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Gender Nation: Is a serial killer targeting black trans women?

By Gwen Smith

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Abstract

Gender Nation is a bi-weekly column by Gwendolyn Ann Smith, the founder of the Transgender Day of Remembrance, reviewing news affecting the trans, intersex, and genderqueer community. Is a serial killer targeting black trans women? The transgender community in Florida is on edge following a string of murders, leading many to assume this could be the [...]

Article



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Is a serial killer targeting black trans women?

The transgender community in Florida is on edge following a string of murders, leading many to assume this could be the work of a serial killer.

Three African American transgender women have been shot in Jacksonville just this month.

On the 4th of February, Celine Walker, 36, was found in an Extended Stay America hotel. She was

pronounced dead on the scene.

Then, on the 1st of June, Antash'a English, 38, was discovered between a pair of abandoned houses in Northern Jacksonville. She had been shot in the abdomen by an unknown shooter firing from behind the wheel of a car. She was still alive when police discovered her but died at the hospital.

The most recent victim is Cathalina Christina James, 24, who was found dead at the Quality Inn and Suites on Dix Ellis Trail in Jacksonville. The hotel is just ten miles from where Celine Walker was discovered.

A fourth shooting, on the 8th of June, was seemingly unrelated, and due to a domestic dispute. The shooting victim, in that case, has survived.

Jacksonville police do not believe these cases are linked and are investigating each as separate incidents. They have also released footage of a white Buick seen leaving the scene of the James murder, and are asking for any information about the car and its owner.

The actions of local police haven't eased the mind of the local community, especially as they have struggled with the police over fair treatment.

For example, police initially refused to identify Walker or English as trans women, a detail that may have hampered their investigations. Misgendering and deadnaming is a common issue in both the police reports and news coverage of anti-trans murders.

A Trans Lives Matter event was held at the Duval County Courthouse on the 27th of June, to highlight these and other issues Jacksonville trans people have faced.

"We haven't heard a word from the mayor. We haven't heard a word from the sheriff. We had about 60 speakers in front of the City Council last night -- didn't hear a word from a council member," said Lakey Love of Equality Florida, quoted at the rally via television station WJXT

"These things are not OK," said Aea Celestic, another speaker at the event. "Our community needs to come up and rise up and take action."

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