

Sexual Violence: Flashpoint 2013

Strike While the Iron is Hot!

Earth shattering pressure builds silently along a fault line. You never know when or where the explosion will unleash. But on the threshold of the new year, unleash it has! Overnight there's a whole new, still shifting and buckling landscape in the global fight to end violence against women.

As often happens at some point in long struggles for social change, the masses start breaking out ahead of the movement and taking it on as their own. Though it's exactly what advocates have strived for, it's also volatile and risky times. Uprisings can lead to the desired leaps forward, or just as easily, to crushing set backs as repressive forces galvanize in response, or to just fizzling out in despair. Which way it goes often depends on the ability of experienced advocates to swiftly step up, inform, push back repressive forces and myths, and channel peoples' outrage toward lasting goals.

It's not just in India where people are spontaneously rising up against violence against women, though the action in India has been astonishing. Even measured against the panorama of all human history, it's hard to think of any other time when a nation has raised up in sustained protests against violence against women, and especially not against rape, the most myth-shrouded violation of all. That this has taken place in India, with its population of a billion people, - one in every seven people on the planet - and its global beacon of development and progress, by itself, bodes of tectonic shifts!

But even India aside, look back over just the last year and you can see an unprecedented pattern building steam all around. A worldwide outcry rose up against the shooting of Pakistani girls' rights activist, Malala Yousafzai. Sustained national ridiculing of one high ranking U.S. Republican after another for their ludicrous pontificating on rape, led to their resounding defeats at the polls. Uproar over media icon Rush Limbaugh calling law student Sandra Fluke a slut led to Limbaugh's sponsors leaving in droves.

Unflinching reporting on the Penn State child sex abuse cover up, week after week, dug deep into its institutional roots, and the same journalistic treatment was given to the Jimmy Seville case and the BBC in England. In Argentina in December, nationwide protests broke out against the acquittal in the trafficking case of Marita Veron.

For over a year now, headlines have been lashing the US military for it's plague of sexual assaults. Spontaneous bursts of 'slut walks' spun from one continent to the next. The continued serial pile on of accusations against Dominic Strauss Kahn have now buried the former head of the world bank for good. And now as I write, official complicities in the Steubenville gang rape case are being exposed. All this and more.

For those of us who have worked for years chiseling away at the seemingly immovable boulders of indifference, these events are nothing short of breathtaking. Interestingly, with few exceptions, these outbreaks in their immediate antecedents have neither been triggered, promoted, nor organized by the violence against women movement. That, by itself, is cause for celebration.

Women's Justice Center * www.justicewomen.com



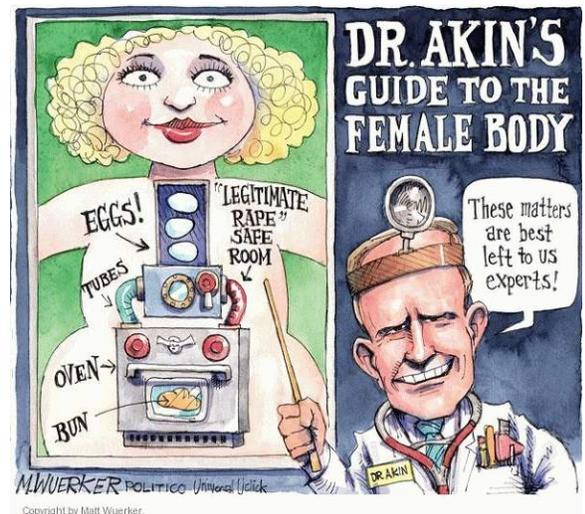
Steubenville, OH Gang Rape Protests



India's Rape Protests



International Outrage at the Shooting of Malala



National Ridicule and Defeats of U.S. Republican 'Rape Experts'



What is of concern is that once under way, the established U.S. violence against women movement has been virtually AWOL, unseen and unheard, as if totally alienated from its activist roots, and determined to avoid the fray.

But it's critical that we do respond! That we wake up! Smell the Coffee! And seize the time! Because if we stand here mute, we've not only become irrelevant, we're squandering the unparalleled opportunities to raise and reset the bar on the very changes we've worked so long to promote.

Rape in the military, exposed

Strike While the Iron is Hot!

Outbreaks of social flux and fluidity don't come around that often, and they generally don't last very long. Whether it's high profile debates, media focus, the whole world watching, or people pouring passionately into the streets, the focus soon shifts, repressive forces push back, and windows of opportunity slam shut.

A Cautionary Tale of Two Countries

There is a cautionary tale writ large in the stories of Pakistan and India, though the same dynamics are at work wherever popular protests occur. When protests broke out in India, a plethora of experienced feminist activists reacted with electrifying speed. In no time they had lists of specific demands spelled out and hoisted high on the international stage. They dispelled myths. They knocked down the draconian calls for death penalties and castration for rapes and quickly derailed attempts by leftist groups to redefine the protests as class and colonialism issues, all without denying the validity of those issues too. In a matter of weeks, India's feminists had taken the raw energy of the protests and forged them into powerful channels and commitments for profound change.

People throughout Pakistan had also taken to the streets in similar outrage at the shooting of girls rights activist, Malala Yousafzai. But without the needed cadre of feminist activists and the social structures to support them the Taliban rapidly rebounded. They brashly escalated their violence to killing health workers, and on New Years day carried out the mass slaughter of 5 female teachers. Instead of being emboldened, girl students were riddled with fear. The girls began protesting, not for education, but against having their schools named after Malala, and, in fear, were tearing her picture off walls.

That kind of repression, of course, is the extreme. What more often happens, as here in the U.S., is that a few heads may roll, perfunctory administrative changes get made, but when the media leaves, the roots and routine of the violence and impunity go on unchanged.

Yes, the Republican 'rape experts' have been sidelined - for now. Joe Pa, DSK, and others have been disgraced and people have vented their rage. The snake has always been able to shed its skin. But it's still the same snake. Just one of many hard realities we must face is that in 2013, in the U.S, when a woman or girl is raped, the chance her rapist will ever spend a day in jail is no better than it was 30 years ago!

You Decide!

Many observers over the last few decades have lamented the decay of the U.S. violence-against-women movement from a fiery mission of social change to the safe and narrow provision of social services. In the social protests over the last couple years, the movement's lack of a cutting edge has been all too evident. Where are our daring, knowledgeable firebrands who would seize the time, provide analysis, fan the flames, rally the cause, set bold initiatives, stake out the next moves, and demand the radical changes needed to rid the world of this patriarchal reign of violence?

It may be that a whole new generation of activists needs to emerge. But if they to have to start by reinventing the wheel without being informed and inflamed by the roots, it will be an terrible loss of precious time and a shame!



Sandra Fluke, NOT a slut



Argentina protests for Maria Veron



World 'Slut Walks'



The demise of DSK