Chapter 1: A Feminist History of Rape in U.S. Film, 1903–1979

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This chapter is *a* history of the representation of rape in mainstream[1] U.S. film from 1903 through 1979, but it is not a *comprehensive* history of these representations during this time period.[2] To write such a history would be nearly to write the history of cinema itself. Scholars argue that rape is pervasive in narratives generally, and cinema is certainly no exception.[3] Quite probably not a year has gone by since the beginning of cinema when any number of films have not represented, implied, or alluded to rape, attempted rape, or other forms of sexual violence. I would argue, in fact, that rape is a key force throughout the history of U.S. cinema and that one cannot fully understand cinema itself without addressing rape and its representation.

While representations of rape are ubiquitous throughout the history of film, shifts in the frequency of particular modes of representation of rape have occurred. Up until the early 1930s, explicit references to rape and onscreen depictions of attempted rape were relatively common. By the mid-1930s, films with explicit rape themes appeared less often; however, allusions to rape and sexual violence continued. In the 1960s, explicit representations of rape once again became commonplace.

The development of self-regulation in Hollywood and the eventual formation (and then demise) of the Production Code offer one perspective from which to understand these shifts. Focusing on self-regulation in the 1910s, Janet Staiger (1995) argues that narrational techniques—such as a clear motivation for a character's immoral act or a moralistic ending in which the "bad" characters face punishment—regulated, but also justified, representations of sexuality. In relation to rape, films might represent a character who rapes or attempts to rape someone in a variety of ways: he could be saved through transformation, function to teach other characters or the audience a lesson, help to define a film as "serious" or

"high art," or face the consequences of choosing to take a "bad" action. Additionally, narratives might depict rape as a punishing consequence of women's inappropriate actions. In this context, one might argue that self-regulatory practices actually *invited* (particular kinds of) representations of rape.

When the Production Code began to take effect in the late 1920s and early 1930s, it held that representations of rape and seduction "should never be more than suggested, and only when essential for the plot, and even then never shown by explicit method. They are never the proper subject for comedy" ("Documents" 1995, 62). Thus, rather than eliminating rape altogether, the code prescribed certain narrational strategies that, as Ruth Vasey (1995) argues, led to "elision, or effacement of sensitive subjects" (81) such as rape.[4] The Production Code's call for effacement was not a new mode for representing rape, however. The development and codification of this Production Code–sanctioned approach followed logically from preestablished modes of representation. As both Vasey and Richard Maltby (1995) point out, the code was based on existing practices of city censorship boards, and it corresponded with many of the methods of self-regulation developed in the 1910s, such as the narrative and moral imperatives for representing rape that I mention above. Furthermore, earlier censorship boards and film producers were themselves drawing on precinematic rape narrative forms. In fact, the Code's imperative that rape "should never be more than suggested, only when essential for the plot" mirrors the findings of the essays in *Rape and Representation,* an anthology that examines both ancient and contemporary rape narratives in oral culture, prose, literature, film, and elsewhere. Summarizing the collective findings of the anthology, the editors write,

> What remains is a conspicuous absence: a configuration where sexual violence against women is an origin of social relations and narratives in which the event itself is subsequently elided. . . . The simultaneous presence and disappearance of rape as constantly deferred origin of both plot and social relations is repeated so often as to suggest a *basic conceptual principle* in the articulation of both social and artistic representations. (Higgins and Silver 1991, 2–3, emphasis added)

The censorship boards and later the framers and interpreters of the Production Code, then, drew on well-established modes of representation when making their decisions about "appropriate" and "inappropriate" depictions of rape in the relatively new medium of film. The result was

that by the second half of the 1930s and continuing into the 1940s representations of rape and sexual violence were predominantly an "absent presence" in cinema. Films alluded to rape obliquely but nonetheless *systematically depended on rape* to motivate narrative progression.

After federal antitrust actions against the film industry and the 1952 U.S. Supreme Court decision that films were to be considered under rules of free speech, the Production Code gave way to a new form of self-regulation: a ratings system, a descendant of which is used today. Concomitantly, the number of films depicting explicit rape or attempted rape increased. For example, Aljean Harmetz (1973) examines nearly twenty films from the late 1960s and early 1970s that include rape, calling rape "the new Hollywood game" (1).[5] While, as I illustrate in this chapter, rape was anything but new to Hollywood, Harmetz's article is an example of public discourse noting a shift in the representation of rape toward more explicit depictions during the late 1960s and early 1970s.[6] Harmetz's article also illustrates, however, that implicit representations of rape continued during this era. For example, Harmetz criticizes the writer/director Paul Mazursky for claiming that what Harmetz considers to be a rape scene from *Blume in Love* (1973) is not a rape scene: Mazursky claims, "on some level, [the character in *Blume in Love* (1973)] permit[s] it to happen" (quoted in Harmetz, 11). This scene, then, is an example of the continuation of implicit representations of rape.

In short, while the number of explicit representations of rape in cinema has varied historically, standard narrative conventions that contribute to rape's elusiveness, many of which were codified during the Production Code era, appeared regularly during the *entire* time period under study here, blurring firm distinctions one might want to draw between pre-/post-Code and Code films and maintaining a consistently high number of representations of rape in film overall. Given this elusive/ubiquitous history, I have the following two goals. First, I seek to *demonstrate just how pervasive rape is* in mainstream U.S. films up until the 1970s, regardless of shifts in self-regulation and modes of representation. In order to illustrate this with as many examples as possible, I draw on my own viewing of more than fifty films from 1903 to 1979 that represent rape in some way; on the subject indexes and plot descriptions in the American Film Institute (AFI) *Catalog of Motion Pictures Produced in the United States* for 1911–1920 (Hanson 1988), 1921–1930 (Munden 1971), 1931–1940 (Hanson 1993), 1941–1950 (Hanson and Dunkleberger 1999), and 1961–1970 (Krafsur 1976) and the AFI special topic

catalog on ethnicity in U.S. cinema for 1911–1960 (Gevinson 1997); and on keyword searches of Web sites that include plot descriptions of films.[7] In order to include many films that subtly imply rape rather than explicitly represent it and thus are not indexed under rape (or related terms) in the AFI catalogs or on the Web sites, I also draw on other scholarly work that explores implicit representations of rape in film[8] and on other relevant films I have seen while researching this book.[9]

Throughout the chapter I rely on brief summaries and downplay some of the more canonical examples of films that include rape (such as *Birth of a Nation* [1915] and *Gone with the Wind* [1939]) in favor of texts that have received less critical attention in order to emphasize how *standard* these representations are *throughout* cinema, not just in the relatively unique films of cinema studies' canon. This approach to criticism helps illustrate rape films' ubiquity and begins to *challenge the elusiveness* of many of these representations, the second goal of this chapter. To further this goal, I also include some close textual analyses, particularly of films that elide the sexual violence on which their narratives depend. If rape is everywhere in film and yet often offscreen, alluded to, or not acknowledged as "really" rape, this chapter offers a critical analysis that insists on identifying all these types of representations and naming them as forms of rape within narrative.

Specifically, the particular history I tell in the first section of this chapter explores the multiple, ambivalent, and contradictory ways rape narratives have contributed to and depend on social categories of gender, class, race, and nation. The second section addresses the relationship between rape narratives and the representation of feminism. In this second section I ask specific questions about how representations of rape have helped to negotiate social understandings of feminism and women's activism historically and about how these representations intersect with the social categories of gender, class, race, and nation described in the first section.

Rape in Film: Gender, Class, Race, and Nation

In what follows, I separate my discussion of gender, class, race, and nation into separate subsections in order to pay due attention to each issue. By addressing each issue separately, I illustrate a distinct difference between a *mutability* of gender and class and a *reification* of race and nation

in these films. In addition to considering gender, class, race, and nation singly, however, I also address the intersections of these issues, arguing, for example, that some rape narratives draw on a relationship between gender and class in ways that reaffirm a heterosexual family structure. And, for instance, I suggest that the mutability of gender is a key part of the process of maintaining national boundaries through depictions of rape. By addressing gender, class, race, nation, *and* their intersections, I hope to illustrate the complex and versatile roles rape plays in U.S. film. Throughout this section I also emphasize that there are no consistent stereotypes in rape narratives that appear in all or even most cases. For example, a man of color, a white man, a wealthy man, or a poor man might each just as easily be a savior as a villain. Similarly, a woman's desire for a "foreign" man might lead to rape, or it might lead to the assimilation of the foreign man into U.S. society. This point is particularly important because much previous research on one or several rape films depends on generalizations about *consistency* in representations of rape.[10] My examination of a large number of films from a wide time period illustrates that rape narratives are much more versatile and varied than this research has suggested. My overall goal, then, is to describe both consistencies and inconsistencies, emphasizing the *pervasiveness of the appearance* of representations of rape while highlighting the *versatility of the forms* they take.

Women, Vulnerability, Independence, and the Family

Women are often vulnerable in rape films, but the relationship between rape and women's vulnerability is complex. Specifically, two seemingly antithetical types of narratives are common: those that depict women's vulnerability as leading to rape and those that depict the rape of an independent woman as making her vulnerable. Paradoxically, the first set of texts suggests that women should be more self-sufficient and independent in order to avoid rape, while the second set of texts suggests that independent behavior and sometimes independent sexuality can lead to rape. In both cases, however, most narratives resolve the paradox between vulnerability and independence by providing a conclusion that successfully incorporates the woman into a stable heterosexual family setting.

In the films that depict women as innocent, naive, and vulnerable, and as facing rape as a result, the women may lack control over their own lives or bodies; hence, they lack agency and therefore logically must be rescued

from rape. Some 1910s films depict men's use of drugs, alcohol, or hypnotism or women's amnesia or fainting to indicate women's hypervulnerability.[11] Other films from the same period represent young orphaned women as particularly vulnerable because they are parentless.[12] In some, rescue by a male guardian culminates in romance.[13] Other films heighten the orphaned woman's vulnerability by depicting her seemingly "kindly" guardian, often a single man, as a rapist.[14]

In the 1948 film *Johnny Belinda,* Belinda is particularly vulnerable because she is both deaf and mute. When Belinda begins to become more integrated into the community her vulnerable naïveté leads to a rape that makes her even more vulnerable. The rape also naturalizes her return to passivity through her eventual incorporation into marriage as the institution most likely to protect her from future rapes. Some scholars have claimed that this is the "first" post–World War II film to address rape *directly,* and rape *is* central to the narrative's development, but *Johnny Belinda* nevertheless relegates the rape and Belinda's experience of that rape to the margins of the text.[15]

The first section of the film depicts Dr. Robert Richardson's attempts to teach Belinda American Sign Language. Belinda, however, already communicates well through smiles, gestures, and body language, and she even keeps track of the customers at her family's flour mill by using a written symbol system she and her father have developed for this purpose. After Lucky McCormick, one of Belinda's customers, rapes her, however, Belinda stops communicating, which isolates her even more than her pre–American Sign Language life did. As a result, after the rape Robert communicates and translates for her, initiating the narrative repression of the rape that Belinda's silence facilitates. For example, when Belinda's father finds out that Belinda is pregnant and demands that she tell him who did this to her, Robert erroneously says, "Even if she could talk she couldn't tell you. . . . [It's] blotted out of her mind." Here, Robert "forgets" that Belinda can communicate and that, because Lucky is one of her customers, she even has a specific linguistic symbol to represent him.

