

Introduction: Now, Not Now

*H*ere is what we know: feminist political optimism in the United States is difficult to come by in the current environment. The revolution (let's call it what it is) of our lifetimes veers hard right as the U.S. state engages open warfare on air, water, land, and wildlife along with every category of minoritized persons: Muslims, immigrants, the poor, women, people of color, queers. It is easy to sound hyperbolic, and there are numerous pundits and paid professionals, especially from the liberal Left, who will quickly declare such language over the top, if not out of bounds, because it is not predicated on fidelity to the ever receding high notes of political rationality. You have heard their instructions: avoid “abolish” when talking about Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE); it is too extreme. Veer right when you see “socialist”; it is best to cultivate the mainstream. Hush all talk of impeachment; it arms the GOP. No to “inequality,” yes to “opportunity.” Annul identity: “all lives matter.”

To be sure, the rhetorical message that sells in the commodified sphere of politics is an easy target for academic feminists adept at reading the logics that shape and inform popular discourse. But we, too,

have shown concern about the timing and tenor of feminist interventions into the hypermediated domains that now serve as public political culture. Much ink was spilled—or more accurately, many keys were furiously hit on social media forums—in the fall of 2017 in debating the academic’s ethical relation to the unfolding scene in which #MeToo rose to prominence in an industry that had long banked its value on brand and spectacle. Could we address the corporate logics that prompted the surprisingly swift dismissals of accused abusers by boards of directors and CEOs, especially as the news of the abuser’s behavior had been well known and highly protected to industry insiders all along? Or would this undermine the political urgency of exposing such behavior by casting suspicion on the motives of the corporation when no other institution—certainly not the state apparatus led by a serial predator—was willing to act as arbiter of justice and public morality? And how could we begin to measure the political consequences of recruiting discourses of morality to feminism’s side when we had spent decades studying the way these very discourses had worked overtime to undermine feminism’s political potency?¹

The matter of putting faith in the corporation was not the only or even the most pressing concern for scholars who sought to engage the unfolding present through queries about the way that sexuality, violence, and the demand for justice were being claimed, narrated, and circulated. In numerous conversations both public and private, and in blogs and comment sections no less than in Facebook posts and on Twitter feeds, many academic feminists found themselves worrying not so much about *what* needed to be discussed as *when* we could safely do so without imperiling the project of public protest and mass education underway.² How soon could we address the collapse of distinctions between harassment and assault or raise issues that drew on the legacy of pro-sex feminism in a media environment more heightened than ever to the profit-generating anthems of scandal and outrage?³ How soon could the conversation deepen beyond liberal critiques of representation and inclusion when it came to the racial politics in which the white actress emerged as star victim of a movement that originated in the organizing labor of black feminist Tarana Burke a decade before? How soon would it seem constructive and not deflating—or worse antifeminist—to discuss the gender essentialism of the female victim and male perpetrator dyad and the heterosexual scenarios in which this dyad lived? And when could we consider the legacy of the feminist sex wars and the powerful but difficult contestations that ensued in their wake about feminism’s own carceral impulses and their ricocheting effect on minority communities (both

racial and sexual), along with the risk of sacrificing the conversation about women's sexual freedom to the political terrain of "danger" once again?⁴

The first meaning of the title of this introduction, "Now, Not Now," is meant to evoke the temporal question animating academic feminist conversations in the early months of 2018 when the editors of *differences* offered to dedicate this volume to explorations crafted at the intersection of insistence and caution. Insistence: that the time was now for an unwavering engagement with everything that we have come to know about the complexity and complicity of feminism, especially when it tries to make space for itself in the discursive venues of the political mainstream. Caution: that there was good reason to deliberate carefully about the relationship between alliance and critique, especially given the ease with which academic feminism had forged its political authority by anatomizing public feminism's faults.⁵ For second-wave warriors, #MeToo promised to revive the meat-and-potatoes feminist issue of sexual discrimination, harassment, and violence while offering student generations a larger venue for the protests they staged on college campuses that had institutionalized an approach to sexual assault largely as problems of public relations and underage drinking. For many women, some of whom held no special attachment to feminism as a necessary politics, #MeToo made visible forms of everyday coercion that had been sedimented in workplace cultures, dating protocols, and domestic intimacy. Most readers here will remember the quick succession in which a number of highly visible and powerful men—most of whom were politically liberal and ethnically white—lost their jobs in the face of various charges, from unsolicited touching and verbal harassment to quid pro quo, assault, and rape: Harvey Weinstein, Kevin Spacey, Louis C. K., Jeffrey Tambor, Charlie Rose, Matt Lauer, Garrison Keillor, Al Franken, and John Conyers.⁶ All this took place while evangelical politician Roy Moore, accused predator of teenage girls, was endorsed by the man occupying the White House, himself a serial denier who more than once floated the idea that it was not really his own bragging voice on the Access Hollywood tape that went viral before the 2016 election.

