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7. Searching for a Tradition *African-American Women Writers, Activists, and Interracial Rape Cases*

JOY JAMES

 This chapter explores the politics of African-American women's writings on interracial rape cases, lynching, and fair trial activism. Beginning with the political thought of Ida B. Wells-Barnett, with references to her peers Florida Ruffin Ridley and Mary Church Terrell, I examine the connections between the historical writings of women anti-lynching activists, contemporary Black feminist revisionism, and Afro-American writings on and fair-trial activism surrounding the 1989 Central Park Case.

Ancestor Mothers and Antiviolence Campaigns

To justify their own barbarism they assume a chivalry which they do not possess. True chivalry respects all womanhood, and no one who reads the record, as it is written in the faces of the million mulattoes in the South, will for a minute conceive that the southern white man had a very chivalrous regard for the honor due the women of his own race or respect for the womanhood which circumstances placed in his power. That chivalry which is "most sensitive concerning the honor of women" can hope for but little respect from the civilized world, when it confines itself entirely to the women who happen to be white. Virtue knows no color line, and the chivalry which depends upon complexion of skin and texture of hair can command no honest respect.¹

African-American feminist Joanne Braxton in *Black Women Writing Autobiography: A Tradition Within a Tradition*² describes how she first met

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Parts of this chapter were published in Z (February 1992). I thank Chris Selig and Katarina Gruber for their research assistance; and Ernest Allen, Jr., for editorial suggestions for this chapter.

the outraged mother or ancestor mothers "in search of a tradition to claim them," while reading autobiographies of Afro-American women such as Ida B. Wells-Barnett.³ According to Braxton, African-American women have historically been "carriers of tradition" as well as "values of care, concern . . . protection, and, most important, the survival of the race."⁴ In autobiographies such as *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells*,⁵ Braxton maintains that the Afro-American "autobiographer incorporates communal values . . . to function as the 'point of consciousness' of her people."⁶ The life of Ida B. Wells exemplifies courageous commitment to communal values. Wells's political activism and writing popularized critical, radical thinking to counter racial-sexual violence in the United States. Her written legacy includes *Crusade for Justice*; the pamphlets *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases* (1892), *A Red Record: Lynchings in the U.S., 1892, 1893, 1894* (1895), *Mob Rule in New Orleans* (1900); as well as numerous newspaper articles and editorials.

In addition to Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Afro-American antilynching activists such as Florida Ruffin Ridley, and Mary Church Terrell established a political language and critique of U.S. racial-sexual politics that demystified the moralism of the press, courts, and police.⁷ Their uncompromising demands for justice challenged the U.S. "Red Record" of African Americans disproportionately sentenced, brutalized, imprisoned, and murdered at the whim of Whites. Skeptical that media, court, or mob prosecution was motivated by the desire to end sexual violence, these women created a legacy of investigative reporting to ascertain facts distorted or denied by racist institutions. As activists they inherited, shaped, and passed on an even broader legacy of political consciousness. Their analyses established the foundations for both antiviolence and pro-democracy campaigns as the greater context for ending lynching.

Lynchings—the murders of African Americans for (often alleged) crimes against property and people—constituted attacks on entire communities. "Crimes" included "talking back" to Whites and just being "in the wrong place at the wrong time." Punishment could be collective, including the destruction or appropriation of property and extending to group lynchings of family or community members.¹¹ Although the majority of victims were men, African-American women and children were lynched as well.

The year 1892, which witnessed the greatest number of reported lynchings—241, to be exact—was a pivotal one for the antilynching campaigns.⁸ Among the victims of these atrocities were 160 African Americans, 5 of whom were women or girls.⁹ Also, in Memphis that year, Thomas Moss, Calvin McDowell, and Will Stewart were lynched for competing with White businesses by opening the "People's Grocery Company" and for defending themselves when attacked by unidentified, armed White men.¹⁰ Moss, McDowell, and Stewart were all

personal friends and associates of Ida B. Wells, then an editor and co-owner of Memphis's African-American paper, the *Free Speech*. Outrage at their murders transformed Miss Wells into an antilynching crusader. A platform was provided her later that year when African-American women convened a testimonial for her in Brooklyn—the largest gathering of Club Women to that date. The gathering raised funds (\$500) for the publishing of *Southern Horrors* and the underwriting of a speaking tour for Miss Wells in the United States and England.

Ida B. Wells's fierce denunciations and her ability to critically depict a society that condoned such violence were key features of her public speaking and political writings. Appealing to both morality and political insight, her critiques focused on the racial-sexual politics of interracial sex and the duplicity of the legal system's double standards and its complicity in lynchings. An analysis of the politics of lynching appeared in one of her news dispatches, excerpted below:

- (1) First: That all the machinery of law and politics is in the hands of those who commit the lynching; they therefore have the amending of the laws in their own hands; and that it is only wealthy white men whom the law fails to reach; that in every case of criminal procedure the Negro is punished.
- (2) Second: Hundreds of Negroes including women and children are lynched for trivial offenses on suspicion and in many cases when known to be guiltless of any crime, and that the law refused to punish the murderers because it is not considered a crime to kill a Negro.
- (3) Third: Many of the cases of "Assault" are simply adulteries between white women and colored men.¹²

Discrediting apologies for lynchings,¹³ Miss Wells critiqued the "law and order" rationalizations of the postbellum South. Lynching advocates claimed that lynchings were a response to "race riots"; but these African-American led "race riots," she observed, never materialized. Another claim was that terrorism prevented "Negro domination" of Whites through the vote; by the late 1800s, however, African Americans had been so effectively persecuted that they posed no serious electoral "threat."¹⁴ Increasing awareness of the invalidity of these rationalizations, according to Ida B. Wells, led to still another justification for racist violence:

Brutality still continued; Negroes were whipped, scourged, exiled, shot and hung whenever and wherever it pleased the white man so to treat them, and as the civilized world with increasing persistency held the white people of the South to account for its outlawry, the murderers invented the third excuse—that Negroes had to be killed to avenge their assaults upon women. There

could be framed no possible excuse more harmful to the Negro and more unanswerable if true in its sufficiency for the white man.¹⁵

Although as specious as the other rationalizations, the accusation of sexual assault against a White woman by an African-American man proved to be the most incendiary and tenacious of charges. Raised in only a fraction of lynchings, this accusation nevertheless became the general rationalization for racist violence in that era. Legitimizing and mobilizing support for lynching, this charge led to the acquiescence to lynching, even by those who considered themselves above the mob.

Lynchings embodied the antithesis of rape prevention or prosecution. Given their inherent sexual politics, such acts functioned as exorcisms to entertain as well as pacify the White mind haunted by Black, sexual demons. Lynchings were sites of sexual violence and sexual mutilations. Demonized African Americans were tortured, hung, quartered, burnt alive, their body parts and genitalia taken home as souvenirs. The overwhelming connection between most interracial rape cases and lynching was, as Ida B. Wells documented in *Southern Horrors* and *A Red Record*, that African-American women and children were raped prior to and during lynchings; they were also lynched along with African-American men who assisted or defended them, for resisting rape by White men. A rare phenomenon for White women, interracial rape was an everyday reality for African-American women. The vast majority of sexual violence against White women, and a significant amount directed against African-American women at the time, stemmed from White men. Legal and social institutions tended to deny White men's sexual violence against White women, African-American women, and men, and ignored African-American men's sexual assaults against African-American women as well. Logically, if a rational connection between lynching and the prosecution of sexual crime existed, the majority of lynch victims would have been White men, who, as a caste, were the moral and legal prosecutors of sexual violence, yet the least prosecuted and censured for sexual violence.¹⁶

