
Zumba-Thons and Other Non-Solutions to Violence Against Women

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Since 1999, the United Nations has observed Nov. 25 as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

Hillary Clinton took the concept and ran with it during her service as U.S. Secretary of State, proclaiming on Nov. 25, 2011, that “empowering women and girls is already a priority of the United States, but we need more countries to step up and take on this challenge.”

According to Clinton, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women was an occasion to remember “the horrific acts of violence against women that take place every day around the world and pledge to recommit ourselves to changing attitudes and ending all forms of violence against women and girls.”

Judging from the U.N. website and fundraising toolkit, violence against women can be counteracted by “orang[ing] the world”— orange being the color selected by the U.N. Secretary General’s UNiTE To End Violence Against Women campaign. Suggested activities range from tweets and Instagram posts containing the hashtag “#oranjetheworld” to fundraising events such as a “Zumba-thon, Spin-a-thon, Bowl-a-thon, or other a-thons.”

Never mind that a more straightforward way of reducing “horrific acts of violence against women” might be to terminate devastating military assaults by Clinton’s own country — not to mention those of other countries like Israel, whose shameless slaughter of women as well as children and men is relentlessly endorsed by the U.S.

Needless to say, the recent election of a decidedly anti-human U.S. head of state doesn’t bode well for the so-called “orange world.”

U.S. hypocrisy is nothing new. The U.N. website notes that “women’s activists have marked 25 November as a day against violence since 1981. This date came from the brutal assassination in 1960 ... of the three Mirabal sisters, political activists in the Dominican Republic, on orders of Dominican ruler Rafael Trujillo.”

This is the same Trujillo who, as the BBC notes, “maintained cordial relations with the U.S.” throughout the bulk of his dictatorial career and appears in a 1955 photograph “in smiling embrace with then U.S. vice-president Richard Nixon.”

In a book published in 1999 by the University of British Columbia Press, Canadian academics Edelgard Mahant and Graeme S. Mount took the relationship even further, claiming that “information reaching Ottawa suggested White House support for the dictatorship of (Trujillo) as late as 1960,” the year of the “brutal assassination” in question.

The authors write, “In January 1960, a Canadian businessman anxious to do business in the Dominican Republic advised the Canadian government that, according to Vice President Richard Nixon, Trujillo was an ally in the struggle against Communism who ran a government that was sympathetic to the cause of multinational corporations.”

Whatever the precise extent of U.S. cordiality with Trujillo, it’s no secret that the ostensible “land of the free” has over various decades exhibited a soft spot for perpetrators of extreme human rights abuses in Latin America and beyond.

Argentina comes to mind, where an estimated 30,000 suspected leftists were eliminated during the “dirty war” of 1976-83 after the military junta was given the green light by former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger.

This extended episode entailed plenty of violence against women, including teenage students kidnapped, tortured, and killed by the right-wing regime. Consider the testimony of one Emilce Moler, who was 17 years old in 1976 and survived an ordeal that left many of her classmates dead: “They tortured us with profound sadism. I remember being naked. I was just a fragile small girl... and I was beaten senseless by what I judged was a huge man.”

It could furthermore be argued that the junta’s practice of stealing newborn babies from subsequently disappeared “leftist” mothers amounted to a double affront against women.

Elsewhere in the hemisphere and the world, Washington’s inherent affinity for governments “sympathetic to the cause of multinational corporations” rather than to the cause of humans has proven similarly hazardous to women.

The Guardian reported in 2011 that “between 1960 and 1996 more than 100,000 women were victims of mass rape in the Guatemalan civil war” — a conflict the newspaper describes as being “between CIA-backed rightwing generals and leftwing insurgents.”

In more recent years, there continue to be gender-based repercussions of U.S. policy in places like Honduras. In a 2014 article for Al Jazeera America, Washington, D.C.-based economist Mark Weisbrot listed some of the effects of the 2009 U.S.-facilitated coup against left-leaning Honduran President Manuel Zelaya: “The homicide rate in Honduras already the highest in the world, increased by 50 percent from 2008 to 2011 ... Femicides skyrocketed.”

In Mexico, another location known for its soaring femicide rate, the U.S. has helped sustain widespread violence via the drug war as well as the attendant economic assault known as NAFTA, both of which have ripped communities apart and rendered existence precarious — particularly, in many cases, for women.

The Intercept reports that Mexico saw “98.3 percent of crimes (go) unpunished in 2013, according to Mexican government statistics.”

The moral of the story: if a global superpower actively encourages impunity in a world already plagued by sexism and gender-based violence, no one should be surprised when the result is an increase in violence against women.

Nor should they be surprised, apparently, when the same superpower turns around and claims concern for women’s well-being, or when the international organization claiming to want to benevolently “orange the world” so

often functions as a multilateral facade for a toxic U.S. agenda.

The U.N. website correctly states that “violence against women continues to be a global pandemic.”

But in continuing to violate nations and people at will, the U.S. could very well qualify as a pandemic in its own right.
