

March brings attention to missing Black girls and women

“How many serial killers do we have out here? We don’t know. Are they locked up? We don’t know. Are they dead? We don’t know. This does not happen to white women and white girls, it only happens to Black and brown women and girls.” —Rev. Robin Hood, Chicago West Side Community Activist

By Samantha Latson

Faces of the young and old, from light to deep dark brown, banded together in the evening summer sun as one in Black unity and love, as they marched south on King Drive. They marched, wearing black-and-white T-shirts, carrying posters and banners for those lives discarded, murdered or otherwise stolen from this city they once called home.

On a Tuesday, two days after the start of a summer here in a city braced for a summer of gun violence amid a current uptick so far this year in shootings citywide, marchers sought to transcend current concerns over violence. Their effort: to bring attention to the murder and disappearance of Black women—an issue that organizers here say has been tucked away in the dark.

Titled the “We Walk For Her March,” it was organized by then 13-year-old Azyiah Roberts, who in 2018 said she noticed a lack of urgency by law enforcement and in news coverage in cases of missing or murdered girls who look like her.

“I was angry that Black women and girls around the city were going missing, being harmed, abducted, even murdered and nothing was being said or done about it,” Roberts said, according to a written press release for this year’s march. “I went to my grandmother and to (KOCO) Kenwood Oakland Community Organization and told them we should do a march.”

The march was organized by KOCO and a coalition of other community organizations, including H.E.R. Chicago, Mothers Opposed to Violence Everywhere (MOVE) and Good Kids Mad City, Protect Black Girls, and Long Walk Home.

During the fourth annual walk, Shannon Bennett, executive director of (KOCO), was reminded of what brought the march into fruition, and of its uniqueness.

“This march is important because it came from the mouths of babes. A 7th grader walked into my office asking, ‘Why do I always hear about Amber Alerts for white girls and white women?’” Bennett said, standing on the corner of 35th Street and King Drive, where marchers gathered for the kickoff.

“She expressed that she was tired of Black girls and women not getting the attention they deserve when they go missing,” Bennett said.

“After that, I said, ‘What do you want to do?’ The We Walk For Her

marches started immediately after that young lady came into my office, approaching us with her concerns,” Bennett explained.

The issue of Black women and girls missing has been well documented. A Feb. 2020 article published by the Women’s Media Center reported that tens of thousands of Black women and girls nationwide have been reported missing.

“The harsh reality is that an estimated 64,000-75,000 Black women and girls are currently missing in the U.S.,” reads the report published by the center, a nonprofit women’s activism group founded by Jane Fonda, Robin Morgan, and Gloria Steinem. “...The tens of thousands of Black women and girls who are missing include abductees, sex trafficking victims, and runaways. Black women and girls exist at the intersection of racism and sexism, and quite often poverty.”

In fact, Black women are murdered at twice the rate of women of other races in the United States. According to the Centers for Disease Control, an analysis of female homicide statistics between 2003 and 2014, Black and indigenous women were killed as a result of homicide at rates more than double women of other races.

Those numbers combined with what critics describe as a lack of media coverage and law enforcement attention and dedication to investigations—coupled with the likelihood that the large number of unsolved cases leaves perpetrators free to victimize more Black women—leaves many asking, “Who cares?”

Among those questioning the media’s and law enforcement’s concern over the cases of Black women is Tiarra Hood, 22, president of Youth Opposed to Violence Everywhere, a branch of MOVE.

“They’re trying to push minorities and this issue under the rug because it’s a publicity thing,” said Hood who at-



PARTICIPANTS IN THE “We Walk For Her March” carry a banner down King Drive on Chicago’s South Side to call attention to missing and murdered Black women and girls. The march was held Tuesday, June 22.

tended the recent march. “Black women and girls have been missing for decades, even centuries. They’re trying to brush it under the rug to prevent commotion.”

At the march, escorted by uniformed police escort, a train of humanity inched down the South Side’s King Drive: teenagers, mothers and fathers, babies in strollers, and the small brown legs of children that dangled while resting on the shoulders of the adults who carried them. All marching for “her.”

Zaid Shah, 38, marched with his daughter on his shoulders as his son walked beside them. Shah said it was important for his children to not only be witnesses of the march but also participants.

“I’m out here with my two children because our family is very important to



MARCHERS WALK SOUTH on King Drive from 35th Street.

us,” said Shah, wearing locks and a green knit shirt, his daughter donning a blue jean jumper. “If our children are endangered, we have to be the protectors. We can’t depend on anybody but ourselves to protect our young ones and anyone that is attached to us. That’s intelligence.”

And that is increasingly necessary, according to Reverend Robin Hood, a longtime West Side community activist who sees the disappearance and murder of Black women as a citywide and national issue.

“Historically, the police department has always looked at Black and brown women as roadkill. They’ll say it doesn’t matter, they live a high-risk lifestyle, they shouldn’t have been out, shouldn’t have come home,” Hood said in an interview as the march trailed down King Drive. “...This is what we live with everyday. So when the cop comes and says she was ‘high-risk,’ well, she was 15. How long has she been ‘high-risk?’”

In Hood’s eyes, there is clear disparity in how the media and law enforcement treats the cases of missing and murdered Black women and girls versus white women and girls.

“I remember two women who were found in Washington Park. One was found on one end where the poor folks lived, and the other was found where the gentrification folks had moved,” Hood said. “Guess which one they got on top of first? The one in the area where the gentrification was happening,” he said, answering his own question. “That was much more important because the park on this side is where the poor folks live.”

So on Tuesday, they marched for her, the faces of the young and old, filing down King Drive and shouting in call and response:

“We walk for who?
... We walk for her.
Who keeps us safe?
... We keep us safe.”

Into the evening light, they marched.



ZAID SHAH, 38, walks with his son and daughter in the “We Walk For Her March.”