Belinda's vulnerability increases further when Lucky and his new wife, Stella, convince the town that Belinda, impregnated as a result of the rape, is an unfit mother and that Lucky and Stella should therefore adopt Belinda's child. However, Belinda fights physically to prevent Lucky from taking her child, which leads to his accidental death and her subsequent trial for murder. At the trial, Belinda is unable to communicate because the lawyers face away from her, making it impossible for her to read their

lips. Ultimately, Belinda is acquitted only when *Stella* speaks up, admitting that Belinda killed Lucky in self-defense. After the trial, Belinda begins to sign something to Robert, who is now her fiancé, but he stops her and says, "You don't have to say anything." By the end of the film Belinda has become even more silent, vulnerable, and dependent on others than she was at the beginning of the film, (supposedly) having lost her language skills, her ability to think, and even her right to talk.[16] Overall, the flow of the narrative suggests that, given her vulnerable state—which led to rape, which led to the birth of a child, which led to an accidental murder, which led to a trial—the film's culmination in heterosexual romance is even more necessary for her protection and happiness.

In such films with drugged, hypnotized, orphaned, and silenced women, innocence makes women vulnerable to rape; other films transform previously independent women into vulnerable women by subjecting them to rape or sexual violence. Some films emphasize this causality by depicting women's strength or independence as an explanation for why they face rape. Thus, the films use rape to discipline independent women into vulnerability. In films from the very first years of the 1900s, being active or visible in public—for example, the street,[17] a train,[18] or even just near a country stream[19]—is enough to put women in danger of peeping Toms, attempts at seduction, or rape. Later films drop the general theme of women in public spaces per se; however, 1910s films commonly include threats to women who express their independence by working for a wage. In *The Ruse* (1915), for example, a man identified by a title as a "crooked mine operator" repeatedly tries to touch his stenographer, Miss Dawson. She pulls away, but he eventually kidnaps her. Crosscutting between a scene of the kidnapper with Miss Dawson and a scene of Miss Dawson's mother with Miss Dawson's soon-to-be-fiancé, Bat, builds suspense and emphasizes the opposition between the dangers of Miss Dawson's independent work life and the security of her protected home life. While Miss Dawson bangs on her boss's shoulders and continually resists him, he does, eventually, manage to kiss her. The film ends after Bat rescues Miss Dawson and proposes marriage, which she accepts with her mother's blessing.[20]

In other films, women's independent expressions of sexuality, in particular, eventuate in rape, which in turn threatens the family. A common 1910s narrative includes a woman agreeing to elope with a man, only to face his rape or attempted rape of her before the marriage takes place.[21] A similar narrative involves a false marriage ceremony, after which the woman is raped or almost raped.[22] Here, a woman's independence of thought and her

interest in leaving her family without her parents' permission ultimately endanger her. A related narrative includes women who are romantic dreamers and who get into trouble as a result. Some romantic dreamers are unmarried,[23] but most are married and thus threaten the family when they consider or engage in adultery. (*The Cheat* (1915) is perhaps the most famous example of this kind of narrative.) *The Talk of the Town* (1918) makes clear the threat women's extramarital flirting poses to marriage when the husband, after the fact, actually *pays* the man who attempts to rape his wife for "curing" his wife of her desire to flirt.[24]

These examples from the 1910s and early 1920s suggest that a woman's active sexuality, in particular, results in rape or attempted rape, which in turn threatens her place in the family. In the 1930s, women's sexual expression leads to sexual violence in a variety of films. For example, in many films women attempt various modes of self-defense, but are ultimately trapped by melodramatic circumstances in contexts where they face repeated sexual violence—at least until the very last moments of the film when marriage, as it is for Belinda, is often their only way out.[25]

I would argue that 1930s and 1940s screwball comedies, as a genre, offer another example of a group of films that include sexual violence as a central narrative element. These films depend not only on sexual tension, but also quite often on violent sexual battle (in the context of the sexual tension) that is ultimately resolved through heteronormative coupling at the narrative's conclusion.[26] For example, sexual violence appears as comedy in this genre when a man uses his knowledge that a marriage ceremony is false—knowledge the woman does not share (but spectators *do* share)—to pretend to want to consummate that marriage against the woman's will[27] and when an attempted rape, brought on by a woman's insistence on independent movement in social space, brings her together with the hero when he rescues her.[28]

I choose to examine one representative screwball comedy in some detail here because, as comedies, screwballs perhaps seem to be the least likely genre to depict sexual violence, and thus an analysis of a film from this genre emphasizes how pervasive implicit sexual violence is in film. Two scenes in particular from *We're Not Dressing* (1934) depict sexual violence. In the first scene, Doris Worthington, a wealthy yacht owner, fights with Stephen Jones, a sailor working on her yacht, to whom she is attracted and who is attracted to her. Stephen has been remiss in his duties, and Doris confronts him. She says, "You annoy me so, I could slap your face." He encourages her to do so, and she does; a reaction shot

shows his surprise, and then he leans forward and kisses her. Here, while they are both acting violently, he links the violence to sex by kissing her in response to her violence and by kissing her without her permission (she slaps him with his permission, after all).

They are soon stranded on a desert island, where Doris becomes dependent on Stephen's working-class, manly savvy for her survival, and where sexual and physical vulnerability replace her independence and class privilege. As his power over her grows, so does his sexual violence. For example, when he frustrates her again and she threatens to throw a rock at him, he says, "Remember what happened when you just slapped me," explicitly threatening a more violent sexual assault. Later, when Stephen discovers that Doris has hidden the fact that there are other people on the island who could help them, he drags her off and ties her up. In response, Doris jokes, "I suppose a fate worse than death awaits me," referencing rape. His response implies that she is right, adding the jibe that he assumes she has been raped before. He says, "How would you know? You've never been dead, have you?" Next Doris pulls away in fright and tells him he "wouldn't dare." He responds with a speech that references the class tensions of screwball comedy: "Why wouldn't I? Tomorrow you'll be back in your own sheltered world, spoiled and petted and sheltered and out of my reach. In all my life I'll probably never see you again. But tonight you're mine." As in many screwball comedies, while Doris and Stephen ultimately engage in consensual coupling at the end of the film, they arrive there only after Doris faces repeated sexual violence as a result of her sexual desire and her independence (enabled by her class privilege).[29]

While I choose to pause over sexual violence in a screwball comedy of the 1930s in order to emphasize that rape can be central in even unlikely places such as comedies, which the Production Code explicitly states should "never" include rape, the number of films that associate women's independence and sexuality with sexual violence is overwhelming. Perhaps the scene from *Gone with the Wind* in which Rhett carries Scarlett up the stairs to her bedroom—despite her explicit physical and verbal protestations—is the most famous rape that a female character's independence and expressive sexuality within the narrative transforms into not-(really)-a-rape after the fact. Examples of women's expression of sexuality leading to rape from 1940s and 1950s films include women who contemplate leaving their marriages only then to face rape, which eventually leads them back to their marriage;[30] women who suffer from some kind of psychological affliction defined as feminine by the film—such as

kleptomania,[31] repressed sexuality,[32] excessive sexual behavior (such as sometimes not wearing panties),[33] or delusion[34]—which in turn puts them in danger of rape; and entire narratives structured so that women have no choice but to capitulate to love/marriage, thus blurring the line between coercion and consent.[35] Additionally, being a former prostitute[36] or even just using femininity as a disguise (e.g., by faking a faint)[37] might eventuate in a woman facing rape or coercive sexuality.

Numerous 1960s and early 1970s rape films depict women's sexuality as even more explicitly excessive, suspect, or unhealthy. In *Straw Dogs* (1971), for example, Amy repeatedly flirts with a group of men working on her and her husband's property, one of whom is a former lover. Eventually, the former lover and another man rape her. While she initially struggles during the rapes, at the end she seems to give in, at least to the first rape. Whether or not she actually consents to any aspect of the rapes, the film implies that her expression of sexuality contributes to the rapes and then to the subsequent drawn-out violent confrontation between the working men and Amy and her husband, David. Thus a woman's expression of sexuality, followed by a violent rape, unleashes even more excessive and sustained violence in the text.[38]

In these films, women's vulnerability is complex and sometimes contradictory. Women may lack control over their own lives and thus need to be rescued, as in *Johnny Belinda*; or they may act independently, moving about alone in public space, working for a wage, or defending themselves, but still face sexual violence, as in *The Ruse*. Expressing their sexuality may be followed by rape that threatens their family structure, as in *Straw Dogs*; or expressing sexuality might lead to sexual violence that helps bring a couple together, as in *We're Not Dressing*. What is consistent here is that no matter how independent and self-sufficient a woman is in these films, rape heightens her vulnerability. Her gender identity may be mutable, oscillating between vulnerability and independence, but, more often than not, the narrative ultimately represents the family as a refuge and heterosexual romance as her salvation.

