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Henry Guston Kemp Broege
Sarah Lawrence College, hbroege@slc.edu

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Belle Versus Beast or Tramp Versus Child?: Contested Representations of the Scottsboro

Trials

Henry Guston Kemp Broege

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2016

In June of 2015, while I was in Montgomery doing research for my master's thesis, an act of terrorism was carried out by Dylann Roof, a twenty-one-year-old White supremacist man, who entered the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina and shot to death nine Black churchgoers during their service.¹ When asked about his motives, Roof said, "I have to do it. You rape our women and you're taking over our country. And you have to go."² Even though Roof was born in 1994, his reason for committing the crime was no different from that of southern White lynch mobs for killing Black men in the late nineteenth century.³ Similarly, in January of 2016, the Governor of Maine, Paul LePage, in attributing the heroin epidemic in the state to Black men from New York and Connecticut, said, "Incidentally, half the time they impregnate a young, white girl before they leave, which is a real sad thing because then we have another issue that we've got to deal with down the road. We're going to make them very severe penalties."⁴ This was a Reconstruction-era allusion to a racially pure and defenseless White woman, complemented by another dangerous social construct: Black rapists, "beasts unfit to be called human."⁵ White men relied on the Black rapist stereotype to reinforce their role as patriarchs, by scaring White women into abiding by their rules for protection. No matter what class, White women in the South were deemed racially pure, requiring the protection of White men.⁶ Over a century later, Roof's manifesto, and LePage's commentary on Maine's

¹ Nick Corasaniti and Richard Perez-Pena, and Lizette Alvarez, "Church Massacre Suspect Held as Charleston Grieves," *New York Times*, June 18, 2015, sec. U.S.

² Lisa Wade, "How 'Benevolent Sexism' Drove Dylann Roof's Racist Massacre," *Washington Post*, June 21, 2015, sec. PostEverything.

³ Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race & Class*, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 185.

⁴ Mollie Reilly, "Paul LePage Makes Racist Claim About Drug Dealers Named D-Money Getting White Girls Pregnant," *Huffington Post*, January 7, 2016, sec. Huffpost Politics.

⁵ Peter Piper, "Revolting In Last Degree In Story Of Girls," *Huntsville Daily Times*, March 26, 1931.

⁶ Martha Hodes, *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 201.

heroin problem articulate fears of this predatory Black male archetype as a contemporary threat.⁷ However, the actual threat that southern White men confronted during Reconstruction was the economic and political agency that Black men had gained from emancipation, which could establish a new Black masculinity that was more similar to White masculinity than during slavery. It was a crisis of gender, race, and power in the making. Lynching, often purported to be a response to a Black man's sexual misconduct, became a tool to maintain traditional racial and gender social order in the South.⁸ During the 1920s, as a result of publications by Ida B. Wells-Barnett,⁹ the organizing of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation,¹⁰ and lobbying by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP),¹¹ lynching rates declined,¹² as did the evocation of the Black rapist myth.¹³ Still, fears of Black sexuality persisted, and played a major role in the most prominent rape case of the twentieth century,¹⁴

⁷ "Segregation was not a bad thing. It was a defensive measure. Segregation did not exist to hold back negroes. It existed to protect us from them. And I mean that in multiple ways. Not only did it protect us from having to interact with them, and from being physically harmed by them, but it protected us from being brought down to their level. Integration has done nothing but bring Whites down to level of brute animals."; "Here's What Appears to Be Dylann Roof's Racist Manifesto," *Mother Jones*, June 20, 2015, sec. Politics.

⁸ James W. Messerschmidt, "We Must Protect Our Women': On Whiteness, Masculinities, and Lynching," In *Race, Gender, and Punishment: From Colonialism to the War on Terror*, ed. Mary Bosworth and Jeanne Flavin (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 83.

The Southern White man was the primary decision maker, "the ultimate source of secular authority," and was to be obeyed by "women, children, and slaves." He was well educated, "firm, commanding, and the perfect patriarch." He had "virility and mastery of his environment," and was commonly addressed as "Lord" and "Master"; Anne F. Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics 1830-1930* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), 14.

⁹ Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *On Lynchings*, Dover Books on African-Americans (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2014).

¹⁰ Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *Revolt Against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign Against Lynching* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 160.

¹¹ Estelle B. Freedman, *Redefining Rape: Sexual Violence in the Era of Suffrage and Segregation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 243.

¹² Average annual lynchings reported in the 1890s numbered 187.5, but for the 1920s, the figure was 16.8; Michael Klarman, "Scottsboro," *Marquette Law Review* 93, no. 2 (2009): 381.

¹³ The Black rapist myth was succeeded in the 1920s by the neo-Sambo myth. Like the Sambo that preceded the Black rapist, the neo-Sambo was "docile, subordinate, pliable, conforming, and loyal," but the neo-Sambo could also be an independent adult; Joel Williamson, *A Rage for Order: Black/White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 236.

¹⁴ Freedman, *Redefining Rape*, 253.

which began when Black male teenagers and young White women were discovered hoboing on the same train.

The year was 1931. The Great Depression was well underway. Unemployment was rising, and young people were leaving their homes in search of work. Many of them hoboed, riding trains to look for jobs. This was especially true in Alabama, one of the southern states hit hardest by the Great Depression.¹⁵ On March 25th of that year, on a Southern Railway freight train traveling from Chattanooga to Memphis, there were over a dozen young people hoboing, including several Black teenage boys, two young White women, and several White teenage boys, all scattered throughout the train. In response to a dispute with the White teenagers on the train, a young Black man named Haywood Patterson called for help from some of the other Black teenagers to force the White boys off of the train.¹⁶ Once off the train, the White teenagers complained to the stationmaster in Stevenson that they had been assaulted by “Negroes.” A phone call was made by the Jackson County Sheriff, M.L. Wann, to a deputy in Paint Rock, Alabama, who was ordered to, “capture every negro on the train,” when it was stopped.¹⁷ Nine Black teenagers were then rounded up, tied with a plow line, and sent to the jail in Scottsboro.¹⁸ The charges were “Assault and attempt to murder.”

Once the teenagers were in jail, they received another charge, which took priority over the first one: rape. The two White women on the train, Victoria Price and Ruby Bates, came to the jail. Price pointed to the Black teenagers, whom the pair claimed had raped them. The nine

¹⁵ *Scottsboro: An American Tragedy*, directed by Daniel Anker and Barak Goodman (Social Media Productions, PBS Home Video, and WGBH, 2001) DVD (Cowboy Pictures, 2001).

¹⁶ James Goodman, *Stories of Scottsboro*, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 4.

¹⁷ James R. Acker, *Scottsboro and Its Legacy: The Cases that Challenged American Legal and Social Justice* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2008), 2.

¹⁸ Goodman, *Stories of Scottsboro*, 4.

male teenagers were nineteen-year-old Charlie Weems, eighteen-year-old Clarence Norris, nineteen-year-old Andy Wright, twelve-year-old Roy Wright, eighteen-year-old Haywood Patterson, thirteen-year-old Eugene Williams, seventeen-year-old Willie Roberson, sixteen-year-old Ozie Powell, and seventeen-year-old Olen Montgomery.¹⁹ In stark contrast to these new accusations, the teenagers contended that they had not seen the two women before the train had stopped in Paint Rock.²⁰ Bates and Price had an ulterior motive for coming forward; their accusation would nullify the charges they could potentially have received for hobboing.²¹ Since the nine teenagers were Black, and Price and Bates were both White, eight of the nine teenagers were swiftly convicted of rape and sentenced to death. Roy Wright was spared the death penalty because he was only thirteen years old.²²

When word got out about the arrests of the nine Black teenagers,²³ the International Labor Defense (ILD), a legal defense group that was the American branch of International Red Aid, from the Communist International (Comintern), reached out to the families of the arrested teenagers and offered legal defense.²⁴ Meanwhile, the Black Communist B. D. Amis,²⁵ a leader of the League of Struggle for Negro Rights (LSNR), sent telegrams and letters to Alabama's

¹⁹ Weems, Norris, Patterson, Montgomery, Roberson and Powell were from Georgia. The Wright brothers and Williams were from Chattanooga; Kwando Mbiassi Kinshasa, ed., *The Scottsboro Boys in Their Own Words: Selected Letters, 1931-1950*. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2014), 2-4.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

²¹ It was illegal to ride a train without a ticket, and they did not sell tickets to ride freight trains; Susan D. Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich: Race and Political Culture in 1930s Britain* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 20.

²² Dan T. Carter, *Scottsboro: A Tragedy of the American South* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), 48.

²³ A front page article in the *Huntsville Daily Times* came out the day the Scottsboro Nine were arrested; "Nine Negroes In Wholesale Assault Case," *Huntsville Daily Times*, March 25, 1931. An article in the *New York Times* came out a day later; "Jail Head Asks Troops As Mob Seeks Negroes," *New York Times*, March 26, 1931.

²⁴ Robin D.G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During The Great Depression* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 78.

²⁵ Walter T. Howard, ed., *Black Communists Speak on Scottsboro: A Documentary History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013), 2.

governor, various LSNR branches, and editors of black newspapers, singlehandedly initiating the campaign to free the “Scottsboro Boys,” as the defendants would become popularly known as.²⁶ Just three weeks after the nine were arrested, 20,000 demonstrators in New York City demanded their release.²⁷ Later in the year, protests to free the Scottsboro Boys were happening all over the world, from Seattle, to Cuba, and as far east as Moscow.²⁸ By the end of the year, following a struggle for representation of the Black teenagers between the NAACP and the ILD, all nine were backed by the legal support of the latter.²⁹ The following year, the convictions in the Scottsboro trials were reversed by the Supreme Court, on the grounds that the teenagers had all been denied right to counsel. This marked the first time that the state of Alabama was forced to provide counsel for Black defendants.³⁰

In the next round of trials, the ILD acquired the pro bono services of New York defense attorney Samuel Leibowitz, one of the most successful criminal defense lawyers of the time. Leibowitz, a libertarian, agreed to work with the ILD as long as he could organize his defense independently, and could maintain his distance from the politics of the U.S. Communist Party (CPUSA).³¹ Leibowitz’s strategy was to go after Victoria Price, who was the only accusing witness at the trial due to the fact that Ruby Bates first failed to appear and then recanted her initial charge.³² He began asking questions about Price’s sexual activity the night prior to the arrest of the Scottsboro Nine, not only to highlight the contradictions in her story, but also to

²⁶ Ibid., 10; Erik S. McDuffie, *Sojourning for Freedom: Black Women, American Communism, and the Making of Black Left Feminism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 59.

²⁷ Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*, 79.

²⁸ “Thousands In Protest March In New York,” *Southern Worker*, May 23, 1931; “Int’l Protest On Scottsboro,” *Southern Worker*, July 11, 1931.

²⁹ Klarman, “Scottsboro,” 387.

³⁰ Ibid., 396.

³¹ Ibid., 399.

