

ANGELA'S VISION: FREEDOM FROM RAPE AND FREEDOM FOR BLACK
WOMEN IN AMERICA

BY

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A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Communication

May 2019

Winston-Salem, North Carolina

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TO BLACK WOMEN

I dedicate this thesis to Marielle Franco and Amber Evans, activist women of color who have lost their lives at the hands of those trying to stifle the worlds progress. Your legacies will never die. Your deaths are proof of the exigency of everything you fought for. Rest in peace and power.

Additionally, this is an ode to my ancestors—especially those Black and slave women who have endured, fought and survived. Your spirit and resilience live in me, and I love you and I thank you.

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ABSTRACT

Black Women have long endured rape and sexual violence. Despite being raped, Black women have always resisted rape. This thesis analyzes activist Angela Davis' rhetoric around sexual violence on Black women. Davis' primary rhetorical strategy is noted as slavery and rapist accountability. Her belief in accountability serves to free the victim of any blame, while getting to the origin of this current epidemic. Davis has laid the groundwork for many current Black women activists, so that analysis of her impact on them is necessary. In this thesis, I analyze Tarana Burke, the founder of the 'Me Too' Movement, to address the impact of Davis' methods while speaking to the larger societal progress. Burke's rhetoric of healing addresses the survivor of sexual violence, while also advocating for their freedom and progress. Embedded throughout this analysis are the tropes of *power* and *purity*; and the ways in which power and purity are interpolated in the rhetorical strategies of accountability and healing. The final rhetorical strategy is that of the Black woman—and how she represents freedom in symbolic form. This thesis addresses the embodied experience of Black women in activism, such as Davis and Burke; and the complexity and strength of participatory rhetoric in the fight for Black women's freedom.

CHAPTER 1: ANGELA DAVIS AND SLAVERY AND RAPIST ACCOUNTABILITY

In Angela Davis' essay *Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves*, she examines the ideological violence utilized by slave masters to discourage the resistance of slaves. Rape served as a deterrent to those who considered participating in uprisings, revolts, or escapes and punishment for those who had done so. In those violent exchanges, the Black woman suffered the physical brutality which Davis asserts is a symbolical attack on the entire Black community. The slave woman's assumed position at the center of the slave community reckoned her essential to the survival of the Black community (Davis, 1971). This doesn't simply lend itself to the birthing of children, but also to the care and well-being the slave woman performed in service of others. This accounts for the food she cooked to sustain the human body and the cleaning she labored for upkeep and hygiene, among many other things.

Davis also discusses the fact that even though Black slave women were absolved of femininity, the sexual force of white slave masters served a manipulative purpose to grant her femininity, and arguably humanity. The purity of the white woman had to be preserved and saved from the white man's urges. Yet, the Black woman was too much of an animal to be considered as pure—and is therefore eligible of rape. First, note that white slave masters manipulated the concept of femininity at their whim. This showed that they were very aware of the humanity and gender of Black slave women, so long as it met their sexual desires and economic greed. Secondly, it is important to note the ways in which the discourse has been shaped to meet the accommodations of the white man. It is justifiable for a white man to routinely rape his slave property—who is “subhuman.”

Yet, rape is understood as an act of dominance performed by human being(s) on other human being(s). White men granted Black women femininity and humanity for controlling and twisted intentions. This “most elemental form of terrorism” and counter-insurgency was furthermore enforced by way of ransom (Davis, 1971). Slave masters used the threat of non-consent-able sex in exchange for better work conditions or treatment. Not only was the physical threat enough to deter one’s spirit, but the exchange of one’s body for a dictatorial figures’ desires is another way of reducing the Black woman’s worth to a physical body.

The role that rape played during slavery is so essential to understanding freedom today because Black women have continued to experience such forms of violence as a result. The epidemic of rape today in American society leaves Black women in a similar place of inferiority. As analyzed in chapter two of this thesis, Tarana Burke, of the ‘Me Too’ Movement works to uplift Black women by providing healing practices in the aftermath of sexual violence. Additionally, Katherine Giscombe cites the sexual harassment and violence faced by women of color and also expounds on the historical roots of rape on Black women in “Sexual Harassment and Women of Color.” Giscombe states that “Women of color experience both racialized and sexualized harassment and assault, stemming from the historical context of their experiences... The institutionalized rape of Black women endured after slavery with the Ku Klux Klan and other oppressive groups using rape to reinforce the oppression of the Black community” (Giscombe, 2018). In *Rape, Racism and the Capitalist Setting*, Davis poses the question of sexual violence being a “ricochet fire of racist-inspired sexual abuse” (Davis, 1978). To explain further, given that white men regularly raped Black slave women, eventually they felt it

okay to violate the women of their own race. The purity that was so intensely attached to white women deeming them “too good” to be raped, dissipated with time. The center of this concept lies in the fact that white men’s actions were justified. However, the same justification was not applied to the Black man. In regard to the myth of the Black rapist, while often untrue and undeniably torturous to Black men—I argue has developed some truth in this ricochet effect. The Black man’s societal inferiority and repressed masculinity began to model after that of the white rapist. While it is important to note here that not all Black men are rapists, some Black men have raped women. Sexual violence crosses and transcends ethnic groups and cultures. Davis is expounding that the true crux of rape and sexual violence on women in America is predicated by racism.

Although slavery went on to be abolished, racism persists—along with the violence it conjoins with. Rape, as a primary weapon of terror on Black slave women, was established to the detriment of American society. With the normalization of rape increasing over time, it became more difficult to obsolete. Slavery being abolished could not possibly fix rape because of this. One would hope that the terrorist act of rape would die along with the system that so largely established it. However, because rape is deeply embedded in the way in which America operates, it has not. Racist and sexist people are still alive and in power. The desire for power maintains a complex societal structure in America that doesn’t believe that Black women and men are equal to whites. This complex society, while projecting equality in the abolishment of slavery, still encourages oppression.

In her efforts to better understand rape conceptually, Davis suggests that a world in which rape is unacceptable is interdependent of societal efforts to eradicate racism. In

Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves and in Rape, Racism and the Capitalist Setting, Davis discusses the large systems of slavery and capitalism; and the depths of which those systems reflect broad and local social oppression. The language that Davis is using to create the vision of freedom for Black women is notable. “After ages of silence, suffering and misplaced guilt, sexual violence is explosively emerging as one of those serious problems plaguing present-day capitalist society” (Davis, 1978). Along with advocating that rape and sexual violence are immoral, she provides a broader framework from where it originates. Thus, to allude that racism, classism and sexism are the root of normalized sexual violence on women is a powerful rhetorical strategy. Over generations, subjects of sexual assault have been blamed for their own rape. Not only this, it has been something that has transformed into an acceptable way of treating women. In this process of victim-blaming, the perpetrator is relieved of any accountability—which serves to completely overlook the motives of the rape. Davis’ rhetorical choice to focus on the rapist’s role in the power relation proves to be a significant contribution to the discussions that are had about the “why.” It is not about what the woman did to welcome her own rape, but about what the perpetrator did and why. Davis’ emphasis on slavery is a stimulating approach that suggests not to ignore the past--despite that so many tell Black women to move on from it. In fact, the origins of the present must be understood to fully comprehend the present. In Davis’ recognition of slavery, she is also asserting the evil nature of this violence. Davis states “An important source of survival, the Black woman could play a pivotal role in nurturing the thrust towards freedom. The slave master would attempt to thwart this process. He knew that as female, this slave woman could be particularly vulnerable in her sexual existence...An

