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Recommended Citation

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The Evolution of Defining Rape in the United States

Sophia Rhoades

Chancellor's Honors Program Thesis

December 11, 2020

Abstract

This thesis is about the development of how rape has been defined throughout history. The article begins with the discussion of the racialization of rape and Ida B. Well's anti-lynching crusade. The thesis concludes with the discussion of the resources survivors have created for each other and the reflection of how the un-normalization of rape behaviors and rape culture has launched it into the political and social spheres. The purpose of this thesis was to provide people with a greater understanding of the history of rape culture in America and why many rapists face little to no time in jail and walk free. I hope that this thesis will be a resource for anyone who wants to further their education on this subject and in the field of American Studies, specifically women, gender, and African American studies.

Ida B. Wells was a pioneer in the anti-lynching crusade beginning in the late 1880s. Her advocacy stemmed from the enormous amount of African American men that were falsely accused of rape by white women and lynched. The racialization of carnal knowledge allowed for white male supremacy to continue to abuse the lives of African Americans through another medium of exploitation. The prosecution of rape in the United States during “the early republic shows that the sexual prerogatives of white men—like their right to citizenship—rested upon the legal disabilities of the African American or Native American men or all women.”¹ Ida B. Wells showed that white men feared losing their dominant power in society therefore the lynching of African American men allowed them to implement their “lesson of subordination.”² Wells also highlights how America’s white patriarchal society created an unhealthy public sentiment and the promotion of a mob culture that would freely achieve mass lynching without any consequences. In Ida B. Wells’ *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases (1892)*, she conveys how the laws in the South function to prevent the consensual relationships between black men and white women but protect nonconsensual relationships between white men and black women; Wells points out that the unwritten law solely allows for the prosecution of African American men on any rumor of relations with a white woman. The white southerners who disapproved of lynching and remained silent only helped the agenda of those who actively participated in lynching.

¹ Estelle B. Freedman, *Redefining Rape: Sexual Violence in the Era of Suffrage and Segregation* (Estelle B. Freedman, 2013), 21.

² Ida B. Wells, *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases (1892)* (Digital History, 2019), 4.

In the late eighteenth century colonial America, white men were separated from black men when convicted of rape. By the end of the eighteenth century, all white men had virtually gained full citizenship rights³ which left black men free or enslaved at the mercy of the power of white men to convict them of rape whether or not if the accusation was true. When white men faced trial of rape allegations, “[s]tandards of evidence were higher...leading to a higher rate of acquittal.”⁴ The beginning development of the racialization of rape convictions foreshadowed what the future of rape would be defined as in the antebellum period of Ida B. Wells’ anti-lynching crusade. A consensual relationship between a black man and a white woman was common throughout the antebellum era. In 1825, Polly Lane who was a lower-class woman accused Jim a neighborhood slave of rape.⁵ When the trial occurred it was revealed by another slave named Dick that he had seen Polly and Jim together in bed before and that they both knew that she might be pregnant.⁶ Polly attempted to protect herself from being ostracized in the community by claiming that Jim raped her. However, Polly’s accusation of rape failed and a “bastardly warrant...[was issued to her shifting the] crime from rape to illegitimacy and the burden of guilt from the black to the white woman.”⁷ The consensual relationship between a white woman and black man posed a threat to the reputation of a white woman if their relationship was discovered by others. As a result, many white women feared violent repercussions, so they projected the responsibility of the relationship on the black man to avoid consequences. Even though when white women would “cry rape” and escape the physical

³ Estelle B. Freedman, *Redefining Rape: Sexual Violence in the Era of Suffrage and Segregation* (Estelle B. Freedman, 2013), 21.

⁴ Freedman, *Redefining Rape: Sexual Violence in the Era of Suffrage and Segregation*, 20.

⁵ Martha Hodes, *White Women, Black Men* (Yale University Press, 1997), 39.

⁶ Hodes, *White Women, Black Men*, 41.

⁷ Hodes, *White Women, Black Men*, 45-46.

punishment, they were still faced with grappling with the torturing psychological consequences of watching the lynching of their former lover.