³² Goodman, *Stories of Scottsboro*, 131-132.

build a narrative that was an alternative to the one based on Price's testimony. Price gave Leibowitz defiant answers, such as, "I won't say,"³³ and, "I have not had intercourse with any other white man but my husband. I want you to distinctly remember that."³⁴ She refused to give any testimony that might suggest that she had not been raped. Leibowitz's persistent questioning about Price's sex life led to protests from southern Whites, who perceived the questioning as an attack on southern White womanhood.³⁵ Over the course of two weeks, despite Leibowitz's vigorous efforts, and the medical evidence contrary to the accusations of Bates and Price,³⁶ Haywood Patterson, the first defendant, was again sentenced to death.³⁷ In 1933, however, Leibowitz made an appeal to Judge James Horton, who had presided over those trial proceedings and was known for his integrity,³⁸ as well as, to quote historian David Cates, "being Abraham Lincoln-esque"³⁹ in appearance. Leibowitz's appeal succeeded and the defense was granted a new trial by Judge Horton, who found the evidence against Haywood Patterson unconvincing.⁴⁰

The trials resumed later that year with a new judge: W.W. Callahan. Having attended neither law school nor college, he was far less qualified as a judge than Horton was.⁴¹ Judge Callahan wanted the trials finished in a hurry. He believed that they were becoming too expensive and was certain that the Black teenagers were guilty. He at one point even told Haywood Patterson, "Judge Horton can't help you now."⁴² Throughout the trial, whenever

³³ Ibid., 127.

³⁴ Acker, *Scottsboro and Its Legacy*, 26.

³⁵ Klarman, "Scottsboro," 400.

³⁶ Only dead sperm was found in the vaginas of Bates and Price, which proved they were not raped on the train. The only bruises and scratches found on Price were so minor, anyone would receive riding on top of a coal car; Acker, *Scottsboro and Its Legacy*, 117.

³⁷ Michael Klarman, "Scottsboro," 402.

³⁸ John F. Wukovits, *An Appeal for Justice: The Trials of the Scottsboro Nine* (Detroit: Lucent Books, 2012), 72.

³⁹ David Cates, *The Scottsboro Boys* (North Mankato, MN: ABDO Publishing Company, 2012), 52.

⁴⁰ Klarman, "Scottsboro," 403.

⁴¹ Acker, *Scottsboro and Its Legacy*, 101.

⁴² Ibid., 102.

Leibowitz questioned Price about the sex she had the night before the arrests, and whenever Price was in a position where she might contradict herself, the lead prosecutor, Thomas Knight, objected and Judge Callahan sustained the objection⁴³ (In doing so, Callahan acted as Price's patriarchal protector). By denying Leibowitz answers regarding Price's sex life, Callahan helped to preserve the newly constructed myth of Price's respectable womanhood. Judge Callahan was so dead set on ensuring the conviction of the Black teenagers, Leibowitz had to remind him to tell the jury that they had the option to acquit Patterson instead of assigning punishment. It was yet another guilty verdict. This was followed by another guilty verdict for Clarence Norris as well.⁴⁴ However, Leibowitz was able to make a successful appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court, who found that Black men had been deliberately excluded from Alabama jury rolls.⁴⁵

Retrials would continue until 1937. That year, the rape charges against Roy Wright, Eugene Williams, Olen Montgomery, and Willie Roberson were dropped. Wright and Williams were determined to be too young, while Roberson and Montgomery were too physically impaired to have raped Bates or Price.⁴⁶ The other five defendants remained in prison, all facing their own struggles over the next several years. Charlie Weems was paroled in 1943. Andy Wright was paroled in 1944, violated his parole, went back to prison in 1947 for reckless driving without a license, and was paroled again in 1950.⁴⁷ Clarence Norris and Ozie Powell were both

⁴³ Goodman, *Stories of Scottsboro*, 126.

⁴⁴ Klarman, "Scottsboro," 406.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 407.

⁴⁶ Roy Wright was twelve years old and Eugene Williams was thirteen years old at the time of their arrest. Olen Montgomery was legally blind and Willie Roberson had a "severe venereal disease"; Goodman, *Stories of Scottsboro*, 308.

⁴⁷ Acker, *Scottsboro and Its Legacy*, 187.

paroled in 1946. Haywood Patterson escaped from prison in 1948, and settled in Michigan, where the governor, Soapy Williams, refused to extradite him to Alabama.⁴⁸

Books about the Scottsboro case appeared swiftly, and have become increasingly abundant in the past twenty years. In 1935, while the Scottsboro Boys were still in jail, *Scottsboro Alabama: A True Story in Linoleum Cuts*, by artists Lin Shi Khan and Tony Perez, became the first narrative of the Scottsboro trials bound in a book.⁴⁹ The following year, Files Crenshaw, Jr., and Kenneth A. Miller released *Scottsboro: The Firebrand of Communism*, which was published in defense of Alabama, arguing that testimony in court proved that the convictions of the Scottsboro Boys were just.⁵⁰ The authors claimed that the Communist Party was trying to initiate a race revolution.⁵¹ The first academic narrative of the Scottsboro trials, historian Dan T. Carter's *Scottsboro: A Tragedy of the American South*, was not published until 1969.⁵² This book concentrates on legal proceedings of the case, with emphasis on racial injustice and the political opposition between Alabama conservatives and Scottsboro case activists. Carter's emphasis on these topics established a master narrative of the Scottsboro trials which would become a model for future publications.

During the Cold War, the output of scholarship on the Scottsboro trials was scant. Apart from Carter's work, the only non-fiction books on the trials published were *They Shall Be Free*, by Allan Knight Chalmers, former head of the Scottsboro Boys Defense Committee,⁵³ and two

⁴⁸ Ibid., 188-189.

⁴⁹ Unlike its successors, this published Scottsboro narrative emphasizes the class oppression as much as the racist oppression of the Scottsboro Nine; Lin Shi Khan and Tony Perez, *Scottsboro, Alabama: A Story in Linoleum Cuts*, Andrew H. Lee (New York: New York University Press, 2002).

⁵⁰ Files Crenshaw Jr. and Kenneth A. Miller, *Scottsboro: The Firebrand of Communism* (Montgomery, AL: The Brown Printing Company, 1936), 10.

⁵¹ Ibid., 290.

⁵² Dan T. Carter, *Scottsboro: A Tragedy of the American South* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1969).

⁵³ Allan Knight Chalmers, *They Shall Be Free* (Garden City, N.Y., Doubleday, 1951).

autobiographies by the incarcerated men: *Scottsboro Boy* by Haywood Patterson and *The Last of the Scottsboro Boys* by Clarence Norris.⁵⁴ The dearth of publications on the Scottsboro trials during the Cold War may have been a result of McCarthyist repression due to the essential role the ILD played in the trials.⁵⁵ Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Scottsboro master narrative constructed by Carter was reinforced by publications such as James Goodman's *Stories of Scottsboro* in 1994, and James Acker's *Scottsboro and its Legacy* in 2008.⁵⁶ In the same year that *Stories of Scottsboro* was published, children's and young adult books on the Scottsboro case began to emerge and reinforce the narrative, including *The Scottsboro Boys* by James Haskins, *Powell v. Alabama: The Scottsboro Boys and American Justice* by Gerald Horne, *The Scottsboro Boys Trial: A Primary Source Account* by Lita Sorensen, *The Trial of the Scottsboro Boys* by David Aretha, *An Appeal for Justice: The Trials of the Scottsboro Nine* by John F. Wukovits, and *The Scottsboro Boys* by David Cates.⁵⁷ Only a few recent books on Scottsboro have diverged from the master narrative's focus on the trials. One of them is Walter T. Howard's *Black Communists Speak on Scottsboro: A Documentary History*, which is a collection of primary source documents written by Black Communists involved in the campaign to free the Scottsboro Boys. This edited work constructs a radical narrative that focuses more on activism than on the trials.⁵⁸ Similarly, there is *The Scottsboro Boys in Their Own Words: Selected*

⁵⁴ Haywood Patterson and Earl Conrad, *Scottsboro Boy* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1950); Clarence Norris and Sybil D, Washington, *The Last of the Scottsboro Boys* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1979).

⁵⁵ James A. Miller, *Remembering Scottsboro: The Legacy of an Infamous Trial* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 197.

⁵⁶ Goodman, *Stories of Scottsboro*; Acker, *Scottsboro and Its Legacy*.

⁵⁷ James Haskins, *The Scottsboro Boys* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1994); Gerald Horne, *Powell v. Alabama: The Scottsboro Boys and American Justice*, Historic Supreme Court Cases (New York: Franklin Watts, 1997); Lita Sorensen, *The Scottsboro Boys Trial: A Primary Source Account*, Great Trials of the Twentieth Century (New York: The Rosen Publishing Group, 2004); David Aretha, *The Trial of the Scottsboro Boys*, The Civil Rights Movement (Greensboro, NC: Morgan Reynolds Publishing, 2008); Wukovits, *An Appeal for Justice*; Cates, *The Scottsboro Boys*.

⁵⁸ Howard, *Black Communists Speak on Scottsboro*.

Letters, 1931-1950, edited by Africana studies professor Kwando Mbiassi Kinshasa. This book contains primary source documents written by members of the Scottsboro Boys, the ILD, the NAACP, and from others who were involved in the Scottsboro case.⁵⁹ James Miller's *Remembering Scottsboro: The Legacy of the Scottsboro Trial*,⁶⁰ discusses how memories of the Scottsboro trials have been preserved, yet altered, through literature and theatre. Additionally, Miller's work is unique in that one chapter provides a substantial gender analysis of the accusers and defendants of the Scottsboro trials.⁶¹ *From Scottsboro to Munich: Race and Political Culture in 1930s Britain*, by historian Susan D. Pennybacker, analyzes Ada Wright's European tour with the Communist Party in the context of British imperialism.⁶²

In this master's thesis, I examine racial and gender stereotypes and other representations that newspapers deployed in their coverage of these trials. In conservative newspapers, Black defendants were brutes while their White accusers were belles; in left and liberal newspapers, the defendants were children and their accusers were tramps. In particular, I study the varying ways that Victoria Price, Ruby Bates and the Scottsboro Nine were portrayed by conservative white newspapers in Alabama, by Communist newspapers in the United States and overseas, by Black newspapers in northern cities, and by white liberal newspapers with national readerships. My work argues that each ideological branch of media represents a monolith. As these monoliths intersect with one another, they contradict each other's stereotypes. Stereotypes function to reinforce class, gender, and race-based hierarchies for conservative newspapers, while

⁵⁹ Kinshasa, *The Scottsboro Boys in Their Own Words*.

⁶⁰ Miller, *Remembering Scottsboro*.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 15-27.

⁶² Ada Wright was the mother of two of the Scottsboro Boys: Roy Wright and Andy Wright. She spoke at rallies in Europe sponsored by the Communist Party; Susan D. Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich: Race and Political Culture in 1930s Britain* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

simultaneously being used by left newspapers to unravel those same hierarchies. The variation in representations employed for the Scottsboro case is not an anomaly. I intend for my thesis to be used as a loose template for examining representations in historical and contemporary events and developments.

I pored over the *Montgomery Advertiser*, the *Huntsville Daily Times*, and the *Birmingham News* at the Alabama Department of Archives and History in Montgomery. At the Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives in New York City, I examined the *Negro Worker*, an international publication based in Vienna, Austria, and the *Southern Worker*, published by American Communists in Chattanooga, Tennessee. To view Black newspapers such as the *Chicago Defender* and the *Cleveland Call and Post*, as well as liberal newspapers such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, I drew upon the online archives of the New York Public Library. These primary sources reveal how gender politics have fundamentally shaped the way the Scottsboro story is told.

The thesis is divided into four sections: the first on White conservative newspapers, the second on Communist newspapers, the third on Black newspapers, and the fourth on White liberal newspapers. Each section analyzes portrayals of the Scottsboro Nine, Ruby Bates and Victoria Price. In each case, these portrayals display racial-gender stereotypes whose remarkable durability this thesis may help to explain.

