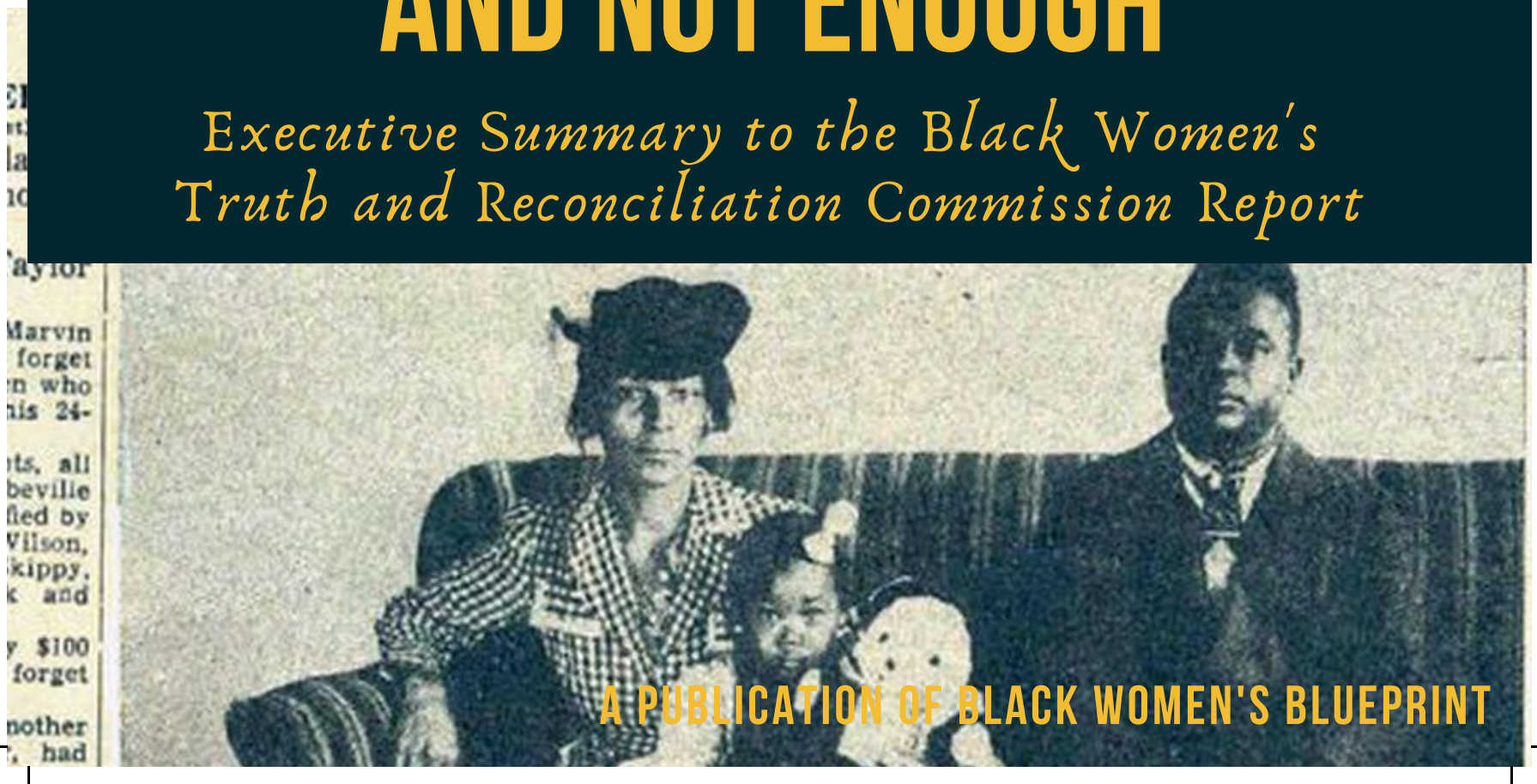
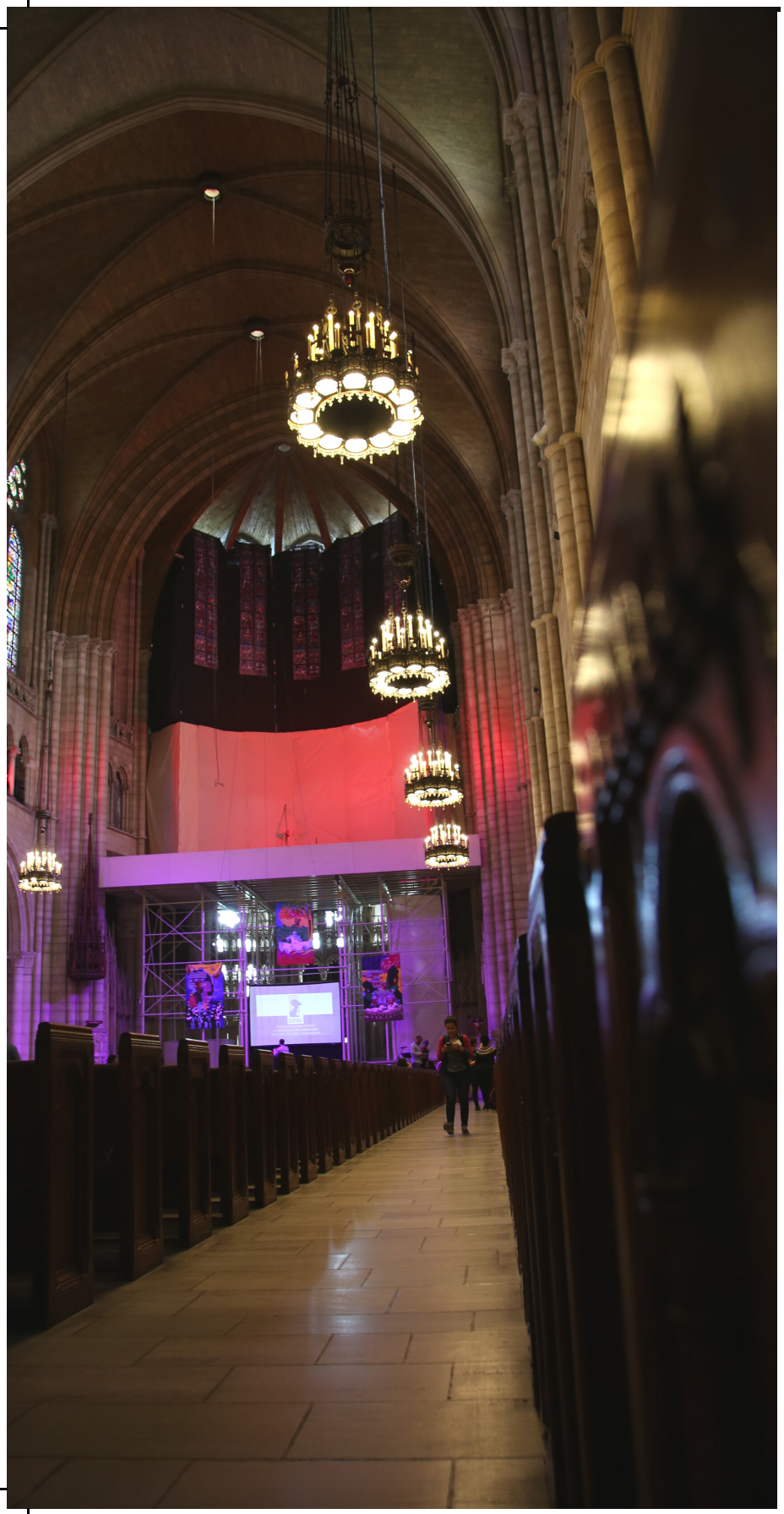
WHEN TRUTH IS JUSTICE AND NOT ENOUGH

Executive Summary to the Black Women's Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report



A PUBLICATION OF BLACK WOMEN'S BLUEPRINT



When Truth is Justice and Not Enough:

Executive Summary to the Black Women's Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report

Farah Tanis
Executive Director
Black Women's Blueprint,
Chair, Black Women's Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Sevonna Brown
Associate Executive Director
Black Women's Blueprint

Contributors to the Forthcoming Report

K.C. Wagner
Cornell School of Industrial and Labor Relations
The Yasamin Miller Group
Netsanet Tesfay, Esq.
Yolande M. S. Tomlinson, Ph.D.
Tamika Middleton

Photography

Maybelline McCoy

A Publication of Black Women's Blueprint

"I think about us, black women, a lot. How many of us are battered and how many are champions. I note the strides that have replaced the tiptoe; I watch the new configurations we have given to personal relationships, wonder what shapes are forged and what merely bent. I think about the sister no longer with us, who in rage or contentment left us to finish what should never have begun; a gender/racial war in which everybody would lose if we lost, and in which everybody would win if we won. I think about the black women who never landed who are still swimming open-eyed in the sea. I think about those of us who did land and see how their strategies for survival became our maneuvers for power."

Toni Morrison, " What Moves at the Margins"

Unfinished Business: *Regarding* The BWTRC *and this* Report

Launched in 2010, the Black Women's Truth and Reconciliation Commission is the first of its kind in the nation to focus on rape and sexual assault against Black women in the United States. Women and girls of African descent, many of whom were denied access and assistance from the criminal justice system, began to organize. We realized our own and collective transformation could not happen without public recognition and acknowledgment of the injustices and harms we had experienced. Out of these early discussions—first in New York City, and later in cities across the country such as Washington D.C., New Orleans, Mississippi, and Chicago—the BWTRC was born.

The United States is one of the few places in the world where mass rapes and brutal reproductive labor and exploitation have occurred systematically against an entire race of people—enslaved African women and girls in the U.S. South. These atrocities—racialized and sexualized in nature—occurred as the nation state laid claim to independence for white citizens, while proliferating an extortionist project which annihilated indigenous lives, colonized and extracted natural resources, and enslaved, coerced and forcibly bred African human beings.

Many people are aware of the atrocities, yet there has been little to no public outcry, no formal governmental process of recognition, no national process for justice or acknowledgement of such violations and the ongoing post-war, post-traumatic impact on survivors and their descendants. The case of Harriet Jacobs, Celia and other Black women under chattel slavery are among hundreds which can be found in U.S. archives. The case of Recy Taylor, Joan Little and other Black women under Jim Crow are somewhat documented. Recent cases like Jannie Ligons and dozens of Black women raped by a white Oklahoma City police officer, Daniel Ken Holtzclaw and the nearly 400,000 untested rape kits sitting on evidence shelves throughout the U.S. today, disproportionately belonging to Black women and girls are testament to the ongoing sexist and racist war using Black women's bodies as battleground.

This executive summary to the Black Women's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (BWTRC) report is a personal invitation to the public to be in conversation with a piece of history. Using art as diplomacy and relying on images of moments which can only be visually conveyed, this booklet unearths the painful history of rape and sexual assault against Black women and girls in America. It takes us to the place where we can change the conversation and the dominant narrative. Survivors continue to dare all of us to engage in more liberatory visions for our community, define justice on our own terms, celebrate the ways in which we have survived and describe the truth telling which took place through this groundbreaking work by Black women.

It was our grounding in the words of Beverly Guy Sheftall, Maya Angelou, Ida B. Wells, Johnetta B. Cole, Paula Giddings, Patricia Hill Collins, Pearl Cleage, Loretta Ross, Akasha Gloria Hull, bell hooks, Deborah Gray White, Barbara Smith, Angela Davis, Beth Richie, Myriam Merlet, Fania Davis, Elsa Barkley Brown, Patricia McFadden, Ruby Sales, Julianne Malveaux, Demita Frazier, Cheryl Clarke and Byllye Avery, that we learned we could deploy a host of voices and ideas and pre-existing truths to scaffold our stories of rape and sexual abuse.

The forthcoming report is for all the girls, the women, the sisters left in back alleys, in heaps on their bedroom or living room floors. It is for those left in building hallways, staircases, backroom parties and basement garages.

We stand with you.

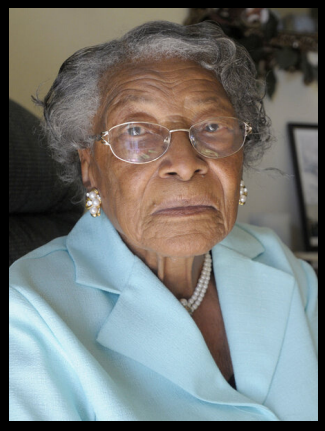
Farah Tanis, Executive Director
Black Women's Blueprint

The Commissioners

Our cadre of Commissioners are leaders specifically in gender justice and racial justice movements, transnational and Black feminists and womanists. This independent, representative, and competent cadre in collaboration with a BWB Steering Committee was charged with co-creating and leading the TRC. We strategically nominated and elected Black women and allies with visible track records in racial justice advocacy, cultural and academic production known to move beyond conversations almost exclusively informed by a paradigm, revolving around very valid but singular experiences of Black men and boys as victims of racist violence. We nominated and elected Commissioners committed to presenting fuller examinations, public debate and actions about racialized violations which include sexualized violence within and outside our communities against Black women, girls including those identifying as LGBTQ.

Recy Taylor, Civil Rights Icon, Anti-Rape Advocate, Inducted, Museum of Women's Resistance
Dr. Amrita Kapur, Senior Associate, Gender Justice Program, The International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) (2014-2016)
Dr. Beverly Guy-Sheftall, Black Feminist Scholar, Anna Julia Cooper Professor of Women's Studies and English, Spelman College
Ejim Dike, Executive Director, U.S. Human Rights Network
Lynn Rosenthal, Vice President for Strategic Partnerships, the National Domestic Violence Hotline. White House Advisor on Violence Against Women (2009-2015)
Monika Johnson-Hostler, Executive Director, NC Coalition Against Sexual Assault and National Alliance to End Sexual Violence
Loretta Ross, Human Rights and Reproductive Justice Advocate, Co-founder, National Coordinator of the SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective
Ruby Sales, Civil Rights Activist, Writer, Mobilizer, Founder, Spirit House
Jamia Wilson, Movement Builder, Storyteller, Feminist Activist, Executive Director, Women's Media Center
Quentin Walcott, Movement Maker, Anti-Violence Activist, Co-Executive Director CONNECT, NYCStephanie Colon, Community Organizer, Anti-Oppression Activist, Poet, Artist
Agunda Okeyo, Author, Writer, Activist, Women's Media Center, Salon, The Daily Beast, and Indiewire
Alisa Del Tufo, Activist, Oral Historian, Founder, Threshold Collaborative
Alicia Garza, Activist, Speaker, Organizer, Co-Founder, #BlackLivesMatter
Farah Tanis, BWTRC Chair, Co-Founder, Black Women's Blueprint and Museum of Women's Resistance

The Commissioners: Truth Keepers



Recy Taylor

Stephanie Colon

Alisa Del Tufo

Ejim Dike

Alicia Garza

Dr. Beverly Guy-Sheftall

Monika Johnson-Hostler

Dr. Amrita Kapur

Agunda Okeyo

Lynn Rosenthal

Loretta Ross

Ruby Sales

Farah Tanis

Jamia Wilson

Quentin Walcott

Farah Tanis, Chair, BWTRC and Recy Taylor (1919-2017), Commissioner, BWTRC in Abbeville, Alabama

In January of 2016, Black Women's Blueprint rode down to Alabama to meet with Recy Taylor to obtain her blessing as we prepared for the day of public tetstimony of the BWTRC.

In Memoriam
CASSANDRA Q. BUTTS 1965-2016

Cassandra Butts, lawyer, policy expert, Senior Advisor to the U.S. Mission to the United Nations, former Deputy White House Counsel and a nominee to the ambassadorship to the Bahamas, died after a brief illness on May 25, 2016, three months after public testimony of the BWTRC. She was just 50 years old. To us Cassandra Butts will always be remembered as the way-maker who took our calls and called members of the U.S. Mission leadership to the table with Black Women's Blueprint. One of the few African-Americans at the U.S. Mission to the U.N., Cassandra was the women's rights advocate and the visionary pioneer who opened the doors for Black women and girls, trans women, survivors of sexual violence and reproductive violation in the U.S. so they could stand within the walls of the United Nations both to speak their truths and exert their full rights.

Reckoning with Grief: Writing The Report on the Black Women's Truth and Reconciliation Commission

The truth still looms large and as we write this report and we echo what we suspect many transcribers of Truth Commissions the world over have themselves exclaimed: "As you type, you don't know you are crying until you feel and see the tears falling on your hands."
-Chief Transcriber, Truth and Reconciliation Commission, South Africa.

