Reflective Solidarity and White Nostalgia: Race Relations between the Combahee River Collective and Bread and Roses

Introduction

Remembering the racial tensions and politics between two socialist feminist organizations of the late 1960's and 70's—Bread and Roses, which was predominantly white, and the Combahee River Collective (CRC), a black feminist group—in "What's Love Got to Do With It?," former Bread and Roses member Wini Breines works through resentment harbored by both groups, deals with memories both sides claim are revisionist, and thinks through her own position within this struggle. Breines argues that a "straw women's history" has been erected in place of a more complicated and textured history of second-wave socialist feminism, and that in this flattening out important issues of race and class "get lost in the telling." (1105) The center of Breines's piece deals with black feminist backlash for white nostalgia for a universal sisterhood. Breines asks herself and us: "Can these contradictory histories and memories, in which gender, race, and class are central themes, be reconciled?" (1096) If reconciliation is possible, what would it entail? Where did white feminists fail in the eyes of black feminists, and if white feminists knew they were consciously anti-racist, then "where does this chasm lie?" (1096) Is the reconciliation Breines proposes a viable one for black feminists, and what kind of solidarity is required for this to be tenable?[1]

Jodi Dean, in Solidarity of Strangers: Feminism After Identity Politics offers a way of conceptualizing group formation and relationships in a post-identity politics era. This offering is the

[1] I follow Chandra Mohanty's cue when she says that "our definitions, descriptions, and interpretations of third world women's engagement with feminism must necessarily be simultaneously historically specific and dynamic, not frozen in time in the form of a spectacle." (6)—I have tried to do this while discussing the racial tensions between white and black feminists in the 60's and 70's. I don't pretend that the black feminists of the CRC are the same as black feminists now, or that there is any one particular unitary black feminism, just as I don't pretend this of white feminism either.

concept of reflective solidarity, and offers a necessary emphasis on dissent and difference as positive, mobilizing, and constitutive forces in comprising the constituency of a group. This concept also offers a reimagining of groups with an understanding of identity that is not fixed and given, but discursive and always in process. Breines enacts a politics similar to that of reflective solidarity. This review essay explicates Dean's concept of reflective solidarity, and its political potentiality as I see it exemplified in Breines. I will also attend to how the Combahee River Collective Statement of 1977 is remembered in Breines, but also how the CRC positions themselves in relation to the very white women that desired and pushed for solidarity.

By putting Dean's concept of reflective solidarity to the test in the specific historical juncture at which Bread and Roses and the CRC confront one another, I hope to see if reflective solidarity, and the kind of remembrance Breines provides us, really are the transformative models they aspire to be. I ultimately argue that although both earnestly work towards a discursive and truly liberatory solidarity across racial tensions, neither adequately capture the intersectional complexity of the specific historical juncture between Bread and Roses and the CRC for two reasons which bleed into one another. First, neither fully account for the material realities and oppressions *black feminists* faced, because secondly, they are overly concerned with the actions of those outside the constituency of black feminists. Dean's concept of reflective solidarity completely hinges on incorporating the voice of a third—if we channel Breines here, in the case of CRC, this would be Bread and Roses. And Breines's forefronting of her own life context as a justification for why she, and other white feminists, experienced and remember the same events and era differently from black feminists arrives at a surprisingly flat conclusion—that we should all "be connected in difference." Where Dean and Breines fall short in their attention towards the specificity of black women's experiences in their theorizing of a way to be solidarily bound, Chandra Talpade Mohanty's concept of

"common context of struggle" and Avtar Brah's thought on how to politically mobilize through differentiation offer a tenable alternative. Mohanty and Brah both posit non-essentialist solidarities, and consider historical and material realities as discursive—I believe these two moves are the moves that Dean does not make, but if they were accomplished, reflective solidarity would become a tenable idea.

