

The Trial of Ruby McCollum the Consequences of Trauma: Segregation Stress Syndrome

Ruth Thompson-Miller*

Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Work, University of Dayton, Ohio, USA

*Corresponding author: Ruth Thompson-Miller, RN, PhD, FAAN, Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Work, University of Dayton, 300 College Park, Dayton, OH 45469-1442, USA, Tel: 937-229-2083; E-mail: rthompsonmiller1@udayton.edu

Received date: June 30, 2017; Accepted date: July 21, 2017; Published date: July 24, 2017

Copyright: © 2017 Miller RT. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

Abstract

In this chapter, I use trial transcripts, books, documentaries, and newspaper articles to examine the case of Ruby McCollum (a wealthy African American woman who spent two years in prison and 20 years in a mental institution for killing her rapist-Doctor Adams). Ruby McCollum is one of an incalculable number of African American women who were systematically raped during the totalitarian era of Jim Crow. Ruby McCollum's story reveals vivid details about her experience with rape, physical and mental abuse, being drugged, and conceiving two children from her rapist. The Jim Crow south-similar to slavery was based on systemic racism that includes a broad range of attitudes, emotions, habits, actions, and racist ideologies supported by white-dominated social institutions and which Feagin calls the white racial frame. The white racial frame includes the attitudes and actions, stereotypes, prejudices, images, emotions, and narratives that contribute to a persisting system of systemic racism. This includes white men acting upon racist ideologies and stereotypes about the bodies and behaviors of Black women (i.e. promiscuous, hypersexual, jezebels, and morally deficit) as their justification for rape. Then, protected by the laws, practices, and policies of the state, these white men didn't fear prosecution for the collective rapes. These men, working from the white racial frame, felt justified in their action knowing that their 'morality' wouldn't be questioned. The white men were rarely prosecuted; African American women, their husbands, and their families had no recourse but to accept the benign neglect of the state to not prosecute. In this article, I will discuss systemic racism, the white racial frame, collective rape, and segregation stress syndrome, which is a collective form of PTSD.

Keywords: Systemic racism; Rape; Segregation stress syndrome; Mental health

Introduction

In the field of sociology the focus of empirical research is to shed light on broader societal issues (i.e. poverty, homelessness, mass incarceration, obesity). The macro examination of a social issue allows a sociologist to substantiate an argument with the support of strong empirical evidence. However, throughout social history, the case study has been used as micro evidence to make strong arguments about larger societal issues. For example, the case of Emmett Till exposed the atrocities of lynching and the brutalization of young Black men in the south; the church burning in Montgomery where four little girls lost their lives exposed the violence of church bombings and the brutality of the Ku Klux Klan [1-3]. In 1923, the racial violence in the town of Rosewood, Florida, exposed the history of racial cleansing and the frequency of entire African American communities being driven from their land, homes, and businesses. These expulsions created an incalculable loss of wealth and economic resources for generations of African Americans [4,5]. In 1991, the case of Rodney King revealed the brutality practiced by police officers throughout the United States; a history that is still unfolding in 2017 with several cases of men of color losing their lives at the hands of police [6]. Indeed, these events show that one case, coupled with media attention and outcry from the community can expose the social injustices that occur every day and go unnoticed and unpunished. The common thread that connects each of these individual cases is the history of systemic racism in this country.

In this article, I use the case of Ruby McCollum to examine the experiences of African American women who were raped and sexually assaulted in the Jim Crow south utilizing the often-silenced voice of a victim who resisted. I shed light on the realities of living in a total institution through Ruby McCollum's story in her own words. I contextualize the trial transcripts of her testimony to describe her rape and underscore an array of social injustices. The history of systemic racism and the white racial frame has contributed to societal acceptance of the collective rape of African American women. Utilizing trial transcripts and other documentation, I reveal the psychological long-term consequences that rape (a weapon of terror, power, and social control) had on African American women. These consequences were compounded by the women's inability to secure justice through the legal system [7-9]. Lastly, I use the testimonies of Ruby McCollum, her family and friends to show that she was suffering from symptoms related to segregation stress syndrome (a collective form of PTSD).

Contextual Literature

Jim Crow: A total institution

Today some believe that during the totalitarian the total institution of the Jim Crow era (1869-1970's), the only differences in the lives of whites and blacks were "separate but equal" public accommodations. In reality, some scholars, like Joe Feagin, have described Jim Crow as an example of Goffman's "total institution." A total institution consumes and controls every aspect of a group of individual lives, similar to being institutionalized in prison. According to Feagin [10],

“some of the characteristics of such a total institution include controlling a person’s language, regularly humiliating a person, and denying acknowledgment of a person’s real name. A total institution also usually entails a rigid hierarchy, extensive economic control, a loss of personal safety, forced deference, sexual and other assaults, an inability to protect loved ones, constant surveillance, and suppression of feelings” (2015: 8). In the total institution of the Jim Crow era, the main objective was utilizing racial violence and the threat of racial violence to keep African Americans in their place as second-class citizens. The techniques to induce fear and social control included torture, lynchings, sexual assaults and rape, murder, beatings, and other inhumane treatment (2015: 9). In order for systemic racism and the white racial frame to be fundamental to society the total institution is necessary.

Systemic racism and the white racial frame

According to Joe Feagin, “systemic racism involves key societal features: (1) a complex array of oppressive racial practices implemented by whites, (2) the unjustly gained privileges and power of white Americans that result from this oppression, (3) the substantial, well-institutionalized, and unjust impoverishment inflicted by this oppression on African Americans, and (4) the extensive white racial frame that has been used for centuries to rationalize and maintain white privilege and power over the oppressed.

