

BLACK SEXUAL POLITICS

**AFRICAN AMERICANS, GENDER,
AND THE NEW RACISM**

PATRICIA HILL COLLINS

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ASSUME THE POSITION

The Changing Contours of Sexual Violence

At the center of the table sat a single microphone, a glass of water, and a name card: "Professor Anita Hill." I sat down at the lone chair at the table. . . . In front of me, facing me and the bank of journalists, was the Senate Judiciary Committee—fourteen white men dressed in dark gray suits. I questioned my decision to wear bright blue linen, though it hadn't really been a decision; that suit was the only appropriate and clean suit in my closet when I hastily packed for Washington two days before. In any case, it offered a fitting contrast.¹

By now, the outcome of Anita Hill's 1991 testimony at the confirmation hearings of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas is well known. In a calm, almost flat manner and before a packed room that contained twelve family members, including both of her parents, Hill recounted how Thomas had sexually harassed her when he headed the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission ten years earlier. Although she passed a lie detector test, her testimony did not affect the upshot of the hearings. The Senate Judiciary Committee simply did not believe her. Hill was no match for the fourteen White men in dark gray suits, many of whom had made up their minds before hearing her testimony. Thomas's opportunistic claim that the senators were engaged in a "high-tech lynching"

sealed the outcome. Because lynching had been so associated with the atrocities visited upon Black men, it became virtually impossible for the senators to refute Thomas's self-presentation without being branded as racists. The combination of male dominance and the need to avoid any hint of racism made the choice simple. Believing Thomas challenged racism. Doubting Thomas supported it. Thomas won. Hill lost.²

But was it really this simple? Certainly not for African Americans. For Black women and men, the Thomas confirmation hearings catalyzed two thorny questions. Why did so many African Americans join the "fourteen white men dressed in dark gray suits" and reject Hill's allegations of sexual harassment? Even more puzzling, why did so many African Americans who believed Anita Hill criticize her for coming forward and testifying? Critical race theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw offers one reason why the hearings proved to be so difficult: "In feminist contexts, sexuality represents a central site of the oppression of women; rape and the rape trial are its dominant narrative trope. In antiracist discourses, sexuality is also a central site upon which the repression of Blacks has been premised; the lynching narrative is embodied as its trope. (Neither narrative tends to acknowledge the legitimacy of the other)."³

Crenshaw joins a prestigious group of African American women and men who, from Ida B. Wells-Barnett through Angela Davis, have examined how discourses of rape and lynching have historically influenced understandings of race, gender, and sexuality within American society.⁴ In American society, sexual violence has served as an important mechanism for controlling African Americans, women, poor people, and gays and lesbians, among others. In the post-emancipation South, for example, institutionalized lynching and institutionalized rape worked together to uphold racial oppression. Together, lynching and rape served as gender-specific mechanisms of sexual violence whereby men were victimized by lynching and women by rape. Lynching and rape also reflected the type of binary thinking associated with racial and gender segregation mandating that *either* race *or* gender was primary, but not both. Within this logic of segregation, race and gender constituted separate rather than intersecting forms of oppression that could not be equally important. One was primary whereas the other was secondary. As targets of lynching as ritualized murder, Black men carried the more important burden of race. In contrast, as rape victims, Black women carried the less important burden of gender.

African American politics have been profoundly influenced by a Black gender ideology that ranks race and gender in this fashion. Lynching and rape have not been given equal weight and, as a result, social issues seen as affecting Black men, in this case lynching, have taken precedence over those that seemingly affect only Black women (rape). Within this logic, lynchings, police brutality, and similar expressions of state-sanctioned violence visited upon African American men operate as consensus issues within African American politics.⁵ Lynching was not a random act; instead, it occurred *in public*, was sanctioned by government officials, and often served as a unifying event for entire communities. In this sense, lynching can be defined as ritualized murder that took a particular form in the post-emancipation South. In that context, through its highly public nature as spectacle, lynching was emblematic of a form of institutionalized, ritualized murder that was visited upon Black men in particular. African American antiracist politics responded vigorously to the public spectacle of lynching by protesting against it as damage done to Black men as representatives of the "race."⁶ Because African American men were the main targets of this highly public expression of ritualized murder, the lynching of Black men came to symbolize the most egregious expressions of racism.

In contrast, the sexual violence visited upon African American women has historically carried no public name, garnered no significant public censure, and has been seen as a crosscutting gender issue that diverts Black politics from its real job of fighting racism. Black women were raped, yet their pain and suffering remained largely invisible. Whereas lynching (racism) was public spectacle, rape (sexism) signaled *private* humiliation. Black male leaders were not unaware of the significance of institutionalized rape. Rather, their political solution of installing a Black male patriarchy in which Black men would protect "their" women from sexual assault inadvertently supported ideas about women's bodies and sexuality as men's property. Stated differently, Black women's suffering under racism would be eliminated by encouraging versions of Black masculinity whereby Black men had the same powers that White men had long enjoyed.

By 1991, the Thomas confirmation hearings made it painfully obvious that these antiracist strategies of the past were no match for the new racism. Ranking either lynching or rape as more important than the other offered a painful lesson about the dangers of choosing race over gender or

vice versa as the template for African American politics. What is needed is a progressive Black sexual politics that recognizes not only how important both lynching and rape were in maintaining historical patterns of racial segregation but that also questions how these practices may be changed and used to maintain the contemporary color-blind racism. Rather than conceptualizing lynching and rape as either race or gender-specific mechanisms of social control, another approach views institutionalized rape and lynching as *different* expressions of the *same* type of social control. Together, both constitute dominance strategies that uphold the new racism. Both involve the threat or actual physical violence done to the body's exterior, for example, beating, torture, and/or murder. Both can involve the threat of or actual infliction of violence upon the body's interior, for example, oral, anal, or vaginal penetration against the victim's will. Both strip victims of agency and control over their own bodies, thus aiming for psychological control via fear and humiliation. Moreover, within the context of the post-civil rights era's desegregation, these seemingly gender-specific forms of social control converge. Stated differently, just as the post-civil rights era has seen a crossing and blurring of boundaries of all sorts, lynching and rape as forms of state-sanctioned violence are not now and never were as gender-specific as once thought.

REVISITING THE FOUNDATION: LYNCHING AND RAPE AS TOOLS OF SOCIAL CONTROL

Lynching and rape both served the economic needs of Southern agriculture under racial segregation. In the American South during the years 1882 to 1930 the lynching of Black people for "crimes" against Whites was a common spectacle—mob violence was neither random in time nor geography. Like many other violent crimes, lynchings were more frequent during the summer months than in cooler seasons, a reflection of the changing labor demands of agricultural production cycles.⁷ One function of lynchings may well have been to rid White communities of Black people who allegedly violated the moral order. But another function was to maintain control over the African American population, especially during times when White landowners needed Black labor to work fields of cotton and tobacco.

Lynching also had political dimensions. This tool of gendered, racial violence was developed to curtail the citizenship rights of African

American men after emancipation. Because Black women could not vote, Black men become targets for political repression. Explaining the power of lynching as a spectacle of violence necessary to maintain racial boundaries and to discipline populations, literary critic Trudier Harris describes the significance of violence to maintaining fixed racial group identities:

When one Black individual dared to violate the restrictions, he or she was used as an example to reiterate to the entire race that the group would continually be held responsible for the actions of the individual. Thus an accusation of rape could lead not only to the accused Black man being lynched and burned, but to the burning of Black homes and the whipping or lynching of other Black individuals as well.⁸

This is why lynchings were not private affairs, but were public events, often announced well in advance in newspapers: "To be effective in social control, lynchings had to be visible, with the killing being a public spectacle or at least minimally having the corpse on display for all to witness. Whereas a murder—even a racially motivated one—might be hidden from public scrutiny, lynchings were not."⁹

The ritualized murders of lynching not only worked to terrorize the African American population overall but they also helped to install a hegemonic White masculinity over a subordinated Black masculinity. Lynching symbolized the type of violence visited upon African American men that was grounded in a constellation of daily micro-assaults on their manhood that achieved extreme form through the actual castration of many Black male lynch victims. Although Black women were also lynched, Black men were lynched in far greater numbers. Thus, lynching invokes ideas of Black male emasculation, a theme that persists within the contemporary Black gender ideology thesis of Black men as being "weak."¹⁰ The myth of Black men as rapists also emerged under racial segregation in the South. Designed to contain this newfound threat to White property and democratic institutions, the sexual stereotype of the newly emancipated, violent rapist was constructed on the back of the Black buck. No longer safely controlled under slavery, Black men could now go "buck wild."

