

#WhyIDidntReport highlights society's long-term problems By Kenya Smith

For the past few years, sexual assault has been a major topic in today's society. Both women and men have opened up about how they were sexually violated. These personal discussions have begun movements such as #MeToo and #TimesUp. Now, at the wake of a sexual assault investigation involving Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh and his accuser Christine Blasey Ford, there's a new movement that is adding to the narrative, #WhyIDidntReport.

#WhyIDidntReport is a huge clap back to the skeptics who believe that the victims waited too long to report their incidents. What many fail to understand is that even if they had reported their ordeal right away, nine times out of 10, it would have been a huge disaster for the victims. Some victims felt ashamed to talk about being sexually violated, especially if the alleged perpetrator was a family member or was prominent and well liked in the community.

Then, there were those who decided to say something right away, but it didn't work. In October 1991, millions watched as Anita Hill sat in front of the Senate Judiciary Committee to testify that she had been sexually harassed by Clarence Thomas who was a nominee for the Supreme Court at the time. Despite Hill's detailed and graphic testimony, Thomas was confirmed as Supreme Court Justice. Recently, a man won't go to prison for strangling and sexually assaulting a woman in Anchorage, Alaska. All he was given was a slap on the wrist by the judge. When victims brought up their ordeal to their families, co-workers and law enforcement, it was either swept under the rug or dismissed by unbelief. In some cases, the victims are held responsible for the assault instead of the perpetrator. Others victims have seen how the court system use factors that do not determine the possibility of being sexually violated such as dress, location, sexual history and intoxication in order blame individuals. Whether the victim's attire was modest or not, that's no guarantee that a person will not be sexually violated. There are many people around the world who live by strict dress codes, and yet they are sexually violated. Just because a victim was intoxicated with drugs or alcohol, that doesn't mean they're giving consent. I don't care whether the victims were promiscuous or not, if they said no verbally or physically (brushing off a hand or pushing someone away), they meant no. I certainly don't care if the perpetrator was prominent in society. In order to make our justice system better, we must make sure that no one is above the law.

I pray that the #WhyIDidntReport movement, as well as #MeToo and #TimesUp will tell society to stop making loopholes and excuses for the abusers by shaming and blaming the victims. This is not to say that these movements are perfect, because when humanity is involved, there is no such thing as perfect. I am also aware of the stories of Emmett Till and the Scottsboro boys whose accusers recanted their stories of sexual assault. Also, Lena Baker is another person who needs to be recognized on the forefront for she had suffered at the mercy of her boss and was executed for his death. I pray that victims will no longer have to suffer in silence nor be intimidated for speaking out and that the truth will come out.

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Hate crime or hoax? Wait and see
By Kenya Smith

“Empire” actor Jussie Smollett told the Chicago Police Department last month that two masked men attacked him and shouted racist and homophobic slurs. He also claimed that the perpetrators shouted, “This is MAGA country!”, doused him in a bleach-like substance and put a rope around his neck. As a result, the police classified the attack as a hate crime. After days of investigating, police located the two men involved. The men, who are personal trainers of Nigerian descent (both were born in the U.S.), claimed that Smollett paid them \$3,500 to stage the attack, and they provided their evidence. As a result, Smollett was arrested for making a false report. As of this week, some media outlets have retrieved a copy of the \$3,500 check along with a copy of text messages between Smollett and one of the men.

Despite this incident, it is still a fact that hate crimes are a reality in today's social climate. The U.S. Justice Department reported that in 2017, there were 7,175 reported hate crime incident which included 7,106 single bias incidents and 69 multiple bias incidents. For single bias incidents, the numbers based on motivation for 2016 and 2017 are as follows:

Race/Ethnicity/Ancestry

- 2016 – 3,489
- 2017 – 4,131

Religion

- 2016 – 1,273
- 2017 – 1,564

Sexual Orientation

- 2016 – 1,076
- 2017 – 1,130

Gender Identity

- 2016 – 124
- 2017 – 119

Disability

- 2016 – 70
- 2017 – 116

Gender

- 2016 – 31
- 2017 – 46

If we calculate these numbers correctly, we would see that there were 1,043 more hate crimes in 2017 than 2016. While these statistics are 2-3 years old, recent reports have shown that these numbers are rising, and it is becoming quite clear thanks to the usage of social media and technology.

For example, a Florida woman who was arrested for a DUI made threatening statements to a black police officer such as, “My KKK friends will burn your family.” A gay man in Utah recorded a video of an intoxicated man who asks him about his sexuality and throws a punch after the victim said yes. This was after the man approached the victim and his friends and made homophobic and misogynistic statements. Black workers in Ohio sued General Motors because they found nooses and “whites only” signs at the plant where they worked. In West Virginia, a woman shouts “Get the **** out my country!” at workers at a Mexican restaurant because they were speaking Spanish.

If Smollett is found guilty, it will have a detrimental impact on today's social climate. This situation will heighten the cause of those with hatred towards minorities and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer communities. Hate groups and individuals alike will have a reason to hate certain people. Even worse, when an actual violent hate crime happens, it would be even harder for victims to speak out because people will bring up this current incident to intimidate true victims,

leaving the perpetrators off the hook.

