



The National Sexual Assault Coalition Resource Sharing Project

ReShape Newsletter

Working together to end sexual violence.

Anti-Racism Efforts from Coalitions

“Change means growth, and growth can be painful. But we sharpen self-definition by exposing the self in work and struggle together with those whom we define as different from ourselves, although sharing the same goals. For Black and white, old and young, lesbian and heterosexual women alike, this can mean new paths to our survival.”

—Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, 1984

As coalitions continue to address oppression in our culture, particularly as it intersects with sexual violence, the Resource Sharing Project offers this ReShape with tools and resources to support their anti-racism work. While we must work diligently to address all forms of oppression, and recognize the inherent relationship between all interlocking oppressions in our work to end sexual violence, our specific focus on racism in this issue allows us to address one of the most structural, institutional forms of oppression; one that creates inequalities in power, access, opportunities, services, and policy in our communities, our institutions, and our organizations. For the good of all, we must challenge words and actions that marginalize, exclude or dehumanize others. Only through identification of the ways racism affects us all, can we begin to shape our commitment to anti-oppression work. Practicing anti-racism work is an ongoing commitment, that if not addressed will divide and weaken our abilities to provide the best services to survivors of sexual assault. We must courageously and honestly examine how racism affects our own organizations so that we may provide stronger anti-oppressive leadership to our member programs and allies.

In this issue, we provide a round-up of resources on anti-racism work to guide you in this work and examples of the great work your peers are doing to address oppression. Attached are multiple examples of letters, press releases, and other published statements reacting to and supporting individuals and groups speaking out about racism and oppression.

Round-up of Anti-racism Resources

Anti-racism work is an ongoing, everyday process of active allyship, listening and learning as organizations and as individuals. In that spirit, the Resource Sharing Project provides some of our favorite resources to aid in your journey to undo racism in your coalition and community. Anti-racism work is an integral part of our work to end sexual violence and essential to advance communities of color leadership in our movement and beyond.

The full list of resources can be accessed at this link: www.resourcesharingproject.org/anti-racism-resource-round.

Coalition Response to National Incidences of Oppression

Anti-oppression work is an integral part of our work to end sexual violence and essential to advance communities of color leadership in our movement and beyond. It can be helpful to see some examples of how various coalitions have created statements in allyship condemning oppression and racism.

The following are collected excerpts of how coalitions and allied organizations have connected the issue of sexual violence to broader social injustices. [For the full text examples, click here to access the documents on the Resource Sharing Project website.](#)

Women of Color Network, Inc.

This statement from November 2014, is a call to action to mobilize and link all forms of violence and intersecting oppressions.

“As many high profile cases continue to occur that directly impact communities of color, Women of Color Network, Inc. (WOCN, Inc.), a national organization working to end violence against women of color and their communities, refuses to take a passive stance. Instead, we seek to galvanize a collective voice in solidarity with those who have lost their lives, and with survivors of individual and collective acts of violence within their homes and within the many systems that victimize and re-victimize marginalized populations.”

National Alliance to End Sexual Violence

A statement discussing the intersectionality of racism and rape.

“We at the NAESV know that only by aggressively addressing both racism and sexism will women of color and white women be able to obtain real justice for the sexual

crimes we suffer. To that end, we call on everyone, particularly creative people working within popular media, to reject and subvert racial and sexual stereotypes. We call on the press to cover more intra-racial acquaintance rape as a serious social and public health crime.”

Iowa Coalition Against Sexual Assault

A statement regarding ICE raids in January 2016 against immigrants and refugees who are survivors of trauma.

“Speaking on behalf of our coalition and on behalf of our sexual assault agencies who serve members of the Latino community, the violent manner in which ICE officers are forcing or coercing their way into homes is unacceptable and damaging. Many of these refugees have already survived a great deal of violence. ICE raids can re-trigger this trauma, making it difficult for survivors of violence to cope. These Central American families are an important part of Iowa communities all across the state and the rest of the country, and they should be treated with respect and dignity.”

Jane Doe, Inc.

A discussion of the direct and indirect connections between the movements to end sexual and domestic violence and the intersections of multiple oppressions.

“There’s much to say, discuss, and grapple with in the aftermath of the two grand juries that failed to indict white police officers in the deaths of two Black men. As we reflect on these cases, we add to the names of Michael Brown and Eric Garner, the names of Marissa Alexander who while not killed will be serving three years in prison, Cece McDonald whose punishment was disproportionate because of the same institutionalized racism and

transphobia that resulted in the deaths of these two men, and countless others whose stories have not made the headlines but whose lives matter.”