The grief experienced while writing this report cannot be overstated. Several persons and consultants have attempted to write this report, but the act of examining and translating the stories, the terrifying experiences of survivors, reading their responses to "What will it take to end rape?" has not only been daunting-- it has on several occasions engulfed writers in profound states of grief and desolation.

To avoid retraumatization, we gave ourselves permission to wait, to pause and to break at several points in time, sometimes to re-engage in our healing journeys once again. For those writers and transcribers who did not identify as survivors, the task of holding the stories of survivors, the review of video footage from the BWTRC, all at once, inspired compassion, triggered memory, but most of all, evoked despair and immobilization. The report illustrates the truth-telling which took place through this groundbreaking work by Black women.

Through the report we share a blueprint with people who want to reckon with the Black past and present. Central to that Black past are the experiences of Black women and girls. This report will never be able to tell all our stories though they exist in books, film, plays, archives and repositories across the country. Find the whole truth. Tell your children. Use this report as a resource for telling part of our history, and never forget ours is a history of the most vast stories from diaspora to diaspora, and from survivor heart to survivor heart.

Our Mandates
Truth, Justice, Healing and Reconciliation

As an independent body led by survivors and comprised of civil society, the Black Women's Truth and Reconciliation Commission set out to examine the history, context, causes, chronology, and consequence of rape/sexual assault on Black women. The Commission established mandates in the pursuit of truth, justice and healing for survivors of sexual assault and to reconcile them to themselves, to their communities or to their families if they desired such a process. The pursuit of recognition of human rights violations against Black survivors of rape underpins each of the mandates.

Truth: Unearth the truth of survivors by providing a platform for speaking and sharing their narratives. Part of this mandate has included critical participatory action research and multi-media (film, audio, photo) documentation of survivors lived experiences across three-generations beginning with the watershed case of Recy Taylor in 1944 to 2016 marking the year Barack Obama, the first Black president of the U.S., left office.

Justice: Strengthen our voices and capacity as women of African descent to develop and set our own standards of social and economic justice, as well as advocate for state and systemic change.

Healing: Create a safe space and programs for survivors of sexual violence to recover and engage in strategies for healing.

Reconciliation: Provide the spaces and tools needed for survivors to engage in processes of reconciliation with themselves, family and community, and create opportunities for organizing on issues of restoration, repair and reparations. In these strategies, survivors will lead the way in determining inter-racial partnerships or partnerships with Black men to promote intra-community reconciliation and public deliberations using antiracist, feminist and human rights frameworks.

Using Art and Culture as Survival and Vehicle

Every February, from 2011-2016 we engaged our communities in creative, artistic events that centered sexualized violence squarely within the context of civil rights and women's lives. These events aimed to provoke an expanded notion of racial justice within the celebration of Black liberation struggles and campaigns within Black History Month each year.

The use of African drums, blues, jazz, contemporary dance and vocals were among the art forms used to garner Black community support for our endeavor—a Black Women's Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Sexual Assault. Poets, activists and actors joined our plight and offered inspiring accounts about sexual identity, intimacy, consent, agency, pleasure, desire and the erotic. All the while, "never forget we were sexually assaulted, and most of us the products of the rape of foremothers" was a forthcoming reckoning.

Over the five years, brazen and spellbinding annual performances of our *Mother Tongue Monologues* explored African-American women's complex histories of struggle and triumph, foregrounding the notion that a violation of human rights through the body of a Black women or girl, should provoke outrage in all of us. We adopted the words of Black feminists, womanists, sexual revolutionaries and shared feats towards sexual liberation that have taken place since the middle passage. We spoke of various prototypes and constructions of Black female sexuality from the "Jezebel", to the "Tragic Mulatto", the "Venus Hottentot" to the "Video Vixen".

Mother Tongue Monologues were hosted at the National Black Theater in Harlem, at the Brecht Forum, the Brooklyn Museum, Medgar Evers College, Roulette Theater and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

Accounting for the Sexual Assault of Black Women

The narratives and accounts gathered by the Black Women's Truth and Reconciliation Commission affirms that while legal slavery has ended, the rape and sexual torture of Black women and the justification for this torture still continues.

From 2010 - 2016, The BWTRC collected evidence from a variety of sources including: public hearings and testimonies, small events and art-based theater performances like *Mother Tongue Monologues* held annually from 2010-2016 specifically to break silences about sexual assault from survivors and perpetrators. Additionally, we recorded disclosures made to us via social media and face-to-face in meetings. The BWTRC also relied on publicly available data sources. A four-year survey designed by survivors using a Community Participatory Action Research (CPAR) model, entitled "*10 Questions About Rape"* provided an opportunity for survivors to record their experiences with sexual assault and their recommendations for change.

Of the participants surveyed using this survivor led CPAR instrument:
70% had been sexually assaulted before the age of 18.
Of that 70%, the most commonly reported age of a **first sexual assault was 5 years old**.
91% of the Black survivors who took the survey identified the harm doer as Black.
11 times - the most number of times one survivor was raped
6 years the most number of years a survivor was raped until she lost count

These numbers are staggering. If nothing else they warrant further research into the prevalence of rape and other sexual assaults in our communities.

Today as 60 to 80 percent of rapes go unreported according a survey by the U.S. Department of Justice, we are under siege from within, at the hands of our fellow Black brothers. Eight out of ten rapes are committed by someone known to the victim. Moreover, the extent of the backlash by Black women against the survivors who accused R. Kelly, Bill Cosby and others of rape, kidnapping and sex trafficking indicates a perpetuation of rape culture which is sadly endorsed by too many in our communities. There is no pain as virulent as the one that is inflicted by our own.

00 To Rape Wife? Ala. White
Take Offer To Recy Taylor Ma

D ATWATER
Staff Correspondent)
MERY, Ala. —
n't $600 enough
our wife?"
illie Lee Taylor
t.

to white Marvin
anted him to forget
six white men who
tured Recy, his 24-

for his clients, all
rominent Abbeville
d been identified by
rre Hugo Wilson,
gs, Sam Skippy,
Dillard York and

illing to pay $100
aylor would forget

e of Recy, mother
old daughter, had
in every town in
very Negro com-
nity. The Grand
el within a week
of the few cases
t to court of white
Negro woman.
his offer of $100
"settlement."
ut "No." But that
White came back
ore pressure and
leveled at the
He said, "Come
ll tell you." He
and Willie an-

Dismissed
ll have stuck to
the Grand Jury

VICTIM OF WHITE ALABAMA RAPIST

First published photo of Mrs. Recy Taylor, victim of six white rapists in Alabama, and her little family is this picture received from their refuge in an Alabama city some distance from their hometown of Abbeville, where the crime occurred. With the young mother and daughter, little Joyce Lee Taylor, are

Our Pilgramage South: Visiting Recy Taylor in Abbeville, Alabama

As a part of the work of the Black Women's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, it was critical that we sit with Recy Taylor, the grand-lady of the BWTRC whose assault marks the watershed moment in the BWTRC's imperative for calling for truth and justice for survivors of sexual violence. We sat with Recy Taylor to obtain her permission to continue with the work of our Truth Commission.

Black Women's Blueprint's regular visits to Recy Taylor were critical precursors to the first transnational convening of the Black Women's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (BWTRC). This historic event commenced a transnational dialogue and reckoning between survivors of violence; their advocates; international and national policymakers; activists; artists and other cultural influencers on how to end sexual violence against Black women and girls once and for all.

In 2011, the Alabama House of Representatives issued a formal apology to Mrs. Recy Taylor for the brutal rape she sustained at the hands of six white men in 1944. No charges were ever levied against her attackers and two grand juries failed to indict them. Taylor's advocacy since has been the primary source of inspiration in shaping the Black Women's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (BWTRC)'s values; honing political strategies; and providing hope to thousands of Black survivors around the country over decades.

The BWTRC committed to unpacking the impact of racialized and sexualized violence over three generations since 1944 precisely because it was a specific turning point when Recy Taylor became a sister-survivor and sparked the early Civil Rights Movement, joining the ranks alongside Rosa Parks and so many unnamed Black warrior women fighting for the right to bodily and spiritual integrity. To us, 1944 represents the casting off of 400 years of slavery and the exploitative and brutal sexual terror experienced at the hands of White supremacists, and the articulation of a civil rights politic based on the leadership, vision, and spiritual brilliance of Black women and girls specifically.

"Who come to see me," - Recy Taylor

“Who come to see me?” Recy looked over her glasses at us as she said this to the attending nursing staff who guided us to where she was watching a game show on television amidst other residents at her nursing home . She smiled as we walked up to greet her. She exclaimed with excitement and presented a quiet but fierce smile in silence for the first sacred moments of our visit. A hum landed between us. Recy had a voice that was butterscotch sweet, and she used it to sing praises to God and tell stories about her "baby brother" Robert. Her voice was sweet yet stern--she knew how to communicate exactly what she wanted and exactly how she planned to go about getting it. She spoke of her daughter, of raising her siblings, and of Rock Hill Holiness Church--where she was abducted from by seven white men, six of whom are responsible for her gang-rape. In all we know about Recy, her love for God could not be missed. In fact the lifeblood of Recy’s survivor narrative is in her relationship with God.

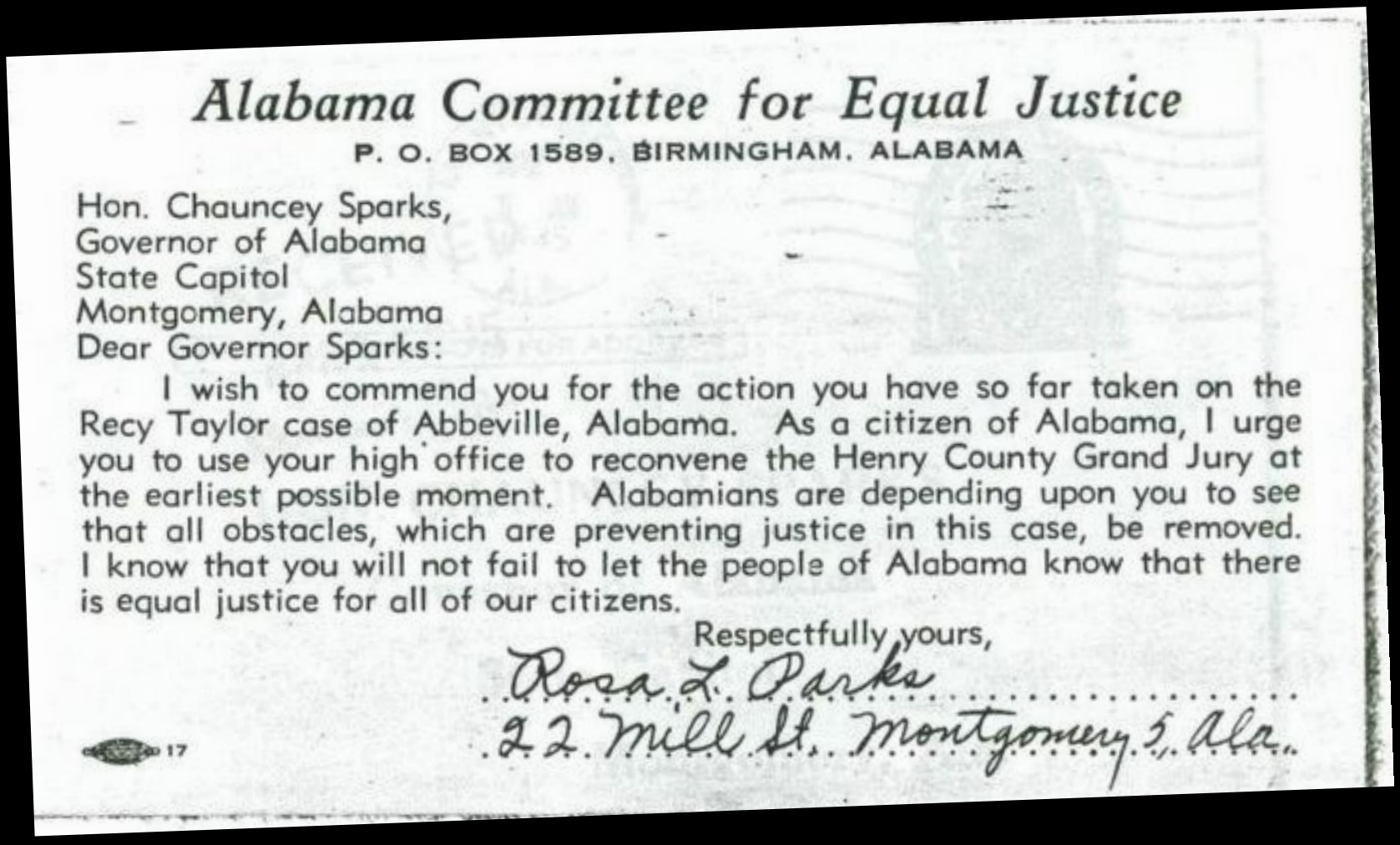
Recy joked with us and kept a tune going as we talked. She asked us if we liked her hair and nails-- she had just gotten them done for the holiday and wanted them to be noticed, she remarked while fluffing the lapel on her leopard print blouse. She had wit that was spellbinding. These remarkable ways of Recy had us not only by her side from the beginning--but also inspirited our determination in holding sacred, Recy’s story.

That afternoon, an overcast day in July, we sat in the cafeteria of the intimate nursing home in Abbeville, Alabama where Recy Taylor told us of her healing and recovery following the traumatic 1944 fall day when she was kidnapped and raped by six white men. Between hymns, laughter, and casting prayers, Ms. Recy’s memories emerged, easefully pouring in and out of our conversations like honey escaping through a comb. She shared intimacies and even the major life-long consequences of the assault and snapshots of life after rape fell like polaroids from her mouth.

Her act of resistance is in and of itself a home truth and theology. Her full story is a pedagogy for this movement. For us, it is critical that we examine the way this nation, and the current feminist movement, is choosing to remember Recy Taylor. As survivors and leaders of the Black feminist organization Black Women's Blueprint, we gathered at the feet of Recy Taylor on multiple occasions, bowing to her bold act to come forward and share her story with the world.

We see this work as a witness statement, a cultural ledger, and symbolic eclipse of the legacy of the Black Women's Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Recy Taylor's advocacy, serving as a pillar of communal ceremony in tribute to the long life that Recy lived and dedicated to survivors. The testimonies of Black women and girls who share the struggle and survivorship of rape speak of the miracles we have created and built between diasporas of memory.

We are honored to ensure Recy's legacy is both re-membered and the wave of revolution continues to meet us on the shores of truth and justice.



Alabama Committee for Equal Justice

P. O. BOX 1589, BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

Hon. Chauncey Sparks,
Governor of Alabama
State Capitol
Montgomery, Alabama
Dear Governor Sparks:

I wish to commend you for the action you have so far taken on the Recy Taylor case of Abbeville, Alabama. As a citizen of Alabama, I urge you to use your high office to reconvene the Henry County Grand Jury at the earliest possible moment. Alabamians are depending upon you to see that all obstacles, which are preventing justice in this case, be removed. I know that you will not fail to let the people of Alabama know that there is equal justice for all of our citizens.

Respectfully yours,

Rosa L. Parks

22 Mill St. Montgomery 5, Ala.

17

Recy Taylor was a 24-year-old mother when she was abducted at gunpoint and gang raped by a group of white men in Alabama in 1944. An activist named Rosa Parks was sent to investigate the attack. Taylor's case, and a number of others like hers, helped spark the civil rights movement.

"I just want him to know who I am..."

Recy Taylor in dialogue with the BWTRC regarding President Barack Obama, January 2016

Petition to President Barack Obama
written September 13, 2016

President Barack Hussein Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

September 13, 2016

Dear President Obama,

We, the undersigned women of African descent across ethnicities including anti-violence advocates, survivors, activists, scholars, organizational, and spiritual leaders who convened the first Black Women's Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Sexual Violence between 2010 and 2016, wish to address the President of the United States, Barack Hussein Obama.