To mention Donald Trump is to enter the labyrinth of all kinds of sexual offenses, from the routine sexism that dribbles from his lips to his reliance on nondisclosure agreements that give cover to the open secret of his extramarital affairs to the more criminalizing accounts of his proclivity for groping and assault. It is no exaggeration to say that anger over the impunity granted to Trump has fueled the feminist response to each new accusation against a leading figure, simultaneously magnifying the

longstanding cultural and legal refusal to take sexual predation seriously in all its manifestations while offering a mechanism to express ongoing public indignation that the Predator-in-Chief has been held to no ethical or legal standard whatsoever. Wendy Brown has called the ascendancy of Trump and Trumpism “the libidinal pleasure of freedom as dis-inhibition,” a characterization that rather brilliantly captures the thrill Trump delivers to the wounded world of white heteromascularity with his poke-’em-in-the-eye and grab-’em-by-the-pussy bravado (“Populism”).⁷ For the rest of us, the sadism that Trumpism unleashes into the shrunken core of liberalism’s civil society is chilling, as it sharpens nationalism’s racist and militarist teeth while enshrining the state’s strategic intention to govern through both threatened and materialized violence. Compounding the visceral effect of all this is the accompanying drum beat of Trump’s daily Twitter habit—over 8,500 tweets since inauguration (as of this writing)—which functions as a living archive of desublimation, one whose menace is heightened and stoked by the profit-generating overload of the twenty-four-hour news cycle. This situation is more than a far cry from the soothing notes of liberalism, which performed its magic as a social depressant by masking violence through the language of democracy, shared national culture, and American exceptionalism. The shock to the system of the Trumpian alternative instead works through amplification, ridicule, and grievance—creating an affective mode of governance we might call mania as state craft.⁸

What kind of feminist sexual politics is adequate in this hideously electrifying and endlessly exhausting environment? For contributors to this volume, this is the most urgent question, one that requires attention not just to continuities between past and present but to how certain aspects of the current terrain of sexual politics have no precise historical precedent. Take the matter of sex panic. Feminist scholarship has long focused on the way sex panics—like moral panics in general—operate by amplifying fear, spreading paranoia and suspicion, and inciting demands for ever greater forms of state regulation and “protection.” Their potency is in direct proportion to their ability to travel in mediascapes on the profit-generating currencies of scandal, melodrama, and sensationalism. They are routinely understood to be episodic inflammations caused by social transformations that disrupt the established order, which means that they are resolutely conservative and seek to quell their insecurities by reinforcing bourgeois sexual norms and excising the social body of its purported impurities. The most important feminist text on the history and anatomy of sex panic is Gayle Rubin’s 1984 “Thinking Sex,” which tracked the continuities between three

different episodes in U.S. history: the 1880s, the 1950s, and her contemporary moment. In discussing the 1970s and 1980s, Rubin importantly traced the way the energies that stoked both the Moral Majority—“God’s Own Party”—and the secular project of antipornography feminism converged in a politically antagonistic but paradoxically mutual desire to wield the institutions of the state for increased sexual regulation (Williams iv).⁹ Today, of course, the tentacles of what was once the Moral Majority have reached deep into social institutions, political parties, educational practices, and the economic foundations undergirding all of these—no less than into the corridors of the White House, the Supreme Court, and Congress. Extensive in social scope and without discernible borders, the sex panic of the religious Right releases its anxieties about reproduction, homosexuality, sex trafficking, gay marriage, and diverse genders into the cultural bloodstream in a modality completely acclimated to daily routine. Normalized, no longer episodic; elemental to media culture and not a momentary flare-up: what we are living in today is an institutionalized sex panic that threatens never to end. Pay no mind to the profane bombast of Trump and Trumpism when the promise is the moral purity of a white Christian holy land.