To demystify the belief that White men enforced written or unwritten laws for the protection of White women, Miss Wells engaged in a radical critique of lynching apologies, exploring their basis in psychosexual mythology. Ida B. Wells's critique of the sexual politics of lynching proved relentless. Her demystification of "rape," controversial a century ago and remaining so today, was the cornerstone of moral and political resistance to racist violence justified as the vindication or prevention of sexual violence. In her memoir Miss Wells recalled her initial belief in European-American assertions that lynching was a preventive measure to protect White women's virtue and restrain the sexual savagery of African-American men. The lynchings of her associates and her subsequent investigative reporting taught her otherwise. In May 1892, after more lynchings followed the deaths of

her friends, Ida B. Wells wrote an editorial ridiculing the charge of "rape" as justification for violence. In response, Memphis's White citizens burned down the *Free Speech* and threatened to lynch the writer; the bounty they placed on Ida B. Wells's head exiled her from the South for decades. Her editorial reads in part:

Eight Negroes lynched since last issue of the *Free Speech*. Three were charged with killing white men and five with raping white women. Nobody in this section believes the old thread-bare lie that Negro men assault white women. If Southern white men are not careful they will over-reach themselves and a conclusion will be reached which will be very damaging to the moral reputation of their women.¹⁷

Despite this polemic, Ida B. Wells did not categorically deny that African-American men assaulted European-American women. The body of her writings, in which the word *many* is generally used to describe false accusations of rape, make it clear that she makes no assertion of universal innocence. (Her memoir's reprint of a 1894 letter by Florida Ruffin Ridley, excerpted below, best reveals her position.) She did demand, however, that White society recognize that actual rape had very little to do with the lynching of African Americans:

With the Southern white man, any mesalliance existing between a white woman and a colored man is a sufficient foundation for the charge of rape. The Southern white man says that it is impossible for a voluntary alliance to exist between a white woman and a colored man, and therefore, the fact of an alliance is a proof of force. In numerous instances where colored men have been lynched on the charge of rape, it was positively known at the time of lynching, and indisputably proven after the victim's death, that the relationship sustained between the man and woman was voluntary and clandestine, and that in no court of law could even the charge of assault have been successfully maintained.¹⁸

Voluntary sexual relationships between European-American women and African-American men were defined by Whites as "sexual assaults"; consensual relations were reconstructed as the "rape" of White women. Such voluntary, interracial associations were punishable by the death of the African-American man involved. Although there were instances of White women being ostracized, institutionalized, and beaten for engaging in such alliances, a repudiation of the relationship through the "rape" accusation brought absolution. African-American men had no such "escape clause," which explains Ida B. Wells's assertion that these liaisons were often voluntary only on the part of the White woman involved. In the reconstruction of "rape" under White supremacy, European-American women, particularly those from the propertied classes, were conceived as "inherently virtuous" and absolved of sexual promiscuity and miscegenation; European-American men, again, particularly of the propertied classes, were considered "inherently chivalrous" and absolved of sexual violence. African-American

men, on the other hand, were identified as "rapists"; defined as "inherently promiscuous," African-American women by definition could not be "violated" because they were without "virtue." The moral and social "legality" of lynching was thus based on racial-sexual mythology and a White code of chivalry.

This code of chivalry featured a macabre duet played in bipolar stereotypes of White knights and ladies; Black sexual brutes and savages. A White man, by definition a "gentleman" in comparison to African Americans, would not rape a "lady" (White woman) and could not rape an object (Black woman). (Intra-class rape of White women, including incest, was usually represented as the "seduction" of the White adult male). A White woman, by definition a "lady" in comparison to Black women, could not desire a "brute"; nor would she join in coalitions with "sexual objects," who argued that lynching's mythology of Black (sexual) pathology functioned as the apologia for rape in a society where alleged and actual assaults against Whites were prosecuted but the prosecution of sexual violence against Black women was an anomaly.

Afra-American antilynching activists rejected the dominant culture's delusions concerning sex and violence. With no control over how White men treated White women, through the Negro Women's Club Movement, Afra-American women organized against their sexual exploitation and assault by both European- and African-American men. These activists-writers did not sever the issues of gender and sexual violence from race politics. For decades women such as Ida B. Wells-Barnett urged U.S. White women to respond to the political use of the "rape" charge in lynchings, recognizing the connections between resistance to sexual and resistance to racial violence: Neither for White nor especially for African-American women was there prosecution of rape, as a nonconsensual act, under lynch law. Women in the antilynching campaigns resisted racial violence, protesting White supremacist terror and sexual violence against African-American women, children, and men. Women in the antilynching campaigns could not realistically sever instances of racist and sexual violence, for race was "sexualized" and sex "racialized." The dual realities of the assaults against African Americans did not permit prioritizing "race" before "sex."

Antilynching Activism as "Counter-Feminism"

[An] error on the subject of lynching consists of the widely circulated statement that the moral sensibilities of the best negroes in the United States are so stunted and dull, and the standard of morality among even the leaders of the race is so low, that they do not appreciate the enormity and heinousness of rape. . . . Only those who are densely ignorant of the standards and sentiments of the best negroes, or who wish willfully [sic] to misrepresent and maliciously slander a race already resting under burdens greater than it can

bear, would accuse its thousands of reputable men and women of sympathizing with rapists, either black or white, or of condoning their crime. (Mary Church Terrell, National Association of Colored Women, 1904)¹⁹

Among contemporary revisionists, Ida B. Wells-Barnett has gained notoriety for being "indifferent" to sexual violence against White women and for "sympathizing with [Black] rapists." Such criticisms may be traced to her editorializing on the "old thread-bare lie"; however, one can only reconstruct Wells-Barnett as a woman of stunted moral sensibilities by erasing or distorting the political praxis of the antilynching movement.

In the absence of historical investigation, such constructions are put forth. For example, in "Split Affinities," Black feminist Valerie Smith focuses on African-American women's perspectives on interracial rape cases to present an argument for Ida B. Wells as a "counter-feminist."²⁰

Smith posits that the divided loyalties of African Americans leads to "split affinities" in interracial rape cases:

Within a context in which rape charges were often used to justify lynching or legal execution, black men and women often perceive an accusation of rape as a way to terrorize innocent black men. This kind of reasoning may lead to the denial of the fact that some black men do rape.²¹

Supporting her thesis on "split affinities," Smith analyzes representations of interracial rape in contemporary "journalistic discourse" and a short story by Alice Walker, "Advancing Luna"—and Ida B. Wells. Smith's narrow reading of Walker's fiction informs her reconstruction of Wells-Barnett as counter-feminist, blurring the distinctions between fact and fiction (historical research, rather than taken as Walker's creativity, is a more accurate guide for assessing the politics of Afra-American antilynching activists).²²

Smith expands her insights into reductive generalizations. Without references to historical research on lynching or Wells's pamphlets, Smith writes that Ida B. Wells-Barnett's "opposition to lynching as a practice requires her effectively to deny the veracity of any white woman's testimony against a black man." Smith's interpretations of passages from Wells-Barnett's autobiography, and an act of ventriloquism, allow her to claim that a logical reading of Wells's sentences reveals her "effectively blaming white women for the lynching of black men" (pp. 273-274). This reading, of an autobiography in which Wells-Barnett also writes that, until the lynchings of her friends, she had accepted the apologia of lynching as the extralegal execution of Black male rapists, crassly simplifies Ida B. Wells-Barnett's politics.

Valerie Smith's portrait of Ida B. Wells-Barnett as indifferent to sexual violence against White women suggests that Wells-Barnett held a profound disregard for White women. Yet, Wells-Barnett had working relationships and personal friendships with prominent White

feminists such as Susan B. Anthony; in addition, English and European-American women joined her and other African-American women in suffrage activism and the establishment of "halfway houses" for single women, as well as antilynching organizing.

Credible historical accounts depict Ida B. Wells-Barnett as a radical antiracist, not anti-White. Public hostility to lynchings rather than personal hostility toward White women motivated activists such as Ida B. Wells-Barnett. In fact, if she were contemptuous of sexual violence in White women's lives, as Smith implies, she would have alienated most of her White female supporters. Joanne Braxton maintains that Ida B. Wells provided leadership for both Black and White women:

Despite the enormity of her task, Wells forged a legitimate black feminism through the synthesis of black nationalism and the suffrage movement, providing a useful model with race, not sex, as a point of departure. Her work established not only the ideological basis for later antilynching work by the NAACP but also for similar work done by the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching, a white group headed by Texas feminist Jessie Daniel Ames.²³

Only through indifference to the historical record can one reconstruct Wells-Barnett as a counter-feminist antipathetic to White women. Smith's lack of research limits her critique of the historical figure she appraises as well as antilynching activism.

