It’s too easy to assign blame for the Civil War on the South and slavery — and intellectually lazy.

Like many other conflicts, the Civil War was decades in the making and the culmination of unresolved issues between the Northern and Southern states. And it finally came to a head during the 1860 presidential campaign and election.

Lincoln argued that secession was legally and constitutionally impossible, a view that stood in stark contrast to his stated beliefs while a member of Congress just twelve years prior.

In a speech in the House of Representatives regarding the war with Mexico, Lincoln argued *in favor* of secession.

It seems that Lincoln wasn’t opposed to secession if it served his political purposes. But now as president of a divided country, he was facing a challenge of potentially dire economic consequences: Should the Southern states have been allowed to leave the Union unmolested, they would have taken with them millions in tax revenues.

On February 8, 1861, the Confederate States of America (CSA) was formed and inaugurated Jefferson Davis as its president. There was, it seemed, no way to remedy the secession issue and its associated financial stress on the North — except by forcing the South to rejoin the Union.

But the last thing the Confederacy wanted was a war with Lincoln.

In fact, soon after Jefferson Davis became the first president of the CSA, he dispatched a commission to Washington, DC to negotiate a treaty and an offer to pay for all Federal property in the South. *(10)* But Lincoln refused to meet with the emissaries, believing acknowledgment would discredit his position that secession was illegal.

The idea that the Civil War was some sort of a morality play about freeing Southern slaves is an ideological distortion that obfuscates many of the atrocities that occurred during and after the war.

But if we accept the idea that Lincoln was waging war to free the slaves, it helps justify the loss of over 600,000 American lives. Not to mention the financial cost of the war, which many historians believe could have been avoided.

Indeed, this wasn’t the first time a United States president had faced the issue of secession.

From 1800 to 1815, three serious attempts at secession were orchestrated by New England Federalists, who were infuriated by what they believed was unconstitutional acts by President Thomas Jefferson.

But the Emancipation Proclamation freed no one. Not a single slave.

*“. . . all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free.”* *(15)*

Only the Southern states were “in rebellion” and Lincoln had no control over the Confederacy. Nor did he have the power to free the slaves in the South or the Union. That would require a Constitutional Amendment, which wouldn’t occur until after the Civil War. In 1865, the 13th Amendment abolished slavery.

Civil Rights Movement

The civil rights movement was a struggle for social justice that took place mainly during the 1950s and 1960s for blacks to gain equal rights under the law in the United States. The Civil War had officially abolished slavery, but it didn’t end discrimination against blacks—they continued to endure the devastating effects of racism, especially in the South. By the mid-20th century, African Americans had had more than enough of prejudice and violence against them. They, along with many whites, mobilized and began an unprecedented fight for equality that spanned two decades.

Jim Crows laws

During [Reconstruction](http://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/reconstruction), blacks took on leadership roles like never before. They held public office and sought legislative changes for equality and the right to vote.

In 1868, the [14th Amendment](http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/fourteenth-amendment) to the Constitution gave blacks equal protection under the law. In 1870, the [15th Amendment](http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/fifteenth-amendment) granted blacks the right to vote. Still, many whites, especially those in the South, were unhappy that people they’d once enslaved were now on a more-or-less equal playing field.

To marginalize blacks, keep them separate from whites and erase the progress they’d made during Reconstruction, “[Jim Crow](https://www.history.com/news/was-jim-crow-a-real-person)” laws were established in the South beginning in the late 19th century. Blacks couldn’t use the same public facilities as whites, live in many of the same towns or go to the same schools. Interracial marriage was illegal, and most blacks couldn’t vote because they were unable to pass voter literacy tests.

Jim Crow laws weren’t adopted in northern states; however, blacks still experienced discrimination at their jobs or when they tried to buy a house or get an education. To make matters worse, laws were passed in some states to limit voting rights for blacks.

Moreover, southern segregation gained ground in 1896 when the U.S. Supreme Court declared in [Plessy v. Ferguson](http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/plessy-v-ferguson) that facilities for blacks and whites could be “separate but equal.”

Rosa Parks

On December 1, 1955, a 42-year-old woman named [Rosa Parks](http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/rosa-parks) found a seat on a Montgomery, Alabama bus after work. Segregation laws at the time stated blacks must sit in designated seats at the back of the bus, and Parks had complied.

When a white man got on the bus and couldn’t find a seat in the white section at the front of the bus, the bus driver instructed Parks and three other blacks to give up their seats. Parks refused and was arrested.

