

RAPE CULTURE SYLLABUS

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SYLLABI



BY LAURA CIOLKOWSKI

I just start kissing them. Just kiss—I don't even wait. And when you're a star they let you do it. You can do anything. Whatever you want. Grab them by the pussy. You can do anything.

—Donald Trump

The video was released on Friday, October 7. At the presidential debate two days later, when CNN moderator Anderson Cooper asked the Republican nominee Donald Trump to explain his apparently predatory behavior to the nation, Trump dismissed his deep-seated serial misogyny and nonconsensual sexual advances as mere “locker room talk.” [Repeatedly.](#)

Afterward, in the GOP spin room, [Alabama Senator Jeff Sessions](#) staunchly defended his ally, insisting, contrary to [the Department of Justice's definition](#), that grabbing a woman's genitals without her consent was not sexual assault. On Wednesday, in the *New York Times*, two women gave their own detailed accounts of having been [sexually assaulted by Trump](#); another woman, a *People* magazine journalist, also came forward to [share her story](#). On Thursday, delivering an [impassioned speech](#) in New Hampshire, Michelle Obama called out Trump as a sexual predator who routinely abuses his male privilege and power: "This wasn't locker room banter. This was a powerful individual speaking freely and openly about sexually predatory behavior, and actually bragging about kissing and groping women ... It reminds us of stories we heard from our mothers and grandmothers about how, back in their day, the boss could say and do whatever he pleased to the women in the office."

The furor went national after the release of the video, but the problems had started much earlier: when Trump's lawyer claimed it was [legal to rape your spouse](#); when Trump, in campaign speeches across the country, [called Mexican immigrants rapists](#); when he [continued to assert the guilt of the Central Park Five](#), who were wrongfully convicted of rape and finally exonerated by DNA evidence after serving years in prison.

The Trump video inspired the writer Kelly Oxford to invite women to tweet at her the [stories of their first assaults](#); by Monday, she had received thousands of testimonies about flashings, gropings, and rapes; along the way, Oxford's account was viewed some 30 million times. Building in intensity throughout the year—in the courts, on college campuses, throughout the blogosphere, and on Facebook pages, Snapchat stories, and Twitter feeds—suddenly it seemed the phrase "rape culture" dominated the national conversation. Rape culture refers to the trivializing of sexual violence and the tendency to blame victims while exonerating or excusing assailants. It also refers to the racial disparities in arrests and sentencing of accused rapists. We need look no further than [the notorious case of Brock Turner](#), a Stanford student who was found guilty of three counts of felony sexual assault, and yet was handed an uncharacteristically lenient sentence by a questionable judge. Even more devastating in its reach, [the Department of Justice recently concluded](#) that the Baltimore City Police, among other crimes, "seriously and systematically under-investigates reports of sexual assault."

Scholars and activists, poets and playwrights have been writing about rape for centuries. What would the conversation around sexual assault, police bias, and the legal system look like if investigators, police officers, and judges read deeply into the literature on sexuality, racial justice, violence, and power? It is in view of this question that the following syllabus is offered as a scholarly resource—and object of critical discussion and debate—on "rape culture" in the 21st century.



The first SlutWalk, an international protest against rape culture, in Toronto, 2011. Photograph by Anton Bielousov / Wikimedia Commons

Week 1: Histories of Gender-Based Violence in the US

No matter whether the slave girl be as black as ebony or as fair as her mistress. In either case, there is no shadow of law to protect her from insult, from violence, or even from death; all these are inflicted by fiends who bear the shape of men.

—“Linda Brent,” pseudonym of the former slave and author Harriet Ann Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861)

- Sharon Block, *Rape and Sexual Power in Early America* (University of North Carolina Press, 2006).
- Saidiya Hartman, “Seduction and the Ruses of Power” in *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford University Press, 1997).
- Lucy Stone, “Crimes Against Women,” *Women’s Journal*, June 16, 1877; “Pardoning the Crime of Rape,” *Woman’s Journal*, May 25, 1878.
- Ida B. Wells, “Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases” (1892), “A Red Record” (1895), “Mob Rule in New Orleans” (1900).
- Crystal Feimster, *Southern Horrors: Women and the Politics of Rape and Lynching* (Harvard University Press, 2011).
- Danielle McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance—A New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (Vintage Books, 2011).
- Estelle Freedman, *Redefining Rape: Sexual Violence in the Era of Suffrage and Segregation* (Harvard University Press, 2013).

