



DRIVING SYSTEMIC CHANGE
AND EMPOWERMENT FOR
WOMEN OF COLOUR
IN PUBLIC SERVICES
THE BURDEN OF ONE

SANDRA SMITH AND SAMANTHA ALEXANDER
WRITTEN BY SUZANNE SIMMONS-LEWIS

ROUTLEDGE



Driving Systemic Change and Empowerment for Women of Colour in Public Services

Change is needed now. For too long, stories of Black Women, where English is not their first language, and Women of Colour in Public Services have been silenced, distorted, and ignored. *Driving Systemic Change and Empowerment for Women of Colour in Public Services: The Burden of One* presents a powerful, multi-voiced, faith-filled narrative that reclaims space and presence.

The personal journeys reveal the invisible labour, silent tears, self-efficacy, and relentless determination required to survive—to thrive in spaces not built for them. Transforming isolation into power, the book traces resilience from childhood trauma and workplace exclusion to grassroots organizing and institutional reform. Blending raw, intersectional storytelling with systemic critique and practical tools, this resource is inspiring and actionable. Part memoir, part social commentary, part guidebook, it offers a blueprint for inclusive leadership, legacy-building, and collective empowerment, detailing individual stories to spark systemic change.

Whether you're a policymaker, practitioner, educator, ally, or woman who believes change won't come in her lifetime, this book provides insight, strength, and strategies to create a more inclusive future. *Driving Systemic Change and Empowerment for Women of Colour in Public Services: The Burden of One* calls us to action, reminding everyone that no one carries the burden alone. Every story matters, every voice counts—together, they reshape leadership, inclusion, and empowerment across the public sector. More than a book—it's a movement. You're not alone. You matter.

Sandra Smith is a registered Fellow of the Chartered Management Institute with over 30 years of leadership experience in retail management, and 8 years in policing, now a retired Sergeant. In 2021, she founded *Women of Colour in Policing*, a pioneering initiative that has been adopted nationally. Sandra serves as a Mission Ambassador for the Anglican Diocese Pool Mission and Local Authority Governor, reflecting deep commitment to community, education, and faith-led service. With numerous awards for innovation, dedication, and unwavering commitment to workforce development, she's passionate about empowering women to reach their full potential in the workplace and continues to champion equity, representation, and growth across the public sector.

Samantha Alexander is a Cultural Intelligence specialist, an advocate for inclusive leadership, and a driving force behind transformative change in UK police

services, where she also spent 20 years as a Fingerprint Expert, predominantly working in New Scotland Yard. With a career rooted in equity and representation, she works across sectors, challenging systemic barriers and elevating underrepresented voices. Known for her strategic impact, empathy, and faith-driven leadership, she shapes programmes rooted in lived experience, believing in a cross-cultural approach to business development, with a focused lens on language. Sam is a multi-award winner for her work on accessibility, diversity, and inclusion.

Suzanne Simmons-Lewis is a researcher, strategist, and advocate for inclusive leadership and systemic transformation. She has contributed to multiple research initiatives and policy frameworks, including work commissioned by Women of Colour in Public Services.

Driving Systemic Change and Empowerment for Women of Colour in Public Services

The Burden of One

SANDRA SMITH AND
SAMANTHA ALEXANDER

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To our late mothers, Mrs Dorrel May Mohan and Mrs Ursil Lewis MBE, whose strength, grace, and unwavering belief paved our path. Your lives have been our blueprint for dignity in the face of adversity, of resilience rooted in compassion, and of leadership born from quiet courage. You taught us that the burden of one can become the legacy of many.

We miss you more than words can carry in every triumph, quiet reflection, and moment that we wish we could share. This book stands on your shoulders, and in your honour.

Thank you for the love, the lessons, and the light.

Co-authors Sandra Smith and Samantha Alexander



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About the Co-Author: Sandra Smith

Sandra Smith is not simply a name in policing; she is a force of nature, a woman who turned invisibility into impact. Her journey into policing began with the quiet weight of isolation but grew into an international movement rooted in courage, empathy, and uncompromising belief in change.

With more than 40 years' experience in leadership roles, Sandra's career spans sectors and continents. From her early days as a senior manager in retail, where she championed inclusive hiring practices to her transformative work in UK retailing, Sandra has consistently led with integrity, vision, and heart. Her leadership is not defined by titles but by the lives she has uplifted and the systems she has helped reshape.

Sandra saw what others ignored: the absence of women who looked like her in leadership, in recognition, in the room. Instead of stepping back, she stepped forward, building what would become Women of Colour in Policing, and later Women of Colour in Public Services (WoCiPCIC). That first moment of defiance, of saying 'we must do better', became a legacy that now breathes in boardrooms, briefings, and communities across the UK.

Her work has earned numerous awards and commendations, including recognition at the Inspire Justice Awards for Inclusion & Diversity Initiative of the Year, and the Diversity, Equality & Inclusion Champion Award at Bedfordshire Police's annual Force Awards. Sandra's unwavering commitment to equity and representation has also been celebrated by community organisations and national platforms.

