



# Feminist *Figures*

## BYLLYE AVERY

*healthcare activist - reproductive justice advocate - founder of Black Women's Health Imperative*

**Byllye Yvonne Reddick** was born in **Georgia in 1937**, but grew up in DeLand, Florida after the family moved there when she was a baby. After her step-father was killed when she was 15, she took on more responsibility around the household and caring for her two younger brothers.

Byllye graduated from Talladega College, the oldest historically black university in Alabama, with a degree in psychology. There she met her husband, Wesley Avery, and they were married in 1960 shortly after graduating.

With **little access to birth control and reproductive resources in the 1960's**, Byllye didn't know she was pregnant until another woman suggested it. Soon after getting married, the couple had two children, Wesley and Sonia.



Talladega College student body, 1870s - Talladega College Archive

Byllye received a **fellowship to study Special Education at the University of Florida in Gainesville**, earning her masters in 1969. The entire family moved to Gainesville, however, shortly after arriving her husband had a heart attack and died at the age of 33. His death led her to question how the black community's health was treated, and how the **discrimination and lack of access to resources was killing people**.

### ***DID YOU KNOW?***

Byllye was the **only** person in the **entire state of Florida** to be awarded the fellowship to study **Special Education\***!

\*education modified for students with disabilities

## **COMMITMENT TO HEALTHCARE AND RACIAL EQUALITY**

Byllye began to work in healthcare rights, especially focusing on the intersections between **race and quality of care**. Byllye Avery gave her first reproductive health talk in 1971, realizing the need for more reproductive services when several women approached her asking for help accessing abortions. Through these experiences, she recognized the **disparity in financial resources and access to reproductive care** between black and white women.

Along with colleagues **Joan Edelson, Judy Levy, and Margaret Parrish**, she worked to open the **Gainesville Women's Health Center**, shortly after the **Roe vs Wade\*** Supreme Court decision.



Byllye Avery & Bell Hooks

The county had previously blocked all efforts by Planned Parenthood to open a clinic, but Byllye Avery was able to secure funding and a facility, **opening the clinic in 1974**. The clinic remained active until **1997**.

\*While **upper-class, white communities** always had more access to abortion, this decision made it accessible to the rest of society as well, particularly women of color. **More than half of abortions are women of color** and Roe vs Wade **ensured safe access** to the procedure.

## BLACK WOMEN'S HEALTH IMPERATIVE

Byllye Avery founded The National Black Women's Health Project in 1983, known today as the **Black Women's Health Imperative (BWHI)**.

BWHI works to advance and promote Black women's health through three main focus areas: **Wellness Programs, Policy and Advocacy, and Research Translation**.

### THEIR WORK

The BWHI helps Black women all over the United States through their various **projects, initiatives** and **training programs** advocating for **affordable** and **comprehensive** healthcare services and **increasing access to treatment**, particularly in **underserved communities**.

In **1994**, an affiliate of BWHI formed in California, called the **California Black Women's Health Project**. They collaborate with critical interventions such as the **SACRED Birth Study**.

#### The California Black Women's Health Project

- Focused on health and well-being of Black women and girls in California
- Providing specialized training in **Advocate Training Programs**:

**Sisters Mentally Mobilized Advocate Training Program**  
to prevent and reduce mental illness in Black women



establishment of localized support groups known as **Sister Circles**

#### My Sister's Keeper program (MSK)

An advocacy and leadership-building initiative for women in Historically Black College and University campuses

**Focus areas:** sexual and reproductive health rights, mental and emotional health, menstrual insecurity and stigma, gender discrimination and violence, anti-racism ...

**BWHI** offers membership to **MSK Academy**, a learning hub that provides training to advocate for wellness, education, and policy related to Black women.

