Good morning! It is such a pleasure to be here.

**First, headsup:**

I will regularly use the terms “white women” and “white men.”

I cannot have a presentation that attempts to explain the importance of recognizing the intersection of the two identities of black and women without being able to sometimes reference the dominant players in the American society within which those black women live.

I want to give this heads up because I am always surprised at the number of people, white males in particular, who sometimes feel as if I am blaming them, or beating up on them or being unfair to them when I do presentations that talk about the lived experiences of black and brown men, women and children in America. My goal is not to invoke shame or guilt or anger or hostility. My goal is to illuminate a problem today, using someone like myself, a black women, as the example, with the hope that once illuminated, you will never walk through life again without considering some of the issues you hear today.

And indeed, although I use myself as an example, the effects I share with you today on how black women are perceived and treated in our society is multiplied, manifold, if that black women is also a lesbian, transgendered, queer, or gender nonconforming.

Generally in America today, women still face sex discrimination, sex harassment, rape, gender bias and other examples of misogyny at phenomenally incredible rates. Woman are still referred to in sexual ways. We are indeed still trying to explain to our children what “grab ‘em by the p*ssy” or what the phrase “Hillary is a CUNT” on t-shirts and baseball caps, wore by men, WITH their wives and kids in tow, means. Women are body shamed--no doubt you are aware of the horrifically sexist comments from men, including judges and legislative officials, who mocked women as fat during the women’s march of January 21. Just mind blowing.

Women are beaten, belittled and abused. We are even threatened with rape, as female video gamers routinely are, when they speak up about issues important to them.

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1 Event sponsored by the Connecticut Commission on Women, Children, and Seniors.
We woman face tremendous continuing struggles for equality and equity with men. But today, I will discuss issues of inequity BETWEEN women. All women, as it turns out, are not equal.

My comments today will focus primarily on one subset of women in America. Black women. That sole being, is actually made up of two immutable identities: race and gender.

I will show that the intersection of these two categories is crucial and defining, and that it is, frankly, impossible to separate one from the other in any meaningful way and nor should we because to ignore a part is in effect, to ignore the whole.

Leaving race, then, at the proverbial door, while one deals with matters of gender, are almost impossible for many, I dare say all, black women to do.

BEFORE GOING INTO MY REMARKS, I wish to thank . . .

NOW

I have been asked to say a few words today about intersectionality in the context of race and gender generally and black and female specifically. The creator of the term intersectionality is the phenomenal and incredible Kimberle Williams Crenshaw, a Columbia University Law School Professor, Director of the Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies (CISPS) at Columbia Law School, which she founded in 2011 and Executive Director of the African American Policy Forum, which . . .

Professor Crenshaw created this term in the 1980s to describe what she believed was happening to Black women. The women were either treated as Black or they were treated as Women. When treated as black, that came with the black male narrative; when treated as women that came with the white woman narrative. So this group, neither male nor white, was being discriminated against but there was no language or frame as Professor Crenshaw would say, for analyzing what was happening.

Consider this example Professor Crenshaw shares from a Title VII employment discrimination suit. Title VII prohibits discrimination based on race and sex discrimination, among other things. Many years ago, a black woman brought a lawsuit against GM alleging race and sex discrimination. She wanted to do a combo as she didn't have solely a race claim or solely a sex claim but rather a combination of both. She lost. The court found that because the company employed black males, although there were no black females, she did not have a race discrimination claim. And, because there were an abundant number of white women employees, this black woman did not have a sex discrimination claim. So, despite the fact that black females could not get hired, this woman had no claim.
Professor Crenshaw realized at that time that being black and being female was not really a one plus one matter in the traditional sense but rather that the parts actually came together to create its own unique whole, no longer just black and no longer just female but an entirely new being who was not being recognized by the courts.

Professor Crenshaw believed that unless we figured out some way to discuss the what, who and why of this new being, the person would be lost, forgotten, harmed, rendered invisible or worse. Hence, her creation of the term intersectionality.

Intersectionality applies in a host of contexts but its fundamental goal still attempts to illuminate the fact that many of our social justice problems, like racism and sexism, are often overlapping, creating multiple levels of social injustice, often impossible to separate one from the other--without doing injustice to the whole. Thus, the narrative proposes to get people, dominant society in particular, to see that we cannot address the social inequities in a person’s life by looking at only a part of the person and in fact, to do so, risks marginalizing the whole. Refer back to the Title VII case I referenced a bit ago.