In Ida B. Wells' Chapter II, *The Black and White of It*, she discusses how a wealthy African American man was shot and killed by a mob of white men because he wrote a note to a white woman of high society.⁸ The murder of this African American man during Wells' time showcases the evolution of the strenuous relationship that existed between the black man and the white woman. The unwritten law fabricated by the white southern mob prevented consensual relationships between black men and white women as both parties were subject to indirect ownership by the white man. In contrast, white men were allowed to freely seduce and rape black women with virtually no consequences. White men believed that they had a sexual entitlement to black women because they were not seen of being capable of virtue. Therefore, "[t]his construction gave white men free sexual rein and limited the ability of African American women of any class to refuse sexual advances."⁹ Antebellum society's belief of the lack of morality of black woman further promoted the false narrative of their uncivilized manner and allowed white men to continue to escape punishment of committing rape. Young black girls also found themselves with no justice for rape that had been committed against them. The "[l]ocal authorities in the antebellum South confronted by the rape of black girls would look the other way."¹⁰ The inability for young black women to be protected by their families against rape, legitimized "when they came of age at the end of the nineteenth century [and had] learned early

⁸ Wells, *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases* (1892), 2.

⁹ Freedman, *Redefining Rape: Sexual Violence in the Era of Suffrage and Segregation*, 82.

¹⁰ Diane Miller, Sommerville. *Rape and Race in the Nineteenth-Century South*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004). Accessed September 16, 2019. ProQuest Ebook Central. 70.

in their lives that race alone was ‘sufficient invitation to the Southern white man.’”¹¹ Both black men and women were oversexualized when it came to sexual relationships with white men and women. Black women were faced with inescapable degradation as they were forced into subordination by both white and black men.

The silence of white southerners that disapproved of lynching only aided the goals of the white mob and their attack on African American men. The concept of rape at the end of the nineteenth century was considered to be “The Negro Crime.”¹² African American men’s right to vote was undermined by the fear of rape which was a concept created by white southerners.¹³ The branding of rape as a crime that African American men were solely responsible for allowed the white mob to overpower others who believed otherwise. “Some white southerners agreed that lynch mobs were barbaric, undermined the rule of law, and sacrificed the reputation of the South.”¹⁴ The white southerners who did not believe in the lynch mobs remained mostly silent to protect their own safety. White southerners feared that if they spoke out especially if they were part of the lower-class, they would risk showing support for African Americans and in turn face violent consequences. There were anti-lynching bills passed however, it did not stop the continued tolerance of the white mob by other white southerners. Ida B. Wells conveys that the inability of action taken by white southerners to condemn lynching made them “equally guilty with the actual law-breakers.”¹⁵ The failure of direct action allowed for the white mob to run rampant in the south creating an uprising of lynching terrors where African American men were forced to fear for their lives if they had any type of interaction with a white woman. The

¹¹ Freedman, *Redefining Rape: Sexual Violence in the Era of Suffrage and Segregation*, 83.

¹² Freedman, *Redefining Rape: Sexual Violence in the Era of Suffrage and Segregation*, 90.

¹³ Freedman, *Redefining Rape: Sexual Violence in the Era of Suffrage and Segregation*, 91.

¹⁴ Freedman, *Redefining Rape: Sexual Violence in the Era of Suffrage and Segregation*, 111.

¹⁵ Wells, *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases (1892)*, 5.

redefinition of rape in the late 1890s was solely the belief that only black men raped white women.

The 1908 Springfield riot that resulted in the burning of the black business district and the lynching of two black men brought upon the establishment of the movement for racial justice.¹⁶ The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was founded and the interracial group set an agenda to combat the false ideas created by white supremacy. The NAACP not only worked to bring attention to the injustices black men were facing but also black women. At the forefront of the NAACP's agenda was the activism of "black artists and writers" as they "addressed the racial dynamics of sexual violence."¹⁷ In the film, "Within Our Gates," the audience witnesses a flashback of Sylvia Landry almost being raped by the brother of the murdered landowner. The film depicts Armand Gridlestone not being satisfied with the lynching of both of Sylvia's adopted parents therefore he attempts to rape her out of anger and sexual aggression.¹⁸ The image of the black woman being subjected to rape showcases the racial dynamic of sexual violence between white men and black women.