- Aishah Shahidah Simmons and Farah Tanis, “Better off Dead: Black Women Speak to the United Nations CERD Committee,” *The Feminist Wire*, September 5, 2014.

Week 2: Second-Wave Feminism and Sexual Violence

Rape is a crime not of lust, but of violence and power.

—Susan Brownmiller

- Maria Bevacqua, *Rape on the Public Agenda: Feminism and the Politics of Sexual Assault* (Northeastern University Press, 2000).
- Emilie Buchwald, Pamela Fletcher, and Martha Roth, eds., *Transforming a Rape Culture* (Milkweed, 2005).
- Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* (Simon & Schuster, 1975).
- Angela Davis, “We Do Not Consent: Violence Against Women in a Racist Society,” in *Women, Culture, and Politics* (Vintage, 1990); “Rape, Racism, and the Myth of the Black Rapist,” in *Women, Race, and Class* (Vintage, 1983).
- Susan Estrich, *Real Rape* (Harvard University Press, 1987).
- Susan Griffin, “Rape: The All-American Crime,” *Ramparts Magazine*, September 1971.
- Catherine MacKinnon, “A Rally Against Rape,” in *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law* (Harvard University Press, 1988); “Rape: On Coercion and Consent,” in *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* (Harvard University Press, 1991).
- Carine M. Mardorossian, *Framing the Rape Victim: Gender and Agency Reconsidered* (Rutgers University Press, 2014).

Week 3: The Politics of Rape and Resistance

You took away my worth, my privacy, my energy, my time, my safety, my intimacy, my confidence, my own voice, until today.

—Victim Impact Statement in the case against Brock Turner

- Noreen Abdullah-Khan, *Male Rape: The Emergence of a Social and Legal Issue* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).
- Kristin Bumiller, *In an Abusive State: How Neoliberalism Appropriated the Feminist Movement against Sexual Violence* (Duke University Press, 2008).
- Katie Cappiello and Meg McInerney, eds., *SLUT: A Play and Guidebook for Combating*

Sexism and Sexual Violence (Feminist Press, 2015).

- Kimberle Crenshaw, “[Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color](#),” *Stanford Law Review*, vol. 43, no. 6 (July 1991).
- Sharon Marcus, “Fighting Bodies, Fighting Words: A Theory and Politics of Rape Prevention,” in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, edited by Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (Routledge, 1992).
- Juliet November, “It Takes Ass to Whip Ass: Understanding and Confronting Violence Against Sex Workers: A Roundtable Discussion with Miss Major, Mariko Passion, and Jessica Yee,” in *The Revolution Starts at Home: Confronting Intimate Violence Within Activist Communities*, edited by Ching-In Chen, Jai Dulani, and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (AK Press, 2016).
- Aishah Shahidah Simmons, “[NO! The Rape Documentary](#)” (film, 2006).
- Carol E. Tracy et al., “[Rape and Sexual Assault in the Legal System](#),” Women’s Law Project (2012).

Week 4: Intimate Partner Violence

And, of course, understand that by the very definition, you can't rape your spouse.

—Michael Cohen, special counsel at The Trump Organization

- The Chrysalis Collective, “Beautiful, Difficult, Powerful: Ending Sexual Assault Through Transformative Justice,” in *The Revolution Starts at Home: Confronting Intimate Violence Within Activist Communities*, edited by Ching-In Chen, Jai Dulani, and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (AK Press, 2016).
 - Janet Halley, “[The Move to Affirmative Consent](#),” *Signs: Journal of Women and Culture* (2015).
 - Jill Elaine Hasday, “[Contest and Consent: A Legal History of Marital Rape](#),” *California Law Review*, vol. 88, no. 5 (2000).
 - Victoria Law, “Sick of the Abuse: Feminist Responses to Sexual Assault, Battering, and Self-Defense,” in *The Hidden 1970s: Histories of Radicalism*, edited by Dan Berger (Rutgers University Press, 2010).
 - Diane Russell, *Rape in Marriage* (Macmillan, 1982).
 - Janelle White, “Our Silence Will Not Protect Us: Black Women’s Experiences Mobilizing to Confront Sexual Domestic Violence,” in *The Color of Violence: INCITE! Anthology* (Duke University Press, 2016).
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Week 5: Queering Violence

It is increasingly frustrating to see organizing only for “violence against women” because when I think about all the survivors I know or have engaged with over the years, not all of them are women. And not all of the “perpetrators” are men. Not even close. When we expect all survivors to fit the mainstream survivor narrative, we miss opportunities to organize and mobilize in a larger capacity.

