

Patriarchy and domestic violence

Women as property a dangerous affair

By L'Asia Brown
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Patriarchy is defined as "a form of social organization in which the father is the supreme authority in the family, clan, or tribe and descent is reckoned in the male line, with the children belonging to the father's clan or tribe". The ideologies and systems of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism run staunchly parallel to patriarchal practices, and extreme measures are being taken globally, to uphold this system. Although many would argue that patriarchy is not necessarily a bad thing, the social repercussions of male-worship have taken a detrimental toll on several movements to improve social interaction, namely domestic violence.

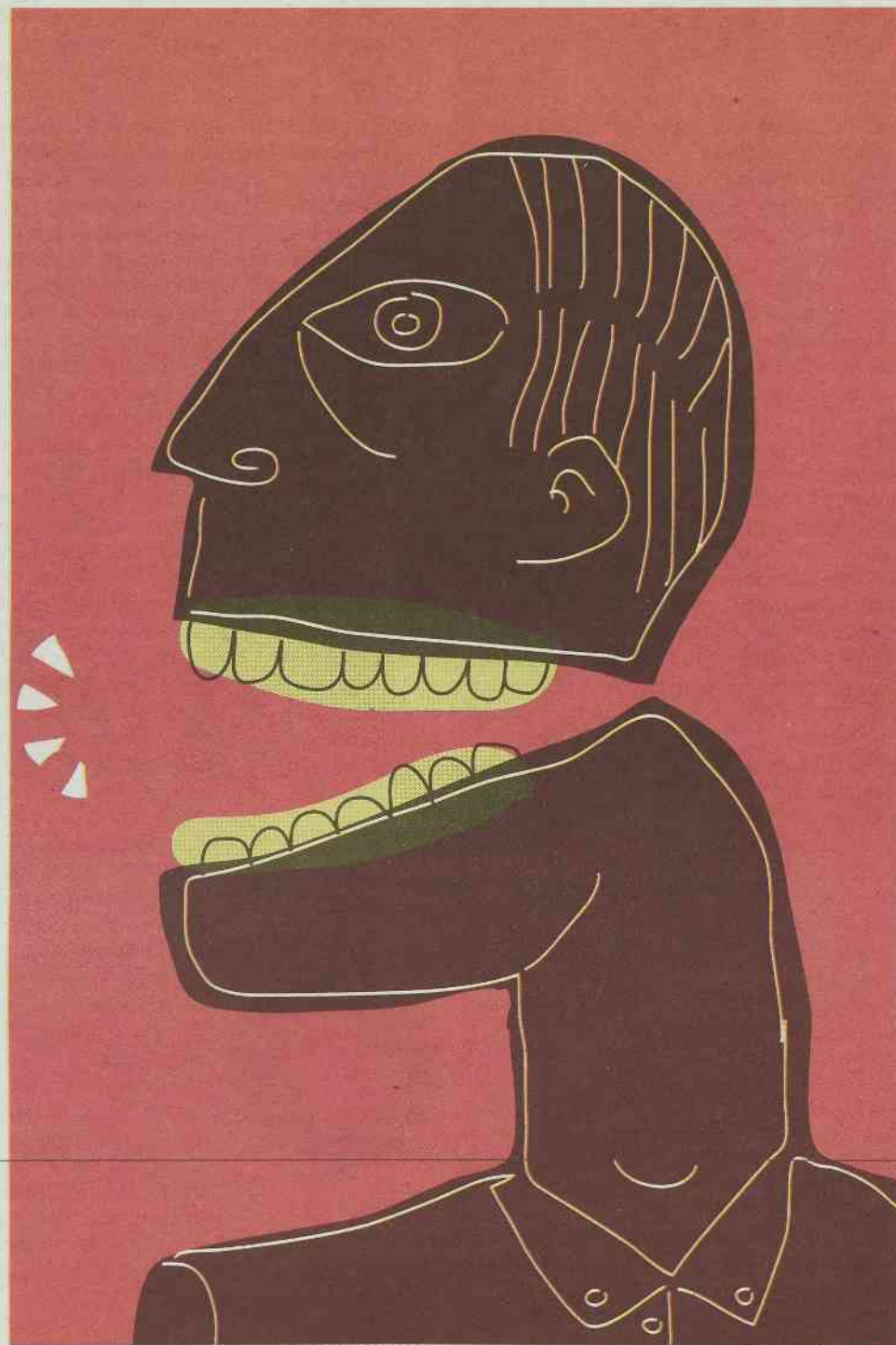
Patriarchy runs rampant in the Black community, from religious sects to the entertainment industry to social attitudes towards marriage, and there is an eerie taboo that hangs over the discussion of abuse in romantic relationships.

