



Why Do We Keep Ignoring All The Black Women Who Die From Police Brutality?

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Rekia Boyd, 22, was shot in the back of her head when Dante Servin, an off-duty police officer, shot into a crowd five times on March 22, 2012 in Chicago. She died two days later.

Servin claimed Boyd's friend Antonio Cross pulled out an object from his pocket and pointed it at him. Servin thought it was a gun, and claimed he feared for his life. The object was a cell phone. Servin was charged with involuntary manslaughter but was found not guilty last month.

There's been outrage, but only about 100 people attended a rally for Boyd in New York City's Union Square on April 22, according to [For Harriet](#).

According to social justice organizers, Black women as both leaders of the Black Lives Matter movement and victims of police violence don't get enough support. They receive little of the media coverage that is often centered around black men.

Janisha Gabriel, 34, website designer of blacklivesmatter.com, helped organize the rally for Boyd with Black Lives Matter: NYC. She expected a small turnout. She said larger white-run liberal organizations respond mainly to the deaths of Black men, due to social media campaigns and news coverage in recent years.

Gabriel's goal is to grow public resistance around the deaths of Black women. She plans to launch a database in July, speakmyrname.org, which will be a collection of Black (non-trans and trans) women and girls who were victims of state, domestic and police violence. Thus far, she has about 700 names.

And while she was glad to see people come out in support of Boyd, black men in particular, she would like to see a lot more.

"I was happy to see the Black men that were there," Gabriel said. "But ultimately we need for a lot of Black men to be present in these moments."

When domestic violence is one of our leading causes of deaths and Black trans women have a [life expectancy of 35 years of age](#), we need Black men to be very present with us to have some deep conversations.”

According to Gabriel, these conversations can't take place because there's an issue with media response. She said Black women and girls as victims of violence don't make national news.

“Media has responded to Black deaths specifically because of the social media campaigns around Trayvon Martin,” Gabriel said. She calls the deaths of Black men a popular topic and said people are interested in seeing Black men as threatening.

“Black men's deaths [are] associated with the concept of Black men being inherently violent, which is why people are always justifying the deaths of Black men. The media plays into that.” Gabriel wants to change the narratives to include all Black people.

Luke “Aidge” Patterson, 35, coordinator of People's Justice, an organization focused on police accountability, said it has taken a long time for even the deaths of Black men to be recognized.

“It's only been recently the news has been covering these cases that happen and it's only because people have been rising up in mass numbers,” Patterson said. “When are we in our own communities going to hold up our sisters to be just as important as our brothers?”

Patterson said even though Black men face oppression, with the privilege men hold in society, the lives of women continue to be devalued.

“It is very real that Black men are under attack in this country, but recognizing the role of that patriarchy and that male-dominated society — it really shows within how we do undervalue the lives of women,” Patterson said.

Andrea Ritchie, 46, Soros Justice Fellow at Streetwise and Safe, an organization focused on sharing the ins and outs of encountering police as LGBTQ youth of color, said Black women are expected to play the roles of the mother, partner and sister of Black male victims of police brutality.

“Black women are saying that not only do we play those roles, we are also directly targeted by police for the same kinds of racial profiling, police brutality, and police killings,” Ritchie said. She added that sexual assault is the second most reported form of police abuse after excessive force, according to a [2010 Cato Institute study](#).

“Black women are starting to say, ‘No! It's time we start standing up for all members of our communities and we need people to stand up for us the way we stand up for them,’” Ritchie said.

Ashley Love, 35, coordinator of Black Trans Women's Lives Matter, shared some words at Boyd's rally last month.

“Black women have been the strongest organizers since slavery and Jim Crow,” Love said. “And these are our sons, our brothers and our fathers that are being murdered, but when we need help sometimes I feel that they aren’t there. I was born with a medical condition. I am trans. But I don’t always feel comfortable disclosing that in some of these spaces because then I feel like the warmth goes to coldness. And it’s like, ‘Just be a cute little cheerleader and be there for the cause, but don’t talk about all that other stuff. It’s radical.’ All of our lives matter. Segregation was wrong for Black people, segregation is also wrong for transsexual people. We are not second-class women. We shouldn’t have to use separate restrooms and drink from separate drinking fountains, but that’s what’s going on right now.”

Love said Black transsexual and transgender women should be supported as well as all Black women. According to Ritchie, Black Lives Matter co-founders Patrisse Cullors, Alicia Garza and Opal Tometi are game changers because they’re hoping to make Black women and trans people the center of the movement.

“Women aren’t often seen as leaders,” said Garza, 34. “That’s always a challenge, dealing with patriarchy. We just get ‘invisibilized’... and not just Patrisse, Opal and myself. This is largely women-led, largely queer-led and trans-led.”

Arielle Newton, 23, the editor-in-chief and founder of blackmillennials.com, said attention to the most oppressed is growing.

“Women, in particular, have been on the forefront. I feel like we have been uplifted within the movement,” Newton said. “Now can more be done? Absolutely.”

According to Ritchie, Black women victims of police brutality and misconduct are receiving attention, but not enough. Thursday, May 21, there will be a national call of action for Black women and girls to end state violence against them and remember the victims. Hopefully many more people will come out and speak up for them.