



**LIGHTING THE WAY**  
HISTORIC WOMEN OF THE SOUTHCOAST  
A project of New Bedford Whaling Museum

eliminating racism  
empowering women  
**ywca**  
southeastern massachusetts

**Women of Color *Lighting the Way* to Equality  
in New Bedford & Beyond**  
Online Panel Discussion  
Thursday, September 17  
7:00 – 8:30 p.m.

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**Presenter Bios**

**Moderator**

**Christina Turner**, Director of Education, New Bedford Whaling Museum. Christina provides leadership, strategy, and direction for a dynamic museum education team at the Whaling Museum. Christina formerly directed the Museum's award-winning High School Apprenticeship Program which earned the National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award under her leadership in 2017 and the American Alliance of Museum's Excellence in Programming Award in 2018. Prior to finding a home at the museum, Christina worked with numerous schools and community organizations in positions focused on program and youth development. Christina also serves on the board of Our Sisters' School and the Providence-based Equity Institute, an organization that develops systems to cultivate culturally responsive schools and communities. She holds a BA in Sociology from Boston University and a Masters in Public Administration from Baruch College, as part of the highly selective National Urban Fellows Program.

**Introduction**

**Gail M. Silva-Fortes**, Executive Director, YWCA Southeastern Massachusetts. Gail is a lifelong resident of New Bedford. Since 2006, She has served as the Executive Director of the YWCA Southeastern Massachusetts and is truly committed to the YWCA Mission of eliminating racism and empowering women. Gail is the 2015 Standard Times New Bedford Woman of the Year and a 2016 Unsung Heroine for the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women. She is also the Past President of the National Association of YWCA Executives, Past Chair of the Board of Lifestream Corporation, Board Member of One SouthCoast Chamber of Commerce, Member of the Board of Corporators for BayCoast Bank, Trustee for Alma del Mar Charter School and Global Learning Charter Public School, Board Member of the United Front Development Corp., Board Member for SouthCoast Community Foundation, Board Member for Youth Opportunities Unlimited, member of the New Bedford Economic Development Council Regeneration Project. and serves as the Secretary of the Cape Verdean Association in New Bedford. She is a past Vice-Chair of the YWCA New England Region, Member of the Board of Trustees of Our Sister's School ( Past Vice-Chair), Past Board Member of the United Way of Greater New

Bedford and Past Co-Chair of the Bristol County Commission on the Status of Women. She is also the host of the Dartmouth Cable Television Show "Voices of Women." Gail has her Bachelors in Physical Education and Masters in Public Administration from Bridgewater State University.

### **Project Scholar**

**Lee Blake**, President, New Bedford Historical Society & Lighting the Way Committee Member. Lee is an education administrator with over 30 years-experience as a teacher and administrator in urban education in New York and Massachusetts. She manages programs that highlight multi-cultural history for both adult learners and students. Lee has developed teacher professional development workshops for K-12 educators and has been awarded five National Endowment for the Humanities Landmarks of American History Teacher Workshop grants for Sailing to Freedom: New Bedford and the Underground Railroad, a summer workshop program that has brought over 240 teachers from around the country to study the role of New Bedford's African American and abolitionist community in the Underground Railroad. Lee also serves as president of the New Bedford Historical Society where she develops and implements programs that highlight the role of African Americans, Native Americans, and Cape Verdeans in the life and history of the Greater New Bedford area. Her work includes researching and writing biographies for the Lighting the Way Project. Lee was recently awarded the Governor's Award in the Humanities as well as the National Park Service Robert Stanton Network to Freedom Award for her work in preserving the history of people of color.

### **Organization of American Historians Distinguished Lecturer**

**Dr. Premilla Nadasen**, Professor of history, Barnard College, and President, National Women's Studies Association. Premilla has published extensively on the multiple meanings of feminism, alternative labor movements, and grass-roots community organizing and is most interested in visions of social change, and the ways in which poor and working-class women of color have fought for social justice. She is the author of *Household Workers Unite: The Untold Story of African American Women Who Built a Movement* (Beacon 2015) and *Welfare Warriors: The Welfare Rights Movement in the United States* (Routledge 2005) and is currently writing a biography of South African singer and anti-apartheid activist Miriam Makeba. Nadasen has earned numerous awards, fellowships and honors, including a Fulbright, a Mellon Fellowship, multiple book prizes, and is a Distinguished Lecturer for the Organization of American Historians. She has been engaged with community and campus activism for many years, bridging academic and activist work by making her scholarly work accessible to people outside of the university. She has worked with the National Domestic Workers Alliance, Damayan Migrant Workers Association, and the Mississippi Low-Income Child Care Initiative. She writes for both academic and non-academic outlets and speaks widely on issues of social justice, feminism, public policy and anti-racist organizing. She can be contacted at [pnadasen@barnard.edu](mailto:pnadasen@barnard.edu) or twitter: @premillanadasen

