

Book Reviews

Review of *All That She Carried: The Journey of Ashley's Sack, A Black Family Keepsake*

Authors: Erin Green, Jessica Enoch

Erin Green is a doctoral student at the University of Maryland in the English Department. On the Language, Writing, and Rhetoric track, they study literacy studies, community writing, writing program administration, composition pedagogy, Black queer studies, and critical race theory.

Jessica Enoch is Professor of English at the University of Maryland, where she directs the Academic Writing Program. Her recent publications include *Domestic Occupations: Spatial Rhetorics and Women's Work*; *Mestiza Rhetorics: An Anthology of Mexicana Activism in the Spanish-Language Press, 1887-1922* (co-edited with Cristina Ramírez), *Women at Work: Rhetorics of Gender and Labor* (co-edited with David Gold), and *Retellings: Opportunities for Feminist Research in Rhetoric and Composition Studies* (co-edited with Jordynn Jack). Her current project is titled *Remembering Suffrage: Feminist Memory and Activism at the Centennial of the Nineteenth Amendment*.

Keywords: African American, archival methods, enslavement, May 2022, women's history

Miles, Tiya. *All That She Carried: The Journey of Ashley's Sack, A Black Family Keepsake*. Random House, 2021.

Tiya Miles' *All That She Carried: The Journey of Ashley's Sack, A Black Family Keepsake* has been widely acclaimed on the national scene: *All That She Carried* is a National Book Award winner; it was celebrated through reviews in the *Washington Post*, *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, *Chicago Review of Books*, *Publishers Weekly*, *Kirkus Review*, and *New York Times*. Miles' book has garnered even more praise from figures like Brittany Cooper, Jill Lepore, and Michael Eric Dyson. In this review for *Peitho*, we join the chorus in agreement that *All That She Carried* is a remarkably compelling book on so many fronts. Our purpose for this review,

however, is to draw attention to how this book speaks to and invigorates the concerns of feminist rhetoricians and feminist historiographers of rhetoric and to mark it as one especially suited for our classrooms, for we believe the book has so much to say to us and our students as we pursue our investments in Black women's history, historiography, and public memory; questions of intersectionality and power, as well as archival methods and methodologies, not to mention our interests in rhetoric's relationship to textiles, materiality, foodways, and spatial rhetorics. Indeed, we (Erin and Jess) taught this book in an undergraduate feminist theory course in fall 2021, and we spent the semester dwelling on the impactful and moving messages this book had for us and our students. We thus use this review to shine light on *All that She Carried* for *Peitho* readers; it is a book that has the potential to deepen and direct the work we do as scholars, teachers, and students.

The focal point of Miles' book is a textile sack that Rose, a Black women enslaved in Charleston, South Carolina in the 1850s, created for her daughter Ashley upon their horrific separation when Ashley was sold at the age of nine at a slave auction. Miles explains how, in anticipation of the auction, Rose prepared this "emergency pack" for Ashley—one that should be read as "a mother's prescient act of provision" (30). Ashley's sack exemplifies the radical imagining that Black women, especially mothers, must have used in such times of despair in which they had to hope for their child's safety and survival in the face of almost certain violence. Against all odds, Ashley and the sack Ruth prepared for her survived, and in *All That She Carried*, Miles tracks the passage of this heirloom to Ruth, Ashley's granddaughter, who embroidered onto the sack these words:

My great grandmother Rose
mother of Ashley gave her this sack when
she was sold at age 9 in South Carolina
it held a tattered dress 3 handfulls of
pecans a braid of Roses hair. Told her
It be filled with my Love always
she never saw her again
Ashley is my grandmother
Ruth Middleton

1921 (5)

All That She Carried is a meditation on this maternal and generational relationship between Rose, Ashley, and Ruth, in which Miles explores the contents of the sack and their meaning as well as what the contents reveal about enslavement, survival, maternal love, and the preservation and persistence of Black women's stories and their history. This is a book about love, trauma, resilience, and hope, but *All That She Carried* is also about the inventive archival and historiographic strategies Miles leveraged to tell these women's stories.