The white press solely projected the horrors of the rape of white women and ignored the black women that were raped. "The Birth of a Nation" showcases that a white woman is better off dead than to be raped by a black man.¹⁹ The black press worked to debunk the narrative of white women being the only victims of rape. Black journalists and writers redefined rape to include black women.²⁰ Ida B. Wells was the first to draw attention to the numerous black

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Evelyn Preer, Oscar Micheaux, and Micheaux Film Corporation. "Within Our Gates." 1919. Video.

¹⁹ D. W. Griffith, and Thomas Dixon AND Griffith Film Corporation. "The Birth of a Nation." 1915.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 235.

women being raped by white men. Wells depicted “white Southern men as the lustful rapists of black women and the hypocritical murders of innocent black men.”²¹ The rape of black women was fully ignored until this point because black women were regarded to be animalistic in nature and unvirtuous. The recognition of the rape of black women devastated communities as black men’s inability to defend their own women from assault hindered their ability to attain the full status of manhood.²² The organization of black women against rape and lynching is defined as a pivotal movement in racial and sexual justice that subsequently led to the creation of the broader definition of rape.²³

At the dawn of the twentieth century, most women were making efforts to receive an education if they had the privilege or trade in domestic work for urban factory jobs. A record number of women were unmarried at the time which concerned Victorian mothers with their daughter’s ability to fulfill the responsibilities of a true woman.²⁴ A number of middle class, elite, and working-class women’s desires to become independent women jeopardized the institution of the Victorian home. The factory work place actually served as a safer space for working women because they lived at home.²⁵ Domestic servitude posed a greater risk to the moral corruption of women as coercive sex and sexual exploitation of servants was more common and therefore led to “ruined” domestic women to enter prostitution.²⁶ The number of black women in domestic servitude was limited as the number of southern black migrants were

²¹ Crystal N. Feimster, “Ida B. Wells and the Lynching of Black Women.” *New York Times*, *New York Times*, April 28, 2018.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Sarah Deutsch, “Women and the city: gender, space, and power in Boston, 1870-1940.” *New York: Oxford University Press* 2000, 54.

²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 58

²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 60

minimal at the time. White employers also rejected black servants because of their “proverbial uppishness.”²⁷ Sylvia Landry in “Within Our Gates” defies the common role of a black woman during this time. As an educated woman, she holds an occupation as a teacher and pursues the agenda of educating poor black children. Sylvia’s ability to achieve a greater occupation than domestic service shows how she redefines what a black woman can be and contribute to society at this time. Sylvia’s desire to uplift her race by educating future generations conveys how she is a respectable working black woman. Even Sylvia’s love interest Dr. V. Vivian mirrors her respectability as he creates a positive image for black men as an educated black doctor.

As women began to advance in society from receiving an education and working, they posed a direct threat to the white supremacist patriarchy. After Reconstruction, white men began to compete with black men for jobs. As women began to participate in the workforce in the early twentieth century, white men were compelled to place more restrictions on women’s freedom in order to protect themselves. As work propelled women to venture city streets unaccompanied there was a push for street harassment to be redefined as a crime. The “[l]inking [of] the murders of women to street harassment meshed with desires for law and order and for urban economic growth.”²⁸ In order for women to achieve economic independence restrictions needed to be placed on sexually dangerous behaviors of men. As a result of new legal restrictions being placed on men’s sexual behavior both northern white and black women eventually rejected the dependence of chivalrous protection by men.²⁹ The domain of the public woman was being redefined as the gender system began to transition from female dependence on men to aspirations of independence.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 55.

²⁸ Estelle Freedman, “Smashing the Masher” in *Redefining Rape*, 2013, 199.

²⁹ Ibid, 192.