As word of her arrest ignited outrage and support, Parks unwittingly became the “mother of the modern day civil rights movement.” Black community leaders formed the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) led by Baptist minister [Martin Luther King Jr](http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/martin-luther-king-jr)., a role which would place him front and center in the fight for civil rights.

Parks’ courage incited the MIA to stage a [boycott of the Montgomery bus system](http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/montgomery-bus-boycott). The Montgomery Bus Boycott lasted 381 days. On November 14, 1956 the Supreme Court ruled segregated seating was unconstitutional.

Little Rock Nine

In 1954, the civil rights movement gained momentum when the United States Supreme Court made segregation illegal in public schools in the case of [*Brown v. Board of Education*](http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/brown-v-board-of-education-of-topeka). In 1957, Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas asked for volunteers from all-black high schools to attend the formerly segregated school.

On September 3, 1957, nine black students, known as the [Little Rock Nine](http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/central-high-school-integration), arrived at [Central High School](http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/central-high-school-integration) to begin classes but were instead met by the Arkansas National Guard (on order of Governor Orval Faubus) and a screaming, threatening mob. The Little Rock Nine tried again a couple of weeks later and made it inside, but had to be removed for their safety when violence ensued.

Finally, President [Dwight D. Eisenhower](http://www.history.com/topics/us-presidents/dwight-d-eisenhower) intervened and ordered federal troops to escort the Little Rock Nine to and from classes at Central High. Still, the students faced continual harassment and prejudice.

Their efforts, however, brought much-needed attention to the issue of desegregation and fueled protests on both sides of the issue.

Civil Rights Act 1957

Even though all Americans had gained the right to vote, many southern states made it difficult for blacks. They often required them to take voter literacy tests that were confusing, misleading and nearly impossible to pass.

Wanting to show a commitment to the civil rights movement and minimize racial tensions in the South, the Eisenhower administration pressured Congress to consider new civil rights legislation.

On September 9, 1957, President Eisenhower signed the [Civil Rights Act of 1957](http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/civil-rights-act)into law, the first major civil rights legislation since Reconstruction. It allowed federal prosecution of anyone who tried to prevent someone from voting. It also created a commission to investigate voter fraud.

Freedom Riders

On May 4, 1961, 13 “[Freedom Riders](https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/freedom-rides)”—seven African Americans and six whites–mounted a Greyhound bus in Washington, D.C., embarking on a bus tour of the American south to protest segregated bus terminals. They were testing the 1960 decision by the Supreme Court in Boynton v. Virginia that declared the segregation of interstate transportation facilities unconstitutional.

Facing violence from both police officers and white protesters, the Freedom Rides drew international attention. On Mother’s Day 1961, the bus reached Anniston, Alabama, where a mob mounted the bus and threw a bomb into it. The Freedom Riders escaped the burning bus, but were badly beaten. Photos of the bus engulfed in flames were widely circulated, and the group could not find a bus driver to take them further. U.S. Attorney General [Robert F. Kennedy](https://www.history.com/topics/1960s/robert-f-kennedy)(brother to President John F. Kennedy) negotiated with Alabama Governor John Patterson to find a suitable driver, and the Freedom Riders resumed their journey under police escort on May 20. But the officers left the group once they reached Montgomery, where a white mob brutally attacked the bus. Attorney General Kennedy responded to the riders—and a call from Martin Luther King, Jr.—by sending federal marshals to Montgomery.

On May 24, 1961, a group of Freedom Riders reached Jackson, Mississippi. Though met with hundreds of supporters, the group was arrested for trespassing in a “whites-only” facility and sentenced to 30 days in jail. Attorneys for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People ([NAACP](https://www.history.com/topics/civil-rights-movement/naacp)) brought the matter to the U.S. Supreme Court, who reversed the convictions. Hundreds of new Freedom Riders were drawn to the cause, and the rides continued.

In the fall of 1961, under pressure from the Kennedy administration, the Interstate Commerce Commission issued regulations prohibiting segregation in interstate transit terminals.

