

SAY IT, STAGE IT:
V-DAY AT TWENTY

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Twenty years ago, Eve Ensler’s play *The Vagina Monologues* gave birth to V-Day, a global activist movement to end violence against all women and girls. The play and the playwright exploded onto the scene, garnering headlines and rave reviews, filling the theater night after night, breaking taboos, opening spaces for dialogue where they hadn’t existed before, and shattering the silence around women’s experiences with sexuality and violence. It was pathbreaking. In 2006, *The New York Times* called *The Vagina Monologues* “probably the most important piece of political theater of the last



V decade,” and since that time, it and Eve have received
• numerous accolades, from an Obie Award to a Tony
D Award.

A The play’s boldness—rooted in the experiences of
Y more than two hundred women Eve interviewed—
broke through the repression, denial, secrets, shame,
and self-hatred that sexual and gender violence have
wrought. With humor and empathy, it woke people up.
The energy surrounding the play led to the creation of
V-Day, in which, every year, people across the planet
stage benefit productions of *The Vagina Monologues*—
and other artistic works and campaigns—to raise funds
and awareness for women and activist groups working
to end violence against all women and girls—cisgender,
transgender, and gender-nonconforming.

V-Day quickly grew into a mass movement active
on every continent. It has become a crucial catalyst in
the global fight to stop gender-based violence, attacking
the silence—public and private—that allows violence
against women to continue and bringing attention to
issues of harassment, rape, battery, incest, female geni-
tal mutilation, and sex slavery.

V-Day activists have worked tirelessly at a grass-
roots level to combat rape culture—often in the face of
brutal misogynist resistance. V-Day has raised well
over \$100 million to build safe houses, save lives,
change laws, and fund rape crisis centers, domestic vi-



olence shelters, and activist groups doing the essential work of ending violence while serving survivors and their families. Connected globally by the movement and the play, V-Day activists have harnessed art and activism at a scale never seen before.

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The Vagina Monologues reminds us with each performance that the personal is political, that speaking out can be an act of resistance. Although the sources of violence are diverse, women who have survived describe facing similar challenges. Besides the pain and strength apparent in their stories of survival, we have seen the same themes emerge: indifference of the authorities, familial denial and secrecy, lack of public outrage about the violence that more than one billion women and girls experience, blatant disregard for the most marginalized, and the prevalence and normalization of rape culture.

As we write this, a war on women is under way, and *The Vagina Monologues* is as relevant as ever. Recent reports from the World Health Organization, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the United Nations confirm that one in three women on the planet will experience physical or sexual violence in her lifetime. That is more than *one billion* women.*

*unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures



V A global gag rule under U.S. president Donald Trump
• is assaulting women’s bodies, and it will, as the Inter-
D national Women’s Health Coalition has said, “reverse
A decades of progress on reproductive, maternal and
Y child health, leading to an increase in unintended
pregnancies, unsafe abortions, and maternal and new-
born deaths worldwide.”* Unintended pregnancies
will contribute to child marriage and the rape of mi-
nors, compounding the inequity under which so many
women and girls already live.

In the sphere of education, girls are also being left behind. Cultural mores and poverty put school out of reach for many girls, while those who have access to education—from nursery school up through university—are faced with harassment and assault. Talk to students today, and they will tell you of ongoing assault in the school setting and of the impunity and inequity within the justice systems available to them.†

Political instability and armed conflict—fueled by religious, ethnic, nationalist, and economic forces—further escalate the risk of such violence, as rape, battery, and sexual slavery are used as weapons of war. At

*iwhc.org/2017/01/global-gag-rule-trumps-week-one-attack-women

†nytimes.com/2017/07/31/world/australia/shocking-levels-of-sexual-violence-found-on-australian-campuses-report-says.html

the same time, immigration status, racial bias, transphobia and homophobia, and economic inequality keep women in unsafe working conditions, where they often have to endure violence as part of the job. The destabilization of the planet's climate creates insecurity that often leaves women vulnerable to rape and violence after storms and increasingly erratic climate catastrophes.* Whether they are facing harassment or assault or unstable conditions, women are often trapped in these situations because they need to survive and ensure that their families do too.

V-Day's work globally had shown us that in the midst of great trauma is great possibility. Despite the instinct of communities and families to deny the existence of violence, women and girls survive the unthinkable and miraculously find ways to cope, often with little to no support. While these are perilous times, V-Day believes a worldwide cultural shift that could help end forms of violence against women and girls—and address the interconnected issues of race, class, and gender—is within our grasp. Essential to this shift is effectively reframing the conversation about gender-based violence. V-Day began with the stories of women: their experiences and their desire to end vio-

*[huffingtonpost.com/entry/climate-change-threat-women-health-security_us_573f5850e4b045cc9a70ecf3](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/climate-change-threat-women-health-security_us_573f5850e4b045cc9a70ecf3)

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lence and live sexually free lives. We believe that if we listen to women, address the impact of rape culture, and employ an intersectional paradigm, a different consciousness can emerge across the globe.

