

Time to Speak the Truth

A Statement from the Anti-Oppression Committee of the Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence

January 20, 2016

There are times when stepping lightly, speaking softly, and withholding passionate speech and action are not just warranted but necessary. There are also times when standing boldly against injustice and speaking the truth, no matter how unpopular or risky it may be, is both warranted and necessary.

It's time to stand up and speak the truth, and here it is: *Black women and transwomen are being raped, beaten, abused, murdered, and otherwise tortured by white men in our society in epidemic proportions, and it must stop. NOW.*

Violence against Black women and transwomen has been committed for centuries as perhaps one of the most frequently utilized weapon of racism, sexism, and misogyny. The torture and degradation of Black women is a time-honored, treasured tool of economic oppression, war, and entertainment for those in privileged positions of power and authority, namely cisgender white men. This truth is so ingrained in our collective, historical conscience and experience, we barely recognize it as truth at all. That is, of course, unless we are targets of the torture.

[The case of Daniel Holtzclaw](#), a former Oklahoma City police officer, is a glaringly ugly yet illustrative example of this truth. Holtzclaw – a man with incredible power bestowed on him by his sex, gender, race, and occupation – was convicted of rape and other offenses against eight of thirteen Black women who accused him. The fact that an all-white jury convicted Holtzclaw and that he faces a potential sentence of over 263 cumulative years in prison for his crimes may seem to be an indication that the systematic rape of Black women is finally being taken seriously in our country.

It's not.

Let's talk about the five women whose testimonies were apparently not credible enough. Let's talk about how many women did not or could not come forward. Let's talk about how Holtzclaw's behavior was viewed and being handled by those in positions to do something about it long before something was done about it. Let's talk about how many men like Holtzclaw continue to live and rape freely in towns and cities throughout our country every single day. Let's talk about the pain, fear, shame, and hopelessness that countless Black survivors feel because no one takes them or their suffering seriously.

There is a backlash – always a backlash – against stating truths like these. Take the opposition to the [Black Lives Matter](#) movement, for instance. There are many who have promoted the mantra “all lives matter” in response to all these Black Americans having the gall to express outrage about the systematic murders of their children, friends, and peers. Black Lives Matter was grown out of the systematic epidemic of multiple forms of oppression and targeting of Black people across the United States of America and beyond. To say “all lives matter” ignores the context and centuries of racism, sexism, misogyny, slavery, murder, and rape that Black communities and people face. Consider, for example, that Black people are incarcerated at six times the rate of white people, and that one in 100 Black American women are in prison (source: NAACP). When compared with white women, Black women face a 22% higher rate of rape and attempted rape, and multiracial women face a 35.5% higher rate (source: CDC).

There is a reason that “Black lives matter” needs to be said and said repeatedly: in our country today, *they still don’t matter*. Racism, heterosexism, sexism, misogyny, and other forms of oppression are still thriving in this country because those with the power and desire to stop it are far outnumbered by those with the power and desire to keep benefitting from it.

The Anti-Oppression Committee of the [Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence](#) chooses to publicly stand with [Black Women’s Blueprint](#), and with all who speak the truth and stand up for justice. If we are to stand against sexual violence, then we simply cannot be silent anymore about the systematic rape, torture, and murder of countless, priceless Black women in our midst. These women have names, they have stories, and they have lives of substance and worth that should mean something to all of us who claim to believe in justice, equality, and human rights. If we are to stand against sexual violence, then we cannot be silent anymore about the institutional racism and sexism that exist in every nook and cranny of our society and our lives within it – starting with the white-dominated anti-sexual violence field. It’s not enough to say that we serve all survivors, that we want to hold offenders accountable, and that we want to eliminate sexual violence. Our mission statements are useless if our words and actions don’t reflect the truth.

To the brave survivors of Daniel Holtzclaw – *all of you* – we believe you and we endeavor to stand with you in truth and solidarity. To all the many Black women who are silent because you are silenced, we endeavor to stand with you in truth and solidarity. To all of our colleagues in the anti-sexual violence field, we implore you to speak the truth no matter how it is received where you are. Let us not speak for Black survivors. Let us instead fight to dismantle that which keeps Black survivors silenced.

The truth exists whether or not we choose to speak it. That choice is what defines us as advocates, activists, and human beings. It’s time for us in Ohio, and throughout this world we all share, to speak the truth.

Respectfully,

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