intricate and savage web of oppression intruded at every moment into the Black woman's life during slavery" (Davis, 1971). Undoubtedly, any act of violence that was encouraged during slavery is immoral. Rape was then a regular terror on Black slave women and is currently a normalized terror on African-American female bodies-- as argued by scholars such as Toni Irving and Johnnie Stover. Irving has discussed the depths of sociopolitical elements of the Black women as a sexual body in the scope of citizenship, as well as the lacking legal recourse of the era of slavery and today (Irving, 2007). Stover has done extensive research on the rhetoric of Black women writing their stories and creating visibility for themselves (Stover, 2003). My study will dive further into this analysis of Davis' texts to show the relevance of slavery to the current surge in rhetoric of accountability. This includes; *Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves* and in *Rape, Racism and the Capitalist Setting, Women, Race & Class*, and the Leccion Inaugural speech delivered in 2018. In addition to examining these texts, this thesis analyzes the rhetoric of healing by contemporary activist Tarana Burke.

Accountability is so integral to understanding this epidemic because it is an outright effort to combat the physical and ideological mistreatment of Black women. In those outright efforts, the blame is not placed on the victim, but the one who rapes. I argue that this is the most crucial element of Davis' rhetoric around rape because it challenges the perpetrator who has wielded said physical and ideological power. A very compelling component of this analysis addresses the connection of the narratives of Davis, Burke and me, all as rhetorics. The system of power is not only embodied in the lived experience of each of us, but that perspective serves as powerful motivation in the desire to fight for freedom. While Davis chooses to address the rapist, Burke's focus on

healing also ideologically holds the rapist accountable *because* of the acknowledgement. Acknowledging that sexual violence happens, is a large and connecting piece to both accountability and healing. Davis' rhetoric has played a monumental role in how rape is discussed and ultimately made sense of. Succeeding this rationalization, should come change. Change ought to manifest in the way rape is justified and overlooked and, and most importantly, committed. The capitalist setting and patriarchal system has allowed and encouraged sexual violence on Black women. Due to the fact that these structures are biased based on race, gender and class (among other things), Black women are vulnerable to all of the violence's that those in power are able to profit and benefit from. Equally important and complex to accountability, is providing healing for survivors of sexual violence. Analysis cannot simply focus on one or the other; both are necessary to rid our communities of rape—along with dismantling and correcting the structures and persons who commit and allow this violence to happen. This chapter carefully analyzes Davis' focus on accountability of rapists. The way in which I operationalize this rhetorical strategy is theorized through the two tropes of *Power* and *Purity*.

Power, Enslavement, and Rape

The institution that laid the groundwork for the epidemic of rape on Black women is undoubtedly the system of slavery. Enslavement, in concept, denies persons of freedom and autonomy over their own body. As Davis stated at the Leccion Inaugural Conference in 2018, "Racial dominance and sexual dominance mutually reinforced one another. The slave master was the sexual master as well" (Davis, 2018). Davis introduced a very scintillating point. She suggests that rape and racism are equally powerful and harmful

forms of oppression that coincide. While rape is a sexually violent act, and racism a hatred-filled belief system, they are both related since the victims of it often experience both. The concept of the sexual master is an intense one that should be addressed further because it is revealing of just how powerful rape is. It is not simply a tool—but it is its own system of oppression. Rape, as a normalized experience of Black women was regularly justified by white people. So not only does this allude that Black women (and men) deserve to be slaves because they are “sub-human,” but they also deserve to be raped because of this. Davis psychoanalyzes the role of the rapist. The rapists (in this case the slave masters) believes they are entitled to violate the body of the Black slave woman. When connecting the analysis of rape to patriarchy, this affirms a world in which the enslaved Black women cannot possibly have a voice. The power that is harbored by white slave and sex masters is enacted and created for the purpose of un-breakability. The current epidemic of sexual violence is the result and validation of rape as a structural system.

In that same speech in 2018, Davis says, “Only addressing the individual will not make the problem go away—because the problem is deep, the problem is structural” (Davis, 2018). Arguing the depth of rape on Black women doesn’t simply note this as the Black woman’s problem but a societal issue. The issue of rape being structural, it is about the system of power and position. The white slave masters are the individuals who maintain patriarchal advantages. Those white slave masters went on to pass down their ideologies of racism and sexism to their lineage. Eventually the slave masters become managers, doctors, prison wardens, detectives, police officers, judges, lawyers, journalists, and CEO’s, among many other titles. I draw the similarity between slave

masters and contemporary occupations to reveal the structural embedment of sexual violence. Those who have the position to dictate how society interprets truth maintains the power to lie about it.

There have been many reasons that the sexual assault of Black women in America has been permitted. In understanding this, we must examine Davis' arguments made in her 1981 book, *Women, Race & Class*. Davis draws an interesting, yet unsurprising association between the Black woman's domesticity and the stereotype of her promiscuity. While it might initially seem arbitrary that the two ideas are linked, Davis does a noteworthy job of explaining the relevance. As mentioned before, it was an established norm for white masters and "men of the house" to take advantage of Black female bodies. Combine that fact with jealous white wives being disillusioned with their husbands raping Black women, and the unfair aspersion is set. From this, generations of Black women have been told that they are "loose women," and are "whores," and that they actually welcome the attention of their rapist-slave masters (Davis, 1981). In thinking back to the concept of hierarchy, with both white men and women, individuals of power, believing and disseminating this myth—it seems that it would be nearly impossible to rectify.

Along with this, the ability for white slave masters to rape Black women with little to no repercussions persisted. So not only are Black women continually raped, but deep, disturbing and psychological beliefs about the issue of rape on Black women are being established and encouraged by white Americans throughout the country. Communal beliefs and practices have made issues of violence that much more insidious and difficult to combat. What I believe makes these racist and sexist beliefs so

psychological is because of how largely the community of white men convinced themselves that they are somehow deserving of a God-like power over other human beings. That is grounded in the understanding that slavery deemed Black people unworthy and white people superior.

I argue that Davis' rhetoric calls us to challenge those police officers, judges and CEO's to not only be honest about their wrongdoings but change them. As mentioned earlier, positions of power enforce the ability to manipulate truths. This is integral when discussing accountability because certain ideologies are accepted without questioning. For too long slaves were not believed to be full human beings by white Americans. Thus, the voices of Black women were deemed un-worthy of hearing and acknowledging. So, who has the world's support? The slave and rape master who is "intelligent" and powerful? Or the slave who is "unintelligent" and "sub-human?" The slave system not only was dangerous to the slaves who labored under it, but truly created and reinforced sickening beliefs about who is worthy of a good and prosperous life—even today. Additionally, it's essential for those in power to start understanding that their lives are not any more important than people of color.

