# RACE, GENDER, AND LEADERSHIP

Re-Envisioning Organizational Leadership From the Perspectives of African American Women Executives, by Patricia S. Parker

Through an analysis of the history and culture of African-American women, and a study of fifteen African-American women executives, Patricia S. Parker demonstrates how to re-envision organizational leadership theory in a period of post-industrialization and globalization. Parker challenges traditional masculine and feminist views of leadership, and builds from a meaning-centered approach to establish a multifaceted feminist framework that intersects race and gender. Through her analysis, she not only provides readers with a new understanding of leadership, but also demonstrates what we can learn from the experience and perspectives of African-American women, thus strengthening and developing leadership approaches in organizations.

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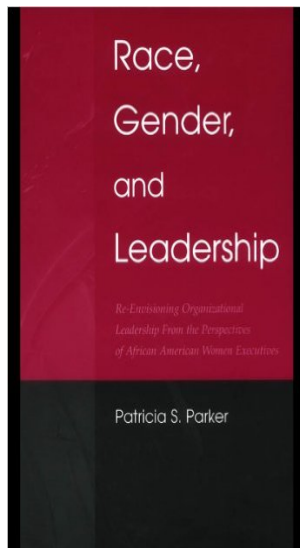
Patricia S. Parker

About the Author
Patricia S. Parker writes and teaches about race, class and gender in the context of organizational and collaborative processes. She has been a faculty member of the University of North Carolina since 1998, and was recently appointed Director of Faculty Diversity Initiatives. She holds a PhD in Communication Studies, a Masters Degree in Speech Communication, and a Bachelor's degree in Speech, theatre, and journalism. She is the founder and Executive Director of the Ella Baker Women's Centre of Leadership and Community Activism.

In this Review:

"If organizational leadership should be understood as a process of negotiating meaning within contradictory and paradoxical situations to bring about social change, then we would do well to listen closely to what the experiences of African American women leaders reveal" (p.19)

Key Concepts

➢ A **Central Problem** of Traditional Leadership Theories is that they have been developed from studies involving white-middle class men, and similarly, gender and leadership theories produced based on studies and efforts of white middle-class women

➢ Approaches to organizational development that negate issues of race and culture not only lack significant perspective but also contribute to systemic oppression in the workplace

➢ Race-Neutral theorizing leads to **domination, exclusion, and containment** in organizational studies

➢ A **Proposed Solution** to the gaps in organizational leadership theories is to implement an inclusive framework that builds from feminist, meaning-centered approaches, and applies intersectionality as a guiding principle.

➢ This framework applies a more valuable approach to organizational and leadership studies in the modern world, and allows for the unmasking of subtle tensions and racial conflicts in the workplace

➢ Through focusing this study on African-American women, gender and race are intersected to introduce new perspectives and learnings about leadership.

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PART I
Establishing the need for a new vision of leadership that intersects race and gender within a meaning-centered approach

Goal of Part I: *"…to show how the silencing of some groups of women and men while privileging others in the study of organizational leadership is a product of the theoretical perspectives that frame our understanding of race, gender, discourse, and organization (p. 39)*

Chapter One	Chapter Two
➢ Similar to **Northouse**, Parker identifies problems with traditional leadership theories that equate leadership and management. She adds a critique of how this reinforces problematic masculinist views of leadership.	➢ Similar to Northouse, Parker emphasizes importance of understanding leadership as a *process* that focuses on interactions between people, adding that it can be understood as "…*negotiating difference, taking into account interlocking oppressions of race, gender, and class that structure organizational life*" (p. 76-77)
➢ Even in **servant leadership**, there is no discussion of how differences in gender or race impacts interactions between leaders and followers	➢ Importance of acknowledging issues of race in organizations (un-masking racial conflicts/tensions)
➢ Feminist leadership approaches create a feminine-masculine duality that negates diversity within each group. They also, however, produce a framework that can be built from	➢ **Transformational Leadership theory** is applied towards Parkers framework as a meaning centered approach that encompasses the focus on both management of meaning and process of social change
➢ Introduction of inclusive feminist framework that can allow for more complexity and fluidity	