In the era of Jim Crow, African Americans’ basic human rights were denied the right to protect family members against white intruders, the right to work, the right to own property, and the right to walk free of random acts of racial violence. On a daily basis African Americans faced the fear of unanticipated physical violence, terrorism, and racial trauma under the yoke of the attitude of white superiority supported by the federal government policies and state practices that were working from the white racial framing of society [11,12].

Indeed, as systemic racism was the thread that connected the cases mentioned earlier, it was systemic racism and the white racial frame that sanctioned and implemented laws and policies that led to the historical practice of disregarding the humanity of African American women and men.

Systemic racism: “paramour rights”

In his book, *Zora Hurston and The Strange Case of Ruby McCollum*, C. Arthur Ellis coined the term “paramour rights”. This unwritten law gave white men the right to a Black woman’s body regardless of her age or marital status with no consequence, a practice that had been around since the days of slavery. It is also important to note that white judges were operating within the white racial frame (a deep-seated pro-white positive placement of whites and negative placement of people of color) and from a system of maintaining the social institution of systemic racism that had been in place for hundreds of years. One of their unspoken objectives was protecting the “paramour rights” of white men while working from the white racial frame belief that accentuates white superiority, virtue, and moral goodness.

Systemic racism: Destruction of the black family and black masculinity

Systemic racism fundamentally contributed to the emasculation of Black men’s ability to protect their female family members, the fracturing of African American marriages, and the stereotyping of

Black families as dysfunctional. In most instances, these were circumstances created by power elites invested in systemic racism; these elites also had access to and, thus, control of the bodies of Black women.

During the Jim Crow era, Black men were forced to decide whether they would stay with their wives or leave after the apparent rape by a white man. Typically, the birth of a bi-racial child forced families to deal with the reality. In many instances a black woman would tell her black husband that the white man forced her against her will. In some instances, men stayed and cared for the children who were not theirs biologically. After all, the Black community knew collective rapes were happening. However, some men left, unable to deal with the reality of the evidence a biracial child.

The white racial frame: Images, identity, and emotions

Feagin’s white racial frame includes how whites organize the ideas of who is moral and who is not which includes all people of color. It includes emotions and the inclination to act on the violence that is an integral aspect of the white racial frame and systemic racism. The white racial frame’s focus is on the ideology that whiteness is synonymous with superiority and fuels the notion of unjust impoverishment for people of color and unjust enrichment for whites. The notion of unjust impoverishment includes the raping of young women and girls, who are impregnated, and are not awarded a conviction or retribution for the offense. The white racial frame historically has been used to justify the actions of whites throughout history. The unjust enrichment includes white ideology that the acts that would otherwise be considered crimes are justified because of their whiteness. The unjust enrichment includes the taking of land, profits from businesses that are owned by Blacks, and the taking of the black body of women and girls.

Segregation Stress Syndrome

Causes of segregation stress syndrome: Racial traumatic events

For the purpose of this paper, a racial traumatic event is one in which the individual fears that their life could be in grave danger due to the actions of one or more members of the dominant group [13]. The probability that they could be badly injured and/or their loved one could be injured or killed is crucial to the definition. The risk of developing segregation stress syndrome depends on the severity and length of the trauma and distress. Along with my examination of Ruby McCollum’s symptoms of PTSD (segregation stress syndrome) I will also examine the tenets of the white racial frame and Jim Crow, and the utilization of systemic racism to ensure continuation of its policies, practices, and attitudes of superiority. Traditionally, studies on PTSD often focus on the experience of one individual. However, for this article I will use Ruby McCollum as a representative voice of a collective group of women who have been sexually assaulted, raped, and invisible to the larger society.

Symptoms of segregation stress syndrome

The literature on the causes of posttraumatic stress syndrome (PTSD) and symptoms are extensive. PTSD has been studied in returning veterans, Holocaust survivors, rape victims, and others victims of trauma. With the exception of Holocaust survivors, PTSD usually focuses on the experiences of one individual [14]. Segregation stress syndrome is the result of the long-lasting racial violence that

occurred during the Jim Crow era and thus focuses on African Americans as a collective group. Preliminary research indicates that experiencing, witnessing, or hearing about a traumatic event can trigger symptoms of PTSD.

The symptoms of segregation stress syndrome include prolonged states of fear and avoidance, which is manifested in an inability to be around the individuals that perpetuated the trauma. In addition, symptoms include anxiety, individual and collective forgetting of the event, denial that the traumatic event occurred (forgetting), rage, shame, being emotionally upset when you recall the event or the memory of it invades your thoughts, and hyper-vigilance in regards to the individuals who carried out the traumatic event. Historically, the notion of hyper-vigilance has been called “paranoia” in reference to African American communities. However, segregation stress syndrome involves the individual and/or collective group becoming hyper-vigilant due to the uncertainty as to when another traumatic event will occur.