Throughout the book, Miles comments on the research methods she uses to stitch together the lives of Rose, Ashley, and Ruth. Her reflections are immediately noteworthy to historians in our field, as Miles considers what she calls "archival deficit" (18) and "archival diminishment" (18)—archival realities in which the lives of enslavers are recorded while there is little traditional documentation of enslaved people's, especially enslaved women's, lives. Miles counters such deficits by employing creative archival practices that draw on the "Black feminist historical methods" of scholars such as Nell Irvin Painter and Marisa Fuentes—methods that "refuse to abandon Black women to the discursive abyss" (17). Miles especially takes up Fuentes' practice of "reading archival documents 'along the bias grain,' which refers to the angled line across a swath of fabric where a natural give already exists" (300). Like Fuentes, Miles uses a "diagonal reading of documents [that] looks beyond what seems straightforward and feels for the stretch in the scholar's materials, the leeway that more likely reveals hidden interiors and obfuscated realities" (300). Important too is what Miles "counts" as an archive. True, her historiography draws from "traditional" archives such as those at the College of Charleston and Schlesinger libraries as well as the Avery Research Center and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, but most critically, Miles also sees Ashley's material sack as an archive unto itself: Miles "seek[s] out the actual material—the *things* enslaved people touched, made, used, and carried—in order to understand the past" (17).

Feminist rhetoricians will no doubt discern echoes in Miles' research strategy as it resonates with the work of scholars such as Chery Glenn, Jacqueline Jones Royster, and Gesa Kirsch. Glenn has similarly documented the necessity of "reading [materials] crookedly and telling it slant" (8), while Royster and Kirsch call feminist rhetoricians "to account for what we 'know' by gathering whatever evidence can be gathered," but then to employ both critical imagination and strategic contemplation to look "between, above, around, and beyond this evidence to speculate methodologically about probabilities, that is, what might be true based on what we have in hand" (71). Additionally, Miles' investment in the material artifact of the sack

and the contents within it connects to the methodological work of feminist rhetoricians such as Sonia Arrellano, Maureen Goggin, and Vanessa Sohan. Miles' work throughout the book invigorates these scholarly conversations about the relevance of the material, as she argues, "things become bearers of memory and information, especially when enhanced by stories that expand their capacity to carry meaning" (13). Miles zeroes in on the importance of textiles, asserting that if the "materials being researched are textiles, [then] stories about women's lives seem to adhere with special tenacity," this is especially so with fabrics, Miles asserts: "because of their vulnerability to deterioration and frequent lack of attribution to a maker, [fabrics] have been among the last kinds of materials that historians look to in order to understand what has occurred, how, and why" (13-14).

Of course, the most significant aspect of Miles' research method is her employment of these inventive strategies to recover the lives of Rose, Ashley, and Ruth, to trace the journey of the textile sack, and to unpack its contents. In Chapter 1, "Ruth's Record," Miles begins with the story of finding the sack—a story similar, Miles suggests, to an "episode of PBS's *Antiques Roadshow*" (30). Almost twenty years ago in 2007, the sack was found by a white woman shopping at an outdoor flea market near Nashville, Tennessee. Interested in the message embroidered on the sack, the woman tracked the sack to Middleton Place—"once the home of the famous wealthy Charleston slaveholders Henry Middleton and Mary Williams Middleton and now a nonprofit organization" (31). Miles then relays how curators researched and displayed the sack not only at Middleton Place but also at the National Museum of African American History and Culture. As Miles describes the "allure" of Ashley's sack (36), she also reflects on the "complicated dynamics of race in processes of museum collecting, philanthropy, and stewardship" (37). Miles concludes this chapter initiating her investigation of the sack's journey, starting in South Carolina in the 1850s at the "scene of the crime—the sale of a child away from her mother" and investigating how this crime was "shaped by the environmental, economic, political, and social conditions that precipitated it" (42).

