they engaging in conversation involving family conflict?” Looking ahead, she shared future research methods, which included conducting in-depth interviews with black moms and families from key cities like Philadelphia, the DMV area, Florida, and beyond. Additionally, she plans to explore educational narratives from youth ages 18-25 and focus on Florida as an important contemporary actor.

“Dr. Barnes doesn’t just talk about strategic mothering, she truly lives it,” said Cecelela Tomi, PH.D. candidate for the Department of Childhood Studies and Program Coordinator for Blackademics.

“This event was made possible by a grant from Rutgers University Equity and Inclusion and, more specifically, their mutual mentoring team grant,” said Dr. Green.

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PhillyBeat

King brings Shirley's story to forefront



Yanina Carter
Entertainment Editor

Have you seen “Shirley” the Netflix film that focuses on the historic presidential run of Shirley Chisholm? Oscar-winner Regina King stars as Chisholm and also serves as producer alongside her sister Reina (who also appears in the film as Chisholm’s sister Muriel).

Oscar winner Lucas Hedges plays Chisholm’s national student organizer, Robert Gottlieb, and Christina Jackson plays campaign volunteer Barbara Lee, who (decades later) was also elected to Congress.

Chisholm was the first African American woman elected to the United States Congress, and in 1972, she also became the first woman to seek the presidential nomination from a major party.

King said the initial idea of doing “Shirley” came in response to the sheer number of people that the two sisters encountered who’d never heard the name Shirley Chisholm. “After so many times of having that experience, we thought, ‘Wait a minute, this is not right. When you hear just even the last name, Chisholm, you should think Shirley,’” King explained. “We set out to tell her story, and early on we worked with a team of writers, including Sonya Winton, who was very good at giving us even a deeper history lesson on who Shirley was and what she had been doing since she ran for president.”

King has been trying to get this biopic made for over a decade. Now, she can finally share Chisholm’s story with the world.

Written and directed by John Ridley (who also wrote the script for the Oscar-winning film, “12 Years a Slave”), the movie focuses specifically on Chisholm’s 1972 national campaign for President. The film wasn’t about her upbringing, childhood, or family bond. It was quite the opposite. Chisholm’s sister had a lot of animosity towards her, and it showed, which was odd for King’s real sister to play—but she was up for the challenge.

King, was also up for the challenge of playing Shirley. The Oscar-winner listened to interviews, and watched countless videos of the real Chisholm, and worked with a dialect coach to nail her accent and mannerisms. “Chisholm was born in Brooklyn, New York, to immigrant parents and spent many years of her childhood in Barbados.

Though she didn’t manage to nab that presidential nomination, she continued to serve in Congress until she retired in 1983. She went on to teach at Mount Holyoke College, as well as co-founded the National Political Congress of Black Women. She was offered a nomination to become U.S. Ambassador to Jamaica in 1993—but was forced to decline due to health issues. She died at the age of 80 in 2005.

Having spent time in Barbados and New York, she would sound Bajan sometimes and other times like someone from Brooklyn, and other times she sounded more scholarly, and sometimes it was a mix of all three because that’s who she is,” King explained. “I promise you, all of the videos and audio that you see of Shirley, you will see so many different sounds and looks.”

The production also had real-life Congresswoman Barbara Lee on set as a consultant. Lee, who is 77, was a friend of Chisholm’s and is even played in the movie by actor Christina Jackson. “Having Barbara Lee come and visit the set was definitely like she was giving us Shirley’s blessing in a lot of ways. I mean, they had such a beautiful relationship,” King said.

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