



BLACK FEMINISM

US feminism

First Wave (19th century): fight for suffrage and universal women rights versus slavery, racism and sexism

Second Wave (1960-'70): the struggle for general equality -> Women's liberation (from the domestic sphere), liberal feminism (white, middleclass)

Third Wave (1980-90s): focus on difference (Black feminism, radical (Lesbian) feminism) and (post-)identity (gender and queer theory)

New Wave(s) of Feminism – (Post Post-feminism) (2010s): reclaiming of 'feminism' by young women -> connectivity/internet

Idea of history of progress versus messy reality -> differences and tensions within each 'Wave'

Feminism as part of history of activism

- Civil Rights: struggle against segregation and systemic marginalization -> race centered
- Marxism/New Left: anti-capitalism -> class centered
- Liberal feminism and radical feminism -> gender centered

Oppression of Black women is part of interlocking system of oppressions: race and gender

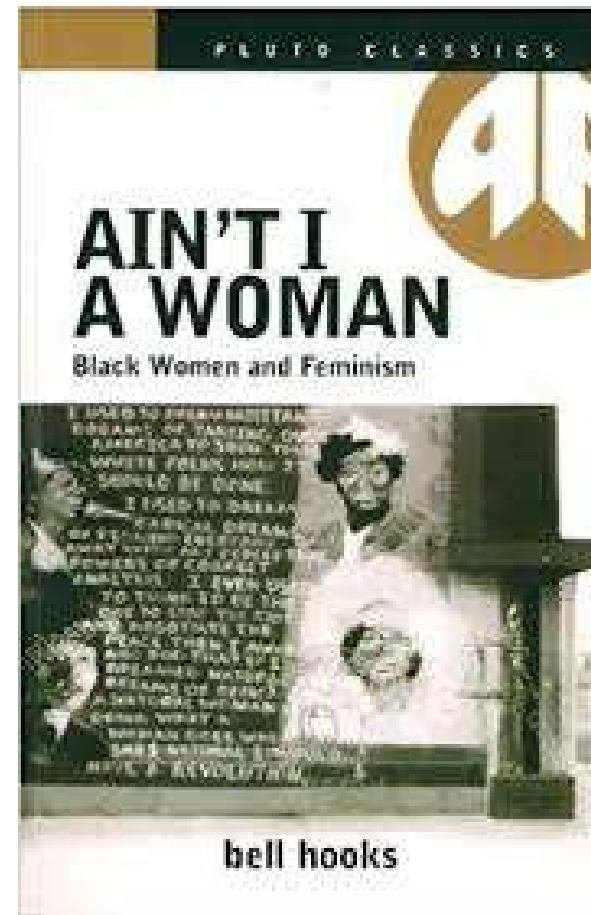
Intersectionality (Kimberlé Crenshaw): single-axis frameworks cannot capture reality of discrimination faced by Black women

Feminism= predominantly white, middle-class and also fraught with racism

Sojourner Truth (1851)



bell hooks *Ain't I a Woman* (1981)



bell hooks (1951)

pseudonym of Gloria Jean Watkins (bell refers to her great grandmother, lowercases are to distinguish herself)

Born in Kentucky (South), educated in Stanford and Wisconsin, 1983 PhD on Toni Morrison (University of California, Santa Cruz)

Author, professor, feminist, activism

Prolific writer: about feminism, popular culture, black masculinity, but also love (self-help), memoir and children's books

Ain't I a Woman (1981)

history of black feminism, starting from the period of slavery to 1970s (written as undergraduate/master student)

Demonstrates how black women have been systematically ignored, while they were by no means absent in the history of feminism

Black women caught in double bind of sexism and racism in white supremacist capitalist patriarchy (US)



*Well, children, where there is so much racket there must be something out of kilter. I think that 'twixt the **negroes of the South and the women at the North**, all talking about rights, the white men will be in a fix pretty soon. But what's all this here talking about? That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! **And ain't I a woman?** Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman?*

“[....] it will just be as bad as it was before”