Revealing its weaknesses, Smith's analysis uses the terms *accusations* and *instances* interchangeably when referring to interracial rape, rendering accusations synonymous with facts. Smith likewise confuses the prosecution of rape with the crime of rape, writing: "Wells' formulations which 'subordinate' sex to race means that the crime rape can never be read solely as an offense against women's bodies" (p. 274). In another passage Smith describes how women's "bodies" are hierarchically valued in society because of racism, classism, and (hetero)sexism.²⁴ Given this reality, the prosecution of rape is never "read solely as an offense against women's bodies." But a century prior to the appearance of Smith's essay, antilynching activists, such as Ida B. Wells, Florida Ruffin Ridley, and Mary Church Terrell, recognized that the prosecution of rape was determined by the social status of the woman assaulted as well as that of the accused. Valerie Smith fails to see that progressive, contemporary analyses, including Black feminism, are rooted in and indebted to the earlier analysis of African-American women.

In addition, one cannot infer a uniform practice of subordinating sexual oppression to racial oppression in African-American women's challenges to lynching (although it would be useful to examine with specificity how, and under what conditions, Afra-Americans subordinate sex to race and vice versa). In antilynching organizing, it was impossible for Black women to make sexual/gender issues "subordi-

nate" to racial issues, given the interrelatedness of racial and sexual violence. As noted earlier, the historical antilynching campaigns were also waged as anti-sexual-violence campaigns; political wisdom dictated that ending lynchings, as well as false and illegal prosecutions, increased the likelihood of legitimate and legal prosecutions of rape. (Afra-Americans active in the antilynching and the Club Movement also worked to end sexual violence/exploitation within African-American communities.²⁵)

Ignoring historical research to ascribe a binary-opposition to African-American women writer-activists dismisses the possibilities of their having developed an integrated political analysis. Braxton explores the intersections of issues in Ida B. Wells's politics, obscured by Smith:

Wells's involvement in the black women's club movement should not be diminished, for it involved the active fusion of powerful influences: black feminism and black nationalism. The result of this fusion was the development of a race-centered, self-conscious womanhood in the form of the black women's club movement. . . . For an Ida B. Wells or a Frances E. W. Harper, a blow at lynching was a blow at racism and the brutally enforced sexual double standard that pervaded the South. It was a defense of the entire race.²⁶

Organizing against racist violence created a "womanhood" formed by race, gender, and class (the impact of "class" on African-American women's experiences of race, sex, and interracial rape cases requires additional investigation).²⁷ Unaware of the historical roots of her own feminism, Smith advocates a multitextured Black feminism over a mono-dimensional Eurocentric one, describing the former as a more competent framework for analysis: "black feminism presumes the 'intersectionality' of race and gender in the lives of black women, thereby rendering inapplicable to the lives of black women any 'single-axis' theory about racism or sexism."²⁸ This "new" analysis, however, is based on a paradigm articulated more than a century ago by African-American women antilynching activists. Their political thought might prove more effective in demystifying current social violence than the critiques of some contemporary Black feminism. Race and gender, after all, intersect (with class and sexuality) not only in African-American women's lives but in European-American women's lives as well. Delineating the impact of race in White women's lives and their complicity in White supremacy as well as racial-sexual violence, Ida B. Wells applies this "intersectionality" more consistently than Valerie Smith, who provides no analysis of White women's complicity in lynchings.

Given for the historical record, Smith's criticisms of Ida B. Wells's "focus on the unreliability of White rape victims" are questionable. Valerie Smith herself observes that false rape accusations by White women against Black men shaped the history of lynchings. Ida B. Wells, moreover, did not view White women in lynchings collectively as "rape victims." Her investigative reporting, documented in *A Red*

Record and elsewhere, reveals that many who claimed to be "rape victims" in order to sanction lynchings, were not sexually assaulted or, if assaulted, their assailants were not Black men. To state as Wells did that *consensual* relationships between White women and African-American men were designated and punished as "rape," whereas sexual violence by Whites against Blacks was not, is not in itself a suggestion that Black men do not assault White women or that sexual violence against White women is irrelevant.

Silence about the intellectual dependencies of contemporary thinkers on their predecessors posits historicism. According to this historicism, evolution has elevated contemporary thinking to a plateau above the political thinking of our foremothers. When ahistorical and revisionist, feminism may shape a discourse that promotes obscurantism concerning historical and contemporary political women's struggles. Maintaining that her predecessors, the women who pioneered the antilynching campaigns, left no suitable, gender-progressive legacy on interracial rape cases, Valerie Smith (mis)reads the past to build narratives on contemporary interracial rape cases, such as the Central Park Case.

For example, "split affinities" notes that African-American women's "identification with white women is problematic" given society's greater indifference to violence against Black women. According to Smith, African-American women, as "members of communities under siege . . . may well sympathize with the black male who stands accused . . . as women they share the victim's sense of violation" (p. 275). These insights into the psychological mind-sets of African Americans concerning interracial rape cases are not totally representative of African-American women's responses to interracial rape; nor can they be critically superimposed onto historical African-American women's responses to interracial rape cases and lynching. Moral and political judgments may lead to actions that might diverge from the original empathic and/or antipathetic feelings. African-American women, whatever their emotional sentiments, may organize based on their perceptions of political or moral responsibilities, even where these felt obligations diverge from their sympathies.

Smith's focus on African-Americans torn by "split affinities" and/or defensively supportive of Black defendant(s) fails to acknowledge that some African Americans prove highly unsympathetic to accused Black males whom they believe guilty (particularly because African-American men are the primary source of sexual violence against African-American women). Still others, outraged by the sexual violence as well as the racist prosecution of the accused, may identify with both survivor and defendant(s), embracing dual rather than split identities. These various perspectives characterized African-American women's responses to the Central Park Case. Smith discusses this case, one of the most

sensationalist of contemporary interracial rape trials, without taking into account the diversity of African-American responses.

Black Feminist "Narratives of Conviction" and the Central Park Case

Black feminists Valerie Smith, bell hooks, and Barbara Smith offer important critiques of sexism and misogyny among African Americans within the progressive frameworks of their larger works. These authors' various essays on the 1989 Central Park Case, however, construct different "narratives of convictions" within frameworks that subordinate not race to sex, but specificity and investigative research to symbolism and antiviolence rhetoric. In order to condemn sexual violence, each writer depicted the defendants, as well as the survivor, in symbolical terms, forgoing the specific events of the case; dismissing critical counter-discourse, they privileged instead the accounts of the White, mainstream media. This media, which has no salient history of antiracist politics or racially neutral objectivity, especially concerning interracial rape cases,²⁹ presented fair-trial advocacy as misogynist, demonized the defendants, and transformed the survivor into an icon. Of the feminist essays cited below, the works of bell hooks and Valerie Smith acknowledge the racist aspects of media coverage; yet none of these three essays suggested the existence of a progressive African-American women's tradition linking anti-sexual violence with fair-trial advocacy for interracial rape cases.

In "Split Affinities," Valerie Smith presents a narrative on the Central Park Case that explicitly argues against the existence of such a tradition. In the same way that sexual violence cases involving African-American female victims tend to receive the least attention, Smith accords least importance and least legitimacy to antiviolence organizing led by African-American women. Although African-American women's organizations have, on their own initiative, organized and educated against sexual violence, Smith's language deflects from the leadership of Black women in organizing to counter sexual violence.³⁰ Soon after the Central Park assault, African-American women at Medgar Evers College in Brooklyn called a press conference to announce their formation of a new organization—WAVE (Women Against Violence Everywhere); although notices were sent to virtually all New York City media, the meeting received basically no press coverage. Its absence from coverage of city responses to the assault and impending trial indicated that those who relied solely upon mainstream media for their information concerning this or other interracial rape cases would be unaware of the existence of anti-sexual violence organizing by African-American women; as well as women's fair-trial activism discussed below.

