

What Does the ‘Cornell Seven’ Rape Case in America Say About Liberalism?

News:

New York prosecutors have re-opened an investigation into the alleged gang-rape of a female student at Cornell University in October 2024 after news of how the case was handled at the time sparked public outrage. The woman states that she entered alone while intoxicated into the Chi Phi Fraternity house of the university to see a male friend and then was drugged, sexually assaulted and raped by 7 fraternity members for several hours. One of these members then sent a message on a fraternity group chat inviting other male students to join in on the assault on the woman. Of the more than 50 men who received the message, none objected or reported the incident, rather some responded with encouragement and delight. There were no criminal charges brought against the perpetrators of the attack at the time. Cornell, one of the prestigious Ivy League universities in America, responded by expelling just 2 of the 7 accused men, while allowing the others to continue their education at the college.

Comment:

Sexual assaults against women are extensive across college campuses in the U.S. A 2019 Campus Climate Survey on Sexual Assault & Misconduct stated that 1 in 4 women reported having experienced some sort of sexual assault or misconduct when pursuing their undergraduate degree. Such crimes are also widespread in the universities of other liberal states such as Britain, France and Australia. The Office for Students “Sexual Misconduct Survey” published last year stated that one in three female students (33%) in England experienced sexual harassment during their time at university or college, and around one in seven students reported experiencing at least one form of sexual assault or violence.

These liberal states have tried to deal with their pervasive rape culture through measures such as greater accountability of perpetrators, education campaigns related to ensuring ‘consent’ in relationships, stricter laws against sexual assaults, better policing and harsher judicial penalties. However, these actions have failed to even dent the scale of the problem. This is because they refuse to examine or acknowledge the true contributing factors and root-causes of these crimes. This includes:

firstly, the consumption of alcohol and drugs driven by the hedonistic lifestyle promoted by liberalism which believes that maximizing personal pleasure is the most important goal in life, and that one’s whims and desires are the standard of right and wrong, with no accountability to a higher power, the Creator.

Secondly, the devaluing of the dignity and status of women through their objectification and sexualization in society that has reduced women to the status of objects for the gratification of men’s desires – all sanctioned and promoted by liberal values such as freedom of expression and ownership. Such an environment does not nurture a mentality of responsibility within men to take care of and protect women from harm; rather to exploit them for their carnal desires.

And *thirdly*, the liberal belief of sexual freedom which encourages individuals to fulfil their desires in any way they wish with no regulation or laws related to the interaction between men and women within society – which they view as unnecessary, regressive and restrictive. The result of all this is a toxic cocktail which creates a dangerous

environment for women. Therefore, it is liberalism – its values and beliefs – that needs to be on trial alongside the perpetrators of these disgusting crimes.

In contrast, Islam has a multi-level approach and framework to prevent sexual crimes against women.

Firstly, it promotes Taqwa, or God-consciousness, amongst individuals which is the first line of defense against such crimes because it nurtures a mentality of accountability to the Creator in the way men view and treat women, according to what Islam expects – with respect and dignity and to protect them from any harm, abuse or violence which Islam unequivocally prohibits, for Allah (swt) says: ﴿وَلَا تُضَارُّوهُنَّ لِتُضَيِّقُوا عَلَيْهِنَّ﴾ **“And do not harm them (i.e. women) in order to oppress them.”** [At-Talaq: 6].

Secondly, Islam prohibits alcohol and drugs and shuns the hedonistic lifestyle which fuels violent behaviour towards women, for it places the Laws and Limits of Allah as the standard for actions, and not personal pleasure.

Thirdly, Islam places the protection of the dignity of women at the level of protecting life itself, prohibiting any form of objectification, exploitation or sexualization of them, protecting their high status in society, preventing any action that degrades them and guarding against violence and harassment. The Prophet (saw) demonstrated the importance of safeguarding the dignity of women when he expelled the Banu Qaynuqa tribe from his state in Madinah due to one of its members humiliating a Muslim woman by violating her Islamic dress and exposing her body.

Fourthly, Islam rejects sexual freedom and prohibits the sexualization of society which cheapens the relationship between men and women and arouses the sexual desires in a way which creates a dangerous environment for women, and contributes to sexual assaults and rape. Rather, Islam has a unique and detailed social system whose laws effectively regulate the relationship between men and women in a way which directs the incitement and fulfilment of the sexual instinct to marriage alone and away from harmful relationships. The Islamic dress of the women; the prohibition of Khulwa (a non-Mahram man and woman being alone together); the segregation of men and women other than for a purpose defined by the Shariah, like education, trade, medical treatment or political life; the prohibition of the look of lust towards anyone except one's spouse; and the prohibition of any intimate relationship outside of marriage – are examples of Islamic laws which provide a practical framework to establish a respectful and safe interaction between men and women in a society, enabling women to have an active public life while also protecting their dignity and wellbeing.

And *fifthly*, Islam deals severely with any form of violence against women or violations of their dignity, including potentially the death penalty for rape.

Respect for women cannot be built within a society which is engulfed in a culture that devalues, degrades and dehumanizes them from every side. Nor can it be achieved from severe judicial penalties alone. It requires values that create the correct view of the sanctity of the dignity of women, alongside laws which safeguard them in reality. It is the Islamic system alone that provides this credible framework for protecting women.

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