

THEOLOGY, SEXUALITY, AND JUSTICE:
NEW FRONTIERS—INTEREST GROUP

- Conveners: Megan K. McCabe, Boston College
Christina Traina, Northwestern University
Moderator: Megan K. McCabe, Boston College
Presenters: Katie Grimes, Villanova University
Bryan Massingale, Fordham University
Respondent: Natalia Imperatori-Lee, Manhattan College

In her paper, “‘Athletes Get Away with Crimes’? Rape (and) Culture in the Afterlife of Slavery,” Katie Grimes looked to the public stories of campus rape purportedly perpetrated by student athletes. Because attention is often given to athletes in both football and basketball, attention to sexual violence on campus is disproportionately focused on black men. Grimes thus explored how anti-blackness can live within feminist discourses about rape culture that may initially appear to be racially neutral. Given the history in the United States of perceiving black men as prone to rape, Grimes called into question the belief that college football and basketball players commit rape with impunity at higher rates than other men. She argued that public concern for campus rape perpetrated by athletes is informed by “anti-blackness supremacy.” Turning to look at the high rates of other instances of sexual violence in the United States, such as rape in prisons, Grime highlighted of the reality of the role of anti-blackness in perpetuating rape in the United States. She thus concluded that feminists ought to ground their opposition to sexual violence in opposition to “anti-blackness supremacy.”

In, “Is Interracial Sex Just? The History of Catholic Complicity in Sexual Racism,” Bryan Massingale explored Catholic complicity in sexual racism and policing interracial sexual encounters through an examination of Catholic practices over interracial marriage, and the sexual racism at work in the admission of African Americans into the priesthood and religious life. He argued that conversations about race are inevitably conversations about sex. The pursuit of racial justice requires attention to sex because racial conflicts, hatreds, and antagonisms have been enacted and are still expressed through sexual relationships and behaviors. The unease, including Catholic unease, with interracial sexual intimacy and the policing of the boundaries of racialized sexual behavior was one way that white supremacy was maintained. Massingale thus argued that we cannot make enduring and effective progress in racial justice without an antiracist sexual ethics that takes seriously dealing with sex and race at the same time. To do so, the Catholic Church must acknowledge and repent for the race-based sexual complicity and sins of its not so distant past in perpetuating suspicion of black male sexuality and interracial intimacy.

In her response, Natalia Imperatori-Lee reflected on the intersection of racism and sexism. Drawing on the work of Latin American feminism, she argued that interculturality/intersectionality attempts to account for a fuller picture of the human condition, one where a person’s circumstances are the product of overlapping realities and compounding marginalizations. She noted that Latin American feminists capture the justice that is the goal of this analysis in the word “convivencia,” which is sometimes translated as living together, but she maintained is more accurately rendered as “sharing life.” Convivencia is a shared life held together not by uniformity but by

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solidarity in building another world where justice is possible. Imperatori-Lee concluded that the papers from Grimes and Massingale point to the reality of suffering as the beginning of convivencia.

In the conversation that followed, multiple attendees raised questions related to LGBT persons and how this reality might reshape the arguments raised by the papers. For example, one attendee pushed the presenters to account for non-binary gender identities in their analysis. Another asked Massingale for an account of how suspicion of black male sexuality in seminaries would have dealt with the reality of gay men. These questions and comments pushed for further intersectional analysis in the interest group.

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