We never could have imagined what has emerged over these twenty V-years. We have seen women transformed into community and global leaders after having produced the monologues or having stood onstage performing them. We have seen the intersections of social, economic, environmental, and political issues and how violence against women and girls is deeply connected to the global challenges facing our planet today. We have seen that by placing art at the center of their activism, V-Day activists have sustained and grown a movement unlike any other on the planet.

V-Day has filled stadiums and taken a subversive piece of theater to equally important stages—from Madison Square Garden to a clandestine performance in Islamabad, from the steps of the Michigan State House to national parliaments. It has raised support for and shined light on the issues and the systemic inequalities that deeply impact women and marginalized populations, who have historically received fewer resources and even less attention. These issues range widely, from rampant violence against Native American and First Nations women in the United States and Canada to brutal sexual violence in the Democratic



Republic of Congo to police violence and abuse against African American women in the United States. The movement has supported and opened safe houses—true places of community and transformation—around the world, from Afghanistan to Kenya, and taken to the streets, demanding an end to all forms of violence, from Juárez to New Orleans to Manila. It has inspired women and men to rise in solidarity from Havana to Zagreb, on college campuses, in houses of worship and government, in the most unlikely of places. It has brought together activists to strategize at critical times, in the wake of disasters and war. And it has gone always back to our roots—to art—using dance, film, photography, music, and of course theater to activate people at their cores.

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Eve Ensler wrote the movement into being with *The Vagina Monologues*, and then set the stage for grassroots leaders, who make the play their own, creating local movements tied to a global vision and network. V-Day's grassroots leaders determine how to address violence in their homes, communities, and institutions. They show up, year after year, doing the hard work of ending violence, on their own terms.

Today, V-Day is an example of how lasting social and cultural change is spread by ordinary people doing extraordinary things. Of how local women best know what their communities need. And of how the collec-



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tive dimension of art has the power to transform thinking and provoke people to act and serve, galvanizing them in surprising and revolutionary ways.

V-Day lives on a cellular level, in people's hearts and minds. It gains momentum on a grassroots level, in people's individual and collective actions. It is an energy unto itself, outside of any one person's grasp—a catalyst, a movement, an ongoing experiment, a beautiful mystery that only art could create.

V-History

The *V* in V-Day stands for “victory,” “valentine,” and “vagina.” V-Day's work is grounded in four core beliefs.

1. Art has the power to transform thinking and inspire people to act.
2. Lasting social and cultural change is spread by ordinary people doing extraordinary things.
3. Local women know what their communities need and can become unstoppable leaders.
4. We must look at the intersection of class, environmental catastrophe, gender, imperialism, militarism, patriarchy, poverty, racism, and war to fully understand violence against women.

V-Day's activities are designed to attack the silence—public and private—that allows violence



against women to continue. V-Day provides a path to action through productions of *The Vagina Monologues* and other works written or curated by Eve Ensler and V-Day (including *Any One of Us: Words from Prison; A Memory, Monologue, a Rant, and a Prayer; I Am an Emotional Creature; and Swimming Upstream*). Almost every year since 2002, Eve has written a new Spotlight monologue to address current issues affecting women, updating the V-Day script along the way.

With creativity and vision, V-Day activists around the world increase awareness and raise money to stop violence against women and girls in their own communities and globally. V-Day events have taken place in all fifty states and in more than two hundred countries and territories. Since 1998, thousands upon thousands of V-Day benefit performances have been produced by volunteer activists in the United States and around the world.

These performances are just the beginning. V-Day stages large-scale benefits and produces groundbreaking gatherings, films, and campaigns to educate and to help change social attitudes toward violence against women. In twenty years, the V-Day movement, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, has raised over \$100 million dollars, educating millions about the issue of violence against women and the efforts to end it, crafting international media, educational, and PSA campaigns, and funding more than thirteen thousand community-

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V based anti-violence programs and safe houses in Af-
• ghanistan, Congo, Iraq, and Kenya. During this period,
D *The Vagina Monologues* has been translated into more
A than forty-eight languages and braille, and has been
Y performed by women of all abilities.

And V-Day has given birth to another social movement—One Billion Rising. Every February 14, we invite the one billion women who have experienced violence—and anyone who wants to show solidarity with them—to rise as one, in a movement of dance to reclaim their bodies and political activism to reclaim their societies. We want to show our local communities and the world what one billion looks like and shine a light on the rampant impunity and injustice that survivors most often face. We rise through dance to express joy and community and celebrate the fact that we have not been defeated by this violence. We rise to show we are determined to create a new kind of consciousness—one where violence will be resisted until it is unthinkable. We rise to envision and bring in a new world.

In the Beginning

In 1994, New York-based playwright, performer, and activist Eve Ensler wrote an honest, heartbreaking, and humorous fictional play based on more than two



hundred interviews she conducted with a wide variety of women. The play, *The Vagina Monologues*, was first performed in 1996 by Eve herself, and received instant acclaim, playing to sold-out houses. Eve performed the show for six months in New York, then took it on the road.* After every performance, she was met by countless women who shared their own stories of surviving violence at the hands of relatives, lovers, and strangers. Overwhelmed by the number of women and girls who had experienced violence, and compelled to do something about it, she began to envision *The Vagina Monologues* as more than a provocative work of art; it could be a mechanism for moving people to act to end violence.