Wide-scale lynching could only emerge after emancipation because murdering slaves was unprofitable for their owners. In contrast, the institutionalized rape of African American women began under slavery and

also accompanied the wide-scale lynching of Black men at the turn of the twentieth century. Emancipation constituted a continuation of actual practices of rape as well as the shame and humiliation visited upon rape victims that is designed to keep them subordinate. Black domestic workers reported being harassed, molested, and raped by their employers.¹¹ Agricultural workers, especially those women who did not work on family farms, were also vulnerable. In the South, these practices persisted well into the twentieth century. For example, in the 1990s, journalist Leon Dash interviewed Washington, D.C. resident Rosa Lee. It took many conversations before Lee could share family secrets of stories of sexual abuse that had occurred in rural North Carolina. Because the experiences were so painful, she herself had learned about them only in bits and pieces from stories told to her by her grandmother and aunt. Rosa Lee came to understand the harsh lives endured by her mother Rosetta and her grandmother Lugenia at the bottom of the Southern Black class structure. Describing how White men would come and look over young Black girls, Rosa Lee recounted her family's stories:

"You could tell when they wanted something. They all would come out there. Come out there in the field while everybody was working. And they're looking at the young girls. Her mouth. Teeth. Arms. You know, like they're looking at a horse. Feeling her breasts and everything. The white men would get to whispering."

"And the mothers let them men do that?" Rosa Lee asked her grandmother.

"What the hell do you think they could do?" Lugenia answered.

"Couldn't do nothing!"¹²

The overseers apparently preferred light-skinned Black girls, often the children of previous rapes, but dark-skinned girls did not escape White male scrutiny. In exchange for the girls, mothers received extra food or a lighter load. The costs were high for the girls themselves. Because Rosetta developed early, her mother tried to hide her when the men came. But after a while, it was hopeless. Rosetta did not escape the rapes:

"Your mama was put to auction so many times," Lugenia told Rosa Lee. "They just kept wanting your mother." The overseers would

assign the girls they wanted sexually to work in isolated parts of the farm, away from their families. The girls would try to get out of the work detail. "It never worked," Lugenia said. "Those men always got them."¹³

Lugenia continued her tale by sharing how two White overseers had raped her when she was fourteen, and how two of her daughters, including Rosetta, had suffered the same fate. Only one daughter was spared, "because she was so fat," explained Lugenia. As for the children who were conceived, they were left with their mothers. Once a girl was pregnant, she was generally never bothered again. As Lugenia recalled: "They only wanted virgins. . . . They felt they'd catch diseases if they fooled with any girl that wasn't a virgin."¹⁴

These social practices of institutionalized lynching and institutionalized rape did not go uncontested. Ida B. Wells-Barnett's antilynching work clearly rejected both the myth of the Black male rapist as well as the thesis of Black women's inherent immorality and advanced her own highly controversial interpretation.¹⁵ Not only did Wells-Barnett spark a huge controversy when she dared to claim that many of the sexual liaisons between White women and Black men were in fact consensual, she indicted White men as the actual perpetrators of crimes of sexual violence *both* against African American men (lynching) *and* against African American women (rape). Consider how her comments in *Southern Horrors* concerning the contradictions of laws forbidding interracial marriage place blame on White male behavior and power: "the miscegenation laws of the South only operate against the legitimate union of the races: they leave the white man free to seduce all the colored girls he can, but is death to the colored man who yields to the force and advances of a similar attraction in white women. White men lynch the offending Afro-American, not because he is a despoiler of virtue, but because he succumbs to the smiles of white women."¹⁶ In this analysis, Wells-Barnett reveals how ideas about gender difference—the seeming passivity of women and the aggressiveness of men—are in fact deeply racialized constructs. Gender had a racial face, whereby African American women, African American men, White women, and White men occupied distinct race/gender categories within an overarching social structure that proscribed their prescribed place. Interracial sexual liaisons violated racial and gender segregation.

Despite Wells-Barnett's pioneering work in analyzing sexual violence through an intersectional framework of race, gender, class, and sexuality, African American leaders elevated race over gender.¹⁷ Given the large numbers of lynchings from the 1890s to the 1930s, and in the context of racial segregation that stripped all African Americans of citizenship rights, this emphasis on antilynching made sense. Often accused of the crime of raping White women, African American men were lynched, and, in more gruesome cases, castrated. Such violence was so horrific that, catalyzed by Ida B. Wells-Barnett's tireless antilynching crusade, and later taken up by the NAACP and other major civil rights organizations, antilynching became an important plank in the Black civil rights agenda.

In large part due to this advocacy, lynchings have dwindled to a few, isolated albeit horrific events today. This does not mean that the use of lynching as a symbol of American racism has abated. Rather, Black protest still responds quickly and passionately to contemporary incidents of lynching and/or to events that can be recast through this historic framework. For example, the 1955 murder of fourteen-year-old Emmett Till in Mississippi was described in the press as a lynching and served as an important catalyst for the modern civil rights movement. The 1989 murder of sixteen-year-old Yusef Hawkins in the Bensonhurst section of New York City also was described as a lynching. When Hawkins and three friends came to their neighborhood to look at a used car, about thirty White youths carrying bats and sticks (one with a gun) immediately approached them. Furious that the ex-girlfriend of one of the group members had invited Black people to her eighteenth birthday party, the White kids thought that Hawkins and his friends were there for the party and attacked them, shooting Hawkins dead. In 1998, three White men in Jasper, Texas, chained a Black man named James Byrd, Jr. to a pick-up truck and dragged him to his death, an event likened to a modern-day lynching. Events such as these are publicly censured as unacceptable in a modern democracy. These modern lynchings served as rallying cries for the continuing need for an antiracist African American politics.

Unfortunately, this placement of lynching at the core of the African American civil rights agenda has also minimized the related issue of institutionalized rape. Even Ida Wells-Barnett, who clearly saw the connections between Black men's persecution as victims of lynching and Black women's vulnerability to rape, chose to advance a thesis of Black women's

rape through the discourse on Black men's lynching. In the postbellum period, the rape of free African American women by White men subsisted as a "dirty secret" within the *private* domestic spheres of Black families and of Black civil society. Speaking out against their violation ran a dual risk—it reminded Black men of their inability to protect Black women from White male assaults and it potentially identified Black men as rapists, the very group that suffered from lynching. The presence of biracial Black children was tangible proof of Black male weakness in protecting Black women and of Black women's violation within a politics of respectability. Because rapes have been treated as crimes against women, the culpability of the rape victim has long been questioned. Her dress, her demeanor, where the rape occurred, and her resistance all become evidence for whether a woman was even raped at all. Because Black women as a class emerged from slavery as collective rape victims, they were encouraged to keep quiet in order to refute the thesis of their wanton sexuality. In contrast to this silencing of Black women as rape victims, there was no shame in lynching and no reason except fear to keep quiet about it. In a climate of racial violence, it was clear that victims of lynching were blameless and murdered through no fault of their own.

Because the new racism contains the past-in-present elements of prior periods, African American politics must be vigilant in analyzing how the past-in-present practices of Black sexual politics also influence contemporary politics. Clarence Thomas certainly used this history to his advantage. Recognizing the historical importance placed on lynching and the relative neglect of rape, Thomas successfully pitted lynching and rape against one another for his gain and to the detriment of African Americans as a group. Shrewdly recognizing the logic of prevailing Black gender ideology that routinely elevates the suffering of Black men as more important than that of Black women, Thomas guessed correctly that Black people would back him no matter what. If nothing else comes of the Thomas hearings, they raise the very important question of how sexual violence that was a powerful tool of social control in prior periods may be an equally important factor in the new racism.

African Americans need a more progressive Black sexual politics dedicated to analyzing how state-sanctioned violence, especially practices such as lynching (ritualized murder) and rape, operate as forms of social control. Michel Foucault's innovative idea that oppression can be conceptual-

ized as normalized war *within* one society as opposed to between societies provides a powerful new foundation for such an analysis.¹⁸ Mass media images of a multiethnic, diverse, color-blind America that mask deeply entrenched social inequalities mean that open warfare on American citizens (the exact case that lynching Black men presented in the past), is fundamentally unacceptable. Many Americans were horrified when they saw the 1992 videotape of Rodney King being beaten by the Los Angeles police. Fictional attacks on Black men in movies are acceptable, assaults on real ones, less so. Managing contemporary racism relies less on visible warfare between men than on social relations among men and between women and men that are saturated with relations of war. In this context, rape as a tool of sexual violence may increase in importance because its association with women and privacy makes it an effective domestic tool of social control. The threat of rape as a mechanism of control can be normally and routinely used against American citizens because the crime is typically hidden and its victims are encouraged to remain silent. New configurations of state-sanctioned violence suggest the workings of a rape culture may affect not just Black women but also Black men far more than is commonly realized. Given the significance of these tools of social control, what forms of sexual violence do African American women and men experience under the new racism? Moreover, how do these forms draw upon the ideas and practices of lynching and rape?

AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Racial segregation and its reliance on lynching and rape as gender-specific tools of control have given way to an unstable desegregation under the new racism. In this context, the sexual violence visited upon African American women certainly continues its historical purpose, but may be organized in new and unforeseen ways. The terms *institutionalized rape* and *rape culture* encompass the constellation of sexual assaults on Black womanhood. From the sexual harassment visited upon Anita Hill and Black women in the workplace to sexual extortion to acquaintance, marital, and stranger rapes to how misogynistic beliefs about women create an interpretive framework that simultaneously creates the conditions in which men rape women and erase the crime of rape itself to the lack of punishment meted out by the state to Black women's rapists, sexual violence is much broader than any

specific acts. Collectively, these practices comprise a rape culture that draws energy from the ethos of violence that saturates American society. African American essayist Asha Bandele describes the persistent sexual harassment she experienced during her teenaged years as part of growing up in a rape culture: "although the faces may have changed, and the places may have also, some things could always be counted on to remain the same: the pulling, and grabbing, and pinching, and slapping, and all those dirty words, and all those bad names, the leering, the propositions."¹⁹ It is important to understand how a rape culture affects African American women because such understanding may help with antirape initiatives. It also sheds light on Black women's reactions to sexual violence, and it demonstrates how this rape culture affects other groups, namely, children, gay men, and heterosexual men.