—Jennifer Patterson, poet/writer/editor

- Rus Ervin Funk, “Queer Men and Sexual Assault: What Being Raped Says about Being a Man,” in *Gendered Outcasts and Sexual Outlaws: Sexual Oppression and Gender Hierarchies in Queer Men’s Lives*, edited by Chris Kendall and Wayne Martino (Harrington Park Press, 2006).
- Doug Meyer, “Gendered Views of Sexual Assault, Physical Violence, and Verbal Abuse,” in *Violence against Queer People: Race, Class, Gender, and the Persistence of Anti-LGBT Discrimination* (Rutgers University Press, 2015).
- Jennifer Patterson, ed., *Queering Sexual Violence: Radical Voices from Within the Anti-Violence Movement* (Riverdale Ave Books, 2016).
- Janice L. Ristock, *Intimate Partner Violence in LGBTQ Lives* (Routledge, 2011).
- Christine Peek, “Breaking out of the Prison Hierarchy: Transgender Prisoners, Rape, and the Eighth Amendment,” *Santa Clara Law Review*, vol. 44, no. 4 (2004).
- Philip Rumney, “Gay Male Rape Victims: Law Enforcement, Social Attitudes and Barriers to Recognition,” *International Journal of Human Rights*, vol. 13, nos. 2–3 (2009).

Week 6: Privilege and Power

I’ve lost my chance to swim in the Olympics. I’ve lost my ability to obtain a Stanford degree. I’ve lost employment opportunity, my reputation, and most of all, my life.

—Brock Turner’s statement to the court after being found guilty on three counts of sexual assault

His life will never be the one that he dreamed about and worked so hard to achieve. That is a steep price to pay for 20 minutes of action out of his 20-plus years of life.

—Dan Turner, Brock’s father

- Michael Kimmel and Abby Ferber, eds., *Privilege: A Reader* (Westview Press, 2016).

- Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (Spiegel & Grau, 2015).
- Roxane Gay, “Peculiar Benefits,” *The Rumpus*, May 16, 2012.
- Peggy McIntosh, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack.”
- Toni Morrison, ed., *Race-ing Justice, En-Gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality* (Pantheon, 1992).
- Keeanga-Yamahatta Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* (Haymarket, 2016).
- Dave Zirin, “Jameis Winston’s Peculiar Kind of Privilege,” *The Nation*, December 5, 2014.



Florida supporters of Donald Trump, 2016. Photograph by mollyesque / Instagram

Week 7: Rape as Sport

An athlete's sense of entitlement to a woman's body is exacerbated because he has been idolized and put on a pedestal in a hyper-masculine culture. "Not only am I a man, but I am also a strong and successful man. Why would someone say no? You should all want me."

—DeAndre Levy, linebacker for the Detroit Lions

- Varda Burstyn, *The Rites of Men: Manhood, Politics, and the Culture of Sport* (University of Toronto Press, 1999).
- DeAndry Levy, “Man Up,” *The Players’ Tribune*, April 27, 2016.
- Jessica Luther, *Unsportsmanlike Conduct: College Football and the Politics of Rape* (Akashic, 2016).
- Nicholas L. Syrett, *The Company He Keeps: A History of White College Fraternities* (University of North Carolina Press, 2009).
- Dave Zirin, “Steubenville and Challenging Rape Culture in Sports,” *The Nation*, March 13, 2013.
- Dave Zirin, “How Jock Culture Supports Rape Culture, From Maryville to Steubenville,” *The Nation*, October 25, 2013.

Week 8: Toxic Masculinity: Gender and Violence in the US

Brock Turner was an all-American boy: a white, Division I swimmer at one of the nation’s top universities. What he did to his victim was arguably all-American, too, confirmed by decades of research tying rape to a sense of male superiority and entitlement.