Dean argues that there are three types of solidarity—affectional (based on particular intimate social ties), conventional (based on common interests and goals), and reflective. Whereas members which comprise a conventional solidarity must acquiesce to the greater good of the group, in reflective solidarity, questioning and dissent are encouraged and indeed, even constitutive of it. Reflective solidarity builds from ties of dissent while conventional solidarity suppresses and discourages dissent—indeed, dissent constitutes reflective solidarity while it breaks apart conventional solidarity. Dissent breaks apart conventional solidarity because it questions the boundaries that had been previously constructed, and attempts to incorporate the third, which had been previously excluded and oppositional. As Dean asserts, "So rather than viewing criticism as potentially disruptive, reflective solidarity sees it as furthering the intersubjective recognition characteristic of solidarily bound members." (30) In order for reflective solidarity to be achieved, difference must be recognized and appreciated.

The Three Stages of Identity Politics and Black Feminists

Dean argues that identity politics was offered as a radical form of political agency and that it gave people a group identity that assured safety and community, but this was unfortunately at the cost of difference and reflection. Dean summarizes the three phases of identity politics as assimilation, accommodation, and accountability.

In the assimilation phase, the self is viewed as a modern subject, rational and autonomous. In this phase, it is the appeal to reason that unites us, and this self targets its efforts on the state, and

on attaining legal recognition as a free and equal citizen. For black feminists of the 60's and 70's such as were in the Combahee River Collective, the assimilation phase positioned black feminists in a double bind. Black feminists were required to identify with black men and with the politics of the civil rights and Black Power movement, but acquiesce to the sexism they experienced. Likewise, black feminists were expected to assimilate to the concerns of white women's politics, which in their extremes, called for complete separatism from men. White women were often in more secure economic and psychic positions than black women to give up the men of their race and those that were straight were impacted by these extremes differently than those that were lesbians. Some had more to loss than others, and black feminists were among them. The CRC Statement declares that "although we are feminists and Lesbians, we feel solidarity with progressive Black men and do not advocate the fractionalization that white women who are separatists demand…we struggle together with Black men against racism, while we also struggle with Black men about sexism." (32) Black feminists were being called to give up on their black brothers in return for the universal sisterhood of the white women's movement, yet they were expected to be complacent with being "adjuncts" (as the CRC put it in their Statement) to the women's movement. The rights at stake in the civil rights movement and women's movement were crucial for black feminists—even so, black feminists could no longer, and would no longer, assimilate to the larger norms of the group and acquiesce on issues integral to their intersectional identities.

In the accommodation phase, the self is viewed as essentially different, needs to be acknowledged as such, and for particularity to be appreciated. In this phase, relationship to the state is ambiguous since the state's exclusion determines the self, but the self prefers to concentrate on this identity rather than challenge the state. The accommodation phase for black feminists occurred when they realized that their needs were not being met by either the Black Power movement or the white women's movement, and when they insisted their presence in both movements be taken into

account. Their identity as black and as women became a source of political energy, a standpoint from which to purview the world—identity politics offered black feminists a space where they could be all of themselves at once. The CRC Statement is a momentous document for identity politics, and is the first recorded place where the phrase and sentiment can be found: "We believe that the most profound and potentially most radical politics come directly out of our own identity as opposed to working to end somebody else's oppression." (275) (Harris 300) For black feminists, identity politics meant a call for a synthesis of their oppressions rather than an additive approach, when they spoke up and spoke out against the oppressions they experienced within groups where they were supposedly represented. The CRC rejected the tokenistic pedestal on which black feminists had been placed and asserted for themselves an identity which was positive, self-possessed, and community-based. The idea of working to end one's own oppression was empowering. The CRC Statement continued: "Black, other Third World, and working women have been involved in the feminist movement from its start, but both outside reactionary forces and racism and elitism within the movement itself have served to obscure our participation." (30) Though these women participated, they were invisible, silenced—they were caught in a conventional solidarity in which dissent could not be tolerated, as it would destroy the group identity.

In the final stage, the accountability stage, the self is viewed as constructed and as formed relationally. In this phase, accountability is demanded of those that have been complicit in the oppression, exclusion, and devaluing of others—power and privilege must be acknowledged and contended with. Context and relationship affect the dimensions of interaction between two people in this phase—the "I" which speaks and the "you" that listens are not just static entities but beings with complex life contexts which are always changing, and so their interactions are always in need of interpretation. Solidarity is appealed to in this phase as "our collective responsibilities toward each other and our life context." (52) The solidarity of this phase is dependent upon the idea that the

rights one is entitled to should be rights the other is entitled to as well. And although in this phase the self participates in state practices and institutions, it also disrupts and challenges them.