New York State Coalition Against Sexual Assault

An open letter regarding violence against women of color.

“As a part of the movement to end violence against women, NYSCASA must also acknowledge our complicity in a movement that too often fails to recognize that women of color started this movement. Women of color continue to make important contributions to this movement, and yet mainstream organizations engage in practices that exclude, discount, and silence women of color. White women must recognize the intersections of oppression and fight for racial justice under the leadership of women of color. Women of color and white women are sisters who must work together in our shared fight for justice.”

Oregon Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence

A statement responding to trauma in activism and the media.

“If for no other reason, we must find ways to respond, organizationally, because our advocates and participants are affected. We’re hearing from many of you that, with the increase in media coverage of racist police violence, community trauma and powerful activism, you’re hurting. You’re confused as to how to integrate your particular day-to-day anti-violence work with what’s happening in the broader world of anti-violence movements. You’re scared for your own safety, or the safety of loved ones or participants. You’re concerned for the young Black and brown people you know and love; will they be safe as they go about their lives?”

Black Women’s Blueprint

This letter was drafted by and submitted by Movement Maker Farah Tanis and her colleagues at Black Women’s Blueprint.

“This letter is to the the sisters assaulted by officers during traffic stops, on highways and byways, in transport from jail cells to the nation’s courtrooms, the backseats of police cars, station bathrooms and on prison floors. It is to the incarcerated and arrested Black women routinely assaulted on hospital beds, and for the women left alone with guards and violated in holding cells at precincts and stations all over our cities and towns.”

Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence

A Statement from the Anti-Oppression Committee of the Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence.

Violence against Black women and transwomen has been committed for centuries as perhaps one of the most frequently utilized weapon of racism, sexism, and misogyny. The torture and degradation of Black women is a time-honored, treasured tool of economic oppression, war, and entertainment for those in privileged positions of power and authority, namely cisgender white men. This truth is so ingrained in our collective, historical conscience and experience, we barely recognize it as truth at all. That is, of course, unless we are targets of the torture.”

Iowa Coalition Against Sexual Assault

Press release announcing participation and support of the Black Women’s Blueprint Justice Ride

“By attending the National Justice Ride in Oklahoma City we hope to remind survivors that they are not alone. We will no longer stand idly by as women of color are brutalized

by State officials who are supposed to protect them. The shameful targeting of victims based on gender, race, class, or circumstance within the criminal and legal system has gone on long enough.”

Jane Doe, Inc.

An endorsement of the Black Women’s Blueprint Justice Ride.

“As a coalition that actively works against racism and oppression, it’s imperative that we show support for these women and to call out the underlying injustice that puts Black women along with other women of color and marginalized communities at risk for sexual and other forms of violence. What happened is not unique to Oklahoma or simply a case of an individual man abusing his position of authority and privilege. This case is a watershed moment that has shone a light on how institutionalized and systemic violence is connected to issues of race and gender. We must listen to the survivors who bravely share their stories and do not allow their truth to remain silenced.”

Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs

A statement in response to the Holtzclaw verdict.

“On January 21, Daniel Holtzclaw was sentenced to 263 years, sentences to be served consecutively resulting from his December 10, 2015 conviction of 18 of 36 counts of sexual assault while on duty as a police officer. The victims range in age from 17 – 57. All of them were African American. Sexual assault convictions are a rare occurrence and even rarer in cases involving perpetrators in positions of power. In the many stages a sexual assault case goes through, systems and communities believed

these survivors enough to move this case forward to a just end.”

Idaho Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence

A statement in response to the tragic Charleston church shooting.

“The tragedy in Charleston occurred because of racism. While there has been much dialogue about the missed opportunities for intervention in other areas such as mental health and gun control, Charleston is about race and our culture of white supremacy. Dylan Roof’s overwhelmingly racist statements made while he opened fire on a prayer group and killing nine Black people who had welcomed him into the prayer group with open arms, are about race, not rape.”

Iowa Coalition Against Sexual Assault

This statement discusses the intersections that exist within society around racism and violence, in response to the Charleston church shooting.

“As advocates, particularly those of us who are white, it is time to recommit to our work against racism and oppression of all kinds. This is part of our overall mission to end violence, and we must tackle racism head-on. We can’t continue to live in a country where these sacred homes of worship are unsafe for our families, friends, colleagues, and community members who are African American.”