Miles dedicates Chapter 2 "Searching for Rose" to recovering Rose's life and story, and here the question that drives her investigation is, "how, in this seaport city [of Charleston], do we go about finding one unfree woman?" (61). In describing her search, Miles explains that the only way to discern Rose's archival trace is by identifying her name in the records of those who enslaved her: "We can trace unfree people through the changing of lands" (67) and their "lists of possessions" (69). The key to finding the Rose Miles is looking for is "her love for a child named Ashley" (65). Searching for these names together brings Miles to a Charleston slave owner named Robert Martin whose list of enslaved people includes both names. Miles' critical reading

of Martin's records offers other clues to Rose's identity: his holdings reveal that Rose's monetary value was \$700, and Miles deduces that this high price could be because of her sexual appeal to slave holders like Martin or because of her talent as a seamstress or cook. As Miles searches for Rose in Martin's materials, though, she steps back to consider what this method signals, writing "It is madness if not irony that unlocking the history of unfree people depends on the materials of their legal owners, who held the lion's share of visibility in their time, and ours" (58). While this method offers insights about Rose, Miles asserts that this "default" method is "one we must resist," and we must do so because "not one record in the Martin family papers describes Rose or the life she lived. Her cares and kindnesses, fears and frailties, fade behind a wall of silence" (77).

In Chapter 3, "Packing the Sack," Miles describes the exigence for Rose to prepare the sack for Ashley: the death of their slaveholder, Robert Martin, and the and the sale of his "possessions," which included Ashley. To Miles, Rose's decision to make the sack for Ashley "highlights an essential element of enslaved women's experience[:] Black women were creators, constantly *making* the slate of things necessary to sustain the life of the family" (102). As she meditates on Rose's preparations, Miles employs a historiographic strategy she relies on throughout the book: when the specific details that attend to Rose, Ashley, or Ruth fall away, Miles consults the lives, records, and writings of their Black women contemporaries. In this chapter and elsewhere, Miles makes use of the writing of figures like Harriet Jacobs, Eliza Potter, Elizabeth Keckley, Melnia Cass, and Mamie Garvin to speculate about the possible experiences of the three women in her study

Miles centers attention in Chapter 4, "Rose's Inventory" on the tattered dress included in the sack as a way to understand the importance of this item within Ashley's archive. Delving deeply into enslaved women's access to clothing in a subsection titled "The Language of Dress," Miles explores dress as a "form of social communication" and explains how dress and fabric within enslavement "signified who owned others and who could be owned" (133). Miles articulates as well that Black women's limited control over their dress signaled their lack of access to the propriety and safety white women often enjoyed. Ultimately, Miles reads the inclusion of the dress in the sack as Rose's "insist[ence] on Ashley's right to bodily protection and feminine dignity" (131). This chapter would clearly be of interest to rhetorics of dress and appearance as the concerns raised here speak to the work of scholars such as Brittany Hull, Cecilia Shelton, Temptaous Mckoy, Carol Mattingly, and Jennifer Keohane.

In Chapter 5, “The Auction Block,” Miles reads the horrific separation of Rose and Ashley through the lens of the economics and spatial rhetorics of Charleston that underwrote and relied on “a set of power relations that structured human exploitation along racial lines for financial gain” (164). Miles considers how the “pseudo-militarization of the public space” structured the lives of unfree people (170), as their lived experience and mobility was determined by high-walled homes and watchtowers as well as the “punishment center” that was the Workhouse (172). Miles goes on to imagine Ashley’s experience during the slave auction, considering not only the trauma of being separated from her mother but also the probability of sexual violation that most enslaved women and girls experienced when being sold. Miles writes, “Ashley must have been gathered up in this squall of the Martin household transformation, after which her mother, Rose, was lost to her. But what can this kind of senseless, existential break have meant for a real, living child?” (183). The horror Miles writes is too much to bear; the “distance of time” is the only factor that can “operat[e] as an emotional shield” (191).

