The Reclaim the Night movement has a long history in women’s liberation and the fight for freedom and safety in all spaces. Although themovement itself has evolved throughout the decades and now carries new messages, it still maintains its ethos from the 1970s. The root issue still exists within society, due to a lack of procedures and actions by both the Police and government. The Reclaim the Night march has been defined as *“marches, which protested the right of all women to have the freedom to go where they wanted without having to restrict their movements to accommodate the threat of sexual violence”.*

The movement originated in the 1970s. Peter Sutcliffe was murdering women and this led to women in Leeds being told by police to stay home during the hours of darkness. This inspired enraged women who might have had to go out for work, or for recreation, to march in protest at theidea that male violence against women was a reason to impose a curfew on women.

  The first Reclaim the Night-style march  is said to have taken place in Scotland in October 1977, and then the first that bore the name took place in Leeds, later that year. The march in Scotland took place in the Edinburgh Meadows to make a stance against the ongoing attacks against women at night and to show that women should not have to feel afraid at night, in the city in which they live; “the Edinburgh Women’s Liberation Movement organised a show of feminist defiance” (Rape Crisis Scotland, 2009)

The suggestion that women should stay indoors to protect themselves, rather than control the behaviours of dangerous men enraged women and feminist groups throughout the country. Women were expected to limit themselves in public space and hide from men, as it was believed that if they were to go out at night, then they were making themselves vulnerable to attack. At the time of the fear of attacks and rape of women at night, it was argued by many that men should be the ones given a curfew as it was them who were breaking the law, not women. Reclaim theNight was a *“specific response to male violence and institutional disregard for women’s lives and freedoms*” (Sarah Ditum,  2015); women began to take direct action to fight for their freedoms and liberties, whilst also making it clear that they were angered by the police’s immediate reaction to the murders in 1977.  Although the movement’s root cause was to make it clear that women should not be placed on a curfew due to thebehaviour of men, it also promoted action and the fight against the threat of rape and sexual violence against women. At the time of the murders in 1977, violence against women was not taken as an overly serious matter by the police and government; as the majority of the women being attacked were prostitutes, they were blamed for choosing to go out at night, even though they had no choice in the matter. It was only when young students and women working in more conventional jobs were being attacked that the police began to take interest and action in the cases. This too also angered the feminist networks behind Reclaim the Night as it suggested that the lives of certain women were more important and valued than the lives of others; the argument was made that the life and safety of every woman is important, regardless of the type of life that they lead.

Reclaim the Night is an important and fundamental part of modern Feminism. It is a movement which gives women a chance to voice their opinions and fears, whilst also showing the rest of society that there are problems and there is continuous fight to resolve them. Rape and sexual assault is still a serious threat for women, there is an estimated 89,000 sexual assaults in the UK each year and this number seems to be on theincrease (British Crime Survey, 2015). Questions have continuously been asked as to why this number is on the increase; why rape is still remains to be such a prominent crime and why there seems to be so little done to prevent it.

The issues surrounding gender equality that existed in the 1970s still exist today, and it seems that society still has failings when it comes to progressive attitudes and behaviours surrounding the lives of women. In any other criminal case, the perpetrator is the one who is immediately blamed, not victim; however in cases of rape and sexual assault the victim is always expected to carry the burden of blame. A study conducted by the Scottish Government in 2007 found that 32% of participants agreed that if a woman is intoxicated or out alone at night, she must take partial blame for her attack. Women who are victims are questioned on their behaviours, rather than given the support that any victim would immediately require. Even in the case of victimhood, women are always portrayed as having done something wrong which has led to her attack and suggests that they deserve it in some way. The actions of violent men are then further legitimised by these societal attitudes. Reclaim theNight sends the message that this is not okay; violent men are the issue, not women exercising their right of free will and liberty. Violent men should be challenged, not women who are simply trying to have a safe and free existence. Liberty is for all, not just those who feel safe at night.

*“Today we march, as so many women have done before us to say that we are never to blame for rape and male violence. Those men who choose to commit these crimes are to blame. We march today to demand our right to live without the fear or reality of rape and male violence, we demand an end to male violence against women, we take back this night to win the day”.*

*– London Feminist Network*