

SPECIAL
COLLECTOR'S ISSUE

35TH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

Ms.

TITLE IX at 35

CAROL MOSELEY BRAUN:
AMBASSADOR OF HEALTHY EATING

STOPPING
SEX ADS

FALL 2007

CELEBRATE WITH:

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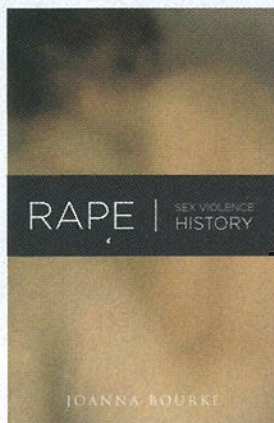
investigation of sexual violence in Britain, America and Australia over the past two centuries. Along the way, she reveals that justice systems have been in great part to blame for allowing abusers (predominantly men) to literally get away with rape; in today's U.K., for example, only 5.3 percent of reported rapes end in conviction. But underlying any judicial failure is the mythology that gives rapists cover for their violence.

"There is no crime more difficult to prove than rape and no injured party more distrusted than the rape victim," writes Bourke. A common myth of the 19th century was the impossibility of rape if the woman resisted. Medical and legal textbooks of the day suggested that a mature woman "in full possession of her faculties, cannot be raped, contrary to her desire, by a single man."

Working- and lower-class victims, especially, were long refused sympathy or legal recourse by the myth that it is "impossible to sheath a sword into a vibrating scabbard," a theory that persisted well into the 20th century. These women were deemed to

be sexually loose, accustomed to roughness, sturdier and less prone to the terror of rape than upper-class women. It was thought that their innate abilities prepared them to rebuff sexual assaults and that gang rape was the only feasible way rape could happen to them.

Other myths include women's and children's tendencies to lie about rape, the essential harmlessness of rape, the belief that "no" means "yes" and, more recently, the "normalization" of male sexual violence by calling it an evolutionary strategy in service of reproduction. Bourke describes this normalization as seen in today's films. "One in every eight Hollywood movies includes a rape scene," she writes. Rape victims are seen to be consenting because they long for sex, and forcible assault is translated into romantic seduction, "just another form of foreplay between lovers."



Sexual abuse by women has its own set of myths, among the most prominent that men can't be victimized. Even though the photograph of Pvt. Lynndie England holding a naked man on a leash at Abu Ghraib became "the most iconic image of the war in Iraq," one radio host quipped that England's act was like a Madonna or Britney Spears stage performance.

Bourke's brilliant social and cultural history shows that only when these myths are laid to rest will we reject the conventional wisdom about rape—those psychological and biological constants that seem to us so natural and obvious—and be able to imagine a future devoid of sexual violence. ■

R. DIANNE BARTLOW is an assistant professor in the department of women's studies at California State University, Northridge.

the immigrant suite: hey xenophobe who you calling a foreigner?

By **hattie gossett**

(Seven Stories Press)

Gossett's poetry enters the darkest realities of the immigrant experience and deconstructs the American dream. She challenges the reader to examine bigotry across ethnic boundaries and economic classes.

Savoring the Salt:

The Legacy of Toni Cade Bambara

Edited by **Linda Janet Holmes and Cheryl A. Wall**

(Temple University Press)

Nikki Giovanni, Amiri Baraka, Pearl Cleage and other African American luminaries remember the late writer and activist. What emerges is a portrait of a brilliant wordsmith and tireless revolutionary who, 10 years after her death, is missed, says Cleage, "each and every day."

Here and Somewhere Else

By **Grace Paley and Robert Nichols**

(The Feminist Press)

This recent offering from the publisher's 2X2 series marries poems and stories by the late Grace Paley with some by her husband. The couple shared an anti-racist, pro-worker worldview, but Paley, unsurprisingly, focused extra attention on women's struggles. One poem includes a last testament of sorts; she seems to compare herself to an old maple stretching to reach sunlight and stay alive: "...but if you've/liked life you do it."

Choices

By **Kate Buckley**

(iUniverse Inc.)

This young-adult novel tackles date rape and abortion with remarkable tenderness. When a Catholic-school teenager becomes pregnant, her friends display unexpected feminist

leanings, and her seemingly anti-choice parents rethink their values.

Run

By **Ann Patchett**

(Harper)

Patchett's fifth novel collapses a complicated family history into the events of a 24-hour period. She links the fates of seemingly unrelated characters in the meticulously plotted, emotionally engaging style that marks her work.

Verses

By **Ani DiFranco**

(Seven Stories Press)

In this collection of DiFranco's lyrics, the prolific feminist singer-songwriter moves gracefully between the political ("the mighty multinationals have monopolized the oxygen") and the personal ("I'll miss you, I say...to the son or daughter I thought better of").