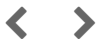


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## **Two Madisons: Annette Miller knows both, talks about how to bring them together**

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Annette Miller has been part of so many inner circles in Madison — as a member of the boards of the Urban League of Greater Madison and St. Mary’s Hospital and an aide in the office of Mayor Dave Cieslewicz just for starters — that you might be surprised to hear that she is a transplant who struggled to find her place here. A military brat who moved around a lot as a child, she is the daughter of an African-American father and German immigrant mother. She came to Madison to attend UW-Madison and was a co-founder of a networking organization for African-American professionals. Today, at 42, she is manager of community outreach for Madison Gas & Electric, a wife and a mother to three school-age children. She shared her perspective on Madison with the Cap Times.

**Capital Times: How did you get to Madison?**

**Annette Miller:** I got to Madison through UW-Madison. I graduated in 1992 and spent 11.5 years working for state government doing policy for different niche groups. Then I ended up going over to the mayor's office and worked on community and neighborhood issues. It opened up a passion in me I didn't even know was there.

**CT: What surprised you about Madison?**

**AM:** How passionate people are and how knowledgeable they are. People from all walks of life were looking for an opportunity to share their perspective with the mayor. It was wonderful to be that bridge that people were walking on to have that access. I also grew to love Madison much more. Living here was the first time I was able to really connect and feel like "this is my home."

**CT: Do you consider yourself biracial?**

**AM:** Most definitely. I remember growing up people used to say, “You’re mixed, that means you’re all mixed up,” and I used to be offended by that. Being a little older and wiser, I think there was truth to that. The benefit of the way I look and my upbringing is that it has afforded the ability to get along with all sorts of people and to advocate on issues across lines.

**CT: You are involved in a lot of civic groups. Is access to civic life in Madison difficult for people of color?**

**AM:** Yes and no. I was in the mayor’s office, and that afforded me privilege others may not have. I try to use it responsibly. But the negative of that is that you are “that person” that people go to. I would constantly be asked: “Can you please do ...?” I had to learn to say “no.” Not only because it is healthy for me, but also realizing I have to be that bridge to give access to other individuals so they can be empowered to do their civic duty.

**CT: Are there two Madisons?**

**AM:** Yes, there are two Madisons.

**CT: Tell me who lives in each.**

**AM:** The white community has had the privilege of learning the rules of the game and passing them on. If you are from a different culture, you may not be aware of what those rules are. We talk about the achievement gap, but it’s an access gap: access to information, access to capital, access to opportunity. People think everybody is at the starting line — but they’re not — some people have yet to get to the starting line.

**CT: It can be hard to “get” the rules of the game if you are an outsider.**

**AM:** Some people take the rules so much for granted, they don't even realize there's something that needs to be translated. But if you are from an urban community and come into a white-collar environment, a myriad of things — the way you dress, the way you speak, or don't speak — make it obvious who's fitting in and not fitting in.

**CT: How strong are connections in Madison between people of color with economic privilege and people of color without that benefit?**

**AM:** There can be tension, but there is so much more that binds us together than pushes us apart. It doesn't matter what color you are — it's really hard to get networked in Madison. I really had a difficult time. When I was in my 20s there weren't a whole lot of places to go meet people like me. That's how the Madison Black Professionals network came into play. I said we should form a network and that was that.

**CT: The idea of “two Madisons” often falls along lines of race. Are there other divisions?**

**AM:** Education is a key component. The way I see it is this: The more layers of barriers there are, the more difficult it is to close the gap. Being low-income can be a barrier. If you come from one-parent household. Or if you are not low-income, but are African-American or Latino or Hmong.

**CT: Where is the gap in opportunities most troubling?**

**AM:** Jobs. We need jobs. The economy is weak. We've got to create family-sustaining jobs — for everyone.

**CT: What kind of prospects do you see for, say, your children?**

**AM:** I have always thought that Madison can solve its problems. We've got the talent and we've got the resources. We need leaders to come together and be intentional how they resolve these issues. Once we get over the uncomfortableness of having to share this beautiful city with other people, I think Madison could really be on the map.

**CT: So, there is enough to go around for both Madisons?**

**AM:** Most definitely.

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Pat Schneider



