

# COLUMBIA SPECTATOR ARCHIVE

Columbia Daily Spectator, Volume CXXI, Number 43, 3 April 1997 — Reclaiming dignity at CU [ARTICLE]

## *Reclaiming dignity at CU*

By **DEBBIE STEIN**

**W**hat is Take Back the Night? Many questions arise when this campus event is mentioned. Why are only women allowed to march? Do radical “feminazis” plan this event? Do the participants of Take Back the Night consist of victims of feminist propaganda? Is this an opportunity for public male-bashing?

Take Back the Night consists of two parts: a women-only march, and a speak-out for survivors of rape and other forms of sexual violence, attended by both women and men. This protest is planned by women who want the students, the administration, and our community to think about the violence committed against women both on and off campus every day. Take Back the Night is about providing a safe space for survivors to talk about their experiences. The march allows women one empowering night a year to fearlessly walk the streets of New York without male protection.

Two years ago, I was stalked by a Columbia College senior. He graduated that spring after an illustrious college career in stalking first-year women. This student had dated and then stalked one Barnard student and one Columbia student before finishing off his studies with me. The administration was fully aware of all of his offenses but was concerned with his “right” to stay on campus and pursue his education. When did they add the sexual violence major to the curriculum? Perhaps it is simply part of the Core requirements. Why else would they strongly advise students *not* to go to the police?

Take Back the Night is not only about rape,



it is about all kinds of sexual violence. It is about terror. It is about the police, administrators, and students that commit and perpetuate acts of violence against women. It is about the fact that I live with a Barnard student who thinks that some women are just asking for it. It is about someone asking me, "So did he like threaten to kill you if you wouldn't go on a date with him, or what?"

Columbia reported zero rapes on campus last year. So, who are the survivors who speak literally all night long about their personal experiences of sexual violence?

They are the students of Barnard and Columbia. Many of their perpetrators are also Columbia University students. Endless stories of date rape, abuse in relationships, and violent assaults in our neighborhood point to exactly what happens in our classrooms, on our campus, and in our community. Either the administration can start expelling rapists or they can advise students to let the real criminal justice system take care of these incidents. Columbia University's fear of bad press has lead to an abusive apathetic policy towards its student survivors. If nothing gets done and no

one will listen, then why do we bother to march in Take Back the Night or tell our stories at the speak out? I march because I know what it is to be terrorized for an entire school year. I know what it is to be afraid to leave my dorm room. I know what it is to receive telephone calls at 4 a.m. telling me that I am going to die of AIDS. I know, as do most women in our community, where and when I can walk at night. And I know that I need one night a year when I can descend into the street and reclaim the right to walk without any security escort in the space that should be mine every night.

Why do I speak at the Take Back the Night speak out? I also need one day a year when someone is willing not only to listen but also to hear and maybe even understand what I lived through. Survivors of acquaintance rape, stranger rape, domestic violence,

and all forms of sexual abuse need a safe space to be heard. I urge other survivors on campus to tell your stories as a testament to the violence that occurs every day. One day is not enough. Take back the day. Take back the night. Take back our bodies. Take up the fight.

**Debbie Stein is a Barnard College senior.**