



CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF LAW AND SOCIETY
BERKELEY LAW

CSLS SPEAKER SERIES

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“The Rebirth of White Womanhood: Emmett Till, Trayvon Martin, and the Preservation of White Manhood”

Trayvon Martin is frequently referred to as this generation's Emmett Till, and scholars and commentators have highlighted similarities and differences between the two victims and their cases. One unexplored commonality is the use of the trope of protecting True Womanhood at the Till and Martin trials. This article seeks to expose the role that the protection of True Womanhood played in each defense team's strategy at trial. Highlighting the raced nature and application of True Womanhood, which defined White women as delicate, spiritually pure, weak, and in need of White male protection, this article offers a brief history on lynching and explains how White men demonstrated their ownership of White women and their dominance over Blacks by using violence against Blacks, particularly Black men, who threatened the social order. Thereafter, this article reveals how defense attorneys in both the Till and Martin cases manipulated and employed the narrative of the White male protector of White women to obtain acquittals for their clients. In so doing, this article analyzes, for the first time in academic literature, the transcript from the Till trial, a transcript previously believed to be lost forever until the FBI discovered the transcript upon its re-opening and investigation of the Till murder and then released the transcript in 2006. Finally, utilizing transcript excerpts from the Martin trial in 2013, this article reveals how the trope of protecting White womanhood affected the outcome in the Trayvon Martin case, even though this stock narrative was not related to the claims about Martin or charges against George Zimmerman, the man who shot and killed Martin, in any way. In the end, this article exposes how little U.S. society has traveled in terms of protecting Black lives and tearing down the structures that preserve White manhood (and womanhood) since 1955.

PLACE Selznick Seminar Room, 2240 Piedmont Ave.
TIME **12:45 – 2:00pm**. Coffee and water provided. Bag lunches welcome.
INFO <https://www.law.berkeley.edu/centers/center-for-the-study-of-law-society/>
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