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Arguments Against Amalgamation: The Citizen's Council Battles Integration By Controlling The Narrative

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EASTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

Arguments Against Amalgamation: The Citizen's Council Battles Integration
By Controlling The Narrative

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Abstract

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In 1954, the Supreme Court decision *Brown vs. Board of Education* eradicated the “separate, but equal” mentality that confined African Americans to the menial state of oppression and exploitation that had plagued their people since they arrived in America. However, this decision did little to neutralize the proclivity to segregation nor did it quell the surmounting racial tensions between black people and the upper echelon of Southern society. Conversely, the federal mandate to integrate public schools roused white supremacists to interpose desegregation through resistance, violence, and fear-mongering propaganda. The most flagrant organization of white supremacists was known as the White Citizen's Council, affectionately called the “Uptown Klan”, and was composed of the most powerful men in the South. The Council's rhetoric to oppose integration was fixated on the possibility of a sexual relationship between black men and white women, which would lead to the “mongrelization” of society by creating a mixed population. They justified white supremacy by vilifying black men as “black beast rapists” who threatened the sanctity of white women. Contrary to the Council's arguments, miscegenation was

perpetuated in their society most often through white on black interracial rape, which was permissible by society and the legal system in the cases of Recy Taylor (1947) and Betty Jean Owens (1959). The black victims of rape were often exploited, discredited, and ostracized by the same white men who fought to maintain segregation to prevent black men from raping white women.

Key words: *Brown vs. Board of Education*, White Citizen's Council, integration, black beast rapist, interracial rape, miscegenation, segregation, Recy Taylor, Betty Jean Owens

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As the sun set over Tylertown, Mississippi, four white men approached Annette Butler's door. Ernest Dillon, local salesman, alongside his brother and a pair of cousins, accosted Annette and her mother at their doorstep the night before Annette's wedding. Posing as a police officer, Dillon informed the women at gunpoint that Annette was arrested sleeping with her boyfriend. He forced Annette into his car, where three other adult white men awaited their hostage. The group had patrolled all evening looking for black women. They drove deep into the Bogue Chitto swamp, where they gang-raped her at knifepoint. The four men raped her and abandoned her in the woods. She wandered, half naked, through the wilderness at night in search of help. She stumbled upon some black fishermen who contacted the police. The police contacted the assailants, collected their testimony, and District Attorney Michael Carr charged all four men with "forcible ravishment and kidnap"¹. Four months later, Judge Tom Brady presided over the case in Pike County. The best lawyers in Mississippi defended the white rapists in court, and only Ernest Dillon

¹ Four White Men Kidnap and Rape Black Girl in Tylertown, Mississippi," *A History of Racial Injustice*, 2014, Accessed November 25, 2017, <https://racialinjustice.eji.org/timeline/05-13/>.

was sentenced to prison for an assault charge. The other three rapists plead not guilty and, despite confessions recorded in their testimonies, walked free.

It was no coincidence that Judge Tom Brady, a tenacious white supremacist and powerful opponent of integration, extended leniency to Dillon and his accomplices. As Mississippi's circuit court judge, Brady oversaw the serious criminal and civic offenses that afflicted Mississippi from 1950 to 1963, years characterized by indisputable racism and violence in the Deep South. When confronted with the violence and racism that induced white on black interracial rape, Brady protected the criminals. His dedication to white supremacy distorted his perception of interracial rape to condemnable, but not punishable by law. His reasoning in Annette Butler's trial illuminates the blatant contradictions. Unanimous with the white elites governing Mississippi, Judge Tom Brady failed to appreciate the irony in manifesting segregation legislation deliberate in preventing racial mixing while defending the white rapists who engaged in racial mixing. His political power relied on his ability to subjugate black people through segregation and social attitudes, so he constructed the dominant paradigm that allowed white men to rape black women without being seen as propagators of amalgamation. Brady, unanimous with leading segregationists, set the precedent that a white man would never pay with his life for raping a black woman while a black man could be publicly lynched for allegations of flirting with a white woman, like fourteen-year-old Emmett Till². Judge Brady belonged to the elite group of white politicians dedicated to Southern values,

² Timothy B Tyson, "'The Blood of Emmett Till'," *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, February 5, 2017, Accessed November 25, 2017, <http://specials.myajc.com/emmett-till/>.

specifically segregation, black disenfranchisement, and racial purity. As a group of white men at the top of the Southern hierarchy, they possessed the freedom to convoke, to create laws, and enforce laws that oppressed black people and dictated the social customs. Discouraging miscegenation is integral to the ideology of a white supremacist group and became the focus of the Brady's prose. Brady and his followers were organized advocates of this principle and able to manipulate the social narrative surrounding interracial sex to blame and emasculate black men, furthering the hypocrisy embedded in race relations in America since slavery breached its coast. His rhetoric exemplifies the centrality of sex to the movement to maintain segregation. White supremacists perpetuated distorted ideas about black sexuality and contradictory attitudes about interracial sex to bolster the argument for segregation.