Eve, together with a group of New York City-based volunteers, founded V-Day on Valentine's Day 1998. The first V-Day was marked by a star-studded, sold-out benefit performance of *The Vagina Monologues* at the Hammerstein Ballroom in New York City. In just one night, \$250,000 was raised and the V-Day move-

*After Eve's run, the play continued for four and a half more years off-Broadway, with a cast of three actors performing the show each night. In order for women onstage to represent the diversity of stories being told and the universality of issues women face, Eve made it a stipulation in her contract that the producers cast women from racially diverse backgrounds. Eve and the producers made an arrangement so that five dollars of every ticket sale would be donated to V-Day, providing the critical resources needed to launch the movement.

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V ment was born. Three years later, on February 10, 2001,
• a benefit performance of *The Vagina Monologues* sold out
D eighteen thousand seats at Madison Square Garden,
A raising one million dollars. The world was taking notice.
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A Campus Movement

Interest ignited on U.S. college campuses, and in 1999 V-Day launched its College Campaign, which invited groups of students to produce and stage benefit performances of *The Vagina Monologues*. Inspired by the play and the mission, thousands of activists quickly emerged: young women and men who were thrust into the roles of gathering people to a cause, addressing groups and media about their events, and leading a team in a public-awareness and fundraising campaign. In that first year, there were sixty-five V-Day campus productions. As with the original off-Broadway production, V-Day encouraged these productions to be diverse in terms of casting and the production team, and, in the spirit of inclusion, asked that no volunteers be turned away. The campaign grew tremendously over the next five years, and by 2007 more than seven hundred colleges registered to participate.

Over the years, the College Campaign has played a significant role in building anti-violence communities on campuses by bringing together engaged, aware,



and empowered women and men who are willing to stand up against violence. These activists have introduced lasting programs and activities to their campuses, such as annual weeklong festivals, violence-free zones, and twenty-four-hour speak-outs to stop rape. Students at Arizona State University raised fifteen thousand dollars to open Home Safe, an on-campus sexual violence prevention and education program, and SAFER (Students Active for Ending Rape)—created through V-Day activities on the campus of Columbia University—helped students change campus policies regarding rape prevention and reporting nationwide.

V-Day's dedication to ending sexual violence on college campuses led to the 2008 creation of the Campus Accountability Project (in partnership with SAFER), which was an early contributor to U.S. senators Kirsten Gillibrand and Claire McCaskill's introduction of the Campus Accountability and Safety Act in July 2014. In many ways, the College Campaign has brought a generation of young women and men to envision a new paradigm for social action. It is not uncommon to see V-Day proudly listed in Facebook and LinkedIn profiles and on résumés of recent college graduates. Being part of the V-Day movement signifies a lifelong commitment to justice for women and girls everywhere.

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Going Global

As the College Campaign gained momentum, word spread to community activists and local theater and anti-violence groups. As a result, in 2001 the Worldwide Campaign* began to take shape. Just as college students organize benefit performances of *The Vagina Monologues*, so too do communities around the world. Growing from forty-one events in 2001 to hundreds annually today, the campaign comes alive each year through the unrivaled commitment and ingenuity of grassroots activists.

Funds raised by V-Day Community Campaign organizers have stopped the closure of rape crisis centers and many other organizations that work to end violence against women, helped them expand their services, and impacted the judicial process for women. Here are a handful of examples:

- In 2003, the proceeds from a local performance of *The Vagina Monologues* in Nairobi, Kenya, helped reopen a women's shelter that had closed its doors due to lack of funding.
- In rural Borneo, V-Day activism helped ensure that rape cases are now heard in the civil

*The Worldwide Campaign is now known as the Community Campaign.



courts rather than the “native court,” so that the rights of survivors are better represented.

- In 2003 in Manila, V-Day events produced by the New Voice Company and Philippine female legislators and congressional representatives for the Philippine Senate and House of Representatives led to the passing of key legislation to combat domestic violence and sex trafficking.
- In 2007, the United States House of Representatives approved a long-awaited measure calling for an apology from Japan to “comfort women,” a term that refers to the estimated fifty thousand to two hundred thousand girls and young women from China, Taiwan, Korea, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Netherlands, and East Timor who were abducted and forced into sexual slavery to service the Japanese military in “comfort stations” from 1932 to 1945.
- In 2016, two young founders of a group called Mightee Shero Productions developed and produced a tour of performances of *The Vagina Monologues* in correctional facilities throughout New York City. A cast of former inmates, prison administrators, actors, and activists traveled to five facilities, raising awareness and

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- support for inmates, culminating in a one-night fundraiser with proceeds supporting the Women’s Prison Organization.
- In the same year, activists in Kampala succeeded in presenting the first-ever successful production of *The Vagina Monologues* in Uganda, after attempts had been continually shut down since 2005. Proceeds supported Mifumi, a campaigning group that works to end the practice of bride prices and domestic violence in countryside communities.

