



# THE RAPE OF REGY TAYLOR

A FILM BY NANCY BUIRSKI



GENERAL DISCUSSION  
GUIDE

I can't help but tell  
the truth of what they  
done to me.

— RECY TAYLOR

THE RAPE OF  
**RECY TAYLOR**

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# INTRODUCTION

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With the activation of the Me Too movement and the creation of Me Too in October 2017, there has been increased awareness of the pandemic of sexual violence. Advocates and activists have noted the impacts of this renewed focus on educational, media, legislative, political, criminal/legal, and social justice outcomes. However, with this most recent iteration of MeToo, a familiar pattern has emerged. Many reports credit the #MeToo movement to Alyssa Milano, a white actress, rather than its founder, creator, and champion, Tarana Burke, a Black activist and counselor. Ms. Burke originated the phrase in 2006 as a means of highlighting the pervasiveness of sexual violence perpetrated against Black girls and women. Within this original context, Me Too was intended to communicate that a victim of sexual assault was not alone, and to reduce isolation. As the Me Too movement continues to expand, Burke has maintained vigilance to ensure that the original spirit of the movement is not erased or co-opted, and to maintain focus on the originators of the movement: Black and Brown survivors of sexual violence.

“I think the floodgates have opened for white women. I don’t think it’s a coincidence whose pain has been taken seriously. Whose pain we have showed historically and continued to show. Whose pain is tolerable and whose pain is intolerable. And whose pain needs to be addressed now,” actress Gabrielle Union told *The New York Times* regarding the sidelining of women of color.

One of the origins of this erasure of Black women’s voices is brought to light in **THE RAPE OF RECY TAYLOR**. On the night of September 3, 1944, Recy Taylor, a 24-year-old sharecropper, was raped by six white teens while on her way home from church. Her story—intentionally forgotten by history—is the center of the film **THE RAPE OF RECY TAYLOR**.

Following the assault, Recy immediately went to the local police, thus exposing herself and her family to retaliation and intimidation. Her report, and the subsequent lack of response by local law enforcement sparked a nationwide campaign and call to action. The film widens its lens to expose the legacy of violations against Black women’s bodies and creates awareness that rape committed by white men against Black women was a commonplace occurrence in the Jim Crow South. The film works to undo the historical whitewashing and silencing of Rosa Parks, a NAACP case investigator who documented Recy Taylor’s assault under threat of physical violence. Far from her simplified portrayal as a tired seamstress, Rosa Parks was a seasoned and fierce social justice activist who championed civil rights long before her arrest on a Montgomery, Alabama bus.

Recy Taylor’s and Rosa Parks’s histories have been subverted and erased in the sexual violence and civil rights movements. Using interviews with family members, scholars, and activists, along with footage from ‘race’ films, **THE RAPE OF RECY TAYLOR** works to restore the full scale of their contributions to these movements. Their stories echo in the #MeToo movement.

# FILM THEMES

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“Planting a flag firmly at the intersection of patriarchy, sexism and white supremacy, **THE RAPE OF RECY TAYLOR** is a documentary of multiple layers and marvelous gumption.” – The New York Times

There are multiple themes illustrated and woven throughout the film. Drawing upon interviews with family members, community members, and scholars, the film examines the issue of sexual violence against Black women from multiple angles, including the below themes:

## THEMES

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Black Women and Bodily Rights

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Speaking the Unspeakable ‘Rape’

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Sexism, Patriarchy and the Civil Rights Movement

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Religion and Civil Rights Movements

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Storytelling Through the Black Lens

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Maintaining White Supremacy

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## THEME 1

### **Black Women and Bodily Rights**

“What does freedom mean if you can’t walk down the street without being touched inappropriately or slapped or brutalized?” — Danielle McGuire (1:20)

The treatment of Black bodies, particularly women’s bodies is a recurring theme of the film. Rape is but one of the mechanisms used to remind Black people about their place in a society governed by white supremacy. This system has deep roots in the establishment, foundation, and maintenance of slavery. Americans have dehumanized the Black population to reconcile the history of enslavement. Nowhere is this more evident in the numerous incidences of the rape of Black women by white men. Recy Taylor’s assailants had no respect for her body, and no concept of their act as a crime. Though several confessed to having non-consensual sex with her while she was blindfolded and they carried a weapon, they did not conceive of this as a violation, and neither did the justice system.