Sandra leads not with volume but with grace. Her story threads through these pages not just as a professional milestone but as a deeply human experience, one that will resonate with anyone who has felt unseen, and anyone who has dared to make that feeling matter.

x About the Co-Author: Sandra Smith

In her own words: 'I am not the first woman of colour to conquer the world ... and I do not claim there have not been women before me. There will undoubtedly be women after me. But I am not leaving a legacy, I am living mine. And that legacy is making our organisations and communities a better place for women of colour to thrive in'.

About the Co-Author: Samantha Alexander

Sam Alexander is a cultural intelligence specialist, an advocate for inclusive leadership, Deputy Lead for Women of Colour in Policing, and a driving force behind transformative change in UK police services. With a career rooted in equity and representation, Sam has worked across sectors to challenge systemic barriers and elevate underrepresented voices.

Sam's work is defined by a deep commitment to authenticity, empathy, and strategic impact. Building Women of Colour in Public Services Community Interest Company, she has shaped leadership programmes that centre lived experience, and her influence can be felt in policy conversations, community engagement, and organisational reform. Award winning and known for her clarity of thought and unwavering belief in the power of storytelling, Sam brings both heart and precision to every initiative she leads.

A true wordsmith, Sam has a rare ability to distil complex ideas into language that moves people, whether through public speaking, writing, or quiet reflection. Her words have inspired action, built bridges, and given voice to those who often go unheard.

At the core of Sam's journey is her deep-rooted faith in God, which has sustained and guided her through both personal and professional trials. Her spiritual foundation is not just a private belief but a public compass, shaping her leadership with humility, purpose, and grace. Sam often draws inspiration from scripture and prayer, believing that true transformation begins with a heart aligned to service and a mission greater than self.

In *The Burden of One*, Sam's voice resonates as both witness and architect, someone who has not only observed the burden carried by others but has actively worked to lighten it. Her contributions reflect a belief that change is not only possible but necessary, and that it begins with those willing to speak truth to power.

Sam continues to mentor emerging leaders, advise institutions on cultural intelligence, and advocate for a landscape where everyone belongs.



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About the Author: Suzanne Simmons-Lewis

Author | Executive & Personal Performance Coach | Communications Consultant | Storyteller | Journalist | Speaker

A dynamic and intuitive coach with over two decades of expertise in journalism, communications strategy, and personal transformation, Suzanne empowers ambitious, high-performing women and organisations to unlock their true potential. Through bespoke coaching, storytelling, and strategic communications, she helps clients shed limiting beliefs—swapping the metaphorical ‘straight jacket’ for a bespoke suit—and align with their authentic purpose.

Blending warmth, humour, spirituality, and creativity, Suzanne delivers sustainable transformation, whether through one-on-one coaching, workshops, or organisational consultancy. Her signature model focuses on core identity, enabling clients to eliminate stress, burnout, and inner conflict while stepping confidently into leadership, impact, and fulfilment.

As a sought-after speaker and author of *Who Am I? Swap Your Straight Jacket for a Bespoke Suit*, Suzanne combines practical tools with inspiring narratives to drive personal and professional growth.



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Sandra Smith and Samantha Alexander

This book was not written in isolation but in the company of brave voices, generous hearts, and unwavering belief.

To our late beloved mothers, **Mrs Dorrel May Mohan** and **Mrs Ursil Lewis, MBE**, your love endures, and your absence is felt deeply every step of the way. You shaped our principles and lit our path. Women of Colour in Policing (WoCiP) was born out of the belly of grief from your passing when Covid-19 stormed through our world. *The Burden of One* stands as a testament to all that you both poured into us. Your legacy and strength is alive in us. We miss you dearly.

To our **partners and families**, especially **Debs** and **Adolphus**, thank you for your patience, love, and unshakable support. You have carried us through long nights and deep reflections, reminding us why this work matters. Your sacrifices, encouragement, and belief have been woven into every page.

To **Suzanne Simmons-Lewis**, whom we commissioned to draft this book, thank you for your skill, your empathy, and your unwavering commitment to telling these stories with authenticity, respect, and power. You have brought voice to a vision and meaning to the burden.

To our **mentors**, who guided us with wisdom and reminded us to trust the journey, thank you for showing us the way when the road was unclear.

To our many **sponsors and allies**, those who championed our cause, provided support behind the scenes, and stood shoulder-to-shoulder in the mission to make this book a reality. Your belief in the message gave it wings.

To our **faith**, which has sustained and anchored us through every challenge. We are deeply grateful for the spiritual strength, grace, and purpose that have guided

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each step and turned burden into blessing. 'They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength ...' (Isaiah 40:31)—we have drawn from that promise daily.

To the contributors, colleagues, and community members who shared their experiences, your voices form the soul of these pages. Your trust has made it possible to illuminate what is often left in shadow.