Rape is part of a system of male dominance. Recall that hegemonic masculinity is predicated upon a pecking order among men that is dependent, in part, on the sexual and physical domination of women. Within popular vernacular, "screwing" someone links ideas about masculinity, heterosexuality, and domination. Women, gay men, and other "weak" members of society are figuratively and literally "screwed" by "real" men. Regardless of the gender, age, social class, or sexual orientation of the recipient, individuals who are forcibly "screwed" have been "fucked" or "fucked over." "Freaks" are women (and men) who enjoy being "fucked" or who "screw" around with anyone. Because the vast majority of African American men lack access to a Black gender ideology that challenges these associations, they fail to see the significance of this language let alone the social practices that it upholds. Instead, they define heterosexual sex acts within a framework of "screwing" and "fucking" women and, by doing so, draw upon Western ideologies of Black hyper-heterosexuality that defines Black masculinity in terms of economic, sexual, and physical dominance. In this interpretive context, for some men, violence (including the behaviors that comprise the rape culture) constitutes the next logical step of their male prerogative.

Currently, one of the most pressing issues for contemporary Black sexual politics concerns violence against Black women at the hands of Black men. Much of this violence occurs within the context of Black heterosexual love relationships, Black family life, and within African American social institutions. Such violence takes many forms, including verbally berating

Black women, hitting them, ridiculing their appearance, grabbing their body parts, pressuring them to have sex, beating them, and murdering them. For many Black women, love offers no protection from sexual violence. Abusive relationships occur between African American men and women who may genuinely love one another and can see the good in each other as individuals. Black girls are especially vulnerable to childhood sexual assault. Within their families and communities, fathers, stepfathers, uncles, brothers, and other male relatives are part of a general climate of violence that makes young Black girls appropriate sexual targets for predatory older men.²⁰

Because Black male leaders have historically abandoned Black women as collective rape victims, Black women were pressured to remain silent about these and other violations at the hands of Black men. Part of their self-censorship certainly had to do with reluctance to "air dirty laundry" in a White society that viewed Black men as sexual predators. As Nell Painter points out, "because discussion of the abuse of Black women would not merely implicate Whites, Black women have been reluctant to press the point."²¹ Until recently, Black women have been highly reluctant to speak out against rape, especially against Black male rapists, because they felt confined by the strictures of traditional Black gender ideology. Describing herself and other Black women rape victims as "silent survivors," Charlotte Pierce-Baker explains her silence: "I didn't want my nonblack friends, colleagues, and acquaintances to know that I didn't trust my own people, that I was afraid of black men I didn't know. . . . I felt responsible for upholding the image of the strong black man for our young son, and for the white world with whom I had contact. I didn't want my son's view of sex to be warped by this crime perpetrated upon his mother by men the color of him, his father, and his grandfathers."²² African American women grapple with long-standing sanctions within their communities that urge them to protect African American men at all costs, including keeping "family secrets" by remaining silent about male abuse.²³

Black women also remain silent for fear that their friends, family, and community will abandon them. Ruth, a woman who, at twenty years old, was raped on a date in Los Angeles; points out: "You can talk about being mugged and boast about being held up at knife point on Market Street Bridge or something, but you can't talk about being raped. And I know if I do, I can't count on that person ever being a friend again. . . . People have

one of two reactions when they see you being needy. They either take you under their wing and exploit you or they get scared and run away. They abandon you."²⁴ Black women recount how they feel abandoned by the very communities that they aim to protect, if they speak out. Theologian Traci West describes how the very visibility of Black female rape victims can work to isolate them: "When sexual violation occurs within their families or by any member of 'their' community, black women may confront the profound injury of being psychically severed from the only source of trustworthy community available to them. Because of the ambiguities of their racial visibility, black women are on exhibit precisely at the same time as they are confined to the invisible cage."²⁵

Contemporary African American feminists who raise issues of Black women's victimization must tread lightly through this minefield of race, gender, and sex. This is especially important because, unlike prior eras when White men were identified as the prime rapists of Black women, Black women are now more likely to be raped by Black men.²⁶ Increasingly, African American women have begun to violate long-standing norms of racial solidarity counseling Black women to defend Black men's actions at all costs and have begun actively to protest the violent and abusive behavior of some African American men. Some African American women now openly identify Black men's behavior toward them as abuse and wonder why such men routinely elevate their own suffering as more important than that experienced by African American women: "Black women do not accept racism as the reason for sorry behavior—they have experienced it firsthand, and for them it is an excuse, not a justification."²⁷

Since 1970, African American women have used fiction, social science research, theology, and their writings to speak out about violence against Black women.²⁸ Many African American women have not been content to write about sexual violence—some have taken to the streets to protest it. Determined not to duplicate the mistakes made during the Thomas confirmation hearings, many Black women were furious when they found out that a homecoming parade had been planned for African American boxer and convicted rapist Mike Tyson upon his release from prison. The Mike Tyson rape case catalyzed many Black women to challenge community norms that counseled it was a Black women's duty as strong Black women to "assume the position" of abuse. Within this logic, a Black woman's ability to absorb mistreatment becomes a measure of strength that can garner

praise. In efforts to regulate displays of strong Black womanhood, some Black people apparently believed that prominent Black men like Mike Tyson were, by virtue of their status, incapable of sexual harassment or rape. "Many apparently felt that Washington [Tyson's victim] should have seen it as her responsibility to endure her pain in order to serve the greater good of the race," observes cultural critic Michael Awkward.²⁹ Rejecting this position that views sexual violence against Black women as secondary to the greater cause of racial uplift (unless, of course, sexual violence is perpetrated by White men), Black women in New York staged their own counterdemonstration and protested a homecoming celebration planned for a man who had just spent three years in prison on a conviction of rape.

ASSUME THE POSITION: BLACK WOMEN AND RAPE

Rape is a powerful tool of sexual violence because women are forced to "assume the position" of powerless victim, one who has no control over what is happening to her body. The rapist imagines absolute power over his victim; she (or he) is the perfect slave, supine, legs open, willing to be subdued or "fucked," and enjoying it. Rape's power also stems from relegating sexual violence to the private, devalued, domestic sphere reserved for women. The ability to silence its victims also erases evidence of the crime. These dimensions of rape make it a likely candidate to become an important form of social control under the new racism.

We have learned much from African American women both about the meaning of rape for women and how it upholds systems of oppression. For one, female rape victims often experience a form of posttraumatic stress disorder, a rape trauma syndrome of depression, anxiety, and despair, with some attempting suicide that affects them long after actual assaults. Women who survived rape report effects such as mistrust of men or of people in general, continued emotional distress in connection with the abuse, specific fears such as being left alone or being out at night, and chronic depression that lasted an average of five and a half years after the assault.³⁰ This climate harms all African American women, but the damage done to women who survive rape can last long after actual assaults. Yvonne, who was molested by an "uncle" when she was eight and raped at age twelve, describes how the rape and sexual molestation that she endured as a child affected her subsequent attitudes toward sexuality: "I didn't take

pride in my body after the rape. After it happened, I became a bit promiscuous. . . . Everyone *thought* I was bad; so I thought, I should just *be* bad. After the rape it was like sex really didn't matter to me. It didn't seem like anything special because I figured if people could just take it, . . . if they just had to have it enough that they would take a little girl and put a knife to her neck and *take* it, . . . that it had nothin' to do with love."³¹ Yolanda's experiences show how as an act of violence, rape may not leave the victim physically injured—emotional damage is key. The rape itself can temporarily destroy the victim's sense of self-determination and undermines her integrity as a person. Moreover, when rape occurs in a climate that already places all Black women under suspicion of being prostitutes, claiming the status of rape victim becomes even more suspect.

Black women are just as harmed by sexual assault as all women, and may be even more harmed when their abusers are African American men within Black neighborhoods. Gail Wyatt's research on Black women's sexuality provides an important contribution in furthering our understanding of Black women and rape.³² Wyatt found little difference in the effects of rape on Black and White women who reported being rape victims. One important finding concerns the effects of *repeated* exposure to sexual violence on people who survive rape: "Because incidents of attempted and completed rape for Black women were slightly more likely to be repeated, their victimization may have a more severe effect on their understanding of the reasons that these incidents occurred, and some of these reasons may be beyond their control. As a consequence, they may be less likely to develop coping strategies to facilitate the prevention rather than the recurrence of such incidents."³³ Stated differently, African American women who suffer repeated abuse (e.g., participate in a rape culture that routinely derogates Black women more than any other group) might suffer more than women (and men) who do not encounter high levels of violence, especially sexual violence, as a daily part of their everyday lives. For example, being routinely disbelieved by those who control the definitions of violence (Anita Hill), encountering mass media representations that depict Black women as "bitches," "hoes," and other controlling images, and/or experiencing daily assaults such as having their breasts and buttocks fondled by friends and perfect strangers in school, the workplace, families, and/or on the streets of African American communities may become so routine that African American women cannot perceive their own pain.