Furthermore, this act rendered her family powerless. The film recalls her father, Benny Corbitt, wanting to seek revenge and being told by the white police officer not to do anything. We hear about her sister Alma’s experience of being slapped by a white male, and subsequently arrested. Alma’s father then advised her that she could not go to town unless she learned to “behave.” This Black family was not entitled to equal justice under the law.

## THEME 1

### Black Women and Bodily Rights

#### Discussion Topics

1. The violation of bodies both physically and ideologically by the act of rape

The rape of Black women was employed as an act of terror designed to keep Black women terrorized for their lives and to remind Black men that they had no right to protect Black women's bodies.

2. The "thingification" of Black people

Martin Luther King Jr. said, "This led to the thingification of the negro. So he was not looked upon as a person. He was not looked upon as a human being with the same status and worth as other human beings. And the other thing is that human beings cannot continue to do wrong without eventually rationalizing that wrong. So slavery was justified, morally, biologically, theoretically, scientifically, everything else."

3. "The busses are about a struggle for bodily integrity."

The 1955 Montgomery, Alabama bus boycott is widely regarded as a turning point in the civil rights movement. However, its context is usually around the right to a seat. The film illustrates the real and present danger (physical violence, sexual violence, abuse, verbal harassment, etc.) that Black women faced when relying upon public transportation. The film also illustrates that Black women felt the greatest impact of the bus boycott: Black women counted for 85% of the Montgomery bus ridership. Thus, Black women were most impacted by having to find alternate transport—which usually meant walking—for 381 days.

4. Jim Crow laws and the separation Black and white people

Within this mandate, there was not equal access to public space dependent on race. Facilities for Black people were either woefully deficient or absent. This idea is demonstrated in the film when Crystal Feimster discussed that there were no bathroom facilities for Black people at most train stations. This might lead to middle class, respectable Black women having to squat in bushes or nearby woods in order to relieve themselves. Professor Feimster describes how this system dehumanizes Black women by putting bodily functions on display and engendering disgust. She recounts a reaction to this discrimination: "Look at these people...this is not a respectable woman."

## THEME 1

### Black Women and Bodily Rights

#### Discussion Topics

5. The historical treatment of Black women's bodies.

How Black women have been treated in this country stretches back to plantation days, when Black bodies were owned without regard to their agency or humanity. Black women's bodies were used for labor, for breeding, for the care of households, and for the care of white children. Enfolded within this narrative is the idea that white slave owners had access to Black women's bodies, and sexual abuse was pervasive. The film discusses the legacy of this idea in white men having continued access over black women's bodies, of white men considering sex with a black woman as their right. "They did not regard Black people as humans...we were animals...(they had the) power to have sex with Black women when they wanted to."

6. The inherent danger of being alone as a Black woman

Near the film's 40-minute mark, Esther Cooper Jackson says, "Women were attacked, raped, disappeared. One had to be careful about what time of day you walked, particularly in a rural area." What is the impact of growing up and knowing that your body was not your own and the world was not safe?

7. Recy Taylor reporting her rape

Crystal Feimster puts forth the idea that Recy did not have shame around what happened to her, and that her reporting of the rape as a crime upends the idea that Black women do not have agency over their bodies. At the 1:04 mark, Feimster says, "I am a woman and I have a right to consent. And, when I do not consent it is a crime."



## THEME 2

### Speaking the Unspeakable 'Rape'

The film intentionally centers the historically underused, often silenced, word “rape.” Rape is a forbidden word, yet it is unavoidable in the title of the film and throughout the story. Rape is called an “unspeakable crime” because of the motivations for not speaking of it. Rape is a crime that is allowed to flourish in darkness and silence. The erasure of rape, and of survivor narratives, is designed to perpetuate its existence. [Feimster, 0:35:00]. Therefore, what does it mean that Recy Taylor names the crime?

#### Discussion Topics

##### 1. Silencing rape survivors

How are rape survivors silenced? How does our unwillingness to talk about rape contribute to its perpetuation?