Methodology

The historical case study of Ruby McCollum required an extensive review of books, magazine articles, newspaper clippings, and trial transcripts. I analyzed and cross-analyzed many documents to accurately represent the experience of Ruby McCollum from distinct but integrated perspectives including her own words during the era of Jim Crow. In addition, I utilized the documents that included interviews with family members and friends who knew Ruby McCollum before the rapes began and who witnessed the dramatic change in her after the rapes and during her trial. The newspaper articles (Jet Magazine, Ocala Star-Banner, Pittsburgh Courier, Suwannee Democrat, and Daytona Beach Morning Journal) included the actual words of Ruby McCollum, family, and friends. In addition, individuals in the above articles provided detailed information describing Ruby’s physical appearance, demeanor, and behavior before, during, and after the trial. After the events of August 3rd and the ensuing trial, we only get to hear Ruby McCollum speak in her own words twice: through interviews with Jet Magazine in 1958 and The Ocala Star-Banner in 1980. Ruby McCollum in both instances insists that she doesn’t remember anything about the events of August 3rd, exhibiting the symptoms of collective forgetting and/or denial that are characteristic of segregation stress syndrome. The information in the article relies on the notes and letters published in several books, trial transcripts, newspaper articles, documentaries, and magazines. Ruby’s McCollum’s story is compelling and offers the larger society an opportunity to glimpse the horrific experience of collective rape sanctioned by the law of African American women during Jim Crow.

The rape of ruby McCollum

Ruby McCollum was a well-to-do, married African American woman in Lived Oak, Florida. Her husband, Sam, ran an insurance agency and an illegal bolita (numbers) operation that involved paying off many of the town’s leaders. One of the town’s doctors, Doc Adams, who treated the McCollum family as patients, began raping Ruby in 1948.

Systemic racism: Details of the rape

According to Ruby’s trial transcript and the authors of the book, The Trial of Ruby McCollum, the first time Doc Adams raped Ruby was in her home in 1948 (Ellis and Ellis 2003:439). At the trial, during the

course of answering the prosecution’s questions Ruby revealed details about the rapes. Ruby revealed that Doc Adams continued to rape her at both her home and his office until his death on August 3, 1952. She stated that there weren’t any set times or dates:

Well, he [Doc Adams] told me this way: He said, “When I call you, if I can come out there you say, Yes, I need you’ or ‘someone is sick,’ and if I call you and someone there that would hinder me from doing what I want to do, you say, “No, I didn’t call you; that was a mistake.”

Doc Adams had derived a scheme to determine if Ruby’s husband or other members of her family or friends were present. If Sam, Ruby’s husband, picked up the phone the doctor would hang up. Ruby’s husband, Sam, was a self-made wealthy man who ran a lucrative bolita business in Live Oak, with the assistance of Ruby. Indeed, wealth didn’t shield Ruby and Sam McCollum from the traumatic events that occurred in Black communities during Jim Crow. Before the rape, Doc Adams was Ruby’s family doctor, he delivered her second child, and treated her for colds and other illnesses.

However, in 1948, in Ruby’s home, in the bed she shared with her husband Sam, this doctor violated all ethnical, moral, and state laws. In the Jim Crow south the raping of Black women by white men, in most instances, went on with impunity. Ruby McCollum was a college-educated bookkeeper with impeccable style, upstanding morals, and substantial wealth. However, this social standing didn’t protect Ruby or her family from the traumatic events that would impact them for years to come. In a Florida courtroom under oath Ruby states:

Dr. Adams came out to my house that afternoon before the morning of the beginning of this sexual relationship and he told me that afternoon, “I will be back in the morning as soon as I finished all of my work, I will be back and I will show you what I was talking about and he came back out there [the house the] next morning about nine-thirty and took me upstairs and laid me down on the bed and began the intercourse, and when it was finished he left, and he said, “I will be back some other time. You call me some other time.” I said, “Yes, I will.” I didn’t call him directly or in three or four days, and so he came out to the house and I wasn’t there; when I got back he was out there, and I said, “I didn’t know you were coming to my house today.” And he said, “You didn’t call me but I came back out her[e] for the same thing I had before.” I said, “Yes, OK.” And he said, “I want you to understand this now. I am not up for any foolishness and you are not green, and if I ever have to tell you about it again you will be sorry of it.

Clearly, the wording that Ruby utilizes to describe the rape sounds almost mechanical, “he took me upstairs,” “he laid me down on the bed,” “began the intercourse,” and “when it was finished he left.” In most instances, one of the places where individuals feel the safest is in the privacy of their own home. However, Doc Adams took that sense of security away from Ruby by raping her and then threatening her life. Doc Adams was clear in his warning to Ruby; she was a strong woman who came face to face with Doc Adams and she knew what the warning meant for her and her family. In the book, Jim Crow’s Legacy, nearly 100 older African American respondents were interviewed; several of the respondents mentioned that if a man saw a woman they wanted they just took her [10]. We see in Ruby’s statement that Doc Adams didn’t fear the police, prosecution, or Ruby’s husband, Sam. He felt he had the right to stop by her house, at any time of the day, and rape her. In the quote, the idea of the metaphor that Ruby wasn’t green is questionable green in terms of money or green in terms of her understanding of what paramour rights were in the Jim Crow south. This statement could have implied that she was not a virgin and

understood that in a society that has a foundation of systemic racism that she knew that she had no choice but to allow Doc Adams to do whatever he wanted to do with her body and that there would be severe consequences for her and her family if she didn't comply.

Systemic racism: Black women pregnant with rapist's child

Ruby's testimony about the pregnancy exemplifies the historical foundation of systemic racism. Throughout history Black women have given birth to the child of their rapist. In the testimony Ruby recalls the circumstances of the birth of her first child with Doc Adams:

I became pregnant in 1951 in October. She was born July 15, 1950. No, this was in 1950, and the baby was born in 1951. Now she is a year old. Maybe fifteen months old. He [Dr. Adams] told me to go to Valdosta to Dr. Saunders at Little-Griffin Hospital. I went there and the baby was born there. I stayed three days and came back to Live Oak. They [Dr. Saunders and Dr. Adams] were first cousins; I understood him to say. He [Doc Adams] came out the next morning after I came home that afternoon and begun treating me and until the tenth or twelfth day was up he came out pretty near, practically, every day, and he treated the baby and me; he took care of the baby and he took care of me until I got up. [Did you ask Dr. Adams for the birth certificate?] Yes, I did I told him that I had not received a birth certificate for my baby yet, and I was supposed to receive a certificate around a month after the baby was born, and I asked him if he would get it for me, and he told me, "Why, I have it, and I am going to keep it until you tell me, until you do as I say do. He told me that the baby's name was made in his last name.