Washington Coaliton of Sexual Assault Programs

A statement that describes the coalition’s commitment to ongoing anti-racism work.

“What we have seen over the past year has been the grieving process of a number of communities in the wake of the killings of numerous African American people—men, women, transwomen, and children—by law

enforcement officers and, more recently, by a white supremacist. This is not new. The deaths in the African American community are not more frequent now than before. We are noticing now because these communities made people notice and made their grief heard.”

NYSCASA’s Anti-Oppression Work: Lessons Learned

*by Joanne Zannoni,
NYSCASA Executive Director*

Overview

NYSCASA, with the support of the National Women of Color Network, has been actively engaged in anti-oppression efforts since 2012. We have set agency anti-oppression priorities, re-established the women of color caucus and the aspiring allies workgroup, created a person of color listserv, developed an advisory group, secured grant funding for our anti-oppression work, taken a critical look at our organizational structure, revised personnel policies, and enhanced hiring procedures. This work has been both incredibly challenging and satisfying. I could share many aspects of our anti-oppression activities, but I will focus on some of the lessons we learned during our journey so far.

Lesson #1: Get Support

When I became NYSCASA’s Executive Director in 2010, I inherited an organization facing many serious challenges. In the midst of all of this, staff mentioned the women of color caucus and allies workgroup that had been active only a few years before. Staff also shared that NYSCASA was supposed to receive some anti-oppression training, and when I

followed up, I learned that the organization had missed the window of opportunity on that. Just a couple months after I was hired, during our staff strategic planning retreat, the topic of traditionally underserved populations came up, and it was clear that our organization had work to do. I did not feel able, at that time, to lead the agency effectively with regard to anti-oppression efforts, and so I told everyone that I felt it was incredibly important work we must do, we would revisit the issues, and I would be looking for support to assist us in undertaking anti-oppression activities in a manner that was helpful, not harmful.

About 18 months passed before the National Women of Color Network offered the National Call to Action Training and Technical Assistance Project (NCTATAP). NCTATAP was designed to provide anti-oppression support to state/tribal/territorial domestic violence, sexual assault, and/or dual coalitions to encourage constructive organizational culture and improve quality of services to communities of color. I completed the application, and NYSCASA was one of the eight coalitions selected to participate in the inaugural class in 2012. Actively participating in NCTATAP truly increased our capacity as a staff to do the work thoughtfully and effectively.

Lesson #2: Take Action – No Excuses

Between 2010 and 2012, when I was not feeling especially prepared to lead the coalition’s anti-oppression efforts, I did not use this as an excuse for inaction. Anything we deem a priority gets our attention. During this time, I talked with colleagues about anti-oppression work to find out what resources might be available to NYSCASA. I also

identified an opportunity for action that felt manageable—working to diversify NYSCASA’s Board of Directors—and I identified a list of seven strong candidates of color for the Board’s consideration. As a result of those initial efforts, the Board became and has remained more diverse than the Board I inherited in 2010.

Lesson #3: Be Clear About Your Organization’s Capacity

NYSCASA’s participation in NCTATAP included each staff member completing a survey and an interview. The purpose was to assess where our organization was on the Cultural Spectrum of Service Delivery and to provide recommendations for our anti-oppression work. Some staff seemed a bit nervous about the survey and interview, so I told them reassuringly not to worry, be honest, and it will be fine.

When I read the report of our compiled results, I must admit my heart sank. Our Cultural Spectrum of Service Delivery score was about as low as it could be. Furthermore, the first recommendation felt completely devastating. It said:

“Throughout the interviews, several respondents identified challenges that were associated with leadership transitions and the feelings about the loss of staff members in the past few years. Given the current challenges faced by the organization, decide if anti-oppression training is appropriate at this time.”

Yes, our organization was facing a lot of challenges, but we were already much stronger than when I started at NYSCASA in 2010. I shared the results with staff and sought their feedback about moving forward

with the anti-oppression training. Staff unanimously agreed that the assessment had underestimated us and that we were committed to moving forward with our anti-oppression work.

Lesson #4: Expect Good Doses of Discomfort All Along the Way

Any organization will inevitably consist of people with different experiences, perspectives, personalities, and backgrounds. Some of the anti-oppression work must take place individually, but there must also be enough cohesiveness for the group’s work to move forward. There were times when I or another staff member needed to provide a co-worker with additional support and encouragement to participate in some aspect of the work. There were times when some staff, infused with outrage, wanted NYSCASA to take bolder steps than most of us felt would be helpful, and I had to reign in the impulses with a dose of reality. Working effectively as a team is important.

