

Ending Violence against Women

Written by Bill Fletcher, Jr.

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March is the official month to “discuss” women and it could not arrive too soon. What is sad about both Black History Month (February) and International Women’s Month (March) is that too many of us think that those are the only legitimate times of the year to discuss the issues affecting these respective groups. In either case, attention to the plight of women, in March or any other month, is warranted.

Last year seemed to be the year to attack women. The language of many on the political Right in during election season was so phenomenally backward that in a different context you would have wondered whether it was all an act. Suggesting that there are acceptable and unacceptable forms of rape, for instance, once again puts the burden on women for the violence that they experience.

This issue of violence against women needs much greater attention and we must realize that it is not only a domestic issue. A very good friend of mine had to flee her country of origin because of the physical and emotional abuse she was experiencing from her husband, knowing that her community would never believe that someone of the stature of her husband would be capable of such crimes. More to the point, she knew that her community would somehow conclude that she, rather than her husband, was the source of the problem.

Stories over the past year about assaults on women in Egypt have made any sane person’s skin crawl. But we should recognize that such assaults—rape and molestation of politically active women—are not new.

There is a long history of rape and other forms of violence being used—domestically and internationally—as a means to subjugate politically active women, and those women who dare

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to speak out on social, economic and political issues, and not necessarily just on women-related issues.

This year's Billion Rising protests were aimed at bringing international attention to the matter of violence against women. The consciousness and concerns raised by this and other such efforts needs to be sustained throughout the rest of the year. Real attention needs to be focused on young men so that they understand that violence against women is totally unacceptable.

A different sort of attention needs to be focused on women such that those who experience violence do not internalize this experience, blaming themselves. But the attention must also go to other women who, because of the male supremacist societies in which we live, will on occasion close their eyes and ears to the pain of victimized women, in the worst case joining in the chorus of putting the blame on women.

March 2013 is just the right moment to raise popular attention to violence against women. We have to shift the impulses, particularly of men, such that violence against women is not met with silence, nor met with excuses, but is met with support to women and condemnation of all perpetrators of violence.

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