



WITNESS FOR JUSTICE

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The Silent Epidemic

Last week, in Cleveland, Ohio, three more bodies of women were found wrapped in plastic bags and hidden in abandoned properties. A suspect, a registered sex offender, has been arrested and is being held on a \$6 million bond. My heart sank, my anger rose, and my prayers went up for those women and their families. We have been through this before, most recently with the discovery of three women who had been kidnapped, raped, and held captive for more than ten years. Their escape made global news and also brought back the harsh memory of the Imperial Avenue tragedy a few years back when eleven bodies of women were found. The most recent suspect has said he was “inspired” by Anthony Sowell who is now convicted of those murders.

What is happening here?

Do we as a society care about the lives of women, especially women of color and poor women? There is a silent epidemic in the world when it comes to the valuing of women’s lives which pervades our own culture insidiously. Sometimes it is easier to think that other cultures demean women, but that we don’t do that here in the United States. But every day, in every city, in every part of the country, and in every community, women and girls are taken from the streets as they walk to school or walk home from work or the grocery store, and forced into commercial

sexual exploitation. Every day, women are hit by their spouse or boyfriend, or verbally abused and intimidated. Every day, women are raped, including those serving in the military who find themselves vulnerable to their peers and commanding officers.

And we, for the most part, remain silent. There are no national demonstrations or outcries for justice for these women. They are our mothers and sisters, our grandmothers and daughters, our nieces and aunts. Just as we are not a post-racial society, we are also not a post-patriarchal society. As much as we think women have gained equality and access to success, however one defines that, the harsh realities of violence and intimidation persist.

Maybe we don't organize around these issues because we think they are "private" matters. After all, there is a supposed sanctity within the marriage contract or within families. Or maybe we characterized some women in such a way that we then believe that they "deserved" what was coming to them.

Remaining silent will only result in more deaths and more damage to women. If the news media were to cover what is actually happening to women and girls on a 24/7 basis, we would be astonished to know the extent of it. But there might also be a national conversation about what we need to do to change the landscape so that every woman and girl could walk safely on the streets of our cities or down a country road without fear, and know that she would be safe within the walls of her own home.

A silent epidemic is dangerous, until we speak out.

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