Women's emergence into the public sphere brought more attention to the street harassment of black women by white men. The resistance of white mashers by African American women contributed to their quest for sexual respectability and economic opportunity.³⁰ Sylvia Landry's journey to travel alone to Boston to fundraise \$5,000 for her school to remain funded shows how she pursued economic opportunity as an educated and virtuous woman. However, her journey to the North did not come without obstacles. Her decision to travel alone resulted in her being robbed. In the film, a man on the street approaches Sylvia as she appears to be lost and he begins to escort her on the street but as soon as he sees her money, he takes off with it. The urban space offered opportunity for women but also presented grave danger and threatened their safety. The moral safety of Sylvia was threatened when she was robbed as she was unable to defend herself without the risk of developing unwomanly characteristics.³¹ The urban space offered freedom of observation for men and therefore the "annoying of women increase[ed] as [they] approach[ed] the cities."³² Men saw cities as spaces where they could not be held responsible for their inappropriate actions because the woman that they would offend would be a stranger to them and they would most likely never see her again.³³ The racial coding of mashers ultimately exposed white male offenders and their insulting treatment of African American women.³⁴

The racial dynamics in relation to sexual violence were beginning to be discussed more in the early twentieth century. The sexual violence against black women was brought up by the black press in efforts to seek racial justice. The movement of racial uplift is demonstrated clearly in the film, "Within Our Gates" as respectable black actors portray black middle class educated

³⁰ Ibid., 206.

³¹ Eleanor Gates, "Girl Who Travels Alone," *Cosmopolitan* XLII, 1906, 170.

³² Ibid., 169.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Estelle Freedman, "Smashing the Masher" in *Redefining Rape*, 2013, 209.

African Americans. The film conveyed how educated African Americans can help benefit American society. This is depicted through Sylvia Landry saving a young child from being hit by a car and her campaign to educate impoverished black children in the South. At this time in the United States, black bodies continued to be racialized but the expansion of women into the public sphere shed light on white offenders that had been getting away with immoral behavior. The redefinition of rape now included street harassment from all men to all women.

The Knoxville race riot of 1919 began when Maurice Mays a biracial man was falsely accused of jumping into bed with a white woman and murdering her.³⁵ The Knoxville Journal and Tribune published an extra edition announcing the murder of Mrs. Bertie Lindsey and how the crime had been committed by an unnamed black man.³⁶ Rumors began to circulate that Maurice Mays had committed the act and tensions that had been building up between black people and white people in Knoxville came to a head and violence broke out on the streets resulting in bloodshed. Mays's unfair prosecution depicts how the crime of being charged with rape was only applied to black men. The idea of the black male rapists continued to be conditioned in white minds. The common belief of the black male rapists allowed for rape to be mislabeled because the majority of defendants in rape trials were black. "In 1906, a black man named Edward Johnson, was convicted of raping a white woman and sentenced to death by an all-white jury in Chattanooga."³⁷ Attorneys' won Johnson's appeal to the Supreme Court but he fell victim to white mob violence and was lynched at the hands of infuriated white men. In the

³⁵ Matthew Lakin, "A Dark Night." J. East TN History 2000, 9.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 10

³⁷ Equal Justice Initiative, "Lynching in America." 2017.

mid twentieth century, the consistency of rape being racialized led to black men being labeled as rapists which in turn led white men to escape from their crimes of rape.

Twentieth century America brought women fully into the public sphere as they were in the workforce to support the war cause or receiving an education. Men in uniform appeared to win over the sentiments of young women in America. After World War I, “soldiers argued that [their] sacrifice for [their] country demanded a similar sexual sacrifice from young women.”³⁸ This general idea held by men led to them believing that they had the right to engage in sexual activity with any women who presented herself as flirtatious or promiscuous. White soldiers believed that their GI status granted them the privilege to not only have sexual relations with any woman but also face no consequences for their actions. When white soldiers stayed in the Normandy region of France after the D-Day, they lived out their belief that all French women were objects of American control.³⁹ American soldiers had landed on the beaches of Normandy with sexual fantasies of France lingering in their minds. They had been conditioned to believe that all French women were sexually promiscuous and obligated to have sex with them for their sacrifice. After the United States liberated France from the Axis Powers, “Norman women launched a wave of rape accusations against American soldiers,...transform[ing] the GI from rescuer-warrior to violent intruder.”⁴⁰ In response to these accusations, the U.S. army labeled African American soldiers as the primary rapists and as a result African American soldiers were

³⁸ Elizabeth Alice Clement, and ProQuest. “Love for Sale: Courting, Treating, and Prostitution in New York City, 1900-1945.” *Gender & American Culture*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006, 145.

