

Black Feminism:
The Fight For The Justice That Was Taken From Them

Emily Sheets-Fitz
Senior Division
Research Paper
Word Count: 2061

Black women in the 1960's were outcasted from the second wave of the National Feminist Movement due to their race and society due to that and the already there sexism. They were forced to take on their own movement in order to combat the oppression that was hitting in from both sides of the general populace. This decision created the Black Feminist Movement which incorporated women of all nationalities to fight back against the wildly oppressive media and politics. They joined together to fight back against the stereotypes and hate against them, and the silence on their voices which eventually succeeded and allowed them to prevail and get their voices heard and ideals spread through mainstream media. An examination of the Early Feminist Movement, intersectionality, and Black Feminism today, show the change from conflict of racism, sexism, and oppression to the compromise of the Black Feminist Movement that incorporated all of those who were ostracized and alienated by the white women, males, and elitists of the media and society then.

The Early Feminist Movement was a combined movement in which blacks and other minorities along with whites worked together for the same goals of gender equality for "all". Blacks however, slowly started to catch on to what was truly happening in the movement. It was only equality for white women, not minority races. White women were stealing credit for achievements that black women had fought for with blood, sweat, and tears. And also there was very clear oppression going around, as black women where not only fighting against sexism in general, but also the racism that came with them everywhere they went. As blacked women were, "Faced with the sexism of black men and the racism of white women, black women in their respective movements had two choices: they could remain in the movements and try to educate non-black or non-female comrades about their needs, or they could form a movement of

their own. The first alternative, though noble in its intent, was not a viable option.”(10) And thus was the birth of the Black Feminism Movement, though, “the Black Feminist Movement, which, though it had been gathering momentum for some time, marks its "birth" with the 1973 founding of the National Black Feminist Organization in New York.”(10) The Black Feminist Movement was created to incorporate prejudice with the anti-sexism ideals of the Early Feminist Movement. The new movement also included the still rising concern of racism towards black women, while it has always been there, in order to garner support and fight back against both aspects of their society. As the movement progresses, it further reached out towards other oppressed and alienated minority communities, to form a solid unified group to combat the rapidly changing societal views of 1960’s America. ”Although neither all the black men nor all the white women in their respective movements were sexist and racist, enough of those with powerful influence were able to make the lives of the black women in these groups almost unbearable.”(10) In this new wave of feminism, “once established in the early 1960s, the Black feminist movement expanded to incorporate the issues of other minority women and even men,”(3). However, when black men were incorporated, they decidedly tried to use the sexuality of the black and other minority women for ill means, and thus were pushed away from the movement. As the Black Feminist movement was trying to gather goals for their movement and what the basis of their ideals were to be, a very powerful word was created that later became the very foundation of the Black Feminist Movement.

The short definition of intersectionality is the combined term for sexism and racism used against black women during the 1960’s and earlier in response to the sexism from the white feminist movement, and the racism from the civil rights movement. “Consider an analogy to

traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in an intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination. . . . But it is not always easy to reconstruct an accident: Sometimes the skid marks and the injuries simply indicate that they occurred simultaneously, frustrating efforts to determine which driver caused the harm.”(1) As time progressed, black women tried to implement the term into court and law, and the response to it was with mixed feeling and the law fought right back, “The plaintiffs allege that they are suing on behalf of black women, and that therefore this lawsuit attempts to combine two causes of action into a new special sub-category, namely, a combination of racial and sex-based discrimination.... The plaintiffs are clearly entitled to a remedy if they have been discriminated against. However, they should not be allowed to combine statutory remedies to create a new “super-remedy” which would give them relief beyond what the drafters of the relevant statutes intended. Thus, this lawsuit must be examined to see if it states a cause of action for race discrimination, sex discrimination, or alternatively either, but not a combination of both.”(1) This was again a sign of injustice against the black feminist movement. As to not give them much or any power at all, the government and law decided that the term intersexuality was too broad to be tried under and that it must either be sexism or racism as both together are giving too much power to the minorities. In response to the court, many, “black feminists argue that the intersectionality of sexism, class oppression, and racism make the experience of Black Women inherently different,”(3) and thus they deserve to be able to try under different terms as sexism

and racism against black women come hand in hand, “some black women attempted to distance themselves from the issues raised by the growing white feminist movement, arguing that blacks as a racial category were subjected to greater oppression than white females.”(5) While the term was denied by law, it still fueled many black feminist within the movement, and much like the ten point party program for the Black Panthers, became the foundation of the movement with common set of goals in mind for all.