## THE INTERSECTION OF GENDER, RACE AND HEALTH

“ — **Sonya Young Adam, CEO** of the Los Angeles-based **California Black Women's Health Project** on why their organization is needed today:

*If you're Black and female, you have lived experiences that put you at risk of suffering from weathering — **chronic toxic stressors** driven by **historical systemic racism, sexism, and classism**.*

*We interface with systems of care that have traditionally left out our experiences, our voices, and our needs.*

***If we don't stand up for ourselves together, no one else will.***

*Longstanding **disparities** in **Black maternal and infant mortality** make it necessary for California Black Women's Health Project to exist...*

## WAYS TO CONNECT



[Black Women's Health Imperative](#)



[/blkwomenshealth](#)



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[BWHI](#)



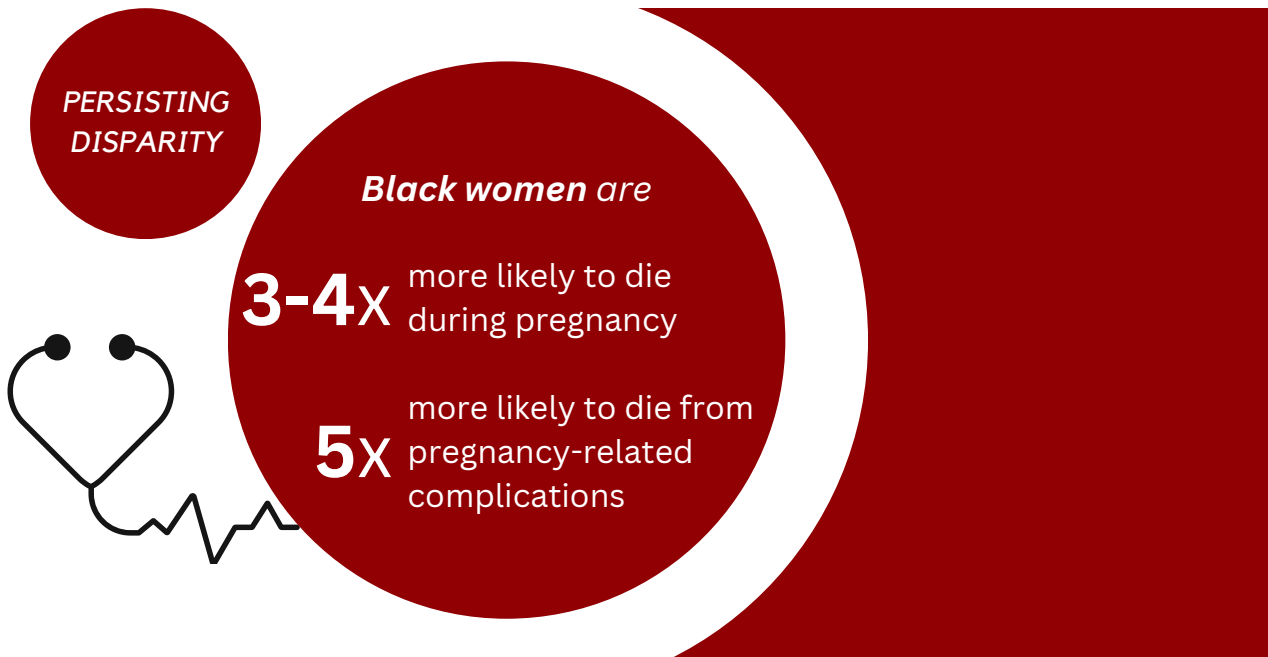
[California Black Women's Health Project](#)



[CABWHP](#)







In **Black communities**, **racism**, **social exclusion**, and **economic inequality** have persistently obstructed the pursuit of **physical** and **mental well-being**. This predicament is even more pronounced for **Black women**, who grapple with added dimensions of bias rooted in both **gender** and **cultural stereotypes**.

At **Politics4Her**, we recognize that **gender equality** cannot be achieved without addressing **intersecting** forms of discrimination based on **race**, **class**, **sexuality** and other factors. We envision a world where **gender-based discrimination**, **stereotypes**, and **biases** no longer hold young women and girls back from realizing their **potential**.

We believe that by **investing in the health and well-being of women and girls**, we can create a **better**, more **equitable** world for all.

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