"I just want him to know who I am." This is what 96 year old Recy Taylor, a civil rights leader who worked with Rosa Parks to address rape in the Jim Crow South and a survivor of sexual violence herself, said after a visit to the White House and being asked what she wished she could say to you, given the chance Mr. President. Recy Taylor's 1944 rape case is well-documented in Alabama governmental and legal documents, the NAACP and research sources. Recy is an African-American woman from Abbeville in Henry County, Alabama. On September 3, 1944, Ms. Taylor, was leaving church when she was kidnapped and brutally gang-raped by six white men. Even though the men admitted the rape to authorities, two all-white grand juries declined to indict Taylor's assailants. Ms. Taylor's rape and the subsequent court cases were among the first instances of nationwide protest and activism among the African-American community and ended up providing an early organizational spark for the Civil Rights movement with Rosa Parks at the helm of the anti-rape movement.

In 2011, after decades of advocacy efforts put forth by her brother Robert Corbitt, the Alabama House of Representatives apologized on behalf of the state "for its failure to prosecute Recy Taylor's attackers." The failure to dispense justice in the 1944 case of Recy Taylor is not surprising, but symptomatic of the larger failing of a society where the intersection of racism and sexism has failed Black women and girls for over 400 years. For example, "We Charge Genocide," a petition submitted to the United Nations by the Civil Rights Congress in 1951, documented thousands of incidents of violence against African-Americans. While the modern Black civil rights movement if the 1960's ushered in a formal end to Jim Crow era segregation and violence, it has taken decades to gain a modicum of mainstream acknowledgement of the multiple and covert ways that racial apartheid functions in the United States. It is still not widely accepted or acknowledged.

When examined through a gendered lens, it becomes clear how Black women's unique experiences with violence are often seen as afterthoughts when addressed at all. A number of scholars and advocates, for example, have documented the ways in which the criminal justice system still functions as a form of a new Jim Crow. Yet, for all the acknowledgement of this new-era racial apartheid and pervasive abuse by law enforcement officials, it has mainly focused on the torture and killing of Black men. The result is that violence against Black women and girls, especially sexual violence, often remains invisible and this non-recognition serves to perpetuate the harm being done. However, Mr. President, whether by police or non-state actors, the rape and sexual torture of Black women and the justification of this torture still continue. The U.S. continues to be one of the few places in the world where rapes have occurred systematically against an entire race of people, especially the Black women among these people, and there has been no outcry, no processes for justice, and still little to no acknowledgement of such violations officially and its impact on Black women and girls today."

We, the undersigned, ask you, Mr. President, to do what no other president before you has done -- acknowledge the history of sexual violence against Black women and girls during slavery and the sexual violence that has been maintained through the enforcement of Slave Codes, Black Codes, and Jim Crow segregation laws, forming the basis of de jure and de facto discrimination. We ask you to acknowledge the rapes which continue to occur, whose motivations are rooted in the structural racism and sexism of today. In an era when human rights are being championed by courageous leaders worldwide, we have witnessed countries fulfilling their obligation of the duty of memory to the most systematically marginalized members of their societies. Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen recently issued a statement acknowledging the human rights abuses that the indigenous peoples suffered at the hands of colonialism and imperialism, and Germany recently formally acknowledged their role in the Herero genocide in Namibia.

As the nation that is looked upon as a beacon and model for human rights, we in the United States have also witnessed you, Mr. President, acknowledge Black women and girls' plight during your 2015 remarks at the 45th Annual Congressional Black Caucus Phoenix Award Dinner. We have also read about your position on feminism in Glamour Magazine with a declaration that "this is what a feminist looks like." We know that never before has a president of the United States been such a champion of women's human rights. No other president has come so close to the much needed recognition and national apology for the systematic sexual humiliation and dehumanization of Black women and girls in the United States.

To make a public statement means to acknowledge that the violence needs to stop. If we as a nation refuse to talk about it, if we as a nation continue to be silent, we as a nation cannot move forward. For you see, Mr. President, one of the horrors of rape is the silence of victims and survivors. Another is the silence of bystanders and loved ones. However, one of the most deafening horrors is the silence of a nation and its leaders. Silence only serves to support the ones who cause harm. First Lady Michelle Obama has already broken one silence, inspiring us during the Democratic National Convention when she said "every morning, I wake up in a house that was built by slaves."

Everyday Black women and girls wake up, exist, live, survive and thrive in a nation built by our enslaved ancestors' hands and birthed by their wombs.

We the undersigned, understand that recognition does not equate with justice, and for many of the testifiers, and survivors more broadly, justice in the form of of the legal system will never be adjudicated. However, recognition does facilitate healing, both personally, as stated by a testifier that who shared that "once I broke through that invisible barrier of denial, I was ready to acknowledge the transition from victim to survivor," and collectively as a nation.

Like Recy Taylor, we, too, just want you to know who we are Mr. President. Mr. President, let 2016 be the year where Black women and girls across the nation, not just those in the White House, hear our President say: "Black women survivors of America's past and those living today, I hear you. I see you, and you are recognized."

The following signatures are listed as they were obtained after circulation by Black Women's Blueprint. We thank and acknowledge those who signed once, twice, or as their heart led them.

We the undersigned.....

Ericka Dixon
Sevonna Brown
Christi Ketchum
Sofia Groopman
Farah Tanis
Shawnda Chapman Brown
Portia D. Brown
Lynn Roberts
Albert Delgado
Darnell Moore
Ahmad Greene-Hayes
Lynn Mercerdi
Dr. Tyffani Dent
Brittany Wright
Hari Ziyad
Kathryn Rolland
Rebecca Browne
Yolo Akili
Sara K.
Sarah Noble
Ana Barreto
Beatrice Anderson
Ruben Kennedy
Christina Jaus
Johndalyn Armstrong
Cynthia Kitt
Verushka Gray
Erica T.
Domonique Freeman
CT Shim
Kenisha Coy
Luciana Polney
Beverly Guy-Sheftall
Efe Osaren
Tasha Robinson
Cassandra Ritas
Tiffany McFadden
Benjamin Griffith
Aileen Smith
Tynesha McHarris
Cheryl Currie
Yaneris G.
Sheba Lo
Lenelle Lewis
Lavon Morris-Grant

Janisha Gabriel
Daniela Zarate
Jill Humphries
Nyle Fort
CeCelia Falls
Sher Tillet
Zachary Miceli
Monica Dennis
Nina Angela Mercer
Danielle McGuire
Isabel Abraham-Raveson
Angela Myers
Carla Patterson
Jad S.
Dorothy Patterson
Imelda B.
Maurern Silverman
Joanne Smith
LeConte Dill
Michael Wiseman
Terri Herring
Jacob Brown
Shapel LaBorde
Melody Ledwon
Marilyn Louis
Amber Aldredge
Sarita Smith
Ashley Terrell
Tanim Awwal
Betty Bolden
Alexandra Wilcox
Alexa King
Sally Laskey
Keslie Spottsville
Seanniece Bamiro
Yvonne Holmes
Justin French
Tammie Ross
Tonya Lovelace-Davis
Monet Phillips
T. DeWitt Smith, Jr.
Kerlisha Broomes
Linda Dixon
Vanessa Green
Jelani Anglin

Cheryl Springs
Genesis Aquino
Mariko Meyer
K.C. Washington
Alexandra Keegan
Portia Brown
Tasasha Henderson
Alexis Posey
Jan Christiansen
Taina Bien-Aime
Nicole Lilian
Stephen Fitzstephens
Janine Abuyuan
Sheila Rainey
Emily Parker
Tahir Della
Irviennne Goldson
Lisa Richardson
Sarah Washington
Cashel Campbell
Brienne Colston
Maria Ramos-Faulkner
Donna Holland
Mira Yusef
Michellle May-Curry
Shawnee Benton Gibson
Chris Riegg
Monica Simpson
Kira Aiken
Michelle Adzido
Jacqueline Johnson
Marlene Ware
Claudine Saliba-Rawls
Monica Casper
Regina Langley
Terra Brown
Deborah Hope
Dayanara Marte
Erica Flashman
Betty Reardon
Kathy Pierce
Carmen Williams
Yamil Anglada
Kelsey Koger
Delores Murphy

Capricia Davis
Dora Howard
M. Scott
Shriellya Stallings
Crystal Jones
Tara Daniels
Waffiyah Saleem
Christine Nemeth
Selena Jones
Raven Ealey
Victoria W.
Joelle Schofield
Corynn Loebs
Daryl Fortson
Jane Parker
Sally MacNichol
Rasheena Perry
Michelle Jennings
Charisse Audra Collier
Beatrice Santa-Wood
Leah Dirkse
Masani McGee
Ever Saskya
Aida Fitzgerald
Chanelle Helm
Brigid Turner
Jamila Childs
Steve Petrey
Siobhan Dingwall
Gloria Jones
Domineek Martin
Latoria White
David Canton
LaToya Anderson
Cassidy Green
Ugochuku Nwachuku
Jay Sterrenberg
Angela Lee
Aaliyah Cobbs
Angela Blount
Erica Flashman
Betty Reardon
Kathy Pierce
Carmen Williams
Yamil Anglada

We the undersigned.....

Amanda Bartell
Shannon Heady
Walter Barillas-Schwartz
Rachel Bryson
Keisha Varnell
William Thomas
Trish Smith
Arlene Spark
Belva Flowe
Mary Catherine Benge
Verna Edwards
Sharon Johnson
James Edward Heck
Michelle Ravenell-Henderson
Khourin Wilkins
Mishawn Glover
Sabrina Cowan
Wendy Cartwright
Rachael Clifford
Blaise Ormond
Dionna Campanella
Christine Schmidt
Rahel Tebo
Ebony Graves
Candace Riddley
Melody Stone
Noelle Fries
Cydney Taylor
Quilli Musgrave
Mayra Salgado
Sherri Sturgis
Ha Tran
Maxcine Ellis-Lopez
Charity Woods
Michelle Moore
Nancy Morisseau
Domonique Charleston
Andrea Ritchie
Marc Pilisuk
Amerah Henrene Shabazz-Bridges
Lisa Evans
Janine Lue

Janisha Gabriel
Lena Williamson
Naomi Imbrogno
Anita Casey
Stacia Frederick
Rae V.
Rebecca Lee
Alyssa Shaw
Kim Catchings
Maureen Silverman
Georgia Berry
Kimberly Heyliger
Michelle Curry
Joyce Smith
Kathy French
Denise Neal
Kimberly Sweeney
Olivia Dowd
Akeel St.Vil
Lucero Jorge
Stephanie Mitchell
Gabriele McAdory
Carol Olson
Brittany M.
Chiquita Williams
Joyce Taylor
Alma Thornton
Olumide Adeniyi
Kirsten Vega-Tatterfield
Gregory Manning
Stephanie Battle-Horsky
Rev. Dr. Lorena Parrish
Rachael Kaufman
Tajh Sutton
Mathilde Milteau
Karen Tronsgard-Scott
Jessica Violetta
Patti Seger
Mishy Lesser
Gerni Oster
Deborah Haynes
Mihika Sapru
Alexis Stanley
Mike Serpe
Sue Lob
Tracy Hobson

Ann Ellman
Linda Winston
Kristen Miller
Lindsay Mapp
Courtney Aucone
Thomas Beauford
Kimyatta Caldwell
Anne Smith
Allison Bones
Rev. Vickye Robinson
Pennie Meyers
Michaelah Valentine
Mary Fontanazza
Chani Waterhouse
Hannah Silverstein
Anneliese Brown
Clarise McCants
Kenneth Wenger
Andrea Eitelman
Cassandra Ferrell
Nicolas Frias
Lana Nelson
Barbara Webster
Autumn Burke
Bradley Adams
Shirnell Lewis
JE Filipello
David Ruffner
Bertha Guerra
Linda Manning
Lani Grigsby
Jeri Altman
Tyesha Crawford
Sarah Ohmer
Rodney Wood
Henry Smith
Cat Ransom
Arelis Figueroa
Barry Lockwood
Phyllis Keun
Laura Grimes
Rye Jackson
Mareah Madison
Sarah Shalewitz
John Washington
Terrell Portwine-Nurse

Alexis Akridge
Leila Macbeth
Leigh-Anne Francis
Elijah Wallen
Rachel Gibson
Roe Owolewa
John Hanright
Bobbi Gagne
Portia "Zeus" Walton
Susana Fried
Jazzika Matthews
Edwina Dickey
Meridith Baier
Katharine Lloyd
Trista Pior
Elizabeth Giffen
Chinyere Okunji
Jim Phillips
Shannon K.
Jeremiah Ryle
Jessica Price
David Blanchard
Richard Huss
Jerlyne C.
Taylor Lamb
Lorena Estrella
Samantha Scott
Esperanza Dodge
Keelia Riegg
Thasfia Chowdhury
Ericka Dunbar
Carol Grannum
Rachel McCave
Gillian Sobocinski
LaTisha McGee
Jasmin Myers
Abby Cabrera
Kathryn Little
Sharon Hinton
Alyce Tyler
Alia Phelps
Omnia Tucker
Kiara Smith
Renada McGuire
Clifton McMillan Jr
Yolanda Johnson

Truth

The Black Women's Truth and Reconciliation Commission exposes the systematic rape of women and girls of African descent over the last four centuries as an intentionally suppressed, and state-sanctioned practice with lasting implications on the possibilities for Black women and girls to achieve social equity and improved quality-of-life.

Some of us have been holding our breath for 400 years.

Farah Tanis, Chair of the Black Women's Truth and Reconciliation Commission

The BWTRC was not an attempt to document all the violations against Black women. It was a commitment to bring to light what has been largely missing from public discourse in America: the root causes of sexual violence against women of African descent in the United States.

Rape in the United States is a systemic crisis that began before the formation of the nation-state. Historically in the United States, Black women were subjected to sex-specific violations such as rape, forced pregnancies, and other gender-based violations. As Black women, they were subjected to chattel slavery and were therefore reduced to being viewed, treated, and consumed as property, and not as human beings. There is a plethora of literature on this dual burden placed on enslaved women.

A review of the colonial period revealed a litany of sexual offenses and atrocities committed by slave owners against Black women. According to Priscilla B. Hayner, a leading transitional justice scholar, "[it] is impossible for any short-term commission to fully detail the extent and effect of widespread abuses that took place over many years, or, for most, to investigate every single case brought to it." Even still, we worked tirelessly to name the harm, violations and assault against Black women and girls across four generations.

The BWTRC documented human rights violations against Black women during slavery, Jim Crow, the Civil Rights Era and the Violence Against Women Era to record the truth as told by the survivors. The Black Women's Truth and Reconciliation Commission creates space for witnesses and testifiers to understand, learn and address these historical wrongs. Because, "without some form of accounting, past atrocities inevitably fuel future ones."

