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Current feminist and anti-rape movements in the United States seek to amplify the voices of women regarding sexual assault. Unfortunately, within this amplification, the voices of Black women are often excluded, which is a direct effect of historically ignoring the abuses of Black women and rarely ever bringing their abusers to justice. These injustices, often committed by white men and perpetuated by white women, create a destructive rhetoric in stereotyping Black women while also silencing them throughout modern movements, especially those of feminist and anti-rape causes. This essay will examine the consequences of three problematic aspects of US history and the role of these aspects in silencing Black women: first, the role of slavery and how the abuse Black women faced at the hands of white slave owners was often ignored, while resentful white women whose male relatives carried out these abuses created the stereotype of the promiscuous Black woman; second, the role of the destructive history of the rape charge and lynching in the post-Civil War era in not only over-criminalizing Black men but also creating the precedent of Black women not receiving the same justice for sexual assault and rape as their white counterparts; finally, the history of feminist and anti-rape movements in the United States and their ongoing, deliberate exclusion of Black women based on stereotypes created by white women.

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Introduction

The transatlantic slave trade not only perpetuated ideas of race and racism in the United States but served as the starting point of the power structure that would condone rape, a crime that affected thousands of African American women's lives. The culture surrounding rape in the US is maintained and fueled by a victim-blaming mentality rooted in racist and sexist rhetoric. Slave women were raped and impregnated by their masters; the common excuse for this being to procreate and create a life reduced to mere labor on his illegitimate father's land. The grandchildren of these bastard children—produced out of plantation rape—would grow up in the era of Jim Crow, when a child that had been stripped of his rights and openly discriminated against would be accused by a white woman that he whistled at her. Her claims would not be questioned. A child like Emmett Till would be beaten to death. The men responsible for his death received no punishment.

The grandchildren of those humiliated by pre-civil rights era laws became activists. When law enforcement officials blame cold-blooded murders on non-existent threats of violence, women of color and members of the LGBTQIA+ community are targeted in sexually violent crimes. These women and men are victims of abuse, and their stories are ignored and claims reduced to their racial or sexual identities. Their abusers, if white, are portrayed as model citizens of society. If of color, they are criminals, at fault before they go to trial. Abusers and victims alike face the same prejudice and harassment as their family members did hundreds of years ago, except now there is protest. There is a movement to change and dispel the culture of rape in the US. This paper investigates the role of race in rape culture to argue that race plays a major role in establishing justice for victims of sexual assault.

Intersectional feminism, racial equality activism, and women's rights movements of the 21st century are creating a culture of accountability and visibility for abusers and victims alike.

Discussion

Feminists observe rape culture as a problem that men, in general, perpetuate. The issue that this creates ignores the racial discrepancies that accompany accusations and legal proceedings of sexual assault. At a time in history when conservative ideals and policies are at the forefront of political initiatives, the rights of people of color and members of the LGBTQIA+ community are overlooked and denied. Grube (2016) writes that anti-rape activism through feminism is "a single-issue movement centering on [the] punishment of sex that ranges from violent to ambiguous, and its antecedents" (p. 1027). Lena Dunham, a white feminist actress, exemplifies this flaw in feminism perfectly. An article in *The Guardian* describes Lena Dunham's approach to feminism as "hipster racism" (Mahdawi, 2017).

Under the guise of equality for women in a male-dominated society, white feminism perpetuates the superiority of white women over women of color traceable to slavery and the Jim Crow era. The best case to exemplify this is the Emmett Till case: A young Black boy was brutally beaten to death by two grown white men for whistling at a white woman in a shop. Before her death in 2016, the woman who accused Till of this harassment publicly admitted to lying about the entire encounter. Angela Davis (1983) explains that the disparities in sexual assault justice stem from the intent behind sexual assault and rape laws. The framework behind rape laws in the United States began as a means for powerful, wealthy men to protect their predatory sons and their wives and daughters who might be assaulted (Davis, 1983).

While the rape charge is one of the most debated in US law, it is overwhelmingly discriminatory towards men regardless of whether they are charged on false pretenses or found guilty. An example of the lack of support by white women for the man is Delbert Tibbs's trial. "Blatantly victimized by Southern racism," Tibbs was falsely accused of rape (Davis, 1983, p. 172-74). Tibbs's case gained national support, with women at the forefront of the case. Very few white anti-rape activists took to publicly supporting Tibbs despite the overwhelming national call for his innocence; only after the charges were dismissed in 1978 did white women align themselves with Tibbs' cause. The initial hesitation by white anti-rape activists stemmed from the skepticism that white women shared among themselves of the man's innocence. Racism that is deeply rooted in the criminalization and brutal policing of Black people in the United States takes shape in the subjectivity of feminist and anti-rape movements.