Economic and Social Class Ambivalence

In addition to addressing women's vulnerability and independence, their sexuality, and their relationship to family, some rape films explore themes of class. For example, in some films women become even more vulnerable as a result of economic losses, such as being orphaned or

having to work for a wage. In these contexts, class disadvantage helps absolve women of responsibility for rapes or attempted rapes. In other films, trouble follows women's access to wealth. In a screwball comedy such as *We're Not Dressing*, for example, Doris's wealth renders her oppressive toward her employee, Stephen. This behavior then provides a motivation for his anger toward her, which he expresses through sexual violence. Similarly, in *Straw Dogs*, Amy taunts her former lover, a working man, both by displaying her status as mistress of her house and by using high-priced fashion to express her sexuality. Eventually he rapes her, moving the film forward to a violent confrontation between the landowning couple, Amy and David, and the working-class men in whose community Amy and David are out of place.[39]

Overall, films representing a relationship between rape and social and economic class express an underlying ambivalence about a classed society. Both the films about working women and the screwball comedies about wealthy women discussed above, for example, include both anxiety about and desire for movement across class divisions. In these films, the sexualized violence can express the anxiety (if a woman crosses a class division she may face rape), or it can make the movement possible (once she faces rape, she may find love in a new class context).[40] As I discuss below, comparing films about villainous wealthy men to films about villainous working-class men illustrates ambivalence about class, as does comparing films that champion social reform of work conditions to films that are explicitly antisocialist. Furthermore, paradoxically, in some films women's desire for wealth may result in a potential rape, but the films nevertheless detail a sumptuously wealthy mise-en-scène as a source of spectatorial pleasure.[41] Ambivalence about class emerges again in films about distinct social groups, whether or not those distinctions are based in economics; for example, artists may be either villains or saviors, and youths may be both wildly violent and potentially reformable.

The villainous wealthy or aristocratic rapist is a stock character in 1910s and 1920s films.[42] The villainous (or at least misguided) wealthy or aristocratic woman also appears either as a mother or sister who insists on a "class-appropriate" marriage[43] or as a young woman who misuses or inappropriately desires wealth.[44] Any of these behaviors can lead to situations that eventually include rape or attempted rape. In *The Auction of Virtue* (1917), for example, a wealthy man is villainous *and* a woman is overly concerned with acquiring wealth. While she desires money only in order to help a friend, her desire nevertheless leads to a situation in which

a wealthy man has an opportunity to rape her. The narrative culminates in an attempted rape and rescue, which naturalizes her return to poverty and to romantic love within that class context.

In contrast, other narratives unabashedly celebrate society or aristocratic life, depicting working-class, poor, or uneducated men as rapists.[45] Although it does not depict a wealthy world in opposition to a working-class world, *Broken Blossoms* (1919) does use a metaphorical rape and (unsuccessful) rescue narrative to depict the villainy of the working class. In this film Lucy, abused by her working-class father, Burrows, runs away. She is taken in by a Chinese man, Cheng, who is attracted to her and begins to approach her sexually without her consent (or, arguably, knowledge), but ultimately stops himself. Burrows then kidnaps Lucy and beats her to death with what Julia Lesage (1981) defines as a "whip-phallus" (53). Consequently, Cheng kills Burrows, reclaims Lucy's body, and finally kills himself. Lesage and Gina Marchetti (1993) both offer persuasive readings of Burrows's sexualized and violent treatment of Lucy[46] and of Cheng's approach to Lucy[47] as depictions of metaphorical rape. Marchetti further argues that although Cheng becomes the avenger when he shoots Burrows, because he is not white he must also die, returning to an emasculated, masochistic role of an Asian man in Hollywood. This difference from standard narratives (of attempted rape leading to rescue, leading to love, leading to heterosexual romantic/family coupling) highlights the racialized nature of the film. Here, the issue of rape emerges in the context of class in such a way that the film depicts both working-class and Asian men as rapists, even though the Asian man simultaneously functions as a(n ineffectual) savior.

Films that draw a relationship between rape and a need for labor reform were also common in the 1910s. Most films that bemoan work conditions primarily do so in order to tell a story about attempted rape—caused by the work conditions—rescue, and a fantasy of reform. Thus, the films acknowledge exploitive labor conditions, but the endings imply that "good men" (and occasionally "good women") are already making all the changes that are needed.[48] Other films, however, are explicitly antisocialist. For example, in *Bolshevism on Trial* (1919), which Kevin Brownlow (1990) suggests "was an attack on socialism, intended to make it seem ludicrous in theory and impossible in practice" (443), Barbara and Norman work together to establish a "Bolshevist" utopian island community where everyone is equal. The leader, however, is villainous: he is married, but advocates free love, which includes an attempt to rape Barbara,

whom Norman rescues. The film ends with the U.S. flag being raised and the (capitalist and masculinist) U.S. Marines restoring order to the island. Here sexuality, sex, and attempted rape signify socialism, and advocating "free love" leads to rape.

While a large number of films link rape and *economic* class conflict in the 1910s, by the 1920s this particular pairing drops out almost altogether.[49] The theme of *social* class continues to appear, however. In 1910s and 1920s films, for example, entertainment professions, such as artist, actor, dancer, or singer, function as a social class associated with rape and the threat of rape. These professions are not economically class specific: these films depict artists, whether wealthy or poor, as on the fringe of mainstream society. In this context, artists can be said to function as a social class. Like films dealing specifically with economic class, films that depict rape in these various contexts collectively portray ambivalent class politics. While they primarily depict these settings as dangerous for women, a savior also sometimes emerges from this world.[50] In *Infidelity* (1917), for example, Elaine is an art student who is taken with another art student who is "Hindu," Ali. The film exoticizes Ali when he uses hypnosis to force Elaine to be alone with him and then attempts to rape her. Her sweetheart, a white man in the art class, rescues her. This film does depict the art world as dangerous for women, and does depict an artist as villainous, but simultaneously depicts a (white) artist as savior. Furthermore, the villain's racialized use of hypnotism, which renders the woman blameless for the attempted rape, makes this film less wary of women's participation in the art world and more critical of immigration and racial difference.

The association of rape with particular social classes continues in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, although with less frequency. In this time frame, rape might occur in the context of the circus,[51] the dance world,[52] a nightclub,[53] or among sailors at sea.[54] In *The Pitfall* (1948), a model, Mona Stevens, faces a relentless pursuit by MacDonald, a man who does occasional private detective work for the hero, with whom Mona is having an affair. In one scene, MacDonald comes to the department store where Mona works and insists that she model for him, thus illustrating his threat to her. In a medium close-up that reveals her discomfort and then a close-up of him watching, he forces her to turn around for him, telling her to lower her shawl to reveal her bare shoulders. While not an explicit rape per se, this scene does include class-based and explicitly coercive sexuality. The 1950 film *The House by the River* does include an explicit attempted rape. This film depicts a villainous author who not only

attempts to rape his maid, Emily, but accidentally kills her when she resists him. Here, simply working for an artist/author endangers Emily.

In 1950s and 1960s films "juveniles" function as yet another kind of social class with a connection to rape. These films weigh two alternatives to controlling youth violence: nurturing psychology or aggressive social control. The young men and women almost always are incontrovertibly "bad," however, and thus by the end of the films aggressive social control appears to be the only solution, suggesting less ambivalence about (marginalized "youths" as a social) class than the other films I discuss in this section. *The Purple Gang* (1960), which takes place in Detroit during Prohibition, explicitly depicts a therapeutic approach as dangerous. In this film, a social worker wants to rehabilitate juvenile delinquents while the police disagree with her, believing prison to be the answer. Eventually, the teenagers rape and murder the social worker, violently proving her wrong.[55]

Like films that use rape to work through social understandings of women's relationship to independence and vulnerability, films that link rape to issues of economic and social class articulate anxiety about these social categories. In this context, rape functions as a narrative tool first to raise anxiety and then either (1) to provide a means of returning characters to a gendered and classed status quo in which gender and class differences, particularly differences associated with social power, are obscured and the heterosexual family is valorized; or, especially in the later films, (2) to articulate an apocalyptic perspective on shifts in these social categories that suggests the worst will happen if one (whether character or spectator) does not remain in one's designated gender and class position.

Solidifying Race

Rape films that address gender and class imply at least a potential mutability and permeability of these social characteristics—as the social definition of women shifts in relation to, for example, mobility in social space, waged work, the family, and expression of sexuality; and as class categories are transgressed and complicated when wealthy men and poor men, artists and other entertainers can be either villainous or virtuous. Conversely, rape films that foreground race tend, overall, to solidify racial categories, perhaps "incorporating" a racialized minority into dominant society,[56] but nevertheless also suggesting the impossibility of shifting what race *is*.[57] For example, the villainous artist in *Infidelity,* discussed above, illustrates this overdetermined racial solidification: he is an artist,

he incapacitates his victim, *and* his method of subduing the woman—hypnotism rather than drugs, for example—is coded as foreign and therefore particularly dangerous. And, in *Broken Blossoms* the strength of Cheng's racial identity is sufficient to "bend" the standard rape/rescue/romance narrative. This melodrama has a particularly tragic ending: both Lucy and Cheng die rather than develop the romantic familial relationship that follows a typical rescue from rape in innumerable other films.[58] Despite this stability of racial *categories,* however, often the particular racial *identity* of the depicted rapists and, to some extent, the women who are raped shift from film to film. In the discussion that follows, I illustrate the reification of race in films that depict men of color as rapists of white women, that depict men of color as saviors, and that depict white men as rapists of women of color. Additionally, I point out that even in explicitly antiracist films, rape's place in the narrative generally helps to solidify racial categories.[59]

One might expect that I would begin this section by discussing films that depict men of color as rapists of white women. While scholars have most often discussed this racist characterization in relation to African American men,[60] it functions in relation to other racialized groups as well.[61] For example, in *Her Debt of Honor* (1916) a Native American man attempts to rape a white woman who is saved by her white sweetheart. In *The Border Raiders* (1918), a presumably Chinese or Chinese American man, Mock Sing, attempts to rape a white woman. She is rescued by her white sweetheart. In *Cora* (1915), a character named José (presumably Mexican American, but certainly racialized) attempts to rape a white woman. She defends herself against him, accidentally causing his death in the process.[62] *Birth of a Nation* (1915), which represents an African American man as (attempted) rapist of a white girl/woman, is probably the most written about film that fits into this category.[63]

The western, in particular, is a genre in which men of color, usually Native American men, regularly appear as villainous rapists. For example, in westerns a woman's bonnet caught on a broken wagon, a silver bracelet on a Native American man's wrist,[64] a darkened room whose contents (presumably a dead and raped woman) are visible only to the hero,[65] a darkened pass between two rocks, again visible only to the hero,[66] an extreme close-up of a woman's frightened face coupled with the sound of approaching Indians,[67] or a white man about to kill a woman he deeply cares about to save her from a "fate worse than death" each symbolizes rape or potential rape within a complex semiotic system of inference.[68] In

these examples (symbolic) rape serves as a justification for white men's (more literalized) massacre of Native Americans. In *The Searchers* (1956), in particular, rape serves as the precipitating event for the entire narrative progression as well as the potential threat that keeps the search for the white child kidnapped by Native Americans—and the narrative—going.[69] Westerns depicting Native American rapists continue into the 1960s and early 1970s.[70] This trope is so common that in some 1970s self-referential comedic westerns, rape becomes a joke. In *Little Big Man* (1970), for example, Native Americans who rescue a young woman frighten her because she assumes they will rape her. The antiracist (but sexist and homophobic) joke turns on the Native American men's sexual disinterest in her, including their initial assumption that she is a boy.[71]

In contrast to films such as *Birth of a Nation* and *The Searchers* that depend on the stereotype of the racialized man as a rapist, some films depict Native American men, in particular, as saviors who sacrifice themselves (usually including their lives) to save white women. Here, heroism rather than villainy defines the man of color's fixed racialized identity.[72] *The Rainbow Trail* (1932), in which a Native American man rescues a white woman from rape, is somewhat more complicated, however, because this rescue is not purely self-sacrificial. Rather, the Native American man rescues the white woman in *exchange* for a white man rescuing a Native American woman. Furthermore, in both cases men rescue the women from attempted rape by a white man. This film includes both a "noble" Native American man *and* a villainous white man who attempts to rape a Native American woman. By placing these characters in relation to each other, the film adds a racialized motivation for the Native American man's "nobility" beyond a more simplified "positive" stereotype.

