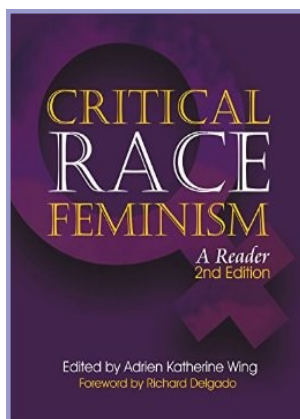




The Monthly Rag

Brought to You by the Feminist & Gender Studies Student Advisory Council and Edited by Kadesha Caradine (FGS '16)

Editor's Note: The articles in this issue were written by students in FG316/ES300 Critical Race Feminism, taught by Professor Heidi R. Lewis during Block 8 last spring. Critical Race Feminism (CRF) originates from Critical Race Theory (CRT), which interrogates the role of race and racism in relation to law and politics. CRF builds on CRT by focusing on the experiences and realities of women of color, especially regarding racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression. This course explores the major themes in CRF, including, but not limited to, work, parenting, sexual harassment, and domestic violence, female genital cutting, and immigration.



Toya Graham and Black Motherhood By Lyric Jackson (FGS '17)

"Baltimore Riot Mom is Mother of the Year!"
"Forget the National Guard! Send in the Moms!"
"Baltimore Mother Praised by Police for Dragging Son out of Riots!"

These headlines and others like them were prominent this past May when a Black mother saw her son participating in the Baltimore riots and beat him. However, Toya Graham claims she is not a hero: "I was not there to be recorded; I was there to get my child." This all came about after Graham and her son discussed the killing of Freddie Gray, and she decided that he should not attend the protests. He swore that he would not go, but when Graham heard news that his school was closing early, she says it was "motherly instinct" to find him. After scoping several usual spots, she came across a large group of people with bricks in their hands moving towards a line-up of police officers. Her son was in the midst of the group, and they eventually made eye contact. Subsequently, video footage of her dragging, slapping, and punching her son went viral, and caused CNN, CBS, Oprah, and many other media outlets to contact her for her story. Despite Black women being regularly understood as bad mothers, there was a sense of gratitude and appreciation for Graham's actions. This leads me to ask, why was Black motherhood being glorified in that way and in that moment? My question is even more critical, considering Terrence McCoy's recent article for *The Washington Post* entitled "What happened to the 'hero mom' of Baltimore's riots?" More specifically, McCoy notes, "She feels unmoored. So much has happened in her life, but so little has changed. She still can't pay her bills. She still can't escape the circumstances into which she was born."

Critical Race Feminist intellectuals have long-problematized theories about "unfit" Black mothers. As Twila L. Perry explains in "Transracial Adoption: Mothers, Hierarchy, Race, and Feminist Legal Theory," "Black mothers are portrayed as raising a future generation of welfare cheats, violent criminals, and absent fathers" (180). So, if Black mothers are seen as incompetent mothers, why was Graham being applauded for beating her child in public? It must be noted that in many ways she clearly represents society's overall view on Black mothers. She is a single mother with no job and six children. Along these lines, in "Punishing Drug Addicts Who Have Babies: Women of Color, Equality, and the Right of Privacy," Dorothy E. Roberts notes that "prosecutions deny poor Black women a facet of their humanity" when protecting the rights of the fetus or the mother (168). With the so-called destructive outcomes of the Baltimore riots, who better to set the "thugs" straight than the Black woman?

Media heavily covered this story to let Black viewers know that their "mother" does not condone rioting for justice. Graham was then seen as an ideal mother for today's Black child, especially during a time of righteous protesting on behalf of the Black Lives Matter movement because she was stopping her child from "going against the law." It's important to point out, though, that in the video footage, Graham is consistently hitting her son while he tries to pull away. In a sense, this shows that Black mothers can only control their children through physical discipline, but if the Black mother knew how to parent, then this incident would not have occurred from the beginning. White supremacist images of Black motherhood rarely induce "positive" outcomes for Black children. Along these lines, Perry concludes that many think that "any problems Black children have are the fault of the Black mothers who have raised them" (181). But as the recent story about Graham illustrates, Black motherhood is recognized as valuable if and only if it operates within a white supremacist framework and then subsequently, Black mothers are forgotten and ignored...along with their children.

