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More Than a Hashtag: Why We Need to #ProtectBlackWomen in Real Life

Golden Gate University School of Law

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Home / 2021 / March / 31 / Domestic Violence /

[More Than a Hashtag: Why We Need to #ProtectBlackWomen in Real Life](#)



MORE THAN A HASHTAG: WHY WE NEED TO #PROTECTBLACKWOMEN IN REAL LIFE

March 31, 2021 • by alexisnoel16 • [comments \(5\)](#)

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The most disrespected person in America is the Black Woman. The most unprotected person in America is the Black Woman. The most neglected person in America is the Black Woman.

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INTRODUCTION

Social media campaigns will tell you to “Protect Black Women,” but rarely is there a serious discussion of what—or who—Black women must be protected from. Put simply, **Black women have been left stranded at the intersection of systemic racism and domestic violence.**



Photo by [Stewart Munro](#) on [Unsplash](#).

This piece will address the ways in which Black women continue to be disrespected, unprotected, and neglected, both publicly—as a result of systemic racism and police brutality—as well as privately—as a result of the legal system's failure to appropriately address **domestic violence** committed against them.

#PROTECTBLACKWOMEN



Image via [Twitter](#).

It is no secret that law enforcement has **historically allowed for**—and in many cases, perpetuated—the abuse of **Black people**. However, due to a general reluctance by many to accept the fact that racism did not end with **Jim Crow**, law enforcement's mistreatment of Black people has evaded consistent mainstream discussion until recently. Groups like **Black Lives Matter** and celebrities like **H.E.R.**, have utilized their platforms to compel police accountability through media exposure of heinous acts committed against Black people, as well as the tragic effects of “legal racism” on the Black community. **Used here, “legal racism” stands for the premise that systemic racism not only causes and perpetuates police brutality, but essentially legalizes it through**

nonintervention and acquiescence. This media exposure has led to mass movements toward **decriminalization** and **decarceration** throughout the U.S., and the world. While criminal justice reform is a necessary and important task, mainstream emphasis on decriminalization and decarceration has left many survivors of domestic violence feeling **conflicted**.

Similar to systemic racism—there has historically been a reluctance by

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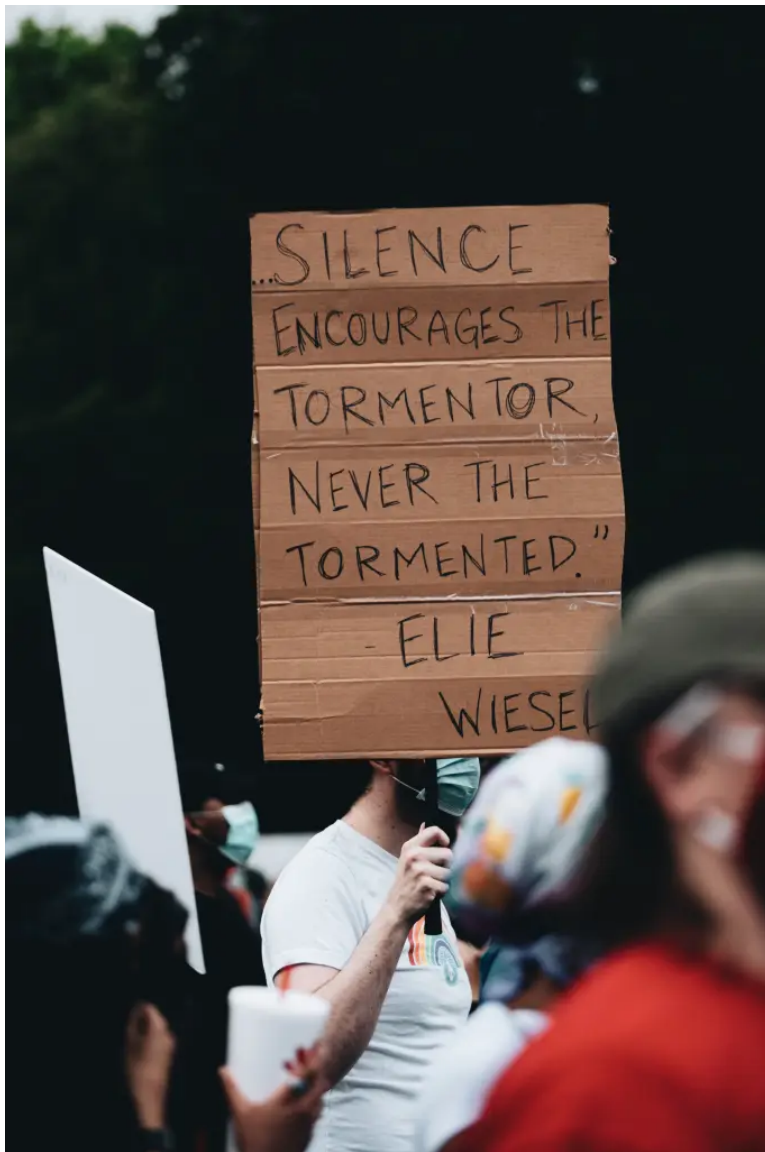


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Research has consistently shown that the **overwhelming majority** of domestic violence is committed by men, against women. Black women experience domestic violence **at a higher rate** than women in general, and are **thirty to fifty percent more** likely to experience domestic violence than white women. Black women are also **disproportionately arrested and incarcerated** in comparison to white women. The disproportionate rates in which Black women are incarcerated and/or abused reflects an alarming reality that it is **impossible to know how many thousands** of Black women are incarcerated or dead as a result of the legal system's failure to protect and support them.

