

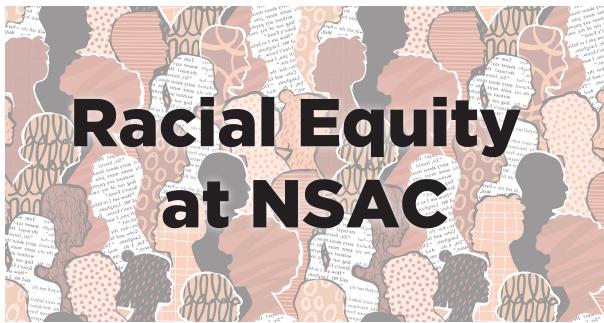


National Sexual Violence  
Resource Center

# Racial History, Equity, and Progress at NSAC® Plenary Sessions

November 10, 2023

Halle Nelson



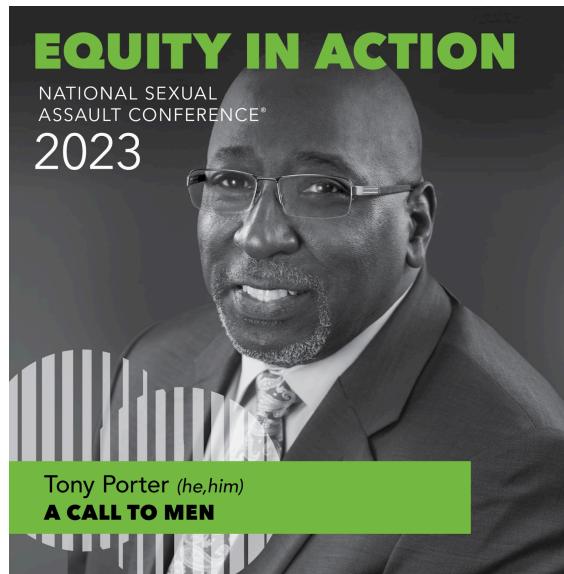
At this year's National Sexual Assault Conference®, NSAC, (which we co-sponsored), we watched as many plenary speakers took the event's theme, Equity in Action, to speak to the many ways in which our movement must work to make our research, prevention, and services truly equitable in their mission. We have taken some excerpts of their speeches that have showcased their observations of racial history, equity, and progress, as their perspectives are vital to this issue of *The Resource*, our work, and this movement at large.



**“Policing, the criminal justice system, and the child welfare system were built from a design intended to punish, separate, and criminalize. Not prevent, transform, or heal. They are also inherently violent, having been built upon the legacies of slavery, genocide of indigenous folks, misogyny, xenophobia, ableism, and the oppression of human beings. Social justice lawyer and author of the book *Just Mercy*, Brian Stevenson, said, ‘The big problem we have in the U.S. is that we don’t actually know our history. We don’t know about the centuries of racial injustice.’ Brian Stevenson gave a lecture in Germany and someone said to him, ‘We can never have the death penalty in Germany. There’s no way, with our history, that we can engage in the systematic execution of human beings. It would be unconscionable! Imagine if, in Germany, there was a death row and Jewish people were systematically more likely to be convicted. Yet in this country, the evidence of racial disparities in this justice system is well-documented.’ Stevenson’s comparison to our racial history to that of the Holocaust in Germany was incredibly powerful. The idea that if we reckon with our history, and acknowledge our history of enslavement of Black people, it will allow us to become a free, just, equitable society. Until we understand that our modern-day system of policing, which includes criminal justice and child welfare, can be traced back to the slave patrol which was created in the early 1700s with one mission: to establish a system of terror and squash slave uprisings with the capacity to pursue, apprehend, kill, and return runaway slaves to their owner. Until we reckon with that, you can’t begin with thinking ‘Well, what are our responsibilities now? What are our obligations now?’**

What would it take to recover from this violence?...We have to reckon and make peace with the country's history. To do so will allow us to move past that single story that prevents us from a more complex, nuanced view of the situation. A system designed to capture slaves cannot be places of safety, support, and healing. What could be? Some of us ask, 'How will we be safe from sexual violence without police and prisons?' If we fully understand this history of our system, we will start to point out that we can't be safe as long as this system exists."

-Nicole Pittman, Just Beginnings Collaborative



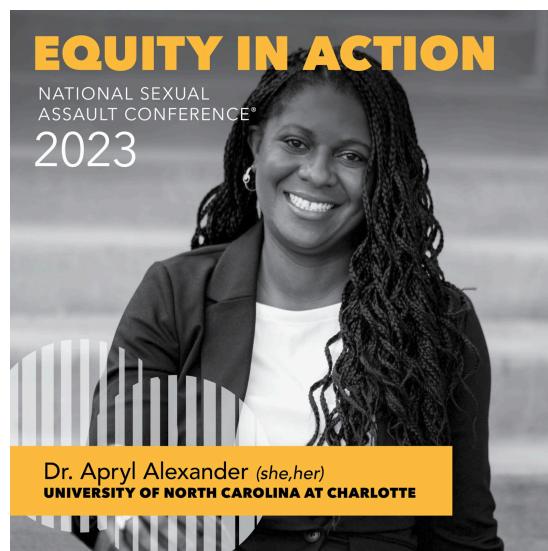
"When I first started doing this work, Black and Brown women would pull me aside and pretty much tell me straight up, 'If you do this work, if you have a desire to be a leading man in this space, you'd better be ready to follow our lead.' I understood that. One of my mentors then and still today, a sister and friend of mine, Gwen Wright...would tell me, 'Tony, one of the differences between white feminism and Black feminism is that white women want the police to do more and Black women are concerned they're gonna do too much.' That simple but profound statement has been a lifelong lesson for me in the work...I am unapologetically pro-Black women...I want you to understand why. As long as white supremacy relies on a society that's rooted in anti-Blackness, I have to be unapologetically pro-Black women. That doesn't mean I don't care about y'all. That doesn't mean I don't care about white women. If I am unapologetically pro-Black women and if I do that well, we all benefit from that."

-Tony Porter, A Call To Men



**“We need to let go of all those things that weigh us down, because when we do we can soar and fly, and be truly liberated. I used to feel guilty about stepping into freedom. Who am I to have this? To be free? To say what I want? To do what I think is the right thing? Who am I to do all that? It went against every grain in my colonization. Then I realized, who am I not to? Because when I heal, my ancestors heal. My descendants heal, and I want that for you, for all of us!”**

**-Shiree Teng**



**“What’s next? What would the holistic healing process look like? Because we know that the harms to marginalized communities didn’t just start now. They’ve been around for generations. How are we repairing the systemic and generational harms that have been caused? Even when we bring up the idea of reparations in the United States, particularly for Black Americans, people brush it off as**

**unrealistic. But we've had incidents of reparations. Monetary, symbolic reparations here in the United States in the past. It's not unachievable. What would it look like for our systems to model repair for harms being caused? Because that's very similar to the work that we hope to do in this space."**

**-Dr. Apryl Alexander, University of North Carolina at Charlotte**

In addition to these plenary speeches, which are all available on the [ValorUS YouTube channel](#), NSAC 2023 had a variety of sessions dedicated to the experiences of communities of color. Please review the names and descriptions of those sessions [here](#) and, if you/your organization would like to continue similar conversations, please subscribe to the [NSAC email list](#) so that you can be notified when we're accepting proposals for our sessions on April 14-16, 2024!

*This blog post was published in The Resource 2023 online magazine special issue on [Racial Equity in the Movement](#).*

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