And what of #MeToo and the viral intensity that has powered it?¹⁰ For some feminists, its political rise has eerily reflected the major themes of sex panic: yoking sexuality to criminality, inflaming public emotion, promoting scandal, and spreading its message through media spectacle. But it has been the movement’s commitment to a set drama of guilt and innocence that has raised the most alarm as it forges an allegiance to the narrative ecology of panic: on one side, the emotionally moving and politically powerful enunciation of (female) sexual victimization; on the other, an equally singular narrative of (male) predation, one that flattens differences between categories of sexual harm in a domino-like logic that renders sexual misconduct as sexual harassment as sexual assault as rape. And yet, even as the lack of sexual definition and the hypermediated spread of emotion are consistent with the known traits of sex panic, one prominent characteristic—and a crucial one at that—is wholly absent in the current conjuncture: #MeToo is not a conservative political production addressed to the moral disciplining apparatus of the state and designed to enhance the institutions of repressive sexual management that had long served as the wet dream of the right wing. On the contrary, many of its first successes have bypassed the state apparatus altogether as corporations suspend or fire those who have been accused (sometimes with but often without internal investigations). This is the panicked power of the brand, which wields publicity to secure

the corporation's agency in adjudication. Is this the anatomy of a sex panic in neoliberal times, orchestrated from the Left and weighing justice through employment contracts, not jail time? And if so, how can we attend to the contradictions that unfold here, as both the political charge of sexual panic and the historical frame for understanding feminist sexual politics shift?

It will surely surprise no one that the contributions in this special issue do not settle these questions. What we do agree on is that the affective atmosphere of the present not only favors but induces outrage and that there is as much truth as cause for concern in the frequent declarations that ours is the *age of outrage*. For as much as we might want to recruit outrage to our side, it is an equal opportunity emotion, available to every political position. Even those propelled by nostalgia for liberalism's managerial rhetoric of rational debate can express *outrage over outrage* as a necessary, if paradoxical, entreaty for democratic repair. In their book, *The Outrage Industry: Political Opinion Media and the New Incivility*, Jeffrey Berry and Sarah Sobieraj do just this. For them, the age of outrage has been manufactured by the entity their title names, "the outrage industry," which creates both a political media environment of enormous profit as well as a media genre that draws on the popularity of reality tv and celebrity culture. This media environment is driven by personality (think Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity, Rachel Maddow, and Chris Hayes) and is not only reactive and ideologically selective but conspiratorial and politically bombastic—no matter the specific political leanings of programming hosts. By producing information as melodrama, provoking anger, and forecasting doom, the outrage industry shapes and promotes a public culture that "takes the form of verbal competition, political theater with a scorecard" (7). While people may find it entertaining—or more accurately *because* people find it entertaining—the outrage industry cashes in on "incivility" and partisanship at the expense, Berry and Sobieraj write, of "political dialogue that is rational, inclusive, impartial, consensus-oriented, and fact-based" (7, 19). The book aims to expose the industry's antidemocratic greed in order to dull its power, reclaiming deliberation and reason for the restoration of democracy to come.

It is difficult to imagine readers of *differences* siding with the analysis that *The Outrage Industry* promotes when it marshals the affective norms of liberal democracy to wage battle with the histrionics of the outrage industry. But a central feature of nearly every conversation about outrage, whether academic or not, does seem to be configured by questions concerning the evisceration of norms, the diminution if not the displacement of a shared public sphere, and the supremacy of affects (as opposed to critical

thought) as the blood (and pus) of contemporary politics. It seems inadequate to lay the blame, as some do, at the feet of mass mediated culture, but there is no doubt that user-based platforms extend the logic of the outrage industry in ways that multiply the avenues and outlets for outrage. While Facebook is the most widely known version of this media form, offering interactivity while profiting from the commodification of the user's information (her market coordinates, friendship networks, shopping habits, political interests, even her zip code), the lure of interactivity has revamped older media as well, with mainstream newspapers and magazines revising their monodirectional transmission through online comment sections and other modes of user engagement. The old adage that the mall is the cathedral of secular society can be updated as the Internet becomes late capitalism's public sphere. In this environment of hyper immediacy, outrage thrives, especially under the auspices of suspicion, fear, and conspiracy. It is, as M. J. Crockett comes close to suggesting, the Internet's gasoline, lucrative to the extreme.