Shining a Spotlight

In 2001, working with and at the behest of activists on the ground in Afghanistan, V-Day launched a campaign called Afghanistan Is Everywhere. This initiative provided organizers across the world with news and updates about the experience of women in Afghanistan under the Taliban, which they shared at their events to educate and engage a vast network of communities and audiences. Ten percent of the proceeds from each event, totaling more than \$250,000, went to Afghan women’s groups, assisting them in opening schools and orphanages and providing education and healthcare.

The success of that campaign evolved into the



annual V-Day Spotlight Campaign. Since Afghanistan Is Everywhere, V-Day Spotlight Campaigns have included Native American and First Nations Women, the Missing and Murdered Women in Juárez, Mexico, the Women of Iraq, the Campaign for Justice to Comfort Women, Women in Conflict Zones (including the women of the eastern Congo), the Women of New Orleans and the Gulf South, Women and Girls in Haiti, Women and Girls in Congo, One Billion Rising, and Violence Against Women in the Workplace; the campaigns have raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for women in these areas and brought the issues they face into the public eye.

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Vagina Warriors

V-Day campaigns support the empowerment and leadership of women who are negotiating change within a wide variety of local, social, political, and religious contexts. V-Day's core philosophy recognizes that local activists must take the lead in planning activities for the communities in which they live. It is through the work of these activists that V-Day comes alive across the globe.

V-Day's work to end female genital mutilation (FGM) in the Maasai community in Narok, Kenya, was made possible because one Maasai activist's story



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connected deeply with—and became an expression of—V-Day’s philosophy. Agnes Pareyio started educating young women and girls on the dangers of FGM over nineteen years ago. A deep friendship between Agnes and V-Day turned into a partnership that, in 2002, gave birth to the first V-Day safe house, led by Agnes and her team at the Tasaru Ntomonok Initiative. A place where girls in Narok can go to be educated and live without fear of being cut, the V-Day Safe House for Girls is a monumental success, inspiring women’s leaders from across Africa to end FGM on the continent.

In Kabul, V-Day partnered with longtime V-Day activists to support the Promoting Women’s Capabilities by Education Center, which provides classes in computer skills, science, English, and literacy to economically disadvantaged local women, many of whom have experienced violence, forced marriage, and depression. Seeking to combat the decades of fundamentalism that has torn down women’s autonomy in Afghanistan, the center, which was founded by and is run by Afghan women, provides critical support and information around issues like domestic violence, legal rights, rape within marriage, birth control, and pregnancy.

The Democratic Republic of Congo has, since 1996, endured the deadliest war since World War II. The conflict—a proxy war for Congo’s vast natural



resources—has directed rampant violence toward raping, mutilating, and murdering women. Advocates on the ground estimate that more than half a million women and girls have been raped since the conflict began.* In addition to the severe psychological impact, sexual and gender violence leaves many survivors with genital lesions, traumatic fistulas, severed and broken limbs, unwanted pregnancies, and sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV. Survivors are regularly ostracized and abandoned by their families and communities. An added challenge is widespread gender inequity.

In 2007, Eve was invited to visit Bukavu, in the eastern Congo, by Dr. Denis Mukwege of Panzi Hospital to witness firsthand the atrocities that women were experiencing in Congo. He had established a hospital to provide emergency medical care during the war, including treatment and surgery for survivors of sexual violence. It was on this trip that Eve met Christine Schuler Deschryver, a tireless activist for the rights of Congolese women. Together they met with dozens of women survivors. It was these women who came up with the idea for a place called the City of Joy, where they could live in community in order to heal—and to *turn their pain into power*. And so, with support from V-Day activists across the world and a group of gener-

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*abcnews.go.com/Politics/International/story?id=8305857



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ous donors, this dream was made real. Under the leadership of Christine and in partnership with women survivors, construction on the City of Joy began in August 2009, down the road from Panzi Hospital. V-Day opened the City of Joy in February 2011, and the first class of women began in June 2011. Since that time, classes of ninety women, ages eighteen to thirty, have lived at the City of Joy for six-month periods. By the end of 2017, one thousand women had gone through the program and returned to their communities as leaders.

Conceived, owned, and run by Congolese women and men, the center has flourished since it opened its doors. The City of Joy is different from many other traditional NGO direct-service programs. It does not use a sponsorship model, and it does not view the women it serves as individuals who need to be saved; rather, the City of Joy aims to provide women with the opportunity to heal and redirect in a community, on their own terms. Its philosophy is grounded in the following beliefs, which are central to V-Day's work:

- Each woman is unique and valuable to her society, and has a right to be treated with dignity, respect, love, and compassion.
- Women are not broken “victims”; rather they are survivors who have been through unjust gender traumas.