Within the strictures of dominant gender ideology that depict Black women's sexuality as deviant, African American women often have tremendous difficulty speaking out about their abuse because the reactions that they receive from others deters them. Women may be twice victimized—even if they are believed, members of their communities may punish them for speaking out. As Yvonne points out, "where I lived in the South, any time a black woman said she had been raped, she was never believed. In my community, they always made her feel like she did something to deserve it—or she was lying."³⁴ Adrienne, a forty-year-old Black woman who had been raped twice, once by a much older relative when she was seven and again by her mother's boyfriend when she was twelve, observes, "Black women tend to keep quiet about rape and abuse . . . If you talk about it, a man will think it was your fault, or he'll think less of you. I think that's why I never told the men in my life, because I've always been afraid they would not look at me in the same way. We all live in the same neighborhood. If something happens to you, *everybody* knows."³⁵

One important feature of rape is that, contrary to popular opinion, it is more likely to occur between friends, loved ones, and acquaintances than between strangers. Black women typically know their rapists, and they may actually love them. Violence that is intertwined with love becomes a very effective mechanism for fostering submission. In a sense, Black women's silences about the emotional, physical, and sexual abuse that they experience within dating, marriage, and similar love relationships resembles the belief among closeted LGBT people that their silence will protect them. Just as the silence of LGBT people enables heterosexism to flourish, the reticence to speak out about rape and sexual violence upholds troublesome conceptions of Black masculinity. Within the domestic sphere, many Black men treat their wives, girlfriends, and children in ways that they would never treat their mothers, sisters, friends, workplace acquaintances, or other women. Violence and love become so intertwined that many men cannot see alternative paths to manhood that do not involve violence against women. Black feminist theologian Traci C. West uses the term "domestic captivity" to describe women who find themselves in this cycle of love and violence: "Although they are invisible, the economic, social, and legal barriers to escape that entrap women are extremely powerful. This gendered denial of rights and status compounds the breach with community. Being confined in a cage that seems invisible

to everyone else nullifies a woman's suffering and exacerbates her isolation and alienation."³⁶

As Barbara Omolade observes, "Black male violence is even more poignant because Black men both love and unashamedly depend on Black women's loyalty and support. Most feel that without the support of a 'strong sister' they can't become 'real' men."³⁷ But this may be the heart of the problem—if African American men need women to bring their Black masculinity into being, then women who seemingly challenge that masculinity become targets for Black male violence. Educated Black women, Black career women, Black women sex workers, rebellious Black girls, and Black lesbians, among others who refuse to submit to male power, become more vulnerable for abuse. Violence against "strong" Black women enables some African American men to recapture a lost masculinity and to feel like "real" men. By describing why he continued to financially exploit women, and why he hit his girlfriend, Kevin Powell provides insight into this process:

I, like most Black men I know, have spent much of my life living in fear. Fear of White racism, fear of the circumstances that gave birth to me, fear of walking out my door wondering what humiliation will be mine today. Fear of Black women—of their mouths, their bodies, of their attitudes, of their hurts, of their fear of us Black men. I felt fragile, fragile as a bird with clipped wings, that day my ex-girlfriend stepped up her game and spoke back to me. Nothing in my world, nothing in my self-definition prepared me for dealing with a woman as an equal. My world said women were inferior, that they must, at all costs, be put in their place, and my instant reaction was to do that. When it was over, I found myself dripping with sweat, staring at her back as she ran bare-foot out of the apartment.³⁸

Powell's narrative suggests that the connections among love, sexuality, and violence are much more complicated than the simple linear relationship in which African American men who are victimized by racism use the power that accrues to them as men to abuse African American women (who might then use their power as adults to beat African American children). Certainly one can trace these relations in love relationships, but the historical and contemporary interconnections of love, sexuality, vio-

lence, and male dominance in today's desegregated climate are infinitely more complex.

In these contexts, it may be possible for African American women and men to get caught up in a dynamics of love, sexuality, and dominance whereby the use of violence and sexuality resemble addiction. In other words, if Black masculinity and Black femininity can be achieved only via sexuality and violence, sexuality, violence, and domination become implicated in the very definitions themselves. Once addicted, there is no way to be a man or a woman without staying in roles prescribed by Black gender ideology. Men and women may not engage in open warfare, but they do engage in mutual policing that keeps everyone in check. As a form of sexual violence, actual rapes constitute the tip of the iceberg. Rape joins sexuality and violence as a very effective tool to routinize and normalize oppression.

The effectiveness of rape as a tool of control against Black women does not mean that they have escaped other forms of social control that have disproportionately affected Black men. Working jobs outside their homes heightens African American women's vulnerability to other forms of state-sanctioned violence. For example, Black women are vulnerable to physical attacks, and some Black women are murdered. But unlike the repetitive and ritualized form of male lynching to produce a horrific spectacle for White and Black viewers, Black women neither served as symbols of the race nor were their murders deemed to be as significant. There is evidence that forms of social control historically reserved for Black men are also impacting Black women. For example, in the post-civil rights era, African American women have increasingly been incarcerated, a form of social control historically reserved for African American men. Black women are seven times more likely to be imprisoned than White women and, for the first time in American history, Black women in California and several other states are being imprisoned at nearly the same rate as White men. Incarcerating Black women certainly shows an increasing willingness to use the tools of state-sanctioned violence historically reserved for Black men against Black women. But is there an increasing willingness to use tools of social control that have been primarily applied to women against Black men? If institutionalized rape and institutionalized lynching constitute *different* expressions of the *same* type of social control, how might they affect Black men?

AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN, MASCULINITY, AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

African American men's experiences with the criminal justice system may signal a convergence of institutionalized rape and institutionalized murder (lynching) as state-sanctioned forms of sexual violence. Since 1980, a growing prison-industrial complex has incarcerated large numbers of African American men. Whatever measures are used—rates of arrest, conviction, jail time, parole, or types of crime—the record seems clear that African American men are more likely than White American men to encounter the criminal justice system. For example, in 1990, the nonprofit Washington, D.C.-based Sentencing Project released a survey result suggesting that, on an average day in the United States, one in every four African American men aged 20 to 29 was either in prison, jail, or on probation/parole.³⁹ Practices such as unprovoked police brutality against Black male citizens, many of whom die in police custody, and the disproportionate application of the death penalty to African American men certainly suggest that the state itself has assumed the functions of lynching. Because these practices are implemented by large, allegedly impartial bureaucracies, the high incarceration rates of Black men and the use of capital punishment on many prisoners becomes seen as natural and normal.

But how does one manage such large populations that are incarcerated in prison and also in large urban ghettos? The ways in which Black men are treated by bureaucracies suggests that the disciplinary practices developed primarily for controlling women can be transferred to new challenges of incarcerating so many men. In particular, the prison-industrial complex's treatment of male inmates resembles the tactics honed on women in a rape culture, now operating not between men and women, but among men. These tactics begin with police procedures that disproportionately affect poor and working-class young Black men. Such men can expect to be stopped by the police for no apparent reason and asked to "assume the position" of being spread-eagled over a car hood, against a wall, or face down on the ground. Rendering Black men prone is designed to make them submissive, much like a female rape victim. The videotape of members of the Los Angeles Police Department beating motorist Rodney King provided a mass media example of what can happen when Black men refuse to submit. Police treatment of Black men demonstrates how the command to "assume the position" can be about much more than simple policing.

Rape while under custody of the criminal justice system is a visible yet underanalyzed phenomenon, only recently becoming the subject of concern. Because rape is typically conceptualized within a frame of heterosexuality and with women as rape victims, most of the attention has gone to female inmates assaulted by male guards. Yet the large numbers of young African American men who are in police custody suggest that the relationships among prison guards and male inmates from different race and social class backgrounds constitutes an important site for negotiating masculinity. Moreover, within prisons, the connections among hegemonic and subordinated masculinities, violence, and sexuality may converge in ways that mimic and help structure the "prison" of racial oppression. Because prisons rely on surveillance, being raped in prison turns private humiliation into public spectacle. The atmosphere of fear that is essential to a rape culture as well as the mechanisms of institutionalized rape function as important tools in controlling Black men throughout the criminal justice system. Whereas women fear being disbelieved, being abandoned, and losing the love of their families, friends, and communities, men fear loss of manhood. Male rape in the context of prison signals an emasculation that exposes male rape victims to further abuse. In essence, a prison-industrial complex that condones and that may even foster a male rape culture attaches a very effective form of disciplinary control to a social institution that itself is rapidly becoming a new site of slavery for Black men.

