

American community and by extension the larger American community are also integrated with the Black women's voices⁵.

The reason I consciously use the voices of Black women scholar-activists as experts who both expose and address the issue of intra-racial rape and sexual assault in the Black community is because in the United States (and I would argue the entire 'Western' world) Black women are not viewed as experts. How often do viewers have the opportunities to see and hear Black women's perspectives as the authoritative voice on celluloid? Since *NO!*'s inception, making Black women's voices and experiences central—not on the sidelines, not on the periphery, but in the center of the work without any excuses or apologies, has always been a part of the vision of the documentary.

Additionally, *NO!* addresses the classist notion that rape, sexual assault and other forms of gender-based violence are only perpetrated at the hands of working class Black men who live in the "hood" or in the "ghetto." The majority of the victim-survivor testimonies featured in *NO!* challenge the classist stereotype that Black men with academic degrees, high profiles, and/or men who are on the front lines fighting for racial liberation are incapable of being sexist, misogynist, and/or rapists.

NO! also takes on the notion that, as freedom fighters, Black women must "choose" between race and gender. Gwendolyn Zoharah Simmons—PhD,⁶ former SNCC (Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee) organizer, Islamic scholar, and my mother—speaks in *NO!* about how Black women knew—and spoke amongst themselves—about rape and sexual assault within the Civil Rights Movement. However, at that time (for many of them felt that the principal issue was racism), rape, sexual assault, and sexual harassment were considered minor problems in comparison to the State-sanctioned racial violence that countless Black people across the United States were experiencing. But in 1964, my mother, one of the anonymous heroines in SNCC, became the Director of a COFO (Council of Federated Organizations)⁷ project in Laurel, Mississippi. And during this time, based on what she both experienced and witnessed, she created a sexual harassment policy to protect the women volunteers on the project—one of the first policies ever established within SNCC. As a result, she gained the reputation of being an "Amazon," which meant "Gwen didn't take any shit from men." The Laurel project also became known as the "Amazon project," and as a result many men refused to work there.

NO! takes on the critical task of publicly uncovering Black women's herstories through testimonies of women such as my mother and sistah Elaine Brown, the only woman to lead the Black Panther Party. In her *NO!* interview, sistah Elaine also talks about the sexual violence she witnessed during the time of the Black Panthers. Too often in the United States, when we think about the Civil Rights movement or the Black Panther Party, we don't think about the countless Black women who were on the front lines of these revolutionary struggles. We forget that women were faced with death threats by the white establishment while simultaneously having to live with threats of rape and sexual assault by their Black male comrades. We do not consider how ironic, and how painful, it was for our mothers and sistahs to have to resist sexual assault and harassment by Black male

comrades while having to fight with them against racial injustice, under the threat of death.

The Making of *NO!*

I may be the backbone of *NO!*, however the making of *NO!* has been a collaborative effort on the part of many women and some men behind the camera,⁸ and men and women in front of the camera. Too often, documentaries are made by people who are not a part of the community they are documenting. Unfortunately in some instances, this has resulted in a distorted view of the documented communities. I believe it was important that the women behind the *NO!* camera were representative of the women featured in front of the *NO!* camera.

Since its very beginning in 1994, the creative production and advisory team has been inclusive of lesbians, young and older women, most of whom are of African descent. This conscious configuration of the production and advisory team resulted in my creating women only production sets, where the featured survivors felt safe to publicly disclose and psychically revisit, on camera, the horror, trauma, and victimization that they experienced during their rapes and sexual assaults. The filmmaking dynamic was a predominantly Black feminist space where everyone's voice and perspective was heard. As the director, I interviewed all of the survivors, scholars, and activists. However, after my interviews, there was always an opportunity for all members of the production and advisory team to ask follow up questions of all of the interviewees. I believe this Black feminist process of valuing everyone's perspective, regardless of their title, changed the dynamic of filmmaking, which is historically a 'top-down' process. This process also strengthened *NO!* because the production and advisory team helped me to take the documentary to a level that I wouldn't have been able to without the collective expertise of the team. It has been an absolute honor and a privilege to work with some of the most talented, technically proficient, intellectually sound, fiercely dedicated and committed women that I know.

In the beginning of my journey through the making of *NO!* very few people wanted to touch the documentary with a ten-mile pole. After all, African American (as well as Native American, Latina, Arab American, Asian American, and Pacific Islander) women are not valued in America (and in most parts of the world)—to quote Elaine Brown, the feeling is "what difference does it make? It's only some Black woman [who's been raped]." As a result, the number one obstacle in making of the documentary was funding. And unlike many other art forms, filmmaking can be very expensive. This has to do with the fact that more often than not, it's a collaborative undertaking, which means that director and producer are not only responsible for their expenses, they're also responsible for the salaries and expenses of the members of the production team. While it is very true that the digital video revolution has reduced the costs of resources needed to make a documentary, filmmaking is still an expensive collaborative art form.