- Each woman is capable of activating her own ability to recover, heal, and be an empowered and transformational leader.
- Rebirth is possible.

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The City of Joy's revolutionary Vagina Warrior Program aims to provide a safe and empowering community for survivors of gender violence who have demonstrated leadership qualities. The focus is on healing trauma, building self-esteem and skills, and training women leaders. Women experience a vast range of activities over the course of their stay. From leadership training on rights awareness, the judiciary, community activism, media, and communications to specialized psychosocial care, massage, self-defense, and comprehensive sexuality education, the center prepares women not only to integrate back into their communities with confidence but also to lead. Women graduate having conquered literacy and English, and are exposed to everything from physical education, culinary arts, theater, and dance to craft-making, onsite farming, and agro-pastoral training at V-World Farm, the center's sister program. At the tech center, women learn computer literacy, helping to better prepare them for the current global workplace.

Women leaving the City of Joy have had the opportunity to heal from their emotional wounds, live in a community, recognize their leadership potential, and



V gain valuable skills they can apply to their lives, future
• ventures, and engagement in civic life. The transfor-
D mation is awe-inspiring. In a society that has for the
A most part rejected women survivors of violence, it is
Y extraordinary to see a group of women so empowered
and determined.

Graduates have integrated back into their communities as true leaders, sharing the skills and information they learned at the City of Joy with their peers and families, starting nonprofits including orphanages and homes for the elderly, launching small businesses, leading at the community level, working as journalists and farmers, and returning to school to further their education.

In a *Time* magazine article on rape entitled “The Secret War Crime,” survivor, City of Joy graduate and now staff member Jane Mukunilwa was interviewed about the program:

The therapy, says Mukunilwa, lets women understand that the rape was not their fault. The life skills and leadership training gain them confidence, and the nurturing atmosphere enables them to build support networks that last long after the program finishes. Graduates are expected to establish women’s support groups when they go



home and become leaders in their community. “People think that, after being raped, you are just a victim,” says Mukunilwa. “What City of Joy taught me is that life goes on after rape. Rape is not the end. It is not a fixed identity.”*

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Perhaps more than any other program or campaign, the City of Joy exemplifies what V-Day is all about—community, transformation, and love. It is at once a physical place and a metaphor.

The V-Day Model Expands

As the V-Day movement grew, interest within communities hinted at the success a coordinated V-Day effort in one geographic location could yield, and several groups began to register to hold multiple V-Day events in the same cities. For an inaugural run in V-Day’s hometown of New York, Eve and the V-Day team planned a two-week festival of spoken-word, performance, and community events in June 2006 called *Until the Violence Stops: NYC*. More than one hundred writers and fifty actors donated their talents to create four marquee celebrity events. Seventy local

*time.com/war-and-rape



V community events also took place, involving thou-
• sands of grassroots activists throughout the city's five
D boroughs.

A One event, an evening entitled *A Memory, a*
Y *Monologue, a Rant, and a Prayer*, featured original writ-
ings by world-renowned authors and playwrights. It
was released as a book in May 2007.

The festival also featured a new theatrical piece
entitled *Any One of Us: Words from Prison*, a compila-
tion of the writings of incarcerated women, highlight-
ing the connection between women in prison and their
past personal experiences with sexual violence. The
piece, curated by Eve and Kimberlé Crenshaw, a lead-
ing scholar in critical race theory, was an extension of
Eve and V-Day's work with incarcerated women over
the years. In 2003, the PBS film *What I Want My*
Words to Do to You documented writing workshops that
Eve conducted with women in Bedford Hills Correc-
tional Facility. The film won the Grand Jury Prize at
the 2003 Sundance Film Festival and has been consis-
tently shown at prisons across the country for staff
and inmates, as well as wider audiences, since then.

Since the debut of *Until the Violence Stops*, in
New York City, the event model has been replicated in
Ohio, Kentucky, Rhode Island, Paris, Los Angeles, and
Lima, and the two new artistic pieces have been per-
formed in hundreds of communities around the globe.



V-Day activists worldwide have also screened the documentary, raising funds for prisoners' rights groups.

In 2013, V-Day launched the One Billion Rising for Justice U.S. Prisons Project in conjunction with incarcerated women around the country. The project embraced a restorative rather than punitive justice model and sought to bring higher ethical standards of treatment to the incarcerated population. It also brought attention to issues including racism, poverty, and violence that have led to the incarceration of many women—women of color in particular.