The accountability stage for black feminists was and is complex, as it required rethinking the identity categories upon which they initially built their politics. The unification they had found in being black feminists was in need of nuance, and internal differentiation, acknowledgement, and appreciation, particularly between straight and lesbian. The nuances of such categorial terms as "black" and "white" had to be rethought not as essentialist categories but as contingent upon one another, not as static but rather discursive, ever-changing, and always in need of interpretation. If solidarity was truly to be achieved within black feminism and in coalitions with Black Power and the women's movement, black feminists had to truly recognize and appreciate the heterogeneity and diversity within their own constituency, and hold those they were in coalitions with accountable for their own race and gender privileges and complicity in black women's oppression. And those constituent to Black Power and the women's movement needed to address their complicities, privileges, and power. As Breines's article so tellingly reveals, while white feminists thought they had filled this tall order compassionately and sensitively, black feminists felt that these issues had not even been addressed. The CRC Statement outlines what black feminists thought of as white women's racism and demands accountability:

> "As Black feminists we are made constantly and painfully aware of how little effort white women have made to understand and combat their racism, which requires among other things that they have a more than superficial comprehension of race, color, and Black history and culture. Eliminating racism in the white women's movement is by definition work for white women to do, but we will continue to speak to and demand accountability on this issue." (37)

While the CRC considered education of white feminists on these issues a concern, they were insistent that this education was the responsibility of white women, and that the major priorities of black feminists should be self-agency, self-love, and destruction of internalized racism: "Our politics

evolve from a healthy love for ourselves, our sisters and our community which allows us to continue our struggle and work." (31)

Women of color feminism called into focus identity as a site of oppression, and demanded affirmation of identities thus far denigrated—a post-identity politics (and postcolonial politics to an extent) names the reification of identities as static and unfixed entities the problem itself, and insists on a rethinking of these identities as discursive, relational, and mutually constituted. The term "women of color" is problematic because it leaves unmarked the dominant racial category of "white," but also because an identity does not entirely a politics make. Political representation, though, around the proposed terms 'women of color' and 'third world women' is still tenable though, as Chandra Mohanty offers, since they form a constituency based on political alliance. Mohanty relies on Benedict Anderson's imagined communities, in which political alliance and mobilization based on an imagined state of being or moral location rather than an allegiance to an actual location or actual nation, to ask what unites third world women as a constituency:

> "what seems to constitute 'women of color' or 'third world women' as a viable oppositional alliance is a *common context of struggle* rather than color or racial identifications. Similarly, it is third world women's oppositional *political* relation to sexist, racist, and imperialist structures that constitutes our potential commonality." (7)

Women of color and third world women are united by a common context of struggle rather than color or racial identification. Any claim to representation for the constituency cannot encapsulate all modes of identities, social locations, life contexts, and so forth, of beings that aggregate under that constituency—nevertheless, there needs to be a politics of representation under which groups of people can mobilize.

Reflective Solidarity: The Communicative We and the Situated, Hypothetical Third

Solidarity must be an interaction among at least three persons for Dean: "I ask you to stand by me over and against a third." (3) There are two concepts here that we must grasp before we can comprehend what reflective solidarity is: the "we" comprised of you and me, and the third. Dean

posits a "we" which can only be understood as discursive and in process, and calls this the "communicative we." This concept helps us to see that the individual "I's" which form a constituency are always in conversation, moving in and out of group dynamics, and carry with them their own individuated baggage, which overlaps with and strays from group formation. How a "we" comes together and mobilizes then, is never static but always changing.

To achieve reflective solidarity (that is, *if* reflective solidarity is possible), a rejection of identity and assertion of community is necessary—it is through this, Dean argues, that a "we" "without labels" is possible. Dean wants identity to be sacrificed to community—for some this is an option, but for others this is not. In particular, a white woman may be able to sideline her identity for solidarity with black feminists, but this does not mean the power differential and privileges accorded to a white woman won't influence her participation in solidarity, conscious and self-aware as she may be. Even further, a group formed of black feminists like the CRC formed specifically in reaction against white feminists and black men precisely because their needs, desires, and rights, were being ignored, suppressed, even acted against. So while Dean's move away from identity politics is in the spirit of further inclusion, power and privilege need to be more fully incorporated into her notion of reflective solidarity.