Smith restricts her analysis of "journalistic discourse" concerning the Central Park Case to the White media, providing no coverage from alternative sources such as African-American or Spanish-language media (the former was skeptical whereas the latter was largely uncritical of the prosecution). Smith offers no explanation for privileging White press accounts. Written before the 1990 Central Park trial, "Split Affinities" does not permit the defendants the right of presumed innocence until proven guilty. Assuming and projecting the impartiality or objectivity of the dominant media leads Valerie Smith to assert pretrial media "convictions" or judgments (particularly those of *The New York Times*) as indicators of factual guilt, writing: "[t]o review the details [of the case]: on the night of Wednesday, April 19, 1989, a young white woman jogger was raped repeatedly and severely beaten in Central Park in Manhattan by a group of black and Puerto Rican adolescent males between the ages of 14 and 17" (pp. 276-277). The words of police and the White media are presented uncritically as "fact." The "narratives" of activists and writers critiquing the prosecution, not designated as significantly newsworthy by *The New York Times*, do not appear. Most importantly, there is no attempt to analyze conflicting reports or deconstruct media accounts with reference to the known, specific facts pertaining to the case that rendered it problematic. For example, even within mainstream conviction narratives, media acknowledged the factuality of retracted incriminating statements, the lack of witnesses, and absence of material evidence. Analyses of journalistic accounts of interracial rape cases need to explore the ways in which narratives may blur the distinctions between fictive and factual guilt, and the presence or erasure of physical evidence in the construction of media narratives.

bell hooks's writing on the Central Park Case, "Reflections on Sex and Race," similarly mirrors the conviction narratives of the mainstream media and "Split Affinities."³¹ Like Valerie Smith, hooks assumes the guilt of the accused prior to the trial and without evidence. Despite her shrewd observations about the racist coverage of the case—"Images of black men as rapists, as dangerous menaces to society, have been sensational cultural currency for some time . . . the media has played a major role in determining public response" (p. 60)—she unquestioningly accepts police statements conveyed through the mainstream media as factual. Influenced by media convictions, she depicts critics of the convictions as a monolith complicitous in sexual violence. Little indication is given that African-American communities are capable of their own shrewd and subtle critiques of racism and sexism. Echoing hooks's argument, Barbara Smith also disavows the existence of a humanist African-American political tradition concerning interracial rape cases where the accused is Black and the survivor/victim White.

In "Black Feminism Divorced From Black Feminist Organizing," a critique of bell hooks's *Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism*,³²

Barbara Smith raises important and critical issues concerning the relationship of African-American feminism to political organizing. "Theory and analysis are not merely the listing of opinions,"³³ she asserts. In "Jogger Rape: Ask a Black Feminist,"³⁴ Barbara Smith expresses strongly held opinions in response to Sally O'Brien's "Jogger Verdict Pains, Angers Black Community"³⁵ (both articles appeared within several months after the trial in the progressive, White weekly *Guardian*, based in New York City). Barbara Smith begins her article by identifying herself as a "Black socialist feminist" who is "shocked to discover that [a White, Communist feminist's] overriding concern was that the Black and Latino teenagers who had been arrested get a fair trial." Smith explains why she finds fair-trial concerns "shocking": "I am a member of the Black community and I am far more pained and angry that O'Brien sees fit to portray the entire African-American community as indifferent to the realities of sexual violence and misogyny than I am at the jury's guilty verdict." O'Brien's article consisted of interviews with African-American leaders who questioned the validity of the August 1990 convictions. Restricting her interviews and reporting to community leaders intimate with the details of the trial and the media coverage, O'Brien neither presents nor constructs a monolithic African-American community. She begins her article, writing: "While many believe the verdict was just, many others, particularly in the African-American community, responded with shock and anger."

O'Brien's article is composed almost entirely of quotes from well-known African Americans: activist-educator Nomsa Brath; Father Lawrence Lucas, then pastor of Harlem's Resurrection Catholic Church; East Harlem Democratic District leader William Perkins; and the editors of the Brooklyn-based weekly, *The City Sun*. Avoiding any dialogue with the African-American community, Barbara Smith instead attacks O'Brien, a non-African American. Neglecting to ground the case in research or interviews, she uses symbols and antiviolence rhetoric to argue that rejecting the validity of the prosecution is equivalent to invalidating "the realities of sexual violence and misogyny." Like Valerie Smith, Barbara Smith will not allow a distinction between the horrific crime itself and its prosecution: to be "pro-survivor" one must be "pro-prosecution." A pro-prosecution stance is not synonymous with support for a just or fair trial; although a fair trial is indispensable in obtaining justice for survivor and the accused.

Barbara Smith's persistence in claiming a universal wasteland of gender-progressive African-American politics leads her to the following conclusion: "What the Central Park rape points out more than anything else, especially its treatment in the media, is how insignificant the voices of Black women are in determining the meaning of events that directly affect our lives." This assertion (also made by Valerie Smith) that African-American women, and particularly Black feminists, are never asked what "all of this means to us," is somewhat misleading. It

is unclear to whom the statement itself is addressed (perhaps it is primarily directed at Whites). In fact the African-American weekly, the *Amsterdam News*, eventually turned over major parts of its coverage of the case to Black women. African-American women journalists from NYC radio stations WBAI-NY and WLIB-NY, writers for NYC's African-American press, the *Amsterdam News* and *City Sun*, as well as activists belonging to the New York chapter of the NAACP, and women's groups such as Motherlove and the International Working Women's Day Committee (IWWDC), all took public positions as fair-trial advocates in the Central Park Case. Given their diverse political views, including pro-feminist politics, it is impossible to dismiss these African-American women as uniformly counter-feminist or indifferent to sexual violence. None of the Black feminist writings reviewed here referred to coverage by African-American media as a possible source for other progressive perspectives on the case. Failures to report and critique the various Afro-American perspectives on the Central Park Case and trials "silences" the diversity of women's voices. Most media censored and censored those who spoke against both racial and sexual violence. Pro-woman/feminist fair-trial advocacy by some journalists, as well as organizing by multiracial women's groups/coalitions, went unrecognized. This silence surrounding progressive/radical women's activism splinters off new meanings of "split affinities." Such silence allows symbolism to replace specificity and the problematic aspects of media/state representations in interracial rape cases to be obscured.

Women and Progressive Fair-Trial Activism on the Central Park Case

We know positively of case after case where innocent men have died horrible deaths. We know positively of cases that have been made up. We know positively of cases where black men have been lynched for white men's crimes. We know positively of black men murdered for insignificant offenses. All that we ask for is justice—not mercy or palliation—simply justice. Surely that is not too much for loyal citizens of a free country to demand. . . . We do not pretend to say there are no black villains. Baseness is not confined to race. We read with horror of two different colored girls who recently have been horribly assaulted by white men in the South. We should regret any lynchings of the offenders by black men but we shall not have occasion. Should these offenders receive any punishment at all, it will be a marvel. (Florida Ruffin Ridley, Boston's Women's Era Clubs, 1894³⁶)

On April 20, 1989, at 1:30 a.m., two men found a brutally beaten unconscious woman in a muddy ravine in Central Park.³⁷ During the night of April 19, this woman was violently assaulted while jogging in Central Park. That same night approximately 50 African-American and Puerto Rican youths had assembled at about 9 p.m. and entered

the park, scattering in groups of various sizes. Some African-American and Latino youths assaulted several men in the park and threatened others. Youths were detained while exiting the park around 10 p.m. and those picked up for questioning in the following days became suspects in whatever crimes occurred in Central Park that night; these youths were dispersed, like others who entered the park that night, at different locations and exited at different times.³⁸ Within several days, *The New York Times*³⁹ and other mainstream, White media, dubbed the survivor, an upper-class European American woman who worked as an investment banker for Solomon Brothers, the "investment banker" or "the jogger" and the detained African-American and Latino male teens the "wolfpack"; this media also denounced the suspects as guilty. The first *New York Times* article to cover the assault appeared April 21. Written by Craig Wolff and relying on uncorroborated police statements for its information, the article ran under the headline, "Youths Rape and Beat Central Park Jogger." All subsequent *New York Times* coverage was consistent with the tone and conviction of this first article. In this climate, the claims by New York City's African-American press and some activists that these (media) convictions created a "legal-lynching" were easily dismissed as "misogynist" or "racist." Because the case had assumed the mythic proportions of a "morality play,"⁴⁰ police and assistant district attorneys played to racial-sexual myths and imagery. By promoting and then appending themselves to the reconstruction of the survivor as an icon, police and ADAs came to represent all that was "good," or at least safe, whereas the youths represented "Clockwork Orange" criminality.⁴¹ Generally, the issue of a fair trial to establish guilt appeared "news-worthy" only to the African-American media and individuals skeptical of most media reporting on such issues.