Major progressive and mainstream foundations and funds, as well as major cable networks, consistently said "No" to funding the making of *NO!* Some of the verbal and written responses I've received to funding requests include:

- “Why are you *only* focusing on the rape of Black women?”
- “Strong point of view and the concept is good; however, the example of Mike Tyson’s case and the indifference from the [Black] community might be due, in part, to the moral point of view that one does not go to a man’s room in the early morning; that opinion cannot be ignored.”
- “Given that you are a lesbian, what’s your axe to grind with making *NO!*?”
- “Let’s face it, very unfortunately, most people don’t care about the rape of Black women and girls, and therefore we’re concerned that there won’t be many viewers who will tune in to watch *NO!*, we were to air it on our network.”

In the face of this racist, sexist and misogynist economic censorship, I developed an international grassroots Black feminist lesbian-led educational fundraising campaign that would raise awareness about intra-racial rape and sexual assault in African American communities while raising funds for the making of *NO!*. Through this network, I had the opportunity to speak about heterosexual intra-racial rape and sexual assault in African American communities across the United States, as well as throughout Italy, in Toronto, Paris and Marseilles, London and Birmingham, Amsterdam, Budapest, and in Dubrovnik and Stubicke Toplice, Croatia. During this eleven year journey, I have worked full time on *NO!* for seven years. I also screened various versions, ranging from 8 to 75 minutes, of *NO!: A Work-in-Progress*. There have been audiences as small as two people and as large as five hundred. These events created a space for me to engage in dialogue with diverse audiences and receive feedback about *NO!* years before it was completed.

This enabled me to both resume production and to return to the editing room to aurally and visually address questions and concerns that weren’t addressed in the work in progress. Initially *NO!* was going to be a short documentary, which only featured the testimonies of Black women survivors. Men weren’t going to be involved and there weren’t going to be any scholars or activists featured in the documentary. Based on the questions that I constantly received during the screenings of the work in progress, I realized that I could not address contemporary intra-racial rape and sexual assault in African-American communities without examining Black women’s herstory in the United States. This decision resulted in *NO!* becoming a feature-length documentary. These experiences also helped me to understand that it was extremely important to include the perspectives, commentaries, and expertise of scholars, activists, and community leaders to not only contextualize the testimonies of the featured Black women survivors but also to create a historical, political, and cultural framework from which viewers will hopefully challenge their own beliefs about rape and other forms of sexual violence. Equally important, I came to fully understand and appreciate the fact that men can stop heterosexual rape. Therefore, I made the decision to include the activism and cultural work of Black men who are involved in the anti-sexual violence movement in *NO!*.

If one were to view the educational fundraising screenings as “test screenings” to see if a film/documentary works with audiences before it is officially released, I don’t know of any film or documentary that has had as many test screenings as *NO!*, prior to its completion. Even in its work-in-progress forms, *NO!* has already been translated into both French and Italian. This translation work was done on a volunteer basis by grassroots European and diasporic African and Arab feminists and/or lesbians, queers, and transgender men based in France and Italy because they wanted *NO!* to be accessible to European-based women and men who did not speak English. In many instances, these people used their vacation time, ranging from a few days to three weeks, to travel with me in their countries and serve as my interpreters, while simultaneously translating the documentary during screenings.

NO! is unique in that it was already doing educational and healing work around sexual violence issues before its completion. To date, at every screening there has been at least one woman or girl who has disclosed to me personally or to the entire viewing audience that she has been raped, battered, sexually assaulted and/or molested.

It was not only my sistahs and their communities who welcomed me who made *NO!* a reality. In January 2003, noted hip-hop historian, author, and political activist Kevin Powell wrote an open letter, via email, to Black men urging them to come together to support *NO!*: “Given the level of violence against women in this country, we owe it to ourselves and to future generations not to turn our backs on *NO!*. For in ignoring this documentary we would be once again ignoring the voices of [Black] women.” As a result of this email, a national intergenerational coalition of Black men came together to form “Black Men in Support of the Film *NO!*.”⁹ In March 2003, this coalition, in conjunction with Hiphop Speaks¹⁰ and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in New York City, hosted a screening of the seventy-four minute version of *NO!* and a public discussion on intra-racial heterosexual rape and sexual assault in the Black community. The response was overwhelming. When Kevin Powell and I initially envisioned the event, we never in our wildest imaginations thought that it would generate the response it did—from women *and* men. On that cold and rainy/snowy evening, we had to turn away *at least* 200 women and men, many of whom were under the age of 30, who stood in line for at least an hour to attend the screening and public discussion. Even after being told that the auditorium was filled to capacity, many Black women *and* men still hung around in the lobby to see if they could get in for part of the screening and all of the public discussion that followed.