The White Citizen's Council, affectionately known as the "Uptown Klan", formed on July 11th, 1955, in quick reaction to the Supreme Court's landmark case, *Brown v. Board of Education*³. Judge Tom Brady pressured the upper echelon of Mississippi society to oppose integrating public schools and to rival the growing power of the NAACP. His speech "Black Monday" served as a call to arms to defend the "sacred principle of States' Rights" in their choice to not integrate the education system⁴. Brady cited examples in early history where the introduction of black blood led to the deterioration and destruction of great civilizations like the Romans and

³ Neil McMillen, *The Citizens' Council: Organized Resistance to the Second Reconstruction, 1944-64* (University of Illinois Press, 1994) 360.

⁴ Thomas P. Brady, *A Review of Black Monday*, (Winona, MS: Association of Citizens' Councils of Mississippi, 1954) 9.

Egyptians. His hate was disguised in arguments for eugenics; a principle he and his supporters believe is validated through religion and the natural world. Brady states “If God in His infinite wisdom had wanted a Mongrelized, mixed man, that man would have been on this earth. He would not have separated into the northwest quadrant, over in Asia and below the trackless Sahara; if God had wanted these races of men to be mixed, they would have been created mixed. No Socialist preacher can deny this”.

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Reverend G.T. Gillespie, popular theologian for white conservative Protestants, made similar arguments in his widely distributed pamphlet, *A Christian View on Segregation*. He justifies segregation through biblical context, like “the Confusion of Tongues” when building the Tower of Babel, and concludes that all Christians are united in faith but they should not be united sexually⁶. Reverend James P. Dees’ *Essays on Segregation* uses the iconic argument, “Do blackbirds intermingle with the blue birds? Does the redwing fly with the crows?”⁷ The religious and civil authorities of this era preached that miscegenation among species is unnatural and defies God’s plan for the human race. Brady sustained that God sanctioned that white people are not to mix with black people and “you can’t change chromosomes by law”⁸. Mississippi’s white society manipulated the arguments of the Bible to combat the popularity of active black churches in the Civil Rights movement. However, if their logic is sound, then God in His infinite wisdom did not account for the forced

⁵ Thomas P. Brady, *A Review of Black Monday*, 14.

⁶ Reverend G.T. Gillespie, *A Christian View on Segregation*, (Winona, MS: Association of Citizens’ Councils of Mississippi, 1954) 12.

⁷ Reverend James P. Dees, “Should Christians Support Integration?”, *Essays on Segregation*, (St. Thomas Press, 1960) 43.

⁸ Thomas P. Brady, *A Review of Black Monday*, 16.

migration of Africans into the United States of America, where a mixed race was forced and created through interracial rape, and where Judge Brady was actively denying the existence of mixed-race individuals and delaying integration in order to prevent more miscegenation.

His speech solidified the necessity for an organized, law-abiding group of white supremacists that were concerned about the future of the nation now that black children and white children can sit together at public schools. “Black Monday” resonated with the men who supported fear and violence as a means of controlling black people and implored them to assemble and resist. However, Brady’s speech stressed that this organization must distinguish itself from the Ku Klux Klan by operating within the law and publicly condemning violence. As affluent white men, the Council could deny associations when beneficial and redirect society’s focus to distance themselves from negative publicity. Images of extreme police brutality and lynching had surfaced into popular media and garnered infamy from around the world⁹. Pictures of black bodies swinging by a noose became analogous with white supremacy and ruined the idealism of the American dream. These men were intently concerned about the reputation of their organization and the Magnolia State as a whole, where rampant racial violence was depleting their tourist industry. Brady and his men worked diligently to separate themselves from the negative perception of white supremacy in order to carry out their intentions of subjugating black people without demoralizing Mississippi’s character.

⁹ Danielle L. 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*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2011) 218.

Faced with the federal mandate to integrate public schools, Mississippi politicians and businessmen convened under the guidance of Robert “Tut” Patterson in Indianola, Mississippi on July 11th, 1956¹⁰. Indianola represented a natural catalyst for the white supremacy movement-it was a politically conservative region at the heart of the Mississippi Delta, rich with plantations and a dense black population. African Americans represented 68% of the population but only .03% of the registered voters in Indianola.