Arguments for presumed innocence until the youth were proven guilty (arguments which some still construe as a case against conviction) contained information largely unknown or ignored, given media coverage that presented accounts critical of the prosecution sporadically and only within narratives of conviction. Information problematic to the Central Park Case convictions disturbed a social equilibrium poised on the image of the youths' savagery. Given the absence of evidence and sensationalist pretrial judgments, progressive activists argued that the willingness to critically reexamine the Central Park Case convictions was tied to demystifying the racial-sexual stereotypes shaping most media representations of this interracial rape case as well as suspicion of media, police, and court activity surrounding the trial. In its racist, rhetorical, and selectively sincere opposition to the epidemic of sexual violence and abuse of women, some argued that most media/police traded in a just judicial process in order to cloak themselves in chivalry. This chivalry was apparently reserved for upper-class, White women: The White media paid little attention to the reported

rapes, brutal beatings, or murders of 25 women of color the week of the Central Park assault.

The reluctance of some women and men to accept the prosecution's or state's narrative for the Central Park Case stemmed in part from the questionable aspects of police activity on the case. Most media, even those whose pretrial judgments made the possibility of a fair trial in New York City nil, observed that convictions would be difficult in the absence of a physical case against the youths. Police had obtained neither witnesses nor evidence (blood, semen, hair, soil, fingerprints, footprints, or skin tissue) to connect any of the defendants in the first trial to the scene of the crime. Still, in spring 1989, without corroborating physical evidence or witnesses, the media "convicted" the youths. The basis of those and later jury convictions⁴² rested on "confessions," the videotaped and written statements taken from the youths during police interrogation. Some defense attorneys maintained that police physically assaulted several of the youths during interrogation and detained others for long hours without food or sleep.

The continuous pretrial replay of videotapes on television and in print gave them a reality independent of their correspondence to physical reality; in some videotaped statements, youth(s) told the wrong location of the assault, described holding down the arms of the survivor who was found bound and gagged, and misidentified her attire.⁴³ Along with the video statements, the youths' contradictory, inconsistent, and factually incorrect written statements were conveyed in a language that was unbelievable to some. *Newsday*, among the White New York dailies the most critical of the prosecution, ran several stories questioning the validity of a case built on these statements. In "Salaam's Mom Also Waits for Evidence," Carole Agus wrote:

A detective read a supposed "confession" of Raymond Santana . . . it sounded like coptalk in its purest form. There never was a 14-year-old working-class kid that ever talked the way Santana is supposed to have talked to the police that night: "We met up with an additional group of approximately 15 other males who also entered Central Park with us. . . . We all walked southbound in the park in the vicinity of 105th Street."

We who are watching this trial all have more than we think in common with [Ms.] Salaam. We are waiting to see if there is any believable evidence that will connect these kids to the crime. So far, we haven't heard any.⁴⁴

Unlike Santana and McCray, Sharomme Salaam's son, Yusef, gave no statement. He also passed a lie detector test soon after the assault supporting his assertions that he was never at the scene of the crime. The collective trial proved particularly prejudicial for him. (Presiding Judge Galligan, known as a "hanging" judge and allegedly specially selected for the case by District Attorney Robert Morgenthau, had mandated collective trials.)⁴⁵ An "unsigned confession" attributed to Salaam was in fact written by Detective Thomas McKenna 2 days after

his interrogation of the former and included more information than that found in McKenna's notes taken on April 20, the night Salaam was detained by the police. McKenna in fact admitted that in order to induce Salaam to confess, he lied to him during the interrogation, telling Yusef that his fingerprints had been found on the survivor's clothing. Although Salaam states he told McKenna he had not been at the scene of the crime and knew nothing of the assault, most media legitimized McKenna's actions with the rationale that because the detective publicly acknowledged lying to the 15-year-old, he thereby retained his integrity and his credibility as a police officer. Because there were no eye-witnesses or corroborating witnesses to testify that the youths on trial attacked the survivor, the only witnesses against the youths concerning the attack⁴⁶ were police and ADAs who could testify solely to the validity of the incriminating statements they obtained during interrogations.⁴⁷ The refusal to uncritically accept statements by the police or ADAs, as well as the belief that everyone is entitled to a just trial, led to progressive fair trial activism. (I distinguish here between progressive fair trial activism that critiques sexual violence as well as researches specific facts concerning the case, and reactionary fair trial activism that presents a misogynist defense of the youth or denies the reality of the assault; both types of activism existed around the Central Park Case, however, usually the latter was privileged in mainstream media accounts.)

Motivated by their criticisms concerning the prosecution's case, during the first collective trial, women in Motherlove and the International Working Women's Day Committee (IWWDC) called a citywide meeting to build nonsexist/nonracist activism for a fair trial. Motherlove, a small Harlem-based women's group created to support the mothers of the defendants and the youths' right to a fair trial, had organized community forums and meetings on the trial in the Harlem community. IWWDC, as a New York-based group of African-, Latin-, and European-American women activists, organized educational events on March 8 celebrating women's contributions to liberation movements. At the suggestion of Motherlove, IWWDC issued an "open letter to the community." Through progressive media, such as African-American journalist Rosemary Mealy's WBAI-NY radio shows with guests Nomsa Brath, an organizer for Motherlove, Esperanza Martell, and flyers, IWWDC invited representatives from women's and social justice organizations to attend an "Educational Forum on the Central Park Case" on July 19, 1990, at the Martin Luther King Labor Center (Local 1199) in Manhattan. That night, lawyers, journalists, and activists, representing different political views, spoke to the packed meeting room, mostly filled with African-American, Latina, and European-American women.

The key presentation came from IWWDC. Citing the tradition of legal lynchings in U.S. courts, IWWDC linked the Central Park Case

to: the Scottsboro Case in the 1930s; New York City's Harlem Six and George Whitmore cases in the 1960s (Whitmore signed a 61-page false "confession" during police interrogation); and more recently, Boston's Carol Stuart case. In all of these cases innocent African-American men were imprisoned for crimes against White women. Because the innocence of the Central Park Case defendants, presumed guilty in most public and media discourse, could not be proven without a doubt, these previous cases were used to emphasize the flaws and racial-sexual biases of the judicial system.⁴⁸ They also served as an intellectual and moral foundation for those demanding a fair trial and further investigation. Forum organizers continuously urged people to investigate for themselves the legitimacy of the prosecution's case by attending the trial; develop antiracist and antisexist coalition work; and recognize that the denial of the democratic right of a fair trial to anyone was a dangerous precedent for everyone.