Most often, however, men of color as cross-race saviors and white men as cross-race rapists do not appear in the same film. Furthermore, when the white man as cross-race rapist does appear, the narrative often veers away from the subject of rape. For example, *The Grip of Jealousy* (1916) displaces the story of a white man raping an African American woman to the pre-film time frame of slavery, seemingly unable to imagine this interracial rape in the present.[73] *The Goddess of Lost Lake* (1918) explicitly suggests that a Native American woman's racial identity places her in danger of rape by white men. In this film Mary, a woman who is mixed race Native American and white, returns from the East with a college degree. She decides, however, to "pretend" to be a "full" Native American. Presumably as a result of her performance of what they understand to be a provocative racialized identity,

two white men who visit her white father find her attractive. One attempts to rape her, while the other saves her from the rapist. In this film and others like it,[74] a white hero rescues the woman of color threatened with a cross-racial rape brought on by her racialized identity and then ends up marrying her, thus drawing her into white culture.[75] By representing a mixed race character, *The Goddess of Lost Lake* has the *potential* to represent race as mutable, but the narrative structure—in which rape emerges only in response to (a pretend) "full" Native American identity and in which marriage to a white man emphasizes the character's whiteness—reifies distinctions between racial categories.

While the representation of Native American men as rapists of white women is pervasive in westerns, often leading to violent colonial incursions, it is also important to note that white men as cross-race rapists appear in this genre as well. In *Wagon Master* (1950), for example, a white man—Reese, an outlaw—rapes a Navajo woman, an act that marks him as villainous. While the rape takes place offscreen, represented visually only by a Navajo woman crying, yelling, and pointing toward Reese after the rape, the Mormons and the two wagon masters traveling with them tie Reese to a wagon wheel, shirtless, and whip him—onscreen. Thus, punishment for rape is a matter to be settled between white men; the Navajo people, while threatening, ultimately simply watch from a victimized position. Other westerns, such as *Canyon Passage* (1946), *The Hellbenders* (1967), and *Firecreek* (1968), however, do include a violent "Indian uprising" in response to a white man's rape or attempted rape of a Native American woman; here, rape provides narrative motivation for a violent confrontation between the two opposed racialized groups.[76] Overall, films that depict white men's rape of women of color also draw attention away from these interracial rapes by displacing the rape as a problem of a former historical period, by folding the women into white culture through marriage, or by following an individual rape with a large-scale, bilateral racialized conflict.

Despite the overwhelming number of films that link rape and race in racist ways, there are also a number of films that depict rape as part of an effort to articulate an antiracist stance. For example, rape is a theme in some of Oscar Micheaux's early films, made and released in the context of independent African American film production and culture during the late 1910s and 1920s and engaging contemporary cultural narratives about rape and African Americans in order to critique white racism. Micheaux's *Within Our Gates* (1919) includes a flashback in which Sylvia's (adoptive) father is unfairly blamed for his white employer and landlord's

murder. In response, a lynch mob hangs and burns Sylvia's mother and father in a scene crosscut with Sylvia experiencing an attempted rape by the landlord's brother, Armand, who is white. When Armand rips Sylvia's dress and sees a scar, however, he realizes that Sylvia is his own daughter and stops attempting to rape her. When the flashback ends, Sylvia is reunited with the man with whom she has fallen in love, a doctor.

The film's *separation* of the rape and the lynching articulates the contemporary antiracist argument that lynchings of African Americans were taking place for reasons other than rape of white women (such as keeping a saloon or having smallpox), but that lynch mobs nevertheless used stories about rape or attempted rape of white women to justify those lynchings (Wells-Barnett 1909, 99). Parallel editing produces a temporal *association* of lynching with rape, however, which ironically mimics the contemporary culture's link of acts of racist mob violence with stories about racialized rape. Furthermore, the film's reversal of race in the standard rape story used to justify lynching, so that in the film a white man attempts to rape an African American woman, not only undermines cultural narratives about rape that "justified" lynching but also alludes to the long history of white men's rape of African American women. The fact that Sylvia is Armand's *unrecognized daughter* emphasizes the frequency with which white men historically created sexual access to African American women's bodies and to the daughters those women sometimes bore as a result of rape. Jane Gaines (1993) argues, "The scene is thus symbolically charged as a reenactment of the White patriarch's ravishment of Black womanhood, reminding viewers of all of the clandestine forced sexual acts that produced the mulatto population of the American South" (56–57).[77]

A few films from the 1930s also use rape to critique racism. In *Eskimo* (1934), when a white captain rapes Mala's wife, Aba, causing her death, Mala kills the captain and then is forced into hiding. Eventually the sympathetic Mala makes friends with Canadian Mounties who are searching for him. When they discover his identity, they let him go. On the one hand, this film depicts the "white man" as dangerous because he rapes and murders. On the other hand, the Canadian Mounties function as a sympathetic representation of the white man's law and thus as an alternative white masculinity. For the indigenous characters, white men's entry into their community is dangerous, but the white man's law is necessary.[78]

Several films from the 1950s and early 1960s, such as *The Sun Shines Bright* (1953) and *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962), support antiracism by depicting an African American man falsely accused of rape but defended

in court by a liberal white man. While these films confront racism, they also take place in a former era, making the false accusation and racist legal system appear to be a thing of the past. As a result, the films implicitly suggest that the legal system contemporary to the era in which the film is produced need not be similarly examined for racism. In these films, rape "justifies" attention to race relations, but when the accusation turns out to be false, the film displaces concern about rape. Furthermore, by drawing on a false accusation model that holds the white woman who (falsely) accuses the African American man at least partially responsible for the racism in the courts, these films further deflect a critique of the racist legal system they seem to set out to address.[79]

All these antiracist films overwhelmingly focus on how rape, attempted rape, and false accusations of rape affect men of color. Occasionally, however, films depict rape in order to address the intersection of racism and sexism for women. For example, in *Lady Sings the Blues* (1972) the rape of Billie Holiday as a child initiates the narrative. While she works in a brothel, she seems blissfully unaware of where she is, listening to music and generally ignoring her surroundings. The camera, however, emphasizes the setting, lingering over her surroundings and on an African American man who leers at her. This split between the knowing spectator and the innocent Billie continues as she walks home. While she skips along, the camera fragments her body, at times showing just her legs or just her face. In one shot of her legs the camera picks up the man from the brothel as he first watches her pass and then gets up and follows her. The next scene shows Billie's coming to consciousness when he intrudes on her while she listens to music and offers to pay her "two dollars" for sex. She attempts to escape by pretending to be interested and inviting him to sit down and take off his hat, but when she tries to run, he grabs her. While the film does not code the rape itself as racialized in any specific way, it does focus on the racism Billie Holiday faces later in life in getting a job, in getting her music on the radio, in facing the Klan, and in facing prosecution for drug possession. Thus, in the film rape initiates her into an adult world in which she must face not only her own sexuality but also racism.[80]

While each of these films relies on and reasserts the stability of racial identities, they do so in a variety of sometimes contradictory ways. Many films depict men of color as inherently rapists; others depict Native American men as (again) inherently self-sacrificial saviors. Films may depict a white man's rape of a woman of color, paradoxically, as justification

for a later massacre of people of color; or they may depict a white man's rape or attempted rape of a woman of color, again paradoxically, as a precursor to the woman of color's assimilation into white culture through marriage. In each case, however, the racial category of various characters remains static. Even antiracist films tend to reify racial categories, as in the 1950s films that depict African American men as inherently innocent, and as in *Lady Sings the Blues* in which (following rape) Billie Holiday confronts her own inescapable identity as an adult African American woman in a racist world. Overall, then, unlike rape films with ambivalence about gender and/or class, rape films that address race stabilize racial categories, even when they sometimes also challenge racism.

Maintaining the Nation

A number of the films I discuss in the previous section use rape not only to reify racial identity but also to link race to questions of nation and nationality. For example, *Birth of a Nation* suggests that an African American man's attempted rape of a white girl/woman produces the white Klan, which (vaguely) saves the infant nation (from reconstruction). Some westerns define Native American rapists as, historically, a cause of white colonization. A link between rape and race thus precipitates what appears to have been an unavoidable contemporary neocolonialist national structure (whether the film represents that link as justified or not). Films from the 1950s that depict African American men as falsely accused of rape—at some time in the past—acknowledge historical racism and sometimes even acknowledge historical racism in the United States in particular; but, they also celebrate the power and justness of abstract Law available in U.S. courts by relegating the problem to the past and by holding (lying) white women primarily responsible. If the woman had not falsely accused the man, some of the films imply, the law, even "back then," might not have led to injustice. Even the socially critical *Within Our Gates* relies on a pastoral version of an antiracist struggle that views rape and lynching as part of the United States' (near) past, ending on an optimistic note when intertitles represent the suddenly patriotic doctor saying, "Be proud of our country, Sylvia. We should never forget what our people did in Cuba under Roosevelt's command. . . . And later in France, from Bruges to Chateau-Thierry, from Saint-Mihiel to the Alps! . . . In spite of your misfortunes, you will always be a patriot—and a tender wife. I love you!"

