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December 2007
801 words

Our Turn

I'm through with black men. I spent too much of 2007 standing up for them and I'm tired. I wore black on Sept. 20th in support of the Jena 6 march. I said a quiet, "Thank God," when Genarlow Wilson, the Georgia man convicted as a teenager for having oral sex with a girl two years his junior, was released from prison. And I forgave Michael Vick after he owned up to his mistake. But when I heard in November of the young black man in Brooklyn, NY being killed by police after threatening his mother, I was done.

There are too many cases; too many incidents of black men putting themselves in situations where they can be mistreated or discriminated against. I can't stand in support of all of them. And I can't continue taking my focus away from black women who are being harmed, often fatally, and frequently by the same black men that I champion.

While the black community has united around hate crimes and the unfair treatment of black men by the legal system, we've ignored the problem of violence in our own homes. According to the U. S. Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), from 1993-2004 nonfatal acts of violence perpetrated by intimate partners was higher for black women than white women. And in 2005 the BJS found that 38% of black female victims were acquainted with their attackers. As black women stand in support of black men, it is important that these same men take note of what is happening to the women beside them.

For the better part of 2007, Americans were distracted by the cases of Vick, Wilson, and the Jena 6. Meanwhile, black women were being raped, beaten, and murdered.

I heard about the rape and torture of the Dunbar Village mother in Florida by a group of black teenagers from a colleague, not through the news. When I found the story online and read the details of the crime, I tried to understand why it had happened. It was a useless exercise.

Reading about Megan Williams of West Virginia who was also raped and tortured, but by seven white men and women, was almost unbearable. The perpetrators actions were beyond evil. Then a few weeks later I found evidence of this same, senseless evil activity in my own state. A Georgia man was arrested for dismembering his girlfriend and scattering her body parts around Newton County, less than an hour from where I live. Leslyan Williams' head and torso are still

missing and media coverage remains scarce. But Vick's sentencing hearing sparked the organization of a prayer vigil in Atlanta.

Black women choose to march and pray for troubled black men, but when will it be our turn? How long must we wait before civil rights groups organize marches and rallies in protest against the destruction of the mothers of our race? How long before our men step up and lead the charge to re-educate and re-program young black boys in the ways to love and appreciate black women? How long do we wait before the decent black men who know a friend, a brother, or a father, who is harming a girlfriend or a wife, intervene to stop the violence?

Press releases concerning Vick and the Jena 6 appear on the National Association of the Advancement of Colored People's (NAACP) website. There was no mention of the Dunbar Village mom or Megan Williams, but there is encouragement to forgive Vick: "As a society we should aid in his rehabilitation and welcome a new Michael Vick back into the community without a permanent loss of his career in football," the message read. In a September 10th press release, the NAACP explains its role in coordinating the Jena 6 March.

There was not a march for the Florida mother or the Georgia woman, but there was a march for Megan on November 3, 2007. In a statement released October 4th, Megan's attorneys called for the Justice Department to "intervene on the Megan Williams' case if black people are to have any protection under Federal Hate Crime Statutes." Perhaps the race of her violators is the reason that a march even took place.

The stories of black women affected by violence must be brought to the forefront. We cannot afford for our suffering to remain two lines in the ticker tape at the bottom of a news program. In Darfur, the brutal assault of women is a war tactic, a strategy for genocide. Wombs are purposefully damaged, often leaving the women disabled or dead.

When women are destroyed, the race, the ethnic group is also destroyed. Who will Black America blame when this happens to us?

I guess as long as Michael Vick gets to play again, it doesn't really matter.