IWWDC devoted most of its program to confronting the mythic proportions of the Central Park Case. The program's primary speaker was Suzanne Ross, a European-American activist and IWWDC member. Ross used Angela Davis's essay, "The Myth of the Black Rapist" from *Women, Race, and Class* to analyze the historical, political aspects of press coverage and the survivor's exploitation as a racial-sexual icon by the White media.⁴⁹ Those present heard the historical arguments that demystifying the "myth of the Black rapist" decreases social indifference to lynching and sexual violence. Ross connected Davis's critique of the White obsession with African-American men as rapists with an analysis of how myth both rendered the prosecution of sexual violence against women of color a legal aberration and obscured sexual violence in White women's lives and their complicity in this obscurantism. Current FBI statistics report that more than 90% of reported rapes are *intraracial*, that is, occur within the same racial or ethnic group. Because those survivors tend to report sexual assaults only when they are likely to be considered "believable" (i.e., when their assailant conforms to the stereotype of "rapist"), sexual violence is grossly underreported. Just as antilynching activists had done in the 19th century, IWWDC argued that unexamined racial-sexual mythology, as the cultural and social backdrop for interracial rape cases, increased the likelihood of lynching and social indifference to lynching.⁵⁰ They also maintained throughout their activism that legal lynchings legitimize violence as well as the state's refusal to prosecute sexual crimes seriously; and that the abrogation of the legal rights of anyone jeopardizes the rights of everyone.

Demands for justice in the Central Park Case were often condemned as calls for mitigation and a condoning of sexual violence. Activists who argued that racism and classism created an unfair judicial process and that violence against women was unacceptable, were criticized by media depicting all fair-trial organizing as anti-White and

antifemale. African Americans who made misogynist and sexist statements throughout the case were portrayed by influential media as representative of the reactionary politics of African Americans in general and fair-trial activists in particular. This selective focus on misogyny, and the general social outrage that accompanied such reports, enabled mainstream media conviction narratives to ignore or obscure the weaknesses of the prosecution's case, erasing the distinction between the brutal assault on the one hand, and the prosecution of the youths on the other. Without that critical distinction, given the emotionalism and media hype surrounding the case, criticism of the prosecution was portrayed uniformly as criticism of the survivor, and support for the youths' right to a fair trial became "sympathizing with rapists." The possibility of being outraged by both the violent assault against the survivor *and* the pretrial conviction and police malfeasance became a public anomaly. The dominant media mandated, as it had a century ago, that no context existed for simultaneous organizing against sexual and racist violence, ensuring that most of the public equated progressive organizing with reactionary denials—denials that the assault was horrific, that African-American men assault White women, that sexual violence is a deadly epidemic.

Stigmatized as counter-feminist or misogynist, fair-trial activism was rarely recognized as part of a discernible radical Afro-American tradition of antiviolence organizing. Even Black feminists writing for White publications further obscured the complexities of the case and organizing, allowing only narratives of conviction to bear the respectability of feminism and moralism. As respectability became based on one's distance from fair-trial activism, criticism of the state's (media, police, courts) prosecution by racial-sexual ideology was transformed into indifference to sexual violence. The desire to distance from critiques of the prosecution stemmed from the unpopularity of such critiques given the pretrial media publicity which depicted the youths as guilty; it also was connected to another desire, not to be identified with the misogynist or anti-survivor statements made by African Americans. Both these desires worked to discourage investigative research and critical thinking. (Ironically, in the absence of critical thinking and judgment, those supporting and those condemning the prosecution shared certain similarities.) The multiplicity of responses among African Americans concerning this interracial rape case ranged from an inflexible certainty in the youths' guilt which precluded any critical study of the prosecution's case as well as considerable hostility toward the courts, police, and White media, a hostility which for some extended to the survivor as well. Although some African Americans vilified the survivor, others, specifically those engaged in progressive politics, expressed concern for the survivor as well as abhorrence of sexual violence. For instance, Harlem District Leader William Perkins and activist the Reverend Herbert Daughtery questioned the legitimacy of

media "convictions" and organized a prayer vigil for the survivor soon after the attack in 1989; New York City leaders, including White feminists, spoke at this vigil. Most progressive acts for critically rethinking the case, particularly political actions by African-American women, were usually minimized, ignored, or derided in mainstream media.

Conclusion

Disavowals of the existence of a humanist African-American political tradition concerning interracial rape cases diminish the historical and contemporary contributions of radical activism. Acknowledged or unacknowledged, the political thinking of ancestor mothers on interracial rape cases, lynching, and activism reappears in the work of contemporary African-American women. The legacy is a contested one—both repudiated and claimed, it is depicted as either antiquated and denial-ridden or as valuably instructive for contemporary antiviolence campaigns.

In a culture profoundly ignorant of and adept at ignoring the contributions of Afra-Americans, it is easy to misrepresent African-American women's politics on interracial rape cases and lynching as counter-progressive. Revisionist writing that depicts African-American civil rights/liberation movements as uniformly sexist deflect from progressive, political African-American women's traditions coexisting with and within patriarchal traditions; for example, women-led African-American movements such as the antilynching campaigns. Black feminist critiques of African-American sexism and misogyny are indispensable. If marred by reductionism and the erasure of women's progressivism, these critiques can obscure the complexity of racial-sexual politics and human rights activism. Minimizing the links between contemporary feminist politics and historical Afra-American protest and resistance increases the likelihood of matraphobic paradigms. Matraphobia, the fear of becoming what our (fore)mothers were,⁵¹ engenders misrepresentation, distorted memories, and political amnesia. Perhaps the disassociation stems from our aversion to the weaknesses of ancestral mothers or arises from our fears of inheriting the dangers and risks of their powerful radicalism confronting an oppressive state. At its most debilitating, matraphobia diminishes our political resources and options.

Historically, in interracial rape cases, women engaged themselves in independent, investigative research to determine the facts of the case independent of state information. Their dialogues with other activists and writers and journalists in the African-American press created a counter-discourse and a skepticism for critically reviewing events that challenged hegemonic interpretations of racial and sexual violence. The presence or absence of these and similar political strategies today

determines the distance between the progressive spectator(-writer) and the progressive activist(-writer). The difference between being a critic of, and being in opposition to, oppressive practices sometimes manifests as the distance between political rhetoric and radical struggle for social change. This dilemma or divide in contemporary Black political life appears not to have been so critical for historical women, such as Ida B. Wells-Barnett, who were both activists and writers.

Today, in order to bridge an emerging chasm, African-American writers may seek to initiate and sustain a greater dialogue between activists and academics. Analyzing the relationship between commentary and organizing strengthens critical writing, research, and activism. Or, as Cornel West notes: "Local activists must become more and more at the center of how we think about the condition for the possibility of social motion and social movement."⁵² This seems particularly true in interracial rape cases where racism and sexism violently converge and mythology shapes cultural meanings and social and legal prosecution.

Studying and critiquing the political practices and thinking of ancestor mothers—and activist sisters—further a productive dialogue. Documented in their writings, the antiviolence activism of African-American women provides a framework for (re)examining interracial rape cases and our approaches to racialized sexual violence. Exploring the dynamics of racial-sexual politics and political resistance, we may note state complacency toward sexual and racist crimes and social indifference to sexual violence that does not "violate" or cross class and race hierarchies or lines. (This greater indifference to intraracial sexual violence is evident among African Americans, given the divergent responses in Black communities to the Tawana Brawley and the Mike Tyson cases.) Women's complicity in the nonprosecution of sexual violence and their validation of mob violence and state malfeasance as "prosecution" and "protection" remain critical issues for examination.

Addressing these issues we may find that the political traditions of ancestor mothers such as Ida B. Wells-Barnett are now, as in her era, too radical to be claimed by more than a few. Still, we are indebted to the work of our ancestor mothers. Standing on the ground they fought for, we cannot suppress indefinitely their memories and legacies. Perhaps the best way to honor them, and the political analyses and protest traditions of all who resisted racial-sexual violence, is to continue to struggle with our inheritance.

