Traps
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If we men, of all races, cultures, and continents would just examine the inequalities of power in our own families, businesses, and political and spiritual institutions, and decide today to reassess and reconfigure them in consultation with the women in our lives, we would all be doing the most fundamental corrective act of a counter-rapist.

There are mobs & strangers in us who scream of the women we wanted and will get as if the women are ours for the taking.

In 1991 the crime of rape in the United States entered our consciousness with the power of the dissolution of the U.S.S.R. The trials of William Kennedy Smith (of the Camelot family) and Iron Mike Tyson, former heavyweight boxing champion of the entire world, shared front pages and provided talk-show hosts with subject matter on a topic that is usually confined to women's groups and the butt jokes of many men. Since women are over fifty percent of the world's population and a clear majority in this country, one would think that the question of rape would not still be hidden in the minor concerns files of men.

However, what is not hidden is that Mr. Kennedy Smith and Mr. Tyson both tried defenses that blamed the women in question. For Smith that
tactic was successful; for Tyson, it failed. Pages of analysis have been written in both cases, and I do not wish to add to them. But one can safely state that no woman wants to be raped, and that if men were raped at the frequency of women, rape would be a federal crime rivaling those of murder and bank robbery. If car-jacking can command federal attention, why are we still treating rape as if it’s a “boys will be boys” sport or a woman’s problem as in “blame the victim”? In the great majority of sex crimes against women in the United States, the women are put on trial as if they planned and executed their own rapes.

Male acculturation (or a better description would be males’ “seasoning”) is antifemale, antiwomanist/feminist, and antireason when it comes to women’s equal measure and place in society. This flawed socialization of men is not confined to the West but permeates most, if not all, cultures in the modern world. Most men have been taught to treat, respond, listen, and react to women from a male’s point of view. Black men are not an exception here; we, too, are imprisoned with an intellectual/spiritual/sexual understanding of women based upon antiquated male culture and sexist orientation—or should I say miseducation. For example, sex or sexuality is hardly ever discussed, debated, or taught to black men in a nonthreatening or nonembarrassing family or community setting.

Men’s view of women, specifically black women outside of the immediate family, is often one of “bitch,” “my woman,” “ho,” or any number of designations that demean and characterize black women as less than whole and productive persons. Our missteps toward an understanding of women are compounded by the cultural environments where much of the talk of women takes place: street corners, locker rooms, male clubs, sporting events, bars, military service, business trips, playgrounds, workplaces, basketball courts, etc. Generally, women are not discussed on street corners or in bars as intellectual or culturally compatible partners. Rather the discussion focuses on what is the best way to “screw” or control them.

These are, indeed, learning environments that traditionally are not kind to women. The point of view that is affirmed all too often is the ownership of women. We are taught to see women as commodities and/or objects for men’s sexual releases and sexual fantasies; also, most women are considered “inferiors” to men and thus are not to be respected or trusted. Such thinking is encouraged and legitimized by our culture and transmitted via institutional structures (churches, workplaces), mass media (Playboy and Penthouse), misogynist music (rap and mainstream), and R-rated and horror films that use exploitive images of women. And of course there are the ever-present, tall, trim, “Barbie-doll” women featured in advertising for everything from condoms to the latest diet “cures.” Few men have been taught, really taught, from birth—to the heart, to the gut—to respect, value, or even, on occasion, to honor women. Only until very recently has it been confirmed in Western culture that rape (unwelcomed/uninvited sex) is criminal, evil and antihuman.
our mothers, sisters, wives and
daughters ceased to be the
women men want we think of them as
loving family music & soul bright wonderments.
they are not locker room talk
not the hunted lust or dirty
cunt burnin hos.
bright wonderments are excluded by association as
blood & heart bone & memory
& we will destroy a rapist's knee caps,
& write early grave on his thoughts
to protect them.