Sojourner Truth (1797-1883): “Aint I a Woman?”
(1851)

Slavery

Rape and violence: starting on the slave ship and perpetuated by white owners

Black women are regarded as the complete property of white men

Black women were forced to occupy both male (work in the fields) and female roles (household cores)

Practice of 'breeding'

- Rape by both white and black men
- Children taken away
- De-humanization and extreme patriarchy

Psychological suffering

Suffering of (male) slaves: emasculation and figurative castration

- because they were captured
- but also because they could not protect 'their' women

-> Devaluation and stereotypes

Idealization of pure white women (19th century: Angel of the house) coincided with institutionalized rape of black women regarded as sexual savage and wanton

-> de-feminization of black women because they fell outside 'cult of true womanhood'

Abolitionist movement

White women also active in abolitionist movement, link with suffragette movement on moral grounds: equality of all people (universal human rights)

Sometimes pro-slavery women denounced abolition because of the humiliation of their husbands' adultery (rape of) with female slaves

After Abolition

Emancipation of slaves (1862 Abe Lincoln) but sexist-racist conditioning of Americans continued

Emergence of stereotypes and myths in the 1920-30s that are perpetuated to this day

- *Black prostitute* <-> 'lady' -> wanton sexuality and unreliability
- *Matriarch* -> position of power in the family + black women had to work to support families -> dominating, loud, manly anti-woman
- *Black mama* -> desexualized servant who loves the white family

Mixed marriage

Black man – white woman is more tolerated than white man – black woman

Why? Two subordinate positions is less dangerous than a position of power that is compromised and transmitted via offspring

-> this might lead to permanent shift in power relations

Post-War patriarchal backlash

WWII: both black and white women had been active and independent

1950s: backlash

- re-emergence of ideal of passive femininity: ideal housewife and mother
- Spread by mass media
- Impossible beauty ideals for black women (see Toni Morrison: *The Bluest Eye*)

Civil rights movement (1950s-1968)

American society: deeply segregated until well into the 1960s

- Black population deprived of civil rights
- Jim Crow laws 'separate but equal': established system of racial segregation in the public domain since 1870
- versus Brown vs. board of education 1954 (segregation of state schools declared unconstitutional)
- Discrimination and violence (lynching)

Civil Rights movement: legal actions to end segregation, discrimination and allow inter-racial marriage

Black power movement

NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) –
Rev. Martin Luther King -> striving for
assimilation (civil rights)

Black Panther movement -> more
radical revolutionary

- 'Afro-American' rather than
'negro', afro-hairstyle
- Black and proud
- Affiliations with Communist and
student revolutionary groups



Tommie Smith (gold) and John Carlos
(bronze) Olympics 1968

Black patriarchy

Black Power movement was profoundly patriarchal, although women were involved from the very beginning

- 'Children's crusade': Rosa Parks, Joanne Bland
- Ella Baker, Angela Davis

Black women were conditioned in the 1950s to adopt a passive role -> 'Stand by your man'

- Complied with patriarchy and sexism, in order to fight racism

Angela Davis as 'revolutionary pin-up'



According to hooks, women in the Civil Rights movement were primarily valued in terms of their beauty and loyalty to men. Their actual contribution to black power and communism has been glossed over by history.

Black women and (white) feminism

A lot of feminist histories tended to overlook black feminist activists (e.g., Anna Cooper, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper or Mary Church Terrell) or to highlight their struggles against racism, while overlooking their activism for equal rights for women

Black women were betrayed by white feminist in the 19th and early 20th century

- Racism
- Not attuned to the different situation of black women (class and race)



Anna Cooper



Mary Church Terrell

Women's Lib(eration) Movement



Feminist activist movement in the 1960-70s perceived by many black women as white, middleclass and hypocritical

Eg. Linda LaRue:

“Let it be stated unequivocally that the American white woman has had a better opportunity to live a free and fulfilling life, both mentally and physically, than any other group in the United States, excluding her white husband. Thus any attempt to analogize black oppression with the plight of American white women has all the validity of comparing the neck of a hanging man with the rope-burned hands of an amateur mountain-climber.” (hooks 186)