News for Southern Tradition

In 1936, a Montgomery-based publishing company released *Scottsboro: The Firebrand of Communism* in defense of the court convictions of the Scottsboro case. This book perfectly

captures the prevailing White supremacist and patriarchal ideology of White Alabamians in the case. According to the authors, Files Crenshaw Jr. and Kenneth Miller, the protesters involved in CP-backed rallies were “misguided,” and the CP’s actual intent was to antagonize racial tensions in the Deep South,⁶³ which the authors feared could lead to a revolution that would end White supremacy.⁶⁴ Crenshaw and Miller argued that White men had been demanding that Black men respect White women since the Atlantic slave trade started⁶⁵ in order to rationalize why interracial rape was considered “the unpardonable sin.”⁶⁶ They claimed that the testimony of the trials proved that the Scottsboro Boys were guilty, which was why they included the vast majority of the trial testimony in the book.⁶⁷ Hidden beneath open fears of interracial reproduction and communism is another fear: that the privilege of White men to rule southern society and family could unravel. If White men could not force everyone else in the South to submit to them, they would not only lose power, but they would also need to redefine themselves because they were largely defined by governance.⁶⁸ The *Montgomery Advertiser*, the *Huntsville Daily Times*, and the *Birmingham News* all projected this fear-based ideology, commonly depicting the accusers and defendants as southern stereotypes to reinforce the southern status quo they worked to uphold. The Black rapist stereotype was deployed to frame the Scottsboro Boys as a threat to southern womanhood, White racial purity, and southern order.

Turning Boys into Beasts

⁶³ Crenshaw Jr. and Miller, *Scottsboro*, 9.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 290.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 59

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁶⁸ Scott, *The Southern Lady*, 14.

Beyond the altercation on that Southern Railway freight train, the method used by the conservative White Alabama newspapers to vilify the Scottsboro Boys was strictly based on deploying southern myths about Black men, especially the myth of the Black Rapist. The Black rapist was the stereotype used most commonly against the Scottsboro Boys because the allegations against them pertained to the rape of white women, which was, as one writer for the *Huntsville Daily Times* opined, “one of the most horrible ever perpetrated in the United States.”⁶⁹ White conservative media used the Scottsboro case to conjure images of “the Big Black Brute” violating “God-like pure snowwhite [sic] angelic American women,” as one writer put it.⁷⁰ The purpose of this tactic was to make Victoria Price and Ruby Bates victims while vilifying the Scottsboro Boys. To do so, the Scottsboro Nine had to be showcased as Black rapists. Unlike Bates and Price, none of the Scottsboro Boys had pasts that could be used to discredit them.⁷¹ However, these newspapers made no mention of their lack of criminal records. It was damning enough to highlight their attacks on the White boys and alleged rape of White women on that freight train.

Three days after the Scottsboro Boys were taken away in Paint Rock, Alabama, the *Birmingham News* published an article titled “Negroes Arrested.”⁷² While the article takes up only a fraction of a column in the newspaper, it speaks volumes about race and gender-based fears in the South. The article begins by discussing the arrest of three adult Black men thought to

⁶⁹ Peter Piper, “Revolt In Last Degree In Story Of Girls,” *Huntsville Daily Times*, March 26, 1931.

⁷⁰ Hall, *Revolt Against Chivalry*, 112.

⁷¹ All of the Scottsboro Boys except Eugene Williams had dropped out of primary school, but all of them had jobs except Haywood Patterson, and all of those jobs were less taboo than prostitution. Williams was a dishwasher. Andy Wright was a truck driver. Roy Wright worked at a grocery store. Charlie Weems worked in a road gang and on a farm. Olen Montgomery worked delivering groceries, in construction, and at a fertilizer plant. Ozie Powell worked at sawmills and lumber camps. Willie Roberson worked as a busboy; Waights Taylor Jr., *Our Southern Home: Scottsboro to Montgomery to Birmingham: The Transformation of the South in the Twentieth Century* (Santa Rosa, CA: McCaa Books, 2011) 36-40.

⁷² “Negroes Arrested,” *Birmingham News*, March 28, 1931.

have been on the freight train.⁷³ While the arrest of these three Black men follow Sheriff Wann's orders given at Paint Rock,⁷⁴ this also implies that any Black men hobbing on the same train as White women would have likely committed rape. The sexual desires of the Black rapist were assumed to be so wild and unrestrained that Black men's merely being in the same train as a White woman posed a threat of sexual assault.⁷⁵ The Black rapist arises in the middle of the article, which reports that the arrestees' "clothing gave indication of the trio having spent some time in the woods."⁷⁶ While this suggested that the three men were in hiding, it also evokes the fear that, as southern academic George Winston put it, "The black brute is lurking in the dark,"⁷⁷ waiting to attack unsuspecting White women when they are alone and without White male protection.⁷⁸

The article showcases the alleged attack by the Scottsboro Nine, while providing no background information on them. They are simply referred to as "nine negroes," or just, "the negroes."⁷⁹ What the article does say about the Scottsboro Boys is that they were "arrested Wednesday after throwing five white youths from a Southern Railway freight train, knocking the other two unconscious and attacking the girls."⁸⁰ This image of Black boys throwing White men out of the way to attack White girls directly evokes the Black rapist stereotype: Black men have animalistic sexualities, and will stop at nothing to satisfy themselves.⁸¹ This lurking violent Black rapist is brought to mind with greater intensity in the *Huntsville Daily Times* article

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Acker, *Scottsboro and Its Legacy*, 2.

⁷⁵ Freedman, *Redefining Rape*, 94.

⁷⁶ "Negroes Arrested."

⁷⁷ Hodes, *White Women, Black Men*, 200-201.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 201.

⁷⁹ "Negroes Arrested."

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Davis, *Women, Race & Class*, 182.

“Revolting In Last Degree In Story Of Girls,” by Peter Piper, who writes, “ Suddenly the 12 negroes, brandishing their revolvers, leaped from a box car into the open car, covered the white men in one corner and ordered them to leap from the train.”⁸² The use of the word “suddenly” could have suggested they were hidden, and beyond Jim Crow surveillance. What may have been more distressing for the white conservatives reading this article was that Black men “ordered” White men off of the train, a total reversal of traditional southern hierarchy. The description of the removal of White men from the train is followed by Price’s rape accusation,⁸³ raising white southern fears of future Black rule in the South. This article, like other conservative Alabama articles on the Scottsboro case, consistently highlights the Scottsboro Boys’ attacking Ruby Bates and Victoria Price, and Piper mentions this twice in the first five paragraphs.⁸⁴ The indictments against the Scottsboro Boys are reinforced at the end of this article, where Piper writes, “Sherif [sic] Wann late last night questioned them and said six admitted attacking the girls, after throwing five white youths who were accompanying them from the train and knocked two others unconscious.”⁸⁵ The confessions affirmed to White conservative readers that the Scottsboro Nine had rebelled against their sociopolitical masters in the South; an attack against White supremacy.

The Scottsboro Nine could also be portrayed as guilty on account of bad reputations. For example, Piper writes, “In addition Haywood Patterson and Eugene Williams, said to be the worst negro characters in Chattanooga, will be charged with shooting with intent to murder.”⁸⁶

⁸² Piper, “Revolting In Last Degree In Story Of Girls.”

⁸³ “We started to climb over the car when a big negro grabbed us and pulled us back on the gravel pile. He had a big knife in his hands. Another man tore our overalls from our bodies and with five men holding each of us, one with an open knife in his hands, they committed the crime”; Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Piper, “Revolting In Last Degree In Story Of Girls.”

Piper elaborates, saying “Thurman...one of the white occupants of the coal car...declares that the negroes fired at him five times before he reluctantly jumped from the speeding train.”⁸⁷ It was already breaking southern code when Patterson, a Black man, said to the White male hobo who stepped on his hand, “The next time you want by, just tell me you want by and I let you by.”

⁸⁸ In contrast to questioning White privilege, a Black man’s shooting at a White man meant insurrection. However, before the alleged assaults took place on that freight train, Patterson did not have a bad reputation,⁸⁹ and neither did Eugene Williams. The suggestion that they were known to be of bad character was a fabrication to redirect attention away from the well-established bad reputation of Victoria Price.⁹⁰ These character constructs are most evident as Peter Piper writes, “And as the story was being unfolded the negroes were telling jokes in another part of the bastille. Nasty jokes, unafraid, denying to outsiders they were guilty, laughing, laughing, joking, joking, unafraid of the consequences, beasts unfit to be called human.”⁹¹ As one of the more explicit evocations of the Black rapist in the Scottsboro case, this is also a clear example of print-based myth. It was assumed that the maniacal laughter was coming from the Scottsboro Boys in a separate part of the jailhouse. White southerners believed that Black men would revert to a “natural” barbarity without White supervision to enforce their morals.⁹² However, this laughter from the Scottsboro Boys could have been caused by something

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Goodman, *Stories of Scottsboro*, 3.

⁸⁹ Patterson had already been hoboing for years, and often played hooky while he was still in school, but nothing worse than that as far as his reputation went before the Scottsboro case; Ibid., 92.

⁹⁰ Price was known locally as a prostitute by the name of Big Leg Price; Sorensen, *The Scottsboro Boys Trial*, 35.

⁹¹ Piper, “Revolting In Last Degree In Story Of Girls.”

⁹² Joel Williamson, *A Rage for Order: Black/White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 79.

unrelated to the charges that were being made against them. The bad character of the Scottsboro Boys is a concoction brewed to reinforce the truth claims of southern order.

With the Black rapist myth firmly fixed in the White southern mind, it was no surprise that Leibowitz's questioning incited local outrage, not just for his "attacks" on southern womanhood, but also for his contesting southern racial hierarchy. This local outcry was heightened by social tensions that had intensified in the first two years of trials. In an article titled "Coast Is Clear To Begin Trial Of First Negro,"⁹³ a reporter for the *Huntsville Daily Times* writes that, "Liebowitz [sic] asked prospective jurors if they would discriminate against a negro, if evidence was produced to show that a white witness was not reliable, or was of bad character."⁹⁴ This suggests that Leibowitz would consider Black testimony over White testimony, which was unthinkable and offensive for most conservative southern White people.⁹⁵

In the *Birmingham News*, reporter Ralph E. Hurst deploys the Black rapist stereotype as a means to garner sympathy for Bates and Price while vilifying the Scottsboro Nine. In the opening paragraph, Hurst writes that there are "Negroes charged with attacking two girls."⁹⁶ For the paper's White southern readers at the time, "Negroes," in this context, would translate to "Black men," while "girls," would mean "White girls." It would have been expected that the "Negroes" would be male because of the Black rapist myth and the thousands of lynchings that took place under its guise.⁹⁷

Building a Belle with "White Trash"

⁹³ "Coast is Clear to Begin Trial Of First Negro," *Huntsville Daily Times*, April 2, 1933.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Southern White people believed that Black people never told the truth at first; Williamson, *A Rage for Order*, 243.

⁹⁶ Ralph E. Hurst, "New Quash Move Slows Up Trial," *Birmingham News*, March 30, 1933.

⁹⁷ There were 3,386 lynchings of Black men recorded from 1882 to 1930; Hall, *Revolt Against Chivalry*, 134-135.

In presenting the Scottsboro case to a southern White conservative audience, the *Montgomery Advertiser*, the *Huntsville Daily Times*, and the *Birmingham News* were tasked with the job of portraying as respectable two young White women with reputedly licentious reputations.⁹⁸ This was challenging since Victoria Price and Ruby Bates had both sold sex under the table, and were locally known to have had intercourse with Black men.⁹⁹ Intercourse between Black men and White women was not only taboo; it was also criminal, and had been defined as rape in Georgia law since 1899.¹⁰⁰ While the prostitution work of Victoria Price and Ruby Bates limited their space for respectability, the greater problem was how the case revealed the flaws in the southern racial and gender order.¹⁰¹ Clearly White men had not been doing enough to protect their precious White women from “contamination.” With the assistance of Price’s testimony and the prosecution’s confirmation-seeking questions, Southern White conservative newspapers could portray Price and Bates as victims convincingly enough to assure readers that the southern social order was indeed infallible. They did this by providing limited information given about Bates, Price, and the Scottsboro Boys.