Lesson #5: Respond Respectfully and Lovingly

People have a lot of fears when it comes to addressing racism and other forms of oppression. People often have had unpleasant experiences that increase their anxiety. The NYSCASA staff was not unique. We each felt vulnerable at times. One of the things we learned during the on-site NCTATAP trainings was the importance of doing the work with love. Nudge gently. Communicate caringly. Take this approach, and people will be honest in a way that allows genuine progress to be made.

Lesson #6: Know That You Might Feel Lost Sometimes

There is no well-established route or roadmap to follow. It’s helpful to get support from

others who have ventured down this path, but your journey will be unique. You can't just follow thoughtlessly in somebody else's footsteps, you have to blaze some of the trail yourself. You can find out what others have done to help inform the decisions you make on your trek, but you need to consider what parts make sense for your organization and what parts don't fit well. This isn't the kind of work that you can do meaningfully by following somebody else's checklist. You've got to wrestle with the issues for yourselves to be successful.

We asked our NCTATAP training team for guidance on how to handle different tasks. We brainstormed how to restart the women of color caucus with colleagues and allies. We asked other coalitions for sample policies. We requested and received a lot of support, but we consistently applied our critical thinking skills to what was before us.

Lesson #7: Identify Your Priorities

During the on-site NCTATAP training sessions in 2013, our training team helped us to identify and develop our top eight goals and objectives. Our goals included restarting the women of color caucus, using privilege to influence policy and to advocate for inclusive practices, and documenting our anti-oppression work to help replication in other programs. With regard to our goal of using privilege to influence policy and to advocate for inclusive practices, NYSCASA identified five key activities: (1) review and update NYSCASA policies and procedures for inclusivity to ensure that we recruit, retain, support, and promote women of color; (2) participate in systems advocacy; be a spokesperson for inclusivity by advocating to policymakers, funders, and others who have the power to make decisions; (3) include an anti-oppression

lens when providing feedback on legislation; establish, grow, and support an advisory board for the purpose of including input from people of color to help guide NYSCASA work; and provide training, information, and resources to rape crisis programs and allies. I will refrain from listing all of our goals and activities here because you will be more likely to come up with your own wonderful ideas if I don't stifle them with NYSCASA's list.

Lesson #8: Expect to Have More Questions Than Answers

Each step of the way brings something new. Some of the tasks might be pretty simple and straightforward, but some of the tasks will take far more time, energy, and effort than you ever imagined. You may start off an activity easily, but then questions arise as things evolve. We had questions about what our goals should be, how to achieve our goals, and who would take the lead on specific activities. We wondered how we could jumpstart the women of color caucus. We knew we wanted to review our personnel policies through an anti-oppression lens, but we weren't sure we knew what good policies even looked like. We started an advisory group, but we haven't figured out the best way to engage this group. After more than a year, we are still working on how we can best ensure a woman of color witness is present in our aspiring allies group. We are considering whether we can open up the aspiring allies group to phone participants. And there are dozens more questions to which we haven't figured out the answers.

Lesson #9: Be Ready for More Change Than You Originally Expected

Our NCTATAP training team warned us that engaging in anti-oppression work tends to lead to other organizational changes. That

is what happened for NYSCASA. No sooner had we developed our anti-oppression goals in 2013, then staff bravely raised other big issues—supervision and pay equity. NYSCASA saw dramatic organizational structure changes early in 2014, followed by additional in-depth dialogue as a full staff on the best organizational structure and how to address pay equity. These were incredibly difficult conversations, but we worked through them to a point where we arrived at solutions that we could all live with, even if we couldn't reach perfect consensus.

In 2015 when we received funding for some new projects and had the opportunity to hire three new staff, everyone remembered that we had made a commitment in 2013 that the next position we had available would be filled by a qualified woman of color. In 2013, only one NYSCASA staff member was a woman of color, staff turnover was essentially nonexistent, and our best hope was that eventually we would have one position to fill. We had done a lot of work on strengthening our hiring procedures, but staff seemed concerned that we would fail at recruiting people of color for our positions. I was the lead for hiring the Associate Director, and two other staff members were the leads for hiring the Policy Coordinator and the Outreach Coordinator for PREA. Well into the hiring processes, I checked with staff to see how it was going and discovered that they were hoping that I had a qualified woman of color candidate for the Associate Director position (I actually had two) because they did not have qualified people of color for the other positions. I had a conversation with the full staff to let them know that this was not acceptable, that ideally we would hire three qualified people of color to strengthen our staff's diversity, that I would accept two

