

Anonymous No More: Chanel Miller Writes Back

BY NICOLE BRAUN

Chanel Miller, *Know My Name: A Memoir*. Viking, 2019. 368 pp. \$28.00, ISBN 978-0735223707.

Note: This review discusses sexual assault/rape.

There is a great deal to absorb from this memoir, which has received a lot of publicity since it came out in September 2019. Chanel Miller was raped in 2015 by Brock Turner, whom most of us know as the Stanford University rapist. Miller woke up in a hospital, initially not even knowing where she was. Eventually, she was informed she had been assaulted. Turner is a young white man from a privileged class background and had been a star athlete at Stanford; because of his class and race, he received a lenient sentence. About her own identity, Miller says, “You cannot note my whiteness without acknowledging I am equal parts Chinese” (p. 220). But until publication of this book, Miller was known to most of the world only as “Emily Doe.”

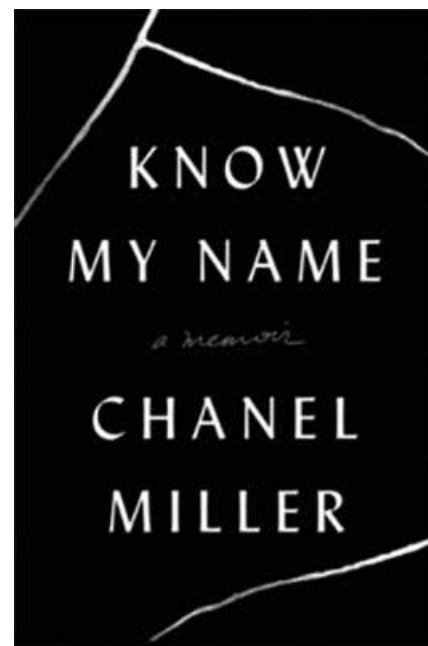
As Miller comes to realize the truth that she was raped — an assault she had no memory of — she writes, “I am a victim, I have no qualms with this word, only with the idea that it is all that I am. However, I am not *Brock Turner’s victim*. I am not his anything. I don’t belong to him” (p. viii; emphasis in original). As her memoir unfolds, she begins to understand that sexual assault is something that happens to other women as well, and this awareness keeps her going. She starts noticing how many times men on the street harass her, making comments about her body,

her appearance, her weight, and her “beauty” and inhibiting her ability to move freely in the world. She realizes that this is the plight of many women — we are objectified for simply existing.

Beyond her growing feminist consciousness, Miller learns about broken systems and institutions — from the university to the media to the “justice” system. “The assault harmed me physically,” she notes, “but there were bigger things that got broken. Broken trust in institutions. Broken faith in the places I thought would protect me” (p. 296).

Like many survivors, Miller wanted her rapist to own up to what he did and demonstrate remorse. Instead, Turner and his wealthy family hired a team of top-notch private lawyers to fight the charges and her accusations; that experience raised her class consciousness. She has this to say about the criminal justice system: “If you pay enough money, if you say the right things, if you take enough time to weaken and dilute the truth, the sun could slowly begin to look like an egg. Not only was this possible, it happens all the time” (p. 150).

Miller points out that everything she did or did not do and said or did not say was essentially on trial, and that this is typical in rape cases. “As a woman, I’d tried asserting my opinion without coming off as self-serving or over controlling,” she writes. “Now, I wondered if I had handled it



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too gracefully, my composure a signal that what he'd done was of little consequence" (p. 219).

Perhaps Miller takes too long to think more critically about the ways in which she has class privilege herself, but she does eventually get there. She recognizes that she has the support of a very loving and educated family, a safe home, and access to middle-class supports and resources. Miller's boyfriend had enough resources to take her on a vacation to Thailand. Her friends and family have access to cars; they are also able to fly across the country, something many of us cannot easily do. Miller even has a family friend who is a feminist professor at Stanford. Though she struggled with loss of identity and

safety because of the rape, she had started life with a strong sense of self and security.

However, as we know, class privilege does not prevent rape.

In short, this book offers the chance to explore class, race, gender, and power around the painful topic of rape. The problem of "affluenza" and many issues related to gender socialization can be explored as well. Readers might also want to ask questions like these: What would have happened to Miller's story if the #MeToo movement had not emerged so powerfully in the years following the rape? What is rape culture, and how can it be addressed? Does Miller speak for all survivors of sexual as-

sault? What is consent? What does it mean to be a victim? Is there a "perfect" victim? What are the definitions of rape and sexual assault, and who gets to decide?

Students, especially those in social work, sociology, psychology, criminal justice, and gender studies, are likely to find *Know My Name* a good read, but it also has the potential to be very triggering. Likewise, the book could inspire university-wide discussions about rape culture, consent, and sexual assault, but it needs to be handled with great sensitivity and care. It could also help survivors in various stages of healing. Chanel Miller has now made sure the world knows her name, and her story will benefit countless others.

[Nicole Braun has been teaching sociology from a feminist perspective for over 20 years as an exploited adjunct while raising her son as a single mother, so she knows a thing or two about economic struggles, sexism, class inequality, and both personal and systemic abuse by the patriarchy. She is interested in eradicating inequality in all forms.]



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