

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

In this review we'll provide an overview of the book's content and ways advocates can implement into their work.

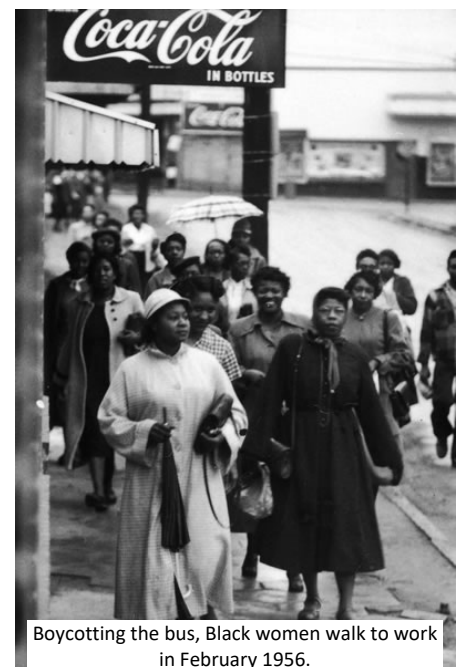
The Dark End of the Street is an essential history of sexual violence and the Movement against it in the United States. This book places the Anti-Sexual Assault Movement within the Civil Rights and Abolitionist Movements and centers the work and victimization of African American women. This book is essential reading for those working in the current sexual assault field particularly for those tasked with community education and advocate training.

Centering Black Women in the Anti-Sexual Violence Movement & Sexual Violence as a Tool of Racist Oppression

From the earliest days of America to today, African American women have been at the forefront of movements against sexual violence and rape.

Montgomery Bus Boycott

Long before Rosa Parks became the "patron saint of the Bus Boycott", she was an anti-rape activist and investigator.



Boycotting the bus, Black women walk to work in February 1956.

The 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott was in many ways was the last act in a decades-long struggle to protect Black women from sexualized violence and rape since they also were sites of sexual and racial violence for Black women, who made up the majority of the riders.

Buses became the target of Black activists' protests because they were the most visible vehicle of the system that abused African Americans daily. Organized, led and sustained by these very women, the Montgomery Bus Boycott was rooted in black women's demands for bodily integrity.



Florida A&M

Chapter Five is titled "It was like all of us had been raped." It describes the 1959 rape of Florida A&M University student Betty Jean Owens by four white men and its impact on an entire student community. Although one student was assaulted, the racial motivation of the crime and the many stories of rape of Black women by white men before it, left the student body as a whole feeling unsafe, helpless, and violated. This history is essentially an exposition on community and race-based traumatic stress inherent in the title of the chapter.

Free Joan Little

The conversation of black women's resistance to rape changed over the course of time related to sexual violence and "the politics of respectability" (early on the Movement strategy focused on putting forth "good" victims). The case of Joan Little changed the face of what a survivor was "supposed to be." Little was a Black high school drop out with a criminal record who murdered her jailer-rapist while in jail. It brought the survivor's right to self-defense against rape to the national forefront and was one of the first stories of incarceration sexual assault. Her case challenged the characterization of a victim of sexual violence and instead showed a whole person in the context of their life experiences.

The Power of Testimony

Finally, this book shows Black women using testimony and speaking out as “direct action and radical protest.” Through the survivor stories, we can see that African American women understood “the personal is political” long before second-wave feminists coined the phrase. It is important for our Movement to acknowledge these gifts from Black women and how it influences our long-held advocacy philosophy of empowerment.

In Your Work

From Recy Taylor to Anita Hill, and now Tarana Burke, founder of the #MeToo movement, Black women have been leading the Anti-Sexual Violence Movement. In general, understanding the multiple levels of oppression, the history, and the contributions of Black women can help advocates and programs consider more culturally relevant services, impacts of historical trauma, and intersectional approaches to our work.

Specific Suggested Uses

- Ensure your History of Violence Against Women / History of the Movement presentations, Core Advocacy training, etc. reflect accurate contributions and leadership of Black women survivors and Civil Rights Activists in the South.
- Excerpts from this book can help show the intersections between racism and sexual violence in U.S. History for new and experienced advocates and managers to deepen their anti-oppression learning.
- Share the stories and history of Black leadership from this book with Women of Color and Black women survivors in advocacy and awareness. Women of Color and Black Women may find healing in the stories of the Black survivor activists before them-- their strength, resilience, activism, and testimony.
- Purchase a copy of the book for a lending library if your program has one.
- Select excerpts for a group or class and lead a discussion.
- Host a community reading group. This can be challenging as there are triggering descriptions of racial violence and rape in this book. Survivors who choose to read should be informed and prepared for these. Any identity specific writing of sexual and racist violence (The Round House, Push, Queering Sexual Violence, etc.) should be read slowly, at the pace determined by individual survivor readers.

Reference

McGuire, D. L. (2011). **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**. New York: Vintage Books.