Some say the historical and strategic protection of the Black man has resulted in the abuse and exploitation of the Black women. "We're so focused on keeping our men out of the system that we're not reporting incidents of rape and domestic violence. And we're brushing off verbal abuse as a side effect of the Black man's struggle in White America. I'm not buying it. At all," says Veronica Bowles, former family advocacy employee with the US Air Force. "We're not in post-racial America. Our men still have it hard out there, but abuse is unacceptable. We have to start holding offenders responsible. Men and women."

Acceptance of domestic violence in the Black American community is documented as early as the 1930s, when Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, was published. In the novel the main character, Janie, endures a beating from her second husband, Tea Cake. The brilliance of the novel has thus far remained almost unmatched in authenticity, but the manner in which it glamorizes violence, is still relevant today. Hurston succeeds in creating a bizarre linkage between deep love and violence, in which Tea Cake exercises his "masculinity, natural dominance, and love" by striking Janie in her face.

"In many instances the woman is made to be at fault, when in reality, regardless of what anybody says to another, violence isn't the answer. But historically, there are traces of a deep-seeded hatred for women. Women are blamed for a lot, rape, violence. A lot. Until society starts holding the man accountable it'll be really hard to make progress," comments Jordan Oleander**.

On February 7, 1988 actress Robin Givens and professional boxer Mike Tyson were married. Approximately seven months later,



Tyson and Givens were granted a divorce. Givens cited spousal abuse behind her decision to leave the marriage. On February 8, 2009, singers Chris Brown and Robin "Rihanna" Fenty allegedly had a violent fight inside a rented Lamborghini. Pictures of a battered and bruised Rihanna leaked days later, with both parties later going on record to discuss the incident, though never in full detail.

Still, there are people who believe Givens and Fenty "provoked" the incidents, which lays proof to the tendency of the Black community to jump to the defense of the Black man while throwing the Black woman to the wolves of blame and judgment.

"She must've done something to get hit," reads a comment on social-networking site Twitter, during a discussion of Chris Brown's recent dramatic episode on *Good Morning America*. "That was two years ago. He served his time. Leave him alone about it," says another comment.

"In the patriarchal system, the woman is seen almost as property while the man as seen as an owner. Relationships consist of two humans who need to observe mutual respect, physically, emotionally, mentally, and sexually. This nasty perspective of somebody owning somebody else is dangerous," says Oleander. "The issue boils right down

to men and women not being seen as equal, and when two people are not equal, blame is usually shoved on the individual with less value."

A lack of affective rehabilitation services can also be blamed. Offenders are usually given probation or jail time, if reported to law enforcement at all. Group therapy sessions are usually assigned, though their effectiveness has been questioned. On Georgetown University's Counseling and Psychiatric Service Web Site, group therapy is encouraged and heralded. "Group therapy is a powerful venue for growth and change. Not only do students receive tremendous understanding, support, and encouragement from others facing similar issues, but they also gain different perspectives, ideas, and viewpoints on those issues," says the site, but some feel differently. "Group therapy sessions for anger management encourage the offender to suppress their anger instead of effectively expressing it. Going for a walk is going to do what? We need feel comfortable talking about their anger, their issues, their sadness, their problems without the threat of being cast off as nutcases," says a domestic violence offender who requested to remain anonymous.

Sean Smith***, a self-proclaimed secular humanist and freethinker, believes we need to move away from religious forms of therapy, citing flaws in its effectiveness. "We need to promote a more secular way of rehabilitating offenders when it comes to anything. Whether it's domestic abuse, sexual assault, any form of violence, drugs, or whatever. Especially within the Black community because we're so loyal to using religious dogma to be able to rehabilitate people."

"Nobody, not a man or woman, can pick up trash [community service] or sit in a jail cell and magically heal. We need to target the children, because anger doesn't just randomly pop-up in an adult. Domestic violence is usually the result of learned behavior, anger, lack of self-control, and an ignorance of how to express thyself. We need to stop this ridiculous behavior. And we need to stop beating around the bush. You would've thought the bush was a thousand miles wide the way we've sat here and ran around it all these years" says Samantha*, domestic violence survivor.

Between misguided efforts to protect males, old-age resentment towards women, and lackluster rehabilitative efforts in the criminal justice system, taking action against domestic violence will continue to flow like a muddy river.

*Last name has been withheld at the request of the interviewee.

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