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**ICYMI: KEY EXCERPTS OF FIRST LADY CHIRLANE MCCRAY PROFILE IN NEW YORK
TIMES MAGAZINE**

In case you missed it, this weekend's *New York Times Magazine* featured First Lady Chirlane McCray on the cover. The following is a list of 10 key excerpts from the feature, which can be found in-full [here](#).

1. *Before they moved into Gracie, McCray and de Blasio lived in a vinyl-sided townhouse in Park Slope, Brooklyn, and worked out at the local Y.M.C.A. Shortly after de Blasio became mayor, McCray said she would be a "voice for the forgotten voices," because, she said, "black women do not have as many positive images in the media as we should."*
2. *Her gift and her burden for the next four years would be navigating the very real expectations and overidentifications being placed upon her. When I asked McCray at that lunch about her new life, she only laughed at the obvious growing pains that she was enduring. "There's no manual," she said.*
3. *At breakfast, McCray remarked on the book I was carrying: Michele Wallace's seminal black feminist text from 1978, "Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman," ... "Oh, wow, I haven't seen that book in years," McCray said. The book set us off into a freewheeling discussion of everything from our shared Ghanaian ancestry to her belief that today's feminist movement was just as robust as it was in the 1970s. She told me about her work, over the years, advocating for more domestic-violence shelters in the city. She ran through the names of organizations she wanted to work with, visibly excited that her new role would let her do this kind of work full time.*
4. *The McCrays moved to Longmeadow, Mass., where the schools were ranked highly, in 1965. Their house was new, and they were proud that nobody had lived in it before. Her father worked at a nearby air base, and her mother worked at an electronics factory, but they told Chirlane, their eldest daughter, to tell the neighbors that their mother stayed home, like the other mothers.*
5. *It was a house filled with pragmatic books like encyclopedias and Reader's Digests. "Every Christmas, I would get one book for Christmas, in my stocking," McCray told me. In 1970, when McCray was 16, she got "The Bluest Eye," Toni Morrison's first novel, about a young black girl's desire to conform to the beauty standards of white America. When she was a child, McCray told me, "there were not a lot of black books." McCray's discovery of black writers like Morrison convinced her that she, too, had a story to tell. I was hungry for it," she said. "My life was very compartmentalized. I went to a school that was all white and then I went home and to my black family."*
6. *Talking with McCray, it was clear that the policy also connected to her and the mayor's own experience as struggling new parents to their daughter Chiara 21 years ago. "At the hospital, they told us: 'You gotta have a car seat. You can't leave the hospital without a car seat,' "she recalled. "So we got our car seat, and we put her in it and get her home and just put her on the sofa and said: 'O.K. Now what do we do?' There's no manual. Neither one of us had family we could rely on to help us in the city,*

we were pretty much on our own. And we had to work. Both of us had to work, it was no question.” Through that experience, McCray said, she came to realize that for women who are living without a safety net, having access to affordable child care could not only change the quality of their lives but also give their children a better start in life.

- 7. At that, his voice rose and trembled with frustration, finally becoming the voice I associate with Sharpton the leader who made black churchgoing grandmothers proud enough to send him a donation, no matter what they said about him. “Yeah, they are gonna try to neuter Chirlane’s voice, and they are gonna keep trying to do it to Michelle,” he said. “But what we got to understand is that they do that as a symbol of trying to neuter my daughters, so I fight for them because Dominique and Ashley don’t have a shot if they are gonna try and do that to the first lady of New York and first lady of the country.”*
- 8. As promised, she wanted to make certain that I understood exactly why they were focusing on an \$850 million health initiative. It was the first time I understood that despite how Pollyannaish it sounded to some, in McCray’s mind, mental health was the key to how the city uses police officers, prisons, hospitals and schools. Those institutions were being burdened with responsibilities that they were not trained to deal with.*
- 9. But in this last conversation, McCray made a remark that briefly lifted the scrim. We were discussing why she thought preventive measures or the long view mattered so much to her, when she interjected to remind me that “everyone needs coping skills. Everyone needs to learn resilience. Some of us come into this world better than others, but we all benefit by learning these skills that will help us throughout this life, which we don’t control.” I had observed McCray enough to know that this is exactly what she had done as a black girl in a predominately white Massachusetts; and again as a young black lesbian at Wellesley; and, later, in jobs where she was often the only black woman. She had coped and looked forward. “I think,” McCray continued, as if we were speaking as two women and not as a first lady to a writer, “that when people know that there’s a solution to a frustration that they have, it just makes it easier to work through. I think that’s what we’re seeing...Once people realize that there’s a solution, it just changes everything. It changes the way they feel and think about something. I think that a large part of the fear people have, and the frustration about anything, is not knowing what the answer is, how to get through it.” I asked if she became exhausted herself. “No,” she said. “I know that it takes time to change a culture. It takes time to change public conversation.”*
- 10. These questions are relevant because McCray and Obama are black first ladies in a country in which women of color still have to ask a question posed by Sojourner Truth a century ago: “Ain’t I a woman?” They are black first ladies in a country where there’s little relation between the realities of black women and those “ladies” who do not look like them. So to be a black first lady is to highlight how little room there has been for women of color to thrive in the political realm, not to mention in real life.*

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