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To Reclaim Our Communities and Culture, Let's Hold Perpetrators Accountable

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During a recent interview, a member of Congress stated,

"We have got this tailspin of culture, in our inner cities in particular, of men not working and just generations of men not even thinking about working or learning the value and the culture of work, and so there is a real culture problem here that has to be dealt with."

This carefully crafted misstatement caused a stir within communities of color because it denied the reality that men and women of color have for generations worked extraordinarily hard to provide for their families. It was a slap in the face that seemed unaware of the factors contributing to poverty in America's inner cities.

However inaccurate, this statement is not surprising because it is part of a narrative we've unconsciously bought into. Over time, with the tragic legacies of global slavery and colonization, dominant society has imposed many standards on us as people of color based on racist beliefs and stereotypes -- ideas about our productivity, economics, intelligence, morals, sexuality and reproduction. But are these truly the standards of our communities or the distortions of our cultures as operationalized in the United States today? Distortions which often create a heightened vulnerability to sexual assault for many women and girls of color.

When it comes to rape culture and manifestations of sexual violence against women, as people of color, we find ourselves at the forefront of this plague. Our women and girls are being trafficked across the United States in a robust underground sexual economy netting billions of dollars per year. Musicians, backed by the rapacious executives of the industry, are encouraged to plaster their videos and liner notes with the scantily clad bodies of women of color, the lyrics of which violate the humanity and dignity of women everywhere. Sexual assault is an epidemic in our communities -- in our homes, families, places of worship, schools; all the places we once held as sacred and safe. The threat is not from the outside; women and children are being violated by the people who are supposed to love them. Fellow community members who are supposed to be neighbors, friends -- trusted.

This is a disappointing reality that is hard for our communities to face. Instead of speaking our truths, we go into secrecy mode, attempting to protect the positive parts of the narrative that has been told about us. We protect the harm-doers out of misguided loyalty because so many of our men have been victimized by the legal system by way of imprisonment, deportation, etc. We lose out on opportunities to protect women in our communities by getting caught up in slut-shaming and other kinds of victim blaming.

But for our own self-preservation, we need to hold perpetrators within our communities accountable for the pain, dehumanization and abuse they inflict; knowing that we are not "selling out" one of our own, but that we are restoring ourselves, our communities and cultures. We at the National Organization of Sisters of Color Ending Sexual Assault (SCESA) encourage our brothers and sisters of color to eagerly seek out our histories and traditions. Perhaps, upon deeper examination we will discover that we come from backgrounds ripe with compassion, respect and wisdom. We need to breathe new life into our traditional values and reject the canned storylines being thrust at us by popular culture. We need to resurrect our time-honored practices of self-care, respect and value for ourselves, for the men, women and children in our communities. Brothers holding brothers accountable; sisters caring about each other in the cherished bonds of sisterhood; a community protecting our mothers, sisters and friends from sexual violence -- for you, your best friend or me.

This post is part of a series produced by The Huffington Post and the National Sexual Violence Resource Center in conjunction with Sexual Assault Awareness Month. To learn more about the NSVRC and how you can help prevent sexual violence, visit [here](#). Read all posts in the series [here](#). Need help? In the U.S., visit the National Sexual Assault Online Hotline operated by [RAINN](#). For more resources, visit the [National Sexual Violence Resource Center's website](#)

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