Over the years, many V-Day and One Billion Rising activists created events and actions to support women in prison as part of their local efforts. In 2015, *The New York Times* reported on a performance at the Taconic Correctional Facility in New York State, in which the producer, Elyse Sholk, wrote that the show “affirmed a core belief that drove us to assemble our powerhouse cast in the first place: formerly incarcerated women, professional actresses, and activists are well-positioned to leverage their art and activism to affirm and remind us all that women in prison matter.”*

As V-Day's work expanded, Eve created addi-

*nytlive.nytimes.com/womenintheworld/2015/05/25/happy-birthday-eve-ensler

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tional vehicles through which individuals and communities could address issues surrounding gender and violence. In 2004, the first all-trans-women performance of *The Vagina Monologues* took place in Los Angeles. At the invitation of the cast, Eve wrote a new monologue, “They Beat the Girl Out of My Boy . . . or So They Tried.” The piece is now in the official script for V-Day performances and has brought many transgender participants into productions, inspiring participation in other monologues and in various parts of the production process. Proceeds from productions have gone to crucial organizations including the Intersex Society of North America; ASTTeQ (Action Santé Travestis et Transexuels du Québec); Austin Latina/Latino Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Organization; Indiana Transgender Rights Advocacy Alliance; Louisiana Trans Advocates; Metro Trans Umbrella Group; SUNY Potsdam Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Association; and hundreds of others.

In 2011, V-Girls, a global network of girl activists and advocates, grew out of Eve’s play and bestselling book *I Am an Emotional Creature: The Secret Life of Girls*. Rooted in youth-driven activism and led by the vision and strategy of the V-Girls Action Team, groups of girls around the world staged performances of *Emotional Creature* and engaged with an academic curricu-



lum covering girl-related issues ranging from body image to sexual orientation. V-Girls gatherings and productions in cities like Paris, Johannesburg, and New York inspired girls to create art and become active in their communities.

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Men have been part of V-Day since its inception. From producing, directing, fundraising, publicity, and website development and design to ushering and supporting the cast, men have been actively involved. After eleven years of projecting women's stories via *The Vagina Monologues*, creating safe spaces for women to acknowledge and often share their own stories, and then witnessing the unstoppable spirit of these sexual violence survivors once they had spoken out, V-Day recognized something crucial. A key part of their work had to be to create similar spaces for men to be open, to share, and to unpack feelings about being victims and/or perpetrators. V-Day created a blog series—launched and curated by author/activist Mark Matousek—and supported V-Men Workshops, led by A Call to Men—an anti-violence organization focused on exploring issues around masculinity—to provide men across the movement with the opportunity to examine the Man Box* in which they are so often trapped and to gather emo-

*ted.com/talks/tony_porter_a_call_to_men



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tional strength from one another to begin to lead in ending violence against women. Men have produced and appeared onstage in V-productions of *A Memory, a Monologue, a Rant, and a Prayer* and led Men Rising events, under the One Billion Rising umbrella. Men organized, gathered, and mobilized other men to join the struggle to end violence against women and girls. Using tools like “The Man Prayer”—Eve’s new piece written for men to perform—One Billion Rising saw groundbreaking, transformative initiatives led and organized by men, serving as an inspiration for other men around the world to be part of the radical shift in consciousness of how women and girls are treated and seen on the community and global level. Across the years, V-Day has also produced a series of panel discussions foregrounding the voices of male leaders in the discussion.

Amplifying New Voices

The V-Day movement is continually expanding, reflecting the local and global contexts and conversations that activists are having in their communities and amplifying those voices. Over the years—often after having staged *The Vagina Monologues*—many new and longtime activists have developed and staged their own artistic works centering new voices in the conver-



sation around ending violence against women. V-Day has encouraged activists to curate these community stories, creating a new pathway for artistic events that invite local writers, activists, and artists to participate.

In 2017, as part of V-Day and One Billion Rising's shared focus on violence against women in the workplace, V-Day invited activists to platform the voices of women who are experiencing or fighting workplace violence. Activists were encouraged to stage *The Vagina Monologues* or *A Memory, a Monologue, a Rant, and a Prayer* at their place of work—a hospital, factory, or office building—bringing the call for justice, safety, and equality to these sites of violence through the plays, and calling out impunity through a radical artistic production featuring women in their field. As part of this effort, activists were encouraged to invite women facing workplace violence to write testimonials, which were featured in community productions.

Creative Resistance

V-Day shatters taboos, lifts the veil of secrecy from the issue of violence against women, and pushes the edge. While the movement has faced opposition over the years, V-Day has always chosen to speak the truth about violence and women's sexuality. When Eve Ensler first performed *The Vagina Monologues*, even saying

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V the word “vagina” out loud was met with controversy
• and discomfort. Radio stations refused to allow “va-
D gina” to be said on the air. TV stations ran entire seg-
A ments on the play without mention of the word, and
Y newspapers hid under the safety of abbreviation. Twenty years later *The Vagina Monologues* has become part of popular culture, and the word “vagina” is spoken openly on TV and radio and printed freely in newspapers and magazines all over the world. With the word being uttered and printed in mainstream media, V-Day has been a catalyst that has helped to shift culture and break through taboos so that women who have suffered invisibly in silence are made visible.

The pushback that V-Day has faced over the years has provided campuses and communities unique opportunities to turn critical feedback into constructive dialogue among students, faculty, and community members. Pushback has also created an environment in which fixed ideas are changed, and in many cases groups end up coming together to support one another in the fight to defend *The Vagina Monologues*. Through acts of creative resistance, productions of the play, and other V-Day campaign activities, activists have defended their right to free speech, to a life free from violence, and to express women’s agency over their bodies.