For Berry and Sobieraj, writing in the Obama era and with only glancing attention to the proliferation of digital media, outrage is a decided negative, one whose power, they hope, can be undermined by attention to the historical emergence of the industry and the genre conventions on which the industry turns. But as we all know, putting the genie back in the bottle, in the midst of the daily mania of the Trump–Fox News love-affair-war-dance, is probably as impossible as it feels. Certainly, any assumption that the political task is to reign in the desublimated thrills of “anti-democracy as fun,” as Brown puts it, obviates two sets of questions that have important implications for how we understand the terrain of contemporary sexual politics (“Populism”). The first set concerns the widely held perception that outrage is an obstacle in contemporary political culture *no matter what*, that it is best understood as a symptom of a catastrophic disorganization of the affective, analytic, and activist components of political life and that as such we must find a way to outmaneuver it. But can we study our way out of outrage? Can we talk people out of outrage—or, more aptly, can you counter the power and ubiquity of outrage by positioning an analysis of it against it? Is there an epistemological fix to outrage, a pedagogy or mechanism through which the prerogative we give to knowledge wields the leverage necessary to imperil outrage and its effects? Can we be sure that the quickest route to a better world lies in subduing—we would be right to say sublimating—outrage and its excessive and excessively profitable affective overload?

At the root of these questions is a simple one: does outrage pose an imminent societal danger? (We'll get to the more provocative question “and

if so, for whom?” shortly.) For Teddy Wayne, writing in the *New York Times*, the answer is yes, especially when it comes to social media platforms where outrage is “ultimately,” he writes, “the milquetoast cousin to direct action, a way to protest by tapping and clicking rather than boycotting and marching.” The problem with outrage here is that while it inflames and spreads, it also paralyzes, becoming an end run around political participation, a quick fix in a world where traditional avenues of agency have gone awry, whether through overt strategies of disenfranchisement, the fragmentation of publics into consumer markets, or the convergent consensus from both the Left and the Right that the social contract as a whole has failed. As with other arguments against outrage, this one tends to read it in symptomatic terms: it is captivating because personally cathartic, but it is born of technological alienation that makes its satisfactions contradictory and fleeting, bound not only to the libidinal pleasures of the mob, which rely on anonymity, but also to the immediacy of first-person declaration. This double bind is anything but inhibiting, which is why Wayne marshals scholars who have studied Internet outrage to rally behind the injunction, as Ryan Martin puts it, “to calm down and think things through” (qtd. in Wayne). The convergence of opinion in the literature on outrage leads me to wonder: is outrage really a substitution for agency, the affective ghost of the Enlightenment in our increasingly medieval times?¹¹ Or is outrage where agency now lives?

This last question matters to me most because of its comportment with one of feminism’s first lessons: that the distribution of affects is irreducibly gendered, pitting rationality against feeling and ascribing anger (which Sianne Ngai names, in her “bestiary of affects,” the “lion” of the emotional world) to masculinity not as fault or threat but as triumph and honor (7). We are surely exhausted by the inexhaustible purchase of the same old story, its unfolding under the auspices of white supremacy, and the historical compact between white masculinity and the institutional power it ratifies: outraged white men are heroes, protectors, and social warriors while outraged women are hags, harpies, and feminazis, routinely vilified or simply ignored.¹² And outraged men of color? They tend to exit the story early, via the postslavery profit industry of mass incarceration or in state orchestrated scenes of assassination, both of which cast their narrative downfall as their own damned fault. Today, these ancient storylines are set to autoplay in the twilight of the hegemony of liberal whiteness, which is what I call white subjectivity as it has been held (at least provisionally) accountable to the history of its own privilege in the post-segregationist era. This is a version of white identity, tacitly multicultural, that was founded

in disidentification if not political competition with overtly nationalist and supremacist formations of whiteness that have long practiced and preached the gospel of racial purity.¹³ Its political apex is best evoked in the soothing moderation of the Obama era, which might explain why the imperative to stop-and-think has been sounded as if it bears nothing but progressive overtones. But while outrage is, at the level of the data commodity, an equal opportunity instigator, its cultural reception as political expression is an entirely different matter. In the simplest terms, the *right* to outrage—like all rights—has never been equally conferred.¹⁴