—Lisa Wade, Professor of Sociology, Occidental College

- Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917* (University of Chicago Press, 1995).
- R. W. Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd ed. (University of California Press, 2005).
- Steve Estes, *I Am a Man! Race, Manhood, and the Civil Rights Movement* (University of North Carolina Press, 2005).
- David Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts of Masculinity* (Yale University Press, 1991).
- Michael Kimmel, *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men* (Harper Perennial, 2009).
- Michael Kimmel, *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era* (Nation Books, 2015).
- C. J. Pascoe and Tristan Bridges, eds., *Exploring Masculinities: Identity, Inequality, Continuity and Change* (Oxford University Press, 2015).
- C. J. Pascoe and Jocelyn A. Hollander, “Good Guys Don’t Rape: Gender, Domination, and Mobilizing Rape,” *Gender & Society*, vol. 30, no. 1 (2016), pp. 67–79.
- Diana Scully and Joseph Marolla, “‘Riding the Bull at Gilley’s’: Convicted Rapists Describe the Rewards of Rape,” *Social Problems*, vol. 32, no. 3 (1985), pp. 251–63.

Week 9: Gender, War, and Violence

Fuck Saddam. We're taking him out.

—George W. Bush, March 2002

- Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (Verso, 2016).
- Kirsten Campbell, “Legal Memories: Sexual Assault, Memory, and International Humanitarian Law,” in *Signs*, vol. 28, no. 1 (2002), pp. 149–78.
- Cynthia Enloe, “Wielding Masculinity inside Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo,” in *Globalization and Militarism: Feminists Make the Link* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2016).
- Wendy Hesford, “Witnessing Rape Warfare: Suspending the Spectacle,” in *Spectacular Rhetorics: Human Rights Visions, Recognitions, Feminisms* (Duke University Press, 2011).
- Christina Jarvis, *The Male Body at War: American Masculinity during World War II* (Northern Illinois University Press, 2003).
- Jasbir Puar, “Abu Ghraib and U.S. Sexual Exceptionalism,” in *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Duke University Press, 2007).
- Mary Louise Roberts, *What Soldiers Do: Sex and the American GI in World War II France* (University of Chicago Press, 2013).
- Sylvanna Falcon, “Rape as a Weapon of War: Militarized Border Rape at the U.S.-Mexico Border,” in *Women and Migration in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands: A Reader*, edited by Denise A. Segura and Patricia Zavella (Duke University Press, 2007).



Mugshot of Brock Turner, 2015. Turner was found guilty by a jury of three counts of felony sexual assault, and given an uncharacteristically short prison sentence of six months, with three already served. Photograph courtesy of the State of California / Wikimedia Commons

Week 10: Unequal Justice: Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Violence in the Prison Nation

The [Baltimore City] prosecutor wrote that “This victim seems like a conniving little whore (pardon my language).” The BPD officer replied, “Lmao! I feel the same.”

—US Department of Justice Report, “Investigation of the Baltimore City Police Department,” August 10, 2016

- Critical Resistance and Incite!, “Statement on Gender Violence and the Prison Industrial Complex,” in *The Color of Violence: INCITE! Anthology* (Duke University Press, 2016).
- Marie Gottschalk, “Not the Usual Suspects: Feminists, Women’s Groups, and the Anti-Rape Movement,” in *The Prison and the Gallows: The Politics of Mass Incarceration in America* (Cambridge University Press, 2006).
- “[In the Shadows: Sexual Violence in U.S. Detention Facilities; A Shadow Report to the U.N. Committee Against Torture](#)” (2006).

- Eithne Luibheid, “Rape, Asylum, and the U.S. Border Patrol,” *Entry Denied: Controlling Sexuality at the Border* (University of Minnesota Press, 2002).
- Andrea Ritchie, “Law Enforcement Violence against Women of Color,” in *The Color of Violence: INCITE! Anthology* (Duke University Press, 2016).
- Beth E. Richie, *Arrested Justice: Black Women, Violence, and America’s Prison Nation* (Duke University Press, 2012).
- Emily Thuma, “Lessons in Self-Defense: Gender Violence, Racial Criminalization, and Anticarceral Feminism,” *WSQ: Women’s Studies Quarterly*, vol. 43, nos. 3–4 (fall/winter 2015).