The original 100 members- local businessmen, doctors, politicians, the mayor- devised the “Indianola plan” to combat the growing sentiment that black people deserve to be equally educated¹¹. Neil McMillen writes on the inner workings of the Citizen’s Council saying, “Only after securing the support of the power structure in the rural communities and county seats of the Delta did the Council come out into the open actively to seek mass support.¹²” The group pledged their influence and funds to defend segregation through whatever legal means possible to preserve the Southern way of life. Interposition is a time-honored tradition in the South and reinforced the Council’s legitimacy.

Mississippi senator James O. Eastland pushed for a nationwide organization to free from “fawning” politicians, to present a united front against integration¹³. Sixty-five representatives from eleven different states secretly convened at the Roosevelt Hotel in New Orleans to form the Citizen’s Council of America. The Deep South was

¹⁰ Neil McMillen, *The Citizens' Council: Organized Resistance to the Second Reconstruction, 1944-64*, 19.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid, 320.

¹³ Ibid, 116.

heavily represented but representatives as far as Florida and Texas pledged to defend their right to resist integration in public schools in their respective districts, depriving millions of African Americans access to a decent education. Senator William Rainach of Louisiana was elected President and Robert Patterson served as secretary. They established their office and developed their publication, *The Citizen's Council*. Rainach declared the national Council independent from other local groups or members, however they gained notoriety through association with resistance organizations like the North Carolina Patriots and Georgia's States' Rights Council.

William J. Simmons is credited for aggrandizing the CCA during the 1960's. The former businessman and accountant became the adroit editor for *The Citizen's Council*, which cultivated a respectable image for white supremacists by creating the systemized conduct of the career supremacist. Simmons also employed Louis W. Hollis, a successful recruiter responsible for organizing block-by-block canvasses and a "Freedom of Choice" survey that attracted hundreds of members¹⁴. The pair led the organization by augmenting their credibility through their publication and spreading their propaganda.

The Council estimated their own membership to be around five hundred thousand strong but these numbers are likely exaggerated. By 1961, the organized resistance movement flourished in Mississippi under Hollis and Simmons, but was withering away in states like Louisiana, Georgia, and South Carolina. The links in Arkansas, Florida, and Texas weakened as well. The Council conducted telephone committees, brochure canvassing, and mail campaigns to recruit members outside of

¹⁴ Ibid, 125.

Mississippi. The organization lacked the support to remain viable by 1965 but could still brag about the temporary coalition of eleven states to oppose integration.

Simmons, Hollis, and other powerful white men forced their ideology upon the white parents of the South through newspapers, manuals, radio stations, pamphlets, posters, brochures, and even textbooks in their children's schools. Any form of media that these men could get their hands on was an opportunity to influence the white elite to oppose integration if they wanted to retain racial integrity. The Council's views arrived at the doorstep of hundreds of thousands of white households across the South via widely circulated newspapers like the *Lexington Advertiser*, the *Jackson Daily News*, the *Meridian Star* and through other organizations dedicated to racial purity. The fight against integration hinged on biblical, sexual, and patriotic arguments that saturated any popular media and was almost unavoidable.

Segregationist author Carleton Putnam's book *Race and Reason* (1961) earned the Council's favor by discouraging miscegenation on the basis that race is the definitive factor of whether a civilization will thrive. Infrastructure and institutions were indicative of a society's success according to Putnam. He provokes his readers to compare the villages of the Congo to metropolitan cities in Europe to decipher which race was superior¹⁵. Southern statesmen offered discounted rates for *Race and Reason* and petitioned Mississippi legislators to make his book required reading for school children. Governor Ross Barnett even dedicated a national holiday in celebration of Putnam. Other Council- approved titles such as *God the Original*

¹⁵ Carleton Putnam, *Race and Reason: A Yankee View* (Washington, D.C: Public Affairs Press, 1961).

Segregationist by Carey Daniel and *The Church and Segregation* by Paul Barrett demonstrate how white supremacy permeated every social institution in Mississippi.

The White Citizen's Council often targeted children in the classrooms to ensure the perpetuation of racism. They distributed handbooks in fifth and sixth grade classrooms that classified the differences between blacks and whites like the difference in the weight of their brains and skulls. For adults, the organization put out a fallacious brochure, advertised as "Racial Facts", that claimed that blacks' IQ was inherently lower and their skin had a distinct odor¹⁶. For children, the purpose of segregation was focused on sexual distinction and one's civic duty. Judge Tom Brady's trepidation with integration stemmed from anxiety towards a perceived decline in racial preference in the nation's youth. He feared that integration would desensitize white children to the preference of their own race, thus causing irreparable damage and threatening the existence of the white race. Therefore, the White Citizen's Council needed to appeal to white people of all ages- parents and children alike.