Notes

1. Ida B. Wells, *A Red Record: Lynchings in the United States* (Chicago, Donohue & Hennebry, 1895; reprinted in Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *On Lynchings* (Salem, NH: Ayer, 1990).
2. Joanne Braxton, *Black Women Writing Autobiography: A Tradition Within a Tradition* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989). According to Braxton, a balance between the "confessional narrative and the historical memoir" allows Miss Wells to relate both her public and private

"duties" as well as "demonstrate her development as a political activist and as an outraged mother." For Braxton, *Crusade for Justice* "looks forward to the modern political autobiographies of Ann Moody, Shirley Chisholm, and Angela Davis . . . [and] represents an important link between the old and the new, part of the 'lost ground' of Afro-American literary tradition" (Braxton, p. 138).

Despite her remarkable achievements, Ida B. Wells was not flawless. When her *Free Speech* editorials exposed the sexual relationships of semi-competent African-American women teachers with corrupt White male members of the school board, Ida B. Wells showed little compassion for the African-American woman who committed suicide after Wells publicized her "mesalliance." After the White school board, angered at the exposure of its corruption, fired Miss Wells, she became a journalist. Braxton also notes Ida B. Wells-Barnett's autobiography claims that Frederick Douglass believed African-American men's proclivity to rape (*Crusade*, pp. 72-73) although there seems to be no record of this as his position. Wells may not have fully acknowledged the extent to which Frederick Douglass influenced her politics.

3. Braxton, p. 2.

4. Braxton, p. 3.

5. Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells*, Alfreda Duster, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

6. Braxton, p. 12. Alfreda Duster spent 35 years finding a publisher for her mother's autobiography and 3 additional years working with historian John Hope Franklin to research and verify Ida B. Wells-Barnett's accounts of historical events. Braxton finds that Duster's role "represents one of the central paradoxes of *Crusade for Justice*, the dependence of the deceased mother on the living daughter for the revelation and publication of her autobiography" (Braxton, p. 107). I suggest that rather than paradox it reveals the interdependency of ancestors and progeny.

7. For additional analyses on sexual violence and lynching, see: Estelle Friedman & John D'Emilio, *Intimate Matters* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988); Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class* (New York: Random House, 1981); Gerda Lerner, ed., *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History* (New York: Pantheon, 1972).

8. According to Wells's *A Red Record*, most of these lynchings were committed in Tennessee, Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, and Mississippi. August Meier's preface to *On Lynchings* (reprint ed., 1990), a collection of Miss Wells's three pamphlets, states that the numbers of African Americans reported lynched averaged more than 100 a year during the 1880s and the 1890s, with lynching "peaking" in 1892 when 161 women and men were lynched. *Intimate Matters* reports that between 1889 and 1940 at least 3,800 men and women were lynched in the South and its bordering states, citing an average of 200 lynchings per year during the 1890s. D'Emilio refers to Whites as well. Prior to the Civil War the majority of lynching victims were White, yet during and after Reconstruction lynching became synonymous with violent assaults on African Americans.

9. Meticulous in her research, Miss Wells uses the lynching or murder numbers reported in the White press, believing them to be an undercount but that Whites could not argue that their own numbers were exaggerated. Concerning her pamphlet, *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases*, historian Rosalyn Terborg-Penn notes: "She knew that if she wasn't meticulous people would question her. . . . She often used the white newspapers so people could not say she was making it up" ("Ida B. Wells: A Passion for Justice").

Not assuming guilt in the absence of just court trials and evidence, Ida B. Wells lists the reasons given for the reported lynchings of 1892:

Rape, 46; murder, 58; rioting, 3; race prejudice, 6; no cause given, 4; incendiarism, 6; robbery, 6; assault and battery, 1; attempted rape, 11; suspected robbery, 4; larceny, 1; self defense, 1; insulting women, 2; desperadoes, 6; fraud, 1; attempted murder, 2; no offense stated, boy and girl, 2. . . . In the case of the boy and girl . . . their father, named Hastings, was accused of the murder of a white man; his fourteen-year-old daughter and sixteen-year-old son were hanged and their bodies filled with bullets, then the father was also lynched. This was in November, 1892, at Jonesville, Louisiana. (*A Red Record*, p. 20)

Wells continues: "During the year 1894, there were 132 persons executed in the United States by due form of law, while in the same year, 197 persons were put to death by mobs who gave the victims no opportunity to make a lawful defense" (*A Red Record*, p. 15).

10. Ida B. Wells was the godmother of Thomas and Bettye Moss's infant daughter Maurine. See *Crusade*, pp. 47-52.

11. Anne Moody's autobiography, *Coming of Age in Mississippi* (New York: Dell, 1968), describes collective punishment in her hometown in the 1950s, where Whites firebombed the home of an African-American man having an affair with a White woman; his family was killed in the fire.

12. *Crusade*, pp. 136-137. This passage, a response to lynching apologists, appeared in a special correspondence from Liverpool for the *Inter-Ocean*, April 9, 1894.

13. Ida B. Wells's critique of three rationalizations for terrorism against African Americans in the postbellum South is similar to that of Frederick Douglass, who wrote:

the justification for the murder of Negroes was said to be Negro conspiracies, Negro insurrections, Negro schemes to murder all the white people, Negro plots to burn the town . . . times have changed and the Negro's accusers have found it necessary to change with them. . . . Honest men no longer believe that there is any ground to apprehend Negro supremacy . . . altered circumstances have made necessary a sterner, stronger, and more effective justification of Southern barbarism, and hence we have . . . to look into the face of a more shocking and blasting charge. (Frederick Douglass, quoted in *Intimate Matters*, p. 218)

14. Wells writes: "The white man's victory soon became complete by fraud, violence, intimidation and murder. The franchise vouchsafed to the Negro grew to be a 'barren idealism' and regardless of numbers, the colored people found themselves voiceless in the councils of those whose duty it was to rule" (*A Red Record*, p. 10).

15. *A Red Record*, p. 10.

16. Angela Davis argues this point in "Rape, Racism and the Capitalist Setting," *The Black Scholar*, April 1978.

17. *Crusade*, pp. 65-66.

18. *A Red Record*, p. 11.

19. This quote appears in *Black Women in White America*, p. 205.

20. Valerie Smith, "Split Affinities," in *Conflicts in Feminism*, Marianne Hirsh and Evelyn Fox Keller, eds. (New York: Routledge, 1990).

21. V. Smith, p. 275.

22. V. Smith shapes the story to support her thesis that African-American women activists' pained and confused politics on interracial rape lead them to support Black male rapists rather than their White female victims. Through highly selective, at times out of context, quoting of Walker's short story, Smith imputes to the Black woman narrator a hostility for Whites and White women that does not exist in Walker's text. Walker's story is more ambiguous and more complex and does not support the Black female sexist-villain and White female feminist-heroine thesis of "Split Affinities."

23. Braxton, pp. 137-138.

24. V. Smith compares White media coverage of the Central Park Case with its coverage of the March 22 rape of a young White woman with a broomstick handle and a miniature baseball bat by five middle-class White teenage football players:

The reporting of these two cases must prompt us to ask why the rape of a brilliant, middle-class investment banker by a group of young black men is constructed to seem more heinous than the rape of a 'mildly retarded' young white woman by a group of young white men. Rape here is clearly not represented as a violation of a woman's body alone. Rather, in the terms of interlocking issues of race, class, and gender, these crimes suggest that certain women's bodies are more valuable than others. (Smith, p. 278)

25. *Crusade for Justice*.

26. Braxton, p. 122.

27. *Crusade for Justice* suggests that upper- and middle-class African Americans tend to be more protected from, and therefore indifferent to, lynchings whose victims stem from the poorer

classes. Clenora Hudson's "The Unearthing of Emmett Till: A Compelling Process" (*The Iowa Alumni Review*, October 1988) also supports this interpretation.

28. V. Smith, p. 272.

29. European- and African-American journalists critiqued the police malfeasance and media pretrial convictions that dominated coverage in *The New York Times* and the *New York Post*.

30. Presenting the "anti-rape movement" as led by White women, Valerie Smith writes that African-American women fail to "find common cause with white women in the anti-rape movement" because of our "invisibility as victims within the movement, and a perceived indifference within the movement to the uses to which the fraudulent rape charge has been put" (Smith, p. 276).