Week 11: Rape Culture on Campus

Regretting drinking is not the same as regretting sexual assault. We were both drunk, the difference is I did not take off your pants and underwear, touch you inappropriately, and run away. That’s the difference.

—Victim Impact Statement in the case against Brock Turner

- Elizabeth A. Armstrong, Laura Hamilton, and Brian Sweeney, “Sexual Assault on Campus: A Multilevel, Integrative Approach to Party Rape,” *Social Problems*, vol. 53, no. 4 (2006), pp. 483–99.
 - A. Ayres Boswell and Joan Z. Spade, “Fraternities and Collegiate Rape Culture: Why Are Some Fraternities More Dangerous Places for Women?” *Gender & Society*, vol. 10, no.2 (1996), pp. 133–47.
 - Annie Clark and Andrea Pino, *We Believe You: Survivors of Campus Sexual Assault Speak Out* (Holt Macmillan, 2016).
 - Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering, *The Hunting Ground: The Inside Story of Sexual Assault on American College Campuses* (Skyhorse, 2016).
 - Caitlin Flanagan, “The Dark Power of Fraternities,” *The Atlantic*, March 2014.
 - Jaclyn Friedman and Jessica Valenti, *Yes Means Yes!: Visions of Female Sexual Power and a World Without Rape* (Seal Press, 2008).
 - Kate Harding, *Asking for It: The Alarming Rise of Rape Culture—and What We Can Do about It* (Da Capo, 2015).
 - *The Hunting Ground* (film, 2015).
 - Peggy Reeves Sanday, *Fraternity Gang Rape: Sex, Brotherhood, and Privilege on Campus* (NYU Press, 2007).
-

Week 12: Representing Violence, part I: Narratives of Rape

I am coming out to you as simply a woman wanting to be heard.

—Victim Impact Statement in the case against Brock Turner

- Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (Ballantine, 1969).
- Susan Brison, *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self* (Princeton University Press, 2003).
- Lisa Factora-Borchers, ed., *Dear Sister: Letters from Survivors of Sexual Violence* (AK Press, 2014).
- Gayl Jones, *Corregidora* (Beacon, 1987).
- Jana Leo, *Rape New York* (Feminist Press, 2011).
- Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (Vintage, 1970).
- Sapphire, *Push* (Knopf, 1996).
- Alice Sebold, *Lucky: A Memoir* (Back Bay, 2002).



Emma Sulkowicz with an exhibition of her work *Mattress Performance (Carry That Weight)*, 2014.
Photograph by Emma Sulkowicz / Wikimedia Commons

WEEK 13: Representing Violence, part II: Visualizing Violence

Your damage was concrete; stripped of titles, degrees, enrollment. My damage was internal, unseen, I carry it with me.

–Victim Impact Statement in the case against Brock Turner

I carry a mattress, because I want to give visual expression to the struggle that the survivors of sexual violence must endure.

–Artist Emma Sulkowicz on *Mattress Performance (Carry That Weight)*

- Ariella Azoulay, “Has Anyone Ever Seen a Photograph of a Rape?” in *The Civil Contract of Photography* (MIT Press, 2008)
- Nan Goldin, *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1989); *Nan One Month After Being Battered* (color photograph, 1984)
- Frida Kahlo, *A Few Small Nips* (painting, 1935)
- Käthe Kollwitz, *Raped* (etching, 1907)
- Emma Sulkowicz, *Self-Portrait* (performance, 2016); see also [Conversation: Emma Sulkowicz and Karen Finley](#) (YouTube video, 2016)
- Eve Sussman, *The Rape of the Sabine Women* (video-musical, 2007); Giambologna, *The Rape of the Sabine Women* (marble sculpture, 1583)
- Kara Walker, *My Complement, My Enemy, My Oppressor, My Love* (exhibition, 2007)
- Sue Williams, *Irresistible* (sculpture, 1992)

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Featured image: *Don't Rape, 2011*. Photograph by Richard Potts / Flickr

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#FEMINISM #MULTICULTURALISM #AMERICAN STUDIES #SYLLABUS**