Taking this argument further, Mississippi councilmen discouraged integration by aligning its efforts (and the NAACP as a whole) to the Communist party. In a manual distributed in 3rd and 4th grade classrooms in 1957, Mississippi Councilors blatantly stated that "race-mixing helps communists". The Council red-baited black enfranchisement efforts during the zenith of McCarthyism known as the Second Red Scare. Integration was portrayed as an intentional attempt to disrupt Southern

¹⁶ Neil McMillen, *The Citizens' Council: Organized Resistance to the Second Reconstruction, 1944-64*, 162.

livelihood and that would make America weak by creating a “Black Empire”¹⁷. The rationale for distributing this information to young children was the pointed effort to distinguish the races and apply civic pressure so white children would be more likely to copulate with other white children because the fate of the nation depended on it. White children of this era never experienced racial diversity in an academic setting and the Council exploited their inexperience to further the racial divide between black and white people. By targeting children born after the era of Jim Crow, the Council preserved their prestige and political ideology to engender the next generation of amenable racists.

The CCA’s influence prevailed in the southern states for a decade, resulting in dramatic battles between the federal government, which mandated integration, and local governments where the CCA fought the mandate with every weapon at their disposal. The Council enacted over 400 laws in total to delay black children from attending schools¹⁸. The guerilla tactics of the KKK were discordant with the dignified image the CCA publicized. Instead they used the law, their publications, and their economic power to suppress even the slightest effort at integration. The most histrionic confrontation between the CCA and the federal government was the escalation of events known as the Little Rock School Crisis, in which the National Guard was deployed to prevent nine black children from attending Little Rock Central High School in 1957¹⁹. The images of the Little Rock Nine bravely entering their school building, unperturbed by the anger and hate hurled by the white

¹⁷ Neil McMillen, *The Citizens' Council: Organized Resistance to the Second Reconstruction, 1954-64*, 184.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 267.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 270.

supremacists surrounding their school, will forever be associated with unwarranted racism in America. The governor contested their enrollment because of pressure from the local Council. Plans were laid to comply with desegregation in 1957, but the school board of Arkansas had to deal with opposition from the organized white segregationists. They disrupted school board meetings, conducted letter-writing campaigns, and put advertisements in the newspaper that beckoned readers to envision the horror of a mixed future with a black boy playing Romeo and a white girl playing Juliet. Amis Gunthridge, a spokesman for Arkansas' Citizen's Council, threatened that desegregation would result in "hell on the border" but did not condone acts of violence from members²⁰. However, there was established tension between the school board and the Citizen's Council. Governor Faubus conceded to the current of racial resistance and constructed blockades to the public schools. For seventeen days the resistance waged on until President Eisenhower intervened. On September 23rd, 1957 nine black students were admitted into the school only to greet an angry mob militantly protesting their education. More troops were sent in to guard the students while the CCC encouraged hostility to deter desegregation. Robert Tut Patterson declared "Little Rock has proven that forced integration is impractical if not impossible²¹."

The CCC responded by establishing the Little Rock Private School Corporation, which would become its chief philanthropy. American segregationists and sympathizers from around the world generously donated to the privatized school movement and made motions to fire forty-four Arkansas teachers, administrators,

²⁰ Ibid, 272.

²¹ Ibid, 276.

and the Superintendent Terrell E. Powell for complying with desegregation²². The lesser known aftermath of the Little Rock School Crisis is known as “The Lost Years” in which Governor Faubus decided to close all public schools from 1958 to 1959 in direct compliance with the Citizen’s Council’s publications. By 1960, Arkansas schools were desegregated²³. The CCC marches and rallies did not defer its progress and were often intercepted by the police force. However, on September 4th, 1960, two years after the initial attacks on Little Rock’s public schools, 3 bombs were planted at the school board office, the mayor’s office building, and in an automobile belonging to a fire department chief who had used his hose against the CCC protest marches. E.A. Lauderdale Jr., a member of the CCC’s board of directors, was convicted and sentenced to three years in prison for the bombings, but was pardoned six months into his sentence. Furthermore, Emmett E. Miller, founder and president of the local Citizen’s Council chapter, was found guilty of bombing an all-black classroom at the Philander Smith College in Little Rock²⁴. As similar bombings occurred, the Council lost its credibility and eventually faded from the public sphere. Similar events unfolded in Louisiana where New Orleans Councilors used methods reminiscent of Little Rock- portraying moderates as Communists, holding mass meetings, and eventually inciting angry mobs to boycott schools.