Racial identity politics indicates a social power issue that marginalizes and excludes those seen as different—in this case, African American men and women. The discrimination of white women against Black women create a racial disparity in the intersectionality of feminism and anti-rape activism, which stems from the racist aggression of slave rape (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Davis, 1983). This disconnect stems from the social structures dating back to slavery put in place by powerful white men. The sexual abuses of the slave master against the Black female slave was a "direct expression of their presumed property rights over people as a whole" (Davis, 1983, p. 175). The rape of Black women created resentment in the wives of slave masters that manifested itself into the racial aggression that envelopes the lack of intersectionality in feminism today. By blanketing racial

discrepancies for women of color in general under feminism, white feminists erase the history of abuse and lack of justice for people of color still in full effect today.

Today, the daily abuses of Black women are silenced as they occur through acts of micro-aggressive racist remarks due to the presumption that the Black woman is promiscuous and, therefore, immoral (Davis, 1983). For example, feminist author Gertrude Stein writes that one of her Black characters in *Three Lives* possesses "the simple, promiscuous immorality of the Black people" (Stein, 1909, p. 86). This contemporary, inherent promiscuity perceived to be possessed by Black women mirrors the inhuman qualities instilled into Black slave women by their white slave masters and mistresses. These inhuman qualities drive the lack of justice for Blackrape victims. Modern feminism confronts racism and sexual assault as two mutually exclusive episodes, which further enables both racism and discrimination by white women and the sexual assault of Black women (Crenshaw et al., 1995).

Slavery and its Connection to Excluding Black Women in Modern Feminist Movements

Racial stereotypes and the victim-blaming of Black women in anti-rape and feminist rhetoric are direct effects of rape and sexual assault against slave women. These violent abuses of slave women were a driving force in the perpetuation of racism and discrimination that Black women still face as survivors of rape today. White slave owners' superiority over slave women created a pattern that simultaneously caused Black women to be viewed as inherently overly-promiscuous and normalized the silence of abuse claims. Furthermore, the abuses carried out by powerful white men on Black women were viewed as a means for white women to justify their racism against Black women. Wives of

powerful white slave-owning men felt that their power was in jeopardy due to the seduction of their husbands by slave women. The abuse that slave women faced at the hands of white men, who claimed an inherent right to their bodies, had two main effects: One was the over-sexualization of the Black female, an inaccurate and misleading stereotype that is often used to excuse and permit sexual abuse towards women today; the other was the silencing of the abuses that Black women faced during slavery. This combination of stereotyping and oversexualizing Black women to excuse the heinous abuses they faced became a dominating principle in progressive movements that today deny Black women the justice they deserve after being raped.

The stereotype of the promiscuous Black woman is partially due to the early fascination and over-sexualization of Black women in 19th century Europe (Wallace-Sanders, 2006). Often, Black women depicted in art were displayed either partially nude with traditional servant garbs to represent their subordination or fully clothed but at the feet of white women, as depicted in the famous and controversial painting *Olympia*. These artistic portrayals created a narrative of Black women as subhuman; they were painted as lesser than their white counterparts and, therefore, used for the entertainment and satisfaction of white men. The *Portrait d'une négresse* or *Portrait of a Negress* by French painter Marie-Guilhelmine Benoist exemplifies this disparity in the use of Black bodies. The concept of Black women existing as prominent subjects in 19th-century art while they are simultaneously demeaned and reminded of their subordination to white women is evident in this painting. A servant woman sits with her breasts partially exposed. She is wrapped in a white sheet, and, on her head, she wears the traditional representation of her status as a servant: a white headdress. By depicting a Black woman as

comfortably nude while reminding the subject and the audience that this woman is somehow lesser within society through her clothing, the painting perpetuates the narrative that Black women are meant to be used at the will of white men. The hyper-sexualization of the Black female body in art is used as an instrument to excuse the abuses that slave women faced throughout hundreds of years of slavery. In this art, the inherent right that white men felt they possessed over Black female bodies were solidified. The stereotype of the promiscuous Black woman has become normalized not only through this art but also the racist ideals that led to slavery. These ideals created the ongoing assumption that Black men and women are subhuman and, therefore, incapable of being abused or processing their abuse as well as their white counterparts.