³⁹ Mary Louis Roberts, “What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II France.” 2013, 11.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

lynched on French soil.⁴¹ The lynching of African American soldiers from rape accusations in the 1940s continued to convince white women that only black men were capable of rape. White women were aware of the sexual aggression of white males, but they were unable to justify the men's actions as rape because they saw them as sons, fathers, and "good men."

In Eugene J. Kanin's study on "Male Aggression in Dating Courtship Relations," he depicts how women in the late 1950s prior to entering college faced offensive male sexual aggression from all men. Kanin found that male offenders tend to be older than the women they offend and that young women are more prone to male aggression because they are further away from marriage. Kanin's findings are demonstrated in the 1960 film "Where the Boys Are" directed by Henry Levin. The college freshman girls in the film take a spring vacation and meet boys who are upperclassmen at other universities. All of the girls are ultimately seeking love with the hopes of receiving a marriage proposal in the future. The girls are extremely naïve especially Melanie who falls for a boy that uses her for sex and is then raped by a friend of the boy she had fallen for.⁴² Men were convinced that any type of flirtatious attitude or "going steady" with a woman opened the gates for them to freely dominate women. At this time, white men had impunity therefore women could not accuse them of rape. The supposed chivalrous man that had protected white women before post-war America now had the ability to publicly be a sexual predator as their male aggression was naturalized by society's beliefs that men suffered from raging hormones. Socially permitted sexual behavior allowed for all men to turn rape into dating as women became solely responsible for their chastity and protecting their bodies.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Henry Levin and George Wells. "Where the Boys Are." Metrocolor, 1960. Video.

New sexual expectations were brought upon young women in the 1950s as sexual experiences became “a defining gender characteristic and means of achieving manhood.”⁴³ The ideas held about proper marital norms and studies of dating practices among young people naturalized male aggression as proof of masculinity which made all girls regardless of respectability vulnerable to violence from their dates.⁴⁴ Women realized that more relaxed dating expectations came at the cost of their safety. All women were at risk of sexual violence from all men regardless of who their date was. Men saw the activities of necking and petting as a gateway to sexual satisfaction. The drastic changes in the sexual relationship between men and women gave men full ownership over women’s bodies and labeled women permanently as sluts if they engaged in sexual activity before marriage. Women were branded as seductresses with naturally promiscuous behavior when they were violently raped by men. Women were unable to label the violent sexual actions of their white male aggressors because the title of rapist continued to be given primarily to black men. This can be seen with the lynching of African American soldiers and the trials of the Scottsboro boys.

While rape continued to be mislabeled and women became aware of white male aggressors, the African American community was working to reshape rape laws in America to lessen the number of black men falsely prosecuted. In March of 1931, two white women named Victoria Price and Ruby Bates accused nine African American teenagers of raping them.⁴⁵ After the arrest of the Scottsboro boys, eight of them were sentenced to execution but due to the intervention of the Communist Party, the case gained international and national news.⁴⁶ The

⁴³ Lisa Lindquist Door, “The Perils of the Back Seat: Date Rape, Race and Gender in 1950s America.” *Gender & History*. 2008, 27.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁴⁵ Estelle Freedman, “Scottsboro and Its Legacies” in *Redefining Rape*, 2013, 253.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

Communist Party's International Labor Defense Committee took over the case which built upon the discourse of undermining the southern belief that black men were a constant sexual threat to white women.⁴⁷ The NAACP ended up joining the Scottsboro Defense Committee in 1935 to help expose the false rape allegations and champion the defendants.⁴⁸ Soon after, African American communities began to mobilize when appeals did not succeed on other rape cases and as a result they worked for their rights as jurors and voters.⁴⁹ The persistency that African Americans had with the Scottsboro case brought African American communities together which collectively helped the NAACP form a new campaign supporting black men charged with rape.