The situated, hypothetical third is Dean's most promising but also most problematic concept. This third is outside the "we" of the group formation. Although Dean does not make this distinction, the third is an entity that cannot enter the "we" of the group either because it is silenced by the "we" or because the "we" arose in reaction against it. Since the hypothetical, situated third is thematized in Dean's model as inclusionary rather than exclusionary and oppositional, I find it necessary to make this distinction to comprehend the full import Dean's lack of distinction has for the entirety of her model. Dean's formulation of the situated, hypothetical third aims to find a theory of *compassionately inhabiting the other's perspective*. But this does not mean, cannot mean, that the

inhabitation requires speaking for the other, or acting for the other, but rather, acting with the other from the periphery.

For reflective solidarity to be achieved, the discursive "we" needs to be conjoined with a situated, hypothetical third. The conjoining which Dean says is necessary for reflective solidarity is not possible in a situation like that of the CRC. The CRC needs this opposition for their group identity—their opposition to white feminists and black men catalyzes their politics and their passions, and allows them at last to articulate their specific needs. It allows them to finally be able to say, "Black women are inherently valuable…our liberation is a necessity not as an adjunct to somebody else's but because of our need as human persons for autonomy." (274) The CRC appeals to universality—they ask to be treated with respect as human beings. Their appeal to identity sometimes seeps into standpoint theory, but their final call is one of universal respect for human beings.

Seyla Benhabib's differentiation between the generalized and the concrete other might explicate the idea of the situated, hypothetical third more clearly. Benhabib deems the generalized other as an organized set of expectations of a social group and their perspective of a relationship. The standpoint of the generalized other, for Benhabib, "requires us to view each and every individual as a rational being entitled to the same rights and duties we would want to ascribe to ourselves" (87) and this process requires us abstract the individuality and concrete identity of the other. With the concept of the concrete other, Benhabib tries to bring the universalism of this rational being into identity and difference—she does not reject the idea of the generalized other but insists we must incorporate an understanding of this other as concrete, particularized. The standpoint of the concrete other, for Benhabib, "requires us to view each and every rational being as an individual with a concrete history, identity and affective-emotional constitution" (87) and this process requires us to abstract from what unites us. The concrete other is affective and emotional,

and has a particularized life context, history, and identity. Hers is a discursive attempt to have universalism and difference speak to one another.

While Dean's concept of reflective solidarity has the potential for shifting how we view political action and transformation, as well as how groups mobilize, I find her failure to centrally integrate concepts of power and specific historical context rather baffling. Breines is an example of a naivete spurred by a notion of universal solidarity grounded in inattentiveness to history and one's own imbrication in it. This is especially salient when Breines outlines how different members of a group dynamic experience and remember differently, especially along the axis of power. Dean's call for a shift from conventional to reflective solidarity resonates with the themes of our class in relation to women of color feminism and postcolonial feminism. These groups can be seen as fitting into, but also struggling against, the concept of a conventional solidarity. These groups can, it is perhaps arguable, be seen as articulating the flickerings of desire for reflective solidarity in their calls for the accountability of the oppressor.

Dean's consistent reliance on Habermasian discourse ethics leads her to a place where she can no longer envision what spaces the situated, hypothetical thirds and the communicative we can and cannot occupy. Difference cannot ultimately be overcome for universal good—it must be attended to not only theoretical, but in its comprehensive historical specificity. Avtar Brah in "Difference, diversity, differentiation," discusses the emergence of the black women's movement as a "historically specific response" which showed that "organisation around the category 'black women' is possible." (111) We need to know what led to a group being formed, and even if we know the phases through which political mobilization occur, we need to know what led to who being the "we" and the "third" and how they came to occupy that space. The unique position of the CRC not only in relation to the Black Power Movement but Bread and Roses exemplifies this.