We see that Ruby had no control over her body, her child, or her future; Doc Adams made all decisions about what was happening with Ruby during and after the birth. Indeed there were some contradictions in Ruby's testimony and her interview with *Jet Magazine*; this is symptomatic of segregation stress syndrome. In the case of Ruby McCollum, Doc Adams was clearly threatening her life. She understood that systemic racism allowed Doc Adams to understand that he didn't have to fear the police, the legal system, or retaliation from Ruby's husband. Her fear is legitimate in that she had no protection. According to a local neighbor, "He (Doc Adams) felt comfortable to stop by her house anytime of the day to rape her" [15]. Ruby continues her recollection of the incident with Doc Adams:

Doc Adams continued, "I am not afraid and I don't want you to be afraid of it. No one is going to bother me. That is definite. I told him, "ok." And that made me begin to be afraid of him. In other words, I just was so worried, I had to either yield or maybe die I suppose that was what would happen, so I couldn't tell him no; any time he came out to my house it was all right, and he continued this for about quite a while. In 50's was when I spoke to him this way; I said, "I am almost afraid." And he said, "Afraid of what?" And I said, "Well you know what I will be afraid of." He said, "That doesn't make any difference." And I said, "Why not use one of those things?" and he said, "What is that?" and I said, "Use a diaphragm." He told me, "To hell with a diaphragm. I don't use such things as that." Then later on, along about October to November, around November it was I spoke to him and told him what had happened. He said, "I know it. I knew it to start with. You don't have anything to worry about."

The rape and the subsequent pregnancy are the events that triggers segregation stress syndrome. In addition, Ruby is fearful that Doc Adams might kill her if she refuses him. In the total institution of Jim Crow white men didn't concern themselves with the repercussions

from the husband and male members of the family. The family understood (from experience) intervention could lead to the death of everyone.

A society that has a foundation of systemic racism allowed Doc Adams the freedom of not fearing any reprisal from either Ruby's husband or the criminal justice system he had paramour rights. Although many in the town were aware of the relationship, nothing was said or done about it. As African Americans, Ruby and Sam would have been at risk of lynching if they accused the white doctor. One of Sam's friends was quoted, "Sam was broken up, and he couldn't believe Ruby would do this to him" (*Jet Magazine* 1958: 53). Indeed, here we see that the burden of the rape and subsequent pregnancies are placed at the feet of Black women rather than the powerful white men committing them or the state sanctioning them. The state sanction of rapes and the long-term consequences of rape, pregnancies by the rapist, and no support from the law can take its toll on Black families and it took its toll on Ruby's mental stability.

During the period of the ongoing rapes, Ruby suffered from mental illness and was twice hospitalized for nervous symptoms. It was also believed that Doc Adams was giving her drugs. In addition, Doctor Adams's fathered Ruby's fourth child, Loretta, A year later she was again pregnant by Doc Adams which lead her to go to his office on August 3, 1952, and shoot him four times and kill him. Ruby McCollum was arrested for the murder of Doc Adams and the day after the shooting of Doc Adams Sam reportedly died of a heart attack.

Ruby McCollum: The murder and the trial

On a hot and humid Sunday morning, in Live Oak, Florida, in August 1952, shots rang out that broke the usual quiet Sunday morning church services. On this Sunday morning, as Sam McCollum accompanied his oldest daughter to church services, his wife, Ruby McCollum, a well-educated prominent 37-year old African American woman, left her home, with daughters Sonja, 7, and Loretta, 1. The speculation in the community was that Loretta (her biracial child) was the child of Doc Adams. Ruby McCollum was considered one of the most financially successful and powerful women in Live Oak and was well known for dressing well, caring for her appearance, and purchasing the best that money could buy. On this hot summer day, Ruby stepped out of her blue Chrysler car wearing a brown dress and matching brown sandals. She brought her children to Doc Adams' office because she didn't have a babysitter. She left her two children in the car. Ruby reported that when she entered Doc Adams' office that morning they were on the best of terms.

Courtroom setting

At her trial in Live Oak, Florida, Ruby McCollum testifies in detail about the first time Doc Adams raped her. On August 21, 1952, Ruby McCollum, a small framed, modestly dressed, 5'2" tall, Black woman, sat in a hard wooden chair, with her hair pulled back in a tiny ponytail. She was, reportedly, visibly suffering from stress and fear. The courtroom was warm; Ruby sat slouched over in a hard wooden chair scanning the courtroom in which she was surrounded by a white judge, an all-white male jury, and a community of white citizens, many of whom were patients of Doc Adams. The only Black face she was able to see was that of her attorney, John Cogdill. In 1952, at the height of Jim Crow, Blacks were legally segregated and forced to sit in the upstairs balcony where they were unable to make eye contact or show Ruby support.

