

racism and rape

HOW ARE THEY CONNECTED?

☑ BOTH USE WORDS AS WEAPONS

Rape and racism are grounded in language with a common purpose — to degrade, dehumanize, and make violence more acceptable. From the time of slavery to the present day, white people have used words — “nigger,” “coon,” “spook,” “spade” — to put down black people and undercut their value as human beings. Men, similarly, employ language — “bitch,” “whore,” “freak,” “baby,” “honey,” “dog” — which sends the same demeaning messages to women. Ultimately, hearing these words negatively shapes our view of the people to whom they refer. When we view others as less than fully human, it becomes easier to hurt and even destroy them. We must recognize the power of our words.

☑ BOTH OPPRESS WITH THEIR POWER

Rape and racism are forms of domination. Rape, through coercion, violation, and violence, forces women and some men to feel intimidated, frightened, and helpless. It makes them think twice about going to the corner store at night and can make them hesitate to trust a friend or lover. Racism narrows people’s world and limits their freedom. It makes a black man avoid browsing in a store for fear of being seen as a thief, or dread that a traffic stop will result in a beating. Racism makes “us” see a Latino in a white neighborhood as a maid or a gardener. We must open our eyes to the constraining impact of oppression.

☑ BOTH FORM THE FABRIC OF OUR NATION

The United States was built upon racist and sexually violent practices. One need look no further than the founding of our nation as an illustration of both — a time when Africans were enslaved and forced from their homelands by the millions, when Native Americans were driven west and massacred, and when black women were routinely sexually assaulted by white slave owners. People of color played a vital role in the birth of our country and were rewarded with violation and humiliation. We must know our history.

☑ BOTH PROMOTE MYTH, NOT FACT

Our attitudes about race and rape are built upon myth and misinformation. Destructive and inaccurate racial and cultural stereotypes are all too common — “Latinos are short-tempered,” “Asian women are passive,” “black men are rapists,” “Jews are stingy,” “black women are insatiable.” Similarly, so are myths about sexual violence and its survivors — “rape is just rough sex;” “only women are raped;” “if her skirt wasn’t so short, she wouldn’t have been raped.” Sometimes, the myths intertwine — “most rapes involve a black man violating a white woman” — reinforcing distorted images of both race and rape. If we are to stop racism and rape, we must speak the truth about them.

☑ BOTH FEED ON OUR SILENCE

Every time we hear a racist joke and say nothing, every time we listen to someone blame a victim of rape and do nothing, and every time we pretend that racism and rape are not our problems, we support the continuation of oppression. We must speak up and speak out. It is not easy, but it is essential. Racism and sexism do not have to be passed from generation to generation. Our voices can make the world safer for us all.



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