One of the catalyzing moments of the CRC was the murder of twelve black women in Boston in 1979 over the span of a five month period and the scant, often inaccurate, indifferent media coverage and concern that followed in white media and newspapers. Duchess Harris says that black feminists were outraged at this lack of concern and rallied around the issue in "From the Kennedy Commission to the Combahee Collective: Black Feminist Organizing, 1960-80," "Having a specific event to respond to and collectively organize around gave the members a cause on which to focus" (300). The pervasive systemic oppression manifest in events like this fortified political alliances among black feminists. Not only was the violent sexism and racism of the murders themselves apparent, but it propelled black feminists to organize themselves, demand visibility and respect for the murdered women, and insist on their own self-agency in response to events such as this.

Breines considers her own white complicity in black women's oppression by way the social and cultural circumstances of the 50's and 60's—while whites experienced an improved postwar American economy, New Deal socialism, and income jumps, blacks experienced a glut of violence and poverty and oppression.[2] These aggregations of different life contexts and social locations led black feminists and white feminists to experience the same movement in history in vastly differently ways. This is what allows Breines to ponder why, if white feminists were active with black feminist politics and consciously anti-racist, the black feminists accused them of racism and of not caring for their political needs.

The leftist politics of Bread and Roses are inflected throughout the CRC Statement, and while the CRC found socialism useful, it is only one aspect of their group politics. The Statement says that the CRC was contacted by socialist feminists with whom they had worked earlier on abortion rights activities, encouraging them to attend the Nationalist Socialist Conference. The CRC

[2] 20th-Century Anglo-American and French Feminism. "Postcolonial Feminism." Class discussion. 13 November 2008.

Statement contends that "despite the narrowness of the ideology that was promoted at that particular conference, we became more aware of the need for us to understand our own economic situation and to make our own economic analysis." (280) Is it perhaps because this unnamed influence remained unnamed that white feminists like Breines still harbor resentment? Breines overly focuses on what feminist organizations like Bread and Roses *did* do and on getting those actions recorded accurately in the little black book of history, rather than *compassionately inhabiting the other's perspective* to think through why white feminist actions were not satisfactory to black feminist organizations. The very nucleus of the CRC was catalyzed by setting boundaries for themselves, a line in the sand that neither black men or white women could cross, a space where they, as blacks and as women simultaneously, could finally stand and not be crowded by black men and white women.

For a concept like reflective solidarity to work, it should include a measure of respect for boundaries and privacy for groups whose needs are not addressed in others groups. Thus, if white women (and even specifically, Bread and Roses and Breines by proxy) are a situated, hypothetical third in relation to the CRC, then how can they seriously incorporate those voices into their formation if the voice of black feminists is not even being heard in the first place? The communicative we of group formation is supposed to take accountability for exclusion, and attempt to include excluded others in the "we"—but what about the responsibility of CRC members to white women as their thirds, if indeed they do have a responsibility? To include black men would have meant refocusing on the Black Power movement again, and perhaps dealing with sexist behavior. To include white women would have meant focusing on white women's issues, and perhaps dealing with racist behavior. The CRC carved themselves a niche precisely because of their experiences within these two groups: "It was our experience and disillusionment within these liberation movements, as well as experience on the periphery of the white male left, that led to the

need to develop a politics that was anti-racist, unlike those of white women, and anti-sexist, unlike those of Black and white men." (273) That Dean does not make a distinction among the various spaces situated, hypothetical thirds can occupy suggests that that her theory needs to be more mindful of specific historical junctures and contexts. White women weren't excluded others because they were forgotten or silenced, they were excluded because they were antithetical to the constituency of the CRC. The voice of the situated, hypothetical third can be taken into account, but what if it's a voice like Breines—intoned with resentment, bitterness, sour grapes? Even if groups like the CRC were to take Breines seriously, how can they incorporate such a voice into their formation if that voice has not heard them correctly? Exclusion was necessary to the survival of the CRC—*at that moment* they needed an exclusive space because their rights, their priorities, their politics, were dependent on it.