Chapter 6, “Ashley’s Seeds,” mines the importance of the pecans in Ashley’s sack. Miles describes the decision for Rose to include these food items as “what Black feminist theorists Stanlie James and Abena Busia call a ‘visionary pragmatism’” (193). The nuts that Rose packed for Ashley were not only practical in terms of feeding her, but they were also a symbol of Rose’s hope in Ashley’s health and growth. Chapter 6 also makes clear the significance of pecans within southern Black culture and foodways, seeing this as an opportunity to consider Black people’s access to foods like pecans and the cooking culture they crafted for themselves. Miles ends Chapter 6 with two kinds of feminist rhetorical practices. First, through critical imagination, she offers a picture of what the pecans might have signaled for Ashley: “The loose, oblong nuts felt smooth in Ashley’s palms, the sound of their jangle in the sack a soothing and muted music. . . reminding her that she was loved despite being cast off, her own and every enslaved child’s private apocalypse” (216). Second Miles provides several pecan-central recipes that enslaved people would have made, such as pecan pie, pecan crisp cookies, pecan wafers, and nut butter balls. With these recipes, Miles offers an alternative way to experience history, readers can not only read history, but they can taste it.

Important to note as well that within this chapter is an insert of Miles’ collaborative visual essay with Michelle May-Curry titled “Carrying Capacity.” This essay situates Ashley’s sack within the fiber arts and textile tradition by making connections to Black women’s artistry evidenced in other seed sacks, quilts, dresses, and hair art. The authors remind readers that, as a textile, Ashley’s sack is yet another example of the ways Black people have used the fiber arts to stitch together themes of family and ancestral ritual” (n.p.).

The final major chapter “The Bright Unspooling” re-emphasizes the difficulty of tracking the descendants of enslaved people as Miles attempts to find throughline from Ashley’s separation from Rose in 1850s Charleston to her granddaughter Ruth and the embroidered message she left on the sack. Miles locates Ruth in Philadelphia in the 1920s as her archival trace emerges in sources such as the social pages of the *Philadelphia Tribune*. Miles uses these artifacts to flesh out an understanding of Ruth’s experience and especially focuses on Ruth’s ability and choice to *embroider* her family’s story on the sack. Ruth’s embroidery indicates her craft, of course, but Miles argues it also suggests an assertion of middle-class “respectability for Black families” (251) and an “eloquent rebuttal” (253) against the prejudice that Black women experienced in 1920s America. Miles’ focus turns towards the storytelling function of Ruth’s embroidery, and Miles surmises that storytelling “may have become a way for Ashley, as well as Ruth, to move beyond the constraining role of a victim and take up the empowering stance of a witness” (231). Miles continues, “To tell the story of one’s own life is to change that life, as telling is an action that can revise one’s relationship to the past” (231).

All That She Carried concludes with a reflection on Miles’ historiographic practice titled “A Little Sack of Something: An Essay on Process.” Here, Miles returns to the research questions that propelled the book forward: “what is the story of this cloth? Who were the mothers and daughters that touched it? What compelled Black women to struggle in defense of life in a system that turned mere existence into hardship? How did they maintain their will across generations in bleak times? And what can Black women’s creative response to the worst of circumstances teach us about the past and offer us for the future?” (299). Feminist historiographers will find great value in the research narrative Miles offers that ranges from learning about the sack for the first time—when she “lost [her]self in their waves of grief and oceans of meaning” (295)—to the advice she received from other scholars, and from the theories that enabled her to read the sack in difference ways to the serendipitous events that shaped her research.

We hope this review conveys how much feminist scholars of rhetoric can learn from Miles’ complex, provocative, and moving book. On so many levels, *All That She Carried* can enrich the conversations we find central to our field. We want to conclude by underscoring the pedagogical value of and possibilities for this text, as we encourage readers to consider bringing this text into their classes. There is no doubt that *All That She Carried* resonated powerfully with our students. In projects that built from Miles’ book, they took the opportunity to further research Black women’s experiences, explore their own families’ stories of loss and survival, pursue

questions of archival complexity, and enact their own unique forms of archival engagement. *All That She Carried* can thus be just as important for our scholarship as it is for our teaching.