Because rape in America widely stems from slavery and racism, this plays a prominent role in what we know today as victim-blaming. Since so many of the rapes were happening to voiceless slaves, there was no sense of accountability as it wasn't perceived as immoral by the majority. Any sense of accountability that began to be recognized afterward didn't immediately detach from the practice of raping slaves. Raping Black women is an area rich in historical significance and connection. To blame a victim of their own rape implies that the rape is justified—very similar to slave rape.

Both the era of slavery and current ideal of victim blaming suggest that the rapist is deserving of sexual power. Therefore, the victim-blaming that occurs today is a result of rape justification that normalized during slavery.

Purity: Justifying Rape

“Why does the world feel Black women are so deserving of rape?” This question led to me to the concept of purity and the demonization of Black women. The purity that has been associated with whiteness and especially white femininity has not been granted for Black men and women. While this is appalling for many reasons, I find it particularly unacceptable given that those white individuals who were committing such evil acts projected their very essence onto Black slaves. There are many anti-Black and anti-Black-women images that have been contrived throughout time. When thinking of the creation of terms like jezebel, mammy, sapphire, savage, and pickaninnies it shouldn't be difficult to understand just how this is relevant today. Caricatures such as these reveal the depths of which white people have contrived falsities to maintain their own power and for the control of their image of purity. I truly believe this is the most fundamental reason for the mistreatment of Black men and women. It is more understandable to justify doing harm to someone deemed impure, immoral and lewd than someone who is simply different from you.

When I discuss purity I don't mean to suggest that the construct of white femininity is something to aspire to. I argue even more so that white purity is a construct because of who it was created by. White slave masters and wives had insidious morality. Therefore, to contrive an image of themselves being pure is ludicrous and surely, a construct. In their efforts, they did succeed in portraying Black women as a variety of

negative things. However, their portrayals were just that. In essence, Black women have shown that they are *not* any of those anti-Black images that were imposed on them. Their ability to care for, birth and work for other bodies is valid proves that that the essence of Black womanhood is full independent of white femininity. I argue intensely that even today, this understanding of Black purity must be re-framed. Black women create our own sense of purity that is rooted in strength, triumph, heritage, beauty, resilience, survival and service. To connect this to Davis' rhetoric, it is necessary to hold those individuals accountable for justifying rape. Black women and slave women did not create this image of themselves. Those who did create the image of the impure Black woman, however, should be held accountable. Part of what makes this so very powerful is because these are impositions by other human beings. Those attempts to desecrate the worldview of Black people's morality is quite shocking. Not only is that shocking, but it speaks to the desire for power white people in America have long craved—and the depths they will take to sustain it.

The concept of purity indeed has psychological effects. The way that Black women are perceived daily by other ethnic groups derives from this premise. If Black women are thought to be angry, or unintelligent, or hypersexual it must be recognized as a thought process developed by white people. Not only is this contrived because of their wrongdoings, but white people have been fearful of Black people lashing out at them since the era of slavery. One of the most fundamental reasons that I challenge this notion of impurity is due to the fact that Black women have always been in service of this country. It is ignorant to argue that those women should be raped, because none should. In regard to rape and purity, they cannot truly be assessed honorably if viewed as

independent of the other. Black women have been raped for reasons of lust, imposed impurity, punishment, and power—all of which aren't to be accounted for by the victim of the rape but the individual who rapes her.

The tropes of power and purity emerge in the rhetoric of rape and slavery accountability. In *Rape, Racism and the Capitalist Setting*, Davis argues “There is nothing new about rape itself; what is new is its pervasiveness and seeming uncontrollability in capitalist countries today...In the US and other capitalist countries, rape laws were originally framed for the protection of men of the upper classes, whose women ran the risk of being assaulted” (Davis, 1981). Also, Davis alludes that the purity associated with white women are a problematic construct that renders Black women unworthy of the same, according to white men and women (Davis, 1971). Davis’ understanding of power in re-framing the historical impositions of impure Black women both generate a discourse that proves the fault could never possibly be the victims. The slave master being the sexual master too (along with judges, lawyers and CEOs) necessitates that those individuals in power be held accountable, but also necessitates progress for the survivors.

One of the most essential forms of progress for survivors of rape is advocated by activist Tarana Burke—healing. In the coming chapter, the tropes of power and purity are also theorized under the rhetoric of healing for Black women. This chapter has discussed that the rhetoric of Davis argues systems of power by way of slavery, capitalism, patriarchy are structures that not only oppress Black women, but legitimize the established notion of the impure Black woman. This notion of purity serves to justify raping Black women as acceptable. However, because the “impure Black woman” is

rooted in racist, sexist and classist ideologies, the justification of raping Black women is unacceptable. Activists like Tarana Burke are proof of the progress, acknowledgement and continued work of Black women who are in search of freedom.

CHAPTER 2: TARANA BURKE AND HEALING FROM RAPE

Tarana Burke, Founder of the ‘Me Too’ Movement, created the organization in 2006 for the purpose of helping survivors of sexual violence. More specifically, the organization seeks to help Black women and other women of color. It promotes healing and advocacy, placing survivors in the forefront to dismantle systems that allow sexual oppression. The implications of this movement’s origin are vast and meaningful. In creating this organization, Burke and the others she works with are acknowledging the experiences faced by many Black women. In 2006, 141 years after slavery was abolished in America, the creation of ‘Me Too’ not only implies acknowledgement for Black women who have survived sexual violence, but also addresses the history attached to it. Burke understands and identifies that Black and brown women are a disproportionately oppressed group--especially in terms of rape. The intersections of race, gender and class are directly confronted in ‘Me Too.’ When slavery ended, the violence that was born in it did not die. The rapes that Black women faced from the era of slavery to 2006, and today, are connected. The same women are being raped. The same women are being oppressed. The same women’s voices remain stifled. However, with Burke’s advocacy, those same women are being acknowledged and healed.

Why is healing so essential in dismantling rape? Healing is a power that combats the vicious weapon of rape. Firstly, with acknowledgement, addressing the very real experiences of Black women has to be achieved societally. Healing addresses what is fact. The fact is, that Black women have always healed others. In their domestic work and laboring. Author Zora Neale Hurston once wrote that Black women “are the mules of the world: they carry the load that white men, white women and black men refuse to carry;

they do the work no one wants to do, without praise or thanks” (Hurstun 1937). This is a powerful example of the depths of the work that the Black woman has done for others. Nurturing others has always been her imposed assignment.

In the context of *rape*, the violence that has been inherent to the experience of Black women, as well as efforts to save them from rape, are attempts to dismantle the entire system of rape in America. If the group who has been deemed most fitting of rape can be saved from it, all women in America can be saved from it. This is why the ‘Me Too’ organization is so rich in meaning. A transgenerational structure of violence on Black women is being worked on, largely by Black women. The women are receiving physical, emotional, psychological, spiritual and metaphorical therapy in ‘Me Too.’ Those therapies are transformative in concept because they allow for healing and a re-framing of this norm.