As this brief discussion of the link between race and nation implies, rape films that address issues of nation, nationalism, and nationality struggle to construct national cohesion, even (or especially) in the face of pressures on the shape of the nation. For example, films might use rape to mark the dangers of immigration for the nation or to encourage assimilation into the nation. Films about war often use rape to distinguish enemies from friends (a fixed binary that helps justify wars between nations) or to attest to the horrors of war, particularly when those horrors infiltrate the United States through the figure of the returning veteran.[81] Even colonial films, located in various "desert locale[s]" (Shohat and Stam 1994, 169), can maintain racialized U.S. borders when rape delineates "us" versus "them" or defines a white woman's appropriate (or at least safe) place as "here" rather than "there."

Films that link immigration to rape include 1910s white slavery films that depict sexual coercion as a dangerous outcome of immigration and portray women as passive victims.[82] While early-twentieth-century white slavery narratives in the popular press initially focused on the supposed dangers posed by ethnic immigrant men to ethnic immigrant women, in 1909 the Immigration Commission Report shifted attention to the supposed vulnerability of native-born women, rather than immigrant women (Grieveson 1997, 158).[83] Lee Grieveson's (1997) analysis of the documentary versus fictional elements of *Traffic in Souls* (1913) points to this kind of slippage, as the film shifts from representing the danger of forced prostitution for recently arrived immigrant women, represented by documentary footage shot on the streets of New York, to dangers for *any* woman (i.e., the native-born woman around whom the primary fictional abduction narrative functions). This shift in the film's form (from documentary footage to narrative centrality) corresponds with a shift from cultural anxiety about abduction of immigrants to cultural anxiety about abduction of native-born U.S. women.[84] Thus, collectively, the white slavery narratives blamed ethnic and racialized men for the victimization of white native-born women and "the quality and integrity of 'the race'" that they represented (Grieveson, 158).

Later films also link rape to immigration. *Daughter of Shanghai* (1938), for example, represents Chinese immigration. When Lan Ying's father is killed for refusing to smuggle immigrants into San Francisco, she decides to help break the smuggling ring, posing as a man aboard a smuggling ship. The immigrants, however, discover that she is a woman and promptly attempt to rape her; she is rescued by Kim, a detective and

her sweetheart. Rape helps define immigrants and immigration as problems in this film, but in *Blue* (1968) a Mexican man who prevents a rape is an idealized—although doomed—U.S. immigrant. Azul leaves his Mexican adoptive father and brother's gang after he kills one of his brothers to prevent him from raping Joanne, a Texan. This action initiates a narrative in which Azul goes to Texas, changes (i.e., translates) his name to Blue, and falls in love with Joanne. Blue is literally caught between Mexico and the United States in the final shoot-out when he dies in the Rio Grande. Joanne then swims out into the river to recover Blue's body, bringing him back to the United States as a martyr for the protection of both white womanhood and the U.S. nation.

While the films I have just discussed are about or allude to dangerous outsiders coming into the United States, other films that involve rape depict a colonial setting in which U.S. nationality and/or white identity are defined—in part through rape—in relation to racialized foreign others. Some films, much like some westerns set in the United States, depict a villainous white man who rapes an indigenous woman, thus precipitating a violent attack by the indigenous people against the white colonists/travelers. Here, a single white man is villainous, but the indigenous people as a whole are violent by nature, as exemplified by their undifferentiated and excessive attack on the entire group in response to one individual's actions. In response, the white colonists have no choice but to protect themselves in order to return to the safety of their nation.[85]

Other films depict racialized men as villains and white women traveling in their country as victims. *Auction of Souls* (1919), for example, depicts both Turks and Kurds as villainous rapists. Furthermore, the exhibition system for the film used the narrative to justify U.S. imperialism *beyond* the text. Not only did the film tell a story about real people, Edith Graham and Aurora Mardiganian, but it opened at ten dollars a seat, with the proceeds going to the Armenian War Relief Association.[86]

Several rape films from the late 1910s draw on the representation of the foreign man as violent but also include a colonialist white woman who is attracted to that violent man. These films intersect with those that define rape as a danger faced by women who actively express their sexuality in a U.S. context, but here women's sexual desire is particularly dangerous because it is both cross-racial and cross-national, thus threatening the loss of white U.S. (or British) citizenship. In *Barbary Sheep* (1917), for example, a married British woman in Arabia indulges her romanticism by engaging in a flirtation with an Arabian chief. When he attempts to

rape her, however, her inattentive husband, who has been off hunting Barbary sheep, arrives just in time to rescue her. This film's focus on the difficulties in, and then the reconciliation of, this white couple's marriage makes particularly clear the way the colonialist setting and the threat of rape in that setting are metaphors for danger outside traditional heterosexual whiteness. Other films, such as *The Arab* (1915), contain an explicitly villainous Arab character, but also provide another racialized man as savior. *Flame of the Desert* (1919) plays with this structure, but ultimately reveals the Egyptian savior, Essad, actually to be an English nobleman disguised as a sheik in order to quell a rebellion in Egypt. An Egyptian rebel remains the primary villain of the film.

These films prefigure the "sheik genre" of the 1920s by representing the white woman as attracted to an "Arab sheik," but the earlier films generally portray the villainy of the racialized man with much less ambiguity than do the later films.[87] In *The Sheik* (1921), *The Thief of Bagdad* (1924), and *Son of the Sheik* (1926), three of the most economically successful and historically famous colonialist films containing rape narratives, the Arab man (played in each case by a non-Arab white man, although Rudolph Valentino was coded as ethnic Italian) initially plans, attempts, or completes the rape of a woman, but later is transformed by love and/or the power of the woman's morality or beauty.[88] By the end of the film, he is drawn into "civilized" white culture (i.e., love not rape) and away from the "barbaric" Arab culture (i.e., rape not love). Looking at *The Thief of Bagdad* in the context of Douglas Fairbanks's relation to "boyishness" as star, Gaylyn Studlar (1996) argues that this film transforms "the boyish criminal, the juvenile delinquent, whose strong, manly instincts have . . . led him into crime" (including, I would add, planned rape) into a moral man. "He has a spiritual conversion sparked by [the princess's] utter chasteness" (82).[89] After the conversion, he then saves "his" princess from rape by another, more villainous, dark man, the Mongol prince. Valentino, on the other hand, who was already coded as ethnic, began *The Sheik* and *Son of the Sheik* not as a boyish criminal, but as one of "many variations on [a] stereotype of sexualized and greedy masculinity, [who] at his most dangerous . . . was darkly foreign" (Studlar, 151). Nevertheless, in *The Sheik* he does not rape his captive; instead, as Joel Shrock (1997) argues, "the moral power of his female prey transforms his primitive manhood into a masculinity more civilized and respectable" (73). And, like Fairbanks in *The Thief of Bagdad,* Valentino later saves "his" captive from another, more villainous Arab man. In *Son of the Sheik,* however,

Valentino *does* rape his captive; thus, while he ultimately also still "saves" her from a villainous dark man at the end of the film, when they do declare their love, in effect he saves her from his former self. By the end of each of these films, the characters reject Arab culture in favor of white Western culture.

While these desert locale narratives were common in the 1920s, they appear in later films as well.[90] Making the jungle's danger to "whiteness" explicit, *Forbidden Adventure* (1938) includes a "white goddess." Before the film begins, a planter kidnaps her and her mother and repeatedly rapes her mother. When they escape, a "Borneo tribe" takes them in. While the Borneo people are not the cause of the "white goddess's" exile from "civilization," the film makes it clear that their kindness is not sufficient for her happiness. The film ends with her mother's death in an accidental fire, freeing the white goddess to return to civilization with a white "explorer" with whom she has, of course, fallen in love.[91] In the more recent *Genghis Khan* (1965), the kidnapping, raping, and branding of a princess illustrate the extreme villainy of a Merkit Mongol leader.[92]

While not all the films I discuss here portray the victim or potential victim as a white woman, the majority do. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (1994) argue that film narratives that depict rape as taking place in a desert setting away from a Western European context elide "the history of subordination of Third World women by First World men" (157). Furthermore, when a woman of color is the victim, she often functions as what James Snead (1994) calls a "prop" in the plot—important to the flow of the narrative but not central to the narrative itself—as in the westerns and colonialist films in which a white man's rape of an indigenous woman precipitates a conflict between two groups of racialized men as a narrative climax. Other films use the rape of a woman of color or ethnically coded woman as a narrative device to tell a story about a *man's* bravery—often in relation to his desire to protect or redefine the nation. In *The Yaqui* (1916), for example, the Native Mexican Yaqui Indians are enslaved by a plantation owner who attempts to rape Modesta, the wife of the Yaqui leader, Tambor. Modesta kills herself, and then Tambor kills the plantation owner, going on to lead a successful revolt.[93] Overall, films that take place in a colonialist setting use rape, whether of a traveling/colonialist white woman or of an indigenous woman of color, to mark the danger of the exotic, to highlight the unchangeable nature of race, and, as Shohat and Stam argue, to displace questions of sexualized violence from a U.S. context.