Moreover, the comparison of Black women to apes creates a narrative of savagery and lewdness that, when paired with the stereotype of promiscuity, propagates rape. This portrayal of Black women is the antithesis of the virtuous European women and further excuses sexual abuse and rape towards Black women (Wallace-Sanders, 2006). During the hundreds of years of slavery, this inherent lewdness that Black women inherited from their apparent, primitive ape ancestors excused the infidelity that powerful white men engaged in outside their marriages. This primitive inability to refuse sex that cursed Black women during slavery simultaneously left white slave owners enticed, which excused the terrible abuses that Black women faced and created resentment between slave women and their white female counterparts. The use of Black female bodies in art and the subhuman definitions of sexuality assigned to Black women by white slave owners and their wives have since transformed into the silencing of Black female rape claims. The silencing is evident

today in the lack of Black female voices in feminist and anti-rape movements. The lack of Black female voices lead to detrimental practices such as victim-blaming, which causes Black women to feel unsafe when speaking about their abuses. This silence creates a generational cycle of abuse that goes unrecognized and therefore does not permit Black women the same justice that white women readily receive for their rape claims.

Due to the exaggerated victimization that enveloped claims of sexual assault by white women towards slave men, slave women often suffered their abuses in silence, unable to receive justice. The issue of silencing the abuses of Black women leads to a definition of the violated body that only includes the rape of a white female or the lynching of a male (Hopkins, 2011). By viewing the rape charge through a lens that focuses on the villainization of Black men who were often falsely accused of raping and sexually assaulting white women, the justice system continues to silence the abuses that Black women have faced. These abuses are also often used as evidence to reform the rape charge rather than include Black women in the narrative of feminist, anti-rape, and anti-racist movements. In the United States today, Black women are raped and sexually assaulted at a rate six times higher than white women (Hopkins, 2011). In addition, Hopkins (2011) explains that this statistic is often used to dispel the rumor that rape is wildly interracial rather than addressing the alarming abuse rates Black women victims experience. This leads to the use of the Black female body as evidence for white feminists and anti-rape activists to demonstrate the disparities in equality between the sexes. The issue that this creates in these feminist and anti-rape movements is that Black women are excluded from the conversation, creating a lack of

intersectionality that perpetuates the silencing and, thus, a lack of justice for Black female abuse victims.

The Rape Charge and Lynching after the Civil War and Their Consequences

The abolition of slavery signified a new problem for white southerners. The issue became how to control Black men and women now that they would no longer be considered property. Through the rape charge and subsequent punishment of lynching, white southerners ensured their power over Black bodies. Feimster (2009) explains:

By accusing [B]lack men of dishonoring white womanhood and at the same time raping [B]lack women, southern white men articulated, on the one hand, deep anxieties about what they understood as the consequences of forced 'social equality' and, on the other hand, a strong desire to maintain sexual dominance over [B]lack women. (p. 50)

Accusing Black men of rape while simultaneously overlooking the abuses that Black women faced at the hands of white southern men, notably Ku Klux Klan members, southern whites began a history of the overcriminalization of Black men that justified thousands of lynchings after abolition. This history of lynching, paired with the victimization of white women who claimed sexual abuses at the hands of Black men, not only created an image of violence and savagery among Black men but further ignored the violence that Black women would face.

The myth of the Black rapist is deeply rooted in the criminalization of Black men for white men to remain in control after the end of slavery. This criminalization of Black men has survived in anti-rape movements where the racism that plagues these movements creates a lack in intersectional efforts today. While it is the case that anti-rape movements address rape as a

universal American issue, they do little to diminish the stereotype that Black men are inherently more inclined to commit sexual abuses than their white counterparts (Davis, 1983). By depicting Black men as inherently wicked and unwavering in committing sexual assaults against white women, the justification of lynching and brutal beating as punishment came into fruition. When looking at the rates of those executed based on rape convictions between 1930 and 1967, 405 out of the 455 men executed were Black (Davis, 1983). The overwhelming racial disparity in executions of Black men for convictions of rape as opposed to their white counterparts is due primarily to the myth of the Black rapist. Brownmiller (1975) describes that in Emmett Till's case, despite getting killed for it, Till's whistling at the white woman was to prove to his friends that a white woman was an easy acquisition. Brownmiller writes, "...It was a deliberate insult just short of physical assault, a last reminder to Carolyn Bryant that this Black boy, Till, had in mind to possess her" (p. 247). Brownmiller (1975) created a narrative of a 14-year-old boy whose desire to prove a point to his friends that white women were to be possessed by Black men earned him the grisly murder later proven to be based on a lie by his accuser.