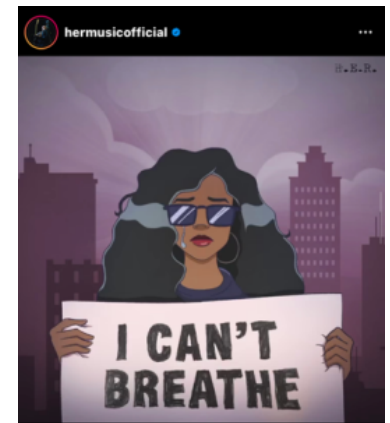


Photo by [H.E.R.](#) via [Instagram](#).

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Abuse is the **leading cause of injury** among Black women ages twelve to forty-four. Black women are **almost three times** as likely to be killed as a result of domestic violence than white women. Despite this, Black women **severely underreport** domestic violence.

While legal remedies for domestic violence have become steadily more available in the last thirty years, access to the legal system often comes at a **steep price** to survivors, especially

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community, as police intervention can be lethal for her partner and may expose the woman herself to violence, arrest, or prosecution.

Many, if not all, domestic violence survivors struggle with not feeling heard, seen, or protected by the legal system. Overall, there were on average nearly 600,000 unreported nonfatal domestic violence victimizations each year between 2006 and 2015. An estimated 61% of female victimizations involving a serious injury were not reported due to fear of reprisal. It is unsurprising then, that Black women in particular often hesitate to—or completely refrain from—calling the police, no matter how dangerous the situation may be. "Many advocates for the Black community maintain that because of their contentious history with law enforcement, many Black women are reluctant to call the police even when they should."

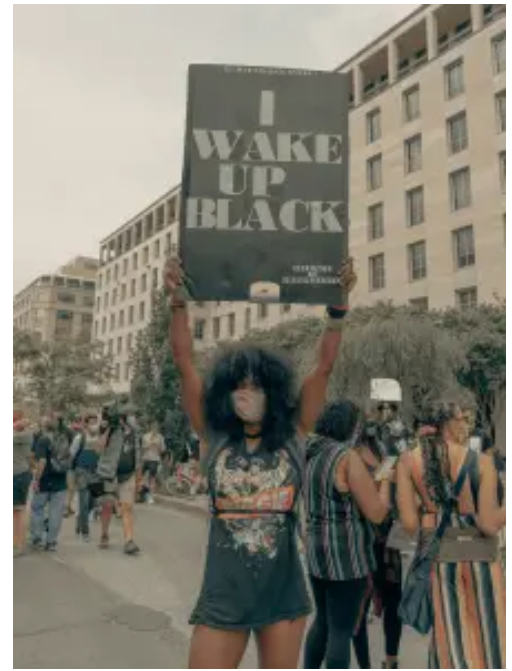


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SYSTEMIC RACISM & POLICE BRUTALITY

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A strong sense of cultural affinity and loyalty to the community and race renders many of us silent . . . as Black people, we don't always feel comfortable surrendering 'our own' to [law enforcement].

- Feminista Jones (2014)

A 2015 survey of women with experiences of domestic violence found more than half said that calling the police made things worse for them. Two-thirds of women who had contacted police in the past are afraid to contact police again.

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had actually been arrested or threatened with arrest during a partner abuse incident or while reporting a sexual assault to police. While nationwide data on the policing of Black women is scarce, a 2015 [study of arrests made in San Francisco](#) demonstrated that, while Black women make up about 5.8% of the population of San Francisco, they constitute about 45.5% of women arrested. Overall, Black women of all ages are [twice as likely](#) to be imprisoned as white women.

The disparity in the treatment of Black women is not exclusive to arrest or imprisonment, however. In 2015, Black women accounted for [almost a quarter](#) of women killed by police, despite accounting for only 13% of U.S. women. A 2006 study found that [over one-half](#) of all cases where a Black woman was the survivor, prosecutions were declined and the cases



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dismissed, compared to only 31% of cases where a white woman was the victim. Further, analysis of police misconduct cases against women of color has shown that [police misconduct against women of color](#) includes failing to submit sexual assault testing kits, under-reporting domestic violence crimes against women of color, and even sexually assaulting non-White victims of crime.

In the article *Police Racial Violence: Lessons from Social Psychology*, [Professor L. Song Richardson](#) identifies and discusses the most commonly understood forms of implicit bias, implicit dehumanization, and white favoritism in order to understand how these concepts work to further police violence against Black people. Professor Richardson contends that “even when people are acting in identical ways, implicit racial bias places black citizens more at risk of mistaken judgments of danger and criminality.” This, Professor Richardson reasons, contributes to a heightened risk of criminal profiling, violence, and even death of Black people at the hands of police.

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tistics cited here are extremely alarming, it is imperative to understand that research specific to issues experienced by Black women is **severely lacking** compared to other groups. For this reason, it is difficult to fully grasp the extent of the harms inflicted on Black women—especially Black women who experience domestic violence.

Going forward, it is imperative that society prioritize Black women in order to address the extremely dangerous position they have been forced into as a result of legal racism. Science in recent years has shown that ancestral trauma can **physically transmit** through genetic memory over the course of generations. Black women have been exposed to some of the most **horrendous and egregious violence** throughout history, so it could not be more imperative that society address the damage done in the past, and work toward preventing any further damage.

This is what #ProtectBlackWomen means.

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