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@GranVarones



on june 7, 2019, layleen cubilette polanco aka layleen xtravaganza, a trans woman was found dead in her cell on rikers island. no word of the cause of death has been released.

rest easy, layleen. [#AbolishPrisons](#)

💖 2,999 6:37 AM - Jun 8, 2019

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Yet, in the wake of these undeniable tragedies, no national Black woman's organization has spoken out. Where is Alpha Kappa Alpha? Where are the Delta Sigma Thetas? Both organizations admit trans women, but have yet to say anything about these instances of abuse. Where is the National Coalition of 100 Black Women or the National Council of Negro Women? Not to even mention Black men's organizations. Black women are being killed and yet, pro-Black institutions are deafeningly silent.

Holding on to the past

Speaking out about the violence against Black trans women is crucial because it fits into a larger pattern of violence against Black women.

According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), Black women have the [highest rate of intimate-partner violence](#) in the country. Only Native American women come close. The problem is so severe that half of all Black women killed in the United States are murdered by men that they know and nine times out of ten, those men are Black.

READ MORE: [Transgender woman who was brutally attacked last month found dead](#)

Unconsciously Black women, like everyone in the United States, have absorbed white supremacy, patriarchy and the essential devaluing of Black womanhood which accompany them. Racist oppression has meant that for most of this country's history, Black women have not even had basic body autonomy.

"Black women are being killed and yet, pro-Black institutions are deafeningly silent."

In speaking with **Dr. Carolyn West**, editor of "Violence in the Lives of Black Women" and Professor of Psychology at the University of Washington Tacoma points out, she pointed out that "even the notion of [Black women's bodies](#) as a legal entity, not to mention a protected space, did not exist in the law until relatively recently."



Activist Imara Jones questions what's at the heart of the rampant violence that's killing Black transgender women and finds Black men and cis Black women as part of the answer that's fueling a weakness in our culture.. Unsplash)

Post-enslavement and during Emancipation this lack of autonomy took on new forms. Black women's fundamental personhood was directly associated with Black manhood. That's because Black men achieved legal standing, however tenuous, in ways that our women did not. These same dynamics are still at work today.

OPINION: While Morehouse College's decision to admit trans men is significant, it's completely at the expense of trans women

"Many cis Black women perceive that one of the few privileges they have is their heterosexuality and they are reluctant to give that up," said West. "Embracing [trans women as women](#), against this historic backdrop, means that cis Black women believe that they are narrowing or possibly giving up that privilege. Moreover, Black women have this notion that if we stay in our place, Black men will take care of us the way that we idealize white women are taken care of by white men."

Therefore cis Black women continue to set their basic humanity within the traditional limits established by Black men. This is problematic because of the deeply anti-trans sentiments found among many of them.

I also recently sat down with **Aishah Shahidah Simmons**, creator of [#LoveWithAccountability](#) and producer of [NO! The Rape Documentary](#), who said, in addition to White supremacy, she believes that there is yet another layer which must be dealt with: misogyny.

"Confronting misogyny, hatred of the feminine, as an issue within our community and within ourselves will enable us to embrace the idea that violence against women is unacceptable. End of story. Only then will be able to include all women," explained Simmons.

What we can any of us do

All of this requires cis Black women to first find their own fundamental worth before valuing and allying with trans women. It would also require insisting that Black men end their [harmful behavior and decenter their needs](#). Black women, out of service and deference to Black men, ask very little of Black masculinity, while Black masculinity demands everything from Black women, literally including our lives.

According to Simmons, driving this imbalance "is the association of Black masculinity with the idea of the Blackness." Somehow Black women believe that "challenging Black men means that we are challenging our community," she adds.

READ MORE: [Black transgender woman found dead in NYC lockup, but officials have few answers](#)

Echoing the point Dr. West declares, "even when Black women are hated by the men who should love us, we stand with them." Within the paradigm of these antiquated systems, Black womanhood is extremely fragile. Until cis Black women center themselves within the idea of Black liberation, they will continue to be prisoners of their second-rate place within it.

The bottom line is that once cis Black women have done the work to ally with their trans sisters in a broader vision of commonality, interests and goals, only then will Black women cease to die in a cruel epidemic fueled by what appears to be a fundamental weakness in our culture.

Imara Jones is the creator of "TransLash," a four-part web docu-series about what it is like to be a trans woman of color at a time of social backlash. She is a Fellow-in-Residence at [The New York Women's Foundation](#) and is on the board of the Anti-Violence Project.