Human proximity defines relationships. Exceptions should be noted, but
in most cultures and most certainly within the black/African worldview,
family and extended family ties are honored and respected. One's sexual
personhood in a healthy culture is nurtured, respected, and protected. In
trying to get a personal fix here, that is, an understanding of the natural
prohibitions against rape, think of one's own personhood being violated.
Think of one's own family subjected to this act. Think of the enslavement of
African people; it was common to have breeding houses on most plantations
where one's great-great-grandmothers were forced to open their insides for
the sick satisfaction of white slave owners, overseers, and enslaved black
men. This forced sexual penetration of African women led to the creation of
mixed-race people here and around the world. There is a saying in South
Africa that the colored race did not exist until nine months after white men
arrived. This demeaning of black women and other women is amplified in
today's culture, where it is not uncommon for young men to proclaim that
"pussy is a penny a pound." However, we are told that such a statement is not
meant for one's own mother, grandmother, sister, daughter, aunt, niece,
close relative, or extended family. Yet the point must be made rather
emphatically that incest (family rape) is on the rise in this country. Incest
between adults and children is often not revealed until the children are
adults. At that point their lives are so confused and damaged that many
continue incestuous acts.

it will do us large to recall
when the animal in us rises
that all women are someone's
mother, sister, wife, or daughter
and are not fruit to be stolen when hungry.

Part of the answer is found in the question: Is it possible or realistic to view
all women as precious persons? Selective memory plays an important role
here. Most men who rape are seriously ill and improperly educated. They do
not view women outside of their "protected zone" as precious blood, do not
see them as extended family, and do not see them as individuals or independ-
dent persons to be respected as most men respect other men. Mental illness
or brain mismanagement blocks out reality, shattering and negating respect for self and others, especially the others of which one wishes to take advantage. Power always lurks behind rape. Rape is an act of aggression that asserts power by defaming and defiling. Most men have been taught—either directly or indirectly—to solve problems with force. Such force may be verbal or physical. Violence is the answer that is promoted in media everywhere, from Saturday morning cartoons to everyday television to R-rated films. Popular culture has a way of trivializing reality and confusing human expectations, especially with regards to relationships between men and women. For too many black people, the popular has been internalized. In many instances, the media define us, including our relationships to each other.

Women have been in the forefront of the anti-rape struggle. Much of this work has taken place in nontraditional employment, such as serving in police and fire departments, as top professors and administrators in higher education, as elected and appointed public servants in politics, and in the fields of medicine and law. However, the most pronounced presence and “advancement” of women has been seen in the military. We are told that the military, in terms of social development, remains at the cutting edge of changes, especially in the progress of blacks and female soldiers. However, according to Gary A. Warner in the San Francisco Examiner (December 30, 1992), the occurrence of rape against women in the military is far greater than in civilian life:

A woman serving in the Army is 50 percent more likely to be raped than a civilian, newly released military records obtained by the Orange County Register show.

From 1981 to 1987, 484 female soldiers were raped while on active duty, according to Department of the Army records released after a Freedom of Information Act request.

The Army rate of 129 rape cases per 100,000 population in 1990 exceeds nationwide statistics for the same year compiled by the FBI of 80 confirmed rape cases per 100,000 women. The 1990 statistics are the latest comparable ones available.

The brutality of everyday life continues to confirm the necessity for caring men and women to confront inhuman acts that cloud and prevent wholesome development. Much of what is defined as sexual “pleasure” today comes at the terrible expense of girls and often boys. To walk Times Square or any number of big city playgrounds after dark is to view how loudly the popular, throwaway culture has trapped, corrupted, and sexually abused too many of our children. In the United States the sexual abuse of runaway children, and children sentenced to foster care and poorly supervised orphanages, is nothing less than scandalous. The proliferation of battered women’s shelters and the most recent revelation of the sexual abuse of women incarcerated in the nation’s prisons only underscores the prevailing view of women by a substantial number of men, as sex objects for whatever sick acts that enter their minds.
Such abuse of children is not confined to the United States. Ron O'Grady, coordinator of the International Campaign to End Child Prostitution in Asiatic Tourism, fights an uphill battle to highlight the physical and economic maltreatment of children. Murray Kempton reminds us in his essay “A New Colonialism” (The New York Review of Books, November 19, 1992) of Thailand’s “supermarkets for the purchases of small and disposable bodies.” He goes on to state that:

Tourism is central to Thailand’s developmental efforts; and the attractions of its ancient culture compare but meagerly to the compelling pull its brothels exercise upon foreign visitors. The government does its duty to the economy by encouraging houses of prostitution and pays its debt to propriety with its insistence that no more than 10,000 children work there. Private observers concerned with larger matters than the good name of public officials estimate the real total of child prostitutes in Thailand at 200,000.

The hunters and others of children find no border closed. They have ranged into South China carrying television sets to swap one per child. The peasants who cursed the day a useless girl was born know better now: they can sell her for consumers overseas and be consumers themselves. Traffickers less adventurous stay at home and contrive travel agencies that offer cheap trips to Kuala Lumpur that end up with sexual enslavement in Japan or Malaysia.

That this state of affairs is not better known speaks loudly and clearly to the devaluation of female children. The war in Sarajevo, Bosnia, and Herzegovina again highlights the status of women internationally. In the rush toward ethnic cleansing and narrow and exclusive nationalism, Serbian soldiers have been indicted for murder and other war crimes. The story of one such soldier, Borislav Herak, is instructive. According to an article by John F. Burns in the New York Times (November 27, 1992) entitled “A Serbian Fighter’s Trial of Brutality,” Mr. Herak and other soldiers were given the go-ahead to rape and kill Muslim women:

The indictment lists 29 individual murders between June and October, including eight rape-murders of Muslim women held prisoner in an abandoned motel and cafe outside Vogosca, seven miles north of Sarajevo, where, Mr. Herak said, he and other Serbian fighters were encouraged to rape women and then take them away to kill them in hilltops and other deserted places.

The indictment also covers the killings of at least 220 other Muslim civilians in which Mr. Herak has confessed to being a witness or taking part, many of them women and children. (Also see the January 4, 1993 issue of Newsweek.)

Much in the lives of women is not music or melody but is their dancing to the beat of the unhealthy and often killing drums of men and male teenagers. Rape is not the fault of women; however, in a male-dominated world, the victims are often put on the defensive and forced to rationalize their gender and their personhood.

Rape is not a reward for warriors
it is war itself
On Becoming Anti-Rapist

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a deep, deep tearing, a dislocating of
the core of the womanself.
rape rips heartlessly
soul from spirit,
obliterating colors from beauty and body
replacing melody and music with
rat venom noise and uninterrupted intrusion and beatings.

The brutality of rape is universal. Most modern cultures—European, American, African, Asian, religious, and secular—grapple with this crime. Rarely is there discussion, and, more often than not, women are discouraged from being a part of the debates and edicts. Rape is cross-cultural. I have not visited, heard of, or read about any rape-free societies. The war against women is international. Daily, around the world, women fight for a little dignity and their earned place in the world. And men in power respond accordingly. For example, Barbara Crossette reported in the New York Times (April 7, 1991) about an incident in Batamaloo, Kashmir:

In this conservative Muslim Society, women have moved to the forefront of demonstrations and also into guerrilla conclaves. No single event has contributed more to this rapidly rising militancy among women than reports of a gang rape a month ago by Indian troops in Kunan, a remote village in northwestern Kashmir.

According to a report filed by S. M. Yasin, district magistrate in Kupwara, the regional center, the armed forces "behaved like violent beasts." He identified them as members of the Fourth Raiputana Rifles and said that they rampaged through the village from 11 p.m. on Feb. 23 until 9 the next morning.

