

Indomitable, Not Invisible

By Zhané Kelly

In 1962, Malcolm X stated that “The most disrespected person in America is the black woman. The most unprotected person in America is the black woman. The most neglected person in America is the black woman”. Decades later these words continue to be proven true. Black Lives Matter is the voice and constant support behind the most unprotected and disrespected people in our society; an ever-present reminder that I am not of less value because I am a black woman, but that I and every black woman are loved, valued, and deserve respect.

Kenneka Jenkins. On September 9, 2017, 19-year old Kenneka’s body was found in a walk-in freezer at a hotel where she had been staying. When her mother learned of Kenneka’s disappearance, she was dismissed by dispatchers. Worried and concerned, Teresa Martin, Jenkins’ mother, begged for help and when no help was offered, she had to take matters into her own hands by knocking on individual hotel room doors, desperate to find Kenneka. When Jenkins’ body was later found, it was ruled accidental, as police claimed Jenkins entered the freezer on her own while drunk. A mother’s cries for help were ignored as she was not taken seriously, cries that could have found her daughter sooner if somebody had just listened. BLM offered a listening ear to Kenneka’s death. Time and time again, we see the criminal justice fail black girls as they inadequately seek answers, applying little to no urgency to these cases. But the BLM movement brought awareness to this case and many others like it. BLM created and continues to create a community coming together to ask the questions law enforcement should be asking. When white girls of the same age suffer these same fates, their stories are plastered across TVs, newspapers, and social media. But BLM works tirelessly to give Kenneka and girls like her the attention their cases deserve.

Megan Pete. In July of 2020, the trailblazing rapper Megan Pete, better known as Megan Thee Stallion survived a violent incident where she suffered gunshots in both of her feet. When the assault was made public, many people took to social media to craft memes

and jokes surrounding the shooting. Even celebrities participated in diminishing the violence against Megan by posting jokes rather than offering their support. We live in a society where the pain of black women is constantly reduced to being the lifeline of insurmountable jokes. Society was quick to forget that Megan and black women are also human beings; people who laugh and cry like everyone else. As black women, we are forced into the complex narrative of strong black women. When faced with times of trauma and persecution, this narrative fixes the blame on us, putting us at fault whilst excusing everyone else from responsibility. Black women are strong because we have never had anyone to be strong for us. But this is where BLM reminds us that black women too feel pain, we too experience failures and struggles, we too face emotional turmoil. The movement worked and continues to work to offer the love and support victims of violence deserve. It is the reminder that the mental health, just as well as the physical health of black women matters. It has established a community where black women are allowed to be human.

Dr. Susan Moore. On December 20th, Dr. Susan Moore died due to complications from COVID-19. In a gut-wrenching video uploaded shortly before her death, Moore expressed the racism she experienced at the Indiana hospital where she was being treated, as her healthcare providers ignored and dismissed her complaints of pain and discomfort. Unfortunately, this situation is not new to black women. The pain of black women is even ignored by those who swore an oath to help them. With black mothers dying in childbirth at three times the rate of white mothers, BLM is the voice shouting to society that this should not be considered normal. BLM is a demand to dismantle the systems that seek to devalue black worth and keep us in a state of oppression.

The three words behind the name of this movement hold immeasurable power. Black Lives Matter is a declaration that black lives are not worth less than others. It is the spotlight we need on anti-Blackness across the globe. It is a community where black women like

myself are reminded that we deserve better and that in what feels like a never-ending battle, we will emerge victoriously.