To the early readers, editors, and advisors who encouraged us to go deeper, push further, and remain true, we thank you for helping shape this into something real, something lasting.

And finally, to You the reader—thank you for opening this book, journeying with us, and for being willing to carry forward the burden of one. May you find strength in solidarity, and purpose on your own.

Foreword

When Sandra Smith and Samantha Alexander asked me to write the foreword for this extraordinary book, I felt deeply honoured, and honestly, a little overwhelmed. Not because I didn't want to say yes, but because I knew how important it was to get this right. This book is not just a publication: it is a landmark. A reckoning. A legacy.

I came to this book not as an academic but as a friend, a colleague, and an ally. I am a white woman who has spent nearly 25 years in policing, rising to the rank of detective chief superintendent and leading efforts to counter serious organised crime and terrorism across the East of England. But more than any title or rank, I have always seen myself as a peace officer; a woman of faith, guided by justice and grounded in the words: 'Here I am Lord. Send me' (Isaiah 6:8).

This powerful and necessary book—crafted through the lived experiences, insights, and reflections of women of colour in policing—is not simply a collection of stories. It is a collective truth, one that is painful, vital, and long overdue.

Sandra and Samantha have created more than a book. They have created a platform. A mirror. A reckoning. Each chapter brings visibility to the experiences that institutions too often erase or flatten. These are not stories for debate but offerings of truth that demand respect, reflection, and ultimately action.

The stories within these pages are as diverse as they are powerful. While rooted in individual truth, collectively they expose the shared burden that so many women of colour carry: the burden of being overlooked, underestimated, and unheard. These women speak with courage and clarity, revealing the invisible labour, relentless strength, and fierce pride required to survive and thrive in institutions not built for them.

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What unites these voices is not just pain but power. They speak not only for themselves but for the many whose stories have yet to be told. And their testimony is a gift to us all, a call to witness, to feel, and to change.

This is not a book of doom and despair: yes, it holds pain, but it also holds power. It holds clarity, community, resistance, and hope; threaded throughout its pages are moments of humour, love, and unwavering sisterhood. It is these roots of truth and humanity that make this work so enduring.

As someone who has walked the halls of power but also strived to walk in step with justice, I urge you to do more than read this book. Reflect on it, share it, change yourself because of it. Whether you are a leader, policymaker, peer, or ally-in-the-making, this book is your invitation.

To Sandra and Samantha: thank you for asking me to write this foreword. It is not a task I took lightly. I am deeply honoured to walk beside you, learn from you, and continue supporting the work you have begun with such courage and clarity. You have my respect, my admiration, and my commitment.

To every reader: you are being handed a gift and a challenge. What you choose to do with it will speak volumes. If you hold privilege, power, or position, this is your moment. You cannot unlearn what you will learn within these pages. These are not stories to be stored on a bookshelf; they are instructions for change. Look inward first: ask yourself how your decisions, your silence, or your systems might be sustaining inequality. Then act. Develop workshops that challenge bias. Fund and implement training that transforms culture, not just policy. Remove the barriers you have the authority to dismantle. Use your influence to open doors, amplify voices, and change lives. Because the women in these pages have spoken: now it is your turn to do your part.

This is *The Burden of One*, but it does not belong to just one person. It belongs to all of us and with that ownership comes responsibility: the question is no longer *if* you will act, but *how and when*.

Dr. Jules Henderson

Author's Note

When Sandra Smith and Samantha Alexander approached me to write *Driving Systemic Change and Empowerment for Women of Colour in Public Services: The Burden of One*, I had already been collaborating with them for eight months, supporting Women of Colour in Policing (WoCiP). They gave me the title, and I immediately understood its weight. *The Burden of One* speaks to the experience of absorbing the world around you until you no longer see yourself clearly: only through the distorted lens of others' expectations, biases, and systemic barriers.

This book was initially conceived as a professional guide; a coaching manual examining the challenges Black women face in policing, while sharing the blueprint of the movement as a model of best practice. But as I listened to Sandra and Samantha's journeys, and those of the many women who shared their stories with me, it became something far deeper. Their experiences demanded more than analysis; they needed to be framed within the broader social landscape—interwoven with personal reflection—and offered as both a testament and a roadmap.

The Burden of One is part memoir, part social commentary, and part guidebook because the truth of these women's lives cannot be confined to one genre. Their stories are not just about workplace struggles; they are about identity, resilience, faith, and the transformative power of servant leadership. Sandra and Samantha's vision for WoCiP was born from their own navigation of this burden, and what began as a movement within policing has since elevated women across the public sector. Their work is guided by their Christian faith.

Writing this book has been a profound journey. I expected to complete it in five months; instead, it took far longer, as each story revealed new layers of courage, pain, and triumph. I was reminded that storytelling is not just about recounting events; it is about honouring the raw and unfiltered truth of lived experience. Too