Let me share with you an example of easy it is to sometimes drop a ball, or an identity, in this case:

In the months building up to the presidential election and definitely in the days, weeks immediately thereafter, there was an uptick in hate incidents directed primarily at immigrants, Muslims, Black people, Jewish people and people in the LGBTQA community.

For me as a black person, some of this stuff was, and actually continues to be, really scary.

The Southern Poverty Law Center has been keeping track of hate incidents reported to them from around the country. Let’s focus on the acts directed black people for a minute.

In the overwhelming majority of cases, NOT all cases, but in the overwhelming majority of cases, we are talking about what white people, usually males, and actually a surprising number of white females, are saying and doing to black folks. Lots of physical confrontation with the whole GO BACK TO AFRICA bit.

I mean people yelling and screaming in people’s faces, spitting at people, scratching up their cars, throwing coffee on people, leaving nasty hate filled notes on student’s lockers. You have seen, no doubt, the gorillas and chants at high school basketball games and
such. We have physical attacks. We even have some recent instances of black males being found hanging from trees.

So about a month ago, I had dinner with a heterosexual couple with whom I have been friends for years. We were talking about the horrible wave of hate filled incidents since the summer of 2016 and the vast increase in such events after the days and weeks right after the election.

The male in the couple, is white, educated, cis, straight, very comfortable socioeconomically. Teaches at a prestigious university. After a long recitation of the horrible acts and exasperation, this male friend looked at me and said, as horrible and unacceptable as these things are, we really have to count ourselves lucky that we do not have to live in the fear that these other people do.

**Check that sentence out. Let me read it again:**

“as horrible and unacceptable as these things are, we really have to count ourselves lucky that we do not have to live in the fear that these other people do.”

WHAT????

Look at me. Admittedly, I have some big time privileges: I am cis, straight, married, Christian, American, able-bodied, educated, a professor at a university and live in upper echelons of the socioeconomic strata.

But you know what? I am also Black. The number one victim of attack in the last 6 months is an immigrant. The number two victim of attack in this country in the last 6 months is a Muslim. And the number three victim of attack in this country in the last 6 months are BLACKS.

That’s me, my stress, my husband, my children, my family, my friends and people I don’t even know.

Is that odd? Is it weird that despite the fact that I have sooo many other privileges going for me, there is one thing about me that can reduce all those other privileges to complete invisibility in a heartbeat?

This is EXACTLY why identity, every strand, road, axis, is relevant. If you ignore my blackness, then, when only looking at my education and socioeconomic status, you will come to a different conclusion about what affects me.

This is the danger of the single story. The single story is one part of who I am but it does not tell you who I am or the challenges I face as I move through society.
My friend has known me for decades. We have talked about race and my experiences for years and yet, in that moment, he only saw our similarity and his vision came at the price of reducing my race to invisibility.

Let’s review some examples now of intersectionality:

Let me start with probably one of the earliest examples of the intersectionality of race and gender that we have.

The time is 1851.

There was a Women’s Convention in Akron, Ohio convened by a group of white suffragists. Now, notice, this was billed as the Women’s Convention in Akron but there was a clear understanding that this was not for Black women and indeed black women were not even invited. Women meant then, and in many instances even today, really meant white woman. Women at the convention were talking about the importance of political action and the right to vote.

There were white male hecklers present who joked about the daintiness and softness of women and thus inability of women to handle the big boy matters of politics.

Sojourner Truth, a former slave, who could not then read or write wanted to attend the conference and to speak but was not invited and was strongly discouraged from attending and certainly from speaking. When she showed up anyway, there was a wave of panic and nervous energy about her presence and whether she would speak.

Some women even beseeched the chair of the convention that Truth be precluded from speaking. The white female organizers of the conference did not want Sojourner there. Race had nothing to do with this they said, not seeing her womanness.

This was an early example of Black women being asked by white women to take a seat so that race would not get in the way. Ironically black women had similar calls from black men who would ask them to sit down and put gender aside so that racial justice could be advanced.