The gang rape of Recy Taylor in Abbeville Alabama in 1944 brought Rosa Parks to the town to investigate. Parks interviewed Taylor in her home but was quickly rushed out by the Deputy Sheriff Lewey Corbitt.⁵⁰ Rosa Parks collected the notes she had and took them back to Montgomery where herself and other black activists organized a campaign to defend Recy Taylor.⁵¹ Rosa Parks gained support from national labor unions, African American organizations, and her local allies and formed the Alabama Committee for Equal Justice.⁵² Recy Taylor faced an unjust trial but because of Rosa Park's attention to the case, people across the nation who supported African American rights attacked the hypocrisy of whites. Rosa Parks' work to bring justice to Recy Taylor depicts how the African American community was pushing back against

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 256.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 257.

⁵⁰ Danielle L. McGuire, "At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance--A New History of the Civil Rights Movement From Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power." Vol. 1st ed. New York: Vintage. 2010.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

unfair rape laws. Recy Taylor's inadequate trial shows how discriminatory rape laws prosecuted both black women and men unjustly.

In 1971, Radical Feminists in New York organized a Speak-Out on Rape where there were 30 or 40 chilling accounts given by women.⁵³ Women detailed how they were raped by their analyst, a stranger who followed them home, a fake house doctor, and gynecologist.⁵⁴ The shared stories made women aware that they were not alone in their experience of sexual violation. The different identities of each rapist also expanded the narrative of who could be considered a rapist. The break from the traditional narrative of the black male stranger proved that any male could be a rapist. The identification of 'date rape,' or 'acquaintance rape,' expanded the definition of assailants beyond the historical stereotypes of black, gay, or psychopathic men."⁵⁵ Women's subjectivity shifted when they challenged the status quo with their stories. However, rape laws had not been changed as they were the same laws that had been "written when a woman was considered the sexual property of any male acquaintance."⁵⁶ There were overwhelming realizations of the sexual abuse women had been enduring. At the 1971 Speak-Out, Gail Sheehy's first-hand account details that when the women are discussing childhood pantsing in grade school, she realizes "[t]hey didn't call it pantsing at [her] school in Westchester. It was just boys in the woods."⁵⁷ Sheehy's recognition of the sexual abuse she endured from her childhood shows how women were developing a collective knowledge of

⁵³ Gail Sheehy, "Nice Girls Don't Get Into Trouble." *New York Magazine*, *New York Magazine*, February 15, 1971, 26.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁵⁵ Estelle Freedmen, "The Enduring Politics of Rape" in *Redefining Rape*, 2013, 283.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

shared experiences. As women realized they were not alone in their sexual exploitation they directly challenged the normalization of rape by sharing their stories and organizing.

The acknowledgement of the collective trauma these women suffered encouraged them to organize. Through their discourse, survivors of rape shifted the blame where it belonged, on the rapists. As women became united by their common experiences, they stood to change the attitudes and laws that prevented victims from receiving justice and freedom from the physical and psychological trauma they carried with them. A couple years after organization began with speak-outs and conferences, “community outreach programs that were imaginative, original and unprecedented: rape crisis centers with a telephone hotline staffed twenty-four hours a day to provide counseling, procedural information and sisterly solidarity”⁵⁸ were popping up in cities across the country. The creation of these new resources by survivors were for the women who never had the chance to talk about their experience and to educate doctors and nurses how to treat a rape victim with greater sensitivity and respect. Women no longer had to sit with being raped as they now had the resources to speak to someone about their experience. Women were now looking at rape from their own perspective which empowered them to see that they were not at fault for any violation of bodily integrity that they endured. At the same time rape crisis centers became accessible, women were participating in “rape legislation study groups to work up model codes based on a fresh approach to the law and to work with legislators to get new laws adopted.”⁵⁹ The ideas that manifested from these study groups can be seen in the changes in legislation that criminalized marital rape and prevented defendants from using the victim’s sexual history as a weapon against her. Similar organizing can be seen in the film, “Born in

⁵⁸ Susan Brownmiller, “Women Fight Back” in *Against Our Will*, 1975, 397.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

Flames,” as women protest unequal job opportunities in their supposedly “equal society” and the murder of Adelaide Norris, the leader of the women’s army.⁶⁰ The women’s fight in the economic sex war and against brutality reflect how the women in the anti-rape movement were pushing back against the status quo.