“Negroes Arrested,”¹⁰² discussed above, is so efficient in establishing the threat of the Black rapist that little needs to be said about Ruby Bates and Victoria Price to present them as victims. In fact, given their backgrounds as mill workers and prostitutes, the less said, the better. This is why Bates and Price are only mentioned twice: as “two young Huntsville white girls,” and as “the girls.”¹⁰³ Nothing is said about their ages or class.¹⁰⁴ White Alabamians unfamiliar

⁹⁸ Aretha, *The Trial of the Scottsboro Boys*, 27.

⁹⁹ Goodman, *Stories of Scottsboro*, 21.

¹⁰⁰ Freedman, *Redefining Rape*, 94.

¹⁰¹ Dora Apel, *Imagery of Lynching: Black Men, White Women, and the Mob* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 64.

¹⁰² “Negroes Arrested.”

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

with Bates and Price could read this article with the assumption that these two women are chaste, honest, and obedient White girls who were somehow left in a vulnerable position. With information about Bates and Price strategically omitted, they could garner sympathy, which inspired condemnation for the Scottsboro Boys as untamed sexual beasts.

“Jury At Decatur Is Put To Bed Without Verdict” published in the *Montgomery Advertiser* on December 1, 1933, also carefully deploys information about Victoria Price.¹⁰⁵ She is referred to as “Mrs. Victoria Price, Huntsville Ala. mill worker,” but not as a prostitute or hobo. Similarly, when mentioning Ruby Bates, the article reads, “Ruby Bates, also a Huntsville mill worker,” and nothing more.¹⁰⁶ By mentioning that both Bates and Price are from Huntsville, a sense of duty is constructed for the southern White male readers because they are meant to feel more responsible for protecting “their” women. As in the other articles discussed, the information on the Scottsboro Boys given here is mainly limited to their being mentioned as attackers.¹⁰⁷ Since this article was written during the third round of trials, its writer, T. M. Davenport, was able to use previous verdicts to his advantage. He writes, “Patterson was tried and has been convicted and sentenced to death twice,”¹⁰⁸ suggesting that since the Alabama courts found him guilty in the two previous trials, he is most likely guilty. However, Haywood symbolizes a much greater threat: the article explains that Attorney Knight tells the jury, “you cannot avenge what has been done to Victoria Price, but you can stop it from being done to

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ T. M. Davenport, “Jury At Decatur Is Put To Bed Without Verdict,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, December 1, 1933.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ “Both negroes were in a group of nine arrested at Paint Rock, Ala., March 25, 1931, and charged with attacking Mrs. Price and her companion, Ruby Bates.” “Patterson as one of the six negroes alleged to have attacked the woman”; Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

another woman.”¹⁰⁹ In this framework, Patterson is being “legally lynched” and hanged metaphorically to scare Black men into not committing the same crime, while Victoria Price symbolizes White southern women, who are all sacred and in the of patriarchal protection from Black rapists.¹¹⁰

The problem of garnering sympathy for a female tramp, however, was resolved by targeting the man who was trying to access this truth from Price: a Jewish lawyer from New York collaborating with the legal branch of CPUSA. Leibowitz “represented a nightmare come true”: a Jewish northerner who White conservative southerners perceived as disrupting White Southern order by blasphemously questioning its most sacred modern idol and aiding the CP in overthrowing southern “democracy.”¹¹¹ Outcry among locals was incited as well when an article mentioned, “Samuel S. Liebowitz [sic], of New York, chief counsel for the negroes, indicated yesterday that he might attack the veracity and character of the principal state witness.”¹¹² This possibility was considered to be a great enough threat that it was used as the third subtitle for this article: “Defense May Attack Veracity of State’s Witnesses.”¹¹³ Questions about the veracity of Price were a problem in the sense that Southern women were, to a degree, sacred beings the truth of whom could not be fully known by men.¹¹⁴ Alabama’s White supremacists perceived Leibowitz as such a great threat that, according to writer and labor activist Mary Heaton Vorse, someone in the courtroom had whispered, “It’ll be a wonder if Leibowitz gets out alive.”¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Hodes, *White Women, Black Men*, 201.

¹¹¹ Williamson, *A Rage for Order*, 246.

¹¹² “Coast is Clear to Begin Trial Of First Negro.”

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Cherry Good, “The Southern Lady, or the Art of Dissembling.” *Journal of American Studies* 23, no. 1 (1989): 75.

¹¹⁵ Goodman, *Stories of Scottsboro*, 132.

“Girl Witness Angered By Defense,”¹¹⁶ by Ralph E. Hurst, also utilizes this northern Jewish threat. Among the articles under examination in this thesis, this one most effectively portrays Victoria Price as respectable. Hurst accomplishes this by making Price a victim, not just because she was attacked by the Scottsboro Boys, but also by virtue of her cross-examination from Samuel Leibowitz. An example of this strategy is seen in Hurst’s description of the aftermath of a verbal exchange between Defense Attorney Leibowitz and the Attorney General Thomas Knight, Jr. Hurst writes, “Efforts were then continued by Liebowitz [sic] to tear to shreds the reputation and character of the witness with Knight’s threat to ‘introduce some testimony’ if the bars are let down for the defense.”¹¹⁷ By claiming that it was Leibowitz who destroyed Price’s reputation, Hurst negates Price’s already established bad reputation, and replaces it with a fabricated but threatened reputation of decency.

In concocting respectability for Price, Hurst implicates Leibowitz’s attack on Price’s ‘good’ reputation by writing, “Liebowitz was obviously trying to anger the witness and was succeeding with her answers being snapped sharply.”¹¹⁸ Here, Hurst argues that Leibowitz deliberately agitated Price, depart from proper womanly behavior. Hurst also suggests that Leibowitz’s questioning of Price made her sound stupid, claiming that Leibowitz “piled Mrs. Price with questions which she complained frequently were too fast for her to understand.”¹¹⁹ Hurst works to garner even more resentment for Leibowitz when he writes, “Mrs. Price was then quizzed about the white boys being knocked from the train, and said she herself was ‘staggered’

¹¹⁶ Ralph E. Hurst, “Girl Witness Angered By Defense,” *Birmingham News*, April 3, 1933.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

by a pistol butt blow on the head.”¹²⁰ This implies that Leibowitz was not simply outwitting Price; he was exploiting her supposedly injured and traumatized state.

Perhaps one of Leibowitz’s highest offences in court, highlighted in this article, was his saying to Price, “You’re something of a little actress aren’t you?”¹²¹ In this instance, Leibowitz suggested Price committed perjury. That functions to make Leibowitz look more belligerent, and therefore, a meddling agitator. Hurst omits Price’s immediate sassy response to question: “You’re a pretty good actor yourself.”¹²² With this retort, Price implicitly acknowledged she was acting, and that contradicts the portrait Hurst presents. He reinforces the construction of Price as an honest woman by referring to her throughout the article as “Mrs. Price,” implying that she is still a married woman.¹²³

Unlike most of the southern White conservative press coverage of the Scottsboro case, which buries the shameful class background of Bates and Price under the fear of the Black rapist, one article in the *Huntsville Daily Times*, “Revolting In Last Degree In Story Of Girls”¹²⁴ actually treats their low class standing as evidence that they were not hobbing when they boarded the freight train. In the article, Piper writes,

Both girls are daughters of Huntsville widows. Both are in poor financial circumstances and had caught a “free” ride to Chattanooga the day before hoping to obtain employment of some nature in the larger city. Unsuccessful in getting work they were forced to take the same type of transportation back home.¹²⁵

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Goodman, *Stories of Scottsboro*, 127.

¹²³ Hurst, “Girl Witness Angered By Defense.”

¹²⁴ Piper, “Revolting In Last Degree In Story Of Girls.”

¹²⁵ Ibid.

With the Great Depression well underway, it was an opportune time to use the poverty of these two poor White women as evidence of their vulnerability and victimhood, generating sympathy they may not have as easily received in the Roaring Twenties. Placing blame on the women's poor circumstances removes blame from southern White men and Alabama's law enforcement for not doing enough to protect these southern White women from Black men.

In *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, Haitian anthropologist and historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot draws a distinction between the chronicler and the narrator. "The chronicler provides a play-by-play account of every event he witnesses, the narrator describes the life of an entity, person, thing, or institution." Trouillot compared the chronicler to the "sportscaster" in that the chronicler describes only "the occurrences that matter to the game."¹²⁶ The writers for these White conservative southern newspaper articles are textbook examples of chroniclers, with the courtroom as the playing field. Most of these articles kept their stories within the courtroom,¹²⁷ while Black, Communist, and White liberal newspapers printed many articles on pro-Scottsboro Boys protests. Any developments happening outside the court regarding the Scottsboro case were rendered the work of misinformed outside agitators, as Crenshaw Jr. and Miller argued.¹²⁸ Confining the story to the courtroom emphasized the authority and expert power of the judge and state attorney, diverting attention from Scottsboro protests and the questions they could generate. As a tool for justifying traditional southern order, these conservative newspapers employed myths that had long been popular in the South. Given

¹²⁶ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2015), 50.

¹²⁷ "New Trials To Be Held For Negroes In Assault Case," *Birmingham News*, November 7, 1932.

¹²⁸ Crenshaw Jr. and Miller, *Scottsboro*, 9.

the class standing of Ruby Bates and Victoria Price, and then having been caught hoboing on a train, conservative writers were unable to reconstruct them into fully respectable southern women. However, by utilizing the Black rapist myth, and superimposing that on the Scottsboro Boys, reporters could make Bates and Price look vulnerable enough to garner sympathy among White southerners. By keeping the narrative in the courtroom, and deploying these southern stereotypes, White Alabama newspapers worked to reinforce the power of White Southern patriarchs to rule the state. These patriarchs, depicted as gods on earth, through White newspapers, were given both authority and a monopoly on truth, rendering ill-informed and invasive the opinions of the Supreme Court, Samuel Leibowitz, and protest around the world.

The Alabama Reds

Communism appealed to Black people in America as a tool for racial liberation, and as a defense against anti-Black violence.¹²⁹ These aspirations for freedom were recognized in 1928, at the Sixth Congress, which resulted in Comintern recognition of a Black nation with the right to self-determination in the Cotton Belt.¹³⁰ In contrast to popular images of communists, the CPUSA branch in Birmingham, Alabama, was predominantly composed of Black, Christian, and illiterate¹³¹ sharecroppers, domestic servants, and industrial workers, with no prior experience in radical politics.¹³² A year before the Scottsboro trials began, the CP of Birmingham was eighty to ninety percent Black,¹³³ and the campaign to free the Scottsboro Boys increased its Black

¹²⁹ Howard, *Black Communists Speak on Scottsboro*, 4.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹³¹ Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*, xi.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 92.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 17.

membership dramatically.¹³⁴ The Birmingham branch of the CPUSA was autonomous, and took orders from neither Moscow nor New York.¹³⁵ For Alabama's White ruling class, the CP chapter in Birmingham represented a threat to White supremacy and southern 'democracy.' The Communist newspapers purveyed political principles dialectically opposed to White reactionaries. They denounced Alabama for its racism, capitalism, and patriarchy in the most fiery fashion. Instead of limiting background information on Bates and Price to present them as decent or vulnerable, the Communist newspapers made that background information a point of emphasis and exaggeration. According to these accounts, Bates and Price were prostitutes, and the Scottsboro Nine were children and workers. Communist newspapers flipped the script followed by conservative newspapers, turning their villains into protagonists and vice versa.