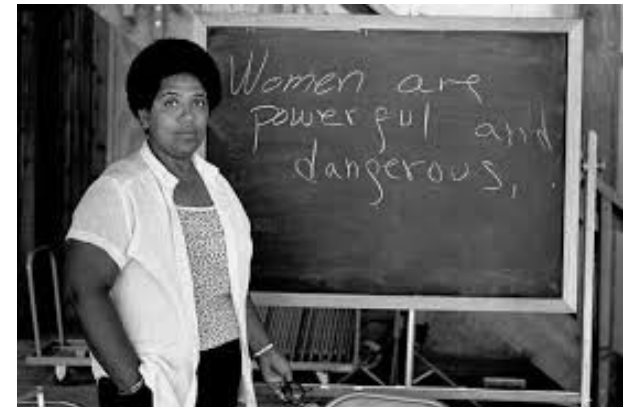
National Black Feminist Association (1973)

Key figures: Pat Robinson, Patricia Hill Collins, Barbara Smith and Angela Davis



Combahee River Collective
Statement (1977)

Kitchen Table press: Barbara Smith,
Audre Lorde en Cherrie Moranga
(Black lesbian press)



Audre Lorde

The internal divides of feminism

Different views of family, abortion and female labor

Race and class versus sisterhood?

White women occupied all the powerful positions ->
opportunistic use of feminism

White feminists have constructed a feminist movement that
is inherently racist

bell hooks' view

To me feminism is not simply a struggle to end male chauvinism or a movement to ensure that women will have equal rights to men; it is a commitment to eradicating the ideology of domination that permeates Western culture on various levels – sex, race, and class, to name few – and a commitment to reorganizing U.S. society so that the self-development of people can take precedent over imperialism, economic expansion and material desires. (hooks, 194-195)

Toni Morrison

Born Chloe Ardelia Wofford (1931-2019)

Novelist, publisher (first black editor at Random House) and professor (Howard, SUNY, Rutgers, Cornell, Princeton)

Pulitzer Prize and Nobel Prize

The Bluest Eye (1970), *Song of Solomon* (1977) and *Beloved* (1987): modernist novels -> wide audience via Oprah Winfrey's book club (1996)



Recitatif

Story written in 1983

‘Recitative’: dialogical musical declaration between song and speech in opera -> recital, repetition

Twyla and Roberta: race and class

Time frame? 1950-1980s

Intersectional feminism (2000s)

Kimberlé Crenshaw (legal scholar, 1991)

Modes of oppression (race, gender, class, sexuality) must be regarded as interlocking -> problem with singular frames of oppression (feminism, queer theory, Marxism...): solutions can be found by analyzing how power works on multiple axes

Whiteness as unmarked norm (white privilege, white supremacy)

Intersectionality or deconstruction?

Tension between intersectionality feminism and queer theory
(Jasbir Puar)

- Intersectionality still centralizes the experience of white women as norm
- Intersectionality recognizes difference but also fixes it into a stable form
- Stable knowable subject and state surveillance

The return of black feminism in popular culture

Chimamanda Ngozi Achidie (1977,
Nigeria)

Studied medicine and pharmacy in
Nigeria and creative writing in the US ->
confrontation with race



Various novels, short stories and essays
TED talks

- 'The Danger of a Single Story'
- 'We Should all be Feminists' (Ted Talks) -> sampled by Beyoncé (Flawless)

Reni Eddo-Lodge (1989)

Journalist and author

Her debut book, *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People about Race* (2017), was written to describe the aftermath of a blogpost and appearance on *BBC's Women's Hour* where she defends intersectionalism

First book written by Black British woman to be n°1 on British book chart (2020) in aftermath of Black Lives Matter and murder of George Floyd

Chapter on the feminism question and the absence of color in the resurgence of feminism today

- *Girls*
- Reading groups and white feminism (distaste of intersectionalism)
- Whiteness as norm