War films similarly depict rape in foreign or historical settings. Some World War I films, for example, use rape as a means of reforming an enemy soldier, usually a German. In these films, the soldier either plans, attempts, or actually enacts the rape of a woman (usually a woman with whom he is falling in love), but then has remorse. Sometimes, he subsequently rescues her from another attacker and then reforms himself in relation to the woman, often even going so far as to revise his position on the war.[94] Sometimes, the reformed rapists are German *American* but have returned to Europe to fight for Germany during the war. In these cases, even when the United States is not directly involved with the war, immigrants or children of immigrants who choose to give up their national identity as "American" illustrate the error in their choice by becoming enemy rapists. Even more complexly, that traitor may be redeemed if he subsequently saves the woman and then chooses to return to the United States, reclaiming his identity as "American" through heroism and patriotism.[95] By 1918 and 1919, however, World War I films tend to depict unilaterally villainous enemy rapists, whether or not the rape is central to the narrative.[96]

World War I films tend to be about foreign villainy and the potential for men's redemption through assimilation into the United States, in part by saving women. Like the sheik films, they also depict women's transformative powers. The tension in these films often is not between men, but between women and men. Conversely, later war films tell stories about men's relationship to each other and to their own patriotism. For example, in *China* (1943), a World War II film, Japanese soldiers rape and kill a Chinese woman, thus illustrating that the Japanese soldiers are evil.[97] In terms of narrative development, the rape then transforms a formerly apathetic U.S. "war profiteer" into a patriotic ally who helps the Chinese fight the Japanese.[98] Similarly, in *Edge of Darkness* (1943), when a German soldier rapes a Norwegian village woman, the underground resistance in town, which has been relatively passive, finally takes action against the Nazis.[99] *The Nun and the Sergeant* (1962), set during the Korean War, involves a group of unsuccessful soldiers on an extremely dangerous mission. It also focuses on rape's effects on men. While the sergeant who leads the soldiers is skilled, the men resist following him until he takes in and protects a nun and a group of schoolgirls. The men begin to respect him, but one remains villainous, attempting to rape one of the girls. The rest of the men, then, reform themselves as soldiers by banding together with the sergeant against the rapist.[100] Other war films from the early

1970s depict returning Vietnam veterans driven to rape in the present context of the United States by their horrific prior experience of war in Vietnam.[101]

Overall, whether films depict immigrants as rapists or saviors, define foreign men as villainous or transformable, represent soldiers who rape or attempt to rape as enemies of women or as enemies of men, these films construct a specifically U.S. identity and do so by linking that national identity to a whiteness distanced from rape. Even when films celebrate a desire for immigration, as does *Blue,* or when white women travel and even sometimes find love in various "desert locales," as they do in *The Sheik* and *Forbidden Adventure,* rape in these films helps to delineate national borders and national identities, holding up the United States, whiteness, or very often both as protected contexts where women do not face rape. Even when white slavery films or returning Vietnam veteran films show rape in the United States, rape often implies a "problem" with an individual's incorporation or reincorporation into U.S. society. If that problem is resolved, then the nation is healed and rape will no longer be a threat. In sum, in all these examples rape represents a threat to national cohesion; thus, the absence of rape at the narrative's conclusion—often replaced by romantic heterosexual love—reaffirms national coherence.

Feminism in the Texts

Many of the films I have discussed so far at least implicitly link rape to feminism. For example, in the early part of the twentieth century, while suffrage may have dominated popular feminism, other feminist issues also emerge in rape films.[102] These include an antilynching campaign; challenges of work conditions, generally, but especially for women and children; the role of women in public spaces, including spaces of entertainment; and women's relationship to sexuality and the family.[103] Thus, the rape films that engaged these issues at least implicitly spoke to and about what feminism was. Similarly, in the 1960s and 1970s, when feminism once again became widely visible in popular culture, questions about women's sexual independence, their right to defend themselves, and their place in the civil rights movement intersected both with feminist activism and with the many films that represented rape.[104] In this section, I trace some of the ways rape films have engaged with feminism. I do not argue that the films "reflect" the historical moment. In fact, I

would suggest that the way these films collectively define feminism is far from an "accurate" portrayal of the complexity of feminist activisms during these respective periods. Rather, I am interested in the ways rape in these films participates in the *discursive production* of what feminism is and can be.

I explore this discursive production of feminism first by looking at films that depict feminism explicitly, particularly in two eras in which feminism was often discussed publicly: the 1910s and the 1960s and 1970s. I then shift my approach and ask how my own particular feminist critical perspective on narrative and representation might reveal "feminist moments" in rape films, whether or not those films appeared when feminism was in the public eye. Here, I am interested in how critical practice can itself participate in the discursive production of feminism by reading films as offering a feminist response to the social and discursive existence of rape. Finally, I combine these two critical approaches when I turn to a particular issue that has been central to feminist discussions of rape since the 1970s: self-defense and revenge. In the process, I use a late-twentieth-century feminist perspective to read self-defense and revenge in a variety of earlier films, and I examine 1970s films that explicitly take up the issues of self-defense and revenge. Overall, by examining a variety of ways rape films intersect with feminism, I hope to provide a background against which to understand the more recent films I discuss in the remainder of the book.

Depicting Feminism

Early films that include women who face rape after engaging in feminist activities—such as moving about in public space, immigrating to the United States, migrating from country to city, working for a wage, participating in reform activities, or attempting to leave a monogamous heterosexual family/marriage—implicitly acknowledge these activities and goals as a possibility for women but also represent them as dangerous and atypical for women. *The Cheat* (1915), for example, addresses a woman's active cross-race sexual desire, her attempts to manage money, her (excessive) participation in a new consumer culture, and her independent freedom of movement.[105] The film represents *all* these issues as potential threats to family life *because* they can lead to a situation in which rape (and in this racialized text in which an Asian/Asian American man obsessively marks everything he owns, literal branding) is a possibility. Simi-

larly, the colonialist films of the late 1910s and 1920s about white women's sexual desire for men of color, particularly "sheiks," acknowledge a specific form of (white) women's sexual desire while simultaneously depending on categories of race and nation to represent that sexuality as dangerous for women. Nevertheless, when the films transform the violent men of color into romantic lovers and even sometimes into *white* romantic lovers, they simultaneously fold the women's sexuality back into a monogamous heterosexual—even familial—context, and thus accept that sexuality. Similarly, in screwball comedies when women are sexually expressive, the threat of sexual violence in response helps fold the characters back into relatively stable class and family positions by the end of the films.[106]

Other early films address women's activism more directly. For example, in *The Woman under Oath* (1919) Grace becomes the first woman to serve on a jury in New York.[107] The trial is a murder case in which Jim, the accused, admits that he had planned to kill a man who had raped his sweetheart, but that the man was dead when he arrived. The jury deadlocks, eleven for and one (Grace) against conviction, until Grace finally admits to her fellow jury members that *she* killed the man because he had refused to marry her sister after seducing her. Although Grace is, in fact, a murderer, that murder takes place in a context of avenging a woman who is raped, and thus the film not only implies that women ostensibly would bring a unique perspective to the jury process, but it does so by suggesting that women have the right to defend their family against sexual assault.[108]

Other films may acknowledge sexism and champion a feminist response to it, but rather than locating the sexism in the U.S. legal system, as does *The Woman under Oath,* they distance the United States from sexism, representing it as endemic to other nations instead. These films link the common displacement-of-rape-to-elsewhere I describe above to feminism, thus depending on feminism to help define the United States as an enlightened feminist nation and a foreign nation as sexist and sexually assaultive. For example, in *The New Moon* (1919) Theo, a dictator of an unnamed Bolshevist country, passes a decree that all women (between seventeen and thirty-two years of age) must register as state property; he does this because he wants to "possess" the Princess Marie. Marie then disguises herself as a male shopkeeper and begins organizing women to refuse to cooperate. Theo continues to pursue Marie, however, and attempts to rape her. The film ends when Marie ultimately abandons her feminist activism in the face of the overwhelming brutality of the

"Bolshevists" and escapes across the border with the man who rescued her from rape (although unspecified in the film, perhaps to the more enlightened United States).[109]

Bolshevism on Trial (1919) also rejects socialism, but, in contrast to *The New Moon,* it draws a *link* between feminism and socialism by connecting the concept of "free love" (which could be associated with women's activism) to "Bolshevism."[110] When "free love" then leads to rape, "feminist Bolshevism" is to blame. From this perspective, the film simultaneously embraces feminism by bemoaning the sexism of others and takes an antifeminist stance by defining "free love" as necessarily sexist. Other films from the time period also explicitly undermine feminist ideals. In *Human Collateral* (1920), for example, Patricia recognizes that she is being treated as "human collateral" when her father borrows money from her fiancé, Roderick. As a result, she rejects both of them, encouraging the attentions of another man, Richard. Richard, however, attempts to rape her. Roderick saves her just in time, and she then realizes he truly loves her. She ignores her previous feminist insight that she is "collateral"—whether or not Roderick loves her—and accepts him as her future husband.[111]

Rape films from the 1960s and 1970s also emerge in an era when feminist activism was particularly visible. Rape, however, was much more prominent as a feminist issue itself by the 1970s.[112] As a result, when these films represent rape, by definition, they at least implicitly also represent feminism. Some films do confront feminist arguments about rape more directly, however. For example, *The Mad Bomber* (1972) implies that pornography, which was an important feminist issue at the time, causes rape.[113] Alternatively, *The Seven Minutes* (1971) explicitly argues against the assumption that pornography encourages rape, implicitly responding to some feminist activism, as well as other contemporary films, such as *The Mad Bomber*. Dealing with another feminist (re)definition of rape as something that happens to women of any age and body type, not just young attractive women, *The Boston Strangler* (1968) dramatizes the sexual assault and murders of thirteen women in the early 1960s.[114] The film emphasizes that the victims were all elderly women and thus works against stereotypes of rape victims as young, sexually attractive women. And, as I discuss later in this section, many 1960s and 1970s rape films deal with feminist issues of self-defense and revenge as a response to rape.

Overall, the films I discuss in this section engage feminism directly, either by supporting or by challenging it. In the 1910s and 1920s, the films often used rape to address other feminist issues, such as a woman's right

to express sexuality actively, her right to serve on a jury, or her role as commodity undergirding the institution of marriage. The structure of some films' narratives connects rape to these issues in ways that support feminism; other films imply that the practice of feminism could produce situations in which women face rape—i.e., feminism causes rape. Nevertheless, as Marchetti argues in relation to *The Cheat,* even films that seem to work against feminism still raise the issues and thus contribute to a cultural interest in women's independent sexuality, for example, as much as they suggest that that independence is dangerous for women. Some 1960s and 1970s films go further still by addressing feminist arguments about rape itself; however, the particular versions of feminism they draw into the text, such as the possibility that pornography "causes" or is linked to rape, are problematic because they simplify and in many ways misrepresent the complexity of feminist activisms against rape.[115]

Reading Feminism

Given that many of these films are ambivalent about feminism, at best, I turn now to a critical practice that seeks to read feminism in and through rape films. Here I want to think more about the possibilities that particular aspects of some films—such as Patricia's insistence in *Human Collateral* that women *are* collateral in marriage (regardless of her subsequent actions)—provide for reading a feminist depiction of rape in a film. Can moments like these produce alternative stories about rape?