In this thesis, I analyze both Davis’ rhetoric of slavery accountability and Burke’s rhetoric of healing. The methods of Davis and Burke’s rhetorical strategies are connected. I view the work of Tarana Burke as carrying the weight of another equally important and necessary form of progress. Davis’ literature on this epidemic acknowledges the history and extensiveness of this issue. Burke’s methods focus on the needs of the woman after enduring sexual violence (Harris, 2018). I recognize that my research addresses the rapist and the survivor—passing over any rhetoric of the physical act. After all, the act of rape does indeed need to be obsoleted. The racist, megalomaniac delusions and sexist-based centers of that act must be discussed as reinforcing components that allow this particular act of violence to happen. Nonetheless, in analyzing the rhetorics of accountability and healing it is important to note Davis’ impact on activists such as Burke. Davis’

willingness to lay the groundwork on this norm, while alone it might not solve the issue, it makes room for the discourse to deepen and strengthen. Both Burke and Davis are grounded in acknowledging the community of sexually oppressed Black women. Burke's work could not manifest without the efforts of Davis. The element of healing assists in rounding out the arguments already made by Davis to create a deeper discourse. Ultimately, I believe that the combination of the two strategies are authentic and honest formulas for understanding the Black woman's experience—and bettering her experience.

A catalyst in the popularity of the 'Me Too' Movement took place when the hashtag #MeToo went viral in 2017. American actress Alyssa Milano posted the hashtag using her platform and celebrity status. While her intention was decent and ultimately fueled the widespread awareness of the work of Tarana Burke, I am problematizing white female voices overshadowing Black women's work. This became an example of a white woman expressing her sexual trauma as more relatable to the general public—as whiteness has long been the central standard of importance and purity. Since this element of whiteness is more relatable, empathy is more regularly attached to it. Black people are certainly as deserving of empathy as those who are white. Black women's traumas aren't viewed as central to America because Black people have been the aides of this country—not those reaping the benefits of that labor. I am not arguing that the traumas of white women are unimportant. As mentioned earlier, Davis feels that the “ricochet-fire of racist inspired sexual abuse” eventually affected white women drastically—and it still does. However, Black women have long been doing the work to resist this issue *because* it has always been prevalent to her identity.

The voicing of #MeToo from a white woman initially served to repress the Black woman's experience. While that might not have been Milano's intentions, her race and status shouldn't be overlooked. I'm not arguing against unity and solidarity, but the virality of the hashtag projects inclusivity. Everyone can say "Me Too." But when the creator of that movement--not a hashtag, is Black, that becomes vastly more meaningful. I am not disillusioned to the implications of projecting inclusivity, and yet keeping whiteness in the center. Burke, a Black woman, said it first. Not only that, she created an organization to do the work to better the lives of survivors. I find it utterly ironic that the traumas of the Black woman *wouldn't* be deemed as a central problem in America. Nonetheless, the day when a Black woman speaks of her oppression and the world says, "Me Too," that might prove real solidarity. The importance of healing, the significance of 'Me Too,' white femininity, and Davis' impact on Burke are all essential to address in the scope of healing for Black women. Additionally, the trope of power *of* healing is a dramatic shift from the previous notions of power in oppression.

Power in Healing

In operationalizing the rhetoric of healing, I find it important to talk about both the power of healing from rape, and the power of Black women creating healing. Healing from rape is surely a journey. For Black women, I believe that there is a certain amount of silence that we feel naturally in being raped. Thankfully, there are resources out there that have been created over time to assist the Black woman. Slavery and ownership over the Black woman's body were normalized by white slave masters and are now normalized by white audiences. There are now organization such as 'Me Too' that are

created by Black women and recognized as legitimate organizations. Many years ago that would be unfathomable. This is a drastic shift from the lives those ancestors lived. I am obviously not suggesting the issue is solved. However, there is much beauty in taking moments to simply appreciate the progress. This sense of transgenerational healing is a noteworthy testament to the spirit of Black women.

I am addressing healing through the notion of power. I believe that healing is a power. It is a power that seeks to dismantle hatred. On the 'Me Too' website, the text emphasizes that Burke's movement is "survivor-led" (2018). That is a meaningful and unique mode of change. In regard to the issue of sexual assault, survivors often find that men will try to tell women what to do with their bodies. This extends to the way women dress, what environments to visit, abortion, etc. However, with Burke's movement, survivors leading the cause ensures that the needs of the oppressed will be met. Also mentioned on the 'Me Too' website, within the movement, this is a rhetorical strategy. The rhetorical strategy of validation emerges from Burke's 'Me Too' movement (2018). Survivors of sexual violence understand the mental, physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual toll that this has. Because it has been a lived experience, only they can truly understand the necessary changes that must be made. This, of course, comes after some healing is attained. Also, this activism is a rich source of healing. With this process, a very full evolution is taking place. There is internal healing for the individual, communal healing for Black women, and transgenerational healing as progress is being made through time.

Healing is a power, but survivors must also heal from powers used against them. This leads me to the question of who provides healing. Can only the individual truly heal

oneself? Is it the job of the therapist or counselor? Other members of the community? Does our healing rely on supernatural and spiritual beliefs? These are deep and complex questions to address. It is so complex in part, because the nature of the violence experienced is so complex. For the Black woman, and all of the historical brutalities she has faced, healing becomes even more dense. The rhetoric of healing is service-based. The service is being done for the self to process trauma. In that service, traumatic moments have to be acknowledged for the shift of healing to manifest. Healing can be difficult. Healing for the individual is predicated on the sources of the pain. The psychology and mental state of the individual prior to the assault, during and after all account for how healing will be achieved. Each person has a way of coping with trauma. It is indeed a service to oneself to seek out the necessary help. Some people individually find healing in counseling, advocacy, telling their stories, volunteering, etc. Based on the comprehensive database provided on the 'Me Too' website, it is clear that a multitude of resources and methods are necessary to heal survivors of sexual violence (2018).

In dealing with communal healing, rich areas of discourse are required to feel a sense of progress. The way in which Black women heal communally depends on a number of areas. According to Tarana Burke, advocacy and resources are the best methods to help Black women. The 'Me Too' website states "The 'Me Too' movement supports survivors of sexual violence and their allies by connecting survivors to resources, offering community organizing resources, pursuing a 'Me Too' policy platform, and gathering sexual violence researchers and research. 'Me Too' movement work is a blend of grassroots organizing to interrupt sexual violence and digital community building to connect survivors to resources. As the 'Me Too' movement

affirms empowerment through empathy and community-based action, the work is survivor-led and specific to the needs of different communities” (2018). This is so meaningful because there is power in numbers. This communal sense of healing carries some of the weight that one might have to endure alone. Working with others who have felt the pains you have serves as a special mode of growing and processing their rape. Communal advocacy, at its core is important because of its capacity to empower the community members while implementing change. With more individuals working together, every person maintains the ability to bring their resources to that space. Those resources are so meaningful because the content is coming directly from the people who have needed it most. Being a member of the community one is advocating for ensures that the needs of the people are met. In addition, educating the public is key to communal healing. Due to the various backgrounds of survivors, they are able to not only help the public, but teach each other.

