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Daily OPINION

PATRICK'S POLITICS:

THE CORNELL RAPE CASE SHOULD ENRAGE YOU

Content Warning: *The following article contains discussions of sexism, sexual assault, sexual violence against women and rape. Student survivors of sexual assault can receive crisis counseling and a free sexual assault forensics exam through Student Health and Wellness. SHaW's 24/7 Advice Nurse can be reached at 860-486-4700.*



FILE LOGO/THE DAILY CAMPUS

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Seven men. Seven hours. Irreparable damage.

Over the past week, the world has come to know the horrifying rape that took place at Cornell University. If what happened at a Chi Phi fraternity house at Cornell on Oct. 19, 2024 doesn't make you angry, I doubt anything will. You should be angry. If you identify as a man and think that it has nothing to do with you, you are mistaken. Just because you don't go to Cornell and just because you consider yourself a good person does not mean you're off the hook. Changing a culture where sexual violence against women is still incredibly pervasive is going to take all of us. This is especially true when you consider how our president, our government and our institutions perpetuate the culture of rape.

This article may be hard to read. It was difficult to research, and it was difficult to write. But it is necessary.

The rape and humiliation of a drugged and intoxicated woman, named Jane Doe in the lawsuit, at the hands of at least seven men needs to resonate far beyond legal repercussions. There is no doubt that Matthew Ingalls, Scott Kretzschmar, Winston Lee, Diego Sarabia, Jonathan Newells, Gillio Lopes and Scott Norris should be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. But any legal fallout for them will not change the wider culture around rape and sexual violence.

For proof of this culture, we can start at the very top of the government ladder. Donald Trump first won the presidency in 2016 even though the Access Hollywood tape revealing his crudely infamous "grab them by the pussy" comment was released. Ultimately, voters didn't care enough then. They didn't care enough eight years later, when Trump won again despite being found liable for sexual assault. That case, in which E. Jean Carroll received monetary damages for Trump's sexual abuse, didn't seriously impact his standing. His attitude and behavior toward women ultimately had little bearing on the electorate.

The Trump administration, by the way, just further reduced Title IX protections. These protections are exactly what was supposed to shield Jane Doe from harm and bring accountability to the perpetrators.

The men of Trump's cabinet are no better. Pete Hegseth, the secretary of Defense, was accused of sexual assault. So too was Robert F. Kennedy Jr, the Department of Health and Human Services secretary. Just like Trump, these allegations had no effect on their political ascendancy.

The Supreme Court has similar issues. Justices Brett Kavanaugh and Clarence Thomas faced allegations of sexual assault and rape during their confirmation hearings, but their nominations went ahead anyway. The two later went on to cast deciding votes in the overturning of Roe v. Wade, which enabled states to impose draconian abortion bans.

The institutions that were supposed to help Jane Doe simply didn't. Cornell only expelled two of the men and had the other five write essays to get out of suspensions. Meanwhile, Jane Doe suffered lasting consequences and ended up leaving Cornell. The district attorney's office initially refused to press charges, despite the details of the police report clearly indicating a crime. Once the case resurfaced and backlash grew this past week, the DA finally caved and reopened the case.

It should be no wonder, then, that the men who raped Jane Doe felt comfortable in their actions. The government itself is filled with powerful men who managed to get away with doing much the same. They suffered no damage to their careers, and now they are making decisions that degrade the ability of women to achieve justice. The system intended to help survivors made sure that the Cornell Seven, by and large, remained free of lasting damage as well.

Amidst this backdrop of accepted sexual violence, how exactly can we change the culture? The vast majority of society recognizes the case of the Cornell Seven as a horrifying and disgusting example of what can, and does, happen to women on a daily basis. Not enough people, though, recognize their role in preventing more cases like Cornell from happening.

If you don't speak out about the culture of rape, if you don't actively make sure that you're cultivating a safe environment for women, you are complicit in the problem. One of the men who was involved in gang-raping Jane Doe posted in a Snapchat group chat for Chi Phi that there was "free pussy" available. There were 57 men in that group chat; some of them participated in the rape, and the rest did absolutely nothing. They didn't push back and they didn't report anything. They kept quiet.

This quiet is what allows the culture of rape to perpetuate. It is a quiet that settles heavily on survivors who feel pressured to drop their cases because they feel making a report will endanger themselves. The silence is filled by the grinding gears of institutions who would like nothing more than to sweep uncomfortable details under the rug. It is filled by misogynist podcasters who proclaim that men are the "real" victims. It is filled by the President of the United States, who spews hateful rhetoric and demeans women regularly.

How will you replace the quiet? Where are you going to put the rage? How will you step up and make your voice heard? Your voice and your actions will be needed. Jane Doe and other survivors shouldn't have to suffer in silence.



The Cornell University Sign at the West Campus Entrance. The Cornell rape case was reported on by Cornell's student newspaper, the Daily Sun.

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