Works Cited

- Arellano, Sonia C. "Quilting as a Qualitative, Feminist Research Method: Expanding Understandings of Migrant Deaths." *Rhetoric Review*, vol. 41, no. 1, 2022, p. 17-30.
- Glenn, Cheryl. *Rhetoric Retold: Regendering the Tradition from Antiquity through the Renaissance*. Southern Illinois UP, 1997.
- Goggin, MaureenDaly. *Women and the Material Culture of Needlework and Textiles, 1750-1950*. Routledge, 2017.
- Hull, Brittany, Cecilia Shelton, and Temptaous McKoy. "Dressed but Not Tryin' to Impress: Black Women Deconstructing Professional Dress." *Journal of Multimodal Rhetorics*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2019.
- Keohane, Jennifer. "'The Most Important Dress in the Country': The Rhetoric of Glamour in the Smithsonian's 'The First Ladies.'" *Women's Studies in Communication*, vol. 40, no. 3, 2017, p. 270-288.
- Mattingly, Carol. *Appropriate [ing] Dress: Women's Rhetorical Style in Nineteenth-Century America*. Southern Illinois UP, 2002.
- Royster, Jacqueline Jones, and Gesa E. Kirsch. *Feminist Rhetorical Practices: New Horizons for Rhetoric, Composition, and Literacy Studies*. Southern Illinois UP, 2012.
- Sohan, Vanessa Kraemer. *Lives, Letters, and Quilts: Women and Everyday Rhetorics of Resistance*. U of Alabama Pt, 2019.

Review of What It Feels Like: Visceral Rhetoric and the Politics of Rape Culture.

Author(s): Rachel Smith Olson

Rachel Smith Olson is a PhD student in Composition and Rhetoric at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Her research focuses on digital rhetorics, identity, and the writing classroom.

Keywords: activism, carceral feminism, embodied rhetoric, performance, rape culture

Larson, Stephanie R. *What It Feels Like: Visceral Rhetoric and the Politics of Rape Culture*. Penn State University Press, 2021.

For the past five years, we have lived in what some have termed the ‘Me Too era,’ a large-scale recognition of sexual assault and harassment and the people who perpetrate it. Stories of actors, politicians, journalists, and others with considerable power have garnered considerable media coverage and national debate. Situating her work within these high-profile cases and the carceral feminist logics that fuel them, Stephanie Larson makes an astute point: despite all of these events, we still lack adequate means to discuss and theorize rape culture. *What It Feels Like* makes a crucial contribution to this ongoing conversation by illuminating how mainstream discourses about rape culture work to contain the stories, feelings, and bodies associated with sexual violence. Connecting to the larger ecology of scholarship and activism focused on rape and sexual assault, Larson suggests that in order to effectively confront rape culture, we must first properly recognize and value the embodied accounts of rape victims. To do so, Larson offers the term ‘visceral rhetorics,’ which describes how the body responds to words or actions with “thick, material, bone-deep, gut-felt sensations” (14). She seeks to remind scholars that bodies are more than just a site of rhetorical invention; rather, bodies - in the most material sense - play a critical role in the felt experiences of rhetoric. In the same vein as feminist rhetorics’ historical attention to women’s silenced voices, Larson examines how women’s bodies, as well as their affective and rhetorical capabilities, are suppressed by rape culture. Working from this point of understanding, *What It Feels Like* is an essential read for those committed to disrupting rape culture.

In Chapter 1, Larson begins by establishing the existing frameworks for theorizing sexual violence, with particular focus on which bodies are able to be recognized within these frames. She traces historical constructions of social norms surrounding sexuality and sexual violence by examining the Meese Commission, an undertaking of the Reagan administration meant to determine the impact of pornography on modern society. Analyzing letters written to the commission by concerned citizens reveals palpable fears regarding threats to the nuclear family structure, the correlation between pornography and male violence, and the state of female sexuality in the US. Larson asserts that, more broadly, the commission exposed desires to protect the systems of inequity that undergird the neoliberal nation-state, proliferating instincts to blame vulnerable people for the violence they experience, including sexual assault. She then draws a connection between the Meese Commission and the 2018 confirmation hearing of Brett Kavanaugh, showing how white supremacy, masculinity, and heteronormativity continue to be protected and upheld at the expense of those victimized by these structures. Larson's read of the commission reveals that national conversations around rape and sexual assault are constantly shaped by "a desire to contain the nation-state and its neoliberal imaginary" (27). This section provides the historical context and inherited legacies that shape the modern intimations of rape culture discussed further on.