The tagline of the movie is, “She spoke up.” What can we unpack about this notion of speaking up? What does speaking up imply? How does it demonstrate a power dynamic? Does speaking up require a raising of voice?

##### 2. Black women and erased history

In the film, Crystal Feimster and Danielle McGuire remind us that the notion of Black women speaking up about crimes of sexual violence is not a new concept. Erased history has a long tradition of Black women naming assailants. However, these voices have been silenced. What does it mean, then, that Recy Taylor decides not to be silent? (0:54:00)

How do we, as a country, currently silence victims of rape? Are narratives silenced or amplified dependent on identity? How so?

How does the Me Too movement prioritize which stories to share? What about the stories of those it doesn't?

##### 3. The language around rape

Consider the use of the term “allegedly” in reporting rape. News sources often use the term when describing a suspect that has not yet been convicted of a crime. (“The alleged bank robber appeared in court today.”) Unlike most other crimes, however, “alleged” is also used to describe the victims of rape or the act itself. (No one would ever say, “Bob, the person allegedly robbed at gunpoint, testified today.”) Whereas in the film, Larry Smith, uses “allegedly” when speaking about Recy’s assault and the apology issued to her by the Alabama State Senate. (1:14:00) What does the use of this word signify and why is it only used for victims of rape?

## THEME 2

### Speaking the Unspeakable 'Rape'

#### Discussion Topics

##### 4. Recy Taylor as a symbol

In the film, Recy Taylor's rape is widely reported in the Black press. She is used as a symbol of the movement for bodily integrity and of civil rights. Why is it important that she is represented as a mother, as a wife, and as a churchgoer?

In the film, we also see that after the second investigation and trial failed to reach an indictment, activists moved on to the next case. How do we reconcile a movement using Recy Taylor as its symbol in order to spur national activism and action, only to have the same organizers leave the case behind, especially considering justice has been denied?

## THEME 3

### Sexism, Patriarchy, and the Civil Rights Movement

“And since it had to happen, I’m happy it happened to a person like Mrs. Parks. Nobody can doubt the height of her character; nobody can doubt the depth of her Christian commitment.” —Martin Luther King, Jr.

Within the film, we learn of Rosa Parks’ long-held identity as a civil rights activist. She was an organizer for the defense of the Scottsboro Boys. She joined the NAACP in 1943 and was immediately tasked as the secretary of the Montgomery chapter. In this role, she worked to record the injustices of Black life. Much of the work focused on protecting Black men from lynching, and recording the prolific number of narratives of Black women who were raped. In 1955, she attended a two-week workshop at the Highlander Folk School on organizing around school desegregation and non-violent protest. Yet, history falsely remembers her as a silent seamstress who was too tired to give up her seat for a white passenger on a Montgomery Alabama bus, and who was subsequently arrested.

The evening before Rosa Parks went to trial—after the first successful day of the Montgomery Bus boycott—approximately 15,000 people gathered at the Hill Street Baptist church to organize. During the meeting, Parks asked if she should speak to the crowd that was offering ovations and the calling for her voice. To which, Parks remembered someone saying, “Why? You’ve said enough.”

From that meeting, the Montgomery Improvement Association began, with its most visible leader being Martin Luther King Jr. We also later learn that Parks was selected as the symbol of the boycott because she was middle-class, married, and a churchgoer.

#### Discussion Topics

##### 1. Respectability politics

How do respectability politics continue to be used today? Name some examples.

Crystal Feimster proposes that women were the backbone of the civil rights movement but notes that “we don’t see them because the light is on the men.” (01:18:00) Why did this happen? How do we perpetuate this?

## THEME 4

### Religion and Civil Rights Movements

“Recy just loved to go to church and she was more Christian than we were.” —Alma Daniels

The film opens with “Go Tell It on the Mountain” playing over footage from church services in the 1940’s, filmed by Zora Neale Hurston.

Recy Taylor was returning home from church when she was raped. The film begins with that knowledge, and with statements from her brother and sister about her Christianity, faith, and sincere love of worship. The film ends with Recy’s words about the assault, including that her rapists could have killed her and her belief that “the Lord was just with me that night”. In this way, the narrative is framed around her belief.