Manifesting healing is a unique ability that Black women have garnered over time. In regard to transgenerational healing, knowledge should continue to be passed down the line. The experiences of mothers, sisters, aunts and grandmothers are invaluable. Transgenerational guidance means that the advice passed down is rich with history, tradition and wisdom. The daily experiences of Black women are being acknowledged and molded for the betterment of those descendants. Along with day-to-day meaningful advice on healing from ancestors, embedded in that healing language are larger implications. Ancestors simultaneously give personal guidance, while also providing a larger understanding of the source of this pain and how to attain healing. This, I believe is a powerful example of the Black woman manifesting healing. The

ability to draw from one's life, while examining society at large is an incredible gift of intelligence and resilience. As an example of power, I argue that this might be the most compelling of the forms healing. It encompasses both the individual and the community and transcends time in a rounded way. In terms of Burke, she as an individual is doing community work for the healing of Black women; while simultaneously shifting the course and progress of history. Her work shows the depth of the impact of activist work and the ways in which that work influences progress.

Healing is an incredible task given the brutalities Black women have endured. Yet, perhaps, because of where they are located in the patriarchy, she is the sole provider from which healing can be attained. Others in a different position can't quite fully empathize with the experiences of Black women. Black women creating healing for themselves is proof of the internal and external fortitude they hold. Black women manifesting their own healing from rape is represented dually in the scope of power. In one way, Black women are drawing from a level of strength that is unmatched—because, unfortunately, their healing can't truly come from the person who rapes them. In another, the healing strength they draw from metaphorically cancels out the power that had been held over them in their rape. Combatting the weapon of rape with the power of healing is a superlative method of pursuing freedom. I don't suggest that this solves the issue at hand, but it is a powerful way of dealing with systemic and transgenerational forms of violence. Once healing is achieved in its fullness, and accountability is held, *then* the process obsoleting the weapon of rape becomes more of a real possibility. In connection to Burke, her strategies of healing and advocacy addresses the real experiences of survivors and reveals healing as a manifestation by Black women.

Healing and Purity

When a woman is raped, there are a disgusting set of feelings that she experiences. Guilt, shame, worthlessness, undesirability, shock, uncleanliness, fear, rage, and sadness are examples of some of those feelings. The amalgamation of these sentiments creates a metaphorical cyst within her. The cyst teeters, deepens, persists and evolves. I also believe that the wickedness of the wrong done to her weighs on her to point in which it disorients her own sense of cleanliness, goodness and purity. For Black women, this must be thought in addition to the disparities they face. The systems that work together regularly to oppress Black women are added cruelties to that metaphorical cyst. So, it is quite difficult for one to imagine the entire healing process for her. However, the healing process that does manifest is purifying. I don't mean purifying from the demonization white people have placed on Black women, because that is totally ludicrous, but purifying from the weight she carries. As mentioned above, healing labors to free the Black woman from the powers that burden her. Not only is the destruction of those powers healing, but the healing intertwines with purity greatly. Both healing and purity are cleansers of any invaders. I'm not suggesting that any individuals who haven't healed in a specific way are somehow impure. This isn't an attack or judgement of the purity of the assaulted but is an argument around the burden brought on her—which necessitates healing. In those cases, there is necessary healing left that should be nurtured. The purifying process is so noteworthy because there is magnitude in shutting down the immoral. Not only this, but it is freeing. Therefore, all forms of healing, specifically healing from rape for the Black woman, is monumental to her freedom.

While a greater sense of freedom would be predicated on the fact that she doesn't have to endure such pain, I think that this is a great start. The Black woman's ability to forgive and/or deal with the reality of her rape reveals the purity that is already within her. I address this notion of purity further in chapter three.

Healing practices and institutions for Black women are proof of a shift in who is considered deserving of healing. Burke is a prime example of this. The 'Me Too' organization that she created wouldn't have been fathomable hundreds of years ago. The organization having been created specifically for Black and brown women speaks volumes to the humanity that has been established for Black people since the era of slavery. To be deserving of healing from rape, one must be recognized as a human being. Not so long ago, this wasn't a reality for Black women. Fortunately, there has been a lot of progress in the area of civil rights to encourage this ideology. This is a beautiful sentiment that is necessary individually, communally and trans generationally. Healing, I believe, implies a certain worthiness of redemption. The redemption and humanity that is being recognized for Black women is incredible with the necessary historical perspective. As argued earlier, white women have long been considered the staple of purity—enduring significantly less rapes than Black women have. However, with the Black woman receiving ideological recognition, a shift in the demonization is manifesting. While whiteness is still central structurally and ideologically, any re-framing of the concept of purity is noteworthy. In chapter three of this thesis, I directly address the impositions of impurity on Black women and note that the Black woman is a rhetoric that re-defines the social construction of purity.

Not only does healing suggest progress for the Black woman, but the implication of healing for Black women reflect a larger societal change. Healing practices and institutions are examples of the drastic shift in the ideology that raping is acceptable. This might seem curious because if Black men were accused of raping white women, they were lynched and brutalized. So, in theory, the notion of rape being immoral was already present. However, in practice, only white individuals reaped the benefits of it. Rape is a deliberate sexual action of enforcing power, a tool for gaining and retaining power, in violation of and to the detriment of the victim. The larger societal change manifesting suggests that no one deserves to be raped. She has historically been deemed as the most affected group of and deserving of rape. Therefore, if America is finally convinced that Black women shouldn't have to endure this, then it must be conceptualized that no one should. Unfortunately, rape has been well-established as a normal practice of violence that will take much structural, communal and person-to-person changes. Nonetheless, societal change reveals the power of the concept of healing. It is a primary source of redemption from the horrendous sexual act of raping. It is a journey of seeking the origin of our wrongs and an outright effort to fix them. From this healing, eventually will ensue dismantling both ideological and structural practices that accept, allow and encourage rape.

When I met Tarana Burke on the campus of Wake Forest University in 2018, I had the privilege of not only asking her an audience question but meeting her afterward to discuss it further. A month or so before that event, I had ordered a sweater from a "feminist" apparel organization that had meaningful text on the front that I identified with. Upon doing further research, learned that the current CEO of the organization is an

“admitted abuser.” This is wildly problematic, and I returned the item as soon as I received it. While I had a number of questions I wanted to ask her, I geared my question to her based on that situation. I inquired about her thoughts on organizations such as that projecting inclusivity and solidarity at its core, but actually being based upon betrayal and lies. The affability of Burke is especially important to note here, because when I felt my question wasn’t answered sufficiently, she was extremely humble and kind enough to allow me to clarify. She spoke of the need for advocates to continue to work on dismantling those structures that allow and encourage sexual violence. Additionally, that event, as an example, shows first-hand the level of service, care and healing Burke provides as she moves through the world. The proximity that she is willing to establish with the community reveals that for her it is ultimately about healing.

Burke and her work are the culmination of the progress manifested by Black women. The rhetorical implications of Burke as an individual within the scope of healing and purity are proof of the Black woman’s service-based intention. On an individual level, Burke maintains humility and advocacy. This is representative of her desire to advocate and heal individuals and communities. While Burke is recognized as a figure of the movement, her pure intentions of putting others first are fundamental to her as a pure and healing individual. Healing as a power, is embodied by Burke and the ‘Me Too’ Movement not only because of who she is as a person, but because of the expansion of this movement. It has reached an international level of acknowledgment around the issue of sexual violence. Burke, a Black woman, created a movement that caters to the individual, the nation—and maintains the world’s attention. This has such rhetorical force

when thinking of the ways in which Black women have historically been silenced, underrepresented and misrepresented.