Are We Still Concerned about the Karnes County Detention Center?

Atiya Harvey (FGS Minor '18)

I became interested in the crises occurring at the Karnes County Detention Center (KCDC) in Karnes City, TX last April when a group of 10 mothers at the center launched their second hunger strike to demand the release of dozens of women pursuing asylum. The complaints of these women were first recognized by the media in October 2014 in response to sexual harassment claims. According to John Roth, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) conducted an investigation and "found no evidence to substantiate the allegations, and were unable to identify a victim or suspect in this matter." Still, the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) continues to claim that the agency "takes the health, safety and welfare of those in our care very seriously." The mismatch in the immigrants' and authorities' accounts can be explained by cultural ignorance. In "Rosa Lopez, Christopher Darden, and Me: Issues of Gender, Ethnicity, and Class in Evaluating Witness Credibility," Maria L. Ontiveros uses the case of Rosa Lopez to propose that "when evaluating a witness's credibility, issues of class, culture, and gender must be taken into account." American authorities are ignoring the cultural backgrounds of immigrant women at KCDC, which is likely contributing to their treatment within this facility.



DHS investigators interviewed 33 witnesses, and their statements were not consistent with the victims' claims. However, the witnesses may have still had the same guards on staff during the investigation and may have been afraid of telling the truth. According to Ontiveros, Lopez also lost credibility in her testimony for inconsistent answers. However, as Ontiveros points out, Lopez was concerned for her life, because she had come from a place where the government could take your family at any given time. Similarly, in the examination of the KCDC case, the DHS is not taking into account the cultural backgrounds of the detainees. Further, in "Latinas-Everywhere Alien: Culture, Gender, and Sex," Berta Esperanza Hernandez-Truyol argues that "the *Latina* is defined by the *Latino* in his dominant position in the family, church, and state." Considering their already harsh treatment, the detainees may have changed their stories last minute so as not to endanger themselves further.

Furthermore, controlling images regarding immigrants are also preventing American authorities from recognizing their credibility as victims. According to Kevin R. Johnson in "Public Benefits and Immigration: The Intersection of Immigration Status, Ethnicity, Gender, and Class," the stereotype type of the "illegal alien" is that of a Mexican male who snuck across the border like a thief in the night. The view of immigrants as sneaky thieves contributes greatly to people believing they are "taking our jobs," which greatly compromises their humanity. The immigrant women who are protesting are not seen as victims but as invaders and thieves in "our" country. As a result, they are objectified and criminalized, which makes the authorities seem like heroes instead of perpetrators.



The Dragon Lady Has Landed: Tired Tropes of Asian American Women in *Fresh off the Boat* By Jazlyn Andrews (FGS '16)

Fresh Off the Boat, an ABC sitcom based on the story of chef and author Eddie Huang, has been heralded as bringing visibility to Asian American families for the first time since Margaret Cho's *All American Girl* was canceled 20 years ago. While the show is making waves with its predominantly Asian cast and discussions about everyday issues Asian-Immigrant families face, the legacies of colonial construction of the Other live on, especially through the women characters. Specifically, the construction of Eddie's mom, Jessica, as demeaning, emasculating, and scheming reinforces the Dragon Lady image of Asian American women that is used to control *all* women's behavior.

The Dragon Lady construction functions to maintain beliefs that constrict Asian women to a submissive identity performance out of fear of being labeled underserving. As Lisa C. Ikemoto points out in "Male Fraud," when women choose not to perform a submissive, sexually available, yet modest portrayal of Asian women, they are characterized as "scheming, duplicitous, and tyrannical" predators who take advantage of American men and values to get to the top (253). When the Huang family is forced to move to Florida to follow their journey to the American Dream, Jessica is vehemently opposed.

For more of Jazlyn's analysis of *Fresh off the Boat*, please click the QRC code or visit www.femgeniuses.com!



Scan the QRC code for more of *The Monthly Rag*! Also, if you would like to submit to the **Block 4 Rag**, please email Editor Kadesha Caradine at Kadesha.Caradine@coloradocollege.edu by **Friday, November 20 by 5 pm!**