It is not surprising that Ruby McCollum's trial drew national attention: a wealthy African American woman had shot and killed a white doctor and elected political official. It was not only Ruby who was on trial, but also the entire system of Jim Crow practices in Live Oak, Florida and beyond, and it all unfolded as the nation watched. The respondents in the interview project mentioned earlier believe that there wasn't anything (including money) that Sam and Ruby McCollum could have done to protect their family and business. It was always going to come to this point where a choice would have to be made in terms of Doc Adams. Ruby's life was full of agony, pain, and shame. Doc Adams, the man Ruby is accused of killing, was someone she trusted to both heal her and deliver her second child, Sonja. In the documentary, "You Belong to Me," this author stated:

They (whites) didn't want to think that Doc Adams was a man that would sleep with a Black woman, would rape a Black woman over and over again, would beat her, harass her, torment her, terrorize her, drug her without her consent. I mean what type of person would do that? Doctor Adams was that Kinda Guy.

During the era of Jim Crow, powerful white men could rape women with impunity from the law and, in most instances, from the spouses, fathers, and male figures in a woman's family.

Ruby's testimony: Doc Adam's office

According to trial transcripts, Ruby McCollum recalled the events of August 3rd after she got out of her car and entered Doc Adams' office:

I went to the doctor's office, and when I first got there it was full of people. I left my two children in the car. Since it was full of people I stayed in the car with the children for a while. Later on I went back to the office and went in and sit down. I sat there for a while? and talked with some more of the people that was waiting there until the doctor came out and when he came to the door he told me to, "Come on in, Ruby," and I said, "OK" I said, "Are you folks ahead of me?" and he said, "That is all right, you can come on in." I walked in and I told the doctor that I had a pain in my right shoulder or arm; that I couldn't hardly get in and out of my clothes when I first get up in the morning. He gave me a shot of penicillin. Then I asked him: "Doctor, I owe you for two calls don't I?" and he said, "Yes, and this one will make three." I said, "that will make three." I gave him ten dollars and he gave me back one dollar, and I put the money in my bag. Then I thought about the bill. When he came back I said, "Dr. Adams, a bill came out to the house for Sam for a hundred and sixteen dollars. Doc Adams asked, "Who is Sam?" Ruby replied, "My husband."

Ruby is still required to pay her bills to Doc Adams in spite of the fact that he has been violating her human rights by raping her without consent or freedom of choice. In addition, he appears to not know the name of Ruby's husband who had been caring for his daughter and raising the child as his own.

Doc Adams said, "Yes, I am going to get my money too if I have to turn him over to the County Judge." So I said, "I have a hundred dollar bill I will pay on it. May I peep and see who made that bill?" and he said to see Thelma about that. I said that is all right just give me a receipt for it, please. I said, "Then I will owe you how much?" And he said, "Ten dollars" and I said, "OK" I said, "I will bring it back sometime when I come in next week," and he said that would be all right. Where we were at that time I was leaning on that table in the back.

Ruby's inquiries into the bill don't appear to be the main emphasis of this exchange between Doc Adams and Ruby. It was reported that Doc Adams was receiving kickbacks from Sam's bolita business (Evan) Ruby continues explaining what happened in Doc Adams's office after she got the signed receipt:

He [Doc Adams] told me to get on the table. I told him well can I wait until another time and he said no, he said, "I want you to get up there now." I said, "Well, maybe I can't get up there today." He said, "Yes, you can get up there today." Then I told him why, and he ran in to me and grabbed me and starting pounding me and he began hitting on me and beating on me with his fist, and he told me that I don't ever intend to do anything else he asked me to do: and I told him, "I do whatever I can when I can." And he continue hitting me and then he turned around and grabbed the gun and stuck it in my stomach and I pulled it away from him and he snatched it back, and I grabbed it again and the gun went off, and it went off again, when he fell, and it went off again, and he makes out of the room and went and stood up in the door that entered into this room where the chairs are. He stood there a while and gradually he went down to the floor and he laid there flat out. He laid something like that. Anyway, when I started out by him he grabbed the gun out of my hand. When he grabbed the gun out of my hand I asked him to give me that gun, please, and he wouldn't give it back to me right then. After a while I asked him for it again and I caught his arm that way, and I don't know anything else that happened.

In addition, while in jail, Ruby miscarried and there were suggestions that she was given something to terminate the pregnancy. An all-white male jury tried ruby, and the judge blocked most of her testimony about the rapes and her biracial child. The judge also placed a gag order on her that prevented her from giving any interviews. She was found guilty of murder and sentenced to execution. Her attorney filed numerous appeals and in 19xx the Florida Supreme Court overturned the verdict on a technicality and ordered a new trial. By this time Ruby's mental health had broken down, and her attorney successfully argued that she was mentally unfit to stand trial. The judge committed her to a state mental institution where she remained for 20 years.

Segregation stress syndrome

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, segregation stress syndrome is the result of the long-lasting racial violence that occurred during the Jim Crow era and thus focuses on African Americans as a collective group. Preliminary research indicates that experiencing, witnessing, or hearing about a traumatic event can trigger symptoms of PTSD.

Rape: High probability of segregation stress syndrome

The traumatic event of rape has the highest probability for the victim to develop symptoms of individual PTSD and collective PTSD (segregation stress syndrome) [16-21]. In addition, fear of the individual and/or the individuals that belong to the perpetrator's group is a common symptom. Indeed, Ruby is fearful that Doc Adams might kill her if she refuses him. Also, Ruby is afraid and anxious that she might get pregnant as a result of the rapes and suggests that Doc Adam use protection. His response, "to hell with a diaphragm," clearly shows that he is not afraid of what will happen if Ruby gets pregnant. Ruby states, "[I]n along about October to November, around November it was I spoke to him and told him what had happened [22-30]." Ruby was pregnant. On July 15, 1951, she gave birth to Doc Adams child, Loretta. It was no secret to the citizens of Live Oak that the baby was

the “biracial” child of Doc Adams and Ruby. Due to systemic racism, African American men during Jim Crow understood that resisting the will of white men came at a cost; possibly the death of the man and his family, lynching, his house being burned to the ground, and more. These traumatic events coupled with the inability to assist your loved ones leads to rage, shame, and sadness, all symptoms of segregation stress syndrome.