Some films from the 1910s and 1920s, for example, take a typical rape narrative structure and turn it around for feminist purposes. In *Brand's Daughter* (1917), Alethea *pretends* she is willing to elope with Norvinsk in order to trap him into revealing that he is trying to rob her father's bank. She nevertheless ends up alone with him as a result. Subsequently she still faces his attempted rape of her, and she still is rescued by her sweetheart. In *Lover's Island* (1925), Clemmy's father decides that he will force the man who raped Clemmy to marry her. Rather than submitting to this patriarchal structure, Clemmy simply announces (falsely) that it was her sweetheart, Avery, who raped her, thus taking control over her own marriage away from her father. Here rape becomes a vehicle for feminist independence, even if her independence from her father leads Clemmy right back into a heterosexual family structure with Avery. While these films end in heterosexual coupling, as do almost all rape films from that same era, along the way they alter standard narrative structures, revealing

those structures as conventions and—at least temporarily—considering other narrative possibilities for rape.[116]

Narratives that increase women's vulnerability by subjecting them to repeated acts of sexual violence can be read similarly. Despite the oppressive traps in which these women are caught, as some feminist scholars have argued in relation to melodrama as a genre, one can read the texts as defining women's circumstances as oppressive through the subjective and sustained representation of that oppression. Thus the films express a feminist perspective on, in this case, the roles rape plays in gendered oppression.[117] For example, *Sadie Thompson* (1928) links a religious interest in reforming prostitution and in colonizing the "south seas" to a patriarchal oppression of women.[118] Into a typical distanced exotic setting come a missionary, Alfred Davidson, and a former prostitute, Sadie Thompson.[119] Tensions increase as Alfred begins to persecute Sadie relentlessly, attempting to force her to repent, to reform, and then to return to San Francisco. While Sadie falls in love with a marine, Sergeant Tim O'Hara, Alfred refuses to let her go on to become Tim's wife, instead insisting on his own right to control her life. As Alfred's reformative pursuit of Sadie heightens, she begins to realize that she has no escape, and thus she approaches him, presumably to try to reason with him. The scene is shot from her emotional point of view, including long drawn out extreme close-ups of his fingers drumming the table, his foot tapping the floor, and his face, with his head in his hands, staring at her unwaveringly. Eventually, when Sadie's attempts to reason with him and to appeal to the governor fail, Alfred's desire to control her, depicted as torturous through her point of view, wins out. Sadie finally agrees to atone, acting, as Tim says, as if she's "doped."

Her newfound faith does not satisfy Alfred's desire for control, however. After an extended crosscutting scene between Alfred sitting on the porch, unable to sleep, and Sadie in her own room, unable to sleep, Alfred rapes her.[120] Having revealed the sexually violent desire for control at the base of his antiprostitution reform, he then commits suicide. Ironically, Alfred's suicide produces a "happy ending," because his death frees Sadie from the oppressively gendered context in which the entire film traps her. The film's conclusion is thus extremely ambivalent about its critique of gendered oppression. While the film has revealed Sadie's oppression, and while Alfred's rape of her ironically frees her from his ability to persuade her that she needs to repent (the morning after the rape she announces that "all men are pigs"), she also forgives Alfred when she hears that he

has committed suicide and then agrees to give up her independence by going to Sydney with Tim when he announces that he still wants to marry her. Furthermore, by focusing on Alfred's pursuit of Sadie rather than on his colonialist role as a missionary, the film leaves colonialism unchallenged, depending, in fact, on the status of "exotic locales" as a displaced site at which rape is likely to take place.

Aspects of *Duel in the Sun* (1946) also can be read as feminist in relation to the film's depiction of sexual violence as pervasive in Native American women's lives. The film defines Native American women's race itself, however, as the source of the problem. The film opens in an unnamed town in which a Native American woman knowingly dances provocatively in a saloon, while her mixed race daughter, Pearl, naively dances provocatively in the street. Men approach both women in these contexts, although Pearl pulls away. Pearl then watches as her white father murders her unfaithful mother. This scene suggests that Native American women's sexuality is innately excessive, passed on from one generation to the next (regardless of a father's racial identity), and implies that it is and will be the ruin of both those women and the white men who become involved with them.

The bulk of the narrative reinforces this idea in the context of Pearl's subsequent life with her father's former lover, a wealthy white woman named Laurabell, and her family. At Laurabell's ranch, Pearl meets Laurabell's two sons, Jesse and Lewt, both of whom fall in love/lust with her. While Pearl is interested in Jesse (the "good" brother), Lewt (the "bad" brother) pursues her, forces his way into her bedroom, and eventually rapes her. After the rape, Jesse rejects Pearl, assuming she consented. Caught as she is in the melodramatic structures of a racialized and gendered fate she cannot escape, Pearl begins a relationship with Lewt. He continues his abuse of her, however, by refusing to marry her and also refusing to let her marry anyone else. The film ends with Lewt and Pearl's death as a result of a shoot-out between them.

By describing the film this way, especially in relation to *Sadie Thompson* in which the act of rape *ends* the man's control over the woman, I hope to illustrate that *Duel in the Sun*'s narrative takes a decidedly unfeminist path from rape to love to death. Nevertheless, there are also moments when the film pauses to define not only Lewt but Pearl's entire life as sexually assaultive. For example, when Lewt (falsely) implies to Laurabell that he and Pearl are engaged in a sexual relationship, Laurabell wakes Pearl in the middle of the night and forces her to come in her

nightclothes to talk with a reverend, who, while telling Pearl that she is sinful, stares at her lustfully and touches her face. In this brief moment, the text reveals its own sexual violence toward Pearl by offering an understanding of Pearl's experience of sexuality as men's assault on her, facilitated in this case by a white woman. This perspective directly contradicts—if only for a moment—the film's overwhelming general implication that Pearl's identity as a hypersexual Native American woman means that, just like her mother, she cannot help but die tragically.

Similarly, when the film emphasizes Pearl's (rather than Lewt's) perspective during his pursuit of her, it again makes possible a reading of both Lewt and the film's own narrative trajectory as assaultive.[121] For example, the first time Lewt enters Pearl's bedroom uninvited his spurs jingle and his shadow is huge. He kisses her, but she hits his face and says she hates him. When she spits at the door after he leaves, the film further emphasizes her point of view of his villainy. When Lewt does eventually rape Pearl, not only do his spurs jingle but lightning flashes as she resists him. Lewt again kisses Pearl while she tries to pull away from him, but just before the scene ends she seems to kiss him back, beginning the troubling narrative trajectory from rape to love to tragic death as a result of their shoot-out.

Responding to Rape

As satisfying, assuaging, productive, or affirming as it may be to read feminist moments into films like *Sadie Thompson* and *Duel in the Sun,* in the end, as in the majority of the films addressing rape and feminism, while they may offer a woman's *experience* of rape, even a feminist *perspective* on rape, they do not engage a particularly feminist *response* to rape. I turn now to films that do, particularly those that represent various kinds of self-defense and revenge.

One form of self-defense is to engage in self-protective behavior after a rape. For example, both *Johnny Belinda* and *Straw Dogs* seem to pause after the rapes, elaborating on the women's experience of post-rape trauma before moving on to the business of increased vulnerability and class and national warfare, respectively. In *Johnny Belinda,* when Belinda jumps at Robert's touch on her shoulder rather than responding to his attempts at communication, she seems to be dealing with her own experience of nonconsensual touch rather than operating as victim-to-be-rescued-by-Robert. Similarly, in *Straw Dogs,* before the film moves forward

from the rape to the working men's violent attack on Amy and David's house, it pauses long enough to portray Amy's fear and trauma through very brief subjective flashbacks of the rapes when Amy ends up in the same space with the rapists at a public event.[122]

Some films depict women's acts of physical self-defense during an attempted rape not as leading to increased vulnerability, as in some of the films I discuss above, but rather as successfully *reducing* women's vulnerability. For example, a few early silent films celebrate new communication technologies as a means of self-defense by depicting a woman using them to discover the leader of a white slavery ring and thus to rescue her sister (*Traffic in Souls*) or to communicate with the Allies during World War I and thus avoid enemy rapists, simultaneously protecting both herself and the nation (*The Little American* [1917] and *To Hell with the Kaiser* [1918]). *Wild Party* (1929) also includes successful self-defense, although it is only successful in a particular context. Rejected by other women at her college for not following the dress code for a party (she dresses too provocatively), Stella and her friends decide to leave, ending up at a roadhouse. There, several men try to assault all the women, and as Judith Mayne (1994) argues, "what was playful in the previous scene [the clothes] here becomes dangerous" (135). The central character sacrifices herself, performing femininity not to protect herself but to protect her friends, pretending to be interested in the men and saying she will stay if the others can go. As she is about to face rape, her male professor, who is quickly becoming her sweetheart, arrives and rescues her. As Mayne points out, however, at the next dance organized by the college Stella again performs femininity by pretending to be interested in a man in order to distract him from his assault on her friend, Helen. In this context, her performance is successful: neither she nor Helen needs further rescuing.[123] More recently, *Saturday Night Fever* (1977) portrays one woman's use of self-defense as successfully stopping a rape.[124]

Related to these potentially empowering (although ambivalently so) depictions of self-defense are films that portray women's acts of revenge. For example, in *Shanghai Express* (1932) Hui Fei kills Cheng in revenge for his rape of her. This act is important not only for her but also for the narrative, because it frees her and her white traveling companions from Cheng's captivity. In this film, a white woman, Lily, is traveling by train to Shanghai. She strikes up a friendship with a Chinese woman, Fei, in part because they are both rejected by other travelers on the train for being too sexually expressive (the film implies that Fei is a prostitute and that Lily is a "kept" woman). Cheng first attempts to rape Lily, but when Lily's

former lover rescues her, Cheng sends for Fei. As the women pass on the stairs, they exchange a look after which Lily struggles aggressively against her guards, although she is unable to break away to protect Fei. When Cheng rapes Fei he precipitates her revenge, which leads to the prisoner's freedom and ultimately to Lily's reconciliation with her former lover. Thus, on the level of the narrative, Fei's revenge works in the service both of confirming a racist depiction of Cheng's intense villainy, so intense he "deserves" to die, and of precipitating the standard romantic heterosexual coupling for the white stars. Nevertheless, the brief moments in which Fei and Lily exchange a glance and in which Fei takes her revenge acknowledge the intensity of the violence of rape, problematize the rape of a woman of color (in part) as a form of protection of a white woman, and offer an image of women resistant to that racialized sexual violence.

Rape-revenge narratives are particularly common in the 1970s. In a historical context in which feminism defines self-defense and revenge as aspects of antirape activism, it is no longer necessary to read feminism into isolated moments of resistance to a man's touch (*Johnny Belinda*) or an exchange of looks as two women pass on the stairs, acknowledging their shared but racially differentiated roles in an inevitable rape scenario (*Shanghai Express*), for example. Rather, 1970s rape-revenge films offer an entire genre with the potential to articulate a feminist response to rape.

