



‘We’re Tired!’ A Reflection from a Black Woman about the IndyPL CEO Debacle

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In February 2021, Charles Venerable resigned as President of Newfields after a job posting listed needing a person who could maintain their “core white audience.” Let’s not forget Dr. Kelli Morgan’s exit before the “core white audience scandal.” This Black woman left over a

toxic culture and racism. Now, a qualified Black woman, Dr. Collette Pierce Burnette, is at the helm of Newfields.

If you thought Newfields was the only organization plagued with these sorts of issues, you missed the part where the IndyPL said ... *hold my beer*. Former Indy Recorder reporter Breanna Cooper diligently covered the claims of racism at the IndyPL branches. Despite these claims and the results of a climate survey, former Indy Library CEO Jackie Nytes said she would not step down despite calls for her resignation. For some reason, she thought she could round up some good 'ole Black folks to be part of a letter supporting her. Well ... she stepped down. Her last day was August 31, 2021. Then, Nichelle M. Hayes was appointed interim CEO in March 2022 and started on April 1.

I was excited about her appointment. I even tweeted about it.

I have heard great things about Hayes, but this will not be easy for her. I hope the board of trustees realizes that appointing a Black woman does not immediately fix the environment for other Black library employees who have self-reported being on the receiving end of racism.

Before that appointment, she served as the Director of the Center for Black Literature and Culture in IndyPL central branch. She is also vice president of the American Library Association Black Caucus. She was a finalist to be the permanent CEO. Unfortunately, she was not chosen, but Gabriel Morley, EdD, was chosen instead. Then, a day later, he turned down the position. Honestly, no one should be surprised by his abrupt exit. He exited his previous job in New Orleans the day after he was caught in violation of the law requiring city employees to live in the city. Prior to his residency violation, he was accused of "spreading lies and misinformation." Why vote to bring in an outsider from another state with problems in his past instead of going with the talented candidate who has proven her commitment to this city?

Now, interim IndyPL Chief Public Services Officer Gregory Hill will serve as the interim CEO.

My sis Fannie Lou Hamer said it best, "We are sick and tired of being sick and tired." Although she referenced a myriad of issues, many are alive and well today. This is the feeling, the burden that many Black women carry.

A study from a few years ago showed that Black women consistently earned higher education degrees at a higher rate. Although there has been some debate about if Black women are the most highly educated group in America, degrees do not guarantee upward mobility. We

continue to earn less even if we are the most qualified candidate. We continue to be overlooked even if we are the most qualified candidate.

Many Black people have heard or been told the adage, "You have to work twice as hard to get half as much." Though we might think we are beyond this, I assert in the year of our Lord in 2022, Black women will tell you that we are not.

To be a Black professional woman is a grueling gauntlet of feats to overcome and endure. We have to be the smartest and have the right degrees and certifications. Our references must be blemishless. Our hair can't be too ethnic or distracting. Our shapely frames need to be de-emphasized. We have to keep our African American Vernacular English (AAVE) tucked away unless we are being comical. We can give just enough sass to be comical but can't be too critical because we might be mistaken as an angry Black women. We can't do that because then we will be too intimidating or unapproachable. We need to go above and beyond whether we are compensated or not. Even if we face racism, we better not pull out the race card because our hiring is evidence that our jobs accept diversity, and surely racism can't happen if diverse people are hired. To be a Black woman requires that we become the best, stay the best, and make sure no one else around us looks bad even the mediocre folks that got hired. And, when someone messes up, we, Black women, are expected to come to the rescue and accept gratitude as payment for rescuing folks from yet another mess.

This is why I'm worried about our sis Nichelle M. Hayes. It is noted that Black women are strong. Just because we carry it, doesn't mean it isn't being carried on a broken back. There was even a protest to demand Hayes receive the job after Morley declined the position. As much as I know she should have been given the job, I hope she isn't offered the job. If she is offered it, I hope she declines. To accept it would be to accept that being chosen as a back up is okay. I want Black women to stop accepting crumbs after all we do. As much as I want her in the CEO seat, I want her to have her dignity, respect, and pride more. I want her to be wrapped in love by our community, and I want the right position to come along where her value is seen and championed.

Before serving the public, she was a school librarian. This is not shared as much, but it is important to note. She served our children. She served our community. She deserved better.

I believe the best is yet to come for her.