Consequences of racial traumatic events: Ruby’s mental state

The consequence of racial traumatic events is segregation stress syndrome and the symptoms include denial, shame, rage, anxiety, and collective forgetting. During Ruby’s testimony she mentions, “I was frightened and I don’t remember all that stuff.” Ruby never did recall details of the event that happened on August 3, 1952. In spite of Ruby’s continuous inability to ‘recall’ the details of the events of August 3, 1952, she was deemed mentally fit to stand trial by Dr. William McCullagh who had been treating her for years. Dr. McCullagh was ordered by the court to examine Ruby and gives this contradictory testimony about Ruby’s mental stability states:

As authorized in the court order dated September 29, 1952, I have made a neuropsychiatric examination of Ruby McCollum, and report that Ruby McCollum is not psychotic (not insane) at the present time. It is my opinion that she was not psychotic (not insane) at the time of the alleged offense [31-36]. I have been treating this patient for a nervous disorder classified as a psychoneurosis depressive and hypochondria being the predominating symptoms I treat this patient for a nervous disorder, and the name of the nervous disorder I said was psychoneurosis depression and hypochondria being the predominant symptoms. I treated her and put her in the hospital in Jacksonville, January, February, and May all in 1952 (Trial Transcript 1 1952:24)

Note, Dr. McCullagh stated that he had been treating Ruby for years for depression and a nervous condition. He felt that her condition was serious enough that on two different occasions before the killing of Dr. Adams, Ruby had been hospitalized for her mental conditions. The doctor continues his testimony by explaining the depression and hypochondria diagnosis for Ruby. The doctor states:

I can tell you what I meant by depression and hypochondria. By depression I meant she was emotionally despondent or blue and worrying, and by hypochondria I mean that she was preoccupied with feelings that she was having. For example, she was complaining of discomfort of her chest, but X-rays of her chest and examination of her heart and lungs and blood pressure was made and nothing was found. She was also complaining of pain in her back and lower abdomen and we made studies of that area and many X-rays of that area which were interpreted to be normal. [And that is what you meant by psychoneurosis and hypochondria?] Yes, Sir. (Trial Transcript 1 1952:25).

Ruby McCollum explains in her trial testimony that Doc Adams frequently physically abused her if he didn’t get his way. It is not unreasonable to deduce that some of her symptoms were the result of those beatings from Doc Adams. The judge decided that based on the information Ruby McCollum was in full possession of her mental faculties and therefore was ordered by the judge to stand trial for the charge of murder in the first degree [37-40]. Here we see the criminalization of the victim and no mention about the unlawful acts of Doctor Adams. In addition, Ruby’s loss of memory is a symptom of segregation stress syndrome. According to Marita Sturken states, “the prevalent notion of forgetting as a form of illness, a loss of self, and a

threat to subjectivity” (Evans 2006:117). The nature of cultural and collective forgetting is a mechanism for coping with the experiences of trauma during Jim Crow.

Ruby’s interview: Jet magazine

In 1958, Ruby McCollum agreed to an interview with Jet Magazine under the watchful eyes of the Florida State Hospital for the criminally insane where she had spent the last five years. Ruby reportedly apologized for her lack of makeup. In the article, Jet Magazine reported:

Ruby confided in her Negro attorney, Relford McGriff, she had lost Sam back in 1948 when she bore Dr. Adams a daughter [41-45]. She lost him (though they continued to live together) (Jet Magazine p. 53)

As shown in the trial transcripts, Ruby didn’t mention this at all while testifying. Furthermore, the children and grandchildren of survivors are at heightened risk of developing symptoms due to the intergenerational transmission of segregation stress syndrome. The intergenerational transmission of trauma to the children and grandchildren has been well researched and documented with survivors of the Holocaust and their families. According to Jet magazine, Ruby stated:

The morning Dr. Adams delivered Loretta, [he] called Sam into the bedroom and told him: “Sam, I love all my children niggers and white and this is my baby. I want you to treat it right and see that it gets proper care. And I don’t want you bothering Ruby, do you understand?”

In the Jet Magazine article, there are gaps between Ruby’s testimony at the trial and the interview she gave to Jet Magazine. However, the interview with Jet Magazine presented some gaps or at minimum discrepancies with Ruby’s official testimony. Ruby testified that Dr. Adams delivered Sonja, not Loretta. In addition, Ruby didn’t mention the conversation between Sam and Doc Adams after returning home. Indeed, the conversation might have taken place but with nearly 30 objections and warnings by the judge there was no record of this in the testimony [46-52]. In fact, forgetting, denial, and the inability to recall details of the traumatic event are symptomatic of segregation stress syndrome.

According to Jet Magazine, “Sam, king of the Suwanee County numbers racket and a shrewd businessman who had parlayed nothing into more than \$300,000 300,000? died the next day. From a “heart attack.” The magazine went on to discuss a conversation with Ruby McCollum and family members. According to the Jet Magazine reporter, Ruby states:

The oldest and youngest girls are living with my sister in New Jersey. They write to me often. I want to see them and be with them so bad, I just don’t know what to do. The middle girl lives in Osceola, Fla., with my brother. And Sam Jr. still lives in Live Oak. When I get out of here I’m going back to Live Oak to live. Isn’t it a nice place? I’ve been to Chicago, Detroit, and I’ve lived in Poughkeepsie, N.Y. but I love Live Oak better than any place I’ve been.

