

Remarks by Susan Herman
Take Back the Night March, Pace University
APRIL 14, 2011

I cannot believe we're still doing this!

I went to the first Take Back the Night March in Philadelphia in the 1970's and it's just hard to face that we're still doing this.

Back then, in Philadelphia, and soon after in cities across the country and all over Europe, Asia and Australia—we were fighting to reclaim the streets so that women could feel safe from any form of sexual assault or violence.

We were fighting to be able to walk the streets at night without feeling afraid and vulnerable. We were fighting to have less fear in our lives--and we were fighting for more humane responses when someone did get assaulted. Since then, Take Back the Night has become an annual tradition in cities across the world.

Now, over 30 years later, and after many hard fought battles, I think many of you probably cannot imagine a world without rape crisis centers, or rape shield laws that protect victims from harassment in court. You are used to schools that teach incoming students about date rape, violence, and morning after pills. You are used to seeing self-defense classes on campus. We take a lot of our old victories for granted.

Because of the victories of the women's movement of the 70's and 80's, to a great extent, we

- destigmatized being a victim of rape, incest, and DV,
- ended the myth of the deserving or provocative victim,
- made sexual harassment in the workplace an actionable complaint,
- got date rape recognized as a crime,
- got marital rape recognized as a crime,
- got stalking recognized as a crime,
- started believing children who said they'd been raped or abused, and
- gained recognition of sexual violence as a tool of war and repression.

And we did most of it with little money, little support-- and lots of resistance from the institutions we were trying to change-- but we had lots of heart, vision and energy.

But we didn't go far enough. Too many of the programs we created turned away from advocacy and started to only focus on providing social services. Yes, we served more victims—but we stopped advocating for them as much as we had. We criticized horrible responses by the legal, health care and social service systems, but instead of holding out for really **good** responses, we settled for responses that were only slightly- better- than-awful.

Getting criminal justice and social service agencies to go from bad and harmful responses to neutral or marginally helpful responses-- was a huge, hard fought victory with thousands of battle scars--but there is so much more to do, and we need to keep fighting.

With all our energy and outrage, we didn't end sexual or domestic violence. We didn't even slow it down.

And we did very little to bring men into the movement. We need men to change men's behavior. Check out the anemic response of the military to the sexual assault of female soldiers. Check out the feeble response of the Catholic Church to systematic, decades-long abuse of children by priests.

We need men to be outraged.

We need men to stand up to men who batter women-- and shame them, educate them, and stop them. We need men to stop other men from hurting women. And we need men to speak—or better yet, **shout**-- the truth about men who are victims of sexual assault and violence.

For 30 years we have fought hard to take back the night and reclaim our streets. During these years, we've realized that sexual violence isn't usually perpetrated by strangers. We now know that sexual violence isn't just an outside problem, but very much an inside problem as well--there's violence

in our homes, our apartments, and our dormitories. So, we need to take back our homes as well as our streets.

Thirty years later, we also have new technology that threatens our safety. Before I went to law school, I was a self-defense teacher. I taught women to walk strong, eyes alert, and to be aware of their surrounding environment. But now, with i-pods, cell phones, and headsets, we do everything we can to escape our environment, to isolate ourselves—and in turn, we make ourselves more vulnerable to crime. If we want to take back the streets and be safe-- we have to be aware of the streets-- and not just the music inside our heads.

So, we have much more to do.

My hope—when I see your enthusiasm, and feel your energy—is that you are the generation that **will** do it. I hope that you are the generation that will actually Take Back the Night—and end sexual assault, domestic violence, and stalking. I hope that in another 30 years, none of the young people in this crowd will be standing in front of a Take Back the Night event wondering why the hell we're still doing this.

Keep fighting for what you know is right. Raise your voices, and let the world know that men and women need to be safe from violence, that we all need to do all we can to prevent it, and that whenever anyone becomes a victim of any kind of violence—they should get all the support they need to rebuild their lives.

So even though I can't believe we're still doing this, we need to keep doing this.

We need to keep marching to Take Back the Night—until we do.