More often than not, rape convictions and subsequent murders through lynching or brutal beatings were based on false pretenses; white women claimed abuses by Black men that never happened. Not only in the case of Emmett Till, but cases less severe still exemplify the power of a white woman's claims against a Black man. In the post-Civil War South, Joseph Beckwith and his wife are brutally beaten and lashed by the Ku Klux Klan members for speaking to a white woman. When asked by a congressional committee if these claims were true, Beckwith denied that he spoke to any white woman in a manner that would have him and

his wife beaten by the Klan (Feimster, 2009). Examples of violence against Black men and women by members of the Klan were not uncommon after the abolition of slavery. By claiming to defend the honor of white women, southern whites maintained power through violence. This violence often involved not only the beating or murdering of Black men but also included the abuse and rape of their wives, sisters, and daughters, as seen in the beating of Beckwith's wife for a claim made against her husband. However, by focusing the lens of the rape charge on the false claims of white women and the lynching of male bodies, the abuses of Black women were overlooked, excluding them from the definition of the violated body (Hopkins, 2011).

Frequently, Black women are used as examples to prove that rape is largely intraracial rather than interracial; as it turns out, the data reflects this, with over 90% of all rapes are interracial (Davis, 1983). Hopkins (2011) explains that although this statistic is used to debunk the myth of the Black rapist, it renders the abuses of Black women invisible. Rather than including Black women in the conversation of rape and sexual abuse and validating their abuses, this statistic is used to prove that Black men are not raping white women. This issue originates from the focus of anti-lynching movements following the Civil War and the abolition of slavery. Although Black men were killed mainly at the hands of white southerners upon the false claims of white women, Black women were often raped and unable to report their abuses without fear of facing the same fate as their Black brothers, fathers, and sons. Black women understood that "they could not adequately resist the sexual abuses they suffered without simultaneously attacking the fraudulent rape charge as a pretext for lynching" (Davis, 1983, p. 183). If they survived their rapes, Black women buried their stories as a means to protect themselves and their families. This

silence changed shape over centuries and manifested into the lack of Black female voices in anti-rape and feminist movements today. The lack of intersectionality in progressive movements is due to the overlook of intragroup differences (Crenshaw et al., 1995).

Modern Feminism and the Justice System: The Systematic Exclusion of Black Women

Today, feminist and anti-rape movements deliberately ignore racial differences between rape survivors to unify and strengthen the cause against anti-woman political policy and legislation. Often, identifying categories, such as race, are considered a dividing bias in movements that call for women's equality and those that call for justice for rape survivors across all races. This bias is not any less racist than the ideals that did not allow Black women to fight for equal rights among the genders in the Suffrage movement safely and effectively, and anti-racism movements after the Civil War.

The Women's Suffrage Movement led by Susan B. Anthony starkly lacked in the inclusion of Black women. Davis (1983) describes that this overwhelming lack of Black bodies in the cause for women's right to vote was deliberate considering the movement's leadership and the United States' culture in the early 20th century. Davis (1983) describes an interaction between Anthony and Ida B. Wells. In this interaction, Anthony explains to Wells that the inclusion of Black women in the suffrage movement, particularly if they were to form a branch of the movement specific to Black women, would signify that the movement is interracial. If the movement was considered interracial, Anthony would drastically lose the support of southern white women whose racism would dominate their motivation to fight for the right to vote (Davis, 1983). Ida B. Wells founded the

Black women's suffrage club after feeling as though her efforts were not being recognized due to her race. Southern white women's deeply rooted racism and their belief in the segregation of the races did not allow Black women to have the same rights as their white counterparts. Consequently, Black women did not earn the right to vote until 1965. This example from the early 20th century of the inability of white women to view Black women as their equals in gender and, therefore, worthy of fighting for their same cause parallels many of the ideals that continue to silence Black female voices in feminism and anti-rape movements and deny these women justice.

The same stereotypes created out of slavery and used to excuse the rape and sexual assault of the Black woman are now used to ensure that Black women do not have a seat at the table when discussing rape. As a result, racism and the inability of Black women to receive justice for their abuses become normalized in these progressive movements. Racism in neo-feminism is described as "hipster racism," which is defined as the "domain of white, often progressive people who think they are hip to racism, which they mistakenly believe gives them permission to say and do racist things without actually being racist" (Mahdawi 2017, para. 9). Through racist microaggressions, white progressives facilitate racism and the exclusion of Black voices while simultaneously denying their racism. In the example of the interaction between Susan B. Anthony and Ida B. Wells, the micro-aggressive act of excluding an entire race of women from fighting for the right to vote (to ensure the support of women who looked like her) magnified Anthony's racism rather than creating the logical thought process that she believed would be agreeable to Wells. Often, self-proclaimed progressive feminists rely heavily on their own experiences rather than recognizing the racial

discrepancies that encompass an intersectional feminist movement.