2 Julie Delpy said at Sundance Film Festival last year that African Americans have it easier in Hollywood than WOMEN because people don’t bash them. Now when she said women, was there some sense that when one uses the term women, it naturally defaults, and always means white women? Did her comments exclude blacks who are women or where they included in her larger category of African Americans?
Truth attended and despite the pleas of many, she spoke anyway. **Nevertheless she persisted...**

She used her time to address the white male hecklers present. She laid to rest the argument that women were too delicate and frail to handle the mind boggling burdens of the vote. She also spoke to some of the horrors of slavery and its impact on black women.

She used her life as an example to dispel the sentiment that women were weak, fragile, frail and needed to be carried and put in glass cages.

Here are just a few of her remarks, now famous throughout the world, from her speech aptly titled: Ain't I A Woman.

“That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman?

Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man - when I could get it - and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?”

The poem goes on but I will stop here. You see the point. This black woman was, in fact a woman. Yet, she was not helped into carriage or lifted over ditches. Rather, in her case, she was treated as a man, and not any man, but a Black enslaved man. And yet, as it turns out, she wasn't really treated a man either. She wasn't given the same amount of food, or drink or rations as a man. She was expected to and actually did the back breaking work of a man and yet, she also was expected to be a woman, bearing 13 children and breast feeding many more that were not hers.

Over 50 years later, in 1913, Susan B. Anthony, a New Yorker, a Quaker, a supposed anti-slavery advocate, would again evoke the fears of the women suffragists of 1851. She would fight the request of Black women to march in the suffragist crusade in DC. She finally offered those women to march separately at the back of the line if they were to march at all---an offer rejected by Ida B. Wells Barnett.
Susan B. Anthony, this anti slave advocate, famously remarked:

“I will cut off this right arm of mine before I will ever work or demand the ballot for the Negro and the not the woman.”

Read those words: “the Negro and not the woman.” Are those two mutually exclusive?

Fast forward to 2016: again Black women found themselves in a bit of a dilemma on and after Election day 2016 as thousands of women went to Susan B. Anthony's grave to place “I VOTED” stickers on her tombstone. Many Black women knew how Susan B. Anthony felt about their ancestors. How should a Black woman feel, in other words, about traveling to and placing a sticker on the tombstone of a woman who fought for women’s rights but who did not include Black women in that fight?

And what of the women even today, just like the women of 1851 and just like the women of 1913, who asked black women in 2017 to forget about race. Recall the HUNDREDS of comments from white women around the country who, in the days and weeks leading up to the march, either said they were not going to participate Or demanded that race be put aside. Don't bring that race “CRAP” one white female said. I don't wanna hear about no black lives matter or any of that other stuff. Leave race outta this!

If I am black, how do I do that? Indeed, depending on how I am dressed or how far I am from you, you are likely to see my blackness before anything else. 1851-2016 and we are still being asked to leave race aside. How much longer? Can't one see that leaving race aside means that the whole of me, continues to lose?

LET'S consider some more contemporary examples of the ways in which black women’s lives are devalued, marginalized, ignored, rendered invisible or wiped out completely all in plain sight.

1) Consider Gender Pay Gap statistics. I quote now from a story in the Atlantic on October 17, 2016:

“Extensive research shows that even when controlling for factors like education, skill, and experience, women routinely earn less than men employed in the same professions. Often, this argument is accompanied by the now-famous statistic that women earn about 79 cents for every dollar men make at work. This is an important data point, but focusing on that figure alone masks the role race can play in perpetuating these disparities. For instance, it is important to ask: Which women? The 79-cents statistic is an average that
includes all women, but it obscures the even wider gaps faced by people of color.\textsuperscript{3} For black women, the number is closer to 65 cents, while for Latinas it is even lower, at 54 cents. This data draws attention to the fact that while women as a group aren’t paid as much as men, women of color see even more pronounced earnings gaps.

Similarly in corporate America, LeanIn.org has some phenomenal data for the proposition that while there is a glass ceiling for women in corporate America trying to get to the coveted C-suite, that ceiling is virtual cement for women of color.

Their 2016 report shows that white men make up 71\% of executives in the C-suite.

\textbf{NEXT TIER IS WHITE WOMEN at 17\%}

Next tier is men of color at 10\% and

\textit{The final tier is WOMEN OF COLOR at 3\%}.