Davis also addresses the notion that Black women across the generations have always been in the resistance struggle. Burke is an example of this because her organization had been established long before she gained national and international acknowledgement of her work. Additionally, the work done by slave women, women of the Women's Suffrage Movement, the Harlem Renaissance, the Civil Rights Era, Black Panther and Communist Party USA, Womanist Theologians and Black Feminists, to Black Lives Matter and #MeToo—all have labored for the benefit of freedom. I draw these examples to show a rich parcel of the services created and enriched by the presence of Black women. Along with the movements mentioned above, the method of healing pursued by Burke is rooted in pure and service-based intention. Tarana Burke, as an example, is not only an activist, but is the founder of a movement and organization. Not just any organization, but the organization that currently embodies the surge in popularity against sexual assault-- which Davis references (Davis, 2018).

This sense of purity is tied to Burke additionally because she speaks and lives her truth. She has often told the story of what motivated her to start the 'Me Too' organization. She details her experience with a young woman who came to her for her help after being assaulted by her step-father. Burke notes her regret in cutting the young woman off and referring her to another female counselor. This hurt Burke so deeply because she felt the pain of this young girl, yet she couldn't bear listening to her story because she identified with it. Eventually, this festered with Burke to the point that fueled her to action. I identify her story as embedded in the concept of purity is because her

story is revealing of her bravery, humility and reflexivity. I believe that it is brave because it is difficult for many people—especially those in the public eye, to share stories that they aren't the proudest of. Burke's willingness and desire to share her beginning is also a testament to her belief that this is not about her, but the movement—which reflects bravery and pure intentions. Her sharing her story reflects humility because of the content of the story. It illustrates that the experience humbled her. She was taught a very valuable lesson from someone who viewed her as a mentor. The fact that she travels the world to discuss 'Me Too' and often tells this story is a direct reflection of her remembering her beginnings. Lastly, reflexivity is embedded in her story because she shows her own depth in identifying her role in the situation. Not only this, she proves that stories like hers are worth being told. It forces a sense of introspection on the listener—in hopes they will challenge themselves to identify how they can be better in supporting survivors of sexual violence. Burke as an example is telling of the service-based intentions of Black women. Ultimately, Black activist women grounded in purity provide foundations for change and freedom.

The rhetoric of 'Me Too' and Tarana Burke reveal that healing is necessary for Black women and will be representative of societal changes. Healing is a power that has been manifested by generations of Black women. In the power of healing, the terrorist weapon of rape is being diminished. Purity, as a concept has not been granted for the Black woman. However, activist women like Tarana Burke and Angela Davis prove that Black women are service-based individuals which reflect pure intentions. The Black woman, herself, is a model rhetorical symbol that reflects not only her uniqueness, but worldly oppressions that she has been forced to adapt to. Rape, as the most normalized

cruelty to which the Black woman has been subjected, has nearly defined her. However, rape and oppression don't define her; and chapter three of this thesis addresses the Black woman as a rhetorical strategy, and how she is representative of *freedom*.

CHAPTER 3: THE RHETORIC OF THE BLACK WOMAN

Her Resistance and Activism

In this third and final chapter, I provide an analysis of the Black woman as a rhetorical strategy, and also discuss my personhood in that context. I use both parts to draw a larger meaning of the rhetoric of the Black woman. Over the course of this thesis I have used both the terms *Black woman* and *Black women*. To clarify, when I say Black women, I speak of a communal understanding of the lived experiences of Black women. This symbol is more generalizable and reveals the over-arching characteristics and experiences faced by the community of Black women. Therefore, I analyze the ways in which certain oppressions are faced by Black women largely. When I note the *Black woman* as a rhetorical strategy, I address the individuality of the Black woman—and her unique, lived experience. In my examination of the Black woman as its own unique rhetoric, she is a symbol; which can be based on stereotypes, reality, falsities, etc. Meaning, each individual Black woman is unique, but there is a symbolic form of “who she is” that culminates and manifests to define Black womanhood.

Davis’ argument about the Black woman’s longevity in the resistance struggle sparked my motivation to examine the Black woman activist. This led me to think about the numerous personal experiences faced by Black women activists who have been raped and violated. From there, I drew on my own personal experience to assist with my analysis. My story: I have considered myself an activist for a few years now, but never avidly surrounding the issue of rape and sexual violence. I had my own experiences with sexual abuse as a child, but never quite under scope of what we understand as rape. When in July of 2018 I was raped by a man who I went on two dates with, I, as many others have, experienced the physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual turmoil associated

with this sort of violence. In the aftermath, taking care of my physical body and physical safety were priority. I “rested” each night with a make-shift barricade over my door. If I saw anyone who slightly resembled him, I panicked. I suffered for weeks with bouts of short-term memory loss from the mental exertion I was using to garner information on him and worry about my health. I would stop mid-conversation to check my hands for signs of an std. I was drugged, so I have faint recollection of the moments wherein I was physically penetrated and remember being confused about what was happening. I was unable to control my body being raped. I was disoriented mentally and emotionally, wondering how I could possibly have been attracted to someone who would do this. I was in a state of utter survival—doing the bare minimum to take care of myself. I don’t share my story to evoke pity, but to provide brief evidence of the traumas faced when rape happens—and for my own therapy. Fortunately, I was blessed to have access to resources and friends who were there to walk through it with me. In the midst of one of the most painful times in my life, I persisted. I told my counselor “he has no idea what he did, I am going to help people.”

In understanding that my experience fueled me to advocate for survivors and educate the community, I developed a curiosity about the process for other Black women activists. The arguments from Davis, Burke, as well as my own lived experience relate to concepts of the resistance-activist: 1) Black women have always been resisting, 2) many Black women are raped because of that resistance, and 3) some women are thus called to resist because they were raped. Given that I have discussed the first two points quite a bit in this thesis, I am going to devote this time to the last point. I believe that the third point adds to the literature that Davis has already provided about the first two points. Resisting

because one was raped speaks to the exigency of this issue. It begs the question of inevitability. Meaning, Black women have been enduring this particular form of violence, not receiving justice, and are thus motivated to advocate. From my own personal experience, my shift in activist work felt necessary. It didn't feel ethical to be silent. Not only because of what happened to me, but what had been done to me. To elaborate, it isn't the moments of fear, while torturous, that strike me most. The times wherein I felt safe under the guise of care, is chief. The man who raped me used carefully deceptive language to control and manipulate me. Knowing the deliberate weapons used against me certainly calls for exigency. For Black women who feel called to resist because of their own rape, we know that calling doesn't ever go away. The volume may turn down at times, but it never truly leaves. Maybe the Black woman was a staunch advocate and was violated for her efforts; maybe the other was raped due to the vulnerability of being a Black woman. While the journey into activism for Black women who have been raped might be different; the calling and search for justice remain the same.

