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**Twice As Well: A Review of 2009 Chicago International Women's Day and "A Powerful Noise" documentary film**

by Cassandra Gaddo, Today's Chicago Woman

*Based on Charlotte Whitton's assertion that, "Whatever women do, they must do twice as well as men to be thought half as good.*

March, as you (hopefully) know, is Women's History Month. A time to look back and reflect on the women who have brought us where...

Blah, blah, blah. I know. Well-intentioned as they may be, "history months" can often seem petty, even patronizing. Let's make posters of all the [blacks, women, Hispanics, Asian Pacific Americans] who have made a difference in our lives - for one month only; then let's forget again until next year. It's like a twisted take on the Dreamgirls song, "One Night Only": "You've got one month only/One month only, let's not pretend to care/Next month, this feeling will be gone/It has no chance going on."

But this past week I attended two events that gave me a different perspective on Women's History Month and made me realize that not only do we still need it, it's more important than ever.

On March 5 (timed with International Women's Day, March 8), the documentary *A Powerful Noise* was broadcast simultaneously across the country in 450 theatres-22 in Chicagoland alone. End-capped by a live broadcast from New York of a panel discussion involving the likes of Nicholas Kristof, CARE president Dr. Helene Gayle and Madeleine Albright, the film followed the lives of three very different women making a difference in their communities under extraordinary circumstances in Mali, Vietnam and Bosnia. But it was the panel discussion that really tied the themes together. Across the world, these panelists said, it is women who have the ability to bring their communities out of poverty and drive economies forward. Kristof, acknowledging that he was perhaps selling out his own gender, noted that in situation after situation, he the economic missteps of men drive families into financial ruin. Women, on the other hand, are more likely to take education and opportunity and use it to start businesses, give back to their communities and invest in their children's education-strategies that pay off for generations to come.

The problem, of course, is that things like education and the resources to start businesses are not always easily accessible to women even in the U.S., nevermind places like the slums of Mali. In these places, it is a dual fight against poverty, a situation to which women are a key to solving, and a long-standing cultural history of sexism, which inherently prevents women from grasping agency over their own life choices, from marriage and children to education and employment. Solve one, and you make extraordinary strides toward solving the other. But it's a vicious circle that's near impossible to break, and which will be solved in incremental, nearly invisible, steps. (Learn more about the film [here](#).)

With these topics on my mind, the next day I attended the **International Women's Day Fair and Luncheon**, held at the Union League Club of Chicago [and sponsored by the International Trade Club of Chicago and the International Visitors Center of Chicago]. The keynote speaker, Carol Coletta, at first seemed an odd choice to mark the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day. As CEO and president of CEOs for Cities, Coletta is an expert and frequent speaker on the success formula for cities and creative communities. But over her powerful speech, she convinced me she was the perfect choice. Though her work centers in the U.S., not Mali or Vietnam, her themes perfectly mirrored those of *A Powerful Noise*-that women are the key to our economic and creative futures. After all, she noted, the success of cities is dependent on the percent of the population of people with a college education-a population which, more and more, is dominated by women. (There are some, certainly following the recent presidential elections, that would argue cities are not the most important places in our country. But let's keep in mind that 86% of our federal tax revenue is drawn from cities-so yes, I would argue, they matter.)

In the U.S. Coletta says, women have a disproportionate impact on the success of society as compared to their male peers. And a college education is the best way to empower them to do so-just a 1 percent increase in the portion of the population with a college education, Coletta noted, can result in an additional \$7.2 billion annually for a city. Just as the panel of speakers in New York noted, the best investment a city can make is in the education of women and girls, because they are ones most likely to take this education and invest it in their communities. "If college education attainment is not number one on your economic agenda," Coletta told us, "you don't have an economic agenda." And though with the job market currently oversaturated with talent and under-saturated with opportunities, an influx of candidates may seem like the last thing we want, Coletta argues that the more talent a city has, the more resilient it is, and therefore the more able to survive and prosper after an economic depression.

I left these events chewing over these new ideas, convinced Women's History Month and International Women's Day are more necessary than ever. Why? Because it's not enough that a few people are aware of this idea; and it's not only a problem that affects those in the far-away slums of strange countries. It's a problem that connects us all. And when a close male friend of mine, whom I generally perceive as an intelligent, open, well-reasoned person, can say in all seriousness to me, "The gender wage gap in America is a myth perpetuated by the Women's Studies professors of America," it's clear that awareness and education about these problems is still a huge hurdle ahead, before we're ever to be able to solve them. (And in case you're wondering, the lack of bloodshed following this statement can be largely attributed to the 1900 miles between my friend and my Women's Studies-minoring self at the time of the conversation.) It's not so much Women's History Month as it is Women's Futures Month-and it can no longer be celebrated One Month Only. It needs to be recognized all year long if we have any hope of driving the economy of the country-and the world-forward.

*Cassandra A. Gaddo is managing editor of Today's Chicago Woman magazine. In this blog, she focuses on women's issues in the workplace and world at large. She also reports on the 8th Annual International Women's day event held on March 6, 2009 co-sponsored by the International Trade Club of Chicago, International Visitors Center of Chicago and the Union League Club of Chicago. See this blog entry at [http://www.tcwmag.com/Blogs/ Twice-as-Well-\(1\).aspx?q=1](http://www.tcwmag.com/Blogs/ Twice-as-Well-(1).aspx?q=1).*