The [Freedom Rides](https://www.britannica.com/event/Freedom-Rides) of 1961 signaled the beginning of a period when civil rights protest activity grew in scale and intensity. CORE sponsored the first group of bus riders who sought to desegregate Southern bus terminals. After attacks by white mobs in [Alabama](https://www.britannica.com/place/Alabama-state) turned back the initial protesters, student activists from [Nashville](https://www.britannica.com/place/Nashville-Tennessee) and other centers of sit-in activities continued the rides into [Jackson](https://www.britannica.com/place/Jackson-Mississippi), [Mississippi](https://www.britannica.com/place/Mississippi-state), where they were promptly arrested for disobeying [racial segregation](https://www.britannica.com/topic/racial-segregation) rules. Despite U.S. [Attorney General](https://www.britannica.com/topic/attorney-general) [Robert F. Kennedy](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Robert-F-Kennedy)’s plea for a “cooling-off” period, the Freedom Rides demonstrated that militant but nonviolent young activists could confront Southern [segregation](https://www.britannica.com/topic/racial-segregation) at its strongest points and pressure the federal government to intervene to protect the [constitutional](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/constitutional) rights of African Americans. The Freedom Rides encouraged similar protests elsewhere against segregated transportation facilities and stimulated local campaigns in many Southern communities that had been untouched by the student sit-ins.

[Southern Christian Leadership Conference](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Southern-Christian-Leadership-Conference) (SCLC)

 leaders worked with [Birmingham](https://www.britannica.com/place/Birmingham-Alabama), Alabama, minister [Fred Shuttlesworth](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Fred-Shuttlesworth) to launch a major campaign featuring confrontations between nonviolent demonstrators and the often brutal law-enforcement personnel directed by Birmingham’s [police](https://www.britannica.com/topic/police) commissioner, Eugene T. (“Bull”) Connor. Televised confrontations between nonviolent protesters and vicious policemen with clubs and police dogs attracted Northern support and resulted in federal intervention to bring about a settlement that included civil rights [concessions](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/concessions). King’s “Letter from Birmingham City Jail” of April 16, 1963, defended [civil disobedience](https://www.britannica.com/topic/civil-disobedience) and warned that frustrated African Americans might turn to black [nationalism](https://www.britannica.com/topic/nationalism), a development that he predicted would lead inevitably to a frightening racial nightmare. International news coverage of the Birmingham clashes prompted Pres. [John F. Kennedy](https://www.britannica.com/biography/John-F-Kennedy) to introduce legislation that eventually became the [Civil Rights Act of 1964](https://www.britannica.com/event/Civil-Rights-Act-United-States-1964).

Similar mass protests in dozens of other cities made white Americans more aware of the antiquated Jim Crow system, though black militancy also prompted a white “backlash.” Those mass protests culminated on [August](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/August) 28, 1963, in the [March on Washington](https://www.britannica.com/event/March-on-Washington) for Jobs and Freedom, which attracted over 200,000 participants. King used his concluding “I Have a Dream” speech at the march as an opportunity to link black civil rights [aspirations](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/aspirations) with traditional American political values. He insisted that the [Declaration of Independence](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Declaration-of-Independence) and the Constitution [comprised](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/comprised) “a promissory note” guaranteeing all Americans “the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

March on Washington

Arguably one of the most famous events of the civil rights movement took place on August 28, 1963: the [March on Washington](http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/march-on-washington). It was organized and attended by civil rights leaders such as [A. Philip Randolph](http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/a-philip-randolph), [Bayard Rustin](https://www.biography.com/people/bayard-rustin-9467932) and Martin Luther King Jr.

More than 200,000 people, black and white, congregated in Washington, D. C. for the peaceful march with the main purpose of forcing civil rights legislation and establishing job equality for everyone. The highlight of the march was King’s speech in which he continually stated, “I have a dream…”

King’s “[I Have a Dream” speech](http://www.history.com/topics/i-have-a-dream-speech) quickly became a slogan for equality and freedom.

Civil Rights Act 1964

President [Lyndon B. Johnson](http://www.history.com/topics/us-presidents/lyndon-b-johnson) signed the [Civil Rights Act of 1964](http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/civil-rights-act/videos/civil-rights-act-of-1964)—legislation initiated by President [John F. Kennedy](http://www.history.com/topics/us-presidents/john-f-kennedy) before his assassination—into law on July 2 of that year.

King and other civil rights activists witnessed the signing. The law guaranteed equal employment for all, limited the use of voter literacy tests and allowed federal authorities to ensure public facilities were integrated.