One of the CP newspapers that turned the tables was the *Southern Worker*. In 1930, an editor for the *Labor Defender* and his wife traveled South to settle in Chattanooga to start the *Southern Worker*. Geographically, this was the closest Communist newspaper to the Scottsboro case, which began a year later. Catering to both Black and White proletarians, the *Southern Worker* stated in its opening editorial that the newspaper "recognizes only one division, the bosses against the workers and the workers against the bosses."¹³⁶

Another Communist newspaper that was against capitalism and racism was the *Negro Worker*. Based in Hamburg, Germany, this newspaper was the media outlet for the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers. The newspaper's chief editor, George Padmore, was a Black Communist and a courageous critic of White chauvinism,¹³⁷ as well as imperialism. The

¹³⁴ Ibid., 23.

¹³⁵ Ibid., xiv.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 16.

¹³⁷ Howard, *Black Communists Speak on Scottsboro*, 12.

Negro Worker was sold in bookstores, and smuggled into other parts of Europe, the U.S., and Africa.¹³⁸ The newspaper was also vigorously defended the plight of the Scottsboro Nine, and even took up the voice of the boys in the first-person.¹³⁹

From Teenage Hobos to Working Class Children

In the context of the Scottsboro case, CPUSA organs like the *Southern Worker* and Comintern organs like the *Negro Worker* stood firmly in defense of the Scottsboro Boys. In doing so, they portrayed the Scottsboro Nine as innocent children and workers, not as bums, or as brutes.

One article that embodies this presentation of the Scottsboro Nine as boys and workers is from the *Negro Worker*, published in July of 1931, and titled “Increase and Spread the Scottsboro Defense.”¹⁴⁰ The article contains a couple of sentences in bold text, one describing the Scottsboro Boys as “**8 Negro Workers!**” and the other describing them as “**8 Negro Boys!**”¹⁴¹ The article emphasizes the Scottsboro Nine as revolutionary workers by putting the two sentences that describe them as “PROLETARIANS” in all caps: “ONLY MIGHTY MASS PROTEST OF THE INTERNATIONAL PROLETARIAT CAN STOP THE MASS EXECUTION OF THE 8 BLACK PROLETARIANS!” and “AT THE SPECTACLE OF WORKERS OF ALL RACES RAISING THEIR FISTS IN DEFENSE OF 8 NEGRO PROLETARIANS.”¹⁴² Elsewhere, the article refers to the nine as “children.”¹⁴³ All of these

¹³⁸ Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, 7.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁴⁰ “Increase and Spread the Scottsboro Defense,” *Negro Worker*, July, 1931.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

examples are within the the context of a mass workers’ struggle to overthrow the ruling class, not just for Alabama, but for the entire U.S. as well. The article’s descriptions of the Scottsboro Boys, except those referring to them as “children,” are more or less accurate. Although they were unemployed at the time of their arrest, most of them had had jobs before and were unemployed because of the conditions of the Great Depression.¹⁴⁴ “Boys,” though a derogatory term for Black men,¹⁴⁵ is somewhat accurate since the Scottsboro Boys were all male teenagers when they were arrested, even though four of them were already adults.¹⁴⁶ Therefore, referring to the Scottsboro Nine as “children” was misleading since all of them were at teenagers except for twelve-year-old Roy Wright.¹⁴⁷ This is no mistake. “Children” is a deliberate mislabelling designed to make the nine appear even younger to garner more sympathy for their cause. While this makes the Scottsboro Boys look helpless and innocent, it also demeaned them, as the Sambo stereotype had for Black men a hundred years before.¹⁴⁸

An article from the *Southern Worker*, titled “They Shall Not Die!,” utilizes the same descriptive terms for the Scottsboro Nine: “boys,” “children,” and “workers.”¹⁴⁹ They are referred to as “boys” as the article highlights the violence Alabama enacted on them: “burning to death of the seven Negro boys in Alabama, U.S.A.”¹⁵⁰ “Boys” also showcases powerlessness: “the seven innocent Negro boys.” Unlike “Increase and Spread the Scottsboro Defense,”¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁴ Waights Taylor Jr., *Our Southern Home: Scottsboro to Montgomery to Birmingham: The Transformation of the South in the Twentieth Century* (Santa Rosa, CA: McCaa Books, 2011) 36-40.

¹⁴⁵ James Haskins, *The Scottsboro Boys*, 18.

¹⁴⁶ Nineteen-year-old Charlie Weems, eighteen-year-old Clarence Norris, nineteen-year-old Andy Wright, and eighteen-year-old Haywood Patterson; Kinshasa, *The Scottsboro Boys in Their Own Words*, 2-3.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁴⁸ Sambo was a childlike Black person who was “simple, docile, and manageable”; Williamson, *A Rage for Order*, 15.

¹⁴⁹ “They Shall Not Die!” *Negro Worker*. February/March, 1933.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ “Increase and Spread the Scottsboro Defense.”

“They Shall Not Die!” Refers only to Roy Wright as “a child of 13.”¹⁵² Eugene Williams, the second youngest of the Scottsboro Boys, is described as “a 14-year old boy.”¹⁵³ While emphasizing the defendants’ youth, the article works to rally support from working-class readers by referring to the nine as “young Negro workers.”¹⁵⁴ Within the same sentence, this is juxtaposed with the description of Ruby Bates and Victoria Price as “two white prostitutes.” This contrast functions to depict the Scottsboro Nine as respectable and Bate and Price as lecherous.¹⁵⁵

The same technique of portraying the Scottsboro Boys as bonafide proletarians and Ruby Bates and Victoria Price as licentious hookers is used in the article from the *Southern Worker* titled “Scottsboro Appeal Raises Question Of Negroes On Jury.”¹⁵⁶ In the opening paragraph, the author writes, “eight Negro working boys are in the death cells at Kilby prison, victims of a frame-up on the part of the white boss class which used two white prostitutes as their chief witnesses charging the boys with the traditional ruling class lie of ‘rape.’”¹⁵⁷ The sentence highlights the innocence and youth, and class of the Scottsboro Boys, and the dishonesty and immorality of Bates and Price. This sentence also emphasizes a dual oppression at the hands of the “traditional ruling class”: the patriarchal oppression of Bates and Price, and the White supremacist oppression of the Scottsboro Boys. Both forms of oppression were necessary for the preservation of White masculinity’s power.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵² “They Shall Not Die!”

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ “Scottsboro Appeal Raises Question Of Negroes On Jury,” *Southern Worker*, February 6, 1932.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Scott, *The Southern Lady*, 14; Messerschmidt, “‘We Must Protect Our Women’”: *Race, Gender, and Punishment*, ed. Bosworth and Flavin, 83.

Inflated Whoredom

While Communist newspapers worked to showcase the Scottsboro Boys as working-class victims of capitalism and White supremacy, in need of assistance from their proletarian comrades, Ruby Bates and Victoria Price were remade into villainous dishonest hookers. However, sex work was a primary profession for neither of them. Historian Susan Pennybacker asserts that Bates and Price were mill workers who occasionally sold sex under the table to supplement their incomes.¹⁵⁹ However, Communist newspapers took what was a sidejob for Bates and Price and made it an identity. By referring to Bates and Price as “prostitutes,”¹⁶⁰ these newspapers contested the notion that Bates and Price were violated, making it easier to garner sympathy for the Scottsboro Boys.

The femininity, decency, and honesty of Bates and Price are effectively questioned in an article from the *Southern Worker* titled “The Scottsboro Facts,”¹⁶¹ which showcases their attire and some of their background.¹⁶² In a description of the arrests made at Paint Rock, Bates and Price are referred to as “two girls dressed in overalls.”¹⁶³ Women wearing overalls were not merely unconventional; it compromised their womanhood.¹⁶⁴ The article also describes Bates and Price as “notorious prostitutes.”¹⁶⁵ Not only was it a declaration of war for Communists to call southern White women prostitutes; it was also taboo just to say “prostitute.”¹⁶⁶ The article goes

¹⁵⁹ Pennybacker, *From Scottsboro to Munich*, 23.

¹⁶⁰ “The Scottsboro Facts,” *Southern Worker*, April 25, 1931; “Prove Scottsboro Frame-Up Before Ala. Supreme Court,” *Southern Worker*, January 30, 1932.

¹⁶¹ “The Scottsboro Facts.”

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ In 1886, there was a story in the *Minneapolis Tribune* about a woman who had been arrested for wearing “a man’s suit”; Tim Cresswell, “Embodiment, Power and the Politics of Mobility: The Case of Female Tramps and Hobos,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 24, no. 2 (1999): 175.

¹⁶⁵ “The Scottsboro Facts.”

¹⁶⁶ D. W. Maurer, “Language and the Sex Revolution: World War I through World War II,” *American Speech* 51, no. ½ (1976): 9.

on to contest the South's racial hierarchy by mentioning that "Ruby Bates had previously been arrested for 'hugging' a Negro on one of the main streets of Chattanooga."¹⁶⁷ For the newspaper's readers, this article affirmed that Bates and Price were lying, and the Scottsboro Nine were innocent victims of Jim Crow and capitalism.

The patriarchal defense of White womanhood is mocked in an article from the *Southern Worker* titled "Prove Scottsboro Frame-Up Before Ala. Supreme Court."¹⁶⁸ The article accuses Attorney General Thomas Knight of having "indulged in the usual twaddle about Southerners 'protecting their women,' never seeming to realize that the two products of a rotten capitalist system, Ruby Bates and Victoria Price, when paraded as typical southern women, were hardly flattering to the majority of women."¹⁶⁹ The article thus suggests that, while the ruling class exploited Bates and Price to reinforce its dominance, it also made a mockery of southern White womanhood. This rape case gave Bates and Price an opportunity to be remade into "virtuous southern white women,"¹⁷⁰ hence casting doubt on the standard for southern White womanhood. "Prove Scottsboro Frame-Up Before Ala. Supreme Court" refers to Ruby Bates and Victoria Price as "prostitutes" three times, each time with a different blow to their womanhood: honesty, class status, and morality.¹⁷¹ At the beginning of the article, the author attributes the death sentences that the Scottsboro Boys had received to "the perjured testimony of two white prostitutes," Bates and Price.¹⁷² Given the disreputability associated with prostitutes, repeatedly

¹⁶⁷ "The Scottsboro Facts."

¹⁶⁸ "Prove Scottsboro Frame-Up Before Ala. Supreme Court."

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Sorensen, *The Scottsboro Boys Trial*, 11.

¹⁷¹ "Prove Scottsboro Frame-Up Before Ala. Supreme Court."

¹⁷² Ibid.

referring to Bates and Price as such could only further embolden *Southern Worker* readers to stand in defense of the Scottsboro Nine's guiltlessness.