What must not be conceded, then, is the primacy of the ensuing question, which will help us arrive at the second meaning at stake in this introduction's title: *whose* outrage are we talking about when we worry that outrage is a prophylactic for political engagement? To query *who* is to engage a first-order feminist question, one that can rip open the insides of feminist collectives as much as generate collective stances against the differently faced enemies who line up against women, including when women victimize and exploit other women. Certainly no one who studies gender or race or the multifaceted complexity of their intersections in the United States can question the political function of outrage as a part of the visceral power of historical and ongoing activisms. This is just as true of #MeToo and the viral engine that characterizes and feeds it as it is of Black Lives Matter and the yet unnamed or distinctly local projects that are registering, from laptops as well as in the streets, their intolerance for the brutality and open predation practiced by the Trump regime in its chest-thumping restitution of the identity politics of the founders' originating declaration: that those who deserve to determine the shape of the world for everyone are rich, white, and male. In this broader context, as a response to the manic disposition of the present, outrage is nothing if not an invaluable resource for staying alert and remaining sane. Paradoxically, it may even be a kind of life preserver for optimisms to come, as it helps meet the political order of a manic *now* with a decided refusal to acclimate to current conditions: no, *not now*.

The scholars whose work appears in this special issue take their turns in wrenching from the outrage they feel toward the authoritarianism and rabid racism and misogyny of our times a range of compelling meditations on feminism, sexuality, power, and publicity. With fourteen contributions, the issue is split between two genres of academic writing: the publication-length article and the keyword essay. If read in the order in which they appear, the volume moves across three general thematics. The first concerns feminism's political and theoretical investment in the sexual

politics of the contemporary moment. Here, we examine the emergence of “#MeToo” as a distinctly feminist political movement (Eva Cherniavsky), the political demand it exacts from feminists in the form of “solidarity” (Rebecca Wanzo), the contradictory inheritances it assumes from the political theory of #MeToo avatar Catharine MacKinnon (Joseph J. Fischel), and the civil war with evangelical Christianity and its theft of the figure of “mother” that any effort in the name of sexual freedoms cannot afford to ignore (Mairead Sullivan). The first thematic ends (so to speak) with a close reading of one of the most controversial #MeToo stories, that of Aziz Ansari, in order to review and revise feminist understandings of heterosexual disappointment and political desire (Andrea Long Chu).

The middle thematic of the volume is oriented toward the vicissitudes of sex in the conjuncture between perversion and pleasure. It begins with the historical constructions of the “sex offender” (Terrance Wooten) and “pedophile” (Kadji Amin) before a rather delicious dissection of the disavowed sadomasochism of MacKinnon’s most influential feminist work (Samia Vasa). From here we consider the confessional risks and pleasures of “testimony” (Juana María Rodríguez) and the political necessity of refusing visibility and speech as the ascribed priorities for black feminist sexual freedom (Shoniqua Roach). The final thematic foregrounds the university and contestations over its rules of sexual engagement, moving from a keyword analysis of the double-bind of “consent” as a property-based ethics (Emily A. Owens) to the terrible privilege of expertise that protected Larry Nassar and his serial crimes for decades (Jennifer Doyle) to the controversy over the pedagogy of the “trigger warning” (Lynne Joyrich) and the unacknowledged history it shares with fan cultures. The volume closes with a consideration of the difficulties facing institutional feminism as it seeks to found and promote a university culture free of sexual harm under the historical conditions of neoliberalism (Jennifer C. Nash).

Suffice it to say that this special issue does not aim to be a comprehensive conversation about the cascade of events that comprise the contemporary terrain of sexual politics. It might be best read as an archive of emergent concerns in the affective environment of 2018, as #MeToo continued to gain political visibility and it seemed absolutely vital to gather an interdisciplinary and intergenerational array of scholars to parse the terms and engage the complexity of the long imagined return of feminism to the center of public culture. It is certainly the case that as this issue goes to press, the initial controversies that engaged us have given way to new political emergencies, as the breathless pace in which right-wing extremism

is being institutionalized continues unabated, eliciting inconsolable political outrage at its desublimated desire to govern by shoving the impunity of white male power down everyone's throat. This issue honors that outrage and the double temporality that ignites and justifies it: *now, not now*.