In this day and age of the glorification of sexism, misogyny, homophobia, and a “pimp culture” through mainstream hip-hop, there are many justifiable critiques of the hip-hop generation. However, it was the hip-hop generation that brought *NO!* to Harlem in 2003. Hands down, it was the hip-hop generation who promoted the event through emails, listservs, and print and audio media. It was the hip-hop generation that created the space, in Harlem, for an intergenerational (from as young as seven to over sixty-five years old) male/female dialogue exposing and addressing heterosexual intraracial rape and sexual assault in the non-mono-lithic Black community in the United States.

My maternal and paternal grandmothers used to always say "Aishah, what doesn't kill you makes you stronger." Through the making of *NO!* I grew as a grassroots activist because I had to resort to forms of fundraising other than the traditional route. I was able to develop connections and alliances with a diverse group of people based in the United States and internationally who I might not have ever met had I received the funding I needed in one or two major grants.

Equally important, receiving the clinical support of Dr. Clara Whaley-Perkins, a Black feminist clinical psychologist and author, during the making of *NO!* journey has educated me, and this journey has definitely put a healing balm on my incest and rape wounds. Through my self-work and my cinematic activism, I developed much more compassion and empathy for myself as a survivor of incest and rape, and by extension for all women who are survivors, regardless of the circumstances in which their assault(s) occurred.

The Final Cut

As a thirty-seven-year-old woman, I have gained power, strength, and vision from these pioneers—Black women whose writings, activism, and cultural work has preceded and inspired my activist cultural work. Through *NO!*, I am putting on the screen that which has been written in books, journals, magazines, periodicals, notebooks, pieces of paper; talked and whispered about at conferences, in community centers and organizations, in schools, colleges, and universities, in churches, mosques, and temples, in beauty parlors and laundromats.

While *NO!* explores how the collective silence about acts of sexual assault adversely affects African Americans, it also encourages dialogue to bring about healing and reconciliation between all men and women. Because too many women, regardless of differences in national origin, culture, ethnicity, language, religion, race, sexual orientation, age, class, and physical ability experience rape and sexual assault, I believe *NO!* is a documentary that women from across the racial and class spectrum will connect with. This was apparent during the screenings of *NO!: A Work-In-Progress*—at colleges and universities, schools, conferences, film festivals, rape crisis centers, community centers, and correctional facilities, both grassroots- and government-sponsored, in the United States and internationally—that took place over the past eleven years.

While I work hard at not being a conspiracy theorist, it's clear to me that there is a reason why I had to struggle for years to raise funds to make *NO!* Through all of my extremely diverse screening opportunities, I have come to understand that *NO!* is a powerful activist tool. I believe this is both a testament to the power of African American women's *herstory* and contemporary reality as well as a profound commentary on the unfortunate, sobering reality of the universality of rape and other forms of sexual violence. In all of its forms, *NO!* has required viewers to confront rape and other forms of sexual violence through the testimonies, scholarship, activism, and cultural work of predominantly African American women.

Were it not for the invaluable in-kind institutional support received from Solutions for Progress, a public policy firm founded by Robert J. Brand, as well as the ongoing international financial support¹¹ received from countless individual women and their grassroots organizations, a growing number of men who oppose

violence against women, as well as women's, feminist, and/or lesbian foundations and funds, and community-based foundations and funds, *NO!* would still be an idea in my head as opposed to a completed documentary. Thanks to all of the people who were a part of the making of *NO!*, I believe that once *NO!* is properly distributed, it has the potential to play an integral role in international movements to end all forms of sexual violence against women and girls.

Finally, in response to the charge that Black women who publicly expose intraracial sexual violence in the Black community through the spoken and written word are traitors to the race, I offer the following thoughts. Yes, it is true that Black men in the United States are victims of racism, expressed in the forms of police brutality, racial profiling, incarceration, unemployment, and lack of access to decent education and jobs for which they are qualified, to name just a few. However, Black women not only experience the same harsh realities of racism every day of our lives, we also experience the horrific realities of sexism, misogyny, and patriarchy every day of our lives. In a system governed by racism, patriarchy, and sexism, Black men can be both victim and perpetrator simultaneously.