Bloody Sunday

On March 7, 1965, the civil rights movement in Alabama took an especially violent turn as 600 peaceful demonstrators participated in the [Selma to Montgomery march](http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/selma-montgomery-march) to protest the killing of black civil rights activist Jimmie Lee Jackson by a white police officer and to encourage legislation to enforce the 15th amendment.

As the protestors neared the Edmund Pettus Bridge, they were blocked by Alabama state and local police sent by Alabama governor George C. Wallace, a vocal opponent of desegregation. Refusing to stand down, protestors moved forward and were viciously beaten and teargassed by police and dozens of protestors were hospitalized.

The entire incident was televised and became known as “[Bloody Sunday](http://www.history.com/news/selmas-bloody-sunday-50-years-ago).” Some activists wanted to retaliate with violence, but King pushed for nonviolent protests and eventually gained federal protection for another march.

Voting Rights Act 1965

When President Johnson signed the [Voting Rights Act](http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/voting-rights-act) into law on August 6, 1965, he took the Civil Rights Act of 1964 several steps further. The new law banned all voter literacy tests and provided federal examiners in certain voting jurisdictions.

It also allowed the attorney general to contest state and local poll taxes. As a result, poll taxes were later declared unconstitutional in Harper v. Virginia State Board of Elections in 1966.

Civil Rights Leaders assassinated

The civil rights movement had tragic consequences for two of its leaders in the late 1960s. On February 21, 1965, former Nation of Islam leader and Organization of Afro-American Unity founder [Malcolm X was assassinated](http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/malcolm-x-assassinated) at a rally.

On April 4, 1968, civil rights leader and Nobel Peace Prize recipient [Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated](http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/martin-luther-king-jr-assassination) on his hotel room’s balcony. Emotionally-charged looting and riots followed, putting even more pressure on the Johnson administration to push through additional civil rights laws.

Fair Housing Act of 1968

The [Fair Housing Act](http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/fair-housing-act) became law on April 11, 1968, just days after King’s assassination. It prevented housing discrimination based on race, sex, national origin and religion. It was also the last legislation enacted during the civil rights era.

The civil rights movement was an empowering yet precarious time for blacks in America. The efforts of civil rights activists and countless protestors of all races brought about legislation to end segregation, black voter suppression and discriminatory employment and housing practices.

**From Black Power To The Assassination Of**[**Martin Luther King**](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Martin-Luther-King-Jr)

The [Selma-to-Montgomery march](https://www.britannica.com/event/Selma-March) in March 1965 would be the last sustained Southern protest campaign that was able to secure widespread support among whites outside the region. The passage of [voting rights](https://www.britannica.com/topic/suffrage) legislation, the upsurge in Northern urban racial violence, and white resentment of black militancy lessened the effectiveness and popularity of nonviolent protests as a means of advancing [African American](https://www.britannica.com/topic/African-American)interests. In addition, the growing militancy of black activists inspired by the then recently assassinated black nationalist [Malcolm X](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Malcolm-X) spawned an increasing determination among African Americans to achieve political power and cultural [autonomy](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/autonomy) by building black-controlled institutions.

When he accepted the 1964 [Nobel Peace Prize](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Nobel-Prize), King connected the African American struggle to the anticolonial struggles that had overcome European domination elsewhere in the world. In 1966 King launched a new campaign in [Chicago](https://www.britannica.com/place/Chicago) against Northern slum conditions and segregation, but he soon faced a major challenge from “black power” proponents, such as [SNCC](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Student-Nonviolent-Coordinating-Committee) chairman [Stokely Carmichael](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Stokely-Carmichael). This ideological conflict came to a head in June 1966 during a voting rights march through Mississippi following the wounding of [James Meredith](https://www.britannica.com/biography/James-Meredith), who had desegregated the [University of Mississippi](https://www.britannica.com/topic/University-of-Mississippi) in 1962. Carmichael’s use of the “[black power](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Black-Power)” slogan [encapsulated](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/encapsulated) the emerging notion of a freedom struggle seeking political, economic, and cultural objectives beyond narrowly defined civil rights reforms. By the late 1960s not only the [NAACP](https://www.britannica.com/topic/National-Association-for-the-Advancement-of-Colored-People) and [SCLC](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Southern-Christian-Leadership-Conference) but even SNCC and [CORE](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Congress-of-Racial-Equality) faced challenges from new militant organizations, such as the [Black Panther Party](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Black-Panther-Party), whose leaders argued that civil rights reforms were insufficient because they did not fully address the problems of poor and powerless blacks. They also dismissed nonviolent principles, often quoting Malcolm X’s imperative: “by any means necessary.” Questioning American citizenship and identity as goals for [African Americans](https://www.britannica.com/topic/African-American), black power proponents called instead for a global struggle for black national “self-determination” rather than merely for [civil rights](https://www.britannica.com/topic/civil-rights).