So, women of color are the most underrepresented group in the corporate pipeline. Despite having higher aspirations for becoming a top executive than white women, their percentages are woefully inadequate.

They are less likely to receive challenging assignments, be included at the table or listened to, less likely to feel comfortable at being themselves at work, less likely to believe that the system is a meritocracy.

And the really interesting thing is that almost 80% of companies report that gender diversity is a top priority but only just slightly over 50% say racial diversity is a top priority.

Consider these questions: 1) why the difference in number between white women and women of color? 2) If all women are working together to equalize and close the gender gap, why is there a 17% v. 3% difference for women DEPENDING on race?

Lean In did the math and it turns out that it is not just that women of color go for lower positions or are not as educated or, or, or. Again, even after controlling for education, skill, experience, we see these kinds of differences.

2) Consider how beauty is defined in America. It has western standards. And this, actually, is a worldwide phenomenon. The overwhelming majority of women believe that being beautiful means white skin, light skin, long, straight hair, slender ablebodiness. It does not have skin my color. It does not have nappy, kinky hair. It does not have my body size and frame. I am the least desirable of all women.

This research has been existing for a long time. Consider the recent online dating study that showed when asked by white, black, Latino and Asian men to RANK their choice of dating and marriage partner (white were asked a similar question), ALL ranked Asian, white, and Latina women. **NONE even RANKED black women.** Zero, Nada, Zilch. These data don't lie. Black women today are the most uncoupled demographic in the country and the least likely to be married.

3) Consider my hair. White women are a majority of the teachers in public schools today and they are a majority on school boards. School after school after school are passing grooming/dress/appearance policies that specifically ban braids, cornrows, afro puffs, twists and locs like my hair. Now, if you are a black girl whose hair grows out of her scalp not at all straight and terribly curly, aka, kinky, aka, nappy, and you don’t want to shave her head or wear a wig or put chemicals in your hair to straighten it or you are allergic to chemicals or you can't afford to get the chemical treatment needed to keep
your hair straight every 4-6 weeks, then what? How are white females voting for these policies without understanding that their own straight hair can’t be the norm for all women?

4) Black women are almost FOUR times as likely to die from pregnancy complications than their comparable white counterparts.

5) Black mothers in America are twice as likely to have their babies die during the first year of the baby's life than white mothers. This twice as much statistic is 6 times higher in San Francisco and 10 times higher in the nation’s capital.

The data also shows us that foreign-born black women living in the United States have outcomes almost identical to white American women.

Rates for black American women are not only horrible in the US but even as compared to our PEER countries -- because in none of those peer countries is racism as embedded in the fabric of the society.

This data is powerful. In fact, even black women with ADVANCED degrees (doctors, lawyers, MBAs) were more likely to lose infants than white women who have not graduated from high school.

And the more segregated the city, the greater the black/white infant mortality disparities.

6) Black women's health is worse, by far, in the US than white women's health. No health care, inadequate health care, racially biased health care, and racial discrimination, all contribute to wear and tear on the body's systems, chronic stress, change of chromosomes, and increased DIS-ease in the body.

So notice that the cure here is not vitamins or regular doctor visits. This requires more systemic changes to the major contributors to race discrimination that adversely impact black women: wages, addressing inequities in employment, health care, criminal justice, housing and school segregation and
more. Folks want to prescribe a pill and be done with this. Not one wants to do
the hard work of eradicating discrimination and inequity.

7) Look at the whole Planned Parenthood and abortion debates. Who are the
most likely people to be negatively impacted by cuts to Planned Parenthood
and restrictions on abortion rights? Not just women but also poor women and
in this country a higher %tage of black women are poor than white women.

And the irony of course is that once that baby gets here, we don't give a
damn about it. We simultaneously wipe out welfare benefits, food stamps,
Medicaid, access to early childhood services, preschool programs, and
everything else. In other words, we only care about the sanctity of life until
the child is born. Then we say, sorry kid; you're on your own.

8) Although there are many more categories I can name here to show the vast
differences in outcomes depending on the multiple identities one holds, I
want to end with the most disturbing difference of all: violence against black
women and girls at the hands of the police and in schools, at the hands of
safety resource officers:

9) Black women are 13% of the female population but they are over a third of
the female related deaths at the hands of the police. While many of us can
recite the names of black males killed by police, consider Freddie Gray,
Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Eric Garner, Alton Sterling, Philando Castille,
Walter Scott, it is almost impossible to find people who can recite a similarly
robust list of black females killed by police.