What I find most interesting is that too many Black men, male-identified Black women, and progressive, antiracist white people, are unable to step outside the awful reality of many Black men's lives to see and hear the physical, emotional, psychological, and psychic pain that Black women experience at both the hands of institutional white racism and at the hands of Black men, who are their fathers, brothers, uncles, cousins, husbands, boyfriends, comrades, and friends. Fortunately, I've never been beaten by the police, and I've never been incarcerated. However, whenever I hear a story about a Black man being beat or murdered by the police or about a Black man unjustly incarcerated, I am not only enraged, I am called to action. There isn't a day that goes by when, on a personal level, I don't worry about whether my brother, my father, my grandfather and my male friends will be unjustly stopped by the police for the crime of being a Black man. In my ongoing conversations with many of my Diasporic African, Arab, South Asian, Latina, Indigenous, feminist/womanist sistah-friends living in the United States, in Canada, and in Europe, I know I'm not alone with these feelings and fears.

And yet, very unfortunately, when it comes to rape, sexual assault, misogyny, sexual harassment, and other forms of violence perpetuated against women of color at the hands of men of color, men of color are too often silent. Instead of taking responsibility, more often than not, men of color want to spend time and energy focusing the blame on women of color for the sexual violence that they experience. These are the usual refrains: "What were you doing out late at night? Most women say 'No.' when they really mean 'Yes.' You should've been properly dressed. etc."

When I was in South Africa in 1994 to monitor the first "free and fair" racial elections, I met with many Black South African women activists. One of these sistah-activists gave me a poster that reads "One of the most violent social settings in South Africa is in the home." In 1994, Black South African women were rejoicing about the end of legal apartheid while expressing serious concern about sexism and misogyny. Today, South Africa has one of the highest rape rates in the world. Black South African men are raping Black South African women. Where is the international outcry against these savage acts as there was against apartheid?

Black South African women, like Black South African men, fought and died for their freedom. And the highest rape rate in the world for women is their reward. Algerian women fought and died along with Algerian men and won the end of French colonization of Algeria in 1962. And in 2006, the forty-fourth anniversary of Algerian Independence from France, Algerian women are fighting and dying for their rights as women in Algeria.

If racism, in all of its violent manifestations, ended right this second, African and African American women, Arab women, Asian women, Pacific Islander women, Latinas, South Asian women, and indigenous women would not be safe. Until African and African American men, Arab men, Asian men, Pacific Islander men, Latinos, South Asian men, and indigenous men take up the issues of rape, sexual assault, misogyny, sexual harassment and other forms of gender based violence that happen every second of every day, with the same vigilance with which racism, xenophobia, colonialism, enslavement, police brutality, state-sanctioned violence, and incarceration are addressed, communities of color will never be whole ... will never be healthy ... will never be safe.

Medical Violence Against People of Color and the Medicalization of Domestic Violence

Ana Clarissa Rojas Durazo

He said, "Do you want to press charges?" He stood tall in front of me, in uniform and with might, and right, on his side. I lay on the hospital bed, recently emerging from a protective unconscious sleep. I wanted it all to go away. The second my head hit the steel door, I remember having a choice to go down, so I took that path. I was unsure of where it would lead, but I knew that's what I had to do. My eyes rolled back, body crumbled before me and everything turned dark. I couldn't take the light of day where the failure of love cuts deeply into already festering wounds. It's like when you're naked in the daylight, it's different, you know? You can't hide anything. This is where the real monsters stand at your feet ready to devour. Monsters don't hide in the light of day.

So I went with it, took to the floor like I was meant for it. It was quiet. All the yelling stopped; the still darkness was like a soft warm blanket. It was a fleeting moment, it passed by quickly, like the flick of hummingbird wings. But you know when something seems to pass in real slow motion and real quick at the same time? I guess that's when fear takes over, or is it wisdom, being so deeply present. I liked it quiet. But slowly the sounds of life came back kind of like at a *feria* or an arcade, intense, loud. I couldn't hear her but I began to make out her head and then the side of her. She stood over me crying, surprised at what she had done. As I held on tightly to the feeling of calm, of quiet and dark, I knew it was time for me to go.

And then she took me to the hospital, found someone with a car and I remember the silence returning. The longest car ride ever. Nobody spoke. Next thing I remember I'm laying on the hospital bed. It's really cold, hospital cold, you know—when they give you those paper thin *batas* to wear? And she was still standing over me, unsure, watching everything. The bright white ominous lights of hospitals glared at me and the ice-cold hospital air ate at my skin.

That's when the cop approached and said "Do you wanna press charges?"

I didn't even know what he meant at first, I literally didn't understand him. I don't know if that was because I had no idea what he was talking about, or if my preoccupation with holding onto the quiet helped me erase everything around me. Or maybe the quiet

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