Throughout the film, hymnals and similar music underscore the narrative and establish mood. Historically we know that song (spirituals in particular) were employed as a way for Black people to communicate. The Black community used songs as a subversive tool to spread information about the horrors of slavery.

#### Discussion Topics

##### 1. Music underscores the message

Examine how the film’s music intersects with the story. For each of the songs listed below, why do you believe they were chosen to be in the film? How do they impact the story?

- “Go Tell It On The Mountain”
- “This Bitter Earth”
- “Let My People Go”
- “All The Pretty Little Horses”
- “We Rise”

## THEME 5

### Storytelling Through the Black Lens

“Most events happening in Black life were not published in the daily papers.” —Esther Cooper Jackson

Recy Taylor’s story is ignored by mainstream, white-owned media. Information is given to these outlets but it is not covered. It is from the Black press, including interviews with her and her family members, that her story becomes amplified. These articles raise awareness of her assault and activism is engendered. Rallies and fundraisers are subsequently held, and citizens are urged to sign petitions and write letters demanding justice for Recy Taylor.

At this time, the Black press pushes forward an alternate narrative in which the rape of Black women is a crime that demands response. This puts pressure on Alabama to investigate the case and provide equal justice. Crystal Feimster vocalizes this idea when she states, “the press is a weapon...if we can narrate our stories then we actually have a chance.”

**THE RAPE OF RECY TAYLOR** also uses footage from “race films,” films made by Black producers and filmmakers for Black viewers. These films offered representation of Black life absent of common stereotypes, depicting a diversity of characters. Their power was being able to see “without the white gaze.” The films were important in that they addressed issues like lynching, sexual violence, and white supremacy that were largely ignored by mainstream films.

#### Discussion Topics

##### 1. History being created by the dominant voice

Black stories have historically been erased through a lack of representation in mainstream press and media. How does this continue today?

What examples do we have of a dominant white narrative?

Where is Black representation prominent and where is it lacking?



## THEME 6

### Maintaining White Supremacy

**THE RAPE OF RECY TAYLOR** demonstrates an example of how rape was used to terrorize and suppress Black people. In many cases, rape was employed as a direct retaliation for gains made in civil rights.

Crystal Feimster reminds us that although rape is a universal experience for women, it serves as further reminder for Black women that their bodies were not their own. The idea that white men had unfettered access to Black women's bodies had been baked into the culture of slavery. Even after the abolishment of slavery, these ideas persisted for generations.

Rape was used a tool to keep Black men down too, albeit in an entirely different way. Even in cases where insurmountable evidence existed against them, white men were almost never held accountable for raping Black women. However, the mere suggestion that a Black man had raped a white woman—an accusation often directed at Black men in interracial relationships—was reason enough to justify violence.

Lynchings were not isolated incidents carried out by random people. "Lynching was targeted racial violence at the core of a systematic campaign of terror perpetuated in furtherance of an unjust social order. These lynchings were terrorism."

Recy Taylor's case highlights the failures of a justice system set up to maintain white supremacy. Judges and juries were white men, who, in Danielle McGuire's words, were not going to implicate or punish their brothers/sons/fathers/etc. Grand juries, made up of white men, were not going to indict white men for incidences that they did not regard as a crime.

Residents of Abbeville described Sheriff Lewey Corbitt, as "the nicest guy." Yet, he failed to extend a search for Recy when she was kidnapped. Nor did he investigate the case or arrest any of Recy Taylor's rapists.

#### Discussion Topics

##### 1. Infrastructure of Injustice.

Many crimes against Black people, like rape, are ignored by the white press. Without an article reporting on the crime, judges and juries question whether a case even exists.

How are missing or incomplete narratives treated today? What happens when a rape survivor tells her story but cannot remember all of the details?

# CALL TO ACTION

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After viewing the film, determine how your community can use accountability and sustainability to enact change. Think of ways community members can hold themselves responsible to maintain dialogues around race and sexual violence, identity, and privilege.

