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Radical Black Care Is the Revolution

by [Tamara Winfrey Harris \(/profile/tamara-winfrey-harris\)](#)

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Angela Davis (Photo credit: [Free Pages \(http://gffreepages.blogspot.com/2014/01/english-angela-davis-revolutionary.html\)](http://gffreepages.blogspot.com/2014/01/english-angela-davis-revolutionary.html))

History has proven that no one is going to protect, nurture, or advocate for Black women and girls but us—

[Not the Democratic Party to which we are more loyal than any other voting bloc.](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/04/08/the-10-most-loyal-demographic-groups-for-republicans-and-democrats/?utm_term=.6c5b861c7873) (https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/04/08/the-10-most-loyal-demographic-groups-for-republicans-and-democrats/?utm_term=.6c5b861c7873)

[Not the school systems that suspend Black girls at alarming numbers.](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/53f20d90e4b0b80451158d8c/t/54d2d37ce4b024b41443b0ba/1423102844010/BlackGirlsMatterReport.pdf)

(<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/53f20d90e4b0b80451158d8c/t/54d2d37ce4b024b41443b0ba/1423102844010/BlackGirlsMatterReport.pdf>)

[Not white feminists who often forget that we are women too.](http://www.theroot.com/sophia-coppolas-blatant-erasure-of-black-women-in-the-b-1796386121) (<http://www.theroot.com/sophia-coppolas-blatant-erasure-of-black-women-in-the-b-1796386121>)

[Not the patriarchal Black church that prospers on the backs of faithful sisters.](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/eboni-marshall-turman/sexism-and-the-black-church_b_8498744.html) (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/eboni-marshall-turman/sexism-and-the-black-church_b_8498744.html)

[Not the Black community that is still making excuses for one Mr. Robert Kelly and too many men just like him.](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/29/opinion/sunday/how-we-make-black-girls-grow-up-too-fast.html?_r=0)

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Still-my-President Barack Obama said, “We are the ones we’ve been waiting for.” And, particularly in the case of Black women, he “ain’t never lied.” But the reality of this truth frightens us. We’ve been getting shit done for centuries. Harassment, rape, and violence are not scary to us. We’re not scared because I don’t believe in the healing power of white feminism. They recognize how the hair curls

RELEVANT: LOVELY SPEECHES ARE NOT RADICAL



by Tamara Winfrey Harris
January 11, 2017

In this political environment, we cannot afford to mistake nice liberal speeches for the radicalism needed to fight the dismantling of democracy and human decency.

relaxed one. They know my recent history and the one encoded in my DNA. I can speak to them in the shorthand of familiarity. There is something cathartic and validating about the support of someone who *knows* you. And no one knows the Black female experience like a Black girl or woman. Black women have loved on each other and supported each other throughout our history in America. We have watched babies; held hands in hospital rooms; cried together; prayed for each other and laughed about the “good good” over good wine. I trust that sort of love power to manifest the impossible.

What scares me are the ways that racism, sexism, and societal neglect have scarred Black women; the dysfunctional ways we have learned to cope with oppression; and how we pass on those blemishes and brokenness to each other. Consider, for example, how we have collectively internalized the myth of superhuman Black female strength, using it to shame ourselves and each other for prioritizing our own health and well-being. For more than a year, I have been working on a book about Black girlhood. It has highlighted for me how Black female pain masked as strength can be congenital and contagious—enduring from childhood to adulthood, spreading from woman to woman and, tragically, from mother to daughter. Months ago, my co-author and I spoke with a mom named Theresa who was confounded by her teen daughter’s deep depression and multiple suicide attempts. The girl, she said, simply needed to “grow some skin.”

“I’ve felt burdened. I’ve been overwhelmed before. Shoot! Working and the bills are due. I was sick, but I was still going to work. I was like, ‘I don’t want to miss no work.’ Job is stressful. I run corrections.”

While her daughter was struggling, Theresa’s mother, who lived more than two hours away, was sick, too.

“I was trying to take care of her. Running up and down that highway was a mess. It was hell. But because it’s just me. I can’t shut down.”

Theresa’s own mother taught her to be unbreakable: “She’d always tell me, ‘You ain’t going to be no punk!’”

In the midst of their mutual pain, Theresa taught her daughter the same.

We don’t nurture our daughters and sister friends from being sick, exhausted and overwhelmed, because we are sick, exhausted and overwhelmed, and our mothers and mothers’ mothers were, too. We have bought into the body- and soul-killing stereotype of Black female indestructibility and so confuse being the mule of the world with strength. And we can’t see any other way. This has to change. It is killing Black women and preventing us from accessing our collective power. We have to reject the idea that overburdened and unsupported is our natural state of being. It may well be how too many of us are forced to exist, but we are doomed if we confuse that with normalcy. Black women’s salvation depends on collectively agreeing that we are human, that our care is essential to our freedom, and crafting a definition for self-care that is not mired in American indulgence and consumerism—manicures, massages and Macy’s shopping sprees.

Transformative self-care is Black women allowing ourselves safe space for weakness, tears and vulnerability and listening without prejudice. It is making our physical and *mental* health a priority in whatever way that we are able. It is a visit to the free clinic or a standing appointment with a counselor, and knowing that the power of prayer and the power of medicine and therapy are not mutually exclusive. It is not using food to salve our sadness and anger. It is about banishing secrets and speaking our truth about violence and sexual assault, and supporting survivors. It is talking about ourselves (and our sisters) with warmth and gentle tongues. It is about refusing to make little Black girls grown women before they turn 21-years-old. It is about embracing all our identities, including gay, trans, childfree, atheist—all the ways there are to be Black and woman. It is about rejecting the pervasive idea that Black men and boys are more burdened, more at-risk and more valuable than their female counterparts. It is refusing to wait for trickle down racial or gender liberation.

It is about Black women recognizing where we are sick, individually and collectively, and working to address it before it becomes epidemic—treating the dis-ease caused by unrelenting racism and sexism before it spreads. This is how we save ourselves. This is how we save each other. Our care and preservation is not a break or distraction from the revolution; it is the damned revolution. Full stop.

BY TAMARA WINFREY HARRIS

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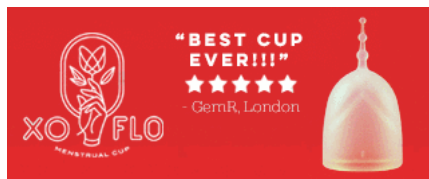
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