Here we see Ruby reminiscing about her life before the traumatic events began at the hands of Doc Adams. The reporter for Jet Magazine wrote that Sam Jr. had no reservations to accepting the dwindling family wealth [53-61]. According to Jet Magazine Sam Jr. states:

I hope I never hear the name McCollum again. You don’t know what it’s like to be pointed out everywhere you go. I have to carry this name

to the grave. My mother's up there and leaver her be" (Jet Magazine, page 52-53).

Sam Jr. was not alone in his wishes to be separated from the family. According to Jet, Ruby's brother had the same sentiment, "I love my sister, but I don't want to see her. I'm trying to pick up the pieces of my life now and go on living. A man can only stand so much without cracking up (Jet Magazine pg. 53).

According to Jet Magazine, Sam Jr. shared what Ruby was like in the last year. Sam Jr. candidly speaks about the change in his mother. He states, Ruby went 'stir crazy,' she cursed her jailor daily and she also cursed Matthew and tormented him, accused him of trying to poison her. Matthew had to sample all food and drink in her presence.

We see the fracture that has permanently impacted the business, the family, and Ruby's freedom. All of these events are connected to the actions of Dr. Adams who raped, drugged, and abused Ruby McCollum [62-65]. In 1980, Ruby agreed to be interviewed by the Ocala Sun-Banner. The two interviews were the only times, other than at the trial itself, when Ruby was able to speak publicly about her experiences. Her attorney secured her release in 1974 on the grounds that she was not a danger to herself or others. She lived another 18 years without any further discussion of the incidents that led to her shooting Dr. Adams.

Conclusion

In the Jim Crow South the aftermath of the murder for the Black and White communities in Live Oak was volatile and fragile. The trial in which an all-white male jury found Ruby guilty (a foregone conclusion), and sentenced her to be executed in the electric chair was not surprising. The African American community was surprised she had a trial. The eyes of the country were on Live Oak and the system of Jim Crow; instead of death Ruby McCollum spent over 20 years in the Black section of Chattahoochee, Florida's State Mental Institution for the criminally insane, which has a history of horrific treatment of its patients. In this article we have discussed paramour rights, rape, the dismantling of the black family, and segregation stress syndrome. In this article, one of the many symptoms of segregation stress syndrome is denial and collective forgetting. Ruby recalled many of the details of the event that happened on August 3, 1952. In addition, we have some testimony about what happened in Doc Adams office on that day. However, another symptom of collective PTSD (segregation stress syndrome) is a lapse in memory (denial and forgetting). Ruby's memory and the details of the events of August 3rd will never be fully known. On May 23, 1992 at the age of 82 Ruby McCollum passed away (Evans 2006:131). The child that she had with Doc Adams has moved from Florida and lives in upstate NY. Loretta has not discussed and continues to refuse to talk about the events that led to her birth, the death of her father, and the institutionalization of her mother. She has instructed her daughters to do the same. In 2014, two film producers came face to face with Loretta's daughters and Ruby's granddaughters. The two young women had one comment, "we are respecting the wishes of our mother and we will not discuss anything" (private communication with Jude and Hillary).

References

1. Litwack LF (1998) *Trouble in mind*. New York: Random House.
2. Ginsberg R (1996) *100 years of lynchings*. New York: Black Classic Press.
3. Dray P (2003) *At the hands of persons unknown: The lynching of black America*. New York: The Modern Day Library.
4. Tolnay SE, Beck EM (1992) Racial violence and black migration in the American south, 1910-1930. *Ame Soc Review* 57: 103-116.
5. Feagin J (2006) *Systemic racism: A theory of oppression*. New York: Routledge.
6. Allen J, Lewis J, Litwack L, Als H (2000) *Without sanctuary: Lynching photography in America*. Twin Palms Publishers.
7. Kessler RC, Zhao C (1999) *The prevalence of mental illness*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
8. Amir M, Sol O (1999) Psychological impact and prevalence of traumatic events in a student sample in Israel: The effect of multiple traumatic events and physical injury. *J Traumatic Stress* 12: 139-154.
9. Horowitz AV, Widom CS, McLaughlin J, White HR (2001) The impact of childhood abuse and neglect on adult mental health: A prospective study. *J Health Soc Behav* 42: 184-201.
10. Thompson-Miller R, Feagin JR (2015) *The reality and impact of Jim Crow in the United States*. New York.
11. Chafe WH, Gavins R, Korstad R (2001) *Remembering Jim Crow: African American's tell about life in the segregated south*. New York.
12. Litwack LF (1980) *Been in the storm so long: The aftermath of slavery*. New York: Vintage Books.
13. Blee K (2005) Racial violence in the United States. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28: 599-619.
14. Van, Alphen E (1999) Symptoms of discursivity: Experience, memory, and trauma." In *acts of memory: Cultural recall in the present*. University Press of New England.
15. Evans T (2004) *The silencing of ruby mcCollum*. Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida.
16. Feagin J (2009) *The white racial frame: Centuries of racial framing and counter-framing*. New York: Routledge.
17. Brownmiller S (1975) *Against our will: Men, Women, and Rape*. New York.
18. Blassingame JW (1979) *The slave community: Plantation life in the antebellum*. New York. Oxford University Press.
19. Bowser BP (2007) *The black middle class. Social Mobility and Vulnerability*. Lynne Rienner Pub.
20. Bryant-Davis T, Ocampo C (2005) Racist Incident-based trauma. *The counseling psychologist* 33: 479-500.
21. Calverton V (1959) No clue to white rapists of girl." *Philadelphia Tribune* (1912-2001). ProQuest Historical News.
22. Campbell R, Wasco SM, Ahrens CE, Sefl T, Barnes HE (2001) Preventing 'second rape': Rape survivors' experiences with community service providers." *J Inter Violence* 16: 1239-1259.
23. Carter RT (2007) Racism and psychological and emotional injury: Recognizing & assessing race-based traumatic stress." *The Counseling Psychologist* 35: 13-105.
24. Clinton C (1984) *The plantation mistress: Woman's world in the old south*. New York: Pantheon Publishing.
25. Clinton C (2004) *Harriet tubman: The road to freedom*. New York: Little Brown Press.
26. Collins P (2005) *Black feminist thought*. New York: Routledge.
27. Davis A (1978) *Women, culture, and politics*. New York: Vintage Books.
28. Foa EB, Rothbaum BO, Riggs DS, Murdock T (1991) Treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder in rape victims: A comparison between cognitive behavioral procedures and counseling. *J Cons Clini Psycho* 59: 715-723.
29. Goffman E (1961) *Asylums: Essays on the social situation of mental patients and other inmates*. New York: Anchor Books.
30. Gwaltney JL (1993) *Drylongo: A self-portrait of black america*. New York: New Press.
31. Hernan V, Gordon A (2003) *Screen saviors: Hollywood of whiteness*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
32. Haines E (2010) *Southern black women find justice elusive for civil rights-era rapes*.

