

“Times Up” Could Be “Times Up” on #MeToo

By Jodi Payne

When I was eleven years old, my 5th grade math class cycled through three different teachers that year. All of them were young, charismatic women with zealous work ethic and passionate hearts for their students. Yet, each teacher departed suddenly, leaving the students to question why.

It wasn't until later that we found out the reason for their leave. Mr. Dunbar, the history teacher next door, had been fired based on accounts of sexual harassment in the workplace by a fellow teacher-- a male, who had witnessed Mr. Dunbar's behavior and finally came forward. Still, this did not keep my three previous math teachers from feeling so silenced by the workplace and resulting social climate that they would sooner leave it altogether than speak out against their mistreatment.

That was 2006. Little did they know that was the same year feminist and social activist Tarana Burke co-founded Just Be Inc. in response to the overwhelming stories she heard about women-- of all colors and sizes and backgrounds-- who had been subjected to sexual harassment, trauma, and violence. This movement focused on rehabilitating female victims of these crimes while furthering the well-being and confidence of women of color in allegiant solidarity. Courtney Connelly from CNBC wrote, saying Burke's vision for this act was to create a community, for women like herself, who could feel safe in discussing their trauma. From this dialogue, Burke continues, they might learn how to combat it on a social and socio-political scale.

Last year, in light of the Harvey Weinstein allegations and charges, actress Alyssa Milano gave greater voice to Burke's message by taking to Twitter. She encouraged all sexual abuse and harassment survivors to unite under a single hashtag of recognition: #metoo. Overnight, millions of women (and men) began using the hashtag to tell their stories-- on Twitter, on Facebook, and even on Instagram. Other celebrities and icons began to speak out as well and took to the forefront of the movement. Thus, the #metoo wave swept across the nation and even made international coverage and alliances.

From this, TIME magazine covered spokespeople for #metoo and their stories, signifying 2017 as the year of the “Silence Breakers”. (Zacharek, Dockterman, & Edwards, TIME, 2017). The magazine special featured stories from women of all ages and backgrounds who had experienced sexual trauma in the workplace or in any professional setting. This indicated that such issues have no race, gender, or socio-economic preference, but can affect women and men from any of these backgrounds.

Now, many are working tirelessly to continue promoting this hashtag and pursuing its place in 2018. Several public demonstrations and events have attempted to move this progression of candid proclamation forward. This includes the women's marches that took place in several major cities across the US back in march of this year. It is also demonstrated in the recent statement made at the Golden Globes, where actors stood united in the color black in order to pay mind to such events that came to light in 2017.

CNN Entertainment cites Oprah Winfrey ending her at speech the Golden Globes for winning the Cecil B. DeMille award with a message to qualify this show of unification: “So I want all the girls watching here, now, to know that a new day is on the horizon! And when that new day finally dawns, it will be because of a lot of magnificent women, many of whom are right here in this room tonight, and some pretty phenomenal men, fighting hard to make sure that they become the leaders who take us to the time when nobody ever has to say "Me too" again.” Because of powerful words, demonstrations, and communion of voices, 2018 has transitioned to include even more than the #metoo movement. To instill finality within its bounds, 2018 has been deemed the “Times Up” year, where the time is up on excused and unaddressed sexual abuse and harassment.

I wish a space like this could have been established earlier for women like my 5th grade math teachers. However In the age of backlash against female empowerment in public demonstration, and in the face of a political world that values leaders who participate in “locker room talk”, the “Times Up” mentality has become more important than ever.

The continuance of open conversation about sexual assault proved its monumental worth through the wide support of #metoo. Yet, solidarity must stretch beyond the hashtag to a “Times Up” stronghold, where the world will acknowledge that survivors will not just stand together but fight together to end the epidemic.

As Oprah Winfrey so eloquently asserted, the hope, then, is for a global community so brimming with warriors and platforms for #metoo victims that the world will not need #metoo any longer.

The more light that is shed and stories that are heard, the more intolerance the activist community will possess for the “Harvey Weinsteins” of the world. Beyond this, our devotion to action-driven dialogue will result in profound power that will exist to combat sexual injustice worldwide.