Drawing upon a national sample of prisoners' accounts and on a complex array of data collected by state and federal agencies, *No Escape: Male Rape in U.S. Prisons*, a 2001 publication by Human Rights Watch, claims that male prisoner-on-prisoner sexual abuse is not an aberration; rather, it constitutes a deeply rooted systemic problem in U.S. prisons. They note, "judging by the popular media, rape is accepted as almost a commonplace of imprisonment, so much so that when the topic of prison arises, a joking reference to rape seems almost obligatory."⁴⁰ Prison authorities claim that male rape is an exceptional occurrence. The narratives of prisoners who wrote to Human Rights Watch say otherwise. Their claims are backed up by independent research that suggests high rates of forced oral and anal intercourse. In one study, 21 percent of inmates had experienced at least one episode of forced or coerced sexual contact since being incarcerated, and at least 7 percent reported being raped. Certain prisoners are targeted for sexual assault the moment they enter a penal facility. A broad range of

factors correlate with increased vulnerability to rape: "youth, small size, and physical weakness; being White, gay, or a first offender; possessing 'feminine' characteristics such as long hair or a high voice; being unassertive, unaggressive, shy, intellectual, not street-smart, or 'passive'; or having been convicted of a sexual offence against a minor."⁴¹

As is the case of rape of women, prisoners in the Human Rights Watch study, including those who had been forcibly raped, reported that the *threat* of violence is a more common factor than actual rape. A rape culture is needed to condone the actual practices associated with institutionalized rape. Once subject to sexual abuse, prisoners can easily become trapped into a sexually subordinate role. Prisoners refer to the initial rape as "turning out" the victim. Rape victims become stigmatized as "punks:" "Through the act of rape, the victim is redefined as an object of sexual abuse. He has been proven to be weak, vulnerable, 'female,' in the eyes of other inmates."⁴² Victimization is public knowledge, and the victim's reputation will follow him to other units and even to other prisons. In documenting evidence that sounds remarkably like the property relations of chattel slavery, Human Rights Watch reports on the treatment of male rape victims:

Prisoners unable to escape a situation of sexual abuse may find themselves becoming another inmate's "property." The word is commonly used in prison to refer to sexually subordinate inmates, and it is no exaggeration. Victims of prison rape, in the most extreme cases, are literally the slaves of their perpetrators. Forced to satisfy another man's sexual appetites whenever he demands, they may also be responsible for washing his clothes, massaging his back, cooking his food, cleaning his cell, and myriad other chores. They are frequently "rented out" for sex, sold, or even auctioned off to other inmates. . . . Their most basic choices, like how to dress and whom to talk to, may be controlled by the person who "owns" them. Their name may be replaced by a female one. Like all forms of slavery, these situations are among the most degrading and dehumanizing experiences a person can undergo.⁴³

Prison officials condone these practices, leaving inmates to fend for themselves. Inmates reported that they received no protection from correctional staff, even when they complained.

Analyzing the connections among imprisonment, masculinity, and power, legal scholar Teresa Miller points out that “for most male prisoners in long-term confinement, the loss of liberty suffered during incarceration is accompanied by a psychological loss of manhood.”⁴⁴ In men’s high-security prisons and large urban jails, for example, sexist, masculinized subcultures exist where power is allocated on the basis of one’s ability to resist sexual victimization (being turned into a “punk”). Guards relate to prisoners in sexually derogatory ways that emphasize the prisoners’ subordinate position. For example, guards commonly address male prisoners by sexually belittling terms such as *pussy*, *sissy*, *cunt*, and *bitch*.⁴⁵ Moreover, the social pecking order among male prisoners is established and reinforced through acts of sexual subjugation, either consensual or coerced submission to sexual penetration. The theme of dominating women has been so closely associated with hegemonic masculinity that, when biological females are unavailable, men create “women” in order to sustain hierarchies of masculinity.

Miller reports that the pecking order of prisoners consists of three general classes of prisoners: men, queens, and punks. “Men” rule the joint and establish values and norms for the entire prison population. They are political leaders, gang members, and organizers of the drug trade, sex trade, protection rackets, and smuggled contraband. A small class of “queens” (also called bitches, broads, and sissies) exists below the “men.” A small fraction of the population, they seek and are assigned a passive sexual role associated with women. As Miller points out, “the queen is the foil that instantly defined his partner as a ‘man.’”⁴⁶ However, “queens” are denied positions of power within the inmate economy. “Punks” or “bitches” occupy the bottom of the prison hierarchy. “Punks” are male prisoners who have been forced into sexual submission through actual or threatened rape. As Miller points out, “punks are treated as slaves. Sexual access to their bodies is sold through prostitution, exchanged in satisfaction of debt and loaned to others for favors.”⁴⁷ In essence, “punks” are sexual property. A prisoner’s position within this hierarchy simultaneously defines his social and sexual status.

Male rape culture has several features that contribute to its effectiveness as a tool of social control. For one, in the prison context, maintaining masculinity is always in play. Miller points to the fluid nature of masculine identity: “Because status within the hierarchy is acquired through the

forcible subjugation of others, and one’s status as a man can be lost irretrievably through a single incident of sexual submission, ‘men’ must constantly demonstrate their manhood through sexual conquest. Those who do not vigorously demonstrate their manhood through sexual conquest are more apt to be challenged and be potentially overpowered. Hence, the surest way to minimize the risk of demotion is to aggressively prey on other prisoners.”⁴⁸ Consensual and forced sexual contact among men in prison has become more common.⁴⁹ Because masculinity is so fluid and is the subject of struggle, it is important to note that sexual relations between men does not mean that they are homosexuals. Rather, sexual dominance matters. Those men who are treated as if they were women, for example, the “queens” who voluntarily submit to the sexual advances of other men and are orally or anally “penetrated” like women, may become lesser, less “manly” men in prison but need not be homosexuals. Moreover, those men who are forcibly penetrated and labeled “punks” may experience a subordinated masculinity in prison, but upon release from prison, they too can regain status as “men.” Engaging in sexual acts typically reserved for women (being penetrated) becomes the mark of subordinated masculinity. In contrast, those men who are “on top” or who are serviced by subordinate men retain their heterosexuality. In fact, their masculinity may be enhanced by a hyper-masculinity that is so powerful that it can turn men into women.

Another important feature of male rape culture in prison concerns its effects on sexual identities. Since male prisoner-on-prisoner rape involves persons of the same sex, it is often misnamed “homosexual rape” that is thought to be perpetrated by “homosexual predators.” This terminology ignores the fact that the vast majority of prison rapists do not view themselves as being gay. Rather, they are heterosexuals who see their victim as substituting for a woman. Because sexual identities as heterosexual or homosexual constitute fluid rather than fixed categories, masculinity in the prison context is performed and constructed.⁵⁰ The sexual practices associated with rape—forced anal and oral penetration—determine sexual classification as “real” men or “punks,” not biological maleness. In this predatory environment, it is important to be the one who “fucks with” others, not the one who “sucks dick” or who is “fucked in the ass.” As one Illinois prisoner explains it: “the theory is that you are not gay or bisexual as long as YOU yourself do not allow another man to stick his penis into

your mouth or anal passage. If you do the sticking, you can still consider yourself to be a macho man/heterosexual."⁵¹ The meaningful distinction in prison is not between men who engage in sex with men and in sex with women, but between what are deemed "active" and "passive" participants in the sexual act.⁵²

Installing a male rape culture in prison has the added important feature of shaping racial identities. White men rarely rape Black men. Instead, African American men are often involved in the rape of White men who fit the categories of vulnerability.⁵³ One Texas prisoner describes the racial dynamics of sexual assault: "Part of it is revenge against what the non-white prisoners call, 'The White Man,' meaning authority and the justice system. A common comment is, 'ya'll may run it out there, but this is our world!'"⁵⁴ Another prisoner sheds additional light on this phenomenon: "In my experience having a 'boy' (meaning white man) to a Negro in prison is sort of a 'trophy' to his fellow black inmates. And I think the root of the problem goes back a long time ago to when the African Americans were in the bonds of slavery. They have a favorite remark: 'It ain't no fun when the rabbit's got the gun, is it?'"⁵⁵ Drawing upon psychoanalytic theory, William Pinar offers one explanation for these racial patterns: "Straight black men could have figured out many kinds of revenge, could they not: physical maiming for one, murder for another. But somehow black men knew exactly what form revenge must be once they were on 'top,' the same form that 'race relations' have taken (and continues to take) in the United States. 'Race' has been about getting fucked, castrated, made into somebody's 'punk,' politically, economically, and, yes, sexually."⁵⁶

Yet another important feature of male rape culture in prison that shows the effectiveness of this form of sexual violence concerns its effects on male victims/survivors. Men who are raped often describe symptoms that are remarkably similar to those of female rape victims, namely, a form of posttraumatic stress disorder described as a rape trauma syndrome. Men expressed depression, anxiety, and despair, with some attempting suicide.⁵⁷ Another devastating consequence is the transmission of HIV.⁵⁸ However, because male rape victims are men, they still have access to masculinity and male power, if they decide to claim it. As one Texas prisoner described his experiences in the rape culture: "It's fixed where if you're raped, the only way you [can escape being a punk is if] you rape someone else. Yes I know that's fully screwed, but that's how your head is twisted.