qualified people of color to fill the positions, but that I would not settle for only one (which would translate into two women of color out of a staff of eight). I shared my philosophy on the matter that there are two possible explanations when we say we don't have a qualified person of color for a position: (1) there aren't any qualified persons of color for the position (which I don't believe); or (2) there is a flaw in our process for recruiting and hiring people for our positions (which I do believe). Given this philosophy, I said that we needed to re-advertise the positions and do a better job of recruiting. We reviewed the long list of places we had initially developed for sharing the job postings and identified additional places, including word of mouth and other less formal avenues, for sharing the job openings—and then we distributed the job postings through all of the initial and new avenues on our list. This was not a popular expectation, but staff agreed to redouble their efforts, and the results were wonderful. The three positions have been offered and accepted by two women of color and one man of color (translating into half of our staff of eight being people of color).

Lesson #10: Engage in Process and Action

Find the balance. You can't just talk and process all the time because things don't get done that way. You can't just check off tasks without wrestling with the thoughts and emotions because the tasks have less impact. We worked at finding the right blend of process and action. We ultimately decided that the first hour of each monthly staff meeting would be set aside for holding us accountable for completing tasks (i.e., providing updates on previously identified action items, determining next steps, and assigning tasks and deadlines to keep progress moving forward). We decided that our

monthly aspiring allies group would be the place where we focused more on processing articles, current events, and issues.

Lesson #11: Accept That You Will Make Mistakes

I entered into this work really wanting to do things right. We all were concerned about doing things wrong. It mattered to us. We didn't want to hurt each other. Striving to effectively engage in anti-oppression work is a good aim to have, but expecting to always do it right isn't reasonable, and having those feelings can paralyze you into doing nothing. We have learned that we will make plenty of mistakes in spite of our best intentions, and we have learned that people are resilient enough to stay on the journey in spite of those mistakes. We try our best and learn and keep moving forward.

We spent nine months reviewing and improving personnel policies. People were really impressed with some of our changes—for example, we have no set holidays because we allow each staff member to select the 11 holidays they wish to take off. In spite of all this careful attention and effort, we realized after we had our newly revised and Board-approved personnel policies that we had missed a couple of important details. We will handle these in the next round of changes.

We also thought that we were doing something wonderful by establishing an advisory group consisting of members who represent the interests of traditionally underserved communities. Then we read an article about trickle-down community engagement and realized what a privileged mainstream approach we had taken. We are

still working on how to fix that one.

Conclusion

Anti-oppression work isn't easy. You may feel like you don't know what you're doing, and you probably don't. But figure it out. Get support from others to help you figure it out. This work is too important to not do. Be brave. Have faith. Take the first step.

A Conversation with Dr. Monique Morris *Tracy Wright,* *RSP TA Provider at NCCASA*

It took about four years to create, yet *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools* is right on time. With the movement to end sexual violence focused on bringing in the margins and working from the intersections while advocating in systems, *Pushout* is the start button on a delayed conversation two decades in the making. The author, Dr. Monique Morris, is wickedly smart. Her bio alone makes one want to increase their current student loan debt to grasp her methodologies and fine threading of policy, systems, gender, and race that lead to the pipeline where Black girls are embedded in corrections institutions yet “invisible.” When fully addressing the school to prison pipeline we have acknowledge socioeconomic factors and how they intertwine with the systems of education, law enforcement, and social services.

Morris, at her core is an advocate and researcher. She saw the pipeline being built and its impact, particularly on Black girls, sometime ago. “Ten years ago people were

not ready to talk about the conditions and trauma of Black girls.” Morris insists that there was a real notion that Black girls were fine and the priority was to be on boys, thereby making the reality and experiences of Black girls unrecognized and unconsidered.

When asked why Pushout is relevant for the anti-sexual violence movement, Morris painted a picture rooted in victimization. “The book is important to sexual assault because it connects the consistency of victimization and its interaction with and in systems.” From my research, 80% of Black girls in correctional facilities have experienced some form of sexual or domestic violence.” Morris believes that alternative system’s advocacy that interrupts entry into the pipeline of the industrial complex is imperative. “Black girls are being pushed out of schools, and go home to strenuous home, socioeconomic conditions only to end up in facilities that exacerbate trauma.” While hearing this, I visualized an actual pipeline. I thought about the number of sexual assaults, victimization, and unimaginable trauma experienced by Black girls as they shuffled through this manufactured existence. Countless Black girls try to escape but the systems won’t allow. That was daunting and sad.