Later in the article, the class of Ruby Bates and Victoria Price is highlighted by the author's referring to, "two white prostitutes, Ruby Bates and Victoria Price, who were 'bumming' their way on a freight train, when they claimed they were attacked by Negroes."¹⁷³ By deploying the word 'bumming' in quotes suggests that these women were lower class and out of place for women. The male tramp was a menace to society as a potential rapist and threat to family unity. However, the female tramp was perhaps a greater peril because of the implication of families being without women: the backbone of societal morals.¹⁷⁴ Within the same paragraph, Bates and Price are referred to as "two witnesses upon whose testimony eight of the boys were sentenced to the electric chair, were prostitutes, notorious for their catering to Negro patronage."¹⁷⁵ This may be an exaggeration, an effort to suggest that having intercourse with Black men was what these women were best known for. Nonetheless, some of their neighbors did know. Someone on the street apparently overheard Price asking a Black man about his genitals.¹⁷⁶ Additionally, claiming that Bates and Price have a reputation for interracial sexual relations raises questions for their accusations of rape. This would suggest to the *Southern Worker's* readership that consual sex between Bates, Price, and the Scottsboro Boys had occurred instead of rape, a scenario unimaginable to Alabama's ruling class.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Cresswell, "Embodiment, Power and the Politics of Mobility," 182.

¹⁷⁵ "Prove Scottsboro Frame-Up Before Ala. Supreme Court."

¹⁷⁶ Sorensen, *The Scottsboro Boys Trial*, 10.

Just as the White newspapers made concerted efforts to conceal the identities of Ruby Bates, Victoria Price, and Scottsboro Boys by allowing the court testimony, and rape accusations, to tell the story, Communist newspapers worked hard to expose and exaggerate those same identities. Instead of Bates and Price being decent and vulnerable, they were lying whores. Instead of them being predatory rapists, the Scottsboro Nine were working class children. However, in Communist newspapers Bates and Price were only villains to the extent that they were willing to lie, and get several Black teenagers killed, just to get out of trouble. At bottom, the women were victims just like the Scottsboro Boys. Furthermore, it is ironic that Bates and Price were othered by communist newspapers because they were working-class like many of its readers were. The act of othering Bates and Price prioritized building interracial class unity over building class solidarity among all working class people; an implication of how influential race politics was to the Comintern.

The Redness of Black News

In the early twentieth century, a mass migration sent Black people from the South to northern cities, for greater social and economic opportunities,¹⁷⁷ as well as physical safety. Between 1910 and 1930, over a million Black people left the South, and half of them settled in Pittsburgh, New York, Detroit, Cleveland and Chicago.¹⁷⁸ Black newspapers were one of the

¹⁷⁷ E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in the United States*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966), 225-226.

¹⁷⁸ Kimberley L. Phillips, *AlabamaNorth: African-American Migrants, Community, and Working Class Activism in Cleveland, 1915-1945* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 17.

primary voices for these bustling Black communities.¹⁷⁹ This included the *Cleveland Call & Post* and the *Chicago Defender*.

The post-war migration to Cleveland from the South tripled the city's Black population. In forging a new urban community, these rapidly growing Black communities embraced ways to express their cultures, strove for political equality, and established new churches, businesses, and other organizations.¹⁸⁰ According to historian Kimberley Phillips, communities growing in Cleveland were composed of many Black migrants from Alabama,¹⁸¹ laying the groundwork for a unique connection between Black Cleveland and the plight of the Scottsboro Nine. During the Great Depression, increasing poverty and exclusion from wage earning jobs pushed many Black Clevelanders to act more militantly and join more radical organizations such as the Future Outlook League,¹⁸² or the Communist Party.¹⁸³

One of the first Communist rallies to free the Scottsboro Boys was in Cleveland, and from the newspaper's inception in 1934 until 1950, the *Cleveland Call & Post* covered the Scottsboro case.¹⁸⁴ The newspaper was so invested in the case that its editor, local politician William Walker, began a donations drive to send the Scottsboro Boys Christmas presents. Donations included "socks, cash, candy, tobacco, stamps, food and other clothing."¹⁸⁵ Walker was well educated, having earned a B. A. in journalism from Wilberforce University and an M. B. A. from Oberlin Business College. Walker's northern educated and age-based bias led him to

¹⁷⁹ Felecia G. Jones Ross, "Mobilizing the Masses: The *Cleveland Call and Post* and the Scottsboro Incident," *The Journal of Negro History* 84, no. 1 (1999): 48.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁸¹ Phillips, *AlabamaNorth*, 15-16.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁸³ Ross, "Mobilizing the Masses," 51.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 53-54.

depict Scottsboro Nine being as helpless children and animals, dependent on out-of-state aid.

These elitist and counterintuitive representations were constructed by Walker to garner sympathy for the Scottsboro youths for contributions to his Christmas donations drive, in alignment with a campaign to free the Scottsboro Boys.

Similar race-based economic hardships and sociopolitical developments took place in Chicago as well. Black migrants from the South after the Great War created new class divisions in Black neighborhoods, partially due to the greater capital and education of the old Black residents, who then moved to the periphery of the city.¹⁸⁶ Black residents made Black workers a significant factor in local industries and led to a variety of new jobs.¹⁸⁷ Due to the efforts of CPUSA to fight poverty, racism, and hold interracial social events, by 1931, almost a quarter of Chicago's communists were Black.¹⁸⁸ Among Chicago's Black Communists were intellectuals such as Harry Haywood and Richard Wright.¹⁸⁹ With that said, it was no surprise that the *Chicago Defender*, one of the most prominent Black newspapers in the nation, often took a position in its coverage of the Scottsboro case that resembled Communist newspapers. The *Chicago Defender* depicted Ruby Bates and Victoria Price in a scathing light as unreliable White trash. This slander against Bates and Price acted as the newspaper's main defense for the Scottsboro Nine.

Santa Claus from Cleveland

¹⁸⁶ Frazier, *The Negro Family in the United States*, 295.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 296.

¹⁸⁸ Howard, *Black Communists Speak on Scottsboro*, 9.

¹⁸⁹ Michael C. Dawson, *Blacks in and out of the Left* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 2.

While articles about community organizing can be commonly found in the *Cleveland Call & Post*,¹⁹⁰ the representations deployed for aiding the Scottsboro Nine were uniquely dramatic. With the donations drive proposed to send Christmas gifts to the Scottsboro Boys, it was necessary for the *Cleveland Call & Post* to portray these young men as helpless children, who relied on outside assistance to survive. These demeaning depictions removed agency from the Scottsboro Nine and reveal Walker's snobbish bias.

One article from the *Cleveland Call & Post* that reflects this effort is titled "Scottsboro Boys Getting Restless In Jail As Fight For Their Lives Drags On."¹⁹¹ Released on January 13th, 1934, it is one of the first articles from the *Cleveland Call & Post* on the Scottsboro case. In his encounter with the Scottsboro Boys in prison, William Walker writes that, "The boys eyed me rather suspiciously so I had to do something to put them at ease and relieve the tension."¹⁹² While Walker describes the boys and men, his account resembles that of someone approaching a territorial pack of wild animals, a pack that needed to be approached carefully. Walker further reinforced this boys-as-animals image when describing the youngest of the Scottsboro Boys, sixteen-year-old Roy Wright. Walker wrote, "He is a rather nice looking boy and appeared fairly intelligent. He appeared nervous and restless."¹⁹³ This implicitly imparted Walker's condescension for the Scottsboro Nine. "Nervous and restless" suggested that Wright had not received proper care by those responsible for him. The use of the word "intelligent," in this

¹⁹⁰ "Housewives League Starts Canvassing Homes Monday," *Cleveland Call & Post*, January 13, 1934; "Aggra Junior League To Continue Charity Work," *Cleveland Call & Post*, January 13, 1934; "Colored Wards Seek To Become Self Sustaining Clubs Being Organized," *Cleveland Call & Post*, January 20, 1934.

¹⁹¹ William O. Walker, "Scottsboro Boys Getting Restless In Jail As Fight For Their Lives Drags On," *Cleveland Call & Post*, January 13, 1934.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

context, suggests that intelligence was not necessarily common among others like him. Walker conjures up this caged animal depiction again when he writes,

As the sun streamed in from the window, the boys' eyes looked longingly to the freedom that was outside and while they did not complain, it was very evident how their poor hearts were longing for these jail doors to open and empty them into the streets so they could go about their business just as they did prior to their arrest March 25, 1931.¹⁹⁴

Later in the article, Walker goes even further, literally describing Wright as a “mustang” looking to break free of its stable and run wild. “Roy’s youthfulness has naturally made him restless at the delay and like a young mustang, he chafes at the bit.”¹⁹⁵ While Walker’s portrayal of Roy Wright as an animal may have garnered sympathy to help the cause for the Scottsboro Boys, it also degraded Wright.

Still, Walker also renders the Scottsboro boys as being clearly human children in the same article. In referring directly to his Christmas gift drive, he asked them,

had old Santa penetrated the fastness of their iron barred cells and brought them cheer. A chorus of no’s greeted me. They had been forgotten. They had received no Christmas presents, no Christmas cards or anything that told them that the thousands of people on the outside who constantly talk about them had even remember them in the least bit.¹⁹⁶

This direct evocation of pathos is meant to encourage Walker’s readers to save the lives of boys and men he describes as abandoned. Walker implies that his readers knew well who the Scottsboro Boys were, and that it is their responsibility to send them gifts because he also implies that they were young enough to anticipate Santa’s arrival. Walker perpetuates their depiction as neglected children while calling for Black Cleveland’s support by writing, “These

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

boys were placing all of their hopes in me, a total stranger to them, but at last somebody they could tell their personal wants to. To them I was gradually being turned into a Santa Claus.”¹⁹⁷

Walker renders a situation in which the Scottsboro Boys were so deserted and deprived that they had turned to a newcomer in desperation. It was an act of faith more common among children than among adults. While being showcased as children is an upgrade from being rendered to animals, it nonetheless demeans the Scottsboro Nine, makes them younger than they were.

A week after the previous article was published,¹⁹⁸ another came out in the *Cleveland Call & Post* which augmented the notion of the Scottsboro Boys as helpless children. In the article titled, “Failure Of Santa Claus To Visit Scottsboro Boys Made Christmas Week A Sad Time For Them,”¹⁹⁹ Walker describes the feelings of the Scottsboro Boys. “It seemed as if their eager hearts had just hoped against hope that somewhere, somehow a real Santa would visit them.”²⁰⁰ Only innocent children are spoken of as having “eager hearts” and waiting for a “real Santa.” Walker reinforces this image of the Scottsboro Boys as abandoned good-natured kids when he writes, “I hope we will be able to assemble these things within the next two weeks so we can send them on to Birmingham and put a little sunshine into the hearts of these boys and let them know that they have not been forgotten.”²⁰¹ In this instance, Walker depicts the Scottsboro Nine as helpless warm-hearted children to create a sense of urgency in delivering the gifts to the Scottsboro prison, while still fighting for their release.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ William O. Walker, “Failure Of Santa Claus To Visit Scottsboro Boys Made Christmas Week A Sad Time For Them,” *Cleveland Call & Post*, January 20, 1934.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

However, Walker is unable to maintain this childish image when he listed what the Scottsboro Boys were asking for. For example, Walker writes, “The next thing they wanted was smokes and stamps. As you know, people confined in jails are comforted greatly by smokes.”²⁰² While older children smoked cigarettes, smoking was a practice still more often associated with adults. Furthermore, Walker explains that these Black boys and men need cigarettes because “people,” not boys, in prison, are “comforted” by cigarettes. This implies that these were adults, not children. “A book of stamps, a package or carton of cigarettes, as many socks as you can afford, a sweater, a hat or a pair of shoes. Don’t delay, make your contribution at once. Bring or send anything you have for these boys to THE CLEVELAND CALL & POST, 2319 E. 55TH St.”²⁰³ While Walker mentions that the the Scottsboro Boys want “cigarettes,” this is immediately followed by a list of a essential articles of clothing, and a couple sentences later, a reference to the young Black men as “boys.” Therefore, Walker can request cigarettes from his Black readers while still leaving them with an image of the Scottsboro Boys as desperate neglected sweet-hearted children, incapable of rape.