Holding space

Bearing witness

Believing survivors

Trusting Black women

Helping each other find the center-point of listening

A Litany of Sexual Offenses- Testifier

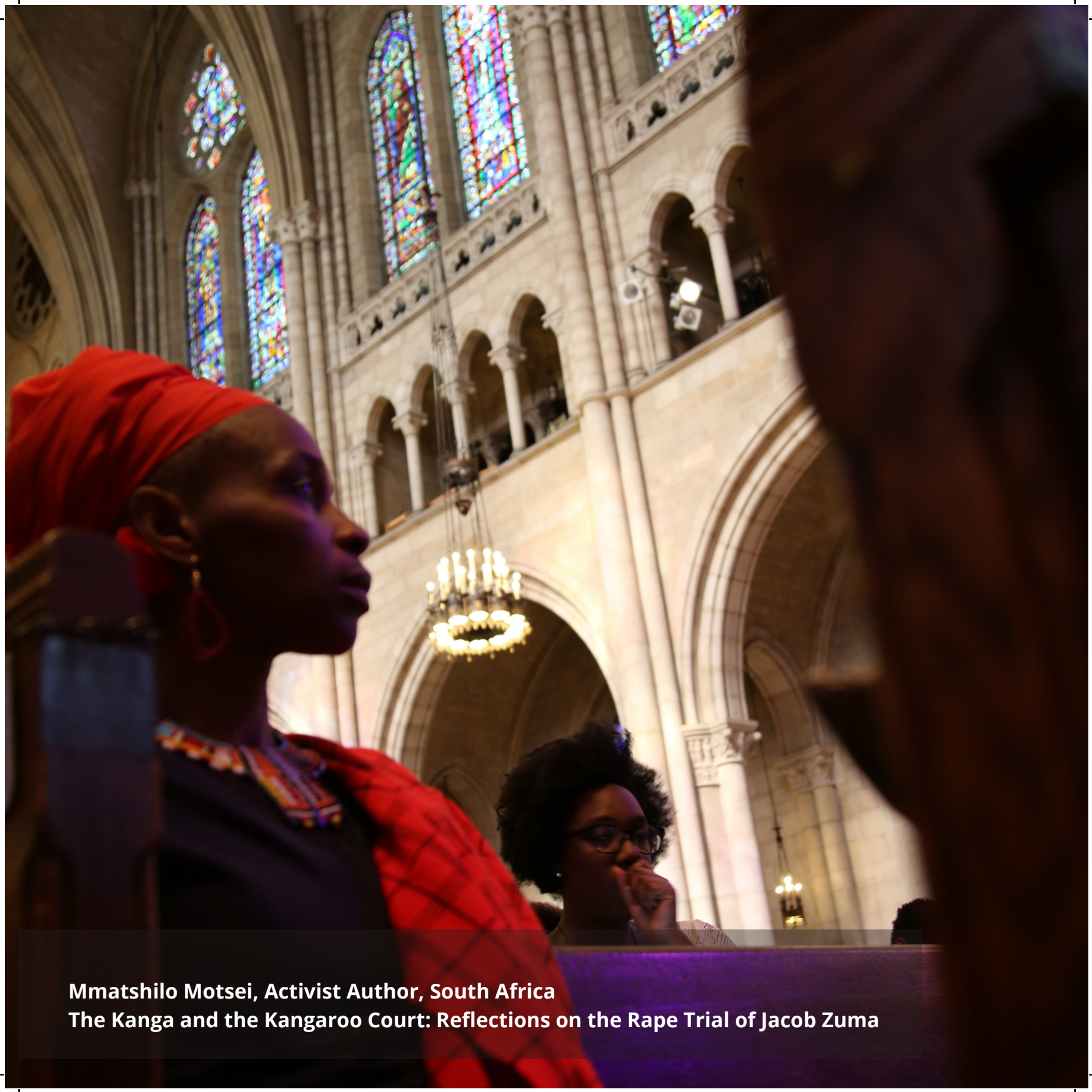
I remember it like it was yesterday! My mom's new boyfriend always looked at me funny. One night he snuck into my room and made me take off my clothes and told me to be quiet. His weight was heavy. When I realized what he was doing, I tried pushing him off but he was too big. It hurt like hell, I cried but I was embarrassed. Why didn't I say something? This happened for about a year, and when I did get the courage, he threatened to kill me. Why didn't I say something? Why did God take me through that? Why did this happen? Why didn't I say something?

Q1. What Will It Take to End Sexual Assault?

"The Return of Christ"

Survivor, Black Women's Truth and Reconciliation Commission Survey Respondent

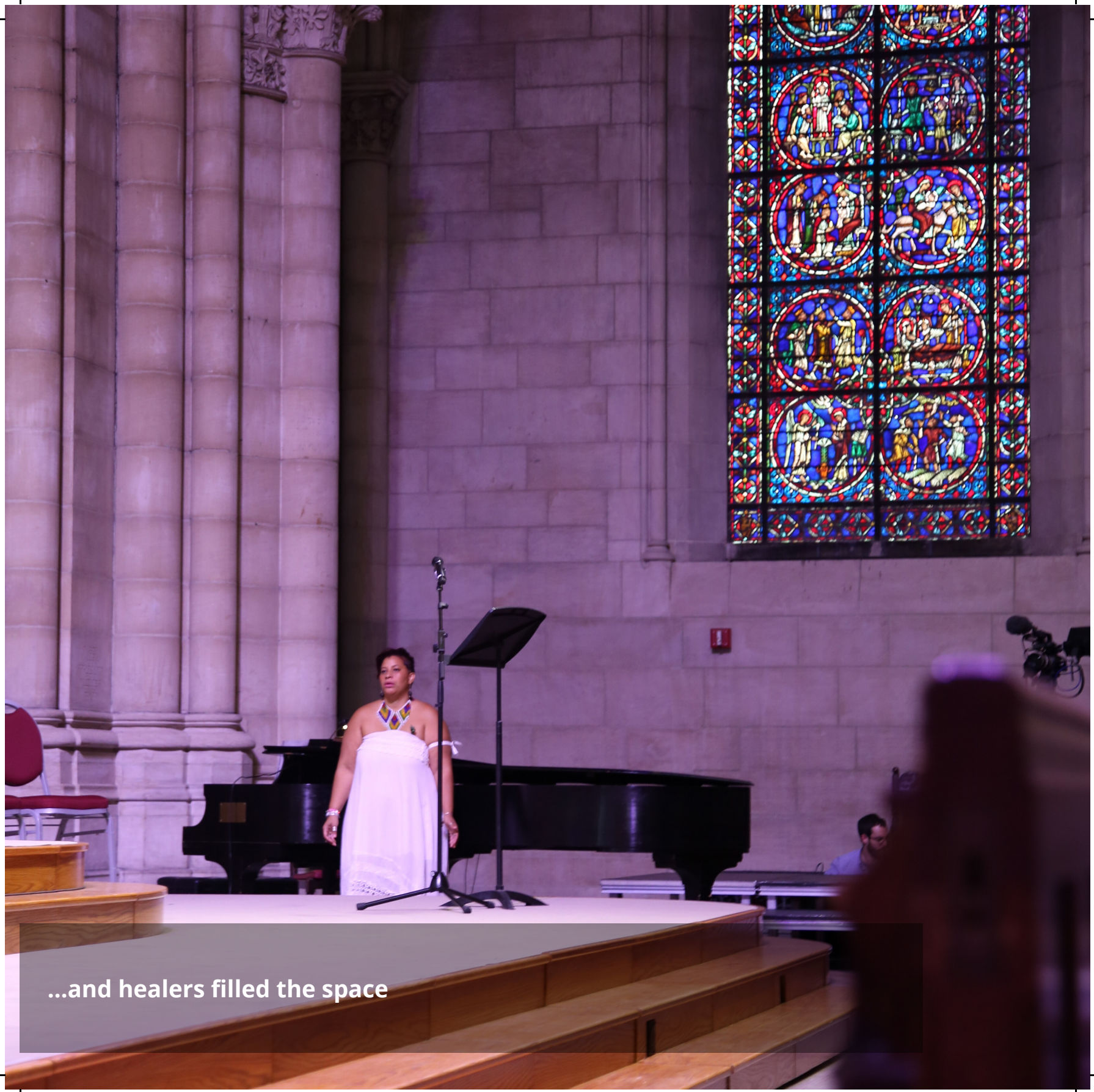
Standing in the gap



Mmatshilo Motsei, Activist Author, South Africa
The Kanga and the Kangaroo Court: Reflections on the Rape Trial of Jacob Zuma

Robert Corbitt, younger brother of Recy Taylor gives testimony on her behalf of the 1944 rape in Abbeville,Alabama

What does this world owe black women?
"Everything" - Alicia Garza



...and healers filled the space

...and healers held our truths sacred

Justice

It is time that this nation finally give voice to survivors in order to ask "what does justice mean to you?"

Conjuring Justice with Our Own Hands

"...we wanted justice, without which there could be no healing for many of us."

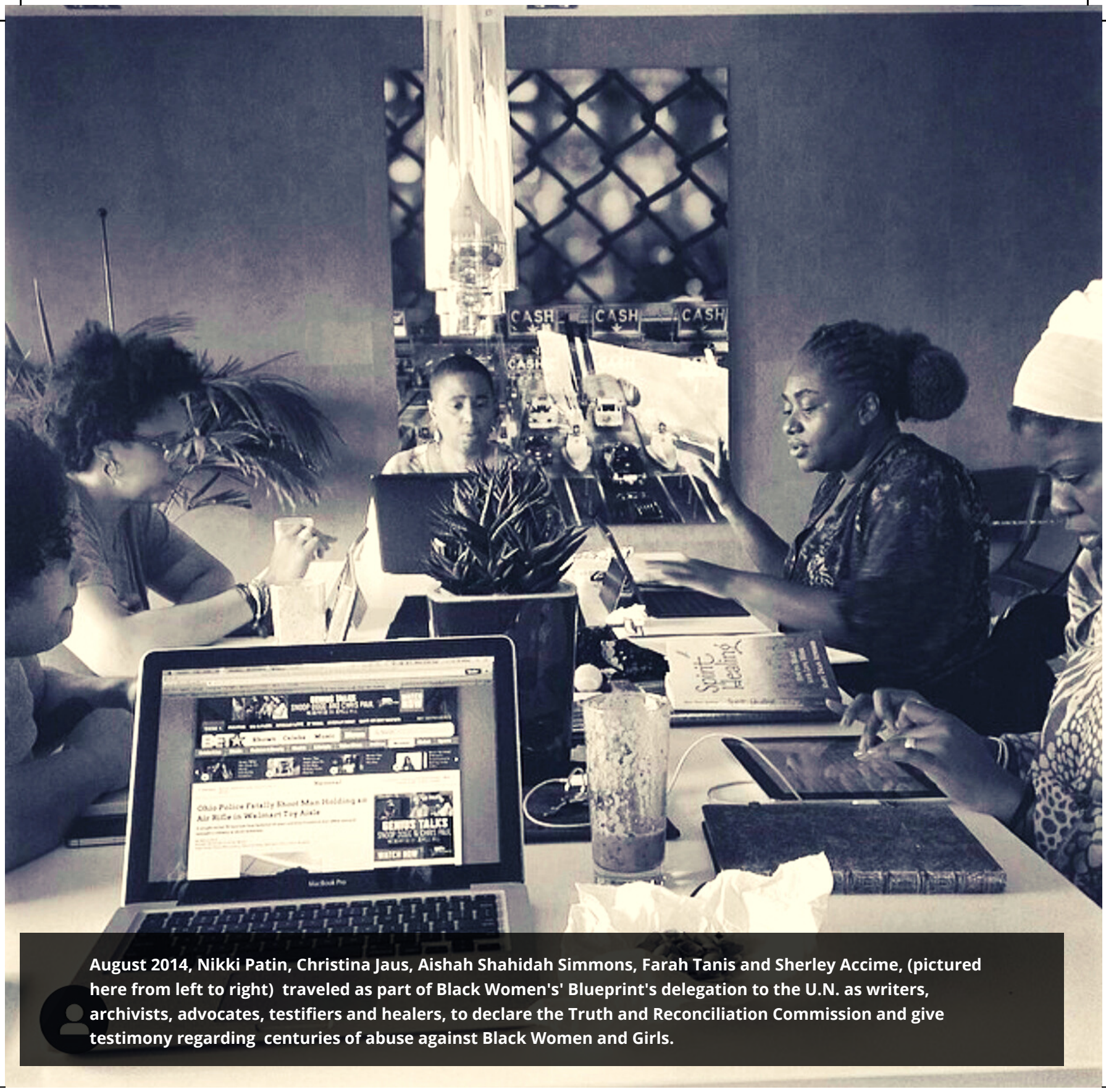
Black Women's Blueprint contends that ending sexual violence against Black women demands new and effective responses geared towards accountability through: targeted and relevant organizing; political advocacy; and alternative justice mechanisms-- not only within African communities in the U.S. but also the global community.

As survivors, we had been seeding an anti-rape movement and a project of transitional justice to coincide with the election of the first Black president of the United States, President Barack Obama, with the formation of a Black Women's Blueprint in 2008. Most of us had just embarked on the journey of piecing our precious, broken lives back together with little to no prospect for accessing mainstream justice systems and conversations on healing from sexual assault were still nascent. We knew we needed to heal. We knew we had been wronged and continued to run the risk of re-victimization. There was no precedence in the U.S. for mass apology to African-Americans, let alone African-American women, for the innumerable atrocities committed against them.

The battle for reparations, though it still raged on, had been marginalized and relegated to the domain of Black nationalists and not discernibly part of a Black anti-rape agenda. We were also fully aware that we could have solely focused our attention on the implementation of more common and traditional strategies to call attention to the rapes of Black women in the U.S. and to the get our voices heard. We could have engaged in more congressional hearings, listening tours and other political meetings, which would have garnered some attention by policy makers, however we had a broader goal in mind. We not only wanted to ensure policies were proposed or laws passed, we wanted justice without which there could be no healing for many of us. We wanted to expose on the world stage, the racialized/sexualized and reproductive rights abuses against us and our foremothers.

We followed what our civil rights activists predecessors had done in the W.E.B. DuBois and the NAACP 1947 "An Appeal to the World : A Statement of Denial of Human Rights to Minorities in the Case of citizens of Negro Descent in the United States of America and an Appeal to the United Nations for Redress"; as well as "We Charge Genocide", a petition filed to the United Nations in 1951 that documented 153 racial killings and other human rights abuses. We issued a plea to the world and we insisted the world hear us, and they did.

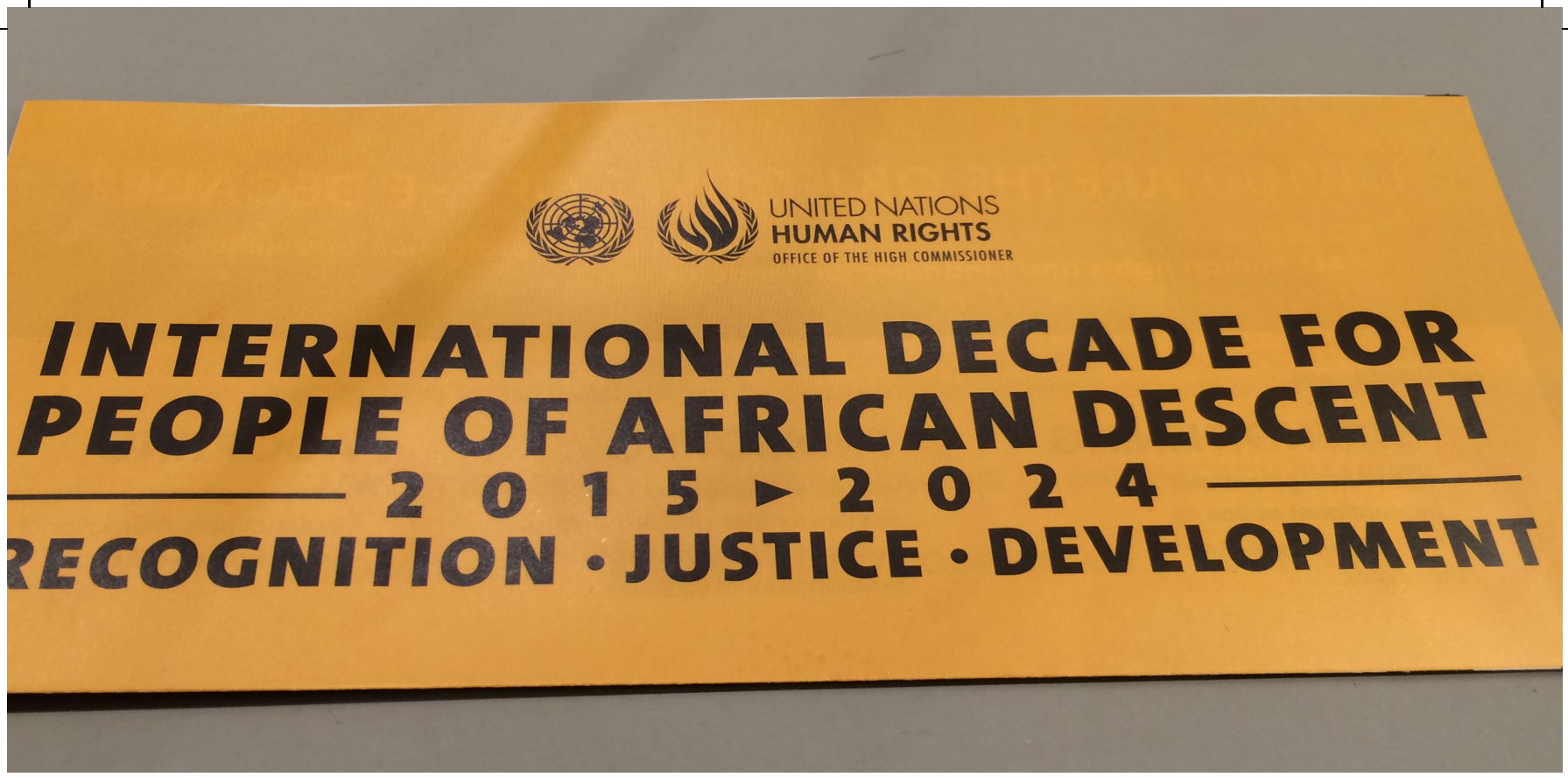
After three years of unyielding and unrelenting dialogue with UN Women, and requests for support to over one hundred country Missions to the UN, almost all of them turning us away, Black women entered the United Nations and took up space in a U.N. Panel Debate on Justice, Recognition and Development focused on the Status of Women of African Descent in the United States.