Although King criticized calls for black separatism and armed self-defense, he supported anticolonial movements and agreed that African Americans should seek compensatory [government](https://www.britannica.com/topic/government) actions to redress historical injustices and end poverty. He criticized U.S. military intervention in the [Vietnam War](https://www.britannica.com/event/Vietnam-War), which he characterized as a civil war, insisting that war was immoral and that the American government had wrongly opposed nationalist movements in [Asia](https://www.britannica.com/place/Asia), [Africa](https://www.britannica.com/place/Africa), and [Latin America](https://www.britannica.com/place/Latin-America). In December 1967 he announced a [Poor People’s Campaign](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Poor-Peoples-March) that intended to bring thousands of protesters to [Washington, D.C.](https://www.britannica.com/place/Washington-DC), to lobby for an end to poverty.

After King’s [assassination](https://www.britannica.com/event/assassination-of-Martin-Luther-King-Jr) in April 1968, the Poor People’s Campaign floundered, and the [Black Panther Party](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Black-Panther-Party) and other black militant groups encountered intense government repression from local [police](https://www.britannica.com/topic/police) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Counterintelligence Program (COINTELPRO). In 1968 the [National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders](https://www.britannica.com/topic/National-Advisory-Commission-on-Civil-Disorders) (also known as the Kerner Commission) concluded that the country, despite civil rights reforms, was moving “toward two societies one black, one white—separate and unequal.” By the time of the commission’s report, claims that black gains had resulted in “[reverse discrimination](https://www.britannica.com/topic/reverse-discrimination)” against [whites](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Caucasian-peoples) were effectively used against significant new civil rights [initiatives](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/initiatives) during the 1970s and ’80s.

## Into The 21st Century

As was the case for formerly colonized people in countries that achieved independence during the period after [World War II](https://www.britannica.com/event/World-War-II), the acquisition of [citizenship](https://www.britannica.com/topic/citizenship)rights by [African Americans](https://www.britannica.com/topic/African-American) brought fewer gains for those who were poor than for those who possessed educational and class advantages. American civil rights legislation of the 1960s became the basis for [affirmative action](https://www.britannica.com/topic/affirmative-action)—programs that increased opportunities for many black students and workers as well as for women, disabled people, and other victims of [discrimination](https://www.britannica.com/science/discrimination-psychology).

Still, in the early 21st century the ascent to the U.S. presidency of an African American, [Barack Obama](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Barack-Obama), seemed to reflect a transformation of American society with ramifications for the civil rights movement (*see* [United States presidential election of 2008](https://www.britannica.com/event/United-States-presidential-election-of-2008)). [Jesse Jackson](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jesse-Jackson) in his own landmark campaigns for the Democratic presidential nomination in [1984](https://www.britannica.com/event/United-States-presidential-election-of-1984) and [1988](https://www.britannica.com/event/United-States-presidential-election-of-1988) had reached beyond the effort to mobilize African American voters and attempted to fashion a “Rainbow Coalition” of “red, yellow, brown, black, and white” Americans. Obama—whose father was a black Kenyan and whose mother was a white American—presented a life story grounded in a search for a satisfactory racial identity. Ultimately, Obama’s approach to the world and, arguably, his appeal to many voters were transracial, grounded in a sophisticated understanding of the complex nature of racial identity that was no longer merely dichotomous—no longer simply a matter of black or white. Given the deeply rooted racial conflicts of the American past, however, it is unlikely that Obama’s election signaled the start of a postracial era without [divisive](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/divisive) racial issues and controversies.

Intersectionality

It was coined in 1989 by professor Kimberlé Crenshaw to describe how race, class, gender, and other individual characteristics “intersect” with one another and overlap. “Intersectionality” has, in a sense, gone viral over the past half-decade, resulting in a backlash from the right.

In each case, Crenshaw argued that the court’s narrow view of discrimination was a prime example of the “conceptual limitations of ... single-issue analyses” regarding how the law considers both racism and sexism. In other words, the law seemed to forget that black women are both black and female, and thus subject to discrimination on the basis of both race, gender, and often, a combination of the two.