“A Typical Southern Back-Woods Woman”

The *Chicago Defender* was one of the nation’s leading Black newspapers in the early 1930s. With a relatively high percentage of Black Chicagoans in the Communist Party during this time, the newspaper often used representations that resembled those found in the Communist newspapers. This was especially true of the *Chicago Defender*’s depictions of Ruby Bates and Victoria Price, which were as harsh as those in Communist newspapers. Just as White southern

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid.

newspapers construct beasts out of the Scottsboro Boys to make Bates and Price appear innocent, the Black newspapers built tramps out of Bates and Price to make the Scottsboro Nine innocent.

In a *Chicago Defender* article titled “Entire Nation Aroused at Scottsboro Case,”²⁰⁴ the unreliability of Bates and Price is constructed by the author’s highlighting their poor reputations. The author writes “The names of Ruby Bates and Victoria Price are said to be known in these parts, and not as those of any decent woman for whom eight boys should be put to death. The fact that they were travelling in a freight train dressed as boys is also cited as proof that they were not to be taken too seriously.”²⁰⁵ This masculinization of Bates and Price undermines their intent to pose as reputable. The combined hoboining, masculine clothing, and reputations of the White women functions to gravitate sympathy towards the Scottsboro Boys.

In a *Chicago Defender* op-ed titled “What Price Martyrdom?”²⁰⁶ the White socialist writer Vera Caspary writes about Bates and Price with both condescension and sympathy.

Caspary writes,

Have you read anything of the histories of the two girls, Victoria Price and Ruby Bates, who accused the boys of rape upon the insistent suggestion (that’s how the reports of the case read, anyway) of the white officers who arrested the boys? Ruby and Victoria were pretty poor specimens of the untouchable white woman whose purity must be protected at all costs. Ignorant, poverty stricken, not very clean, they were the type called “poor white” and “lowest of the low” by the respectable whites of the ruling classes.²⁰⁷

In this passage, Caspary mocks the myth of chaste White womanhood by emphasizing the low class and ‘uncleanliness’ of Bates and Price. She also implies the Scottsboro Nine are innocent by doubting the newspapers who covered the rape accusations from the two women. However,

²⁰⁴ “Entire Nation Aroused at Scottsboro Case,” *Chicago Defender*, June 13, 1931.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Vera Caspary, “What Price Martyrdom?” *Chicago Defender*, January 9, 1932.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

like the Communist newspapers, Caspary places blame on the system, not the main players involved. “It was not until the rich and respectable southerners, the high-class promoters of ‘culture’ and ‘beautiful home life,’ put into their heads the idea that they should turn against these boys, accusing them of a crime punishable by death, that the girls felt prejudice.”²⁰⁸

Caspary suggests that Bates and Price, like the Scottsboro Boys, were pawns in a capitalist game played by the White ruling class. Nonetheless, this framing of the Scottsboro Case also renders the young Black men and boys faultless.

Investigative journalist J. Winston Harrington also wrote an article in the *Chicago Defender* that smears Bates and Price. Unlike Caspary’s article, his is more unforgiving. Harrington writes,

This Victoria Price is a typical southern back-woods woman. She has stringy, straight black hair, which she wears coiled around her head. Her voice, harsh and strident, is pitched high as she tells of what she says happened to her on that train. Although it has been more than two years, she doesn’t seem to have forgotten a line. But she kept her eyes pointed either up or down as she talks.²⁰⁹

Not only does Harrington attack Price’s class standing, he makes a sexist attack on her attire and her behavior. Her hair is “stringy,” and is “coiled around her head.” Her voice is “harsh and strident.”²¹⁰ Harrington’s description makes Price, from an audio and visual standpoint, filthy and unbearable, forcibly driving away liberal sympathy. Harrington works to drive even more sympathy away when he writes, “Several times during her testimony she refused to answer questions put to her by Mr. Leibowitz. One of those, touching on her reputation as a prostitute, Mr. Knight advised her not to answer.”²¹¹ Harrington suggests that Price is much worse than

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ J. Winston Harrington, “Scottsboro Trial Nears End As State’s Frameup Charges Fail,” *Chicago Defender*, April 8, 1933.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid.

court testimony can show because she, in cooperation with the Alabama court, deliberately withheld information to defend herself, and more importantly, the myth of southern womanhood. In framing this elaborate sociopolitical scheme, Harrington provides quite a bit of sympathy for the Scottsboro Boys.

In representing the Scottsboro Nine, the *Chicago Defender* minimizes information about them, just like southern White newspapers did for Ruby Bates and Victoria Price. In “Entire Nation Aroused at Scottsboro Case,” The Scottsboro Nine and men are referred to as “eight young boys,”²¹² while in “What Price Martyrdom?” they are the “Scottsboro Boys.”²¹³ Additionally, both articles mention the Scottsboro Nine as “boys” alluding to them only in the context of them being on death row, and explicitly express the opinion that the Black youths are innocent.²¹⁴ While including more background information on the Scottsboro Nine does not hinder the capacity of these Black newspapers to gather sympathy for the Black boys and men, it is unnecessary. Making villains and pawns out of Bates and Price is enough by itself.

As soon as the campaign to free the Scottsboro Nine gained traction, both of these newspapers came aboard. The campaign gave these newspapers a political agenda that reduced both accusers and defendants to inaccurate and shallow representations. In the *Chicago Defender*, Ruby Bates and Victoria Price are depicted as renowned liars, tramps, and hookers, who acted in self-interest, but even more so, in the interests of the White ruling class. Within those same articles, nothing is said about the Scottsboro Boys beyond their being young and innocent. In the *Cleveland Call & Post*, editor William Walker was so hell-bent on constructing

²¹² “Entire Nation Aroused at Scottsboro Case.”

²¹³ Caspary, “What Price Martyrdom?”

²¹⁴ “Entire Nation Aroused at Scottsboro Case”; Caspary, “What Price Martyrdom?”

the defendants as innocent for his Christmas donations drive that he lost sight of his own relative privilege, and reduced them to children and animals. The use of animal depictions was especially problematic in that it might evoke fears of Black males akin to what historian Joel Williamson called “Negro retrogression.”²¹⁵ Both of these newspapers saw the Scottsboro case as the epitome of everything that was wrong with the South. All of these representations from the two newspapers degrades both defendants and accusers, and showcases them as ignorant and helpless characters within a real life American epic.

Northern Elitists

In the early years of the Great Depression, as well as in the previous few decades, most White Americans either favored Jim Crow, and other race exclusion laws, or showed no concern of knowledge of the plight of Black Americans.²¹⁶ Like White America at large President Franklin Delano Roosevelt kept quiet when it came to Black rights,²¹⁷ knowing the Dixiecrats were an essential part of the Democratic coalition.²¹⁸ This hostility to Black civil rights facilitated disregard for anti-discrimination rules by northern employers,²¹⁹ the promotion of segregation by the Federal Housing Administration,²²⁰ and the exclusion of sixty-five percent of Black workers from coverage by the Social Security Act.²²¹ While W. E. B. Du Bois’s theory of Black progress

²¹⁵ Williamson, *A Rage for Order*, 79.

²¹⁶ Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal For Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue*, vol. 1, *The Depression Decade*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 33.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 41.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 45.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 48.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 50.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 52.

gained favor with some northern White liberals,²²² America's White ruling class by and large did not care about the plight of Black Americans.

These attitudes towards race were reflected in the national newspapers of the North, such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. Nowhere was it more evident than in the Scottsboro case. These White national newspapers looked down on the accusers, defendants, and courtroom attendees, viewing them all as inferiors who lacked education. While the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* showcases Victoria Price as a poor untruthful whore, depicts blue-collar White southerners as savages, and even hints at the racial injustice of the case, they in no way made the Scottsboro Nine look respectable. Like the White southern newspapers, the White liberal newspapers in the North often refer to those boys as "Negroes."

Condescending Sympathy

In an article in the *Washington Post* titled "Police Club Woman In Scottsboro Protest," the Scottsboro Boys are rendered explicitly genderless, and are identified only by age, race, and location. This short article mentions the Black males only as "nine Scottsboro, Ala., Negro youths."²²³ It is implied that they were male only by mentioning that they attacked "two women."²²⁴ Although the young Black men and boys supposedly committed a crime, the article does mention that "approximately 500" people protested the convictions by Alabama, and their signs that read, "justice for Scottsboro martyrs," were being removed by police.²²⁵ This implies that

²²² Williamson, *A Rage for Order*, 65-67.

²²³ "Police Club Woman In Scottsboro Protest," *Washington Post*, May 8, 1932.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Ibid.

readers are skeptical of the convictions, but with snobbish White chauvinist sympathy: the Scottsboro Nine might be innocent, but they are still young and Black, and lack manhood.

Five months after “Police Club Woman In Scottsboro Protest”²²⁶ was released, the *Washington Post* came out with yet another article reducing the Scottsboro Boys to their race and location. That article is titled “Scottsboro Trial Up As Higher Court Reopens Tomorrow.”²²⁷ The article refers to the Black men and boys only three times, as “Alabamans,” “Alabama Negroes,” and simply “Negroes.”²²⁸ Like “Police Club Woman In Scottsboro Protest,” this article only implies the defendants’ masculinity by mentioning that they had assaulted “two White women.”²²⁹ This article expresses the blatant racial apathy of much of the White northern bourgeoisie. Halfway through the article, the author quickly transitions from the Scottsboro case to “more important cases” in Texas regarding oil, cases in Florida and Kentucky involving taxes, and a case in Chicago about real estate.²³⁰ America’s White ruling class prioritized all significant financial matters above any Black lives, regardless of the predicament. This supercilious indifference only further disparages the Scottsboro Nine, who are already being explicitly denied of their humanity.

Like the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times* makes no effort to portray the Black men and boys as reputable. An article titled “Fight For Negroes Opens In Alabama” mentions the Scottsboro Nine multiple times, but only as “Negroes,” and prisoners.²³¹ If anything, the article suggests that the Black males on trial are disreputable, when its author, Raymond F. Daniell,

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ “Scottsboro Trial Up As Higher Court Reopens Tomorrow,” *Washington Post*, October 2, 1932.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Raymond F. Daniell, “Fight For Negroes Opens In Alabama,” *New York Times*, March 28, 1933.

writes that in the Black section of the courthouse, “the Negroes were chatting and joking among themselves as Judge Horton called the court to order.”²³² Due to discourse beyond their control, racism makes the Scottsboro Boys symbols for the Black race. If any Black people at the trials appear uncivil, so are the Scottsboro Nine. The irony here is that the entire article is about the primary defense lawyer, Samuel Leibowitz of New York, who tries to prove to the judge and jury that Black people are intelligent and reliable enough to serve on Alabama juries.²³³ In short, while Leibowitz is presented as a respectable professional for trying to make the Alabama juries more racially democratic, the young Black men are maintained as subhumans, unworthy of recognition beyond their Blackness in singular.

The Homewrecking Hobo

Being situated mostly in the North, White liberal newspapers reflected northern ideas of womanhood. Unlike the South, the North did not have sacred women to defend. When it came to Ruby Bates and Victoria Price, not only did these newspapers not defend them, they maligned them. White liberal newspapers, especially the *New York Times*, roast Bates and Price for their class, reputations, and sexualities. While these newspapers do not call the women “notorious prostitutes,”²³⁴ they describe them in ways that were equally stigmatizing.