Avtar Brah asserts in "Difference, diversity, differentiation" that the categories "black feminist" and "white feminist" are not essentialist but rather contingent upon one another—that is, black feminism only has meaning in relation to white feminism and vice versa. They are, rather, "fields of contestation inscribed within discursive and material processes and practices in a post-colonial terrain. They represent struggles over political frameworks for analysis…" (111) Brah's piece is critical to understanding how Breines's reflection fails to account for the reactionary catalysts for black feminism. Brah asserts that "black feminism was constituted in articulation with a number of political movements" and that "this multi-locationality marked the formation of new diasporic subjectivities and identities; and it produced a powerful new political subject." (113)

To reiterate: the concept of a situated hypothetical third is both promising and problematic. If we think of an Anglo-American feminist group, a hypothetical third could be a Latina lesbian who perhaps feels silenced into acquiescence to the greater good of the group norms. Yet, if we think of a group like CRC, the participation of a white woman or black man cannot be thought of in the

same way. The CRC was catalyzed in response to the inadequacies of the politics of groups comprised of white women, or black men—if a person from either of these two groups were to be a situated, hypothetical third, their voice must count for something, of course, but we must remember the nuanced context which led to them being a situated, hypothetical third in the first place. In this scenario, the idea of the situated, hypothetical third could potentially work against those that are oppressed by taking the potential for self-action out of their hands, and putting it back into the normative power matrix.

The promising aspect of the situated, hypothetical third is when one does it willing. Dean hopes that this third is one who can and does enter the margins—willingly so—and places "others" in the center. This interaction would look more like "I'm going to stand with you in your cause." This interaction is based on a mutual recognition of universal rights, but it must also be based on an understanding of the history which has led to this interaction. Why has the "we" formed; Why am I a situated, hypothetical third; Am I complicit in becoming that third for this group? The politics of a situated hypothetical third are ideally those of one who can, does, and wants to enter the margins and places "others" in the center in the "others" fight, whatever that may be.

Dean argues that reflective solidarity requires space for a situated, hypothetical third, and that this third must push herself to the periphery and place sexual and racial others at the center. At first gloss, Breines' reflection would seem to be indicative of one who acts as a situated, hypothetical third—she locates herself precisely within this debate, owns up to her own "white nostalgia," and comes to terms with why she thought what she thought, did what she did, and appropriated the framework of the civil rights movement. Hers is a mournful apologia, a coming-to-grips, and folded into this narrative is a desire for the universal "sisterhood" made possible by civil rights. But it is this desire, among others, that estranged groups like Bread and Roses and CRC. White reification of Black Power and third-world revolutionaries further intensified the ravine of resentment: "Whites in

the radical movements recognized racism and looked to blacks and black culture in order to make sense of American society and whites' place in it…an identification with racial otherness, was a critical part of white youth's creation of oppositional identities…not only as appropriation but to find meaning for their own lives." (1108) This appropriation is what made black feminist socialist groups so distrustful of their white feminist counterparts. There was additional distrust over what was thought to be the minimal efforts of white feminists. Bread and Roses attended Black Panther rallies as a sign of solidarity with black women, but the Black Power movement has its own tumultuously complicated history for black women. The disparity between how white and black feminists experienced and remembered the same point in time points to how important difference is as an analytic category which includes social location, subjectivity. Brah says of these different groups that "a major source of contention amongst them has been the relative lack of attention or, in some cases, an almost complete amnesia by one project about issues central to the other." (120)

Are Breines's ultimate resolution that we must unite in difference, and Dean's hope that reflective solidarity will unite us through difference and dissent tenable in the face of everything I've just said? Brah would say no: "the key issue…is not about 'difference' *per se*, but concerns the question of who defines difference, how different categories of women are represented within the discourses of 'difference', and whether 'difference' differentiates laterally or hierarchically." (115) It is exactly these questions which concern me in regard to Breines and Dean—they both posit a change which involves incorporating difference, but they don't let us know how exactly this change will be incorporated, and they dubiously eave out the power differentials upon which black feminism built its foundations.