Professor Crenshaw has started this project at her AAPF institute
called #sayhername. You can google this. There you will learn the name of
women and girls, ranging in age from 7 to 95, like Natasha McKenna, Alexia
Christin, Kayla Moore, Tanisha Anderson, Aiyana Stanley Jones, Shelly Frey,
Rekia Boyd, Deborah Danner. Alberta Spruill, Stantel Davis, and more.

In all of these cases, the women were unarmed. Some were killed in
front of parents, their children. Some were alone, some sleeping, some
driving.
Society hasn't heard their names. The media doesn't tell their stories. They are rendered invisible despite suffering the same fate as black males. So that when we think of blacks who are killed by police, our minds immediately go to black men. The females are not on the radar.

Not all of these stories have resulted in death. There are a painful number of incidents that relate to rapes, sexual assaults and similar indignations, even of a virgin 17 year old who trusted an Oklahoma police officer to drive her home. Watch the video of a black woman being straddled on a public highway in LA being repeatedly plummeted in the face, women thrown head first in a car door, or into a WALL, or dragged by their blouse collars like garbage. Elementary schools girls referred to as future whores. School students being slammed on concrete grounds or put in a chokehold and then thrown out of their chair and onto the ground as other students sat and watched as if this was just another day. 5 year olds handcuffed for crying in school.

I watch these abuses WEEKLY holding back tears, I wonder if I will ever have to endure this abuse, or my daughters. I wonder why there is not more outrage. I hear this stuff about all lives matter and in incident after incident after incident when these women are killed or defiled, I hear no support, no demand for justice, no recitation that the life there mattered.

I believe to my core that if white women and girls were the victims here, we will see more outrage and movement. I am reminded of the looking the other way our society did collectively when heroin use ravaged black and brown communities but now, a whole new vision, not of punishment and imprisonment, but of love and treatment now that the face of heroin is white.

I see how often black women are called ugly, animals, monkeys, gorillas surprisingly by white women more than white men. Even black women who played by all the rules and did what society expected, women like me, and even famous women like Michelle Obama and Serena Williams, who are ROUTINELY compared to savages and animals.

WHAT???????????? I don't get it. I don't.
There is a dehumanization of black women that occurs that is widespread throughout this nation and is unparalleled in any other body. WHY? . . .

**CONCLUDING REMARKS:**

Black women just can’t check race at the door. Being black is an integral part of our entire being. Indeed, an experiment was done at a feminism conference some years ago and all women attendees were asked to list the top 3 things about themselves. Not one white woman listed race. Every black woman did.

My fight for equal pay for example, is NOT just about pay equal to the man, but it is about pay equal to other women.

**My fear for my sons is** not just about being a mom, but it is about being a mom of black children. The stress that my children might not make it back home takes a toll on my body. It is an experience not all mothers have to deal with.

I gotta tell you this story: Years ago my husband and I were going to celebrate our anniversary and take a cruise to Alaska. Grandma was going to stay with the kids. My twins boys were in 7th grade. Close to 6’ then. Were going to be walking to middle school up street from us. Black and out of place in our neighborhood, I worried about police confrontations. How can I keep them safe? I decided to write the chief of police. I told him my story. I asked if I could bring my sons to meet him and other officers. He responded. The meeting occurred. I still have our email exchange by the way. Yup, I took my sons to meet the police in our neighborhood. **Imagine putting on your to-do list: introduce kids to police.**

My identity, my full, identity is important and has social consequences. We cannot separate parts to solve problems. Multiple identities have resulted in overlapping societal problems and these problems have to be dealt with, head on, in their complexity.

Focusing on one to the exclusion of the other, leaves the other behind. Marginalizes the other. Causes the other to be forgotten. You end up solving or working on one problem to the complete exclusion of the other. Half of me is on the road to recovery. Or maybe not. Maybe by ignoring half of me, you end up ignoring all of me, just like the Judge did in that Title VII case I referred to earlier.

Ignoring my race does not include me or women like me in the equation. Rather, it does the complete opposite. It renders us invisible.

Thank you.