After it's over you may be disgusted with yourself, but you realize that you're not powerless and that you can deliver as well as receive pain."⁵⁹ Because prison authorities typically deny that male rape is a problem, this inmate's response is rational. As one inmate in a Minnesota prison points out, "When a man gets raped nobody gives a damn. Even the officers laugh about it. I bet he's going to be walking with a limp ha ha ha. I've heard them."⁶⁰

It is important to remember that the vast majority of African American men are not rapists nor have they been raped. However, male rape in prison as a form of sexual dominance and its clear ties to constructing the masculine pecking order within prisons do have tremendous implications for African American male prisoners, their perceptions of Black masculinity, and the gendered relationships among all African Americans. First and foremost, such a large proportion of African American men are either locked up in state and federal prisons and/or know someone who has been incarcerated, large numbers of African American men are exposed to conceptions of Black masculinity honed within prison rape culture.⁶¹ Among those African American men who are incarcerated, those who fit the profile of those most vulnerable to abuse run the risk of becoming rape victims. In this context of violence regulated by a male rape culture, achieving Black manhood requires *not* fitting the profile and *not* assuming the position. In a sense, surviving in this male rape culture and avoiding victimization require at most becoming a predator and victimizing others and, at the least, becoming a silent witness to the sexual violence inflicted upon other men.

Second, so many African American men are in prison on any given day that we fail to realize that the vast majority of these very same men will someday be released. Black men cannot be easily classified in two types, those who are "locked up" in prison and those who remain "free" outside it. Instead, prison culture and street culture increasingly reinforce one another, and the ethos of violence that characterizes prison culture flows into a more general ethos of violence that affects all Black men. For many poor and working-class Black men, prison culture and street culture constitute separate sides of the same coin. Sociologist Elijah Anderson's "code of the streets" has become indistinguishable from the violent codes that exist in most of the nation's jails, prisons, reform schools, and detention centers. Describing young Black men's encounters with the criminal jus-

tice system as "peculiar rites of passage," criminologist Jerome Miller contends: "So many young black males are now routinely socialized to the routines of arrest, booking, jailing, detention, and imprisonment that it should come as no surprise that they bring back into the streets the violent ethics of survival which characterize these procedures."⁶² For middle-class Black men who lack the actual experiences of prison and street culture, mass media representations of gangstas as authentic symbols of Black masculinity help fill the void. They may not be actual gangstas, but they must be cognizant that they could easily be mistaken as criminals. Varieties of Black masculinity worked through in prisons and on the streets strive to find some place both within and/or respite from this ethos of violence.

Black men who have served time in prison and are then released bring home this ethos of violence and its culpability in shaping Black masculinity. Certainly these men are denied access to full citizenship rights, for example, having a prison record disqualifies large numbers of Black men from getting jobs, ever holding jobs as police officers, or even voting. But an equally damaging effect lies in the views of Black masculinity that these men carry with them through the revolving doors of street and prison culture, especially when being victims or perpetrators within a male rape culture frames their conceptions of gender and sexuality. One wonders what effects these forms of Black masculinity are having on African American men, as well as their sexual partners, their children, and African American communities.

As sociologist Melvin Oliver points out in *The Violent Social World of Black Men*, African American men live in a climate of violence.⁶³ Because the American public routinely perceives African American men as actual or potential criminals, it often overlooks the climate of fear that affects Black boys, Black men on the street, and Black men in prison. In his memoir titled *Fist, Stick, Knife, Gun: A Personal History of Violence in America*, Geoffrey Canada details how he and his brothers had to work out elaborate strategies for negotiating the streets of their childhood, all in efforts to arrive safely at school, or buy items at the grocery store. As children of a single mother, they lacked the protection of an older Black man, thus making them vulnerable in the pecking order among Black men.⁶⁴ All Black boys must negotiate this climate of fear, yet it often takes an especially tragic incident to arouse public protest about Black boys who victimize one another. For example, in 1994, five-year-old Eric Morse was dropped from

a fourteenth floor apartment window to his death in the Ida B. Wells public housing project in Chicago. His tormentors allegedly threw him down a stairwell, stabbed him, and sprayed him with Mace before dropping him from the window. The two boys convicted of murdering him were ten and eleven years old.

The question of how the ethos of violence affects Black male adolescents is of special concern. In many African American inner-city neighborhoods, the presence of gang violence demonstrates a synergistic relationship between Black masculinity and violence. Research on Black male youth illustrates an alarming shift in the meaning of adolescence for men in large, urban areas. Autobiographical work by David Dawes on the Young Lords of Chicago, Nathan McCall recalling his youth in a small city in Virginia, and Sayinka Shakur's chilling autobiography that details how his involvement in gang violence in Los Angeles earned him the nickname "Monster" all delineate shocking levels of Black male violence.⁶⁵ As revealed in these works, many young Black men participate in well-armed street gangs that resemble military units in which they are routinely pressured to shoot and kill one another. In these conditions, it becomes very difficult for Black boys to grow up without fear of violence and become men who refuse to use violence against others.

Only recently have scholars turned their attention to the effects that living in fear in climates of violence might have both on the quality of African American men's lives and on their conceptions of Black masculinity. Sociologist Al Young conducted extensive interviews with young Black men who were in their twenties, with some surprising findings. The men in his study did not exhibit the swagger and bravado associated with glorified hip-hop images of gangstas, thugs, and hustlers. Instead, these men shared stories of living in fear of being victimized, of dropping out of school because they were afraid to go, of spending considerable time figuring out how to avoid joining gangs, and, as a result, becoming cut off from all sorts of human relationships.⁶⁶ Some suggest that Black men have given up hope, or as columnist Joan Morgan states: "When brothers can talk so cavalierly about killing each other and then reveal that they have no expectation to see their twenty-first birthday, that is straight-up depression masquerading as machismo."⁶⁷

Unlike Young's work, the effects of violence on African American men, especially those with firsthand knowledge of a prison male rape cul-

ture, have been neglected within social science research. Moreover, the effects of sexual violence on African American men also generates new social problems for African American families, communities, and American society overall. As the graphic discussion of the male "slaves" as property within the penal system indicates, many Black men victimize one another and strive to reproduce the same male pecking order *within* African American communities that they learn and understand as masculine within prison. These men victimize not just women and children; they harm other men and place all in a climate of fear.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE REVISITED

The new racism reflects changes in mechanisms of social control of the post-civil rights era. Lynching and rape as forms of violence still permeate U.S. society, but because they no longer are as closely associated with the binary thinking of the logic of segregation, these seemingly gender-specific practices of sexual violence are organized in new ways. First, movies, films, music videos, and other mass media spectacles that depict Black men as violent and that punish them for it have replaced the historical spectacles provided by live, public lynchings. When combined with the criminalization of Black men's behavior that incarcerates so many men, the combination of mass media images and institutional practices justifies these gender-specific mechanisms of control. For example, as vicarious participants in spectator sports, audience members can watch as men in general, and African American men in particular, get beaten, pushed, trampled, and occasionally killed, primarily in football arenas and boxing rings. The erotic arousal that many spectators might feel from viewing violence that historically came in attending live events (the violence visited upon the lynch victim being one egregious example of this situation) can be experienced vicariously in the anonymity of huge sports arenas and privately via cable television. Films and other forms of visual media provide another venue for framing societal violence. Contemporary films, for example, the slasher horror films targeted to adolescents, produce images of violence that rival the most gruesome lynchings of the past. Lynching is no longer a live show confined to African American men, but, as is the case with other forms of entertainment, has moved into the field of representations and images. Thus, there is the same ability to watch killing, but

in the safety of one's living room, with DVD technology allowing the scene to be replayed. Both of these mass media spectacles fit nicely with the lack of responsibility associated with the new racism. Viewers need not "know" their victims, and violence can be blamed on the "bad guys" in the film or on governmental or corporate corruption. Witnessing beatings, tortures, and murders as spectator sport fosters a curious community solidarity that feeds back into a distinctly American ethos of violence associated with the frontier and slavery. Black men are well represented within this industry of media violence, typically as criminals whose death should be celebrated, and often as murder victims who are killed as "collateral damage" to the exploits of the real hero.

Second, in this new context of mass media glorification of violence, rape of women (but not of men) along with the constellation of practices and ideas that comprise rape culture has been moved from the hidden place of privacy of the past and also displayed as spectacle. Whether in Hollywood feature films, independent films such as Spike Lee's *She's Gotta Have It*, or the explosion of pornography as lucrative big business, viewers can now see women raped, beaten, tortured, and killed. Clearly, the ideas of a rape culture persist as a fundamental form of sexual dominance that affects African American women. As feminists remind us, thinking about rape not as a discrete act of violence but as part of a systemic pattern of violence reveals how social institutions and the idea structures that surround rape work to control actual and potential victims. Not every woman needs to be raped to have the *fear* of rape function as a powerful mechanism of social control in everyday life. Women routinely adjust their behavior for fear of being raped. The workings of a rape culture, the privacy of the act, the secrecy, the humiliation of being a rape victim, seem especially well suited to the workings of routinization of violence as a part of the "normalized war" that characterizes desegregation. Rape becomes more readily available as a public tool of sexual dominance. At the same time, prison rape of men is not taken seriously and does not routinely appear as entertainment.

