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OPINION

Being Treated as Human Beings That Matter

Why we still need feminism

BY JILL RICHARDSON

From his campaign rhetoric to his transition appointments, our next president has placed himself squarely in a conservative movement calling itself the “alt-right.” That movement, the Los Angeles Times reports, “generally embraces and promotes white nationalism, racism, anti-Semitism, homophobia, transphobia, and misogyny.”

As a privileged, white, and heterosexual woman, I’ve never considered my rights under attack to the same degree as the other groups in that list. But to this incoming bunch, feminism is a dirty word.

For instance, Donald Trump’s chief strategist, Steve Bannon — a leading figure in the “alt-right” media — called feminists “a bunch of dykes.”

Maybe it’s time to review what feminism is, and why it emerged in the first place.

Odds are that most of us have no idea how bad women once had

it. And men, before you check out, let me assure you that this is no man-hating screed. I have a hunch we’ll be on the same page, actually.

No doubt, you probably know that women couldn’t vote until 1920. And that women were once expected to be homemakers instead of pursuing careers. But what else are those up-

and voted for the both of them. And he had a legal right to her body.

This is what the first feminists opposed. Through their agitating, married women first won the right to own property in 1848. The right to vote followed in 1920, but marital rape wasn’t illegal in all 50 states until 1994.

Consider that. Just 22 years ago, a Texas man could still le-

wasn’t one of them. In much of the country, neither was domestic violence.

Once married to your spouse, you were stuck with them unless they committed adultery, more or less. If your husband beat you, that was your problem.

Women who wished to work were relegated to “women’s jobs” like teaching, nursing, and secretarial work, and those jobs

wife as he chose, women had no control over the number of children they had. (Unmarried Americans only gained the right to use birth control in 1972.)

Over the last two centuries, those are the issues feminists have fought for. So why does feminism still exist?

Because women still earn less than men for doing the same work. And because our bodies still don’t enjoy the full protection of the law. To put a finer point on it, the Stanford rapist served just three months in jail for raping a girl behind a dumpster.

Feminism isn’t about hating men or burning bras. It’s about women wanting to be treated like human beings who matter.

So when the white nationalist website Breitbart, under the management of Bannon, asked, “Would you rather your child had feminism or cancer?” the correct answer is outrage that such a question is asked at all — or that the one who asked it is allowed anywhere near the White House.

OtherWords columnist Jill Richardson is the author of *Recipe for America: Why Our Food System Is Broken and What We Can Do to Fix It*.

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pity women whining about?

For starters, there’s the right to own things — like our own bodies.

At the founding of our nation, women were bound by something called “coverture” — the idea that a married woman’s legal identity was subsumed under her husband’s. He owned property

gally rape his wife as often as he chose. How dare those crazy man-hating feminists demand they not be raped!

But wait, there’s more.

Until 1970, states only permitted divorce when one of the spouses was found “at fault.” Only certain reasons were allowed — and falling out of love

paid less than “men’s work.” With men doing all the science, it took until 1966 for the “discovery” that women actually have orgasms.

Married couples couldn’t legally use birth control until 1965. Since abortion was also illegal in much of the country, and since a man could have his way with his

Legal System Fails Girls When They Need Help

And then punishes them for the result

BY NIA NYAMWEYA

In every state in the country, the right to self-defense is considered a mitigating factor in criminal prosecutions. If you use violence to defend yourself in an extreme situation, most Americans believe, the law should treat you gently.

But not everyone gets to enjoy this right. Just ask Bresha Meadows, who was arrested earlier this year for allegedly shooting and killing her father. She was just 14.

Advocates say that prosecutors failed to account for Meadows’ home situation. Her father, they argue, was a violent and abusive man who terrorized her family and threatened to kill them. “In the 17 years of our marriage,” her mother wrote in a court complaint, “he has cut me, broke my ribs, fingers, the blood vessels in my hand, my

mouth, blackened my eyes.”

She went on to warn: “I am 100 percent sure he will kill me and the children.”

More troublingly, the evidence suggests authorities had failed Bresha and her family at earlier moments of crisis. Bresha herself cried out for help to family members and repeatedly ran away from home to escape her situation. Yet law enforcement never questioned Meadows without the presence

of her father and sent her home every time she tried to escape. Now 15 and detained in Trumbull County, Ohio, Meadows faces charges for aggravated murder. Denied pre-trial release, she’s been locked up away from family, friends, and school for months. In October, she was placed on suicide watch.

Unfortunately, Meadows’ case is not unique. In fact, 84 percent of girls in juvenile detention have experienced family violence. And the number of girls in juvenile jail is rising, especially for black girls. Even

as a national conversation around mass incarceration and racial profiling gains momentum, black girls like Meadows are often left out. That sends a harmful message

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that they aren’t valued.

The Meadows case is one of many examples in a larger trend of policies that criminalize girls and leave trauma unaddressed. These systems fail young girls when they need help the most, and then punish them for the result.

“Countless black women, girls, and gender-nonconforming people face similar matrices of interpersonal violence and state violence,” the advocacy group Love and

Protect explained in a statement.

“Many, like Bresha, are criminalized for choosing survival.”

Worse still, the juvenile justice system doesn’t work to rehabilitate anyone. Instead, it’s often damaging and re-traumatizing, especially for people who come from violent

homes. Affordable, community-based solutions that prioritize assessing family security needs over sending teens that lash out to prison would be far preferable to incarcerating traumatized children.

Each day Bresha spends in prison is a reflection that the law doesn’t apply to everyone. “We should be worried about Bresha,” says Mariame Kaba, the founder of Love and Protect. “With the charges they put on her, it could be 25 years to life.”

Though incarceration rates are rising, violence against black girls isn’t new. Our justice system has been failing them for a long time.

A petition is circulating calling for prosecutors to release Bresha Meadows and drop her charges. Like all victims of domestic and family violence, she deserves support. Meadows’ release from detention would send a different message: that black girls’ lives are worthy of defense.

Nia Nyamweya is a Next Leader with the Criminalization of Poverty project at the Institute for Policy Studies. Distributed by OtherWords.org.