PART II
Identifying leadership traditions that emerged from the history of struggle and survival of African American Women
"What Can we learn from listening closely to the experiences of a particular culture?" (p. 87)

Chapter Three	Chapter Four
➢ Emergence of notion of *Bad Black Womanhood* during the era of slavery, representing African-American women as *Sapphire* (hyper-sexualized), *Mammy* ("Ideal servant"), and *Matriarch* (masculinized version of Mammy), all of which contributed to the social construction/acceptance of Black women as exploitable laborers	➢ An examination of the 100 years after the end of institutionalized slavery in the USA, and how the five themes discussed in chapter 3 progress into traditions of leadership
➢ Discussion of how strategies for survival, resistance, and change were born from the struggle to fight oppression and slavery	➢ During this time period, African American women were marginalized and devalued as workers
➢ Identification of **five themes of African-American Women's resistance and empowerment**: 1. Being Self-Defined 2. Being Self-Determined 3. Developing and using voice 4. Connecting to and building community 5. Seeking Spirituality and Regeneration	➢ Response to oppression: formation of "…Black women-led organizations devoted to the survival and prosperity of the black community" (p. 119).
	➢ Organizational leadership was displayed through local community building towards a larger battle for social justice
	➢ African-American women's leadership described to have crystallized through the civil rights movement (e.g. Ella Baker and collective leadership)

PART III
Re-envisioning leadership from the perspective and experiences of African-American women executives

"…there is a need for processes that help organizational members work through the politics and contradictions of their own background experiences, identity, and preconceived notions as they encounter others who are different" (p. 145)

Chapter Five	Chapter Six	Chapter Seven
➢ Overview of leadership approach developed from study with African-American women executives	➢ View of leadership derived from study "…suggests a process dependent simultaneously on follower autonomy and direct leader engagement…"(p.159)	➢ Overview of contributions of study
➢ Introduction of **five themes of leadership communication**: 1. Interactive Communication 2. Empowerment through Challenge to produce results 3. Openness in Communication 4. Participative decision-making 5. Leadership through Boundary Spanning	➢ Executives demonstrated interactive and accessible leadership, and simultaneously direct and indirect empowerment strategies	➢ Focus on previously marginalized groups reveals need to disrupt race-neutral aspects of organizational leadership ➢ Benefits of re-framing approaches to leadership in an inclusive, meaning-centered, intersectional way
➢ Concepts of collaboration, control, and empowerment are redefined	➢ A positive direct communication was exhibited, one that was open about important issues, had no hidden agendas, and gave voice to the people below (similar to adaptive leadership)	➢ Suggestion to further study how race and difference influence leadership processes ➢ Importance of reclaiming cultural traditions

Discussion and critique

Patricia S. Parker does an excellent job of identifying the gaps in organizational leadership theories, as well as demonstrating how we can re-frame and re-define our approach to organizational leadership to not only identify and tackle issues of prejudice but also embrace and utilize diverse perspectives from previously muted voices to enhance our learning and approaches to leadership in the 21st century.

As this book was first published over ten years ago, it would be interesting to learn whether and how diversity and intersectionality have been further developed in the context of organizational leadership theory. It also would have been interesting had the author provided further exploration and discussion as to HOW her study's contributions could be applied to existing leadership theories.

Questions for Discussion:

1. What contributions have the authors approach, and findings, made to our learning about organizational leadership in this course?
2. If we go back and re-examine leadership theories covered in Northouse, which theories can be related to the approach and findings discussed in this text? Where do we see gaps in the discussion as discussed by the author (re: race, diversity, and leadership)?
3. How can you apply the authors' discussion of race, gender, and leadership, to your professional setting?

References

1. Parker, Patricia S. (2005) *Race, Gender, and Leadership: Re-envisioning Orgnizational Leadership From the Perspectives of African American Women Executives.* Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Inc.
2. Northouse, Peter G. (2016) *Leadership Theory and Practice* (7th Ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
3. <http://college.unc.edu/2012/03/01/parker-named-director-of-diversity-initiatives/>