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7-29-2019

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Recommended Citation

Barr, Marleen S. "Rape at Bergdorf's." QUAIL BELL MAGAZINE. July 29, 2019.

<http://www.quailbellmagazine.com/the-real-20/essay-e-jean-carroll-and-believing-women>

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Rape at Bergdorf's

Words and Images by Marleen S. Barr



E. Jean Carroll's account of being raped by Donald Trump in the Bergdorf Goodman department store's lingerie area initially did not receive a lot of attention. On June 24, CNN's Anderson Cooper corrected this oversight when he engaged in a lengthy interview with Carroll. While sexual accusations against Trump are not new, the interview reveals several timely insights related to language and intention.

Although Carroll answered affirmatively when Cooper asked if Trump had penetrated her, she explained that she prefers to call what happened "a fight" rather than "rape." Her choice relates to Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's decision to describe the facilities housing migrant children as

“concentration camps. Since all concentration camps are not Nazi death camps, Ocasio-Cortez is correct when she uses this term. (Because this is a sensitive word choice, I want to add that New York Times opinion writer Paul Krugman states that “yes, the detention centers meet the historical definition of concentration camps—Paul Krugman, “Trump and the Merchants of Detention,” New York Times, July 8, 2019, A27). Her verbiage calls attention to outrageous abuse. Carroll was subjected to rape. She is correct when she uses “fight”; she physically defended herself against Trump’s assault. Her verbiage calls attention away from outrageous abuse.

Carroll is using linguistic deflection to assert that she is not a victim. Unlike the migrant children, she had the power to fight back. She correctly asserts that being sexually attacked in a lingerie department for three minutes is not analogous to, say, being sexually attacked at knife point in a dark alley. Like the “concentration camp” usage argument, the difference is in degree not in kind. The most important question is why Trump attacked her. I think the answer is that Carroll is a female version of Trump. She is tall; she is athletic; she enjoys a New York City cultural platform. When Trump encountered this six foot one inch physically strong female writer, he exaggerated her power and saw her as a version of the science fiction giantess the 1958 film *Attack of the 50 Foot Woman* epitomizes. Carroll said to Cooper that, as a former *Saturday Night Live* writer who wanted to generate a hilarious New York story, she asked Trump to wear lingerie. She was at once humiliating and emasculating Trump. Trump, to assert male dominance against this seemingly larger than life tall woman, enacted his version of the patriarchal empire strikes back. He raped her. Trump defended himself by stating that Carroll is not his type. Carroll said that she is glad that she is not his type. What he said refers to sexual attractiveness. What she said refers to the fact that her place as a public person, a writer, has nothing to do with sex—or with him.



When Cooper and a panel addressed why Carroll waited twenty years to tell her story, they dismissively commented that perhaps she is trying to sell her book. Her entrepreneurial efforts are empowering, not negative. If Trump can monetize the presidency by making money from his Washington hotel and visiting his properties to advertise them while he is abroad at tax payer expense, then why can't Carroll tell her story to sell her book? By doing so, like Rocky, she has won the fight.

Whose life is it anyway? Rape at Bergdorf's is Carroll's story. She has the right to write it—and to profit from it. Yes, she was raped—all the way to the bank. Carroll can't change what happened. What this writer can do is to transform the narrative about female victimhood. Her

efforts are to be applauded. Right on Ms. Carroll!



The immigrant children have been raped in that Trump's punitive stance instituted to appeal to his base has penetrated the children's sense of security, personhood, and family. All women are relegated to social space in which they are given second class status in pink collar concentration camps. When Trump came down the escalator, he said that Mexicans are rapists. Carroll said that Trump is a rapist. A man who brags about being a sexual abuser and who tries to benefit politically via exposing children to conditions which are worse than prison should not be the president of the United States. Rape and child abuse are impeachable offenses.

Using your own story to sell a book is not a crime. Unlike *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, rape at Bergdorf's is not fiction.

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