My conversation with Dr. Morris continued centering the narratives of Black girls in facilities. Yes, they have been failed. Morris believes that participatory action and research are remedies. She also encourages the collective of advocates to engage and listen to those pushed out. Morris recalls conversations during her research. “These girls have a vision for what they need, safety, and healing. What they wanted was no one raping them and adults who cared.” She adds, “it’s time for us to construct safe, culturally

relevant safe spaces. To do this, we must shift the message that Black girls won’t perform well and instead lead with love and dissect what makes Black girls unique.”

Rigorous, co-construct, robust, efforts are how Morris described to end the pushout. When asked about the sexual assault coalition’s role in preventing the pushout, Morris spoke to the true essence of mission. “The beautiful thing about coalitions is they have a way of pulling people out of silos, delivering training, resources, working with systems that are a part of the pushout (education, law enforcement, social services,).” Morris believes in our coalition capacity to impact change and policy that disproportionately suspend Black girls steeped in understanding impact on violence and socioeconomics, examine risk factors, understand the dynamics of protection and threats that cause Black girls to avoid school; thereby making them prime candidates to the corrections pipeline. We have to re-imagine how we do the work pushing out dated practices and lifting up those who are most vulnerable: those who look like me.

Reflections on The Black Women’s Truth & Reconciliation Commission

Tracy Wright,

RSP TA Provider at NCCASA

It was beautiful day in New York City. I entered the United Nations Church to harmonies and strong voices telling narrative over rhythmic sounds. The chants were of self-worth, community and awareness. My selfish self said, “wow I am a super-shero and every

super-shero must have their theme music so this is mine.” As the voices proclaimed beauty and emancipation from negativity, my self decreased and I realized I had entered the TRUTH of Black and Brown girls. It felt good. Imagine a sea of young gifted and Black bodies swaying, clapping in true celebration of their TRUTH.

This Saturday in May was the day of the Black and Brown girl. The set-up of the room even echoed these sentiments as girls were the radius. The circumference of the circle was elders who actively listened during conversations around safety, social media, and violence. The only time the elders infused their voices into the space was with love and kindness when a girl dismissed her beauty, full lips, or curvy hips. Soft yet firm voices from the likes of Dorothy Pitman Hughes, the co-visionary of Ms. Magazine, would correct and remind the youth that they were perfect and beautiful just as they were. By far one of the most compelling components of the day was the conversations with youth about their communities and issues impacting the Black and Brown girl. They had the full gamut of social justice issues in their vocabularies. They knew injustice, unsafe environments, and innovative remedies. They lived in the intersections of the roots of violence. I learned about the impact of street harassment of Black girls in urban settings. Majority of the girls vividly recanted an experience of when trying to go to school on subways and buses or just in community they were faced with encounters of aggressive approaching, name calling and body shaming. They didn't and don't feel safe. The day was filled with spoken word, group think activities and imagination for justice exercises. Our time together ended with each girl contributing to the fluid Black Girls Bill of Rights. The only

requirement to writing this history was to tap into black girl magic and share why they ROCK. “We can do anything because our ancestors overcame a lot and so can we. We can do anything,” said a student. I believe that and will hold that for you, young lady, because you indeed can!

A rainy Sunday in Harlem. A quiet space with an energy of anxiousness. Everyone assembled was hoping for something: peace, hope, conviction, truth, and peace. The ceremony opened with chants and practices of yesteryear. Ancestors and their strength were summoned. I was sitting in Reconciliation. Brilliant minds and social change agents actively listened to “conjurer” Monika Johnson-Hostler invoke charges to the collective to embody the change they want to be in the world by engaging in policy, intervention, and awareness building. She challenged them to do their respective parts in the move to end violence against women and girls. The Black Women's Blueprint, the organization responsible for the convening, gave us the “blackprint” to design and re-imagine what we need to move forward in centering the voices and experiences of black girls. It begins with Truth and Reconciliation. It's what we ask of every survivor and what's needed in the self-discovery each of us experiences that comes along with doing this work.

You can learn more about the Black Women's Truth and Reconciliation Commission at <http://www.blackwomensblueprint.org/sex-assault.html>.

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