Writer, actor, and director Lena Dunham exemplifies the "hipster racism" that overlooks white privilege and holds an individualistic view of feminism and anti-rape movements. Recently, Dunham received backlash for her deliberate covering-up of a Black actress' claims of rape against a prominent writer on Dunham's television show (Guardian, 2017). Dunham publicly accused the actress of lying, an act that exemplifies the racist aggressions that Black women have been subjected to for centuries. Dunham's intense and frequently problematic feminist views have often soiled the reputation of the modern feminist movement. She is often used as an example to illustrate the problem with white feminism and the lack of intersectionality in the feminist movement. Dunham has been outspoken about the importance of eliminating the culture of rape and, more specifically, believing victims when they are courageous enough to share their stories of rape and abuse. By silencing a Black woman in her claims of rape against a white writer, Dunham perpetuates the racist ideals that stemmed from slavery and were used to demean and dehumanize Black women for centuries.

By blanketing the term feminism to unify all women and overlooking women of different races, white anti-rape activists typically achieve the opposite. Due to the privilege that white women have over Black women and other women of color, the silencing of these women becomes inherent. Ignoring differences within groups helps to contribute to the tension among other groups (Crenshaw et al., 1995). Ignoring these differences politicizes violence against women rather than unifying women (Crenshaw et al., 1995). This politicization of violence against women is further perpetuated by the stereotypes and assumptions

held by white women in progressive feminist and anti-rape movements against Black women and women of color. This creates a space in which Black women and other women of color cannot fight for the same cause as white women without having to create safe spaces for themselves and women like them.

Black. Women's suffrage was meant to be a universally inclusive movement that created a safe space for Black women to fight for the right to vote alongside their white counterparts. Instead, the deeply rooted racist ideals that stemmed from resentment toward Black women from slavery created a space where women—like Ida B. Wells—could not be safe in being Black and a woman fighting for a just cause. This racism delayed the initiatives that would earn women of color the right to vote, which they did not receive until 1965, while their white counterparts, on the other hand, earned the right to vote in 1920.

Today, through movements like the #MeToo movement, which address rape and sexual abuses in the entertainment industry, there is a clear parallel to racism and the overlook of voices that plagued the suffrage movement. White actresses, writers, and directors—both male and female—are at the forefront of the movement as they are empowered and safe in sharing their stories of sexual abuse in Hollywood. They are often believed fully and without hesitation, while their Black counterparts are not nearly as readily awarded the same respect. White women who have spoken out against the abuses by director Harvey Weinstein have gotten their cases taken to court with the public's support. However, dozens of Black women who have spoken out against the cruel and brutal abuses by singer R. Kelly for years have yet to see the same results. Are these women not awarded the same respect in having their stories heard?

The problem created through the stereotypes of over-sexualization and sub-humanity assigned to Black women furthers this pervasive hesitation in believing women of color who share their abuse stories. These women are often dismissed by the justice system and never receive justice for the crimes against them. Black women are often punished for sharing their stories. Cyntoia Brown was convicted of murder and sentenced to life in prison after killing the man who bought her for sex when she was 16 years old. Despite acting in self-defense against her rapist, Brown was seen as a murderer capable of a serious crime despite her circumstances. This exemplifies the inability of Black women to be seen as wholly human when facing abuses that would otherwise be considered cruel in the justice system. A 16-year-old can be sold and bought for sex and convicted of murder despite the crimes committed against her at her young age.

Conclusion

The perpetuation of the stereotypes and over-sexualization of Black women and the silencing of their stories are issues that have become systemic and ingrained in the framework of US history. Black women and men's rights have always and will always be determined by factors that are not in their control. Their white counterparts, who created these stereotypes and unjust systems, perpetuate the injustices faced by Black men and women through the lack of intersectionality in progressive movements and promote their exclusion from feminist and anti-rape movements. The rape charge is disproportionately discriminatory towards Black men and, therefore, promotes their overcriminalization. A change in the framework of feminism and anti-rape movements, as well as in the justice system that robs Black men and women of the justices that they are owed once falsely accused, would require

a change in the framework of the founding racist ideals of the United States.

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