We know there are individuals and organizations who have shown apathy towards the pain and the plight of minorities and the LGBTQ community from the very beginning, and they will try to use this incident to make themselves look good and to mock those who really do care. They are the ones who deny that racism exist and that homophobia is real. They were jeering and snickering about this situation last week. These are the same people who asked, “Oh, Where is the outrage of the black community? Where is the outrage of the LGBTQ community?” The answer is, since we now know more about the check and the text messages, the outrage needs to be put aside for a while until we know for sure what really happened.

Despite all of this chaos, let us not forget individuals like Emmett Till, the Birmingham Four, James Byrd Jr., Matthew Shepard, Gwen Araujo, the Oak Creek Six, Abdisamad Sheikh-Hussein, the Charleston Nine, the Orlando 49, Blaze Bernstein and the Tree of Life 11. These individuals died because of their race, or religion, or sexual orientation, or gender identity. That being said, don't let what is happening now with Smollett stop us from taking action and speaking out against bigotry. Visit <https://www.justice.gov/hatecrimes> to learn more about hate crimes and to dive deeper into the statistics that were mentioned.

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Anti-lynching bill should stay as is By Kenya Smith

Senators Corey Booker (D-NJ), Kamala Harris (D-CA) and Tim Scott (R-SC) introduced a bill called the “Justice for Victims of Lynching Act of 2018.” The bill will classify lynching as a federal hate crime and defines lynching as “an act of willfully causing bodily injury to any other person because of the actual or perceived race, color, religion or national origin,” or “acts that cause injury due to actual or perceived “gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or disability.” Most people believe that lynchings are hangings, but lynchings can be conducted in various forms.

Despite the anti-lynching bill being passed in the Senate, there are some who oppose the current bill. Mat Staver, founder and chairman of Liberty Counsel, was interviewed by OneNewsNow, and advocated to remove the mentioning of “sexual orientation” and “gender identity” before the anti-lynching bill can be passed because he felt that allowing Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered and Queer individuals to be protected under this particular bill would further push the LGBTQ “agenda.” Staver and his organization became upset when media outlets did reports on the organization's disapproval of the bill. They believe that the bill limits the application of the law because it creates a list of protected categories. As a response, Staver said, “Lynching is wrong no matter whether someone is white or black, gay or straight, disabled or able-bodied. An anti-lynching bill should apply to everyone without any categories.”

Let's breakdown the following protected categories that are mentioned in the bill:

- Race (Black/White/Asian/Latino/Native American/etc.)
- Color (light complexion/dark complexion)
- National origin (natural born or immigrant)
- Religion (Christian/Jewish/Muslim/Buddhist/etc.)
- Sexual orientation (gay/straight/bisexual/queer/etc.)
- Gender and gender identity (man/woman/cisgender/transgender/intersex)
- Ability (able-bodied/disabled)

Therefore, without even knowing it, Staver's response to the media outlets confirms the reason why the “Justice for Victims of Lynching Act” was passed by the Senate and why the House needs to pass it. If you read the bill thoroughly, it does apply to everyone. These protected categories are broad, and it can be broken down some more. The bill itself is not providing “special treatment” for specific groups because protecting and valuing all lives are not considered special treatments. Instead it's a fundamental, unalienable and equal right.

He even claimed in his editorial for the *Orlando Sentinel* that “Under this limited application, the federal law would not apply if the perpetrator lynched someone for reasons unrelated to one of these categories.”

However, can he give an example in American history of someone being lynched for reasons other than discrimination?

History has shown us the fact that people used lynching as a tool to disenfranchise certain categories of people as it is mentioned in Section 2 of the bill. For example, the Scottsboro Boys, Lena Baker, Emmett Till, Michael Donald, James Byrd Jr. and so many others were lynched because they were black. Even white people such as Viola Luizzo, Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman were lynched because they supported the Civil Rights Movement. Individuals such as Matthew Shepard, Gwen Auarjo and Blaze Bernstein were lynched because they were LGBTQ individuals.

The House needs to pass this bill in order to atone for the past atrocities and to give justice to future victims. We are now seeing that hate crimes are rising in this country, and it is time that we as a nation become united and speak out against hatred and bigotry. Saying that all lives matter but at the same time advocating to exclude certain lives in an anti-lynching bill is contradictory. Lynching has always robbed people of their existence, and that is an issue of life and death.

As for my brothers and sisters in Christ, the Bible says that if we say that we love God, but hate people, we are lying. Furthermore, if we say we love everybody, but we are not willing to protect everyone's right to live and to be safe, that's not love. That's the definition of hate. If we say we value all lives but celebrate or remain silent when a tragedy is motivated by prejudice against a specific group of people such as the ones in Charleston, Orlando and Charlottesville, that's not valuing. That's the definition of degrading. If we say we care about everybody but remain silent when those who claim to share our faith use our very same faith to incite spiritual abuse on those who are different, that's not caring. That's the definition of apathy.

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