As time progressed, second wave feminism was met with the backlash of many critics that believed their activism had only made the lives of women more inadequate. Women who spear headed the opposition against the feminist movement believed that women’s liberation had robbed them of what every women’s happiness rest on—men.⁶¹ Their mission to restore traditional roles to women was motivated by their belief that feminism had only led to distress an identity crisis for women.⁶² These women were set on the ideas that gender equality only contributed to their unhappiness. They believed the work they did outside the home made them less likely to find a husband and have a family. Many young women of the nineties believed that their generation was the human sacrifice to the women’s movement.⁶³ This harsh backlash from other women only made it more difficult for all women to continue to improve their status in society and respectfully seek the resources now available to them if they were raped. The women who opposed the second wave feminist agenda were confident that the campus sexual assault crisis was not a fact but rather advertising a mood.⁶⁴ The anti-feminist rhetoric spread the false idea that “rape-crisis feminists reinforce[d] traditional views about the fragility of the female body and will.”⁶⁵ These statements made by women who were a part of the opposition to

⁶⁰ Lizzie Borden. “Born in Flames.” First Run Features. 1983. Video.

⁶¹ Susan Faludi, “Introduction: Blame it on Feminism” in *Backlash*, 1991.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Katie Roiphe, “Date Rape’s Other Victim.” *The New York Times*, *The New York Times*, June 13, 1993.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

feminism reinforced the status quo of the mindset that gender is natural. This type of thinking only further enforced the fear, anger, shame, and guilt all women faced.

The work of feminist critics is reflected in the initial reaction of the public to the accusations against Ted Bundy. In the case of Ted Bundy, people could hardly believe that he could have raped and murdered numerous young women. Bundy's inability to fit the traditional stereotype of a sexual psychopath provided a gate way for people to sympathize with him. Many people were hesitant to believe that Bundy had committed such harsh crimes as "[h]e loved children, read poetry, [and] showed courage by chasing down and capturing a purse snatcher on the streets of Seattle."⁶⁶ The characteristics that Bundy had previously portrayed to the public demonstrates how the message of the "nice man" was overshadowing the criminal evidence against him. Bundy's white male privilege provided him with the opportunity to have his knowledge and character valued as more credible by the public. Ted Bundy was even given special privileges in prison and allowed to study law books in preparation to represent himself in court. Even when Bundy broke out of prison people treated him like some sort of modern Robinhood instead of a suspected mass murderer.⁶⁷ The young people in Aspen, started wearing T-shirts with inscriptions like "Ted Bundy is a One-Night Stand" and a local restaurant offered a "Bundyburger."⁶⁸ The way that people continued to idealize Ted Bundy and treat him as a vigilante rather than a rapist and murderer depicts how the backlash against second wave feminism was influential in reinforcing the idea that women were not the victims of these crimes but rather at fault for them.

⁶⁶ Jon Nordheimer, "All-American Boy on Trial." *The New York Times*, *The New York Times*, December 10, 1978.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

The accessibility to rape crisis centers and new rape laws have had a positive impact in aiding victims however it has not stop individuals from being raped. Women continue to struggle to speak out against rape because of the power that their male rapist holds over them. Martha McSally served in the United States Air Force for two decades and began her enlistment in the late 1980s. McSally was raped by a male superior officer on her journey to enter that distinct boys club and did not report it up the chain of command.⁶⁹ McSally's reasoning for not reporting her rape was due to the fact that if she chose to do so it would threaten or even end her military career. Even though McSally challenged her position in the Air Force by becoming the first woman to pilot an American warplane into combat and had her superiors wave the height requirement, she was reluctant to come forward until a few months ago.⁷⁰ McSally was burdened with ending her career if she dared to call out her colleague and chose to keep her rape as a private matter and her individual problem for years. Regardless of her choice to keep her rape private for many years, her silence contributed to keeping the structure of military hierarchy in place. Men were left to continue to believe that it was acceptable to exert control over women through sexual exploitation. Another recent case involved the sexual abuse by Larry Nassar on more than 160 women.⁷¹ These women included elite gymnasts, runners, divers, swimmers, and other athletes.⁷² Nassar's abuse was allowed to continue for decades as he silenced his victims by his position of power as a "trustworthy" doctor. Nassar manipulated these young women by his assurance that he was doing everything he could as a doctor to help their athletic career. Nassar's