In Chapter 2, Larson explores the bystander discourses prevalent on college campuses by examining two rape prevention campaigns, *It's On Us* and *1 is 2 Many*. These campaigns are significant because they emphasize male action and responsibility in combatting rape and sexual assault. In doing so, they decenter the lived experiences of real rape victims, instead invoking cultural conceptions of the archetypal victim: a "heterosexual, college-aged, cis, white, able-bodied, US American, middle-class, educated woman in need of protection from a male body and male gaze" (58). Thus, to analyze these campaigns, Larson employs a methodological approach she terms 'patriarchal spectrality.' She explains that, just as ghosts may be present but unseen, "rape victims and perpetrators, too, are *absolutely there* but unable to be heard or seen as clearly due to the modes of vision that inform US rape prevention discourses today" (60). Larson shows how prevention programs and other public discourses surrounding sexual violence may erase rape victims even as they seek to save them or bring them justice. Discussing victims in hypothetical terms or only platforming stories that align with the larger narrative of rape culture enables audiences to erase bodies that do not fit the archetype based on their identity and/or actions. Larson connects this to a historical precedent, describing the United States' legacy of permitting and facilitating sexual violence against Black women, a legacy that is still not recognized on a national scale. With this in mind, productive future

discourses must attend not only to what is there, but what is silenced, excluded, and made invisible. Following Jacqueline Rhodes' call for a critical feminist rhetoric, Larson asks readers to more effectively disrupt rape culture by recognizing the specters of patriarchy and critically imagining what has been strategically left out of the conversation.

Chapter 3 focuses on rape kits and the role they play in shaping public perceptions of victim testimony. Larson begins the chapter with a brief narrative that quickly gets at the heart of the matter, recounting the story of a woman who endured a rape kit exam after being raped on her college campus. The woman waited a year and a half for the kit to be processed and another six months for her perpetrator to be found guilty, even though she “knew and named him from the beginning” (86). Larson uses this story to illustrate the perceived power and importance of the rape kit, even in cases when the assailant need not be identified using DNA evidence. Extending onto recent discussions of the rape kit backlog, Larson interrogates the rhetorical function of medico-legal tools, arguing that the way rape kits are employed serves to silence victims and create public distrust in visceral testimony. Examining legislative responses to the rape kit backlog, Larson identifies three major problems: the proliferation of the archetypal rapist as a stranger with a violent criminal history; the emphasis on scientific innovation over victim testimony; and the implementation of rape kits to logically assess a victim's visceral experience. All together, Larson asserts that rape kits and other medico-legal tools “partake in conditioning publics not to believe victims,” most especially when these tools are treated as more credible than first-hand accounts (89). Throughout, Larson weaves in rape victims' accounts of both the violence they endured and the additional trauma and discomfort of the rape kit exam, providing examples of how visceral rhetoric conveys the deeply-felt sensations and emotions connected to sexual assault. While acknowledging the usefulness of rape kit technology, Larson holds space for the way rape kit exams can further harm victims by attempting to sanitize their feeling bodies and curtail rhetorical means of describing their experience. Drawing connections to the use of police body cameras, Larson points to a troubling trend where technology is used to fix deep-seated issues rather than confront the culture that produced the conditions. She encourages us to wonder “what it might mean to listen to an individual's account of what has been done to their flesh...especially when that body is in pain” (111).

In the next two chapters, Larson begins to answer that question by identifying instances of visceral rhetorics within protests. In Chapter 4, she examines the public performances of two high-profile rape victims who sought to push back against rape discourses and protest the inadequacies of their institutional proceedings, constructing what she terms ‘visceral