August 2014, Nikki Patin, Christina Jaus, Aishah Shahidah Simmons, Farah Tanis and Sherley Accime, (pictured here from left to right) traveled as part of Black Women's' Blueprint's delegation to the U.N. as writers, archivists, advocates, testifiers and healers, to declare the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and give testimony regarding centuries of abuse against Black Women and Girls.

In August 2014, Frances Naelah Bradley, Artist and Creator of Womanhood or Woman-Hurt? traveled as part of the Black Women's Blueprint Delegation to the U.N. to declare the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and make the case that Black women and girls in the U.S. and their historical and contemporary experiences with rape no longer be excluded from the UN Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

After three years of unyielding and unrelenting dialogue with UN Women, and requests for support to over one hundred country Missions to the UN, almost all of them turning us away, Black women entered the United Nations and took up space in a U.N. Panel Debate on Justice, Recognition and Development focused on the Status of Women of African Descent in the United States.



Answering the call to justice and action

Black women matter

Sprouting our pain into resistance, we converged with the International Decade for People of African Descent, United Nations

Janet Mock, speaking to the need for justice for all women and girls at the margins

Queen Mother Moore, reinstating the the call for reparations

Nadine Neufville, The Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) speaking in affirmation of survivors

Monica Raye Simpson using song as a tool, vocalizing with harmony, "the fire of justice"

Creating the table for justice

Jannie Liggons, surrounded by Tezlyn Figaro and Attorney Benjamin Crump.
Her presence was the completion in the continuity of voices between truth and justice as she denounced the sexual assaults by Oklahoma Police Officer Holtzclaw in front of witnesses at the U.N.

Sevonna Brown (left) and Ahmad Greene (right) pursuing justice shoulder to shoulder

Lynn Rosenthal (left), Shawnda Chapman Brown (middle), and Luz Marquez (right) living in the possibility of Justice

What makes you feel unsafe in your home, Community, and world??

Police

Gangs

when men you don't know

family members

you don't follow

inadequate education

capitalism

a STATIC Mind

negative people

ways hanging out by the store

you

domestic violence

alcoholics

stereotypes

liars

drugs

Uncle Toms

Donald Trump

sexism

OSCAR Rodriguez

drug dealers

guns

judgemental people

comfort in ones ignorance

rapists

thieves

unstable parents

friends

media absence

drunk drivers

institutionalized racism

careless people

lack of support

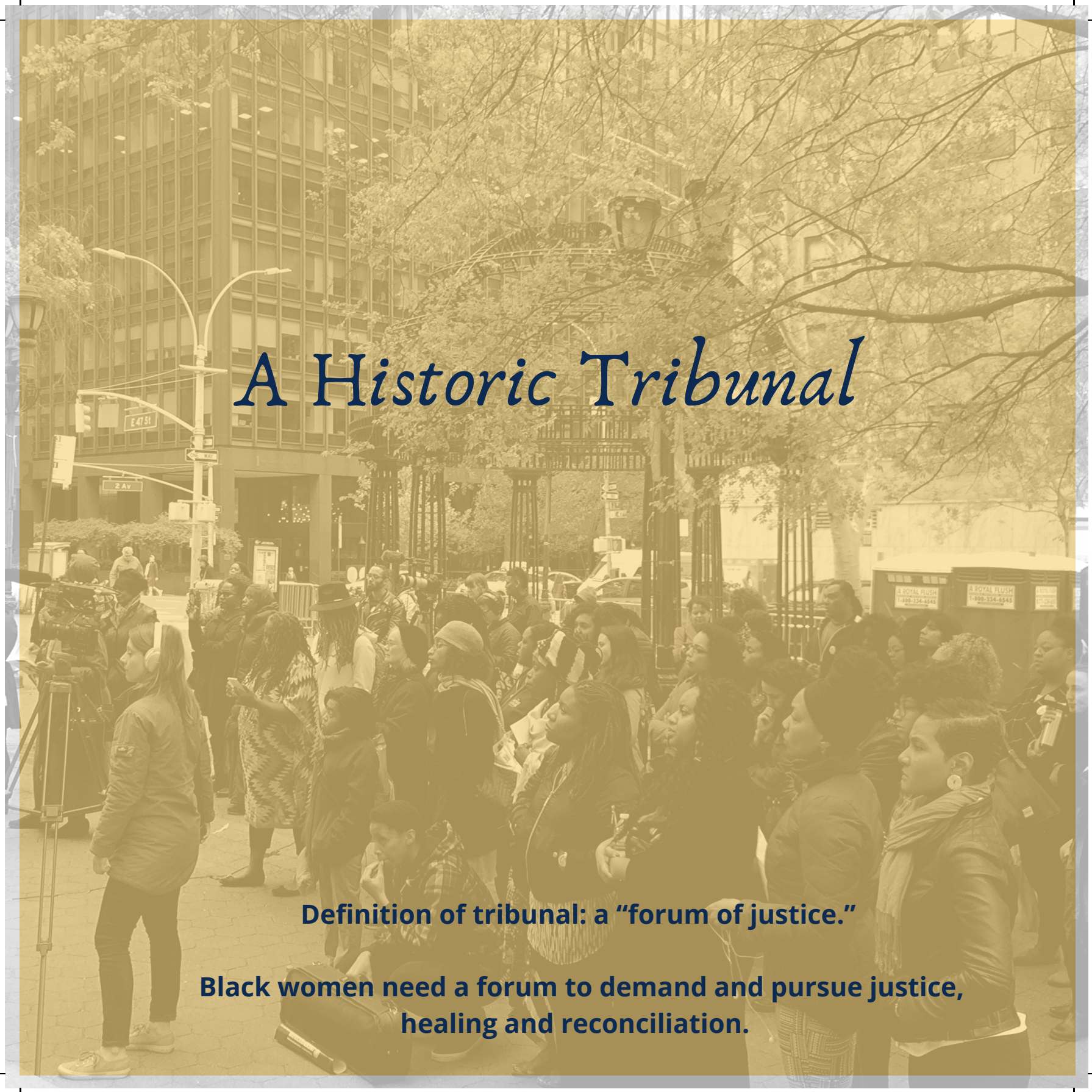
-adequate healthcare

sexuality

Q1. What Will It Take to End Sexual Assault?

"A safe and secure platform for the victims to disclose who the criminals are. Thorough education to the younger women of what is considered unlawful touching or sexual assault. An effective system that brings the perpetrators to face the full weight of their atrocity as justice is served."

Survivor, Black Women's Truth and Reconciliation Commission Survey Respondent



A Historic Tribunal

Definition of tribunal: a "forum of justice."

Black women need a forum to demand and pursue justice, healing and reconciliation.

Tribunal Hearings on the Sexual Assault of Black Women in America

The decision to culminate this Truth and Reconciliation Commission as a Tribunal is intentional

The United States of America is one of the few places in the world where mass rapes have occurred systematically against an entire race of people--African American women--with no outcry from human rights communities, no processes for justice, and no acknowledgement of such violations and its impact on the culture of violence against Black women today.

On April 29, 2016 in the State of New York, Black women convened a Tribunal, the first of its kind convening for recognition, central to a Black Women's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, in order to demand a reckoning.

We sought to name the names of those who are perpetrators and those perpetrated against - women of African Descent in this country who were raped and tortured, from 1700, through the 1944 rape of Recy Taylor, to 2016 and the rape of a young woman in Brownsville. We stood up to decolonize the decade and speak the truths embedded in the fabric of Black Women's lives.

The vast majority of these cases were never brought to justice, nor was justice accessible. While we could not tell every single story, we acknowledged the thousands of unknown names, the sacred texts of Black women's lives, the whispered truths, and the silenced voices that pronounce themselves clearly and eloquently through our daily acts of resistance. We remember the sisters of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, the mothers who jumped ship with their babies, and the ones who stayed aboard. We procured acknowledgement for past and present suffering so that Black women and their communities could begin to heal. We sought justice on that day and we continue to seek it every day, hereafter.

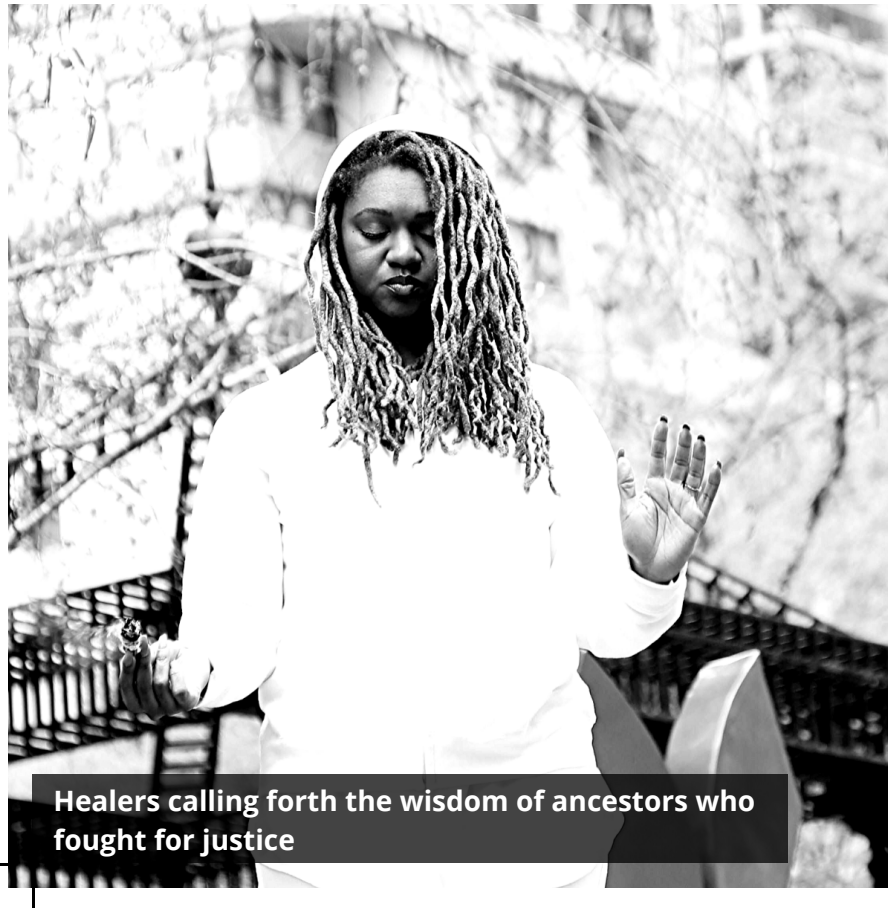
WE ARE THE TRIBUNAL.
And in the cases of Black Women of African Descent, we find the defendants guilty.

The women gathered for a historic public tribunal with Lynn Roberts and Frederica Stines

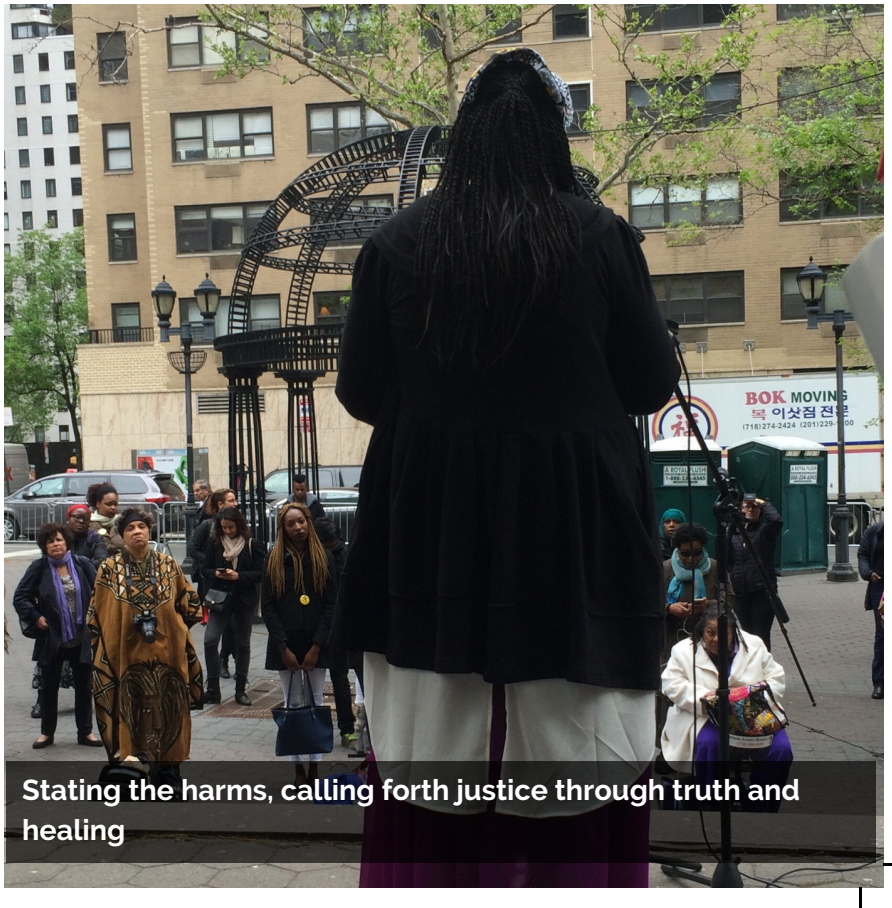
Revival, rage, resistance and re-memory

Michelle Duster, Great Granddaughter of Ida B. Wells sourcing from the wells of ancestral wisdom

Survivors speak to bridge justice between past, present, and future



Healers calling forth the wisdom of ancestors who fought for justice



Stating the harms, calling forth justice through truth and healing

Legacies of Black feminists are the shoulders on which we stand

Healing

Create a safe space and programs for survivors of sexual violence to recover and engage in strategies for healing.

Healing As A Mandate

"We wanted justice, without which there could be no healing for many of us."

An essential component of the Black Women's Truth and Reconciliation Commission process is the imperative for healing for the trauma survivors experienced at the hands of both individual and institutional perpetrators of violence. We cultivated healing spaces for Black women and girls throughout our work. Indeed, addressing individual and collective trauma is fundamental to creating conditions in which reconciliation is possible. For Black women and girls, both in the US and throughout the diaspora, the trauma of sexual violence is both individual, as experienced through specific instances of trauma, and collective, experienced as generational trauma resulting from a history of systemic sexual abuse as a structural tool of the oppression of Black people. Adopting a framework rooted in an understanding of the necessity of healing allows survivors to free themselves of the aftershocks of violence and connect more deeply with themselves, their families, and their larger community. Healing the generational trauma of sexual violence catalyzes intracommunal conversations about gender relations amongst Black people globally. It is necessary for Black communities to have an honest, historically rooted conversation about sex, gender, and power.

The BWTRC particularly recognized the importance of rituals and spirituality in facilitating healing. For us as conveners, the reclamation of rituals, songs, recipes, and memory is the first step in healing and reconciliation. Spirituality was centered in all the work, with emphasis on the traditional and communal ways of being, knowing, healing, learning, and loving that had sustained Black folks as they were forced across the Atlantic. Black Women's Truth and Reconciliation Commission Chair, Farah Tanis, notes, "We ritualized everything. We added one part healing ritual for every part of organizing strategy." The issue of generational trauma also necessitates that entire communities be involved in the healing process. Systematic sexual violence against Black women and girls has both an individual component and a collective component. As a result, a process for healing the trauma of that systematic violence must also be both individual and collective.

The BWTRC held space for the healing of Black women who had individually experienced trauma, while also holding spaces for the remembrance of historical instances of trauma that have impacted Black communities overall. This collective healing work was largely promoted through arts and culture work. The BWTRC was also intentional about drawing connections between the violence experienced by Black women and girls in the US and elsewhere in the African diaspora. Cultivating a sense of transnational kinship was important to the process of collective healing.