"A large number of armed personnel entered into the houses of villagers and at gunpoint they gang-raped 23 ladies, without any consideration of their age, married, unmarried, pregnancy etc.,” he wrote. “There was a hue and cry in the whole village.” Local people say that as many as 100 women were molested in some way.

As a man of Afrikan descent, I would like to think that Afrikans have some special insight, enlightened hearts, or love in us that calms us in such times of madness. But my romanticism is shattered every day as I observe black communities across this land. The number of rapes reported and unreported in our communities is only the latest and most painful example of how far we have drifted from beauty. However, it is seldom that I have hurt more than when I learned about the “night of terror” that occurred in Meru, Kenya, on July 13, 1991, at the St. Kizito boarding school. A high school protest initiated by the boys, in which the girls refused to join, resulted in a night of death, rapes, and beatings unparalleled in modern Kenya, in Africa or in the world. As Timothy Dwyer reported in the Chicago Tribune (April 18, 1991):

The night of terror a month ago at the boarding school near Mount Kenya has torn the soul of the Kenyan people. What had the girls done to invoke the wrath of their male schoolmates? They dared say no to the boys, who wanted them to join a protest against the school’s headmaster, according to police and to those girls who lived through the night.
In Kenya, one-party rule has resulted in a tyranny of the majority. Dissent, even in politics, is not welcome. “Here, the minority must always go along with the majority’s wishes,” said a businessman who has done a lot of work with the government in the last 15 years and asked not to be named. “And it is said that a woman cannot say no to a man.”

Women’s groups have said the rapes and deaths were an extreme metaphor for what goes on in the Kenyan society. The girls of St. Kizito dared to say no to the boys, and 19 paid with their lives while 71 others were beaten and raped. . . .

There have been many school protests in Kenya this year. This summer alone, some 20 protests have turned into riots resulting in the destruction of school property. There have been rapes at other schools when girls have refused to join boys in their protests.

A growing part of the answer is that we men, as difficult as it may seem, must view all women (no matter who they are—race, culture, religion, or nationality aside) as extended family. The question is, and I know that I am stretching: Would we rape our mothers, grandmothers, sisters, or other female relatives, or even give such acts a thought? Can we extend this attitude to all women? Therefore we must:

1. Teach our sons that it is their responsibility to be anti-rapist; that is, they must be counter-rapist in thought, conversations, raps, organizations, and actions.
2. Teach our daughters how to defend themselves and maintain an uncompromising stance toward men and boys.
3. Understand that being a counter-rapist is honorable, manly, and necessary for a just society.
4. Understand that anti-rapist actions are part of the black tradition; being an anti-rapist is in keeping with the best Afrikan culture and with Afrikan family and extended family configurations. Even in times of war we were known to honor and respect the personhood of children and women.
5. Be glowing examples of men who are fighting to treat women as equals and to be fair and just in associations with women. This means at the core that families as now defined and constructed must continually be reassessed. In today’s economy most women, married and unmarried, must work. We men must encourage them in their work and must be intimately involved in rearing children and doing housework.
6. Understand that just as men are different from one another, women also differ; therefore we must try not to stereotype women into the limiting and often debilitating expectations of men. We must encourage and support them in their searching and development.
7. Be unafraid of independent, intelligent, and self-reliant women. And by extension, understand that intelligent women think for themselves and may not want to have sex with a particular man. This is a woman’s prerogative and is not a comment on anything else other than the fact that she does not want to have sex.
8. Be bold and strong enough to stop other men (friends or strangers) from raping and to intervene in a rape in process with the fury and destruction of a hurricane against the rapist.

9. Listen to women. Listen to women, especially to womanist/feminist/Pan-Africanist philosophies of life. Also, study the writings of women, especially black women.

10. Act responsibly in response to the listening and studying. Be a part of and support anti-rape groups for boys and men. Introduce anti-rape discussion into men's groups and organizations.