²² Ibid, 288.

²³ Sondra, Gordy, *Finding the Lost Year: What Happened When Little Rock Closed its Public Schools?* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2009).

²⁴ Neil McMillen, *The Citizens' Council: Organized Resistance to the Second Reconstruction, 1954-64*, 283.

One of the more popular editions of *The Citizen's Council* was William J. Simmons's manual entitled "How to Start a Private School²⁵". Once it became inexorable that public schools were going to integrate, the Council pushed for private white academies aimed at preserving Southern traditions and the white race. Efforts in Mississippi, South Carolina, Louisiana, and Alabama provided an alternative for segregationists parents who didn't want to send their children to integrated schools. In 1964 Council School No. 1 opened its doors, quickly followed a year later by numbers 2 and 3. With laws like the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Supreme Court's decisions to rapidly desegregate all public schools, private schools enjoyed rapid popularity in the late 60's. An estimated 300,000 children were enrolled in Southern academies during this time, and the CCA took credit for their success²⁶.

Through their "lily-white" schools, their widely circulated publications, and many campaigns, the Citizen's Council successfully disseminated their message to every white individual in Mississippi²⁷. Messages advocating for racial integrity, Southern values, and the sexual deviance of African Americans were staples in their media and school systems. The concentration towards sexuality is central in their arguments against integration. Their logic dictated that if black and white children sat next to each other at school, they would date, copulate, and create mixed race that would eradicate all Caucasians. This terrified white parents across the Deep South. The root of the Citizen's Council's argument is sexual insecurity. The White Citizen's Council's success and popularity can be attributed to their cognizance of white men's

²⁵ Ibid, 300.

²⁶ Ibid, 302.

²⁷ Ibid, 267.

sexual insecurities and their position at the top of the social ladder allowed them to exploit it. The Council had the means to produce material intended to fear-monger their constituents into submitting an entire race of people to oppression and ignorance while denying any responsibility for the inevitable violence.

This material included rhetoric intended to demean African Americans and promote stereotypes. Disturbing racial stereotypes masqueraded as scientific research. This research concluded that though blacks only accounted for ten percent of the population, they committed sixty three percent of murders, sixty two percent of prostitution arrests, and forty percent of the rapes ²⁸. Some of this material cited historical evidence that suggested black people mongrelized society. For example, Georgia politician Roy V. Harris wrote in his weekly tabloid, the *Augusta Courier*, “No race of people in antiquity developed and made progress as did the Egyptians...Yet during all this development, the Black contributed two things to the history of mankind: 1. Human slavery. 2. Cannibalism”²⁹. Furthermore, the Council’s newspapers consisted of sensationalized editorials and articles depicting a “sex atrocity” between blacks and whites during this era³⁰.

All of this material was targeted towards the specific, dreaded, interracial interaction between a white woman and a black man. The purpose of the Council’s creation and dissemination of their message was to deter white women from black men. They used their platform to cast black men as sexually charged deviants who were raping white women and responsible for a generation of mixed-race people. In

²⁸ Ibid, 186.

²⁹ Ibid, 180.

³⁰ Ibid, 186.

November 1956, a few months after Annette Butler was raped by multiple white men, in an article entitled "Mixed Marriages Will Become Commonplace", the Council argues that the motivating force behind integration is racial amalgamation³¹.

Councilman Walter C. Givhan of Alabama stirred fear in the hearts of every white man of the South by stating that the NAACP had used the *Brown vs. Board of Education* courtroom decision to open the bedroom doors of white women to black men. Council leaders were convinced that the Supreme Court had lowered the racial barriers of public schools to promote interracial mixing. Their logic followed that there could be no other reason that black people would seek equal education other than the opportunity to be near white women, who were "the loveliest and purest of God's creatures³²." They casted African Americans as sexual criminals unfit for a full participation in society. This roused support from white men who were willing to do anything to protect their daughters and wives from the savage men the Council created.

It is important to note that the portrayal of African Americans in media was constructed to force an agenda upon society. The mongrels representing black people in the Council's newspaper were not intended in anyway to be accurate, but instead to incite fear. The Council fueled fear and hate by targeting interracial marriage and intercourse in a variety of ways. They gave the black man an image: a monster with protruding lips and eyes, dark as night with spears and grass skirts. They gave him a stereotype: a beast, a rapist, a predator lurking in the night, waiting

³¹ "Mixed Marriage Will Become Commonplace," *The Citizen's Council* 2, no. 1-3 (1956): 4.