As time progressed, so did the Black Feminist Movement. Many black feminist activist became famous throughout the media, and spread their ideals onto all of America and with that came the support of millions. Angela Davis, a prominent black rights activist, had an interview with someone in which she was questioned on the black feminist movement and where it is today. The interviewer asked Angela Davis, “One of the things that struck me as I've gone back and revisited this history --is that Martin Luther King starts this movement for economic justice just before he's assassinated. The Black Panther Party's just getting off the ground here in California and in a way there seems like there was a march towards merging these issues of class and race in the late 60s that somehow got derailed.”(16) Angela Davis' response to this is, “Yes, I think it's really important to acknowledge that Dr. King, precisely at the moment of his assassination, was re-conceptualizing the civil rights movement and moving toward a sort of coalitional relationship with the trade union movement. It's I think quite significant that he was in Memphis to participate in a demonstration by sanitation workers who had gone out on strike. Now, if we look at the way in which the labor movement itself has evolved over the last couple of decades, we see increasing numbers of black people who are in the leadership of the labor movement and this is true today.”(16) The black feminist movement has become a movement in

which all minority races were included, along with religion, and even sex. It became a beacon of hope for many that finally the world would give justice to those who deserved it. The black feminist movement also became more than just for women's rights and racial equality along with it, but also about racial equality within the workforce, housing, etc. It was much along the lines of the civil rights movement and the Black Panther Party,

“I think of Black Power—or what we referred to at the time as the “black liberation movement”—as a particular moment in the quest for black freedom. In many ways, it was a response to what were perceived as the limitations of the civil-rights movement: we needed to claim not only legal rights, but also substantive rights—jobs, housing, healthcare, education, etc.—and to challenge the very structure of society. Such demands were summed up in the ten-point program of the Black Panther Party. Although black individuals have entered economic, social and political hierarchies, the overwhelming number of black people are subject to economic, educational and carceral racism to a far greater extent than during the pre-civil-rights era. In many ways, the demands of the Black Panther Party's ten-point program are just as relevant—perhaps even more relevant—as during the 1960s.” A quote by Angela Davis(15)

Throughout the civil rights movement, black feminist played a major part not just with sexism, but also racism against all minorities as well. They became Activists along race with it being one of the two main points that defined their movement. Many black feminist worked together with other parties, but still were exploited by men and used for their sexuality instead for their reasons and ideas. As previously stated, the rise of Black

Feminism lead to a rise in voice in which it held, and one such voice was bell hooks who gave the “Ain’t I A Woman” speech. Bell hooks states,

“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 could have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain’t I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man—when I could get it—and bear the lash as well! And ain’t I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen them most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother’s grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain’t I a woman?”(1)

This speech gave all a slight taste in the grief that all black woman had experienced, and collectively how oppressed they were compared to white women who never had to experience slavery or the racial isolation that comes with being black, “If women are allegedly passive and fragile, then why are Black women treated as “mules” and assigned heavy cleaning chores? If good mothers are supposed to stay at home with their children, then why are United States Black women on public assistance forced to find jobs and leave their children in daycare? If women’s highest calling is to become mothers, then why are Black teen mothers pressured to use Norplant and Depo Provera?”(1) With this ideology, it pushed them even further for change, and though they were not granted the full change they deserved, they got their party platform into mainstream media and society and large black feminist have made headlines and have finally gotten the public to hear what they have to say and why it needs to change.

Throughout history, we have seen a massive change in black feminism, from the conflict of the combined movement, to the inclusion of all races, to finally black feminist making news and preaching what all must hear. They finally got what they needed to say out into the world and with that, they finally started to get the justice they deserved in which was so wrongfully taken from them.

Bibliography

Primary Sources:

1. Gale, Thomson. "Feminism in Literature: A Gale Critical Companion ." The Feminist Movement in the 20th Century: Primary Sources. Encyclopedia.com, www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/feminist-movement-20th-century-primary-sources.

This source helped me with gathering primary sources and also which ones were good as well.

2. PBS, Public Broadcasting Service, www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/race/interviews/davis.html.

This source helped me as it was an interview and everyone I asked to interview did not reply.

3. Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. Routledge, 2015.

This book helped me see the movement from the eyes of a black feminist and what the movement was really about.

4. Hooks, Bell. *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015.

This gave me another perspective of someone who was inside the movement and give me more information.

5. Collins, Patricia Hill. *Uniteyouthdublin*. second, Routledge, 2000.

This helped me break down ideology of black feminist and see more from their perspective.

6. Davis, Angela Y. *Blue Legacies And Black Feminism*.

This helped me tremendously with getting information from one of the most famous black feminist.

7. Barat, Frank. "A Q&A With Angela Davis on Black Power, Feminism and the Prison-Industrial Complex." *The Nation*, 29 June 2015, www.thenation.com/article/qa-angela-davis-black-power-feminism-and-prison-industrial-complex/.

This was my interview used within my essay as I couldn't use any other of my own interviews.

Secondary Sources:

8. Smith, Sharon. "Black Feminism and Intersectionality." *Black Feminism and Intersectionality | International Socialist Review*, isreview.org/issue/91/black-feminism-and-intersectionality.

This helped me with baseline information of intersecuality.