In 2005, Notre Dame University officials banned



the on-campus production of *The Vagina Monologues*, sparking wide-ranging debate and resulting in a panel discussion at the university featuring members of the faculty and Eve. The following year, Notre Dame president Rev. John I. Jenkins announced that he would allow the campus production, stating, “The creative contextualization of a play like *The Vagina Monologues* can bring certain perspectives on important issues into a constructive and fruitful dialogue with the Catholic tradition. This is a good model for the future.”*

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At the same time, the Ugandan government shut down a production of *The Vagina Monologues* in Kampala despite the scrutiny of the international press. Amid the discussion that ensued, activists responding to this controversy were still able to raise eleven thousand dollars for the Lira Women Peace Initiative and Kitgum Women Peace Initiative, two local groups working to keep women safe in northern Uganda.

In 2006, V-Day again found itself the center of controversy when the president of Providence College banned the annual production of *The Vagina Monologues*. Hundreds protested, and V-Day organizers from across Rhode Island (as well as many of the event’s beneficiaries) came to the aid of the Providence Col-

*Margaret Fosmoe, “ND Discourse Ends: ‘Monologues’ Allowed,” *South Bend Tribune*, April 5, 2006.



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lege organizers, helping to arrange an off-campus production. Following the outpouring of community support, the production has continued to take place at the college ever since.

Now, in the aftermath of the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign and in the midst of the presidency of Donald Trump, *The Vagina Monologues* feels as topical as ever, as the country and the world are alight with conversations about consent, sexual harassment, and assault. Journalist Sarah Rebell, who spoke to V-Day activists in red and swing states in the U.S., wrote, “Many said how empowering it has been to have *The Vagina Monologues* as an outlet, a means of expressing their anger about the current political situation. It’s also been a way of connecting with their larger communities, of promoting empathy and inclusiveness in a potentially bleak and divisive time.”*

By generating media coverage and starting a worldwide dialogue, V-Day activists have addressed opposition to their work, turning controversy into conversations and ultimately reaching a deeper understanding about the experiences of women with sexuality and violence, creating the very change V-Day seeks. They have learned to fight for what they want most.

*theintervalny.com/features/2017/02/v-day-in-trumpland-exploring-the-relevance-of-the-vagina-monologues



V to the Tenth

On April 11–12, 2008, V-Day celebrated its tenth anniversary, V to the Tenth, in New Orleans, to shine a light on the issues facing the Gulf South community in the wake of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, which devastated the region. Over the weekend, V-Day took over the New Orleans Arena and Louisiana Superdome, which served as a makeshift shelter during Hurricane Katrina and came to symbolize the lack of care for the poor and the African American community. More than thirty thousand people attended the events over the two days, and V-Day transformed the Superdome into “SUPERLOVE,” with conversations, slam poetry, performances, storytelling, and art that explored the issues of the environment, failing infrastructure, and violence against women with an intersectional lens. Thousands traveled from out of state and overseas for events that featured more than 125 speakers and 40 stars, a choir of 200, and 800-plus volunteers.

V-Day’s Coastal Women Coming Home Project brought twelve hundred women displaced by the hurricanes to New Orleans for the weekend and provided access to free massage, support groups, yoga, meditation, and makeovers. As part of SUPERLOVE, V-Day staged the premier reading of *Swimming Upstream*, written by fifteen local New Orleans artists in partnership

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V with the Ashé Cultural Arts Center. The play told the
• raw stories of women who lived through Hurricane
D Katrina with grace, rage, humor, and great resiliency.

A A benefit performance of *The Vagina Monologues*
Y featured Jane Fonda, Rosario Dawson, Kerry Wash-
ington, Ali Larter, Calpernia Addams, Lilia Aragón,
Stéphanie Bataille, Jennifer Beals, Ilene Chaiken,
Didi Conn, Lella Costa, Alexandra Hedison, Shirley
Knight, Kristina Krepela, Christine Lahti, Liz Mikel,
Doris Roberts, Daniela Sea, Amber Tamblyn, Leslie
Townsend, and Monique Wilson, plus musical perfor-
mances by Faith Hill, Jennifer Hudson, Peter Buffett,
Charmaine Neville, and the Voices of New Orleans
Gospel Choir.

V-Day donated more than \$700,000 to groups in
the region working to end violence against women and
girls.

The V to the Tenth celebrations were an import-
ant marker for the V-Day movement, laying the
groundwork for an intensive multiyear focus on
women survivors of violence in Congo and for a
series of events, conversations, and actions around
different forms of violence marginalized communities
experience—from economic to environmental to ra-
cial. It was out of this work that the One Billion Rising
campaign was born, an annual global action demand-
ing an end to all forms of violence against women.