I also acknowledge that Black women activists are *that* much more susceptible to being raped because of their service and position. There is a vulnerability of Black women being raped. Black women activists, however, are particularly more susceptible because of their work. This has to be addressed because it does not only apply to the era of slavery. Women of the Civil Rights era to those involved in Ferguson protests, have been sexual targets because of their willingness to fight. Black women are still being raped and even killed because of their work. The body of devoted activist Amber Evans was found in the Scioto River in Columbus, Ohio on Saturday, March 23rd, 2019. Her murder speaks to the dangers of this work. Black women are still susceptible to fatal

forms of violence. This example indicates just how sub-human racists still believe we are. The work of Amber Evans is the resistance laid by the slave woman. That same threat of rape and murder for Black women is happening today. Just as Davis argues, the rape and murder of Black women in activism is an attack on the entire Black community. That brutality hurts all of the Black community because wonderful, devoted and brilliant activists are being violated and taken from us. This is wildly discouraging and can be representative of stifled progress. However, we persist. In a larger sense, I believe activist women's rape and murder is an attack on the world. I understand that this is a large claim. However, I the quote by Zora Neale Hurston (the Black woman is the mule of the world) demonstrates that the Black woman's work for the community is an attempt to better the world. Her service-based intention hopes to heal the world and rid the world of oppressions—because she has seen the lowliest of times. Those Black women, who are trans generationally oppressed, know that their healing will manifest worldly healing. When Black women are continually raped and murdered, the world's progress is stifled.

For the activist, there is an understanding that the systems that oppress you are watching very closely. I don't suggest that fear should be the practice of advocates. If there is any sense of fear in the Black woman's activist work, it can never overshadow the importance of what she does for the struggle. The fact of the matter is, we want those oppressors to hear us. We want them to know that we recognize the systemic violence placed on our people. But this sense of visibility that has been labored for, for so long, is continually used as an example. The rape and death of Black activists have long been a symbol to evoke fear. However, this symbolism only strengthens the arguments that are made by those activists—proving the very forms of violence we advocate against are still

happening. In 2019, Black men and women lifting their voices for the development of their people can result in sexual and fatal violence. Those rapists and murderers don't believe Black women activists are worthy. But they do know, that Black women in activism are groundbreaking, brilliant, resilient, hard-working, and are changing the world. That ideological threat the Black woman poses is fear-inducing for the oppressor in power. I believe that the strength harbored by Black women is so powerful, that even those who have the highest positions of power in this country and the world are threatened. This is why oppressors feel the murder is the best option to retain their power. If Black women activists are beaten, arrested, raped, fired, and threatened the fight doesn't stop. Black women have seen the worst of all of those brutalities. It is clear in this process who truly is fearful --and it isn't Black women.

The narratives of Davis, Burke and myself all have some connection in understanding the rhetoric of the Black woman. In connecting my story to Davis, I draw a connection by way of suffering and exigency. While Davis was writing *Reflections*, she was in prison. So not only was Davis around other Black women who have endured sexual violence, but she is living under cruel conditions while still doing her activism and scholarship. This notion of suffering, yet triumph is powerful and connects to my story. While I was in what is called "survival-mode" I still managed to see the benefit in helping others. The sense of exigency was so prevalent in my eyes, as with Davis, that it seemed useless to not make myself useful—no matter the circumstance. To connect Davis to Burke, I see great similarity because of their experiences as internationally-recognized Black women activists. They not only live the daily experience as a Black woman, but they represent Black women communally in their own unique ways. Their

expansive search for freedom is proof of the Black woman as rhetorically symbolic of freedom. They live it and they manifest it. To connect my story to Burke, I also draw the notion of exigency. Burke felt called to resist when she had that experience with the young woman who needed her help. I too, felt called to resist after having been raped. This is a truly compelling example of the ways in which activism is a calling. This experience doesn't derive from simply watching a community of people be oppressed and pity their experience. Lived trauma, violence, oppression and suffering all weighs on the Black woman so that she can't possibly ignore the call.

This section of the thesis addresses the purity of the Black woman activist conceptually. Black women laying their lives on the line is a clear source of pure and service-based intention. The nature of activism comes with the territory of knowing that you will most likely not live to see your fullest dreams manifest. From the women in slavery, to women of the 60s and 70s and today—this holds true. However, those dreams travel generationally. The dreams of slave women are dreamt from within the scope of their lives. I believe that through time, the magnitude of those dreams expand. Slave women had a vision of freedom, education, ownership, among other things. Scholars like Angela Davis can craft a vision of prison abolition, despite that slave women may never have been able to believe it possible. It is incredible to think about devoting one's life to the resistance struggle, but never seeing it in its fullness. This means, that hope is dominant belief held by these women. They hope for a better future. Also, they work. The work they do is tangible proof that indicates there are structures in place creating change. To be an activist, I believe is the epitome of service for the world. You can live to see some changes manifest, while others you will continue to lay groundwork for. That

is why the rhetoric of the Black activist woman is so significant. It's pure, by nature, driven from a place of unmatched strength and power, and labors for the vision of freedom.

The Black Woman Symbol & Freedom

When I was thinking through tropes for this thesis, one of my many brilliant committee members, Dr. Janaka Lewis, thought of the notion of the Black woman as a rhetorical strategy. I find this is a unique argument for the purpose of this thesis. To expand upon her argument, I address the Black woman as a symbolic form of freedom. I base my analysis on the rhetoric of both Davis and Burke.

The Black woman has been a figure of domesticity, service, healing and leadership, among many other things. All of which she encompasses combine to create freedom in symbolic form. I understand that this is abstract, but it is also rich ideologically. What exactly do I mean by freedom in symbolic form? In my analysis, this embodies the collection of lived experiences, qualities, and practices by Black women—all of which come together to define freedom in its truest sense. I problematize that white Americans symbolize true freedom, rather Black women do. I argue this intensely because of the foundation Black slaves have provided for this country, especially Black women. To begin with her lived experiences, this is the area that addresses the root of her oppressions and the beauty of her triumph. The experiences lived by the Black woman in America are so greatly attached to this notion of freedom because her life has always aspired to it. Not only has she aspired to freedom, but she makes sure to work toward it. Lived experiences can entail a number of things: slavery, jail, domesticity, rape, activism, etc. Her position in society has dictated that lived experience. Her position in society and

in the hierarchy, prove that she is the standard of freedom—because she has never truly had it. There is no notion of freedom without slaves of oppression. The individuals that define freedom fully, are those who have lived life absent of it, yet are in constant search of it.

The argument made by Davis of the slave master being “sexual master” leads me to identify rape’s connection to freedom. Sexual slavery, as one of the Black woman’s most common experiences, must be addressed in this notion of freedom because as mentioned, it’s such a crucial part of her lived experience. I believe that freedom from rape is one of the most meaningful and transcendental forms of liberation because of this normalcy. The magnitude of the weapon of rape used by white slave masters is responsible for the current epidemic in this country, the descendants of slaves and transgenerational trauma. The exigency of this issue can’t be overstated. I argue that rape has remained the most terrorist form of oppression that mentally, emotionally, psychologically, physically and spiritually, torments Black women. Therefore, Black women **are** symbolic of freedom. Black women have been the victim of the white master’s desires, brutalities, and blame. Black women have suffered at the hands of white men to an exhausting capacity. The white master, who wields both the physical and ideological power, has used his polar opposite as his punching bag. Freedom in symbolic form is the Black woman because she represents what is farthest away from the individual who constructs and controls it. The person who harbors freedom as a possession cannot possibly define freedom. Only those who have lived through the opposite of freedom can, because it is an on-going, ever-reaching goal.