11. Never stop growing, and understand that growth is limited and limiting without the input of intelligent women.

12. Learn to love. Study love. Even if one is at war, love and respect, respect and love must conquer, if there is to be a sane and livable world. Rape is anti-love, anti-respect. Love is not easy. One does not fall in love but grows into love.

We can put to rest the rape problem in one generation if its eradication is as important to us as our cars, jobs, careers, sport-games, beer, and quest for power. However, the women who put rape on the front burners must continue to challenge us and their own cultural training, and position themselves so that they and their messages are not compromised or ignored.

A significant few of their fathers, brothers, husbands, sons and growing strangers are willing to unleash harm onto the earth and spill blood in the eyes of maggots in running shoes who do not know the sounds of birth or respect the privacy of the human form

If we are to be just in our internal rebuilding we must challenge tradition and cultural ways of life that relegate women to inferior status in the home, church/mosque/temple, workplace, political life, and education. Men are not born rapists; we are taught very subtly, often in unspoken ways, that women are ours for the taking. Generally, such teachings begin with the family. Enlightenment demands fairness, impartiality, and vision; it demands confrontation of outdated definitions and acceptance of fair and just resolutions. One's sex, race, social class, or wealth should not determine entitlements or justice. If we are honest, men must be in the forefront of eradicating sex stereotypes in all facets of private and public life. I think that being honest, as difficult and as self-incriminating as it may be, is the only way that we can truly liberate ourselves. If men can liberate themselves (with the help of women) from the negative aspects of the culture that produced them, maybe a just, fair, good, and liberated society is possible in our lifetime.
The liberation of the male psyche from preoccupation with domination, power hunger, control, and absolute rightness requires an honest and fair assessment of patriarchal culture. This requires commitment to deep study, combined with a willingness for painful, uncomfortable, and often shocking change. We are not where we should be. That is why rape exists; why families are so easily formed and just as easily dissolved; why children are confused and abused; why our elderly are discarded, abused, and exploited; and why teenage boys create substitute families (gangs) that terrorize their own communities.

I remain an optimistic realist, primarily because I love life and most of what it has to offer. I often look at my children and tears come to my eyes because I realize how blessed I am to be their father. My wife and the other women in my life are special because they know that they are special and have taken it upon themselves, at great cost, to actualize their dreams, making what was considered for many of them unthinkable a few years ago a reality today. If we men, of all races, cultures, and continents would just examine the inequalities of power in our own families, businesses, and political and spiritual institutions, and decide today to reassess and reconfigure them in consultation with the women in our lives, we would all be doing the most fundamental corrective act of a counter-rapist.

It is indeed significant, and not an arbitrary aside, that males and females are created biologically different. These profound differences are partially why we are attracted to each other and are also what is beautiful about life. But too often due to hierarchical and patriarchal definitions one’s sex also relegates one to a position in life that is not necessarily respected. Sex should not determine moral or economic worth, as it now does in too many cultures. In a just society, one’s knowledge and capabilities, that is, what one is actually able to contribute to the world, is more valuable than if the person is male or female.

Respect for the woman closest to us can give us the strength and knowledge to confront the animal in us with regards to the women we consider “others.” Also, keep in mind that the “others” often are the women closest to us. If we honestly confront the traditions and histories that have shaped us, we may come to the realize that women should be encouraged to go as far as their intellect and talents will take them—burdened only by the obstacles that affect all of us. Most certainly the sexual energies of men must be checked before our misguided maleness manifests itself in the most horrible of crimes—rape.

No!
Means No!
even when men think
that they are “god’s gift to women”
even after dropping a week’s check & more
on dinner by the ocean,
the four tops, temptations and intruders memory tour,
imported wine & rose that captured her smile, suggested to you private music & low lights drowning out her inarticulated doubts.

Question the thousand years teachings crawling through your lower depths and don’t let your little head out think your big head.
No! means No!
even when her signals suggest yes.