Here are some ways to get involved:

1. In the film, the publication and outreach around Recy Taylor's case leads to petitioning and letter writing campaigns to the governor of Alabama. How can your community become involved in this type of activism? What are the current legislative and/or funding efforts related to sexual violence on a local, state, and national level?
2. In the film, we are introduced to alternate media representation via race films and the Black press. How can communities identify cases in which mainstream media has missed narratives and how can they seek to correct this? How can communities work to ensure representation for all survivors of sexual violence, and call out instances when certain identities and narratives are ignored?
3. The title of the film centers on the term "rape" and asks the viewer to contend with it. How can your community form action campaigns to stop the erasing of survivor stories? How can communities educate themselves on the structure and spectrum of sexual violence and work to address the cultures and norms that prop up rape culture?
4. How can communities currently support efforts toward nonviolent social justice? How does your community discuss the Black Lives Matter movement and Colin Kaepernick's protest of the national anthem? How can your community support campaigns for issues that matter to you?
5. In the film, we witness the impact of the rape of Recy Taylor on her family. How does your community support survivors of rape? How are disclosures met? Community members can educate themselves on local and national resources for survivors and support community members who disclose experiences of sexual violence.
6. In the film, white men are mostly depicted as denying the rape and defending the rapists. How can communities work to integrate white men into anti-oppressive movements? What about white women? What role do they play in highlighting and centering Black women's stories and undoing systems of oppression?
7. In April 2018, The National Memorial for Peace and Justice opened in Montgomery, Alabama. How can communities educate themselves about the work of this monument and perpetuate conversations that lead to the truth and reconciliation of the history of America?
8. The film uses modern imagery of Michelle Obama, Sandra Bland, and Iesha Evans to illustrate points about Black voices and activism. How can your community work to elevate these stories and narratives?

# LESSON PLAN — GUIDED Q&A WITH FILM CLIPS

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## 19:02 - 22:34 James Johnson II / Larry Smith

For many years, advocates have sought to arrive at an understanding that rape is not about sex but about power, controlling and terrorizing the victim. How is this definition further layered by the power dynamics between white men and Black women? Using the clip, analyze the descriptions of rape as described by James Johnson and then by Larry Smith. “By having the power to have sex with Black women when they wanted to, they were in control.”

## 30:10-31:10– Crystal Feimster

Rosa Parks is described as laying a claim to own bodily space, which decries the dehumanization of Black women. She claims the right to space on the bus, at Recy Taylor’s kitchen table, and in the world. This clip uses modern examples to overlay this assertion with the real danger Black women face when claiming space. How can we tie Rosa Parks’ activism with the current Black Lives Matter movement?

## 31:25-34:27 Reveal of attempted sexual assault of Rosa Parks

Many people become involved in the anti-sexual violence movement through personal experience as a victim. How does our knowledge of Rosa Parks as a survivor of attempted rape frame our understanding of her activism? What are the impacts of working for a cause and having experienced violence? What impact does this have on the person and her ability to be in this role?

## 44:15- 45:32– Crystal Feimster

“She didn’t just come out of nowhere.” In this clip, Crystal Feimster describes Rosa Parks’ representation as a tired, elderly seamstress who refused to give up her seat on the bus because she was tired. Was this the first time you learned of Rosa Parks’ background? Why has her history been hidden? Why is she represented so differently in our understanding of her place in the civil right movement?

## 51:19 -52:13 – Crystal Feimster / Race Films

Crystal Feimster states that race films—films that were produced, written, and filmed by Black people for Black people—were important because they produced content that was free of the white gaze. They represented Black life without the usual stereotypes and were an important tool in combating white supremacy.

How is representation important today? What stereotypes about black people persist and how can we combat these notions?

## 104:38 – Crystal Feimster

“It takes profound courage to speak out.” Crystal Feimster asserts that Recy Taylor does not display shame; she notes that what happened to her was a brutal crime and that she did not blame herself for what had happened. We know that self-blame is a common component of a sexual assault survivor’s experience. Why is this absent for Recy Taylor? Why is shame such a powerful tool for silencing survivors?

# LESSON PLAN – GUIDED Q&A WITH FILM CLIPS

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## 105:45-106:29 – Leamon Lee, James York

“I liked every one of them.” Luther Lee’s brother conceptualizes the rapists using tropes like “boys will be boys” and “boys carrying on.” How do we reconcile this portrayal of the rapists and the assault of Recy Taylor with the descriptions offered by their relatives? How is this language a function of silencing the impact of assault on Black women? How can we fit together the notion of violent crime being committed by “normal” men?