As Crenshaw details, in May 1976, Judge Harris Wangelin ruled against the plaintiffs, writing in part that “black women” could not be considered a separate, protected class within the law, or else it would risk opening a “Pandora’s box” of minorities who would demand to be heard in the law:

Crenshaw argues in her paper that by treating black women as purely women or purely black, the courts, as they did in 1976, have repeatedly ignored specific challenges that face black women as a group.

The theory of those systems became known as intersectionality, a term popularized by law professor [Kimberlé Crenshaw](https://law.ucla.edu/faculty/faculty-profiles/kimberle-w-crenshaw/" \t "_blank). In her 1991 article “[Mapping the Margins](https://www.jstor.org/stable/1229039?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents),” she explained how people who are “both women and people of color” are marginalized by “discourses that are shaped to respond to one [identity] or the other,” rather than both.

“All of us live complex lives that require a great deal of juggling for survival,” Carty and Mohanty said in an email. “What that means is that we are actually living at the intersections of overlapping systems of privilege and oppression.”

To take an example, they explain, think of an LGBT African-American woman and a heterosexual white woman who are both working class. They “do not experience the same levels of discrimination, even when they are working within the same structures that may locate them as poor,” Carty and Mohanty explained, because one can experience homophobia and racism at the same time. While the other may experience gender or class discrimination, “her whiteness will always protect and insulate her from racism.”

Failing to acknowledge this complexity, scholars of intersectionality argue, is failing to acknowledge reality.

Marie Anna Jaimes Guerrero poignantly highlights the importance of intersectionality or “indigenisms” for American Indigenous women in an essay in Mohanty’s book [*Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*](https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0415912121/ref=as_li_qf_asin_il_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=time037-20&creative=9325&linkCode=as2&creativeASIN=0415912121&linkId=009c7f3eb3b4bc859bd0eda89c7e145a)*.*“Any feminism that does not address land rights, sovereignty, and the state’s systemic erasure of the cultural practices of native peoples,” states Guerrero, “is limited in vision and exclusionary in practice.”

The FFW video archive and its companion book, [*Feminist Freedom Warriors: Genealogies, Justice, Politics, and Hope*](https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1608468976/ref=as_li_qf_asin_il_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=time037-20&creative=9325&linkCode=as2&creativeASIN=1608468976&linkId=7ba303e7aa2281bd230a662df20b6653)*,* chronicle the decades long scholar-activism for a more expansive and inclusive feminism — and that includes women’s history. “Genealogies are important,” say the FFW founders, “because we are made by our histories and contexts.” But they’re also, they say, motivated by providing a service for those feminists of the future.

“The core of intersectionality then,” they say, “is coming to appreciate that all women do not share the same levels of discrimination just because they are women.” FWW is their “deep commitment to gender justice in all of its intersectional complexity.”

Intersectionality is a framework for conceptualizing a person, group of people, or social problem as affected by a number of discriminations and disadvantages. It takes into account people’s overlapping identities and experiences in order to understand the complexity of prejudices they face.

In other words, intersectional theory asserts that people are often disadvantaged by multiple sources of oppression: their race, class, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, and other identity markers. Intersectionality recognizes that identity markers (e.g. “female” and “black”) do not exist independently of each other, and that each informs the others, often creating a complex convergence of oppression. For instance, a black man and a white woman make $0.74 and $0.78 to a white man’s dollar, respectively. Black women, faced with multiple forms of oppression, only make $0.64. Understanding intersectionality is essential to combatting the interwoven prejudices people face in their daily lives.

Kimberlé Crenshaw, law professor and social theorist, first coined the term intersectionality in her 1989 paper [“Demarginalizing The Intersection Of Race And Sex: A Black Feminist Critique Of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory And Antiracist Politics.”](http://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1052&context=uclf)The theory emerged two decades earlier, however, when black feminists began to speak out about the white, middle-class nature of the mainstream feminist movement. Many black women found it difficult to identify with the issues of the mainstream (white) feminist movement, issues such as the pressure to be a homemaker. Black women, who often had to work in order to keep their family afloat and therefore did not have the luxury of being homemakers, did not feel as though these issues pertained to their experiences. At the same time, many black women experienced sexism while participating in the Civil Rights movement and were often shut out of leadership positions. This intersectional experience of facing racism in the feminist movement and sexism in civil rights encouraged black women to call for a feminist practice that centralized their lived experiences.