Rising—Out of the Theater and into the Streets

Bodies moving spontaneously, but not randomly, are participating in a global conversation about violence. And in dancing at the sites that the Risers select, the risings tell us something about intersectional politics the world over. People—women—live intersectionally—sites where sexism overlaps with economic marginality, racism, environmental degradation, queerphobia, able-ism, xenophobia, and the like. Risers show us what the face of intersectionality is by what they choose to resist. [There are] thousands of unique actions that make up the global mapping of how violence festers at the intersections of vulnerability. Dancing at these sites calls attention to these vulnerabilities, and transforms them into sites of resistance. It is coalitional politics on a global scale.

—Kimberlé Crenshaw, co-founder of the African American Policy Forum, professor of law at UCLA, faculty director of the Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies at Columbia Law School, and V-Day board member

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Launched on Valentine's Day 2012, One Billion Rising began as a call to action based on the staggering statistic that one in three women on the planet will be beaten or raped during her lifetime. With the world population at seven billion, this adds up to more than *one billion* women and girls.

On V-Day's fifteenth anniversary, February 14, 2013, people across the world came together to express their outrage, strike, dance, and rise in defiance of the injustices women suffer, demanding an end at last to sexual and physical violence. As One Billion Rising has grown and the local campaigns have deepened, the scope of issues igniting grassroots activism has expanded. One Billion Rising activists are seeking justice in the face of economic violence; racial violence; gender violence; violence caused by corruption, occupation, and aggression; violence caused by environmental disasters, climate change, and environmental plunder; violence impacting women in the context of state-sponsored wars, militarization, and the worsening internal and international displacement of millions of people; and violence created by capitalist greed.

Through One Billion Rising, activists have mobilized, engaged, and awakened people worldwide, making violence against women a global human issue not restricted to country or tribe or class or religion. They



have revealed it as a patriarchal mandate, present in every culture of the world. They have made visible the volatile connections between violence against women and economic, environmental, racial, and gender injustice. They have formed new and lasting coalitions between existing groups and individuals not only within the women's movement but also between people's movements covering diverse sectors. And they have shown that there is nothing more powerful than global solidarity, as it makes all of us safer in our outspokenness, braver in what we feel willing to do.

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One Billion Rising has demonstrated the power of art and dance and the astonishing political alchemy that occurs when art and activism happen simultaneously. Dance is one of the most powerful forces on the earth, and we have only just begun to tap into where it can take us. The struggle of humanity is the struggle to return to our bodies. Through trauma, cruelty, shame, oppression, violence, rape, and exclusion, the human species has been wounded, and we have been forced to flee our bodies. This same cruelty, rape, and oppression have been enacted on the earth itself, and the consequences have been dire.

Dancing allows us to come back into our bodies as individuals and groups. It allows us to go further, to include everyone, to tap into a revolutionary and poetic energy that is inviting us to take the lid off the



V patriarchal container, releasing more of our wisdom,
• our self-love. Our sexuality, our compassion, and
D fierceness. Dancing is defiance. It is joyous and raging.
A It is contagious and free and beyond corporate or state
Y control. We have only begun to dance.

The intentional structure of One Billion Rising—based on the idea of “expanding and not branding”—has allowed for mass engagement across sectors and existing networks that have traditionally worked apart from one another, while also providing a platform to honor and recognize the incredible work already being done on the ground by groups fighting to end gender-based violence. In many ways, One Billion Rising is an energy that moved across the planet, a decision shared by activists and adapted to each culture and place. From unions, migrant workers, and teachers to religious leaders, actors, and youth, the campaign has inspired countless individuals to take to the streets. Activists have brought to the surface the intersection of issues both causing and affecting violence against women.

Rising activists have supported and taken part in Say Her Name actions—which call for an end to the scandalous ignoring of violence against African American women—and called for a gender-inclusive movement to end state violence and uplift the stories of black women. Through the frame of Artistic Uprising,



many participants stage artistic and political events—in locations throughout the United States and the world—centering on creative resistance and voice, and the power of art to engage wide support for cultural change.

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Groups that have been traditionally marginalized—including indigenous, LGBTQ+, disabled, migrant, and incarcerated women—are at the center of the campaign in many communities. One Billion Rising has created global solidarity and strength, cutting across borders, races, religions, sexual orientations, ages, genders, and abilities. It has also reignited solidarity between women’s organizations in various countries and has rekindled the ethos of sisterhood among women on a global scale.

One Billion Rising has affirmed what a global solidarity movement looks like—people coming together for a uniquely local yet shared global vision. One such example is the recent Women Workers Rising effort, a coalition calling for broad-based solidarity among women workers, an end to workplace violence and harassment, pay equity, a fair living wage, paid leave, and labor rights.

As One Billion Rising has been embraced by veteran and new activists alike, V-Day has seen its work go deeper into the fabric of communities, helping to provide a path for groups to come together and cata-



V lyzing V-Day into a new place in its evolution as a
• global grassroots movement.

D It all started with a series of stunning mono-
A logues, but it has turned into an energetic, determined
Y global uprising, crisscrossing continents, demanding
one thing—liberation for all our sisters. As V-Day en-
ters its twentieth year, we continue to seek a world
where women and girls will thrive rather than merely
survive. We invite you to join us.