## 108:15-108:41 – Crystal Feimster

Black men cannot protect their wives and daughters. White men use sexual violence to justify their violence against Black men. How do these notions of protection continue? How does this relate to campaigns that ask people to think of their mother/sister/aunt as a mean of activating empathy or protection for rape survivors?

## 109:45-110:31 – Danielle McGuire

Robert Corbitt was nine when his sister was raped. The film describes the impact of the crime on Recy Taylor, but on her entire family as well. How do we conceptualize the notion of assaults happening to individuals and to communities and to families via secondary traumatization? How do we expand our focus to include care and reconciliation for secondary survivors?

## 119:35-120:57 – Danielle McGuire

Danielle McGuire contends that the Montgomery bus line ridership was 80% Black women. Women were at the root of the Montgomery bus boycott: It was started by women, organized by women, and funded by women. What are the female-led battlegrounds today?

## 122:33-124:06 - Crystal Feimster

Crystal Feimster discusses her understanding of the rape of Recy Taylor and all its pieces: How racism works, how white supremacy works, how sexism works, and her cries for the rapists not seeing Recy’s humanity. How are we encouraged to study the film and discuss themes? How does the film work to educate and how does it work to haunt and cause feeling? Is one more important than the other?

# YOUNG ADULTS GUIDE

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## Description:

On the night of September 3, 1944, Recy Taylor, a 24-year-old sharecropper, was raped by six white teens while on her way home from church. Her story, intentionally forgotten by history, is centered in the film, *The Rape of Recy Taylor*. Following the assault, Recy immediately went to the local police, exposing herself and her family to retaliation and intimidation. Her report, and the subsequent lack of response by local law enforcement sparked a nationwide campaign and a call to action. The film widens its lens to expose the legacy of violations against Black women's bodies and creates awareness that rape committed by white men against Black women was a commonplace occurrence in the Jim Crow South.

The film also works to undo the historical whitewashing and silencing of Rosa Parks, a NAACP case investigator who documented Recy Taylor's assault under threat (and carry out) of physical violence against her. Far from her simplified portrayal as a tired seamstress, Rosa Parks was a seasoned and fierce social justice activist who championed civil rights long before her arrest on a Montgomery, Alabama bus.

## BEFORE THE FILM

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What do you know and believe about the Jim Crow era?

What do you know and believe about Rosa Parks?

What do you know and believe about the start of the Civil Rights movement?

What do you know and believe about the #MeToo movement?

Viewers should take the time to reflect upon their knowledge of these people and events and keep this baseline knowledge in mind as they view the film.

Concepts and ideas: How is knowledge gained? What are young peoples' sources of knowledge of historical events and people within history? How do sources reflect the bias and the motivations of the creators of history?

Viewers should revisit these questions after the film. How have their ideas and knowledge been stretched? What does it feel like to acquire this new information? How are we responsible for broadening our sources of information about history?



# YOUNG ADULTS GUIDE

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## After the Film - Discussion Points:

**Learning About Systemic Racism:** Most people are taught to recognize individual racism: These would be acts of discrimination, prejudice, and bias perpetrated by a person identified as a racist toward another person. Examples of individual racism are identified within the film.

Systemic racism can be identified as prejudice and bias in wealth systems, socioeconomic levels, employment, property ownership, housing distribution, government surveillance, and incarceration.

How is systemic racism demonstrated in the film? Why is it important to note systemic/institutionalized racism along with identifying individual racist behavior?

**Dehumanization of Black People:** The film demonstrates via action and through the narratives of its characters how the dehumanization of Black people had been achieved. Think of some examples given in the film where Black people are dehumanized? How effective is this strategy for the maintenance of white supremacy and slavery?

What do we notice about Recy Taylor's character? How is she portrayed in the film? What character traits does she demonstrate via speaking up about the rape?

The film takes place in the Jim Crow South. This setting provides context to the rape and the events that followed. How do similar dynamics play out today? What has changed over the course of 70 years and what has remained the same?