9. "Black Feminism." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 6 Nov. 2017, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_feminism.

THis was a basic source I first used within my essay to just tests the waters to see what I was dealing with.

10. Hoffman, Lindsay. "Black Woman, White Movement: Why Black Women Are Leaving the Feminist Movement." *The Huffington Post*, TheHuffingtonPost.com, 15 Nov. 2015, www.huffingtonpost.com/lindsay-hoffman/black-woman-white-movemen_b_8569540.html.

This helped me with truly understanding the reason for the split within the movement.

11. "Black Feminism Goes Viral [EXCERPT]." *EBONY*, 3 Mar. 2014, www.ebony.com/news-views/black-feminism-goes-viral-045#axzz4zdjTcwkW.

This helped me with more basic information

12. "Amistad Digital Resource." *Amistad Digital Resource: Black Feminism*, www.amistadresource.org/the_future_in_the_present/black_feminism.html.

This helped me with some in depth information on the movement

13. Hooks, Bell. "Bell Hooks." *Http://ic.galegroup.com*, 28 Apr. 2000, ic.galegroup.com/ic/suic/BiographiesDetailsPage/BiographiesDetailsWindow?disableHighlighting=false&displayGroupName=Biographies&currPage=&scanId=&query=&docIndex=&source=&prodId=SUIC&search_within_results=&p=SUIC&mode=view&catId=&u=scho84541&limiter=&display-query=&displayGroups=&contentModules=&action=e&sortBy=&documentId=GALE%7CK1618002928&windowstate=normal&activityType=BasicSearch&failOverType=&commentary=.

Her book helped me very much to see the movement from the inside.

14. Naylor, Gloria. "Gloria Naylor." *Gloria Naylor*, ic.galegroup.com/ic/suic/BiographiesDetailsPage/BiographiesDetailsWindow?disableHighlighting=false&displayGroupName=Biographies&currPage=&scanId=&query=&docIndex=&source=&prodId=SUIC&search_within_results=&p=SUIC&mode=view&catId=&u=scho84541&limiter=&display-query=&displayGroups=&contentModules=&action=e&sortBy=&documentId=GALE%7CEJ2108101670&windowstate=normal&activityType=BasicSearch&failOverType=&commentary=.

This helped me much with being a biography.

15. MORGAN, JOAN. "Why We Get Off: Moving Towards a Black Feminist Politics of Pleasure." *Black Scholar*, vol. 45, no. 4, Winter 2015, p. 36. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1080/00064246.2015.1080915.

This helped me with understanding the split of the movement.

16. Story, Kaila Adia. "Fear of a Black Femme: The Existential Conundrum of Embodying a Black Femme Identity While Being a Professor of Black, Queer, and Feminist Studies." *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, vol. 21, no. 4, Oct. 2016, pp. 407–419., doi:10.1080/10894160.2016.1165043.

This helped me for why white feminist stole credit from the black feminist.

17. "But Some of Us Are Brave: A History of Black Feminism in the United States." *Vol. 9.1 - A History of Black Feminism in the U.S.*, www.mit.edu/~thistle/v9/9.01/6blackf.html.

This was a nice through information on the movement.

18. Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *We Should All Be Feminists*. Anchor Books, 2015.

This was basic feminist knowledge.

19. Hooks, Bell. *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015.

Her book helped me understand the movement as well.

20. Williams, Maxine. "Why Women's Liberation Is Important To Black Women." *Black Women's Liberation*, pp. 1–15, https://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/wlmpc_wlmms01004/.

This helped me with what is the black feminist movement.

21. "Amistad Digital Resource." *Amistad Digital Resource: Black Feminism*, www.amistadresource.org/the_future_in_the_present/black_feminism.html.

This was basic information.

22. "Postscript: Feminist Revisions of Political Thought." *Feminist Moments : Reading Feminist Texts*, doi:10.5040/9781474237970.ch-023.

This was different perspectives on the movement.

23. "Black Feminist Theory." *Taylor & Francis*, www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1300/J014v26n02_04?journalCode=wzwp20.

This showed me more on perspectives.

24. Hoffman, Lindsay. "Black Woman, White Movement: Why Black Women Are Leaving the Feminist Movement." *The Huffington Post*, TheHuffingtonPost.com, 15 Nov. 2015, www.huffingtonpost.com/lindsay-hoffman/black-woman-white-movemen_b_8569540.html.

This was good for the split of the movement.

25. "A Future for Intersectional Black Feminist Technology Studies." *S&F Online*, sfonline.barnard.edu/traversing-technologies/safiya-umoja-noble-a-future-for-intersectional-black-feminist-technology-studies/.

This was about intersecuality and the reasons for the movement.

26. Ltd, White Fuse Media. "Black Feminist Epistemology." *Social Theory Rewired*, routledgesoc.com/category/profile-tags/black-feminist-epistemology.
27. This helped for more information.