³² Thomas P. Brady, *Black Monday*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1955) 45.

to rape your white wife and daughter. They created social customs designed to emasculate black men: referring to any black man of any age as “boy” or lynching. The White Citizen’s Council was a devoted and tactful organization of manipulation that saw a threat to their status, their Southern values, and created an attack campaign against black men.

The Council operated on already established stigmas against black Americans and expounded and validated these views. There was a growing anxiety towards the perceived overbearing sexuality of black men that had roots before the Civil War. Howard Odum, a professor of sociology from the University of North Carolina, attributed the frenzy and panic surrounding slave rebellions that occurred during the nineteenth century as a reason behind white people’s fear of inter-race relations³³. Whites believed that slaves would be hoarding weapons and plotting to rape their wives to establish dominance in the South. This perpetuated the “black beast rapist” stereotype that claimed African American could not resist the appeals of a white woman³⁴. Judge Tom P. Brady justifies the black man’s tendency to rape by affirming, “The black, in so far as sex is concerned is not immoral, he is simply nonmoral. He surely follows his natural instinct,” in his address to the Commonwealth Club of California in 1957. The far reach of this stereotype is implicated by the widely popular silent film, “The Birth of a Nation”, which was a commercial success during its debut in 1915. The film depicts the sexual aggression of black men (white actors

³³ Danielle L. 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*, 25.

³⁴ Diane Miller Sommerville, *Rape and Race in the Nineteenth-Century South* (University of North Carolina Press, 2005) 241.

in blackface) as a moral justification for the actions of the Ku Klux Klan, who are the film's heroes. In a particularly disturbing scene, the "black beast rapist" appeared to chase a young white girl up a mountain, where she chooses to jump to her death than risk sexual assault from the deviant yet simple-minded black man. The dramatization of a cultural anxiety towards black men and white women provoked the "rape myth" from the South that justified the emasculation of black men due to the dangers they posed for white women. "Many white southerners sought to justify extralegal violence by claiming it was a necessary means of deterring black rapists, and lynching unsurprisingly became the primary vehicle for discussions of sexual relations between white women and black men in the twentieth-century South" writes author Linda Lindquist Dorr in her book *White Women, Rape, and the Power of Race in Virginia, 1900-1960*³⁵. Most lynchings were often a result of alleged black-on-white sexual assault, the violent act served to threaten black communities as well as unite white communities to protect their women. Rumors of black-on-white rape were especially prevalent in areas where Jim Crow laws were challenged and became sensationalized where African Americans sought political or social control.

"Unsubstantiated rumors of black men attacking innocent white women sparked almost 50 percent of all race riots in the United States between Reconstruction and World War II," write author Danielle McGuire³⁶. White segregationists sponsored unsubstantiated rumors of rape to align African American enfranchisement efforts

³⁵ Lisa Lindquist Dorr, *White Women, Rape, and the Power of Race in Virginia 1900-1960* (University of North Carolina Press, 2004) 8.

³⁶ Danielle L. 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*, 26.

with threats to the purity and safety of white women. By both demonizing and emasculating black men, the White Citizen's Council was able to incite the necessary fear to rally white people against their efforts to educate themselves alongside white women. The Council's cycle of intimidation and subjugation afforded them the opportunity to portray black people as sexually deviant and unfit for the full participation in society. This further perpetuated the "rape myth" that ensured all white women could cry rape and white southerners would accept their accusations on all accounts against black men because black men were often uneducated and afraid.

But it wasn't only black men who were afraid and uneducated. Arguably the most marginalized and exploited demographic in American history, black women suffered the most from the messages of the White Citizen's Council. Through the social traditions that oppressed their gender, the lack of education, and the Council's active labors to emasculate their men, black women were left defenseless in a nation that treated them as property resources. Black women were not people with bodily integrity or valued lives in the eyes of the White Citizen's Councils. They were things to be used and discarded. Rape was a method of subjugation and social control- a vehicle for controlling black women's bodies after no longer considered property by law. The consistent prevalence of white-on-black sexual assault following Jim Crow era proves a region-wide phenomenon to exert " economic, emotional, psychological, spiritual, physical, reproductive, legal, political, and ideological" control over all black women. The personal effects of interracial sexual violence are well documented in literature- *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* by Harriet Jacobs, *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, and

countless slave narratives- as well in 92 interviews from African American men and women collected over decades by researchers Ruth Thompson-Miller and Leslie H. Picca in their article, "'There Were Rapes!': Sexual Assaults of African American Women and Children in Jim Crow"³⁷. Their research confirms the systemized sexual assault of black women from post-Reconstruction until the 1960's that were largely ignored during their time of occurrence. The prevalent theme of the interviews was the result of white on black sexual violence- the socialization of reserved, cautious behavior around white people. Respondents recount being taught as young children to listen to and obey white people, but to not trust them. This notion carries through in testimony recorded by Ida Mae Holland in her memoirs about her time as a babysitter for a wealthy white family, where her 70-year-old employer raped her at 11 years old. She writes:

'Folks used to tell how, in the South no white man wanted to die without having sex with a black woman. It was just seen as part of life and if you... were black, you were always at the mercy of white people. You didn't need to be sitting babies or cleaning houses to fall victim to the white man's lust. We could just as easily be picking cotton or walking to the store or spending money in a white man's store when the mood would take him and he'd take us- just like that, like lightning striking. ³⁸'

³⁷ Leslie Picca and Ruth Thompson-Miller, "'There Were Rapes!': Sexual Assaults of African American Women and Children in Jim Crow", *Violence Against Women*, 2016.

³⁸ 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*, 203.

The lack of control and safety around white men bred mistrust for black women. Indicated by both the interviews in the research and Ida Mae Holland's experience, black women were taught to avoid white men at all times. White men didn't face consequences for snatching up black women in public. White men justified sexually assaulting black women to the extent that they would even attack them in their own homes - their perceived place of refuge and security- as is with the case of Annette Butler and many others. Their men could not protect them for rape, their body wasn't (in the eyes of white men) their own to defend, and they would be the one to blame after it was all over, if they had the gumption to report sexual assault. Despite the onslaught of interracial rape during this era, black women were hesitant to report sexual assault for fear of being ostracized or killed. Brave victims who stepped forward to voice their attacks were targeted by white supremacists that used intimidation and violence to preserve the status quo. Recy Taylor, a young black mother who was gang raped by white men while walking home from church, had her house set on fire with her toddler inside by white mercenaries after reporting her attack³⁹. Black women who spoke out against their rapists would receive death threats, be shunned from their communities, and put the lives of their loved ones in danger. But these were minor in comparison to the humiliation and emotional suffering they would receive in the courtrooms.

The lawyers assigned to defend Annette Butler's rapists followed meticulous protocol to push the narrative of the White Citizen's Council. Judge Tom Brady and his allies used allegations of interracial rape to propagate African Americans

³⁹ Ibid, 6.

predilection towards sexual promiscuity. These lawyers were insensitive and obdurate in their attacks on the victim-blaming young black women for being raped by white men. Defense lawyers forced Butler to recount her attack in “lurid detail” and lead an interrogation about Butler’s night before the rape where she partied at a local juke joint past midnight⁴⁰. The lawyer’s tactics were uniform for defenders of white rapists- cast the victim as black Jezebels to discredit their rape allegations. To create a persona of an easy, loose woman, the lawyers used the anecdotal evidence of her night at the juke joint and the testimony of a local white man to conclude Butler’s poor reputation around town unqualified her from being raped by white men. In the eyes of powerful white men, black women couldn’t be raped because they were all sexually available. Black women’s testimony and accusations were devalued in Southern courts where white men in power were desperate to maintain the patriarchy. Annette Butler was mortified in the courtroom; blamed for her own rape, and then the all-white jury acquitted the confessed white rapists.

Butler’s case was considered justice in the white community. To sentence a white man to death for raping a black woman was considered an excessive punishment and misuse of the legal system to deteriorate Southern livelihood. No judge in Mississippi would consider setting a precedent that a white man’s life was worth less than a black woman’s security. Hypothetically, if that were to happen, this judge would likely be beleaguered, maybe attacked, and removed from office as quickly as possible. When this precedent was overturned in a Florida court in 1959

⁴⁰ Ibid, 144.

for the white rapists of Betty Jean Owens, the community became incensed and racial tensions thickened.

“Are you going to believe this nigger wench over these four boys?” Defense attorney Howard Williams roared in disbelief in the Florida courtroom where Betty Jean Owens testified to her rape⁴¹. Owens remained composed and confident as Williams relentlessly grilled her about her virginity, her pleasure during the sexual assault, and why she hadn’t resisted harder while four white men gang raped her seven times over. His attempts at casting her as a prostitute faltered and Judge Walker sentenced the four white boys to life in prison with the recommendation of mercy on June 21st, 1959. This saved the rapists from being sent to the electric chair- solidifying that no white man would die for their crimes against black women- but still shows some development in the definition of justice in interracial rape cases. For the first time in Florida history a white man would be sent to jail for raping a black woman. The verdict was a Dixiecrat’s worst nightmare and led to more dissolution of white supremacy and segregation. White communities faced heightened anxiety about blacks colluding in retaliation, further perpetuating the “black beast rapist” stereotype, which demonstrates how deeply embedded these social stigmas were. The hypocrisy was lost on white people who feared for the safety and security of white women around black men after a black woman was gang-raped by white men. White Floridians felt the entire rape case was a ploy by the NAACP to mongrelize society through integration rather than acknowledging the reality of situation, which was that white men were doing more than the NAACP to “mongrelize” society by