# YOUNG ADULTS GUIDE

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## Action Items:

One of the root causes of sexual violence are the messages that we receive about consent, our bodies, and our right to define and have agency over our bodies. After viewing **THE RAPE OF RECY TAYLOR**, youth communities may form an Education or Empowerment group designed to address these messages.

- Introduction and Coalition Building. Determine the members of the group, how people are recruited, what the rules of the group will be, and how often you will meet.
- Social Identity and Skills Sets. Groups and individuals will need to work to define their social identities (e.g., what privileges do they hold? how have they experienced oppression?) as a way of locating the lens with which they approach the work. Groups will also need to identify skills sets and leadership within their communities.
- Support and Accountability. What outside support or help is needed for the group to function?
- Once formed, groups might identify topics to examine within the context of sexual violence and the film.
- Analyze messages received about sexuality, consent, and sexual violence via media, community, parents, and faith-based institutions. How have these messages shaped the individuals concepts of self and of their place in the community.
- Consent : What is it and what does it look like? Groups might discuss how they would ensure that they have the communications skills necessary to obtain consent. What are the barriers that young people face when naming consent? What skills are not endorsed or taught by schools, parents, and other learning influences are necessary to navigate consent?
- Bystander Engagement: Understand effective bystander interventions and how to employ them.
- Examine core issues of sexual violence within your community. Where does sexual violence feel most present within your community? What issues impact members of the group and community the most? How can the group work to define and address these issues, using coalition building and community organizing?

## Supporting Survivors

- One in 9 girls and 1 in 53 boys under the age of 18 experience sexual abuse or assault at the hands of an adult.<sup>3</sup>
- 82% of all victims under 18 are female.<sup>4</sup>
- Females, ages 16-19 are 4 times more likely than the general population to be victims of rape, attempted rape, or sexual assault.

(Source: <https://www.rainn.org/statistics/children-and-teens>)

# YOUNG ADULTS GUIDE

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Given these current statistics of sexual assault and sexual violence, it is likely that most people know a survivor. If someone discloses an experience of sexual assault or sexual violence:

## **DO:**

**Believe and validate:** If someone discloses to you, they've identified you as a trusted support. Solidify and signify their decision to tell you about their experience.

What It Sounds Like: "I believe you." "I'm glad you told me." "Thanks for trusting me."

**Provide options and allow for decision making:** Allow the person to choose how much they tell you, the questions you ask, and what the information means.

What It Sounds Like: "How can I best support you?" "You can say as little or as much as you want."

**Recognize your limitations and know your resources:** What other sources of support does the survivor have? Would counseling, advocacy, or legal services be helpful? Talk with the survivor about who else can be helpful within their life, and if they want further professional support.

What It Sounds Like: "It sounds like you're coping with a lot. Would it be helpful to know about places where you can get the support you need?"

**Recognize your own feelings/anxieties/experience/judgments:** hearing disclosures of sexual violence, especially from those close to us, can be difficult. Work to hold yourself accountable for understanding your reactions to disclosures.

# YOUNG ADULTS GUIDE

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## DON'T:

**Investigate:** When we are anxious, we might try to alleviate the anxiety by seeking information. We believe that having “all the information” will help. Follow the pace of the survivor. Don't try to determine the “truth” of the experience, seek the impact.

**Minimize its seriousness:** Survivors may downplay their experiences. Be aware of this tendency and try not to join the survivor. Avoid phrases like, “I would have...”

**Tell the person what to do:** Provide information and support for the survivor, and let them decide the best pathway forward. Even if you disagree with their decision, respect the choices they make toward healing.

**Fail to follow through:** Check in with the survivor. Disclosure is not a one-time event, but a conversation that continuously unfolds. Let the survivor know that they have your support and that it is unchanging.

## Support Statements:

“It's important/I'm glad that you're telling me this.”

“I hear you.”

“I believe you.”

“I'm so sorry this happened to you.”

“It's okay for you to have these reactions.”

“What you are feeling is very normal for someone who has been through what you have.”

“How can I best support you?”

“You can tell me as little or as much as you want.”

“I'm here to listen.”

# CREDITS

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# THE RAPE OF RECY TAYLOR

A FILM BY NANCY BUIRSKI



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