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Notes

- 1 While the scholarly archive on morality discourses and their politically conservative effects is vast, two important edited collections provide instruction into the key points of the discussion. See Fahs, Dudy, and Stage; and Herdt.
- 2 See Jane Ward for a compelling discussion of some of the political and personal stakes of holding one's tongue in the name of feminist strategy. "We are whispering to one another, *please don't muddy the waters by talking about false equivalences now*. We are admonishing each other out of fear, *please, I beg you not to distract from this powerful wellspring of feminist truths, this unstoppable testimony of violation and survival, by attending to gray areas and complexities. Not now. The stakes are too high. This is finally working!*"
- 3 For an important early discussion of the role of women's studies analysis in addressing the current conjuncture of "sex and power," see Ashwini Tambe's inquiry into the global reach of #MeToo, the impunity of Trump as a "trigger provoking the fury at the heart of [the movement]," and the dynamic of moral panic alive in the current moment (197, 198). Tambe's essay also addresses how the media's representation of #MeToo, along with the movement's own discourses, are "out of step with currents in contemporary academic feminism" that highlight pleasure and healing, intersectional analysis, and a nonmoralistic relation to transactional sex (200).
- 4 I am invoking the simple but brilliantly astute phrase "pleasure and danger" here, which is drawn from the 1982 Barnard Conference on Sexuality and the edited collection by Carole Vance that followed it. For context and commentary of the conference and the feminist sex wars more broadly, see Duggan and Hunter; Stein and Press; and Wilson.
- 5 See Wiegman, "No Guarantee," for a discussion of the way academic feminism today functions as a pedagogy of correction by reversing its founding relationship to movement feminism. Instead of serving as the academic arm of the movement, it enacts the political agency that will revise the ways in which the movement has failed.
- 6 The news outlet *Vox* kept a running list of the accused, organized by industry, through April 2018. See North.

- 7 In a related discussion about the current compact between authoritarianism and neoliberalism, see Brown, “Neoliberalism’s.”
- 8 My thinking here is inspired by Eva Cherniavsky’s meditation on mania in ch. 4 of *Neocitizenship*, esp. 125–27.
- 9 In placing the history of morality crusades in the United States alongside the practices and ideologies of antipornography feminism, Rubin highlighted four feminist missteps: its recruitment of state regulation for censorship, best demonstrated by the legal activism of Catharine MacKinnon, its leading figure; its failure to differentiate sexual representations and fantasy worlds from real life, especially in the oft-repeated equation of lesbian sadomasochism with patriarchal sexual violence; its critique of transactional sex, which overinflated coercion while altogether dismissing consent; and its tendency to apply a feminist litmus test to erotic choices, thereby restricting the politics of sexuality to specific sex acts and/or their participants. In 2010, *GLQ* published a special issue on Rubin’s work that features a retrospective discussion of her groundbreaking essay. See Rubin, “Blood.” For a broad discussion of the punitive practices of the state in relation to sexuality, see Lancaster.
- 10 For prominent popular writing on this question, see Beck; Blanton; Gessen; Hamblin; Hempel; and Schulte.
- 11 I am citing Purnima Bose here, who has characterized the anti-science conservative Christian political project as the fantasy restoration of the dark ages—a characterization that I wish seemed more funny or fantastical than true.
- 12 Evidence for this claim can be found everywhere but let me use an example from yesterday because its significance will in no way be diminished by the temporal lag that accompanies academic publishing. On the contrary, what was on display at the Senate Judiciary Committee’s second hearing on the nomination of Brett Kavanaugh on September 27, 2018 tells us everything we need to know about the implicit rules governing the affective dispensations of gender and race, organized in Manichean overdrive as masculine entitlement and feminine constraint. Kavanaugh’s Trumpian display of outrage, belligerence, and accusation was deemed heroic by GOP senators and the right-wing media, while Christine Blasey Ford earned credibility through the pitch and tenor of her emotional restraint. Anger for her was not an option. See Loofbourow; and Thomas. In a slightly different trajectory of analysis, see Tolentino for a discussion of male bonding as the affective tie in both the scenes of assault described by Kavanaugh’s accusers and the Senate hearing room.
- 13 See Wiegman, “Political.”
- 14 Think here of the response in October 2018 to the protests that accompanied the nomination of Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court—not only those that took place inside the hearing room but the many sit-ins and sound-outs in offices, corridors, elevators, civic spaces, and the streets that came to be referred to by Mitch McConnell, Paul Rand, Mitt Romney, and Trump himself, along with the Fox News chorus, as “mobs.” In these terms, feminist protesters, especially those speaking as sexual assault survivors, were rendered altogether dangerous to the nation. McConnell, in a tone deafness

surprising even for him, declared,
“We were literally under assault
by protestors,” before declaring

his satisfaction that the Senate GOP
“refused to be intimidated by the
mob.” See Olmstead.

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