31. bell hooks, "Reflections on Sex and Race,"

32. bell hooks, *Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (Boston: South End Press, 1983).

33. Barbara Smith, "Black Feminism Divorced From Black Feminist Organizing," *The Black Scholar* (Vol. 14, No. 1, January/February, 1983), p. 45, special issue on "Black Community Issues." According to B. Smith, hooks ignores or minimizes Black male oppression during slavery and overestimates the extent to which Black men were spared sexual abuse and humiliation. Barbara Smith writes: "If the system protected Black male sexuality so thoroughly, what in the world is the history of lynching all about?" (p. 39).

34. Barbara Smith, "Jogger Rape: Ask a Black Feminist," *Guardian*, New York City (November 7, 1990).

35. Sally O'Brien, "Jogger Verdict Pains, Angers Black Community," *Guardian*, New York City (September 12, 1990).

36. Quoted in *Crusade for Justice*.

37. The two collective trials in 1990 for the assault ended with the convictions of six African-American and Latino youths. This chapter focuses on the first collective trial where, in August 1990, Antron McCray (16), Yusef Salaam (16), and Raymond Santana (15) received (and are now serving) the maximum youth sentence for rape and assault: 5-10 years in prison. Their appeal attorneys include William Kunstler for Salaam and Vernon Mason for McCray.

38. Rick Hornung's thoroughly researched account of the arrests is used in this discussion of the first trial. See Rick Hornung, "The Case Against the Prosecution," *Village Voice* (February 20, 1990) for an in-depth discussion of the arrests.

39. Craig Wolff, "Youths Rape and Beat Central Park Jogger," *The New York Times* (April 21, 1989) p. B1.

40. European-American Michelle Hammer describes the "callousness" of the mythology objectifying the survivor:

How many times have we heard the word miraculous, as though the gods themselves were on her side? This miraculous recovery has been expressed as a triumph of good over evil, her extraordinarily good attitude—the result, as the myth would have it, of good breeding, good family, good schools, a good job—has made medicine itself seem almost superfluous. Her good attitude has prevailed over bad boys, from bad families, who do bad things (including live) in that bad part of town where the good jogger somehow strayed. In the stiff and demanding morality of this myth, only a miraculous recovery will do, because her recovery is not only her reward for being good, but also proof that she is good. As an '80s morality tale this made perfect sense, since having the goods in the '80s made you good. Hence, the apotheosis came when Salomon [Brothers], named her a vice president. It was as if to say, not only had she not lost ground, she had gained. And gains could be made only by getting ahead, not by wavering. (Hammer, "Memory, Myth and the Jogger," *Newsday*, June 21, 1990, pp. 72, 74)

41. Consistent with the symbolism in the prosecution's case, necessitated by the absence of either witnesses or evidence, ADAs Elizabeth Lederer and Linda Fairstein, as White women, became simultaneously the avengers and symbols of victimized (White) women—the former by assuming the "male" roles of state prosecutors, the latter by appropriating the body and voice of the survivor. Their highly visual presence also allowed the state's role to be feminized.

When the survivor testified for 15 minutes in the August 1990 trial, it was to detail her recovery from the brutal beating. This account was used as testimony against the youths, although she failed to identify any of them as her assailants. Lederer and Fairstein were the only

(White) women who claimed in court that the youths had sexually and physically assaulted anyone. With repeated displays of medical photographs of the survivor's battered and partially nude body taken soon after the assault, and by having the survivor "testify," despite her being afflicted with amnesia, Lederer introduced the woman's "body" as evidence of the youths' guilt. Only words—those of Lederer, Fairstein, and the police, as well as the youths' (Salaam excepted) own incriminating, contradictory, and repudiated statements—connected the youths to the "body." The Manhattan District Attorney's office lists the file of the Central Park Case as "closed," although ADA Lederer publicly acknowledges that there is still a "rapist[s] out there" connected to the April 1989 assault; even though physical evidence existed, police never attempted to find the male(s) whose semen matched that found on the survivor. (See: Transcript #3034, *Phil Donahue Show*, September 14, 1990, "Crime and Punishment: Was the Jogger Defendant's Sentence Fair?")

42. Timothy Sullivan describes troubling aspects of jury deliberations: jurors who already believed the youths guilty reconstructed reality: "[Juror] Brueland . . . believed he could read the lips of one defendant on videotape [tapes were redacted] and discern Salaam's name. . . . In fact, neither McCray nor Santana names Salaam anywhere on the tapes." (Timothy Sullivan, "Jogger Juror Threatened to Block Verdict," *Manhattan Lawyer*, 3(21), October 1990, pp. 1, 25-27.)

43. Inconsistencies in the prosecution's case are reported in: Elombe Brath, "The Media, Rape and Race: The Central Park Jogger Case," *NOBO: A Journal of African American Dialogue* (Winter 1991); Timothy Sullivan, "Jogger Juror Threatened to Block Verdict," *Manhattan Lawyer*, 3(21), October 1990, pp. 1, 25-27. Brath argued that, due to the inconsistencies in the statements and the questionable conditions under which they were taken, it was more accurate to refer to the video and written statements by the youths as "self-incriminating statements" rather than "confessions."

44. Carole Agus, "Salaam's Mom Also Waits for Evidence," *Newsday* (July 18, 1990), pp. 3, 25.

45. *The New York Times* reported in August 1990 that Galligan's offices were charged with anti-Black bias by NAACP legal counsel on issues unrelated to the Central Park Case.

46. Other attacks against male joggers or cyclists occurred in the park that night. The ADA had a stronger case against some youths concerning these attacks.

47. Detailing police admissions to breaking the law in order to obtain incriminating statements, *Village Voice* writer Rick Hornung predicted: "The police engaged in . . . conduct so improper that it . . . will undoubtedly be the grounds of a strong appeal even if the defendants are found guilty." According to Hornung, the pretrial hearings revealed that police violated: state laws protecting juvenile rights by separating all the children from their parents; Fifth Amendment and Sixth Amendment rights of at least three defendants by failing to inform them respectively of their rights to remain silent and to consult an attorney; Fifth Amendment right against compelled self-incrimination (accompanied by ADA Linda Fairstein, police transported several of the youths involved in the second trial to the scene of the crime, without defense lawyers or parents, in order to have them "put themselves in it" more convincingly. (See Rick Hornung, "The Case Against the Prosecution," *Village Voice*, February 1990, p. 32.)

The need to prove innocence in order to mobilize for a fair trial is an inversion of the U.S. justice system where, in theory, only guilt beyond a reasonable doubt must be proven must be proven guilty. In the absence of virtual certainty of the youth's innocence, people acquiesced to police malfeasance and the possibility of an unfair trial; or as one African-American man opined: "They railroaded the right guys."

49. Erica Munk's "Body Politics at Its Worse [sic]" (*Village Voice*, July 31, 1990) reported the July 19, 1990 organizing session as an "anti-survivor" event. Her article failed to note that the key address at the forum advocating fair-trial activism was given by a White woman, Suzanne Ross. Munk, who argued that the youths were guilty (based on her experience as a theater critic, which gave her insight into the veracity of the videotaped confessions) identified by name African-American women who were minor speakers or moderators, depicting them as uniformly hostile to White women. In fact, an African-American woman strongly criticized a Black lawyer for his harsh rhetoric concerning the defense lawyers' refusal to cross-examine the survivor. See Joy James, "The Myth of the Black Rapists," Letters to the Editor, and Munk's reply, both in the *Village Voice*, August 14, 1990.

50. Loretta Ross, "Rape and Third World Women," *Aegis* 1983, Washington, D.C.

51. Braxton, referring to biological mothers, attributes this term to Margaret Homans (see Braxton, p. 3). I use *matrophobia* here to refer to ancestral, not biological, mothers.

52. Cornel West, "We Socialists," *Crossroads* (July-August 1991), No. 12, p. 4.