In that ever-reaching goal, practices of Black women are solidified. I argue that practices imposed on and created by Black women are freedom in symbolic form because she adapts to the life she has without freedom. The practices embodied by the Black woman is always an effort for liberation. Therefore, her true essence reflects its fullness. As detailed before, my analysis has noted the impact of pure and service-based existence in America. This is the most paramount practice of the Black woman. It has become the most instinctual, necessary and purposeful aspect of the Black woman symbolically and otherwise. The service-based existence of Black women, I believe, serves as validation of her truth in freedom. As mentioned earlier, the Black woman “is the mule of the world.” In the services she provides for the world, she labors for those above her hierarchically who harbor more freedom than she does. White men, white women and Black men have reaped the benefits of her services. Thus, the Black woman understands the depths and complexities of freedom for all and freedom for herself.

The alternative approach of using the embodied experience of being a Black woman has been a deliberate effort to prove not only the power of participatory rhetoric, but to also show the complexities of being Black, a woman and an activist. In this thesis, I analyze the personal and advocational methods of both Davis and Burke to reveal that power structures are based on the imposed impurity on Black women. Additionally, I have included my own perspective as a rhetorical scale that is grounded in those academic, personal and advocational methods. I argue that both the personal and advocational are valid, because the advocacy resists for our personhood. The rhetoric of Davis and Burke while unique in strategy, are in hopes of the same liberation. The Black woman as freedom in symbolic form is embedded with resistance and service. These are

the foundations of the spirit and essence of Black women in America. The individual, communal and transgenerational sexual violence she endures prove the depth of her triumph. This triumph is a reminder that one day, freedom will embrace her, with open arms—while she simultaneously defines what freedom is.

In conclusion, freedom from rape and freedom for Black women are necessary modes of change that will indicate national and worldly progress—as well as progress for this deserving group of people. Black women are an incredible source of strength in both purity and in power. In purity, Black women embody a resistance-based and re-signifying model. The purity of Black women resists everything that was imposed upon her. While that purity is grounded in strength, resilience, service, etc., it is largely so unique because it fights against what had been defined for her. Just like rape, the demonization of Black women was committed without any possibility of consent. The Black woman's resistance of those worldly impositions led to the re-signification of the demonization placed on her. Her resistance manifests in fighting for herself, her children, partners. It also exists in the ways that she has nurtured others physically, emotionally, communally and socially. This re-signification, as a result of her resistance, is a powerful testament that argues that Black women will not remain subject to those worldly impositions. In the context of rape, any justification contrived by white slave masters and women may have brutalized and traumatized her—but it hasn't destroyed her.

In power, Black women are proof of the spirit of humanity. No matter that enslavement and rape have been an identifying part of the Black woman's experience; the element of triumph is proof of power within Black women. Black women have fought their own sense of power for generations. That resistance and spirit of triumph is a unique

trait harbored by and taught by Black women on the individual, communal and transgenerational levels. Not only is that power within her, but the magnitude of what she fights speaks volumes. The power structures of enslavement and rape are torturous forms that don't seem to relent. In order for the Black woman and the Black community to survive, however, she must fight. Black women manifesting healing, (because it's historically not been given to her) is a groundbreaking example of power and strength. Healing is embedded with love, care and honesty—a reality that she wouldn't have to manifest if it weren't for oppression. Black women in power are true models of what power of the spirit really is.

While in this thesis, I address the rapist (accountability) and the survivor (healing), I do recognize that I pass over any rhetoric of the act itself. Further research will be necessary to address the psychology of the act itself in power. Why rape? I believe connecting this to the Black woman's experience will be an important discussion of how to combat the weapon itself. Since the Black woman has been a disproportionate target of rape, this can prove to be groundbreaking discussion of race-inspired rape as a concept. Cultural, racial and gender-based superiority all play an important role in understanding the act of rape. The gratification that is associated with sexual dominance, while difficult to address, is necessary to understand this pandemic form of oppression. The complexities of the psychology and physiology of rape as a human act on Black women, should reveal psycho-social elements of the world wanting to rape Black female bodies.

In addition to better understanding the act of rape, I believe that Black men who rape women needs to be addressed further. This thesis largely discussed the immoral

actions of white slave masters and white men. While Davis has made arguments about the fact that some Black men do rape, I would like to address this in future studies. This interest derives from a personal fact of having been raped by a Black man, and also having heard the stories of many young Black women and girls being violated by Black men. Any attempt to add to this discourse will not seek to condone the myth of the Black rapist. However, for the sake of all of the Black women and girls who have endured sexual abuse and rape at the hands of Black men—this is dire. Therefore, careful analysis of the current normalcy of Black men raping Black women, in particular, is needed. I believe that there is something noteworthy underlying in this concept that will address the Black family structure and romantic relationships of Black people in America.

While the topics of rape as an act and Black men who rape are complicated and difficult, analysis of them will play a monumental role in combatting the vulnerability of Black women being raped. Another important concept deals with the validation of the Black women speaking their truths. This is represented by way of activists such as Davis and Burke. The fact that they are Black women who voice their truths and advocate for Black women reveals the need for validation of the lived experience. In expressing those lived experiences, there exists a sense of passion and understanding. The truths of the lived experiences aren't being contrived. As with Burke's strategy of leading the cause with survivors, this holds true. The individuals affected by sexual violence are the very people who can determine the best ways to combat it. Why might that be? Devoting one's life to understanding why they were raped and how to help free others from it is an unrelenting sense of devotion. My sharing of my own story strengthens the discourse of rape on Black women. It not only contributes to individual healing but adds authenticity

to understanding the weapon of rape. There isn't any element of disassociation in participatory rhetoric, which will lead to the closest possible understanding of the truth. Black women voicing their truths, as resistance, is evidence of the fight for freedom. The stories of Black women need to be voiced recognized as enough validation. That validation comes with re-framing the perceived impurity of Black women and shifting the centrality of white importance and power in American society.

Freedom has been the most controlled and manipulated system of oppression in the lives of Black women. Freedom, as a possession, has been dangled, so to speak, in front of Black women for hundreds of years—without the possibility of grasping it. Freedom from rape, is a concept that seems impossible for Black women. However, the vision of freedom crafted by women like Angela Davis and eventually Tarana Burke, reach for freedom and manifest the possibility of freedom. Black women manifest freedom in their voicing, their resistance, their re-signification against all oppressions imposed on them. Black women manifest freedom ideologically, physically, emotionally, communally and trans-generationally. Rape, as an oppressive system of power is the violence Black women know all too well. Freedom from rape *is* freedom for Black women because of the magnitude it has had on Black women in the mind, body and spirit. Yet, Black women persist—and speak an authentic life into what freedom truly is.

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