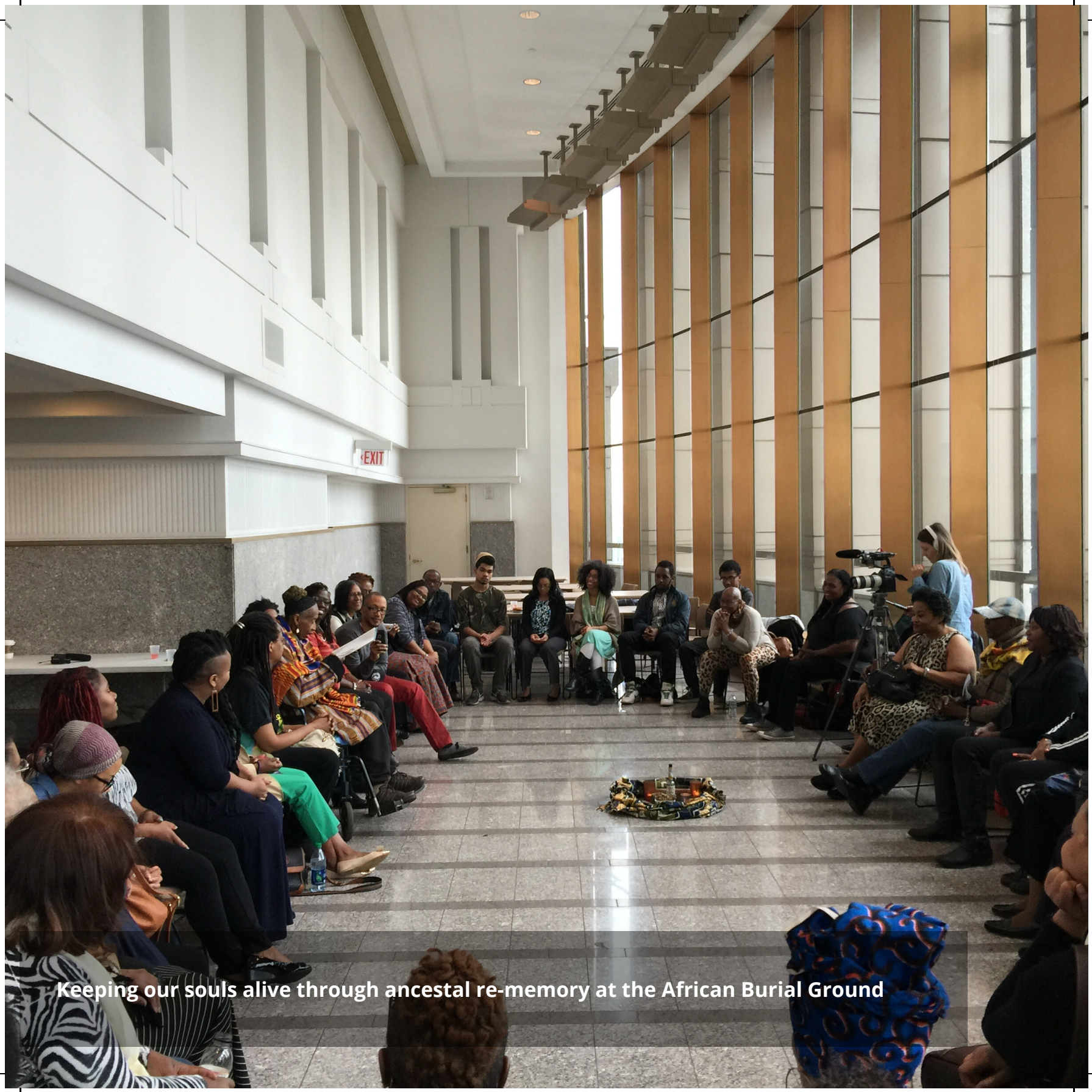
Q1. What Will It Take to End Sexual Assault in our Black communities?

"Personal healing, communal healing, speaking out, exposing our personal stories to let them go, self-knowledge, self-respect, self-love, and to not interpret abuse or violence as love, nor respect nor as being desired."

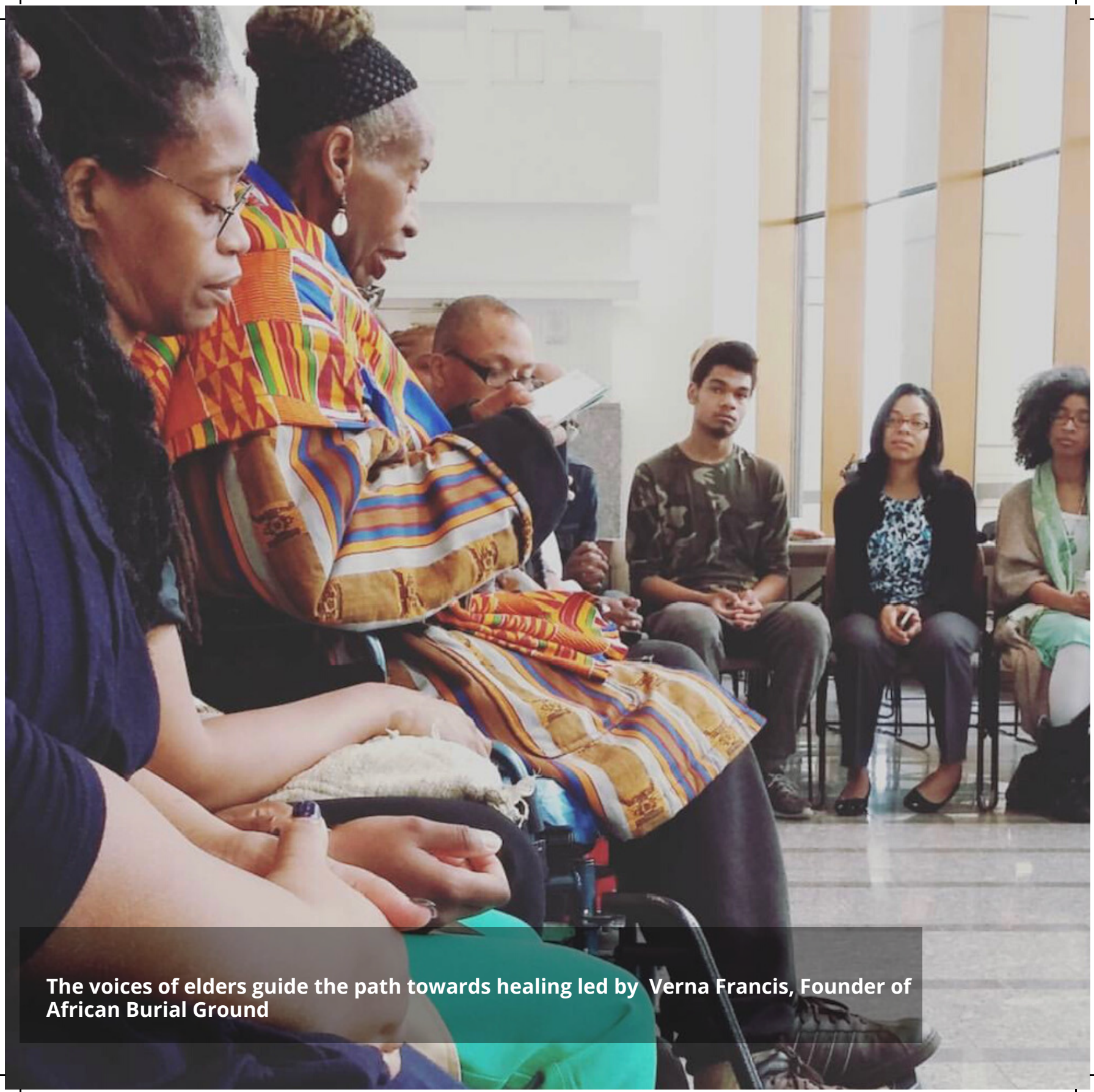
Survivor, Black Women's Truth and Reconciliation Commission Survey Respondent

Communal and collective healing and transformation, justice, and the harvest of sisterhood

Beseeching the ancestors so they may surround us with the wholeness of life and light



Keeping our souls alive through ancestal re-memory at the African Burial Ground



The voices of elders guide the path towards healing led by Verna Francis, Founder of African Burial Ground

Dorothy Pitman Hughes spoke with intergenerational feminists sharing in wisdom, tools, and language for liberation

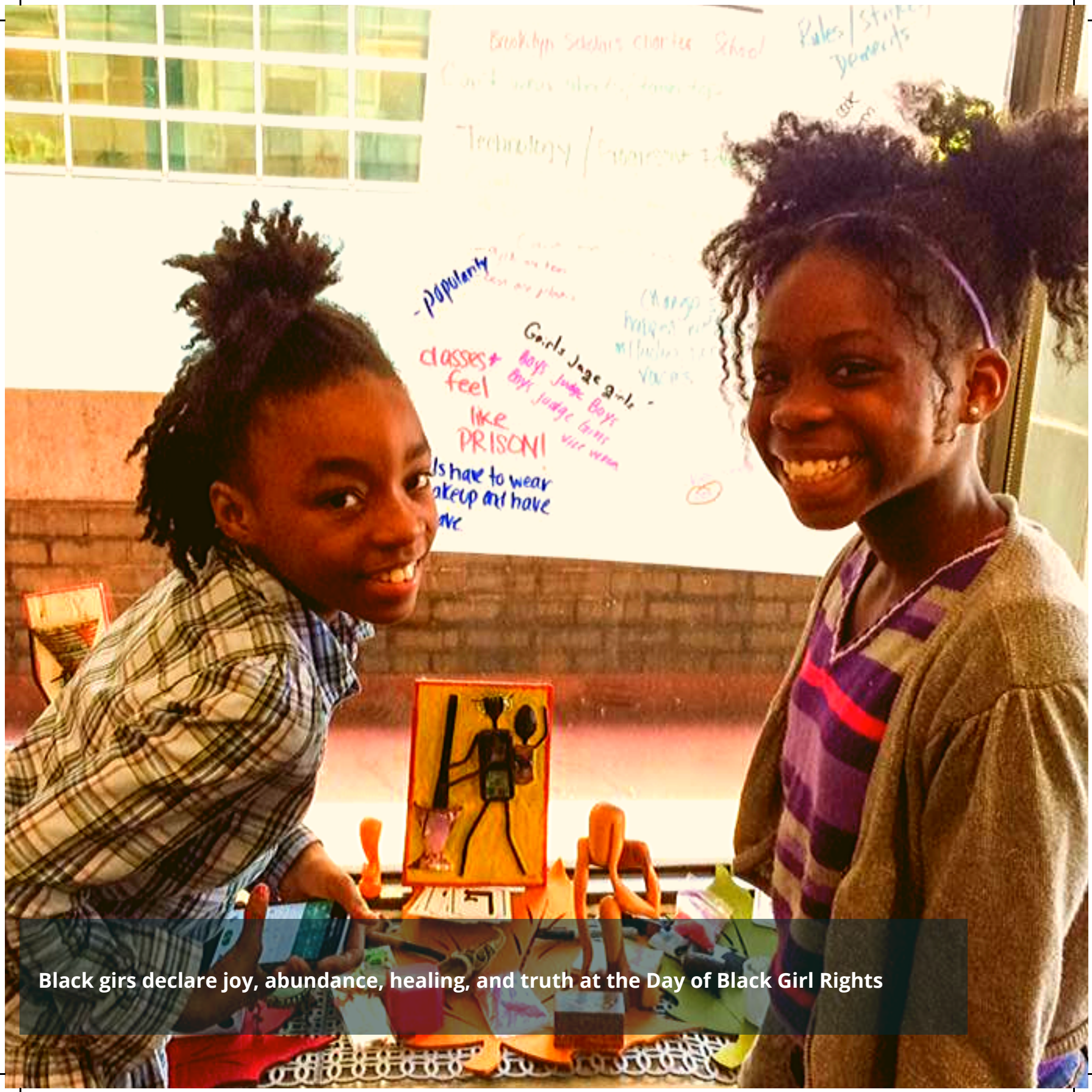
What is your vision or dream of a world and community that values black girls?

- People can see into your heart and see your purest qualities

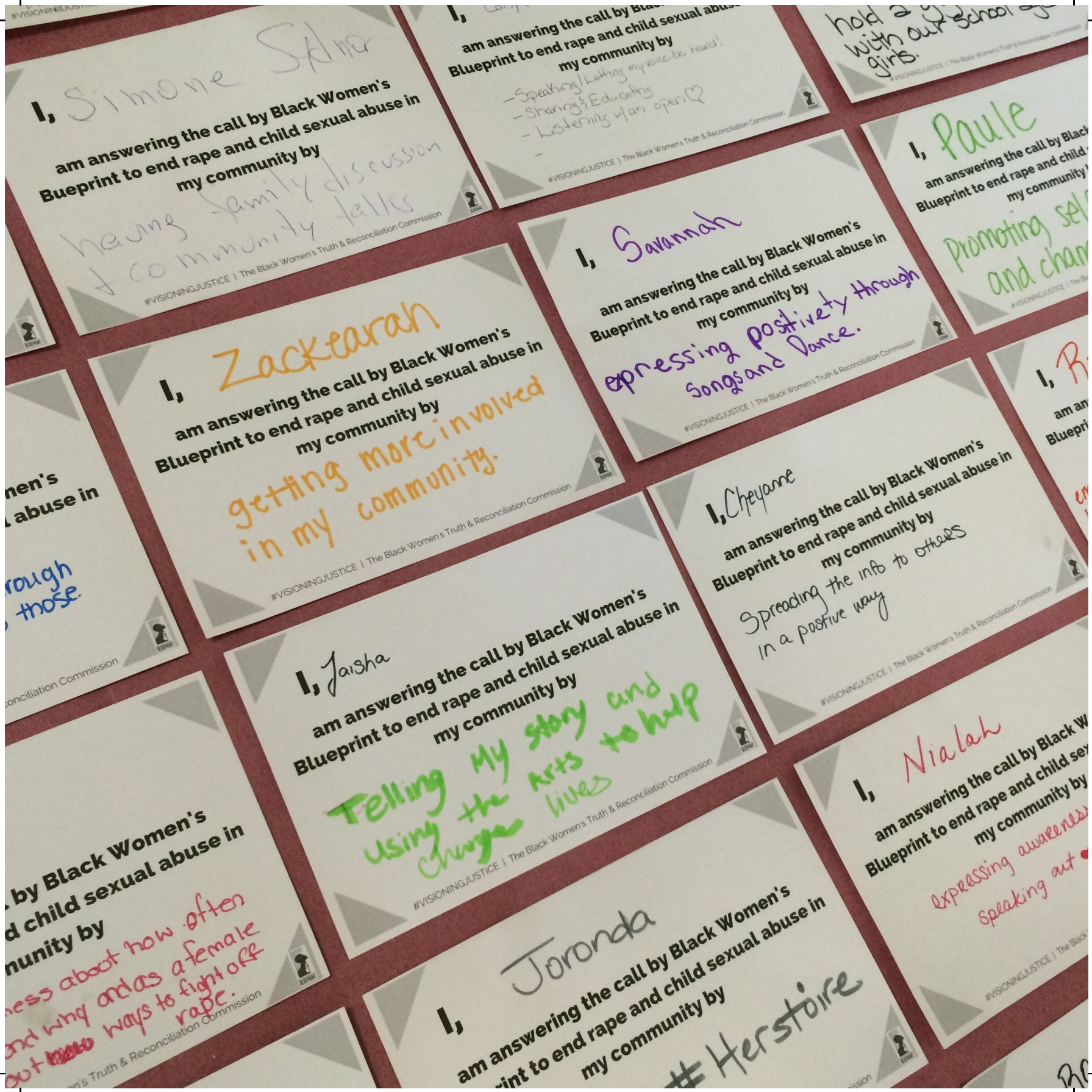
-guardian of the Internet to filter out negative vibes