The abstractness of white feminists' anti-racism disturbed black feminists since personal genesis was important to them, as the Combahee River Collective assert. Then, how *do* white and black feminists come together over anti-racism? For this to happen, white feminists must

particularize their anti-racism, and avoid appropriating anti-racism for their own self-esteem and only in order to assuage their white guilt. Breines asserts that "Bread and Roses and other socialist feminist groups articulated race and class politics *did not matter* to African-American women who experienced white feminism as racist. Whites' abstract antiracism did not speak to them." (1123) Abstraction did not work precisely because identity politics relies on an embodied, particularized experience. But is there room in identity politics for a situated, hypothetical third? How exactly can white and black socialist feminists "be connected in difference," which is Breines' final resolution? For a reflective solidarity to be possible, it seems that they cannot just be united alongside one another together? Is it still helpful to imagine group formation as having a center, and as having a certain group of people on the periphery? Is it possible to have everyone in the center?

Breines' meditation is not that of a situated, hypothetical third not because of where she locates herself within the racial tension she outlines, but rather because of how she situates herself. Even though Breines accuses herself of "white nostalgia" and admits, "I have not easily let go of a humanistic, universal, racially integrated sisterhood and brotherhood ideal where, hand in hand, we create a benign and just world, a vision I took from the civil rights movement," she nonetheless (1096) finds her resolution in this unity, though it is not the discursive universalism Dean finds her potentiality in.

Dean ultimately hopes that the concept of reflective solidarity "can move us out of the 'we' of identity politics and toward an inclusive and ultimately universal understanding of the 'we' of discourse" (11). I'm skeptical of the transformation Dean envisions precisely because the "we" articulated in identity politics was necessarily introduced because the universal "we" was disguised as universal. Dean's formulation is suspect because within it the "I" does not question the viability of the space it asks the "you" to stand in. Black feminists cannot stand in the same spot as white feminists because of their own historical specificities—in order for reflective solidarity to be truly

reflective, those that ask for solidarity need to think about the space to which they beckon people and whether or not that space is inhabitable. This is the dilemma the CRC faced—they couldn't stand with the white feminists solely, and they couldn't stand with the Black Power movement solely. They created their own movement to address their own needs—how can Breines think of a reflective solidarity with this in mind—black feminists moved out of the space white feminism presented to them precisely because they could no longer stand there. Black feminists needed to represent themselves, find a way to say what was missing, what they were, and name it. The term identity politics was proposed and although it may not have encapsulated everything, it was a political term that captured a critical turn in the feminist movement.

The quote the CRC leaves us with from Robin Morgan's Sisterhood is Powerful is exactly the place where an intervention needs to happen. Morgan says, "I haven't the faintest notion what possible revolutionary role white heterosexual men could fulfill, since they are the very embodiment of reactionary-vested-interest-power." And the CRC responds: "As black feminists and Lesbians we know that we have a very definite revolutionary task to perform and we are ready for the lifetime of work and struggle before us." (37) While the CRC intervenes with an idea of how they will proceed as black feminists and Lesbian, they do not question the potential role that this white heterosexual man could play in dismantling some of the oppressions they face. I think that it is this that Dean is getting at in Solidarity of Strangers. Perhaps the revolutionary role of this white heterosexual man is the space that needs to be opened up—a space in which accountability is demanded, and those that should be accountability take up that mantle willingly, and use their power to dismantle the oppressiveness inherent in their power. The CRC ends with the high note of identity politics—not knowing what others' roles are in ending your own oppression, but having a clear idea of what work you need to do, from your own identity, to work against the oppressions facing you. But this extra step that neither Morgan nor the CRC take is in seriously questioning what kind of solidarities can

emerge out of holding accountability those whose social roles facilitate your oppression, and those in those social roles being willing to hold themselves accountability.

Solidarity is about recognizing the importance of others' struggles, and assisting however you can because you believe that their struggle is against an oppression which is universally unjust. It is not about asking others to join in solidarity with you—it should be an action of good will towards others that you recognize as being oppressed. The end purpose should not be togetherness—although that can be a byproduct—it should be about one group recognizing as fundamental to their identity a compassionate need to assist another group in its struggle. The interaction Dean posits—"I ask you to stand by me over and against a third" should instead look like "I stand with *you* in your struggle because I recognize that what is going on is universally unjust" This interaction is necessary, but the power dynamic needs to change, and the statement of assistance should flow in a different direction—the "I" should recognize that it needs to help the "you," and not that the "you" needs to help the "I".

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