⁶⁹ Helene Cooper, et al., "'I, Too Was a Survivor': Senator McSally Ends Years of Silence." *The New York Times*, *The New York Times*, March 26, 2019.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Christine Hauser and Maggie Astor, "The Larry Nassar Case: What Happened and How the Fallout Is Spreading." *The New York Times*, *The New York Times*, January 25, 2018.

⁷² *Ibid.*

position of authority subjected these young women to be vulnerable when he sexually violated them. U.S.A. Gymnastics further enforced Nassar's position of power by not terminating him as soon as they received evidence that he abused these young women. More than 150 young women gave victim impact statements at Nassar's sentence hearing which solidified his 40 to 175 years in prison.⁷³

Not only have rape victims included women but they also have included the sexual abuse of young boys. In the sexual abuse case of Jerry Sandusky at Penn State, he sexually assaulted young boys. Even when individuals in the locker room witnessed Sandusky's abuse on these young boys they failed to intervene. Mike McQueary, "then a graduate assistant to the football team, 'left immediately' after witnessing the former assistant coach Jerry Sandusky sodomize a young boy."⁷⁴ McQueary's inability to take action to report Sandusky's actions to the police enforced the power Sandusky continued to have over raping his victims. Sandusky's position of power resulted in McQueary denial of the rape victims. The devaluation of the young boys' sexual violation demonstrates how Penn State officials were more disgusted at the perceived gay element than the horror of the crimes themselves.⁷⁵ The child sexual abuse demonstrates how male rapists held power over the children by manipulating them and over other adults by shaming them of the possibility of exposing homosexual relationships. Charles Blow, a victim of childhood sexual abuse has come to terms with what he experienced as a child. He conveys that stating he was a victim of abuse to the world helped begin the reparation of the damage it had done and allowed him to see that the majority of damage had been caused by trying to keep the

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Daniel Mendelshon, "Secret Dread at Penn State." *The New York Times*, *The New York Times*, November 19, 2011.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

offense in the dark.⁷⁶ Blow's truth allowed him to reclaim his life and his bodily autonomy that had been violated when he was a child. Blow's strength and perseverance demonstrate how he was able to distinctly separate his sexual identity as a bisexual man from his sexual abuse.⁷⁷ Although, Charles Blow sets an example that it is possible for victims to overcome their abuse, it is still difficult because of the male discourses that continue to dominate conversations and the normalization that rape still has in society.

Second wave feminism contributed to changing status for all women and African American men however they were unable to change the balance of power. Everything in American culture continues to promote male knowledge as superior to female knowledge. Women are now aware of the white male rapist from learning from each other's shared experiences. Many individuals realized that the racialized discourse of black men as the sole perpetrators of white women's bodies was a lie. Women's new understanding that rape was a weapon used by men to exert control over them encouraged organizing and fighting against the naturalized behaviors of the sexual aggression of men. Although second wave feminism was met with backlash by female critics, it did not substantially damage the progress that feminists had made in the movement. However, the issue of rape has not changed because there are still victims including men, women, and children. Women have to continue to keep pushing to change the male discourse and the value of their knowledge to men. The feminist scholarship that comes out of second wave feminism redefines rape once again. The redefinition of rape now includes rape as a political and social issue. The politicization and socialization of rape is focused on un-normalizing rape behaviors and rape culture that has been created by men. To

⁷⁶ Charles M. Blow, "It Got Better. That's My Testimony." *The New York Times*, *The New York Times*, June 16, 2019.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

push back against rape, change can be reached through discourses that rethink the meaning of sexual violence and enforce the importance of bodily integrity.

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