counterpublicity.’ These embodied performances challenge narrow definitions of rape, ones that prioritize male anatomy and action, by offering visceral experiences of rape and encouraging felt experiences of the accounts. Drawing on the work of Jenell Johnson, Larson argues that affects, like the ones shared through these performances, may disrupt publics in the same way they may construct or coalesce them. She first analyzes the victim impact statement read by Chanel Miller during the trial of Brock Allen Turner. Through this letter, audiences may understand Miller’s experience through her own recollection and from her own perspective. This visceral account of violation centers her embodied experience, offering a different perspective compared to how Turner’s lawyers focused on delineating between rape and sexual assault. Larson then examines the work of Emma Sulkowicz, best known for their performance art piece in which they carried their dorm mattress around Columbia University in protest of the university’s response to their reported rape. Larson focuses on Sulkowicz’s piece *Ceci N’est Pas Un Viol (or This Is Not A Rape)*, a video that seemingly shows the reenactment of a rape while simultaneously assuring the audience that the actions they are watching are consensual. This performance calls upon the audience to “grapple with the experience of rape beyond the discursive assertion that violation did not occur,” invoking the lived experiences of victims whose rhetorical accounts are denied by powerful institutions (131). In these instances, Larson asserts, Miller and Sulkowicz “expose threatened bodily boundaries and encourage affective responses” by giving their audiences the means to understand rape as something experienced, not just theoretically defined (122). Larson connects their work to other modern forms of protest that highlight the body, including athletes kneeling during the national anthem and the use of the phrase “I can’t breathe.” Through these visceral counterpublic tactics, audiences may better understand instances of violence, even when those in power seek to deny them. This in turn creates greater opportunity to recognize harm done to any body—especially marginalized bodies—rather than only acknowledging discourses that are safely contained.

Chapter 5 explores another tactic of public disruption by focusing on #MeToo. Beginning with Tarana Burke’s original concept of the Me Too Movement as a part of Just Be Inc., Larson discusses the phrase’s viral moment, describing the now-famous tweet by Alyssa Milano that sent #MeToo out into the digital world. Temporally aligned with the emerging allegations against Harvey Weinstein, the hashtag caught on overnight and rapidly constructed a new site of protest for victims and supporters. Larson theorizes the body of #MeToo as a form of *megethos*, which took the shape of a feminist list. Using the functionality of the hashtag, audiences could read one tweet after another, experiencing the magnitude generated by these brief messages as a “bone-deep, felt assurance” that sought to disrupt normative discourses regarding rape culture

(138). Larson points out #MeToo's success compared to previous hashtags and online campaigns, as it gained considerable traction beyond Twitter and beyond the digital sphere entirely. Not only did the magnitude adequately convey users' experiences of rape culture, but it also invited audiences to feel these tweets in a visceral way, change their previous beliefs about rape culture, and be moved to action. In closing, Larson acknowledges that #MeToo was intrinsically linked to white female celebrities and fueled by the public disclosure of trauma. Thus, she prompts us to look deeper at both historical and contemporary contexts to find useful protest tactics within the #MeToo movement, ones that may be reconfigured to operate in more nuanced and intersectional ways. Returning to an idea introduced in the preface, Larson reflects on the "methodological hope" offered by #MeToo, which "must not be hastily or uncritically idealized but constantly interrogated" (154).

At times, I wished this book approached the issue of sexual assault and harassment from a more intersection perspective; however, perhaps one of its strongest arguments is that how we address rape culture on a national scale is not intersectional. As Larson explains, her consistent use of 'woman' functions "not to ignore femmes, queer women, people from trans or nonbinary communities, or men, who most certainly experience rape and sexual assault, but rather to acknowledge a public obsession with focusing solely on cis, white women in predominant rape prevention discourse" (10). By examining the subject matter through governing structures that have emerged from the oppressive foundations of the US, Larson reveals how this focus on certain victims with privileged identities has come to control all aspects of conversation regarding rape. As someone who perfectly fits the description of the 'archetypal victim,' this research moves me to reflect on my own positionality and work to dismantle harmful structures meant to protect me and others like me. As Larson makes clear, until we reckon with the normative approaches to rape culture that function to contain bodies and maintain the nation-state, we will always lack adequate methods for rape victims outside of the archetype to be seen and heard, thus perpetuating rape culture for all.

What It Feels Like offers a new entry point for understanding rape culture by examining its function in everyday contexts—legal, medical, institutional, public—and how it works to suppress the visceral rhetoric of rape victims. Nearly five years after the phrase 'me too' gained widespread cultural significance, we are still searching for new and meaningful ways forward, and Larson's scholarship is a much-needed contribution to that endeavor.