Third, the mechanisms of social control associated with a rape culture and with institutionalized rape might be especially effective in maintaining a new racism grounded in advancing myths of integration that mask actual social relations of segregation. Both Black men and Black women are required to "assume the position" of subordination within a new multicult-

tural America, and the practices of a rape culture help foster this outcome. Most Americans live far more segregated lives than mass media leads them to believe. The vast majority of men and women, Blacks and Whites, and straights and gays still fit into clearly identifiable categories of gender, race, and sexuality, the hallmark of a logic of segregation. At the same time, the increased visibility and/or vocality of individuals and groups that no longer clearly fit within these same categories have changed the political and intellectual landscape. For example, many middle-class African Americans now live in the unstable in-between spaces of racially desegregated neighborhoods; lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) people who have come out of the closet undercut the invisibility required for assumptions of heterosexism; some working-class kids of all races now attend elite universities; and biracial children of interracial romantic relationships have challenged binary understandings of race. Crossing borders, dissolving boundaries, and other evidence of an imperfect desegregation does characterize the experiences of a substantial minority of the American population.

When it comes to African Americans, focusing too closely on these important changes can leave the impression that much more change is occurring than actually is. The record on African American racial desegregation is far less rosy. This illusion of racial integration, especially that presented in a powerful mass media, masks the persistence of racial segregation for African Americans, especially the racial hypersegregation of large urban areas. Maintaining racial boundaries in this more fluid, desegregated situation requires not just revised representations of Black people in mass media but also requires new social practices that maintain social control yet do not have the visibility of past practices. Institutionalized rape serves as a mechanism for maintaining gender hierarchies of masculinity and femininity. But institutionalized rape and the workings of rape culture can also serve as effective tools of social control within racially desegregated settings precisely because they intimidate and silence victims and encourage decent people to become predators in order to avoid becoming victims. In this sense, the lessons from a rape culture become important in a society that is saturated with relations of war against segments of its own population but that presents itself as fair, open, and without problems.

Finally, these emerging modes of social control have important implications for antiracist African American politics generally and for develop-

ing a more progressive Black sexual politics in particular. Violence constitutes a major social problem for African Americans. State violence is certainly important, but the violence that African Americans inflict upon one another can do equal if not more damage. When confronting a social problem of this magnitude, rethinking Black gender ideology, especially the ways in which ideas about masculinity and femininity shape Black politics becomes essential. As the Clarence Thomas confirmation revealed, African Americans' failure to understand the gendered contours of sexual violence led them to choose race over gender. Incidents such as this suggest that Black leaders have been unable to help either Black women or Black men deal with the structural violence of the new racism because such leaders typically fail to question prevailing Black gender ideology. What happens when men incorporate ideas about violence (as an expression of dominance) into their definitions of Black masculinity? Can they remain "real" men if they do not engage in violence? How much physical, emotional, and/or sexual abuse should a "strong" Black woman absorb in order to avoid community censure? Stopping the violence will entail much more than Black organizations who protest state-sanctioned violence by White men against Black ones. Because violence flows from social injustices of race, class, gender, sexuality, and age, for African American women and men, eradicating violence requires a new Black sexual politics dedicated to a more expansive notion of social justice.

27. Patterson 1982, 61.
28. Patterson 1982, 61.
29. Banks 2000, 29.
30. Girls constitute a related benchmark used to construct hegemonic femininity. Girls are allegedly pure, innocent, and sexual virgins. They should be unspoiled. Interestingly, representations of young women/girls within contemporary popular culture contain the contradictions currently plaguing views of young White womanhood. On the one hand, women are expected to aspire to a body type that approximates that of adolescent girls. The inordinate pressure placed on thinness within U.S. society advances a social-norm that values youth. At the same time, these same inordinately thin adolescent girls are dressed as highly sexualized women within high fashion. Black women as sexualized, full-figured women become juxtaposed to the thin, young, fragile and increasingly ornamental and sexualized young White girls.
31. Torgovnick 1990, 53. This theme of White female submissiveness also appears in other major icons of Western popular culture. For example, the various remakes of *King Kong* take this need to rescue White womanhood from sexual predators to an entirely new level. With *King Kong* theorized to be symbolic of Black men as animals or "apes" run amuck, just as Jane needed saving from the predators in the jungle, the White woman in Manhattan needed saving from a lustful Kong now transplanted to an urban jungle (Dines 1998).
32. Naylor 1988, 28.
33. Gomez 1999, 174. Gomez observes that Black lesbians are rarely represented on film or in print and that, if they are, the fully developed characters presented by Audre Lorde or Alice Walker are missing. Instead, Black lesbians are typically presented as tragic (television adaptation of *The Women of Brewster Place*), as peripheral to the main story, or as caricature (Cleo played by Queen Latifah). Given this history, the character of Kima on the HBO series *The Wire* constitutes a breakthrough character.
34. Collins 2000b.
35. For general discussions of Black women, family, and work, see Giddings 1984; Jones 1985.
36. This recognition does not mean that race and gender discrimination were given equal weight within African American politics. Black feminist analyses of Black women's subordination have long been present, but, until the post-civil rights era, they have functioned as a minor strand within Black community politics (Collins 2000a).
37. Calmore 2001.
38. Petterson 1997.
39. Petterson 1997, 605.
40. Neal 2002, 68.
41. Black women's unwillingness to confront the SBW image can foster Black women's vulnerability to domestic violence (Richie 1996) as well as their experiences with incest and sexual abuse (Wilson 1994; White 1985b).
42. Baldwin 1993, 217.
43. Mercer 1994, 171-220.
44. Mercer 1994, 174.
45. See the photograph on p. 186 in Mercer 1994, 174.
46. Denizet-Lewis 2003, 30.

47. This was a major plank in the platform of turn-of-the-twentieth-century Black Club Women (Giddings 1984).
48. For discussions of hypersegregation, see Massey and Denton 1993. For discussions of the erosion of Black institutions, see Gregory 1994.
49. Jones 1994, 92.
50. McClary and Walser 1994.
51. Racial integration may be one marker of the post-civil rights era, but it is clear that it has been accompanied by dramatic increases in the incarceration rates of African American men. In the last half of the twentieth century, especially during the post-civil rights era, the incarceration rates of African Americans in relation to Whites went up dramatically. In 1933, Blacks were incarcerated at a rate approximately three times that for Whites. By 1950, the rate was 4 to 1; in 1960, it was 5 to 1; in 1970 it was 6 to 1, and by the 1980s, it was 7 to 1 (Miller 1996, 88). Various expressions of racial bias in all phases of the criminal justice system have, by now, been well documented as producing this outcome (Miller 1996, 48-88).
52. This growing interconnectedness of prison, street, and youth culture, with the importance given to hierarchies of masculinity, became repackaged and sold within the commodified relations of global mass media. These ideas now permeate not only African American culture but also have become markers of a new form of authentic Blackness.

CHAPTER SEVEN

1. Hill 1997, 13.
2. African Americans may have lost far more than Anita Hill as a result of Thomas's appointment. Routinely aligning himself with its most conservative wing, Thomas's record on the Supreme Court concerning racism has been disappointing to labor organizations, women's constituencies, and civil rights groups. Anita Hill also suffered personal loss. In the ten years following the hearings, Hill experienced hate mail, unwanted phone calls, and death threats. In contrast, Thomas has remained on the Supreme Court, enjoying its privileges. Hill was virtually run out of her job as a law professor at the University of Oklahoma and underwent persistent harassment by students, colleagues, and strangers on the street (Hill 1997).
3. Crenshaw 1992, 405.
4. Wells-Barnett 2002; Davis 1978.
5. For a discussion of consensus and cross-cutting issues within Black politics, see Cohen 1999.
6. Lynching has not always been so central to Black antiracist politics. See historian Paula Giddings' analysis of Black leadership, which initially took little action concerning lynching before Ida B. Wells-Barnett's solitary crusade (Giddings 2001).
7. Beck and Tolnay 1992, 22.
8. Harris 1984, 19.
9. Beck and Tolnay 1992, 7-8.
10. Gender analyses shed light on why castration reappears in accounts of Black male lynchings. Robyn Wiegman provides a psychoanalytic analysis of lynching that examines its power in terms of national identity—the end of slavery constituted a rebirth of the nation that needed to develop new race relations. African American bodies were no longer commodities, and making this transition from slavery to the

reenslavement of Jim Crow de jure segregation required a complicated process of reworking Black male sexuality and African American masculinity. Wiegman suggests that lynching served as a "threat of ritualized death" that provided one means for hegemonic White masculinity to be rearticulated within the uncertainties of postemancipation. As Wiegman points out, "not only does lynching enact a grotesquely symbolic—if not literal—sexual encounter between the white mob and its victim, but the increasing utilization of castration as a preferred form of mutilation for African American men demonstrates lynching's connection to the sociosymbolic realm of sexual difference. In the disciplinary fusion of castration with lynching, the mob severs the black male from the masculine, interrupting the privilege of the phallus, and thereby reclaiming, through the perversity of dismemberment, his (masculine) potentiality for citizenship" (Wiegman 1993, 224).