33. Huie WB (1956) Ruby McCollum: Woman in the suwannee jail. New York.
34. Jacobs H (2000) Incidents in the life of a slave girl. New York: Dover Publication.
35. Jennings T (1990) US colored women had to go through a plenty: Sexual exploitation of African American slave women. *J Women's History* 1: 45-74.
36. LeFlore J (1947) 14-year old Babysitter raped by White Man. *Chicago Defender*.
37. Lerner G (1972) Black women in white America. New York: Vintage Books.
38. Lorde A (1984) Sister outsider: Essays and speeches. New York: Crossing Press.
39. McGuire D (2011) At the dark end of the street: Black Women, rape, and resistance: A new history of the civil rights movement from rosa parks to the rise of black power. New York: Knopf Press.
40. McKissack P, McKissack F (1992) Sojourner truth: Ain't I a woman? New York: Scholastic Press.
41. Mills TL, Edwards C (2002) A critical review of research on the mental health status of older African Americans. *J Aging Soc* 22: 27-304.
42. Moran RF (2003) Interracial intimacy: The regulation of race and romance. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
43. Mukamana D, Collins A (2006) Rape survivors of the rwandan genocide. *Int J Critical Psych* 17: 140-166.
44. Pearlin LI (1999) The stress process revisited: Reflections on concepts and their interrelations. New York: Plenum Press.
45. Pennebaker J, Paez D, Rim B (1997) Collective memory of political events: Social psychological perspectives. Florence, Kentucky: Psychology Press.
46. Pierce-Baker C (1998) Surviving the silence: Black women's stories of rape. New York.
47. Richardson E (2007) She was working like foreal': Critical literacy and discourse practices of Black females in the age of hip hop." *Discourse and Society* 18: 789-809.
48. Skloot RL (2010) The immortal life of henrietta lacks. New York: Crown PublishingCompany.
49. Smith MD (2001) Sex without consent: Rape and sexual coercion in america. New York: New York University Press.
50. Smith S, Ellis K, Aslanian, S (2014) Remembering jim crow. American Radio Works.
51. Stiglmyer A (1994) Mass rape: The war against women in bosnia-herzegovina. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press.
52. Talty S (2003) Mulatto America: At the crossroads of black and white culture. New York: HarperCollins.
53. Miller RT, Feagin JR, Houts L (2014) Jim Crow's Legacy: The lasting impact of segregation. New York: Rowman and Littlefield.
54. Van Wormer K, Jackson DW, Sudduth C (2012) The maid narratives. Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press.
55. Wasco S (2003) Conceptualizing the harm done by rape: Applications of trauma theory to experiences of sexual assault. *Trauma Violence Abuse* 4: 309-322.
56. Wiggins JB (1983) Rape, racism, and the law," *Harvard Women's Law Journal* 6: 103-141.
57. Williams LM (1986) Race and rape: The black women as legitimate victim. University of New Hampshire.
58. Williams SL, Williams DR, Stein DJ, Seedat S, Jackson PB, et al. (2007) Multiple Traumatic Events and Psychological Distress: The South Africa Stress and Health Study. *J Trauma Stress* 20: 845-855.
59. Williamson J (1995) New people: Miscegenation and mulattoes in the United States. Louisiana State University Press.
60. Wyatt GE (1992) Sexual abuse of ethnic minority children: Identifying dimensions of victimization. *Research and Practice* 21: 338-343.
61. (1916) Thirteen-year-old girl criminally assaulted by farmer. *Black Historical Newspapers*.
62. (1932) An 11-year old child raped delivering clothes. *Black Historical News Parer*.
63. (1931) Kentucky 16-year old raped. *Black Historical Newspapers*
64. (1915) White man charged with rape of eight-year-old girl. *Black Historical Newspapers*.
65. (1959) Negro woman least protected american. *Philadelphia Tribune*.