In these films, sometimes the revenge is taken by a man who loses his wife or daughter to a rape/murder, and sometimes the revenge is taken by women who have faced rape themselves. The films in the first category depend on rape to motivate and justify a particularly violent version of masculinity, relegating women to minor "props" in the narrative.[125] The films in the second category, however, can be understood as feminist narratives in which women face rape, recognize that the law will neither protect nor avenge them, and then take the law into their own hands. Carol J. Clover (1992) argues that rape-revenge films "share a set of premises [including] . . . that we live in a 'rape culture' in which *all* males—husbands, boyfriends, lawyers, politicians—are directly or indirectly complicit and that men are thus not just individually but corporately liable" (138–39). More specifically, she argues, for example, that *I Spit on Your Grave* (1977) analyzes how the "dynamics of males in groups" can lead to rape (144) and that both *Rape Squad* (a.k.a. *Act of Vengeance*) (1974) and *Lipstick* (1976) criticize the failure of "the law and the legal system" to respond to rape (145). Revenge, then, becomes women's only viable response to rape.[126]

Foxy Brown (1974) is a particularly interesting example because it puts a woman at the center of both a blaxploitation film and a rape-revenge narrative. While Foxy Brown's primary goal is revenge for her boyfriend's and brother's murders, rape is also one of the acts of violence and racism with which she has to contend. Immediately after the rape, she attacks the men who are holding her captive, one of whom raped her, and escapes. Continuing her vengeance, she ultimately has the main villain, a white drug dealer and high-class pimp, castrated. This act forces him to live on with a lifetime reminder of his racist and sexist acts.[127]

In the end, the films I describe in this section offer feminist depictions of rape, but they do so in ambivalent ways. Collectively, they contribute to a discursive production of feminism that keeps it fragmented, links it to racist, colonialist, and xenophobic ideologies, supplants it with heterosexual romance, and limits a woman's response to rape to violent vengeance. Nevertheless, I consider it useful to pause over the moments during which the films provide an opportunity for reading the representation of rape in ways that have the potential to empower characters and/or spectators rather than, for example, to increase their experience of vulnerability.[128] The trick is to pay attention to how the films then seek to recuperate or undermine that empowerment without giving up the potential resistant reading a feminist perspective can bring to the film. In other words, I choose to dwell on Patricia's critique of women's role in marriage as "human collateral," on Sadie's resistance to Alfred's reformative pursuit, on Pearl's hatred of Lewt, on Belinda's rejection of Robert's touch, on Fei's murder of Cheng, and on Foxy Brown's escape, while nevertheless remembering that my feminist readings and the characters' self-protective actions do not decrease the existence of discursive rape.

Conclusion

Rape narratives are so common in cinema (and elsewhere) that they seem always to be available to address other social issues. In this chapter, I draw attention to a variety of ways rape has functioned throughout the history of film, and I suggest there is not simply one way that rape intersects with gender, class, race, nation, or feminism. Thus, while I argue that films often link rape to women's vulnerability, the place of rape in the narrative may be a result *or* cause of vulnerability. And, while the expression of sexuality may lead to rape, rape in turn may lead to a romantic rescue that

accepts the woman's sexuality within a heterosexual family context. The ambivalence about social and economic class in many of these films emerges through rape narratives that can just as easily condemn the wealthy as the poor, the "insider" as the "outsider"; can just as easily reassert a class status quo in which unique individuals cross boundaries as articulate an apocalyptic vision of "outsiders" (e.g., youths) as wholly different and unreformable. Similarly, the reification of racial categories in many of these films depends on rape narratives that work equally well to further racism (e.g., *Birth of a Nation*) as to (at least attempt to) work against racism (e.g., *Within Our Gates, To Kill a Mockingbird*); to depend on stereotypes of men of color as villainous or as self-sacrificial; and to define women of color as inconsequential "props" or to incorporate them into a mainstream white society purged of all marks of cultural identity. Rape narratives' versatility also means they can work either to incorporate immigrants into or to exclude racialized others from the nation, to attest to the horrors of war (for the United States) or to argue for the necessity of war (to protect the United States). Finally, the complexity of rape narratives allows them to evoke feminist issues and perspectives, to make possible critical readings that can find feminist responses to and critiques of rape in the text, while simultaneously undermining those critiques with narratives that end in marriage or death, for example.

The complexity and contradictions in the ways rape interacts with gender, class, race, and nation in these films illustrate the importance of a feminist intersectional analysis that goes beyond a sole analysis of gender by addressing specificities as well as linkages among social positions. In this case, an intersectional analysis of these films illustrates the ways rape narratives function to suggest a mutability for gender and class—to imply that women's relationship to vulnerability and independence can change and that class boundaries are permeable—while also maintaining clear boundaries around social identities of race and nationality. An intersectional approach forces additional looks at the films in order to see how, for example, the depiction of women's independence and its relationship to rape can work narratively in the service of maintaining classed and national boundaries, or how depictions of African American men as innocent of rape can work in the service of blaming women for lying or of celebrating the present (of the film's production and reception) as a historical moment in which the nation has supposedly exorcised racism.

To put it simply, this chapter argues that film criticism needs to go beyond pointing out that rape films punish women and vilify economic, so-

cial, racial, and national others.[129] While some do include these types of representations, many do not. Furthermore, as I have shown, even those that do are often ambivalent about their own depictions. Instead, if anything is common to all the texts I address in this chapter it is the way rape functions to work through tensions and anxieties surrounding gendered, classed, raced, and national border crossings. In other words, I am suggesting that what is particularly troubling about rape films is not that they are sometimes sexist, capitalist, racist, nationalist, and colonialist (although, of course, many are), but that violence against women is so central to the films, so key to character transformations and narrative development and resolution, so *versatile,* that it not only seems to be necessary to the film itself, but it concomitantly naturalizes the policing and negotiating of gendered, classed, racialized, and national boundaries these films engage.

I would suggest that one of the reasons rape in film is so versatile, beyond its overall ubiquity, is its existence in so many different narrative forms that endure across time. For example, I have illustrated rape's central role in screwball comedies and westerns, as genres. On the one hand, it is important to pay attention to the specificity of the roles rape plays in each genre. Thus, for example, in screwball comedies sexual violence can help articulate tensions about women's independence and class divisions, themes central to the genre, while in westerns racialized rape often plays a more central narrative role by motivating an escalating conflict between two groups and helping to naturalize the narrative conclusion in an "unavoidable" violent colonial confrontation. On the other hand, the fact that sexual violence is central to *both* genres suggests that, despite particular genres' specificities, it is important to understand the role rape plays in supporting genre itself as a narrative form in cinema.

Rape does not only support genre. Other common rape narrative forms include the rape/rescue/romance trajectory; pervasiveness on an implicit—but nonetheless narratively significant—level of the text; the threat to and/or protection of the heterosexual family; the exportation of rape into other racialized, exotic, or historical locales; rape's precipitation and sometimes justification of a more violent, more social, more narratively significant conflict; the use of rape of women to focus on relationships among men; and the woman of color as prop. Through these and other common narrative forms, rape functions both as the narrative motor for individual films and as a cultural reference that connects any number of films together—forming genres, shaping expectations, and naturalizing the cultural pervasiveness of sexual violence against women.

In the process of identifying rape's pervasiveness, I have included examples of films in which rape is obvious, such as *Johnny Belinda* and *Sadie Thompson,* and of films where it is less obvious, such as *The Ruse, We're Not Dressing, Broken Blossoms, The Pitfall,* and *The Cheat*. On the one hand, the employer's kiss of Miss Dawson in *The Ruse,* Stephen's threat of a "fate worse than death" for Doris in *We're Not Dressing,* Cheng's thwarted sexual approach to an unconscious Lucy and Burrows's sexualized violent murder of Lucy in *Broken Blossoms,* MacDonald's insistence that Mona bare her shoulders in *The Pitfall,* and the Asian/Asian American man's branding of Edith in *The Cheat* are *not* rapes. On the other hand, they *are* all examples of sexualized violence that draw on many of the same narrative and representational conventions as do more literal rape films. Thus, the pervasiveness of rape in film naturalizes the existence of all these other forms of sexual violence. By reading these other kinds of sexual violence as *part of* the matrix of rape in film, I am insisting on understanding how they contribute to and depend on the elusive/ubiquitous place of rape in U.S. cinema. Examining both obvious and not-so-obvious representations of rape emphasizes and challenges the pervasiveness of rape in film—two of my central goals in this chapter.

Overall, by identifying these narrative structures I hope, at base, to have illustrated the centrality of rape to cinema itself. While not all films include rape, an overwhelming number not only include but *depend on* rape and sexual violence to generate narrative action. As a result, various critical models that film studies has brought to bear on cinema (i.e., Production Code history, genre theory, feminist theory/criticism of romance and the preservation of the heterosexual family, and antiracism work on the history of racialization in cinema) also implicitly depend on rape. Why has an analysis of rape, except for a few important works, been overwhelmingly absent from film studies in general and feminist film studies in particular?[130] What aspects of our theory and history in film studies might we want to rethink and rewrite, given how elusive yet ubiquitous cinematic rape is? While I would not want to suggest that all studies of film be done through the lens of rape, I do want to pause over these questions, to acknowledge—at least for a moment—how central rape is to film, and therefore to film studies.

In this context, rape films also sometimes provide cultural definitions of feminism. In the early twentieth century, despite the fact that rape was not necessarily a visible feminist issue, rape narratives that already raised issues about women's relationship to independence, vulnerability, and family

could easily provide a context in which to explore specific feminist issues such as women's right to serve on juries, free love, and the oppressiveness of marriage. In the late 1960s and 1970s, when rape was a central feminist issue, rape films sometimes more directly engaged feminist perspectives on rape, such as the relationship between rape and pornography or the validity of self-defense and revenge in response to rape. No one version of feminism emerges from these films, however. Like the complex and varied representation of gender, class, race, and nation, the films' depictions of feminism are ambivalent and contradictory, certainly across films but also sometimes even within individual films. Reading feminism into the texts through critical methods that focus on brief moments in the texts, temporary shifts in standard narrative forms, or the acknowledgment of women's experience of oppression through the excessive representation of that oppression is similarly ambivalent in that this critical method depends on finding feminism in the text *despite* the text.

Overall, then, by focusing in this chapter on ambivalence and contradiction as well as on consistency and repetition, I hope to emphasize the complexity of the discursive production of rape and of feminism and to illustrate how criticism can point to—and thereby expand—the partiality of popular culture's ability to define both rape and feminism.