Springer and Breines

In *Living for the Revolution*, Kimberly Springer examines five black feminist organizations and interrogates the question of what constitutes a "woman's issue." Just as women of color and working-class women often had to create their own groups to address the issues they were concerned with, so too have black feminist historians had to write books to include these movements in the historical record. Springer notes that even the "wave" formation of historical feminist movements has been centered on white women (p. 8). She points out the call by black feminist historians to include the resistance of nineteenth-century bondswomen as an early form of feminist opposition, and also notes the fact that many black women – such as Claudia Jones and Amy Jacques Garvey – were actively fighting for social justice during an era when it was assumed by white women that feminist organizing was at a standstill. Clearly, continuing to utilize the categories of feminist waves is another way to silence the voices of women who have already been ignored in feminist history. Another point related to slavery that came up in both books concerns the notion during the Black Power movement that black men had been further brutalized and humiliated under slavery than black women had, and therefore black women ought to take a backseat role while supporting 'their' men (Breines, p. 51, Spring p. 47). After reading so many works about the treatment of bondswomen, and the sexual abuse they often suffered, it's difficult to understand such statements – clearly they were uttered before today's black women's historians had entered the academy, and their work has helped to correct such ideas. While the notion of emasculation is central here, this very concept is misogynist and implies that for a man to be feminized is the worst fate that could fall upon him. Why was there no call during Black Power for men to discuss how badly slavery had brutalized black women as well? Was this due to the masculine rhetoric of nationalism? Both books give examples of how assumed stories of historical events can both affect collective memory as well as current treatment of people. Just as the wave analogy serves to continue to marginalize women of color fighting gender oppression, the 1960s assumption that black men suffered more during slavery served to rationalize black women's modern day subordination.

Springer raises another point in her discussion of The Third World Women's Alliance concerning the rhetoric of black nationalism. The collective wrote in *Triple Jeopardy*, "Now we noticed another thing. And that is, with the rise of nationalism and the rejection of white middle class norms and values, that this rejection of whiteness…took a different turn when it came to the Black woman (p. 48)." This shows the keen analytical eye of the collective, for if white middle-class ideology upheld the nuclear family and traditional gender roles, would not a disparagement of this normative way of life also call for an alternative form of gender relations? Why was white men's tradition of protecting and subordinating 'their' women replicated in black nationalist rhetoric? Couldn't there be space for women to raise children as well as lead on the frontlines?

After reading these books together with the articles on women in the Black Power movement a few weeks ago, it appears that among historians there is a debate around whether black women came to black feminism on their own, or through the positive or negative influences of white women and black men. On one hand, there appears to be the hope of historians that black women came to gender analysis on their own without the

impetus of white women, but on the other, there is the notion that in the mid-60s, feminism was construed as a privileged critique only made by white women, as evidenced in the letter written by two white women in SNCC. However, movements and organizations always begin in reaction to events already in play; they do not form in a bubble, and acknowledging the events and ideologies of groups with more privilege that helped instigate the movement doesn't weaken the legacy of black feminism.

Springer does a great job of revealing the heterogeneity not only of black feminists but also of their various organizations. Clearly, the Combahee River Collective, with its commitment to socialism and visible lesbian leaders, was construed as the most radical, while groups such as the National Black Feminist Organization were sometimes referred to as "the black NOW." Noting this, it's interesting that even the NBFO garnered more support outside of the black community than within it (p. 52). How did mainstream black attitudes against black feminism different from mainstream white attitudes against white feminism? As is the case with most radical movements, clearly the mainstream press, as evidenced by the coverage in *Jet* and *Encore*, played a part in instilling the notion that black feminists were lackeys for white women, among other inaccuracies. The larger question might be, why was black feminism viewed as threatening to the black community during this era? Was this primarily due to the image of the black matriarch that the Moynihan Report summoned, and the fact that both black nationalists and the black mainstream saw black feminists as upholding such a supposedly negative image?