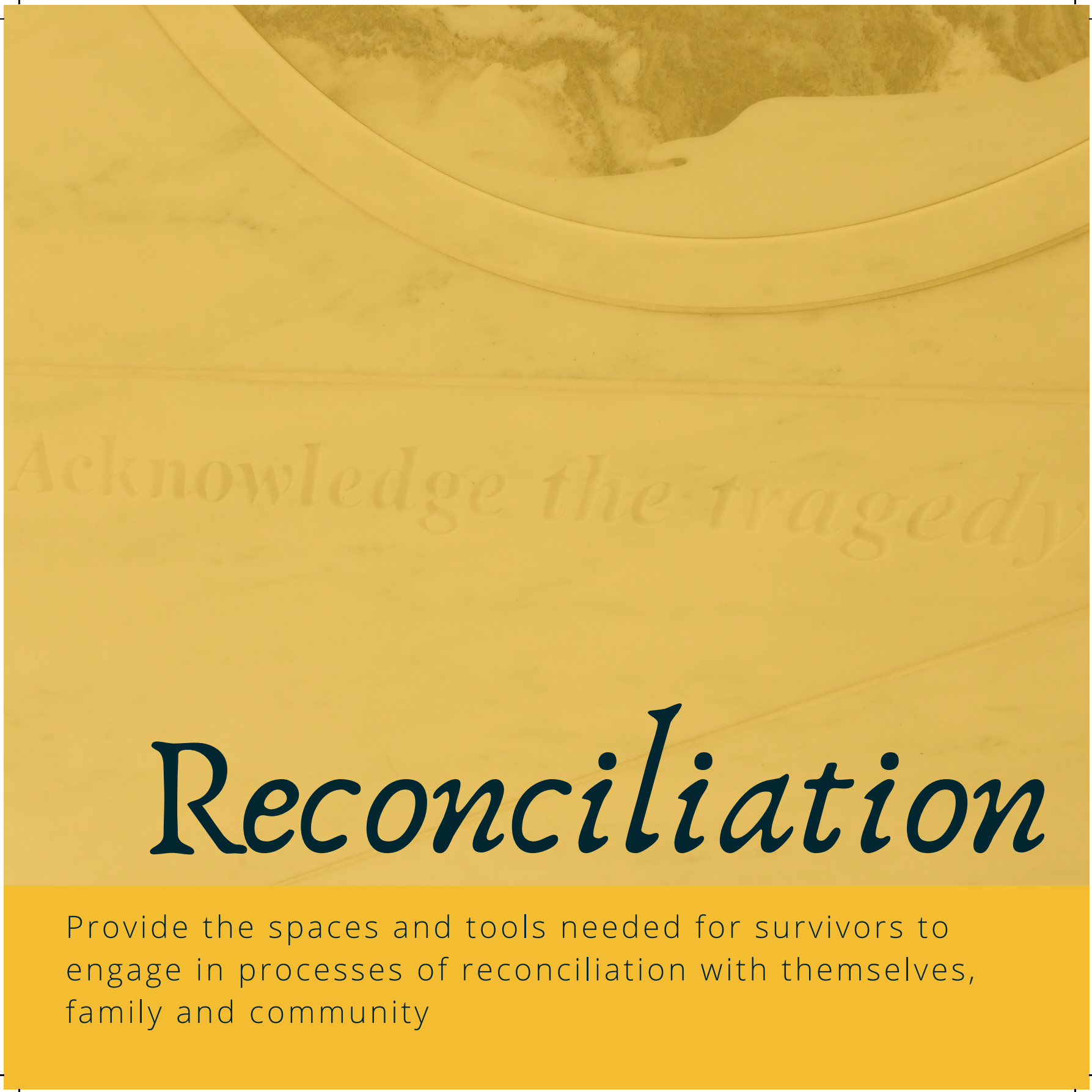
-

Nina Angela Mercer centered Black girls in practices and conversations of safety and community freedom



Black girs declare joy, abundance, healing, and truth at the Day of Black Girl Rights


I, Simone Salmon
am answering the call by Black Women's Blueprint to end rape and child sexual abuse in my community by
having family discussion + community talks
#VISIONINGJUSTICE | The Black Women's Truth & Reconciliation Commission
-Speaking/Letting my voice be heard!
-Sharing & Educating
-Listening w/an open?
I, Zackearah
getting more involved in my community.
I, Savannah
expressing positivety through Songs and Dance.
I, Paule
Promoting self and chan
I, Cheyanne
Spreading the info to others in a postive way
I, Jaisha
Telling My story and using the Arts to help lives
I, Joronda
#Herstoire
I, Nialah
expressing awareness speaking out



Reconciliation

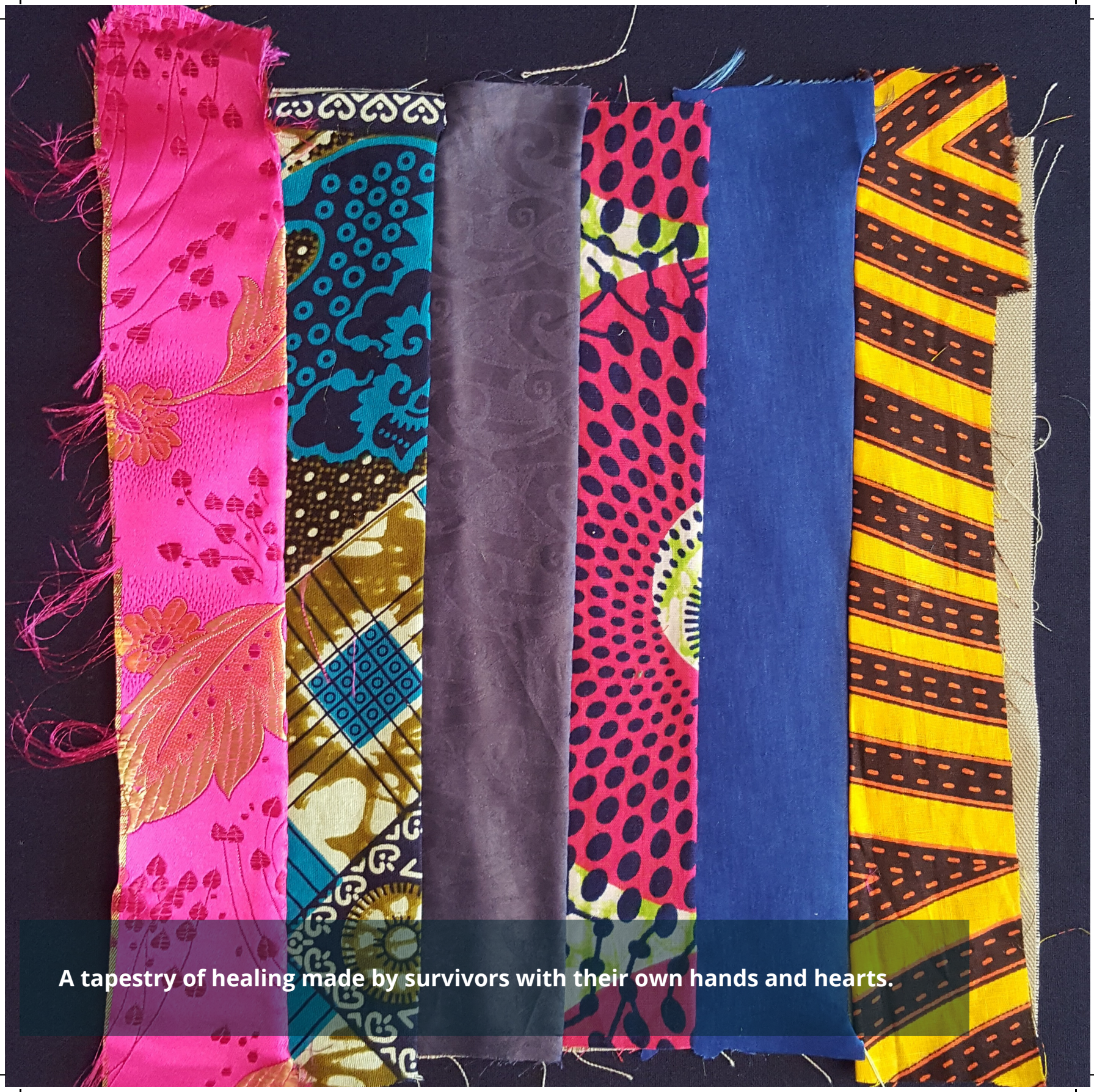
Provide the spaces and tools needed for survivors to engage in processes of reconciliation with themselves, family and community

Reconciliation Repair Restoration

The majority of survivors made it very clear they did not want reconciliation with any harm-doer, not the person who raped them, not white descendants of slave owners and not the state. Many did not believe racial healing or any healing could occur within a community that blames, ostracizes and silences victims. Several threatened not to come to the days of testimony at the Riverside Church, the UN or the Tribunal if we issued an invitation to any harm-doer, "rapists and child molesters" in particular. On this we did not compromise. The agency, volition and self-determination of survivors was paramount.

However, the question remained: How then, could we continue to call ourselves a Truth and Reconciliation Commission when reconciliation would not be considered? What emerged almost immediately through healing circles was the need for reconciliation with ourselves first. The intergenerational and immediate consequence of rape is disconnection—disconnection to the self and the body, mind and often spirit, disconnection from family and loved ones, disconnection from the ancestors and a full sense of what we owe to future generations.

As a BWTRC, our decision as survivors to keep reconciliation as a mandate was rooted in the agency and volition several of us had already exercised to forgive and work toward forgiving. It was also rooted in the choice many made not to entertain the notion of forgiveness. We decided each of us would exercise their own self-will to determine how we would engage in our own healing, what we would gain from the BWTRC and what justice meant to each one.


A tapestry of healing made by survivors with their own hands and hearts.

Q1. What Will It Take to End Sexual Assault in our Black communities?

"Deeper communication among all members of society, men and women, starting by greater communication among our own families or closest circles. The kind of communication that allows the expression of suffering and that seeks for healing even beyond the closest communities. A profound awareness about the importance of a healthy sexual life."

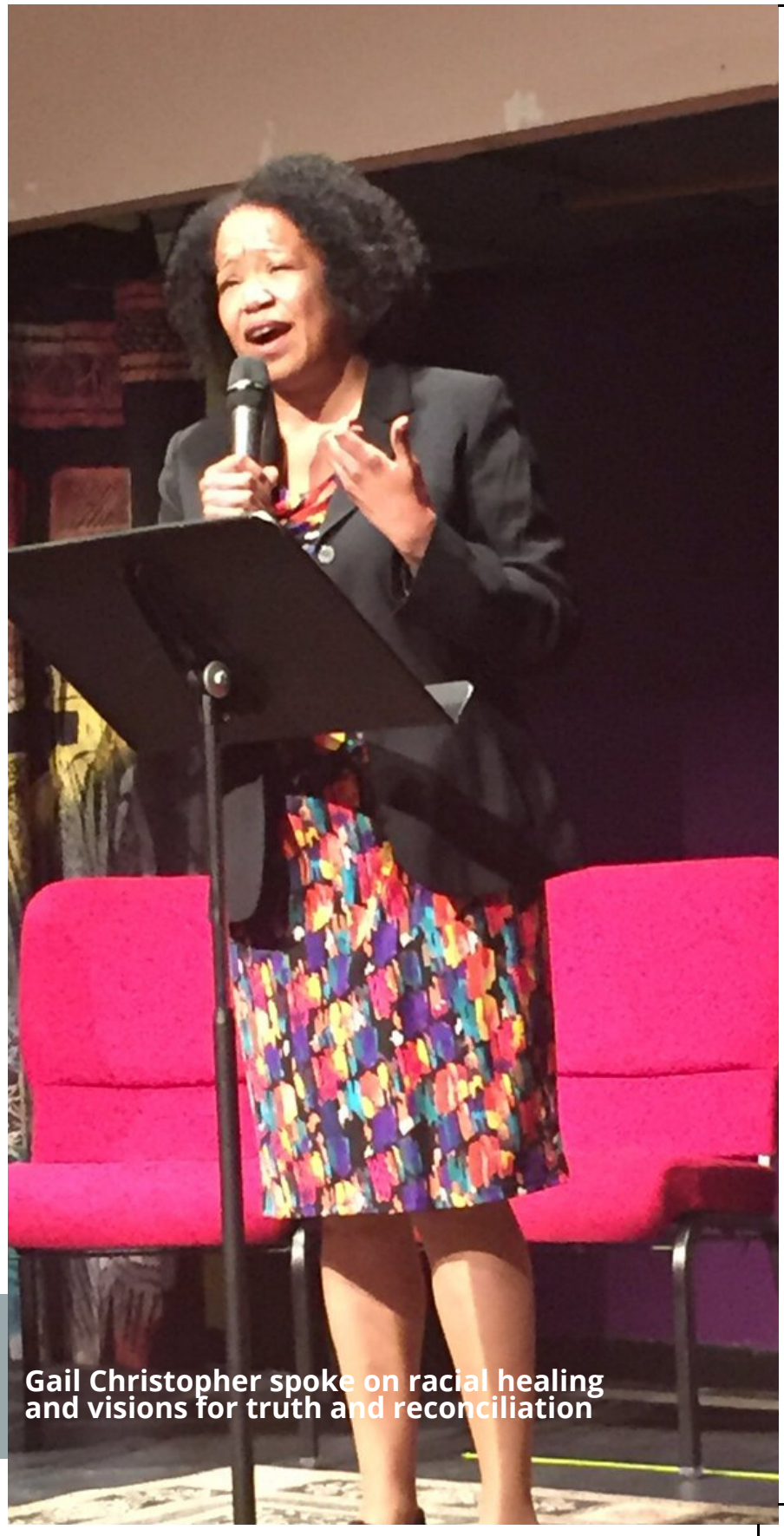
Survivor, Black Women's Truth and Reconciliation Commission Survey Respondent

Black men engaged in accountability, authenticity and justice work in the barbershop as a site of individual and collective transformation with Quentin Walcott and Ahmad Greene.

Clergy member Rev. Bertram Johnson issued an apology on behalf of the church to all survivors of sexual violence

Quentin Walcott called forth the engagement and allyship of men in the work of healing and reconciliation

Brittney Cooper spoke truth to power in the way of reconciliation and justice



Gail Christopher spoke on racial healing and visions for truth and reconciliation

Outcomes

Our most important outcome has been the development of a liberatory healing model to address trauma

Outcomes of the Black Women's Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Our most important outcome has been the development of a liberatory healing model to address trauma which engaged more than 600 survivors of sexual assault in what we came to call the Liberatory Trauma Healing circuit. It was important for survivors to move from stages of crisis to full agency and liberation from the symptoms and consequences of trauma in their lives through self-determination.

A community of transformation, trust, and love was built through the liberatory praxis of healing for survivors. Survivors found home in themselves and one another, **reclaiming safety, reclaiming security, reclaiming hope.**

Survivors who engaged with the Liberatory Trauma Healing circuit **stepped into their power,** taking up leadership in the realms of advocacy, policy making, leadership organizing, and arts based healing. Their triumphs are a testament to survivor-led healing and interventions as well as the support and attentiveness they received while in counseling at Black Women's Blueprint. Survivors who participated in our healing programs are now opening businesses, going back to college, graduating as attorneys, creating families of their own, publishing books and starting independent healing circles themselves.

The BWTRC **provided a platform within which Black women of the diaspora could use testimony to build power, shift discourse, and share best practices for survival.** From culturally-specific curricula on bystander intervention against sexual assault at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) grounded in Black feminism and womanism, to the prevention of the sexual abuse of girls under the age of 18, the BWTRC achieved its goals.

Through the BWTRC, Black women in the diaspora have learned and shared so much with one another, from the liberatory potential of the cultural and spiritual activism of Black women's cosmologies like Brazilian candomblé and Haitian vodoun in survivor healing, to the transnational frameworks of revolutionary feminism popular in Afro-Latina housing struggle.

The BWTRC achieved a renewed focus on increasing resources for meaningful primary prevention programs that focus on factors that impact both the risks and the consequences of sexual violence, including political structures, patriarchal systems of hyper-masculinity, poverty, discriminatory policing and over-criminalization.

The BWTRC achieved an articulated demand for intra-community models for harm-doer accountability and transformative processes to address and eradicate gender-violence.

The BWTRC continues to organize so that the United States keep its commitments to the survivors of what the World Health Organization is calling "the most pervasive human rights violation in the world"—violence against women; and especially those from marginalized communities disproportionately impacted by rape and the spectrum of sexual violence. In particular, we refer to commitments made by the Obama Administration in VAWA 2014, the Guidance on Gender-Biased Policing of 2016, and U.S. periodic reports to the U.N. Committee on the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) and Convention Against Torture (CAT) to commit the necessary resources to intervene and prevent sexual assault.