### **Panelists**

**Laurel Berryman**, Racial & Gender Equity Program Coordinator, YWCA Southeastern Massachusetts. Laurel is setting a new standard for how to abolish racist and unequal practices in the South Coast. Her commitment to using education as a tool for reform and empowerment is changing the way local institutions handle human rights and DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) work. As the Racial & Gender Equity Program Coordinator at The YWCA Southeastern Massachusetts, she specializes in developing educational programs about race and gender and fostering conversations for change. She also serves as

the co-chair of the Say Her Name working group for the YWCA. In 2020, she graduated Magna Cum Laude from The University of Massachusetts Dartmouth with a degree in Women's and Gender Studies. As a lifelong New Bedford Resident, Laurel supports arts, culture, and civil rights organizations through volunteering, membership, and providing technical assistance for virtual events. In 2016, Berryman participated in a public forum entitled Students for Change, where she and several of her peers voiced their experiences with racial profiling, misogynoir, sexual harassment, and gender oppression at Greater New Bedford Regional Vocational Technical High School. When she is not working or volunteering, Laurel enjoys posting about self-care, self-recovery, and beauty routines for Women of Color on her Instagram blog, "The Goddess Checklist".

**Rayana Grace**, Arts and Culture Program Manager at the SouthCoast Community Foundation. Rayana is a lifelong New Bedford resident. In 2013, she graduated from Boston College with a degree in Sociology and African and African Diaspora Studies. In April 2018, she began her role as the Arts and Culture Program Manager at the SouthCoast Community Foundation. In her role, Grace provides support for arts and culture nonprofit organizations that serve youth, immigrants, and culturally and ethnically diverse populations in Fall River and New Bedford through grants, technical assistance, and other programming. Grace also serves a number of local organizations and nonprofits including the New Bedford Historical Society and Our Sisters' School and teaches catechism at her church. She is the co-chair of the Board and Civic Leadership Racial Equity Working Group for the YWCA. In 2016, she was named one of five Southcoast Emerging Leaders under 40 and in 2017, she graduated from Leadership SouthCoast. In 2018, she was awarded the Spirit of Leadership Award from the YWCA of Southeastern MA. In 2020, she was accepted as a PLACES Fellow through the Funders' Network. This fellowship uses learning, coaching and reflections to explore structural racism, community empowerment and equitable grantmaking practices. She also is a Zumba instructor at the New Bedford YMCA. When she is not working or volunteering, Rayana enjoys spending time with her family, cooking, and writing spoken word poetry. She and her partner Brian purchased their first home in May 2017 and are looking forward to getting married next month.

**Lisa Lemieux**, President, Southeastern Massachusetts Central Labor Council and Organizer with 1199SEIU. Lisa has been a union organizer with SEIU since 2005 representing healthcare workers including hospital and nursing home workers and Personal Care Attendants with a mission of achieving quality healthcare and good jobs for all. Lisa was elected the first Latina President of the GSMLC in 2017 and has been a delegate for over 18 years. Born and raised in Texas, she moved to Massachusetts in 1989 and started her first union job at AT&T in Fairhaven in 1997, where she became a member of CWA Local 1051 where she was elected a steward then a District Vice President and started her education in Labor Studies at UMASS Dartmouth and graduated with a BA in Labor Studies at UMASS Boston. Lisa is also a Massachusetts Democratic Party elected Senatorial Women and a state committee member and co-chair of the New Bedford Democratic City Committee. Elected Parent of the Year from PACE - Parents Alliance for Catholic Education, Labor Representative and executive Board, Mass Hire Greater New Bedford Workforce Board, Vice President, MA AFL-CIO. When she is not working or volunteering, Lisa enjoys rowing and sailing authentic Azorean whale boats with the Azorean Maritime Heritage Society and spending time with her fiancé Donald Rei, four children, four grandchildren and her newest great granddaughter (and she currently has another grandbaby due in October).

**Maria Angela Rosario**, Executive Director, NorthStar Learning Centers. Maria has served for 16 years as executive director of NorthStar Learning Centers, a minority-led nonprofit organization that serves disadvantaged New Bedford area children, youth, and families. For more than two decades, Maria has been active in community and state-level planning and advocacy groups to remove historic barriers and open pathways for all children, youth, and families to achieve a better life. Motivated and informed by her own uphill struggle to overcome the cultural, language, and class barriers to succeeding in school, Maria has been a leader in efforts to raise the level of student achievement in the New Bedford Public Schools and other communities. A seasoned leader who leads with cross-cultural awareness, she has been instrumental in building bridges between schools, families, and communities. Maria has received local, state, and regional awards for her leadership in promoting community, school, and other positive change. In 2006, she won New England Grantee of the Year from the New England Minority Business Development Agency. She was a 2016 YWCA Women of Distinction Awardee, and most recently, was recognized by the Providence, RI-based Latino Public Radio for her exceptional leadership and dedication to community in its multiple dimensions. Ms. Rosario has a BA in Sociology and pursued a graduate degree in Counseling Psychology from the Cambridge College Graduate School.

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