

Browne-Marshall, G.J. (2020). *She Took Justice: The Black Woman, Law, and Power 1619 to 1969*. Routledge. 308 pp. USD 19.95 (paperback), ISBN 9780367482190

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Black women are often at the crux of oppression yet continue to preserve and take justice for themselves. Gloria J. Browne-Marshall's *She Took Justice: The Black Woman, Law, and Power – 1619 to 1969* demonstrates the historical contexts of Black women continuously fighting for and achieving liberation, within the criminal legal system. The reader is left to consider the history and future of Black women as organizers and vessels for freedom, despite inaccurate historical portrayals of Black women as secondary contributors in movements for abolition, civil rights, judicial recourse, and equity. This book review, completed from the perspective of a Black woman criminologist, will discuss *She Took Justice's* contribution to literature.

She Took Justice first presents a list of plates that give the lifespan of the women discussed and a timeline of selected cases to introduce the Black women centred in each chapter. Each chapter chronicles the resilience of women who work within the oppressive systems used against them to obtain freedom (Browne-Marshall, 2020). *She Took Justice* is an overview of the historical and legal context of court cases that journey the reader through the oppression overcome by Black women through perseverance. The book ends with a table of court cases discussed and a bibliography of the manuscript collections and archives used for the author's research.

The book is structured as a history lesson discussing legal cases of perseverance, some well-known and others not as much. Both well-known and lesser-known cases address the historical erasure that occurs in retellings of the roles of Black women as justice leaders. The value of this book comes from having these stories in one place. Being removed from the narrative is all too familiar for Black women, but by bringing these stories

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together Browne-Marshall acknowledges that these experiences and contributions and their value are not lost. Most of society has benefited from the efforts and tenacity of Black women. While typically represented as caregivers and nurturers, Browne-Marshall captures the complexities of Black women as organizers, survivors, and leaders against injustice. *She Took Justice* shares the accounts of these women as they endure enslavement, racism, misogyny, victimization, and the justice system.

Chapters one and two tell stories from the first of many Black women who used their prowess and grit to take justice against all odds. The first chapter shares stories of Queen Nzingha, Angola, and other Black women not typically centred in historical accounts of the oppression forced on Black women as they were stolen and brought to American colonies. Chapter two describes the experiences of women who were exploited for free labour and stripped of autonomy. Experiences with enslavement, pregnancy by rape, and physical abuse lead these women to fight for freedom and exemplify the Black woman as a symbol of bravery, strength, and perseverance.

Chapters three and four provide the stories of Black women as they are accused of witchcraft, attempt to escape slavery, and fight for justice. These chapters demonstrate the limited control Black women had over their lives, and the torture they experienced and observed. In these chapters, Black women are presented in courtrooms as witnesses and defendants protecting their character and lives. The journeys of Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth are explored with the legislative provisions created to protect slave masters and punish enslaved people from seeking freedom. These women were persistent in their pursuits of freedom despite the danger.

Chapter five depicts the ongoing struggle of Black women in the courtroom seeking freedom from human bondage. Once achieved, chapters six and seven describe the experiences of these women and their families post-Civil War as they encountered racism and misogyny in the courtroom and amongst their peers in social movements. In chapters eight, nine, and ten, the reader follows Black women as they yearn for education, the right to vote, and positions in politics. These chapters reveal the legal barriers they were faced with to attain their proper position in society. The benefits of these efforts are shown in the works of Maya Angelou and the legacy of Shirley Chisholm. Chapter eleven shows Black women in roles of leadership as activists, this is important as they are typically thought of as supporting actors to the Black men accentuated as leaders, while they were just as



responsible for inciting justice movements. The final chapter titled Sankofa, meaning ‘go back and get it’, demonstrates how Black women have relied on the relentless efforts of their ancestors to continue striving forward.

In each chapter, Browne-Marshall retells the experiences of multiple Black women who face their oppressors to demonstrate their strength and resilience against all odds. As these stories detail circumstances of different events (i.e., enslavement, trials, escaping bondage, fighting for education and equality), they garner similar results, which is the instinctive action of Black women to advocate for freedom. While working within the systems created to silence and erase them, Black women situate themselves as a representation of hope in a world where they were never meant to be “seen”. This hope and instinct for survival allow them to organize and break away from the shackles of oppression. For the reader, these experiences reiterate the power embodied by Black women throughout our history. Browne-Marshall accomplishes what she sets out to do with *She Took Justice*. Composing these stories in one book to highlight the circumstances and outcomes of these experiences empower those who may not recognize their own power. Showing what Black women can do with so little is inspiring and necessary when acknowledging the crucial role Black women played in emancipation and advancement.

She Took Justice is a quick, yet powerful read suitable for anyone because of the natural storytelling abilities of Dr Gloria J. Browne-Marshall. This book can be used for leisure reads or in disciplines focused on Criminal Justice, Law, History, and Women and Africana studies. Though heavy in some respects, these stories are the contributions of Black women that benefit American society. Ordinary women doing extraordinary things to survive and seek justice is exactly what is needed to empower all. The main strength of *She Took Justice* is found in its overall message. The way Browne-Marshall ties together the fragments of history that have omitted the strife and success of Black women highlights society’s failure to properly recognize their labour. Moreover, it demonstrates the fortitude of Black women who have positioned themselves as leaders and justice seekers despite attempts to erase their existence.

The reader is left with a message of hopefulness in the pursuit of justice. Browne-Marshall’s writing made each story feel personal even when covered briefly. Sentences and elements of poetry dispersed throughout the book affect and captivate the reader by highlighting the literary contributions of Black women. As far as weaknesses are concerned, there

are times when stories overlap and move so quickly that it was necessary to go back and recall which woman's story was being told. There are times when information felt repetitive. Court case topics overlapped because they repeatedly showed Black women seeking autonomy from the oppressive systems that reinvent their means of oppression throughout history. However, given the purpose of the book, this was done to reiterate the strife of Black women when taking justice for themselves over 350 years.

She Took Justice evolves the static portrayals of Black women and presents them in their rightful state as complex leaders who organize to provide opportunity and rights for everyone, not for prestige or fame. The book offers the novelty of a history lesson while reviewing significant legal cases that affected the lives of Americans, yet still feels personal and encouraging. This work contributes to the fields of criminology and sociology from a social justice perspective as it demonstrates the intersections of inequality, crime, and justice, their impact among Black women, the work done and still left to do when seeking justice. Browne-Marshall adds to Black feminist perspectives by reframing what we know of Black women's roles and centring their unique experiences as actors against and within the justice system. As it pertains to efforts of freedom and equality, much of what these women fought for aligns with the struggles of Black women in the present day. The difference is Black women have since taken their rightful place in the justice system as lawyer, judges, and politicians to protect those who still suffer from the oppression of these institutions as they have evolved. The impacts of inequality may no longer be in the form of enslavement or a result of Jim Crow laws but still exist in policy and societal institutions that uphold racism and misogyny. Even still, generations of Black women continue to use the justice system to establish justice. *She Took Justice* is the long-overdue recognition Black women deserve. Although the stories for this book ended in 1969, the fight for justice and centring the experiences of Black women continues.