Though a significant amount of work remains to be done, the **BWTRC achieved a recognition of the centrality of the rights of women, girls and gender nonconforming people of African descent in particular, within racial justice concerns of all people of African descent.**

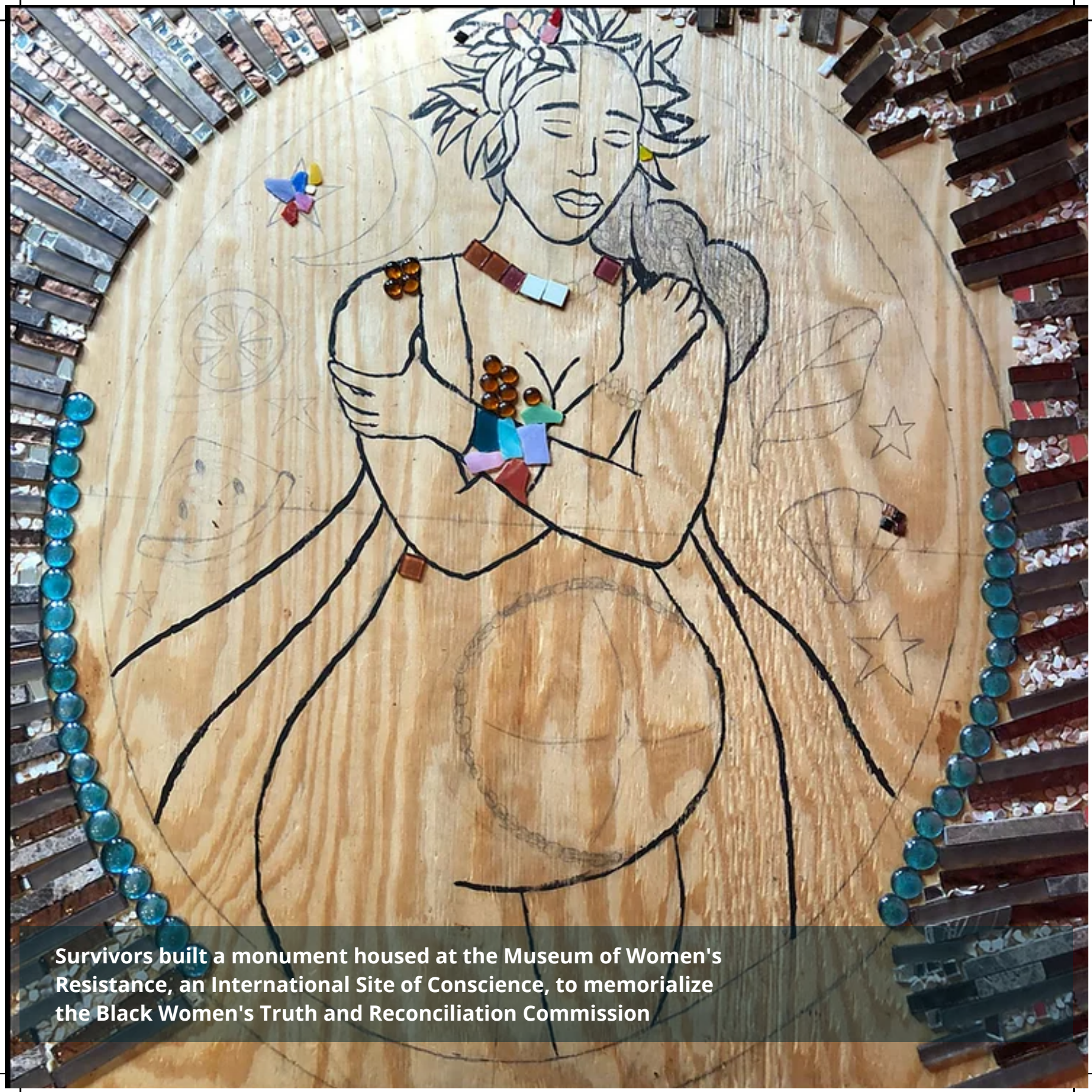
Memorializing the Black Women's Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Black Women's Blueprint developed the Museum of Women's Resistance (MoWRe) out of its commitment to memorializing the narratives and celebrating the lives and resistance embodied in the testimonies during the Black Women's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The Museum is a Site of Conscience recognized by the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience.

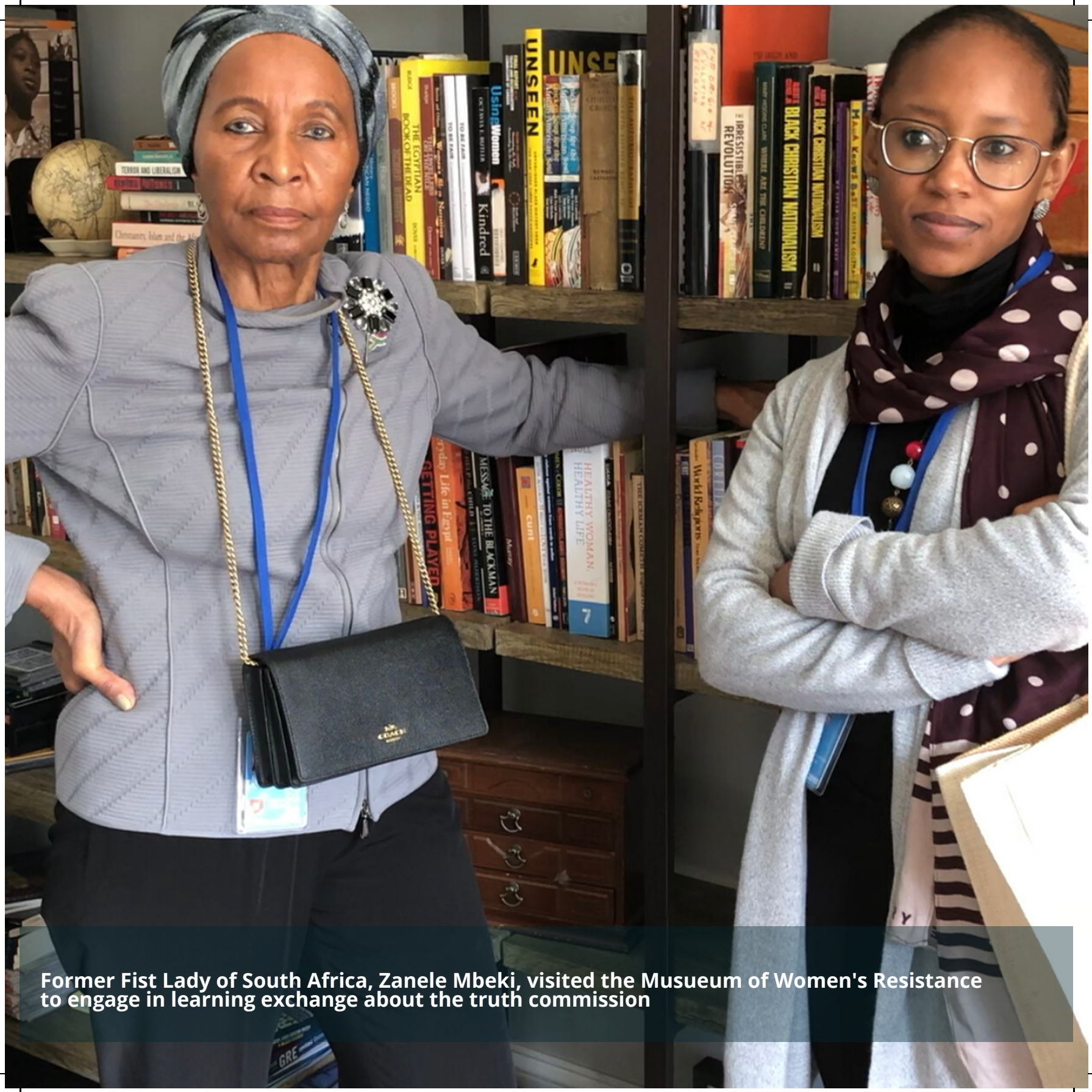
The museum archives the Tribunal, the work of Black women during the Black Women's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It functions as a repository for video, texts, and other artifacts of the Black Women's Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

The Black Women's Truth and Reconciliation Commission works in partnership with the Museum of Women's Resistance to provide a home to truth-telling and memorialization initiatives poised to craft a new herstorical record that documents Black women's legacies of movement building, cultural production, and innovation.

The museum is a space for survivors to tell our narratives, and recognize that we are the embodiment of the memory of the violence of slavery that was enacted upon us. We are also the embodiment of resistance from slave ships to plantations, from Jim Crow to jail cells, and we will continue to tell our stories and to raise our voices. We will continue to pass these stories not only to our children, but to the world.



Survivors built a monument housed at the Museum of Women's Resistance, an International Site of Conscience, to memorialize the Black Women's Truth and Reconciliation Commission



Former Fist Lady of South Africa, Zanele Mbeki, visited the Musueum of Women's Resistance to engage in learning exchange about the truth commission

The Ministry for Women's Chief Executive, Ms. Renee Graham, visiting the Museum of Women's Resistance from New Zealand during the Commission on the Status of Women

From the Ministry for Women in New Zealand

"Dear Museum of Women's Resistance (MoWRe) staff,

I am writing from the Ministry for Women in New Zealand. We are the New Zealand government's principal advisor on achieving better results for women and wider New Zealand. The Ministry for Women's Chief Executive, Ms. Renee Graham, will be in New York next month for the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. We are aware that MoWRe is an excellent site of knowledge about women, and as such would like to arrange a visit to MoWRe for Ms. Graham. We see this as a fantastic opportunity for Ms. Graham to learn more about United States' Black women's histories, traditions and campaigns for justice. This is particularly relevant to the Ministry for Women as we have a policy focus on women of diverse backgrounds. I would be very grateful if you could let me know whether it would be possible for a MoWRe representative to meet Ms. Graham to talk about MoWRe's work and possibly provide her with a tour. The dates Ms. Graham could visit the museum are Saturday 10 March or Sunday 11 March. I appreciate your consideration of my request and look forward to hearing from you."

Kind regards, Kate, Ministry for Women in New Zealand

The Last Mandate: Reconciliation

Black Women's Blueprint (BWB) a national Black feminist organization which mobilized civil society to convene the first Black Women's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (BWTRC) in the U.S. to locate women within the work of racial justice and pursue truth, justice, healing and reconciliation, invites all of the participating witnesses of this process to engage in the work of the last mandate.

Through the BWTRC, survivors of sexual assault were able to collectively create a healing paradigm that focused on their own needs as well as the larger scope of the global struggle for Black women. Based on this understanding, the BWTRC developed healing tools and mechanisms rooted in the cultural and spiritual practices indigenous to Black communities to support the healing of Black women and girls as we fight for justice.

The last mandate asks of us that we reconcile with our spirits, our ancestral lineage, the diaspora, and the fact we have survived for all generations forward and backward. What we need is to radically reclaim ourselves. We are meant to live in community. That is our inheritance as human beings. We are meant to live in harmony and interconnectedness, not as broken human beings who then proceed to break other human beings.

Within this last mandate, Reconciliation, we are called toward repair and restoration. This is the repair and restoration of ourselves as individuals, our societies, communities, institutions, environments, and even spiritual landscapes. It requires that if we are to engage in a conversation about reparations, that we look at all forms of reparations: Symbolic - apologies, memorials, monuments; material, financial, historical; Truth and Memory; Collective Reparations/Individual Reparations.

The Last Mandate grants us the opportunity to engage in the processes that ultimately leads us to the continued liberatory work that is imperative to our truth, justice, and healing. It is through the last mandate that we will reach the lighthouse needed for eradicating the human rights violation of sexual violence that impacts the entire globe.

Christina Jaus, Co-founder and Kaitlyn Newman, Advisory Board Member

Believing that we are meant to live in harmony and interconnectedness, not as broken human beings who then proceed to break other human beings.

The Reconciliation Bowl

The Reconciliation Bowl: Unfinished Business

West African author, researcher, and healer, Malidoma Patrice Some, offers the best narrative for how the bowl should be used. We heard the same instructions from community members at Manhyia Palace in Kumasi, Ghana.

It is the community's responsibility or the chief, of any gender, to maintain the shrine and ensure that crises are correctly handled. When a conflict occurs between two people, it is resolved by employing a ritual in the presence of the whole community. Divination is used to determine the nature and extent of the conflict, whether it involves only two people or the community as a whole.

The parties involved in the conflict come together in an ash circle.They sit facing each other, and the defendant listens to the story of the accuser first. The accuser tells the defendant about the impact of his or her actions.The chief and community support and guide the discourse. Of course, things may not always work out like this. It may be that the crisis, because it has been simmering for a long time, does not cool off in the circle of ash. When this occurs, healers are brought in to make an offering to the ancestors. The healers tune-up in the energies of the two parties in order to allow for a healing ash circle. So a failed ash-circle ritual means that the healers have a job to do -- to reduce the heat between the two people before they meet again. Should none of this work, it shows that one of the parties is not doing his or her part. When this occurs, the chiefs of all the elements will deliver their warning to the renegade party, making him responsible for the lingering of the circle.

The Ghanaian reconciliation bowl offers individuals who have been harmed and complicit in harm an opportunity to do peacemaking, peacebuilding, and to heal. Reconciled to each other as individuals, families, or community members, they break bread together and "eat" from the same bowl, creating harmony and unity where there once was trauma and pain. This is an ongoing collective process that requires a continued and courageous dialogue that is healing and liberatory. Healing for those who have caused harm, requires taking a risk with the backing of Spirit. At Black Women's Blueprint we are reclaiming ancestral practices that were lost as a result of historical trauma. The reconciliation bowl ritual, a technology of healing which now lives at Black Women's Blueprint, provides an opportunity to restore and revive our broken relationships.

Freedom Bound: Choosing Human Rights

We chose to pursue human rights. We grounded the BWTRC in the credo of universality and interdependence, the principles of our rights as inalienable and indivisible. The human rights principles in which Truth Commissions are grounded offered us as survivors, the promise of dignity. It offered the kind of recognition which did not have to be granted by any nation-state or civil rights decree.

We were convinced that the right to truth, to be believed, to seek justice, to dignity, integrity and security were already ours by virtue of being human. This allowed us to divest our energies from the constant quest to be recognized by the state as a legitimate truth and reconciliation commission. We suspected, given the extent to which rape culture and racism permeated every level of our society, and given the issue we were raising—rape between 1944-2016, we would not gain the formal governmental recognition we deserved. However, we appreciate the individual allies that emerged out of governmental agencies to offer support for the Black Women's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, support for the important healing component, support for recognition, reparations and efforts at seeking justice.

We hope that the Executive Summary to the full report for the Black Women's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, serves as the beginnings to a replicable model and toolkit for gender/racial healing and reparations projects across the country that centralize sexual violence and its impact on Black Women.

The forthcoming report will offer language and provide a roadmap for individuals and movements across the globe, and feminists in particular who have been searching for a model for engaging in transformative processes and work around accountability and justice.

We see the forthcoming report and our continued work as a step toward the realization of the last mandate (Reconciliation) of the Black Women's Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Sexual Assault.

It Continues: A Call to Action

The Black Women's Truth and Reconciliation Commission continues to organize so that the United States keep its commitments to the survivors of what the World Health Organization is calling "the most pervasive human rights violation in the world"—violence against women; and especially those from marginalized communities disproportionately impacted by rape and the spectrum of sexual violence.

In particular, we refer to commitments made by the Obama Administration in VAWA 2014, the Guidance on Gender-Biased Policing of 2016, and U.S. periodic reports to the U.N. Committee on the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) and Convention Against Torture (CAT) to commit the necessary resources to intervene and prevent sexual assault.

Though a significant amount of work remains to be done, the BWTRC achieved as an outcome, a recognition of the centrality of the rights of women, girls and gender nonconforming people of African descent in particular, within racial justice concerns of all people of African descent.

To continue engaging in the work of the Black Women's Truth and Reconciliation process with us, join us in the following:

Center women of African descent within the International Decade of People of African Descent.
Give to the Gender Justice Fund at Black Women's Blueprint
Engage in the continued provision of collective apologies by harm-doers and survivor allies.
Read the Apology Toolkit by Chair, Black Women's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Farah Tanis
Elevate the visibility and momentum in communities of African descent across the globe about the incidences of human rights violations--mainly the historical and contemporary patterns of rape against women of African descent.

THE BLACK WOMEN'S TRUTH & RECONCILIATION COMMISSION

www.blackwomensblueprint.org