11. Collins 2000a, 53–55.
12. Dash 1996, 225.
13. Dash 1996, 226.
14. Dash 1996, 226.
15. In 1892, Ida B. Wells-Barnett learned firsthand the lengths to which some White citizens of Memphis were willing to go to maintain African American political and economic subordination. In March, Memphis Whites lynched three successful African American managers of a grocery business. Wells knew all three men, and also understood that they were resented because their store successfully competed with a White store. This painful personal experience of her friends' lynching was a turning point in Wells-Barnett's commitment to social justice activism. Wells-Barnett wrote an editorial that, for 1892, advanced the shocking hypothesis that not only were African American men often falsely accused of rape but also that because some White women were attracted to Black men, some sexual relations that did occur between African American men and White women were consensual. Fortunately, when the editorial appeared, Wells-Barnett was out of town or she too might have been lynched. Memphis citizens burned down the *Free Speech* and threatened Wells-Barnett's life if she ever returned to Memphis. This shocking catalyst marked the beginning of Ida Wells-Barnett's impressive over-twenty-year crusade against lynching that took the form of going on speaking tours, publishing editorials, preparing pamphlets, organizing community services, participating in women's and civil rights groups, and publishing *Southern Horrors*, *A Red Record*, and *Mob Rule in New Orleans*, three of Wells-Barnett's important pamphlets on lynching (Wells-Barnett 2002).
16. Wells-Barnett 2002, 6.
17. James 1996; Giddings 2001.
18. These ideas come from Ann Stoler's excellent analysis of Michel Foucault's ideas about race. Stoler states: "as 'private wars' were cancelled and war was made the prerogative of states, as war proper moves to the margins of the social body, as society is 'cleansed of war-like relations' that this 'strange,' 'new' discovery emerged, one in which society itself was conceived as an entity saturated with the relations of war" (Stoler 1995, 64–65).
19. Bandele 1999, 86.
20. See Wilson 1994 and Pierce-Baker 1998, 117–139. African American adolescent mothers also report that the fathers of their babies are much older men (Kaplan 1997).
21. Painter 1992, 213.
22. Pierce-Baker 1998, 64.
23. Cleage 1993.
24. Pierce-Baker 1998, 91.
25. West 1999, 59.
26. Because so many African American women live in large, racially segregated urban areas, Black women more likely to be victims of rape than White women—reported rapes are 1.4 to 1.7 times higher. Yet such women are less likely to have their rape cases come to trial than White women, and they are less likely to get convictions for those cases that do come to trial. Moreover, African American women who are sexually assaulted are less likely to use rape-counseling services. It is important to stress that patterns of Black male violence against Black women occur within a broader social context in which the routinization of violence works to desensitize everyone to its effects. Viewing one's first violent movie may be shocking—viewing the fiftieth film has far less impact. The genre of stalker films that make raping and killing women a spectator sport contributes to this broader climate of violence against women. Black men whose violent behavior is targeted toward Black women are certainly not immune from these societal pressures.
27. Bell 1999, 240.
28. Childhood sexual assault (Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*); family violence (see Alice Walker's fiction, especially *The Color Purple* and *The Third Life of George Copeland*), and the effects of rape on African American women (Gayl Jones's *Eva's Man*) have all been explored in African American women's fiction. Black women's essays examine similar themes. Statements about the pain of rape (Austin 1993), rape as a tool of political control (Davis 1981), and the pervasiveness of violence in African American civil society (Cleage 1993) all have received considerable treatment in African American women's writings. Increasingly, womanist theologians are providing a new interpretive context that encourages Black women to speak out about abuse. See Douglas 1999 and West 1999.
29. Awkward 1999, 137.
30. Wyatt 1992, 87.
31. Pierce-Baker 1998, 136.
32. Supplementing survey data with interviews with 126 African American and 122 White women in the Los Angeles area conducted by a same race interviewer, Wyatt investigated women's perceptions of rape. Wyatt's interviewees also asked the question, "Why do you think you were victimized?" African American women were significantly more likely than White women to offer explanations about their victimization that involved the riskiness of their living circumstances (Wyatt 1992, 84).
33. Wyatt 1992, 85.
34. Pierce-Baker 1998, 124.
35. Pierce-Baker 1998, 161.
36. West 1999, 58.
37. Omolade 1994, 89.
38. Powell 2000, 74.
39. Miller 1996, 1–9.
40. Human Rights Watch 2001, 3.
41. Human Rights Watch 2001, 5.
42. Human Rights Watch 2001, 7.

43. Human Rights Watch 2001, 8.
44. Miller 2000, 300.
45. Material in this section is taken from Miller 2000, 300.
46. Miller 2000, 302.
47. Miller 2000, 303.
48. Miller 2000, 303.
49. Human Rights Watch 2001.
50. Sociologist R. W. Connell offers an explanation for the fluidity of gender categories: "In our culture, men who have sex with men are generally oppressed, but they are not definitively excluded from masculinity. Rather, they face structurally-induced conflicts about masculinity—conflicts between their sexuality and their social presence as men, about the meaning of their choice of sexual object, and in their construction of relationships with women and with heterosexual men" (Connell 1992, 737).
51. Human Rights Watch 2001, 70.
52. Violence targeted against gay Black men can be especially vicious, in part, because gay Black men become suitable targets for the violence. Some guards view homosexuality as an open invitation to sexuality. As one prisoner, who was heterosexual, recalled: "I had an officer tell me that 'faggots like to suck dick, so why was I complaining'" (Human Rights Watch 2001, 114).
53. Pinar 2001, 1031–1046. Given the myth of the Black rapist, placing Black men in prison situations in which they are encouraged to rape other men produces the very stereotype created in the postemancipation era. Black men become dangerous, a reason to keep them locked up.
54. Human Rights Watch 2001, 169.
55. Human Rights Watch 2001, 216.
56. Pinar 2001, 1119.
57. Pinar 2001, 1053–1057.
58. Human Rights Watch 2001, 109–122.
59. Human Rights Watch 2001, 171.
60. Human Rights Watch 2001, 168.
61. African American men constituted 42 percent of those admitted to prison in 1981 and, by 1993, had become an unsettling 55 percent of those admitted (Miller 1996, 55).
62. (Miller 1996, 97). Sociologist Elijah Anderson describes the code of the street in which demanding respect and exhibiting toughness function as important dimensions of Black masculinity within inner-city neighborhoods (Anderson 1999). In his lengthy study of lynching and prison rape, William Pinar identifies another connection between prison culture and masculine identity: "Prisons are not alien womanless worlds in which men resort to unimaginable acts. Prisons disclose the profoundly womanless worlds most men in fact inhabit, in which women are fundamentally fictive, units of currency in a homosocial economy . . . perhaps most men 'live' in an all-male world intrapsychically from which women are aggressively banished. It is a sign of manhood" (Pinar 2001, 1119).
63. Oliver 1994.
64. Canada 1995.
65. McCall 1994; Shakur 1993.
66. Anecdotal, unpublished material.
67. Morgan 1999, 73.

CHAPTER EIGHT

1. Root 2001, 1. This rule may seem natural, but it actually requires constant reiteration. Most people encounter widespread societal pressure to get married. Should there be any confusion about the definition of marriage, the 1996 Federal Defense of Marriage Act felt compelled to clarify it: "In determining the meaning of any Act of Congress, or of any ruling, regulation or interpretation of the various administrative bureaus and agencies of the United States, the word 'marriage' means only a legal union between one man and one woman as husband and wife, and the word 'spouse' refers only to a person of the different sex who is a husband or wife" (U.S. Census Bureau 2000). One wonders just who is attacking marriage if Congress feels that it must pass laws to "defend" it.
2. Social movements for Black and Latino civil rights, for women's rights, and for the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) people, among others, profoundly changed historical relations of segregation. Whether racial segregation in schools, housing, and public life; of gender segregation of women and men into separate spheres of life; of heterosexuals from gays and lesbians through the forced closeting of sexual minorities; and of national policies that excluded immigration from Latin America, Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean, rigid forms of segregation are all giving way to an imperfect desegregation. Despite higher rates of residential racial segregation for African Americans than Whites, especially those living in large cities, rates of residential racial segregation dropped between 1980 and 2000 (Iceland, Weinberg, and Steinmetz 2002, 59–76). On average, all women still earn less than men, but White women in particular are closing the occupational gap—in 1999, 35 percent of non-Hispanic White women were in professional and managerial jobs compared to 32 percent of non-Hispanic White men (McKinnon and Humes 2000, 4). Assumptions about marriage and about LGBT partnerships are changing. In the 2000 census, 5.5 million couples reported living together without being married, up from 3.2 million in 1990. The majority of unmarried-partner households had partners of the different sex (4.9 million), but about 1 in 9 had partners of the same sex (Simmons and O'Connell 2003, 1). Assumptions concerning American citizenship are also changing. The Census Bureau estimated that by 2002 the foreign-born population numbered 32.5 million people, accounting for 11.5 percent of the total U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau 2003).
3. In 1998, 60 percent of all White men over the age of fifteen were married. In contrast, 41 percent of Black men fell in this category. Marital rates for White and Black women were even more disparate. For White women, 57 percent were married whereas 36 percent of Black women were married. A sizeable proportion of African Americans remain unmarried (which does not necessarily mean living without a partner)—46 percent of Black men and 41 percent of Black women were never married (U.S. Census Bureau 1999). Marital rates among African Americans may be in decline, but it is important to note that, despite the lower rates, Black men (41 percent) are more likely to be married than Black women (36 percent).
4. Marital rates are not adequate evidence of commitment. The marital rates mask the prevalence of unmarried partnerships among African Americans. Black men and women (never married, widowed, and divorced) may be identified as unmarried yet live with opposite-sex partners in unmarried-partner households. In 2000, approximately 15.5 percent of all households maintained by African