⁴¹ Ibid, 181.

raping black women. In a state of what only could be assumed as angered delusion, local white man Bill Arens petitioned the judge for leniency by stating, "Black woman like to be raped by the white men... something like this will help the Supreme Court force this low bred race ahead, making whites live and eat with him and allow his children to associate with the little apes, grow up and marry them"⁴². For centuries, the white South denied any responsibility in the creation of a mixed race and used the threat of amalgamation to manipulate the laws and legislation of their region. When a white man proved to be directly involved in race mixing, logic was dismissed and hypocrisy flourished in the sake of preserving the social hierarchy. "Sex was the principle around which the whole structure of segregation... was organized. It was because of sex that racial segregation... was intended to permeate every aspect of society," said sociologist Gunnar Myrdal in his study of southern culture in 1947⁴³. His statement holds true as Florida lawmakers bolstered legislation to segregate children by sex in integrated public schools in response to Betty Jean Owens' rape.

In contrast, Annette Butler's rape was ignored, stifled under the weight of the white supremacists who refused to relinquish the control of black women and the sheer frequency of cases like hers. Her rape did not bring about any social change or progress in Mississippi, but instead the reaction was to further entrench the state in hypocrisy. In response to the sentence, Judge Tom Brady concerned himself more with the negative image the white rapists have cast on Mississippi rather than the physical and emotional damage of sixteen-year-old Annette Butler. "When confronted with real interracial mixing and actual rapists, not the fictional black

⁴² Ibid, 185.

⁴³ Ibid, 153.

rapists he saw lurking behind every school-desegregation case, Brady buckled under the weight of his own racial prejudices,” writes author Danielle McGuire⁴⁴. As the circuit court judge for Mississippi, Brady set the precedent to discourage mixing between the races by demoralizing the black victims of rape and chastising white men for lowering their standards. Brady ambivalent towards the victim but perturbed at the concomitant shame brought upon his state as reports of the influx of interracial rape reached national news. To be fair, Brady did have reasonable concerns with the state’s growing reputation as a host to violence and hatred. The Civil Rights movement was not well received in the South and many white men felt it necessary to act in violence- whether that is physical or sexual- to ensure their status above blacks. This meant lynching, raping, and ostracizing whomever to stay at the top of Mississippi’s society.

Butler’s rape was the quintessential case of interracial sex for the mid-20th century, and follows almost a formulaic procedure. A group of entitled white men would go out looking for black women. This was apparently a frequent activity that went by many different names- “nighttime integration”, “night riders”, or explicitly just “huntin’ for niggers (Sally Belfrage, pg. 20 *Dark End of the St, The Color Purple*). The technique was to pluck unlucky black women up from whatever circumstance by posing as men of authority (which was easy for a white man to do), gang rape her, and then ditch her in the middle of nowhere, unconcerned with the consequences of their crime. Law enforcers who would collect confessions but not carry out charges reinforced the white men’s insouciant attitude towards rape. As evidenced, the crime

⁴⁴ Ibid, 143.

was typically swept under the rug, the defenders of white supremacy were martyred, and the victim was deemed a scourge in the community and eventually ostracized. Often during the trial, the black victim's integrity was the focus of interrogation rather than crime. The result would typically foster more stigmatization towards the victims of sexual assault and greater confidence of white men to continue to treat black people as property.

During this era, white men reigned supreme and fought hard to subjugate African Americans and preserve their way of life through fear, violence, and legislation. By raping black women and lynching black men, white Southerners stripped any sense of control or security from their lives with no repercussions. The regularity of interracial rape exposes the power of white men; either the lawmakers, the police officers, or the rapists, to oppress black people. While Annette Butler was being called a whore for being raped by a white man, the White Citizen's Council was disseminating articles, journals, and stereotypes that blamed African American men for the influx of mixed race individuals. They controlled the social narrative to turn fiction into fact for the sake of their tradition. When it came to amalgamation, proven white rapists were uninvolved and individualized, while black men even suspected of flirting with white women, like Emmett Till, were solely responsible for the mongrelization of society, the disruption of southern livelihood, and worthy of a brutal murder.

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