One article was especially damaging to Price’s reputation in that it revealed some of the more damning background information on her. A couple paragraphs in, the article describes Price’s frustrations from the direct examination administered by Leibowitz, mentioning that “her lip curled and she snapped her answers in the colloquialisms of the ‘poor white,’” highlighting

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ “The Scottsboro Facts,” *Southern Worker*, April 25, 1931.

Price's low economic class status and lack of education.²³⁵ The article further works to discredit Price as a reputable woman by stating that Lebowitz sought to prove that the way in which she was found on the freight train "was the result of her misconduct the night before in the hobo jungle on the outskirts of Chattanooga." The article also mentions that Price "had been arrested for offenses against the moral code," and "that she had wrecked the home of a married woman with two babies."²³⁶ This suggests that Price lacks chastity, and therefore, lacks credibility.

As if Price's class status and lewd record were not enough to convince the reader of her perjury, the medical evidence via the testimony of Dr. R. R. Bridges, under direct examination by Leibowitz, revealed that "only superficial bruises and scratches" were found on Price and Bates.²³⁷ These results directly contradict Price's claim that she cut on her head from "a blow from the butt of a pistol."²³⁸

The article then takes a sardonic turn in its description of the outfit Price wore to court: "Mrs. Price came to court wearing a black dress with a fichu of white lace at the throat. The little blue straw hat on her head was enlivened by a small red feather sticking above the crown. A string of glass beads adorned her neck and on three fingers of her left hand were large and showy rings."²³⁹ Given the class and gender-based scorn against Price earlier in the article, the image of Price in fancy clothing renders her court performance a mere parody of a respectable southern white woman. Price's wearing multiple rings was especially discrediting. Respectable women wore only one, and since Price had not recognized this herself, she appeared foolish. The article reported that Leibowitz himself suggests a performance on Price's part, telling her, "You're a

²³⁵ F. Raymond Daniell, "Girl Repeats Story In Scottsboro Case," *New York Times*, April 4, 1933.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Ibid.

little bit of an actress, aren't you?" To which Price replied, "You're a pretty good actor yourself."²⁴⁰ Price did indeed have personal interests that she was performing for: redirecting attention from her history to her new victimhood and avoiding going to jail for hobbing on a train. By the end the article, Price even incriminates herself by identifying herself in photos, "showing one of the girls with a Negro." Leibowitz uses this evidence "to show that Mrs. Price was on friendly terms with Negroes." This was blasphemy to southern social code on its own,²⁴¹ but also ironic considering whom she was accusing of rape: nine Black teenagers.²⁴²

Although this article does not explicitly defend the Scottsboro Nine, the defamation of Victoria Price, combined with the satirization of her trial performance, likely generated skepticism among *New York Times* readers regarding her innocence. Most of this criticism for Price was gendered, noting her "offenses against the moral code," her status as a homewrecker, and providing a rather detailed description of her courtroom attire.²⁴³

As damaging as "Girl Repeats Story In Scottsboro Case" was to Price's claims, the *New York Times* put out yet another article that portrayed not only Price, but also Ruby Bates, as dishonest and licentious. The article opens by referring to Bates and Price as "white girl hobos,"²⁴⁴ attacking both the class and the anxiety that the image of female tramps evoked.²⁴⁵ The author, F. Raymond Daniell, gives Price another blow when he explicitly states that she had lied, writing "The jury, however, chose to believe the Price woman, who stuck to the main part of her story,

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Following the Civil War, newly attained Black political freedoms were repressed by more rigid and violent racial segregation. Part of this new segregation was the new expectation of poor White women to share the responsibility with rich White women to preserve the perceived purity of the white race; Hodes, *White Women, Black Men*, 199-201.

²⁴² Daniell, "Girl Repeats Story In Scottsboro Case."

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ F. Raymond Daniell, "Negro Found Guilty In Scottsboro Case," *New York Times*, April 10, 1933.

²⁴⁵ Cresswell, "Embodiment, Power and the Politics of Mobility," 176.

although uncontradicted evidence was presented to show that she did not tell the truth about her activities in Chattanooga.”²⁴⁶ In one comment, Daniell presents to a national audience exactly what Judge Callahan and Attorney General Knight had worked so vigorously to conceal: Price was lying for herself and out of necessity for the South.²⁴⁷ Lies needed to be the truth to uphold southern order, composed of patriarchy and White supremacy. It is no wonder that “the jury admitted that they did not consider the testimony of the Bates girl.”²⁴⁸ Bates betrayed the White ruling class by telling the truth. Any southerner who sided with Bates would have had to leave the region.²⁴⁹ Daniell could write whatever he wanted. In the North, he was safe from harm’s way in New York, unlike Leibowitz and the Scottsboro Boys, who needed armed protection.

While the *Washington Post* does not humiliate Price to the same degree the *New York Times* did, it does portray Bates and Price with clear disregard for southern womanhood. In an article titled “Court Sets Aside Scottsboro Ruling,” Price’s class standing is mocked again when she was referred to as a “white girl hobo.”²⁵⁰ After referring to Bates and Price respectfully as “Mrs. Victoria Price and Ruby Bates,” the article ends by reminding readers that the women were “on a freight train in Northern Alabama,” or to be more concise, they were tramps.²⁵¹

In the article “Negro Found Guilty In Scottsboro Case,” Daniell writes that, “The only Negro present was the janitor of the court house [sic], who stood silently turning his cap around

²⁴⁶ Daniell, “Negro Found Guilty In Scottsboro Case.”

²⁴⁷ Acker, *Scottsboro and Its Legacy*, 102-103, 111

²⁴⁸ Daniell, “Negro Found Guilty In Scottsboro Case.”

²⁴⁹ It is for this reason that Dr. Lynch, who had examined Ruby Bates and Victoria Price, refused to testify that he strongly believed that the women had lied; Goodman, *Stories of Scottsboro*, 175-176.

²⁵⁰ “Court Sets Aside Scottsboro Ruling.” *Washington Post*, June 23, 1933.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

in his hands as he waited.”²⁵² Highlighting the race and class marginalization of the janitor, the scene perfectly reflects the attitudes of White northern liberals of the 1930s. While racial injustice was recognized, here in the turning cap of the janitor, their concerns were not great enough to change the status quo. This was the national northern-bent attitude towards the Scottsboro Nine: Black, poor, uneducated, and therefore, unworthy of much attention.

As for Ruby Bates and Victoria Price, White liberal newspapers cared even less. By having their low class status and interracial sexualities showcased on the national stage, their ability to pose as respectable women to attract sympathy was mainly limited to White southern conservatives. Unlike the South, the North had no socioeconomic reasons to defend this stereotype that dialectically opposed Bates and Price.²⁵³ It is safe to say that White national newspapers viewed both the accusers and the defendants in the Scottsboro case with great condescension, reducing the Bates and Price to tramps and the Scottsboro Boys to Black males deficient in masculinity.²⁵⁴

Immortal Ideologies

In the British documentary *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology*, Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek reenacts the scene in James Cameron's *Titanic* in which Jack Dawson has frozen to death, and Rose DeWitt Bukater breaks his grasp on her arm and pushes him underwater.

²⁵² Daniell, “Negro Found Guilty In Scottsboro Case.”

²⁵³ Southern belles were supposed to be modest; Anne F. Scott, *The Southern Lady*, 4-7. Belles could only resemble southern women living in the top ten percent; Sharon McKern, *Redneck Mothers, Good Ol' Girls and Other Southern Belles* (New York: The Viking Press, 1979), 10.

²⁵⁴ Among popular ideas on race was the notion that the ‘superior’ White race had more defined gender distinctions, hoisting up White masculinity as the supreme gender. Demasculinizing the Scottsboro Boys functioned as a covert means to reinforce White supremacy; Messerschmidt, “‘We Must Protect Our Women’”: *Race, Gender, and Punishment*, ed. Bosworth and Flavin, 78.

Playing the role of Dawson's corpse being pushed underwater, Žižek exclaimed, "I may be freezing to death, but you will never get rid of me; all the ice in the world cannot kill a true idea."²⁵⁵ Žižek's statement was not boldly claiming his ideas to be true; he was referring to the permanence of ideologies. Historian Joel Williamson argues that the Black rapist myth had fallen out of fashion by the 1920s, yet it was present in the Scottsboro case.²⁵⁶ A hundred years later, Dylann Roof and Paul LePage espoused ideas closely linked to the Black rapist and the notion of Black retrogression.²⁵⁷ These ideologies outlive their creators and their popularity, becoming inseparable components to our realities. In *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema*, the precursor to *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology*, Žižek argues that "If you take away from our reality the symbolic fictions that regulate it, you lose reality itself."²⁵⁸ The White conservative, White liberal, Communist, and northern Black newspapers did not simply construct distorted representations of the accusers and defendants for their own political agendas; they built and augmented separate realities. These newspapers served as primary purveyors of knowledge to their readers. Historian Joan Wallach Scott claims that "knowledge is not absolute or true, but always relative.... Its uses and meanings become contested politically and are the means by which relationships of power...are constructed."²⁵⁹ It was these knowledge-based ideological realities that formed the basis for stereotypes and representations utilized in press coverage of the Scottsboro case and in

²⁵⁵ *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology*, directed by Sophie Fiennes (Sophie Fiennes, Katie Holly, Martin Rosenbaum, and James Wilson, 2012), DVD (Zeitgeist Films, 2014).

²⁵⁶ Williamson, *A Rage for Order*, 234.

²⁵⁷ "Negro retrogression" was the notion that without White male supervision, Black men would lose their obedience and civility and degenerate into violent uncontrollable hypersexual beasts, who sought out White women to defile; Ibid., 78, 201.

²⁵⁸ *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema*, directed by Sophie Fiennes (Amoeba Film, Lone Star, Mischief Films), DVD (P Guide Ltd. and ICA Projects, 2006).

²⁵⁹ Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, 2nd ed., (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 2.

the case itself.²⁶⁰ The newspapers I have examined reconfigured the accusers and defendants into heroes, villains, and victims. This reflected the political agendas of the newspapers to maintain or challenge the power structures that gave rise to the case. The representations of Ruby Bates, Victoria Price, and the Scottsboro Nine reflected the relationships of the newspapers to interlocking sociopolitical and economic power structures.

Among the four sets of newspapers examined here, only the White southern papers tried to portray Bates and Price as decent, because they were the only newspapers that directly mirrored the interests of the southern White ruling class. After all, the patriarchs of the South had constructed for themselves a precious and fragile White womanhood. The poverty and interracial sexual relations of Bates and Price were not merely grounds for liberal and Communist ridicule, making the women into tramps and hookers, but also a challenge to the realities constructed by the South's White male managers.

As for the Scottsboro Boys, their representations had a bit more variation. In White Alabama newspapers, they were beastly rapists, who along with Communists, were the greatest threats to southern order and the power of the White ruling class. The Communist newspapers depicted them as either boys or workers, and always as victims; using the Scottsboro Nine to build solidarity among young workers across racial divides. Northern Black newspapers, especially the *Cleveland Call & Post*, worked so vigorously to display the innocence of the Scottsboro Boys that they not only reduced them to children, but reconstructed them into animals as well. These portrayals were an ironic departure from the political ideology of the Black papers serving burgeoning northern communities. While the White national press was sympathetic to

²⁶⁰ Hazel V. Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 20.

the Scottsboro Nine, they were ultimately too poor, too Black, and too uneducated for White northerners to sustain concern.

Whether they were for or against those on trial, these newspapers all recognized the same prevailing class, gender, and race hierarchies. They deployed stereotypes to confirm their ideologies, and unknowingly worked in concert with each other to reduce Bates, Price, and the Scottsboro Nine to one-dimensional cut-outs, whose humanity had been obliterated in the production of knowledge.

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